

# PSYCHE: A TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE

## PART III

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In the previous chapters, we have discussed the six greatest traditions of the world in reference to their views on psyche. We have attempted thus to present what amounts to a traditional view of psyche. But this attempt can not be complete unless we compare these different perspectives and their respective theories. In the following pages we will endeavour to do precisely that.

In the introduction, we had mentioned a -common characteristic shared by all traditions which became the criteria and excuse for treating them jointly. Now comparing them one is again struck by the significance of this criteria. For as must be apparent by now, under the apparent multiplicity and variety, of forms which these tradition assume there, lies a startling similarity which one cannot help noticing. As soon as the study of a specific tradition is started the same views begin to emerge; one comes across similar concepts and identical principles. It is as if one basic story is being told, over and over again with new names, and places, each time in different styles and languages, or a play being enacted repeatedly with a fresh cast and new setting each time but keeping essentially to the same theme. So much so that by the end of it one knows the whole story by heart. This by no means guarantees that viewer has understood this too symbolic a story. It is far too elusive for comprehension; all one can grasp is an overall picture or outline. To supply this picture with details, would require another study, tenfold the volume of this work and yet it would be incomplete. Such is the nature nature of the topic which we attempted to study and yet the gist of it can be explained in one short sentence:

“He is the Self within and without; yea, within and without.  
(UPANISHAD).

“He is the first and the Last and the Outward and the Inward and He knows infinity all things”.

Quran.  
(LVII,3)

or

“For the kingdom of Heaven, may rather the king of Heaven is within you”.

(PSALMAS)

or

“In truth I say to you that within this fathom high body ...lies the world and the rising of the world and the ceasing of the world.

(THE BUDDHA)

One could go on endlessly. But the point is made. All sacred traditions, based on revelation, point towards one direction; and that is the direction of the Divine, the Absolute, the One. They see God as the ultimate reality and the cosmos as theophany. To see the cosmos as theophany is to see the reflection of the one self in the cosmos and its form. As Dante has described in the depth I saw in gathered bound by love in one single volume, that which is dispersed in leaves throughout the universe: Substances and accidents and their relations, as though fused together in such a way that what I tell is but a simple light!

It is this vision of reality which the traditional societies held which penetrated all activities and was projected in all sciences, arts, crafts, artifacts, patterns of life etc. Apart from the spiritual man to whom this vision was directly available through the intellect, the average man was constantly reminded of it through the sacred forms which surrounded him serving as symbols of Reality and revealed wisdom was available to him in the form of sacred scriptures as well as in sciences which studied cosmos as a theophany; as the theophany of that Reality which resides at the centre of the being itself.

The traditional sciences while studying nature and natural laws in the cosmos always remained aware of the essential unity of all phenomena as manifestation of the One Reality and of the harmony between the physical, subtle and spiritual realms of being which make the life of the cosmos possible. The ultimate Reality which is both Being and supra-being is at once transcendent and immanent. It is beyond everything, and at the very heart and centre of man's soul. Scientia sacra can be expounded in the language of

one as well as the other perspective. It can speak of God or Godhead, Allah, the Tao, Brahma, or even Nirvana as being beyond the world, or forms or samsara, while asserting ultimately that Nirvana is samsara and samsara, nirvana. But it can also speak of the Supreme self, of Atman compared to which all objectivization is maya. They were able to see unity in multiplicity. One could say that they possessed knowledge of essential principles and absolute realities which is totally absent from modern sciences, since it has lost sight of the wisdom contained in revelation. It is easy to see how various traditions coincide in their view of a reality. The Divine Essence, Self, Brahma, Tao or primordial One is manifested at various levels of Being, (recall five Divine presences of God according to the sufi doctrine).

The law fundamental to all sacred sciences is the law of correspondence between hierarchial levels of being. As we have had the occasion to see in the course of this study, this law is, applied everywhere, together with the law of inverted analogy. This same law can be seen working behind the traditional doctrine of correspondence between man and the cosmos. To be sure, the image of man as depicted in various traditions has not been identical. Some have emphasized the human state more than the other (the example of the former could be Christianity and Islam), and envisaged the eschatological realities differently. But there is no doubt that all the traditions studied here, agree upon the centre and origin of man and see his end in a state which is other than his terrestrial life. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the traditional doctrine of man is based, in one way or the other, on the concept of primordial man as the source of perfection, the total and complete reflection of the Divinity and the archetypal reality containing the possibilities of cosmic existence itself. Man is the model of the universe because he is himself the reflection of these possibilities in the principal domain which manifested themselves as the world. The world is not seen as the reflection of man qua man but of man as being himself the total and plenary reflection of all those Divine qualities whose reflections comprise the manifested order albeit in a scattered manner.

The situation of man as a bridge between Heaven and Earth is reflected in all of his being and his faculties. Metaphysically speaking man has his archetype in that primordial 'perfect' and universal being of man who is the

mirror of the Divine Qualities and Names and the prototype of creation. In Islam the correspondence between man, the cosmos and the creator is central to the whole religion. As the Quran says “we shall show them our signs upon the horizon and in their souls ---” Not only is man a part of the cosmos, he is a cosmos in himself, a microcosm. The levels of cosmic reality, correspond in man to spirit, (Infinite), psyche (intermediate) and body (terrestrial/material).

The traditional sciences have spoken at length about the inner structure and faculties of man as well. On the first level of understanding the human microcosm, one must take into consideration the tripartite nature of the human being consisting of spirit, soul, and body - the Spiritus, anima and corpus of Hermetism and Grecian thought and Ruh, nafs and jasad of Muslim psychology. Whereas in Hinduism we find the distinction of Shatula sarira (subtle body) and suksanasaria (gross body) whereas jivatma is the living soul as manifestation of universal Atma. However, in contrast to this we do not find the concept of a supreme entity in Buddhism but void takes the place of Divine Principle and Nirvana as prototype of the soul, and consciousness as totality of psychic functions as well as spiritual awareness.

Buddhi, Intellect, Logos and ‘Aql are four words signifying the same faculty that is intuitive intellect in man. It is at the same time, a transcendent faculty, whereas reason is bound to the psychic realm. Sankhya psychology has attributed the power of decision, resolution and will to Buddhi whereas in the Islamic sciences, will is the noblest of man’s faculties yet it is not a part of ‘Aql or Intellect.

Almost all traditions have elevated the function of Buddhi and attributed it to heart, similarly heart is also the seat of emotion and desire, and mind is only assigned to a second place. Centre of our consciousness or egoic consciousness is also not mind or brain but our spirit which is the centre of our self. Buddha compares mind to a bird, flying at different levels or to monkey who jumps from branch to branch. Whereas heart, as the seat of Buddha, is peaceful, and tranquil.

Prana or vital spirit (ar-ruh) is another concept which we find in almost all traditions. One thing must be kept in mind, the similarities that we see between Hermetism, Greek thought and Islam are also due to the fact that

Islam and Greeks have been greatly influenced by the former. However, a later tradition borrows from an earlier one only what fits the frame-work of it's essential principles. Islam has done the same and Islamic sciences are richer for that.

The human body consists of three basic elements: the head, the body, and the heart. The heart which is the invisible centre of the both subtle and the physical body, is the seat of intelligence and the point which relates the terrestrial human state to the higher states of being. In the heart, knowledge and being meet and are one. the head and body are like projections of the heart: the head whose activity is associated with the mind is the projection of the intellect of the heart, and the body is the projection of being.

Man also possesses numerous internal faculties, a memory which has an every day and a sacred function, an imagination which has the power to create forms corresponding to cosmic realities and plays a central role in religious life. Man's gift of speech is a manifestation of the Logos which shines in his heart at the existential level and enables him to voice the word of God (Kalimah).

It is evident from what has been discussed so far that man is seen as a tripartite being by all traditions. The psyche is his subtle self but not the total subtle self. The highest or deepest level of man's self is his spirit or Intellect which is normally not available to his consciousness. In previous chapter we had broached the issue of the unconscious. Now we will try to explain it:

In our discussion of the consciousness, we have seen that Guenon has attributed a far greater ability of extension to the human consciousness than it is normally thought to possess. Dreams, since they belong to the psychic realm, and organic consciousness, both are thought to be extensions of consciousness., since the psyche is reabsorbed in the universal psychic realm during sleep it perceives the forms inherent in this realm and is conscious as far as it's pure consciousness is concerned; it is only in reference to the sensible world that it has suspended or withdrawn it's functions. As explained earlier, the psychic realm is prone to influences of infernal as well as angelic forces and dreams are penetrated by both kinds of contents. Notwithstanding those dream-contents which are mainly formed of memory or

personal experiences, if we presume that all other dream contents come from the unconscious, then, unconscious necessarily comprises of divine as well as infernal impulses. In this regard, T. Burckhardt says that there are some psychic “events” whose repercussions traverse all the degrees of the subtle world “vertically”, since they touch the essences; others are the ordinary psychic movements that only obey the “horizontal” coming and going of the psyche; lastly there are those that derive from the sub-human depths (here we must remember that some medieval cosmologists place the hells symbolically between heaven and earth). The first of these do not lend themselves entirely to expression - they include an element of “mystery” - and yet the forms which they evoke occasionally in the imagination are clear and precise such as those characterizing the sacred arts (calligraphy, music etc). The third kind, the demoniac “inspirations” are unintelligible by their very forms, as well as obscure.

Hence it follows that the influences from these two dimensions can penetrate the psyche anytime and they are equivalent to what is called the unconscious by psychoanalysis, but only in one sense. Freud did not recognize the angelic inspirations or the positive side of the unconscious. Burckhardt explains further that there is a distinction between, on the one hand, a more or less darksome layer of consciousness lying beneath every day consciousness (which layer in any case cannot be completely unconscious in that it somehow does enter consciousness) and on the other hand, the true, purely passive and thus in itself unformed, ground of the soul. The darksome layer which was referred to is filled with the sediments of psychic impressions and behavioral modes. The true ground of the soul on the other hand is in itself neither dark nor light nor is it a brooding volcano of irrational eruptions. On the contrary, when it is not completely veiled, it can mirror its complementary pole, the universal spirit, and the truths reaching from the realm of the spirit that sometimes acquire the form of symbols.

Hence we have seen that psyche receives influences from its lower as well as higher realms; from sub-human depths as well as from the spirit.

Now coming back to the concept of the unconscious, what can be inferred is that among the two poles or realms that encroach the psyche, spirit is said to be the core of being but man is not conscious of it nor can he reach it in any way except through the intellect. It is as Eckhart says “something in

the soul which is uncreated and uncreatable". Spirit is like a lamp and when the lampshade becomes dusty its light is only dimly seen by others. Huston Smith points out that spirit is actually the part of ourselves which can be called unconscious. He calls it the sacred unconscious.

Jung: We have been discussing traditional sciences and their doctrines on psyche, and we have found out that it is perceived as an intermediate or border line are between the spirit and body and which partakes of both and is connected to them; to the former through intellect and wham, to the latter through the sense faculties. It perishes with the body in the terms of sense faculties but that part of the soul which is attached to the spirit survives independently of the body after the dissolution of the body. It has the functions of knowledge, being and action, which it carries out through its sense faculties <sub>A</sub> (internal as well as external). Brain is not the seat of intellect as is generally thought but heart which is to other senses what sun is to the other planets. So far we have found out that traditional sciences bear a concept of the psyche, entirely their own and as is obvious, contrasts sharply with the theories of modern psychology. We would not venture into the detailed comparative analysis, which is a study of its own, but merely point out the important ways in which hypotheses of modern psychology differs or agrees (whatever may be the case) with the traditional psychology. Among the trends of modern psychology we are mainly concentrating on the Jungian theory with passing reference to other systems. As mentioned earlier the most fundamental chasm that separates two approaches to the psyche is their view of man or rather, one should say, their view of the ultimate reality. Whereas traditional thought treats man as a manifestation of the Divine self and a reflection of the universe, modern outlook studies him in isolation from these levels of reality; the first approach is primarily cosmic whereas second is merely individual; the latter cuts off man from the vertical dimension of his existence and confines him to the horizontal plane only.

Jung says, "the object of psychology is the psychic; unfortunately it is also its subject". According to this opinion, every psychological judgment inevitably participates in the essentially subjective nature of its object for according to this logic, no one understands the soul except by means of his own soul and the latter, for the psychologist precisely belongs only to the psychic and to nothing else. No psychologist whatever may be his claim to

objectivity can escape from this dilemma. Thus it follows that relativism is inherent in modern psychology. This relativism is also a kind of promethium that would make of the psychic the ultimate reality of man. But despite the admitted precariousness of its view point modern psychology behaves like any other science. It utters judgments and believes in their validity. If we are to observe, that the psychic is subjective, that is to say, dominated by a certain egocentric bias imposing on it certain limits this is to say that there is something in us which is not subject to same limits or tendencies but exceeds and dominates them in principle. That something is the Intellect and this is what provides us with the criteria whereby the fluctuating and uncertain world of the psyche can alone be illuminated.

As we have discerned again and again during the course of this work the traditional doctrines place intellect much above reason and thus it is able to study the psyche objectively. Whereas reason which is itself a faculty of psyche without being guided by intellect proves entirely insufficient when it comes to describing the world of the soul. All the chaos of the inferior, mostly unconscious, psychic possibilities escapes rationality, and so do those which stand above the rational i.e. the spiritual or metaphysical realm hence as T. Burckhardt observes “psychology finds itself facing a domain that overflows in all directions the horizon of a science built on empiricism and the Cartesian dualism”.

The thesis of traditional psychology stands on the law that the soul like any other compartment of reality can only be truly known by that which exceeds it, otherwise objectivity is not possible. If intelligence was no more than a psychic reality and was not guided by the intellect, it would not be possible for man to rise above his subjectivity. He says that what modern psychology lacks is criteria allowing it to situate the aspects or tendencies of the soul in their cosmic context. In traditional psychology these criteria are provided by two principal dimensions namely, on the one hand cosmology that “situates” the soul and to modalities in the hierarchy of the states of existence and on the other hand a immorality directed towards a spiritual aim. This immorality is not unnatural or suffocating since it reviews man’s-psyche in a cosmic context and thus makes rules based on a objective knowledge of psyche. As we have seen all traditions relates man’s psychic possibilities to his spiritual nature and envisage tendencies of his psyche as



compared to the cosmic tendencies, and universal principles. Traditional psychology thus as we have seen, has one “static” dimension namely cosmology and another personal and “operative” dimension namely morality. It is said in Sufism that “the genuine knowledge of the psyche results from the knowledge of one’s self. He who by the eye of his essence is able to “objectivize” his own psychic from by that very fact knows all the possibilities of the psychic or the subtle world. “This is the vision which goes into the making of a traditional science of soul. As we have observed in the previous chapter, traditional science of soul, proclaims that only higher can know the lower thus, spirit knows soul in it’s psychic forms and soul through sensory faculties knows the corporeal.

As Jung has expressed many times, what we know of reality is all that reaches us through the “images” of it that our mental faculty is able to keep hold at. It is in vain to try to know what the world is outside the subtle web of our memories, impressions, and expectations. So far traditional psychology agrees with Jung but he further says that world is nothing outside our consciousness of it and there is no absolute principle. Whereas the traditional view of reality points towards an absolute reality which is also the centre of man’s being.

What appears in the previous chapter as a whole-some concept of reality, denotes that it is not the individual soul but the entire subtle order that contains the physical world. The logical coherence of the latter implies the unity of the former, as evident from the fact that the multiple individual visions of the sensible world, fragmentary though they are, coincide in substance as part of formal existence. In ancient Hindu mythologies, it is compared to the atmosphere surrounding the earth and pervading all porous bodies and acting as a vehicle of life.

Comparing concepts in Jung’s theory to the traditional cosmology and mythology, one discovers that he had borrowed immensely from traditional doctrines of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Greek, as well as from mythologies of many diverse cultures. He saw in mythological symbols and in the art the unconscious expression of a collective, universal psyche. The reader will no doubt recall that in traditional societies arts and crafts are efforts to express an in- expressible ultimate reality in form of symbols. It is obvious how Jung has attached his own interpretation to the sacred forms.

Dr. Gerhard Adler narrates an old Cabalistic legend. Let's hear it and then we will see how it is interpreted differently by Jung and by the traditional thought. This legend describing the "Formation of the child" says that at the moment of creation, the seed of the future human being, is brought before God and he decides what its soul shall become man or woman, sage or simpleton, rich or poor. Only one thing he leaves undecided that is whether it be righteous or unrighteous. Then the soul protests and begs not to be sent to the world where upon God rebukes her and tells her that she was made for the earthly life. After this soul is initiated into all the mysteries of other world and knows the Beyond as well as the hell and paradise .On coming to the world the angel extinguishes the light of knowledge burning above it and the soul enclosed in its earthly envelope enters this world having forgotten its lofty wisdom but always seeking to regain it.

By now reader must be well acquainted with traditional perspective and can see what this legend implies, as regards soul's destiny, a purpose of its creation and its original source. As we have seen in previous discussions of the traditional concepts, soul is a manifestation of God or the Divine principle, and before entering the body it lived in the world of archetypes and human intellect seeks to recapture the knowledge of those archetypes of immutable possibilities. Now hear the Jungian explanation: it say that "the soul is made only for earthly life and the Beyond from which the soul originates is the repository of the ultimate secrets of heaven and hell, light and darkness, above and below, positive and negative in other words it is the world of the collective unconscious from which we all originate".

So now we come face to face (only figuratively) with the most fundamental, and famous (or notorious) concept in Jung's theory of psyches i.e. the collective unconscious. Starting from the analysis of dream - contents, he observed that a certain category of dream images could not be explained on the basis of residual personal experiences; this led him to distinguish within the unconscious domain between a personal zone" whose contents represent the other face of individual's psychic life and a "collective" zone made up of latent psychic dispositions of an impersonal character such as never offer themselves to the direct grasp of the consciousness but manifest themselves indirectly through symbolic dreams and irrational" impulses "Just as the human body displays a common anatomy independently of racial

differences, so also the psyche possesses beyond all cultural and mental differences a common substratum that I have named the collective unconscious". So far it looks plausible but soon enough his theory takes an arwinian turn and asserts that "it is here (in collective unconscious) that the psychic parallelism with the animal is situated – Ithe different lines of psychic evolution starting out from one truth and roots plunged through all the ages". It follows from this theory that the archetypes are an expression of an ancestral psychic fund that brings man near to the animal! what has been said so far and what can easily be concluded after reading what Jung has written on the topic, it becomes clearly visible that, for Jung, the "collective unconscious" is situated "below" at the level of physiological instincts. The basic term collective unconscious could carry a wider or in a way spiritual meaning, if Jung had retained the original meaning of the term archetypes' and also placed the concept in it's cosmological hierarchy. The resemblance of Jung's collective unconscious to the materia prima of Hermetic tradition is quite acute now. In this regard T. Burckhardt has provided a most illuminating analysis of the issue: He says that symbolically materia prima lies "below" because it is completely passive and it appears "dark" because as the absolutely unformed it eludes every advance of the intelligence. This is the source of misunderstanding which confuses the materia prima of the alchemists with the "collective unconscious" of modern psychology. Materia, however unlike that ill-defined psychic domain is not a source of irrational and more or less exclusively psychic impulses but the passive basis of all perception.

As for the archetypes, they do not belong to the psychic realm but to the realm of pure spirit as we have seen already, they nevertheless are reflected at the psychic level - as virtualities of images - but they are not innate complexes which can possess a man nor are they irrational since they come from the supra rational realm. Burckhardt also emphasizes that in every individual two poles of being are present (yin yang or purusha- prakrati one feminine, one masculine or one passive, one active etc.) Hence in every human individual there is to be found a man, a woman, a father, a mother, a child and an elderly person etc. It is not possible here to go into the details of these concepts. It suffices to show that though Jung has taken many essential concepts from traditional wisdom, he has used them and interpreted them in

his own manner which is radically different from their original usage.

Burckhardt explains that under certain condition the soul is able to take on the function of a mirror that reflects in a purely passive and imaginative manner universal truths contained in the intellect. Hence Jung's thesis that motives and forms common to all men manifest themselves in dreams as well as in myths and symbolism. But such "inspirations" are rare as in the case of dreams which announce future events.

Hence if the conscious is defined as all that lies outside ordinary consciousness - then it is made to include inferior chaos as well as the superior states. The definition of the unconscious therefore in no wise delimits a concrete modality of the soul, whereas "depth psychology" operates with the "unconscious" as if with a definite entity. Another concept which Jung interprets differently is that of the self. He considers it not as a transcendent principle but as the outcome of psychological processes.

From the comparison of traditional perspective with the modern view point it has become clear that as far as the traditions are concerned, there is intra-traditional variety in expressions and forms but no disparity or contradiction in essential principles. They seem to be expressing the same truth. They are in the words of F. Schuon "paths leading to the same summit". Whereas modern science differs essentially from the traditional perspective and interprets the reality of human psyche in a totally different context.

## **CONCLUSION**

From introduction to conclusion, it has proved to be a long journey. But a most fascinating one; taking the researcher into unfamiliar terrains and providing the glimpses of unseen landscapes. Though a travel diary of this Journey has been presented in previous pages, it still remains to be synthesized. What has the researcher accumulated during this Journey, not only in the form of individual souvenirs but also as a collective experience. Let's look at it.

In the introduction, it was stated that self knowledge is the most vital kind of knowledge for man, and then we made an attempt to see what the sciences which are concerned with man's self, have to say in this regard. That is how do they view the inner self of man. At the end of this research, with a

wonderfully revealing data in our hands, we can say no more than, this, that the outcome of this research has elevated as well as depressed us. The exploration and rediscovery of the traditional wisdom has been a wonderful and enriching experience, as well as a cause for rejoicing because it opens new doors and vistas, which can free the modern mind from stagnation of a horizontal and profane “wisdom”, but it also gives rise to apprehension. In the light of what we learnt during the course of this research, it seems that inspite of all the claims to the contrary, man is far from the centre of his self and all the time rushing away from it.

At the beginning, we formulated two hypotheses that; all traditions share a more or less common view regarding the nature and composition of man and that modern approach was in conflict with the traditional view. Both our hypotheses stand confirmed. And the conclusions to which they lead are many, and extremely significant.

Firstly, if all the traditions are paths leading to the same summit (theosis) and all human beings stem from the same root, then knowledge of this fact can enable man see beyond the multiplicity of forms, the unity of essence and rise above the inter-religious prejudices and differences (though on the same time adhering to the forms of its own religion). Secondly it implies that all traditions believe in one truth, and point towards one direction and have done so since ages. How can such a huge section of humanity and with wise and pious men among them, be wrong? If it is right then what should be our attitude from now on.

Besides these general inferences there are those which concern the science of psychology itself. As we mentioned in the introduction psychology seems to leave most of the psychic phenomena unexplained and what it does explain i.e. behaviour is not at all conclusive. Neither does it exert any profound influence on the inner self of man. Same can be said of psychotherapy, which was a diversion we deliberately avoided because it could have led into extra-long details. However from the discussion given above, it is evident that in the traditional societies, to cure the illness of soul was not the job of a psychologist as such, but of the medical and spiritual authorities and if the medicine of traditional civilizations knows nothing analogous to modern psychotherapy, this is because the psychic cannot be treated by means of the psychic. It can only be cured by something situated

outside and above it.

From the traditional point of view modern psychology is a standard case of psychic trying to grasp the psychic and isolating it from its cosmic dimensions. Whereas traditional psychology for example sufi disciplines, do not separate the soul either from the metaphysical or from the cosmic order. This provides it with qualitative criteria wholly lacking in modern psychology, which only studies the dynamic character of the phenomena of psyche, and their proximate causes. More over it confuses the psychic with the Spiritual. What is the solution? S.H Nasr says that it is possible to integrate the knowledge of the soul contained in the traditional doctrines with the resources of modern psychology and evolve a new, better and truly objective science of the soul. We fervently hope that it will be brought out. So much in the future of humanity depends on this.