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Stilling the Mind:

The Journey of Consciousness in the Mental-Egoic Era

Crystal Marie Hoshaw¹

California Institute of Integral Studies

Introduction

I recall one afternoon as a young woman sitting at my bedroom desk, immersed in the study of a high school psychology book. This was my first introduction to such psychological theories as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Erikson's psychosocial stages. I was deeply engaged in the study of the human psyche and personality, as I felt I was learning about myself; how I was formed, what I was becoming. I was struck by the thought that these maps of human development laid out by prominent and discipline-shaping psychologists mirrored the course of the evolution of humankind, that we had gone through our own stages of development as a species that echoed those of the infant, the child, the adolescent. It occurred to me that we are very much in our adolescence as I reflected on our place on the world stage. When compared with the hallmarks of individual adolescence outlined in the psychology text, modern humanity's values and ideals nicely parallel the journey of the newly independent, often foolhardy young adult.

I had a similar insight years later as I neared the end of my undergraduate studies in philosophy. I had begun that journey with a study of the Ancient Greeks, and with the expert help of my advising professor—who had earned his PhD in the history of ideas from Brandeis University—had traced the path of Western philosophy's history from the ancient to the postmodern. I felt as if my view of the human journey had magnified a thousandfold so that I was no longer seeing the journey of the species but the journey of the mind, and that our history was actually contained within the psyche's evolution. It became clear to me that our beliefs, our passions, and our perceptions were responsible for shaping the history we had lived. What occupies our minds, I thought, becomes our reality, and subsequently

¹ Crystal Hoshaw <onethousandpedals@gmail.com>

our history.

It was not until undertaking studies at *California Institute of Integral Studies* that I encountered this insight in print. On page 28 of Allan Comb's *Consciousness Explained Better*, I came across the inviting proposal that “we will explore the strange idea that the growth and development of every child mirrors the much longer developmental history of human consciousness.” This sentence sends me tumbling into a fast-paced fantasy in which I envision a small child becoming smaller still, until it is clear he is surrounded by the whole of humanity. Then the throngs of humanity pan backward and show themselves to be infinitesimal as the millions upon millions of individuals metamorphose into the dotting of stars along the milky way galaxy. This galaxy shrinks away to become one in a multitude of similar but distinct star systems until all distinctions themselves dissipate and my imaginal reverie rests in the infinite and unified all of which I am a part. This vision is a fast-forwarding of the human trajectory to a point beyond history and humanity, to a point—in fact—beyond space and time. It is fueled by an urge in me, which I believe resides in all others whether they are conscious of it or not, to reach toward that end with whatever tools I find at my disposal. In this instance, that tool is my imagination, itself indicative of the point at which humanity currently finds itself in its upward ascent.

We are a strange mix of our past, our present, and our future, as the breadth of our diversity contains the whole of the human story. Much of the existence of humanity is still characterized by the sleepy quality of an earlier stage in our evolution, a stage in which we found ourselves still enmeshed with the world around us yet beginning to know ourselves through a nascent process of differentiation; that is, of self-knowing. In my view, this self-knowing is the object of the urge to which I alluded earlier, as well as the object of life itself, in all its forms. It is this unassailable drive toward self that leads us to congregate in classrooms and discuss consciousness, first as something to be chewed on, considered, and dissected with the full application of the intellect, and later, something to propel ourselves toward with the utmost devotion, eschewing our prior rhetoric of the mind after assimilating reason fully, and instead embracing without trepidation the mandate of the evolution of consciousness. However, before we reach this point, we are compelled to traverse the murky territory between this sleepy twilight consciousness and the full brilliance of self-realization. That leaves us where we are today; the awakening of the mind.

The New Promise of the Mind

As the age of mind rises to the forefront of the world stage, we are greeted with the grandeur of

the human capacity to imagine. I remember trips to Disneyland with my family as a young girl in which I gaped in delight and wonder at Walt Disney's visions of a future human utopia. Sprawling before me in lively cartoons and the programmed ballet of animatronic characters was a future world of peace and ease. We were to enjoy a new level of comfort brought about by the innovations of science, technology, and our limitless material wealth. This also meant that we no longer had to toil as laborers or squabble for resources, as everyone would be perfectly provided for. Each household on Earth, and perhaps beyond, would have its own car—levitating, of course—and its own space-station home. Even the heavy burden of the housewife had been lifted and reassigned according to the congenial and unceasingly deferential obedience of the household robot. Innocent at the time of political ideologies, the shortcomings of capitalism, or the looming environmental crisis, I shared Disney's inspired optimism at the possibility of our unchecked creativity. We were standing at the threshold of a new era, it seemed to me, for which we could thank the boundless promise of the human capacity to imagine, to reason, and to create; that is, the era of the mental landscape.

In my prior vision of the expanding cosmos that comes to rest in unity, I view the mental era as the blossoming of the mind of the cosmic organism. Like an adolescent emerging from the magical realm of the child, we drowsily shake off our old ways of perceiving and begin to look with a new sharpness, focus, and discrimination at who we are and what our purpose is. Despite falling short of Disney's utopian vision, this is no less an exciting and unique point in history. Having reached up from our primordial roots, the collective symbolic tapestry of our ancestors tells us that mind is the final frontier. A prime example of this metaphoric mapping can be seen in the progression of the chakras, beginning at the animality of the root and making its way upward toward the third eye. We can think of the lowest chakra, Muladhara, as representing Wilber's uroboric period in which we slumbered peacefully at one with the material world, undifferentiated and unperturbed. It is this chakra that contains the primal energy of creation and links us to our animal predecessors. By a similar token the second chakra, known as Swadhisthana, loosely corresponds to Wilber's Typhonic phase, in which we are still enmeshed in the Earth but beginning to develop a sense of ourselves as separate. Next, we encounter Manipura at the solar plexus and Anahata at the heart. These two chakras aptly represent the mythic level of consciousness, which is composed of heroic, often romantic journeys for personal power. A coupling of the throat chakra known as Vishuddha and the third eye chakra known as Ajna works as an analogue for Wilber's mental-egoic period, which we find ourselves in the midst of today. The final stage of Samadhi, or undifferentiated consciousness, represented by the crown chakra known

as Sahasrara, is territory we've yet to tread on. This explanation of the stages of consciousness evolution using the chakras as metaphor is meant to illustrate the repetition of patterns, whether in our biology, the natural world, or esoteric concepts, that serve as maps on the journey. These maps are essentially keys to unlocking the truth of our reality. They are initially perceived in limited ways, but serve to guide us out of limited perspectives into higher, more objective ways of understanding ourselves and world. In the mental-egoic period, we apply the faculties of reason, discrimination, judgment, and discernment to lead ourselves—with the help of such metaphors—away from fragmented experiences of reality and toward the absolute.

A Six Realms Analysis of the Mental-Egoic Era

The Renaissance might be considered the birthplace of the mental-egoic period and the emergence from the darkness of the Middle Ages, carried forward by the European Enlightenment's promotion of science, intellect, and reason. Turning away from animalistic superstition, humankind began to recognize the possibility of objectivity presented by the higher mental faculties. It was supposed that we came closer to the truth when we relied on our capacity for reason and discrimination instead of the lower capacities for superstitious ways of seeing and groupthink. To my mind, French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes is the figurehead of the mental-egoic shift. His thinking, which was at the time blasphemous, produced the immortal phrase *Cogito ergo sum*; “I think, therefore I am”. This phrase could serve as the heading for the entire mental period. It not only represents the revolutionary shift toward mind that took place during Descartes time, but the subsequent over-reliance on the mind that I believe characterizes the modern and postmodern period, epitomized by the cult of science. Although undoubtedly beneficial to humanity up to a point, the modern allegiance to science has reached unbalanced proportions. This imbalance is evidenced in rampant industrialization, pollution of the environment with destructive chemicals, and the medical establishment's reliance on invasive procedures and pharmaceuticals instead of prevention, natural immunity, and health cultivation.

Another lens through which we can come to understand the mentality of modernity is known as the Six Realms View. Chogyam Trünzpa Rinpoche, in his book *Transcending Madness* lays out this view in the eloquent, poetic, and pithy terms that only a seasoned practitioner could. The concept of the six realms is that we as human beings create distortions of reality in our own minds and subsequently view the world through these distortions. Such distortions are the origin of madness, whether the

impassioned anger of a betrayed lover, or the hallucinations of a paranoid schizophrenic. The distinction between the two is only a matter of degree, but in both examples the individual is seeing reality through a distorted lens that keeps them from abiding in their true nature.

Of the six realms, the first is hell realm. Hell realm is the experience of the world as a place of persecution. The individual caught in a hell realm cycle of perceiving believes that they are a victim, and accordingly they feel hatred of self and the world around them. They believe in the inherent unfairness and danger of life, and are often disempowered, angry, bitter, and critical. Paranoid schizophrenia is an extreme example of the hell realm view. It is interesting to note that studies have shown that paranoid behavior in psychiatric patients in which the patient expected to be alienated, disliked, or harmed by others instigated similar paranoia in fellow patients, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. The way we perceive the world very literally affects our environment to the extent that we create the reality we expect, reinforcing delusional thinking. The next realm is that of the hungry ghost. Ghost realm is the sense of never having enough, constant craving for more—whether it be for food, excitement, or security. There is a perpetual sense of emptiness for the individual suffering from ghost realm delusions. Nothing can ever be enough, and contentedness is always elusive. The next view is that of the animal realm, which is characterized by the desire to stay asleep, to avoid effort and discomfort, and to numb oneself. Those caught up in the animal realm would prefer to shut themselves off than to engage with the rigor of living. After the animal comes the titan realm, in which the individual is simultaneously full of pride and full of insecurity. The titan is competitive, striving, and struggling with his or herself. They constantly feel inadequate compared to those who have accomplished or acquired more, and superior to those who have or have done less. This person becomes self-aggrandizing, envious, and self-serving while always trying to hide their insecurity. In the next view, known as god realm, the individual is always attempting to manufacture the experience of true presence, but only actually experiences the external qualities of spiritual connectedness. This person acts as if life is perfect; full of love, light, and bliss. This includes the denial of pain, discomfort, and death, and treating the world with a cavalier attitude. It can also involve actual substance abuse. The final realm which individuals can entrap themselves in is the human realm. Human realm is the most subtle and poignant realm, because it is the process of perceptual filtering itself. It is the belief that intellectually grasping reality is the equivalent of spiritual knowing, and so the person caught in this way of seeing is attached to their intelligence. They equate understanding with control, and are constantly in denial of the chaos of nature.

The human realm is an exceptional analogy for the way of seeing characteristic of modernity. Rene Descartes himself could be said to be participating in human realm with his declaration of *cogito ergo sum*, setting the stage for centuries of human realm thinking. It is a classic error of philosophers to believe that by contemplating higher modes of consciousness, that they are actually experiencing those modes as well. The six realms view teaches that while contemplation *can* be a means to understanding the true nature of reality—if coupled with the appropriate inner attitude and a sincerity of heart—understanding the conceptual basis of reality is not the same as experiencing the reality that conceptual basis describes. This is why the mental-egoic lens, though it constitutes an advance in consciousness from its mythic-heroic predecessor, is incomplete in itself. It also has qualities of all other realms contained within it. Hell realm is evidenced perhaps most clearly in political institutions vying for power and resources. This behavior has built into it an implicit assumption that the world is not a place of abundance where everyone will be provided for. The contrary belief is characteristically feminine, and has its place in goddess and fertility cults, as it assumes the great mother will provide for her children. Instead, the modern mythos contains the belief that nature must be manipulated and hoarded to sustain human life. It is not unlike the declaration by God in Genesis that after the fall, humanity would win its bread by the sweat of its brow. This paints the Earth as a cold, unfeeling place instead of a nurturing, hosting mother. Modernity shows signs of collective ghost realm beliefs as well. It is perhaps best illustrated by the rampant consumerism in industrialized nations. No matter what goods are bought, there is always more to be had. Food is consumed for recreation, not for sustenance, and goods are made cheaply so as to encourage the process of acquisition itself, rather than valuing and caring for passed-down possessions. I'd venture a guess that this behavior in Western culture is a cover-up for the emptiness caused by the reductionist outlook, when individuals have no higher power to look to for meaning or guidance. It also serves to mask the anxiety of a world constantly in flux, with shaky economic and political foundations, and the specters of world war, disease, and environmental disaster looming closer.

Consumer culture also lends itself as an apt analogy for animal realm. Much of nonessential consumer activity stems from the need to participate in culture, yet individuals lack the empowerment to participate in its creative aspects, especially because highly specialized experts create much of modern culture. The resulting technocracy leaves individuals with no adequate outlet to express their innate human capacity for creation, and the act of consuming creatively designed goods mimics this need. The repetition of this stand-in ritual keeps the consumer from confronting the true lack in their

experience and creates the illusion that a need is being met. The fact that it is not means that consumer behavior continues. The titan realm is exemplified by the clash between nations and their constant struggle for power, but is illustrated particularly well by the old cliché of “keeping up with the Joneses”. Constantly looking over one’s shoulder at what others have done or what others own and using that information as a standard for measurement of worth has become the norm in industrialized cultures, particularly in America. Again, value is measured by material means. The nuclear arms race is another prime example. The realms view teaches that this titan outlook is false, as true value exists in correct perception of reality. Finally, god realm finds its way into the modern outlook in the unselfconscious assumption that the modern, technological, industrial way of life is the self-evident superior. The American rhetoric of freedom falls under this umbrella, a shaky claim that serves as a justification for systematized class inequality, gender imbalance, and a polarized distribution of wealth.

Applying the six realms view in this broad way to the general attitudes that characterize the mental-egoic era simply mirrors the way these false lenses perpetuate themselves in our own individual psyches. We become habituated to the experience of the six realms, however they manifest for us, and are barred from actual presence. Arriving in one’s situation and experiencing presence could be said to be the *telos* of the evolution of consciousness itself. When reality is not buffered by false view, life is experienced as perpetually fresh, arising spontaneously from moment to moment. Then we are able to experience ourselves as we truly are—that is, we become conscious of the objective reality that exists beyond the chattering of our minds.

Loss of the Feminine in the Mental Era

It is an interesting paradox that the mental-egoic period we are living in retains an element of the mythic in its unchecked allegiance to the all-powerful deity of science. This allegiance to the scientific perspective was evidenced in a recent conversation with a friend. I explained to her how my partner had made a broth out of the placenta after my baby was born, owing to the long-standing tradition in many cultures of the mother eating this highly nutritious and nourishing organ after giving birth. I noted that animals often instinctively eat the placenta after birth as well, as they readily identify it as the healthful organ meat that it is. My friend grimaced at the thought of eating an internal organ, especially one expelled from the vagina after the birth of a baby, and said, “Yes, maybe animals need to eat the placenta for those nutrients, but we are so advanced that we don't have to.” Her statement is choc-full of assumptions that characterize the cult of reason/science that characterizes with the mental-

egoic age. The first that strikes me is her belief that we aren't animals at all, but something of a higher order. This reminds me of Wilber's idea that each stage of consciousness suppresses those before it, until a breakdown occurs and the formerly suppressed aspects of self are assimilated in the process of growth. The second assumption is that science elevates humans above nature and has advanced so far that the rules of the natural world (in this case, the rules of nutrition) don't apply to us anymore. She seems to believe that we can eat whatever we choose, irrespective of the detriment to our health, because the medical establishment can nip, tuck, and triple bypass whatever problems might arise from such behavior. Thirdly, she believes that animals are forced to be subject to nature (and to eat unsavory things like placenta) whereas, since we have the choice, human beings would obviously choose not to degrade ourselves by acting like animals and dining on repulsive body parts. This last assumption is a poignant example of the implicit self-denial we see in this period of time, and points to what aspects of self we are denying. The body is often metaphor for the Earth and vice versa, and the body and Earth are often metaphors for the feminine. Personally, my ingestion of the placenta after my son's birth was a feminist act of honoring my body (and the Earth) by restoring to it what it had originally sacrificed in the creation of new life. In this way, assimilating the nutrients of the placenta acted as a form of worship for the feminine divine within myself—a force I view as responsible for my son's existence—as well as an acknowledgment of the great effort performed by the body in which I live.

Wilber discusses at length the subjugation and degradation of the feminine characteristic of the mental-egoic era in *Up From Eden*. According to Wilber, the psychology of the typhonic and early membership structures of consciousness are dominated by the Great Mother (126). This is best understood through the parallel developmental experience of the infant. Initially undifferentiated from the mother, the infant identifies totally with the caregiver on whom he relies. Around 4-6 months of age, the infant begins to differentiate himself and emerge from the experience of uroboric fusion. This figure is both loving and terrifying at the same time, for—as Wilber states over and over again—where there is other, there is fear. The mother becomes “representative of global, *bodily*, separate, and vulnerable existence in space and time, with consequent desires for a Great Protectress and consequent fears of a Great Destroyer” (127). When extrapolated to the experience of humanity as a whole, this separation drama takes as its opposite player “mother” nature. Numerous examples exist in goddess and nature cults in which ritual sacrifice was a central part of the belief system, in which the mother is appeased with blood. Humans of this era feared retribution if the mother went unappeased. While this fear might have been of literal circumstances, like flood, famine, or other hardships forced upon

humanity by the Earth, the symbolic fear is of being forcibly returned to a lower state of consciousness. As mind was beginning to emerge and separate itself from the Earth and from the body, it was threatened by the great inertial pull of the Mother, who sought to subsume her progeny back into herself. Wilber writes that “she was the Earth Mother, which pulled the newly crystallizing mind back into the body, back into mother nature, back into instincts and will-less subservience to the typhon and the uroboros, back ultimately into that diffuse primal state wherein self and environment cannot be differentiated” (138). As a result of this metaphoric role of the mother, the goal of self became the vanquishing of the mother figure, who ultimately prevented the maturation of her offspring (read; self) in her attempts to reabsorb them (read; bodily death, mortality). Thus, the mythos of self emerging from the mythic-membership period of cultish ritual and into the new frontier of the solar ego and the mind was that of the male hero conquering the evil, base, material mother. The first side of this mythos is contained in the new age of the Renaissance and the European Enlightenment and the emergence from the Dark Age of humanity, in which superstition and cultish belief reigned over reason. Once the triumph over the mother was complete and self had fully emerged into the new frontier of mind, however, comes the darker side of the story. As mentioned earlier, Wilber's formula for each new stage of consciousness is that the former must be suppressed in order to accommodate the latter. In this case, the mind conquers and then subjugates the mother, the goddess, the feminine principle.

This concept is paralleled in dualistic philosophies such as Samkhya. In such systems, the material aspect of the universe is known as Prakriti, a feminine principle which stands in opposition to the masculine Purusha, or pure consciousness. In order to achieve a higher state and experience objective reality, one must transcend the illusory material realm. Ascetic practices are engaged in order to tear the practitioner from the seduction of matter, known as Maya. These can include the denial of the needs of the body to the point of emaciation, just as in the story of the Buddha's diligent meditating until his ribs bulged out of his chest and his hair began to fall out. As a practitioner of a nondual type of yoga, in which there is only a perceptual separation of the material and spiritual rather than an actual one, I would argue that such practices are derived directly from the denial of the feminine characteristic of the early and unevolved emergence of self in the mental period, in which the masculine dominates both in literal practice and in subtle symbolism, even down to our subtle ways of thinking and perceiving, whether masculine or feminine. The nondualist philosophy of the yoga that I practice sees no ultimate separateness between any two things and states that all “otherness” is illusion. It also states that the highest ground of reality before the absolute, which is beyond characteristics, is feminine in

nature; the hosting, nourishing Shakti.

Yet another metaphor that very aptly illustrates the mental era's opposition to the feminine is the dichotomy between the Promethean and Orphic. In *The Veil of Isis*, historian of ideas Pierre Hadot contrasts these two ways of perceiving the natural world. The first is characteristic of the scientist, the rational thinker, and the industrialist. It involves the desire to tinker with nature, to discover her secrets, and to manipulate them for material gain. The latter, Orphic view involves respect in the face of mystery and the disinterestedness typical of a sage. To illustrate the difference, Hadot provides a parable of two men at opposite sides of a mountain during a solar eclipse. The first is a scientist with many instruments. He is measuring, calculating, and recording the phenomenon in the sky with meticulousness and painstaking efforts. The man opposite him is a poor, uneducated shepherd, who has never seen a solar eclipse before. As the moon passes before the sun, the shepherd is overtaken with such emotion at the beauty of the event that he falls to his knees. While Hadot argues that neither perspective is the correct one and that both have their merits, he points out that the dominant perspective throughout much of human history has been the former. As a result, we are missing out on what might be called an aesthetic way of experiencing life. This way of experiencing the world is that espoused by the nondual yoga I referred to earlier. The aim of this practice is to see that everything, from a rose to a corpse, is infused with the divine.

Slavishness, Nihilism, and Agency

The mental-egoic era was an undeniable advance in the evolution of consciousness, as it brought humankind out of the darkness of the Middle Ages. The blind allegiance to monarchs and monotheistic deities that characterized this period led to bloody wars and institutionalized oppression of peoples by their rulers. The mental-egoic shift brought about a new spirit of freedom that came along with the unbridled search for knowledge. No longer ignorant serfs and slaves, humanity was blossoming into the merchant, the explorer, and the scientist. At least one thing can be said, though, of the Dark Age that the Enlightenment left behind, and that is that those living in that dark period knew their place. Despite the fact that it was dictated oppressive doctrines, they had the solid foundation of understanding their role in society and humanity's larger role in the cosmos as the shepherded flock protected by and accountable to the Heavenly Father. The Enlightenment could be said to mark the beginning of the end of this cosmological certainty. Eventually emerging in place of the priest came the scientist, and the promise of heaven over time gave way to an existential doubt that perhaps reaches its

peak in the postmodern period, in which it is said we arrive at the end of all context. This leaves humanity alone and shivering in a cold and empty cosmos.

Nietzsche writes of this problem in his monumental work, *The Will to Power*. The inevitable response to the Christian-Moral worldview, says Nietzsche, is nihilism; that is, we are “*not* to esteem what we know, and not to be *allowed* any longer to esteem the lies we should like to tell ourselves” (1967, p. 10). In light of the now-standard scientific materialism that emerged from the Promethean attitude of the Enlightenment, humanity is forced to mourn the death of God and the metaphysical certainty of devotion to divine will. This mourning period can lead to extended existential poverty and paralysis, or can be a coping stage that sets the scene for a new kind of social and moral agency, ultimately leading to an emancipatory, participatory, and transformative reality. This latter possibility is, for Nietzsche, a Dionysian transvaluation of all values that brings about redemption through the insight that individuation is the cause of human suffering. As a result of this insight, “the subject-object distinction that rules discursive thought is suspended as the dynamic unity of life is perceived” (Schutte 1986, p. 27). Richard Tarnas uses similar language when he writes, “Not just modernity but the entire human project can be seen as impelling the gradual differentiation between self and world. An emergent distinction between subject and object seems to have been present already at the very birth of *Homo sapiens*, with its novel capacity and impulse to consciously plan rather than act automatically on instinct, to rely on one's own wits and will to make one's way in the world, to manipulate and control nature rather than be so embedded in it as to be its passive subject.” (p. 19). This initial differentiation was undoubtedly a vast leap in our evolution and our understanding of ourselves, but has reached a point of imbalance. This is precisely what Wilber refers to when he writes of the “hijacking of higher structures by lower impulses,” when *eros* becomes *thanatos* (xiii). I'm reminded of a rebellious teenager who so fervently emphasizes the contrast between herself and her parents that she slips into the territory of self-denial, suppressing those aspects of herself that are undeniably composed of her progenitors. If differentiation is considered as a growth process, this is a natural and healthy step in the adolescent's movement toward autonomy. However, getting “stuck” in this developmental stage is a retardation of the adolescent's shift toward mature independence, a characteristic of which is the recognition and acceptance of the individual's interdependence with family, community, and society. This phase of development can be considered analogical to that we are facing as a culture. Having undergone the process of differentiation from the animal and the natural, we are coming to realize—with help from the strong indicators of environmental and social crises—that our separateness is an

illusion.

Healing the Split of the Mind

Now we find ourselves in the modern era where mind reigns. The validity of the feminine and emotional self is suppressed, as we have seen the mental-ego requires the denial of the Mother. Science refuses to look outside the confines of its own discipline to concede that there may be anything more to the story of humanity than endless death and birth on a material plane. Because nothing else can be measured, it cannot exist. Thus, we are alone and separate from all else that makes up our world. This separateness is required for the continuation of the reign of the mental-ego, with its penchant for competition and its Promethean attitude. The initial subject-object dualism that allowed us to perceive our separateness was a step out of the uroboros and thus a step in the evolutionary trajectory of humanity, much like the differentiation of the adolescent mentioned before. We now see the consequences of taking that differentiation to its logical extreme, where it fails to honor the more basic truth of interconnectedness that underlies the cosmos. Reconciling this psychic split gives us the ability to reconnect with the creative capacity that initially led to our sense of ourselves as separate and superior, but we are now seeing becomes a destructive force unless checked by the recognition of our interconnectedness with the rest of the world.

This leaves us with the question of what comes next in the evolutionary journey. Where might we be heading after the full maturation and assimilation of the mental-ego? If I can venture some conjecture, I believe we are seeing signs of upward ascent all around us, particularly in the growing popularity of Eastern spiritual and philosophical thought, and the marriage of these Eastern perspectives with those of the West. I see this shift alive and well in places like California Institute of Integral Studies, where there seems to be a burgeoning revival of the study of Western mysticism and esoteric thought that is not reductionistic, materially-based, and spiritually void. Even in popular culture, the enormous demand for yoga classes—although often a watered-down, Westernized “fitness” form of yoga—is a sign of the continued climb of consciousness toward once again knowing itself fully. Wilber calls the goal of consciousness the supramental, which is to say that it transcends the realm of mind and reaches another mode of being entirely. Whatever it may be named, it seems clear that the mind is not the resting place of truth. In the Dhammapada, the Buddha wrote of the task of overcoming the mind as the last frontier before enlightenment;

Like an archer an arrow, the wise man steadies his trembling mind, a fickle and restless weapon.

Flapping like a fish thrown on dry ground, it trembles all day, struggling to escape from the snares of Mara the temptress.

The mind is restless. To control it is good. A disciplined mind is the road to Nirvana.

Look to your mind, wise man; look to it well - it is subtle, invisible, treacherous.

A disciplined mind is the road to Nirvana.

Swift, single, nebulous, it sits in the cave of the heart.

Who conquers it, frees himself from the slavery of death.

The mental-egoic period inflates the mind, and so is at the mercy of this “restless weapon”. It seems that the beginning of a new era will be signified by the harnessing of the mind as a powerful tool instead of the identification with the mind so characteristic of the human realm way of seeing that dominates the era of the mental-ego.

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Crystal Hoshaw is a transplant from Los Angeles who has come to call San Francisco's East Bay her home. Her work marries her lifelong passion for the written word with her love of spiritual wisdom and esotericism. She is currently on hiatus from pursuing a graduate education in philosophy and consciousness at California Institute of Integral Studies and maintains a yoga practice in the Tantric tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. She and her partner, Evan, recently had their first child, Noah, who is rapidly becoming their greatest teacher. Crystal spends her time with her family, enjoying the bounty and natural beauty that the bay area has to offer.