

Duality and Non-Duality: Awakening to Unified Perspective

Donna M. Brown



“Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there.”
Jalal as-Din Muhammad Rumi¹

Abstract

The Ageless Wisdom is predicated on the idea that all life is fundamentally One, that duality has no permanent existence and only emerges in the transition from the One to the Many. Although dualism is basic and necessary to manifestation, it has major limitations that do not account for gradations of perception or the continuum that exists between polarities or opposites. This article explores the dual and non-dual nature of existence and their reflection in human thinking. It provides an overview of non-duality as it has been expressed in diverse religious traditions, esoteric philosophy and science, and concludes with some thoughts on how non-dual or unitive consciousness unfolds.

Introduction

The ultimate nature of Reality is non-dual. All the great religious traditions, despite expressing their own unique archetype, recognize the underlying unity of Life. In fact, numerous scholars believe that the concept of “Oneness” lies at the heart of every authentic religion.² However, life, as the average per-

son perceives it, regardless of his or her religious affiliation or lack thereof, consists of fragmentation, dissonance and the absence of unity and cohesion. This is due, in part, to the contingent and relative nature of divine manifestation and to the fact that dualistic thinking is one of the primary processes engaging the mind.

Dualistic thinking has its roots in the interaction and pull between Spirit and matter. From the interplay of these two fundamental polarities, all the many lesser dualities emerge. The opposites, such as right and wrong, self and other, good and evil and male and female, lead to desire for one thing to the exclusion of the other and consequently to suffering and pain; to a life filled with turmoil, imbalance and conflict.

About the Author

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Since dualistic thinking splits reality and disallows for integrated, inclusive points of view, it imprisons the spirit in a fog of untruth, distortion and deception. Thus the great heresy of separateness, along with the many crises, cleavages and problems of the individual and humanity arise and/or become exacerbated.

Although dualistic thinking—the either/or approach toward life—can be a useful tool for acquiring knowledge, there are, as esoteric philosophy and the various schools of non-duality teach, other ways of knowing. In addition to the analytical, discursive approach, a more comprehensive awareness comes through the effort to reconcile or balance the opposites. A third, more elevated approach, is based on bypassing or superseding the reasoning process altogether to allow for the immediate apprehension of truth—the perception of a thing “through its essence.”³ The non-dual perspective allows us to reclaim our thinking so that we can grasp the fundamental singleness inherent in and underlying all existence.

Non-Duality in the Major Religious Traditions

Christianity

Christianity contains a separation philosophy that emphasizes the struggle between good and evil and the contrast between human and divine action. Although the term non-dualism is not used directly, several Christian and Buddhist thinkers claim that non-dualism is present in Christianity from the beginning.⁴ The gospel of John 10:30, 14:19, declares: “I and my Father are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”⁵ One of the most explicit instructions by the Christ on non-duality, as Peter Scoonheim Samara points out in the *Non-dual Christ*,⁶ can be found in Luke 11:37: “The light of the body is the eye: Therefore, when thine eye is single, your whole body will be filled with light...” Some commentators point out that “non-duality blossoms” in the Christian emphasis on compassion, identification and love. One Buddhist scholar sees non-dual

parallels between Christianity and Buddhism because both recognize, in the ideals of love and compassion, the mutual interpenetration of all things, and ask that “we move upward from the straight-forward, commonsensical commandment of ‘love thy neighbor’ to the counter-intuitive dictum of ‘love thy neighbor as thyself.’”⁷

Others argue that the supreme symbol of Christian non-duality finds its expression in the Mass and the ritual drama of the Eucharist or sacramental union, for at its climax participants are made one with God and each other.⁸ Still others point to the incarnation of Christ into human form as the greatest affirmation of the unity between the divine and human.

One of the greatest philosophers of Christian non-dualism was Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) who stated that “God speaks the One but we understand two.”⁹

God is indivisible without parts, but this is no objection to the notion of multiplicity in Oneness...distinctions are made wholly within the unrestricted actuality of knowledge-in-itself: separations are always from without, and it is only when separation or partition from God is conceived that contradiction arises.¹⁰

Thus we can see that non-dualism is inherent in Christian thought wherever the emphasis is placed on the fundamental unity of life and on the need to move beyond the separate self. It begins with the teachings of the Christ and the non-duality of Christ Consciousness and extends to Meister Eckhart and to a number of Christian mystical thinkers, such as Thomas Merton and Father Bede Griffiths.

The modern day *Course in Miracles* also contains a number of non-dual concepts. It begins with a non dual statement: “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God.”¹¹ *ACIM* draws a fundamental distinction between the real and the unreal, the knower and the known, the world beyond space and time and the world of contingency, time and process. However, it states that God and creation

share one Will and that nothing can exist outside of God's perfect unity or Oneness.¹²

Judaism

Despite efforts to give dualistic theology prominence, the concept of wholeness or non-duality in Judaism is central, especially among Kabbalists. We read in the Zohar, for example, that God "fills and surrounds all worlds"- *memaleh kol almin u'sovev kol almin* and that *leit atar panui mineha*, "there is no place devoid of God." In the Kabbalah, which contains some of the most explicit expositions of non-dualism, we learn that the cosmos and all that it contains emerged out of an Absolute Reality through a kind of outpouring or series of emanations. The Absolute or *Ein Sof* is seen as a "unified one without two."¹³ The Kabbalah views the visible world as a kind of superficial, apparent garment or skin made up of a seemingly infinite number of separate things. According to this perspective there is One Spiritual Substance with its countless symbolic representations. In the words of Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572):

There is no single substance existing in the world, whether it be that which we experience through the sense, or that which we perceive through the mind, which is not comprised in the Creator. Everything emanates from Him. Therefore, what we know as contrary, or unrelated in Him, are but one unified Substance.¹⁴

We see another example of this pervasive non-dualism in a quote from Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570):

The essence of Divinity is found in every single thing—nothing but it exists. Since it causes everything to be, no thing can live by anything else. It enlivens them; its existence exists in each one.

Do not attribute duality to God. Let God be solely God. If you suppose that *Ein Sof* emanates until a certain point, and that from that point on is outside of it, you have dualized. God forbid! Realize, rather, that *Ein Sof* exists in each and

every manifestation. Do not say, 'This is a stone and not God.' God forbid!
Rather, all existence is God, and the stone is a thing pervaded by divinity.¹⁵

Islam

Islam provides numerous conceptualizations that distinguish between Absolute Unity and the relative unity of polarity. In the words of Ibn al-'Arabī, "God possesses the unity of the One and the unity of Many."¹⁶ One commentator on Ibn al-'Arabī's formulations furthers this idea in saying that "God is one and only one, but everything other than God is two or more."¹⁷ That is to say that anything other than God in His Essence represents the *many*. Although Islam does note the distinctions between God and the Cosmos, the principle of unicity and non-dualism stands at the very core of Islam. The essential credo of Islam is to testify to God's oneness through the formula (*tawhīd*) that expresses the truth of oneness,¹⁸ *La ilaha illa' Llah*, "There is no god but God." The inner teachings of Islam tell us that the One Absolute God does not incarnate as either male or female, although His Essence is often referred to in feminine form (*al-`ilat*).¹⁹

...the Face He turns to the World as Creator and Sustainer is addressed in its masculine form. Both male and female are created by Him and the root of both feminine and masculine are to be found in the Divine Nature, which transcends the duality between.²⁰

The idea of the One and the Many is expressed in the name Allāh. The "...first syllable is short, contracted absolute, while the second is long, expanded and infinite..."²¹ The name Allāh seems to have a specific mantric quality deliberately formulated to communicate the idea that there is one sole divinity having the potential for duality and infinite possibility.

Sufism, the inner, mystical dimension of Islam, has as its primary goal the ending or letting go of all notions of dualism. This is expressed in the central Sufi doctrine called *whadat al-wujud* (unicity of being) which Islamic scholars equate to the Vendantic phi-

osophy of *Advaita* or non-duality.²² Although Sufism contains a number of different orders, it is united in this primary aim. One of the chief methods or practices used by all Sufis is *fiṭrah* the practice whereby the Sufi attempts to restore his or her primordial nature. The practice of *fiṭrah* seeks to annihilate the ego and remove the subject/object dichotomy in order to create an inseparable union between humanity and the divine.²³ The renowned Sufi Master, Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273), refers to this essential non-duality in many of his writings and poems.

All desires, preferences, affections, and loves people have for all sorts of things are veils. When one passes beyond this world and sees that Sovereign (God) without these “veils,” then one will realize that all those things were “veils” and “coverings” and that what they were seeking was in reality that One.²⁴

Buddhism

Both the Buddhist and Hindu traditions can be characterized as non-dual. While there are significant similarities and overlap between the two, there are important distinctions. The Hindu conception of non-duality is conceived in ontological and epistemological terms and concerns itself with the nature of life or being, reality or consciousness, and existence or form. In an article exploring the distinction between Buddhism and Vedanta, David Loy explains that “Non-Duality in Buddhism does not constitute merging with a supreme Brahman, but realising that the duality of a self/subject/agent/watcher/doer in relation to the object/world is an illusion.”²⁵ Buddhist philosophy, therefore, envisages non-duality as the *Not-Self* or as the absence of the separated ego. The notion that the self has no reality, that there is no self at all, is its most unique feature.

Not surprisingly, the illusion of duality is the essential principle of the Diamond Sutra—the oldest known dated, printed book (868 CE). This sutra, apply named by the Buddha as the “Diamond that Cuts through Illusion” (*The Vajracchedika Prajnaparamit Sutra*),²⁶

focuses on the doing of good deeds to eliminate karma and the distinction between self and others. The Buddha is claimed to have said its capacity to cut through illusions and afflictions will lead one to the shore of Liberation.²⁷ The principle of non-duality and the Not-Self along with renunciation of all manner of grasping is the underlying theme contained in all the major canons of Buddhism. The Lankavatara Sutra—a memorandum kept by a Mahayana Master said to contain the actual words of the Buddha as he entered Lanka—stresses that all the objects and forms of experience in the world are merely expressions of the mind. “In essence things are not two but one... All duality is falsely imagined.”²⁸

The *Vimalakirti Nirde'sa*, (Teaching of Vimalakirti) alternatively titled the “Reconciliation of Dichotomies,” imparts the skillful means needed to enter the “Dharma Door of Non-Duality.” Deliverance from duality and the opposites, according to Vimalakirti, is obtained through self control, the absence of presumption, by seeking neither good nor evil, and through similarity of vibration, contemplation, constant adjustment and complete detachment.²⁹ The Lotus Sutra, the Heart Sutra, the Madhyamaka (which represents the “Middle Way”), and numerous other canons from the Buddhist tradition all focus on the perplexities of duality and the means to their elimination.

Hinduism

Vedanta, which forms the basis of Hinduism, is one of the earliest sacred philosophies. Two principle assertions as taught in the Vedas are that God is “One without a second”³⁰ (*Ekam advitīyam*), eternal, without division and changeless, and that all of the manifestations of God on Earth are (*Atma-swarupa*) “embodiments of the all pervading divine Self.”³¹ The three principle philosophies of Vedanta—Advaita (non-duality), Visiṭadvaita (qualified duality), and Davatia (duality)—each evolved different systems of thought with respect to these two fundamental assertions. Advaita, the oldest system in the Vedas, expounded by Sri Adi Shankaracharya (788-820) its most revered teacher,

maintains that there is an *ultimate, non-dual* relationship between the soul, all of creation and Brahman.³² Advaita maintains that while the three tiers of reality or being exist—

absolute/non-duality, relative/qualified duality and illusion/duality—each one counterbalances or neutralizes the previous.³³ These three tiers are contained in Brahman where all are One. In the words of Shankaracharya:

No matter what a deluded man may think he is perceiving, he is really seeing Brahman and nothing else but Brahman. ...This universe, which is superimposed upon Brahman, is nothing but a name.³⁴

That which permeates all, which nothing transcends and which, like the universal space around us, fills everything completely from within and without, that Supreme non-dual Brahman—that thou art.³⁵

The mysteries involving the dissolution of the separate self, the cessation of suffering and eventual liberation are the principal aim and objective of all the Vedas. Vedanta, along with the authentic and inner teachings of all the great religions, provides a unique set of tools or guidelines for extinguishing the cleavage between the eternal and the ephemeral, the real and the unreal. The principle of Oneness and Non-Duality are shared by all of these traditions.

The Creation of the Many

Each of the major religious traditions also offers its own distinct perspective on how the *One becomes the Many*. The movement from the Absolute One to the multiplicity of form is an inexhaustible theme. The Ageless Wisdom teachings, which can be

said to represent a synthesis of the aforementioned traditions, assert that there is One Boundless Reality in which everything is contained. It goes on to say that within the

Oscillation and the tension between opposites are part of the creative process and one of the primary ways in which creation is refreshed, renewed and presented with new or other possibilities. This polar tension is linked to the impulse toward expression as well as the first act of will or volition.

One there exists the potential for polarity or duality. Once duality emerges, it gives birth to a third (the Trinity) and hence to the multiplicity of forms.³⁶ These fundamental postulates, originally formulated by Helena Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* and further elaborated upon in the teachings of Alice A. Bailey, have their roots in Vedic cosmological thought. They offer some of the most comprehensive and profound discussions on the One and the emergence of dualism and multiplicity.

According to the Samakhya school of Vedic philosophy, Purusha (cosmic mind or ideation) and mula-Prakriti (cosmic substance or energy) are the eternal parents or the beginningless source. The Bhagavad Gita, which bears the principal influences of this school, tells us that “the cosmos is formed by the polarity of Purusha and Prakriti.”³⁷ The Ageless Wisdom or Esoteric Philosophy, as it is also called, furthered these ideas in saying that the “Manifested Universe” comes into being as a result of the interplay of Cosmic Thought and Cosmic Substance. However, once the field of Absolute Unity is passed (this field contains the Unmanifest and Manifest, without separation or contradiction), duality supervenes in the contrast between Spirit and matter.³⁸ This basic or foundational duality takes place as a part of the divine effort to “modify Unity so that it supports the manifestation of the Many in the One and the One in the Many.”³⁹

Phenomenal existence therefore, is not possible without the dynamic between Purusha and Prakriti. Creation would have remained formless or unmanifest, and consciousness, which involves a sense of relationship, could not have arisen.⁴⁰ Thus, Spirit and matter (or the contrast of opposites) must not be viewed

as independent realities, but as “co-existent facets of the Absolute One Cause which constitute the basis of conditioned Being.”⁴¹ For duality only exists in relationship to manifestation (“Manvantaric Maya” as H.P.B terms it) and in relationship to space-time.

The Vedantic and Theosophical perspectives lead us to understand that the undifferentiated Absolute realizes itself through polar tensions⁴² and that duality allows for differentiation and movement. Additionally, we learn that every duality can be envisaged as a unity existing at a level of being superior to, or above, its twofold manifestation.⁴³ This holds true whether one considers the most elemental duality of manvantara (appearance) and pralaya (dissolution), or the common distinctions of light and dark, pleasure and pain, or any of the other so-called opposites expressing in nature. Furthermore, we can see that the opposites are ultimately impermanent, for they are involved in a continual state of change and evolution between phases.⁴⁴

Dualism and the Mind

These teachings provide a template for understanding cosmological and ontological processes. They reveal how the paradoxical nature of truth, the multi-dimensionality of the world, and the complex nature of existence have given rise to an experience of life that promotes differentiation and separation.⁴⁵ This tendency, which is especially pronounced in the human world, arises primarily from an erroneous or limited notion of space-time⁴⁶ and the mind’s tendency to compartmentalize, to set limits and boundaries and think along narrowly defined lines. Dualism then is the product of mental modification and the control of form by mental energy. Its existence is woven into the very fabric of the mind and the process of thinking!

As a result of the mind’s tendency to think, to will, modify and separate, our experience of the phenomenal world becomes rooted in a dichotomy of two aspects: “a subject that perceives and an object that is perceived”⁴⁷ or the experience of self and others. This basic division gives birth to countless distinctions

or divisions, such as the idea that humans have two basic natures, the physical and the spiritual, or that the world is governed by pairs of competing forces: good and bad, animate and inanimate, chaos and harmony, and pleasure and pain. These many modifications and the dichotomies they create between our inner and outer reality form the basis for our valuations and judgments.

Recognizing the Value of the Opposites

Duality and the opposites, while ultimately illusory within the framework of Pure Being, serve a number of critical evolutionary functions. The dual nature of existence is related to the beginning of oscillation and rhythm between the two poles of the one Reality and to energy cycles of constant and simultaneously occurring creation and dissolution.⁴⁸ Oscillation and the tension between opposites are part of the creative process and one of the primary ways in which creation is refreshed, renewed and presented with new or other possibilities. This polar tension is linked to the impulse toward expression as well as the first act of will or volition. Duality is a prerequisite for existence created by the Will to Manifest. It allows the Absolute to reveal Itself to Itself and its emanations.

One of duality’s other functions is to produce an awareness of the relationship and interplay between Spirit and matter or Creator and creation. The *Tao of Islam* informs us that

Every correlative term is limited and defined by its correlative. Hence it cannot be an absolute point of reference. The differentiation among things that make it possible to know them only comes through distinction and opposite. Things become distinguished through their opposition.⁴⁹

The contrasting quality of the world therefore, encourages us to distinguish, discriminate and draw comparisons in an effort to reconcile and ultimately identify, not with division or separation, but with the continuum between opposing forces. The poet Rumi sums up this idea when he says: “No

opposite can be known without its opposite. Having suffered a blow you will know a caress.”⁵⁰

Another contemporary thinker reminds us that “there is no merit in doing good if you could not choose the opposite.”⁵¹ Duality, therefore, has a positive function in that truth, beauty and goodness are thrown into contrast by means of their being opposites. This allows the opposites to work in temporary collaboration to contribute to the realization of the good.⁵² Duality and the contrast of opposites act as a support to choice or free will. The opposites allow for a measure of self-conscious freedom. Freedom of choice, however, might well require that we learn how to manage dissonance⁵³ and choose neutrality rather than choosing one opposite over the others. Conscious choice and free will also come into play in terms of how we react or respond to the myriad combinations of binaries or opposites and the conflicting messages they seem to convey. Duality presents us with the opportunity to choose a course of action between two seemingly divergent and dissimilar things. The dialectical tension or opposition between interacting elements or forces also prompts an exchange of energy and information. In this way, the opposites can be seen to partner in an effort to communicate and make certain possibilities explicit.

A Closer Look at the Pairs of Opposites

Michael Robbins, author and long time teacher of the Ageless Wisdom, defines the pairs of opposites as “energy states, energy patterns or entities, which when compared with each other are maximally distinct and as different from each other as the mind can conceive.”⁵⁴ But rather than grouping the opposites into one general category, Robbins distinguishes three non-rigid categories or classes of opposites existing within a circle or sphere. These three categories might be likened to the three tiers of reality or the three truths of Advaita. The sphere might be said to represent the “field” of quantum physics or, in Robbins’ view, multidimensional

consciousness and an awareness of the Whole.

The first class of pairs are described as “the horizontal opposites;”⁵⁵ opposites that the mind conceives concurrently that are non-hierarchical, equal in value and intrinsic to each other. East/west, north/south, above/below and hard/soft typify the opposites in this category. Robbins also includes the astrological pairs, the six polarized pairs of constellations (Aries/Libra, Taurus/Scorpio and so on) that underlie the nature of reality. While each constellation is diametrically opposed to another, each is valid in its own right and incomplete without the other. Each of the pairs in opposition represents a puzzle to be solved and is a key to Unity within the pair.⁵⁶

In the second category are the “vertical opposites.”⁵⁷ These are the opposites that the mind tends to view as hierarchical in nature. They are not equal or equivalent to each other and can be ranked or rated according to their “relative importance of function within the whole.”⁵⁸ Truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and evil, love and hate are some of the pairs Robbins uses as examples of the vertical opposites. He reminds us that dealing with these pairs requires subtle discrimination or analysis and the ability to prioritize the opposite that promotes the most integrity, balance and unity.

Robbins refers to the third category of opposites—“the fundamental, super-cosmic pairs”—as the self-cancelling, self-annihilating, seemingly irreconcilable opposites. The super-cosmic pairs are fundamentally contradictory and seemingly paradoxical in nature. Several examples from the Ageless Wisdom are: Be-ness and Becoming, infinite and finite, total repose and ceaseless motion, time and the eternal now, transcendent and immanent, and universal causality and free will. These are the opposites that operate simultaneously and express a non-dual truth. Robbins hypothesizes that the resolution of these apparent irreconcilables might come through spherical or multidimensional thinking requiring the cultivation of the higher faculties, such as Buddhi and Atma.

As Robbins explains, it is important to distinguish between the categories of opposites and the levels upon which they function. One has to determine whether the opposites are indispensable and therefore inevitable, or whether they are temporarily necessary or merely relative and expendable. Italian psychologist Robert Assagioli reminds us that “wisdom is the power to play with the opposites.”⁵⁹ Learning to “play” with the opposites requires understanding, subtle discrimination, reconciliation, acceptance, and balancing. It might also entail choosing one opposite over another, such as choosing Truth over falsity. In this last instance, one brings the Law of Repulse—the dispersing, rejecting energy—into play. However, as Robbins points out, such a rejection necessitates holding a point of identification with what has been repulsed. In this way, one remains detached from the opposites and continues to hold to the all-important “Middle Way.”

Non-Duality and the New Physics

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless; Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is, But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity, Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards, neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point, There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
(T.S. Eliot)⁶⁰

The obscure nature of the Absolute’s outward radiation and the mind’s tendency to split the world into categories are largely responsible for the development of dualistic theologies, philosophies, systems of logic and science. The ascent of the deterministic materialistic model, especially in the sciences, has contributed immensely to our understanding of the world. But it has also produced a worldview that contributes to separation, division, fragmentation and a dichotomy of ego and environment. This limited and distorted worldview divides existence into an objective or physically based existence and a subjective or psycho-spiritual realm in which

the form or physical aspect rules. Twentieth-century developments in physics however, have drastically undermined the deterministic/materialistic model⁶¹ and shed much light on the role of the opposites and the fact of their co-existence. Quantum physics reveals the opposites not as isolated entities, but as integral parts of an inseparable network of interaction.⁶² For example, the opposites of space and time (which provide the field for events to take place) are seen as existing independently, yet they seem to combine to form a single construct: “the space-time continuum” where there are no true separable or static objects.⁶³

Physicists describe this quantum “field” as the only reality—a single universal substance that manifests as a co-existent duality. In other words, “the field and its complementary manifestations are one and the same thing.”⁶⁴

Some physicists portray the interaction and inseparable relation of the opposites in terms of “a dialectical dance or a ballet.”⁶⁵ This dance takes place at subatomic levels and involves the totality of existence. The oscillating rhythm of creation and destruction results in a constant exchange between seemingly separate units of energy. The opposites, such as birth and death, are seen as essential to the processes of creation and the existence of all phenomena. The interplay between positive and negative energy waves actually structures or orders the world of appearances.⁶⁶

As Fritjof Capra notes in *The Turning Point*, this relationship between the opposites is perfectly depicted in the figure of Shiva, the God whose dance balances the forces of destruction and creation.

Science has also revealed that the opposites, particles and waves, or energy and mass, can shift to take on the characteristics of the other. Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity concludes that energy and mass are different manifestations of the same reality and have a perfect conversion from one state to another.⁶⁷ These developments show also that the opposites are not fixed, but are part of a

dynamic interplay. This interplay or dance between the opposites expresses not only as energy-mass and the wave particle/duality, but also as space-time, attraction-repulsion, action-reaction, subject-object, as well as thought and thinker. The far-reaching implications of these discoveries reveal that external reality does not consist of independent spatially separated components that counter and exclude each other, but must be defined in terms of complementarity, interaction and interrelations.⁶⁸ In other words, reality can be defined in terms of a “cosmic dance” taking place at subatomic levels and by extension to all the parts of creation.

The Taoist Perspective

Yin and Yang

No better symbol depicts the dance of the opposites, their interplay and the constant movement of energies than the Yin Yang. This symbol is replete with meaning. It is believed to have originated from observations of the night sky and is said to be a “Chinese representation of the entire celestial phenomena.”⁶⁹ The Yin Yang depicts the passage from oneness or union into vibration or the field of contrasts, duality and multiplicity.⁷⁰ According to the perennial philosopher Frithjof Schoun, the Yin Yang is an “image of the fundamental relationship existing between the Absolute and its contingent.” He goes on to say that it contains the “whole play of Maya, its modes, its cycles, its diversity and its alterations.”⁷¹ *The Secret of the Golden Flower* reiterates this theme. According to Richard Wilhelm, “The fundamental idea is...that the Tao, though itself motionless, is the means of all movement and gives it law...It is the ‘one essence or Great One.’”⁷² The two principles or poles of manifestation are said to arise out of the Tao and through their union the “ten thousand things”⁷³ come into being.

Technically speaking, the Tao is said to exist between two opposites—the beginning of existence and its end. The Tao is the path between the beginning (Yang) and the end (Yin). The following graphic depicts this idea.



Beginning (Yang) ==>The Tao (Path) ==>Ending (Yin)⁷⁴

These two poles of manifestation emerge jointly and are the two sides of a single whole or unit. They are irrevocably connected and each holds each in a balance where neither side predominates. Each exists in relationship to the other in a kind of collaboration or partnership.⁷⁵ The opposites are neither separate nor distinct since each contains the essence of the other. They co-exist in a kind of shared consent that allows for continual transformation and change.

Taoist teaching tells us that we have to dis-identify with our fixed mental conceptions of good and bad, right and wrong, pleasure and pain etc., so that we can engage in an inner *alchemy of the opposites*. This implies allowing ourselves to consciously embrace the dance of opposites so that we intuitively grasp a non-dual truth or paradox. Flexibility, detachment, self control and the ability to hold a position of mutual inclusion and inner balance regardless of fluctuations are all involved. By adopting a dynamic and holistic attitude the contraries begin to balance, interpenetrate and fuse into each other. The following symbol—a most familiar one—expresses this dynamic movement, balance and fusion.



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Tao is the path that leads to an unchanging stillness (the single point) where “the polarity between self and other begins to dissolve” and where we are enfolded “back into the Mind of the Tao, that primordial and ever-present Unity out of which the play of Yin and Yang originally emerges.”⁷⁷

Unitive Consciousness

Reconciliation of Dichotomies

The various religious traditions and philosophies as well as the new scientific theories offer valuable clues for moving away from dualistic thinking toward a more single-minded point of view; a view that is decidedly more creative and holistic and that sees into, through and beyond the pairs of opposites. Esoteric philosophy and the teachings of Alice Bailey have much to communicate about the importance of balancing and moving beyond the opposites. These teachings make it clear that the whole problem of glamor (distortions of truth, deceptions, illusions, misunderstandings and misinterpretations) is rooted in duality and dualistic thinking.⁷⁸ Bailey goes on to say that duality is a difficulty based on wrong or distorted perception as well as identification with the realm of phenomena. Freedom from glamor and its many offspring lies in the balancing and the equilibrating of the pairs of opposites. This is accomplished from the midpoint or center and means turning neither left nor right as we seek to relate, balance and eventually synthesize.⁷⁹

Detachment from the warring process is critical to the non-dual experience. Detachment or non-attachment—one of the most fundamental spiritual ideals—shows itself as the ability to disengage emotionally and mentally from external events, things, people and concepts in order to view the world from a more balanced and holistic perspective. The great significance of detachment (and meditation practices where it is explicitly cultivated) is that it has the power to release the Soul from the chaos and bondage of form life. Detachment or divine indifference allows us to let go of our personal desires and expectations,

The heart chakra is known for its expansiveness, equilibrium, and its ability to relate and reconcile polarities. Bailey termed it “the organ of synthesis” due its ability to heal cleavages and create unbroken links within and without. At its centre is the unwavering light of love, which illumines the path to the Soul and to Oneness. As such, it functions as the bridge to the non-dual experience.

to dis-identify with the opposites and to use the mind in a way that perceives duality as a demonstration of the One Life. Non-attachment is an elementary requirement to

treading the so-called “Middle Way”—the way that transcends the antithetical experience of existence.

One of the other steps toward non-dual thinking involves the effort to distinguish and discriminate between the pairs and various categories of opposites. This entails close observation, subtle discernment and refined sensitivity with regard to the opposites encountered. Clear thinking and the right direction of energy are also involved. This places an obvious emphasis on the need for conscious

responsibility with regard to our attitudes, intentions and thoughts. Our perception of reality, whether we view it in terms of its dissociated parts, or in terms of a continuum, is directly influenced by where we focus our attention. If, for example, the mind is caught between two polarities, such as pleasure and pain, the focus is on one to the exclusion of the other. A more balanced approach recognizes the interchangeable and transitory nature of the opposites and the dynamic of the dance. It turns categorical discrete units or elements into a continuum so that they are experienced as cyclic, mutually arising, co-dependent and working in alliance.

Another factor figuring prominently in the development of the non-dual experience is love. In Esoteric philosophy, love is viewed as a coherent force in the Universe—a force that makes all things whole. Love underlies the great principle of attraction responsible for establishing the interplay between pairs of opposites. According to Bailey, love is not a sentiment or an emotion, but a natural

process and a great motivating power that not only unites the opposites, but brings about their eventual fusion, synthesis or marriage.⁸⁰ It seeks the “transmutation of the desire nature” (wherein the pairs of opposites are mostly potently felt) and “links it up with the greater magnetism of the love aspect on the buddhic plane”⁸¹—the plane of multidimensional or spherical awareness.

In the human system, the heart is the natural abode for love, compassion and empathy. It sits between the lower chakras of duality, egoism and karma and the higher centers of unitive consciousness.⁸² The heart chakra is known for its expansiveness, equilibrium, and its ability to relate and reconcile polarities. Alice Bailey termed it “the organ of synthesis” due to its ability to heal cleavages and create unbroken links within and without. At its center is the unwavering light of love, which illumines the path to the Soul and to Oneness. As such, it functions as the bridge to the non-dual experience.

Control of the desire nature, the right use of the mind, and the cultivation of love (with all that these developments imply) are the underpinnings of the non-dual experience. They are the ABC’s for the integration of the personality and its fusion with the Soul. The Soul is neither spirit nor matter, but the mediator between the two and as such, it represents a unity of consciousness. It gives an awareness of form, of the Self, and a growing awareness of the source from which both stem. Unitive or non-dual consciousness can also be described as a state in which different aspects or states of awareness are unified with one another and, ultimately, come to be viewed as comprising a single inclusive field or state.⁸³ The Soul, therefore, provides freedom from the opposites. The awakening to single mindedness and non-dual wisdom is the motivational foundation and goal of the Soul.

Additionally, the Soul provides a platform from which the intuition or pure reason can be brought into play. The intuition is a blend of two qualities: higher abstract mind, or *manas*, and *buddhi*. Their merger allows for the synthetic, multidimensional grasp of reality,

based not only on a balanced point of view, but also upon a measure of interpenetration and identification⁸⁴ with the underlying unity that antecedes manifest creation.

Concluding Remarks

Dualism or the emergence of two polar forces is the result of the Infinite’s radiation and is basic to manifestation. It is universally present. Inherently purposeful, duality is one of the primary means by which the Divine discloses Itself as universal possibility. It is one of the chief methods by which a measure of relationship and interplay is established between the Unmanifest and Creation. But, duality is paradoxical in nature, for it both connects and separates.⁸⁵

The dual nature of existence and the friction it generates prompt us to speculate about our own existence and the meaning of life. The sense of division and separation the dual forces create underlie the yearning for peace, wholeness and union. Tensions between conflicting forces encourage us to delineate, discern and choose, eventually bringing the will into play. Duality and the allied Principle of Conflict, along with the crises that they create, account for the urge to balance and then synthesize polarizing, separative forces.

Dualism or dualistic thinking, however, is self-referential and inherently distorted. The deeper reality of accord and wholeness is obscured by the sense of division and separation that rigid, analytical reasoning and selfish desire creates. The self-referential attitude toward life also creates attachment—attachment that leads to suffering, as well as a narrow, overly simplistic and often arbitrary approach toward life. Focusing on our personal desires and expectations, and therefore on only one of the opposites, prevents us from seeing them as part of a shared field or greater unit. Unbalanced, one-dimensional, fragmentary thinking is the result. Such distorted and artificial thinking further exacerbates and isolates us from the eternal now and the higher synthesis that exists.

Non-dual awareness on the other hand, is the practice of self-inquiry, self-control and non-

separativeness. It's been described as a "living insight" requiring the suspension of judgment and the complete unconditional acceptance or embrace of life as is.⁸⁶ Awakening to non-dualism is a gradual process involving the elimination of the ego and the cultivation and expression of inclusiveness, empathetic resonance and wisdom. It is the process by which glamor is dispelled and divisions are healed. In shifting from referential knowledge to non-dual or unified thinking, the opposites and phenomenal experience are perceived as working together in a kind of beneficent partnership. As inner union demonstrates and outer cleavages dissolve⁸⁷ our understanding of the opposites becomes intuitive, direct and unified. We sense the blossoming of the Presence in all beings and share in the simplicity of undifferentiation where all life exists as One.

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