

**COMMITTEE VI**

Eastern Approaches to Knowledge and  
Values: With an Emphasis on "QI"

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**Discussant Paper on Joseph Jordan's Paper**

**THE HUMAN PSYCHE: PERSPECTIVE FROM THE EAST**

by

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Discussion by Professor A. J. Ellison of the paper by Professor J. T. F. Jordens:

The Human Psyche: perspective from the East

My understanding of Professor Jordens' paper is as follows. He suggests that the many systems of thought within Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism all stem from the ancient Samkhya system of India and that these systems, though they have important differences, have common and fundamental views of the human psyche. He first enquires as to the beginnings of the system and then goes on to consider the place of man in the universe, with particular attention to the 'physiology' of the chakras or psychic centres in the subtler parts of man and the manner in which the whole system, including man, is schematized in the mandala.

Much later than the Veda, the Upanishads were the results of the deep study of the psyche, using new methods and sketching the systems based on the idea of different states of consciousness, especially what occurred when the yogi 'moved' from normal physical consciousness to samadhi, that is, from the 'normal' state of 'separateness' to a state of conscious unity with all that exists. It was suggested that the normal waking consciousness, dreaming sleep, dreamless sleep and samadhi formed a continuous series or progression. Professor Jordens suggests that these ideas were based on rigorous self-experimentation and personal experience of those early explorers in consciousness.

He briefly mentions the idea of reincarnation - a series of lives on earth rather than only one - the lives being linked together in a cause and effect relationship by the law of karma.

Exactly what was transferred from one physical embodiment to the next, creating the linkage, was a particular problem considered by many thinkers and, though many answers were produced, fundamentally all accepted the mutual interdependence of psyche and matter. Professor Jordens mentions the assumption in all those systems of thought that it was possible to experience a transcendence of the process of reincarnation. The process of so doing entailed a spiritual journey from the body consciousness to the deepest inner consciousness at the 'centre' via concentration, meditation and ultimately contemplation.

The ancient thinkers considered the question of how this temporary experience of the ultimate core of being related to ordinary life and living. That inner centre was considered to be a state of complete transcendence utterly different from all ideas of thinking, feeling, choice and self-awareness. So the idea arose, he suggests, that psychic phenomena and faculties involved the same 'matter' as did the 'outside world', body and psyche being in one continuum.

Professor Jordens now turns to the details of the Samkhya system of Indian philosophy, providing a cosmic evolutionary scheme involving twenty-four categories ranging from the ultimate 'stuff' of the universe ('root matter' or prakriti) through generalized mind and individuation to the grossest elements of the material world. This process of evolution is started by pure spirit 'disturbing' the ultimate root matter and first producing generalized mind.

This scheme was evolved, he suggests, as a result of the

experiences of the different states of consciousness in yogic meditation. The ultimate 'stuff' of the universe is equivalent to deep sleep, this then leading to awareness, the awareness then becoming internally individualized, and finally waking up to the outside world experienced through the senses. This may also be considered in reverse, going from normal consciousness inwards through imagination to deep sleep or the deep unconsciousness. So the Samkhya scheme of the universe might be considered also a map of the human psyche, useful as a personal guide for the yogic journey.

Professor Jordens next suggests that the various types of yogi, as a result of their experiences from the practice, built up a 'physiology' of the psyche (or 'subtle body') involving the psychic centres or chakras and conduits or nadis. The nadis in this system carried the 'vital energy' (prana), one of them carrying the 'Divine energy' (kundalini). In Tantric meditation the yogi rouses the kundalini, dormant in the chakra at the base of the spine, and leads it through the central nadi in the spine through all the chakras to the top in the head. Its arrival there is said to reunite the male aspect of pure absolute consciousness (Shiva) at the head and the female aspect of pure cosmic power (Shakti) at the base of the spine.

Professor Jordens completes his paper with a description and explanation of the mandala, suggesting that it is a cryptograph summarising the scheme of life and reality: the cryptograph can take one of several forms. The cryptograph summarises not only the formation and dissolution of the universe but also that of the human being. It all refers to the early Samkhya system and

acts as a road map to give the yogi direction back to the Self: from the All to the One (and back). Psychology and cosmology are parallel. The aim was to realise total harmony while living in the world.

I now come to my critical appraisal of the paper.

The paper is a description of the views of the ancient Aryans, described by Professor Jordens as theories. He mentions differences between schools but refers to a number of common fundamental approaches to the study of the psyche. He refers to the kinds of questions answered and the kinds of methods used in the early investigations. I did not, however, find any discussion of those methods but only references to asceticism ('ascesis'?) meditation and concentration. What exactly was supposed to be occurring during these procedures? Suggestion of 'dreamless sleep' having the external world in it - the form of the forces of the subconscious - I do not entirely understand. Certainly the psyche seems to span both 'external' and 'internal' worlds, but I imagine the situation could well be the other way round, that is, the 'forces' of the subtler worlds may be determining influences on the nature of the 'external' world. Also the idea of reincarnation is referred to, and what exactly was transferred after death to the new body, including what transfers the karma. Professor Jordens refers to 'speculation' about the three bodies: the gross body, the subtle body and the body of karma.

The big question which arises in my mind is: Was all this conjecture and speculation? Were there no people so spiritually advanced that they could actually explore the nature of the subtler worlds and subtler bodies in full consciousness and give the results of their findings? (We have the Indian idea of a series of Avatars.) What of the injunction of the Eastern teachers that the physical world was a Maya and that we should 'open our eyes' and perceive reality? Did they not know that this was true? Surely there was something more than just 'speculations'? (Professor Jordens later suggests that there was (and is) in his section on the Mystical Physiology of the Chakras.)

Of course it is true, as Professor Jordens says, that the answers to these big questions were 'intensely considered' by Hindu, Jain and Buddhist students in various schools. As one would expect from 'considerations', they produced a great variety of answers. Surely, again, there were others who did not only 'consider' but also 'explored'? There was, Professor Jordens says, the common assumption that the transmigratory states could be transcended and these could be experienced. Was it only an assumption? Was it not a belief of lesser scholars based on the teachings of those greater explorers who had achieved it and who taught it from personal experience?

Modern Western science has something to say in regard to some of this, in particular regarding the 'mutual penetration' of psyche and matter - this idea that the subtler body interpenetrates the physical body, that is, 'all psychic phenomena and faculties ... purely cosmic, as made of the same

matter as the outside world', body and psyche being 'in the same continuum'. This is something that can be tested and such tests have been made. It is now possible to say that the matter of the subtler worlds is not of the same nature as the physical world (surely necessitating thereby its occupying of the same space). It looks very much as though the 'worlds' or states of consciousness are in different spaces, their real existence being only in the mind of the 'observer' - and this applies equally to the physical world. On this basis all 'matter', physical and subtle, would be equally illusory - or nearly so. It looks to me as though the claim that the physical world is a maya or illusion and is not at all as it seems is absolutely true and demonstrable - and this applies equally to the psychic levels of consciousness. Of the yet higher spiritual levels in which subjectivity and objectivity may be quite different it is of course not possible to speak. Our language is based on our shared experiences of the physical world and so, for the reasons Professor Jordens gives, may be only to some degree applicable to the psychic worlds. The traditional way is metaphorically to 'go and see' and that means a long process of meditation in addition to living a life based on the unity of all life and a gradual loss of the personal ego centre. There is a snag to the meditation method, mentioned later, however.

Regarding Professor Jordens' description of the Samkhya scheme of evolution, it is probably not possible to apply Western science. It is the result, as Larson suggests, of deep meditation combined with parallel high spiritual development.

Levels of consciousness above the psychic can only be models and discussed in terms of symbols which might evoke subtler memories in a human being evolved to the appropriate level. The mandala is clearly a symbolic representation of matters which cannot be understood or represented but can only be experienced by the 'initiate'.

I am a little puzzled by the description of the 'mystical physiology of the chakras' and Professor Jordens' description of the yogi's explanation of the psyche. I might accept that the psyche 'possesses' another body like the physical body which had a similar objectivity and that the other body had structures called chakras and nadis to conduct prana and kundalini. However, I do not understand, in that case, and if they are not in any sense at the physical level of consciousness, how the nadis can be said to be entwined around the spinal column, the chakras being 'located' along the spine. That all certainly implies the existence of the subtler body in physical space - which it clearly is not. Perhaps the subtler has a similar appearance to that of the physical body and the description applies only to the subtle body. In this case there would have to be, it seems to me, some sort of 'resonance' between the activities of the prana, kundalini and chakras and the functions of the physical body. I might find it possible to accept this. We must not expect to be able to model everything in purely physical world terms and the form of the 'resonance' - a sort of mystical resonance - would remain a mystery. There is no doubt of the extreme effects on the physical body of the vigorous practice of kundalini yoga.



A final consideration: when one is in meditation, at a different level of consciousness from this very illusive physical world, one is clearly in a world of thought and emotion where belief is of over-riding importance. What is firmly believed in may tend to be actualized - including in the physical world. It may be that a traditional system of spiritual development giving a scheme for going from the 'outer' manifestation of the physical world to the 'inner' realms of the deep unconsciousness (or higher levels of consciousness, where ordinary human beings would normally be practically unconsciousness), taught by strongly believing teachers, would indeed be a way forwards to the highest - or back to the divine centre. There are considered to be many ways to God. Perhaps it is inappropriate to try to be too 'materially scientific' in regard to these studies. Perhaps the Samkhya system of cosmology and evolution is rather materialistic because it is symbolic, the symbols necessarily being those of the physical world. If one accepts it and believes it perhaps that is all that is necessary. We are trying to discuss matters for which there can be no words which have a clear meaning. Ordinary human beings trying to discuss prakriti and purusha is perhaps rather like a dog trying to understand the theory of relativity? If the system - any system - works, and seems to imply the sort of life which appeals to the highest within us, then it is well worth following. Perhaps a Western scientific training, over-developing the critical and analytical side of a human being on the basis of Cartesian dualism, is not always the best start on the path to the highest unless it can be

transcended. We must perhaps be more constructive and creative rather than overly analytical. The words of tradition are perhaps only analogous to the reality, which is metaphysical.