

The sky and ice-tower, the earth and mystic-fire: The yinyang spectrum of mental-emotional disorders

This article is based on the clear insights of Tony Parsons and the ancient expressions of yinyang in Classical Taoist understanding.

There is always a spectrum of expression in the world, different forms of life coming into existence and dying back to the source again, a constant and fragile game of shadow-puppets. The expression of “self” in a way is a warped function (neither good nor bad), or an internal-reflection of the bodyspirit. Very often the “self” forms as a consequence of the nature of the bodyspirit’s natural expression. So bodyspirit expressions that are either more fiery or more cool overall will both express as such, but the added “self” can be called a pathological state. It is rare that a “self” expression will for long periods be the complete opposite of the bodyspirit physiology from which it emanates. Overall we can form a spectrum of understanding of the nature of the “self” into basic structures of yin and yang. Here we will describe yin as fire and earth, and yang as water and the sky.

There are four categorizations:-

- yang within yang:- sky
- yang within yin:- water
- yin within yang:- fire
- yin within yin:- earth

These four qualities express a range or spectrum which we can apply to the idea of “self” and understand therein mental-emotional expression. In pathology the following four expressions are produced:-

1. Yang within yang:- the dominator and dictator
2. Yang within yin:- the ice-tower, observer of worlds, the depressive/outsider
3. Yin within yang:- the mystic fire, the naked anxiety
4. Yin within yin:- the grief-struck, the deep pain of separation

We can say that the upper two expressions are more associated with the mental-emotional male picture overall and the lower two expressions are most common to women.

If we consider the Yang mental-emotional picture first (typical!) this consists of either the extroverted self-orientation of power and direct force of action, not seeing anything else but him-“self” and what he does or doesn’t want. There is a concentration of “self-hood” here but it is also cut off from other people, there is no connection to the exterior other than through the veil of “self”. The heated-“self” in this case has many forms, the powerful teacher or guru, the leader, the king, the man-at-arms, the warrior, the aggressor. The idea of the sky is simply that it is bigger than anything else, in command and in control, the anger of the gods can “rain-down” and this kind of dominance is depicted by the megalomaniac type expression here.

The yang within yin is the cooler version of this. It is the hardness of ice and the aloofness of a tower high over others. The “self” this time is not associated with the exterior and power, but with viewing the world from afar, there is detachment, the world has forms that come and go things people and places are observed, almost at a distance, to come into and out of existence. Tony Parsons has described this as the “Glass box” or “Ivory tower”, the nature of it is as if everything is happening in front of you, there is a kind of meditative silence behind but also a hiding within the stillness and a non-interaction, a not “in-love-ness” with life. This marks the “self” that is the monk or the mediator, the one who hides himself away and considers himself aloof or inaccessible, high above yet imprisoned in ice, critical, judgmental, calm, tending towards the psychopathic. This is the untouchable high-tower, he observes the whole world yet cannot touch it, as though a mist or blanket surrounds him, he is at a deep loss for he wants to be in-love but he also wants to hold him-“self “and wants to be “safe”. The tower is cold and still but it is familiar, devoid of emotion, so at least there is some respite from pain - and yet there isn’t because angst still gnaws in the background.

As we can see the yang have one thing in common, be they fiery and hot expressions or unemotional, internal, cool expressions, they both have a disconnection from the world, they are either caught within a hot and angry fire-ball or chilled to the point of insensitivity. These are often the two aspects of male mental-emotional patterns which women find difficult. For the two yang it relates more to the mental-aspect of mental-emotional than to the emotional, so it is more head than it is body in the above. Note also that these two are the primary expressions of “self”-hood. Both in male and female the mental-emotional is founded on these expressions, but it pertains to the male.

If we now look at the yin within the yang this represents the fire quality, which in Chinese medicine/philosophy is very commonly misconstrued as yang. In its metaphorical base understanding fire does express yang but the root of fire is yin. The flame is empty at the centre. The female expression is met in this expression and is fundamentally associated with nakedness, of feeling like a naked flame. This female mental-emotional pattern is about being hyper-sensitive to so much of the world that there is feeling of being impelled towards immolation or total disintegration.

Again there is a profound fear of loss of “self” but also a sense also that this is unstoppable and actually occurring right now! There is no protection and so the expression will consume everything. This causes mania, anxiety, a frantically and fearfulness.

The yin within yin is cool but also exposed to life, there is no covering, less of a separation between the world and “me” than the male expression has. Here there is deep grief, unfathomable sadness and discomfort. Sensitive and subtle, it is the “crying” woman, the earth and the expression of great loss.

The four expressions above represent stages of mental-emotional expression and whichever aspect of the bodyspirit and “self” type it naturally forms and its opposite, which will balance out or create realization of wholeness. These aspects are both external

or internal because from the perspective of “reality” there is no such thing as internal and external, however the interaction of different people is one way which can engender a balancing of the energetics. So fire and water combine as do sky and earth. When these qualities unite the mental-emotional qualities die away. For the sky the connection with the earth is one of total surrender and still darkness, for the earth connecting with the sky it is total light/enlightenment. For the water to join with the fire it is burning up and then letting go, he has a cooler and harder self to surrender than the open and dramatic yang expression of the sky. The fire finds safety and objectivity in the calmness.

The problem is that these opposite qualities have to be ripe to be open to letting go into fusion. One might say that to fall “in-love” there has to be a readiness to do so which cannot be forced as this simply creates contraction, as force itself is a contraction and a fragmented idea about something. The package that encompasses this process is very important, the communication or tone needs to be resonant for there to be a relaxation into communion, please see my previous article “On Resonance” to further this understanding. In both the sky and water pathologies there is a situation which is cut off by one’s own expression, as in sky, or one’s own fearfulness, as in water. In both cases there is a seeking, a belief that either going outwards, sky, or inwards, water, will secure the missing piece but actually it’s like living in a bubble. There is a “surface-tension” with the exterior world, either expanded out in the sky expression or very close-to in the water expression but in either case it produces a sense of separation. In both cases there is a belief that there is something to find, that one has to obtain union or “love” either through force (sky) or coercion (water), but in fact this is all a manifestation of fearfulness. When the surface-tension of “self” is recognised to be a resistance to life rushing in relief occurs, like a bubble bursting and air filling the vacuum. The Bubble can either burst open or explode outwards, it makes no difference, there is simply a letting-go and a realization that nothing needs to be done, life is already in-love with itself and the “you” is already free.

Therefore whenever one comes into contact with the opposite there is an immediate powerful reaction and fusing, then death of the mental-emotional expression in both cases. It is always the female expression which can unbind the masculine and the masculine that can always “hold” the feminine.

The above notions are not specific to external physicality. So the two yang expressions can apply for a male or a female and the two yin expressions can apply to the male. It is clear also that dissolution or the end of “self”-hood is much closer to the openness of the two female expressions than it is for the male. The internalization and “self-hood” of “individuality” is very much a male formation passed on to the female over generations but the female mental-emotional picture tends to incorporate much more of the child-like expressions of direct and immediate responsiveness and emotional sensitivity which the male loses and may then seek in adulthood. While no expressions are “better” or “worse” we can say that the mystic fire and particularly the earth expression has a tendency to move to the end of “self”-orientated ideology. This always requires a letting-go and an opening outwards from contraction, so essentially we could typify “self”-hood as the first two yang expressions in everyone.

If we do this then we can simply and look at the spectrum as extroversion/sky or introversion/water, manic-sky to depressive-water spectrum. While it's true that anxiety and mania do move into depression this is at their limits, at the limit points yang will move to yin and yin will move to yang. Generally a person will be in one or other side for most of life. As we move into the mystic fire and the earth these could be considered the processes of the end of "self" and so are about either letting go in total exhaustion and collapse, which is the nature of the yang within yang / sky at limit point, or for the yang within yin/ water. It is simply an opening out to being in-love with life, or being "in-love with the ordinary" as Richard Sylvester comments, in a playful and expressive way, as it was when we were children.

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