

On the *Tri-Kaya*

Part 3 of 3

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In the first two parts we have considered two approaches to the subject of the *Tri-Kaya*, namely, that of *The Voice of the Silence* and that of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In these two treatments there are certain points that are in agreement and certain point that appears as an incompatibility which we have already dealt with at some length, and suggested a possible reconciliation.

We'll list first the points of agreement: both standpoints are in agreement that the *Dharmakaya* is that vesture whereby the individual is conscious in the *nirvanic* state. Here we may introduce certain considerations that have not so far been considered before we take up the other points. Consciousness in *Nirvana* is a power that is attained. To begin with, that from which all comes, namely, that which is human, and that which is not yet human, and that which is more than human, abides in the Root Consciousness eternally. But the Root Consciousness may be indistinguishable from a state of complete unconsciousness; and for most creatures, including the vast majority of human beings, the Root Consciousness which is realized in *Nirvana* is a state of unconsciousness. In our Western psychological development, this state is part of the meaning of the collective unconscious. It is for the ordinary kind of consciousness, the subject-object consciousness, or consciousness as *shes-rig*, it is unconscious. But we may say that the journey through necessity, the path of the pilgrim through all forms in nature, culminates in the possibility of becoming conscious in that universal unconsciousness so that the universal unconsciousness is realized as Universal Consciousness. This calls for a subtilizing of the power of relative consciousness, or *shes-rig*, so that it can turn upon itself and be conscious of its own roots. This, in a few words, is a partial interpretation of what is meant by Enlightenment, or Fundamental Realization. Now, the *Dharmakayic* state is a state of Buddhahood in which consciousness of Root Consciousness has become possible, and that condition or state is what is meant by *Nirvana*; otherwise, it is only a *pralaya*.

On another point in which there is fundamental agreement between *The Voice of the Silence* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, we find this: that both affirm the necessity of developing compassion and love for all creatures. This is viewed as primary. Now, there is a point of difference in this respect, that in *The Voice of the Silence*, because of the compassion for all creatures, the pilgrim is urged to renounce the *Dharmakaya*, since it is viewed as involving a locked-in state so that there is a break of all correlation with the condition of suffering creatures. It is therefore urged that this state be renounced in order that service may be rendered towards the redemption of all creatures, a service lasting for unnumbered *kalpas*. In *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, on the other hand, we pointed out that the pilgrim is urged, at the moment of dying, to accept the full Realization of the *Dharmakaya* for the sake of all creatures, and that the compassion for

all creatures should be maintained. Seek, therefore, the *Dharmakaya* and accept it in order that this redeeming service may be rendered to all creatures.

The two approaches are quite different, as is quite obvious, and why this difference may require certain considerations. First of all, *The Voice of the Silence* is concerned with the neophyte, or *sadhaka*, or pilgrim who is progressing in yoga to the point where he can reach the vestibule to *Nirvana* during lifetime. In the case of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, it is said that the highest possibility of all, the Realization of the Clear Light in its purest form—and by the Clear Light we must understand the pure, unformed Root Consciousness—the attainment of this is offered as a possibility for all creatures, not only for advanced yogins, but even for creatures that are sub-human. At this one moment, the highest possibility of all life, of all the journey through necessity, is offered to the aspirant. This would correspond to the *Nirvana* attained by the enlightened ones at the moment of death, and it may well be that this is a different aspect or fullness of the *nirvanic* state, as contrasted to the vestibule of *Nirvana* attainable through yoga at an advanced stage and so that the meaning is different here.

Furthermore, it was pointed out in the last tape that the *sadhaka*, at this point, may perhaps have reached the possibility of achieving a Tri-Kayic state, so that instead of there being a situation of either/or, namely, a *Dharmakaya* on one side with separation from all suffering creatures, and a renunciation of that state and an acceptance of a *Nirmanakayic* robe so that there could be labor toward the redemption of all creatures, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in contrast, suggests that all three vestures are attainable, and can be attained at the moment of death. This would suggest that there are two levels involved here: the first being a stage reached earlier, and the second, something at the moment of death that transcends that. I suggested, then, that the *Tri-Kaya* must be in principle possible.

I've but recently run across an obscure phrase in a footnote found in the book *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* which is confirmatory of this. This footnote is found on p. 125 of the *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* and is footnote number 1. It is related to a different problem that is not pertinent to us here. Only the one phrase is of importance. However, I'll read the whole of the footnote:

This seed [(*tigle*)] is said to have its Tibetan prototype in the pearl-like excrescences found in the ashes of the funeral-pyre after the cremation of a Great *Yogin*. These are considered the material proof of there having been manifested through the fleshly form the Divine Force of *Bodhic* Mind, or of the *Dharma-Kaya* reflected through its two reflexes, the *Sambhoga-Kaya* and the *Nirmana-Kaya*.¹

The important reference here is to the words, “reflected through its two reflexes, the *Sambhoga-Kaya* and the *Nirmana-Kaya*.” Now, the fundamental meaning of ‘reflex’ is reflection, as the reflection of an image on another level. Here, then, there is the implication very clearly put forth that the *Dharmakaya*, of itself, implies, or can imply,

¹ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 125.

the *Sambhogakaya* and the *Nirmanakaya*, and that means that we have a Realization of a *Tri-Kaya*. The situation, now, is not one of either/or, but rather, not simply both *Dharmakaya* and *Nirmanakaya*, but the triune form of *Dharmakaya*, *Sambhogakaya*, and *Nirmanakaya*. There is here, then, the implication that if we consider only the *Dharmakaya* and the *Nirmanakaya*, it is a case of either/or, but with all three vestures, there is a possibility of attaining to the use of all three. And from this there follows an implication that there can be a consciousness which participates in the *nirvanic* state without losing contact with the world of action, the world of forms, the *Sangsara*, or the evolution. It implies, then, a sort of compound consciousness held by the entity at one and the same time. No doubt this is a more advanced stage than that which was referred to in *The Voice of the Silence*, the implication being that it is possible to reach a *nirvanic* state without the power of holding at the same time to a *sangsaric* state; that this latter is an achievement of a more advanced sort, and that the previous achievement, which was either/or, was one of the steps on the way, but not the ultimate state.

Let no one assume that the acceptance of the primary Clear Light is in any sense an easy accomplishment. Constantly it is noted in the text that this is a very difficult achievement; a good deal is implied. First, death must be a conscious event. It is not enough to die while asleep, or in any other state of unconsciousness. It is not enough to permit oneself to become immersed in what is called the death-swoon. The dying must be conscious. And it would naturally be important that every power of the consciousness should be retained at such a time, as far as that is possible. It also must be remembered that it is stated that there is a tendency for the mind to become unfixed, that it is not stable, that it does not hold easily the material that it has acquired. The text is read not alone to the simple people. It is read even to those who are advanced in yoga, those who are rich in knowledge, to remind them of what is transpiring to them to help aid them in holding to a firm mental position when the forces of dissolution are tending to make the mind anything but steady. That's the first difficulty. But assuming that the mind is clear and does recognize the Clear Light, there are other problems. I will illustrate these from two bases, or points of view.

Mr. Huxley has written a novel called *Time Must Have a Stop*, and in this he presents an interesting interpretation of the presentation of the Clear Light that is quite suggestive.² There was in that story one character, a man of wealth, who loved his expensive cigars, his drinks, his food, and all of the "enjoyments" of external life. Place the word "enjoyments" in quotes. He suddenly died from unexpected causes, and there Huxley portrays him as facing the Clear Light. The Clear Light was not simply passive, as conceived by Huxley, but gently reached out to this one who had passed in, seeking to draw him within its folds. But this man was attached to his expensive cigars, his liquors, and his food, and the other so-called "pleasures" of external life, and he sensed immediately that to accept the Clear Light would mean that he would have to forego all these, so he did everything he could to avoid entering into the Clear Light. But the Clear Light was gently insistent and sought to embrace him within its folds. So in order to escape it, he entered into a very inferior vehicle, that of a child in the ghetto area of the city of Rome. In fact, he entered into an incarnation in great physical poverty. Now, this

² Aldous Huxley, *Time Must Have a Stop* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944).

was about as foolish as a human being can be. To be sure, one may have to forego his beer and skittles, but he who accepts the wonder of the Clear Light finds that in the state which would then possess him, he had a mass of value, of wealth, that would make even the more desirable aspects of external life seem relatively painful. Nothing would be lost, only a liability would vanish. All that was asked was that he give up a handful of fool's gold and receive in its place a great warehouse filled with real gold.

But even though the pilgrim has succeeded in dying consciously, and has carried with him his discriminative intelligence and the memory of that which he learned in life, and, in addition, feels a positive response to the offering of the Clear Light, yet he has but covered only the initial difficulties that confront him. The real, the supreme difficulty with respect to this state is indicated by a certain footnote in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, on p. 97. I shall reread the last portion of the long quotation which I made in the second part, and the footnote connected with it:

Repeat this distinctly and clearly three or [even] seven times. That will recall to the mind [of the dying one] the former [*i.e.*, when living] setting-face-to-face by the *guru*. Secondly, it will cause the naked consciousness to be recognized as the Clear Light; and, thirdly, recognizing one's own self [thus], one becometh permanently united with the *Dharma-Kaya* and Liberation will be certain.³

With this, then, is the following footnote quoting as follows:

If, when dying, one be familiar with this state, in virtue of previous spiritual (or *yogic*) training in the human world, and have power to win Buddhahood at this all-determining moment, the Wheel of Rebirth is stopped, and Liberation instantaneously achieved. But such spiritual efficiency is so very rare that the normal mental condition of the person dying is unequal to the supreme feat of holding on to the state in which the Clear Light shines; and there follows a progressive descent into lower and lower states of the *Bardo* existence, and then rebirth. The simile of a needle balanced and set rolling on a thread is used by the *lamas* to elucidate this condition. So long as the needle retains its balance, it remains on the thread. Eventually, however, the law of gravitation affects it, and it falls. In the realm of the Clear Light, similarly, the mentality of a person dying momentarily enjoys a condition of balance, or perfect equilibrium, and of oneness. Owing to unfamiliarity with such a state, which is an ecstatic state of non-ego, of subliminal consciousness, the consciousness-principle of the average human being lacks the power to function in it; *karmic* propensities becloud the consciousness-principle with thoughts of personality, of individualized being, of dualism, and, losing equilibrium, the consciousness-principle falls away from the Clear Light. It is ideation of ego, of self, which prevents the realization of

³ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 97.

Nirvana (which is the ‘blowing out of the flame of selfish longing’); and so the Wheel of Life continues to turn.⁴

I would add that not only is thought of self or of dualism a disturbing factor, but also any form of affect, positive as well as negative. An emotional condition renders impossible the subtle balance essential for the holding of this consciousness. Imagine that you felt close to you a most wonderful Consciousness which would satisfy in the fullest possible degree, and that, therefore, you reached out to it with enthusiasm, but the enthusiasm would drive it away. Then, hold still, so that there is no feeling at all, and, as near as possible, no reaching out, no thought even, and let this very subtle and gentle Consciousness reach out and envelope you. Holding perfectly still, no emotion—before all, I would say, no emotion, but just stillness—and then, this Consciousness will begin to possess you. As it takes hold, then it becomes possible, in time, to think within it without destroying it or dissolving it—thinking in a state that is free from all craving, all seeking, all emotion, as we understand emotion. But there comes over one a Consciousness that transcends all the values of feeling, as we know them; that carries within it, values beyond conceiving. Here, then, one is possessed by a Consciousness of which he may not speak; not because there is any law or rule against speaking, but because the Consciousness does not fall within the limits of any of our categories of relative awareness. There are no words or images to represent it. It cannot be communicated, save by the one power of induction.⁵ This, then, will be known as a value that is well worth a thousand lives of suffering, if that were necessary for its attainment.

He who has gone thus far has achieved the Great Release. No longer must he labor on the journey of necessity. But, there is a further achievement—a journey on a path that leads Beyond. And here one meets a still more subtle difficulty. To bring, now, into the field of the Pure Consciousness—the *rig-pa*, the unsullied and unsulliable, the unmade and the uncreated—that consciousness which is relative, that the Tibetan calls *shes-rig*, is to bring together two powers that are not easily adjusted to each other. Bear in mind that the relative consciousness is equivalent to the whole world of action, of externality, of things, of domains, of galaxies and stars and suns, as well as of all the lesser things of our relative existence. It is the relative consciousness that is equivalent to all this. And if that relative consciousness were dissolved, it would mean that for the pilgrim, the domain of *Sangsara*, the universe of action, the evolution, would have been dissolved, though not for other centers of consciousness.

Now, as the Pure Consciousness meets this relative consciousness that cognizes phenomena, the Pure Consciousness acts like a chemical menstruum or solvent that serves to dissolve the relative consciousness, so that it tends to vanish. And this means that the total domain which we call the evolution or *Sangsara* tends to vanish as a vast *maya*—not only the presence of it, but even the memory of it. And if this process were to continue to the end, there would be wiped from the pilgrim’s consciousness all awareness of the world, and not only that, even, in addition, the memory of ever having journeyed through the world of forms and action. And, thus, one would stand in that stupendous

⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁵ See the audio recording,s “Induction Talk” and “On Tulku,” part 2.

realm, not knowing that there was a *Sangsara*, not knowing that there were any creatures suffering anywhere; and, therefore, he would feel no call to go forth again among men in order to aid in their redemption because the idea of suffering creatures would have been wiped from his consciousness both as present fact and as memory.

But, now, it is possible so to use the will, that these two consciousnesses can be brought into relation, which implies that almost impossible act of relating the relative to the non-relative and then to hold these two consciousnesses in balance. This would be the marriage of *shes-rig* and *rig-pa* of the Tibetan text. And then there would be knowledge retained of the world about, of the *Sangsara*, the universe of objects, the evolution, even though abiding at the same time in the Pure Consciousness. Here, then, is involved the very subtle balance between two qualities of Consciousness which tend toward a mutual exclusion. Only by maintaining a very subtle balance is it possible to hold these two together. But it can be done. And though difficult at first, one can, like the wire-walker, having first mastered the balance on that wire until it has become second nature, and who then can perform juggling feats without destroying his balance, so too, the balance can be maintained between the Pure Consciousness and the consciousness that is concerned with cognition of phenomena, with thought, and with action. Then one can be a dweller in more than one domain at the same time.

To appreciate the difficulty here, one must bear in mind that from the perspective of the Pure Consciousness, it would appear that the whole idea of a universe of objects and that there are suffering creatures seems manifestly unreal. One, therefore, does not feel the need of a dedication to the service of a suffering humanity, for it appears that there is no such suffering, only a bad dream of a moments duration, but no reality whatever in the dream of suffering. The thought, then, that there is a necessity to go forth among men has no force, for there is no need. But, if the attitude of love and compassion has been established in the consciousness of the pilgrim before he has attained this point, there is a force that can counteract this overwhelming sense of the unreality of suffering. And therefore it is supremely necessary that that quality of compassion be so implanted in the consciousness; one, then, tends not to forget. And remember that the will is very powerful upon this level and by a simple act of will, the dissolving tendency of the Pure Consciousness with respect to the relative consciousness can be stopped, and they can be maintained in equilibrium. In the end, action and thought becomes possible without destroying the peace, and bliss, and calmness, and sweetness, of the Eternal.