

Comparative views of divine union in Kabbalah and Tantra

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COMPARATIVE VIEWS OF DIVINE UNION IN KABBALAH AND TANTRA
BY JAKE JACOBS

This paper examines the connections between mystical Jewish Kabbalah and Tantric Yoga in their focus on the uniting of masculine and feminine energies in the quest to experientially encounter God/ Ultimate Reality. I first look at the writings of Kabbalist Rabbi Mordechai (Marc) Gafni and of Indic religious scholar Dr. Georg Feuerstein to systematically explain role of the bond of Sefirot¹ of Tiferet (masculine) and Shechinah (feminine) in Kabbalah toward the divine encounter in comparison to that of the Gods Shiva (masculine) and Shakti (feminine) in Tantric Yoga.² I note the similarities and differences in the systems and suggest the value to each tradition that is found in the other. I then touch on the function of ethics/morality in the cosmic view of both systems as accessed in the union of male and female. Ultimately I argue that the two traditions can be mutually enriched by the encounter with the divergent ethical path of the other.

I come to this task having been raised secularly Jewish, though educated as a child in a conservative synagogue. I quit my encounter with Judaism the day after my bar mitzvah and lived secularly as a high holiday Jew until the age of 35. At that time, in the midst of emotional crisis, I reentered an active engagement with Judaism through a meditative Synagogue that drew from both the Kabbalist and Chasidic traditions. While in my 20s, I first encountered the practice of yoga primarily following only the asana (poses) and pranayama (breathing) aspects of the practice. I maintained this yoga practice on and off through my 20s and 30s returning in my mid-40s to the practice of yoga on a regular and consistent basis. As I approached my 50th birthday, I began to

1 Sefirot = energy center.

2 I also utilize the pluralistic approach of mutual engagement and transformation championed by Diana Eck. See Eck, Diana L., *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

study the yoga tradition in its more esoteric nature and as something beyond a mere physical practice but one that had a strong basis in a technology toward ascertaining encounter with ultimate reality.

At about the same time, I was at an auto body shop in West Los Angeles waiting for my car sharing the waiting area with an elderly woman who was reading Tikkun magazine. She put the magazine on a desk and I asked if I could read it while I was waiting. She said yes. I sifted through the table of contents and found an article on Eros and Ethics, which piqued my interest, particularly when I discovered it was mostly an article about divine union from a Kabbalistic viewpoint. Reading it I was struck by the similarities in a general sense with what little I knew about Tantra. Last summer I found myself in a comparative theology course, part of a new direction in my life, which was not even a seed in my thoughts back at the body shop. When time came to write a paper I recalled that article, found it online and this paper began its process of coming into being.

As I delve deeper into the Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali and the subsequent text that further expanded this seminal work, as well as maintaining my connection with meditative and mystical Judaism I began to see strong connections between the two. This has been enhanced by reading recent literature on the connection of both systems to Quantum Mechanics.³ Now entering into a new phase as a student of theology I am drawn back to these two essentially mystical/spiritual takes on the true nature of our reality.

³ See Haisch, Bernard, *The God Theory: Universes, zero point fields and what's behind it all*, San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2006 and Wallace, B. Alan, *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*, (New York: Columbia Press, 2003).

While postmodern seekers may be most attracted to this study, the more traditional religious person should find great value in experiencing the significant role ethics and morality play in these 2 mystical/spiritual esoteric practices.

SHIVA AND SHAKTI: Connecting the masculine and feminine toward the encounter with Ultimate Reality.

"Yoga is undoubtedly the union (samayoga) of Shiva and Shakti." Tantra-Sutra (703)

In his book *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy*⁴, Feuerstein explains the roles of the gods and goddesses who are sought out to help the practitioner through invocation, prayer ritual, meditative visualization and not least mantra recitation. The deities are considered to be very real, each corresponding to a particular energetic presence that can be palpably felt in meditation and even at other times. They are seen as personifications of specific intelligent energies present in the subtle dimension.⁵ The gods and goddesses are also seen as symbols that point beyond their immediate forms of manifestation to the absolute godhead, the singular being. The Tantras are presented as a direct communication from Lord Shiva, who declares at the conclusion of his teachings:

'In reply to your questions I have completely revealed in this tantra what was the most secret discipline and the most excellent knowledge.'⁶

⁴ Feuerstein, Georg, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy*, (Boston: Shambala Publications, 1998).

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 70-71.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 73-74

Ultimate Reality is known as Parama- Shiva, the godhead, characterized by being, consciousness and bliss.⁷ The god Shiva, as opposed to Parama-Shiva, is that aspect of the Ultimate Reality that is consciousness. It is pure subject, "I" without the slightest notion of "I am". From that perspective of evolution, the Shiva principle emerges first within Ultimate Reality, that is the transcendental "I". " It is Shiva who is the seed of the multidimensional universe, giving rise to all other ontological categories. But there is no duality in Shiva, because he is completely immersed in blissful union with Shakti."⁸

Shakti is the principle of creativity within Ultimate Reality. She coexists with Shiva and co-creates the universe. In doing this she triggers the process of evolution and obscures consciousness. This is seen as a closing to revealing the true nature of Shiva but

this veiling effect does not block Shiva from our view entirely and we can get a glimpse of our true nature and are free to restart rediscover our essential being just as we are "free to deny it and live the inauthentic life of the ordinary worldling who follows the dictates of self delusion, greed and aggression as well as the other Karma engendering negative emotions and attitudes."⁹

The intersection of Shiva and Shakti is symbolized in many ways, the most familiar in the West being the yoni-linga symbol depiction of an oval base onto which the upright linga (phallus) is centered. The yoni (vulva) stands for Shakti as immanent

⁷ The limited scope of this paper does not allow for a full examination of Ultimate Reality. For the reader's purpose herein, Ultimate Reality and God can be seen as analogous though not referring to a personal God but similar to Ein Sof in Kabbalah

⁸ Feuerstein, Tantra supra p. 78.

⁹ Ibid. p. 79.

energy; the linga represents Shiva as transcendent consciousness. This symbolizes the divine intercourse as a creative union toward encounter of the Ultimate Reality.¹⁰

What is significant in tantra is that Shakti plays the active role, whereas Shiva, although surrounded by Shakti's love play, remains passive and cool. "He manifests the absolute stillness of consciousness; she expresses the own limited potency of Power Energy."¹¹ Shakti energy rises up into the passive Linga consciousness. This interplay is found on all levels of cosmic existence and pre-exists in the Ultimate Reality. As we move down the ladder of cosmic existence -- from the transcendental to the subtle to the coarse levels of manifestation -- the transcendental polarity increasingly becomes one of stark opposition.

"Ontologically speaking, the polarization of the ultimate reality into Shiva and Shakti is the matrix for the opposites experienced at the level of conditional reality. All polarities and dualities -- notably male and female -- that we can possibly encounter in the world are pre-contained in the Shiva-Shakti dimension. Psychologically speaking, the unitive relationship of Shiva and Shakti can be understood as a symbol for intra-psychic unity or, in Jung's terms, the integration of animus and anima. We could say that because Shiva and Shakti are ultimately in perfect union, we are capable of achieving a similar union within our psyche. Conversely because the ultimate reality has these two aspects, our psyche also exhibits a feminine and masculine side."¹²

In his recent book, *Yoga Morality*¹³, Feuerstein focuses on the role of ethics and morality in all forms of Yoga practice. "The core process of yoga, which conducts the yogi practitioner from a state of the inauthentic existence to authentic being, is unglamorous and proceeds through the gradual, quiet transformation of one's body and mind in

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 81

¹¹ Ibid p. 82.

¹² Ibid. pp. 83-84.

¹³ Feuerstein, Georg, *Yoga Morality: Ancient Teachings at a Time of Global Crisis*, (Prescott, AZ:Hohm Press, 2007.)

everyday life. Thus, the foundation of all genuine yoga practice, like any other spiritual discipline in the world, lies in the realm of moral behavior.” As swami Sivananda states: "ethics is the foundation of yoga... at ethics is the gateway to God realization.” This thought is supported by Gandhi who wrote in his autobiography of his "conviction that morality is the basis of things" and "truth is the substance of all morality"¹⁴

Feuerstein notes that the five moral disciplines of Pantanjali's classical eighth fold path constitute the ethical ground of all yogic teachings.¹⁵ When stripped of its spiritual and moral teachings yoga cannot lead to inner freedom peace and happiness as it was designed to do. He adds, that the yoga masters spoke of Jesus of Nazareth when he asked

'who will cast the first stone' to advise not to look at the moral flaws of others but to focus on our own shortcomings and concentrate on transforming our character to prevent moral failings in the future.¹⁶

In Hinduism, which spawned Yoga, virtual identity/self is by definition: infinite, eternal, and immutable. The ego personality is finite, mortal, and highly changeable. The infinite self contracts in on itself creating the artificial sense of individuated existence (ego self). The ego is the main culprit behind our universal human experience of suffering. The authorities point to spiritual ignorance as the source of all evil. Thus an important dimension of yoga lies beyond the personal and impersonal and includes the whole area of moral behavior. Yoga "seeks to overcome being drained of obsession with the ego self by connecting the ego personality with other ego personalities through the

¹⁴ Ibid. p. XIV.

¹⁵ These are the Yamas (the moral restraints of non-harming, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-acquisitiveness) and the Niyanas (self-restraint through purity, contentment, austerity, study and devotion to the Lord).

¹⁶ Ibid. p. XIX.

common ground of virtue.”¹⁷ Morality is based on the insight that all beings are vitally interconnected and they must accept a common ground at the level of social interaction. “It would seem that inner freedom and goodness go together and that a liberated master who is evil simply is an impossibility.”¹⁸ Yoga holds to the principle that “Virtue or morality is the glue that holds human life together.”¹⁹

The foundation of morality in yoga is that it sees interconnection between all beings and things. The law of karma or moral causation is an expression of the deep interconnectedness and orderliness of the cosmos. The ancient sages have avowed that in order to live harmoniously human beings must structure their lives according to Universal interconnectedness and natural orderliness of life. According to Feuerstein, the ancient sages praised the value of moral life. That inherent tension between morality and the pursuit of liberation is a major theme of the Sanskrit literature of the so-called epic era as seen in the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics.²⁰ He also notes that Buddhism places a premium on virtuous conduct and that the moral virtues were turned into actual yogic practices. Dharma is looked on as morality and virtue. “What is unique about virtue ethics is its focus on the individual, arguing that moral action flows naturally from a moral character. For good or bad, we typically act in keeping with who we are.”²¹ Through the practice of yoga we seek to move from our egocentric nature to our actual inherently virtuous higher nature.

17 Ibid. p. 5.

18 Ibid. p. 7.

19 Ibid. p. 8.

20 Ibid. p. 26.

21 Ibid. p. 32.

THE LINE AND THE CIRCLE.

The kabbalistic view as expressed by Gafni focuses on the relationship with the Goddess, the desire to be on the inside and fully experience the erotic, the natural world: “ The erotic is not a mere synonym for the sexual, but an expression of inner passion, which sexuality mirrors but does not begin to exhaust.”²² He notes that in modern Judaism we have forgotten the Goddess and that the “longing for eros is also a longing for ethos and all ethical breakdown emerges from the death of eros.”²³

In Kabbalistic tradition the erotic has 4 faces. The first is to be fully present on the inside to be in the flow of life “like the river that flows from Eden.”²⁴ Shechinah, the Hebrew mystical term for the indwelling feminine presence of God is no less than the erotic merged with the holy. The second face of eros, according to Gafni is the fullness of presence. It is about showing up being fully present in a conversation without necessarily losing yourself in the encounter’s flow. The third face of eros is desire. I yearn therefore I am, this is sacred to the Hebrew mystic unlike his Buddhist or yogic cousins. The fourth phase of eros is the inter connectedness of being. Noting that Religion comes from the Latin root *ligare*, which connotes connection. Thus religion’s (*re-ligare*,) original intent could be seen as a search for “that inner place where we could experience the essential interconnectivity of all reality.”²⁵

²² Gafni, Mordechai (Marc), *On the Erotic and the Ethical in Tikkun*, Vol. 18, #2, March/April, 2003, p. 34. See also Gafni, Marc, *The Mystery of Love*, (New York: Atria Press, 2003).

²³ *Ibid.* p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

“The drive towards union between the female and male is the essential

underlying force that powers the Universe,” in Gafni’s Kabbalistic model. Thus, the sexual union of man and woman models and participates in the more primal energetic union of Shechinah (the Divine Feminine) and Tiferet (the Divine Masculine). This integration is seen as “the essential erotic expression of a healed world.”²⁶ Gafni references the cosmic worldview of the great Hebrew mystic Isaac Luria, to whom this integration is represented by the paradigm of the masculine line and the feminine circle. The circle is defined by relatedness that surrounds and envelopes moving “round and round in a constant flow of re-newal, re-membering and re-cognition.”²⁷ It is natural erotic and intimate. The masculine line is rigid and lacks intimacy. It is “forward moving, goal oriented, directed and focused.” The lines and circles are the DNA of spiritual reality as expressed by Luria, ‘Every world of world and every detail of detail in every world of world is made up of these two principles, circles and lines.’²⁸ By intersecting the circle, the line challenges the circle consciousness. Thus as Gafni sees it, “We need to fully embrace the truth of line, then roundly challenge it with circle consciousness, only to re-embrace the line from a more, Similarly, we need to rejoice in the circle, only to bisect it with the challenge of the line all in order to come back to the circle in a more balanced honest way”²⁹. The line seen as level two rejects the level one circle only to be transcended and absorb into the level three circle, which is an evolved version of level one.

26 Ibid.

27 *ibid.* p. 35.

28 *Ibid.* and Gafni, *The Mystery of Love*, *supra* p. 188.

29 Gafni, *the Mystery of Love*, *supra* pp.189-190.

Line consciousness, always moving forward with higher and lower status along the line, without the balance of circle consciousness, places tremendous focus on hierarchy. Gafni sees a current excess of line energy in the modern world, as evidence by the corporate focus on the bottom line that has the earth on the edge of unprecedented ecological disaster. The circle consciousness of Shechinah is the force that allows the human being to feel at home in the world, to be on the inside of nature. Since God is seen as being the place of the world, circle consciousness is to be in God. Symbolically this is seen as being in the womb of the goddess.

On the other hand the circle cannot stand alone. A circle not integrated with the line lacks integrity and is seen by the mystics as a primary ontological cause of evil, an empty void. The circle is by definition a closed static system. The biblical story can thus be seen as the line of evolution beginning with the story of creation, and seen in the story of the first Hebrew (ivri-the one who crossed over) Abraham, who escaped from the pagan circle consciousness and began the linear journey to God with the thrusting forward of spirit in the world. Thus, the human being participates in the evolution and healing of God by evolution of the human spirit.³⁰

In pagan or first circle consciousness God was equated with nature. In the Biblical myth, God is not merely nature but infinitely beyond, “radically immanent, as well as transcendent.” To the Hebrew mystic, humans by being created in the image of God have the means to reach beyond the natural world to the moral world. This arises because

30 Ibid. pp. 199-200.

God's primary demand on us is ethical behavior. Thus, it is how we treat each other not how we think about each other that matters.³¹

Ethical behavior is seen as requiring us to act against our primal instinctive nature, piercing the level one circlet to become response-able. To the Hebrew mystic "the most important act of love is to develop a training system for goodness." In Judaism, the belief that people were naturally good is not only wrong but destructive. "If people were naturally good, then evil would be the result of some set of external forces." Only the "control and refinement of our internal nature, the integration of the line with the circle, can bring good." Gafni finds support for this in the teachings of the prophet Jeremiah who insisted that nature was not all of God, yet he experienced with his being that God was all of nature. As Gafni states, "The goal of the prophet is integration. The erotic and ethical, the line and circle, must merge." ³²

REFLECTIONS OF DIVINE UNION IN PRACTICE

The basic concept of divine union and the relationship between feminine and masculine energy as even crept into the popular ritual within American Judaism. Today in almost any synagogue of any denomination, on Friday night after the lighting of the Shabbos candles, there is the ritual of Kaballat Shabbat (originated by 16th Century Kaballists led by Isaac Luria) whereby the coming of Shabbat is seen as the Sheckhinah, as the bride of Israel descending on the Jewish people. So at this point after the candles have been lit but before that the Barchu (the prayer that begins all services) comes the

³¹ Ibid. p. 203.

³² Gafni in Tikkun, supra p. 53.

ritual of welcoming the Shabbos bride with the song “L’chah Dodi” or “Come My Beloved” which has the central refrain:

L’chah Dodi Likrat Kallah P’nei Shabbat n’kalah

Come, let us go forth and welcome the Queen, Shabbat

When this is sung in Synagogue on Friday night, the congregation stands and turns to the back, the door through which the Shabbos bride will enter.

In practice Tantra is Kundalini Yoga focused on the Cakra (energy spheres) system of the body, similar in concept but not particularity to the Sefirot. The devotional practice follows chanting hymns from Tantric literature and relates the Siva-Shakti connection as seen in a stanza from a poem by Ramprasad Sen:

Then cast me

A compassionate glance----

I keep bring reborn!

Your feet alone bring nectar.

You are Shakti, cosmic sound,

And Siva the dot in “om”

Full of nectar like the moon.

Who can cleave the One Self? 33

COMPARING THE TWO SYSTEMS

The technologies discussed here share the common goal of Encountering God (Kabbalah)/Spiritual Integration (Tantra) through the divine intercourse of masculine and feminine energy. The first difference that one sees is that in Kabbalah the masculine line is the active partner intersecting the passive circle of natural consciousness that precedes

33 McDermott, Rachel Fell, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

it. In Tantra, the active feminine energy of the creative Shakti is seen as rising into the passive pre-existing masculine consciousness of Shiva. Yet, in both technologies the feminine circle is seen as a closed system. Feuerstein sees analogy in the resulting cosmic

union of polarities to a hologram "that yields one image when viewed from a certain angle and another image when viewed differently."³⁴ Gafni sees it more as continuous action, circle meets line and a new circle emerges, again and again. Regardless, both systems see this unity expressed by human sexuality, which is actually transcendent and asexual.

On the issue of ethics and morality there is an operative difference. To the Yogi ethics is foundational and to some extent detached from the technology itself; to the Kabbalist it is the active action of the evolutionary line of mankind. In either case the problem, as Feuerstein notes, is defining morality from culture to culture.³⁵ As I see it this is the real battleground of humanity. Almost all religions consider their ethics/morality to be a core principle and Universal. To that extent these mystical systems play a significant role by showing the more rationalistic religious groups of the world that a fixed sense of morality rooted in an egocentric nature is self-defeating and leads only to disconnection and conflict. The goal is spiritual integration of Divinity not religious claims of unique and superior knowledge.

The most significant difference between the two systems arises from Tantra's emphasis on the personal nature of the practice that requires a withdrawal from the natural world through meditation and ascetics³⁶ and the Kabbalah's emphasis on the

³⁴ Feuerstein, Tantra, supra p. 80.

³⁵ Feuerstein, Yoga Morality, supra p.17.

³⁶ Ibid. P.1.

active role of desire to engage the natural world consciousness; both toward the goal of divine integration. The yogic path in its ultimate manifestation requires a level of detachment that essentially requires a monkish lifestyle that rejects engagement in our conflicted world for success. I say to the yogis to engage is to be human. The danger in the yogic path comes from being so focused on the higher realms that one lives without the grounding effect of ego to earth and all of humanity. To the Jew, I say the danger is in the drama that occurs from becoming overly ego involved, which is a prime cause of suffering. Yoga teaches the value of detaching from the creation of drama for sake of ego to allow equanimity when we engage our inherently dramatic world.

A CAVEAT AND CAUTIONARY TALE

A fundamental element in the Kabbalistic concept of the divine direction of the worlds is “the continual tension that exists in the life of the Godhead, in the activity of the lower realms, and in the way in which the world is control. The whole of existence is subject to the extreme tension of direct opposites: the leniency of love or mercy and the harshness of judgment, virtues and vices, good and evil, God and ‘the other side.’ “37 As such mankind is both individually and collectively responsible for maintaining the balance between Love and Judgment which is Mercy. “ Herein lies the tremendous responsibility of mankind, for it is man that has the wherewithal to harmonize the opposing powers and to affect a balance between them. “38

37 Tishby, Isiah, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, Vol. 1 (Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989, 1991, 2002.) 426,
38 Ibid. 428.

Thus I must issue a caveat regarding this article where knowledge and actions have collided. One of the authors I engaged in this comparison, Mordechai aka Marc Gafni, is a somewhat controversial figure in Jewish academic and religious circles. Gafni was educated in a modern Orthodox Judaism in New York yeshivas and later ordained as a modern Orthodox rabbi in Israel by Rabbi Shlomo Rivkin.I. Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi, considered the father of the Jewish renewal movement, also at one time granted him ordination. He later became known as a charismatic rabbi and leader of a community known as the Bayit Chadash spiritual center in Jaffa.

In 2004, Gafni was accused of sex with a minor, which allegedly occurred in the early 1980s when he was living in Queens New York, married to his first wife, and leader of a group known as the Jewish Public School Youth (JPSY). The girl who came forward in 2004 was 13 at the time of the incident; Gafni was 19. Gafni has been quoted in response to the allegations, "I was a stupid kid and we were in love. She was 14 going on 35, and I never forced her."³⁹ He was also accused by another JPSY student who was 16 when Gafni, then 25, allegedly sexually abused her twice. In 2006, women members of Bayit Chadash accused Gafni of sexual impropriety and harassment. Gafni denies these allegations, which were reported to the police. When the other hand, Gafni quickly left Israel. On hearing that Rabbi Rifkin was considering revoking his S'micha (the Jewish term for ordination); Gafni returned it by letter and left the rabbinate, reappearing in Utah as a self described " cutting edge spiritual teacher, television personality, mediator,

³⁹ Rosenblatt, Gary, The Jewish Week, September 24, 2004.

corporate consultant, iconoclast, and gentle provocateur.”⁴⁰ Rabbi Schacter Shalomi with drew his S’micha stating:

What I can say at this time is that I’m in mourning, in some form of Shiv’ah, I’m grieving like one bereaved for an ideal that I held in my mind of a genius, though erratic, but ultimately at the service of the values he claimed for himself. This image has been shattered.⁴¹

In personal conversations with various Jewish academics and religious figures and when reviewing what is an ongoing conversation on the Internet, it appears that there are differing views regarding Gafni. Some still see his scholarship as worthy yet question his personal ethics. Others basically have shunned Gafni and with it dismissed his academic works and is on scholarly, although this appears more to be based on his morally questionable conduct than his academic worthiness.

In these actions, it appears that Marc Gafni has failed to act in accordance with his own teachings with respect to the relationship of divine union and the role of ethics/morality. He has brought the energies of judgment upon himself and to a great extent lost the love of the Jewish community. It is yet to be seen whether he will be able to embrace the energies of love and find mercy from the community that has rejected him.

PERSONAL CONCLUSION

Reflecting on my own life in light of these two at times confluent and at times opposing systems, I realize that I first learned detachment in a very instinctive way at the age of nine. I grew up in a in the somewhat enclosed dramatic environment, peopled by an

⁴⁰ marcgafni.com/?page_id=3&lan=english

⁴¹ Jewishsurvivorsblogspot/2006/05/Zalman-schacter-shlomi-statement-on.html posted on May 27, 2006.

erratic mother and put upon father; the late in life parents of a bright and somewhat hyperactive child in a one-bedroom apartment. It was at nine that I first realized that whether my mom praised me or cursed me had nothing to do with my behavior and everything to do with her mood. And with that realization I began to detach emotionally from my mother's actions and words, without detaching from her being my mother or my inherent love for my mother. This I knew was necessary for my very survival. Thankfully my father and my nature kept me occupied in the real world, or the shared reality as I like to call it, and eventually I detached at the age of 17 from the insular life of Mt. Vernon, NY and summers in the cheap part of the Catskills to the University of Southern California in what was then seen as the land of milk and honey, Los Angeles.

For me this level of detachment came at the cost of any true adult relationship with my father, who let me go so far away and protected me from having to deal with a different level of detachment; that being my mother's increasing detachment from the shared reality. And that is what I am talking about above when I caution against excessive detachment because my own experience has been that so many seekers, particularly those attracted to Indic and Eastern paths, are overly focused on detaching from the shared reality that they attempt to live with their feet off the ground until it all crashes down.

I've also come to realize just now that the desire to engage in the world that is so central to the theme of the circle and the arrow. It is what led me to be matriculating at Loyola Marymount University as a graduate student in comparative theology. A little background to explain; I retired from the practice of law in 1998 due to long term effects

of a “how did you survive that” auto pedestrian accident. Being financially prepared though not wealthy, I focused inward having already returned to the practice of yoga, I began to study yoga from a philosophical viewpoint at LMU and while I learned about detachment I slowly detached from active engagement in the outside world. Eventually, something stirred in me and I know that it's that Jewish part of me that demands I be engaged in the outer world when I could have comfortably become a beach bum. I suspect also that some internal moral compass must have been involved in my choosing this graduate program as one of my paths of engagement. So that's how this Jew ended up at a Jesuit University studying theology.

I also reflected on my own attachment to my Jewish identity unlike many I know who have chosen yogic paths, Buddhist paths and various other new age journeys, no longer identifying as a Jew. Yogic teachings would probably encourage detaching from that identity other than as necessary to operate in the shared reality. I've come to realize not only do I not want to do that but that I don't think it's possible. I belong to an ethno religion; being Jewish is in my genes and my Levis, too.

On the other hand, I for one prefer to stay out of the drama that seems to pervade the Jewish world as much as it is reasonably possible. It is probably a certain ability to apply detachment that keeps me sane while still enjoying the company of my friends and family.