

# 1990 Conference: *Buddhism and Modern World*

*During four weekends in July and August, Dharma Realm Buddhist University held a conference on the theme Buddhism and the Modern World. Topics included how Buddhism relates to science, the family and education, and the modern world. Specialists in each of these fields, including Dharma Realm Buddhist University faculty members, gave talks and joined in discussion. This is the first in a series of articles on the conference proceedings.*

*Guest speaker Mr. Ricardo Stocker, an anthropologist, philosopher, and educator, presented the following paper during the first weekend. The topic for the weekend was Buddhism and Science, and some rather lively discussion took place which will appear in future issues of Vajra Bodhi Sea.*

## *Light Within—Light Without*

*The Quest for the Nature of Light as the common ground of Mysticism and Science*

*By Ricardo Horatio Stocker*

### *1. The History of Science and the Desacralization of Nature*

As we survey the cultural developments and transformations along the whole history of humankind, we cannot fail to notice that the way we perceive and experience the universe has undergone several changes throughout different historical periods. Each period resonated a particular mode of consciousness, a cosmology or understanding of the world. To clarify these transformations of awareness, we could divide, very roughly, the whole evolution and history of consciousness in four distinct modes.

- a) The Pre-historic or Ab-original Mode
- b) The Ancient Mode
- c) The Modern Mode
- d) The Contemporary Mode

Certainly, these modes or qualities of perception interpenetrate and overlap, so we cannot fix beginnings and endings of precise dates. Also, it is important to keep in mind that today, though we are immersed in the fourth mode, the other three are also present and active, not just as memory but as actual experience. That is to say that the Pre-historic mode never actually "ended"; it went "underground." The same with the Ancient and Modern modes. It is all comprehended in the collective or archetypal unconscious in which all experience is transmuted into impulse, all past into future within the Eternal-Now.

How do these modes relate to the history of science? On the one hand these stages and levels of awareness are the very biography of science, the process of knowing reality and tuning in to its rhythms and cycles. On the other hand these ways of perceiving the universe show that science as such only emerged as distinct from religion and art during the transition from the Ancient mode to the Modern mode; that is, during what today we call the middle ages.

What are the special characteristics of these modes?

a) **The Pre-historic or Ab-original Mode** extends far into the remote evolutionary past. It's main aspect is the discovery of the celestial nature of fire and its mastery for earthly purposes. The first-hand realization that all fire comes from the sun and that both are sacred manifestations of divine beings. All of Nature, the whole universe, is experienced as permeated, suffused and woven through with an exuberant multiplicity of Beings—Celestial Beings, Nature Beings, Elemental Beings, Ancestors, Animal Spirits, etc. Nothing can exist without spirit. The very "form" of things shows the presence of "spirit." Every "thing," even apparently lifeless objects, has a "soul." Modern and contemporary minds have looked back, or rather down, on this Ab-original consciousness and tried to explain it away with labels such as: animism, spiritualism, or archaic mysticism, pantheism, nature worship, etc.

A very useful tool to help us understand these very different ways of relating to the cosmos is the concept of the "*gunas*." Ancient Indian thought differentiated three basic modes of existence and called them: **Sattva**, **Rajas** and **Tamas**. Each *guna* points to a particular cosmic dimension, and this triad itself denotes a hierarchy of realms, that is a "sacred order" of being or existence within the vastness of worlds.

**Sattva** is the realm or modality of Being, Luminosity, Intelligence, Cosmic Mind, Clarity, Divine Transparency, Spirit.

**Rajas** is the realm of Energy, Activity, Dynamism, Power, Force, Movement, Vibration and Waves.

**Tamas** is the aspect we discern as inert matter, substance, elements, particles, weight and gravity. So at the highest level we speak of the celestial radiance of Beings (*Sattva*) emanating subtle and highly refined energies and substances. These energies descend, degrade, or involve manifesting as forces (*Rajas*) and the whole spectrum of vibrations. These forces and waves condense further, manifesting in turn as elements, substances and the inertia of "solid matter" (*Tamas*). This is the darkest, heaviest, denser and coarser realm.

So, if we apply the triadic concept of the *gunas* to the understanding of the modes and their interrelationships along History, we are able to develop new and fresh insights into the nature of each mode, and into the whole process of consciousness transformation throughout the ages.

Returning to the pre-historical, ab-original or primeval mode of consciousness, we see it as permeated with a *Sattvic* predominance, that is consciousness or awareness illuminated by the presence of countless Beings. Everything that happens is a direct outcome, or emanation of Beings. There is no such thing as chance or "accident." The "destiny" of every single creature or being is woven by the vast cosmic intelligence of myriad Beings. What today we call Mythology was developed at a later age and contains remnants and clues to the insights of this Ab-original mode of experiencing universal existence. There was no difference between sacred and profane, supernatural and natural, the "other" worlds and "this" world.

b) **The Ancient Mode** of consciousness emerges as a new way of perceiving the multiplicity of realms and the regularity of events. It is the birth of mathematics and the quest for the Logos, the laws and intelligence behind events. There is a noticeable shift from *Sattva* to *Rajas*, that is from the dimension of Being-ness to the realm of forces and powers. The gods, goddesses and plenty of spiritual Beings are still there, but this new emerging awareness begins to differentiate the forces and energies from the Beings themselves.

A new sense of separation and duality sets in. The dream-like awareness of "other" worlds begins to recede into the background and a "down to earth" focus begins to unfold. This manifests into magnificent architecture, sculpture, art and recorded language. Memory begins to be "objectified" in glyphs. Ancient Science is founded on the principle of cosmic correspondences. The dictum "As above so below" is the key that sounds through the ancient mode of consciousness. A sense of polarities and opposites permeates this newly awakened faculty of discrimination. Now there is a distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane," between the "inner" temple and the "outer" side (profanum). Also a clear boundary is drawn between life and death, "this" world and the "other" world. The awareness of *Sattva* is somehow removed from "earth" and placed in "heaven." The emphasis is now on *Rajas* as the interweaving of forces and energies harmonizing the celestial and the terrestrial spheres. We see a struggle towards equilibrium; sometimes manifesting in static, rigid forms, sometimes appearing in dynamic, flexible ways.

For thousands of years, across many civilizations, Science unfolds, first as a quest for "vertical" correspondences, and then becomes more and more "horizontally" oriented. This increasing emphasis towards understanding the workings of "this" world and applying this knowledge to improve survival and to consolidate power over the "unruly," "unclear," "obscure," "mysterious" aspects of nature, lead to a progressive alienation of Science from the sacred, from *Sattva*, from Being-ness, from Religion.

c) **The Modern Mode** of consciousness starts manifesting with increasing clarity after the first millennium A.D. Though the ancient gods and goddesses have somehow disappeared into other realms, still there is a feeling for the "celestial intelligences" weaving through the cosmos. But something has changed radically, the Light, the Fire, that hitherto was brought down by the deities, now has become available "within." Gautama became the Buddha not by borrowing or receiving, but by Self-kindling the innermost Light. The Christos demonstrates and announces, "The kingdom of Heaven is

within you!" So, that ocean of intelligence in which all worlds interpenetrate and have their Being, is now rapidly reduced to a drop of "reason" within a human skull. During the Renaissance transition to the modern mode, a new set of correspondences is discovered—this time between "within" and "without" the microcosm and the macrocosm, the individual and the universe. A new center is found: The Human-Being, Humanism. Also the Sun, a self-illuminated Being, becomes the center of the world. The key-note of Modern consciousness is sounded in the words of Shakespeare, "I can be bounded in a nutshell, and be the King of Infinite Space." Out of this new awareness infinitesimal calculus is born.

And through incredible measurements and calculations man eventually descends on the moon knowing exactly what his weight will be. In a period of a handful of centuries we witness a tremendous increase and diversification of knowledge. A multiplicity of sciences expanding into all realms, penetrating the innermost workings of all kingdoms. The emphasis has now moved from *Rajas* to *Tamas*. The focus is now the elements, substances, "matter," the main tool, a deepening "analysis." We still speak of forces, energies, vibrations, but with no reference whatsoever to "Beings." Suddenly the whole universe appears as a vast and complex "machine." Books on "celestial mechanics" are written. The cosmologies of Newton and Descartes prevail and permeate the scientific world. Then, as Darwin, Marx and Freud enter the stage, we are left with a predominantly *Tamasic* world view, all is reduced to matter, chance, blind forces, numbers, pieces.

The industrialization of the world, and the tremendous technical achievements in all fields are all fruits of this Modern mode of consciousness, which finds its culmination at the middle of the twentieth century.

d) **The Contemporary Mode of Consciousness** begins to emerge with tremendous momentum at the birth of the twentieth century. Through the arts, sciences, social movements, wars, and fresh spiritual impulses, something totally new on a planetary scale begins to stir within the hearts and minds of millions. The darkest and densest hours, the loss of "solid reality" starts to break down under the melting radiance of a cosmic fire released upon the earth. Not only powerful stellar energies blast away solid matter, but the very concept of material reality is transmuted. Matter is now seen for what it is: an illusion, both conceptual and perceptual. Frozen clots of energy in the mind-freezer. The leading edge of the contemporary mode of consciousness is re-cognizing and re-discovering in a new light, the realm of *Rajas*. Universal reality is seen again as an ocean of energies and deeply interacting fields of force at all levels. Though at the vanguard of Contemporary consciousness, the breakthrough has already happened, the tremendous inertia of the Modern mode still permeates today's cultures with obsolete or anachronistic mind patterns.

In all cultural and scientific fields, we begin to see clear trends toward transcending modern reductionism and towards a symphonic integration of disciplines.

When we take a close look at what is actually happening in the realms of New Physics, New Biology, Psychology, Ecology and many other sciences, we quickly realize that the

flow, quality of perceptions and information shared is opening up a multi-dimensional vision of reality that strikes an harmonic resonance with the Ancient mode of consciousness.

An alchemical marriage of Science and Religion is happening. Artificial boundaries belonging to out-dated mind-sets are naturally melting away by a new kind of planetary mysticism. This, for example, is what we see in Deep Ecology, the rebirth of Shamanism and the growing trend towards spiritual growth and awakening.

Where we used to only see "organisms" or "animals," now we begin to perceive Beings.

This awakening towards the Being-ness of all species, all races, all individuals is resonating with deeper levels of the archetypal unconscious, with the Ab-original mode of consciousness. This awareness goes beyond the "natural" world, it includes the world of the so-called "dead" and higher realms of super-natural or cosmic Beings.

In other words, the blossoming of Contemporary consciousness comprehends and reintegrates the other modes in a process of on-going transformation and spiritual evolution.

The following diagram shows the relationship of the three *gunas* to the four modes of consciousness and its changes in time:

