

Spirituality for the Third Millennium Part 1

I am honoured by the task I have been given, for I see it as a very significant task to envision a spirituality for the new millennium. I feel such respect for the mystics that have originated the existing religions that to undertake sharing how I think that it should be today or may be the future is not something that I would have done out of my own initiative. Yet, as you see, I have come, having decided to accept the challenge and, as it often happens to me, realizing already, (now thanks to Pater Jaeger's invitation) that I didn't know I had much more to say than I had imagined.

For instance, I have already spoken in the past about "the patriarchal contamination of religions", and that already implies the view that it would be desirable to have a spirituality not polluted by power politics and dogma.

It seems to me that all religions come from a pure source but they come into a polluted psycho-cultural world which is far from being and embodiment of wisdom and compassion. In such a world truth is not only not recognized, but usually victimized, so that any group of spiritually awakened beings will have to do something special to survive and carry on.

The Buddha's approach to the upside-down-ness of truth to the world (and of the world to truth) was monasticism. You live the truth away from the world.

The Taoist way has been hiddenness, Taoism being the most esoteric of all religions. But the so-called Abrahamic traditions have been, rather, *diplomatic*; they have spoken the language of the culture in which they arose-- and in an authoritarian world they became authoritarian.

It is one thing for a spiritual teaching to communicate a view of things and another to tell you that you must think one way or another, under threat of persecution or excommunication; and the same thing applies to the sphere of action: advice is very different from obligation or prohibition. Yet in the Judeo-Christian tradition we have become used to religion as Law--a law that it is punishable to transgress, both on earth and presumably in the after-life. And not only does religion involve religious prescriptions in which religious observance takes the authority of law, but moral prescriptions extending to how we should live at all times; and since the mythical days of Moses we have become used to to "commandments" --presumably for our own good. The problem, however, is that beliefs inculcated by a threatening authority become obstacles to true understanding, and compulsive morality becomes moralism, which implies the institution of an inner police-state that may be effective to control behavior but interferes with true moral development. Moralism says "you *must* be moral", and it is essentially a power maneuver to make people wrong or bad: a way of lording it over them from an implicit moral superiority. And not only is moralism covertly immoral (for it is a way of deprecation in the service of domination, but it is also a sickness when we turn it on

ourselves--though a sickness so pervasive in the civilized world (and so much idealized) that we don't perceive it as such.

But let me not elaborate on this preliminary remark on one of the characteristics that it would be desirable for spirituality to leave behind, and let us proceed to a thought experiment: Let us imagine that the world heals and religion ceases to be authoritarian and dogmatic. Would it not naturally follow then that once the artificial walls between the different traditions fall, it would happen that, just as in science and in art, an integration of the many streams of creativity would take place?

For it is normal for all creative contributions in the sphere of culture to become integrated,--only that in religion this has been stopped, and a natural ecumenism has been arrested by the hegemonic tendencies in each of the competing spiritual paths. Mahatma Gandhi said that he endorsed all religions for what they affirmed and was critical of what they denied, and it is easy to see that religions have in common their invitation to improve our personality and discover the contemplative dimension of existence, but they also share the claim to supremacy. Thus, if we envision a future when religion has healed from the patriarchal sickness of the hegemonic spirit, this leads us to also envision the natural integration of the contributions of religious genius that have arisen in different lands and times.

In the domain of science we have become increasingly inter-disciplinarian and trans-disciplinarian. One would hope the spiritual world too there were a more inter-cultural and trans-disciplinary spirit-- and not only between religions, but also between the worlds of religion and psychotherapy. Therapy seems a very small thing in comparison to religion, that has dominated the world for millennia; and sometimes psychotherapists are not so good, which contributes to our feeling that the two domains cannot be compared; yet the spirit of psychotherapy is that of being a Way: an interpersonal Way, a kind of *interpersonal yoga*. And though our culture has conditioned us to call certain things spiritual and others not, I think that it is time that we recognize our bias, and acknowledge the hidden but important spiritual dimensions of therapy.

What we call psychotherapy is two things combined: self-knowledge and the spirit of liberation: liberation of desires, liberation of instinct, liberation of the inner child. A good therapist helps people become aware of what they want and have not known they wanted because of an implicit prohibition concerning desires and a potential guilt. Most people don't even know to what extent they are guilty of wishing, and unfree to enjoy. That was the great discovery of Freud: the gap and struggle between Civilization and Eros, through which the pleasure principle is domesticated and castrated in civilized life. And while the liberation of instinctual life may seem irrelevant to our spiritual aspiration and pursuit in view of the ascetic spirit of Christianity, it appears to have been an important aspect of religion before our patriarchal age.

According to Alan Danielou, one of the more original religious historians of the 20th Century, the common religion of Europe was Dionysian before the time of the time of the

Olympian gods of the conquering Indoeuropeans, and the deity known as Dionysus in Europe was the same that was known as Shiva in India.

When Alexander the Great marched over Afghanistan and came to India with his army, the initiates in the Dionysian mysteries who traveled with him met with the initiates of Shiva, and they greeted each other like brothers, for it was clear to them that it was the same path they followed.

This was a religion of what is natural, in nature and in the mind, a religion that makes life sacred as it is, and this we may take as a continuity from the earlier matristic spirit. It seems that at the time of the origin of civilizations there was a shift in emphasis in spiritual life from immanence to transcendence.

It is said that when our ancestors discovered the religion of Heaven, heavenly deities replaced the worship of Chthonic deities, but I suspect that transcendence was already known to the prehistoric shamans of a matristic age, and the change that took place was more political and mythological and dogmatic rather than a true evolution of consciousness, but I cannot prove my point here in what is only an introduction to my assigned subject. Let me just state my conviction that the advent of patriarchy was more a matter of political power than consciousness evolution--and if we want to look at it in terms of consciousness then we must see it as the essence of what mythical language describes as the Fall; for archeology tells us that it marked the beginning of wars and social injustice. It is clear to scholars that patriarchal religion was in the service of the state, and equally clear that once the oppression of women set in the matristic values of life, fertility and relationship became not only subordinate to those of transcendence but eclipsed by the ideals of renunciation and warriorship. Thus, when the religion of heaven triumphed, the religion of Earth became forbidden.

The transition must have been gradual, however, and now it is thought that the biblical narrative, believed at present to have been written--not by Moses or by priests at the time of king Solomon, but as late as the reign of king Josiah, greatly exaggerates the monotheism of the people of Israel.

One curious sign of this transition is the knowledge that there was kept in the temple in Jerusalem a sculptured snake, which in light of modern archeology we understand as an archaic symbol of Nature and the Great Mother. In spite of the demonization of the snake in Genesis, we may assume that it was still kept there because of respect for a venerable tradition.

And if you read the Book of Enoch one of the books of Old Testament Apocrypha, you discover that the highest of the angels--who only sing hosannas to God have the bodies of crocodiles-- with three pairs of wings. And the cover of the ark of the covenant, in which were kept the stone "tables of the law" and was regarded as a seat for divine visitations, was sculpted in the form of cherubim--which were conceived to have the shape of dragons. We may understand such images as residues of an earlier conception of holiness as something not above our heads but related to the animal world-- and a particularly archaic animal world; a conception surely born of the intuition of "the highest" as no

different with “the deepest”-- a very primitive and therefore basic consciousness that we today may relate to our primitive or reptilian brain-- with which we have lost contact. But this is getting too long as an introduction, and I’ll better go into the heart of my subject, which I take to be a consideration of what would be an integral spirituality, that would correspond to the natural facets of the mind and the universal dimensions of spiritual life.