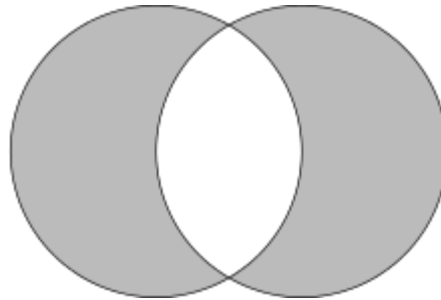


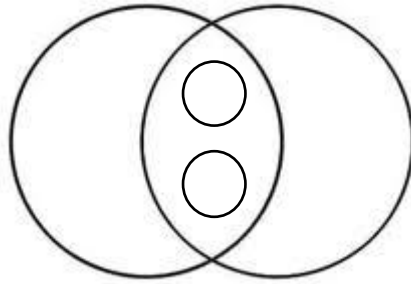
Circles of the Soul and the 'Vesica Piscis' or 'Mandorla'



The 'Vesica Piscis' or 'Mandorla' is an ancient spiritual symbol with many associations – but geometrically it is simply a diagram showing the fish- (piscis) or almond-shaped (mandorla) intersection of two overlapping circles. This geometric form, which I dreamt of before knowing *anything whatsoever of its mystical or religious history, symbolism or associations*, formed an important part of my MA Dissertation on 'Group Dimensions of Lucid Dreaming' (1980), having emerged in one of the dreams I had during the 'dream group' I set up for my research. It also played a powerful role in helping me to both conceptualise and illustrate new concepts pertaining to the deeper theme of my dissertation - the nature of personal identity and selfhood. Yet it also went on to eventually provide me with a new understanding of its own spiritual symbolism – an understanding derived not from scholarship but from my own metaphysical experiences – not least the experiences of pair meditation described in these memoirs. I should emphasise however that none of the many *experiences* which the symbol helped me to symbolise came from simply meditating *upon the symbol itself* - as if its meaning would magically reveal itself in this way.

But let me begin at the beginning – with the initial dissertation on my research into dreaming, in which I came to use my own version of the Vesica Piscis to argue that the dream state is one in which it is the overlapping dimension of identity or selfhood that we experience most dominantly, i.e. those parts or aspects of *ourselves* that are symbolised by things or personified and embodied by other people – or that we symbolise for them.

At the most basic level, the mere fact that we can dream of others is rooted in the nature of identity – in the truth that, ultimately, we are all parts or aspects of one another. My version of the Vesica Piscis or Mandorla therefore included two smaller circles *within* the area of overlap of two larger circles. So if one of the larger circles is taken as representing an individual called John and the other an individual called Jane, then the two smaller circles in the area of overlap between the circles would represent the 'Jane-aspect' or 'Jane-ness' of John's larger identity and the 'John-aspect' or 'John-ness' of Jane's larger identity.



It was the principal thesis of my dissertation that all inter-personal difficulties and conflicts (as well as inter-racial, inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, inter-national ones etc.) arise from placing artificial boundaries on our own larger identity – specifically through failure or resistance to recognise aspects of *ourselves* in those aspects of *others* (including other people, other religions, other cultures etc.) we found most difficult or dislikeable.

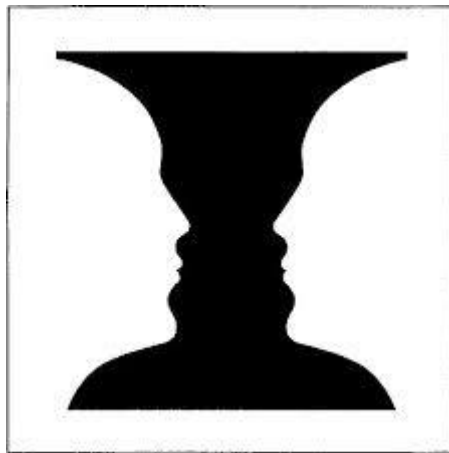
What however, is this ‘larger identity’ the aspects of which we find reflected in ‘the face of the other’? It is what I came to call ‘soul’ as opposed to ‘self’, and also ‘awareness’ as opposed to ‘consciousness’. Here we come to the *metaphysical seed* of so many of the experiences described in these memoirs – a seed planted by my mentor Michael Kosok. For it was he who first introduced me to the radical idea that not only what we think of as ‘awareness’ or ‘consciousness’ but also and at the same time identity itself – has a non-local or ‘field’ character. Through this fundamental insight I later came to distinguish and redefine ‘awareness’ or ‘soul’ as both consciousness and identity in its unbounded, non-local or *field* nature and - conversely, to redefine ‘consciousness’ as awareness in its *seemingly* bounded, local and also focussed or *focal* nature.

In this context however, we need not think of the Vesica Pisces or Mandorla – of two overlapping circles - but just of *one single circle*, drawn say, on a white background. This single circle seems to *bound* one area of a field – the field being the white space or background on which it is drawn. I say *seems to bound* because, if we think about it, the circle as such is as much defined by the *unbounded and uncircumscribed* background space or ‘field’ of white space *around and surrounding* it as by the area or field of white space that the circle itself bounds and circumscribes.

Pointing this out may make it seem obvious – or at least conceptually obvious. And yet it runs up not just against our whole way of perceiving things – but also our way of experiencing our self or soul. For if you were to now *colour in* the circle you have drawn, or else draw it not just as a circular figure, but, for example, as a circular black disk on a white background (or a circular white disk on a black background) what happens if you then ask people what *colour* the circle is? They will invariably identify the colour of the circle with the colour with which it is *drawn, filled in or pictured as a disk*. So drawing a black circle or disk on a white background they will say the circle or disk is *black*, just as drawing a white circle or circular disk on a black background they will say the circle or disk is *white*. Indeed whatever colour the circle is drawn in, filled in with or presented in the form of a circular disk – they will identify *this* colour as the colour of the *circle or disk as such* – completely forgetting that what makes the circle or disk *circular* is just as much the background area surrounding it as the area it bounds.

So drawing a *white* circle or disk on a black background one could just as well say that the circle is black and not white. The same applies to any foreground figure, not least an enclosing one such as a circle, square or triangle, drawn against a contrasting background field.

Hence it requires so-called optical 'illusions' in the form of silhouetted shapes to get them to realise that the same shape or figure can be seen in two quite different ways – depending on whether their awareness is focussed on the foreground figure or its background field. And there is sometimes surprise when what first appeared, say, as something like a single black vase in the foreground, suddenly transfigures before our eyes into two white faces in profile – or vice versa - these faces being exactly the same shape or figure as that of the black vase - except now seen in a way defined by the white background field.



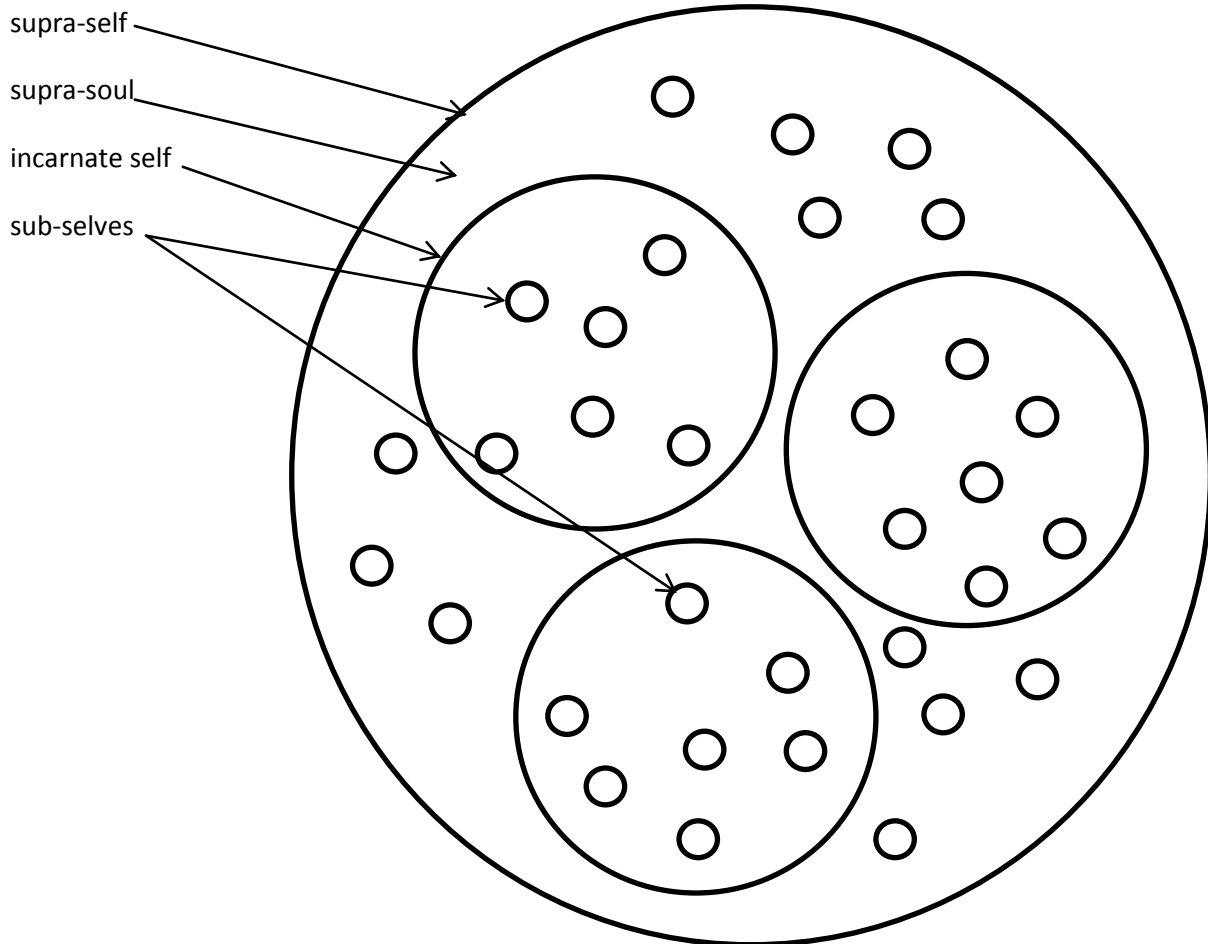
What does the old insight of 'Gestalt Psychology' tell us however? It tells us something very important indeed. It tells us not only that people tend to *focus* awareness on foreground shapes and figures rather than the field or space surrounding them but also something else: namely that people automatically identify any foreground figure in a background field with an area of a field that *bounds or encloses* rather than with the background areas of that field which surrounds it - in exactly the same way that people identify and experience their own 'soul' or 'self' only as something *internally* bounded by their own bodies and having nothing to do with the field of awareness that *surrounds* it and constitutes their experienced world. Hence the whole notion of the body as something 'containing' a soul or 'self'. This notion runs directly counter to a radically new concept of 'soul' and 'awareness' - understood *not just* as a field, space or region of awareness *bounded* by any body but *also* as the *unbounded* 'background' field or space of awareness surrounding it – and surrounding *all other bodies* at the same time.

The metaphysical seed that Michael Kosok planted through his field theory of awareness or subjectivity is what therefore first led me to three fundamental concepts. Both are based on a central distinction between 'soul' and 'self' – any 'self' being just the *apparent boundary* of any 'soul', i.e. any space or *field* of awareness.

Firstly (see diagram 1 below) it led me to a concept of a hierarchy of 'higher' or larger 'selves' (such the 'great self' or *Mahatman* in Indian thought). These 'supra-selves' can be pictured as larger circles or 'selves' whose bounded inner area or field of awareness ('soul') may in turn embrace countless smaller circles, including incarnate selves and their own 'sub-selves'. The supra-selves however, may themselves constitute sub-selves in the 'soul field' of yet *larger* bounding circles or 'selves' - any

'self' being represented by circles or circles within circles whereas 'soul' is simply the spaces or fields of awareness *within and around any given circle*. Notice that not all of the smallest circles embraced by the largest circle or 'supra-self' in the diagram find expression within any of the three circles representing *incarnate selves* - yet these nevertheless constitute a pool of dormant potentials or qualities of awareness from which they can draw.

Diagram 1

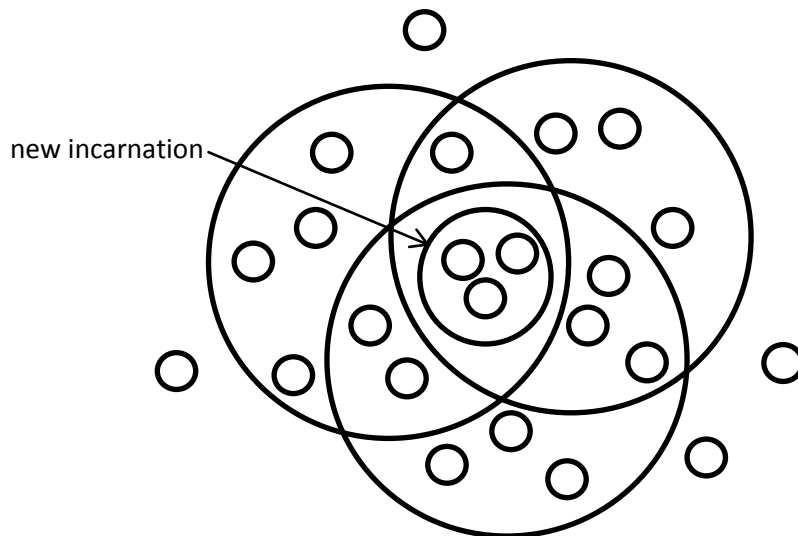


Within the inner area or soul-field of any incarnate self, not all of the sub-selves within it may have equal status. Some may represent a central or dominant self or identity, whereas others might lie latent or reveal themselves only as 'sub-personalities'. Most importantly however, all incarnate selves are co-present within a larger field of awareness – in other words they are not 're-incarnations' of each other so much as simultaneous or 'co-present' incarnations of their own mutual supra-self – all existing in their own 'present' and none merely constituting 'past' or 'future selves'.

Secondly however, if we think of the three inner circles in the diagram above as representing three simultaneous or 'co-present' incarnations of that larger soul whose field is bounded by the biggest circle, then we could also visualise these three circles (or more) as overlapping – as in the Vesica Piscis or Mandorla. We could also visualise a new circle emerging in their area of overlap - one containing and sharing one or more of the sub-selves specific to each incarnation.

This would then give us a picture (see diagram 2) of how *new* incarnations, representing a unique combination of sub-selves are formed from the unity of different sub-selves belonging to existing incarnations, and/or sub-selves or potentials of the supra-self that have not yet formed part of any incarnate self.

Diagram 2



This, in a nutshell is the process that occurs in the 'life between lives'. Yet given that all incarnations are co-present within a singular field or 'time-space' of awareness, it can also happen that within any given life two or more parallel incarnations overlap – allowing elements of their identity to become shared as common 'sub-selves' linking them together.

Thirdly, I was led to an even more radical idea - that of a *universal* soul or field of awareness - one embracing all possible selves and realities and yet, unlike any *seemingly* bounding circle, figure, form or body of any sort, being in principle, essentially *unbounded*. Why unbounded? Because the paradox is that any boundary (such as that of a body, shape or geometric figure of any sort) is not itself anything *bounded*. Thus whilst a circle you draw may appear to bound an area within it, the circle as such is also what *unites* that bounded area or field within it with the *unbounded* space or field around and surrounding it.

Herein lies a decisive metaphysical clue to the whole mystery of 'God', of 'body', 'soul' and 'spirit' – and their relation to what is called a 'self'. For like any 'self' or 'identity', so also is any 'body' something which, like a circle, *appears to bound or to have a boundary*.

Seen as a bounding circle, figure or form of any shape therefore, bodyhood and selfhood are therefore, and in principle, *identical*. As boundaries however, they are also and in principle *unbounded* – both distinguishing and *uniting* a bounded area or field of awareness or 'soul' within them and an *unbounded* soul or awareness field around them. Thus it makes no difference *how* infinitely big or all-embracing the 'circle' is by which we represent both God and/or what some see as our ultimate or divine 'Self' – for by virtue of constituting a *boundary* it is necessarily and in principle inseparable from an *unbounded* field of awareness or soul surrounding it.

Neither any 'self' nor any 'body' therefore can be seen only as *bounding* awareness containing a 'soul'. On the contrary, what we call 'soul' is, by virtue of its field nature just as much unbounded as bounded - being just as much a region of awareness internal to an *unbounded* field of awareness *around* any given 'self' as a region of that field bounded by that 'self'.

From this perspective, the old controversy between Hinduism and Buddhism about the existence or non-existence of a 'self' is completely overcome - 'soul' being just as much an unbounded field of awareness and therefore 'no-self' (*an-atman*) as a bounded field of awareness or 'self' (*atman*).

If this sounds all very complicated just take a pen or use your computer cursor and draw one circle in black on a white background without filling it in with any colour. One circle? In fact if you count properly there are *three*: the circle as marked out in black, the circle as a circular area or field of white *within* it, and the circle as circular area *within* and internal to the overall field of white *around* it - like a circular 'hole' within that field. And yet in one sense you *have* just drawn *one* circle. For what is that black circle if not simply a single *field boundary* - that which first distinguishes *and* unites *two* circular areas of *one* white field - the one within and the one around the black circle. As such however - as this 'two in one' boundary uniting two circular areas of one field - this one circle you have drawn could also be considered not just as a single circle or even a third but as a *fourth* circle - being the *unity* of all three 'circles'.

There remains a problem however. For so far we have used the image of a marked or drawn circle to represent a boundary - in much the same way, for example, as a balloon is a boundary between the air within it and the air around it. Yet where exactly is this boundary, the boundary between the balloon itself and the air within or around it? For whilst the balloon may be said to be a boundary between the air within and around it, it cannot be said to be the boundary between, say its own outer surface and the air around it - just as little as it can be said to be the boundary between its own inner surface and the air within it.

Similarly our skin may be seen as a boundary between the tissue and flesh beneath it and the air and space around it. But again, where exactly are either of these *two* boundaries - the boundary between skin and air and skin and flesh? The point here is that nothing, including a balloon skin or our skin, can, in itself, *be* the boundary *between* itself and something else. So what or where is that boundary? In what way does any boundary exist at all? Only - and this is where all diagrams and illustrations fail us - as a field boundary of space as such. And yet as we also know, atoms and molecules - whether of skin or rubber or air - consist themselves primarily *of* space, so how or where can there be any boundary at all? Only if any and all boundaries are essentially nothing more or less than boundaries *of* awareness. For so it is with the human soul, which, far from being bounded by its bodily skin, knows no boundaries except boundaries of awareness - an awareness which pervades not only the spaces of our body's atoms and cells but the entire space around our bodies - and every other body *within* that space.

Everything with a 'self' or field-boundary of awareness - however porous or flexible in size and shape - can also be thought of as what Seth calls a 'Consciousness Unit'. According to Seth such Consciousness Units, though they can be represented by circles, can take any form whatsoever. They are what essentially constitutes the aware inwardness or soul of anything we experience as a 'self', 'body', or 'thing' of any sort - all things being but the outwardly perceived or 'phenomenal' form of Consciousness Units - as represented by any and all of the 'circles of the soul' in the diagrams above.

We normally think of space as that which *separates* things - including souls and selves, bodies and beings. Yet what if space is nothing more or less than our principal way of experiencing awareness or soul as a *spacious field* – that field from and within which all Consciousness Units first take shape.

If so, then - *by virtue of being their common source* – what appears to us as seemingly empty and separating spaces are in fact the very medium *connecting* rather than separating all things. So even if we simply imagine multiple seemingly separate circles or disks drawn against a common and otherwise seemingly blankly white or empty background, these circles themselves are in fact *connected* rather than *separated* by this background field.

What happens, however, if we visualise our circular Consciousness Units as connected in another way - by representing them as actually intersecting and overlapping – as in the Vesica Piscis or Mandorla? Then the almond- or vulva-shaped area of their intersection or overlap can be thought of not just as representing their connection with each other but also in two others ways: as a both a portal to the background field that is their common source – and also as a sort of birth canal, a region or field of awareness or soul allowing the emergence of *new* Consciousness Units within it. Hence it is within this field of intersection that the Virgin Mary and/or the Christ is often pictured in religious icons – in this way allowing the icon to represent not just a specific Consciousness Unit, but also its birth from a divine and universal ‘source field’ of awareness (‘God’) and its nature as a *new embodiment* of that divine-universal source field.

Similarly, the Vesica Piscis or Mandorla also represents the nature of pair meditation as described in these memoirs – the intersection of two circles representing the ‘bi-personal field’ created by resonance between two beings (two circular Consciousness Units). This field is also a portal and a birth canal, allowing new faces or aspects of the soul fields to emerge and manifest: faces of their own soul, faces of the larger ‘circles’ or Consciousness Units of whose inner soul-fields they are a part, faces of the divine ‘source field’ or ‘soul field’ from which all Consciousness Units spring – and faces or manifestations too of *any* Consciousness Unit embraced by the unbounded and universal field of awareness or soul that is ‘God’.

For not just talk of a ‘self’ or ‘body’ but of any being whatsoever – even a supreme or divine being – implies a bounded entity. Hence the essential theosophy of what I call ‘The Awareness Principle’ – namely that God is not a being with awareness but *is* awareness – not an awareness that is yours or mine but a universal awareness, one that is the very essence of the Divine.

Ultimately however, we require no esoteric, geometric symbol to tell us any of this. We simply need to recognise that as beings or ‘Consciousness Units’ - or as more or less complex and ever-changing groupings or ‘Gestalts’ of such Units – we are each like a fish (*piscis*) swimming in an *unbounded ocean of awareness*. This ocean not only connects us all by virtue of being our common source – but for the same reason *is* also who we all most essentially *are*, allowing us to experience both ourselves and all other fish in the ocean from its perspective and as manifestations of it.

No surprise then, that the word ‘soul’, like its German equivalent - *Seele* – means ‘coming from the sea’ (German *See*) and that (unlike the word ‘self’) it has no equivalent in Sanskrit or Indian thought - and is in no way a *synonym* for the word ‘self’ as it figures in both Hindu and Buddhist metaphysics on the one hand and Western thought on the other.