

Jung and the East - West Dialogue

Janine Edge, London

The day was opened by DAVID LORIMER, who threw to the speakers the challenge of Ravi Ravindra; the ultimate frame of reference is that of a human being, not East or West.

JOHN CLARKE immediately took up this issue in his talk on Jung and cultural relativism. Jung saw Buddhism, for example, as having an important role to play in the West's so called spiritual crisis but his attitude to the East was ambivalent - Buddhism should be used as an inspiration to Westerners to develop their own spiritual values. Jung saw particular problems with adopting Hindu practice; "yoga in Mayfair or Fifth Avenue, or in any other place which is on the telephone, is a spiritual fake"!

At the epistemological level, John saw Jung as strongly relativistic; for Jung an ethical decision was itself a "subjective, creative act". This contrasted with thinkers such as Radhakrishnan and Huxley who espoused some form of unified world society with its own grand narrative. But Jung's relativism was not a world-weary type of postmodernism; he saw plurality as the basis of creativity and a diversified conception of human reality. This is reflected in much of Eastern thought itself, with its refusal to privilege one single philosophy.

LEONARD SCHLAMM was able in his talk to throw light on why Jung had such a strong antipathy to Westerner's use of yoga. Jung had diagnosed an abyss in the European psyche between its underdeveloped primitive side and its higher spiritual Christian aspect. Jung considered that the only remedy for this was to encourage the repressed energy of the primitive man to develop through confrontation with the unconscious, and the European mind needed active imagination exercises to achieve this. Jung was convinced yoga would not work; a European would just use yoga to strengthen his will in order to repress his unconscious contents.

Although ingenious, Leonard pointed out that this view was not supported by experimental evidence. Further it sprung from Jung's ignorance of the extent of the Hindu religious tradition, and his over emphasising of the significance of yoga and introverted spirituality in it. It was this ignorance which must have led to Jung's strange assertion that the Hindu religious tradition was inferior to both Islam and Buddhism

Jung equated synchronicity with Tao and the sound system at Colet House was reflecting this. Whereas the first two speakers had to struggle both with Jung's ambiguous relationship with Eastern thought and the absence of microphone, Jung's passionate embrace of the 'I Ching' rang out clear through the loud speakers in STEPHEN KARCHER'S talk.

Jung's love affair with the 'I Ching' started in 1923 when he met a German evangelical missionary to China, Richard Wilhelm (who was proud of the fact that he had never converted a single Chinese). He was the source of the famous Wilhelm/Baynes translation of the 'I Ching'. For Jung "psychology ..is bound up with the *whole practical use of the I Ching*".

So why should an ancient system of Chinese divination be so important? Jung had even been accused of using the attitude of archaic religions; omens and divinations as signs from the spirits. Stephen explained how the "I Ching" can be used to re-fashion our own imagination. Divination is, like dream, an interface between consciousness and the psychic image or archetype that is creating a particular situation. The symbolic response of the 'I Ching' to a

question is a challenge or interface with which we interact and we can let it re-form our awareness.

Stephen ended by tackling the bigger question of what we see in the mirror of the East; he suggested it first reflects our shadow, and that includes the act of divination itself. Divination is seen as the work of the devil and behind this we sense the imagination, the power of which we find so hard grasp. Stephen's final reading was from the Kuan tz'u (400 BCE Taoist text) which says "When you imagine, you know."

In the afternoon we broke into small groups then came back into a plenary session for concluding reflections. David Lorimer commented that much of the day's discussion stemmed in a sense from Jung's 1930s essay 'Modern Man in Search of a Soul'. The spiritual vacuum posed a challenge that encouraged many people to look beyond their Western roots. Jung himself found the Gnostics and Alchemists most congenial, but the path of individuation and the pursuit of understanding could lead in other directions. We all had our own views but were at the same time searching for common ground.

Janine Edge is a Trustee of the Network and is studying for an MSc in Transpersonal Psychology.