

The Inner and Outer Human Being

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“[T]he *vyakti*, the outer self, is but a shadow of the *vyakta*, the inner self.”¹

– Nisargadatta Maharaj

“[T]he Heavenly is on the inside, the human is on the outside.”²

– Zhūangzi

“[T]hough our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”³

– 2 Corinthians 4:16

“In any definition of Man, his inner and outer aspect are both to be considered.”⁴

– Ibn ‘Arabī

In earlier eras when human collectivities were more anchored in their spiritual traditions, the social ambiance of the outer world reflected the sacred, and permeated the culture which nurtured and sustained the integrity of a person. In such an environment, both the horizontal

¹ Śrī Nisargadatta Maharaj, “In the Supreme the Witness Appears,” in *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, trans. Maurice Frydman, ed. Sudhakar S. Dikshit (Durham, NC: Acorn Press, 1999), p. 294.

² Zhūangzi, “Autumn Floods,” in *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 104.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, “The Wisdom of Exaltation in the Word of Noah,” in *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R.W.J. Austin (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 73.

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and vertical dimensions of reality supported the fullness of human beings. With the loss of a sense of the sacred on a global scale, our outer dimension has gradually become eclipsed and no longer reflects the Divine. This has inevitably led to the obscuration of our inner dimension, causing the fragmentation we now see mirrored in the current global mental health pandemic, and topsy-turvy state of the world. In our day, it is the outward which dominates the inward, which is an inversion of the traditional norm. Our true purpose, then, is to live in accordance with the sacred and to better integrate our outward and inward dimensions. In fact, a flourishing society depends on the human psyche remaining stable: “The state of the outer world does not merely correspond to the general state of men’s souls; it also in a sense depends on that state.”⁴

Among the spiritual traditions of the world, we find unanimous agreement that the tripartite constitution of the person and that of the cosmos – of which we are but a mirror – comprises Spirit, soul, and body; or the spiritual, psychic, and corporeal states. The dominance of the unseen world proclaimed by the spiritual traditions (and their corresponding psychologies) was gradually overthrown and replaced by the more tangible demands of the sensorial world and its empirical modes of knowing, represented by the modern West’s culture of materialism.

Persian poet and scholar Jāmī (1414–1492) underscores this fact as follows: “Therefore the universe is the outward visible expression of the Real, and the Real is the inner unseen reality of the universe.”⁵ In relying on a purely empirical approach, mainstream psychology – along with its mental health treatments – fails to recognise that it is through the visible world of forms that we can glimpse the unseen realities of the Divine. This reduction of reality to evidenced-informed ways of knowing, radically limits the scope of psychology to provide true healing.

The Perils of Reductionism

If, according to many of our contemporaries, we cannot identify the human soul or the transcendent Spirit by empirical means, then this

⁴ Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn, “The Lore of Certainty,” in *The Book of Certainty: The Sufi Doctrines of Faith, Vision and Gnosis* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), p. 21.

⁵ Jāmī, quoted in Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 82.

must mean that they do not exist. A prime example of this flawed outlook is evidenced in this observation: “If your belief conflicts with empirically confirmed knowledge, then you are not seeking meaning; you are delusional.”⁶ What this myopic position fails to recognise is that there are distinct levels of knowledge and modes of being.

What may be self-evident at one level is not so on a higher one, for lower levels cannot encompass what lies beyond them; only the higher can know the lower. While the reductionist position ostensibly shuns metaphysics, embedded in its argument is a hidden metaphysic of its own; one that implicitly attacks any suggestion of a reality that transcends the psycho-physical order. In doing so, it has transgressed its own conceptual assumptions.

With the emergence of the European Enlightenment, psychology lost its ability to fully discern the transpersonal aspect of reality, which alone can unify all dimensions of a human being in harmony with the environment. This has been the root cause of many present-day calamities. Theodore Roszak (1933–2011) remarked that a fundamental insight emerged “at the birth of modern science. Our knowledge of nature Out There begins with knowledge of ourselves In Here. Until we [are] freed ... of the hidden presuppositions that stand between us and the world, we can never be certain we are in touch with reality.”⁷

The Divide Between Psyche and Cosmos

This debilitating secularism has fundamentally marginalised the inner dimension of the person. This is evident in the following description provided by American psychologist James Hillman (1926–2011): “There is only one core issue for all [modern] psychology. Where is the ‘me’? Where does the ‘me’ begin? Where does the ‘me’ stop? Where

⁶ Sabine Hossenfelder, “A Warning,” in *Existential Physics: A Scientist’s Guide to Life’s Biggest Questions* (New York, NY: Viking, 2022), p. xvii.

⁷ Theodore Roszak, “Afterword: The Idols of the Bedchamber,” in *The Gendered Atom: Reflections on the Sexual Psychology of Science* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1999), p. 154.

⁸ James Hillman, “A Psyche the Size of the Earth: A Psychological Foreword,” in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, eds. Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Book, 1995), p. xvii.

does the ‘other’ begin?”⁸ The split between “in-here” and “out-there” is ultimately a play of appearances due to the superimposition of the ego on a limited comprehension of what is reality. However, according to a traditional understanding, this bifurcation is not problematic when discerned through the transpersonal faculty of the Intellect or “eye of the heart,” which confirms the distinction between the inner and outer human being – a fact acknowledged unanimously, in all times and places, by the spiritual patrimony of humanity.

The mind-body dualism attributed to René Descartes (1596–1650), is embedded in the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of mainstream psychology. This has led to inevitable consequences for how we envisage the human condition and, indeed, reality itself. Cartesian dualism – the exclusive division of the world into *res extensa* (extended entities) and *res cogitans* (thinking entities) – reduces all experience to the private and subjective realm, thus denying the demands of objective reality.

As the Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1927–1989) points out, this dichotomy becomes evident in the therapeutic process itself, seeing as many individuals “have come to experience themselves as primarily split into a mind and a body. Usually they feel most closely identified with the ‘mind.’”⁹ French metaphysician René Guénon (1886–1951) speaks to how extensively this fundamental scission has permeated today’s intellectual climate: “The Cartesian duality ... has imposed itself on all modern Western thought.”¹⁰

The distinction between the inner and outer facets of our nature is evident in the very foundations of modern psychology. Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966) offered an acute

⁹ R.D. Laing, “The Embodied and Unembodied Self,” in *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 65.

¹⁰ René Guénon, “Spiritus, Anima, Corpus,” in *The Great Triad*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 68. “Cartesian bifurcation created a dualism between mind and matter which has dominated Western thought since the seventeenth century, a dualism which has led many to choose the primacy of matter over mind and to establish the view that in the beginning was matter and not consciousness.” (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “In the Beginning was Consciousness,” in *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. William C. Chittick [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007], p. 224).

criticism of the fragmented mentality that underlies the modern form of this discipline: “The cancer of all [modern] psychology up to now [is] ... the cancer of the doctrine of subject-object cleavage of the world.”¹¹ This is exemplified in its two pillars of behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) observed: “Ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else”¹² and, elsewhere, he remarks on the “boundary lines between the ego and the external world.”¹³

John B. Watson (1878–1958) took a more extreme position: “No one has ever touched a soul, or seen one in a test tube, or has in any way come into relationship with it as he has with the other objects of his daily experience.”¹⁴ B.F. Skinner (1904–1990) calls for the eradication of our internal dimension altogether: “It is ... inner man who is abolished, and that is a step forward.”¹⁵ He continues by reducing the human being exclusively to its corporeal or physical order:

The picture which emerges from a scientific analysis is not of a body with a person inside, but of a body which *is* a person in the sense that it displays a complex repertoire of behavior.... What is being abolished is autonomous man—the inner man, the homunculus, the possessing demon, the man defended by the literatures of freedom and dignity. His abolition has long been overdue.... Science does not dehumanize man, it dehomunculizes him.¹⁶

It cannot be stressed enough that unless this disjunction is overcome, there cannot be a true “science of the soul.” We need to

¹¹ Ludwig Binswanger, quoted in *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*, eds. Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1958), p. 11.

¹² Sigmund Freud, “Chapter One,” in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 12.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, “Chapter One,” in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 13.

¹⁴ John B. Watson, “What is Behaviorism? The Old and New Psychology Contrasted,” in *Behaviorism* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), p. 3.

¹⁵ B.F. Skinner, “What Is Man?,” in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1972), p. 205.

¹⁶ B.F. Skinner, “What Is Man?,” in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1972), pp. 190–191.

examine the causes that have led to this dire predicament, as Victor Danner (1926–1990) notes: “One thing is certain: the modern world has generated a permanent separation between man’s inner and outer nature.”¹⁷

Furthermore, modern philosophy goes as far as denying the interior life altogether, as the well-known words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) reinforce: “There is no inner man.”¹⁸ As a response to this reductionist perspective, we turn to a paragon of Islamic spirituality, Rūmī (1207–1273), who writes: “For the common people are not able to see the inward—they only see the outward”;¹⁹ and further adds: “The body is outward, the spirit hidden.”²⁰ This vision reflects the metaphysical levels of existence, and the corresponding ways of knowing reality.

The Two Natures of a Person

In stark contrast, *Duo sunt in homine* (“There are two [natures] in man”)²¹ was an axiom in the West – prior to the emergence of the Renaissance – which recognised an inner and outer aspect to our being. Plato (429–347) also acknowledges this doctrine of the two natures within us: “[When] there are two opposite impulses in a man at the same time about the same thing, we say that there must ... be two [natures] ... in him.”²² All religions take for granted that we are one essence that comprises two natures; an outward form connected to the psycho-physical, and an inward dimension, being our spiritual constitution. Kurt Almqvist (1912–2001) writes:

¹⁷ Victor Danner, “The Inner and Outer man,” in *Traditional Modes of Contemplation and Action: A Colloquium held at Rothko Chapel Houston Texas*, eds. Yusuf Ibish and Peter Lamborn Wilson (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), p. 411.

¹⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Preface,” to *Phenomenology of Perception* (London, UK: Routledge, 1962), p. xi.

¹⁹ Rūmī, quoted in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 161.

²⁰ Rūmī, quoted in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 41.

²¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, Question 26, Fourth Article, *Summa Theologica, Part II (Second Part), First Number, QQ. I—XLVI*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, UK: R. & T. Washbourne, 1917), p. 336.

²² Plato, Republic 10.604b, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 829.

One of the most important themes in religion—the most important—is the confrontation between the two “selves” in man: the inner, which partakes of God’s unconditional, infinite nature and is identical with his “kingdom”, and the outer self, or human personality with a certain name. It is the intersection of these two dimensions that comprises the religious life. One sees man horizontally from the earthly side; the other vertically as a vehicle of divinity. The crossing point may be multiplied both horizontally and vertically, making a cosmic web formed in one direction of layered worlds or conditions and, in the other, of the beings embodied in them—horizontal and vertical, woof and warp.²³

Throughout the traditional cultures of the world, it is recognised that “your outward is the analogy of your inward”²⁴ — these two natures unified in the transpersonal Self.

The diverse religions all express the immanence of this transpersonal dimension found in human beings: “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21), “I am the Self ... seated in the heart of all beings”²⁵ (Bhagavad Gītā 10:20), or “The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of my believing servant does contain Me” (*ḥadīth qudsī*). It is through the primacy of the ‘vertical’ dimension that immanence – or the horizontal dimension – is possible. Isaac the Syrian (c. 613–c. 700) gives a compelling description of our inner treasure-house and its connection to the celestial treasure-house that transcends each person:

Be zealous to enter the treasury within thee; then thou wilt see that which is in heaven. For the former and the latter are one, and entering thou wilt see both. The ladder unto the Kingdom is hidden within thee and within thy soul. Dive into thyself

²³ Kurt Almqvist, “Every Branch in Me,” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 15, Nos. 3 & 4 (Summer/Autumn 1983), p. 194.

²⁴ Rūmī, quoted in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 276.

²⁵ Bhagavad Gītā 10:20, *The Bhagavad-Gītā with the Commentary of Śrī Śankarachāryā*, trans. Alladi Mahadeva Sastri (Madras: V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons, 1961), p. 241.

[freed] from sin; there thou wilt find steps along which thou canst ascend.²⁶

Spiritual Health as Wholeness

Our theomorphic essence is unconditioned and unaffected by the activities of the world: “Everything a man does in the lower part of active life is necessarily exterior to him, so to speak, beneath him.”²⁷ This was expressed slightly differently by the great art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947): “Our Inner Man is in the world but not of it, in us but not of us, our Outer Man both in the world and of it.”²⁸ Mainstream psychology exclusively focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of the outer human being, unaware that its materialistic science excludes, perforce, the “inward man” (Romans 7:22), and thus has no framework by which to bridge the traditional doctrine of our two natures.

According to Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), “It is necessary to make a distinction in the human being between the outer and inner man: the former is turned toward the outward and lives in the ‘accidental’; the latter looks inward and lives on Substance.”²⁹ Similarly, Buddhist writer Marco Pallis (1895–1989) observes: “As between the outer and inner man, only the latter is the Man (the image of God), the outer man being the ‘shadow’ or ‘vehicle’ or ‘house’ or ‘garment’ of the inner, just as the world is the Lord’s ‘garment.’”³⁰ Martin Lings (1909–2005) remarked that “The perfect balance of the primordial soul depends on

²⁶ Isaac the Syrian, “The Six Treatises on the Behaviour of Excellence,” in *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans. A.J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923), p. 8.

²⁷ *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, trans. Clifton Wolters (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 72.

²⁸ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology,” in *Coomaraswamy, Vol. 2, Selected Papers: Metaphysics*, ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 371.

²⁹ Frithjof Schuon, “The Argument Founded on Substance,” in *Logic and Transcendence*, trans. Peter N. Townsend (London, UK: Perennial Books, 1984), p. 82.

³⁰ Marco Pallis, “Do Clothes Make the Man?,” in *The Way and the Mountain: Tibet, Buddhism, and Tradition*, ed. Joseph A. Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p. 153.



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the harmonious union of the domains of inner and outer man.”³¹ This distinction was understood by the traditional world, yet it has been forgotten, if not altogether subverted, by our contemporaries: “The Inner Man, who in traditional terms is considered as a spiritual being, endowed with mind and body, is thus reduced to the Outer Man.”³²

In the Hindu tradition, also known as *sanātana dharma* (eternal religion), there are several texts that speak of the “two birds who dwell on the same tree” (*Muṇḍaka Upanishad* 3:1:1; *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad* 4:6). One oft-quoted passage is the following: “Two birds, inseparably united companions, dwell in the same tree; the one eats the fruit while the other looks on without eating” (*Muṇḍaka Upanishad* 3:1:1). These birds illustrate the nature of the human being: one of them eats the fruit of the tree, meaning that it engages in the world of phenomena, while the other looks on without eating—witnessing the transitory nature of all things with equanimity. This describes the distinction between the corporeal and spiritual nature that exists in all of us, and presents a fully integrated understanding of the person.

The great Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) exhorts us to “harmonise [the] inner and ... outer man.”³³ He observes:

In every man there are two kinds of man: One is called the outer man, which is our sensuality, with the five senses serving him, and yet the outer man works through the power of the soul. The second man is called the inner man, which is the man’s inwardness. Now you should know that a spiritual man who loves God makes no use in his outer man of the soul’s powers except when the five senses require it; and his inwardness pays no heed to the five senses, except as this leads and guides them, and protects them, so that they are not employed for beastly purposes, as they are by some people who live for their carnal

³¹ Martin Lings, “The Heart,” in *What is Sufism?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), p. 54.

³² M. Ali Lakhani, “The Black Mole on the Cheek of the Beloved: The Problem of Metaphysical Ambiguity,” *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 26 (Winter 2010), p. 12.

³³ Meister Eckhart, “Tractates 18: Commentary on the Gospel of St. John,” in *Meister Eckhart*, trans. C. De B. Evans, ed. Franz Pfeiffer (London, UK: John M. Watkins, 1924), p. 403.

delight, as beasts lacking reason do. Such people deserve to be called beasts rather than men.³⁴

The renowned Sufi al-Ḥallāj (858–922) tells us that “We are two spirits dwelling in one body”³⁵ and Ḥāfiz (c. 1315–1390) writes: “Look not at the outward poverty of Ḥāfiz, for his inner self is a treasure-house of the Divine love.”³⁶

Plotinus (c. 205–270) asserts that, because we lack discernment, our lives are driven by the outward: “[U]ndisciplined in discernment of the inward, knowing nothing of it, run after the outer, never understanding that it is the inner which stirs us; we are in the case of one who sees his own reflection but not realising whence it comes, goes in pursuit of it.”³⁷ The spiritual traditions teach that there is a part of us that is always firmly rooted in divine reality. The dimension of ourselves that is caught in dysfunctional patterns, or addictive tendencies, can never compromise our primordial nature. Whatever transpires outwardly, it can never destroy the inward, as Johannes Tauler (c. 1300–1361) explains: “Even though thy outward man grieve, or weep ... thy inner man remain[s] at peace.”³⁸

According to Zhūangzi (Chuang Tzu, c. 369–c. 286), “by [the] cultivation of the inner man there is no failure in Tao.”³⁹ Likewise, Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) notes: “As the power of the inner man over the outer man increases, the former changes the qualities of the latter.”⁴⁰ An integral psychology informed by metaphysics and a sacred

³⁴ Meister Eckhart, “On Detachment,” in *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 290.

³⁵ Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, quoted in Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 151.

³⁶ Ḥāfiz, quoted in Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* (London, UK: Luzac and Company, 1950), p. 115.

³⁷ Plotinus, Enneads 5.8.2, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 412.

³⁸ Johannes Tauler, “From the Second Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity,” in *Selections from the Life and Sermons of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler*, trans. Susanna Winkworth (Boston, MA: Roberts Brothers, 1878), p. 142.

³⁹ Zhūangzi, “On Declining Power,” in *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralizer, and Social Reformer*, trans. Herbert A. Giles (London, UK: Bernard Quaritch, 1889), p. 381.

⁴⁰ Jakob Böhme, quoted in Franz Hartmann, *The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme: The God-Taught Philosopher* (Boston, MA: Occult Publishing Company, 1891), p. 280.

science recognises two distinct dimensions of human identity: one relative or horizontal, and the other Absolute or vertical (while never blurring or confusing the two). In order to understand the fullness of what it means to be human, Paracelsus (1493–1541) points out that “If we would know the inner nature of man by his outer nature,”⁴¹ a properly ordered metaphysical framework is required.

Every ‘science of the soul’ provides spiritual teachings and methods to integrate our inner and outer selves. Again, in our true identity as the primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), the “image of God” (*imago Dei*), Buddha-nature (*Buddha-dhātu*), or the Self (*Ātmā*), we are the eternal witness that does not partake in the activities of the temporal world. No matter how many transgressions we may incur in this life, it must never be forgotten that our primordial nature can never be lost or destroyed, as it contains within itself the transpersonal human archetype. It is our essential identity in the Divine that prevents our fallen or *samsāric* state from becoming absolute or terminal.

The obscuration of the Intellect or “eye of the heart” has distorted our vision of reality, which inevitably leads to innumerable problems and immense suffering: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (*Proverbs* 29:18). Because of this, our noetic faculty is reduced to a one-dimensional or tunnel-like vision, which makes us forget who we truly are, and what our relationship should be with all that is. It is only the perspective of the outward that denies the inward, and not the other way around: “Who is it then who is calling it ‘nothing’? Our outer self, to be sure, not our inner. Our inner self calls it ‘All.’”⁴² The limited scope of our vision has been described in the following manner: “They know only an outward appearance of this lower life” (*Qur’ān* 30:7). This ubiquitous darkening of the “eye of the heart,” coupled with an exclusive reliance on reason alone, has caused us to see only the outward at the expense of the inward.

A central tenet of any “science of the soul” is affirmed by the Sufi Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj (d. 378/988): “The outward cannot get by

⁴¹ Paracelsus, “Arts, a Gift of God,” in *Paracelsus: Selected Writings*, trans. Norbert Guterman, ed. Jolande Jacobi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 133.

⁴² Chapter 68, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, trans. Clifton Wolters (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 143.

independent of the inward.”⁴³ Without the inner self to ground the outer, we become diffused into our environment without orientation. Zhūangzi admonishes that “you let outside considerations weigh on your mind. He who looks too hard on the outside gets clumsy on the inside.”⁴⁴

Philip Sherrard (1922–1995) explains: “The higher or spiritual consciousness perceives and experiences things as they are in themselves, inner and outer, spiritual and material, metaphysical and physical interpenetrating and forming a single unsundered and unsunderable reality.”⁴⁵ Through the transpersonal order, human beings can obtain a lasting equilibrium, because the body and soul are contingent on what surpasses them. For this reason, only what transcends the psycho-physical order can bring balance to the physical body and its human soul.

The True Self

We cannot overlook the complexity involved in understanding and healing the human psyche. As the soul is inseparable from the spiritual dimension of existence, treating it requires knowledge of humanity’s spiritual traditions. This is something that modern Western psychology does not appear to comprehend. Each person consists of Spirit, soul, and body, and has an inner and outer facet; the inward is linked to the spiritual dimension, and the outward to the psycho-physical order. Neither of these dimensions can be ignored without causing grave harm to our equilibrium.

References to the three-fold constitution of human beings can be found in St. Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians: “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your *spirit and soul and body* be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 *Thessalonians* 5:23). This tripartite structure of Spirit/Intellect, soul and body is known in Latin as *Spiritus/Intellectus*,

⁴³ Sarrāj, quoted in *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, trans. John Renard (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), p. 83.

⁴⁴ Zhūangzi, “Mastering Life,” in *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 122.

⁴⁵ Philip Sherrard, “Introduction,” to *Human Image: World Image: The Death and Resurrection of Sacred Cosmology* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey, 2004) p. 8.

anima, and *corpus*; in Greek as *Pneuma/Nous*, *psyche*, and *soma*; and in Arabic as *Rūḥ/Aql*, *nafs*, and *jism*.

The soul is a mystery; it is immersed in time while also being rooted in the timeless. The human body participates in time and space, whereas the Spirit transcends both. The human psyche belongs to the intermediary realm between body and Spirit, but partakes of both dimensions. The spiritual traditions all attest that the intermediary realm of the person is of Divine origin. We see this, for example, in the Islamic tradition – the “Lord who created you from a single soul” (*Qur’ān* 4:1). Muslim philosopher, Mullā Ṣadrā (1572–1640) points out that “The soul is *the junction of the two seas* ([*Qur’ān*] 18:59) of corporeal and spiritual things.”⁴⁶ That the heart-intellect is the centre of the human psyche is taught by Eckhart: “There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable ... [and] this is the intellect.”⁴⁷ Additionally, he informs us that “At the highest point of his ... soul, man is more God than creature.”⁴⁸

The purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) is of utmost importance, as we are reminded: “Surely the soul commands to evil, save whom my Lord may show mercy” (*Qur’ān* 12:53). Within the mystical dimension of Islam or Sufism, there are four degrees of the human psyche: ascending from the animal soul (*an-nafs al-ḥaywāniyah*), the passional soul (*an-nafs al-ammārah* or “soul that incites” to evil), the discerning or intelligent soul (*an-nafs al-lawwāmah* or “soul that blames”), and the intellective soul (*an-nafs al-muṭma’innah* or “the soul at peace,” the human psyche reintegrated in Spirit or *Rūḥ*).

In the Hindu tradition, the Spirit (*Purusha*) or Self (*Ātmā*) manifests as the individual soul (*jīvātmā*), which is enveloped by five sheaths

⁴⁶ Mulla Sadra, “Principle (concerning the soul as ‘spiritual body’),” in *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, trans. James Winston Morris (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 148.

⁴⁷ Meister Eckhart, quoted in *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. and ed. Maurice O’C Walshe (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), p. 28.

⁴⁸ Meister Eckhart, “Tractates 3: The Rank and Nature of the Soul,” in *Meister Eckhart*, trans. C. De B. Evans, ed. Franz Pfeiffer (London, UK: John M. Watkins, 1924), p. 290.

(*koshas*). The Spirit transcends each of these yet includes them at the same time. They are listed here in descending order, from the highest to the denser, or from the innermost to the outermost. The first envelope (*ānandamaya-kosha*) is the Spirit, the next three (*viññānamaya-kosha*, *manomaya-kosha*, and *prānamaya-kosha*) pertain to the intermediary realm, and the final one (*annamaya-kosha*) corresponds to the corporeal. The Sage of Arunachala, Śrī Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), offers the following pithy insight from a non-dual perspective: “In fact there is no inside or outside for the Self.”⁴⁹

In Buddhism, each of us is said to consist of five psycho-physical aggregates or “heaps” known as *khandhas* (Pāli; Sanskrit: *skandhas*): (1) form (Pāli/Sanskrit: *rūpa*); (2) sensation or feeling (Pāli/Sanskrit: *vedanā*); (3) perception (Pāli: *saññā*; Sanskrit: *saṃjñā*); (4) mental formations (Pāli: *saṅkhāras*; Sanskrit: *saṃskāras*); and (5) consciousness (Pāli: *viññāna*; Sanskrit: *viññāna*). However, the existence of these aggregates does not preclude the existence of an abiding Self (Pāli: *Attā*; Sanskrit: *Ātman*) that is not bound to birth, old age, sickness, and death. The Buddha does not take issue with the Hindu understanding of the Self as *neti, neti* (“not this, not that”) which, by means of negation, conveys an apophatic understanding that eliminates all determinate conceptions, leaving only the consciousness of that which is – the Self alone; all that is not this, can be considered ‘non-Self’ (*anattā*).

Mending the Fissures

If we are going to authentically address the harm caused by the Cartesian mind-body dualism that continues to handicap modern Western psychology, the discipline needs to return to its rightful foundations in metaphysics, sacred science, and spiritual principles. The demarcations of inside and outside correspond to the centre and the circumference, as well as to the vertical and horizontal among all levels of reality and modes of knowing. We recall the Qur’ānic verse: “He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward” (57:3).

Ultimately all distinctions are unified in the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute. Paracelsus explains that “form ... is also the essence, and

⁴⁹ Śrī Ramana Maharshi, “Talk 13b—January 7th, 1935,” in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai, India: Sri Ramanasramam, 1996), p. 5.

thus the form reveals the essence.”⁵⁰ Within the Buddhist tradition, this idea is expounded in the Heart Sūtra (*Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya-sūtra*): “Form is emptiness ... emptiness is form.”⁵¹ Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000), discusses the power of traditional spiritual practices for transforming “these ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds into one.”⁵² Fundamentally, as Paracelsus again notes: “The outer and the inner are one.”⁵³ It is worth recalling the pertinent words in *The Gospel According to Thomas*: “When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner and the above as the below ... then shall you enter the Kingdom.”⁵⁴ Śrī Rāmakrishna (1836–1886), the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, recognises this non-dual dimension: “There is inner and outer harmony between *Purusha* [Spirit] and *Prakriti* [universal substance].”⁵⁵ In Ultimate Reality or the Absolute, there are no distinctions between the inner and outer for they are all one in the Divine.

Without returning to its metaphysical and ontological foundations, the discipline of psychology is unable to acknowledge either the tripartite division of the Spirit, soul, and body, or the inner and outer dimensions of the human being and its integrative healing modalities. True wholeness flows from the transpersonal order, yet only the outer self requires therapy, as the inner self is already intrinsically whole. The “science of the soul,” as informed by the spiritual traditions, supports the

⁵⁰ Paracelsus, “Inner and Outer Worlds,” in *Paracelsus: Selected Writings*, trans. Norbert Guterman, ed. Jolande Jacobi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 121.

⁵¹ Heart Sūtra, quoted in *Buddhist Scriptures*, trans. Edward Conze (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 162.

⁵² Joseph Epes Brown, “Contemplation Through Action,” in *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, eds. Marina Brown Weatherly, Elenita Brown and Michael Oren Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), p. 62.

⁵³ Paracelsus, “Man and His Body,” in *Paracelsus: Selected Writings*, trans. Norbert Guterman, ed. Jolande Jacobi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 21.

⁵⁴ Logion 22, *The Gospel According to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated*, trans. Antoine Guillaumont, Henri-Charles Puech, Gilles Quispel, Walter C. Till, and Yassah ‘Abd al-Masīḥ (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 17, 19.

⁵⁵ Śrī Rāmakrishna, “Bankim Chandra,” in *The Gospel of Ramakrishna: Originally recorded in Bengali by M., a disciple of the Master*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York, NY: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1977), p. 667.

human psyche in becoming fully integrated in all its modes of knowing and corresponding ways of healing: “The soul’s apprehension of the nature of things changes in accordance with its own inner state.”⁵⁶ In the same way that sages have emphasised the existence of the inner teacher – “the Guru is always within you”⁵⁷ – there is also an inner therapist, along with the medicine to heal us within. But this first requires the spiritual guidance of a valid tradition to help prevent us from going astray and becoming lost in our turbid subjectivity.

A true “science of the soul” ensures that the assessment, treatment, and healing of a person is informed by the transpersonal dimension – this is confirmed when we discern the intrinsic wisdom reflected in the human body.⁵⁸ Therefore, being a wayfarer on a spiritual path is indispensable. Paracelsus speaks about the “inner physician” hidden within each person and that “Each ... disease bears its own remedy within itself.”⁵⁹ Rūmī states something similar, “The physician comes to the sick man and questions the inward physician; for within you there is a physician.”⁶⁰ St. John Cassian (c. 360–c. 435) writes: “The Doctor of our souls has also placed the remedy in the hidden regions of the soul.”⁶¹ According to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661): “Your cure is within you, but you do not know.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Nikitas Stithatos, “On the Practice of the Virtues: One Hundred Texts,” in *The Philokalia, Vol. 4: The Complete Text*; Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, trans. and ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 92.

⁵⁷ Śrī Ramana Maharshi, “Talk 398—April 14th, 1937,” in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai, India: Sri Ramanasramam, 1996), p. 370.

⁵⁸ See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Wisdom of the Body,” in *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 235–269.

⁵⁹ Paracelsus, “Nature of Disease,” in *Paracelsus: Selected Writings*, trans. Norbert Guterman, ed. Jolande Jacobi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 76.

⁶⁰ Rūmī, Discourse 11, *Discourses of Rumi*, trans. A.J. Arberry (London, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 61.

⁶¹ St. John Cassian, “On the Eight Vices,” in *The Philokalia, Vol. 1: The Complete Text*; Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, trans. and ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 76.

⁶² ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, quoted in William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2008), p. 104.

The overthrow of metaphysics in the modern West, by scientific materialism, has led to human beings being rendered one-dimensional. To deny that “Man is both inner and outer”⁶³ or that “there is within every man both an outer and an inner man”⁶⁴ is to perpetuate the fissure in consciousness, that has severed the human soul from its transpersonal centre. This bifurcation has created a void in the human psyche that has proven to be profoundly traumatic. A metaphysical framework integrating the Spirit, soul, and body – and its diverse modes of knowing – is urgently needed to reconcile all facets of a person with a view to offering fully efficacious mental health treatment.

While there is a boundary that divides our inner and outer selves, they are not impervious to one another as one might think; in fact, through the Intellect or the “eye of the heart,” the outward can illuminate the inward. Modern science is restricted to the phenomenal world, but the sacred science of the world’s spiritual traditions provides the keys to unlock knowledge of both the human microcosm and the universal macrocosm, as it applies to the spiritual, psychic, and corporeal orders. Only in returning psychology to a true “science of the soul,” can humanity become fully integrated, and thus faithful to its true vocation: “May the inward and outward man be at one.”⁶⁵ ▲

⁶³ Philip Sherrard, “The Roman Background,” in *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in The Christian Tradition* (Limni, Eva, Greece: Denise Harvey, 1995), p. 20.

⁶⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Self-Awareness and Ultimate Selfhood: The Role of the Sacred Science of the Soul,” in *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 15–16.

⁶⁵ Socrates, quoted in Phaedrus 279b, *The Dialogues of Plato, Vol. I*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1892), p. 420.