

[Did Carl Jung Bring Karma and Rebirth into Western Psychology?](#)

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Next to Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung has probably had more impact on human understanding of the mind than any other modern Westerner, and his effect on religious studies exceeds Freud's. Jung was the first in his field to pay serious attention to the East, drawing deeply from theories of karma and reincarnation for the development of his influential works on psychiatry and religion. Just how deeply Jung drew has been a hidden subject, until recently.

Dr. Harold G. Coward, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary in Canada, author of "Jung and Eastern Thought" (SUNY, 1985), reveals just how profoundly Jung (1875-1961) leaned on Eastern thought. Dr. Coward told Hinduism Today that Jung's interest began soon after he and Freud parted.

The trauma almost caused Jung a breakdown, and he retreated to a Zurich beach "to explore his psyche, to rescue himself." He examined Christian gnosticism, yet could not accept the Western concepts of God and evil. "It was Eastern thought," asserts Dr. Coward, "that provided the parallels of his personal experience and discoveries, leading to a long period of fascination with the East that lasted from about 1915 to 1940."

Carl Jung's systematizer, Jacobi, almost completely ignored or concealed his debt to Indian concepts, perhaps fearing Eastern references would erode scientific respectability. It was left to Dr. Coward to bring forth the facts. He writes: "Jung himself clearly credits karma theory with the filling in of his notion of archetypes..." Jung lectured in the 1930's on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, on kundalini yoga and the Tibetan Book of the Dead. "Concerning Rebirth" was his 1940 lecture on the Buddha's experience of a long sequence of rebirths.

As the years passed, Jung accepted more and more the traditional Eastern view that something survives death and is reborn. His own dreams became his best personal assurance of rebirth. Still, he never gave up the Western notion of a finite, limited ego. As Dr. Coward notes, "To Jung, the Indian understanding seemed a great advance on the common Western view that a person's character is the particular admixture of blessings or curses which fate or the gods bestowed on the child at birth."

Another school of psychology is evolving in the '80s - Transpersonal Psychology. Its followers hold that each early human society had its own "psychological expertise" embedded in scriptures and meditative and devotional practices. They view cultures such as the Indian Hindu one as "not only religious experiences, but possessors of a coherent system of concepts and practices which is at least potentially comparable to a Western, modern psychological theory." Himalayan Academy, Hinduism Today's publisher, took 25 people to Ascona, Switzerland for three summers in the late '60's. There, at Casa Eranos, we researched with Jung's unpublished insights into kundalini yoga and man's being.

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