

Interpenetration, The Buddha's Enlightenment

In human evolution dualism was once our crowning achievement. It distinguished us from animals and gave us the reflective distance to curb blind instinct and superstition, and thus to create culture, science, and the possibility of true freedom. Dualism structures experience into mutually exclusive categories such as subject and object, good and bad, cause and effect, and past, present, and future. These categories have worked so well in ordering nature and people that they are now generally assumed to be real.

Dualism, however, is an ontological error with widespread consequences. It has led us to believe in a universe consisting of independently existing, mechanistically interacting elementary particles. It has led us to identify the Self with an ego in a dying body alienated from the rest of life. It is leading to a world lacking in higher principles and meaning, with people ironically coping with existential anxiety by enhancing egocentric interests at the expense of the more fulfilling common good.

The challenge facing us today is to graduate from dualism and realize that all interpenetrates all without obstruction. Interpenetration is our fundamental experience. Our highest experience is the realization of this experience as fundamental. Thus Shakamuni exclaimed at his enlightenment, "How mysterious, how wonderful! All beings are Buddhas from the beginning."

Indian Buddhists conceive of a Universe of infinite time and space in which the creation and dissolution of world systems eternally recur, and sentient beings transmigrate through countless lives on their way to the perfection of a Buddha (The Awakened One). It is said that three incalculable aeons, each longer than 10^{27} years, are needed to become a *bodhisattva* (a being destined to become a Buddha), and another one hundred aeons to fulfill this destiny. Shakamuni is the historical Buddha of the present world system.

He was born as an Indian prince over twenty-five hundred years ago. At birth it was foretold that he would be a great king or a religious prophet. The king wanted his son to succeed him and kept Shakamuni away from any suffering which might lead to spiritual searching. Growing up within the palace walls, he excelled in all the martial and cultural arts, married the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, fathered a son, and enjoyed the best that the material world had to give.

At twenty-nine, however, he ventured outside the palace and was confronted by old age, disease, death, and poverty. The impermanence of existence transformed his happiness into anguish, and he felt like a man trapped in a burning house. Renouncing his family and kingdom, he sought salvation through ascetic practice.

For six years he practiced austerities that brought him to the brink of death, until finally he sat in the lotus position with the vow not to move until he was enlightened. He exhausted his intellect going over and over the twelfefold chain of causation in the endless wheel of suffering. Eventually he entered into the deepest of samadhis. On the morning of the seventh day, the twinkling of a star shattered his samadhi and awakened him.

After his enlightenment he first taught that all things and events in the universe interpenetrate each other freely without obstruction. But when no one could follow him, he taught the Four Noble Truths instead. The principle of interpenetration has been elaborated in the Kegon Sutra in a four-fold conception of existence:

1. The world viewed as individual existences.
2. The world viewed as absolute.
3. The world conceived as individuals retaining their individuality in the absolute.
4. The world conceived as each revealed through each other, so that each individual has no hindrance from being merged in every other.¹

D.T. Suzuki called the principle of interpenetration the culmination

of Buddhist philosophy. It is illustrated by the metaphor of mirrors encircling a candle. The candlelight reflects itself in every mirror, and every reflection is again reflected in every mirror such that a perfect interplay of lights is reflected into infinity.

Interpenetration is the transcendental oneness which is at the heart of the teachings of sages throughout history. For example:

There is neither seer nor seeing nor seen. There is but one Reality. It is changeless, formless and absolute. How can it be divided?

There is but one Reality—like a brimming ocean in which all appearances are dissolved. It is changeless, formless, and absolute. How can it be divided? . . .

It is our delusion which superimposes the universe of differences upon Brahman. But the wise know that this universe has no separate reality. It is identical with Brahman, its ground. . . .

This delusion of difference has its origin in the gross mind. When the mind is transcended, it ceases. Therefore let your mind be absorbed in contemplation of the Atman, the Reality, your inmost essence.

—Shankara²

When is a man in mere understanding? I answer, “When a man sees one thing as separated from another.” And when is a man above mere understanding? That I can tell you, “When a man sees All in all, then a man stands beyond mere understanding.”

—Eckhart³

Each being contains in itself the whole intelligible world. Therefore All is everywhere. Each is there All, and All is each. Man as he now is has ceased to be the All. But when he ceases to be an individual, he raises himself again and penetrates the whole world.

—Plotinus⁴

Without the illuminating presence of such individuals, however, interpenetration could be too easily dismissed before as esotericism. But now following the logic of dualism to the nth degree, paradoxically, physics also points to the fundamental oneness of the universe. The analysis of subatomic and astrophysical phenomena refutes the dualistic, mechanistic paradigm of the universe and opens the mind to new possibilities. It has led eminent physicists to such thoughts as follow:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us “Universe”; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison.

—Albert Einstein⁵

It had not been possible to see what could be wrong with the fundamental concepts like matter, space, time, and causality that had been so extremely successful in the history of science. Only experimental research itself, carried out with all the refined equipment that technical science could offer. . . provided the basis for a critical analysis—or, one may say, enforced the critical analysis—of the concepts, and finally resulted in the dissolution of the rigid frame.

—Werner Heisenberg⁶

Subject and object are only one. The barrier between them cannot be said to have broken down as a result of recent experience in the physical sciences, *for this barrier does not exist.*

—Ernest Schroedinger⁷

Inconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you—and all other conscious beings as such—are all in all. Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the *whole*. . . . Thus you can throw yourself flat on the ground, stretched out upon Mother Earth, with the certain conviction that you are one with her and she with you. You are as firmly established, as invulnerable as she, indeed a thousand times firmer and more invulnerable. As surely as she will engulf you tomorrow, so surely will she bring you forth anew to new striving and suffering. And not merely “some day”:

Now, today, every day she is bringing you forth, not *once* but thousands upon thousands of times, just as every day she engulfs you a thousand times over.

—Ernest Schroedinger⁸

Although the new physics begins to sound like philosophical mysticism, they are not the same. The wisdom of the sages is a direct expression of the absolute transcending all forms, including those of

physics. It expresses the absolute which cannot be named. Einstein said:

The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the sower of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger. . . is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense only I belong to the ranks of devoutly religious men.⁹

The growing convergence between scientific findings and the insights of sages does, however, signal a revolutionary shift from a dualistic to a wholistic paradigm. As our knowledge increases, it will become clearer that our highest ideals are grounded in the actual nature of the universe. It will become clearer that effectiveness and creativeness in any field ultimately come from self-development. The new physics can help to shatter the dualistic perspective and the limitations it places on human potential, for it depicts a reality where there is no such thing as a thing, where all is interpenetrating fields of energy in flux; where space, time, and causality disappear. Consider the following phenomena: 1. An electron jumps from one position to another without passing through any positions in between. 2. Two atoms which initially combined to form a molecule are separated by a great distance. When a change in one occurs, a change in the other simultaneously occurs.

To make sense of such phenomena the physicist David Bohm proposes the holomovement, a model of “the unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders.” In the holomovement particles no matter how small are the manifestation on the explicate order of patterns enfolded in the implicate order, which is the more fundamental level of reality. Bohm offers the following mechanical analogies to illustrate how his model accounts for the phenomena described above.

To account for electrons skipping spaces, he gives the example of a device consisting of two concentric glass cylinders with a thick fluid between them. A drop of insoluble ink, A, is placed in the liquid, and the outer cylinder is turned so that the ink drop is drawn out into a fine thread that eventually becomes invisible. Another drop, B, is inserted in a different position, and is also enfolded into

the liquid. After enfolding a large number of drops along the line AB, the cylinder is rotated rapidly in the reverse direction such that what is seen is apparently a particle crossing space. Bohm comments:

Such enfoldment and unfoldment in the implicate order may evidently provide a new model of, for example, an electron which is quite different from that provided by the current mechanistic notion of a particle that exists at each moment only in a small region of space and that changes its position continuously with time. What is essential to this new model is that the electron is instead to be understood through a total set of enfolded ensembles, which are generally not localized in space. At any given moment one of these may be unfolded and therefore localized, but in the next moment, this one enfolds to be replaced by the one that follows. The notion of continuity of existence is approximated by that of very rapid recurrence of similar forms, changing in a simple and regular way. . . . More fundamentally, the particle is only an abstraction that is manifest to our senses. *What is* is always a totality of ensembles, all present together, in an orderly series of stages of enfoldment and unfoldment, which intermingle and interpenetrate throughout the whole of space.¹⁰

To account for instantaneous, corresponding changes in distant objects, he uses the analogy of two television cameras focused on fish swimming in an aquarium. The cameras are at right angles to each other and transmit different but correlated images of fishes swimming in the tank to two television screens in another room. Clearly neither image causes related changes in the other. Both are two-dimensional projections of a more fundamental, three-dimensional reality. Similarly the simultaneous, correlated changes of the two atoms described earlier must be viewed as a projection of change occurring at a more fundamental, multidimensional level of reality.

Quite generally, then, the implicate order has to be extended into a multidimensional reality. In principle this reality is one unbroken whole, including the entire universe with all its 'fields' and 'particles'. Thus we have to say that the holomovement enfolds and unfolds in a multidimensional order, the dimensionality of which is effectively infinite. However, as we have already seen, relatively independent sub-totalities can be generally abstracted, which may be approximated as autonomous.¹¹

In Bohm's model the electron is not a particle that dematerializes and rematerializes from place to place; nor does information travel faster than the speed of light from one atom to another. It is more accurate to say that the electron is always already there and that information is everywhere in the enfolded patterns of the implicate order.

The new physics refutes the dualistic paradigm, but it is not enough to know this intellectually. A person must experience the unbroken, flowing wholeness of the universe and live accordingly. This requires the cultivation of samadhi until consciousness transcends dualism. It is possible to cultivate samadhi through the perfection of the forms of any field of endeavor. Concentrated and refined effort naturally leads to the absorption of subject into object. But such a samadhi is limited to the specific field. The great spiritual traditions, however, developed ways of mind-body training which transformed the structure of being and enabled a person to abide in samadhi while living fully in the relative world. Such a person has gone beyond the suffering inherent in dualism and lives a bright and boundless life like the smiling sage who mingles among people with fish, wine, and bliss-bestowing hands.

The first part of this book studies self-realization in the tradition of Zen Buddhism. The essence of Zen is the Buddha's enlightenment. Historically it is one of the schools of Mahayana Buddhism, originating in the sixth century from a blending of the metaphysics of Indian Buddhism with the pragmatism of Chinese Taoism. Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of Zen in China, characterized it as:

*A special transmission outside the scriptures,
Not dependent on words and letters,
Direct pointing at the essence of human being,
Seeing into one's nature and becoming a Buddha.*¹²

In the literature of Zen, samadhi refers to both the highest state of awareness and the means to this state. Master Shibayama Zenkei defined samadhi as follows:

Originally a Sanskrit word meaning to concentrate one's mind on one point so that the mind remains still and quiet. In Zen, samadhi is used in a somewhat different sense, that is, it is the pure working of no-mind that has transcended both action and quietude.¹³

From the perspective of training samadhi is a state of pure and relaxed concentration which is strengthened and refined by rigorous psychophysical discipline. In samadhi awareness is clear and unhindered by preconceptions and preferences, and one experiences the interpenetration of all things as emptiness. A distinction, however, remains between emptiness and the suchness of the relative world, between samadhi and ordinary mind. When samadhi deepens and is finally shattered, there is true enlightenment transcending every trace of duality. But the formulation of training leading to samadhi, and samadhi to enlightenment is misleading. From a higher perspective, as Master Dogen said, training is enlightenment, and enlightenment is training.

Around the eleventh century various schools of Zen were transmitted from China to Japan. The two major remaining schools in Japan, the Soto and the Rinzai, are described below by a contemporary master of each.

This is the real life, when practice and realization are one. Finally he reaches the ultimate goal of Zen, to adapt freely to the world. Now the parents are like parents, the children like children, the husband like a husband, and the wife like a wife. The willow is green and the flower is red. . . . We call it ordinary life, and it is, but this is also the Truth unchanged throughout the ages. See! When it is cold the bird perches on the tree; the duck takes to water. Each repairs to its own refuge. The truth is the truth in each. Neither is better—there is no better or worse because there is no inequality. Where there is no inequality, the heart is tranquil and the world radiates the light of peace. This is our Soto Zen, and it is the final resting place of Zen.

—Takashina Rosen¹⁴

Now as to the characteristics of the Rinzai Sect, we read. . . as follows: “The great spirit of Zen, leaping out of the basket or out of the nest in its vigorous operation, dances about like a tiger, leaps like a dragon, flies like a star, roars like thunder, opens and closes the Gate of Heaven, turns the Earth on its axis, displays its high spirits to the extent of pushing up Heaven, and goes beyond the dualities of rolling and unfolding, catching and freeing, and killing and reviving in the exceptional Way.” The above expressions are difficult to understand, but at any rate, these inspiring words seem to help me vividly visualize the activ-

ity of the spirit of Zen in all its inviolable freedom and vitality,
almost to the extent of upsetting Heaven and Earth.

—Omori Sogen¹⁵

Both Rinzai and Soto schools are currently being transmitted to America through various lines. The first part of the book presents the tradition of Zen through the lives and teachings of six masters in a traditional line of Rinzai Zen: Bodhidharma, Hui-neng, Lin-chi, Hakuin, Omori, and Tanouye. They are masters in the line of Chozen-ji, a temple in Hawaii established by Omori Sogen in 1972.

The second part of the book presents Zen therapy, a way of transpersonal development emphasizing the cultivation of samadhi through psychophysical training. It is a way based on theories and practices from Zen, the martial arts, and psychotherapy. While transforming insights may occur in an instant, development is a process which takes time and energy as new cognitive structures must emerge and the body must be freed from unnatural habits. Otherwise, insights will be just passing highs, and a person will quickly regress to egoistical patterns under stress.

“Transpersonal” refers to the highest level of self-development. At this level a person transcends the identification with the ego and the dualistic structure of ordinary experience. One of the forerunners of transpersonal psychology was Carl Jung. He anticipated the convergence of physics and psychology, identified the collective unconscious, and coined the term *synchronicity* as an acausal connecting principle. He wrote:

Sooner or later, nuclear physics and the psychology of the unconscious will draw closer together as both of them, independently of one another and from opposite directions, push forward into transcendental territory. . . . Psyche cannot be totally different from matter, for how otherwise could it move matter? And matter cannot be alien to psyche, for how else could matter produce psyche? Psyche and matter exist in the same world, and each partakes of the other, otherwise any reciprocal action would be impossible. If research could only advance far enough, we should arrive at an ultimate agreement between physical and psychological concepts. Our present attempts may be bold, but I believe they are on the right lines.¹⁶

Jung made extensive studies of the myths and symbols across cultures and found striking similarities which led him to the collective

unconscious. The collective unconscious contains the archetypes, the primordial images and experiences imprinted on the human psyche in the course of phylogenesis and expressed in myths and symbols. He wrote:

I can only gaze with wonder and awe at the depths and heights of our psychic nature. Its non-spatial universe conceals an untold abundance of images which have accumulated over millions of years of living development and become fixed in the organism. My consciousness is like an eye that penetrates the most distant spaces, yet it is the psychic non-ego that fills them with non-spatial images. . . . Besides this picture I would like to place the spectacle of the starry heavens at night, for the only equivalent of the universe within is the universe without.¹⁷

Buddhist metapsychology goes beyond the collective unconscious and postulates the storehouse unconscious which contains the images of cosmogenesis. Beyond the storehouse unconscious is the transcendent Unconscious which is beyond the duality of conscious and unconscious.

Jung also acknowledged meaningful, acausal relationships which he termed synchronicity and gave the following event as an example.

A young woman patient, in spite of efforts made on both sides, proved to be psychologically inaccessible. The difficulty lay in the fact that she always knew better about everything. Her excellent education had provided her with a weapon ideally suited to this purpose, namely a highly polished Cartesian rationalism with an impeccably “geometrical” idea of reality. After several fruitless attempts to sweeten her rationalism with a somewhat more human understanding, I had to confine myself to the hope that something unexpected and irrational would turn up, something that would burst the intellectual retort into which she had sealed herself. Well, I was sitting opposite her one day, with my back to the window, listening to her flow of rhetoric. She had had an impressive dream the night before, in which someone had given her a golden scarab—a costly piece of jewelry. While she was still telling me this dream, I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. I turned round and saw that it was a fairly large flying insect that was knocking against the window pane from outside in the obvious effort to get into the darkened room. This seemed to me very strange. I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air

as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle. . . whose gold-green color most nearly resembles that of a golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, "Here is your scarab." This experience punctured the desired hole in her rationalism and broke the ice of her intellectual resistance.¹⁸

In this example, Jung, the patient, the dream, and the beetle are all the play of one mind. Jung was effective synchronistically at the implicate order of reality. In Taoist terms, abiding in Tao, he did nothing and nothing was left undone.

Like quantum phenomena in physics, the collective unconscious and synchronicity jar the common assumptions of the nature of ourselves and reality. But in psychology it was not until the humanistic movement of the 1960's that the transcendental aspects of the self received serious consideration in the work of Abraham Maslow, who developed a hierarchy of needs ranging from the physiological, to the interpersonal, to the existential. Transpersonal psychology is the fourth psychology predicted by Maslow in 1968:

I consider Humanistic, Third Force Psychology to be transitional, a preparation for a still "higher" Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like. . . . Without the transcendent and the transpersonal, we get sick, violent, and nihilistic, or else hopeless and apathetic. We need something "bigger than we are" to be awed by and to commit ourselves to in a new, naturalistic, empirical, non-churchly sense, perhaps as Thoreau and Whitman, William James and John Dewey did.¹⁹

Richard Mann defines the field of transpersonal psychology well in his study of Siddha Yoga.

Transpersonal psychology, as I see it, is defined by the primary place it gives to the concept of the absolute in its analysis of human life. This commitment to honoring the reality of the absolute should not be confused with a commitment to any specific imagery, formulation, or spiritual practice. Transpersonal psychology will perform a much needed function if it serves all the diverse systems of worship and scriptural narrative by providing each a place within its perimeter. If it can develop analytic categories that permit us to see the commonalities as well as the

differences among the many ways of approaching the absolute, it will have greatly enriched the human community. . . .

The place to start is with the absolute. Whereas scientific and clinical psychology deliberately and, it could be argued, wisely limit their concepts to what I label the relative domain, transpersonal psychology conceives of a reality that includes both relative and absolute. We shall see whether this two-category model of reality is transpersonal psychology's final word on the subject. For a start, however, there is no more essential assertion than that reality includes more than the temporary, conditional, causal universe. . . . It may be that the paradigm guiding our conception of physical and psychic reality is limiting our understanding of the role of the absolute in our daily lives. Only after reformulating our fundamental assumptions concerning observable reality can we develop a transpersonal psychology that appreciates both being and becoming, both the unchanging and the endless processes of transformation.²⁰

The fundamental tenet of transpersonal psychology is that the universe is one mind evolving to see itself. This seeing is the fundamental drive of life. In human being life has developed the neuro-linguistic sophistication needed for self-reflection. After countless generations, the ego has finally become a phylogenetic legacy for modern human being. The task before us is no longer to differentiate from nature and develop the ego, but transcend the ego and realize the true Self that is one with the universe. Human destiny is fulfilled in this experience of existence seeing itself. Jung put it this way:

“But why on earth,” you may ask, “should it be necessary for man to achieve, by hook or crook, a higher level of consciousness?” This is truly the crucial question, and I do not find the answer easy. Instead of a real answer, I can only make a confession of faith: I believe that, after thousands and millions of years, someone had to realize that this wonderful world of mountains and oceans, suns and moons, galaxies and nebulae, plants and animals *exists*. From a low hill in the Ahti plains of East Africa I once watched the vast herds of wild animals grazing in soundless stillness, as they had done from time immemorial, touched only by the breath of a primeval world. I felt then as if I were the first man, the first creature, to know that all this *is*. The entire world around me was still in its primeval state; it did not

know that it *was*. And then, in that one moment in which I came to know, the world sprang into being; without that moment it would never have been. All Nature seeks this goal and finds it fulfilled in man, but only in the most highly developed and most fully conscious man.²¹

Today dualistic, linear thinking has turned full circle to confirm oneness as the fundamental reality. Seamless because infinitely differentiated, brimming with creativity because empty, interpenetrating because transcendent, this reality is your true Self.