

Commentary on the Mandala

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September 6, 1971

It is my thought to produce an extended commentary concerning the mandala, which consists of two conjugate equilateral hyperbolas with a square and a circle inscribed within it and a second square inscribed within the circle. This discussion will consist of four parts: first, a consideration of the circumstances or occasion which led to its development; second, a discussion of the correlation of mathematics in connection with religious orientations and philosophic orientations in general; third, a discussion of the mathematics of the hyperbola; and fourth, an interpretation of its derived significance.

Part 1

It was either during the latter part of July or the early part of August 1936, when I was standing on the bank of a creek in northern California and, as I remember, was looking at the sky when it suddenly dawned upon me that an error which is very common, in fact universal, is that of regarding the objects which stand before consciousness as being substantial. And it also dawned upon me that there where there seemed to be no objects whatsoever was actually a fullness, a substance, and that with respect to this substance the objects which arrested the attention of consciousness were actually emptiness, or rather relative emptiness, for I saw very clearly that there is a difference between the objects that stand before our consciousness, that some are indeed very dense, some make a strong impact upon us, and others are so subtle that they are almost impossible to apprehend, and that therefore it was not a simple case of stepping from a zone of objects arresting attention in one step to a zone of no objects whatsoever, but rather that there was a gradation between the state of objects and the state of the absence of objects. This formulated itself in my mind in the following way therefore: that substance, the real durable substance which is the stuff of the universe, is there where nothing arrests our consciousness as being an object, and, on the contrary, these that seem to be objects before consciousness were actually voids. Possibly it was the influence of Sir Isaac Newton which led to the formulation *substantiality is inversely proportional to ponderability*, for it sounds a good deal like Sir Isaac Newton's formulation of the inverse square law of gravity.

This statement very soon appeared to me as essentially a mathematical statement and I very promptly formulated it in mathematical terms, and that was this following statement: S , representing substantiality, equals $1/P$, P representing ponderability. Now, by 'ponderability' I mean that which produces an effect upon consciousness in the form of being an object that can be cognized specifically, can be measured, can be defined by a group of conceptions. It is, in other words, the measurable. But measurability or conceivability is here understood as an absence of substance, substance being that which is inconceivable when it is taken in its purity. But as the principle of progression was clearly present in my mind, that there was not simply one fell step from an absolute ponderability to an absolute substantiality, I

formulated it in the form which I have described, which implies the principle of the continuum and the principle of limits, as will be made clear in the part dealing with the theoretical mathematical aspect of this mandala.

This impressed me as a very illuminating insight. I had not known at the time that there was any statement similar to this to be found anywhere. Yet, later, in fact quite recently, when reading *The Voice of the Silence*, which had been a book that I had given great attention to over many years, one sentence stood out, and that served as a very important confirmation of my formulation. It is a sentence which is to be found on p. 59 of *The Voice of the Silence*, the edition of 1889, and published by the Alliance Publishing Company of New York, and is in the middle of the first paragraph appearing on the said p. 59. And the sentence is this:

Thou hast to study the voidness of the seeming full, [and] the fullness of the seeming void.¹

A thought has just come to me which I wish to put down before I lose it. So let us introduce it here as a sort of extended parenthesis or footnote. It is this, that the space which seems to surround us and contain us as embodied entities and all the objects which we call mountains, valleys, lakes, oceans, rivers, houses, cities, vehicles, worlds, stars, galaxies, all whatsoever that we call objects before consciousness in the perceptual sense, but not that appear before our conceptual cognition as the ideas and thoughts in conceptual form. Now, the space, as we ordinarily conceive it, seems to be a vast emptiness which is a universal container of the perceptual objects, not so, exactly, of the conceptual ideas. But then it dawned on me that it is precisely the function of consciousness to contain the objects. No object exists for us unless it is known.

Now, it is true that we have the very common habit of thinking of things as existing in space whether we are conscious of it or not, but that is only a habit. If we are really rigorous in our thinking, we will see that we have no right whatsoever to predicate existence of anything which is not somewhere abiding in consciousness, that that habit of predicating the existence of things in space apart from consciousness stands upon no stronger footing than predicating an extracosmic god as the cause of the events which we experience but do not understand. It is simply, essentially, a false predication. We do not really know any existence whatsoever save it abides in consciousness in some sense. Therefore, the great container of all objects, perceptual, conceptual, or otherwise, if there is any other way of cognizing them, the great container is consciousness. Therefore, the assumed space of our ordinary point of view conceived as something empty that is the universal container of existences is actually performing the same function which clear analysis shows to be performed by consciousness itself.

This being so, it dawned upon me that the seemingly empty space in which the worlds and stars seem to abide is nothing more than a projection, in the psychological sense, of the true Space which is nothing other than Pure Consciousness itself—Consciousness conceived as not dependent upon the presence of either objects or a knower, that the knower and the known are derivative, but the Consciousness is

¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence* (Pasadena, Calif.: Theosophical University Press, 1946), 55-56.

original. Our ordinary space is, thus, only a projection and not a reality in itself. The true Space or container, perhaps that which is meant by *Akasha*, is the primordial, unmade, uncreated Consciousness.

And this helps to explain many things. It causes my thought to go back to what was called a hitherto unpublished discourse of the Buddha in which he said to his disciples, there are three things that are eternally real and these are, *Nirvana*, the Law, and Space or *Akasha*, and these three are reducible to one, namely, to Space or *Akasha*, which now we must conceive of as a pure primordial, uncreated Consciousness which preexists all objects and all selves, that this is the one ultimate, unmade, eternal Reality.²

Here I would like to draw your attention to the first *sloka* of the First Stanza in *The Secret Doctrine*. It runs as follows:

The Eternal Parent, wrapped in her Ever-Invisible Robes, had slumbered once again for Seven Eternities.³

And the first part of the Commentary is as follows:

The “Parent,” Space, is the eternal, ever-present Cause of all—the incomprehensible DEITY, whose “Invisible Robes” are the mystic Root of all Matter, and of the Universe. Space is the *one eternal thing* that we can most easily imagine, immovable in its abstraction and uninfluenced by either the presence or absence in it of an objective Universe. It is without dimension, in every sense, and self-existent. Spirit is the first differentiation from “THAT,” the Causeless Cause of both Spirit and Matter.⁴

Here, then, if for ‘Space’ we substitute the conception of a pure, undifferentiated Consciousness, or Consciousness-Substance as I have suggested elsewhere,⁵ the same thing can be said in terms which are more psychologically understandable. Consciousness is, thus, the true Space, the Space behind our objective space. And from THAT there is differentiated, as it says in the Commentary, both Spirit and Matter; but here interpret Spirit

² H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 3 (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophy Co., 1910), 393.

This section is headed “An Unpublished Discourse of Buddha.”

There are three things, Bhikshus, that are everlastingly the same, upon which no vicissitude, no modification can ever act: these are the Law, Nirvana, and Space,* and those three are One, since the first two are within the last, and that last one a Maya, so long as man keeps within the whirlpool of sensuous existences.

*Akasha. It is next to impossible to render the mystic word “Tho-og” by any other term than “Space,” and yet, unless coined on purpose, no new appellation can render it so well to the mind of the Occultist.

³ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1888), 55.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵ See the audio recording, “Reflections on Buddhism.”

as the knowing subject, and Matter as the object before Consciousness, and we have an understanding of this Commentary which I think comes more clearly within our grasp.⁶

⁶ Although Wolff does not complete this commentary, he does give a comprehensive commentary on the mandala in the audio recording “Purpose, Method, and Policy of this Work,” part 9.