

Correspondence

Consciousness and Yoga Philosophy

- from Mary Scott, 3 Castle Court, River Park, Marlborough, Wilts SN8 1NG

I have read with interest Lisa Mallette's further contribution to the discussion on consciousness and the Self. I could not agree more with Lisa's view that it is both possible and necessary to be objective about our inner experiences as a prerequisite for any scientific study of consciousness and its relation to the Self. I particularly liked her use of the term 'subjective science'.

When I was exploring yogic sources for "Kundalini in the Physical World" the more I tried to find my way through imagery to meaning the more I came to feel they were the work of seers who were both subjective scientists and truly holy seekers after unity with the Divine. The fact that so many paranormal phenomena fell into place when analysed in Tantric terms suggested deep personal experience of such events. Moreover everywhere the acquisition of such insights seemed by-products of an aspiration to become one with the Divine. Meditation in the sense of subjective objectivity could never have been enough to produce the Vedic and Tantric shastras.

There is also another point which needs stressing if the yogic model is to be of value to the development of science generally and that is the need to distinguish between consciousness and the Self which both Mick Burley and Lisa tend to identify. The mistake students tend to make in this field is not to carry their analysis beyond the *purusha* as observer and *prakriti* as the phenomenal world observed to the essential nature of Brahman as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. When Absolute Brahman enters into manifestation *Sat* (Being, Selfness) splits and with it *Chit* (Consciousness). *Sat-Chit* appears to divide into the observer (I) and the events observed (Other). This creates the illusion of *Sat-Chit* being both self on the one hand and not-self on the other. This is *maya* or the flaw in perception that fails to recognise that *Sat-Chit* remains itself throughout but appears divided depending on how it is viewed. This is analogous to the wave-particle dilemma of the early physicists.

As observers we experience ourselves as I and the phenomenal world as Other. *Sat* is prepotent. When we focus on the phenomenal world we tend to overlook the presence of ourselves as observers, conscious only of what we are perceiving. *Chit* is prepotent. *Maya* is that aspect of reality which both clouds perception and challenges the divided *Sat-Chit* to recognise its fundamental unity. The wave-particle dilemma was a manifestation of *maya*. The brain-mind dichotomy which has bedevilled Western science since Descartes is just such another. It is the overcoming of these flaws in perception that brings the 'aha' experience to the scientist and that of Ananda or bliss to the mystic.

The recognition that consciousness and being or I-ness are two functionally distinct aspects of a single whole which both transcends our small selves and contains them seems to me a basic insight of the greatest analytic importance. The yogic concept of Brahman enables us to apply this insight equally well to the individual and the cosmos. The challenge is to adapt it semantically so that it can be catalytic in differing scientific and philosophical contexts.

Life Reviews

- from: Mick Burley, 28 Belleville Drive, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 4HA

In his article *Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience* (Network No. 68) Kenneth Ring provides some quotations from near-death experiencers relating to 'life reviews' and suggests that we reflect on these commentaries in relation to our own lives. When so reflecting I find a multitude of questions tugging at my thoughts which are not adequately addressed in the NDE literature that I have read. The questions have to do with broad ethical issues, to which, it would seem, discussions about NDEs constitute a useful entry point. The most central of these questions are the following:

1. If I inflict an injury upon another person and then subsequently (as part of an NDE) re-experience that injurious action from the other person's viewpoint, to what extent do I identify myself as the other person? Do I (a) take on the entirety of his/her personality, including all beliefs, thoughts, memories, etc; (b) take on some aspects of that personality while remaining conscious of my normal identity; or (c) experience what I would feel had someone inflicted a similar injury upon me? If (a) is not the case, then how can I be said to experience the injurious action from the other person's viewpoint? Surely the way that any event is experienced depends upon factors which are unique to the experiencer (i.e. *subjective* factors) and therefore it is impossible to precisely experience an action from another's viewpoint unless one *becomes* the other person, in which case, paradoxically one would no longer be 'the other' but merely a different 'I'.
2. Life reviewers (in NDEs) are said to experience the effects of their (previous actions) upon another (see, e.g. Ring's article, p.7), but how far do these effects extend? Is it possible to be clear about what is and is not an effect of any particular action, or is it rather the case that any action sends ripples out into infinity which make ultimate consequences impossible to determine? In other words, is the butterfly in the Chaos mathematician's proverb (morally) responsible for the tornado on the other other side of the planet? If it is impossible to determine final consequences of any particular action, then how can any action be judged 'good' or 'bad' (or anything else)?
3. Do the consequences of one's actions for non-human entities count for anything in the NDE life review? Is it possible (intelligible?) to experience the effects of our actions from the position of, say, non-human animals, plants, micro-organisms, celestial bodies...?
4. Why should the effects of actions be of any moral significance at all? Is it not the intention that is of ultimate importance? An exclusive emphasis on intention would overcome the difficulties hinted at in questions 1-3 above, and it is this emphasis which is exhibited in certain ethico-religious traditions in which *karma* plays a crucial role such as Jainism, Buddhism, and the Vedanta of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Would it not be of greater value to the near-death experiences (or anyone else) to gain a deeper insight into their own intentions, motivations and psychological 'attitude', rather than dwelling upon the way that an action is experienced by another? For the mere fact that someone experienced suffering or pleasure as the result of an action does not bear any obvious weight in determining the moral validity of that action.

If the accounts of near-death experiencers are to be used as a springboard for advancing discussions of ethical issues, including the complex notion of karma, then these are the sorts of questions that, I propose, need to be given attention. While acknowledging the difficulties faced by anyone attempting to report such extraordinary experiences, it is in my view necessary for researchers and experiencers alike to aim for clarity in their interpretations of

NDEs and related phenomena. In addition to the reports and the powerful feelings stirred therefrom, we also require clear thinking.

A Millennium Project

- from: *Adrianna King Hall and Mike Chambers*

For the last few months some of the members of the Guildford (UK) group have been working on a project to mark the coming Millennium. It grew from the Network chairman's suggestion that members might devise a practical project to help bridge the gaps in the perceptions of reality which arise in issues relating to health and disease.

A series of discussions and presentations have been held and a plan of work has now been prepared. This letter is an invitation to all members of the Network, wherever they may be in the world, to join in the project's work, by Email, fax or in personal meetings.

The project has two objectives. To establish a sound basis for communication on the nature of reality in a form which is mutually satisfying and acceptable to both the scientifically educated and the spiritually aware communities. Secondly, to use this established understanding in practical applications in the fields of psychotherapy, medicine and health.

The plan is to prepare two publications. First a *Reader* and then a companion *Workbook*. The *Reader* will present clear and authoritative accounts of different world views and the consequences that flow from each one in relation to the promotion of health and the care required in disease. The contents will be in the form of essays, probably arranged in four sections. Each will be properly references. The *Reader* is to be of use both as a basis for discussions amongst members of the *Network* and as teaching texts in the professional training institutions for medical, nursing, midwifery and related professionals and in the institutions training practitioners in the natural and alternative therapies.

The aim of addressing the project's work to these groups is to enable future practitioners to be equipped to offer health care for the whole person in a comprehensive and effective approach using both the coarse and the subtle senses possessed by human beings.

To complement the *Reader* there will be a *Workbook*. This will be developed from the issues that emerge from the preparation of the *Reader*. Its purpose will be to provide a basis for the project's aims to be carried further forward into the new Millennium. It will do this by identifying from the *Reader's* presentations the key issues that can facilitate the building of better understanding of the nature of reality and the implications for the care of those in need. This will especially relate to matching tangible evidence from the "coarse" senses with evidence gained through the "subtle", intangible, senses and what relevance this has in developing improved treatment and care for the whole person.

The success of the project will depend upon the willingness of members of the *Network* to participate actively in preparing the material for these two intended publications. We invite all who would like to consider working with us to contact one of the addresses below. Please indicate your particular area of interest in the project and what you would be willing to contribute in personal effort to achieve its objectives. A copy of the working plan will be sent to all who express an interest in taking part in this practical effort to put into practice the purposes of the *Network*.

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A Science of the Subjective?

- from: *Nicholas Spicer, 286 Kew Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3DU*

The notion is often put about in the S.M.N. that there is no science of the subjective. There is. It is Depth Psychology. This discipline is characterised, among other things, by: a) self-knowledge b) participation c) treatment of the subject as a reliable knower.

This science of the subjective was a theme of Synergy '99, a recent conference on the relationship between psychotherapy and the sacred (see report above). The question of a method of a critical analysis of subjective experience was welcomed and explored. Participation, both in dialogue and experience, formed the structure of the day.

By the way... One inspiring contributor to this conference was a Hermeticist, and I was reminded that, in *The Elixir and the Stone*, the authors suggest that the S.M.N. are modern successors of the Hermetic tradition. Does anybody know why? Is this a reference to many members of the S.M.N. who belong to the Gurdjieff/Ouspensky tradition and its successors? Or something I have missed. I would welcome any enlightenment - just like Hermes himself.

The Importance of "Land"

- from: *Bob Cripps, The Old School House, Knock Point, Isle of Lewis BS2 0BW*

My article in the Scientific & Medical Review (*The Aura & Reality*) generated considerable light from many quarters and considerable heat from some. For anyone involved with activities, involving what we see be it the aura, ghosts or apparitions the work of Edmund Land is of fundamental Importance. This brief article deals with my understanding of Land's work.

If the eye is considered from an Engineer's point of view in terms of sensors the eye is predominately black and white sensitive with a small colour sensitive area and a small area with no light sensors. It is important to note here that the experiments that yielded this data used light levels only not images. If there was a one to one correspondence between the eye sensor array and what we "see" in our minds we would see a black and white world with a small coloured area and a blind spot. That we do not see in this way is of course apparent.

In 1959 Land (1) published his work on colour vision in an article entitled "Experiments In Colour Vision". He found that our colour vision is independent of the energy received at the eye. In addition he demonstrated that once an image is formed the energy received by the eye could be altered significantly without changing the perceived image. This simple experiment challenges all previous work on human imaging.

In 1979 Land (2) published his second paper in this area entitled "The Retinex Theory of Colour Vision". He showed that our coloured image is being formed from "clues". Coloured images being formed by light to dark contrast of the Image. This revelation removes the

previous theoretical argument against colours being seen at light levels that could not stimulate the colour sensitive cells. Further, so as a range of frequencies are not required to create the coloured aura the brilliant depictions of coloured auras are after all based on science.

In my view the importance of Land's work is that our imaging system is a complex formation process that is created by the retinex system. Such a system is not suitable for experiments that treat our imaging system as an energy based jigsaw puzzle. In my opinion experiments using the energy jigsaw model of imaging to validate or otherwise the existence of the aura have no clear scientific basis. Further the failure to validate the CXI existence of the aura using the stated technique is simply a crude extension of Land's work.

(1) Scientific American 1959

(2) Scientific American 1979