

SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS AND TIME

'Step out of the circle of time and into the circle of love.'

Rumi

Traditional Worldview

For most of human history, time was life itself and perceived as a divine mystery. Jungian scholar Marie-Louise von Franz: "The mind of primitive man made less distinction than ours between outer and inner, material and psychic, events. Primitive man lived in a stream of inner and outer experience which brought along a different cluster of coexisting events at every moment, and thus constantly changed quantitatively and qualitatively."

Even our seemingly self-evident concepts of past, present and future, do not seem to be universal. Certain traditional cultures, for instance, do not possess them in their language. Their universe has two basic aspects: that which is manifest and thus more 'objective' and that which is beginning to manifest and is more 'subjective.' Concrete objects are manifest, and in this way already belong to the past; inner images, representations, expectations and feelings are on their way to manifestation, and thus bend more towards the future. The present is that razor's edge where something stops beginning to manifest (is already past) or is on the verge of beginning to manifest. There is no continuing flow of time for them, but a multiplicity of subtly distinguished events. (1)

Most traditional and indigenous cultures viewed time as cyclical rather than linear, based on the regularity of motion of the sun, moon, planets and stars, and recurring seasonal changes. The archetypal idea of time as a spiral reconciles the linear and cyclical aspects of time.

The notion of nonlinear time appears in many of the myths, fables, parables and teaching stories of traditional cultures. Typically, they are set in a non-temporal time without a linear sequence and structure. Religious historian Mircea Eliade writes: "Myths take man out of his own time – his individual, chronological, 'historical' time – and project him, symbolically at least, into the Great Time, into a paradoxical instant which cannot be measured because it does not consist of duration."

In the traditional teachings of the Australian Aborigines two types of time are distinguished: ordinary, passing time and "the Great Time." The latter is metaphorically conceived as the time of myth, gods and heroes, as well as dream time. "It is the time of all-at-once instead of the time of one-thing-after another. What occurs in the Great Time has sequence, but it cannot be dated as to *when* it happened." In their cultural heritage, Great Time can only be approached through myths and symbols: "Great Time is a mythic Time in which is the true source of all beings and of all cosmic events."

This conception of time is very similar to that of the Hopi Indians of North America. Their language contains no tenses for verbs indicating past, present and future events. The Hopi do not see time as a series of discrete events, one following the other like beads on a string, but rather as a nexus of events. "They live in a kind of continual present that contains everything that has ever happened. Even though they make no explicit references to past, present or future, they are able to function effectively within their own cyclical, nonlinear time frame." In his essay, "An American Indian Model of the Universe," linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf describes the Hopi worldview:

The Hopi language contains no references to "time" either implicit or explicit. At the same time, it is capable of accounting for and describing correctly, in a pragmatic or operational sense, all observable phenomena of the universe . . . Just as it is possible to have any number of geometries other than the Euclidian which give an equally perfect account of space configurations, so it is possible to have descriptions of the Universe, all perfectly valid, that do not contain our familiar contrasts of space and time. The relativity viewpoint of modern physics is one such view, conceived in mathematical terms, and the Weltanschauung of the Hopis is another and quite different one, nonmathematical and linguistic. (2)

Western Philosophy

Throughout the ages, great minds have approached the mystery of time and have produced numerous profound, although never definitive, interpretations. Time has been viewed as real or illusory, sacred or profane:

Time is and always has been a mystery – the great mystery of our existence. It is arguably the most familiar element of our lives. We are born into time, live in it, measure it, pass it, spend it, save it, waste it, die out of it, and talk and act as though we understood it. But if we step away from this "understanding" for a moment and ask the simplest questions about time, it quickly becomes apparent that we understand nothing at all. For example, what is time? We can say that we experience it as a succession of events or phenomena or impressions. But why a succession? Is something moving? If so, what? Movement implies motion from something or somewhere to something or somewhere else. Where does the apparent motion of time come from and where is it going? What is my place in this flow of time? I cannot see the future, although I do seem to be able to calculate and anticipate some aspects of it sufficiently well to survive. I have a more real view of the past, but it is a view of some sort of internal videotape rather than a direct experience, and it is not a particularly reliable process. So where in time do I exist? The present? But what and where is that, and how do I apprehend its existence? If I try to look at the present moment, I find that in some mysterious way it keeps slipping away, into either the future or the past or some kind of

dream that contains elements of both. By the time I have said to myself, "This is the present moment, what's going on here?" – the present moment has disappeared. So if I am at all honest I am forced, albeit grudgingly, to accept the fact that not only do I not understand this seemingly most familiar element in which I have my existence, I have no idea what it is that I don't understand. (3)

Western philosophers have historically approached the question of time from many different perspectives and lines of thought:

- Heraclitus: "There is nothing permanent except change."
- Plato: "Time and the heavens came into being at the same instant, in order that, if they were ever to dissolve, they might be dissolved together. Such was the mind and thought of God in the creation of time."
- Aristotle: "Time is the number of motion."
- Philo: "In Eternity, there is no past and future, only the present."
- Nicholas of Cusa: "All time is compressed in the present or 'now.' The present, therefore, in which all times are included, is one: it is unity itself."
- Spinoza: "Eternity cannot be defined by time or have any relationship to it."
- Kant: "Space and time are forms of sense perception but not objective things."
- Hegel: "Time is precisely the existence of this perpetual self-cancellation."
- Bergson: "Reality is a flowing. It means that movement, change, becoming is everything that there is. There is nothing else; everything is movement, is change."

The pinnacle of Western philosophical thought is generally recognized as the Greek school of Plato. He taught that there is a higher order of existence, one of infinite harmony. The phenomenal world of space and time is a weak reflection of this perfect order of things. In his great work the *Timaeus*, Plato referred to the state of reality before creation and the emergence of time as "what is existent always and has no becoming."

According to Plato's pupil Aristotle, 'now' is the beginning and end of time. Although past and future have duration but no existence, the present has existence but no duration. He distinguished between temporal stages by the fact that we remember the past, feel the present and expect the future. In congruence with Plato, he believed that everything which is time-bound is a moving image of eternity:

References to eternity as being fixed or unchangeable do not mean a static or frozen condition of things. On the contrary they mean a perfect expression of all things – a state in which all possibilities, interblending and interpenetrating, are in harmonious accord, a state of infinite richness and diversity and *fullness*, obeying unchanging principles which bring every part in to relationship with the whole. If a man could reach a state of harmony, he would have *being* corresponding to this eternal world. Aeon [the eternal world of ideas], as a thought of God realized to its full, is developed in every direction; and *time* is a moving image, a trace of aeon, limited to our imperfect understanding, one expression of this full form. If we think of it in the language of dimensions, it means that time, as we know it, has not the dimensional capacity to contain aeon. (4)

The nature of time has been an important topic of both Western philosophical and Eastern spiritual teachings throughout the ages. Although their approaches are different, both have reached similar conclusions – time can only be understood from the perspective of unity and the reality of the present moment or *now*. Zen teacher Maurine Stuart articulates this view in *Subtle Sound*:

Western as well as Eastern philosophers have inquired a great deal about time. This moment, that moment, past, present, future. David Hume said that whenever we have no successive perceptions, we have no notion of time. He said, "Time cannot make its appearance to the mind either alone or attended by a steady, unchangeable object; it is always discovered by some perceivable succession of changeable objects." Hume is on the very edge of Zen insight. He is saying that the idea of time is a product of change, and change can only occur when there is more than one object, or at least more than one quality. So we may presume that when there are no objects, there is no time. Time was invented with naming. Separation occurs when one thing is set apart from another, through naming. However much we may try to divide and classify the world by means of words, it is still one; it is never really divided. As soon as one thing is named, however, everything else seems to exist in relation to it. That creates an inescapable duality. Before such definitions are made, nothing stands in relationship, or apart from, anything else. There is no knower, no known; there are no subjects and no objects, no succession of objects and therefore no time. A Western philosopher may say, from things we get words. In the Zen view, from words we get things. All that we actually experience is in the immediate present – Now – and we can never experience anything beyond this Now. There has never been anything other than this Now, this moment. No matter how many periods of time, even tens of thousands of them, that we can think of, they consist of nothing but the present moment, the absolute Now. All existence, all worlds are realized in each temporal particularity. (5)

Mystical and Eastern Spiritual Teachings

People who have mystical experiences are able to enter states of consciousness in which time has no duration; they experience a continual “present moment” or timeless state of being. In *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist*, psychologist Lawrence LeShan describes the mystical experience and its relationship to time:

Our usual concept of past, present, and future as separate, differentiated states is an illusion. If all is one – and this is the basic statement of the mystical world-picture – then there is unity in time as well as space. In this view, the separation in space between two entities is an illusion and the separation in time between two events is an illusion. Since in this metaphysical system we are most concerned with the relational aspect of “things,” all events and entities “flow” into one another. Sharp dividing lines are an illusion, and this includes the sharp dividing lines we customarily make between the past, the present, and the future. Time, says the mystic, is a “seamless garment” on which man customarily makes arbitrary seams and separation lines. The Absolute, the One, the Real, Brahman, from the mystic’s viewpoint, *is*. It was, is, and will be, and is not divided into “has happened,” “is happening,” “will happen,” into past, present, and future. The Real contains no such characteristics and division any more than the movie film resting in its container, has them. We view the real through the narrow lens of the film projector, and it therefore appears to us as if events were happening in motion and as if the universe were divided into what *has*, *is*, and *will be* happening. That this is the *only* way to perceive is an illusion arising from the structure of our nervous system and the false way we are trained as children to perceive. (6)

The mystical experience and the simultaneous understanding of the nature of time are not confined to mystics and enlightened beings. Some scientists have recognized that time may have a sacred or spiritual aspect which involves a sense of wonder, mystery, and deep thankfulness. Professor of astrophysics Arnold Benz expresses this deep sense of wonderment and grace in *Astrophysics and Creation*:

It may be that, at a certain point in life, we experience a special minute that is more than just a self-evident continuation of the 72.6 million million previous minutes that have passed since the Big Bang. We may experience it as *graciously granted time*. In such a moment we experience time as creation. It may feel like a veil has been lifted from our eyes when we realize that Earth and humanity are not simply thrown into time, and are not here simply as a matter of course, but that the universe and cosmic developments are granted a certain duration. Cognizant of our limited lifetime, we may then also perceive that time is given to us personally. Time is granted not only to us, but to everything else in the cosmos! In this respect we can understand ourselves as on a par with all that is, throughout the universe. “Time is given to us” is a metaphoric expression

for experiencing time as if it were a gift, as something other than self-evident. From this standpoint, the ticking of the clock is no longer experienced as defining the normal state of time. Real gifts are something extraordinary and undeserved. Time and its created power include all processes in the entire universe in the past, present, and future. The giver of time is part of the great metaphor wherein a gift is bestowed, an exchange in which the receiver also plays an integral role. Humans are those who receive the gift and are capable of perceiving it as such. And it is fitting that the one who receives should be moved to thank the giver. (7)

Many Eastern spiritual teachings also consider time as a fundamental principle of the universe. Cosmic time is generally conceived as a cyclical, repeating phenomenon. For instance, in Hinduism a cosmic day is defined as a *kalpa* with a duration of 8.64 billion years. During the first half-day the transcendental Spirit or *Brahman* grows and evolves, but then sleeps for another half-day as the manifest universe collapses and dissolves into nothingness and a state of pure potentiality. The cycle then repeats as Brahman awakens again. Time is also divided into shorter periods called *yugas* which delineate an epoch or era within a four-age cycle totalling 24,000 years. Each *yuga* is characterized by a process of birth, growth and ultimate destruction, followed by a re-creation as the cycle repeats.

Buddhist cosmology conceives time as a *Kalachakra* or "wheel of time" (*kala* means time and *chakra* means wheel). Thus time is cyclical and ever-repeating through countless eons. The Buddha taught that there are many realms of existence, each with its own scale of time. Time is envisaged as a process related to a given phenomenon, rather than existing as an independent reality.

Process suggests change, impermanence and the transitory nature of all that exists. In the words of the Dalai Lama: "Things are all the time moving, never fixed. This fact indicates the impermanent, dynamic nature of things, that they never remain fixed or static, they are always in the process of changing from one form to another." As well, Buddhism also challenges the concept of "past, present and future." Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki: "In the spiritual world there are no time divisions such as the past, present, and future; for they have contracted themselves into a single moment of the present where life quivers in its true sense."

Buddhism also teaches that time has higher dimensions that transcend linear, directional time: "There are infinite universes and infinite time scales." Although we usually think of time as flowing from the past to the future, in another sense time also flows from the future to the past as pure potential becomes actual. Certain ancient Buddhist texts, such as the *Flower Ornament Scripture*, teach that past, present, and future are all infinite in extent and dependently co-existing. In *One Mind*, Larry Dossey writes: "Thus, the future can affect the past – and, since our awareness is timeless and nonlocal, it should not be surprising that we can and do experience communications with the future in precognitive dreams." From such a perspective, time is multi-dimensional and encompasses all possible times in one whole or unity in which past, present and future co-exist together.

The ancient sages of China viewed reality, or the *Tao*, as a dynamic process of continual flow and change. In *The Turning Point*, physicist Fritjof Capra expands on this idea: "In their view all phenomena we observe participate in this cosmic process and are thus intrinsically dynamic. The principal characteristic of the Tao is the cyclical nature of its ceaseless motion; all developments in nature – those in the physical world as well as those in the psychological and social realms – show cyclical patterns."

In Taoism, the yin-yang symbol expresses cycles of duality, forever repeating in endless cycles of transformation (day and night, activity and passivity). Time is seen as an aspect of the basic dynamic, creative principle of the universe. Marie-Louise von Franz:

Time thus belongs to the masculine Yang principle, which is symbolized by three straight lines; its female counterpart Yin (symbolized by three broken lines) is associated with space. These two together manifest the Tao, the secret law which governs the cosmos. Yang, the creative, acts in the world of the invisible with Spirit and time for its field. Yin, the receptive, acts upon Matter in Space and brings material things to completion. Time, seen in this way, is the means of making actual what is potential. (8)

Sufism

The great classical Sufi master Jalaluddin Rumi divided reality into two realms – Spirit and Nature: "The most important difference between the realm of Spirit and the realm of Nature is that the former is out of time (since time is an arbitrary category of understanding) and the latter is in time. Time is a characteristic only of the phenomenal world and not of the Ultimate Reality."

Rumi rejects the concept of a static world, a finished product which is incapable of change and development. On the contrary, he believes that the world has only a semblance of duration; in truth, all phenomena are annihilated and re-created at every moment by the eternal manifestation of Divine Energy. The Prophet said, "the world is but a moment," i.e. a flash of Divine illumination. But in our minds this immediacy produces the illusion of Time and we deem the world enduring. The truth cannot be learnt except through the highest mystical experience, that of the saint in timeless union with God. Time is an arbitrary category of understanding. The Sufi surpasses this limitation. He is not of Time: there the past and the future and time without beginning and time without end do not exist. All these terms belong to the domain of discursive reason; they are not applicable in the non-spatial and non-temporal world. Therefore, the Sufi is the son of the "moment" by which is to be understood only a denial of the division of time into several categories. (9)

Contemporary Sufis conceive time as a continuum linking past-present-future in an inter-related whole. Sufi teacher and author Idries Shah: "In a certain important sense there is no such thing as past, present and future. If you affect the future, you will affect the past and the present. Sometimes you have to affect the past in order to get people into a condition to cope with the present and the future." In the classic teaching story of the "Turkish Bath," the Sufi figure Mulla Nasrudin, playing the role of the 'wise fool,' illustrates this concept with humour and insight:

Nasrudin enables the Sufi Seeker to understand that the formal ideas current about time and space are not necessarily those which obtain in the wider field of true reality. People who believe, for instance, that they are being rewarded for past actions and may be rewarded in the future for future doings, cannot be Sufis. The Sufi time conception is an interrelation – a continuum.

Nasrudin visited a Turkish bath. Because he was dressed in rags, he was cavalierly treated by the attendants, who gave him an old towel and a scrap of soap. When he left, he handed the amazed bath keepers a gold coin. The next day he appeared again, magnificently attired, and was naturally given the best possible attention and deference. When the bath was over, he presented the bath men with the smallest copper coin available. "This," he said, "was for the attendance last time. The gold coin was for your treatment of me *this time*." (10)

The story contradicts our usual belief that reward and punishment must necessarily *follow* certain actions and behaviours. "The Sufis hold that there is a different time-system at work concurrently. In other words, something that seems to follow something else may in fact precede it in another time-system belonging to an invisible world parallel to ours."

According to the Sufis, the experience of time is also related to *scale* and the ability of human consciousness to perceive events from a comprehensive perspective. This idea can be expressed by an analogy:

The limitations of scale is connected with time: with the maximum and minimum of the "present moment" which our consciousness is able to span. A time-scale gap closer to everyday experience may illustrate. Suppose a young child has a thorn deeply embedded in a finger. The mother sees the situation in terms of a present moment vastly greater than the child's. She sees her baby's life as a whole, its well-being, growth, maturity. She takes a needle, quickly digs it under the thorn and removes it. The child's present moment is restricted to the three or four seconds during which a needle is piercing its flesh. In terms of the child's present moment the mother is committing an incomprehensible act of cruelty, a deliberate infliction of needless suffering. The child does not understand, and cannot, that the mother's action arises from concern for its own ultimate good. To appreciate this, the child would need access to a present moment which it does not possess, and, at its stage of development, cannot possess. (11)

Zen Buddhism

The Buddhist conception of time concurs with Einstein's concept of the relative nature of time and space, denying that there is any absolute frame of reference for both. In *The Universe in a Single Atom*, the Dalai Lama places this formulation in a historical context:

In the Buddhist philosophical world, the concept of time as relative is not alien. Before the second century C.E., the Sautrantika school argued against the notion of time as absolute. Dividing the temporal process into the past, present and future, the Sautrantikas demonstrated the interdependence of the three and argued for the untenability of any notion of independently real past, present and future. They showed that time cannot be conceived as an intrinsically real entity existing independently of temporal phenomena but must be understood as a set of relations among temporal phenomena. Apart from the temporal phenomena upon which we construct the concept of time, there is no real time that is somehow the grand vessel in which things and events occur, an absolute that has an existence of its own. These arguments for the relativity of time, subsequently developed by Nagarjuna, are primarily philosophical, but the fact remains that time has been perceived as relative in the Buddhist philosophical tradition for nearly two thousand years. (12)

Most Westerners assume that time has a beginning and will eventually have an end. However, the notion of "beginning" and "end" are the product of the conceptualizing mind. Eastern teachings such as Zen Buddhism offer a different view. For instance, the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dogen spoke of "being-time." Contemporary Zen roshi Dainin Katagiri develops Dogen's concept in *You Have to Say Something*:

Our usual sense of before and after is associated with time, which we see as flowing from past to present to future. We tend to think of time as a continuum, i.e., we see past, present and future as being connected. But Dogen speaks of each moment as being independent, although always manifest within the Whole. Thus each moment, though absolutely distinct, is simultaneously the entire universe. But how does a single moment become the whole universe? Time is just motion, but it is motion with nothing moving. Time has no form apart from space. And all things that appear exist in becoming, in movement from moment to moment. In other words, your life is time. It exists only in the coming and going of this moment, and nowhere else. In this realm of arising and ceasing, all beings are manifest. This moment – now – is not our idea of this moment, which is necessarily separate from the next moment. We cannot *think* this moment – we have to *see* it. And we can only *see* this moment by going deeply into it . . . In touching the bottom of *this* moment, there is no idea of "this moment." In the vividness of *this* moment, time and space are one. Thus, our individual life and the whole universe can be seen simultaneously in this moment. (13)

One of the fundamental teachings of all schools of Buddhism is impermanence. The Buddha taught that the transience of all forms and processes is a basic truth of existence. Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh: "All is impermanent, because all is in a state of perpetual change. It is because things transform themselves ceaselessly that they cannot maintain their independent identity. Not only are physical phenomena impermanent and devoid of identity, but the same is true even for physiological phenomena, as for example our body, and psychological phenomena, such as our feelings." Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki offers a useful analogy to express this concept:

Within this moment, this temporal existence does not change, does not move, and is always independent from other existences. In the next moment another existence arises; we may change to something else. Strictly speaking, there is no connection between I myself yesterday and I myself in this moment; there is no connection whatsoever. Dogen-zenji said, "Charcoal does not become ashes." Ashes are ashes; they do not belong to charcoal. They have their own past and future. They are an independent existence because they are flashing into the vast phenomenal world. And charcoal and red-hot fire are quite different existences. Black charcoal is also a flashing into the vast phenomenal world. Where there is black charcoal there is not red-hot charcoal. So black charcoal is independent of red-hot charcoal; ashes are independent of firewood; each existence is independent. (14)

The ceaseless change inherent in passing time is a constant reminder of our fleeting existence. The great classical Japanese poet Basho captures this reality in a concise haiku:

"All day in grey rain hollyhocks
follow the sun's invisible road."

For the modern Western mind, time is the grid imposed on change and impermanence. In *Grassroots Zen*, Perle Besserman and Manfred Steger reinforce this important thought:

We find that everything is changing, unfolding from moment to moment. Over and over again, yet always fresh and new, never stale, never routine, we ourselves are coming and going as change. We need to allow ourselves to let change happen. Only when we realize that the universe is itself nothing but change, and that it's going on all the time, we can begin to experience ourselves as change . . . Really allowing yourself to become one with change means you no longer think about change. Instead of separating yourself from changing conditions, emotions, expectations, and goals, you simply disappear into them. They are always new. Life is never boring. Having closed the gap between the changing universe, the moment, and the separate entity you think of as your "self," you can at last come and go in peace. (15)

Continuous change is the cardinal principle of existence, combining in itself the dual processes of creation and dissolution. The experience of change creates the abstraction of the concept of time, which can be transcended through inner development and transformation: "To be in time and yet by a supreme effort of discrimination to live beyond it, enables us to catch the reflection of time-eternity, and this is the first step towards our realization of infinite Being." In *The Wheel of Life and Death*, Zen roshi Philip Kapleau challenges our normal conception of time by pointing to the underlying source from which time and all other phenomena ultimately arise:

Our True-essence is like a mirror, which reflects different phenomena. These various phenomena have a limited existence in time and space, and in that sense are ultimately unreal. But the mirror itself is permanent and real since it projects varying images without being marked by them. Similarly, True-mind embraces all phenomena without being affected by them . . . Actually, we can't say whether anything exists or doesn't exist, simply because nothing has an enduring life of its own; all forms are empty of self-substance, and nothing is the same from moment to moment. Everything is in flux, constantly forming, dependent upon causes and conditions, disintegrating, and reforming again. (16)

Advaita Vedanta

The great Indian sage Ramana Maharshi held that our sense of time is a purely mental concept based on the arbitrary division of time into seconds, minutes, hours, and so on. The mind creates psychological time with a past and a future as an explanation for the appearance of change. While acknowledging that all phenomena are always changing and in flux, he emphasized that underlying this incessant change is a timeless source or 'eternal now.' "There is neither past nor future. Yesterday was the present to you when you experienced it, and tomorrow will also be the present when you will experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present, and beyond experience nothing exists."

I don't consider time real. We know nothing about the past, nor do we know about the future. But we know the present exists. Let us know about it first. Time and space always change. But there is something that is eternal and changeless. For example, the world and time, past or future, nothing exists for us during sleep. But we exist. Let us try to find out that which is changeless and which always exists. (17)

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj also recognized that reality or experience only exists in the present moment, as timeless awareness or consciousness: In *I Am That*, he wrote: "What begins and ends is mere appearance. The appearance may last very long on some scale of time, and be very short on another. But whatever is time bound is momentary and has no enduring reality. I see the word as it is, a momentary appearance in consciousness."

A moment back the remembered was actual, in a moment the actual will be the remembered. What makes the actual unique? Obviously, it is your sense of being present. In memory and anticipation there is a clear feeling that it is a mental state under observation, while in the actual the feeling is primarily of being present and aware. It is awareness that makes the difference between the actual and the remembered. One thinks of the past or the future, but one is present in the *now*. Wherever you go, the sense of here and now you carry with you all the time. It means that you are independent of space and time, that space and time are in you, not you in them. It is your self-identification with the body, which, of course, is limited in space and time, that gives you the feeling of finiteness. In reality you are infinite and eternal. (18)

As well, the law of cause and effect is also a mental construct since all that exists is here and now in a timeless unity: "Cause and effect make up a whole and cannot be distinguished as separate events as they have an indissoluble unity." Time and space, past and future, cause and effect, exist in consciousness only. From this perspective, the future affects the present as much as the past since each moment contains the whole of the past and creates the whole of the future. "To see the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end is the intimation of eternity."

The source of all that is contains all possibilities, much as a seed is the last of innumerable seeds and carries the experience and promise of numberless forests. "So does the Unknown contain all that was, or could have been and all that shall or would be. The entire field of becoming is open and accessible; past and future coexist in the eternal now."

Contemporary Western Advaita teacher Jean Klein distinguishes between 'psychological time' and 'functional time.' Psychological time is a creation of the human mind and results in the direction or arrow of time from past to present to future. Psychological time becomes an explanation for things appearing to change. Thoughts about the past and future give the impression of duration or extension out of present moment awareness. "All there is, is the ever-changing content of the mind, arising presently in awareness. It is only when there is immersion in the stream of thought that time seems real."

Chronological or astronomical time is based on memory, just like psychological time, but it is functional memory without the intervention of an ego: "Memory which functions without the limitations of the self-image is completely integrated in cosmic memory, the all-possibility, whose archetypes are within us just as the tree is within the seed. Functional memory appears spontaneously when needed in different situations." In *The Ease of Being*, Klein writes:

Are you clear what you mean by "time"? It is true that man is always creating time. Psychological time is thought based on memory. It is essentially the past and we continually revive the past through it. In fact, what we call the future is only a modified past. Psychological time is never in the now, but like a pendulum is in constant movement from past to future, from future to present, in

rapid succession. It exists only on the horizontal plane of having-becoming, pleasure-displeasure, grasping-avoidance, security-insecurity. It is the source of misery and conflict. Understanding psychological time and space is the way to meditation and right living. (19)

Rupert Spira, a student of Jean Klein, notes that the concept of time conceived by the thinking mind is based on the duration between two events. However, we never actually experience two events simultaneously; we only experience the present moment. Without reference to thought we have no direct knowledge of time:

All experience takes place now. 'Now' is normally conceived as a fraction of time sandwiched between the two endless expanses of past and future. The now is considered to be a moment of minute duration – hence the phrase, 'the present moment' – moving along a line of time. The now is undoubtedly known or experienced. But what about time? Time is the duration between two events. For instance, there is apparently a duration of twenty-four hours between breakfast this morning and breakfast tomorrow morning. But what is our actual experience of this duration? What is our experience of breakfast this morning at this moment? It is only a thought or an image. And breakfast tomorrow morning is likewise only a thought or an image. All thoughts and images take place now, never in a past or future. We truly only know now; we never actually know a past or future. If we don't actually know a past or future, how can we know time? We cannot! If we stay close to our experience we find that this now is the only now there ever is. It is eternally now. This now is not going anywhere in time. There is no time present in which it could travel forwards or backwards. The now is not a moment in time. It has nothing to do with time. It is not made out of time-stuff. What is the now made of? The now is ever-present, so it can only be made out of something that is also ever-present. What in our experience is ever-present? The mind, the body, the world? No, only our self. The now *is* our self. We are not present *in* the now, we *are* the now. The now is not a container that holds our self along with everything else. It *is* our self, eternal Presence. (20)

References

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