

Sober Or Drunk, We See Double!

Dr. Mitra Makbuleh

One night, two drunks were arguing about how many moons they saw in the sky. One claimed that there was only one moon, while the other insisted that there were two. They decided to ask a passerby, who happened to be even more intoxicated than the two of them.

“Pray tell us,” they asked the stranger, “are there one or two moons in the sky tonight?”

“I can’t help you,” the third drunk mumbled in between hiccups. “I don’t live in this neighborhood.”

This story may sound silly, but it teaches us an important lesson: sober or drunk, it seems we tend to view life in dualistic terms. We perceive and experience the world in terms of pleasure and pain, right and left, male and female, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, young and old, mine and yours, day and night, light and dark, us and them, black and white, mind and body. This yin and yang experience of reality is made more tangible in the following illustration by Arthur D’Adamo:

Joe is driving down a street, late for work, feeling tired and tense. A cheerful song comes on the radio and Joe sings along, more relaxed now. Parking his car, Joe notices the day is cold; shivering, he walks quickly toward the building. The lobby is quite warm; the receptionist smiles pleasantly. Joe returns the smile, but then remembers someone he forgot to call yesterday and regrets it. Joe enters his office, takes off his coat, and sits behind the desk. Does he have any appointments today? He’s uncertain. He sighs. Another day has begun. The illustration contains many pairs of opposites, many yang-yin pairs, such as relaxed-tense, cheerful-sad, warm-cold, happy-regretful, pleasant-unpleasant, energetic-tired, and certain-uncertain. From an introduction to the I Ching: “The list of contraries is inexhaustible.”ⁱ

But is the world really divided in groups of two or are we merely imagining things? As I searched for an answer to this question, I discovered that mystics of various traditions say that, paradoxically, reality is both united and divided at the same time. Furthermore, I found that empirical observations in various branches of science seem to back the mystics on this subject.ⁱⁱ It is said of the quantum physicist Niels Bohr that:

Trying to understand such mysteries as an electron’s ability to be at once a wave and a particle, Bohm began talking to spiritual masters—Krishnamurti, the Dalai Lama. After 20 years he came up with a concept that linked theorems like the Schrodinger equation to the insights of the mystics.ⁱⁱⁱ

The creative co-operation of binary opposites has been documented everywhere in the natural universe. The entire field of computer technology is based on the binary system. In biology, there are the two strands of DNA, the right and the left hemispheres of the brain, acid and alkaline effects, estrogen and testosterone, and sympathetic and parasympathetic operations in our nervous system. Beyond biology, there are positive

and negative charges in electromagnetic phenomena, protons and electrons in atomic structure, and the dual wave and particle behavior of photons in quantum physics.

The news from the social science front seems to be encouraging as well. There is supply and demand in economics, freedom and responsibility in law, right and left parties in politics, nature and nurture in human development, and so forth. To take just the latter example, it is now becoming increasingly clear that all human personality traits and behavioral patterns such as genius, schizophrenia, and alcoholism ensue from the combination or union of both *nature* (genetic factors) and *nurture* (environmental/social influences). Also, in philosophy and political science, we find the likes of Hegel and Carl Marx who built their entire system of thought on binary opposition.

The concept of the re-union of binary opposites also lies at the foundation of myth, religion, and modern depth psychology. The word “religion,” for example, has been said to originate from the Latin *re* “back” and *ligo* “to bind” or from *re-ligare* “to re-unite, to re-join.” The essential task of religion is the binding back, the relating, and the rejoining of opposites in balance and harmony. The Hebrew word *Mitzvah*, as in *Bar-Mitzvah*, has a similar meaning and comes from the root *tz.v.t.* rendered as “to bring together.” When we perform a *Mitzvah* or a “commanded good deed,” we join together spirit and matter, the divine and the mundane, God and his creation.

On the psychological front, Freudian analysis revolves around the idea of the opposition between the Id and the Superego.^{iv} But it was Freud’s disciple, Carl Jung, who gave the issue of binary opposites his most serious consideration. He boldly asserted that:

A psychological theory, if it is to be more than a technical makeshift, must base itself on the principle of opposition; for without this it could only re-establish a neurotically unbalanced psyche. There is no balance, no system of self-regulation, without opposition.^v

In short, evidence from the natural sciences, the social sciences, religion, philosophy and psychology all seem to vindicate the Kabbalistic insistence on the significance of binary opposites and their creative re-union as the basis of all creation.

ⁱ D’Adamo, 1995, Ch.7, p. 12.

ⁱⁱ See for example, Carl Jung, *Collected Works*, 1958; Levi-Strauss, 1962; Leach, 1967, and *Leach*, 1976; and Needham, 1973.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Life Magazine**, July 1997, p. 49

^{iv} Freud maintained that this monumental conflict begins with our expulsion from the womb. ~~He contended that~~ Mysticism was based on the unconscious human wish to go back to the idyllic state of the mother’s womb. As with all other great Freudian notions, this is only partially true. It is certainly accurate that ~~the~~ mystic’s work toward reunion with their divine source, the “Divine Womb,” if you will. However, what Freud failed to recognize is that this search is conscious, not unconscious. As one mystic (I believe it was T. S. Eliot) put it, the objective is “To go home again and to recognize it for the first time.”

^v Jung, 1972, p. 61.