

On Jung's "Seven Sermons to the Dead"

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This morning I shall attempt a discussion of Dr. Jung's "Seven Sermons to the Dead." But recently, I have received two copies of this document, one from Robert Johnson and one from Dr. Joan Price. The reading of this was a rare experience. They are, to say the least, an abstract and abstruse discussion. In his accompanying letter, Robert Johnson says in part as follows, "I enclose the "Seven Sermons to the Dead" of Dr. Jung. They are puzzling to me. He did not think well of them."

For my part, I would give to them a considerably higher valuation. There is a meaning that can be attached to them that is of the profoundest sort. They are referred to in Dr. Jung's *Memories, Dreams, [and] Reflections* in the chapter called the "Confrontation with the Unconscious." At that time, he says that the psychic atmosphere in the house was very strange, and seemed to be filled with a multitude of entities—the "dead," as he calls them. There were incidents that belong in the field of parapsychology where non-visible entities seemed to produce visible physical effects. The tension imposed upon Dr. Jung was very intense and he was forced, as it were, to give these sermons, seven in number, before the tension could be released. He regarded the experience as definitely numinous, that is, involving the presence of a factor related to that which is commonly called the divine. It is evidently the same as that which I have called the transcendental component. He states that he was forced to write in the form of a hieratic language, that is, a language such as is used by priests when laying down the law, as it were; the form is thus categorical. He said that he found the use of such language very obnoxious, that it grated upon him in the same way that scratching a blackboard with a nail of the finger generally grates upon those who hear it. Nonetheless, he had to use this language. When the seven sermons were completed, the strange psychical condition vanished, and there was a return to the normal state of peace in the consciousness.

I am told that Dr. Jung never intended that these "Seven Sermons" should be published, since he regarded them as purely private and bearing upon a personal psychological condition. However, as I have perused these Sermons, and meditated upon them, I regard them as having a general value, that they can be interpreted as representing a penetration into a fact that is of premier importance, namely, the movement from dualistic consciousness to the nondualistic consciousness, which brings us at once into the domain of the yoga of Sri Shankaracharya. I shall read into the tape the first two paragraphs of the first sermon:

The dead came back from Jerusalem, where they found not what they sought. They prayed me let them in and besought my word, and thus I began my teaching.

Harken: I [began] begin with nothingness. Nothingness is the same as fullness. In infinity full is no better than empty. Nothingness is both empty and full. As well might ye say anything else of nothingness, as for instance, white is it, or black, or again, it is not, or it is. A thing that is infinite and eternal hath no qualities, since it hath all qualities.¹

That the dead did not find the answer to their question in Jerusalem is quite understandable since there is nothing in the Judaic religion, or the Judaic-Christian religion, that will provide an answer in terms that require the conception of *Advaita*, or Nondualism. The answer is more easily found in the *Advaita* Vedanta. And by consideration of the *Advaita* Vedanta, and of certain considerations connected with formal logic and with mathematics, and a portion of the imperience I had on August 7, 1936, I think we can work out the meaning of these abstract statements of Dr. Jung.

As an aid to our thinking, imagine a configuration in the form of an inverted Y. Of this form, the vertical shaft above represents the All in a state of non-manifestation, one which we may call a state of Being, or more accurately, Be-ness, but of nonexistence. The distinction between Being or Be-ness, on one hand, and of existence, on the other, is that the state of Being *is*, but is not manifest. When manifest it exists, existence meaning a projecting outward, as it were, so that it may be evident to itself. In the state of Be-ness, the All has no parts, no differentiation whatsoever. It is, as it were, everything at once. Here there is no possibility of thought, no possibility of differentiated action. Strictly speaking, it is a state which is neither rest nor action. It is, in fact, the state that can only be described for our consciousness in negative terms. It is the state of the negation of all the pairs of opposites. In Shankara's terms, this is *Brahman*. In my terms, this is Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject and has no content, but does have the potentiality of all possible content. But in this state, none of this is manifest. There is no self and there is no world. It is timeless, spaceless, and unconditioned by law; but, on the other hand, it is the source of time, space, and law. When there is a manifestation, it is as though the Pure THAT, of which we can cognize nothing, proceeds to divide itself into two parts, represented by the lower branches of our inverted Y. When this happens, time and space are born, and the law becomes activated and a determinant factor in the manifestation. With the manifestation, a bifurcation of all substances, essences, and qualities takes place so that every identifiable aspect whatsoever stands in contrast to its opposite. Each identifiable aspect and its opposite is of equal reality. One is not to be preferred or rated as more real than the other. Every aspect and its opposite is a manifested part of the whole. With the manifestation, the subjective and the objective are born out of its latency in the Pure Consciousness, and now become active facts. This, then, leads to the evolution of the worlds and all creatures, and all of the multitude of possibilities manifest before our empiric consciousness here in the present state in which we commonly abide.

Let us now reverse our viewpoint, and take the standpoint of the man in the world. Here, he is beset on all sides by the contrast of the pairs of opposites, and each member of every pair appears as distinctly other than its opposite. Thus *upness* is

¹ Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1961), 378-379.

distinctly different from *downness*, *rightness* from *leftness*, *northness* from *southness*, *goodness* from *evilness*, and *righteousness* from *unrighteousness*. They are in a state of confrontation with each other. Each member of the pairs of opposites appears as distinctly different and other than its opposite. From the standpoint of the man in the world who has entered upon the way of yoga, the movement is toward the integration of these pairs of opposites into that which Plotinus called the One, namely, the condition or state represented by the upper vertical shaft of our inverted Y.

There is that which is called the mystic death—much more profound than ordinary death. This mystic death is the penetration into the state represented by the vertical shaft. From the perspective thus attained, all of the pairs of opposites fuse, each member into its own other. And that will, then, lead us to an understanding of the following statement from the quotation: “Nothingness is the same as fullness.” This statement could be made concerning all the pairs of opposites, but this is a critical statement and seems utterly impossible from the standpoint of the man in the world. But, when viewed from the perspective of the vertical shaft, nothingness and fullness fuse, and they are of one sameness. Thus we can predicate anything, as Jung suggested, of the nothingness or the fullness, and equally well deny every such predication. The Infinite has no qualities because it contains all qualities. This is evident, for to identify it in a differentiated sense would be to give it a single discreet quality. But it, on the other hand, contains the potentiality of all qualities whatsoever; no one differentiates the Infinite by itself since it is at the same time all qualities. In these Sermons, Dr. Jung transcended psychology and entered into metaphysics.

The distinction of the pairs of opposites is analogous to, or even identical with, the differentiation in logic between the thesis and its opposite, and is not the same as the distinction between the thesis and its contradictory. The contradictory includes everything not in the thesis. The opposite includes only that which is diametrically opposed to the thesis. Thus the extension of the contradictory is far vaster than the extension of the opposite. The contradictory includes the possibility of every other pair of opposites than the one which is immediately under consideration. This is a point of some importance. The contradictory is represented by the logical dichotomy in the form: all is either *a* or *not-a*. We cannot say of the opposite that all is either the thesis or its opposite; or, in other words, that all is either up or down, for there are innumerable theses that are not relevant to this statement at all, as, for instance, the state of being in love is in the contradictory of upness, but is not the opposite of upness.

I wish here as a sort of footnote to formulate a criticism of the thesis maintained by the dichotomy of contradiction, namely, the statement that all is either *a* or *not-a*. This statement is a judgment concerning all possible objects, all possible qualities, actions, or whatnot—everything that can be a content of consciousness. But this dichotomy does not contain the cognizer of the dichotomy. And here it must be borne in mind that the cognizer of the dichotomy is not the body of the entity who cognizes; that body is an objective content and is included in the dichotomy, but the true cognizer is not an object of consciousness at all, however, is a reality not contained either in the *a* or the *not-a*, which is simply a cognition of the cognizer.

In algebraic terms, we may let $+x$ represent every pole of the pairs of opposites which we commonly regard as *positive*, and $-x$ represent the opposite pole which we

generally regard as *negative*. Thus *upness* would be positive and *downness* negative; *goodness* positive and *evilness* negative; *righteousness* positive and *unrighteousness* negative. Now, the sum of $+x$ and $-x$ equals zero, and here zero represents the state of non-distinction. In that state of non-distinction there is no difference between the members of the pairs of opposites. Hence, we can say, "Nothingness is the same as fullness," as Dr. Jung did say; but we could say the same concerning every pair of opposites.

It may help us in our effort to imagine the state of non-distinction by making the following supposition concerning the pairs of opposites known as *upness* and *downness*. Imagine that one was in deep space so far from galactic systems that the gravitational pull of the galactic systems was negligible; it was as though it did not exist. In that state, what possible distinction could be made between *upness* and *downness*? *Downness* is a conception related to a gravitational field; *downness* is a movement, or directedness, in the direction of the gravitational pull. *Upness* is an orientation or movement against that gravitational pull. But where there is no gravitational pull, there is no distinction between *upness* and *downness*, and one therefore could say that *upness* is the same as *downness*. It's only in relation to the gravitational field that these notions take on distinction; otherwise, they have no distinction.

In considering the distinction between *upness* and *downness*, this is a pair of opposites concerning which we have no strong feeling or predilection, and that is the reason I used this pair of opposites. But let us now proceed to consider the distinction between *goodness* and *evilness*; and, now, note that what was true of *upness* and *downness* in the deep space where there is no discernible gravitational field, the same thing is true in the state of nondualism with respect to *goodness* and *evilness*, namely, in this state of nondualism there is no distinction between *goodness* or *righteousness*, on one hand, and *evilness* and *unrighteousness*, on the other hand. And here we are face to face with a formidable problem.

Let us imagine two entities: one a man whose word is as good as his bond, who is considerate and fair in all relations, and is universally compassionate, in other words, the ideal of the saint; and on the other hand, a man whose word is utterly worthless, who murders, who mutilates and rapes. And, then, how is it possible, we may ask, that these two are of one sameness? To say so, is a hard thing. Yet to this I can testify that as one ascends from the dualistic order to the nondualistic order, *goodness* ceases to be good and *evil* ceases to be evil, and they become fused in a somewhat which transcends both *goodness* and *evilness*.

Now we are faced with a question of most profound importance. Is it possible to enter into the nondualistic state by the path of *unrighteousness* as well as by the path of *righteousness*? By reason of logic, I am forced to answer yes, inasmuch as each member of every pair of opposites is of equal reality and of equal potency, though of a different sort. But there is a difference in the consequent result. He who enters the state of nondualism by the path of *righteousness* passes through the vestibule stage through an experience of inconceivable delight; while contrawise, he who rises to nondualism through the path of *unrighteousness* passes through the vestibule stage of unbearable pain. And in the ultimately achieved state, there is this difference, that he who travels by the path of *righteousness* is self-conscious in the state of the nondualistic consciousness; whereas, he who passes to nondualism through the path of *unrighteousness* is non-self-

conscious of that absolute consciousness. In other words, he who follows the path of *righteousness* realizes absolute consciousness as consciousness, while he who reaches this state through the path of *unrighteousness* realizes it as unconsciousness, and therefore as a state of darkness and apparent extinction.

These two paths are known in the literature as the *Dakshinachara* contrasting to the *Vamachara*, or the right hand and the left hand paths. There is a point on which I have to take a position of variance with respect to the statements made by Shankara, namely, that the state of identity with the Brahman, which is the nondualistic state, is a state of bliss. But bliss stands in contrast to the state of pain or suffering, and is thus a dualistic conception. I grant that in the state which I have called the vestibule to the nondualistic state, is a state of inconceivable bliss; but beyond that, in the full state of nondualism, all pairs of opposites are transcended, including the pair of opposites known as *bliss* and *pain* or *delight* and *suffering*, and is truly a non-differentiated, non-distinction state of indifference, which we may symbolize by zero.

Can one state what the state of nondualism is like? The answer is no, for to make any statement whatsoever is to invoke the action of the pairs of opposites. To say that it was thus-and-so would immediately enforce upon one the necessity of saying that it is the opposite of thus-and-so equally truly. Nondualism can never be truly represented in dualistic language; nonetheless, he who has entered the nondualistic state, and emerges from it again, carries within his consciousness the sense of immeasurable or illimitable value and wholeness, though he may not report in any terms that can be employed in the dualistic order a true statement concerning it. Nonetheless, it will color his dualistic thinking thereafter and act as a catalyst in producing value in the employment of dualistic methodology. The nondualistic remains as a sort of catalyst in the background of the dualistic consciousness and modifies the course of thought and action in the dualistic world.

A thought comes to me as to how we may conceive of the pair of opposites consisting of *goodness* and *righteousness*, on one side, and *evilness* and *unrighteousness*, on the other, in terms that render it more conceivable how we could say they are of “one sameness.” Consider these two contrasting members as energies, or in energetic terms. Each arouses an energy potential in the whole. Disregard the value as *good* or *evil*. Consider them only as energies. As energies, each plays a determinant part in the producing of that which exists in this world. In other words, each is determinant and potent in producing the context of the world in which we actually live and exist. In that sense, as energetic principles, we may reasonably say, they are of “one sameness.”

I shall not here attempt a commentary on the whole of the “Seven Sermons to the Dead.” The crucial contrast was presented in the statement that fullness is the same as emptiness, and the discussion of that is fundamental to all other possible contrasts. However, in passing, I might here note the fact that this gives a key to those *sutras* of the Buddhists which speak of the one sameness of contrasting elements. I hope that my commentary has afforded a key for the understanding of these *sutras*. However, there is one pair of opposites discussed in a later Sermon that is of especial importance. In that Sermon the statement is made that sexuality is the opposite of spirituality. I found this a very thought provoking suggestion. Ordinarily, we view spirit as the opposite of matter,

and spirituality as the opposite of materiality, but here is a new suggestion in viewing spirituality as the opposite of sexuality.

What is the function of sex? It is the primary instrument whereby nature preserves biological specimens in the manifested universe. Sexual orientation is orientation, *par excellence*, to the dualistic order. It is that which peculiarly maintains the stream of living forms in the *adhar*, or in the dualistic order. Spirituality, being viewed as the opposite of sexuality, represents an orientation to the nondualistic. In other words, the most rigorous meaning of the word 'spirituality' is this orientation to the *Advaita*. There are other meanings that are attached to the word which have, on the whole, made the word an ambiguous one, but here we have a really rigorous definition. It tells us why that an essential yogic orientation tends to be ascetic. Yogic orientation is a movement towards the nondualistic away from the propagation of a world order, a movement toward the root, toward that from whence all comes. Hence, it is essentially ascetic, from the standpoint of the world orientation. Nothing is more fundamental in the world orientation than the orientation to sexuality, for thereby the stream of species is maintained. The opposite movement is a movement from that development outside towards that which men call, commonly, the Divine. The way to the Divine is, therefore, essentially ascetic. But it is ascetic with respect to the operations characteristic of dualistic existence; it is positively expansive in consciousness with respect to the root of all—negative towards the dualistic order, positive towards the nondualistic order. This, I think, is something of a clarification.

As a final word, I direct your attention to a possible symbolic meaning attaching to the three numbers: 1, 2, and 3. One, clearly represents the nondualistic order represented by the single vertical shaft of our inverted Y. Two, represents orientation to the dualistic order of the manifestation represented by the two diagonal branches of our inverted Y. The orientation of Plotinus to the One would be a pure orientation to the spiritual pole of Being, and the same is true of Shankara's yoga and philosophy. But how about the meaning of the number three? It is noteworthy that the Blessed One is represented as habitually speaking of important things three times. This occurs so often that it implies an emphasis of threeness. And what does this mean? This, I suggest, that it means an inclusion of both the transcendent, or supermundane, along with the mundane and the manifested order. It would imply that the ultimate goal is not simply a movement to absolute spirituality, but is rather toward an integration between the supermundane and the mundane; and implies that the mundane, or manifested order, is not merely a transcendental mistake, but serves a serious purpose; that what is needed is a redemption of our whole experience in this world so that it may become consciously united to the spiritual, or nondualistic, without destroying the dualistic, or the manifested aspect. Thus, in the final state, we truly attain ultimate wholeness.