

Introceptual Consciousness and the Collective Unconscious

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I've just received a letter from one of the *sadhakas* dated June 17, 1970, in which certain questions are raised which I think deserve a permanent answer. First, I'll read the letter into the tape. It is as follows:

A few questions have arisen in my mind which I am as yet not able to answer, if answer there be. First of all, I am undecided about the relationship between what seems to me at times to be two different paths of yoga. The first path I conceive of as being oriented toward the transcendental and the second path seems to be oriented more toward the descendent or autochthonic, to coin a term. More precisely, the question is: what is the relationship between the psychological notion of the *collective unconscious* and the metaphysical notion of *introceptual knowledge*? Why is it that we speak of descending into the unconscious but of ascending to the transcendental? Is there in fact a real difference in method and orientation here, or is the descent a preliminary step to the ascent? Or are the words 'descent' and 'ascent' simply relative to the base of reference taken at the start and not to the direction in which one's consciousness actual travels? What can be gotten out of the collective unconscious—a new self-identity instead of the ego-identity? Or does even this self-identity remain something less than the Realization of what has been called the true Self or *Atman*?

I am afraid that I may be only a little off the beam and therefore making very little sense in even trying to formulate such a problem. I may be dealing with a seeming problem and nothing of any consequence. What I'm getting at is a distinction between the real meaning, if there is in fact a distinction to be got at, of saying that the pearl beyond price is found in the mud and saying that the pearl beyond price is found in the transcendent. Can a metaphysical distinction be made between the Jungian path of individuation and the mystical path of Self-Realization? Perhaps what I am searching for is a more detailed analysis of the blanket term 'collective unconscious' and a more detailed analysis of what is meant by what you have called the introceptive organ, faculty, or function of consciousness. You have said that the third function may not be a simple function but that it may be a complex one. If it is complex, would an analysis of its complexity into its parts be of any use?

In answer to the foregoing letter, I first would like to remark that these questions are not light or trivial. They are worthy of serious consideration. Let us deal at once with

the meaning of the collective unconsciousness of Dr. Carl G. Jung. Insofar as I understand Jung's use of the conception of the collective unconscious, it is a blanket term covering everything other than that which we view as ordinary consciousness, namely, that which I have called relative or subject-object consciousness, involving a relationship of consciousness between a knower and a known. The collective unconscious appears to be used to cover every other psychical possibility, including possibilities below the level of relative consciousness and possibilities above. It is a negative term defining rather our ignorance as scientists with respect to these possibilities. It does not imply that there may not be another way of consciousness which would render available cognition in the zone known as the collective unconscious. I think we may correctly maintain that yoga is a process whereby one may enter into this massive zone consciously and realize it as a way of consciousness, no doubt quite different from our ordinary consciousness. In fact, the great yogin Sri Aurobindo has spoken of the collective unconscious as simply meaning another way of consciousness—a position with which I do heartily agree.

Aurobindo, in his analysis of the different levels of consciousness, speaks of a consciousness below our ordinary consciousness which he calls the *subconscient*, and he distinguishes two levels in this zone and claims that he has consciously and deliberately penetrated into it. He then distinguishes a zone which he calls the *subliminal*, which is given as being on the same level as our ordinary consciousness but behind it, as it were. In this he distinguishes three subdivisions called respectively: the *subtle physical*, the *subtle vital*, and the *subtle mental*, which are not conscious zones ordinarily for the non-yogic individual. Then most important of all, he defines a zone standing above our ordinary consciousness and differentiates this in considerable detail. This zone he calls the *superconscious*, and the divisions or levels within it run as follows: first, a *higher mind*, which is said to be above the head—the mind within the head corresponding to what we call intellectual cognition. Above higher mind there would lie *illuminative mind*. Above that, *intuition* in its true sense operating on its own level though manifesting to mankind and other creatures through a modification projected downward in which case it is not completely pure. Above intuition he has identified what he calls “overmind,” the principle that governs the cosmos. And these are all realms located in what is known as the lower hemisphere. Above that, in the upper hemisphere, there is *supermind*—the source and parent of all forms of mind within the lower hemisphere. In *supermind* he differentiates subdivisions which are not greatly elaborated. And above *supermind* he places *ananda*, then *chit*, and finally, *sat*—the zone known, as a whole, as *satchitananda*. This involves a very complex classification, and it also implies that if there is such a classification there has been a power present that knew it and was able to classify it and to give the properties or functions of each level. Now bear in mind that all this that is here elaborated in the philosophy and psychology of Sri Aurobindo is listed by Dr. Carl G. Jung as simply the collective unconscious.

Thus, in answer to the question as to whether we descend into the unconscious or ascend into it, takes more than one form. Definitely, if it is a movement into the subconscient, it is very proper to call it a descent. This would probably lead into the conscious zones of creatures below man such as animal consciousness—or part of animal consciousness which lies below rather than corresponding to human levels—to such consciousness as may be possessed by vegetable forms, insect forms, and finally, that which may be associated with the mineral, though this is called by Sri Aurobindo as

inconscious on the surface though conscious and even potentially highly spiritual behind the surface. Now, a movement into the subliminal would not be a descent, but a movement on the same level; and, in contrast, any movement into the superconscious would be an ascent in consciousness. In my own thought and terminology, the *introceptual* is identified with the zone meant by Sri Aurobindo when he spoke of the superconscious, so that a movement into it would be an ascent. Perhaps this would clarify the problem presented in the first question.

Now, there is another consideration. When we speak of up and down, before and after, to the left and to the right, and also when we speak of a past and a future and a present time, we're speaking in terms of an organized relative order. In the ascent of Realization, there comes a time when one has arisen sufficiently high when all of this relativity is irrelevant—the past, the future, the present, spatial dimensions like up and down, to right, to left, before and after are without meaning. On this level, there is not a sense of process but rather a sense of an at once all inclusiveness. Evolution is a predication irrelevant to this state of Realization. So that with respect to that consciousness it would not be strictly correct to say one rises into it or descends into it, for that depends upon a principle of relativity, whereas this is non-relative, truly the infinite. This reminds us of something said in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krishna is represented as saying, "From a portion of myself, I produce this universe yet remain one apart."¹ The result is that we have to say that development, relativity is a part truth, and yet at the same time, from another perspective, nothing has happened, all is present now in an eternal durable reality. There is no least and there is no greatest. But we must keep perspective here and not apply what is true in this supreme metaphysical sense to the relativity that is valid in process or evolution. There is in the evolution an early stage where, in the language of Sri Aurobindo, the Divine has descended and veiled itself in matter so that on the surface in the mineral it is truly *inconscious*, and from that, develops through the simplest forms of consciousness on the surface, which would move progressively through vegetable, insect, animal forms, and finally into the human, to reach the stage with which we are now familiar, and then on beyond the human into the trans-human or supramental orders and whatever may lie beyond that. In this process that which is potential in the background becomes kinetic or actual on the surface.

We can tie this into Dr. Carl G. Jung's statement that the important thing for man is to be conscious, conscious on the surface in Aurobindian terms. And when he starts as an infant, he emerges out of this collective unconscious—which, bear in mind, really is consciousness in another sense or operating according to a different law—he emerges out of this in a form of limited and separated islands of consciousness, which might very well be represented, say, by icebergs, which being made of the same stuff of which the water enveloping them is made, can be melted by that water and returned to it in liquid form, and thus illustrate what can happen to the early consciousness. It, too, can melt and return to the collective unconscious. But evolution is a development in the emergence of consciousness on the surface, first in the form of these islands, and then becoming more and more connected forming continents, which build in time a resistance to the dissolving

¹ William Q. Judge, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Co., 1947), 76: "I established this whole universe with a single portion of myself, and remain separate."

power of the collective unconscious so that they can stand against that dissolving force. That is a way of viewing the aim of evolution, and relative to process, with which we are concerned; this is very important thing to achieve—to be able to stand against that dissolving force. And being an entity is the great achievement—to be able to stand alone, as it were, even though one were the last man in a dying world; to feel secure and not in danger of dissolution. This is real strength. This involves, in other terms, the achievement of conscious Buddhahood. This is the goal for man.

How we speak of a relativity of stature among the evolving things, there is a criterion suggested by Dr. Jung. We may, for instance, speak of things, or creatures, or human beings, or even Buddhas of different orders such as one-principle, two-principle, three-principles, and ultimately seven-principle Buddhas, as representing a hierarchy. There are things in which even the simplest creatures in this hierarchy would excel. As for instance, a redwood tree excels in longevity, and animals excel man in the exercise of instinct, and some men excel other men in muscular capacity, and still others excel in mental and moral capacity or artistic ability. There is here a relativity only with respect to a specific capacity or function; any one of these entities may be inferior with respect to other capacities or functions. The question arises, is there any sense in which we can classify an entity as superior *per se* in the scale of evolution apart from any special function? Jung gives a criterion in these terms, which seem to me quite valid, namely, that he who is most conscious on the surface, in other words, less conditioned by the collective unconscious, less subject to projection—that is unconscious projection, for all projection in this sense is unconscious—that individual is superior *per se*, a more highly evolved entity as compared to those who are less conscious on the surface, less in control of themselves.

Let us return now to some of the questions asked by the correspondent. I will re-read a portion of them:

More precisely, the question is: what is the relationship between the psychological notion of the collective unconscious and the metaphysical notion of *introceptual* knowledge? Why is it that we speak of descending into the unconscious but of ascending to the transcendental? Is there in fact a real difference in method and orientation here, or is the descent a preliminary step to the ascent? Or are the words descent and ascent simply relative to the base of reference taken at the start and not to the direction in which one's consciousness actual travels? What can be gotten out of the collective unconscious—a new self-identity instead of the ego-identity? Or does even this self-identity remain something less than the Realization of what has been called the true Self or *Atman*?

The answer to some of these questions, I think, is already evident from what has been said before. The collective unconscious, being conceived of as a blanket term, includes the heights as well as the depths, and therefore the goal of the true yogin lies within it. Yoga, in the most restricted and fundamental sense, is the movement toward Liberation or Enlightenment—a state in which one has mastered the problems of life here and is redeemed in the strictest sense of the term. It is the Great Attainment. This yoga, at this state, does not stop short of a state of consciousness which is identical with

Nirvana or *Moksha*, even though final acceptance of this state may be rejected for the purpose of aiding the unredeemed portion of humanity. As I use the term in most of my writing, it is to be understood in this sense. But in a broader use of the conception of yoga, it includes various other powers not developed in *Pathways* or in *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, but which are nonetheless real powers, most of which I cannot claim to have experienced, nor can I claim to have very great interest in them unless they serve a deeper purpose. Therefore it would follow that in the total resources covered by the word yoga there is a power of descent into realms inferior to that normal to man as well as a power to research in domains that may be on an equal level with his present state of evolution. In this broader sense, the answer to the question of whether we descend or not can be yes.

Jung has made the statement somewhere in his writings that before one can ascend to a higher peak of consciousness, he must first descend to his base, and from that, climb anew to other heights. And the figure has been used, by myself and others, of having reached a certain height of consciousness and from that position discerning still greater heights, and that then one, in order to reach those greater heights, must first descend from the peak he has reached, cross the valley separating him from the heights beyond, perhaps passing through water running in the valley—and since water represents the unconscious, this means activating elements that lie there hidden within it—then from this descended state, re-ascending to the greater peak lying beyond. I would hesitate to say that this is a law, but it may be a more or less general truth. In connection with Jung's discussion of this point, he makes the statement that only the god's can cross the rainbow bridge from one peak to a higher peak and that for a mere human who has not evolved so far to try to do so would be to lead to almost a certainty of a fall. There is, however, this possibility, that if one individual in a past life had attained to certain of those more distant and greater peaks, and then in a new birth had an obscuration of his knowledge and was repeating the climb, for him it might well be possible to cross over the rainbow bridge and not have to pass through the intermediate experiences, those having been mastered in an earlier life.

I think now that we have given the material for answering the question as to whether entering the collective unconsciousness leads to a self-identity other than the ego-identity and does this mean the same as the Self or the *Atman*. It can mean the Self or the *Atman* since the collective unconscious includes all that we regard as other than our ordinary self-consciousness.

There is another question that should be dealt with that has come up in a recent communication. A young man in his twenties recently died from damage to the liver apparently produced by the use of psychedelic drugs. It was stated that he had apparently an authorization to proceed this way by reason of a certain statement that occurs in *Pathways* to the effect that one is justified in doing anything that would lead to Enlightenment. This statement is valid only in connection with real Enlightenment, for real Enlightenment takes primacy over everything else. The only condition being that collective Enlightenment takes primacy over individual Enlightenment. But the greatest good that one can effect for oneself or the good of mankind is to achieve Enlightenment. Even though one does not take the course of the renunciation referred to at the close of *The Voice of the Silence*, even the individual act of private Enlightenment lifts humanity

to that extent. But the greater act of seeking the Enlightenment of the human totality does have primacy over individual Enlightenment if it were possible that by renunciation of one's own Enlightenment the greater Enlightenment was facilitated—something which is highly improbable. It is therefore true that there is no other seeming human good that takes precedence over the progress toward Enlightenment.

But, what does a drug, particularly a psychedelic drug, produce? First of all, let me say emphatically, it does not lead to true Enlightenment. It can lead to a condition of consciousness quite different from our ordinary consciousness to be sure, and sometimes this different consciousness may have a quality of delight that would be highly intriguing, but it is not the real thing. In this connection, I would recommend to the student a study of a communication of Sri Aurobindo known as the "intermediate zone," a zone of potential deception because many of the experiences are simulations of real, authentic, enlightening experiences, but they are not themselves authentic. They can lead to confusions of various sorts. They can lead to a sense of what Aurobindo calls the Divine leading which is not truly a Divine leading; and because of the dangers of the intermediate zone, the guidance of a guru is of premier importance. It is better to wait through a period of apparently barren consciousness in the search for real Liberation and Enlightenment than to pass unnecessarily through this intermediate zone. The real thing carries a lofty quality that is beyond imagining and is well worth a passage through an apparently barren state, often symbolized as the passage across a desert, in order that it may be attained and one be not diverted by lesser lights.

I would warn everyone who seeks true Enlightenment to avoid beyond anything else indulgence in the use of psychedelic drugs, for the price of use of them may well be a postponement of real Liberation and Enlightenment for several incarnations. The drug, the use of the drug, can be the path of the thief who tries to break over walls instead of entering through the true Door to Realization, and the price can be very severe indeed. Avoid this as one would avoid poison. I once said that if I were placed in a position where I had to choose between a bullet and a coerced injection of psychedelic drugs into my organism, I would choose the bullet, for what may those psychedelic drugs do to the subtle organization of one's consciousness at the moment of death? It may make one easily the victim of forces that are totally beyond his control; whereas, the effect of the bullet could leave that power unbroken, and one could meet the tests, the delusions that face one, perhaps, after death with his resources unweakened and strong. And that could be a very important matter, for there is nothing much more important than preparation for an intelligent passage over to the consciousness beyond death.