

### The Firm Cord of Servitude

by Theo Cope

The idea of mysticism, what the word means, how we envision it, what experience the word describes, is understood in a myriad of manners. Persons who investigate or grasp to understand the field or experience called “mysticism” realize the complexity and history involved. Like all ideas, mysticism seems to have a strongly emotional component that is inherent in its dynamic. Many books have been written on the topic of mystical experience from philosophical, neurological, sociological, historical, psychological, and of course religious perspectives. In the directives offered by Bahá’u’lláh, when one considers any undertaking, one needs ask the question: Is the study I am to undertake one that will be beneficial to humanity, or will it begin and end in mere words that cannot be proven? To reflect upon the study of mysticism implies much; to attempt to re-vision it in light of current scientific methodologies demands much. Of what value is another conference, or another view on mysticism?

Perhaps we can restate this question and by so doing re-orient our ideas. A “practical mysticism” that does not lead to ascetic living is one that contributes to “an ever advancing civilization.” We note that in the early days of Islam, mystics established many social institutions and were very active in social reform, yet later degenerated into ascetic styles. So, let us ask instead: “Do we have the psychological tools necessary to begin a re-vision of the phenomena referred to as mysticism, and connect it with daily life?” The answer to this must be an unconditional “Yes!” A beginning re-vision is where we will focus our attention. Re-vision entails a re-focusing and a re-ideating, a re-framing and a re-thinking. Viewed psychologically, it is inherently valuable to reconsider this domain of human experience, for humanity must embark more consciously upon its mandated journey towards maturity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá informs us that those who wish to teach the Bahá’í Faith “...must be embodied spirit, (and) personified intellect” as well as “incarnate light and personified spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Mysticism has heretofore been considered the domain of a few, or the result of ascetic practices, or defined by encounter with God, or Nature. The permutations upon this theme are varied. We are now given to know that all of us are to be and live as embodied spirit and incarnate light; this is an embodied approach to mysticism, contrary to the dominant manner of expression of experience that has often been forged in the crucible of ascetic and monastic practices.

This work is an introductory piece, to present some very basic ideas offered by the late Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung (1875–1961), that may enable us to approach an understanding of mystical ideas from a psychological view, while not limiting our understanding to psychology. It is intended to serve as a catalyst, a petition in a sense, for others to join a serious dialogue of the value of Jung’s ideas for approaching a spiritual psychology.

Ideas about mysticism, it is purported, have been constrained by their historical ancestors. Every thought or idea has attached to it a history, a genealogy. When one investigates the influences of these genealogies in the thought and writings of another, it is easy to interpret these writings according to the known genealogies of the investigator. If one knows Sufi thought in depth, Christian mystical thought, or Buddhist, Chán (Zen), Hindu, or Jewish, etc., it is likely that one will read passages in the Bahá’í Writings and see in them views that in some cases clarifies some misunderstandings (such as union with God, faná’), and in others verify the positions articulated before. What would happen if we radically re-vision these ideas in light of psychological approaches? Would we thereby somehow denigrate what mysticism is about? Would we be reducing mystical experience to psychological experiences? Would it be an affront to the cherished ideas we hold about mystic experience? We must here assert unequivocally that the response is “No!” All we do if we explore these mystical claims in the light of psychology is to return

these experiences and imaginal creations to their proper places, in the human psyche—the soul—as used psychologically. In this way we bring these within the realm of daily, embodied experience, that is within the realm of psychology.

This work takes an approach from Jungian psychology, the Bahá'í and Sufi teachings, in the hopes of providing ideas and methods we can use to re-think mysticism in light of the spirit of the age, as well as the mandate for an essential harmony of science and religion imposed upon the followers of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. It will not encompass the domains of a scientific delimitation on the topic, and as such will not focus on neurobiological determinants, nor the genetic, nor biochemical considerations. This being said, an acknowledgement is made about the value of these approaches, yet the need to create a dialogue with the work of Carl Jung and his successors is one thrust of this work. However, any scientific approach which attempts to reduce "mystic experience" to a biological foundation must be seen as that: reductionistic. Likewise, to reduce these experiences to "merely psychological," with the current understanding of psychology, is reductionistic. Both of these approaches will be avoided in this work. The human reality is far too complex to entertain any notions of reductionism.

The concept of "mystic experience" needs some immediate clarification, and an operational definition for our purposes. This definition will be seen to have limits imposed upon it, and may be controversial thereby. Yet, to place a limitation upon the interpretation of experience is not unusual, in fact it is the only way humanity has available to understand. This limiting by defining is akin to what the Cheshire Cat expresses in *Alice in Wonderland*: a word means exactly what I say it means. Each individual's experience is limited by the particular world-view, that is, the *Weltanschauung* one espouses. Thus, for one who adheres to a strictly Jungian view of mystic experience, one may interpret such an experience as originating in the collective unconscious and conclude that it is the experience of an archetypal complex. On the other hand, for one who is limited by a strictly Sufistic view, or any Western or Eastern theistic view, it is likely that such interpretation will be of "union with God," "union with the Logos," "existential monism," "union with the Self" where "my Atman is Brahman," etc. There are many different ways this can be viewed and has been done so by many authors in this field. Mention is made here to highlight how one's view colors one's understanding of experience. It "frames" it, so to speak. Experience is one thing, interpretation of it is quite another. This seems to be the assertion of Bahá'u'lláh in the *Seven Valleys* as well when He expresses: "...that all the variations which the wayfarer in the stages of his journey beholdeth in the realms of being, proceed from his own vision."<sup>2</sup>

The limit we shall place upon "mystic experience" in this current work goes beyond these attitudes and consideration of *Weltanschauungen*. The departure point we shall embrace finds its grounding in the Bahá'í Writings:

*For whatsoever can be conceived by man is a reality that hath limitations and is not unlimited; it is circumscribed, not all-embracing. It can be comprehended by man, and is controlled by him. Similarly it is certain that all human conceptions are contingent, not absolute; that they have a mental existence, not a material one. Moreover, differentiation of stages in the contingent world is an obstacle to understanding. How then can the contingent conceive the Reality of the absolute? As previously mentioned, differentiation of stages in the contingent plane is an obstacle to understanding.*<sup>3</sup>

*O Salman! All that the sages and mystics have said or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, the limitations to which man's finite mind hath been strictly subjected. To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. The meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either human pen or tongue, are but a reflection of that which hath been created within themselves, through the revelation of the Lord, their God. Whoever pondereth this truth in his heart will readily admit that there are certain limits which no human being can possibly transgress.*<sup>4</sup>

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These two passages will serve as the focal points of our meditation. Indeed, this will be a meditation, for we pursue it in the temple humility, seeking to re-think what mysticism refers to.

Let us define mysticism, then, as an experience of ecstasy, where ecstasy follows its linguistic roots: “to stand outside of.” Mystic experience has traditionally been defined as union with God, with Nature, or with the higher Self in the individual. For our purposes we shall refer to it as a manner of union, the embodiment of spiritual qualities and attributes. Thus mysticism becomes “an embodied approach to life that experiences the profound mystery of creation, and the symbolic manifestations of the psyche, the soul, and perceives and lives with the belief that all existence is a reflection of the Unknowable Essence we call God.” This definition compels one to “stand outside” the normal views of daily mundane and biologically oriented life. In this definition, it is the perception and its concomitant effects upon lifestyle that becomes the focus.

This paper proposes that until the advent of psychological approaches to human experience, what has heretofore been interpreted to be mystic union with the Deity, or Brahman, is, in fact, a profound realization of the individual divine Self, and a progressive embodiment of the characteristics of this Self. This proposal is based upon many passages from the Bahá’í Writings. Besides those cited above, we find:

*In this connection, He Who is the eternal King—may the souls of all that dwell within the mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him—hath spoken: ‘He hath known God who hath known himself.’*

*...From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God.<sup>5</sup>*

In one of His Tablets, Bahá’u’lláh informs us that, “...the primary intent of knowing the self in this station is the knowledge of the Self of God in every era and age. For the pre-existent essence and the ocean of reality is exalted above the knowledge of all else but Him. Therefore, the insight attained by all the mystics actually hath reference to their insight into the Manifestations of His Cause.”<sup>6</sup>

Interwoven into the core of our being, our psyche, is what Jung called the “God archetype.”

The heritage of this “He hath known God who hath known himself” is well known in Christian and Islamic circles, and we find it mentioned first in the works of “Clement of Alexandria [who] says in the *Paedagogus* (III, 1): ‘Therefore, as it seems, it is the greatest of all disciplines to know oneself; for when a man knows himself, he knows God.’”<sup>7</sup> Clement lived from 150–215 A.D. Many have misunderstood Jung to be reductionistic or a metaphysical thinker by proposing this concept, overlooking that he was always speaking as a psychologist, not a metaphysician. He asserted, in a manner that appears to be harmonious with comments by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “I am therefore of the opinion that, in general, psychic energy or libido creates the God-image by making use of archetypal patterns, and that man in consequence worships the psychic force active within him as something divine. We thus arrive at the objectionable conclusion that, from the psychological point of view, the God-image is a real but subjective phenomenon.”<sup>8</sup> Many find it objectionable that Jung could assert such a thing, and he even acknowledged this since it flies in the face of our long-cherished assumption that we could experience God in the depths of our being. It is important to note that Jung was speaking psychologically, not metaphysically. Jung knew the controversy that would erupt when he or anyone asserted that our image or experience of “God” is created by psychic energy. In part this is because our notions of the psyche are far too limited, and even “soul” is a personal construct. Let’s compare this psychological view with a passage from the Master:

*Accordingly all these attributes, names, praises and eulogies apply to the Places of Manifestation; and all that we imagine and suppose beside them is mere imagination, for we have no means of comprehending that which is invisible and inaccessible. This is why it is said: ‘All that you have distinguished through the illusion of your imagination in your subtle mental images is but a creation like unto yourself, and returns to you.’*

*It is clear that if we wish to imagine the Reality of Divinity, this imagination is the surround-*

*ed, and we are the surrounding one; and it is sure that the one who surrounds is greater than the surrounded. From this it is certain and evident that if we imagine a Divine Reality outside of the Holy Manifestations, it is pure imagination, for there is no way to approach the Reality of Divinity which is not cut off to us, and all that we imagine is mere supposition.*

*Therefore, reflect that different peoples of the world are revolving around imaginations and are worshipers of the idols of thoughts and conjectures. They are not aware of this; they consider their imaginations to be the Reality which is withdrawn from all comprehension and purified from all descriptions. They regard themselves as the people of Unity, and the others as worshipers of idols; but idols at least have a mineral existence, while the idols of thoughts and the imaginations of man are but fancies; they have not even mineral existence. 'Take heed ye who are endued with discernment.'*<sup>9</sup>

We here learn as well that the soul creates “subtle mental images” and that whatever we may imagine, or imagine that we experience, beyond the Manifestations, is “pure imagination.” To one versed in Shi'ite Islamic (NeoPlatonic) philosophy of the Ishraqi strain, and has a sense of the development of “imagination/khayal,” imagination as creative is exalted as the faculty of mystic knowledge par excellence. In Bahá'í thought, however, we note a cautious attitude towards these imaginal creations. We note this as well in Bahá'u'lláh's “Commentary on ‘He who knows himself knows his Lord’”: “Therefore, the insight attained by all the mystics actually hath reference to their insight into the Manifestations of His Cause.”<sup>10</sup> These names and attributes, those “that we recount of the Divine Essence, ...have derived from the existence and observation of beings, and it is not that we have comprehended the essence and perfection of God.”<sup>11</sup> In this passage we are given to see that even these names and attributes are our categories, derived from our observation of created beings, attributed to the cosmic order; psychologically we could say that they are projected into the cosmos, or perceived by the human psyche.

The power of the soul, the psyche, to create has often been overlooked in works on mysticism in the West. In Islamic mysticism, it has been often a central concern, especially in the Ishraqi tradition where imagination became “imaginal,” under the exegetic work of Henry Corbin. Yet, to assert in any mystical heritage that the soul creates a “God archetype” is anathema; as much an affront as it is to orthodox religious views that the soul can experience union with God. In Western mystical traditions, it is categorically asserted that the soul experiences some sort of union with God. This is in part determined and conditioned by the NeoPlatonic or monistic heritage and assertion that “like can be known and experienced by like” of Plotinus. Thus, since the human reality is like that of God, we can have such an experience. But perhaps it is imagination...but what a power imagination is! Let us not belittle it.

There exist many works on imagination, and in the NeoPlatonic tradition imagination is lauded as a faculty of immense potentiality. In Islam beginning with Avicenna, developed by successive Islamic philosophers, cultivated by Suhrawardi and the Ishraqi tradition, and bearing fruit in many minds and hearts, notably Ibn 'Arabi, Mulla Şadra, and eventually Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsa'i, imagination transcends the psychological heritage proposed by Aristotle in *DeAnima*, and progresses into ontology in the notion of *'alam al-mithal*, the “world of similitudes/exemplars” also referred to as *'alam al-khayal*, the “world of imagination,” or *hurqalya*. This is well known in Ishraqi mystical thought, delineated by Fazlur Rahman, Henry Corbin, and many other commentators.

What is not well known is how this concept becomes “Westernized” and returned to its imaginal-psychological heritage in the heart of James Hillman and his brand of archetypal psychology. In many of Hillman's works, he addresses the notion of the imaginal ego, seeking to espouse an approach to psychology that enlivens it with archetypal personifications. Thus we find him expressing the current understanding of psychology towards the psyche, adopting its habitual dualism about “reality”:

First, the word means the totality of existing material objects or the sum of conditions of the external world. Reality is public, objective, social, and usually physical. Second there is a psychic reality, not extended in space, the realm of private experience that is interior, wishful, imaginal. Having divided psychic reality from hard or external reality, psychology elaborates various theories to connect the two orders together, since the division is worrisome indeed. It means that psychic reality is conceived to be

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neither public, objective, nor physical, while external reality, the sum of existing material objects and conditions, is conceived to be utterly devoid of soul. As the soul is without world, so the world is without soul.<sup>12</sup>

To pursue mysticism in an isolated environment, in an ascetic milieu, serves to separate this ecstatic living with a socially lived existence. Interior experience; this is what mysticism has been thought to be about. But it is more than this, it is about life as lived in the exterior world and a means of realizing that exterior and interior are illusory concepts to the psyche. The psyche experiences, using outer and inner faculties and processes. An embodied mysticism, a return of soul to the world, and our hearts to the world of soul, is Hillman's passionate quest. He would not call it mysticism, however, for it is psychology to him. Psychology, as a "science of the soul", where soul is translated from the Greek *psyche*, is Hillman's journey, and was that of Jung. While Jung approached psychology from a trans-national, trans-cultural and trans-historical stance, Hillman does also, but finds his roots most deeply nourished by Corbin's hermeneutics of Sufi thought, as well as Greek mythology. Our world is ill because we have lost our roots. As Shoghi Effendi remarked: we cannot separate the human heart from the environment around it.<sup>13</sup> When we begin to contemplate how it is that mysticism is a practical endeavor, to be embodied and socialized through action balanced with contemplation, then we strip it of its ascetic heritage and return soul to the world by infusing the world with new ideas about soul. In so doing, we are enabled to overcome the concept of inner and outer experience and realize most profoundly that it is the soul that experiences. If our thoughts are turned towards the body and material reality, or if they are turned towards the heights of spiritual contemplation, the attention differs, but it is the soul that experiences in both. Inner and outer become adjectival terms describing the focus of conscious attention.

None of this is new, none of it unique. The problem with a psychological approach to mysticism has been due to its being primarily a "science without soul," a psychophysiology that examines the minutiae of physiological, neurological, cognitive, behavioristic expressions of the psyche. And most often the psyche is conceived to be a mere epiphenomenon of brain functioning. This is all very understandable given psychology's young heritage and being compelled into an empirical stance by the currents of the time. But the currents have changed, and it is no coincidence that psychology began burgeoning with the Advent of the Revelation of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

It is our *ideas* about mysticism that are being called into question, that need re-visioning. Implied in this is the power of the idea, and anyone who knows Greek philosophical heritage knows the significance of the Ideas in Plato, the *Eidos*. Ideas exist before our visioning, are what we see with, how we see, and what we see. If we change our ideas about something, we change not only how we see, but also what we can see. There is, however, no firm *proof* of the existence of these Platonic Ideas, and even Aristotle is known to have questioned their ontological existence. Let an example suffice: oppression. This is an idea we observe with. We see human interactions and people striving to discern truth. In some interactions we see events, and these events we define as oppressive. Events are events, the idea of oppression gives us a different interpretation of the event. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "What 'oppression' is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?"<sup>14</sup> Being unable to find truth is not often considered as oppressive, but we are given to know that it is a grievous oppression. Oppression is first an idea, it enables us to see life's events differently; when we see an idea anew, we see with new ideas and see new realities that our old ideas could not embrace.

Mysticism is such an idea. In the Bahá'í corpus, the notion of *wahdat al-wujúd* is *complex, and varies with the context*. Thus an idea supporting a monistic view, in the "realm of the attributes" is presented, while it is clear that any idea of existential monism, and union with the Essence of God, as has been asserted by many mystics, is not supported. The complexity of the subject and the length of this article does not permit a fuller discussion. In the *Seven Valleys* we learn that in the "Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness" "...the wayfarer leaveth behind him the stages of the 'oneness of Being and Manifestation' and reacheth a oneness that is sanctified above these two stations."<sup>15</sup> Moojan Momen wrote about such a dichotomy in an article "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics," but his view was not psychological<sup>16</sup> What we are delineating here is. As such, in keeping with the demands of the

psyche (and remember that psyche is used as soul, but in its psychological sense), we are seeking experiences and ways of understanding experiences. Psyche exists for experiences, and these sometimes are not in the heights of ecstasy, but the valleys; there are seven, and four more. Spirit pulls psyche up towards the disembodied heights of its domain, seeking its reflection in the fiery Sun; psyche yearns to wallow in the waters, seeking its reflection in what is below; and we are both. Psyche is intimately connected with the body and earth. The Manifestation brings teachings and ideas that assist the spirit in transforming the psyche from its propensity to stay in the “depths” to a comfort in the “heights.” Let us not construe this literally.

If we strip mysticism of its exclusive metaphysical overtones, and its abstruse ontological and epistemological assertions, we are left with a different sort of mystery. And indeed, “mystery minded” mysticism is accessible to us all, illuminating our hearts and minds with a cosmos that is full of the Light of Glory and the Glory of God. In this mystery we discern that all existence is a reflection of this Light, that each aspect of creation is a “sign”; every Name of God portends mysteries that generate, sustain and animate creation.<sup>17</sup> The soul is such a sign.<sup>18</sup> The logos of the soul, psychology, lost its way on the path of exploring psyche because it took psyche to be the mind, since the “science of mental processes” was more amenable to its developmental milieu than a science of the soul. We can look to Galileo as one source of the beginnings of this loss, and his mathematization of nature that reverberated throughout the West and captivated the minds of many; though these were mostly men. Women likely would have never excluded the body and world. Descartes, Locke, Mill, Hume. These names have a history and impacted history in a way that perpetuated the empirical exploration of the world, that fostered the division between psyche and physics and compelled psychology to become psychophysics.<sup>19</sup> Soul became reduced, minimized, exiled; a mere epiphenomenon of the machine universe. Our ideas became more concretely divided between inner and outer reality; we have yet to fully learn that “the world of existence is a single world, although its stations are various and distinct.”<sup>20</sup> Soul also became minimized thorough time and the burgeoning development of individual ego awareness: *my* soul, and *your* soul; possessive, personal, a pauper in the cosmos. No longer a microcosm within the macrocosm even.

This has changed, and quantum ideas have instigated a revolution on many fronts. We know now of multiverses and many Big Bangs, not just one anymore. We know that on the quantum level matter is spirit, that the physical universe is in continual flux, coming into and going out of existence; the *illusion* is that it is a stable concrete existence. But soul, ever patient with human folly, bides its time. It exists as it always has, it is our ideas that have gone astray. Yet, this is part of soul’s unfolding, let us not forget this. A song once sang “You don’t know what you have till it’s gone,” and our loss of soul is sadly noticed in our lives; its loss has prompted us to approach it in new ways. It is not soul that was lost, but our awareness and embodied acceptance of it.

Psychology, from the heart and findings of Carl Jung, proffers to us a manner of approaching psyche again, but in a more mature manner; and in a manner that imbues it with mystery. The mystery that Jung delineated is succinctly captured in two dominant psychological attitude types, the extravert and the introvert. Briefly, the extravert is characterized by being: object oriented; nominalistic; prone to sensation and affectivity; empathic; concrete; focused on the individual element—particulars; pluralistic; empirically guided; “romantic.” The introvert is characterized by being idea oriented; realistic; logical; idealistic; focused on ideas and similarities—universals; monistic; dogmatic; “classic.”<sup>21</sup> No one exists as a “pure” type, but there is frequently one type that dominates. If we use these two types to investigate many of the claims of mystics of all ages we will immediately notice why it is that there has existed the persistence of such debates and harangues as have characterized most such assertions of mystic union with God.

On the one hand, we know of the *wahḍat al-wujūd* and of *wahḍat ash-shudūd*. Moojan Momen expresses it thusly: “This is the controversy between two positions concerning the nature of the relationship between God and His creation. These two positions existed from the earliest days of Islam and eventually became known as *Wahḍat al-Wujūd* (existential unity, oneness of being) and *Wahḍat ash-Shuhūd* (unity in appearance only). The former was the position taken by the followers of Ibn al-‘Arabí (d. 638 A.H./1240) and was more common among those inclined towards Sufism and mystical philosophy. The

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latter was the position commonly taken by jurists and was given its name by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindí (971 A.H./1563–1034 A.H.—1034/1624–5) in the 17th century.”<sup>22</sup> The former sees and interprets mystic experience and theosophical speculative thought in an introverted manner, and the latter in an extraverted one. Likewise, we note that there exists a debate as to the ontological reality of the “realm” of *‘alam-al-mithal*, with the followers of Ibn ‘Arabí seeing it as an ontologically existent realm, while Sirhindí and his followers viewed it as a realm of “seeing” not being.<sup>23</sup> With these two typologies, the felt need for argumentation about who is “correct” is undermined. It is even as Bahá’u’lláh expresses in many Tablets, notably the “Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality,” as well as “Commentary on a Verse of Rumi (for Salman),” that both are right, and both are wrong. This is the position taken by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as well in His “Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: I was a Hidden Treasure” where He expresses:

*Thus some of the mystic knowers who have ascended to the Heaven of meanings have recognised forms, realities and potentialities as pre-existent and unoriginated. And some of those informed of the path of knowledge and wisdom consider quiddities and realities to be originated and created. And this servant has given the expositions and evidences of both parties in the clearest possible manner in this treatise. But to this servant all these expositions and questions, stations and states are complete in their own station without defect or flaw. For although the object being viewed is the same, nevertheless the viewpoints and stations of these mystic knowers is different. Each viewpoint, with respect to the person who is in that station is perfect and complete. Know thou, O lover of the All-Glorious Beauty, that differences between the statements of the saints is on account of differences in the effulgences of the Names of the Absolute and variations in Their places of manifestation.*<sup>24</sup>

This theme of viewpoints being dependent upon the wayfarer is stated in the *Seven Valleys* as well, and is what we find in our opening passages of meditation. Thus it can be seen how Jung enables us to discern this clearly as an essential component of one’s psychological makeup. A recognition of these typologies permits us to henceforth dispense with any such argumentations and harangues, and instead begin to approach the profound mystery of the God-image created in the soul, by the soul, and in accordance with individual psychological orientations. This is a very simplified presentation of this complex issue from a psychological approach, given briefly here to indicate one manner of seeing this lengthy historical debate. As an introductory work, we cannot delve deeper.

Indeed, the mystery of the soul’s creations is what mysticism is about. Since we have been guided by Bahá’í teachings to accept humbly and deeply the limitations imposed upon us as created realities, limitations that free us in manners that we are only beginning to understand, perhaps it is time that we take seriously the fact that the soul creates and that one can “never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts...” This is a profound mystery, worthy of our pursuit and embodiment. The Guardian characterized the potentialities thusly: “Who can visualize the realms which the human spirit, vitalized by the outpouring light of Baha’u’llah, shining in the plenitude of its glory, will discover?”<sup>25</sup> These realms lay enfolded within us, attested by Bahá’u’lláh’s affirmation, “Some have described him as the ‘lesser world,’ when, in reality, he should be regarded as the ‘greater world.’ The potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God.”<sup>26</sup> And

*Likewise, reflect upon the perfection of man’s creation, and that all these planes and states are folded up and hidden away within him. Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form When within thee the universe is folded?*<sup>27</sup>

We know that full knowledge of the Self, individually speaking, is impossible, and it is no great jump to realize the impossibility of knowing the Self of God, the Manifestation, or the “names and attributes.” If we persist, as witnessed in all previous religious dispensations, with argumentations about the “correct” understanding of the relationship with God to creation, we not only fail to understand the clear admonitions of the Faith, but also fail to grasp the power of the soul. On the former, we come to learn in Bahá’í thought that all we can even refer to refers to the Manifestations of God, and not to the

Unknowable Essence. This is expressed clearly in the Tablets mentioned above, as well as in *Some Answered Questions*, a passage cited previously also. Yet, even this, we are given to comprehend, is reflected in our being.

*But we ask God to acquaint the people with their own selves, so that they might avoid trespassing beyond their bounds and their station, and might speak of God by means of this most great mention and might aid God with all their limbs and members. Thus might they become standards streaming between the heavens and the earth. Dwell, O people, in the shadow of God, then persevere in your seats of honor by means of the mysterious peace of God and his serene dignity. Hold firm to the cord of servitude.*<sup>28</sup>

The station of the Manifestation is beyond our capability to fathom, thus we need to focus on the human psyche and heart, therein seeing these reflections. We need to comprehend and embody the implications of clearly demarcated stations in existence. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions three such stations, referring to them as conditions, as being limited to “servitude, prophethood and Deity”<sup>29</sup> The clear admonitions enjoining us to refrain from such debates is expressed in many places, and we note in the “Commentary on a Verse of Rumi” Bahá’u’lláh stating:

*But, Salman, the pen of the All-Merciful says, ‘Today, those who affirm and those who deny these utterances are on the same level.’ For the sun of reality is itself resplendent and is shining from the horizon of the heavens. All those who busy themselves with such sayings are, of course, deprived of mystical insight into the beauty of the Compassionate. The prime time for investigating illusions is the time when no divine guidance is present. Today is the springtime of unveiling and attainment. Roam, O people, in the garden of revealment and disclosure, and forsake illusions. Thus are you commanded by the pen of God, the Guardian, the Eternal. All branches of knowledge were set forth only for the sake of establishing that which is valid. Now, praise be to God that the sun of the object of knowledge has dawned above the horizon of the sky of eternity, and the moon of validity is shining in the heavens of command. Sanctify your heart from all allusions and gaze with your outward eyes toward the daystar of meanings in the holy and spiritual firmament. Note well His effulgence of names and attributes in what is other than He, so that you might attain to all knowledge, and to its origin, mine, and wellspring.*<sup>30</sup>

This is also what we find in His “Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality,” and the Master’s “Commentary.” “Hold firm to the cord of servitude,” impels us and emboldens us to explore the mystery of the soul.

By taking a psychological perspective, that adumbrated by Carl Jung and his “psychology with the psyche,” we are enabled to begin an approach to the profound mystery of the soul and our relationship to our Self, and the mysterious workings of creative libidinal energies.<sup>31</sup> In so doing, we shall begin an exploration as promoted by the Bahá’í Writings, and according to the station of being human, that of servitude. This exploration will be to the manifestations and creations of the psyche, the soul, and the mystery of such a reality. In this way, we may come to grasp one intent behind this injunction: “To transgress the limits of one’s own rank and station is, in no wise, permissible. The integrity of every rank and station must needs be preserved. By this is meant that every created thing should be viewed in the light of the station it hath been ordained to occupy.”<sup>32</sup> Every created thing, and this includes the creations of the psyche; “To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts.” What a profound mystery! What a suitable endeavor for mysticism!

In closing, let us ponder some passages from Bahá’u’lláh, looking anew at them, seeing in them profound psychological assertions of the most serious import. By asserting they are psychological statements implies only that they are *at least* psychological, and psychology puts them within the grasp of every person’s experience:

*As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested*

## The Firm Cord of Servitude

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unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself.<sup>33</sup>

Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.<sup>34</sup>

O My servants! Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you.<sup>35</sup>

To whatever extent they who seek to rise to the highest stations of mystic knowledge may ascend or to whatever high station in the degrees of certitude they that hold fast to the Divine unity may climb, they are only reading the letters of the book of their souls (cf. Qur’án 17:14), only attaining the sign that is refulgent, deposited, incorporated, and concealed within the realities of their own inner being and only revolving around the centres of the circles of their own essential natures. And as for the stages that are above their worlds and beyond their attainment, they are not able to seek information about them nor to understand them.<sup>36</sup>

Surely, if we ponder Clement of Alexandria’s statement that “when a man knows himself he knows God,” we realize the profound importance of self-knowledge, no matter how limited. We are a limited creation, and yet this limitation is vast and expansive. Indeed, the “firm cord of servitude” is what we observe in the embodied life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Bahá’í Exemplar.

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### Notes

- 1) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977), p. 48; p. 18.
- 2) Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys (SV)*, trans. Gail, M. rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1952), p. 18.
- 3) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, original text published in Persian in 1992, this text from REFER program, p. 15, it is taken from *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. XV, pp. 37-43.
- 4) Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Effendi, S., 2nd rev. ed., (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 317-318.
- 5) *ibid.*, p. 178.
- 6) Bahá’u’lláh’s Commentary on “He who Knows Himself Knows His Lord,” prov. trans. by J.R. Cole, from *Bahá’u’lláh, Majmú’ih-yi Matbu’ih-yi Alvah-i Mubarakih*, ed. Muhyi’-Din Sabri, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), pp. 346-361.
- 7) Cited in Jung, Carl, *Aion, Collected Works 9ii*, (CW) eds. Read, Sir H., Fordham, M., Adler, G., McGuire, Wm., trans. Hull, R. F. C. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX); par. 347.
- 8) Jung, CW 5, par. 129.
- 9) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (SAQ), trans. Laura Clifford-Barney. 3rd ed., (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 1981, p. 149.
- 10) Bahá’u’lláh’s “Commentary on a Verse of Rumi,” provisional translation by J. Cole.
- 11) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 25.
- 12) Hillman, James. *Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World*, (Texas: Spring Publications, 1992), p. 95.
- 13) This is found in the compilation on the Environment. Due to my location, I do not have access to this document, thus this may not be verbatim.
- 14) Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Effendi, S., 2nd ed., (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 31.
- 15) SV, op. cit., p. 39.

- 16) Momen, M. "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics," in *Studies in the Bábi and Bahá'í Religions Vol. 5*, (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press), 1988, pp. 185-217.
- 17) See *Gleanings*, section LXXXIV.
- 18) *Gleanings*, section LXXXII.
- 19) This is discussed in the author's work, *Summoning the Courage: Jungian Psychology, Spiritual Psychology and the Bahá'í Teachings*, written as a thesis for the Graduate Fellowship Diploma at Landegg Academy; unpublished.
- 20) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, trans., Gail, M. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre), 1978, p. 193.
- 21) These have been developed further in the author's other works as it impinges upon epistemologies. The romantic-vs.-classic, as well as nominalist-vs.-realist are philosophical and cultural orientations. For a fuller discussion of these in the works of Jung, see his Psychological Types, in the *Collected Works* Vol. 6; see also Cope, T., *Re-Thinking, Re-Visioning, Re-Placing: From Plotinus to Bahá'u'lláh in a Jung Way*, forthcoming, February 2001, UK: George Ronald Press.
- 22) Introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's "Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality" (Lawḥ Basít al-Haqíqa); prov. trans. by M. Momen of text found in *Iqtidárát*, no date, no place of publication, pp. 105-116; 1999.
- 23) This is discussed by F. Rahman in his article, "Dream, Imagination, and 'Alam al'mithal," in Von Grunebaum, G. E., and Caillois, R. eds., *The Dream and Human Societies*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 409-416.
- 24) "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: 'I was a Hidden Treasure,'" in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 3:4, (Dec. 1985), trans. Momen, M., pp. 4-64, emphasis added.
- 25) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Selected Letters*, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955), p. 206.
- 26) *Gleanings*, p. 340.
- 27) *SV*, p. 34.
- 28) Bahá'u'lláh's "Commentary on a Verse of Rumi," provisional translation by J. Cole. This can be found on the World Wide Web at: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/>
- 29) *SAQ*, p. 230.
- 30) see fn. 28.
- 31) It is vital to understand that the Jungian and Freudian use of "libido" are dissimilar. Jung uses it in the manner of an "energetic concept" not restricted like Freud was wont to do. See Jung, "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche," *CW* 8, pars. 1-130.
- 32) *Gleanings*, p. 188.
- 33) *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
- 34) *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
- 35) *ibid.*, pp. 326-327
- 36) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makatib 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. 1, pp. 62-102, provisional trans. Momen, M., 2000.