Psychology East and West: An Interview with Eve Jackson

Rosamund Oliver

How did you first meet Buddhism?

During 1963, my first year at university, while studying Modern Languages, I was very much aware of looking for something. I had a friend who was Buddhist and a Chinese scholar. Through him I met Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Akong Rinpoche who had both arrived in Oxford from India. That same year I came into contact also with the ideas of Jung. It was a wonderful experience for me. I was like a starving person arriving at a feast and having an opportunity to explore ideas and find kindred spirits.

It was very easy, at that time, to get grants and go on being a student forever. I wanted to be an academic, so I went on to

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write a thesis. Then I had a crisis, when everything seemed to come crashing down, and my academic interests dried up. Everything that I had been working for up to that point somehow vanished. I had to move out of my digs. My parental home was being sold off. My mother had died. My father was remarrying. I had nowhere to go. So I dumped most of my belongings in Oxfam. I just thought, 'Well, I'll go to Scotland. I've never been there'. On the way I thought — 'I'll go and see this Tibetan place' — where Akong Rinpoche was. I arrived at Samye-Ling and stayed there, on and off, for the next 18 months.

I was in a state of breakdown, and when I arrived at Samye-Ling, I found a protected space. At that time there were different practices each day — Tara, Chenresig and two hours of silent practice. Sometimes Akong Rinpoche gave individual teachings. After a time I decided I wanted to take Refuge [where one formally becomes a Buddhist]. An English woman who was a nun arrived and she was like a whirlwind. She'd come from the Karmarpa [at that time the principal lineage holder of the Kagyupa, one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism] and there was this tremendous enthusiasm. So with her coming I took Refuge.

Looking back, I can certainly see that it was suffering that brought me to that point. However I can also see that when we get into a lot of emotional turmoil and suffering we want to fly upward, to rise above suffering and go where everything's blissful. I think that I was hiding behind the *dharma* as a protection. I threw myself into it in a way that was blocking a great deal out. Now I see quite a lot of phoniness in where I was. I had the answer for everything. I had got myself an identity and had a sense of purpose of being a religious person. For a while, I was going to be a nun.

We sit down to practise because we want to get peaceful and then all the shit comes up. So it was quite a difficult time for me. I was in a fairly disturbed state of mind and I was forced into looking into aspects of myself that I didn't like. From a Jungian perspective, during that time I was being pushed into contact with my shadow, the part of myself that may be visible to other people, but which isn't part of my conscious construction of myself. If we are trying to be a good and nice person, we tend to put a lot of pretty dreadful stuff into the shadow; although there could also be some good things there. I experienced this as 'things' getting in the way of my practice. I didn't see that that *was* the practice. It took me a long time to realise that. Of course, there were also wonderful moments when it all subsided. I remember Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche said, 'Better never to have started, but having started, better to continue'. You go through the phase where it just seems that you've made the wrong decision. You have to work through that.

This is very like what happens when clients come to psychotherapy and they want to feel better. After a while they find they're feeling worse and they think it's the wrong kind of therapy. What actually happens is that they're becoming more conscious of what's going on inside them and it's not very nice. Ignorance is bliss.

Can you say more about your own background?

My background is Protestant and in part non-conformist with its traditional suspicion of ritual, churches and priests. I grew up in Wales. My great, great grandfather

was a Baptist minister who broke the ice on the River Taff in winter in order to baptise people; a powerful initiation of being pushed through broken ice into the freezing river. But it was outside the Church in the river, it wasn't in a font or inside a cathedral.

My Protestant background connects me very strongly with the Buddhist belief in finding out for yourself. It is a tradition of communicating directly with God rather than going through intermediaries. For me Buddhism is knowing through our own experience rather than taking it on authority; meditation is a process of enquiry. Jung also came out of a Protestant background, his father was a pastor in Switzerland. In Jungian psychology there is a tradition of not taking someone else's word for it, but finding out for yourself.

At Samye-Ling I loved the ritual but I also longed for the space of being, for simple meditation and enjoyed the practice of Tonglen [a compassion practice of giving and receiving]. What had appealed to me in Buddhism was the individual practice, that inner enquiry. The more churchly it got, the more uncomfortable I felt. Part of my resistance boils down to my Protestant background and also the negative impressions I had formed of organised religion. I had run up against 'the Church', and that was partly what I was in flight from. So I went through that whole process, but there was something in me that did it quite grudgingly. I can look back and feel regretful that I didn't get more out of it. I'm not saying that we can dispense with ritual, or even that we should, but it brought up all sorts of resistance in me. I certainly don't rule out the possibility that I will find my way back into some of those practices at some point.

How did you start Jungian analysis?

After being at Samye-Ling, I took up studying astrology which I saw as a kind of psychology, but as soon as I got my diploma I knew it wasn't enough. I started doing various counselling courses and it became necessary to be in psychotherapy. So I went into Jungian analysis. As time went by I felt, through my own experience of analysis, that that was the way I wanted to work. I was originally attracted to the transformative aspects of Tibetan practices and now I feel I am working with those in a different way. The Jungian way is about transforming psychic energy. Images are always moving; a fluidity where forms give way to other forms.

How do you see psychotherapy and Buddhism informing each other?

We can put so very much on to our teachers and demand of them an unreal perfection. Actually someone with immense understanding and insight doesn't have to be perfect in that sense. Then as time goes by the situation forces us to withdraw some of that projection. If we have a great investment in the projection, then any slight disturbance in our image makes us go to another view — as far as we are concerned the teacher has fallen into the shadow. When we find the teacher is not absolutely wonderful, we think, 'Something wrong here, — wrong teacher, — wrong tradition' and we go off and find another one.

Psychotherapy with its work on transference has a contribution to make through being aware of this. One of the things that comes up working with clients is that they are driven so much by a desire to be perfect and to get it all right. So there

is a divide, a split between what is perfect and what is completely unacceptable, the shadow. Striving for perfection tends to create a lot of shadow. In working with a psychotherapist a client is encouraged to take back any projections of perfection and shadow and see them as ultimately coming from within.

It is recognised that a client may project the self on to the analyst. (Here 'self' is not 'ego self'; it could perhaps be translated as 'Buddha nature'.) It can be valuable therapeutically to have someone to carry this positive projection, but if that is where it stays, then something hasn't been worked through properly. Sometimes a client will have dreams about his or her analyst. Fortunately they don't always have wonderful dreams. It is natural to have clients thinking their analyst is wonderful, but it is also a terrible trap, because for their own self they need to discover that the analyst is not so wonderful.

When I worked as an astrologer someone had an image of me as a very spiritual person. She cancelled the workshop for which she had paid a deposit and the question came up of her getting the deposit back. Then just like that, from being a wonderful spiritual person I became this dark, grasping, devilish person who was trying to take her money away from her. No reasonable discussion of this could take place. So the more you idealise the teacher, or the analyst, the more you are exposing them to the negative projection as well, eventually.

Jung was a profoundly religious man. His psychology made room for the spiritual by working with the psyche, within the realm of images that come up. It allowed the spiritual dimension to be of any kind, and he encouraged people to stay with whatever religion they had. He was not saying that psychotherapy was a substitute for religion. But where a religion fails (which is part of the predicament of many an ordinary Western human being), where we cannot find a way in religion to sort out our psychological problems, then at least we can work within Jungian analysis with whatever arises, with the images.

How do you work with images?

There is a distinction between visualisation [as used in Tibetan Buddhism] and imagination. In visualisation one imagines very precisely described figures. These we would call archetypal figures, which have a certain resonance, and they are very real, but they are given. Whereas the Jungian way of working with imagination is to allow the energies to arise as images and then simply to engage with them. We would take those images and listen to them and explore them. We work with dreams or 'active imagination' — a dreaming in the waking state with spontaneous images arising. Sometimes catching the image can tell you a lot about the state you are in. This is also different from Buddhist meditation practice or *shyné*, where images arise and then just dissolve. You can of course move from one into the other, from the imaging mode into the meditation mode.

The Buddhist view, which is very beautiful, is that life is a dream which we just see through and it is empty. From the Jungian point of view a dream is life and is just as real as walking down the street. So we take images seriously and explore them, staying with the painful ones, rather than trying to dissolve them or be somewhere else. For me, of course, ultimately all of those images and waking life too are transparent. I don't know to what extent this

Buddhist view affects my way of working as an analyst but it is a perspective that is there.

You have been active in bringing together dialogue between East and West; could you say more about this?

I am in favour of dialogue to bring together Eastern and Western viewpoints. Making connections between different traditions seems to me to be very valuable. Jung was very impressed by his visit to India. He talked to Japanese and Tibetan Buddhist teachers. He was however against Westerners doing Buddhist practices. But we have to remember that this was just at the beginning of the meeting between East and West. He thought that even if Oriental systems are more advanced and subtle, we cannot escape from our own Western psyche by just grafting on to it another system. And I think he has a point.

But at the same time I think personally, belonging to a later generation, that the diaspora of the Tibetans since Tibet was invaded by the Chinese has been historically very important. We cannot see this yet as we are still in the middle of it, but I'm sure later that it will be seen to be bringing something here that was desperately needed. I feel Buddhism does very much meet up with the seeking of people in the West for understanding, much of which has been going on under the umbrella of the psychotherapy movement and within New Age exploration.

We have to ask ourselves why there has been a spiritual vacuum in the West. What I found in Buddhism was a breadth, a universality that goes beyond the very anthropocentric traditions of the West. The spirit of Buddhism is one of respecting other people's practice. The West has accentuated and developed in an arrogant way the rather narrow-minded belief that we can make things happen the way we want them to. Buddhism has never had that kind of illusion. It is offering something beyond this materialistic view. For example, it has to offer psychology a tradition of looking at the human mind going beyond the ego. This connects it specifically to Jungian psychotherapy, which is not an ego psychotherapy.

'Ego' is a term sometimes used differently in psychotherapy and Buddhism; could you explain a bit more what you mean here?

The word 'ego' creates conflict and misunderstanding. Buddhist practice is not about getting rid of ego, but rather about transcending it, or getting rid of one's attachment to it. From the Jungian view we need to develop ego, in the sense of a good stable centre of consciousness; that is, the capacity not to be constantly swept away by anger or envy or whatever happens to be rising. We have a central place we can come back to. Buddhist meditation very much develops that. So the practice of meditation can be about developing a good ego and transcending it at the same time.

But one difference is, that according to Jung, the task of the first half of life is that we develop a strong ego. The task of the second half of life is the 'relativisation' of that ego. By this Jung meant that we realise that the particular perspective we each hold is only a fragment of the whole range of psychic possibilities. One of the paradoxes I find when working is how to accept and stand for my way of seeing things and my beliefs, but at the same time to recognise that this is just my perspective, at this particular time.

In Jung's psychology there is 'individuation'. This involves the recognition that every living thing is unique and has its own particular journey. Individuation is the conscious acceptance and realisation of that uniqueness, and taking responsibility for becoming who we are and all the limitations that come with it. If you start out with a cherry stone, you will not get an apple tree. As long as we are trying to be someone else or trying to get rid of all the bits we don't like, we are not going to be a complete person or make the contribution that only we can make.

People sometimes confuse individuation with individualism in a negative sense, just living for oneself and being selfish, but it is not that at all. On the contrary it involves taking responsibility for our decisions and not letting someone else take them for us; taking what would otherwise be a burden off other people, and making fewer demands. However by going through this introverted process of analysis we are drawing energy inward. It is up to a point a self-centred kind of process and its only justification is if we give back to the world we live in what we have taken out in some way. In this way it connects to the Bodhisattva ideal.

Western society has been very extroverted, conquering the world out there and manipulating things out there, whereas Buddhism and analysis have been more introverted. We have definitely been looking outside in the West for a long time and perhaps it is time we turned a bit more inward.