

The Self in Jung and Zen

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THE MOST CONSPICUOUS DIFFERENCE between Buddhism and Western psychology is perhaps found in their respective treatments of the concept of "self." In Western psychology, the existence of a "self" is generally affirmed; Buddhism denies the existence of an enduring "self" and substitutes instead the concept of *anātman*, "no-self."

In Western spiritual traditions one of the classical examples of the affirmation of an enduring self is Plato's notion of the immortal soul. The basis of the modern Western conception of the self was established by Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, which led to a dualistic interpretation of mind as thinking substance and matter as extended substance. Christianity, which is not based on human reason but divine revelation, emphasizes man's self-denial or self-sacrifice in devotion to one's God and fellow human beings. Even so, as a responsible agent in an I-Thou relationship, the human self is affirmed as something essential. Although it is a relatively new scientific discipline, modern Western psychology shares with older Western spiritual traditions the affirmation of the existence of a self.

In ancient India, the Brahmanical tradition propounded the idea of atman or the eternal, unchanging self which is fundamentally identical with Brahman, the ultimate Reality of the universe. The Buddha did not accept the notion of atman and discoursed instead about anātman, no-self. As Walpola Rahula states:

Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self, or Atman. According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism,

and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.¹

Throughout his life, the Buddha taught the means to remove and destroy such a false view and thereby enlighten human beings.

To those who desire self-preservation after death, the Buddhist notion of no-self may sound not only strange but frightening. This was true even for the ancient Indians who lived in the time of the Buddha. A bhikkhu once asked the Buddha: "Sir, is there a case where one is tormented when something permanent within oneself is not found?" Not unaware of such fear, the Buddha answered, "Yes, bhikkhu, there is." Elsewhere the Buddha says: "O bhikkhus, this idea that I may not be, I may not have, is frightening to the uninstructed worldling."² Nevertheless, the Buddha preached the notion of no-self tirelessly until his death, simply because the doctrine is so essential to his teaching: to emancipate human beings from suffering and to awaken them to the fundamental reality of human existence.

To properly understand the Buddhist notion of no-self, it would be helpful to consider the following five points:

First, the doctrine of no-self is the natural result of, or the corollary to, the analysis of the five skandhas or five aggregates, that is, matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. According to Buddhism, human beings are composed of these five aggregates and nothing more.³

Second, the notion of no-self, that is, the notion of no substantial unchanging own-being, is applied not only to human beings, but also to all beings. This is why one of the three essentials peculiar to Buddhism is that "all dharmas [i.e., all entities] are without self." Thus, not only conditioned, relative things, but also unconditioned, absolute things are understood to be without self, without their own-being. Accordingly, not only samsara, but also nirvana, not only delusion, but also enlightenment, are without own-being. Neither relative nor absolute

¹ Walpola Rahula, *What The Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 51.

² Rahula, p. 56.

³ Rahula, pp. 52 and 57.

THE SELF IN JUNG AND ZEN

things are self-existing and independent.

Third, the notion of no-self entails, therefore, the denial of one absolute God who is self-existing, and instead forwards the doctrine of dependent origination. That is, in Buddhism, nothing whatever is independent or self-existing; everything is dependent on everything else. Thus, all unconditioned, absolute, and eternal entities such as Buddha or the state of nirvana co-arise and co-cease with all conditioned, relative, and temporal entities, such as living beings or the state of samsara.

Fourth, in accordance with these teachings, the ultimate in Buddhism is neither conditioned nor unconditioned, neither relative nor absolute, neither temporal nor eternal. Therefore, the Buddhist ultimate is called *śūnyatā*, that is, "Emptiness." It is also called the "Middle Way," because it is neither an eternalist view which insists on the existence of an unchanging eternal entity as the ultimate, nor an annihilationist view which maintains that everything is null and void.

Fifth, if one clearly understands that the Buddhist notion of no-self is essentially connected with its doctrine of dependent origination and *śūnyatā* or Emptiness, one may also naturally understand that the Buddhist notion of no-self does not signify the mere lack or absence of self, as an annihilationist may suggest, but rather constitutes a standpoint which is beyond both the eternalist view of self and the nihilistic view of no-self. This is forcefully illustrated by the Buddha himself when he answered with silence both the questions "Is there a self?" and "Is there no-self?" Keeping silence to both the affirmative and negative forms of the question concerning the "self," the Buddha profoundly expressed the ultimate Reality of humanity. His silence itself does not indicate an agnostic position, but is a striking presence of the true nature of human being which is beyond affirmation and negation.

In the light of these five points, I hope it is now clear that the Buddhist notion of no-self does not signify a mere negation of the existence of the self, but rather signifies a realization of human existence which is neither self nor no-self. Since the original human nature cannot be characterized as self or no-self, it is called No-self. Therefore, No-self represents nothing but the true nature or true Self of humanity which cannot be conceptualized at all and is beyond self and no-self.

In the Buddhist tradition, Zen most clearly and vividly emphasizes that the Buddhist notion of No-self is nothing but true Self. Rinzai's

phrase, the “true man of no rank” serves as an example. “No rank” implies freedom from any conceptualized definition of human being. Thus the “true man of no rank” signifies the “true man” who cannot be characterized either by self or no-self. “True man of no rank” is identical with the true nature of human being presenting itself in the silence of the Buddha. Unlike the Buddha who emphasizes meditation, however, Rinzai is an active and dynamic Zen master, directly displaying his own “true Self” while demanding his disciples to actively demonstrate this “true Self” in themselves. The following exchange vividly illustrates this dynamic character:

One day Rinzai gave this sermon: “There is the true man of no rank in the mass of naked flesh, who goes in and out from your facial gates [i.e., sense organs]. Those who have not testified [to the fact], look! look!”

A monk came forward and asked, “Who is this true man of no rank?”

Rinzai came down from his chair and, taking hold of the monk by the throat, said, “Speak! Speak!”

The monk hesitated.

Rinzai let go his hold and said, “What a worthless dirt-stick this is!”⁴

In this exchange, “true man of no rank” represents a living reality functioning through our physical body. Furthermore, Rinzai is asking his audience to notice the living reality functioning in himself by saying “Look! Look!” and demanding from the monk a demonstration of his own true nature, taking him by the throat and saying “Speak! Speak!” Zen does not intend to provide an explanation or interpretation of the nature of true Self, but rather to precipitate a direct and immediate testimony or demonstration of it through a dynamic encounter between master and disciple.

⁴ D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard DeMartino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 32.

THE SELF IN JUNG AND ZEN

II

In seeking to point out the similarities and dissimilarities between modern Western psychology and Buddhism, especially Zen, with regard to their understanding of the concept of the "self," let us examine a dialogue between Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889-1980) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961).

Hisamatsu Shin'ichi was a professor of Buddhism at Kyoto University. He is regarded as one of the outstanding Zen thinkers of contemporary Japan. But Hisamatsu was also a Zen layman who had attained a very profound, clear-cut Zen awakening, and his subsequent thinking and way of life were deeply rooted in this awakening. He was an excellent calligrapher, tea master, and poet as well. In all, he was a real embodiment of the Zen spirit, outstanding even among contemporary Zen masters in Japan.⁵ This dialogue with Carl Jung took place at Jung's home at Küsnacht, on the outskirts of Zurich, on May 16, 1958.⁶ While there were many stimulating exchanges and many interesting points raised in the course of the dialogue, I would like to focus here on the issue of self as understood by Jung and Hisamatsu.

After a discussion about the relation between consciousness and the unconscious, Hisamatsu asked, "Which is our true Self, the 'unconscious' or 'conscious'?" Jung replied,

The consciousness calls itself 'I', while the 'self' is not 'I' at all. The self is the whole, because the personality—you as the whole—consists of the 'conscious' and the 'unconscious'.

⁵ On Hisamatsu's life and thought, see my articles, "A Buddhism of Self-Awakening, Not a Buddhism of Faith" in *Añjali: A Felicitation Volume Presented to Oliver Hector de Alwis Wijesekera on his Sixtieth Birthday* (Peradeniya, Ceylon, 1970), pp. 33-39; and "Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening" in *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. XIV, No. 1 (Spring 1981), pp. 26-42; for his obituary, see pp. 142-147 of the latter.

⁶ The dialogue was subsequently published in Carl G. Jung and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, "On the Unconscious, the Self and the Therapy," *Psychologia* 11 (1968), pp. 25-32. In 1960, when Satō Kōji, the editor of *Psychologia*, first asked Jung for permission to publish a transcript of the dialogue, Jung refused. This was partly because Jung was already seriously ill and could not see to its revision, and partly because he felt that a satisfactory mutual understanding had not been reached in the course of that brief encounter. Several years after Jung's death, a transcript of the dialogue in German was sent to Hisamatsu by Jung's secretary Frau Aniela Jaffé, which later appeared as the English translation cited here.

That is the whole, or the 'self'. But 'I' know only the consciousness. The 'unconscious' remains to me unknown." (p. 27)⁷

This is Jung's well known distinction between I or ego, and self. To Jung, "ego" is the center of the field of consciousness and the complex entity to which all conscious contents are related, whereas "self" is the total personality which, though always present, cannot fully be known.⁸

Later in the dialogue, the following exchange occurs:

HISAMATSU: "Is the 'I-consciousness' (ego-consciousness) different from the 'self-consciousness' or not?"

JUNG: "In the ordinary usage, people say 'self-consciousness', but psychologically it is only 'I-consciousness'. The 'self' is unknown, for it indicates the whole, that is, the conscious and the unconscious . . ."

HISAMATSU: "What! The 'self' is not known?"

JUNG: "Perhaps only the half of it is known and it is the 'I'. It is the half of the 'self'."

Hisamatsu's surprise is understandable, because in Zen practice the self is to be clearly known. Satori is "self-awakening," that is, the self awakening to itself. The awakened self is characterized as *ryōryōjōchi* 了々常知, that is, "always clearly aware."

Here we can see an essential difference between Jung and Zen. In Jung, self as the total personality consists of the consciousness as "I" or "ego," which is known to itself, and the unconscious, which remains unknown. Furthermore, the unconscious includes the personal unconscious which owes its existence to personal experience, and the collective unconscious, the content of which has never been conscious and which owes its existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious can sooner or later present itself to consciousness, the collective unconscious, being universal and impersonal, consists of pre-existent forms, or archetypes, which give definite form to certain

⁷ Page numbers from *Psychologia* dialogue are given in parentheses.

⁸ C. G. Jung, *Aion: Contributions to the Symbolism of the Self*, Collected Works, Volume 9.2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), pp. 3, 5.

THE SELF IN JUNG AND ZEN

psychic contents, but which can only become conscious secondarily.⁹ It would therefore be appropriate to say that in Jung, the collective unconscious, as the depth of the self, is seen from the side of the conscious ego as something beyond, or as something "over there," though not externally but inwardly. It is in this sense that the unconscious is unknown. In contrast to this, according to Zen, the self is not the unknown, but rather the clearly known. More strictly speaking, the knower and the known are one, not two. The knower itself is the known, and vice versa. Self is not regarded as something existing "over there," somewhere beyond, but rather is fully realized right here and now.

We must therefore recognize clearly that although both Jung and Zen discuss the concept of the self, the entity of the self is understood by them in fundamentally different ways. According to Zen, in order to awaken to the true Self, it is necessary to realize No-self. Only through the clear realization of No-self can one awaken to the true Self. And the realization of No-self in Zen would reflect the realization of the non-substantiality of the unconscious self as well as the conscious ego, to use Jungian terminology. In Jung, self is the total personality which cannot be fully known. It consists of the conscious and the unconscious. But in Zen the true Self is awakened to only through overcoming or breaking through the self in the Jungian sense. I will try to clarify later how this process can occur, but at this point I would merely like to observe that there is no suggestion of the realization of the No-self in Jung. Since the No-self, that is the nonsubstantiality of self, is not clearly realized in Jung, it therefore remains as something unknown to the ego.

III

The dialogue now turns to the case of a patient's mental suffering and the method of curing the infirmity. Hisamatsu asked, "How is the therapy connected with the fundamental 'unconscious'?" Jung replied, "When a disease is caused by things which we are not conscious of, there is the possibility that it might be cured by making these

⁹ C. G. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Collected Works, Vol. 9.1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 43.

ABE

causes conscious. While the cause does not always exist in the 'unconscious', there are cases where the symptoms show that the psychic causes have existed [in the 'unconscious']." Emphasizing the existence of the worries and difficulties in our daily life, Hisamatsu then raises several other questions. "If the essence of cure is freedom from worry, what sort of changes in the sphere of the 'unconscious' correspond to this freedom?" "Is it possible or not possible for psychotherapy to shake off the thousand and one worries of human life all at once?"

JUNG: "How can such a method be possible? A method which enables us to free ourselves from suffering itself?"

HISAMATSU: "Doesn't psychotherapy emancipate us from suffering all at once?"

JUNG: "Free man from his suffering itself? What we are trying to do is to reduce the suffering for human beings. Still some suffering remains."

At this point in the conversation, Jung's reaction to the possibility of sudden emancipation from suffering itself was quite negative. Referring to Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha, Hisamatsu says, "The intention of these religious founders was to emancipate us from our fundamental suffering. Is it really possible for such great freedom to be achieved by psychotherapy?" Jung's response to this question is not simply negative.

JUNG: "It is not impossible if you treat your suffering not as a personal disease but as an impersonal occurrence, as a disaster or an evil . . . Patients are enmeshed by *klesha* (passion) and they are able to be freed from it by their insight. What [psychotherapy] aims at is all the same with the aim of Buddhism."

This leads to a crucial point in the dialogue:

HISAMATSU: "The essential point of freedom [from suffering] is how we can be awakened to our fundamental Self. That fundamental Self is the one which is no more confined by a myriad of things. To attain this Self is the essential point of freedom. It is necessary, therefore, to free oneself both from the 'collective unconscious' and from the bondage

THE SELF IN JUNG AND ZEN

caused by the 'collective unconscious'."

JUNG: "If someone is enmeshed by a myriad of things and confined in them, it is because he is caught in the 'collective unconscious' at the same time. He can be freed only when he is emancipated from both of them. . . . After all, man must reach, to the degree that he is able, freedom both from 'he must', being obligated to chase after things, and from being obligated inconveniently to be ruled by the 'unconscious'. Both are radically the same and nirvana."

HISAMATSU: "In what you have just said before about the 'unconscious', Professor Jung, do you mean that the 'collective unconscious' is something from which, in its nature, we can free ourselves?"

JUNG: "Yes, it is."

HISAMATSU: "What we generally call self is the same as the 'self' characterized by Professor Jung. But it is only after the emancipation of the self that the 'Original Self' of Zen emerges. It is the true Self of *dokudatsu mue* 独脱無依, absolute freedom, independent from everything."

At this point, Jung answered affirmatively Hisamatsu's question as to whether the collective unconscious is something from which one must be emancipated for real freedom. Earlier in the dialogue, he answered negatively a question concerning the possibility of gaining freedom from suffering all at once. Towards the end of the conversation, however, Jung clearly agreed with Hisamatsu on the need of overcoming even the collective unconscious for a complete cure of the patient. According to Tsujimura Kōichi, who acted as interpreter for the dialogue, Jung's affirmative response surprised people in the room, for if the collective unconscious can be overcome, then Jung's analytical psychology must be fundamentally reexamined.

IV

Looking back over the dialogue, I would like to make three remarks:

First, the psychotherapeutic method of relieving a patient's suffering and the Zen method of dissolving a student's suffering are different. In Jungian psychotherapy, to cure a patient's suffering, the analyst tries

to help the patient become aware of the causes of his suffering, which previously had been unconscious, or he tries to help the patient realize the aim or meaning of his life, or he tries to help change the patient's attitude towards psychic worry and make him more accepting and positive. But as Jung says in the conversation, there is no universal rule or method for the cure. There are only individual cases, and in psychotherapy the analyst must cure the patient's worries as fully as possible in each individual case. As Hisamatsu points out in his additional note, however, "If each disease is cured separately and individually, we shall not be completely cured of disease, for when one disease is gone, another disease comes. This in itself may be said to be a disease in a very profound sense." (p. 31)

Hisamatsu calls this "the vicious endlessness" of psychoanalytic therapy. Unless the root of all possible diseases is dug out and cut away, the vicious endlessness of psychoanalytic therapy will not be overcome. What, then, is the root of all possible psychic diseases? According to Jung it is the collective unconscious or the unknown self which is responsible for hindering us psychically. Instead of analyzing psychic diseases one by one, Zen tries to dig out and cut away the very root of the human consciousness beyond consciousness, including the Jungian or any other hypothesized realm of an unconscious. Zen insists that only then can complete emancipation from human suffering be achieved and the true Self be awakened. The realization of No-self, which is indispensable for the awakening to true Self, is simply another way of describing "cutting away" the root of human consciousness.

Second, in Jung, the collective unconscious is something unknown which must be intensively analyzed to discover the cause of a patient's suffering, but it is at the same time a realm that can never be completely known. By definition, the collective unconscious remains an unknown "x" for both analyst and analysand. In Zen, through zazen and koan practice with a Zen master, the Zen student not only digs out the root of the unknown "x" but also becomes one with it. For the Zen student the unknown "x" is not something "over there." It comes to be realized as "here and now." In other words, it is totally, completely and experientially realized by the student *as the unknown "x."* In this total, experiential realization, it ceases to be an *object* to the student, and instead the two become one with each other. Now, the student *is* the unknown "x" and the unknown "x" *is* the student. Only in this way

THE SELF IN JUNG AND ZEN

can the student overcome the unknown "x," "cut off" its root, and awaken to his true Self.

This event can be illustrated by a *mondō* (a question and answer exchange) between Bodhidharma, the first patriarch in the Zen tradition, and Hui-ko, who later became the second patriarch. In deep anguish and mental perplexity after many years of inner struggle, Hui-ko approached Bodhidharma and asked him:

"My mind is not yet pacified. Pray, Master, pacify it."

"Bring your mind here and I will pacify it," said Bodhidharma. "I have sought it for many years," Hui-ko replied, "I am still unable to take hold of it. My mind is really unattainable."

"There! Your mind is pacified once and for all," Bodhidharma confirmed.¹⁰

Instead of analyzing the causes of Hui-ko's suffering, Bodhidharma asked Hui-ko to bring forth his mind. Confronted with this straight-away command, Hui-ko, who had sought after his mind for many years, clearly realized that the mind is unattainable. Suddenly, he totally and experientially realized the mind to be the unattainable and the unattainable to be the mind; there was no longer even the slightest gap between himself and the unattainable. His internal perplexity was resolved in this existentially complete realization of the mind as the unattainable. Recognizing this, Bodhidharma immediately said, "There! Your mind is pacified once and for all."

In Jung, the depth of mind is *objectively* regarded from the side of the conscious "I" as the unknown collective unconscious. In contrast, by overcoming such an objective approach, Zen straightforwardly enters into the depth of mind and breaks through it by becoming completely identical with it. In Zen, this breaking through is called the Great Death—because it signifies the complete denial of human consciousness, including any such Jungian notion of the collective unconscious. And yet the Great Death in Zen is at one and the same time a resurrection in the Great Life—because in this breaking through of mind, not only is the realization that mind is unattainable or

¹⁰ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, First Series (London, Rider, 1949; reprinted 1973), p. 190; adapted.

unknowable included, but also the realization that the unattainable or the unknowable is precisely the true Mind or true Self. This is why 'No mind' in Zen is not a negative but a positive entity. That is to say, unlike the Jungian unconscious, No-mind in Zen is not an extra-conscious psyche, but rather is the true Mind or Original Mind which is realized beyond Jung's framework of the mind.

A significant aspect of Zen in this connection is perhaps the emphasis in koan practice on the Great Doubt. Most koans, such as Joshu's *Mu* and Hakuin's "Listen to the sound of the single hand," are designed to drive a Zen student into a mental corner, to break through the wall of the human psyche, and to open up an entirely new spiritual dimension beyond analytic or dualistic thinking. For example, the koan, "Show your Original Face before your parents were born," does not refer to one's pre-existence in a temporal sense, but rather asks of a student to demonstrate his or her original nature which can be *immediately* realized at the depth of existence. Only when the student demonstrates it can he or she break through the framework of a self-centered psyche. The phrase, "Original Face *before your parents were born*" can be understood to refer to that which lies beyond even the hypothesized collective unconscious and which is impersonal, universal, and yet is the root-source of your own being and which is unknown to the "I" which is limited by time and space.

Zen emphasizes the importance for a Zen student to become a "Great Doubting Mass": "At the base of Great Doubt lies Great Awakening." This emphasis on Great Doubt implies that a Zen student must dig up and grapple with the unknown "x" so thoroughly that he turns into the unknown "x" itself. To become a Great Doubting Mass is to turn into the unknown "x." To turn into the unknown "x" is to come to know existentially that the unknown "x" is nothing but the true Self. And that knowing is the Great Awakening to the true Self, characterized as *ryōryōjōchi*, "always clearly aware." Koan practice has proved an effective way to lead a student to the Great Awakening through Great Doubt.

Third, despite the essential differences between Zen and Jungian psychology in their understandings of self and their respective methods of curing human suffering, I believe there are also points at which these two disciplines can profitably learn from each other, although the scope and depth of their mutual learning may perhaps not be equal.

THE SELF IN JUNG AND ZEN

Since Zen is so overwhelmingly concerned with cutting off the root of the human consciousness in order to attain No-self as true Self, or to attain No-mind as true Mind, it tends on the whole to neglect psychological problems that occur sometimes in the process of Zen practice, in particular the delusory apparitions known as *makyō*.¹¹ But if Zen learns from Jungian psychology about the theory of the archetype as an unconscious organizer of human ideas, and the process of individuation, it might help the Zen practitioner to better understand such mental fabrication.

Modern Western psychology, and particularly Freudian and Jungian psychology, have claimed to discover the existence of a psyche outside consciousness. With this discovery the position of the ego, until then absolute as the center of human consciousness and the active source of man's spiritual act, was relativized.¹² In Jung, the ego is no longer identical with the whole of the individual but is a limited substance serving as the center of non-unconscious phenomena. If this relativization of the ego is strengthened, that is, the substance of the ego is understood to be even more limited, it could help open the way to the realization of No-self. But in Jung, instead of a relativization of the position of ego, the position of the self as the total personality based on the collective unconscious is strongly maintained. If the collective unconscious is something ultimate in which human suffering is rooted, then, as Hisamatsu suggests in his dialogue with Jung, Jungian psychotherapy may not be free from an inevitable "vicious endlessness," because even though it can relieve a particular disease separately and individually, other forms of psychic disease may recur endlessly. Only when the true source is reached beyond such possible psychological realms as the collective unconscious, can human beings go beyond the root of suffering itself and be released from the "vicious endlessness" of particular manifestations of suffering. Zen offers a way to break through even the collective unconscious and similar theories about the structure of the mind.

¹¹ The 18th century Zen master Hakuin was an exception; his disciple Tōrei discusses some of the psychological problems that may occur in the process of Zen practice in his *Shūmon mujintō ron* (The Inexhaustible Lamp of Zen), Taishō 81: 581a-605b.

¹² Jung, *Aion*, p. 6.

ABE

In this respect, it is extremely significant that in his dialogue with Hisamatsu, Jung seemed eventually to agree with the possibility and necessity of freedom from the collective unconscious. Ultimately, Jung and Zen seem to agree that there is hope for human beings to be emancipated from suffering itself, rather than their being destined to remain in a samsaric cycle, finding relief from one suffering only to be faced with another.