

DIMENSIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Dora Van Gelder Kunz

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The life of even the most ordinary person, which may seem very uneventful, is actually full of experiences on many levels. While we are focused on the daily business of living, we are at the same time involved in a whole complex of interactions between physical processes, feelings and thoughts. Though we may not pay much attention to these interactions, they constantly influence our behaviour, as well as our sense of well-being.

What I try to do in this book is share with you something of my perception and appreciation of the hidden dimensions of consciousness within us, and in so doing, make you more aware of these aspects of your own life, and of your ability to effect conscious changes in yourself.

My focus is principally upon our feelings, for the aura -the luminous cloud of colour surrounding each of us— is the personal emotional field. But our feelings are part of the larger whole we call a human being, and therefore they are inseparable from everything else that goes on within us. The interactions between mind, emotions and physical energies are so rapid and so constant that they blur these differentiations, and so we usually only notice them when they break down. Therefore, in order to understand the nature of the emotions and the role they play, we have to see them from the perspective of the whole person—and this includes not only the body, mind and feelings, but also still higher dimensions of consciousness.

Higher Dimensions of Consciousness

Theosophical, Indian and other literature has identified the nature of these higher states, and given them various names. While I always recommend that people study this literature for themselves and make their own judgments, for present purposes I will simply offer my own descriptions and use my own terms, which I hope to make as simple and clear as possible.

For many reasons, I prefer to think of the different states of consciousness not as “planes,” as they have been called in earlier descriptions, but as dimensions, or fields. Both these words suggest the possibility of movement within an open, dynamic space, and also of an almost infinite expansion into higher reaches of consciousness. Both imply the existence of a greater whole of which the various dimensions or fields are aspects, and within which they constantly interact. In speaking about the human energy fields, I always try to emphasize that everything including ourselves—exists in terms of this greater whole, which is the universe itself. All the dimensions of consciousness are present everywhere, in everything, even if only in a rudimentary state.

Consciousness

Consciousness takes many forms, and its ranges extend far beyond what we ordinarily think of as the conscious mind. The various states go all the way from primitive body awareness at one extreme to the highest reaches of spiritual insight at the other. Thus they form a hierarchical system, in that the energies associated with the various states of consciousness become increasingly refined as they move into the higher dimensions. But this does not mean that any one of these states is negligible, or less important than the rest. If we try to see all of the dimensions in terms of the whole of which they are a part, we see that each one has a unique part to play within the total spectrum of consciousness.

Lama Govinda has explained this very well: “The consciousness of a higher dimension consists in the coordinated and simultaneous perception of several systems of relationship or directions of movement in a wider, more comprehensive unity, without destroying the individual characteristics of the integrated lower dimensions. The reality of a lower dimension is therefore not annihilated by a higher one, but only . . . put into another perspective of values.” (Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, E. P. Dutton, N.Y. 1960, p.218.)

In the same sense, when I speak of “higher dimensions” or “higher levels” I am not trying to make value judgments, but merely describing the “systems of relationship” which Lama mentions above. Indeed, value judgments are inappropriate when we are trying to understand the nature of the different dimensions of consciousness. It is more to the point to study their functions and characteristics, and become aware of their

special contributions - as well as their limitations - in terms of that far greater reality which is the whole of human nature.

Looked at in this way, states of consciousness are actual conditions which are *different* from one another but not separate - either from each other or from the body itself. The subtle fields co-exist within the same space and influence each other. Their distinctiveness lies in the fact that each has its own unique type of energy and rate of vibration. This makes it possible for the various fields to exert their special effects and at the same time interpenetrate and interact with the other fields without interference.

It is difficult to find an exact analogy to this phenomenon in terms of ordinary experience. Perhaps the whole effect is achieved in somewhat the same way that the unique sound of a musical chord is created by combining different tones, each of which can be distinguished by a trained ear. The experience of listening to music is the best analogy I can think of, because the differences between the subtle fields are essentially *harmonic* in nature. Each dimension of consciousness has its range of frequencies, and plays a particular part in the total orchestration of a human being.

Radiant Energies

Not being a scientist, I can only suggest how it may be possible to perceive the subtle fields. We know that sound and light are forms of radiant energy which have different wavelengths, and that many phenomena beyond our sense perception, such as ultraviolet light, become accessible to us only when we have the instruments to detect them. To me, the higher dimensions are forms of radiant energy related to light. Just as sunlight can be broken up into the spectrum we see as a rainbow, so these higher energies reveal themselves through their characteristic colours. It is these that I perceive. Therefore, clairvoyance may be an instrument which makes some otherwise invisible wavelengths and frequencies come within the range of perception.

When questions about clairvoyance arise, one of the greatest stumbling blocks for most people lies in the fact that the ability to see subtler dimensions seems to be limited to a few people. While I am unable to account for this, I want to point out that until modern times it was impossible to see viruses, or distinguish ultrasonic waves, or examine genetic material. All these things existed before there were instruments which made it possible to observe them, and it may well be that in the future the mechanism of clairvoyance will be investigated and understood. As of now, I can only say that I achieve my clairvoyance by a shift of visual focus. It is under my control, and I use it only when I choose to do so. I use the word “visual” to describe the process because it is a kind of seeing, but the actual eyes are not involved. It is more a focusing of attention. I use my clairvoyance primarily in my work, and my ordinary vision is just like that of anybody else.

To me, vitality, feeling and thinking are forms of energy. Although most of us do not think of them in this way, a number of scientists whom I have consulted say it is legitimate to use the word “energy” in connection with the emotions, since energy means “the capacity of acting or producing an effect.” We accept physical fields like gravitation as “real,” because although we never see them we experience their effects directly. At the moment, due to our lack of more information, the nature of the subtle fields can only be assumed from the ways in which they affect us. I always try to emphasize that feelings are not just subjective psychological states; they have real physical consequences, and influence our health in many ways. I speak from personal experience, for this is an area in which I have been observing and working all my life.

The Spectrum Of Consciousness

Regarded as energies, feelings and thoughts are related to one another in a way that is analogous to the relationship between sound and light. At one end of the spectrum of consciousness lies the field most closely related to the physical body. It is known as the etheric, and its characteristic form of energy is what is called prana in Indian thought—that is, life energy or vitality. All living things are nourished and sustained by this energy. In diagnosing illness, the colour and radiance of an individual’s pranic flow are important indicators to me of the state of health. The reason why the emotions have such an impact upon our health is because the etheric is very closely linked with the emotional field; there is a constant interplay between the two types of energy.

Incidentally, this is the most difficult field to study clairvoyantly, because it is the most complex. The etheric is really the prototype of the physical body, and it replicates the complexities of our bodily processes. In looking for traces of disease, therefore, one must take note of variations in colour, texture, degree and type of motion, and many other factors within the etheric. In the practice of healing techniques such as Therapeutic Touch, we work primarily to discover and remove impediments in the flow of etheric energy, while always thinking of the person as a whole. A discussion of the etheric and its functions is not appropriate here, but

those readers who would like a fuller description might be interested in a book which I wrote with Dr. Shafica Karagulla, called *The Chakras and the Human Energy Fields*. (*Shafica Karagulla and Dora Kunz, Theosophical Publishing House, The Chakras and the Human Energy Fields, Wheaton, Ill. 1989.*)

Next in order of subtlety of material and speed of motion comes the astral or emotional field, whose characteristic form of energy is feeling, followed by the mental, whose energy is thought or thinking. Beyond lie the intuitional field and still subtler levels. These dimensions are increasingly finer in texture, lighter, faster moving, and have higher rates of vibration. They are more powerful, because they are able to transform coarser energies into finer. They are more open to spiritual influences, and they are also more enduring, since they are less affected by the storms and stresses of physical life.

As I mentioned, our tendency is to think of things that are “higher” as being “better,” but this is not necessarily the case with the relationship between mind and feeling. On the level of daily activity, these two faculties ordinarily work closely together. As soon as we feel something we rationalize that feeling, and place it in the context of our experience, so that our emotions and thoughts are constantly interacting.

The Mind

The mind can influence the emotions very powerfully, because it is that part of us which can distance itself from our feelings and observe their effects: “I feel happy; I feel angry.” Thus the mind can give more objectivity to our emotions by pointing out the direction in which they are leading us, and by so doing, produce order and coherence in our lives. But the mind can also become warped and exert an egotistic, negative and harmful effect upon the emotional life. It can justify our prejudices and pervert the truth, thus becoming, as H. P. Blavatsky put it, “the slayer of the real.”

Yet the mind’s influence is essential for personal integration and balance, as well as for guidance. It is the mind that sets goals, plans strategies, formulates problems and works them out step by step. Reason offers guidance, gives shape and coherence to our wandering thoughts, permits self-criticism. All these are the positive uses of the mind in daily life.

There is also a level of the mind which is engaged with abstract thinking, such as mathematics, philosophy or science, and this does not affect the emotions directly to the same extent. However, mathematicians and scientists would not pursue their profession unless it aroused their interest, which is needed to engage emotional drive, focus attention and kindle enthusiasm for an abstract enterprise. Some people have a real passion for ideas and can become totally absorbed in them; such interest is far from being merely academic. In this case, emotional and mental energies are working fully together, which is one of the signs of personal integration.

But there is all too often a gap, a lack of synchronism, between the reason which tries to understand a situation and the feelings which make us act. Often people do not heed the information so offered, but directly act out what their feelings dictate at the moment. Then our emotional drives can lead us into behaviour which does not accord with our intention, or even with our experience. In such a case we say that a person is impulsive—even, perhaps, to the extent of being out of control. Such splits in the psyche show up visibly in the personal aura of an individual. The mental field can be open to the intuition as well as being clear and well-focused, but the individual may not be well-balanced at the emotional level. When this happens, there may be a fertility of ideas without the ability to follow through and put them into practice.

There are many such kinds of dysfunction between the fields. However, except in the very ill or disabled, the emotional and mental fields always work together quite closely, for thinking is as a matter of course accompanied by some degree of feeling. It may be interest or boredom, like, dislike or indifference, but even when repressed, there is always an emotional component in our thought.

The Intuition

Our feelings for nature or for beauty or for world peace are also emotions, but of a different kind. They go beyond the purely personal, and are linked with that aspect of ourselves which we call the intuition. This is a level of consciousness which is beyond the mind, or lies deeper within us, and it gives us insights which reach beyond our knowledge. Many people have had a sudden experience of unity with nature—or with the spiritual component of the world—so strongly that for the moment it dissolved all the barriers that separate us from one another. Such a unitive experience transcends both mind and emotion, suffusing them with higher-level energies so powerful that the result can be an entirely new perspective on life.

In a different case, insight - seeing the whole of a relationship or the truth of an idea - is also an aspect of the intuitive field, for it is both more sudden and more direct than our usual cause-and-effect thinking. It is this that makes it possible for us to see new truths in old situations, to find creative solutions to intractable problems and to make sudden, quantum jumps in understanding.

The Experience of Time

There is another point to note about the subtle fields that seems to indicate that they really are dimensions of space. The experience of time is different in these higher dimensions. I do not understand how or why this should be so, except that we all know that time is relative to motion. Since the dynamics of the subtler fields are different from those of the physical world, time values on these levels are much more flexible. Past and present, as we know them, lose much of their distinctiveness and become part of one-time continuum. Both are represented to some extent in the here and now of the emotional and mental fields. This is why it is possible to discover traces of the distant past in a person's aura, and to forecast tendencies which may develop in the future. The way this time factor becomes part of the individual human psyche will be touched upon in describing the auras of babies and children.

Although we may be unaware of the different states of consciousness and energy within us, we make use of them as easily as the air we breathe, for they are part of the natural world. But what makes it possible for us to draw upon all these energies without being conscious of them? What is the principle of integration which coordinates and unifies all the physical, vital, emotional and mental dimensions within us?

The Timeless Self

I believe that this integrating factor is what I like to call the "timeless self"- a principle of being which provides continuity during life, and persists after death. This is a concept which occurs mainly in Hinduism (where it is linked to reincarnation), although it is kin to the soul as described in Christianity. However it be defined, from my point of view that self is a reflection of the ultimate aspect of being. It is rooted in a timeless spiritual reality which transcends and embraces all the dimensions of consciousness.

As will be shown in the aura pictures, especially those of children, everyone is born with a link to this spiritual reality, whether or not this link is ever consciously realized during life. The self (which should not be confused with the ego or egotism) is the thread which not only connects us to reality, but also gives ultimate shape, meaning and value to our experience. It is the power of the timeless self within us that makes it possible for human beings to overcome the greatest obstacles. Even severely handicapped people can draw upon this inner strength. By so doing, they can develop their own creativity and find it possible to make a contribution—not physically, perhaps, but on the level of human relations. \

I have a dear friend who illustrates this point in a remarkable way. As an infant she contracted polio, which left her extremely disabled. She is confined to a wheelchair, has lost the use of her left arm, and is neurologically impaired in a variety of ways. In spite of all this, she has never been without the confidence that she would be able to function in the world. Although her health is always precarious, her courage and her creative potential have made it possible for her to overcome many of the obstacles to a full life. She was able to study painting and develop her artistic gifts to the extent that she has been capable of earning her own living, at least partially.

Although she is in constant pain, she never complains and is always interested in the lives of other people. As a consequence, she has dozens of friends. The realization that she is able to make a contribution to others in spite of all her difficulties has sustained her spirit throughout her life.

This story illustrates a point I shall be emphasizing in different ways throughout this book. With determination, and the self-confidence it inspires, we can draw upon an almost limitless potential of higher energies within us, giving us the ability to achieve goals which might seem far beyond our capacities.

The Effects of Karma

Lastly, there is the question of personal idiosyncrasy. We are all born with a basic emotional pattern, or with the possibility of developing certain emotional qualities, as I shall try to show in discussing the auras of children. In this connection, it is impossible to ignore the question of karma (the effects of past action), which sets the boundary conditions of human life. These conditions are not cast in concrete, because karma can work itself out in many ways and on many different levels. Nevertheless, it establishes certain predispositions which a person will have to cope with during life, and these are clearly represented at the level of the emotions.

Today we have become used to the idea that we are born with certain genetic patterns that determine our physical make-up and also govern our mental processes and emotional responses. This is true to a certain extent, but our knowledge of the genes does not yet encompass the ways in which mental and emotional characteristics are formed, or how they will develop. Medicine is finding ways to change genetic patterns and perhaps eliminate hereditary defects, but will such changes make people more humane, kinder, more compassionate? Most of us accept the fact that illness affects our mental and emotional states, but not that the reverse is also true.

Human beings have far greater depths within them than one might suppose. As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, the subtle dimensions of consciousness are in many ways more powerful than our physical attributes.

We all have access to these inner resources. They are not reserved for the few, the privileged or the especially gifted, for they are part of our human heritage. Even when they remain an untapped resource, they are there, always available if we have the will and the motivation to use them.