Jung, Pure Land Buddhism, and Psychological Faith

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THE QUESTION OF faith is not only of concern to the religions of the world, but is of fundamental importance to depth psychology. Jung wrote of the apparent "conflict between faith and knowledge," a conflict that he considered to be due solely to an "historical split in the European mind." Such a division, continued Jung, is a mere illusion: "One can easily imagine a state of mind in which one simply knows and in addition believes... There are no grounds whatsoever for any conflict between these two things. Both are necessary, for knowledge alone, like faith alone, is always insufficient." But while stressing the importance of faith, Jung sidestepped the complex debate about the actual nature of this phenomenon. Indeed, despite his affirmation, the idea of faith seems at times to rest uneasily within both his opus and depth psychology in general. One would certainly expect the question to occupy a significant place in Jung's 1943 commentary on the Amitāyur-dhyāna Sūtra. This Sanskrit-Chinese text springs directly from Pure Land Buddhism, a form of Buddhism within which faith has a privileged, if not absolute, position. However, in his commentary Jung makes no mention of the question of faith and focuses instead upon the technical and symbolic details of the meditational visualisations.2 Nevertheless, I hope to show that Jung's brief discussion of this text, when read in conjunction with his other studies of Eastern religions, enabled him to deepen his understanding of psychological

¹ C.G. Jung, "Yoga and the West," Collected Works, Vol.11 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) para. 864 (referred to hereafter as C.W.).

² "The Psychology of Eastern Meditation," C. W. 11.

faith. In this process, two elements were crucial: the importance of imaginative language and confirmation of the autonomous psyche, the imaginal realm.

Pure Lands and Mythic Geography

Two unique features of Mahāyāna Buddhism are the "Pure Lands" and the "vows" made by specific Buddhas. These qualities reach their most extreme development in the so-called "Pure Land schools", of which Shin Buddhism of Japan is the most notable example. One of the principle texts of this school is the Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra which recounts the progress of Amida from the human realm to that of Buddha-hood. After an immense period of discipline and preparation, Amida stands on the brink of enlightenment; at this point he makes 48 vows. The 18th vow has become the particular focus of Shin Buddhism, claimed to be the largest Buddhist sect in Japan. This is Amida's "Original" or "Primaeval" Vow.4

If, upon my obtaining Buddhahood, . . . all beings in the Ten Quarters should not desire in sincerity and trustfulness to be born in my country, and if they should not be born there by only thinking of me for, say, up to ten times—except for those who have committed the five grave offences and those who are abusive of the true Dharma—may I not obtain the highest enlightenment.

But who is Amida, and what is the meaning of his Vow? What is meant by "His country", and the more general image of "Pure Lands?"

An immense cosmic tapestry is unraveled in Mahayana texts. There are innumerable Buddhas, each of whom presides over his own "Buddha Field". Each Buddha, and each "Field" can be seen to represent specific qualities of Mind. For example, Sakyamuni, the

In Theravadin Buddhism there is the idea of the Brahmavihāras. These divine abodes are exalted states of consciousness, or places, which are attained by the efforts of the person concerned. (Not only are such "states" conceived in non-imaginative terms, also, unlike "Pure Lands," they are not gained solely by the grace and action of the Buddha.)

⁴ Sangharakshita, A Survey of Buddhism (Bangalore: The Indian Institute of World Culture, 1976) p. 354: D.T. Suzuki, Shin Buddhism (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 28.

historical Buddha, is associated with the place known as Vulture's peak. Yakushi Buddha (Bhaisajyaguru), the Buddha of healing, presides over the Pure Lapis Lazuli Paradise (jōruri jōdo). Kannon (Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion) reigns over Mount Potalaka. Chenrezig, the Tibetan equivalent of Kannon, is associated with Dewachen. The future Buddha, Maitreya, awaits in Tusita heaven until the time comes for him to descend to earth. The Buddha Aksobhya, the Imperturbable, presides over the Pure Land of Abhirati, the land of exceeding great delight, which is to be found in the East. Aksobhya, like Amida (Amitābah), is one of the five principle Sambhogakāyas of the Buddha. Amida's Pure Land is Sukhāvatī, the happy land, and is found in the West, in the direction of the setting sun.

These Pure Lands, or Paradises, were often made the subject of paintings, and explanatory diagrams, as well as being described in flamboyant imagery in the sutras. Jung discusses such imagery as found in the Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra, which consists of 16 meditations on the Pure Land of Amida. For Jung, the visualization practices outlined in this sutra enabled the meditator to create a firm ground, a "solid body for his vision. In this way he endows the figures of his psychic world with a concrete reality." Though repeatedly imagining the extraordinary complexity of the Pure Land and at the same time by progressively deepening its imaginal tangibility, the unknown depths of the psyche are harmoniously revealed to the meditator. "Psychologically this means that behind or beneath the world of personal fantasies and instincts a still deeper layer of the unconscious becomes visible . . . "7 Even the merest glimpse of the deep, autonomous, psyche can evoke the experience of faith. However, Jung draws a fine distinction between the Christian who desires to escape the "transitory and egobound world of consciousness," and the Buddhist who "still reposes on the eternal ground of his inner nature. . . . In other words, the Christian experiences faith as a yearning whereas the Buddhist ex-

⁵ The *Dharmakāya* can be thought of as the archetypal-realm of the psyche. The *Sambhogakāya* is the realm of "archetypal thought-forms" or images, whilst the *Nirmānakāya* is the phenomenal world. See C.G. Jung on "The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation," C. W.11, para. 790-1.

⁶ C.W.11, para. 937.

² C.W.11, para. 943.

^a C.W.11, para. 949.

periences it as a deepening of repose. Such a distinction is, of course, far too generalized, but it does highlight two essential modes by which faith can be experienced.

For Jung, the careful attention to imagery, as outlined in this sutra, paralleled that of alchemy, and seemed preferable to the abstraction of other forms of meditation, although he was always cautious about the use of prestructured imagery. He believed that these methods could just as easily "shield consciousness from the unconscious and suppress it." Even worse, by relying on prescribed imagery an individual's symbol-forming capacity could be appropriated by the religious dogma. Nevertheless, Jung seemed to suggest that the Pure Land sutras presented a valid way of revealing the autonomous psyche. As James Hillman writes when discussing the relationship between religion and imagination:

This faithful attention to the imaginal world, this love which transforms mere images into presences, gives them living being, or rather reveals the living being which they do naturally contain, is nothing other than...[a] remythologising... Psychic contents become "powers", "spirits" "gods". One senses their presence as did all earlier peoples who still had soul. 10

Psychological Faith

Psychological faith is synonymous with this deep imaging activity: "It is faith in images, and acts of psychological faith are imaginative activities." Robert Grinnell has drawn a clear distinction between dogmatic faith and psychological faith. The former identifies faith "with what we believe, with its objects," whereas psychological faith rests on "the psychic energy that permits belief or enjoins conviction."

[&]quot;Mysterium Coniunctionis", C.W.14, para. 708; see also, C.W.14, paras 706, 749; "Commentary on the Secret of the Golden Flower", C.W.13; and also "Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon," C.W.13; para. 173. Also see my discussion in "Jung, Eastern Religion, & the Language of the Imagination," The Eastern Buddhist, Vol. XVII, Spring 1984, No. 1.

¹⁶ J. Hillman, *Insearch* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1979) p. 118.

¹¹ J. Hillman, Re Visioning Psychology (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) p. 239 fn 106.

Psychological faith vitalises "our experience of belief"; 12 it is the trust in the imaginal realm, or in Jung's terms, the autonomous psyche. Indeed the word faith is etymologically related to "trust", "true", "loyal".

But, as Jung repeatedly emphasized, the experience of the autonomous psyche is not always easy to achieve. The process is full of pitfalls for the acquisitive ego. Help is needed from a guide, a psychopomp. In addition, few can devote themselves to the long, intense and highly complex meditative practices outlined in such texts as the Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra. It is against the background of these difficulties that we can begin to understand the purpose of Amida's vow to grant rebirth in his Pure Land to those who simply trust his word.

The Nembutsu

But what does it mean "to be born" in Amida's Pure Land? Suzuki in his study of Shin Buddhism writes:13

Instead of being born in the Pure Land, for sincere followers, the Pure Land itself is created: it comes into existence when we sincerely pronounce Namu Amida Butsu. Therefore instead of our going over to the Pure Land, it comes to us.

As the devotee moves towards Amida the environment itself becomes Sukhavati, the Pure Land: "...his Pure Land is this dirty earth itself", writes Suzuki. He points out that:

Salvation... consists in pronouncing the name of Amida in sincerity and devotion... when a name is uttered, the object bearing that name appears before one.¹⁴

Mythology offers numerous examples of moments when the physical environment is transformed by an encounter with an archetypal presence. In the Arthurian legend, for example, Perceval suddenly finds himself

¹² R. Grinnell, "Reflections on the Archetype of Consciousness (Personality & Psychological Faith)," *Spring 1970* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1970) p. 36; also Hillman, *Insearch*, p. 118.

¹³ Suzuki, Shin Buddhism, p. 20 (my emphasis).

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 17,19.

in an other-world domain with the Grail Castle before him.¹⁵ This appearance of an other-world, with its mythic landscape, is a common feature of Celtic fantasy. Celtic religion, like Buddhism, places a heavy emphasis on the power of the word to transform physical reality.¹⁶ Conze writes:

To pronounce a mantra is a way of wooing a deity and, etymologically, the word mantra is connected with Greek words like 'meimao' which express eager desire, yearning and intensity of purpose, and with the old High German word minn-ia, which means 'making love to'.¹⁷

It is Perceval's intense desire and remembrance of his Queen, and of his Mother, which immediately proceeds the appearance of, and his entrance into, the Grail-world. Amida's mantra is not an arbitrary formula. It names Amida himself. This is the essence of imaginal or poetic speech. Heidegger writes that poetry is "the inaugural naming of the god" and that:

Poetry rouses the appearance of the unreal and of dream in the face of the palpable and clamorous reality, in which we believe ourselves at home.¹⁸

However Pure Land doctrine introduces a decisive development to this idea, and departs sharply from the notion of an almost heroic, individual poet, creating worlds at whim. To comprehend this we need to look a little closer at the figure of Amida.

Self Power and Other Power

One of the most important patriachs of Pure Land Buddhism, Honen (1133-1212), wrote that Amida's mantra, the Nembutsu:

¹⁵ Sec, E. Jung and M.L. von Franz, *The Grail Legend* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1972), pp. 66-9; W. von Eschenbach, *Parzival* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 120.

See J. Miller, The Vedas (London: Rider & Co, 1974), for a discussion of the basis of mantra and language.

¹⁷ E. Conze, Buddhism: Its Essence & Development (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) p. 183.

¹⁸ M. Heidegger, "Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Existence & Being (London: Vision Press, 1968) pp. 306, 310.

does not mean calling to mind the Buddha's being or meditating on his signs of eminence but calling with all one's heart upon the sacred name of Amida.¹⁹

Honen wanted to emphasize the difference between his teaching and that of other Buddhist traditions. Unlike these other forms of Buddhism, Pure Land devotees rely entirely on the grace of Amida. There is a distinction in Japanese religion between Jiriki, Self-power and Tariki, Other-power. 20 Pure Land Buddhism totally eschews Self-power and holds that it is insignificant compared with Other-power in the form of Amida. The founder of Shin Buddhism, Shinran (1173-1262), wrote that the devotee cannot know what is good or bad and that such things should be left to Amida.²¹ He insisted that it is essential just to let Amida do the work. In fact, the separation between ourselves and Amida is imagined to be so vast that his help is essential. No other form of Buddhism so one-pointedly stresses the utter dependency of the individual on the grace of the "deity". The recitation of the Nembutsu, from such a perspective, is less a form of psychological or spiritual "work" than a spontaneous outpouring of gratitude towards Amida in the certainty of His assistance. Similarly, Jung warns that it is both a waste of time and also highly dangerous to try to use this Other-power for one's own purposes. It is "greater than man's consciousness and greater than his will"; "it is the source of that fearful power which drives us towards individuation."22

Amida's Vow

The confidence of Pure Land devotees comes from a double act of remembrance. Amida has vowed that He will not enter Nirvana until all beings have been saved. This is His Vow, and His remembrance. The word "Vow" is etymologically connected to the latin uouere an ardent wish, from which derives vote, votive. It is akin also to the English woo, to court for marriage. "Devotion" and its associated "devout" relate to a firmly taken vow. We have already seen that a "mantra" is a means of wooing the deity and now we find that the deity is

¹⁹ C. Eliot, Japanese Buddhism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 251.

²⁰ Suzuki, *Shin Buddhism*, p. 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²² C. W.13, para. 437.

also committed to wooing the individual. A reciprocal relationship is therefore set up,—the Vow of Amida and the mantra of the devotee. Amida remembers His connection to all life, to the Anima Mundi, whilst the devotee remembers his or her connection to Amidaconsciousness.23 Such vows are common in Mahayana Buddhism. Another famous set of vows are attributed, for example, to the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra in the Hua-yen Sütra.24 It is interesting to compare such a relationship between humans and a Bodhisattva with the relationship between the Jews and their God. Both are relationships which are based on the Word, logos. But the vow of the Bodhisattva is very different to the covenant between Yewah and the Jews. The latter constantly remind both themselves and their God of this covenant. Pure Land Buddhists on the other hand do not call upon Amida in order to remind Him of His Vow. Amida's remembrance is taken for granted. It is an act of faith and is integral to Amida. But the mantra does serve to awaken the devotee's remembrance of Amida's desire to save all beings.

When we look closer at Amida, it therefore becomes clear that Amida and the Vow are synonymous. From a psychological standpoint Amida is a personification of those aspects of psychic-reality which support, and even urge, reconnection with the imaginal realm. In Psychology and Alchemy Jung discusses the awakening of Otherpower:

I know from experience that all coercion—be it suggestion, insinuation, or any other method of persuasion—ultimately proves to be nothing but an obstacle to the highest and most decisive experience of all, which is to be alone with his own self, or whatever one chooses to call the objectivity of the psyche. The patient must be alone if he is to find out what it is that supports him when he can no longer support

For a parallel situation in Islamic mysticism, see H. Corbin, Spiritual Body & Celestial Earth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) pp. 28-9, 42. Corbin describes the dialogical encounter between the individual soul & the World soul, the Anima Mundi; For a discussion of Anima Mundi, see J. Hillman "Anima Mundi: The Return of Soul to the World," Spring 1982 (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1982).

²⁴ G. Chang, The Buddhist Teaching of Totality (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), pp. 188-196.

himself. Only this experience can give him an indestructible foundation.²⁵

But this "support", which comes from contacting the "objectivity of the psyche", should not be envisaged as merely an inert, homogenous and passive foundation. It is the realm of the "Gods," or in Buddhist terms, the Buddha-Lands. So the psychological idea of support is a dynamic, polytheistic image. Amida and his Pure Land present merely one possible aspect of this. It is through mantric, or poetic, discourse that the realms of humans and Gods are brought into alignment and reconnected. As Heidegger wrote:

... When the gods are named originally and the essence of things receives a name... human existence is brought into a firm relation and given a basis.²⁶

Such a naming, as with the Nembutsu, is not a solitary, willful act of the ego, but an articulation of the imaginal:

The Pure Land reveals itself when we realize what we are, or rather what Amida is.²⁷

In an important paper on "Betrayal," Hillman discusses relationships which are created by the Word, logos. 28 He suggests that when the primal trust of the Mother-child relationship has gone, an attempt is often made to create a new kind of security or temenos with the Father through the power of the word. But to accept trust in this fashion also means embracing the possibility of betrayal. They are two sides of the same reality. However there is no sense of any possible betrayal from Amida. Such possibilities must therefore all be on the side of the devotee. As Hillman points out what is really desired in such cases is protection from one's own self-betrayal and treachery, from one's own wanderings and failings.

Through repeatedly testing the Vow and through one's own failure to remember, the relationship to Amida is deepened. But there is a

²⁵ C. W. 12, para. 32.

Meidegger, Existence & Being, p. 305.

²⁷ Suzuki, Shin Buddhism, p. 22.

J. Hillman, "Betrayal," Loose Ends (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1978), p. 65-67.

danger that the relationship could stagnate at a level where all is assured, all is known, and no psychological work is needed. Many commentators on the Pure Land have discussed this problem and have seen it occur. For example, Shōkū has observed a tendency among Pure Land devotees towards a flight from social reality and an avoidance of social responsibility. It seems that Hōnen, a founding patriach, was also aware of this problem.²⁹

Betrayal, the feeling that the Word has been broken, can be valuable by promoting an ever increasing search for wider and deeper contexts, for more imaginal surfaces.³⁰ But this opening-up can only occur through forgiveness because forgiveness does not constrict the psyche. However, in the case of Pure Land Buddhism, Amida is beyond forgiveness. In effect one must therefore forgive oneself. This is one of the hardest struggles is psychology:

Even where one wants to forgive, one finds one simply can't, because forgiveness doesn't come from the ego. I cannot directly forgive, I can only ask, or pray, that these sins be forgiven.³¹

It is paradoxical that such forgiveness does not mean a forgetting, but rather a remembering, "... the remembrance of wrong transformed within a wider context..."³²

The absolute brightness of Amida, (the Buddha of infinite light) of whom some sources point to a Zoroastrian origin, lures and invites the devotee to self-remembrance and to self-forgiveness. The ever increasing scope and the deepening of this process of forgiveness is Amida.

The Bodhisattva vow, to postpone enlightenment until all other beings have achieved it, masks a simple yet profound paradox of the Anima Mundi, the world soul. All life is intricately connected, and there is no isolated individual separate from this set of interconnections. The Bodhisattva's awakening is to this intimate totality, and hence as Suzuki comments on Amida, "his attainment of enlightenment is dependent upon our obtaining of enlightenment." Such a pro-

²⁹ Eliot, Japanese Buddhism, pp. 124, 263.

³⁰ Hillman, "Betrayal", p. 78.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³² Ibid., p. 79.

³³ Suzuki, Shin Buddhism, p. 31 (my emphasis).

cess is not separate from life, indeed the Shin sect departed radically from the strict, precept-laden, celibate, and monastic life style which forms the ideal of most other forms of Buddhism. While the kind of intense, prayerful, watching advocated by Hönen can lead to an excessively isolated and other-worldly approach to life, this was not the intention of the founders of Pure Land Buddhism. A similar misemphasis has accompanied depth psychology despite Jung's insistence that, "Self-knowledge is not an isolated process: it is possible only if the reality of the world around us is recognized at the same time." So great is Amida's concern that a tradition arose in Japanese art which focused exclusively on the raigō, His Welcoming Descent. He is lyrically depicted either with attendants, or a host of deities, coming down from His Pure Land to greet approaching mortals. The opposite of such total concern is divine indifference. This has been expressed forcefully by the nineteenth century German poet, Friedrich Hölderlin:

Surely, friend, we have come too late. The gods are alive, yes, but yonder, up there, in another world overhead. There they are endlessly active and seem not greatly to care if we are living or not, ...³⁷

There are often times when a deep movement in the imaginal realm causes reverberations, sometimes overwhelming, in our lives. These acts are not always vindictive towards us, nor deliberate as, for example, in the case of Job.³⁸

These moments are revealed by the irreducible core of the unexplained, when we have exhausted all attempts at understanding. In Jung's terms we have arrived at what supports us, and this can be equally as indifferent, or hostile, as it can be caring. There are many styles of support. Also, that which we may want to be supported can very often turn out to be unsupportable. The indestructible foundation, referred to by Jung is a tapestry of varying styles of support. Psychological

³⁴ Cited in Eliot, Japanese Buddhism, p. 371.

³¹ C.W.14, para. 739.

³⁴ J. Okazaki, Pure Land Buddhist Painting (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd. & Shibundo, 1977), p. 94ff.

³⁷ "Bread & Wine," in F. Holderlin & E. Morike, Selected Poems (tr. C. Middleton; Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 43.

³⁸ See "Answer to Job," C.W.11.

faith must also therefore embrace doubt and even despair. Only in this way can we move beyond an ego-centric self-referencing. Paradox and unknown-ness deepen faith. "One is thus 'saved by faith' from personalisations and depersonalisations..."

As Jung emphasized, in a very real sense "the experience of the Self is always a defeat for the ego": 40 an observation we can extend to an encounter with all the archetypal powers. One moves from a faith in one's self, to a faith in one's Self and ultimately into a faith in the Other. Jung summed up such an attitude with his version of St. Paul's well-known saying: "It is not I who live, it lives me". Once the illusion of the ego's self-control is "shattered by a recognition of the unconscious, the unconscious will appear as something objective in which the ego is included." Suzuki similarly comments that once our heroic attempts at awakening are exhausted then we can become conscious of the Other-power "doing its work in us." 22

For religion faith is a problem, but for psychology faith is primarily a question of image-making. Like other theological or philosophical issues such as morality and guilt, archetypal psychology views faith imagistically and pluralistically, asking less what it is, than how it has been imagined. There are many styles and many images of faith. As we have seen, depth psychology has frequently reached out to an energistic metaphor in an attempt to imagine faith, particularly its *intensity*. In addition, the *depth* nature of faith has been imagined in terms of the fantasy of levels. Grinnell refers to an "animal faith observable in neurobiological processes at the psychoid level, through the identifications and compulsions of unconsciously motivated psychological behaviour, through the world of conscious beliefs and goals, to the symbolic appreciation of one's own individuality." However, one

³⁹ Grinnell, "Reflections on the Archetype of Consciousness," p. 37.

C.W.14, para. 778.

⁴¹ C.W.13, para. 76 (my emphasis); & C.W.14, para. 756.

⁴² Suzuki, Shin Buddhism, pp. 66-7.

Grinnell, "Reflections...", p. 36. He also discusses the imagery of a dove in terms of Jung's struggle to deepen his psychological faith. Certainly by mentioning "animal faith," Grinnell opens up a whole other dimension. Wherever there is soul there will be faith. For example the Classical and Medieval belief in a vegetative soul as part of human psychology leads us into the image of a vegetable faith; See P. Bishop, "The Vegetable Soul," Spring 1988 (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1988). On a human's

does not need to literalize this fantasy of levels, nor introduce a hierarchy of faiths, in order to affirm the principal behind it: the pluralistic, imagistic nature of faith and its unfathomable depths.

Jung was unequivocal in his refusal to accept the literal claims of any esoteric teaching: "My admiration for the great philosophers of the East is as genuine as my attitude towards their metaphysics is irreverent." He was equally dismissive of any attempt to use Eastern meditations as psychological techniques: "Since Western man can turn everything into a technique, it is true in principle that everything that looks like a method is either dangerous or condemned to futility." One is reminded here of Hönen's warning: "What I teach is neither a sort of meditation... nor is it an invocation...". From this highly discerning standpoint the Pure Land practices, including Amida's Vow, are of psychological value primarily as a form of "healing fiction," as a way of moving the ego out from its fearful, isolated world and into the presence of the autonomous psyche, into a trust in the reality of the deep imagination.

animal faith, see J. Hillman, "The Animal Kingdom in the Human Dream," Eranos Yearbook 51-1982 (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1983).

⁴⁴ C.W.13, paras, 73, 74.

⁴³ C. W. 11, para. 871.

In Eliot, Japanese Buddhism, p. 267.

⁴⁷ C. W.11, para. 498.