

SELF-REALIZATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTURBANCES

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The study of the psychopathological aspects of human nature has contributed a vast mass of observations, theories and techniques for the diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric disorders. It has produced the widespread psychoanalytic movement and other aspects of dynamic psychology which have greatly enlarged and deepened our knowledge of the human psyche.

However, this pathological approach has, besides its assets, also a serious liability, and that is an exaggerated emphasis on the morbid manifestations and on the lower aspects of human nature and the consequent unwarranted generalized applications of the many findings of psychopathology to the psychology of normal human beings. This has produced a rather dreary and pessimistic picture of human nature and the tendency to consider its higher values and achievements as derived only from the lower drives, through processes of reaction formation, transformation and sublimation. Moreover, many important realities and functions have been neglected or ignored: intuition, creativity, the will, and the very core of the human psyche—the Self.

These limitations have been realized in recent times by a growing number of investigators who have started a healthy reaction. Attention has been called to the neglected factors both in normal men and women and in those more highly developed, aptly termed by Goldstein (1939) and Maslow (1954) “self-actualizing” individuals. The importance and value of the ethical element and of the religious tendencies in human nature have been emphasized by Allport (1955), Angyall (1941), Baruk (1945), Caruso (1959), Frankl (1955), Fromm (1950), Jung (1933), Maslow (1954), May (1953), Proffoff (1959), Rank (1945), Sorokin (1954 a & b), Urban (1946), and others; this trend has recently been covered by the names of *ortho-psychology*, proposed by Maslow (1958), and orthogenesis, suggested by Ferrière (1959) in Switzerland. It is a current of research which appears to be headed in the right direction, and although still in its initial stages promises to offer most valuable contributions to the knowledge of the *whole* human nature, and to the unfolding of its higher creative possibilities.

Yet, we think that also in this case some caution should be used, for all reactions have the tendency to go towards the other extreme, and one can already note evidence of such overcompensation in this field. Some representatives of the new current show a leaning towards reversion to the former conception of man as an already unified personality, which, unfortunately, is far from being the case. The drive towards integration has been rightly described and emphasized as a basic and normal urge of the human personality; but this is something quite different from the illusion of an already organically and harmoniously functioning personality.

A realistic observation of the flow of the psychological life in ourselves and in others shows clearly the existence of a number of differing and conflicting tendencies, which at times constitute the nuclei of semi-independent sub-personalities. Both psychoanalysis and the picture of human beings given by great novelists who were good intuitive psychologists point up these basic conflicts inherent in human nature.

The recognition that different drives and the various psychological functions are interrelated and interacting does not mean that they are integrated in a harmoniously functioning organism as are the biological functions in a healthy body. Even conflict constitutes a relation; and two armies fighting each other surely interact powerfully.

One kind of conflict which occurs frequently is that evidenced by ambivalence, and it explains many curious, contradictory manifestations of human beings. Another basic conflict is that between inertia, laziness, tendency to preservation, craving for security (which expresses itself in conformity) on the one hand, and the tendency towards growth, self-assertion and adventure on the other. Still another source of conflict is that of the awakening of new drives or needs which oppose pre-existing ones; this occurs on two chief occasions: first, the tumultuous awakening of new tendencies at the time of adolescence, and second, the awakening of religious

aspirations and new spiritual interests, particularly at middle age. It is this last type of conflict which is the primary concern of this paper.

It therefore appears that “organic unity” is a goal and not a present reality—a goal which can be visioned, approached, and up to a certain point achieved. It is in the most favorable cases the fruit of spontaneous growth and maturation; in others it is the well-earned reward of self-training, education or therapy, through the use of a variety of techniques, in order to help and hasten the process. In the exposition which follows, we shall try to describe the various stages of self-realization, and to point out the difficulties and the emotional and mental disturbances which often—although not necessarily—occur during the process.

First of all, it is well to have a clear idea of what self-realization is. The term has been used to indicate two kinds of growth in awareness, of expansion of consciousness, which, although more or less related, are different in their nature and have quite different manifestations. The meaning most frequently given to self-realization is that of psychological growth and maturation, of the awakening and manifestation of latent potentialities of the human being—for instance, ethical, esthetic and religious experiences and activities. These correspond to the characteristics Maslow (1959) ascribes to *self-actualization*, and it would perhaps be well to use this term in order to distinguish it from the second kind of self-realization. This is the realization of the Self, the experience and awareness of the synthesizing spiritual Center. It is not the realization of the personal conscious self or “I,” which should be considered merely as the reflection of the spiritual Self, its projection, in the field of the personality.

Self-actualization may be achieved at different levels and does not necessarily include what can be called the spiritual level. On the other hand, an individual may have genuine spiritual experiences without being at all integrated, i.e., without having developed a well-organized, harmonious personality. This has been clearly shown by Jung (1956, p. 155) who calls our attention to the fact that the developing of the personality is not an absolute prerogative of the man of genius, and that he may have genius without either having personality or being a personality. Spiritual awakening and spiritual realization are something different from conscious awareness of the Self. They include various kinds of awareness of superconscious *contents*, either descending into the field of consciousness or found in the process of ascending to superconscious levels and thus having what Maslow (1959) calls a “peak experience.” The distinction between the personal conscious self, the superconscious, and the spiritual Self is indicated in our discussion of the psychological constitution of man and in its accompanying diagram in the article *Dynamic Psychology and Psychosynthesis* (Assagioli, 1958).

We are using the word “spiritual” in its broader connotation which includes, therefore, not only the specific religious experience, but all the states of awareness, all the functions and activities which have as common denominator the possessing of values higher than the average, values such as the ethical, the esthetic, the heroic, the humanitarian and the altruistic. We include under the general heading of “spiritual development” then, all experiences connected with awareness of the contents of the superconscious, which may or may not include the experience of the Self. It should also be pointed out that the reaching up into the realm of the superconscious and its exploration, while approaching the consciousness of the Self, may sometimes even constitute an obstacle to full Self-realization, to the reaching of the summit where the personal-I awareness blends into awareness of the spiritual Self. One can become so fascinated by the wonders of the superconscious realm, so absorbed in it, so identified with some of its special aspects or manifestations as to lose or paralyze the urge to reach the summit of Self-realization.

In the following analysis of the vicissitudes and incidents which occur during the process of spiritual development, we shall consider both the successive stages of self-actualization and the achievement of full Self-realization.*

*Maslow has well recognized that self-actualization should not be considered as a state in which all conflicts have been eliminated and full unity is achieved once and forever. His exposition of this important point is so lucid and cogent that it deserves to be quoted in full:

This paper is the first of a projected series, "Critique of Self-Actualization," whose long-term aim is the further exploration of the full reach of human nature, but whose immediate, pedagogical aim is to correct the widespread misunderstanding of self-actualization as a static, unreal, "perfect" state in which all human problems are transcended, and in which people "live happily forever after" in a super-human state of serenity or ecstasy.

To make this fact clearer, I could describe self-actualization as a development of personality which frees the person from the deficiency problems of growth and from the neurotic (or infantile, or fantasy, or unnecessary, or "unreal") problems of life, so that he is able to face, endure and grapple with the "real" problems of life (the intrinsically and ultimately human problems, the unavoidable, the "existential" problems to which there is no perfect solution). That is, it is not an absence of problems but a moving from transitional or unreal problems to real problems. (Maslow, 1959, p. 24.)

Man's spiritual development is a long and arduous journey, an adventure through strange lands full of surprises, difficulties and even dangers. It involves a drastic transmutation of the "normal" elements of the personality, an awakening of potentialities hitherto dormant, a raising of consciousness to new realms, and a functioning along a new inner dimension.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that so great a change, so fundamental a transformation, is marked by several critical stages, which are not infrequently accompanied by various nervous, emotional and mental troubles. These may present to the objective clinical observation of the therapist the same symptoms as those due to more usual causes, but they have in reality quite another significance and function, and need very different treatment.

The incidence of disturbances having a spiritual origin is rapidly increasing nowadays, in step with the growing number of people who, consciously or unconsciously, are groping their way towards a fuller life. Moreover, the heightened development and complexity of the personality of modern man and his more critical mind have rendered spiritual development a more difficult and complicated process. In the past a moral conversion, a simple whole-hearted devotion to a teacher or savior, a loving surrender to God, were often sufficient to open the gates leading to a higher level of consciousness and a sense of inner union and fulfillment. Now, however, the more varied and conflicting aspects of modern man's personality are involved and need to be transmuted and harmonized with each other: his fundamental drives, his emotions and feelings, his creative imagination, his inquiring mind, his assertive will, and also his interpersonal and social relations.

For these reasons a general outline of the disturbances which can arise at the various stages of spiritual realization and some indications pertaining to their proper treatment will, we believe, serve a useful purpose.

We might, for the sake of clarity, tabulate four critical stages:

1. Crises preceding the spiritual awakening.
2. Crises caused by the spiritual awakening.
3. Reactions to the spiritual awakening.
4. Phases of the process of transmutation.

We have used the symbolic expression "awakening" because it clearly suggests the perception, the becoming aware of a new area of experience, the opening of the hitherto closed eyes to an inner reality previously ignored.

1. Crises Preceding the Spiritual Awakening

In order to understand thoroughly the strange experiences that often precede the awakening, we must review some of the psychological characteristics of the "ordinary" human being.

One may say of him that he "lets himself live" rather than that he lives. He takes life as it comes and does not worry about the problems of its meaning, its worth or its purpose; he devotes himself to the satisfaction of his personal desires; he seeks enjoyment of the senses and endeavors to become rich and satisfy his ambitions. If he is more mature, he subordinates his personal satisfaction to the fulfillment of the various family and social duties assigned to him, without taking the trouble to understand on what bases those duties rest or from what source they spring. Possibly he regards himself as "religious" and as a believer in God, but his religion is outward and conventional, and when he has conformed to the injunctions of his church and shared in its rites he feels that he has done all that is required of him. In short, he believes implicitly that the only reality is that of the

physical world which he can see and touch and therefore he is strongly attached to earthly goods, to which he attributes a positive value; thus he practically considers this life an end in itself. His belief in a future “heaven,” if he conceives of one, is altogether theoretical and academic, as is proved by the fact that he takes the greatest pains to postpone as long as possible his departure for its joys.

But it may happen that this “ordinary man” becomes both surprised and disturbed by a change—sudden or slow—in his inner life. This may take place after a series of disappointments; not infrequently after some emotional shock, such as the loss of a loved relative or a very dear friend. But sometimes it occurs without any apparent cause, and in the full enjoyment of health and prosperity. The change begins often with a sense of dissatisfaction, of “lack,” but not the lack of anything material and definite; it is something vague and elusive that he is unable to describe.

To this is added, by degrees, a sense of the unreality and emptiness of ordinary life; all personal affairs, which formerly absorbed so much of his attention and interest, seem to retreat, psychologically, into the background; they lose their importance and value. New problems arise. The individual begins to inquire into the origin and the purpose of life; to ask what is the reason for so many things he formerly took for granted; to question, for instance, the meaning of his own sufferings and those of others, and what justification there may be for so many inequalities in the destinies of men.

When a man has reached this point, he is apt to misunderstand and misinterpret his condition. Many who do not comprehend the significance of these new states of mind look upon them as abnormal fancies and vagaries. Alarmed at the possibility of mental unbalance, they strive to combat them in various ways, making frantic efforts to re-attach themselves to the “reality” of ordinary life that seems to be slipping from them. Often they throw themselves with increased ardor into a whirl of external activities, seeking ever new occupations, new stimuli and new sensations. By these and other means they may succeed for a time in alleviating their disturbed condition, but they are unable to get rid of it entirely. It continues to ferment in the depths of their being, undermining the foundations of their ordinary existence, whence it is liable to break forth again, perhaps after a long time, with renewed intensity. The state of uneasiness and agitation becomes more and more painful and the sense of inward emptiness more intolerable. The individual feels distracted; most of what constituted his life now seems to him to have vanished like a dream, while no new light has yet come. Indeed, he is as yet ignorant of the existence of such a light, or else he cannot believe that it may ever illuminate him.

It frequently happens that this state of inner disturbance is followed by a moral crisis. His conscience awakens or becomes more sensitive; a new sense of responsibility appears and the individual is oppressed by a heavy sense of guilt and remorse. He judges himself with severity and becomes a prey to profound discouragement. At this point it is not unusual for him to entertain ideas of suicide. To the man himself it seems as if physical annihilation were the only logical conclusion to his inner breakdown and disintegration.

The foregoing description constitutes merely a general outline of such experiences. In reality individuals differ widely in their inner experiences and reactions. There are many who never reach this acute stage, while others arrive at it almost in one bound. Some are more harrassed by intellectual doubts and metaphysical problems; in others the emotional depression or the moral crisis is the most pronounced feature.

These various manifestations of the crisis bear a close relationship to some of the symptoms regarded as characteristic of psychoneuroses and borderline schizophrenic states. In some cases the stress and strain of the crisis also produce physical symptoms, such as nervous tension, insomnia and various other troubles (digestive, circulatory, glandular).

The differential diagnosis is generally not difficult. The symptoms observed isolatedly may be identical; but an accurate analysis of their genesis, and a consideration of the patient’s personality in its entirety and (most

important of all) the recognition of his actual existential problem, reveal the difference in nature and level of the pathogenic conflicts. In ordinary cases, these occur between the “normal” drives, between these drives and the conscious ego, or between the ego and the outer world (particularly human beings closely related, such as parents, mate or children). In the cases which we are considering, the conflicts are produced by the new awakening tendencies, aspirations, and interests of a moral, religious, or spiritual character, as previously mentioned; and it is not difficult to ascertain their presence once their reality and validity are admitted rather than being explained away as mere phantasies, or as the internalizations of social taboos. In a general way they can be considered as the result of crises in the development, in the growth of the patient’s personality.

There is this possible complication: the presence in the same patient of symptoms deriving, in varying proportions, from both sources; but in these cases too, the differential criterion consists in discovering the different sources.

2. Crises Caused by the Spiritual Awakening

The opening of the channel between the conscious and the superconscious levels, between the ego and the Self, and the flood of light, joy and energy which follows, often produce a wonderful release. The preceding conflicts and sufferings, with the psychological and physical symptoms which they generated, vanish sometimes with amazing suddenness, thus confirming the fact that they were not due to any physical cause but were the direct outcome of the inner strife. In such cases the spiritual awakening amounts to a real cure.

But in some cases, not infrequent, the personality is inadequate in one or more respects and therefore unable to rightly assimilate the inflow of light and strength. This happens, for instance, when the intellect is not balanced, or the emotions and the imagination are uncontrolled; when the nervous system is too sensitive; or when the inrush of spiritual energy is overwhelming in its suddenness and intensity.

An incapacity of the mind to stand the illumination, or a tendency to egotism or conceit, may cause the experience to be wrongly interpreted, and there results, so to speak, a “confusion of levels.” The distinction between absolute and relative truths, between the Self and the “I,” is blurred and the inflowing spiritual energies may have the unfortunate effect of feeding and inflating the personal ego.

The author encountered a striking instance of such a harmful effect in the Psychiatric Hospital at Ancona. One of the inmates, a simple little man, formerly a photographer, quietly and persistently declared that he was God. Around this central idea he had constructed an assortment of fantastic delusions about heavenly hosts at his command; at the same time he was as peaceful, kind and obliging a person as one could imagine, always ready to be of service to the doctors and patients. He was so reliable and competent that he had been entrusted with the preparation of medicines and even the keys of the pharmacy. His only lapse in behavior in this capacity was an occasional appropriation of sugar in order to give pleasure to some of the other inmates.

Doctors with materialistic views would be likely to regard this patient as simply affected by paranoid delusions; but this mere diagnostic label offers little or no help in understanding the true nature and causes of such disturbances. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to explore the possibility of a more profound interpretation of this man’s illusory conviction.

The inner experience of the spiritual Self, and its intimate association with and penetration of the personal self, gives to those who have it a sense of greatness and internal expansion, the conviction of participating in some way in the divine nature. In the religious tradition and spiritual doctrines of every epoch one finds numerous attestations on this subject some of them expressed in daring terms. In the Bible there is the explicit sentence “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” St. Augustine declares: “When the soul loves something it becomes like unto it; if it should love terrestrial things it becomes terrestrial, but if it should love God (we may ask) does it not become God?” The most extreme expression of the identity of the human

spirit in its pure and real essence with the Supreme Spirit is contained in the central teaching of the Vedanta philosophy: “*Tat Twam Asi*” (Thou art That) and “*Aham evam param Brahman*” (In truth I am the Supreme Brahman).

In whatever way one may conceive the relationship between the individual Self and the universal Self, be they regarded as identical or similar, distinct or united, it is most important to recognize clearly, and to retain ever present in theory and in practice, the difference that exists between the Self in its essential nature—that which has been called the “Fount,” the “Center,” the “deeper Being,” the “Apex” of ourselves—and the small ordinary personality, the little “self” or ego, of which we are normally conscious. The disregard of this vital distinction leads to absurd and dangerous consequences.

The distinction gives the key to an understanding of the mental state of the patient referred to, and of other less extreme forms of self-exaltation and self-glorification. The fatal error of all who fall victim to these illusions is to attribute to their *personal ego* or “self” the qualities and powers of the Self. In philosophical terms, it is a case of confusion between an absolute and a relative truth, between the metaphysical and the empirical levels of reality; in religious terms, between God and the “soul.”

Our illustration represents an extreme case, but instances of such confusion, more or less pronounced, are not uncommon among people dazzled by contact with truths which are too powerful for their mental capacities to grasp and assimilate. The reader will doubtless be able to record instances of similar self-deception which are found in a number of fanatical followers of various cults.

Once the delusion has become established it is a waste of time to antagonize and to ridicule the patient’s aberration; it will merely arouse his opposition and resentment. The better way is to sympathize and, while admitting the ultimate truth of his belief, point out the nature of his error and help him learn how to make the necessary distinctions.

In other cases the sudden influx of energies produces an emotional upheaval which expresses itself in uncontrolled, unbalanced and disordered behavior. Shouting and crying, singing and outbursts of various kinds characterize this form of response. If the individual is active and aggressive he may be easily impelled by the excitement of the inner awakening to play the role of prophet or savior; he may found a new sect and start a campaign of spectacular proselytism.

In some sensitive individuals there is an awakening of parapsychological perceptions. They have visions, which they believe to be of exalted beings; they may hear voices, or begin to write automatically, accepting the messages at their face value and obeying them unreservedly. The quality of such messages is very varied. Sometimes they contain fine teachings, but they should always be examined with much discrimination and sound judgment, and without being influenced by their uncommon origin or by any claim by their alleged transmitter. No validity should be attributed to messages containing definite orders and commanding blind obedience, and to those tending to exalt the personality of the recipient.

3. Reactions to the Spiritual Awakening

The reactions accompanying this phase are manifold and often occur a certain time after the awakening. As has been said, a harmonious inner awakening is characterized by a sense of joy and mental illumination that brings with it an insight into the meaning and purpose of life; it dispels many doubts, offers the solution of many problems and gives a sense of security. At the same time there wells up a realization that life is one, and an outpouring of love flows through the awakening individual towards his fellow beings and the whole of creation. The former personality, with its sharp angles and disagreeable traits, seems to have receded into the background and a new loving and lovable individual smiles at us and the whole world, full of eagerness to please, to serve and to share his newly acquired spiritual riches, the abundance of which seems almost too much for him to

contain.

Such an exalted state lasts for varying periods, but it is bound to cease. The personal self was only temporarily overpowered but not permanently transformed. The inflow of light and love is rhythmical as is everything in the universe. After a while it diminishes or ceases and the flood is followed by the ebb.

Necessarily this is a very painful experience and is apt in some cases to produce strong reactions and cause serious troubles. The personal ego re-awakens and asserts itself with renewed force. All the rocks and rubbish, which had been covered and concealed at high tide, emerge again. The man, whose moral conscience has now become more refined and exacting, whose thirst for perfection has become more intense, judges with greater severity and condemns his personality with a new vehemence; he is apt to harbor the false belief of having fallen lower than he was before. Sometimes it even happens that lower propensities and drives, hitherto lying dormant in the unconscious, are vitalized by the inrush of higher energy, or stirred into a fury of opposition by the consecration of the awakening man—a fact which constitutes a challenge and a menace to their uncontrolled expression.

At times the reaction becomes intensified to the extent of causing the individual even to deny the value and reality of his recent experience. Doubts and criticism enter his mind and he is tempted to regard the whole thing as an illusion, a fantasy or an emotional intoxication. He becomes bitter and sarcastic, ridicules himself and others, and even turns his back on his higher ideals and aspirations. Yet, try as he may, he cannot return to his old state; he has seen the vision, and its beauty and power to attract remain with him in spite of his efforts to suppress it. He cannot accept everyday life as before, or be satisfied with it. A “divine homesickness” haunts him and leaves him no peace. Sometimes the reaction presents a more pathological aspect and produces a state of depression and even despair, with suicidal impulses. This state bears a close resemblance to psychotic depression or “melancholia” which is characterized by an acute sense of unworthiness, a systematic self-depreciation and self-accusation; the impression of going through hell, which may become so vivid as to produce the delusion that one is irretrievably damned; a keen and painful sense of intellectual incompetence; a loss of will power and self-control, indecision and an incapacity and distaste for action. But in the case of those who have had an inner awakening or a measure of spiritual realization the troubles should not be considered as a mere pathological condition; they have specific psychological causes. One of these has been indicated by both Plato and St. John of the Cross with the same analogy.

Plato, in the famous allegory contained in the Seventh Book of his *Republic*, compares unenlightened men to prisoners in a dark cave or den, and says:

At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck around and walk towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which, in his former state, he had seen the shadows

St. John of the Cross uses words curiously similar in speaking of the condition called “the dark night of the soul”:

The self is in the dark because it is blinded by a light greater than it can bear. The more clear the light, the more does it blind the eyes of the owl, and the stronger the sun’s rays, the more it blinds the visual organs, overcoming them by reason of their weakness, depriving them of the power of seeing...As eyes weakened and clouded suffer pain when the clear light beats upon them, so the soul, by reason of its impurity, suffers exceedingly when the Divine Light really shines upon it. And when the rays of this pure Light shine upon the soul in order to expel impurities, the soul perceives itself to be so unclean and miserable that it seems as if God has set Himself against it and itself were set against God. (Quoted by Underhill, 1913, p. 453.)

Before proceeding further it seems appropriate to point out that crises, less total and drastic, but in many ways similar to those taking place before and after the “awakening,” occur in two main types of creative individuals—artists and scientists.

Artists have often complained of periods of aridity, frustration, inability to work. At such times they feel depressed and restless and may be affected by many of the psychological symptoms mentioned above (pp. 6-7). They are apt to make vain attempts at escape or evasion of that painful condition by means such as alcohol or drugs. But when they have reached the depth of despondency or desperation there may come a sudden flow of inspiration inaugurating a period of renewed and intense productive activity.

Often the work of art appears as a virtually finished product elaborated without conscious awareness at some unconscious level or region of the artist’s inner being. As Murray (1959, p. 107) has stated in his brilliant essay on *Vicissitudes of Creativity*, speaking of the requirements of creation, “there must be sufficient permeability (flexibility) of boundaries, boundaries between categories as well as boundaries between different spheres of interest and—most important for certain classes of creation—sufficient *permeability* between conscious and unconscious processes... Too much permeability is insanity, too little is ultraconventional rationality.”

The “frustrations” which harass the scientist at various stages of research and the role they play “in sending the energy inward to richer sources of inspiration” have been ably described by Progoff (1959, pp. 223-232).

The proper treatment in this type of crisis consists in conveying to the sufferer an understanding of its true nature and in explaining the only effective way of overcoming it. It should be made clear to him that the exalted state he has experienced could not, by its very nature, last forever and that reaction was inevitable. It is as though he had made a superb flight to the sunlit mountain top, realized its glory and the beauty of the panorama spread below, but had been brought back reluctantly to his starting point with the rueful recognition that the steep path leading to the heights must be climbed step by step. The recognition that this descent or “fall” is a natural happening affords emotional and mental relief and encourages the subject to undertake the arduous task confronting him on the path to Self-realization.

4. Phases of the Process of Transmutation

We now have to deal with the stage in which it has been recognized that the necessary conditions to be fulfilled and the price to be paid for the high achievement of Self-realization are a drastic transmutation and regeneration of the personality. It is a long and many-sided process which includes phases of active removal of the obstacles to the inflow and operation of superconscious energies; phases of development of the higher functions which have lain dormant or undeveloped; phases in which the ego must let the higher Self work, enduring the pressure and the inevitable pain of the process.

It is a most eventful period, full of changes, of alternations between light and darkness, between joy and suffering. The energies and the attention of the individual are often so engrossed in this task that his power of coping with the problems and activities of normal life may be impaired. Observed from the outside and gauged in terms of ordinary efficiency he seems to have deteriorated and to be less capable than before. He is not spared unfair judgment on the part of well-meaning but unenlightened friends or physicians, and he is often the target of pungent and sarcastic remarks about his “fine” spiritual ideals and aspirations making him weak and ineffective in practical life. This sort of criticism is felt as very painful, and its influence may arouse doubts and discouragement.

This trial constitutes one of the tests on the path of Self-realization; it teaches a lesson in overcoming personal sensitiveness, and is an occasion for the development of inner independence and self-reliance, without resentment. It should be accepted cheerfully, or at least serenely, and used as an opportunity for developing inner strength. If, on the other hand, the people in the individual’s environment are enlightened and

understanding, they can help a great deal and spare him much unnecessary friction and suffering.

In reality this is a period of transition; a passing out of the old condition, without having yet firmly reached the new; an intermediate stage in which, as it has been aptly said, one is like a caterpillar undergoing the process of transformation into the winged butterfly. The insect must pass through the stage of the chrysalis, a condition of disintegration and helplessness. But the individual generally does not have the protection of a cocoon in which to undergo the process of transformation in seclusion and peace. He must—and this is particularly so nowadays—remain where he is in life and continue to perform his family, professional and social duties as well as he can, as though nothing had happened or was still going on. His problem is similar to that which confronts engineers in the reconstruction of a railway station without interrupting the traffic even for an hour. It is not surprising then that this difficult and complicated task, this “double life,” is likely to produce a variety of psychological troubles, such as exhaustion, insomnia, emotional depression, aridity, mental agitation and restlessness. These in turn can easily produce all kinds of physical symptoms and disorders.

Sometimes the trouble is caused, or at least aggravated, by an excessive personal effort to hasten the higher realization by the forceful inhibition and repression of the sexual and aggressive drives—an attempt which only serves to produce an intensification of the conflict with resultant tension and neurotic symptoms. Such an attitude often is the outcome of moral and religious conceptions too rigid and dualistic—which engender condemnation of the natural drives, viewed as “bad” or “sinful.” Then there are people who have abandoned *consciously* that attitude, but who are still unconsciously conditioned to some extent by it and manifest either ambivalence in this respect, or oscillation between the two extreme attitudes—that is, *suppression*, and the uncontrolled expression of all drives. The latter, while cathartic, is by no means an acceptable solution, from either the ethical standpoint or the medical, because it inevitably produces new conflicts—between the various basic drives, or between these drives and the restrictions imposed not only by the conventions of the social order, but also by the demands of interpersonal relations, and right social integration and adjustment.

The solution lies, rather, along the lines of a harmonious integration of all drives into the total personality, first through the proper subordination and coordination, and then through the transformation and sublimation of the excessive or unused quota of energy.

The achievement of this integration is not only not impeded but can be greatly facilitated by the activation of the superconscious functions, by the realization of the Self, because those larger and higher interests act as a magnet which draws up the “libido” or psychic energy invested in the “lower” drives. Moreover, when one of the specific functions of the Self, the will, is recognized and utilized, it too can contribute effectively, by means of its regulating and controlling power, to the harmonious integration, to the bio-psychosynthesis of the *whole* human being.

A different and, in a sense, opposite difficulty confronts the individual during the periods in which the flow of superconscious energies is easy and abundant. If not wisely controlled it may be scattered in feverish excitement and activity. Or, on the contrary, it may be kept too much in abeyance and unexpressed, so that it accumulates and its high pressure may injure the nervous system, just as too much electric current may burn out a fuse. The appropriate remedy is to use the inflowing energies constructively and harmoniously in the work of inner regeneration, in creative expression and in fruitful service, in such ways as the individual’s capacities, conditions and opportunities may determine.

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The subject of this article has made it necessary to stress the darker and more painful side of spiritual development, but it should not be inferred that those who are on the path of Self-realization are more likely to be affected by psychological disturbances than ordinary men and women. The stage of most intense suffering

often does not occur. The following points should, therefore, be made clear:

1. In many individuals such development is being accomplished in a much more gradual and harmonious way than that which has been described, so that the inner difficulties are overcome and the different stages passed through without causing severe reaction or producing definite symptoms.
2. The neurotic symptoms and the emotional disorders of the average man or woman are often more serious and intense, more difficult for them to bear and for doctors to cure, than those connected with Self-realization. They are mostly due to violent conflicts between the various aspects of the personality, or to unreasonable rebellion against circumstances and people. Some of these conflicts may be explicable in terms of Freud's (1953) interpretation (which is by no means valid for all), some in accordance with those of Adler (1931), Frankl (1955), Homey (1945), Jung (1953-1954), and others. It is often difficult to cure them satisfactorily because the higher psychological levels and functions of these patients being not yet activated—there is little to which one can appeal to induce them to make the necessary sacrifices or submit to the discipline required in order to bring about the needed adjustments.
3. The nervous, emotional and mental problems arising on the way of Self-realization, however serious they may appear, are merely temporary reactions, by-products, so to speak, of an organic process of inner growth and regeneration. Therefore, they either disappear spontaneously when the crisis which has produced them is over, or they yield more easily to proper treatment.
4. The sufferings caused by periods of depression, by the ebbing of the inner life, are abundantly compensated for by periods of renewed inflow of superconscious energies and by the anticipation of the release and enhancement of the whole personality produced by Self-realization. This vision is a most powerful inspiration, an unfailing comfort and a constant source of strength and courage. One should therefore make a special point of recalling that vision as vividly and as frequently as possible, and one of the greatest services we can render to those struggling along the way is to help them to keep the vision of the goal ever present before the inner eye.

Thus one can anticipate, and have an increasing foretaste of, the state of consciousness of the Self-realized individual. It is a state of consciousness characterized by joy, serenity, inner security, a sense of calm power, clear understanding and radiant love. In its highest aspects it is the realization of essential Being, of communion and identification with the Universal Life.

Implications for Diagnosis and Treatment

Considering the question more strictly from the medical and psychological standpoint, we should realize that, while the troubles that accompany the various phases of Self-realization may be outwardly very similar to, and sometimes appear identical with, those which affect ordinary patients, their causes and significance are very different, and the treatment should correspondingly be different. In other words, the existential situation in the two groups not only is not the same, but it is, in a sense, opposite.

The psychological symptoms of ordinary patients have generally a regressive character. These patients have not been able to accomplish some of the necessary inner and outer adjustments that constitute the normal development of the personality. In many cases they have not succeeded in freeing themselves from emotional attachment to their parents, which persists into later life in the form of childish dependence on them or on other individuals who have become their substitutes. Sometimes an unwillingness to meet the requirements of ordinary family and social life, or an inability to cope with its difficulties, make them unconsciously seek refuge in illness or invalidism. In other cases the cause is an emotional shock or bereavement that they cannot or will not accept, which may lead to reactive depression or other neurotic symptoms. In all these cases we find, as a common characteristic, some conflict or conflicts, between various conscious and unconscious aspects of the personality, or between the personality and its environment.

The difficulties produced by the stress and strife in the various stages towards Self-realization have, on the contrary, a specifically *progressive* character. They are clue to the stirring of superconscious potentialities, to the strong “call from above,” to the pull of the Self, and are specifically determined by the ensuing maladjustment and conflicts with the “middle” and “lower” aspects of the personality. This crisis has been described in striking terms by Jung:

To be “normal” is a splendid ideal for the unsuccessful, for all those who have not yet found an adaptation. But for people who have far more ability than the average, for whom it was never hard to gain successes and to accomplish their share of the world’s work—for them restriction to the normal signifies the bed of Procrustes, unbearable boredom, infernal sterility and hopelessness. As a consequence there are many people who become neurotic because they are only normal, as there are people who are neurotic because they cannot become normal. (Jung, 1933, P. 55.)

It is obvious that psychotherapeutic treatment appropriate to the two diverse kinds of patients must correspondingly be altogether different.

The therapeutic problem concerning the former group is that of helping the patient to reach the normal state of the average man or woman by means of the elimination of repressions and inhibitions, of fears and childish dependence; to find his way out of his self-centeredness, his emotionally distorted outlook, into an objective, sane and rational consideration of normal life, into a recognition of its duties and obligations and a right appreciation of other individuals. The contrasting, partly undeveloped, uncoordinated conscious and unconscious trends and functions have to be harmonized and integrated in a *personal psychosynthesis*.

The specific therapeutic task for the latter group, instead, is that of arriving at a harmonious adjustment by means of the proper assimilation of the inflowing superconscious energies and of their integration with the pre-existing aspects of the personality; that is, of accomplishing not only a personal but also a *spiritual psychosynthesis*.

From this it is apparent that the treatment suitable for the first group of patients proves not only unsatisfactory, but may be definitely harmful for those of the second group. The lot of the latter is doubly hard if they are being treated by a therapist who neither understands nor appreciates the superconscious functions, who ignores or denies the reality of the Self and the possibility of Self-realization. He may either ridicule the patient’s uncertain higher aspirations as mere fancies, or interpret them in a materialistic way, and the patient may be persuaded that he is doing the right thing in trying to harden the shell of his personality, and close it against the insistent knocking of the superconscious Self. This, of course, can aggravate the condition, intensify the struggle and retard the right solution.

On the other hand, a therapist who is himself spiritually inclined, or has at least an understanding of and a sympathetic attitude towards the higher achievements and realities, can be of great help to the individual when, as is often the case, the latter is still in the first stage, that of dissatisfaction, restlessness and unconscious groping. If he has lost interest in life, if everyday existence holds no attractions for him and he has not yet had a glimpse of the higher reality, if he is looking for relief in wrong directions, wandering up and down blind alleys—then the revelation of the true cause of his trouble and the indication of the real un hoped-for solution, of the happy outcome of the crisis, can greatly help to bring about the inner awakening which in itself constitutes the principal part of the cure.

The second stage, that of emotional excitement or elation—when the individual is carried away by an excessive enthusiasm and cherishes the illusion of having arrived at a permanent attainment—calls for a gentle warning that his blessed state is, of necessity, but temporary; and he should be given a description of the vicissitudes of the way ahead of him. This will prepare him for the onset of the inevitable reaction in the third stage, and

enable him to avoid much suffering because it is foreseen, as are subsequent doubts and discouragement. When a patient under treatment during this reaction has not had the benefit of a warning of this sort, the therapist can give much help by assuring him that his present condition is *temporary* and not in any sense permanent or hopeless as he seems compelled to believe. The therapist should insistently declare that the rewarding outcome of the crisis justifies the anguish—however intense he is experiencing. Much relief and encouragement can be afforded him by quoting examples of those who have been in a similar plight and have come out of it.

In the fourth stage of the “incidents of ascent,” during the process of transmutation—which is the longest and most complicated—the work of the therapist is correspondingly more complex. Some important aspects of the treatment are:

1. To enlighten the patient as to what is really going on within him, and help him to find the right attitude to take.
2. To teach him how, by the right use of the will, to wisely control and firmly master the drives emerging from the unconscious, without repressing them through fear or condemnation.
3. To teach him the techniques of the transmutation and sublimation of sexual and aggressive energies. These techniques constitute the most apt and constructive solution of many psychological conflicts.
4. To help him in the proper recognition and assimilation of the energies inflowing from the Self and from superconscious levels.
5. To help him express and utilize those energies in altruistic love and service. This is particularly valuable also for counteracting the tendency to excessive introversion and self-centeredness that often exists in this and other stages of self-development.
6. To guide him through the various phases of the reconstruction of his personality around a higher inner center, that is, in the achievement of his spiritual psychosynthesis.

At this point we should like to make it clear that the psychotherapeutic treatment we are describing does not by any means exclude an appropriate physical treatment, which can be combined with the former. But it is outside the scope of this article to deal with the physical means that can be used and which differ greatly according to the special requirements of each patient.

In some cases the treatment is complicated by the fact that there is an admixture of “regressive” and “progressive” symptoms. These are cases of irregular development. Such people may reach a high level with one part of their personality and yet be handicapped by certain infantile fixations or dominated by unconscious conflicts. One might say that a careful analysis shows that most of those who are engaged in the process of self-actualization are to be found with remnants of this kind; this is not surprising because the same can well be said also of so-called normal people who, as Maslow rightly states, live “in a state of mild and chronic psychopathology and fearfulness, of stunting and crippling and immaturity.” (1956, p. 1.)

From all that has been said it is apparent that, in order to deal in a satisfactory way with the psychological troubles incident to Self-actualization, a twofold competence is required -that of the professionally trained psychotherapist and that of the serious student of, or better still, the experienced traveler along the way to Self-realization. This twofold endowment is at present only rarely found; but, considering the growing number of individuals who require such treatment, it is becoming increasingly urgent that as many as possible of those who wish to serve humanity by administering to its greatest needs should be induced to qualify for the task.

It would also be of great benefit if the public were better informed about the general facts of the subject. At present, it frequently happens that ignorance, prejudice and active opposition—particularly on the part of the patient’s relatives—hamper the task of patient and therapist.

With a more enlightened approach by both the public and by psychotherapists, much unnecessary suffering can

be avoided. Thus many earnest men and women will more easily and speedily reach the goal of their endeavor—the attainment of an ever increasing Self-realization.

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