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Ayurvedic and Bionian Theories of Thinking: Mental Digestion and the Truth Instinct

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Doctor of Psychology in the Department of Clinical Psychology at
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**AYURVEDIC AND BIONIAN THEORIES OF THINKING:
MENTAL DIGESTION AND THE TRUTH INSTINCT**

presented on April 8, 2020

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Dedication

For my beloved parents, Janie and Gerard Labbe, who suffused my childhood with loving reverie and thus made it possible for me to think these wild thoughts.

For my husband, Jesse Labbe-Watson, who walked alongside me through every step of this journey, reminding me of who I am and casting loving gazes and extending warm caresses when I was weary.

For my daughter, Scarlet Labbe-Watson, who ignites my passion for consciously “becoming.” It is an honor to receive and pre-digest all that you cannot contain alone.

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Finally, I extend a deep and heartfelt thank you to my parents, Gerard and Janie Labbe. Dad, through your love and confidence in me, I have shaken off many of the insecurities of my youth and stepped more into the fullness of what I might become. And: “This one’s for you,

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Abstract

This theoretical paper integrates Ayurvedic and Bionian psychoanalytic theories of thinking into a new, integrative understanding of how individuals learn from experience. The relationship between knowledge, emotional experience, and the truth instinct is explored. Ayurvedic and Bionian theories describe the complexity involved in transforming raw sensory and emotional experiences into thoughts that nourish our intelligence and permit us to continually dream ourselves into being. Ayurvedic theories of intrapsychic processes and the anatomy and physiology of the mind will be explicated alongside Bionian concepts of intersubjective projective identification. For the promotion and maintenance of psychological growth, Bionian psychoanalytic thinkers describe the prerequisites of possessing a set of mental functions that transform raw sense impressions into usable elements for thinking and a functional mental apparatus that can make meaning from them. In addition, Bionians assert that the presence of a caring other in infancy and beyond aids in the metabolism of our most difficult experiences. Ayurveda describes the prerequisite of sufficient mental digestive capacity, which is supported or remediated by physical, social, psychological, and spiritual factors. These adjunctive therapeutic interventions are useful to therapists working with patients who fail to heal despite immersive psychotherapy. Both traditions hold the paradoxical view that one's ability to tolerate not-knowing is also essential to psychological growth. In this paper, a dialogic approach between these two schools of thought results in an integrative theory of intrapsychic and intersubjective processes for coherent thinking and illuminates the conditions that support the evolution of self/personality.

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Keywords: Ayurveda, Bion, intersubjective projective identification, Absolute Truth, O, doshas, mental gunas, container-contained, waking dreaming, alpha-function.

Wild Thoughts That Found a Mind to Think Them

I left a private practice in Ayurvedic medicine in order to begin my doctoral studies in clinical psychology. I had learned from my decade of studying and practicing Ayurveda that sufficient space and time for processing the stimulation of the day was necessary for psycho-emotional well-being. I reflected on an oft used metaphor my Ayurvedic teachers had used: All of the sensory stimulation of the day had to be metabolized, just as the food we ingested needed to be digested and integrated into the tissues of the body. I began to wonder how I would take in and process the barrage of ideas, tasks, and interactions that constituted my days.

During my first semester of graduate school I learned of Wilfred Bion's works and his frequent use of metaphors involving the alimentary canal (Bion, 1962b). I suspected that his theory of thinking would offer me insight into the psychoanalytic perspective of mental digestion. With the help of Dr. Steven Stern, PsyD (personal communication April 18, 2017; Stern, 2017), I began to understand Bion's ontological epistemology. This allowed me to create new unconscious mythic templates through which Ayurvedic cosmology and Bion's ontology began to morph and play. As I contained these "wild thoughts" (Bion & Bion, 1997), some emerged into conscious awareness for "domestication." I'd like to think my receptivity to these thoughts without a thinker was facilitated by what Grotstein (2007) described as an open state, "either exploratorily curious or passively unsaturated, but in either case open to and ready for the unexpected. Once we encounter it...and are able to allow it entry by our readiness to tolerate it...we process it" (p. 125). My hope is that this paper is a coherent reflection of such a process and allows the reader to dream previously undreamt dreams of her own.

Rationale

Integrative and complementary approaches to health are increasing in popularity (Clarke, Black, Strussman, Barnes, & Nahin, 2015); Ayurveda in particular is gaining prominence and legitimacy (“Ayurveda Wellness Growth Trends,” n.d.; White, 2000). Therefore, this is a timely investigation into the alternative perspectives Ayurveda has to offer contemporary clinicians, especially those who value an intersubjective and ontological approach to the work of psychotherapy and those who are receptive to complementary medicine for stubborn cases.

Psychotherapists working with patients who continue to rely on primitive defenses, such as excessive projective identification, despite ample time spent in psychotherapy, can seek consultation and adjunctive Ayurvedic therapies in order to address pathophysiological processes that are unresponsive or under-responsive to psychotherapy alone.

Intrapsychic Equipment and Intersubjective Processes

The current interdisciplinary investigation into the “equipment” and processes necessary for thinking is also relevant to contemporary clinicians, as the tendency to evade thinking is ubiquitous (Ogden, 2009) and the consequences can be dire. The inability to think and to learn from experience may be acute and situational (Bion, 1962b; Ferro, 2005) or may be pervasive and thus associated with severe forms of psychopathology, such as psychosis (Bion, 1965). Furthermore, the individual’s ability to think and to learn promotes “becoming” and thus fosters the development of the self (Bion, 1965).

The traditions of Ayurvedic psychology and Bionian psychoanalysis offer perspectives on the processes and practices that support healthy metabolism of experiences, aiding individuals in assimilating that which will nourish them, projecting that which cannot be processed alone, and creating an internal environment conducive to ontological development (Bion, 1965; Dash, 2008). Both systems link thinking and knowledge with the evolution of the self. Put differently,

learning from experience and knowledge are not an end unto themselves, but rather a necessary process that facilitates an individual's ability to maintain a sense of "beingness" in the face of emotional arousal and external changes (Grotstein, 2007). As will be revealed, the Ayurvedic paradigm emphasizes the role of the individual and intrapsychic processes, while Bion (1965, 1970) elevated the role of the pair and intersubjective metabolization of experience.

Ayurvedic and Bionian systems of thinking both embrace post-positivist ways of knowing, thus making room for conjecture, intuition, and metaphysics as tools for the investigatory process (Bion, 1965, 1970, 1984; Frawley, 2011; Lad 2002, 2006, 2012; Svoboda, 1999, 2004). Bion himself spent the first eight years of his life in India, which may have instilled in him a mystical orientation toward life (Bleandonu, 1994). The progression of his theories from Transformations on were infused with Eastern sensibilities. He put forth that the evolution of self is fostered by a receptive encounter with truth and reality. Although Ayurvedic and Bionian theorists differ in their conceptualization of truth and reality, both value an ontological epistemology. Put differently, both systems agree that knowledge is sourced from experience and an individual's subjective truth can be understood through his emotional responses to reality. Within this epistemology, fleeting transcendent states, faith in the ineffable, and the ability to tolerate uncertainty may be nourished by thinking and knowledge, but are emotional and phenomenological in nature.

Methodology and Objectives

Methodology

I approached this research using a dialogic methodology (Bakhtin & Voloshinov, 1994). This process has allowed the two paradigms to interact through the medium of my mind. Dialogic methodology allows each tradition to preserve its essence while being influenced by the

other. The goal was to deepen the understanding of each, maintain the uniqueness of Ayurvedic and Bionian thinking, yet allowing them to interact with and inform each other.

To understand another person's utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it, to find the proper place for it in the corresponding context. For each word of the utterance that are in the process of understanding, we as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words. The greater their number and weight, the deeper and more substantial our understanding will be. Thus, each of the distinguishable significant elements of an utterance as a whole entity are translated in our minds into another, active and responsive, context. (Bakhtin & Voloshinov, 1994, p. 35)

My process of orienting myself toward the utterances of Ayurvedic and Bionian scholars and actively responding to each, began as a careful and recursive reading of primary and classical texts in each discipline, including Bion's *Learning from Experience*, *Elements in Psycho-analysis*, *Transformations*, *Attention and Interpretation*, and *Cogitations* as well as the *Ayurvedic Caraka Samhita* (Dash, 2008), especially Volumes I and II.

In order to enhance my understanding of fundamental concepts, I studied contemporary scholars in each tradition. Ogden (1994, 2004, 2009), Lopez-Corvo (2003), Sandler (2005), Ferro (2005), and especially Grotstein (2007) aided me in grasping the evolution of Bion's ideas and his movement toward a mystical psychoanalysis. Frawley (2011), Lad (2002, 2006, 2012), Welch (2005, 2015), and especially Svoboda (1980, 1999, 2002, 2004) facilitated my comprehension of the process of mental digestion and the relationship between knowledge and being-ness in the Ayurvedic tradition.

Once situated in the rich ideas and clinical approaches of the two systems, I began to consider parallel and complementary concepts. One could say I employed Bion's binocular

perspective in which, “the two eyes operate in binocular vision to correlate two views of the same object” (Bion, 1962b, p. 86) as I examined the theory of thinking and the truth instinct. By carefully studying Bion’s model of alpha-functioning in tandem with the Ayurvedic anatomy and physiology of the mind, I was able to formulate an integrative hypothesis regarding the structures and processes involved in the transformation of raw sensory stimuli into psychic facts. Also, by considering Bion’s formulation of O and Lad’s description of our true nature, I was able to postulate the ontological state that both systems encourage individuals to seek. I considered these, side by side: “One cannot know O [Absolute Truth], one must *be* it” (Eigen, 1993, quoting Bion, p. 124); and, “You can clearly see a space between two thoughts... Take care not to name it. The vast, incredible, immeasurable space is your true nature” (Lad, 2002, p. 204).

Objectives

In this paper, I aimed to elucidate the theories of thinking (mental digestion) articulated in each tradition in order to arrive at an integrative theory. Integral to this exploration was the investigation of how the mind forms, how the qualities of the mind influence breadth and depth of thought and the toleration of frustration, and the factors that interfere with thinking. Furthermore, the signs and symptoms of evasion of thinking are presented and clinical interventions articulated. Additionally, through the exploration of the factors that support mental health and therefore, evolution of the personality, I paint a picture of the clinical implications of an integrated theory and how these implications fit within a Western psychologist’s scope of practice; some Ayurvedic therapies will be adjunctive to the psychotherapeutic work.

Furthermore, I offer an integrative theory of thinking that synthesizes the intersubjective, intrapsychic, and mystical aspects of both traditions. Special attention was given to the role of

interpersonal metabolic processes and the role of psychotherapy in promoting metabolism of experiences (Bion, 1962b; Ferro, 2005; Grotstein, 2007; Welch, 2015).

As my research evolved, so too, did the scope of this paper. While I began this work focused on understanding the factors that influence the digestive capacity of the mind and remedial measures that restore coherence, I arrived, mentally and emotionally, in Bion's world of ontology and O. This elongated the study, which now includes an exploration of mental digestion *and* links this process with the phenomena of "becoming."

Introduction to Ayurveda

The specific factors that gave rise to Ayurvedic medicine also influenced its theory of mental digestion. Therefore, philosophical, historic and linguistic elements are explored before proceeding with definitions of terminology.

A Brief History of Ayurveda

Ayurveda is a holistic medical system originating in India that has been practiced continuously for more than 5,000 years. This "science of longevity" considers the interdependent state of the mind, body, senses, and soul in the maintenance of health. Ayurveda has a high standard for health: "One is in perfect health when the three doshas, digestive fire, all the body tissues and components, and all the excretory functions, are [functioning properly] with a pleasantly disposed and contented mind, senses and spirit" ("Definition of Health," n.d., p. 1). Ancient seers of India codified Ayurveda in the Vedas, spiritual and philosophical texts that describe this elaborate medical system, which remain in use today, influencing a new generation of Ayurvedic practitioners and scholars.

The application of Ayurvedic medicine spans practical modalities that address physical and psychological health as well as those that address metaphysical concerns, such as the pursuit of Self-realization (Frawley, 2011; Svoboda, 1999). In the current study, Self-realization is

capitalized to indicate its transcendent nature. Svoboda (2004) stated that the goal of Ayurveda is “to define, create and maintain a harmonious relationship between macrocosm and microcosm; the final end of the Vedic path, union with the Absolute, is achievable only after establishing right relationship with the relative” (p. 20). Indeed, he elaborated that, “The salient difference between Ayurveda and other philosophical systems is that Ayurveda concentrates upon the effects of desire on health, the ability to function harmoniously in the relative reality of the world, rather than upon one’s relationship to Ultimate Reality” (p.135). In other words, while Ayurveda holds Self-realization as an ultimate goal, it pursues this by addressing the relationship of the individual with his internal and external environment, establishing fertile conditions for metaphysical pursuits. Ayurveda aids in the process of deidentification with matter by offering practices that support conditions for clear thinking and the prevention or removal of accumulated mental and physical waste products that interfere with Self-realization (Frawley, 2011).

Ayurveda was originally recorded in the Sanskrit language. Within the current study, Sanskrit terms will be introduced and defined with subsequent English translations whenever possible; occasionally, Sanskrit terms will be used when an adequate English translation does not exist or is unusually verbose. (Please see Appendix A for a pronunciation guide.)

Philosophical Underpinnings of Ayurveda

Sankhya Philosophy

Although Ayurvedic medicine has been influenced by several branches of Indian philosophy, the greatest influence has been Sankhya. This atheistic philosophy articulates a metaphysical dualism that gave rise to all of creation. The original dualism was between *Purusha*, or unconditional, pure consciousness, and *Prakruti*, or unmanifested, primordial nature. Within Prakruti existed three “universal qualities” or *mahagunas* known as *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. When these three mahagunas remained stable, in a state of equilibrium, Purusha and

Prakruti were unmanifested. When desire disrupted this equilibrium, Prakruti began to evolve, manifesting 23 specific evolutes (Lad, 2002; Roger, 2013; Svoboda, 2004). (See Appendix B for a visual representation of Sankhya cosmology and complete list of evolutes). Below, the evolutes germane to this study are described.

Pure Consciousness: Purusha. Svoboda described Purusha as the “homogenous spirit beyond time, space and causation, a single point, which, however, encompasses everything” (Svoboda, 2004, p. 23). Lad (2002) offered a similar description, stating, “Purusha is the Ultimate Truth, the ultimate healing power, the ultimate enlightenment, the transcendental state of being and existence...[Purusha] is formless colorless, beyond attributes and takes no part in creation. [It] can be called pure consciousness” (p. 6). The moment desire occurs, the cosmos explode into existence.

The superordinate goal of human existence, according to Sankhya philosophy, is to recognize that our true identity is a fragment of cosmic Purusha; this aspect of unconditional pure awareness resides in the deep consciousness (*chitta*) of each individual and can be thought of as the personal soul (*jiva*). Within the current study, “spirit” and “soul” are used interchangeably to refer to this personal microcosm of Purusha. Likewise, “spiritual” practices and therapies are those that support the recognition of Self as pure consciousness.

Primordial nature: Prakruti. Prakruti “is primordial matter, creative potential. [It] has form, color, and attributes in the field of action. It is awareness with choice” (Lad, 2002, p. 6). Desire disrupts the equilibrium of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, causing the merger of Purusha and Prakruti, which gives rise to the world of form. From this union, the process of consciousness differentiating into diverse forms of matter follows, in a particular sequence (Chatterjee & Datta, 2007; Lad, 2002; Svoboda, 2004).

Supreme intelligence: Mahat. The first to emerge from this explosion of desire is *mahat*, or, supreme intelligence. Svoboda (2004) explained that, “when Prakruti becomes aware of its existence, it evolves into the state of undifferentiated transcendent intelligence” (p. 24) known as mahat. At this stage, intelligence is not yet personal but rather is a form of cosmic intelligence. Further divisions take place that give rise to individual intelligence.

Personal intelligence: Buddhi. When supreme intelligence is contained within the individual, it becomes *buddhi*, or personal intelligence. Here, through buddhi, is where sensory data and experiences are processed and result in perception and intelligence (Frawley, 2011). Within buddhi, doubts are resolved, clarity is achieved, and decisions are made (Frawley, 2011). Personal intelligence includes reasoning capacity and memory (Lad, 2002) and the potential for abstract and concrete thinking (Frawley, 2011). Frawley offered the following: “It enables us to discriminate the nature of things from mere appearances or speculations. Through it we develop our core perceptions of self and world: who we are, why we exist, and what the world is” (p. 94). Under the umbrella of abstract thinking is the ability to create and understand philosophy and to contemplate infinity (Frawley, 2011). Frawley suggests that when we turn this ability for abstract intelligence inward, we become capable of direct perception that is not mediated by reason and sensory information. In contrast, the capacity for concrete thinking lends itself to scientific inquiry and seeks empiricism (Frawley, 2011).

I-ness: Ahamkara. Next, supreme intelligence “develops an atomized form aware of its individuality and differentiates itself into bundles of... ego” (Svoboda, 2004, p. 24). *Ahamkara* creates the sense of a separate self, which paradoxically supports individual immunity and creates a barrier between individual identity and Self-realization.

“The sense of... separateness from all else in the cosmos, divides us from the unity of life, but without it there is no life, because only [ego] can cause all the disparate parts of a being to relate to each other as part of the same separate but unified organism...”

(Svoboda, 2004, p. 25)

Sankhya philosophy asserts that the ego, *ahamkara*, arises from a failure of the intellect (*buddhi*) to correctly understand the nature of the self. As ego creates the sense of separation from the true Self, individuals become identified with their “bodily sensations [and] mental states” (Frawley, 2011, p. 127). The soul (*jiva*) contradicts the ego’s movement toward separation and outer sensory experiences by encouraging unity and Self-knowledge (Dash, 2008; Frawley, 2011).

Frawley further clarified that, “The ego is the source of attraction, repulsion and attachment, the emotional afflictions that bring pain and sorrow” (Frawley, 2011, p. 130).

The mind: Manas. The interaction of the luminescence of *sattva* with the kinetic energy of *rajas* creates the sensory mind (*manas*). *Manas* is the mind, considered the sixth sensory organ that takes in “mental impressions” (Frawley, 2011, p. 110) such as ideas and emotions. Emotions in this context refer to the reactive emotional responses that occur moment-to-moment (Frawley, 2011). The mind governs both sensory urges and the impulses of the motor organs and is primarily concerned with organization of sensory data and volition (Frawley, 2011; Lad, 2002). *Manas* can be utilized as an instrument for egoic craving and aversion. Frawley (2011) stated that the “ego operates through the mind to acquire sensations that allow it to expand and feel good about itself” (p. 128). *Manas* is the place where doubts can be entertained before being resolved by *buddhi* (Frawley, 2011).

Deep consciousness: Chitta. Although chitta is not named as an evolute in Sankhya philosophy, this Ayurvedic concept is included here because of its role in mental digestion. Deep consciousness, or chitta, is distinct from mind and personal intelligence. At this level, individuals have a sense of “knowing” that transcends sensory perception (Frawley, 2011). In deep consciousness, there is a shift from analyzing and understanding to “being-with.” This ontological phenomenon is exemplified by feeling another’s emotional state within one oneself. Additionally, deep consciousness, chitta, holds our long-term patterns and it is here that the essence of core feelings such as love, hatred, anger, and joy reside (Frawley, 2011). (In this way “core feelings” are distinct from “emotional reactivity.”)

The five elements. The interaction of kinetic energy (rajas) with the density of tamas gives rise to the five elements of ether, air, fire, water, and earth (Lad, 2002). Early Ayurvedic practitioners observed that the elements condensed into pairs, forming the three metabolic types or *doshas* (Pole, 2006).

Ayurvedic Individual Constitution

Physical Constitution: The Doshas

The doshas, or “metabolic types” are *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. Each human is comprised of the three doshas in a unique ratio that forms her constitution. An individual’s constitutional type influences her rate of metabolism and emotional palette. Metabolism here refers to both the gross and the subtle (i.e., food as well as sensory impressions). Because English translations for the three doshas are inadequate, the original Sanskrit terms of *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* will be used throughout the current study.

Each dosha has a “seat” or primary location in the body from which it governs as well as subsidiary sites. When the doshas are in balance they remain concentrated in their primary seat; during the disease process, described later in this study, the dosha(s) begin to overflow their

primary site and wander, depositing themselves in a defective space and wreaking havoc (Svoboda, 2004).

The doshas themselves cannot be observed, therefore, their presence is detected by the manifestation of the qualities associated with each, detailed below.

Vata dosha. Ether and air join together to form vata, which governs catabolism and the movements of the body. This means that all movements from the most gross, such as walking, to the subtlest, such as the movement of nutrition into a cell, are manifestations of vata dosha. The seat of vata is the colon and its subsidiary locations are the pelvic cavity, thighs, bones, nervous system, and ears (Lad, 2002). Vata's qualities are dry, light, cold, rough, subtle, mobile, and clear (Lad, 2006, p. 209). When in balance, these qualities promote flexibility, creativity, and inspired action. Identification of these qualities in excess indicate a vata imbalance. For example, when the "mobile" quality is disturbed, movements are deranged. This can impact the "movement" of thoughts and the transmission of nerve impulses. Additionally, an increase in fear and anxiety is noted in cases of excess vata (Lad, 2002).

Pitta dosha. Water and fire combine to form pitta, which governs transformation. The heat associated with this dosha is responsible for the metabolism of gross and subtle phenomena, such as the processing of food into energy and of experience into knowledge. The seat of pitta is the small intestine and the affiliated sites are the lower region of the stomach, blood, liver, gallbladder, eyes, sebaceous glands, and gray matter of the brain (Lad, 2002). Pitta's qualities are hot, sharp, light, liquid, slightly oily, and have a "spreading" quality (Lad, 2006, p. 219). When in balance, these qualities create such conditions as warmth, healthy digestion, and promote intelligence. When in excess, they can promote irritability, sharp words, hypomania, voraciousness and "hot" emotions such as anger and jealousy (Lad, 2006; Svoboda, 1999).

Kapha dosha. Water and earth join together to form kapha, which governs the structure of the body. Kapha dosha is associated with anabolic processes and promotes endurance and strength. The seat of kapha is the upper region of the stomach and its subsidiary sites are the lungs, mouth, plasma, lymph, joints, adipose tissue, and the white matter of the brain (Lad, 2002). The qualities of kapha are heavy, slow/dull, cold, oily, liquid, slimy/smooth, dense, soft, static, sticky, cloudy, hard, and gross (Lad, 2006, p. 226). When in balance, these qualities promote such traits as stability and generosity. An accumulation of kapha results in stagnation, slow and foggy thinking, and lethargy. Emotionally, an imbalance of kapha can result in depression and greed.

The subdoshas. Each of the three doshas has five subdoshas. The subdoshas refer to the particular locations of the body where each dosha functions. They exhibit the consistent qualities of each respective dosha across all anatomical structures, yet the functionality is distinct depending on the location. Mental digestion relies on the physiology of multiple subdoshas, particularly those that reside in the heart and brain, that are functionally integrated (Lad, 2002; Moore, 2018). These will be explicated in the section on Ayurvedic mental digestion.

The three vital essences: Prana, Tejas, and Ojas. Each of the three doshas has a subtle essence that contributes to the health or dis-ease of the individual and together they comprise the “electromagnetic field” (Lad, 2012, p. 541). Prana as vital essence is distinct from the subdosha, prana vayu, and will be capitalized in the current study to indicate its greater role in the health of the individual. Prana is the subtle essence of vata and embodies vitality; it is the life force that circulates through the body and extends beyond the body, co-mingling with the energetics of others (Welch, 2015). Tejas is the subtle essence of pitta and provides clarity. Ojas is the subtle essence of kapha and provides immunity and endurance (Frawley, 2011, p. 25). Prana, Tejas, and

Ojas are proportionate to the “qualitative and quantitative expressions of the three doshas” (Lad, 2012, p. 541).

Mental Constitution

The gunas of the mind. Within Ayurvedic medicine, the three mahagunas that disturbed the balance of Purusha and Prakruti, giving rise to the world of form, also comprise the mental constitution. They are sattva/harmony, rajas/agitation, and tamas/inertia (Dash, 2008; Frawley, 2011; Lad, 2002). Each is essential and functions interdependently, cyclically expressing dominance and suppressing the others (Lad, 2002; Svoboda, 2004). Sattva “creates harmony, balance... and contentment” (Frawley, 2011, p. 31). It brings mental clarity and a sense of unity and supports spiritual purpose (Lad, 2002). Rajas is kinetic energy, creating disequilibrium and goal-directed behaviors; it stimulates desire, often causing short-term pleasure followed by suffering and exhaustion (Frawley, 2011). Tamas “is the quality of dullness, darkness, and inertia and is heavy, veiling, or obstructing in its action” (Frawley, 2011, p. 31).

Each individual contains all three, yet, similar to the doshas, the ratio is unique and results in a mental constitution (Frawley, 2011). An individual’s mental constitution represents a lifelong tendency toward a particular style of mental activity. Svoboda (1999) explained that sattva is a state of equilibrium in which the mind’s normal state of accurate discrimination is intact. This is significant given that right understanding facilitates the highest objective of Self-realization. Each of rajas and tamas weakens discrimination through excessive and insufficient mental activity, respectively. Dissimilar to the doshas of vata, pitta, and kapha, in which all three are valued equally for the roles they play in physical health, sattva is prized above rajas and tamas in the mental constitution.

Digestive fire and toxic waste: Agni and ama. Agni is the digestive fire that is responsible for the metabolism of gross and subtle elements such as food and ideas (Lad, 2006). “The primary function of agni is the digestion, absorption, assimilation, and transformation of food and sensations into energy” (Lad, 2002, p. 81). It has multiple locations throughout the body and those germane to mental digestion will be explored below. A consequence of ineffective agni is ama. Ama is unprocessed physical or psychological toxic waste. It has an obstructive quality, promoting pathogenesis (Lad, 2006). A presence such as ama must be expelled or broken down.

Within the paradigm of psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1962b), expulsion and pre-digestion are components of a “both / and” process. The expulsion of undigested psycho-emotional material into a receptive container that has sufficient digestive capacity to “break it down” is a precursor to the developmental process of forming a mind that can process increasingly frustrating and complex thoughts (Bion, 1962b).

Introduction to Bionian Psychoanalysis

Wilfred Bion was a psychoanalyst who made original contributions to the field from the 1940s through the 1970s. He exists in the lineage of Freud and Klein and his theoretical formulations reimagined and expanded on those of his predecessors (Bion, 1965; de Azevedo, 2000; Grotstein, 2007; Lopez-Corvo, 2003; Sandler, 2005). Four of Bion’s reimaginings are germane to the current investigation. First, Bion identified the need to know the truth as the primary force that exerts the pressure to think thoughts and that, “the welfare of the patient demands a constant supply of truth” (Bion & Bion, 1992, p. 99); Grotstein (2007) labeled this the “truth instinct” (p. 295). Bion asserted that truth is apprehended through the emotional linkages of love, hate and knowledge between self and objects (1962b). He scaffolded onto the sexual, death, and epistemophilia drives by “[conflating] affects and drives and reorganiz[ing] them as

personal and emotional ways of knowing how one feels about an object” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 296).

Secondly, Bion expanded upon Freud’s concept of dreaming. Bion (1962b) saw “dreaming” as a process that takes place in sleep and wakefulness and believed that the unconscious and conscious systems selectively share dream thoughts with each other. Third, he refined the Kleinian concept of intrapsychic projective identification by explicating an intersubjective process (Bion, 1962b; Grotstein, 2007). Additionally, Bion posited a dynamic relationship between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, rather than a linear and static one that privileged attainment of the latter (Bion, 1965; Sandler, 2005)

Bion’s Theory of Thinking

Thoughts without a thinker. Bion (1962b) evolved a theory of thinking that emphasized intersubjective processing of sensory data and emotional experiences. Bion (1962a) asserted in an early essay on his theory of thinking that, “thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts” (p. 306). Individuals in the nascent developmental stage of infancy lack an apparatus that is capable of thinking (Bion, 1962b). The pressure to develop the capacity for thinking is exerted by the coincidence of a pre-conception, or an expectation without awareness, and frustration (Bion, 1962b). When pre-conceptions are realized, they achieve the status of a conception/thought (Bion, 1962b; de Azevedo, 2000). Bion (1962b) expounded that infants evacuate experiences that exceed their tolerance for frustration, and thus, are unthinkable.

Projective identification. The infant who is confronted with disturbing emotions she cannot metabolize, must rely on the digestive capacity of a loving other. In Bion’s (1962b) lexicon, the *mother* is the loving other who contains and transforms the baby’s evacuated experiences. In the current study, “mother” and “primary caregiver” are used interchangeably. The Bionian concept of “realistic projective identification” (Bion, 1984, p. 118) is predicated

upon the mother's ability to introject her baby's unwanted experiences and to process them into a form that is useable by the infant (Bion, 1962b). Bion labeled this process as "realistic" in order to normalize the healthy communicative process necessary for the formation of mind, distinct from pathological evacuative projective identification and the intersubjective projective identification employed by healthy adults in times of crises. Both of these latter versions are discussed later in this study. Here, the mother is functioning as a "container" for her baby's proto-emotions. As she contains them, she acts as an intermediary between her infant and her infant's unconscious; essentially, she "dreams the infant's dream" for her (Grotstein, 2007, p. 166).

Maternal reverie. Bion's term for this maternal containment and predigestion is "reverie." Reverie is an aspect of the mother's mental activity, "suffused with love" (Bion, 1962b, p. 36). Akhtar (2009) described it as, "the mother's capacity to hold, contain, elaborate, and transform her baby's unspoken and unspeakable thoughts and affects into thinkable and understandable ideas" (p. 168). It is through this iterative process of the baby's re-introjection of these transformed and now tolerable dream thoughts that the infant's own capacity for thinking is developed, bit by bit. Put succinctly, the mental apparatus that deals with thinking is constructed over time within the mother-infant pair.

Intersubjectivity in psychotherapy. The need for processing disturbing thoughts intersubjectively continues throughout life (Ogden, 2009). This is especially true for individuals who lacked a receptive maternal container in infancy and, therefore, failed to adequately develop their own mental apparatus. Put another way, these individuals tend to have difficulty tolerating frustration and seek to evade thinking by evacuating unwanted experiences into the other. Such individuals require assistance in developing "negative capability," which is the "tolerance of

doubt, frustration, and uncertainty” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 3). When such individuals embark on psychotherapy, an opportunity arises for the therapist to become the container for the patients’ undigested experiences.

Analyst’s reverie. Now, it is the therapist’s reverie that aids in the metabolism of the patient’s evacuated bad objects and proto-emotions. Ogden (1994) described the analyst’s reverie as a “relaxed, subdued, and floating mentation that captures the analysand’s unspoken and unspeakable thoughts via highly personal and even idiosyncratic bits of analyst’s mental activity” (p. 83). In this way, the psychotherapist engages with symbolic and sensation-based elements of the patient that are often not yet detectable to the patient herself (Akhtar, 2009). As a result, these thoughts can begin to be worked through and explored through the pairing of therapist’s and patient’s intersubjectivity and the capacity for the patient’s thinking can be expanded. This is significant because it facilitates the ability to learn from one’s experiences and to develop emotionally, supporting curiosity and the truth instinct (Grotstein, 2007).

Beta-elements, alpha-functioning, alpha-elements, and dream thoughts. Bion intentionally made use of unsaturated terms when describing the elements and factors involved in the process or failure of thinking. Such terms aid his readers in eschewing prior notions of what it means to think or to evade thinking and predisposes us to embrace the novelty of his theory. “Beta-elements” is Bion’s term for unsaturated things-in-themselves, undigested facts, and inherent preconceptions (Bion, 1965; Grotstein, 2007). They are acted upon by a set of mental functions he labeled “alpha-functioning.” Alpha-functioning exists for the purposes of dealing with reality, forming dream thoughts, and learning from experience (Bion, 1962b). Dream thoughts are fragments of affect-laden narratives that can be stored as memories and accessed as needed in service to “becoming.” These dream thoughts can be acted upon by the

rich unconscious processes that facilitate the attribution of personal symbolic meaning to our lived experiences (Bion, 1965b; Ogden, 2009).

Consciousness, the unconscious, and the contact-barrier. Bion reimagined consciousness and the unconscious, and posited the existence of a permeable contact-barrier that both connects and separates them. Consciousness represents finite self-awareness, “mediated by verbal symbols” (Ogden, 2004, p. 866). The unconscious represents infinity, a place of unlimited and ever-evolving possibility. Within this model, it is necessary to relegate thoughts and feelings to the unconscious for a time, where they can be “built and rebuilt” (de Azevedo, 2000, p. 85). Grotstein (2007) asserted that,

all sensory stimuli, internal and external, must first be dreamed and relegated to the unconscious in order to be processed, encoded, encrypted, and assigned to different faculties of the mind—that is, to memory, to repression, to supply dream elements for further dreaming, for re-enforcement of the contact barrier, and to supply the ingredients of emotional and abstract thought. (p. 269)

The contact barrier is a “selectively permeable membrane between the unconscious and consciousness” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 78). It allows for each to function autonomously, yet also allows for “movement and exchange” between the two (de Azevedo, 2000, p. 85). The durable form of the contact barrier allows the individual to learn from experience due to the thinking that is made possible by the selective interchange between the conscious and unconscious systems (Grotstein, 2007).

Love, hate, and knowledge linkages. Bion “attempt[ed] to build a tool to observe that which is ultimately unobservable” (Sandler, 2005, p. 408): the sexual, death, and epistemophilia drives. This “tool” is the model of the emotional links: Love (L), hate (H), and knowledge (K).

Bion expressed that “An emotional experience cannot be conceived of in isolation from a relationship” (Bion, 1962b, p. 42), thereby highlighting the primacy of the dynamic relationship between self and objects. Bion elevated the role of emotional linkages between self and objects and overlaid it with the traditional libidinal and death drives, articulated by Freud and Klein, respectively (Grotstein, 2007). Grotstein summarized it thusly: “One knows (K) an object by how one feels (L and / or H) about it. Consequently, L, H, and K linkages join alpha-function in assigning categories (emotionally encoding) to beta-elements as they become alpha-elements” (p. 137).

In Bion’s lexicon, knowledge (K) represents a dynamic relationship between self and objects that is characterized by receptivity and is dependent on the capacity for containment of “doubts, questions, or variables bound by emotional experiences that sequentially add to each other... [leading to] growth of the apparatus for thinking and of K, as well as the possibility of learning from experience” (Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p. 158). Bion asserted that K encompassed “the sum of alpha and beta-elements” (Bion, as quoted by Sandler, 2005, p. 377), illuminating his belief that the K link in its positive form makes space for the unknown as well as for that which can be experienced.

“O”: **Ultimate Truth.** Bion (1965) introduced a foundational, mystical component to psychoanalytic theory with his elucidation of “O,” or Ultimate Truth. He asserted that underlying the tension between preconception and realization was a truth instinct, driving us to merge (“become”), however briefly, with Ultimate Truth, in a personalized form. O is ineffable, constantly evolving, and exists at both the meta and personal levels (Grotstein, 2007). Within the analytic session, it represents the emotional truth of the intersubjective pair (Eigen, 1993). Here,

in Bion's explorations of O, the ontological epistemology that he came to prize, is most apparent. Bion (1970) wrote that,

O does not fall in the domain of knowledge or learning, save incidentally; it can "become" but it cannot be "known." It is darkness and formlessness but it enters the domain K [knowledge] when it has evolved to a point where it can be known, through knowledge gained by experience, and formulated in terms derived from sensual experience; its existence is conjectured phenomenologically. (p. 26)

Grotstein (2007) further defined the so-called structure of O, pointing to two distinct "arms" (p. 132) of its configuration. He explicated that, "*One arm* is the transcendental analytic, the deep structures within our unrepressed (inherent) unconscious. The *other arm* is raw inner and/or outer sensory experience itself" (p. 132). The individual's superordinate task is to interface with the raw inner and outer stimuli, which are representatives of "indifferent" O, and to transform them, through alpha-functioning, into a personal and subjective form of O that can now be lived (Bion, 1965; Grotstein, 2007). Through this fleeting merger, we become our higher self, facilitated by the spontaneous experience of our emotional life. Paradoxically, while the drive to know the truth exerts pressure to think thoughts, the tolerance of not-knowing is equally essential because it allows for the receptive state necessary for dreaming O.

With Bion's discovery of O, the domain K underwent a revision, revealing its function in transformations in O (Bion, 1965). For Bion, transformations in knowledge referred to a process in which new understandings about the process of psycho-emotional growth could be attained (Bion, 1965). This stood in contrast to transformations in O, which lead to "growth in becoming" (Bion, 1965, p. 156). The two processes can reciprocate transformations; Bion (1965) explained that an individual's emotional response to O leads to the beginning process of transforming it

through *feeling* it, leading to the integration of this new bit of truth into the unconscious (Grotstein, 2007).

Faith. Bion's conceptualization of faith is non-religious; it connotes, "belief in the existence or presence... of an ultra-sensual object" (Grotstein, 2007, p. 315). It also conveys, "the capacity to mourn the object in its absence and... develop the grace to be able to feel the good effects of the object in the latter's absence" (Grotstein, 2007, p. 316). It is affiliated with O, the ineffable, rather than K because it involves making contact with a phenomenon that can only be intuited (Bion, 1970).

A Dialogic Weaving of Absolute Truth: O, Purusha, and Prakruti

In examining Bion's O dialogically with Ayurveda's concept of truth, congruencies and important differences emerge. O is a conflation of Purusha and Prakruti. It is transcendent, indivisible, ineffable, and infinite, making it qualitatively similar to Purusha. Yet, it is also immanent and "first cause" (Grotstein, 2007, p. 117), as Prakruti (primordial matter) is. Whereas Ayurveda offers a vision of Ultimate Truth that is utterly suffused with love, luminescence, and bliss, Bion (1970) warns of the explosiveness of truth. He described O as a potentially chaotic and meaningless "formless void" (Bion, 1970, p. 52).

In teasing apart Purusha from Prakruti in Bion's O, it is possible to differentiate the chaos from the bliss and the darkness from the light. Transcendent Purusha has the potential to be overwhelming to the individual consciousness, yet when proper preparations are taken (i.e., meditation, self-inquiry) the titrated (fictive) encounter with Ultimate Truth can induce equanimity and liberation from the tyranny of the desirous mind (manas). This supports the evolution of the transcendent Self. Both traditions agree that individuals have within them an immanent fragment of Truth/O. In the lexicon of Ayurveda, this is Purusha; in the parlance of Bion (1970), it is the immanent godhead.

When introducing the qualities of Prakruti, the encounter with truth does indeed become more explosive/terrifying. Prakruti, being associated with the world of form and containing within it the agitating energy of rajas and the obstructing inertia of tamas, presents layers of reality (the evolutes) that can induce such states as terror, envy, and lethargy. Ayurveda presents a path toward harmonizing the individual with her environment so as to create health (clarity, coherence, faith, peace, love) thereby fortifying the individual for the inevitable delayed gratifications and negative realizations of life. Central to this task is the formation of a mind and mental digestive processes that can suffer emotional pain and think disturbing thoughts.

The Mind and Mental Digestion

The mind, being noncorporeal, does not lend itself to empirical scrutiny. Both Bion and Ayurvedic scholars have proposed theories of mind that rest on conjecture, intuition, or phenomenology.

Ayurvedic Perspectives on Physical and Mental Constitution

Within Ayurvedic literature the Sankhya delineation of the cosmology of mind is referenced and a theory of the genetic and karmic factors that influence the development of the individual mind is explicated (Lad, 2006).

From the Ayurvedic perspective, each individual has interdependent physical and mental constitutions. Various factors influence the individual nature; relevant to this study, (a) karma, or the energetic accumulation of the actions of past lives; and (b) the parents' lifestyle, diet, and emotions leading up to conception influence the constitution of the fetus (Lad, 2006). This includes the ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha that are present in the sperm and ovum at the time of conception, which influences both the physical and psycho-emotional tendencies of the individual. Concurrently, sattva from supreme intelligence (mahat), and rajas and tamas, proportionate to the quantity in the parents' minds, take root in the individual, shaping the

qualities of her mental constitution (Lad, 2006). During fetal development, the mother's habits, relationships, nutritional intake, and emotional tendencies further influence the constitution of the baby (Lad, 2006).

The ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha that is established prenatally remains the place of balance and health for the individual throughout his life. Individuals may have one dosha more concentrated than the others or may be dual-doshic; tridoshic individuals, for whom all three doshas are equal in quantity, are rare (Lad, 2002). The efforts needed to maintain or restore this constitutional ratio change with the environmental influences and the aging process. A deviation from the original ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha is considered an imbalance that requires remediation.

The mental constitution, in contrast, is malleable; although it represents a lifelong tendency toward a particular style of mental activity, it can be influenced by lifestyle factors (Frawley, 2011; Svoboda, 1999). In this way, sattva, rajas, and tamas are distinct from the physical doshas; although a quantity of rajas and tamas are required for such endeavors as goal-directed activity and rest, respectively, it is the harmony of sattva that is prized. A person with an agitated (rajasic) or dull (tamasic) mental constitution can promote a calm and steady mind capable of transforming sensory experiences into knowledge through diligent sattvic practices (Svoboda, 1999). The cultivation of sattva prevents "crimes against wisdom" (Svoboda, 1999, p. 126) and promotes the highest purpose of the mind: to facilitate the recognition of true identity as a fragment of Purusha, pure consciousness (Lad, 2002).

The physical doshas and the three qualities of mind are in relationship with one another. As Lad (2006) stated,

Kapha is primarily tamasic and also sattvic, so it induces sleep. Pitta is sattvic and rajasic, so it brings knowledge, understanding, and comprehension as well as criticism, aggression, and competition. Vata is primarily rajasic and also sattvic, so it governs all movements and activity. (p. 176)

Ayurveda and Mental Digestion

Within Sankhya philosophy, personal intelligence (*buddhi*), ego (*ahamkara*), and mind (*manas*) are the primary evolutes involved in the process of mental digestion (Roger, 2013). Our mind receives the sensory impressions that are delivered through the five senses, organizes, and holds them. Next, intelligence, functioning as the digestive fire of the mind, metabolizes the impressions and transmutes them into experiences and memories (Frawley, 2011). When intelligence is functioning properly, it promotes the absorption of sattvic qualities from the environment and the expulsion of rajasic and tamasic ones. In this way, the mind embodies such sattvic attributes as peacefulness, clarity, and generosity while retaining adequate amounts of healthy rajas and tamas so as to promote active engagement with life balanced by deep rest. The experiences and memories created by the metabolic efforts of our intelligence are stored in our deep consciousness (*chitta*). Frawley (2011) described this stage of mental digestion as being akin to digested food that becomes an integral part of our physical body. Similarly, consciousness is infused with the ratio of the qualities of the three gunas we have taken in (Frawley, 2011).

The subdoshas of mental functioning. Four of the subdoshas of vata are involved in mental health (Moore, 2018). These are prana, udana, vyana, and apana vayu. Prana vayu, governs the progression of awareness into perception, sensations, feelings, thoughts, and, finally, emotions (Lad, 2002). It influences cognitive functioning and vitalizes the mind (Lad, 2002). Prana “moves the mind” (Lad, 2002, p. 49) and connects *buddhi*, personal intelligence, and the

body (Moore, 2018); it allows for decisiveness and action (Moore, 2018). Prana vayu controls the senses and when active, desire is awakened and the pursuit of sensory experiences is initiated. Motionless prana is pure awareness; this is a state free of craving and aversion (Lad, 2002). Udana vayu is concentrated in the throat and diaphragm and governs upward movement. It catalyzes memory and influences the expression of emotion from manas, mind and buddhi, personal intelligence. Vyana vayu is located in the heart and “it holds the mind and keeps the mind and body moving at an even pace, connecting the mind and body” (Moore, 2018, p. 1). Apana vayu resides in the lower abdomen and governs waste removal, thus keeping the body and channels of the mind free from toxicity and obstructions (Moore, 2018).

One subdosha of pitta is involved: sadhaka pitta. Sadhaka pitta introduces the fire element into mental processing, thus promoting the transformation of sensations into “feelings and emotions” (Lad, 2002, p. 60). It is bilocated in the gray matter of the brain and in the heart and performs emotional processing. It is responsible for “turning sensations... truth, and reality into feelings and memory” (Moore, 2018, p. 1). Sadhaka is the aspect of intelligence that gives individuals their sense of separateness (ahamkara). When sadhaka is functioning well, our experiences are metabolized swiftly leading to knowledge and understanding (Lad, 2002), which is stored by tarpaka kapha.

Kapha has two subdoshas explicitly involved in mental functioning: tarpaka and avalambaka (Moore, 2018). Tarpaka kapha is primarily located in the white matter of the brain and is responsible for the storing of memories (Lad, 2002). Thoughts pass through tarpaka kapha and may be recorded and remembered or discharged. “It nourishes and provides information to Buddhi” (Moore, 2018, p. 1) that helps individuals learn from their experiences. Avalambaka kapha is primarily located in the heart, lungs, and spine, and provides courage for right actions.

This subdosha “is associated with support, love and compassion” (Lad, 2002, p. 71). It unites body, mind, and intellect by holding our emotions until they are carried by vata to sadhaka pitta for processing (Moore, 2018).

In summary, the subdoshas of vata govern awareness, perception, expression, mind-body integration and the elimination of wastes. The subdosha of pitta governs metabolization of experience. Finally, kapha’s subdoshas allow for storage of memories and courage. These subdoshas interact with the deep consciousness, intelligence, mind, and ego to coordinate mental digestion.

Vital essences revisited. The subtle essences of the doshas play an important role in mental digestion. “Awareness is the perfect state of balance between Prana, Tejas, and Ojas” (Lad, 2012, p. 555). They work together to “nourish the mental faculties and consciousness” (Lad, 2012, p. 541). Welch (2015) explained that, “the stronger and more ingrained the Pranic pattern is in a person, the more likely it is to affect others, rather than be affected by others” (p. 205). In other words, the smooth and unobstructed flow of Prana protects an individual from the negative or toxic influences of others. Lad (2012) offered that,

Prana is the vital force that maintains cellular respiration and a flow of intelligence and communication at a deep cellular level... Tejas is radiant energy and maintains cellular metabolism and intelligence... Ojas is the medium through which the current of Prana passes and it maintains cellular immunity. (p. 541)

Digestive fire and mental toxins. The digestive capacity of sadhaka pitta (gray matter of the brain) and manas (sensory mind) determine mental clarity leading to “knowledge, understanding, comprehension, recognition, and identification” (Lad, 2006, p. 192). Thoughts and feelings are potential nourishment for the intelligence; however, they must first be processed

by sadhaka pitta (Lad, 2006). The health of manas agni/the digestive capacity of the mind is dependent upon the strength and radiance of the central fire in the stomach and small intestine. This is the primary location of heat in the body, and it subsequently enkindles the digestive fire of the tissues and cells, which then support the proper functioning of mental digestion (Lad, 2006). Lad (2006) acknowledged that, “There is a mystical link between the physical digestion of food and the mental digestion of information” (p. 192).

When mental digestion is weak or variable, the accumulation of raw sensory data, as well as memories, thoughts, and emotions, become mental toxins (mental ama; Lad, 2006). “This toxic indigestion of thoughts, feelings and emotions clogs the [channels of the mind] and creates psychological problems” (Lad, 2006, p. 193). Ayurvedic medicine delineates several methods for redressing ineffective digestion and thereby resolving mental toxicity, outlined later in this study.

Ayurvedic Anatomy and Physiology of the Mind

Within the Ayurvedic tradition, various channels exist to carry energy and nutrition. These channel systems have both physical and noncorporeal attributes and move from a “root” through a “passageway” and, finally, to an “opening” (Lad, 2002). The root of the mind is in the heart and the passageways encompass the entire body, moving through the “ten vessels,” that are partially correlated with the sensory organs: the (a) two nostrils, (b) two ears, (c) two eyes, (d) mouth, (e) rectum, and (f) urethra (Welch, 2005). The tenth vessel is *sushumna*, which is rooted in the heart and opens through the crown of the head (Welch, 2005). The channels of the mind are located throughout the body and therefore bidirectional communication exists between body and mind (Dash, 2008; Welch, 2005). Thus, an imbalance of the body may infiltrate the mind and vitiation of the mind may cause physical disturbance (Welch, 2005).

Classic Ayurvedic texts explicate the link between the mind, the soul, the senses, and the body (Dash, 2008). The state of the mind is influenced by the contact between the sensory

faculties and their objects of perception. The mind, in conjunction with the action of the soul, seeks sensory stimulation. If the sensory input is excessive, deficient, or inappropriate, vitiation of the mind is likely to occur.

When the individual mind is functioning without pathology, the signs of adequate mental digestion are apparent. Svoboda (1999) described six signs of good mental digestion:

- (a) No mental discomfort after ingesting your desired quantity of sense objects;
 - (b) the mind does not feel jaded and full afterwards;
 - (c) no untoward emotions are produced during the period of time you are processing new information;
 - (d) you effortlessly and accurately retrieve your experiences from memory and can communicate it;
 - (e) your sleep after indulgence is sound and enjoyable, without disturbing dreams (which are indicative of ama [undigested experiences]);
 - (f) desire for further sensory gratification arises after an appropriate period of time.
- (pp. 127–128)

Adequate mental digestion of internally and externally arising stimuli nourish the healthy development of the personality and promote the smooth flow of Prana.

Bion and Mental Digestion

Bion (1965) also recognized the importance of nourishing the personality through the metabolization of experiences. Perhaps his most succinct and penetrating comment on mental growth can be found in Transformations: “Healthy mental growth seems to depend on truth as the living organism depends on food. If it is lacking or deficient, the personality deteriorates” (p. 38).

Bion (1962a) asserted that thinking comes into existence in order to deal with the pressure of thoughts. These thoughts without a thinker originate in O, which has two branches: (a) the immanent, and (b) the transcendent. The immanent aspect of O is the inherent

pre-conceptions /noumena/Ideal Forms that expectantly await their mating with a realization. The transcendent branch is comprised of raw sensory stimuli, which must be converted “into alpha-elements by alpha-functioning, followed by their distribution to dream thoughts, memory, contact barrier, and feelings” (Grotstein, 2007, p.122).

The processing of these beta-elements (O’s imprint) involves two distinct forms of “thinking.” The first might be better named “becoming” as it is performed through unconscious wakeful dreaming that supports the evolution of a personalized truth and sense of self (Grotstein, 2007, p. 292). The second form of thinking consists of various preconscious/conscious processes that support “subject–object differentiation” (p. 292) and the ability to transform thoughts and feelings through cognitive processes (Grotstein, 2007).

Ayurvedic practitioners also value both forms of “thinking.” In order to achieve the ontological state of relaxed presence, various practices may be employed such as open monitoring meditation. This style of meditation promotes nonjudgmental attention to inner and outer sensory stimuli and entrains to nervous system to bring calm and receptive attention to life beyond meditation (Burgin, 2018). Likewise, cognitive processes are considered important, as the ability to transform information into knowledge prevents the formation of mental ama and nourishes intelligence.

Let’s take a careful look at these processes from a Bionian perspective. Bion offers the example of the Breast, as a way to describe the progression of the development of the mind capable of thinking thoughts.

The baby has an innate pre-conception (expectation without awareness) of the Breast and must contend with the negative realization of the No-Breast. If the baby is genetically endowed with a high tolerance for frustration the negative realization is less emotionally provocative.

Initially, the baby does not have an apparatus equipped for coping with negative realization. Instead of thinking thoughts, he attempts to evade frustration either through realistic projective identification of the bad experiences or through omnipotent phantasies. In both instances, he evacuates his bad feelings through “realistic projective identification” (Bion, 1984, p. 118) into the container of the receptive caregiver.

When an attuned and receptive caregiver is available to receive the evacuated beta-elements, they undergo a detoxification process through containment in her loving reverie. Next, the “pre-digested” beta-elements, now transformed into alpha-elements, are offered back to the baby in a tolerable form. Over time, the baby introjects the alpha-functioning of the caregiver, thereby developing the capacity for thought and increased toleration of frustration (Bion, 1984).

When the infant has had adequate introjection of a caregiver’s alpha-function, she is able to transform the absence of the object into a thought, thus modifying the frustration and rendering it more tolerable. Next, whether this conception is met with a continued negative realization, or a positive realization of the Breast, learning from experience becomes possible. Through this iterative process, the mental apparatus is continuously developed, thus allowing for more sophisticated thinking to develop (Bion, 1984; Lopez-Corvo, 2003).

When pre-conceptions are mated with a realization, a conception is formed. Conception is Bion’s term for a “thought” that emerges to deal with the discrepancy between the expected Breast and the Breast that is offered; such thoughts are amenable to future realizations. “The conception remains in constant conjunction with a satisfactory emotional experience” (Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p. 63). As thinking becomes more sophisticated, greater complexity and abstraction becomes possible. Concepts are born when pre-conceptions become saturated with

the knowledge of previous realizations (Lopez-Corvo, 2003).

Bion's theory of container-contained grew from his reimagining of Melanie Klein's formulation of projective identification. The projected object must be *contained* by another mind, functioning as the *container*, that is capable of acting upon it in a meaningful way. In a successful process of mental digestion, the relationship between container-contained is "commensal." Bion (1962b) clarified, "By commensal, I mean contained and container are dependent on each other for mutual benefit without harm to either...The mother derives benefit and mental growth from the experience: the infant likewise abstracts benefit and achieves growth" (pp. 90–91). Bion (1963) later offered that, "From the point of view of meaning, thinking depends on the successful introjection of the good Breast that is originally responsible for the performance of alpha-function." (pp. 31–32). And: "Learning depends on the capacity of the [growing container] to remain integrated and yet lose rigidity" (Bion, 1962b, p. 93). In other words, to be cohesive enough to hold the contained while being flexible enough to allow for maximum receptivity and transformation.

Through the commensal relationship between container-contained, the baby's alpha-functioning continues to develop. Alpha-functioning acts upon sensory stimuli and emotions, transducing them into "psychic facts" (Sandler, 2005, p. 25). These "psychic facts" are analogous to alpha-elements, the building blocks of mental life. Alpha-elements, as they proliferate, enter into relationships with each other. They may blend together, arrange themselves into linear narratives, or order themselves in a multitude of ways, promoting coherence and forming the contact barrier (Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p. 69).

The contact barrier is a permeable membrane that exists between the conscious and the unconscious, selectively allowing for the movement of thoughts, dream thoughts, and feelings to

move between the two systems. It links systems conscious and unconscious *and* maintains their separateness (Sandler, 2005). Because it is created by the proliferation of alpha-elements, the qualities and functioning of the contact barrier are determined by the effectiveness of alpha-functioning (Sandler, 2005) and the relationships between the alpha-elements themselves (Lopez-Corvo, 2003). In this way it determines, “the nature of defences, deciding the way consciousness behaves in relation to the unconscious, either repressing it or allowing it to become conscious and to be used as a thought that might reveal the truth” (Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p. 69). The contact barrier also aids the individual in discriminating between outside and inside realities (Lopez-Corvo, 2003). In Bion’s (1962b) own words,

the contact barrier permits a relationship and preservation of belief... as an event in actuality, subject to the laws of nature, without having that view submerged by emotions and phantasies originating endo-psychically. Reciprocally, it preserves emotions with endo-psychic origin from being overwhelmed by the realistic view. (pp. 26–27)

In other words, the secondary process of realistic thinking is protected from the amorphous feeling-thoughts and phantasies of the unconscious, and the rich dreaming of the primary process of unconscious thinking is shielded from the linear and logical tendencies of the conscious system.

Bion believed that emotional stimuli, both external and internal, must be dreamed by the unconscious, detoxified, and sorted. Following the introjection of the caregiver’s alpha-functioning, an individual performs these tasks for herself through wakeful dreaming (Grotstein, 2007). These dream thoughts can then be filtered back to conscious thinking across the contact barrier or can be retained in the unconscious for further phantasying (Grotstein, 2007). Grotstein explained, “dreaming constitutes a continuous sensory...process whereby the

sensory stimuli (internal and/or external) of emotional experience undergo a transformation and an aesthetically honed reconfiguration, making them suitable for being experienced affectively, thought about cognitively, and recalled in memory” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 266). Therefore, dreaming facilitates the process of moving from impersonal O, through paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions in order to arrive finally at a personal, if fictive, O (Grotstein, 2007).

O can be thought of as myriad unknowables lurking simultaneously and vertically...

Dreaming realigns them longitudinally... The rationales may at first be fictional – in the form of dreams, unconscious phantasies, conscious daydreams, or myths... The purpose of the story is to bind the anxiety created by O by transforming... it into fictive but credible narrative structure that restores the subject’s sense of cosmic causality and coherence. (Grotstein, 2007, p. 276)

As the individual continuously encounters ever-evolving truth, the wakeful dreaming process transforms the truth into an idiosyncratically fictionalized aspect of truth, one that retains the invariances and prevents catastrophic change. Bion reorganized the relationship between paranoid schizoid and depressive positions and between systems unconscious and conscious. In his paradigm, these relationships are ever-evolving and dialectical, rather than sequential and hierarchical (Grotstein, 2007, p. 197). With the binocular perspective, experiences can be “seen” cyclically as parts and wholes, and as dreams and thoughts (Bion, 1970).

An Integrative Theory of Thinking: Part One

As previously mentioned, Bion purposefully assigned ambiguous terms to his theory of thinking in an effort to aid his readers in eschewing previous understandings. Although there is benefit to inducing original thinking through these unsaturated terms, there is also benefit in overlaying complementary Ayurvedic anatomical and physiological processes. By correlating these structures and functions across the two disciplines, new insights into dispositional

differences, developmental processes, and potential interventions becomes possible. For example, alpha-functioning can be understood to be a multifactorial process that involves the doshas and the mental gunas.

Recall that the mental gunas are in relationship with the doshas. If the influence of rajas is greater on vata than that of sattva, the tendency toward ungroundedness and fear are pronounced, interfering with negative capability. For pitta, if the influence of rajas is greater than that of sattva, the tendency toward irritability and envy is promoted, impairing negative capability. If tamas exerts a greater influence on kapha than sattva does, the kaphic tendencies toward greediness and depression are supported, thwarting negative capability. Thus, the prominence of sattva in the mental constitution greatly influences the individual's ability to remain in a state of relative equilibrium when suffering through frustration. Therefore, the capacity of the individual to develop alpha-functioning is mediated by the mental gunas.

The effects of sattva, being harmony, peace, and balance, are consistent with the qualities needed for negative capability. A mental constitution with a predominance of sattva embodies the patience and security that Bion associated with successful movement between the paranoid schizoid and depressive positions ($Ps \leftrightarrow D$). The agitating effects of rajas and the dulling effects of tamas interfere, increasing the likelihood of persecutory anxiety and depression. In fact, sattva, paradoxically, promotes the truth instinct alongside the ability to suffer not-knowing with faith. Sattva, "expresses itself as curiosity" (Joshi, 2005, p. 21), thus supporting the truth instinct and creating a state conducive to transformations in O.

Before proceeding with subsequent processes that comprise this integrative understanding of mental digestion, we must first take a detour into the realm of mental indigestion.

Mental Indigestion and Evasion of Thinking: Ayurveda and Mental Indigestion

Mental indigestion, in the Ayurvedic paradigm, is caused by an imbalance of the doshas, namely, vata, pitta, and kapha, or of the mental constitution, comprised of sattva, rajas, and tamas (Svoboda, 2004). The health of the digestive fire (agni) is interdependent with the functionality of the doshas and the mental gunas and plays a critical role in mental digestion. The pathogenesis of doshic imbalance unfolds over six stages: (a) accumulation, (b) aggravation, (c) overflow/spreading, (d) depositing, (e) manifestation, and (f) diversification (Lad, 2002; Svoboda, 1999). Rajas, and tamas may be imbalanced at the time of birth due to prenatal, genetic, or karmic influences or imbalance may occur in life due to vitiating factors elaborated on below (Frawley, 2011). (Recall that sattva, which represents balance, peace, etc., is never the cause of mental imbalances.)

Although causes of mental imbalance are numerous and delineated in both classic and modern texts, it is the weak or malformed sense of “I-am-ness” that promotes *prajnaparadha*, or “crimes against wisdom” in the first place. Svoboda made use of the alimentary metaphor when he wrote that, “weakness of ahamkara [causes us to] bite off more than we can chew...Allowing ahamkara’s investment in her assumed persona to regulate your life causes you to swallow more than you can digest” (Svoboda, 1999, pp. 138–139). There is an opportunity to “prevent undigested experience from entering your system by ‘vomiting’ it” (p. 139). Crimes against wisdom occur when an individual purposefully or inadvertently fails to act in accordance with the rhythms of nature, due to the presence of desire. Because of malformed ahamkara and subsequent crimes against wisdom we inevitably have sensory experiences that are excessive, deficient, or inappropriate for our constitution or current digestive capacity.

Malformed ego can cause imbalance through desire/attachment, anger, greed, confusion, pride, envy, repulsion, or fear (Lad, 2006, p. 182). These can show up as consumption of an

inappropriate diet, engaging in overactivity, alienating oneself from nature, allowing for wrong relationships between the sensory organs and their objects of perception, and the suppression of natural urges¹, among other varied manifestations (Svoboda, 2004).

Additional external causes of imbalance include exposure to pollutants, side-effects of medical treatment, high speed travel, and the contagion of other people's negativity (Svoboda, 2004, p. 111). Finally, "stress (physical, psychological, emotional)" (Lad, 2006, pp. 182–184) are additional causes. Even with these external causes, a healthy *ahamkara* would offer a layer of immunity and protection.

Ayurvedic medicine emphasizes the relationship between humans and the elemental qualities of their environments. Given that humans are physically and psychically permeable, there is a natural fluctuation in the ratios of the doshas and the three universal qualities. When individuals do not act to rebalance their constitution, the accumulation of the elements becomes pathological and initiates the disease process.

When individuals commit crimes against wisdom, they engage in behaviors that are inappropriate for their constitution or current condition. Such behaviors tend to weaken digestion, which leads to the formation of *ama*, or toxic waste. Once the obstructing presence of *ama* has been introduced into the system, the bodily and mental channels are no longer amenable to the proper flow of *vata* and *Prana* (Svoboda, 2004). Although pathogenic processes can occur without *ama*, it can complicate and accelerate the disease process.

Mental *ama*, or unmetabolized experiences, can be both the cause or the effect of poor mental digestion. In the former, an individual's digestive capacity may be overwhelmed by the quality or quantity of sensory data that must be processed. In the latter case, the digestive fire has

¹ The 13 natural urges are: flatulence, bowel movements, urination, belching, sneezing, thirst, hunger, sleep, coughing, breathing, yawning, vomiting, ejaculating, and crying.

been weakened by the aggravated dosha, or excessive rajas or tamas, and as a result, sensory information is insufficiently processed. In Frawley's (2011) words,

Wrong mental digestion occurs when we are unable to break down the names and forms of our experience into truth energies. Then the undigested names and forms accumulate in the mind and block its perception. We mistake the appearance of things for their meaning or truth content. (p. 173)

Let us now revisit the six stages of disease, which are generic to every doshic pathogenic process. Most commonly, a single dosha goes out of balance in the following sequence, potentially recruiting additional doshas in the later stages of the process. Note that the first three stages occur in the gastrointestinal tract, making them easier to treat.

The first three stages of doshic pathogenesis. During the *accumulation* stage, a dosha accumulates in its primary site in the body; this phase can occur naturally with the changes in elemental properties through a day and likewise can naturally be pacified as the elemental quantities shift in the environment, as described above.

When the excess is not resolved, it further accumulates leading to the *aggravation* stage. At this time, the dosha continues to increase and becomes irritating in its primary location causing disturbances to the site itself. Frawley (2011) asserted that the vital essences of Prana, Tejas, and Ojas halt the disease progression at the stage of aggravation. Through their subtle work on the level of cellular digestion, they restore the doshas to their proper quantity before they overflow their primary sites.

Should the pathological process progress, it reaches the third stage of *overflowing and spreading*. At this stage, regardless of which dosha has gone out of balance, the channels of the mind are affected. The rogue dosha uses these channels to travel (Lad, 2006). Now, the dosha

begins to wander, “visiting” its subsidiary sites and giving rise to prodromal symptoms. If the offending dosha is not successfully expelled or palliated, it begins looking for a weak or defective space in the body-mind to deposit itself. Svoboda (2004) asserted that, “if the imbalance is further suppressed with stimulants, allopathic drugs, or by repressing emotion, both ama and the doshas dive deeper into the tissues” (p. 118), including the heart and brain. Recall that the heart is the root of the channels of the mind, and the brain contains the subdoshas integral to mental digestion (*prana vayu, sadhaka pitta, and tarpaka kapha*).

The second three stages of doshic pathogenesis. During the fourth stage of the disease process, the rogue dosha successfully *deposits* itself in a weak or defective space and symptom expression becomes more recognizable. At the fifth stage of *manifestation*, the illness is fully expressed and can be diagnosed by the tools of Western medicine. The sixth and final stage of disease is *diversification* and encompasses the involvement of nearby tissues and organs in the pathological process and potentially the aggravation of additional doshas (Svoboda, 2004).

Imbalances of the mental gunas. Imbalances caused by rajas and tamas, when developed postnatally, are the result of crimes against wisdom. Excess of rajas occurs when the diet contains frequent alcoholic beverages, “grains and beans, potatoes, tomatoes...sour fruits” (Lad, 2012, p. 62) and spices. Lifestyle factors such as overactivity, materialism, excessively goal-focused behavior, sexual indulgence, competition/striving for dominance, and neglect of spiritual aspects of life increase rajas. When rajasic imbalances occur, the individual over-exerts, which leads to exhaustion (Frawley, 2011). Exhaustion is in the domain of tamas. Tamas can occur as the inevitable result of excessive rajas that has burnt itself out, or can be brought about by tamasic diet and lifestyle factors. Tamasic foods include, “fermented, stale, and overripe foods as well as mushrooms, eggs, and meat” (Lad, 2012, p. 62). Lifestyle factors such as being

sedentary, overeating, oversleeping, and insufficient mental activity promote *tamas* (Svoboda, 1999).

When this disease process unfolds in a manner that involves the channels of the mind, signs and symptoms of poor mental digestion become apparent. The outward manifestation of the imbalance will express the qualities of the offending *dosha* through the unique location and will vary in severity based on the stage of the disease. Therefore, the signs and symptoms of poor mental digestion range from coma to attentional difficulties. Other examples of impaired mental digestion include negative thinking, emotional lability, confusion, indecision, and a sense of meaninglessness (Lad, 2006, p. 321).

Within the Ayurvedic understanding of etiology and healing, emphasis is placed on the personal habits and history of the individual. This vertex illuminates the opportunities and requirements for personal responsibility in the maintenance of health; however, important contextual and relational influences are overlooked. In this way, Bion offers a complementary perspective that accounts for such influences and leads to intersubjective mechanisms of change.

Mental Indigestion and Evasion of Thinking: Bion and Evasion of Thinking

The evasion of thinking arises out of a failed intersubjective process between infant and primary caregiver (Bion, 1962b). Just as the realistic projective identification and the loving reverie of a primary caregiver promote the development of a mind capable of learning from experience, so the absence of reverie hinders the development of negative capability. When a receptive container is chronically unavailable for or hostile to the detoxification of beta-elements, the infant's ability to tolerate frustration is increasingly burdened. In the latter scenario of a hostile container, the container-contained relationship has become "parasitic." Bion (1970) explained that this occurred when either container or contained is dependent on the other in such a manner as to be destructive to both as well as the relationship itself.

As the infant works to “decide” between modifying or evading a frustration, the tendency to evade becomes predominant under the aforementioned conditions (Bion, 1984). Bion (1962b) noted that an infant with “marked capacity for toleration of frustration may survive the ordeal” (p. 37) and develop alpha-functioning; however, at the opposite extreme, an infant with a pronounced inability to tolerate frustration may fail to develop alpha-functioning even in the presence of warm maternal reverie (Bion, 1962b).

Bion (1984) described how the mother’s inability to detoxify the baby’s fear of annihilation lays the groundwork for psychotic thinking. When the infant, “reintrojects, not a fear of dying made tolerable, but a nameless dread” (Bion, 1984, p. 116) the need to avoid further emotional pain supports the dominance of the pleasure principle. The truth instinct is distorted and replaced by “defensive omnipotence” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 207).

Bion (1984) articulated two psychopathological consequences of absent or inadequate maternal reverie in infancy and Ferro (2005) added a third. When psychopathological developments occur, Bion (1984) stated that it may be due to, “a breakdown in the development of the apparatus for ‘thinking’ or dealing with thoughts” (p. 111). Ferro described this in his own lexicon and noted that it is a severe form of pathology. He referred to this first type as a “primal deficiency” (Ferro, 2005, p. 2) in the formation of mentalized pictographs, or emotionally laden narrative bits, indicating that the mind may have failed to develop. Under these circumstances, psychic fragility may make alpha-functioning nonexistent. Put differently, there is an inability to act upon sensory and emotional stimuli in a meaningful way, thus making it difficult to form alpha-elements (Ferro, 2005). In this scenario, there is psychotic thinking and a failure to learn from experience. As Bion (1962b) stated, “Failure to use the emotional experience produces a... disaster in the development of the personality” (p. 42).

Psychotic thinking is characterized by, “avoidance of reality, intolerance of frustration, excessive projective identification in order to rid the psyche of painful thoughts and feelings, hallucinosis as a substitute for dreaming, and a reversal of alpha-function” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 295). Bion (1962b) defined reversal of alpha-function thusly: “Instead of sense impressions being changed into alpha-elements for use in dream thoughts and unconscious waking thinking, the development of the contact barrier is replaced by its destruction” (p. 25). With the destruction of the contact barrier and the inability to form alpha-elements, the unconscious and conscious become intertwined (Sandler, 2005), forming “bizarre objects.” This reversal of alpha-functioning, “does not produce a simple return to beta-elements...which had no tincture of the personality adhering to them. The beta-element differs from the bizarre object in that the bizarre object is beta-element plus ego and superego traces” (Bion, 1962b, p. 25).

Bion (1984) described the second form of psychopathological development as being related to, “a breakdown in the development of thoughts” (p. 111). In this second type, if mental functioning is sufficient to form alpha-elements, the mind may not be capable of making use of them to form dream thoughts (Ferro, 2005). It is as if the alpha-elements are free floating and cannot be linked to form useful narratives.

The third psychopathological development, explicated by Ferro, is that which results from trauma. Here, the sheer amount or intensity of beta-elements overwhelms the alpha-functioning, even in a healthy individual, thus resulting in a trauma that cannot be metabolized independently (Ferro, 2005).

Bion (1984) and Ferro (2005) posited that psychopathology can result from various combinations of the processes outlined above. Furthermore, Ferro acknowledged that it can be challenging to distinguish between an excess of unprocessed beta-elements, the formation of

balpha elements² or a deficiency of alpha-function. Further complicating etiology are the potential problems with the dialectic of the paranoid schizoid $\leftarrow\rightarrow$ depressive positions (Ps $\leftarrow\rightarrow$ D). Bion (1963) noted that when there is a disintegration of Ps $\leftarrow\rightarrow$ D it results in, “a total loss depressive stupor, or, intense impaction and degenerate stuporous violence” (pp. 51–52). Also, potentially troublesome is the dialectic of negative capability $\leftarrow\rightarrow$ selected fact (Ferro, 2005). When there is a failure of negative capability, there is inadequate tolerance of meaninglessness; therefore, the selected fact that would offer thematic cohesion in the chaos is not given space to emerge (Ferro, 2005). Finally, as alluded to previously, there is the relationship between container and contained, which, if parasitic or absent, contributes to psychopathology. In each of these scenarios, beta-elements must then be evacuated and defense mechanisms developed.

Evasion of thinking can result in multiple, and varied signs and symptoms, ranging from mild and situational to pervasive and clinically significant. Bion (1992) listed schizoid tendencies, “immaturity, confusion, helplessness, and impotence” (p. 300) as well as “greed, envy, hate, destruction, and paranoia” (Bion, 1965, p. 38) as potential consequences. Eventually, Bion (1965) came to call the deliberate denudation of meaning “transformations in -K” (p. 115) or minus knowledge. Minus K is an attack on linking characterized by a greedy state of mind in which violent envy creates a degenerative polarization of superiority—inferiority (Sandler, 2005). This is a superiority of not understanding, which may be pursued through lies (Bion, 1962b, 1965; Sandler, 2005). Bion (1965) also noted that morality can cause a disregard for the truth, which results in “starvation of the psyche and stunted growth” (p. 38). The “psychological disaster” (Bion, 1958, p. 144) of curiosity becoming bound with arrogance and stupidity.

² “Balpha is Ferro’s (2005) term for “partially processed beta-elements, stored in lumps” (p. 3).

Ferro outlined several possible signs and symptoms of psychopathology, including: (a) the formation of undigested facts, (b) splitting and projection, (c) disavowal, (d) negation, (e) psychosomatic disorders, (f) hallucinations, (g) characteropathic acting out, (h) perversions, (i) psychic dismantling, and (j) narcissism (Ferro, 2005, p. 3).

Techniques and Interventions for the Restoration of Mental Coherence

Ayurvedic Interventions

“Ill-health is the state of disharmony of the individual with regard to his or her environment, and medicine is the means by which this harmony is restored” (Svoboda, 1980, p. 21).

The Ayurvedic approach to general disease management includes assessment and targeted interventions (Lad, 2012). These treatments are carried out on four levels, depending on the nature of the imbalance. They may address (a) the three biological humors of vata, pitta and kapha; (b) the three vital essences of Prana, Tejas, and Ojas; (c) the relationship between the mind and the senses; and/or (d) the functioning of consciousness, including the three mental gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas (Frawley, 2011).

First, the Ayurvedic clinician determines the constitution of the patient and the nature of the current imbalance. These assessments are performed through the eight methods of clinical examination³ and reveal the ratio of the three doshas and the three mental gunas (Lad, 2006). Recall that the unique proportions of vata, pitta, and kapha at the time of birth represent an individual’s place of health throughout her lifespan. Thus, any discrepancy between this and the current quantity of the doshas indicates an imbalance. Dissimilarly, the mental guna of sattva is

³ The eight methods of clinical examination are: (a) pulse; (b) urine; (c) feces; (d) tongue; (e) speech; (f) palpation; (g) examination of the eyes; and, (h) physical form or appearance (Lad, 2006, see chapter 5).

prized above rajas, and tamas. Therefore, an excess of rajas or tamas indicates an imbalance of the mental constitution.

Next, the Ayurvedic clinician must determine the cause of the imbalance and seek to remove it. The cause may be physical or mental and may have arisen externally or internally and will continue to produce its effects so long as it remains an influence on the patient.

Determination of the cause can be carried out through clinical interview, home visits to assess the physical environment of the patient, and a thorough review of the individual's daily habits, among other assessment tools (Lad, 2012).

Once the nature of the patient, the ailment, and the environment have been established, the Ayurvedic clinician prescribes new daily routines (*dinacharya*; Lad, 2012). The 24 hours of the day are broken down into six 4-hour segments, each ruled by a single dosha. During the healing process and for general maintenance of health, individuals are encouraged to align daily activities, including exercise, sleep, mealtimes, and mental exertion, with the appropriate time of day. Elemental qualities fluctuate throughout the day and can support or hinder such activities. Through proper alignment of activities with doshic qualities in the environment, mild disturbances to the physical doshas and the mental gunas are naturally palliated (Lad, 2012).

After aiding the patient in establishing new daily habits, the Ayurvedic practitioner selects and carries out a detoxification procedure. Physical and mental ama can be addressed during this step. Within Ayurvedic medicine, there are two main branches of detoxification: one seeks to palliate the aggravated dosha(s), restoring it to its appropriate quantity and situating it in its rightful seat in the gastrointestinal tract; the other approach seeks to forcefully expel the excessive dosha, typically through the nearest orifice. This latter approach, *panchakarma*, is often a residential/in-patient procedure. Multiple factors influence the decision for palliation or

elimination including the strength of the disease, the strength of the patient, and the goals of treatment (Svoboda, 2004).

This step includes purification of the mind. Mental detoxification is carried out through fasting of inappropriate sensory impressions, allowing for personal intelligence (buddhi) to process the storage of wrong impressions, released by consciousness (chitta). Frawley (2011) asserted that, “Once the intake of impressions ceases, consciousness, whose nature is space, will naturally empty itself out. Its contents will come up to the level of intelligence which can then digest them properly. This requires deep thinking, inquiry, and meditation” (p. 175). When indicated, rebalancing of the mental gunas can be incorporated into this stage of treatment.

Integral to the daily routine and detoxification procedures is the Ayurvedic dictum that “opposite qualities provide balance” (Lad, 2012, p. 14). Recall that each of the doshas as well as the mental gunas are associated with specific qualities. For example, vata is cold, dry, and rough and tamas is heavy, dull, and inert. When formulating a treatment plan, foods, herbs, activities, and so on should embody opposite qualities to the offending dosha/guna (Lad, 2012; Svoboda, 2004).

The final step in the general protocol for disease management, is rejuvenation (Svoboda, 1999). This is a frequently overlooked step in the West, where we often feel satisfied with a successful detoxification procedure. However, following purification, the body and mind are often left in a weakened state and must be nourished and restored in order to avoid future vulnerability to disease. Mental rejuvenation can take the form of a restorative retreat during which “one must... regulate sleep, desist from sex and travel, enjoy only mild exercise and avoid loud speech, violent behavior, and other vata-provoking behaviors” (Svoboda, 2004, p. 225).

Such retreats support individuals in fasting from cravings as they are removed from their familiar environment with easy access to habituated tendencies.

The specific interventions for the steps detailed above are carried out through physical, psychological, social, and spiritual interventions, depending on the nature of the patient and the imbalance (Frawley, 2011). It is beyond the scope of this study to offer a detailed description of the vast array of interventions outlined in Ayurvedic texts; however, general principles with examples are detailed below.

Ayurvedic treatment through physical factors. Diet, herbs, and exercise are three physical approaches to healing. These approaches are especially helpful in dealing with aggravated doshas as they are designed to pacify or expel the excessive dosha (Frawley, 2011). In regards to diet, Ayurveda considers six “tastes”⁴ and their effect on the doshas. Vata is balanced by tastes that are sweet, sour, and salty. Pitta is balanced by the sweet, bitter, and astringent tastes and kapha is balanced by bitter, astringent, and pungent tastes (Chopra, 2015; Lad, 2002). The sweet taste has a concentration of water and earth elements and is comprised of carbohydrates, protein, and fat, such as rice and dairy. It is soothing and anabolic, which pacifies vata. Its cooling nature balances pitta. The sour taste is comprised of water and fire and is found in such foods as citrus and fermented vegetables. It stimulates appetite and digestion; it is heating, which warms up cold vata, and stimulating which invigorates sluggish kapha. The salty taste is made of earth and fire and is found in foods such as table salt, soy sauce, and sea vegetables; it balances vata grounding and hydrating and stimulates digestion. The bitter taste is comprised of air and space and is found in such foods as leafy green vegetables; it is detoxifying,

⁴ The sweet taste is comprised of carbohydrates, protein, and fat; the sour taste is comprised of organic acids including ascorbic acid, citric acid, and acetic acid; the salty taste is found in mineral salts; the bitter taste is comprised of alkaloids and glycosides; the astringent taste is made of tannins and oxalic acid; the pungent taste is found in essential oils (Chopra, 2015).

which balances pitta and kapha. The astringent taste is made of air and earth and is a secondary taste in foods such as pomegranates, apples, and spinach; it cools off pitta and condenses the moisture of kapha. Finally, the pungent taste is comprised of fire and air and is found in spicy foods such as garlic and jalapeno peppers; it balances kapha by stimulating digestion, and generally creating warmth (Chopra, 2015).

Ayurvedic practitioners prescribe exercise that opposes the natural tendencies of each dosha (Lad, 2012). For mobile and erratic vata, exercise should be “slow, gentle, [and] flowing” [such as] “yoga, stretching, and tai chi” (Lad, 2012, p. 103). For hot and competitive pitta, physical activity should not be overheating or combative; dancing, biking, swimming, and walking are indicated (Lad, 2012). The heaviness and slowness of kapha are balanced by “strenuous endeavors... [that are] vigorous, stimulating, and lengthy” (p. 103), such as jogging and jumping rope.

Ayurvedic treatment through psychological factors. Gaining control of the senses and subverting the incessant power of desire is an essential step in recovering mental coherence. Sensory impressions that are balancing to vata, in general terms, will be grounding and calming; for pitta, they will be cooling and will support the cultivation of compassion; and, for kapha, they will be stimulating and will support the cultivation of equanimity (Frawley, 2011).

Ayurvedic treatment through social factors. Certain qualities in the social environment are desirable regardless of constitution or current condition, such as meaningfulness and love. However, each of the doshas is balanced by unique factors, and this is reflected in the types of work, recreation, and relationships that are balancing. For example, aggravated vata is soothed by affirming and grounding relationships and activities; excess pitta is reduced through

environments that emphasize friendliness and cooperation over competition; and kapha is balanced by endeavors and relationships that are invigorating and challenging.

Ayurvedic treatment through spiritual factors. Spiritual factors aid in increasing sattva, thereby restoring peace and balance to the mind. They also support the healthy functioning of the vital essences of Prana, Tejas, and Ojas (Frawley, 2011; Lad 2012). Practices that cultivate sattva are consuming a fresh vegetarian diet of such foods as grains, dairy, fruits, and vegetables (Joshi, 2005). Additional helpful practices include yoga, meditation, and sound therapy, such as kirtan and mantra. These practices are tailored to the constitution of the individual. Vata predominant types should practice gentle and slow yoga, while pitta requires a faster flow through the postures and kapha must be stimulated through rapid yogic sequences (Lad, 2012).

In addition to open monitoring meditation, mentioned earlier in this study, two additional forms of meditation are commonly employed: *empty bowl* and *so'ham*. During empty bowl meditation, the patient breaths normally, with attention on the breath and the natural pause that occurs between inhales and exhales (Lad, 2012). Meditating with the mantra “so’ham” promotes identification with our higher consciousness (Lad, 2006). “So” is spoken on the inhale and “ham” on the exhale. Lad (2006) asserted that, “So is higher consciousness, which goes in. Ham is the ego, which goes out. So’ham is the pure state of choiceless, passive awareness” (p. 222).

Although Ayurvedic interventions tend to focus on personal actions taken and internal conditions, both Joshi (2005) and Welch (2015) acknowledged the importance of keeping good company. Joshi advised to, “keep the company of the wise and engage in activities that are conducive to positivity and joy” (p. 27). These suggestions hint at but do not fully explicate the

contextual and relational influences on the development of the mind and the restoration of coherence and presence. For that, we now turn our attention toward Bionian techniques.

Bionian Techniques

In general, Bion and those in his lineage recommend the presence of a stable and loving other who can contain and aid in transforming the difficult thoughts and feelings naturally encountered by individuals throughout life. One way of thinking of this is that the smooth Pranic pattern of the loving other is contagious to the distressed individual. Well-functioning mental subdoshas as well as buddhi and chitta facilitate emotional connection and predigestion of such difficult experience. When this is complemented by a sense of I-amness that is properly situated in the greater context of Purusha as true identity, the loving other adequately guards against crimes against wisdom. There is room for imperfection and “good-enoughness” here; perhaps the most important prerequisite of all is that the encounter is suffused with love. The loving container may be a family or community member, or this role may fall to the psychotherapist.

Psychotherapy offers another chance for the individual to develop the capacity for thinking and evolution of self. Through the gradual introjection of the analyst’s alpha-functioning, the patient’s ability to tolerate frustration and to pursue truth increases. Bion (1963) asserted that extensions in the domains of sense, myth, and passion are tools of psychoanalytic investigation.

Bion’s (1992) manner of bringing sense, myth and passion into the psychotherapy session supports his assertion that, “the analyst must dream the session” (p. 120). Grotstein (2007) thinks of the relationships between alpha-function, transformation, the contact barrier, and the emotional linkages as a “holographic dream ensemble” (p. 233) that supports this work of dreaming the session. This ensemble acts upon the O of the therapeutic pair through diverse

“editing functions” (p. 233) that render tolerable and personalize the unconscious anxiety of the session.

In this context, “sense” encompasses the methods of observation that occur through the sensory pathways, usually of sight and hearing (Bion, 1963), as well as to “common sense” allowing for consensus reality (Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p. 231). The use of myth refers to the use of stored and unconscious mythic templates that can be used to “organize and join together the analytic object [the maximum unconscious anxiety] and the O of the session” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 83). Passion refers to “the analyst’s capacity for emotional representation... his ability to feel his emotions, which are triggered by, are in response to, and are in resonance with those of the patient” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 69). It is the “analyst’s submersion into his own subjectivity to locate matching experiences and emotions that resonate with the analysand’s emotional experience and convey credible patterns and configurations” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 91). Passion is the emotional link between therapist and patient (Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p. 231).

Grotstein (2007) summarized the tasks of each analytic session as follows:

The analyst to discipline himself with the suspension of memory, desire, and understanding (suspension of ego) in such a way that he becomes all the more intuitively responsive to his inner sense receptor that is sensitive to his “waveband” of O, which then resonates with the analysand’s *psychoanalytic object*, his own O, which is characterized by his Ultimate Reality, his Absolute Truth. Thus, the analyst’s O becomes resonant on the ineffable ‘waveband’ with the O of the analysand, which the former must then transduce or transform for the analysand in K as symbols in the form of interpretation; if accepted, it then becomes retransformed into the analysand’s personal O. (p. 117)

While Bion (1965, 1970) and Grotstein (2007) privileged interpretation as the primary psychoanalytic intervention, Ferro (2005) put forth his belief that “‘interpretation’ is not enough” (p. 67). According to my reading of Bion, Ferro is merely making explicit what Bion leaves implicit. Through sense, myth, and passion, a nonverbal transformative process is unfolding that supersedes the importance of verbal interpretations. This process has been elucidated above and includes dreaming and reverie. In essence, it is predicated upon the therapist’s unsaturated and receptive presence. Lopez-Corvo (2005) also supports this: “Transformation of O→K represents the act of structuring the interpretation, but this act will require from the analyst a special stance in order previously to allow transformation of K into O” (p. 200).

Similarly, the stance of the Ayurvedic practitioner is also predicated upon presence, free from the agitation of a distracted mind. As Bion has emphasized the role of love in successful reverie, so too does Ayurveda rest upon the compassionate and loving posture of the practitioner. Dr. Lad offered the following translation of a passage from the classical text *Caraka Samhita*: “Unless you [the practitioner] enter the heart of your client with the light of awareness, knowledge, compassion, and insight, you will not be able to diagnose their problem or treat the person accordingly” (Lad, 2012, p. 558). Dr. Welch (2015) also asserted the importance of the Ayurvedic practitioner being capable of “subtle communication” (p. 54) in which they “remain patiently open to receiving communication” (p. 53) and working with their own unmetabolized experiences so that practitioners do not enter the session with a heart that is “overcrowded with emotion” (p. 54).

Though the interventions offered from each tradition may differ, with the Ayurvedic practitioner actively prescribing lifestyle modifications, and the Bionian one offering

interpretations, the nonverbal component of a receptive and unsaturated state is foundational for both.

An Integrative Theory of Thinking: Part Two

Thus far in this paper, I have explained how Wilfred Bion and Ayurvedic doctors and scholars theorize about the process and purpose of thinking. In this section, I further explicate an integrative theory of thinking, weaving Ayurvedic anatomy and physiology with Bion's theory of alpha-functioning and intersubjective projective identification.

Bion was explicit in saying that thinking comes into being in order to cope with the pressure of thoughts without a thinker. These *expectations without awareness* (pre-conceptions) await the realization of the object. This expectancy is a form of desire. The equipment of the mind is called upon to modify this frustration and the subsequent frustration that occurs when the expected object and the one that is offered are discrepant or negatively realized.

Ayurveda puts forth a different perspective, while still acknowledging the role of desire. Ahamkara (I-ness) establishes separateness and precedes the formation of the mind. When ahamkara is malformed it encourages over-identification with the body and senses, and the pleasure principle becomes dominant. The mind is animated by ahamkara and jiva and uses prana vayu to seek the sensory objects it desires.

In both Bionian and Ayurvedic perspectives, the explosiveness of desire disrupts the equilibrium of the mind and impairs an individual's ability to learn from experience. Individuals are diverse in their negative capability; as Bion noted, some are able to modify frustration and develop the capacity to think even when negative accretions of stimuli are abundant; others struggle to develop alpha-functioning under favorable conditions. To my knowledge, Bion did not account for these dispositional differences present from infancy. Ayurveda, however, offered

several explanations. The energetic accumulations of actions from previous lives can influence our psycho-emotional processes (Lad, 2002) as well as the quantity of sattva derived from supreme intelligence (mahat). Genetic factors and the inheritance of the mother's and father's ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha as well as rajas and tamas at the time of conception are additional influences.

Also integral to the development of the mind (manas) and alpha-functioning is the loving reverie and commensal containment by a primary caregiver/therapist/loved one. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to this as the mother/maternal container here. Let us begin to walk through this process of mental digestion, weaving together anatomy and physiology from Ayurveda and Bion.

In the deep consciousness (chitta) inherent *expectations without awareness* (pre-conceptions) await the realization of the object. When the negative realization of the object causes frustration, individuals evacuate the undigested beta-elements (emotional turbulence) into the mother's chitta/maternal container. This evacuation takes place via realistic/intersubjective projective identification that is carried on a wave of Prana, or vital life force, which extends beyond the body. The mother uses her "sense, myth, and passion" to perceive and act upon her baby's distress. Recall that the channels of the mind move through the sensory organs the mother uses her outwardly directed perception through the five senses to take in cues from the baby. She accomplishes this through the functional integrity of buddhi and the subdoshas of the mind.

Simultaneously, the maternal chitta allows for an intuitive "being-with" in which she can feel her baby's emotional experience within herself. As chitta interacts with the personal intelligence (buddhi), the mother, through her loving reverie, can dream her baby's dream for him. As mentioned previously, when the abstract intelligence of buddhi is turned inward, "extraordinary perception" (Lad, 2002, p. 11) is possible that transcends sensory perception.

Here, mother is searching her own mythic templates for ones that resonate with her baby's experience, catalyzing an emotional response. As mother experiences her own subjective emotional response, she has linked with her infant, through the K (knowledge) domain. Now, the baby's detoxified projections can be given back to him, on a wave of the mother's Prana. Over time, this iterative process develops the baby's alpha-functioning.

This novel theory implicates novel approaches to clinical work with patients who require alterations of Pranic patterns, expulsion of ama, and treatment of other maladies not sufficiently addressed by psychotherapy alone.

Clinical Implications

How People Heal

Mental digestive capacity is essential to the process of thinking thoughts, learning from experience, and successfully encountering and personalizing Absolute Truth. In some cases, intersubjective projective identification, sense, myth, passion, and accurate interpretations, all situated within the Bionian model of psychoanalysis, are sufficient for the development of alpha-functioning. This can in turn support the aforementioned goals. Other patients continue to evade thinking and to rely on primitive defenses, such as excessive projective identification, despite immersion in psychotherapy. In such cases, Ayurvedic treatment may be a helpful adjunctive approach.

Consider that a lack of harmony between an individual and his environment, and/or contact between the sensory organs and their objects of perception that is excessive, deficient, or constitutionally inappropriate can vitiate the channels of the mind; this can cause the formation of mental ama and/or distorted Pranic patterns. If these are addressed through physical, psychological, social, and/or spiritual factors as outlined in Ayurveda, the efforts of the analyst may be augmented and supported and the patient may improve.

Scope of Practice

Western therapists may implement some of these treatments themselves, as it is within their scope of practice. For example, attention to daily routine, sleep hygiene, conflict resolution and interpersonal effectiveness, mindfulness practices, and working with desire to delay gratification are all in the wheelhouse of the psychotherapist.

Other interventions are distinctly in the domain of Ayurveda. Constitutional evaluation, dietary, herbal, and yogic interventions, and sound therapy are best designed and implemented under the guidance of an Ayurvedic practitioner.

Therapist Self-Attentiveness

Therapists committed to “dreaming the session” must live in such a way as to support their own becoming and transformations in O. Bionian technique requires the therapist to be receptive to the state of the patient and to be sufficiently unsaturated so as to be capable of reverie. Furthermore, the therapist must have the ability to emotionally connect with the client and to mythify content received on the “waveband of O” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 117). In order to arrive for the work in such a state, “the creative worker” (Bion, 1992, p. 120) must have unimpaired alpha-function. Here too, Ayurvedic prescriptions of daily and seasonal routines, tailored to constitution, are of use to the analyst.

Conclusion

In this paper I have described the relationship between knowledge, emotional experience and the truth instinct and how each relates to “becoming.” I have done this by dialogically weaving Ayurvedic and Bionian theories of thinking, based in ontological epistemologies. Using Bion’s reimagining of knowledge as an emotional link between subject and object I have made the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and the innate pursuit of emotional truth clear;

transformations in K are not an end in themselves, but rather inform and influence transformations in O, and vice versa. Learning from experience rests upon adequate alpha-functioning, which allows for increasingly sophisticated and complex thinking. This in turn, fosters our ability to be with the emotional truth of our experiences and to evolve as a person.

Bion explicated the formation of mind as an intersubjective phenomenon, carried out through realistic projective identification between infant and primary caregiver. Throughout life, it is natural to rely on the containment and predigestion by a loving other of our most disturbing thoughts and feelings. Psychotherapy is an important option for this in modern times. In some cases, psychotherapy alone is not sufficient for catalyzing alpha-functioning. By using Ayurvedic anatomy and physiology, I attempted to bring a new understanding to obscure aspects of Bion's theory of thinking. For example, I've drawn correlations between alpha-functioning and buddhi, chitta, and the subdoshas of mental functioning. My hope was that this served at least two purposes; first, by creating a new vertex for understanding the equipment of mental digestion, I offered an explanation of the functional integrity of various aspects of the mind; second, through this understanding, clinical implications, including adjunctive Ayurvedic therapies, as well as tools that support the therapist's alpha-functioning have been delineated.

Additionally, by explicating the role of the doshas and the mental gunas, I have elucidated the causes of dispositional tendencies and practices that support sattvic ways of being. Through sattva, patient curiosity (the truth instinct) that is at once receptive to learning and capable of tolerating not-knowing, is cultivated. Bringing these two paradigms into dialogue with one another reveals the essential roles of personal accountability and relational factors in the promotion and maintenance of psychological health and personal evolution. Through Ayurveda,

the harmonious relationship between the individual and the rhythms of nature as well as attention to intrapsychic functioning, are emphasized. This leads to interventions that are largely solitary endeavors and places the responsibility for avoiding crimes against wisdom on the individual. Through Bion, the intersubjective formation of mind and metabolization of thoughts and feelings through the loving reverie of another is prized. This highlights the importance of the individual's social context. Still, each tradition embodies something of the other. Ayurveda points to the contagion of Pranic patterns and Bion acknowledged the importance of the individual's contact barrier, for example. These points of overlap strengthen the potency of the dialogue by creating common ground complimented by salient alternative vertices.

Through the synergy of Ayurvedic and Bionian interventions, Absolute Truth, in both its blissful and explosive manifestations, can be sought, encountered, and titrated for the nourishment of the Self.

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Appendix A: Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide

The following Sanskrit vocabulary is listed in the order of appearance in the text:

1. Sankhya ... SAN-key-ya
2. Purusha ... Pah-ROO-sha
3. Prakruti ... PRAH-kroo-tea
4. Mahagunas ... MAH-ha-GOO-nas
5. Sattva ... SAHT-vah
6. Rajas ... RAHJ-ahs
7. Tamas ... TAH-mahs
8. Mahat ... Mah-HAWT
9. Buddhi ... BOOD-hee
10. Ahamkara ... ah-hum-KAR-ah
11. Manas ... MAH-nahs
12. Chitta ... CHIT-ah
13. Doshas ... DOE-shahs
14. Vata ... VAH-tah
15. Pitta ... PIT-ah
16. Kapha ... KUH-fah or Ka-PUH
17. Prana ... PRAH-nah
18. Tejas ... TAY-juhs
19. Ojas ... OH-jahs
20. Agni ... UGN-nee
21. Ama ... AH-mah
22. Udana ... oo-DAH-nah

23. Vyana ... vee-YAH-nah
24. Apana ... a-PAH-nah
25. Vayu ... VI-yoo
26. Sadhaka ... sah-DAWK-ah
27. Tarpaka ... TAR-pah-kah
28. Avalambaka ... ah-vah-LUM-bah-kah
29. Sushumna ... sah-SHOOM-nah
30. Prajnaparadha ... Praj-NAH-pah-rah-DAH

Appendix B: Sankhya Philosophy

The Journey of Consciousness into Matter

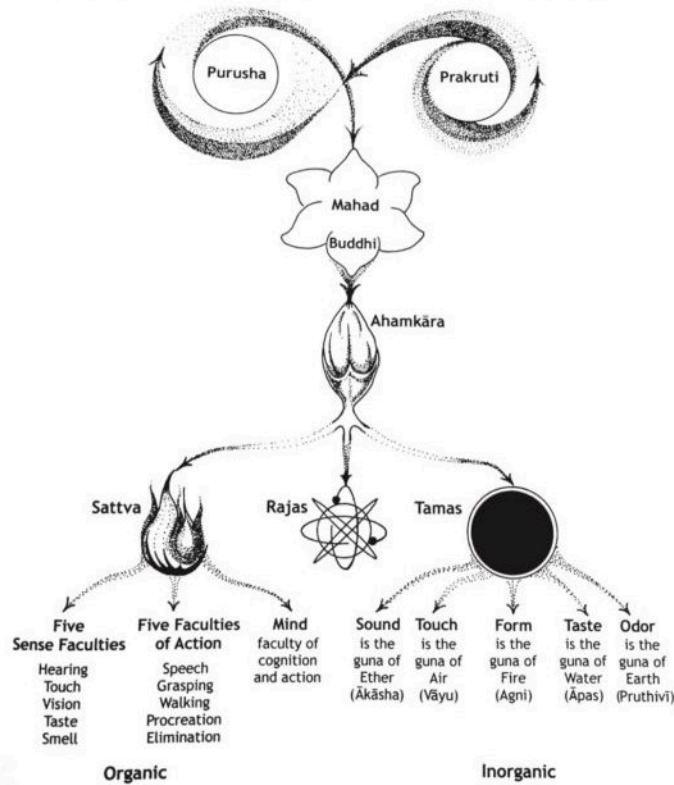


Figure 1. The Journey of Consciousness into Matter

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The Evolutes of Sankhya Philosophy

Sankhya philosophy includes *Purusha* and the twenty-four principles of creation:

1. Primordial Nature (*Prakruti*)
2. Supreme Intelligence (*Mahat*) and Personal Intelligence (*Buddhi*)
3. I-ness/Ego (*Ahamkara*)

Formed from the interaction of Sattva and Rajas:

4. Mind (*Manas*)

Sensory Faculties:

5. Hearing

6. Touch

7. Vision

8. Taste

9. Smell

Motor Faculties:

10. Speech

11. Grasping

12. Walking

13. Procreation

14. Elimination

Formed from the interaction of Tamas and Rajas:

Objects of Sensory Perception:

15. Sound

16. Touch

17. Form

18. Taste

19. Odor

Five Elements:

20. Ether/Space

21. Air

22. Fire

23. Water

24. Earth

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