

The Correlations between Non-dualism and Psychology

By Carolyn Reynolds

As a young child I wanted to know all the answers to everything. We prayed in church about a world with no beginning and no end. How can that be? No beginning, no end! I wanted to know the truth about God, how the planets were made, what happens after we die, etc, etc. The questions without answers were endless. So I decided that the only way I could know all these answers was to die so I could be in that nebulous place that looks down on all of creation and sees it clearly. That wish remained throughout childhood, though in the background.

On October 4, 1957 the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I; a beach ball sized artificial satellite. That single event affected political, military, technological and scientific development. It also affected me and my friends in junior high school. Math and science courses were geared up and demanded. My guidance counselor insisted that she would not recommend me to a college if I chose to take Art 4 instead of Trigonometry.

Sputnik's shadow must have been in the registrar's office as I matriculated at college. The priest in charge of admissions at Duquesne University told me that the higher math and science courses would be accepted by any of the other colleges within the university but if I took the less demanding courses in math and science, they would not count for credit in the Sciences. I acquiesced. But, oh, I was so misplaced. My only shining light freshman year was Psychology 101. I thought, "Perhaps it is here that I can find out some of those answers from childhood". I fell in love with the study of the human psyche and graduated with a major in Psychology and a minor in Philosophy and later a Master's Degree in Educational Psychology.

In the study of psychology, there are many viewpoints concerning the existence and experiences of mankind. Conventional theories of personality are each born through a particular person's experience and the social climate in which he or she lived. For example, Viktor Frankl's experience of being torn from his young family and his profession as a doctor to be sentenced to and then survive Auschwitz

was fertile ground for his most notable work on life and suffering, Man's Search for Meaning.

Alfred Adler introduced the terms Inferiority complex, compensation, superiority complex, and Will to Power. Alfred was a sickly child. He had rickets and later nearly died of pneumonia. He strove to compensate for his health problems and that included his striving to be better than his father. He eventually went to medical school and set up a medical practice. His practice happened to be near a circus so many of his clients were circus performers and this, too, had an impact on his theory of Organ Inferiorities.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a term most people have heard. It describes how man's most basic needs must be taken care of before safety, then social, then esteem, then self actualization. Maslow felt that only 1% of the population actually reaches this stage of self-actualization. This concept of self-actualization is the cornerstone of the next wave of psychology, transpersonal. Later in his career, Maslow did add another level that he called transpersonal.

So it started with Freudianism or depth psychology, then that gave way to Behaviorism, then Humanism. Then I read this quote: "Yet even then, as the heyday of humanism appeared to lead to little more than drug abuse, astrology, and self indulgence, cognitivism (Piaget, Harry Harlow) provided the scientific ground students of psychology were yearning for." Although that is a little over the top, yes, LSD was on campuses and in the psychology labs. Timothy Leary and Harvard's Richard Alpert (latter known as Ram Das) were two of the major promoters of psychedelic tripping. So we are ending our psychedelic trips and running on the cognitive road to try to understand just how the mind works, what is wrong with it and how we fix it. Although fascinating, it is also dizzying and frustrating if a person is looking for *the answer* to understand the mind and how it works. The individual theories are reminiscent of the blind men standing around an elephant and describing it from their one perspective and thinking it is the whole elephant.

One day a friend invited me to join her at a hatha yoga class. The teacher, Diane, would bring many books for check-out each class. I began reading books on Yoga and that old passion returned. For me,

it was psychology *and* philosophy *and* practice. I would read three or four books at the same time, trying to get in as much as possible as quickly as possible. This, too, was the study of the human psyche but it was different. This system is HEALTHY.

Whereas the theories of personalities had as their basis, a flaw, a problem to be worked on so that one could feel whole and happy again, Yoga's premise is that we are born whole and perfect and we have only to realize what is our false identity and what is our true nature. When we shake out those false identities as not our true self we can let go of the ego investment in them and easily modify our beliefs and behaviors to make our lives more peaceful. With a sense of equanimity, the personality plays in the world. When we don't have attachments to those personality traits or to stuff, it is much easier to modify, let go, or change so that life can function more smoothly and we can regain balance.

Although the perspectives of psychology are varying, they all are useful. And although they are all dualistic practices, they are complementary to the insights of non-dualism. *The one thing that stands between the individual and the experience of Absolute Reality without a second is the mind. Understanding the mind and knowing that it is our bag of tools, and not our boss, is the key to understanding what lies beyond the mind.*

Yoga is Universal and independent of the social climate. That is because the influences of society, trauma, birth order, life experiences, health of body, etc. all come together to form a personality. Personality comes from the Greek word, persona, which means mask. Psychology and the Theories of Personality study the mask. Yoga urges us to recognize the mask and then challenges us to find what is under the mask. Knowing that, adjustments to the world and to others is much easier, sometimes even joyful when we realize the freedom in letting go.

When my own marriage of 23 years was ending I had had the benefit of several years of yoga study. When my then-spouse asked, "Who gets the silver?" I could answer, "You can have it". "Who gets the china?" "You can have it." "Who gets the kids at Christmas?" "You can have them." Incorporating the practices of

yoga before this event allowed me to get through this passage with minimal pain as the rest of the separation seemed to catch the flavor of those first few moments of negation. Even now, when family events include both of us, they are joyful and pleasant.

The study of Psychology can be a useful tool for identifying and understanding habit patterns so that they can be more easily modified. Having a stable tranquil mind is a necessary step along the way as it clears the way for the deeper contemplative work which leads to the direct experience of the oneness with all that is. Dualistic psychology can well serve the experience of Non-dualism.