

# Sitting in Forgetfulness:

## The Path of Negation in Daoism and Integral Awareness

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"In the deep dark the person alone sees the light." — Chuang Tzu

## Introduction: The Terror and Call of the Void

Deep within the depths of consciousness, beyond the dissolution of the self, beyond the abandonment of all that is loved, beyond even the destruction of time and space itself, lies the realm of absolute nothingness. This is not emptiness in a mere colloquial sense, nor is it the nihilistic void of Western philosophical dread. Rather, it represents what the Daoists have called *wu* (無), an ontological nothingness that paradoxically serves as the underlying fabric from which all being emerges and to which it returns.

Within the Eight Circuit Model (ECM), a meta-model of human consciousness and intelligence I have explored in depth elsewhere,<sup>1,2</sup> the most expansive and, arguably, most complex circuit is that of the eighth dimension of self in which this nothingness may be accessed. This terrain of human experience has been referred to as nondual or unitive intelligence, the creator circuit, or the non-local quantum circuit; representing a point radical enough to challenge nearly every assumption about existence, identity, and even reality itself. A realm of inherent contradiction and paradox. Here we will explore how intentional work along a path of negation, or a process of conscious, active "forgetting" as described within Daoist texts, systematically dismantles structures of embodied consciousness to reveal this simultaneously empty yet, as we will see, immeasurably full place. Circuit 8 confronts us with an integral view of what remains when nothing remains: the groundless ground, the luminous darkness, the pregnant void from which creation perpetually springs.

This nothingness seems to be neither static, inert, nor merely absent. Instead, as a dynamic potentiality akin to what physicist David Bohm referred to as the implicate order - a perpetually arising, perpetually creating, perpetually dissolving and reforming of the cosmos within each eternal moment. Commentary on the foundational Daoist text, the *Zhuangzi* reveals the ability for nothingness to act "as the onto-cosmological fabric of Dao while serving as the medium through which it instantiates itself in the myriad things of the world."<sup>3</sup>

## The Phenomenology of Nothingness

### Beyond Being and Non-Being

Western philosophy has traditionally conceived of nothingness either as absolute negation - the opposite of being - or as a pathway to nihilistic despair. This dualistic framework misses a profound subtlety of what Circuit 8 reveals. Daoist tradition makes a crucial distinction between wu (無, nothingness) and non-being. Non-being denotes the mere cessation of existence as in death, absence, or termination; while nothingness symbolizes "absentia" forms of existence: trance, shadow, void, hollow, and ultimately the abode of Dao itself.

In Chinese medicine and Daoist internal cultivation, this understanding is fundamental. The acupuncture point known as *Shenque* (神闕, "Spirit Gate" or "Spirit Palace"), located at the navel, is sometimes called the "Palace of Nothingness." It represents the gateway between prenatal and postnatal existence, between the unmanifest and manifest. Traditional texts describe it as the place where "original qi gathers before birth and disperses at death"<sup>4</sup> acting as a literal anatomical marker of the void from which life emerges.

This nothingness is called *wuwu* (無無) - "the nothingness of non-being," a self-negating solipsism whose purpose is to release us from the conceptual chains that bind our understanding of existence.<sup>5</sup> As Guo's classical commentary on the *Zhuangzi* explains: "Once one understands nothingness, then heaven and earth, the myriad things, you and I, right and wrong, shall suddenly be authentically so."<sup>6</sup> The paradox is essential: only by penetrating to absolute nothingness do we discover authentic being.

Emerging from a very different cultural context but arriving at remarkably similar insights, the Kabbalistic tradition maps this territory through the three veils of negative existence that precede even the first emanation of manifest reality:

**Ain (Nothingness):** that which transcends all possible modes of logical explication, articulation, and verbalization. This is the divine darkness, the absolute emptiness that contains all potential.

**Ain Soph (Without Limit):** the clear wisdom mind beyond all conceptual thoughts, notions, and abstractions. This limitless expanse that can only be intuited through silence, never grasped through language or logic.

**Ain Soph Aur (Limitless Light):** the sudden flash of pure awareness arising from the void of wisdom. This is the "thunderbolt of recognition", the burst of consciousness that emerges from pregnant darkness.

Rather than sequential or hierarchical "stages," these can be thought of in terms of interpenetrating dimensions of a singular reality beyond conception. Existing outside space and time, before being and nonbeing, they lie in the primordial condition that the Gnostics called the pleroma - the fullness of emptiness.<sup>8</sup>

## **Bohm's Implicate Order: The Physics of Emptiness**

A more modern lens in the realm of physics has arrived, through rigorous mathematical analysis, at conclusions that echo these ancient mystical insights. Physicist David Bohm's concept of the implicate order provides a contemporary scientific framework for understanding how the mystics spoke of nothingness.

## **The Enfolded Universe**

Bohm proposed that what we perceive as reality - the "explicate" world or order of manifest things - is merely the surface expression of a deeper, hidden dimension he termed the "implicate order." In this view, the universe is not fundamentally composed of separate objects interacting through space and time, but rather is an undivided wholeness in which everything is "enfolded" into everything else.

The analogy Bohm used was holographic: just as every portion of a hologram contains information about the whole image, every region of space-time enfolds information about the entire universe.<sup>10</sup> The apparently separate objects and events we experience are temporary "unfoldments" from this deeper order. Waves arising from and subsiding back into an ocean of potential.

This is remarkably similar to the Daoist understanding of the term wu (無) as latent unmanifested potential. The *Daodejing* states: "Dao produces one; one produces two; two produces three; three produces the myriad things."<sup>11</sup> This production is not temporal creation but continuous unfoldment akin to what Bohm called the holomovement.

## **The Holomovement: Reality as Process**

The holomovement is Bohm's term for the dynamic, flowing nature of totality. It describes the continuous process of enfoldment and unfoldment through which the implicate order gives rise to the explicate order and then reabsorbs it. Nothing being static; everything as a process.

In Bohm's words: "The implicate order has to be extended into a multidimensional reality. In principle, this reality is one unbroken whole, including the entire universe with all its fields and particles. Thus, we have to say that the holomovement enfolds and unfolds in a multidimensional order."<sup>12</sup>

For those familiar with Chinese medicine, this may bear similarity to the understanding of the concept of qi (氣). Qi representing not a physical substance, but a dynamic process - the continuous transformation between stillness and movement, between the relative dynamics of yin and yang, and between the unmanifest (xiantian, 先天, "before heaven") and the manifest (houtian, 後天, "after heaven"). The Huangdi Neijing teaches that "qi transforms and all things are completed."<sup>13</sup> This transformation is the holomovement expressed in the language of Chinese cosmology.

## **Thought as a System: The Creation of Fragmentation**

Perhaps Bohm's most relevant contribution to understanding Circuit 8 is his analysis of thought, or consciousness itself, as a system. In his book *Thought as a System*,<sup>14</sup> Bohm argues that what we experience as consciousness is largely the product of thought - and thought itself is a material process that shapes reality through its operation.

The crucial insight here is that thought creates divisions where none exist in the implicate order. Thought fragments the undivided wholeness into separate categories: subject and object, self and other, mind and matter, internal and external. These divisions are useful for practical purposes but become pathological when mistaken for the fundamental nature of reality.

Bohm writes: "Thought creates the world and then says, 'I didn't do it.'" <sup>15</sup> This self-deception is precisely what a path of negation addresses. By systematically dismantling or "forgetting" the thought-created divisions, we can glimpse what remains when this fragmenting activity ceases.

For Western readers unfamiliar with Eastern philosophy, Bohm's framework may provide an accessible entry point. The idea of the implicate order is not built out of mystical speculation or experiential reporting, but as a rigorous scientific hypothesis grounded in quantum mechanics. Yet it leads to a similar conclusion to Daoist meditations: that the apparently solid, separate world of everyday experience is a surface manifestation of a deeper, unified reality.

### **The Quantum Vacuum: A Plenum of Nothingness**

The quantum vacuum, what gets referred to as "empty space" that makes up an estimated 99.999999% of the universe, turns out to be anything but empty. Instead, it appears to be a seething ocean of virtual particles constantly emerging from and dissolving back into the void. In quantum field theory, particles are understood as excitations of underlying fields, and these fields pervade all of space; even "empty" space.

This has overlap with what interpretations of Daoist concepts mean by describing nothingness as "the meontological material used by Dao to fulfill its own self-so nature." <sup>16</sup> The void seems to not be barren, rather pregnant with infinite possibility. Bohm's implicate order understands this quantum vacuum as the plenum of potential from which all manifest phenomena arise.

Bohm feels this acts as the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves. The universe is not separate from this cosmic sea of energy. <sup>17</sup>

The phenomenon of quantum entanglement, in which particles that have interacted remain fundamentally connected regardless of distance, demonstrates that separation appears to be an illusion maintained only at the level of manifest reality. Particles that have interacted together remain correlated even when they appear separate in the explicate order. This non-local interconnection points toward what the mystics have always insisted: at the deepest level, the multiplicity of phenomena appears to emerge from an underlying unity: the "oneness of Dao" that is simultaneously the "nothingness of non-being."

## **The Negative Way: Systematically Dismantling Our Constructs**

The pathway to Circuit 8 is not one of acquisition but of relinquishment. It follows what has been called the *via negativa* or negative way: a systematic process of negation that strips away false identification, every conceptual overlay, every structure of mind and meaning until only the groundless ground remains.<sup>19</sup>

## Progressive Negation within the Qliphoth

One of the most detailed Western maps of the process of progressive negation is the Qliphothic descent through inversion of Kabbalistic Tree of Life,<sup>19</sup> acting as counterparts or mirrors to the ten sefirot, and can act as additional guideposts in this work. Beginning with Naamah (the mirror of Malkuth - physical existence), the initiate progressively negates identification with increasingly more subtle aspects of selfhood:

*"We are not our body"*: A realization that consciousness is not identical with or limited to its physical vehicle.

*"We are not our mundane desires"*: Recognition that our wants, cravings, and attachments are conditioned responses, not essential nature.

*"We are not our mind"*: The dissolution of rational consciousness, where "divine madness" subverts the boundaries of intellect.

*"We are not our feelings"*: The release of emotional attachments and the constructed ego.

*"We are not our mental constructs"*: Language becomes recognized as an obscuration of ultimate reality.

*"We are not our mental judgments"*: The release of the judging mind, where all discriminations dissolve.

*"We are not that which we love"*: Even love itself becomes recognized as another form of attachment.

*"We are not time, space, motion, or unity"*: The final negations dissolve the very categories through which experience is structured.<sup>20</sup>

For those unfamiliar with Kabbalah, this systematic negation parallels practices found across contemplative traditions. In Buddhism, it bears similarity to the progressive realization of anātman (no-self).<sup>21</sup> In Advaita Vedanta, it is *neti neti* ("not this, not this").<sup>22</sup> In Daoist internal alchemy, it is the progressive refinement of *jing* (精, essence) into *qi* (氣, energy) into *shen* (神, spirit) toward *wu* (無, emptiness).<sup>23</sup>

Each negation acts as more than mere intellectual exercise, but as a lived realization, that can be accompanied by profound psychological or even somatic disruption. The experiencer discovers that they are not what they thought they were. A discovery that can be in the moment, as we will discuss, quite terrifying.

## The Daoist Art of Forgetting

The foundational Daoist text, the *Zhuangzi*, offers a parallel methodology through what it calls *zuo wang* (坐忘) "sitting in forgetfulness."<sup>24</sup> This is not the pathological forgetting of repression or dissociation, but a deliberate, skillful unknowing; a progressive release of the structures that bind consciousness to limited modes of being.

The classic passage describes the progression through the teaching dialogue between Confucius and his student Yan Hui:

"I have made progress." "What do you mean?" asked Confucius. "I have forgotten benevolence and righteousness." "That is good, but you have not quite got it."

Another day, Yan Hui saw Confucius again and said, "I have made progress." "What do you mean?" "I have forgotten rites and music." "That is good, but you have not quite got it."

Another day, Yan Hui saw Confucius again and said, "I have made progress." "What do you mean?" "I sit in forgetfulness."

Confucius was startled and said, "What do you mean by sitting in forgetfulness?"

Yan Hui said, "I slough off my limbs and trunk, dim my intelligence, depart from my form, leave knowledge behind, and become identical with the Great Thoroughfare. This is what I mean by sitting in forgetfulness."<sup>25</sup>

This "sitting in forgetfulness" represents a realization of Circuit 8. The body becomes "like withered wood," the mind "like dead ash." Not through mortification or violence, but through a gentle, persistent releasing.

In the language of Chinese internal cultivation, this is the movement from *yǒu* (有, being/having) to *wú* (無, non-being/emptiness). Classical texts describe this as "returning to the root" (*gui gen*, 歸根) or "returning to stillness" (*gui jing*, 歸靜). Chapter 16 of the *Daodejing* states: "Returning to the root is called stillness; this is termed returning to destiny."<sup>26</sup>

What is being forgotten is the very structure of selfhood. To forget things is to release epistemological attachments. To forget the body is to transcend somatic identification. To forget the self is to dissolve the relational-ego. Finally, to forget even conceptualization of the Dao is to arrive at that groundless ground where the text says, "the presence of the 'I' diminishes the presence of Dao's spirit in one's body."<sup>27</sup>

The very first line of the *Daodejing* states: "The Dao that can be spoken is not the true Dao"<sup>28</sup>

The Daoist sage is not transcending the world but returning to it transformed. Having forgotten everything, one experiences the "non-I" of Dao. As one commentary explains: "Any forgetting of the egoistic 'I' is in fact a remembrance of the 'non-I' of Dao."<sup>29</sup>

# Hundun: The Cosmological Chaos

## Chaos as a Creative Principle

Deep at the heart of Circuit 8 awareness lies primordial chaos, what the ancient Chinese called *hundun* (混沌). For many Western readers, "chaos" typically comes with associations to disorder, dysfunction, or randomness. Hundun, however, represents something far more subtle: the undifferentiated wholeness from which all order spontaneously arises.

In Chinese cosmology, hundun appears as the state before separation - preceding the division of heaven and earth, the emergence of dynamics between yin and yang, or the ten thousand things of material manifestation coming into being. It is associated with the "cosmic egg", with a watery fluidity and embryonic potentiality. The character for hundun itself suggests "turbid water" or "muddy confusion". Not as something negative, but as the fertile chaos from which clarity emerges.

The famous parable in the *Zhuangzi* illustrates this with devastating simplicity:

The emperor of the South Sea was called Shu [Brief], the emperor of the North Sea was called Hu [Sudden], and the emperor of the central region was called Hundun [Chaos]. Shu and Hu from time to time came together for a meeting in the territory of Hundun, and Hundun treated them very generously. Shu and Hu discussed how they could repay his kindness. "All men," they said, "have seven openings so they can see, hear, eat, and breathe. But Hundun alone doesn't have any. Let's try boring him some!" Every day they bored another hole, and on the seventh day Hundun died.<sup>30</sup>

The seven holes represent the seven sensory apparatuses of embodied consciousness: the gates through which awareness becomes particularized, differentiated, individuated. Two eyes through which to see, two ears through which to hear, 2 nostrils with which to smell, and the mouth through which to taste. Accessing to Circuit 8 is a figurative "death" of these differentiations, to "close up" the holes and return to the primordial wholeness before sensory experience crystallized awareness into discrete phenomena.

Yet this is not a nihilistic dissolution. The tradition is clear: the return to hundun is medicinal, rather than destructive. It is *yangsheng* (養生) - the cultivation of life, the nourishment of vitality through re-identification with the source.<sup>31</sup>

## The Alchemical Solve et Coagula

Western alchemical traditions recognize a similar principle as well in its fundamental dictum: *solve et coagula* - dissolve and coagulate. The alchemical concept of the Great Work requires the reduction of complex substances to their *prima materia*, their first matter, before they can be recombined into the philosopher's stone.<sup>32</sup>

Carl Jung, drawing on his deep study of alchemy, observed: "The chaos is a *massa confusa* that gives birth to the philosopher's stone." This "confused mass", the undifferentiated chaos, points toward a necessity for entropy and dissolution before genuine transformation is able to occur.

Jungian psychoanalyst Nathan Schwartz-Salant refers to a "*fusional complex*" that can develop out of difficulties with this process that "can lead to an extreme and destabilizing anxiety, a compensatory rage, and temporarily impaired capacity for reflection and clear thinking. The subject often defends against the ambiguity and madness in the Complex through a disguised and destructive shadow behavior."<sup>34</sup> He describes it as "the simultaneity of fusional drives and non-communication - at once there is a fused connection and a state of disconnection."<sup>35</sup> Individual or interrelational fusional complexes are considered activated points of a larger *fusional field*, which "contains both a fusional pull toward an undifferentiated state of Oneness, and a simultaneous drive toward the separating and differentiating quality of twoness"<sup>36</sup>

This paradoxical state may create extreme anxiety. Yet as Schwartz-Salant insists: "Suffering the disorder is functional: it breaks down body armoring, so that the self can embody."<sup>37</sup> The chaos being a pathway rather than pathology. Dissolution offering transformation rather than destruction.

## **The Paradoxes of Non-Dual Awareness**

### **Beyond Unity and Multiplicity**

One of the most subtle traps on the path of Circuit 8 is a premature assumption of unity. Many spiritual teachings emphasize oneness, non-duality, and the collapse of subject-object distinctions. But Circuit 8 experiences can reveal something even more radical: the transcendence beyond unity itself.

The Qliphothic sphere of Thaumiel, "the twins", embodies this teaching. As the mirror of Kether (the crown, the unity of being), Thaumiel represents what lies beyond unity. It is "a state where we are BETWEEN opposites, rather than lumping them into a homogenous unity."<sup>38</sup> This is represented by the image of the double-headed phoenix, the paradox of maintaining differentiation even in union.

To be able to stand between opposites rather than collapsing them creates what has been called a "negational paradox"<sup>39</sup> that requires enduring contradictions without prematurely resolving them. As Jung stated: "Anyone who perceives his shadow and his light simultaneously sees himself from two sides and thus gets in the middle"<sup>40</sup>

Integral philosopher Jean Gebser's concept of systasis illuminates this crucial distinction. Unlike synthesis, which merges opposites into a new unity (thereby creating a new duality), systasis allows multiple structures to be "co-present" simultaneously without collapse or merger. As Gebser writes: "Systasis is not a synthetic but an integrating process... The vital, the mythical, and the mental are not dissolved and preserved in a higher unity, but are transparent and present."<sup>41</sup>

In Daoist philosophy, this is expressed through the relationship between *taiji* (太極, "supreme ultimate") and *wuji* (無極, "non-ultimate" or "limitless"). *Taiji* (太極) represents the unity of yin and yang, the wholeness that contains differentiation. Yet *wuji* (無極) lies beyond even this unity, as the undifferentiated potential before yin and yang emerge, before even the possibility of polarity exists.

Classical texts describe *wuji* (無極) as "the state before heaven and earth divided."<sup>42</sup> It is not oneness (which still implies number, quantity, unity) but no-thingness - the absence of all qualities, including unity. Paradoxically, it is also described as containing all possibilities.

Bohm's implicate order expresses a similar paradox. It is both unified (a single undivided wholeness) and infinitely differentiated (containing all possible unfoldments). Each part contains information about the whole (unity), yet each part is unique in its particular expression (multiplicity). The holomovement continuously enfolds multiplicity into unity and unfolds unity into multiplicity.

The quantum principle of superposition approaches this paradox in which a particle exists in all possible states simultaneously until measurement collapses it into one actuality. Before observation by the senses or instruments, the particle is neither here nor there, neither this nor that. It dwells as pure potential. Here we find similarities to the concept of *wuji* (無極) as not absence, but infinite possibility and the unmanifest ground from which the manifest springs.

## **Time-Freedom and the Ever-Present Origin**

Circuit 8 intelligence also reveals a radically different relationship with time. What appears as past, present, and future from the perspective of linear consciousness becomes seen as a simultaneous unfoldment from a timeless origin.

Gebser's concept of the "ever-present origin" can provide crucial clarification here. Origin exists neither as a point in the distant past from which we have departed, nor a future goal toward which we strive. As Gebser insists: "Origin is ever-present... it is ever-originating, an achievement of full integration and continuous renewal"<sup>43</sup> This origin is not merely eternal (existing across all time) but *atemporal* by lying outside the very category of time itself.

What Gebser refers to as "time-freedom" is not the abolition of time but liberation from its constraints. He writes: "Time-freedom is the conscious form of archaic, original pre-temporality"<sup>44</sup> In this state, past and future become transparent as we see through them to the origin that was never absent. This is fundamentally different from timelessness, which would be seen as a form of stasis. Time-freedom is dynamic presence and the capacity to perceive the origin actively manifesting within each moment.

In Daoist thought, time is understood not as an objective container in which events occur but as the dynamic unfolding of potentiality. The *Yijing* (易經, I Ching or Book of Changes) is fundamentally about time. Not

clock time, but *shi* (時), the "opportune moment,"<sup>45</sup> the quality of time that makes certain actions appropriate and others not.

The 64 hexagrams of the Yijing do not predict a future; they describe patterns of change that are always already occurring. Past, present, and future are aspects of a single transformative process rather than separate segments. To act in alignment with Dao is to participate in this process rather than being dragged along by it.

This participatory quality is what Gebser calls "verition" - truth as an active, ongoing process rather than static possession. He states: "Truth is not something that is possessed, but something that is continuously verified and realized."<sup>46</sup> In Circuit 8 awareness, truth is enacted and lived; verified in the ever-present now.

Bohm articulated something remarkably similar in his concept of the implicate order as "undivided wholeness in flowing movement."<sup>47</sup> Time, in this view, is not a dimension through which we move but the continuous unfoldment and enfoldment of the holomovement. Past and future are enfolded in the present; the present unfolds what was previously implicit.

This offers an interesting consideration to resolving the paradox of how one can access "past lives" or have precognitive experiences. If all time is enfolded in the implicate order, deep meditative states that quiet the fragmenting activity of thought may allow access to information normally filtered out by the linear time-sense of ordinary consciousness.

The *Zhuangzi* expresses this as dwelling in the "pivot of Dao" (daoshu, 道樞). The pivot is the still point at the center of all change and the source from which time flows. To rest in the pivot is to be free of time while still participating in temporal existence. This echoes Gebser's time-freedom: not escape from temporality but a transparent perception of the origin that is present in every moment.

## **Ontological and Meontological Shock: In the Face of Nothingness**

Ontology refers to the investigation into the nature of being, existence, and reality itself. Asking the question of what it means for something to exist. Western philosophy has been fundamentally ontological since Parmenides declared "being is, non-being is not,"<sup>48</sup> privileging existence as primary and foundational.

### **Ontological Shock: When Reality Shatters**

*Ontological shock* is the sudden, devastating realization that one's fundamental assumptions about reality are incoherent.<sup>49</sup> What one has taken to be solid, reliable, and foundational as the scaffolding that constructs being-ness reveals itself as a fabrication. Going beyond intellectual doubt, this experience goes into a lived crisis of reality itself. The ground we've stood on dropping away below us.

This type of shock may be preceded by experiences ranging from profound loss, deep meditation, psychedelics,

extreme inquiry, or spontaneous emergent or mystical experiences. Ontological shock can manifest as derealisation (the world seems unreal), depersonalisation (the self seems unreal), temporal disruption (time as non-linear), category failure (fundamental distinctions collapse), and existential vertigo (feeling as though falling through space with nothing to grasp onto).

As Gebser noted, unfoldings or mutations in consciousness “are times of disturbance and even destruction”<sup>50</sup> The difference between transformation and psychosis lies in having a framework for understanding, a container for holding dissolution, and capacity to integrate. We discuss this container below.

While it may feel disorienting or even terrifying, ontological shock can be part of a process of growth or transformation in one’s worldview. Ontological shock demolishes ontological presumptions that may have been held all of one’s life but turn out to not be complete. With circuit 8 realizations, however, something even deeper than ontological disruption may occur, something that can be called *meontological shock*.

## **Meontological Shock: Encountering Nothingness Itself**

Compared to ontology, which explores the dynamics of being, *meontology* approaches the nature of non-being or nothingness itself. This is a radically different framework from which to work. Instead of referring to simple absence, the Daoist concept of wu (無) implies a positive creative potentiality within the fabric from which being-ness emerges. The question begins not with “what is?” but with “what is the nothingness from which what-is arises?”

If ontological shock can reveal deeper understanding of how the world and the nature of reality *is*, meontological shock allows access to direct encounters with what *is not*.

This is a crisis particular to Circuit 8 experiences, of encounters not just of the emptiness of being, but the emptiness of emptiness (wuwu 無無, śūnyatā-śūnyatā).<sup>51</sup> Whereas ontological shock remains within being and non-being as opposites, meontological shock reveals that nothingness itself is not what we thought, but instead, an underlying creative potency.

## **Phenomenology of Meontological Shock**

Meontological shock can involve:

*Encountering the Void Face-to-Face:* Rather than concept, here there seems to be absolute immediate presence.

*Collapse of Being/Non-Being Distinction:* The entire ontological framework reveals itself as conceptual overlay.

*Recognition of Groundless Ground:* The continuously manifesting ground that was never absent, yet having no actual substance.

*Terror of Infinite Potential:* Reality continuously springing from absolute nothingness. Simultaneous creation and destruction within every instant.

*Loss of Reference Points:* Not just external reference but the possibility of reference. Gebser's "aperspectival" consciousness in which one is freed from the necessity of perspective itself.

## **Function and Paradox**

The fundamental paradox of meontological shock is that it involves the direct experience of nothingness. Something which should be impossible, yet experiencers insist happens. Not as an intellectual understanding, but a direct immersion in discovering and recognizing what has always already been the case.

Meontological shock serves to complete the movement into what Gebser refers to as *integral consciousness*. Prior mental constructs are characterized by perspectival consciousness, subject-object duality, three-dimensional space, linear time, and causal thinking. All of these rest on ontological presumption.

Meontological shock dissolves the structure itself by revealing that the entire framework rests in nothingness as an ever-emergent integral structure characterized by a freedom from the individual perspective - an *aperspectival awareness*. What Daoism has called the *zhenren* (真人, genuine person)<sub>52</sub> by dwelling at Dao's pivot and wandering freely between being and non-being.

## **The Shadow of Enlightenment: Integration and Bypassing**

### **Spiritual Bypassing and the Unintegrated Void**

Any discussion of Circuit 8 must confront a critical pitfall: the temptation to use spiritual attainment as a defense against psychological reality. Georg Feuerstein makes a crucial distinction: "The uprooting of the ego identity in enlightenment does not terminate the processes of attention: it merely ends the anchorage of attention to the ego... the important difference is that the residue is not experienced as a hindrance to ego-transcendence simply because this is an ongoing process in the enlightened condition."<sub>53</sub>

In other words, the realization of Circuit 8 does not automatically dissolve one's shadow. The personality structure, with its historical conditioning, neurotic patterns, and unprocessed trauma, does not simply vanish upon touching the void.

This creates a paradox at the heart of the negational path. The journey to Circuit 8 may require systematic dismantling of ego structures, yet the arrival at nothingness does not eliminate the necessity of psychological work. As John P. Conger noted: "The shadow is not to be totally dissolved, nor can it be successfully disowned"<sub>54</sub>

The danger is what contemporary psychology calls "spiritual bypassing", that is, using transcendent states or nondual philosophy to avoid facing personal work and darkness. Someone may have genuine access to Circuit 8 intelligence while simultaneously harboring deep-seated misogyny, unacknowledged narcissism, or addictive patterns.

In Chinese medicine, this is understood through the concept of *xuyao* (虛邪, "empty evil") versus *shiyao* (實邪, "full evil").<sup>55</sup> *Xuyao* represents depletion, deficiency, emptiness used as avoidance. A practitioner might cultivate profound states of emptiness while the body remains diseased, relationships remain damaged, and unconscious patterns continue to create suffering.

True integration requires what Feuerstein calls "horizontal work," an often unglamorous process of examining and transforming personality structures. This is different from "vertical" transcendence. As he notes: "Unlike transcendence, integration occurs in the horizontal plane."<sup>56</sup>

The complete path requires both vertical access to Circuit 8 (vertical in the sense of increased breadth and complexity, not hierarchical importance) and horizontal work of shadow integration (transformation of personality). One without the other remains incomplete and potentially dangerous.

## The Return from the Void

The void is not a permanent dwelling but a transformative passage. Inevitably, one must return to engage with the mundane world.

The return is beautifully articulated in the Daoist teaching of *xiaoyao you* (逍遙遊)—"free and easy wandering" or "carefree wandering."<sup>57</sup> After achieving *zuo wang* (坐忘, sitting in forgetfulness), after touching the void, the sage does not remain absorbed in undifferentiated emptiness. Rather, they return to the world transformed, "wandering beyond boundaries," engaging with phenomena while remaining rooted in nothingness.<sup>58</sup>

"The sage," the Zhuangzi says, "steers by the torch of chaos and doubt"<sup>59</sup> with those achieving such abilities being referred to as "remote practitioners of the arts of Mr. Chaos [Hundun]"<sup>60</sup>

The *Zhuangzi* describes this: "The genuine person does not nullify his or her ontic presence but envelops it in the luminosity of oneness shared by the myriad things."<sup>61</sup> This is not world-denying asceticism but world-embracing freedom - the ability to participate fully in existence while no longer being enslaved by it.

This teaching is captured in the famous Zen ox-herding pictures, which culminate in the sage returning to the marketplace, helping others, engaging with the ordinary world rather than remaining absorbed in emptiness; but now doing so from the ground of extraordinary realization.<sup>62</sup> Or as the Heart Sutra proclaims, not as philosophical abstraction, but as lived truth: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form."<sup>63</sup>

Bohm expressed a similar principle through his concept of "*generative order*." The implicate order being not static, but generative - continuously giving rise to new forms in the explicate order. To realize the implicate order is not to escape manifestation but to participate consciously in the holomovement, the continuous dance of enfoldment and unfoldment.

The return brings what the *Zhuangzi* calls the freedom of "non-freedom": "He is free not from something, nor free to do something, but is free insofar as he no longer needs to be free. The freedom of non-freedom is thus more powerful than freedom because it is a self-forgetting of the need for a free self."<sup>64</sup>

## Living from the Groundless Ground: Practical Implications

### The Transformation of Daily Life

What does it mean, practically, to live from Circuit 8 awareness? How does realization of nothingness manifest in daily existence?

Firstly, there tends to be a fundamental shift in how one relates to phenomena. Sensations, thoughts, emotions, relationships, etc are still experienced, but they are no longer clung to as substantial, permanent, or defining of selfhood. "Making use of nothingness is not the same as doing nothing. For using that which is not to effect that which is, is precisely to dance with Dao in the hall of nothingness."<sup>65</sup>

This produces what Gebser calls "diaphaniety", a quality of transparency or translucence where the origin becomes visible through phenomena. He writes: "Diaphaneity is the form of manifestation of the spiritual... the transparency of the world."<sup>66</sup> The person becomes see-through, permeable to the reality that shines through all things. The separate self is recognized as a temporary crystallization of the larger field of awareness.

This diaphaniety is not metaphorical but describes an actual shift in perception. What was opaque becomes transparent. The mental structures, emotional patterns, and physical forms that seemed so solid reveal themselves as temporary concretions of the void. Gebser called this "concretion," the process by which the spiritual becomes material without losing its spiritual nature.<sup>67</sup>

In Chinese medicine, this manifests as what classical texts call *shenming* (神明 - "spirit brightness" or "spiritual clarity.") A practitioner with cultivated *shenming* can perceive patterns in the body and psyche that remain invisible to ordinary awareness.

This is not a supernatural perception, but natural perception freed from the fragmenting activity of thought and filtering. Bohm would say that thought has stopped dividing reality into artificial categories, allowing the implicate order to reveal itself more directly. Gebser would say that the integral structure has become transparent, allowing perception of the systasis - the mutual presence - of all structures simultaneously.

Second, a profound reorientation of values may occur. What matters shifts from a focus on acquisition to participation, from control to flow, from achievement to presence. This is an active alignment with what the Chinese call *ziran* (自然): "self-so-ness" or natural spontaneity.<sup>68</sup>

The *Daodejing* articulates this transformation:

Haste is replaced by silence and the capacity for silence<sup>69</sup>  
Goal-oriented thought is replaced by purposelessness (*wuwei*, 無為)<sup>70</sup>  
The pursuit of power is replaced by the capacity for genuine love<sup>71</sup>  
Manipulation is replaced by trust in natural unfolding<sup>72</sup>  
Prejudice is replaced by seeing things as they are<sup>73</sup>  
Action is replaced by appropriate response<sup>74</sup>

These are not moral injunctions imposed from without but natural expressions of awareness grounded in nothingness. One who dwells in Circuit 8 has no need for haste as they are no longer fleeing the present. There is no need to manipulate because they trust the self-organizing intelligence of Dao.

## Void Made Flesh: Embodied Emptiness

A crucial teaching that runs through all contemplative traditions is that Circuit 8 realization must be embodied. That this is not a disembodied philosophy or intellectual position, nor even a meditative state dissociated from ordinary life.

The *Zhuangzi* famously teaches: "The genuine person breathes with their heels while ordinary people breathe with their throats."<sup>75</sup> This image of breathing with one's heels points toward a somatic realization of nothingness. The awareness is not located in the head or in the conceptual mind, but distributed throughout the entire organism.

In Chinese internal cultivation, this is the difference between mere *jing zuo* (靜坐, quiet sitting, meditation as technique) and true *nei dan* (內丹)<sup>76</sup> internal alchemy, transformation of the entire being). Internal alchemy requires that emptiness descend from the head through the heart into the *dantian* (丹田), the field of elixir located in the lower abdomen. Only when emptiness is rooted in the body does genuine transformation occur.

The acupuncture system itself can be understood as a map of this embodiment. The extraordinary vessels, particularly the Chong Mai (沖脈, Penetrating Vessel) and Ren Mai (任脈, Conception Vessel), are said to connect prenatal and postnatal existence, the unmanifest and manifest. To open these vessels is to embody the transition between Circuit 8 nothingness and Circuit 1 somatic intelligence. At the same time, "any one point is a secret passage to all points" when the body is viewed through an integral lens.<sup>77</sup>

Cook Ding's famous parable in the *Zhuangzi* illustrates embodied emptiness perfectly. When asked about his skill in butchering an ox, he replies:

"I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I follow the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are... I've had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I've cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone."<sup>78</sup>

Cook Ding does not transcend the body to access some higher realm; rather, he allows awareness to settle so deeply into the body that distinctions between inner and outer, self and other, disappear. His knife moves through the spaces that already exist in the ox's body - not cutting against reality but flowing with it.

This is void made flesh - nothingness embodied in action, emptiness expressing itself through form. This is "making use of nothingness"<sup>79</sup> in its most practical sense. The task performs itself through him, his body becoming transparent to the intelligence of Dao. It is *wuwei* (無為), non-action or effortless action, not as passivity but as action arising from alignment with the implicate order rather than from egoic striving.

## **Catastrophe and Metamorphosis: The Dark Night as Threshold**

### **Crisis as Initiation**

For many who experience and develop a relationship with Circuit 8, the journey is not gradual or gentle. It more often arrives as a kind of catastrophe - devastating loss, psychological breakdown, a crisis so profound that all previous structures of meaning collapse. This is what St. John of the Cross called the "dark night of the soul," what depth psychology terms "psychospiritual emergency," what the alchemists knew as the nigredo, the blackening, and the putrefaction.

Crisis is not the problem, however, but the solution attempting to break through. What appears as a destructive force is really our own refusal to leap from a narrow, limited state of awareness to a more encompassing one. The old structure cannot accommodate the emerging awareness and something must give.

In Chinese medicine, this is sometimes recognized as a qi crisis; a blockage so severe that the vital force can no longer flow through established channels. The organism must create new pathways, and this creation is experienced as breakdown. The Huangdi Neijing states: "When the qi cannot flow, there is pain and disease. When the qi flows freely, there is health and vitality."<sup>80</sup>

The crisis of Circuit 8 activation has the potential to be the ultimate qi blockage: the structures of embodied consciousness itself proving too narrow to contain the influx of primordial emptiness.

The impending paradox of the demand to both merge and separate, to both dissolve and cohere, the fusional complex within the fusional field, can create "extreme and destabilizing anxiety, a compensatory rage, and temporarily impaired capacity for reflection and clear thinking."<sup>81</sup>

Yet, here lies the crucial insight: "There is a purpose to the fusional complex, achieved not through a 'heroic' attitude of striving to overcome obstacles, but rather through another kind of heroism: the strength required to suffer inwardly the disorganization of painful mental and physical states."<sup>82</sup>

## **Sitting in the Fire: Containment and Transformation**

"All through the creation and dissolution of the Universe, I remain untouched" - Sri Maharaj Nisargadatta

The alchemical image of the *vas hermeticum*, the sealed vessel in which the Great Work occurs, provides essential guidance through this crisis. The vessel must be strong enough to contain the chaos, the heat, the pressure of transformation. If it cracks prematurely, the work is lost. If it remains too rigid, no transformation occurs.

Psychologically, this vessel is provided by what Schwartz-Salant calls "containment" - the capacity to hold the experience without either dissociating from it or being overwhelmed by it. This is where spiritual practice and solid foundational lower circuit anchoring becomes essential. Not to bypass the chaos, but to provide the container within which chaos can do its transformative work.

Within the Eight Circuit Model, work on personal cultivation and balance within other circuits allows for a foundational container the capacity to hold, "anchor," and integrate the destabilizing nature of circuit 8 transpersonal experiences.

In Chinese cultivation, this container is built through practices like *nei guan* (內觀, inner observation), *jing zuo* (靜坐, quiet sitting), and the disciplined refinement of the *san bao* (三寶, three treasures: jing, qi, shen). These practices don't prevent the dark night but create a stable enough structure to survive it, to use it, and to be transformed by it rather than destroyed.

The Daoist teaching of *xin zhai* (心齋, "fasting of the heart-mind")<sup>83</sup> points toward this same necessity. This is not fasting from food but a "reorganization" that allows consciousness to remain present to its own dissolution. The *Zhuangzi* teaches that receptivity and lucidity are the qualities that one should be working towards. It is through openness and spaciousness that we can become present to these things latent in presence.<sup>84</sup>

In Bohm's language, the container is what allows thought's fragmenting activity to slow down enough that the implicate order can reveal itself. The "fast" is a fast from thought. Not by force, but by creating space for thought to settle like sediment in water that becomes clear once it is allowed to rest.

## **The Promise of Integration**

If Circuit 8 can be integrated, both individually and collectively, what becomes possible?

At the individual level, it suggests the possibility of living without the constant background anxiety that characterizes fragmented consciousness. When one genuinely recognizes that all phenomena, including the separate self, arise from and return to nothingness, what is there to fear? Death is no longer an ending, but a return. Loss is no longer tragedy, but transformation.

At the collective level, it points toward radically different forms of organization. As David Chai asserts, "Daoist cosmology is not based on hierarchically irreversible relationships but on Dao's symbiotically spontaneous creation realized through nothingness"<sup>85</sup> which suggests governance structures that are self-organizing rather than imposed; emergent rather than predetermined.

This echoes Gebser's vision of integral consciousness, which is not a system or method, but transparency or diaphaneity. The integral structure allows for what he calls "origin-present awareness."<sup>86</sup> - thought that remains transparent to its source in the ever-present origin rather than becoming opaque, fixed, and fragmenting.

Ecologically, this suggests a fundamental shift in humanity's relationship with the natural world. When human consciousness recognizes itself as a temporary manifestation of the same nothingness that gives rise to all phenomena, the exploitation of nature becomes literally unthinkable. As Bohm writes: "the universe is an undivided whole in flowing movement."<sup>87</sup> - and so are we.<sup>87</sup>

In Chinese medicine, this would manifest as a return to *tianren heyi* (天人合一): "heaven and humanity united as one."<sup>88</sup> Not humanity dominating or romanticizing nature, but humanity recognizing itself as nature, as one expression of the Dao's continuous unfoldment.

Most profoundly, integrated Circuit 8 consciousness can allow for what the *Zhuangzi* beautifully expresses: "Wandering in the freedom of cosmic harmony with Dao is to wander carefree beyond the confines of temporal and spatial boundaries. It is a wandering that has neither beginning nor end, but becomes a form of spiritual existence in its own right."<sup>89</sup>

## **Conclusion: The Groundless Ground of Being**

"I am not merely a wave. I am the sea" - Walter Russell

Circuit 8 represents the most radical proposition of the entire negational journey of sitting in forgetfulness: that at the foundation of existence lies groundlessness, nothingness, and a substanceless void.

This void is not empty in the nihilistic sense, but is pregnant with infinite potential. In Daoist language, it is *wu* (無) - the meontological fabric from which all phenomena continuously arise. In Bohm's language, it is the implicate order - the undivided wholeness from which the explicate world unfolds. In Kabbalistic language, it is *Ain* - the nothingness that precedes all manifestation. In quantum physics, it is the vacuum - the plenum of potentiality.

To touch this nothingness is to undergo what amounts to a form of death; the death of every identification, every construct, every assumption about self and world. The traditions are unanimous: this passage can be terrifying; and the stronger our egoic attachments, the more there is to let go of, the more terrifying it tends to be.

Yet the traditions are equally unanimous about what lies on the other side: a freedom so complete it includes the freedom from needing to be free, a peace so profound it embraces chaos; a wholeness that recognizes all fragmentation as temporary play of the void.

This is not a transcendence in the sense of escape, but a realization in the sense of recognition. The nature of reality does not change, but our relationship to it does. The world continues, sensations arise, thoughts occur, emotions flow, relationships develop, but all are recognized as temporary waves on the surface of the underlying sea of nothingness.

The path of negation, the systematic “forgetting” of all constructs, reveals itself finally as the most positive affirmation imaginable. By destroying all false identifications, it uncovers what cannot be destroyed: the consciousness that remains when every content of consciousness has been released, the luminous darkness that gives birth to light.

Gebser's concept of the ever-present origin illuminates this paradox with precision. Origin is not something we lost in the past and must recover, nor something we will achieve in the future, but which is present at every moment, from which we originate and to which we are constantly directed. The journey within Circuit 8 is therefore not movement toward some distant goal but progressive transparency to what has always been present and accessible.

This is what Gebser means by “verition” - the continuous verification and realization of truth as an active process. Circuit 8 is not a static attainment but an ongoing truth-ing, a perpetual accessing of the origin. As he writes: “The integral consciousness is distinguished by its making present the structures and mutations of consciousness which are latent or concealed in man.”<sup>90</sup>

In the words of Master Eckhart, the Dao is “nichts” - nothingness. Not as absence, but as that which precedes and enables all presence. To realize this nothingness is not to *become* nothing but to discover what one has always been: the groundless ground from which being perpetually springs.

The journey of Circuit 8 intelligence is a journey home.

Not to some distant paradise, but to the ever-present origin that we never truly left.

Circuit 8 realizations is to consciously participate in the holomovement - to know oneself as both the emptiness and the form, the implicate and the explicate, the void and the manifestation. Not one or the other, but the seamless whole that precedes and transcends and includes all dualities.

Gebser's final vision points toward this same realization: the diaphanon of the ever-present origin shines through all phenomena and makes them transparent. To live from Circuit 8 is to become this transparency, where origin shines through every moment of existence as lived reality with the continuous verification that we have never been separate from the groundless ground, the luminous void, the ever-present origin from which all springs and to which all returns.

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### **For Further Exploration:**

Those interested in Gebser's integral consciousness might explore *The Ever-Present Origin* for his complete analysis of consciousness structures and the emergence of aperspectival awareness. For Bohm's physics and philosophy, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* and *Thought as a System* remain essential. For accessible introductions to Daoist philosophy, the *Zhuangzi* (particularly the Watson or Ziporyn translations) and the *Daodejing* offer direct encounters with wu (無) and zuo wang (坐忘). Chinese medicine practitioners might investigate the classical concept of shenming and its relationship to emptiness in texts like the Huangdi Neijing. For those approaching from Western contemplative traditions, Master Eckhart's sermons on nichts (nothingness) and the Kabbalistic exploration of the negative veils offer profound parallels to Daoist concepts of emptiness (wu, 無).

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