

Center Voice

fall 1992

the newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

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Special Focus: Inquiry

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This issue's guest contributor:

After graduating from Stanford University in 1987 with a degree in physics, Tom McFarlane studied with Joel for three years. He is currently a graduate student in mathematics at the University of Washington.

Whales and Other Submerged Phenomena

reflections on inquiry and symmetry

This afternoon I went for a long walk by the ocean. The beach is very rocky here at Yachats and the ocean displays surprising fierceness at high tide. As I walked waves would rush up the narrow inlets between rocky fingers of land and shatter high overhead. In places the water has battered the rocks so hard underground channels have been carved beneath my feet. In one spot a few feet away from where I am now sitting, the roof of one of these channels has caved in and when waves smash into each other inside it, a rainbow-filled geyser crashes uproariously out of the hole.

There are so many singularities here at the ocean's edge that the power of mindfulness, "a clean, bare attention" to what is happening, seems easy to sustain. Yet noticing the distinct qualities in each realm of consciousness, one of the basic steps in a practice of inquiry, is not easy. The ocean's presence is so striking, sensory experience feels unified and seamless. How can I divide it up? Here is the sound of ocean. Listening, I try to hear it as a sound. What is it that I experience when I hear this? I listen not for the roar of ocean, but the quality of the sound as a part of awareness, distinct from what I see, touch, feel . . .

It's hard. The sound is so evocative, it's difficult to distinguish it from a feeling of expansiveness as I sit here, and what is the sense that I feel as pressure and vibration in my body? Sound? Touch? And the rhythmic nature of what I hear—is this sound itself or something else? I am aware that as I follow what I thought was sound, it runs into multiple channels of awareness, just as the water rises up in a mass and breaks into thousands of separate rivulets on the rocks and trickles down to the sea.

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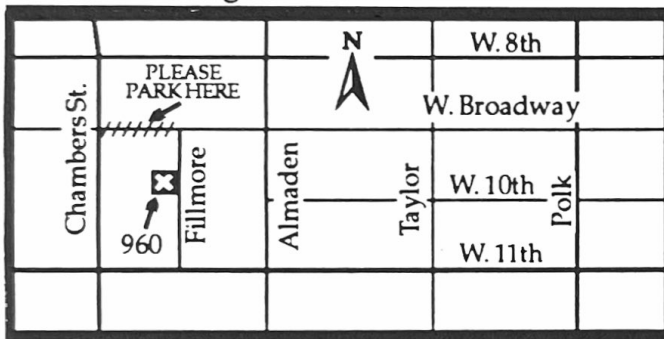
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The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to the creation and dissemination of a new Worldview, based on the wisdom of humanity's great spiritual teachers, but presented in forms appropriate to our present scientific culture. Our programs draw on the teachings of the mystics of all traditions, as well as evidence of modern physics. Among the Center's current offerings are Sunday Programs with meditation and talk by Joel Morwood, meditation classes and retreats, and workshops and study groups. Joel also leads a weekly Practitioners' Group for committed spiritual seekers, as well as being available for private consultation. The Center also maintains an extensive lending library of books and tapes covering a broad spectrum of spiritual, psychological, and scientific subjects. Other than a small stipend for our Spiritual Director, the Center has no paid staff. We rely entirely on volunteer labor to conduct our programs, and on donations and membership dues to meet operating expenses.

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A Reading List: Inquiry

The Center Library has many books from different traditions that emphasize the practice of inquiry on a spiritual path. This book list is not complete, it's designed as a starting place for people wanting to know more. Books are rated on a scale of "1" (most accessible) to "3" (most challenging).

Buddhist

"The Lankavatara Sutra" in *The Buddhist Bible*. (3)
The Mahamudra: Eliminating the Darkness of Ignorance. Wang-ch'ug Dor-je. (2)

Christian

The Gospel of Thomas. (1)
Meister Eckhart. Meister Eckhart. (2)

Hindu

The Spiritual Teachings of Ramana Maharshi.
Ramana Maharshi. (1)

Sufi

Bezels of Wisdom. Ibn Al'Arabi. (3)

Taoist

Tao Te Ching. (Several Translations) (1)

Western Philosophy

Symposium and Meno. Plato. (1)

For a further look at inquiry in spiritual traditions see "Inquiry: Quotes from Traditional Sources," p.11.

Notes from this Summer's events:

June 13. Barbara Hershey and Mike Dewey were married by Joel at the Knights of Columbus Church. Congratulations to them both.

August 8. Joel was the featured speaker at the convention on Franklin Merrell-Wolff's philosophy in Lone Pine California. He spoke on "Shifting the Base of Reference in Your Life."

August 29. A panel discussion with Joel and Ligia Dantes (author of *The Unmanifest Self*) on "Psychotherapy and Spiritual Practice: Relationship and Differences" was held at the Unitarian Church. Robert Tompkins, philosophy professor at WOSC, was moderator.

THE FUNCTION OF INQUIRY

Self and No-Self

A fundamental dichotomy between subject and object, I and other, self and world characterizes all profane experience. And because the subject, self, or I seems to be a finite and ephemeral entity, existing in a world of finite and ephemeral things, it, too, appears inescapably destined for decay, suffering, and death. Such is the "human condition"—at least, so say our humanist philosophers, who counsel us to face the reality of our situation and make the best of it.

But is this our *real* situation? Is it our *true* condition? Not according to the world's great mystics. The Hindu sages called this division between 'I' and 'other,' *maya*, an illusion. The Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, insisted that "if we will see things truly, they are . . . intimates of the One that is bare of any kind of multiplicity and distinction,"¹ and the Sufi master Ibn Al' Arabi, wrote: "Know that you are an imagination, as is all that you regard as other than yourself an imagination."² Perhaps the Buddha summed it up most succinctly in his doctrine of *anatman*—literally, no-self.

According to the mystics, then, the 'I' you believe yourself to be is not who you really are. In reality, you are something else, something which strictly speaking cannot be named. Names distinguish and confine, whereas this something is "bare of any distinctions," is unconfined, unlimited, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent. Nevertheless, for

purposes of discourse it has been called by many names, including *God*, *Brahman*, *Buddha-nature*, *Allah*, *En-sof*, and *Tao*. Such is the testimony of the mystics. But where does the truth lie, with them or with the humanists?

This is a question of momentous import—not only because of its profound implications for a new worldview (see Tom McFarlane's article, this issue),

but more intimately, because your own ultimate happiness depends on the answer. If there really is a self, then decay, suffering, and death certainly are your destiny. But if, as the mystics claim, this 'self' does not truly exist, then there is no 'one' to be born, no 'one' to grow old, no 'one' to suffer, and no 'one' to die. The only way to find out for yourself which is the case is to make your own inquiry.

The function of inquiry is to uncover your true identity. It is a practice of self-observation which aims at isolating whatever you believe yourself to be in

order to determine empirically (i.e. by *direct* experience) whether or not you truly *are* that. Consequently, a good place to begin is to make a list of some of those things you currently think of as comprising your 'self'.

Although different people hold different assumptions about themselves, a typical list (for Westerners, at least) usually includes a *body*, *emotions*, *desires*, *thoughts*, *habits*, *gender*, etc. If you feel you have a psychological or spiritual component, the list may also include such entities as an *ego*, *psyche*, or *soul*.

"The function of inquiry is to uncover your true identity. It is a practice of self-observation which aims at isolating whatever you believe yourself to be in order to determine . . . by *direct* experience . . . whether or not you truly *are* that."

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The Domain of Inquiry

The next step is to start testing these assumptions against your own actual experience. But this is not as easy as it sounds. For one thing, when you try to examine experience closely it often presents itself as a disorderly stream of sights, sounds sensations, thoughts, feelings, etc. Moreover, what order you do find is usually one which you have inherited from your culture. Thus, much of your experience comes pre-packaged with conceptual labels and meanings you have learned from others. To guard against such preconceptions, as well as to clarify exactly what experience is, it will be useful to try to define it in terms that are as simple and neutral as possible.

First note that all experience takes place *here*, not necessarily here in physical space, but *here* in the space of your awareness. Thus, though you may be intellectually convinced that Paris exists while you are sitting in New York, it has no sensory existence within your actual experience. If you happen to be thinking of Paris, then what you are experiencing is an *idea* or *image*, which means that within your actual experience, Paris has only an *imaginary* existence.

Likewise, all experience always occurs in the *now*. That is, even a memory of a past visit to Paris, or the expectation of a future visit, is always remembered or expected in the present. Thus, *experience* can be defined as whatever is happening in the *here and now*, or (as we shall call it) the total field of consciousness-awareness, and it is this field of consciousness-awareness that will constitute your domain of inquiry. By defining the domain of inquiry in this way, you can then limit your practice to a concern with only what actually arises in consciousness. All speculations about what may or may not exist outside of consciousness can be safely ignored because they are unverifiable in your own experience.

Second, it will be useful to divide the total field of consciousness-awareness into subfields in order to establish a nomenclature for identifying its contents. A convenient way of doing this is to distinguish between sensory and non-sensory phenomena. Sensory phenom-

ena may then be classified in terms of the five sense fields in which they appear—i.e., sight, sound, sensation, taste, and smell. All the other non-sensory phenomena—such as thoughts, memories, fantasies, images—can then be relegated to a sixth field of consciousness which may be called the imaginary field. Within the context of this classificatory scheme, then, there are only six possible kinds of objects which may be experienced: *sight-objects*, *sound-objects*, *sensation-objects*, *taste-objects*, *smell-objects*, and *imaginary-objects*.

Having thus defined the domain of inquiry and established a simple nomenclature for identifying its contents, you are ready to begin the practice of inquiry proper. Remember that the goal is to isolate and observe those objects in consciousness which you currently identify as your 'self'. Now, turn back to the list of the things you believe yourself to be, choose one—say, your body—and focus attention on it.

“Notice that the ‘body’ is not *one* object, but actually a *series* of objects, appearing in various fields of consciousness.”

The Practice of Inquiry

Notice that the 'body' is not *one* object, but actually a *series* of objects, appearing in various fields of consciousness. If you look down at your torso, for instance, you will observe a sight-object in the visual field. If you listen carefully you may hear some sound-objects, like breathing noises and stomach rumblings, in the auditory field. If you focus attention on the sensate field, you will experience a variety of sensation-objects—tensions, tinglings, pulsings, aches and pains.

Finally, if you focus on the imaginary field, you may observe a sequence of thoughts, such as “so this is my body. I didn't realize it was so stiff. Perhaps I should take up yoga . . .”—all of which being *thoughts*, are, of course, imaginary-objects. Now the question is which, if any, of these various objects is you?

Suppose you assume that you are all of them. The next step is to test this assumption. Look up at the ceiling. Notice that the sight-object, torso, disappears from consciousness. But have *you* disappeared? If not, then obviously you cannot be that sight-object. Perhaps you are the sounds your body makes? Paying close attention to these sound-objects, notice that they come and go. When they are gone, are you gone as

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well? If not, then you cannot be these sound-objects. Now, focus your attention on your bodily sensations. At first, these may seem to be solid and enduring objects. But, if you observe them for a while, you will realize that they, too, come and go. The ache in your elbow, the itch on your nose, the tingling of your skin are all constantly arising and passing away in the sensate-field of consciousness. What's more, if you observe these bodily sensations as you are falling asleep at night, you will find that as wakefulness vanishes they disappear altogether, even though *you*, the observer, are still present. Therefore, you cannot be any of these bodily sensations.

Nor can you be the idea—"I am my body"—not only because this idea also comes and goes, but because the bodily image it incorporates changes. That is, your bodily image of yourself as a two-year old baby is not the same as your bodily image of yourself as an adult. Moreover, while dreaming, the body you imagine yourself to be may be that of another person, or an animal, or even totally non-existent (as when you witness some dream-scene from a disembodied perspective).

The point is, when you analyze what you call a 'body' into its various sensory and imaginary parts, and then observe these parts over a period of time, you discover that they are all impermanent and ephemeral while you, the one who observes them, persist. Therefore, you cannot be any of these parts, and since there is no body apart from its parts, you cannot be a 'body' at all.

Next, you must apply this inquiry to all the other items on your list. If you identify yourself with your emotions, you must watch them closely, observing how they arise and pass in consciousness. The same holds true for thoughts. All these objects—whether bodily, mental, or emotional—are transitory and impermanent, while *you*, the one who experiences them, are not. Whoever you are, then, you are not any of these objects.

The End of Inquiry

Of course, no single session of inquiry is likely to convince you that you are not what you have been

conditioned since birth to believe you are. During the course of your socialization, these assumptions about yourself have been so deeply woven into the fabric of your experience that they now dictate its moment-to-moment form. Thus, to be effective, inquiry must be repeated over and over with respect to every facet of your presumed identity as you experience it under all kinds of circumstances. In other words, you must develop *mindfulness*—the capacity for continuous attention.

Most people find this difficult because their attention is undisciplined and readily distracted by desires for and aversions to external things. For this reason, inquiry must be augmented by other practices—such as meditation, morality, and devotion—designed to stabilize attention, liberate it from self-centered interests, and yoke it to a passion for truth.

Inquiry, however, always remains the essential thread upon which these other practices are strung, for without inquiry they can easily degenerate into mechanical exercises and meaningless rites. In the end, only inquiry can awaken that Perfect Realization or Gnosis which explodes the delusion of self once and for all.

Through the relentless practice of inquiry one gradually comes to sacrifice the conviction that one

could be *any* object arising in consciousness, even such a subtle object as an 'ego', 'psyche', or 'soul'. This sacrifice is accomplished through the attainment of non-conceptual insights—that is, insights which produce not only a new way of thinking about things, but a new way of experiencing them as well. And it is this *experiential transformation* that finally begins to undermine the whole edifice of maya by rendering it increasingly transparent. For as you cease to identify with any particular object arising in consciousness, it grows harder and harder to distinguish your 'self' from a separate 'world' in which these objects appear. Thus, in place of division you perceive connection. Behind multiplicity, you glimpse unity. Instead of disharmony, you observe harmony—the living Logos that embraces all being. In short, profane experience is gradually

“For as you cease to identify with any particular object arising in consciousness, it grows harder and harder to distinguish your ‘self’ from a separate ‘world’ in which these objects appear.”

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transmuted into sacred experience full of new-found beauty and joy. But despite this spiritual enrichment of your life, you have yet to uncover your true identity.

As the practice of inquiry approaches its final stage, attention naturally turns inward upon itself. Having examined and rejected the identification of self with every object arising *in* consciousness, it now attempts to discover its own source—i.e., the subject *to* consciousness. But this time, instead of finding another object to observe, attention finds nothing at all. This is the state of *kenosis*, or emptiness—so-called because not only have you failed to uncover any 'self', but because you have also utterly exhausted the whole practice. There is simply nothing more to do. You have entered a cul-de-sac, a dead end. Here, all passion subsides, all effort vanishes, and attention comes to a standstill. It feels like the stillness of death itself.

And yet it is here—right here—in the midst of this stillness, this death, that suddenly and spontaneously you Realize *why* your search for something distinguishable as your 'self' has proved fruitless. In Reality, no 'self'

ever existed. In Reality, you have always been *indistinguishable* from all that arises in consciousness—not only bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, etc., but also and equally, mountains, rivers, people, and stars,—everything! What's more, all these things have themselves been *indistinguishable* from the total field of consciousness—awareness, or Consciousness Itself.

This Realization is Gnosis, the end of the path, the Truth that sets you free from all selves, all worlds, all destinies—indeed, all forms of distinction whatsoever—because all forms of distinction are now recognized to be only imaginary. CONSCIOUSNESS ALONE IS ABSOLUTELY REAL, and CONSCIOUSNESS is who YOU are.

TAT TVAM ASI

7/12/92

1. Meister Eckhart. *Meister Eckhart*. NY: Paulist Press, 1981, 227.

2. Ibn Al' Arabi. *Ibn Al' Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom*. NY: Paulist Press, 1980, 125.

THE LIBRARY CORNER

by Jennifer W. Knight

NEW HOURS:

Sunday 2:00-4:00p.m. & Tuesday 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Quotes from recent favorites:

♦ *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom* by Frithjof Schuon. Bloomington Indiana, World Wisdom Books, 1992.

To claim that knowledge as such could only be relative amounts to saying that human ignorance is absolute. (p. 8)

The paradox of the human condition is that nothing is so contrary to us as the requirement to transcend ourselves, and nothing so fundamentally ourselves as the essence of this requirement, or the fruit of this transcending. (p. 2)

Man yearns for happiness because divine Beatitude, which is made of Beauty and Love, is his very substance. (p. 3)

♦ *Look This Is Love: Poems of Rumi*. Trans. by Anne-marie Schimmel. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1991.

Shortly before his death, Rumi expressed the mystery of love once more in his description of the loving woman Zulaykha, whose every thought was directed to the One, manifested in the beautiful Yusuf:

And when she said: "The wax is melting softly!"
That was to say: My friend was kind to me!

And when she said: "Look, how the moon is rising!"
And when she said: "The willow is now green!"
And when she said: "The leaves are a-trembling!"
And when she said: "How lovely burns the rue . . ."
And when she said: "The birds sang for the roses."
And when she said: "Beat firmly all my rugs!"
And when she said: "The bread is all unsalted!"
And when she said: "The spheres are going wrong . . ."

She praised something--that meant, "His sweet embracing."

She blamed something--that meant: "He's far away."

(pp.10-11)

♦ *One Hundred Butterflies* by Peter Levitt. Seattle: Broken Moon Press, 1992.

Watermelons and Zen students
grow pretty much the same way.

Long periods of sitting
till they ripen and grow
all juicy inside, but
when you knock them on the head
to see if they're ready--
sounds like nothing's going on.

(p.71)

Symmetry in Science and Religion

Tom McFarlane

Symmetry *n.* 1. (beauty resulting from) right proportion between the parts of the body or any whole, balance, congruity, harmony. 2. such structure as allows of an object's being divided by a point or line or plane or radiating lines or planes into two or more parts exactly the same in size and shape and similar in position relatively to the dividing point etc., repetition of exactly similar parts facing each other or a centre; [f Gk *summetria*: *sum* like + *metron* measure.]

-The Concise Oxford Dictionary

We will show in this paper how the above definition of symmetry may be generalized to a universal principle. Far from being limited to art and geometry, the essence of symmetry pervades the world at every level. Just as the artist mirrors the world and reveals its symmetrical structure, so does the mathematician, physicist, and religious philosopher. Symmetry is the archetypal key that unlocks the true nature of the world.

Let us begin our investigation of symmetry with a simple example. Consider the isosceles triangle in figure 1A. Since the vertical line bisects the triangle into two equal halves, it is an axis of symmetry. This is called a reflection symmetry since an imagined reflection along this axis leaves the triangle unchanged. Any other axis does not have this property. In fact, because this triangle has two equal sides, there is exactly one reflection symmetry. Figures 1B and 1C show triangles with no reflection symmetry.

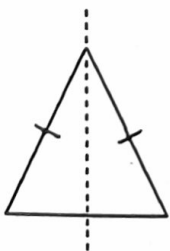


Fig. 1A

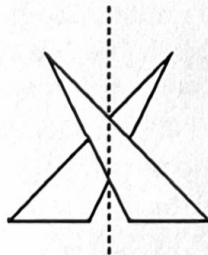


Fig. 1B

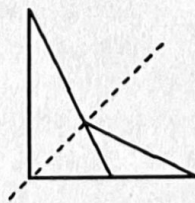


Fig. 1C

Consider next an equilateral triangle. This triangle has three reflection symmetries, indicated by the three symmetry axes drawn in figure 2A. Upon reflection through any of these three axes the triangle remains the same. Choose any other axis, however, and the triangle will end up different. Figure 2B shows us that this triangle also has a rotational symmetry. When we rotate the triangle around the point at its center by 120 degrees or 240 degrees, it is not changed. It should be clear that a rotation by any other angle will leave the triangle different, as will rotation around any other point.

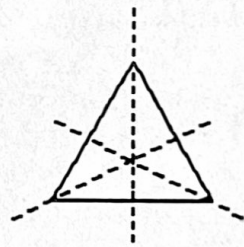


Fig. 2A

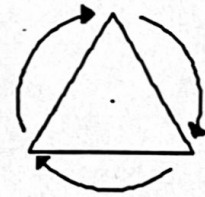


Fig. 2B

We can apply the same analysis to other figures as well, such as rectangles, squares, and circles. In each case, we will discover the characteristic symmetry properties of the figure. But in any case, the principle of symmetry is the same: change the figure so that it is left unchanged. This formulation of the idea behind symmetry suddenly reveals a paradox: we want to at once change the figure and leave it unchanged, create a difference and yet leave it the same. This paradox suggests that we take a closer look at symmetry.

Let us return to the triangle and attempt to isolate these opposing elements of difference and sameness. On the one hand, we recognize that symmetry without any distinction is impossible (Fig. 3A). For if the vertices are all absolutely identical, a symmetrical "change" does not really change anything at all and so there can be no symmetry. On the other hand, symmetry with absolute distinction is also impossible (Fig. 3B). For if the vertices are really distinct, then the change does not leave anything

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unchanged and hence there is no symmetry in this case either. Therefore, if difference is taken as real or unreal, symmetry leads to contradictions.

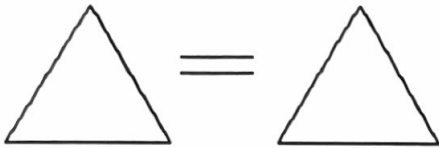


Fig. 3A

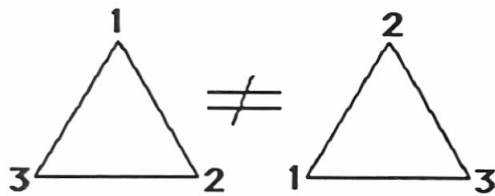


Fig. 3B

The harmony of symmetry is revealed upon the recognition that distinction is neither real nor unreal. When we recognize it as imagined, the distinction becomes transparent to the underlying unity, and archetypal symmetry unfolds as the harmonious play of our imagined distinctions amidst the abiding unity. Thus, rather than mistaking symmetry for the extremes of unity (Fig. 3A) or diversity (Fig. 3B) we see it truly as the playful creation of diversity-in-unity (Fig 3C).

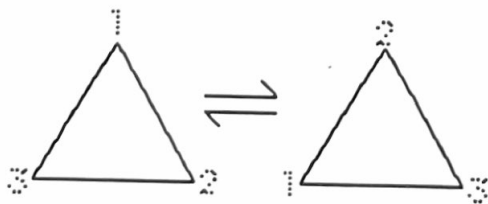


Fig. 3C

From this simple example of the triangle, we have extracted an archetypal principle which applies in general: Whenever we find an underlying unity amidst apparent distinction, we have an instance of symmetry. But since **all** distinctions are only imagined, in truth there is always unity beneath apparent diversity, and thus symmetry is the true nature of **every** distinction. And since every object's existence (*existence*: literally, "to stand out") depends on its distinction from a background, symmetry reveals the true nature of all existence. "All things were made by it," John writes, "and without it was not anything made that was made."

We have thus found the archetypal principle at the heart of all creation. As Plato put it,

We say that the one and many become identified by thought, and that now, as in time past, they run about together, in and out of every word which is uttered, and that this union of them . . . [is] an everlasting quality of thought itself, which never grows old.

-Philebus

Discussing Plato's Parmenides, the NeoPlatonist Proclus adds,

The cosmos is not a unity here and a plurality there, but a unity and a plurality at the same time throughout its whole being . . . and there is nothing you can take within it that is not both one and many.

Franklin Wolff described this principle of symmetry as Equilibrium, the Law which appears as subject-object relationship. This symmetry of subject and object is revealed in the ultimate mystical insight: the recognition of the imaginary nature of the subject-object distinction, and hence the underlying identity of subject and object. Every object that comes into being is thus governed by this harmony of diversity-in-unity.

Just as we applied the principle of symmetry to the triangle, so we can apply this analysis of relationship to any object whatsoever, revealing the symmetry in all relationships, the unity amidst all distinctions. "By analogical transposition," Simone Weil tells us, "[these relationships] furnish the key to the whole of human knowledge. There is great profit in meditating indefinitely upon these relationships"--which is just what the Buddhists have done for 2500 years. An analytic meditation on the true nature of distinctions

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forms the foundation of their philosophic practice. Through meditation on the symmetry of all objects we follow the Middle Way between the extremes of real and unreal. This is what you must do, Plato tells us in the Parmenides, "if you would train yourself perfectly and see the real truth."

Let us take this sagely advice and apply this analysis to objects other than the triangle. Consider these words before you right now. They appear as objects distinct from you. Now let us investigate the nature of this distinction. Suppose there is a real distinction between you and these words. Then since you and the words are absolutely distinct and independent of each other, there is no common basis, and hence there can be no way for you and the words to relate. But this contradicts your awareness of them right now: since you have an immediate apprehension of these words right now, they cannot possibly be completely distinct from you. On the other hand, suppose that the distinction is absolutely unreal, that there is no distinction whatsoever between you and these words. This also contradicts your awareness of them right now, for your awareness of these words is made possible by the fact that there is distinction between you and them: with no distinction whatsoever, there can not be any words at all. Therefore these words are neither absolutely distinct nor absolutely nondistinct from you.

This analysis passes **between** the extremes, negating the exclusive truth of both absolute distinction and absolute nondistinction. Without making any positive assertions, it shows us our error simply by refuting the extremes on their own grounds. Thus the analysis frees us from our clinging (*analysis*: literally, to loosen up, to free) by revealing the contradictions inherent in holding exclusively to one extreme or the other.

In particular situations in our lives, we often find ourselves clinging repeatedly to an extreme. In order to free us from this extreme, we apply the half of the analysis which refutes it. For example, to develop compassion toward objects of aversion, we apply the half which shows the error of absolute distinction. On the other hand, to develop detachment from objects of identification, we apply the half which shows the error of absolute nondistinction. This amounts to

the practice of discrimination. In either case, the archetypal symmetry guides us along the razor's edge between extremes. And through the recognition of symmetry in our lives, the true nature of creation comes into focus until it is all seen to be the symmetrical play of imagined distinctions in utter unity.

In addition to revealing the true harmony of symmetry, this understanding of the imaginary nature of distinction also shows us how paradoxes and illusions arise. When we cling to the imaginary distinctions as real, the underlying unity is denied and the two distinct triangles cannot be related in any way. Conversely, when we cling to the imaginary distinctions as unreal, the difference is denied and there are then no distinct triangles to be related. In either case, there is ignorance of unity-in-diversity, and hence a denial of symmetry. But since symmetry is the true nature of all things, we end up in conflict with the world. And in this illusion lies the true origin of all our suffering. The very existence of this world apart from its source is Maya, an illusion which breaks symmetry, or ruptures equilibrium. As Simone Weil writes,

The energy which moves [the universe] is the principle of rupture of equilibrium. But, nevertheless, this becoming, composed of ruptures of equilibrium, is in reality an equilibrium because the ruptures of equilibrium compensate each other.

Or in Dr. Wolff's words,

An object exists as a tension. Although, in the ultimate sense, every tension is balanced by its opposite phase, so the equilibrium is never actually destroyed, yet consciousness, taken in a partial aspect, may comprehend only one phase, or may be only imperfectly conscious of the counterphase. For this partial aspect of consciousness, equilibrium does not exist.

Thus, although in reality everything is blended in a harmonious whole, through Maya we mistake the imagined asymmetry as real, and equilibrium is apparently ruptured. This is only a trick of the imagination, though, an unconsciousness of the true nature of things. In reality, there is no breaking of symmetry. Not even in Maya is

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symmetry really broken. It is only imagined as really broken--and that is Maya.

In Kashmir Shaivism, this process of apparent division which creates the world of Maya is not described as arbitrary or random. Rather, "its operation is marked by steps of stages, which follow one another as logical necessities--each successive step following inevitably from the one preceding it, as the deduction of a certain conclusion of a particularized kind follows inevitably . . . from certain premises of a general type." In fact, G. Spencer-Brown has developed a mathematics of distinction which he compares to the "Levels of Eternity." Beginning with the Void, we create a single distinction, and out of this the whole calculus unfolds. As he describes these Laws of Form, "it's what **would** be if distinction **could** be." The lawful order of the universe and its mathematical structure are thus seen as a direct consequence of the principle of symmetry, the nature of distinction.

We can now understand the creation of this illusory world as a symmetry-breaking process which veils the underlying unity, leaving behind the residue of a divided world. Conversely, through insight we rediscover the lost unity and return back to the recognition of the ultimate unity of all things in symmetry. The One is both our origin and destiny. In this world of apparent diversity, symmetry is both the link to our origin and the key to our destiny, connecting diversity with unity on every level.

Although physics deals with levels far removed from the original Void, we can still clearly see the symmetry-breaking process in its theories. From the universal laws, we descend down through progressive imposition of conditions which distinguish one situation from another and limit the laws accordingly. Beginning with the universal law of gravitation, for example, we impose constraints on the equation so that it describes our particular experimental conditions, say an apple falling off a tree. The equation we thus deduce has only a limited validity and is very different from the equation we might deduce for calculating the moon's orbit around the earth. Nevertheless, as Newton's genius was able to see, these two particular laws both derive from a single universal law of gravitation. So from the unity of a law we break the symmetry by imposing distinctions which limit its scope and validity. But if we recognize the universal law behind the

derived particulars, the true symmetry is not lost.

While the practical application of these physical laws pretends to break symmetry, insights such as Newton's bind broken symmetry back together. This act is therefore religious in the deepest sense of the word. (*religion*: literally, to bind back). And the whole of physics is a religious quest, for its purpose has always been to unify our understanding of nature, to rediscover the symmetry behind the apparently diverse phenomena. For example, when Maxwell discovered the equations which unified electricity and magnetism, separate laws pertaining to different parts of reality were united in a single, more universal law. Before Maxwell, the laws of electricity and magnetism were distinct. Now they are understood to be merely different manifestations of the same underlying electromagnetic laws. While electricity and magnetism still manifest as relatively distinct phenomena, today we recognize the identity behind these apparent differences, we see their symmetry. Thus, embedded in the mathematical representation of the world by physics we find the same archetypal principle as in the religious philosophies.

With our vision guided by symmetry, we have glimpsed the inner meaning of both scientific and religious thought, united under one archetypal symbol. But this principle of symmetry offers us much more than a vague glimpse of the unity behind science and religion. It provides a deep mathematical foundation which can show this unity explicitly. From the perspective offered by such a unification, science and religion as we know them today would be seen as particular and limited views of the world which may be derived from a more comprehensive theory of symmetry. Such a theory would combine the coherence of mathematics with the spirit of religion to give us a truly sacred science. In the visionary words of Simone Weil:

I believe that one identical thought is to be found--expressed very precisely and with only slight differences of modality--in . . . Pythagoras, Plato, and the Greek Stoics . . . in the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita; in the Chinese Taoist writings and . . . Buddhism . . . in the dogmas of the Christian faith and in the writings of the greatest Christian mystics . . . I believe that this thought is the truth, and that it today requires a modern and Western form of expression. That is to say, it should be expressed through the only approximately good thing we can call our own, namely science. This is all the less difficult because it is itself the origin of science. ❖

Whales, cont'd from page 1

You know those Gestalt images in psychology books, optical illusions in which you can see the profile of a young woman one instant and the profile of an old woman the next—but you can never see the two profiles at once? Each distinct, imaginary image is created from the same set of lines. They're not really separate: one image becomes foreground; the other, background. They're polarized, symmetric—objects located exactly in the same space. The image you see submerges the other, which goes—where?

Are the boundaries between things, the solid world of objects that we experience simply a trick of the way we focus on the whole? When we shift focus we find our easy definitions unraveling. Think—is everything carved out of our awareness like this? Including ourselves? “What we see, we see / and seeing is changing,” Adrienne Rich said in “Planetarium.” As we isolate boundaries with our attention, we begin to see their imaginary nature. But baring enlightenment, new boundaries rise up in their place. Our attention shuttles back and forth, within/without, weaving this seemingly seamless whole (and it is!) into its familiar shape.

Much later—people around me are pointing, binoculars out, staring at the sea. I squint out over the water, amorphous specks in my vision resolving into—seabirds? anomalies of waves? A puff of froth and a shadow. It's true, it's a whale.

He's not so far out. But he never quite emerges. I see the long dark sleek shape of him rise imperceptibly, so that after the fact I think “oh!” and then he glides by and disappears like the fabled sea serpent, the merest sinuous line on the water's surface. All the late afternoon he stays, almost in one spot, rising and disappearing like that other fabulous beast, the final object in consciousness, the self, leaving behind only a cloud of vapor. I have been staring so long at the space where he appears that at times I don't realize if I'm still seeing him or not.

I think perhaps it's time to go, but I am reluctant to abandon watching him, hoping that he will emerge so I can see him clearly. I feel just as I often do when I meditate, anticipating the reward of insight that remains stubbornly submerged in the familiar sea of habitual experience.

So I've been sitting a long time now, the tide is out, and I am aware of how the clarity of the noonday light has changed. The late afternoon sun spreads a milky golden light over the water. Everything calms down, recedes slightly into the distance. A seal's head pops up in the surf, gilded like everything else with the mellowing light. A haze forms on the horizon. This novelty contains its own reassurance. Even without whales visible there is something to see, something that may not be seen when whales emerge.

-Melody Carr-

Inquiry: Quotes from Traditional Sources

For however much a man may know about every created spiritual thing, his intellect will never be able to comprehend the uncreated spiritual truth which is God. But there is a negative knowledge which does understand God. It proceeds by asserting everything it knows: this is not God, until finally he comes to a point where knowledge is exhausted. (*Cloud of Unknowing*, p 139)

Jesus said: Whoever knows the All but fails (to know) himself lacks everything. (*Gospel of Thomas*, p 39)

Our very self-nature is the Buddha, and apart from this nature there is no other Buddha. (Hui-Neng, *The Buddhist Bible*, p 514)

“There is a Spirit which is pure and which is beyond old age and death; and beyond hunger and thirst and sorrow . . . It is this Spirit that we must find and know: man must find his own soul. He who has found and knows his Soul has found all worlds, has achieved all his desires.” Thus spoke Prajapati. (*Upanishads*, p 121, penguin edition)

Knowledge of self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: “He who knows himself knows God.” (*Alchemy of Happiness*, p 19)

Each of us possesses a soul, but we do not prize our souls as creatures made in God's image deserve and so we do not understand the great secrets which they contain. (Theresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, p 206)

If you recognize me, the Dakini Queen of the Lake of Awareness,

The principle of the whole of *samsara* and *nirvana*,
You know that I live in the minds of all sentient beings; . . . Though certainly we are ultimately inseparable,

Failing to recognize me, you objectify me as an external entity.

But when you finally discover me,
The one naked mind arisen from within,
Absolute Awareness permeates the Universe.

(Lady Tsogyel, *Sky Dancer*, p 159)

Center for Sacred Sciences Activities

CSS Annual Open House

On Sunday October 18, CSS is hosting its second annual Open House. Come at 11:00 a.m. for a brief meditation and talk by Joel Morwood, our Spiritual Director, introducing the Center and some of its history and aims. Or drop in from 1 - 4 p.m. and browse our literature table, tour our lending library, enjoy some snacks and chat with some of our members. Bring a friend!

Christmas Service

Friday, December 25, the Center will hold a special Christmas Service at 11:00 am.

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Center For Sacred Sciences

Fall 1992 to Spring 1993 Schedule

Sunday: 11:00am. Meditation and Talk. The first Sunday of the month includes a cold-plate potluck and video.

Wednesday: 8:00pm. Practitioner group. (Interview with Joel required before beginning this group.)

Fall Library Hours

Sunday 2:00-4:00pm. Tuesday 5:30-8:30pm.

Special Events

Annual Open House: Sunday October 18th.

See announcement on back cover of the newsletter.

Christmas Service: Friday, December 25th, 11:00am.

Closed

November: Friday, 11/13 through Wednesday, 11/18—Fall Retreat & Tuesday, 11/24 through Sunday, 11/29—Thanksgiving.

December/January: Monday, 12/21 through Saturday, 1/2—Winter Holidays

April/May: Friday, 4/30 through Wednesday, 5/5—Spring Retreat.

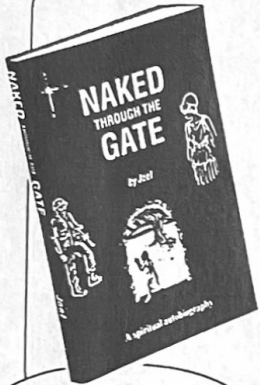
Sunday Video Schedule

- October 4 **Merton: A Film Biography.** A comprehensive look at this twentieth century Christian mystic.
- November 1 **Future of Humanity.** A dialogue on fundamental issues between Krishnamurti and physicist David Bohm.
- December 6 **Interview with Christian mystic Brother David Steindl-Rast.**
- January 3 **Sri Anandamayi Ma,** biography of a contemporary woman saint of India.
- February 7 Bill Moyer's **Spirit and Nature.** Excerpts from a conference on spirituality and ecology, includes the Dalai Lama.
- March 7 **Foundations of Buddhist Philosophy.** The Dalai Lama discussing the spiritual path as the union of emptiness and compassion.
- April 4 **Missa Luba.** Traditional Congolese mass sung by the Muungano National Choir of Kenya.
- May 2 **Sacred Rituals of Tibet.** Features historical footage prior to Chinese invasion and Buddhist ceremonies performed by the Gyoto Monks choir.

Center for Sacred Sciences

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