

The Soul Mind and the Ego Mind

A COMPARATIVE REFLECTION



“The Heartmind is what we are beneath the movement of thought and reaction.”



Hosshin

HEARTMIND

For those who have ever wondered which voice, within, was speaking.



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PART ONE

The Soul Mind and the Ego Mind

There are two minds at work in us. The soul mind, which we can also call the Heartmind, is what remains constant beneath all conditions. It arises as love and as wise action. It does not change with circumstance because it does not depend on circumstance.

The ego mind is different. It is based in the brain, and it is short lived and changeable. It reacts. What arises in it depends entirely on what has already been placed there: past experience, conditioning, whatever has been addressed to it before. Some of its function is essential. It maintains the physical body and manages the basic requirements of survival. Beyond that existential function, the ego mind operates through personality: preference, prejudice, and attachment to the world.

We can tell which mind is speaking by watching what arises. Reaction, preference, and grasping point to the ego. Love and wise action point to the soul.



PART TWO

The Shared Structure, in Brief

Every tradition considered here draws this same line, though each gives it a different name. On one side sits a mind built from conditioning: reactive, self interested, tied to the body and its history. On the other sits something prior to conditioning: awareness, consciousness, or spirit, already whole, not built up from experience and not destroyed by its passing.

The traditions differ on vocabulary and on how completely the first must be set aside, but they agree that a person's task is to stop mistaking the conditioned mind for the whole of who they are.



PART THREE

Dzogchen

Dzogchen names the two minds sem and rigpa. Sem is ordinary discursive thought: it arises in response to conditions, grasps at what it wants, and pushes away what it does not want. It always needs an object to move toward or against.

Rigpa is pure awareness itself. It is not produced by conditions, so it is not undone when conditions change. Practice in Dzogchen is not a matter of improving sem. It is a matter of recognizing rigpa, which was never actually obscured, only overlooked.



PART FOUR

Kashmir Shaivism

Kashmir Shaivism speaks of citta and cit. Citta is the individual mind, contracted and shaped by vasanas, the habitual tendencies laid down by past experience. This is where preference and prejudice come from.

Cit is consciousness itself, unbound, and Kashmir Shaivism holds that cit is never actually separate from the divine. The sense of being a separate small self is a contraction within something that was whole all along. The work is recognizing that contraction for what it is.



PART FIVE

Sufism

Sufism gives us the nafs and the qalb. The nafs, particularly in its lower form, the commanding self, is driven by desire and self interest. Sufi teaching does not simply reject the nafs. It maps its refinement through stages, since the nafs must be worked with, not merely discarded.

The qalb, the heart, is where true knowing arises, once the nafs has quieted enough to let it be heard. Sufism places spiritual perception specifically in the heart, not in some general expanded awareness.



PART SIX

Meister Eckhart

Eckhart calls the constant part of the soul the little spark, the *scintilla animae*. He holds this spark as uncreated, untouched by time, and always united with God, whether or not the person is aware of it.

Against this he sets the will and the faculties, which become bound up in images, attachment, and self will. His path, *Gelassenheit*, releasement, is the letting go of self willing, so that the spark, which needed no improvement, can simply be recognized as what it is.



PART SEVEN

The Shared Summation

Set side by side, the pattern holds across all four. The ego mind, whether called sem, citta, nafs, or the bound will, is conditioned, reactive, and built from personal history. The soul mind, whether called rigpa, cit, qalb, or the little spark, is prior to conditioning, constant, and already whole.

Spiritual life in each tradition is the work of shifting identification from the first to the second.



PART EIGHT

The Critical Difference

There is a real difference underneath this agreement, and it should not be smoothed over. Sufism and Kashmir Shaivism treat the ego mind and the body as usable. The nafs can be refined rather than abolished. The body, in Kashmir Shaivism, is a vehicle for cit, not an obstacle to it.

Dzogchen and Eckhart go further. For them the ego mind, sem or the bound will, has no ultimate reality at all. It is only apparent, a movement within awareness rather than a thing to be reformed.

This is not a minor point of wording. It changes what practice is for. In the first pair, practice refines the ego mind toward the soul mind. In the second pair, practice sees through the ego mind entirely.



PART NINE

The Heartmind as Ground

Despite this difference, every tradition here points to the same conclusion. The Heartmind, however it is named, is the fundamental reality. It is not one part of us among others. It is what we are beneath the movement of thought and reaction.

This is why spiritual practice exists at all: not to improve the ego mind, and not even always to defeat it, but to keep awareness returning to what was never actually lost.

The teachings differ in method because people and traditions differ. But they hold this one aim in common, and it is why they can support each other rather than compete: to bring a person back, again and again, to the Heartmind as the true ground of a life.



*With love,
Hosshin*

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