NAMAH is a pioneer body, mind and spirit journal with an integral vision looking at the influence of the spirit or soul in psychology and health.
Stress management — a different approach

Dr. Alok Pandey

Editor’s note
We are introducing a series of articles on ‘Stress and Self management’ through personal growth. This article is the first of the series and attempts to explore some of the basic issues and key areas. We hope to develop some of these themes and add new ones integrating ancient wisdom and modern discoveries on the subject.

Introduction

Sheikh Saadi was passing across a wasteland when he saw someone sitting under a solitary tree. "Who is he?" enquired the Sheikh, surprised to see someone at noon in a desolate spot.

The court philosopher accompanying him replied, "None of any consequence, sir."

But the Sheikh was curious. They went closer only to find a hermit eating gruel in solitude. The court philosopher now recognised the man whose wisdom was praised by many in distant lands.

Pitying his condition, the court philosopher turned to him and remarked, "If only you had learned to please the king, you would not have to eat gruel for the rest of your life."

The hermit looked up quietly, and said, "If only you had learned to eat gruel, you would not have to please the king for the rest of your life."

Though the situation appeared stressful to the court philosopher, the hermit was perfectly at ease.

In any stress, one has to deal with the response of the organism and the mind’s perception of the problem.

The response of the organism

Whatever be the external circumstances, once the organism perceives it as stressful it responds habitually. The response itself is atavistic, a carry-over of a collective past which we find difficult to outgrow. The cave man and the beast still linger in our consciousness and come out in moments of real or imaginary threat. What is interesting is that in the modern age the danger may not be physical at all. It may be for instance, the threat of losing one’s face or one’s job, or failure in an examination. Yet the body is involved. The limbs tremble, the heart pounds, the mouth dries up, the muscles cramp,
the whole system is tense, frightened, fidgety. And even when the threat is over, the body may react to any associated stimulus or even the thought of the problem. Though no longer externally apparent it still lurks in the consciousness. A memory, imagination or foreboding can draw it out. The organism suffers, the balance of life is disturbed and sickness results.

Techniques have been developed to help the body cope with stress. The market is flooded today with sophisticated gadgetry and innumerable methods to relax. Each helps a little but none cures. These methods can work in various ways: they give us a sense of widening through imagery, habituate the body to stressors through repeated exposure, develop the right response etc. The physiological responses can also be stabilised with the help of Dānas and prāDānas. But the roots of the problem remain. They surface again in sleep through dreams and nightmares when our waking consciousness is quiescent and one may wake up with a headache or a tired feeling. Even worse, one may unexpectedly find oneself face to face with a heart attack or paralysis.

**The perception of the problem**

True, the body functions best when it is introduced to certain healthy habits. Yet this also is not sufficient.

For the roots of the malady lie in our psychology i.e. the peculiarities of our preferences, value systems, attitudes and beliefs, hopes and ambitions, perception and cognition.

It is we who give the value to an event. In itself, a happening has no absolute value. It is our past learning, associations, preferences and a host of other factors that determine our evaluation of the event and thereby its capacity to produce stress.

We often say that attitudes should change. Little do we realise that it is no use talking about changing attitudes unless one changes the aim. Attitudes are only certain standpoints taken by the mind based upon its beliefs. These beliefs translate themselves to our mind as an aim or an ideal that we pursue. Thus for a soldier living for the nation’s glory, it is an honour and a pride to die on the battlefield. To another who has joined the armed forces for mercenary reasons, such a death means the end of all hopes and ambitions and is an extremely stressful situation.

The aim itself is something that changes as we evolve. At a certain stage of our life we may feel that amassing wealth, becoming a writer, a doctor, an executive, a musician etc. is our aim. Later as we grow, we realise that these occupations providing comfort, knowledge, fame, happiness etc. are not really fulfilling. The true source of fulfilment lies within us. The profession, chosen as an aim, may not give what we truly want. Thus the comfort of money is often mixed with the curse of an illness; the knowledge gained through books is often shadowed by error and doubt; the price of being a top executive may be too high and the fall as steep as the ascent; the happiness through music may be marred by our incapacity and limitation. In more complex personalities, we often find a many-sided seeking, a branching out into many aims and pursuits,
making the problem still more complicated, even though the rewards of success are richer.

Here we may ask, how is the aim related to our practical life, its many situations, the baffling problems and their solutions? We have already mentioned that what is danger to one is an adventure to another. What is rest to one is boredom to another. What is learning to one is conditioning to another, what is ease to one is stress to another, what is sacrifice for one is freedom for another.

We often associate quality of life with the comforts of living. But the quality of life actually depends upon the intrinsic values rather than external successes. A cultivation of such intrinsic values helps one to spontaneously outgrow many stressful situations.

To understand how the quality of life is linked with our aim and motivation it would be interesting to study the interaction of our temperamental predisposition with the environment.

Indian psychology understands this through the concept of svabhāva and guṇas.

The svabhava or temperamental predisposition is influenced by gunas (universal determinants of behaviour) to produce personality types.

The gunas are: Sattva — the mode of harmony, balance and intelligence; Rajas — the mode of action and movement; and Tamas — the mode of inertia.

These three guṇas are present in every individual in varying degrees but one or the other predominates in a particular personality type.

The tāmasic character denotes inertia, resistance to change and indolence; the rājasic — qualities of courage, kinesis, dynamism, high ambition, need for activity, urge to accomplish, strength, swiftness, etc.; the sāttvic — qualities of benevolence, goodwill for all, sympathy, compassion, just dealings, fairness, etc.

In human nature each movement may be oriented towards the height or the abyss. Thus, a capacity for immobility has peace and calm on the positive side while indifference, apathy, inertia, dullness, sloth, bondage on the negative side. Similarly, dynamism has courage and strength as its positive aspects while possessiveness, vanity, arrogance, desire and ambition are its negative aspects. In a nature turned to ideals harmony, humility, benevolence, sympathy, clarity of understanding, righteousness, freedom, wisdom are the positive aspects whereas pride of knowledge, cunning, deceit of logic, doubt and deception are the negative echoes.

The idea in the Indian psychological perspective was to match the personality type not only with action but also with the aim and motivation associated with the action. When one’s actions are in conflict with one’s temperament or svabhāva the dissonance precipitates stress.
According to the Indian tradition a spiritual seeker has another source of stress. He strives to replace his ego-centred personality by a soul-centred personality. In this process not only his action but his svabhāva too undergo a change.

**Facing stress**

All stress is not necessarily bad to be avoided or escaped from. Instead one can understand its meaning and message through introspection. Once observed, it can be rightly oriented. As long as we are identified with the surface foam we are bound to the mercy of each passing wave. At best we can only manipulate the surface reactions and responses of our nature but cannot change them. Hence the different techniques to manipulate our nature cannot fundamentally alter its course.

A workaholic, an ambitious executive, suffered stress and had a nervous breakdown in his mid-forties (a period when there is a natural reorientation of life’s goals termed as mid-life crisis). The treating psychiatrist prescribed some medications, gave a few relaxation techniques and counselled him to divert his mind from work by playing tennis regularly. The man was happy and felt relieved for a couple of months. But he soon came back with the same problem. He was stressed after playing tennis. This time, he was asked to take off from work and go on a trip to a hill station. He returned with depression added to his anxiety. A deeper probing revealed that the executive faced an inner conflict. He realised that he often felt that he would fail. Tennis diverted his mind for sometime but he began competing and wanted to win every match. The hill station could have helped him but being away from work confirmed his foreboding of failure. Believing that he had ultimately failed, he suffered depression.

This person basically had a rājasic character which helped him to be a successful executive and later helped to recuperate himself, albeit temporarily, through playing tennis. He suffered from stress

a) when the negative effects of dynamism (viz. arrogance, possessiveness, vanity etc.) outweighed the positive effects (viz, courage, strength etc.) as happened in his job and later in his game of tennis

b) when, instead of conforming to his rājasic character, he drifted into tamas (doubts, despondency, inertia). In addition his mid-life crisis brought in another element — the necessity to reorient himself. This in turn came into conflict with his character and preoccupations. The first need therefore was to give a positive turn to his mid-life crisis by looking from within and facing the challenge. This man was gradually lead towards a new orientation and aim. With that, his phenomenal formations of thought, patterns of desire, feeling and action changed and he felt much relieved.

**The precipitant**

Do we mean to say that the outer circumstance or situation precipitating the crisis has no value at all? From one standpoint the outer circumstances are not the primary or main thing. They can be viewed as an objectivisation of our inner state. Essentially an external event appears disagreeable and stressful when the inner urge does not match with the environment. Thus pursuits of pleasure in a hedonistic society may appear

For other articles please visit [http://www.namahjournal.com](http://www.namahjournal.com)
stressful to someone whose nature is oriented inwards. Yet the external circumstance then becomes an occasion to unmask one’s conflicts and potentials.

One may understand it by the analogy of a TV set. The picture that is displayed represents the event of one’s life. The channel can be likened to the station one attunes to out of many universally relayed vibratory modes. The channel-button serves to draw a particular set of images. The images displayed, give an indication of the channel we have knowingly or unknowingly selected. To change the image, we have to change the channel. If we are too much identified with the scenes and images it becomes difficult to shift to other channels. It is a subtle law of nature that difficulties aggravate unless we detach ourselves and open to higher possibilities.

Often the shock of painful external events wakes us to a deeper inner life. We question and seek to understand what we never felt necessary or important. We arise and move towards a new possibility which was earlier nearly impossible. All stress therefore also has an evolutionary perspective.

It comes to liberate us out of the bounds of narrowness to wideness, out of the limits of senses to a higher and larger horizon of faith and experience, out of the dullness and sloth to a higher and truer life, out of the chaos and turmoil of the surface to a deeper reality and awareness. The more rigid and resistant we are to change, the greater the stress. The more plastic and clay-like we are to the evolutionary nisus, the easier it is to cope with stress.

*Dr. Alok Pandey, a psychiatrist, is currently working on the theme of stress management with an inner approach.*
Sri Aurobindo and the future psychology

Dr. A.S. Dalal

“Emerging from the periods of eclipse, the nights of ignorance which overtake humanity, we assume always that we are instituting a new knowledge. In reality, we are continually rediscovering the knowledge and repeating the achievement of the ages that have gone before us, — receiving again out of the ‘Inconscient’ the light that it had drawn back into its secracies and now releases once more for a new day and another march of the great journey (1).

Sri Aurobindo

“The new dawn, treading the eternal path of the Truth, follows it to the goal of the dawns that have gone before, — how many, who shall say (2)?”

Sri Aurobindo

During the past two or three decades there has been occurring what has been called a ‘paradigm shift’ — a fundamental change in the general conceptual framework — in several fields, particularly physics, medicine, psychology and economics (3). In psychology, while the great majority are still wedded to the paradigms of one or another of the established schools, a growing number of researchers are shifting to a new psychological paradigm, giving rise to a new trend in psychology as yet not quite well defined. Some of the principal turns which characterise such a nascent psychology of the future are examined here from the perspective of Sri Aurobindo’s thought.

The science of consciousness

Someone has wittily recapitulated in the following words the major historical shifts which have occurred in defining psychology:

“Pity poor psychology. First it lost its soul, then its mind, then consciousness, and now it’s having trouble with behaviour (4).”

The trouble — or at least the dissatisfaction — with the latest generally accepted definition of psychology as the science of behaviour has been growing, and an increasing number of psychologists are once again coming to look upon psychology as the study of consciousness. Alluding to the ‘renewed interest in the empirical investigation of consciousness’, Walsh and Vaughan state:

“This is a relatively recent development in Western psychology, for although William James laid the groundwork for a psychology of consciousness at the turn of the century, there followed a period of some fifty years during which Western psychology shunned anything suggestive of introspection in an effort to secure its recognition as one of the objective hard sciences (5).”

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
The newly emerging view of consciousness, however, is radically different from that of the early introspectionist school of psychology which, too, defined psychology as the science of consciousness. For, whereas the study of ‘the elements of consciousness’ by the early psychologists was limited to the normal waking consciousness, the new psychologists of our times speak of different states, levels or strata of consciousness (6). It is after several centuries that once again consciousness, conceived as such a multi-levelled reality, is being made the object of scientific study following in a fashion the footsteps of the ancient thinkers of India about whom Sri Aurobindo writes:

“...psychology has made an advance and has begun to improve its method. Formerly, it was a crude, scholastic and superficial systematisation of man’s ignorance of himself. The surface psychological functionings, will, mind, senses, reason, conscience, etc. were arranged in a dry and sterile classification; their real nature and relation to each other were not fathomed nor any use made of them which went beyond the limited action Nature had found sufficient for a very superficial mental and psychic life and for very superficial and ordinary workings.... The new psychology seeks indeed to penetrate behind superficial appearances....

“...whatever the crudities of the new science, it has at least taken the first capital step without which there can be no true psychological knowledge; it has made the discovery which is the beginning of self-knowledge and which all must make who deeply study the facts of consciousness, that our waking and surface existence is only a small part of our being and does not yield to us the root and secret of our character, our mentality or our actions. The sources lie deeper. To discover them, to know the nature and the processes of the inconscient or subconscient self and, so far as is possible, to possess and utilise them as physical science possesses and utilises the secret of the forces of Nature, ought to be the aim of a scientific psychology (8).”

**Four errors impeding the growth of the new psychology**

Sri Aurobindo, however, noted four basic errors afflicting the young science and impeding its growth towards the greater psychology of the future. He wrote:
“...it [the new psychology] is encumbered by initial errors which prevent a profounder Knowledge, — the materialistic error which bases the study of the mind upon the study of the body; the sceptical error which prevents any bold and clear-eyed investigation of the hidden profundities of our subjective existence; the error of conservative distrust and recoil which regards any subjective state of experience that departs from the ordinary operations of our mental and psychical nature as a morbidity or a hallucination, — just as the Middle Ages regarded all new science as magic and a diabolical departure from the sane and right limits of human capacity; finally, the error of objectivity which leads the psychologist to study others from outside instead of seeing his true field of knowledge and laboratory of experiment in himself. Psychology is necessarily a subjective science and one must proceed in it from the knowledge of oneself to the knowledge of others (9).”

Some of the recent psychological thought and research mentioned below will serve to indicate that as a result of the paradigm shift, psychology is beginning to recognize and disencumber itself of the errors just stated.

(i) “The materialistic error which bases the study of the mind upon the study of the body.”

Experimental Psychology which marked the birth of psychology as an independent branch of knowledge and as an empirical science, began with the study of various psycho physiological functions and processes. Associated with such an approach of studying psychology through physiology is the Western conception of mind or consciousness as “a product, even an epiphenomenon, of material processes, particularly brain processes (10).” Contrasted with this materialistic view is the conception of yoga psychology according to which:

“Consciousness has not come into being but was and is always there, a fundamental power of existence, latent or involved or even concealed from our mind and sense even in what we call inanimate and unconscious things. It has not come into existence but has emerged from existence; involved it has evolved in the general evolutionary process (11).”

In recent years, some men of science have put forth a view of consciousness which, upholding the primacy of consciousness, represents a total reversal of the materialistic view. The following is a notable example:

“I went through thousands of records of LSD sessions.... I was surprised to find that the seemingly disconnected experiences of these LSD subjects could be integrated and organized into a comprehensive metaphysical system....

“It is based on the concept of a Universal Mind, or Cosmic Consciousness, which is the creative force behind the cosmic design.... In this framework, consciousness is not something that can be derived from or explained in terms of something else. It is a primal fact of existence out of which everything else arises.... It is a framework into which I can really integrate all my observations and experiences (12).”

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
(ii) “The sceptical error which prevents any bold and clear-eyed investigation of the hidden profundities of our subjective existence.”

Because of scepticism, many areas of psychological research have until recently been frowned upon by scientific psychology and are still regarded by the majority as belonging to ‘fringe psychology’. Such areas include various paranormal phenomena pertaining to parapsychology, altered states of consciousness, meditation, ‘peak’ experiences including mystical experiences, etc. The bias against such areas of study due to scepticism about everything that lies outside the ‘normal’ state of consciousness appears to be rapidly diminishing as indicated by the increasing number of research studies being carried out in erstwhile tabooed areas. Two chief factors which have prompted such research have been the epidemic use of consciousness-altering drugs and the widespread practices of meditation, both of which have introduced people to experiences and states of consciousness other than those previously known to or adequately explained by modern psychology. It is beginning to be recognised that modern psychology, uncognizant of states of consciousness other than the normal one, has given to the latter a falsely superior status and has at the same time precluded the study of other states. As has been noted by Walsh and Vaughan:

“Western psychology has long regarded the ordinary waking state of consciousness as optimal. Various other psychologies, however, claim that more adaptive ‘higher’ states exist and that the range of potentially available states is far broader than is usually appreciated. Traditional Western psychological models cannot encompass such claims since the ‘usual is best’ assumption automatically excludes them from consideration. Hence a shift toward broader models is underway (13).”

The present movement towards broader models encompassing a wider range of states of consciousness was foreseen by Sri Aurobindo who wrote during the second decade of the twentieth century:

“And now once more in the revolutions of human thought these depths [of consciousness which the Vedantic psychology was aware of] have to be sounded; modern psychology will be led perforce, by the compulsion of the truth that it is seeking, on to the path that was followed by the ancients. (14).”

(iii) “The error of conservative distrust and recoil which regards any subjective state or experience that departs from the ordinary operation of our mental and psychical nature as a morbidity or a hallucination.”

---

1 Acknowledging the scepticism about parapsychology, The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology describes it thus: “A more or less [with the emphasis on the less] accepted branch of psychology concerned with paranormal phenomena.... Although there is a great deal of interest in parapsychology and many actively pursue the scientific basis of various claims that have been made, the majority of psychologists are deeply skeptical and for good reason.” (1987 ed., s.v. ”parapsychology.”)

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
This error, prominent in psychoanalytical interpretations of mystical experiences in terms of regressive pathological states is illustrated in the following statement made by Prince and Savage:

“We propose that mystical states represent regressions to very early periods of infancy. The basic characteristic — that of ecstatic union — suggests a regression to early nursing experience (15).”

Recognising the error of such reductionist interpretations of mystical experiences Walsh, Elgin, Vaughan and Wilber have pointed out:

“It has not infrequently been suggested that mystical phenomena, even the supposedly highest and most illumined transcendental experiences, are essentially pathological, representing psychotic or near psychotic ego regressions toward an undifferentiated infantile state of consciousness.... Such interpretations do not seem to consider the problem of paradigm clash or the now sizable body of experimental data on the psychology and sociology of transcendental experiences(16).”

The authors of the passage just quoted explain that what Kuhn (17) has called a ‘paradigm clash’ inevitably results when models of human nature conceived by the mystical traditions are examined from the perspective of Western behavioural science which is based on altogether different paradigmatic assumptions. One of the chief Western assumptions which clashes with the paradigm of mysticism is the view that our usual or ordinary state of consciousness is the normal or healthy state, any other being regarded as ‘abnormal’ or pathological. Contradicting this is the view of mysticism that man’s ordinary state is one of ignorance and inalienable suffering and that freedom from ignorance and suffering can be obtained only by attaining a higher state of consciousness.

According to Sri Aurobindo, it is the attitude of conservatism which equates normality with health and sanity, and regards everything other than the ordinarily normal as pathologically abnormal. He writes:

“According to this [materialistic] Science the normal mental and physical states and the relations between mind and body actually established by our past evolution are the right, natural and healthy conditions and anything other, anything opposite to them is either morbid and wrong or a hallucination, self-deception and insanity. Needless to say, this conservative principle is entirely ignored by science itself when it so diligently and successfully improves on the normal operations of physical Nature for the great mastery of Nature by man. Suffice it is to say here once for all that a change of mental and physical state and of relations between the mind and body which increases the purity and freedom of the being, brings a clear joy and peace and multiplies the power of the mind over itself and over the physical functions, brings about in a word man’s greater mastery of his own nature, is obviously not morbid and cannot be considered a hallucination or self-deception since its effects are patent and positive (18).”
The fact that supernormal experiences produce positive effects — and therefore denote a greater well-being rather than pathology — is being increasingly recognised by mental health professionals today. As Walsh, Elgin, Vaughan and Wilber state:

“Several lines of evidence suggest that these [transcendental] experiences tend to occur most often among those who are psychologically most healthy....

“Such experiences may apparently produce long-lasting beneficial changes in the individual.... This echoes the ideas of Jung, who was the first Western therapist to affirm the importance of transcendental experience for mental health and wrote, ‘the fact is that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy and inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experiences you are released from the curse of pathology (19).’

(iv) “The error of objectivity which leads the psychologist to study others from the outside instead of seeing his true field of knowledge and laboratory of experiment in himself.”

In its excessive zeal for objectivity, psychology has not only discarded the introspective method of the early school but has also tended to base its objective methods of observation and experiment on the Galilean dictum that whatever cannot be measured and quantified is not scientific. In so doing, psychology has had to jettison concepts such as that of consciousness and has rendered itself incapable of dealing with various vital aspects of human experience which cannot be quantified. Commenting on the inadequacy of quantitative methods for the study of consciousness, Capra observes:

“A true science of consciousness... would have to be a new type of science dealing with qualities rather than quantities and being based on shared experience rather than verifiable measurements.... Such a new science would quantify its statements whenever this method is appropriate, but would also be able to deal with qualities and values based on human experience (20).”

Sri Aurobindo’s statement regarding the error of objectivity, besides striking down the shibboleth of quantification, affirms the need for pursuing psychology as a subjective science, that is, a science of self-knowledge, in which ‘one must proceed from the knowledge of oneself to the knowledge of others’. Such a futuristic view of psychology has been well echoed by John Welwood who states that the new psychology, rather than attempting to be an objective and natural science,

“...needs to be a self-knowledge psychology.... Such an approach would evolve as a human science, rather than as a strictly natural science, with its own unique methods and

---

2 Objective psychology is defined as “any approach to scientific psychology in which the only data considered ‘legitimate’ are those based upon measurement in physical, objective terms. Specifically excluded are data based on introspection or interpretation.” (The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. “objective psychology.”)

3 cf. “A complete psychology cannot be a pure science, but must be a compound of science and metaphysical knowledge....
areas of investigation. Its findings might be tested and verified by any individual who undertook to examine his or her own experience in an attentive, detailed, and disciplined way (21).”

According to the methodology of Yoga, the ‘unique methods’ just alluded to necessarily involve the development of inner or subjective instruments of observation.

“The field of psychology needs a direct inner psychological instrumentation by which we can arrive at sure data and sure results in ourselves verified [by] equally sure data [and] results in our observation of others and of the hidden psychological world and its play of unseen forces. The physical is the outwardly seen and sensed and needs physical instruments for its exploration: the psychological is the physically unseen and unsensed, to be discovered only on organisation of the inward senses and other new undeveloped and occult means. It is through consciousness, by an instrumentation of consciousness only that the nature and laws and movements of consciousness can be discovered.... (22)”

A subjective science of psychology is not, as it might appear, restricted to observation of causal phenomena of a seemingly narrow field of individual consciousness, precluding controlled observation through experiment. On the contrary, the study of consciousness ‘through consciousness’

“...extends the range of our observation to an immense mass of facts and experiments which exceed the common surface and limited range very much as the vastly extended range of observation of Science exceeds that of the common man.... (23)”

It should be apparent that a subjective science of psychology as thus envisaged does not involve a solipsistic subjectivism devoid of objectivity, for one’s subjective findings are objectively verifiable through observations in and by others.

**Psychology of the new age**

The two quotations at the opening of this essay reflect Sri Aurobindo’s psychological interpretation of social evolution. The central thesis of this interpretation is that human society in the course of its development passes through certain distinct psychological stages which may be distinguished as follows:

(a) **Symbolic**: The stage of a society in its early beginnings, such as the Vedic age in India, during which symbolism associated with a widespread imaginative or intuitive religious feeling pervades thought, customs and institutions.

“Psychology may begin as a natural science, but it deals already with superphysical and must end in a metaphysical enquiry....

“Being or the Self of things can only be known by metaphysical — not necessarily intellectual — knowledge.” (Sri Aurobindo, “Psychological Maxims”, Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1976, pp.9-10).
(b) **Typal and Conventional**: At first predominantly ethical and psychological, the typal stage passes into the conventional, characterised by formalism, authoritarianism and rigidity.

(c) **Individualistic and Rational**: This is the Age of Reason, Revolt, Freedom, Progress; the dominant need of this period is to rediscover by the light of reason the truths of life, thought and action which have been overlaid by false conventions.

(d) **Subjective**: The period during which man pursues the ideals of intuitional knowledge and a deeper self-knowledge in order to

“circle back towards the recovery of his deeper self and a new upward line or a new revolving cycle of civilization (24).”

What we are witnessing at present, says Sri Aurobindo, is the transition from the individualistic and rationalistic-scientific period of human development to a new subjective age of humanity. The rediscovery of the wisdom of the ancients as indicated by the emergence of parallels between modern science and ancient wisdom, and

“the remarkable trend towards mysticism of recent scientists, mathematicians, thinkers (25).”

noted by Sri Aurobindo are part of the phenomena of the passage to a new subjective age of intuition and self-knowledge. In the emerging new physics as well as the new psychology of our times, one can discern beginnings of some of the signals which, Sri Aurobindo wrote, would be the precursors of the new subjective age:

“There will be new unexpected departures of science or at least of research, — since to such a turn in its most fruitful seekings the orthodox still deny the name of science. Discoveries will be made that thin the walls between soul and matter; attempts there will be to extend exact knowledge into the psychological and psychic realms with a realisation of the truth that these have laws of their own which are other than physical.... (26).”

**References**

2. Ibid.

9. Ibid. p.258.
23. Ibid.

Dr. A.S.Dalal, now residing in Pondicherry, received training as a clinical psychologist in the United States where he worked from 1964 to 1985. He has compiled several books on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as they relate to psychology and mental health.

For other articles please visit [http://www.namahjournal.com](http://www.namahjournal.com)
Flower remedies in psychodynamic psychotherapy

Dr. Michael Miovic

Editor’s note:

This article written by a practising psychiatrist deals with an unusual combination of flower remedies and psychiatry. For those familiar with flower remedies it does not seem too dissonant. These cases can be a doorway to the use of flower remedies in psychiatry and the bridge between ‘Alternative’ and ‘Allopathy’ can become possible.

I would like to report some reflections on the use of Bach flower remedies in two long-term psychotherapy cases I am conducting. I have permission from both patients to relate the facts of their treatment, but in this report I have altered their identities in order to protect their right to confidentiality.

The first case involves a 56 year old married, Hispanic man with no past psychiatric history who was referred to me for treatment of major depression in February of 1999, 11 months after sustaining a work-related left ankle trauma that subsequently left him with debilitating chronic back and ankle pain. His past medical history was significant for asthma, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and newly diagnosed mild to moderate obstructive sleep apnea for which he was started on nightly CPAP (breathing device) with good effect. Medications included albuterol inhaler, omeprazole (for GERD), ibuprofen, and indomethacin as needed for pain. He denied active substance abuse and had failed trials of oral narcotics and lumbar steroid injections for pain control. Laboratory evaluation revealed normal thyroid study (TSH), vitamin B12, folate, rapid plasma reagin test for occult syphilis, and CAT scan of the head.

Mr. Perez presented to me in financial distress because worker’s compensation refused to continue disability payments as his primary care physician found his persistent disability in excess to the degree of his injuries. Consequently the patient’s previously amicable 30-year marriage became overtly conflictual as the mortgage on their house went into foreclosure and the patient’s wife worked extra hours to make ends meet. The couple set to bickering and blaming each other for a myriad of failures, and they began to make threats and counter-threats of divorce, a prospect doubly troubling to them given their Catholic faith.

I began treating Mr. Perez with weekly psychotherapy and medication management. His neurovegetative symptoms of depression responded well to Bupropion 150 mg

1 Please note that when I use the word unconscious in the psychodynamic sense, this means subconscious in the terminology of the Integral Yoga.
BID, a newer antidepressant that has minimal sexual side effects, yet he continued to complain of anhedonia and diminished libido. A trial of Viagra did not improve his libido (he did not have true erectile dysfunction), and I surmised that the chronic conflict with his wife was as much to blame for his loss of libido as any organic cause. In therapy it soon became clear that his anhedonia had deep psychodynamic roots in addition to any biological cause of depression.

In terms of developmental and social history, Mr. Perez’s childhood was notable for the death of his mother when he was three, a father who remarried and was mostly absent from the child’s life, and the fact that he was raised by his maternal grandmother. Although she was a warm and caring woman, he had always yearned for his true parents. He moved from Santo Domingo to the United States at age 18, and at age 23 married his current wife. Prior to his accident, their marriage had been stabilized around traditional gender roles, and he had always worked in manual labor (warehouses) and on the weekends drank beer with a handful of male friends. In short, he was a simple man who had defined his sense of self by his body, had little mental development, and was not articulate about his emotions, although he was generous by nature. He loved his wife and two children, but had no deeper or higher aspirations in life. His Catholic faith was of a traditional, religious type.

I quickly found that expressive/insight oriented psychotherapy with Mr. Perez was a premature venture on my part, as he was unable to articulate his thoughts and emotions, and he related his childhood experiences in a nonchalant manner. I did not think he was malingering, but I did suspect that he was unconsciously unable to return to work because of his lack of nurturing as a child. In Kohutian terminology, I sensed that the absence of adequate self-object mirroring and empathic support of his aspirations in childhood was underlying his general inability to reconstitute his image of himself as a viable man and return to his prior level of physical and social functioning. I also suspected that in this regressed state he was unconsciously pulling on his wife to fill his unmet dependency needs, i.e., to be the mother he never had but always wanted, and that this was fueling their growing marital discord (at least from his side of the dynamic).

This vital formation was certainly palpable in Mr. Perez’s transference to me as a medical caregiver. As the months passed, he started to dress up nicely for every visit, and I could literally see how much he behaved like a good boy yearning for approval and support from me, the parental figure. Unfortunately, as he was not yet ready to become conscious of these feelings in expressive therapy, I had to switch to a longer and slower supportive strategy. I referred him to a Hispanic day-treatment program to structure his days. He took to this avidly and within two months spontaneously said that he wanted to cut back his psychotherapy visits to every other week as he was feeling better.

Over the winter of 1999-2000, we were finally able to do some grief work around experiences of loss and abandonment in his life, notably the death of a close brother in 1982, and how he had felt ignored by friends and family after his accident. This work lead to an initial opening of his emotional life to his mental awareness. For the first time...
he was able simultaneously to name, discuss, and show a feeling to me during the process of therapy. Building on this base, I decided to recommend adjunctive treatment with Bach flower remedies as he expressed an interest in alternative medicine. I suggested *Wild Rose* remedy, 2-3 drops 3 times a day, because its Bach characterization — for resignation, apathy and lack of joy — seemed to suit his persistent complaint of amotivation and anhedonia, and I hoped it would open his heart chakra a bit.

One month after starting *Wild Rose*, Mr. Perez spontaneously began to speak about his lack of nurturing in childhood and how he had always yearned for his mother, but this time he spoke with palpable feeling. With my help, over the next month he began to verbalize how this profound sense of emptiness and absence had haunted him his entire life. Themes of sadness, loss, and deep fear of solitude began to surface in our sessions, and for the first time he was able to tell me that whenever I went on vacation, he feared that I would never return. This was all extraordinary for a man who previously had demonstrated little psychological sensitivity.

In June of 2000, I added *Honeysuckle* to the prescription of *Wild Rose* to address the sense of nostalgia and to help him release the past.

By July, the strong nostalgia had passed and Mr. Perez became focused on his ongoing conflicts with his wife, which we are now beginning to address with more insight. As he becomes more aware of how he has passively depended on her as a mother-figure, he is slowly awakening to the difficult decisions and choices that face him if he is to become an active agent in his life. Specifically, we have been looking at how he has been unable to find the motivation to enrol in English classes because his wife does not approve (she wants him to stay at home all day because she fears he will get interested in other women if he socializes). Recently I changed his Bach regimen to *Mimulus* (to overcome the fear of his wife’s disapproval) and *Centaury* (to make him less anxious to serve others and more focused on finding his own mission in life). One week after starting this regimen he spontaneously went out and enrolled in English classes!

I report this case as an example of how Bach flower remedies can be integrated into modern psychiatric practice, as an adjunct to pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy. In this case, the remedies helped Mr. Perez consciously to access memories and feelings that were previously unconscious in his transference to me (and to his wife), and traditional talk therapy in turn reinforced these evolving mental and vital openings. At this time Mr. Perez remains unemployed, but his symptoms of depression are about 75-80% improved and his physical pain is lessened, although not eradicated. He has had no spiritual awakening, but his mental and vital atmospheres have become much more clarified and concentrated. Now when I sit with him there is a strong sense that his

---

2 The Mother’s name for Bach’s *Wild Rose* variety (*Rosa canina*) is *Psychic Soaring of Nature* and its message is nature has a soul that blossoms very prettily!

3 Mother’s name for *Honeysuckle* is *Constant Remembrance of the Divine*, which concurs with the Bach characterization, though from a different angle: the way to release the past is constantly to remember the Divine in the present.

For other articles please visit [http://www.namahjournal.com](http://www.namahjournal.com)
integral psychology

Awareness is present in the room, whereas in the past the mental felt dissociated and absent while the vital was heavy and turbid. He remains stuck in a conflictual marriage, and now his wife has developed a major depression for which she refuses treatment, yet he is beginning to awaken to the need to play an active role in addressing his existential situation.

II

The second case is of a 26 year old gay man who was diagnosed with HIV about 6 years ago, had his first AIDS defining illness in 1997, and currently is in good physical health. His viral load has recently risen again to moderate levels (about 50,000) so he is now resuming a standard regimen of protease inhibitors and anti-retrovirals after being off them for the last year. He has no history of major psychiatric disorder or substance abuse, and has never met DSM-IV criteria for an axis I disorder, nor required treatment with psychotropic medications other than a few doses of nightly lorazepam for anxiety.

Mr. Jones came to me in the summer of 1998, requesting weekly psychotherapy to resolve issues around a chaotic family background which had left him feeling disconnected from any deep and supportive human relationships. He was concerned that were he to become critically ill, he would die alone because he was estranged from his family. In brief, as a child Mr. Jones had suffered repeated sexual abuse from his uncle, had been inappropriately fondled by his mother, and had witnessed repeated domestic violence between his mother and father. Both his parents were active alcoholics, and several times he had called the police to prevent them from seriously harming each other — interventions for which he was invariably beaten after the police left. Finally, and perhaps most painful of all, his father had continually denied or belittled all of his achievements at school, had never recognized any of his talents, and summarily rejected him when his sexual orientation became known at age 12. It was because of this oppressive family environment that Mr. Jones ultimately ran away from home at age 16.

However, despite this dismal-sounding developmental history, Mr. Jones was possessed of unusual emotional resilience. He was a bright and socially talented boy and rapidly forged a new identity for himself. He became outspoken in the arena of gay rights, and soon rose to a position of some prominence in the gay political arena. He spoke at a variety of public events, and by the age of 22 was helping to administer non-profit programs designed to increase awareness of HIV transmission among at-risk youths. Still, despite his professional successes, he led an unhappy personal life. He had no intimate romantic relationships, and to fill the void he frequented sex clubs and cruising spots almost every night, having unprotected and anonymous sex with multiple partners. That is how he contracted HIV, and his activity did not decrease in the least after he was diagnosed.

I spent much of the first year of therapy with Mr. Jones gently approaching his shame about his vulnerability in relationships and how he used sex to soothe his feelings of emptiness and disconnection. I also heard a string of stories about his rage at various medical doctors who had failed to attend to him promptly and with sufficient respect.

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
Needless to say, as a psychotherapist I knew this could only mean that he would eventually get angry with me for letting him down in some way.

The inevitable disillusionment occurred in the summer of 1999 when I came 15 minutes late to a scheduled appointment. Mr. Jones was predictably outraged, yet by the end of the session he was able to talk about how my wasting his time reminded him of the many painful disappointments he felt in his family as a child. This session proved to be a turning point in the therapy. In the next month he started to speak openly about the feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness that haunted his childhood, and he observed that he was re-experiencing this emotional neglect and abuse in a current relationship with his boyfriend. Subsequently he broke up with this boyfriend, asked to enter into twice-weekly therapy to better understand himself, and engaged in difficult emotional work. Over the next 9 months he grieved the death of his father and acknowledged his yearnings for love and approval which his father had never fulfilled; explored his conflicting feelings about his mother and older sister and ultimately re-opened communication with both of them; stopped his addictive sexual behavior and allowed himself to feel deeply sad and empty at times without distracting himself from these painful feelings; decided to go back to school to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a veterinary doctor; and explored some sexual concerns as they related to his history of abuse.

Now all of this significant progress occurred in the context of an expressive, insight-oriented therapy cast along psychodynamic lines. As with Mr. Perez, my basic formulation was that Mr. Jones was struggling with a lack of nurturing as a child, plus, of course, his history of trauma. I took a standard self-psychological or Kohutian approach, all-owing him to bond with and idealize me as a surrogate father-figure while providing persistent empathy and, when possible and appropriate, positive feedback for his strivings and achievements. I made no interpretations about Oedipal conflicts, nor analyzed any of the subtle undertones of possible erotic transference towards me. I received continual supervision throughout the therapy, and it was my supervisor’s opinion that none of these latter issues needed to be analyzed at the time because the patient was using the therapy well. Also, as Mr. Jones did not endorse any of the cardinal symptoms of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), we opted not to recommend EMDR (eye-movement desensitization reprocessing), which is a newer and still somewhat controversial treatment for psychological trauma.

After two months of twice-weekly therapy, Mr. Jones began to speak about his dormant spiritual yearnings and recalled how as a child he had had a number of experiences with intuitive powers that seemed paranormal. As he expressed interest in alternative medicine, I suggested Rescue Remedy given his trauma history. He found it calming and after several weeks noted that sometimes he was crying spontaneously, though now out of gratitude for the ‘good things in life’. During the next few sessions, we continued to touch on spiritual themes and even tried one session of guided imagery. On several occasions, I felt a touch of his soul-element break through the veil of his outer being as we talked, so naturally I offered the process to the Divine.
After a month or so of catching glimpses of an inner sunlight peeking through the vital clouds, the spiritual opening receded and Mr. Jones again became absorbed in the vital material welling up from his subconscious, and in the transference relationship with me. I made no effort to recapture the spiritual focus, as I suspected that the opening had brought to light various subconscious vital formations that needed to be ‘worked through’ in psychotherapy terminology, or ‘trans-formed’ (at least partially) in yogic vocabulary. The strongest and most basic of these was the basic transference relationship of the infant seeking care from the parent, which at times created a palpable ‘tug’ on my mid and lower vital on the subtle level.

By March of 2000, Mr. Jones was starting to date some men in a developmentally healthy fashion, but he was still brooding nostalgically on his ex-boyfriend from the summer before. I surmised that the tenacity of this attachment to a tormenting and emotionally unavailable figure belied the paternal transference that had been stirred up in the relationship, and I decided to recommend Honeysuckle to help release the past. The effect was positive but also surprising. After about three weeks Mr. Jones suddenly recovered warm, nurturing memories of a Caribbean babysitter who had taken care of him from the ages of 3-5. She had been a literal island of safety, because whenever he was with her he was protected from any sexual abuse. This revelation answered the psychodynamic puzzle of where he had obtained his emotional resilience and healthy adaptive qualities, for in addition to his inborn constitutional strengths there had also been the fact of an early attachment to a ‘good enough mother’, to use the Winnicottian term.

As we processed the feelings wrapped up in these memories, I could see Mr. Jones almost glow with contentment at times. He became increasingly conscious of the many ways in which his wishes for nurturance, when frustrated, would set off a cycle of anger followed by depression. As he worked this process through in therapy, he was able to stand up to a male boss (a father figure) in a steady, effective manner, and he ultimately made the decision to leave the arena of HIV services and go back to school to become a vet. He also moved into his own apartment for the first time in his life. These were all dramatic steps forward in his individuation process, and by the end of May his nostalgic attachment to his ex-boyfriend had almost entirely vanished, suggesting that the combination of Honeysuckle and therapy had been helpful.

In July, Mr. Jones asked to reduce his therapy to once weekly. He said that he felt settled enough in his new life that he wanted to become less dependent on therapy. I decided to support the move as a progressive one because my goal was to get him better, not to turn him into a professional patient! — though in supervision I contemplated the possibility that unconsciously he could be enacting a resistance against unanalyzed erotic transference. I had noted that recently Mr. Jones had started to lie back in his chair during our sessions, sometimes adopting an almost fetal posture with his legs propped up on the back of my desk. His verbal output had decreased and his voice had become quieter, and he had started to look at me with shy, furtive glances. I felt this conduct was imbued primarily with infantile longings to be held and nurtured, and that this posture was a temporary regression in the service of the ego, i.e., that he was seeking sustenance to help him through the major changes he was facing in his outer...
life. Nonetheless, I duly noted that there could be erotic derivatives or undertones inter-mingled. I attempted to explore with Mr. Jones what the meaning of his posture might be, but he was unable to verbalize any clear feeling and seemed perplexed by why I kept returning to the theme — evidence to me that we were dealing with a truly unconscious transference.

Over the summer I switched Mr. Jones’s Bach prescription briefly to Walnut to help him stop smoking and make the transition to his new apartment, with good effect, and then to Centaury to help him develop clearer boundaries in his relationships with boyfriends, as he continued to date and get drawn in by men with turbulent, emotionally enmeshing styles. He was now quite conscious of how this dynamic repeated his early family environment and related to his history of sexual abuse. The Bach characterization of Centaury is for “kind, quiet, gentle people who are over-anxious to serve others. Their wish so grows upon them that they become more servants than willing helpers and in so doing they may neglect their own particular mission in life (1).” I have postulated that Centaury has wide applicability in the context of psychotherapy, where clients are frequently struggling with individuation and finding their mission in life, and it should be particularly useful with childhood sexual trauma, where there is almost invariably a subconscious identification with the aggressor as well as gratification derived from the sexual abuse since it frequently substitutes for the healthy nurturing and affection which the child so desperately needed. All children are anxious to please their parents because they cannot do without parental love, and will therefore sacrifice much and make a variety of psychological adaptations (e.g. the classic defence mechanisms) in order to preserve some sort of stable, internal image of parental figures. This is part of normative development of the untransformed vital.

Mr. Jones found the Centaury helpful in his personal and professional relationships outside of therapy, but in the therapy itself his response seemed initially paradoxical. The entire month of August he came 20 minutes late to each session, whereas he had previously been extremely punctual, and he produced little new or affectively charged material to process. I again contemplated the possibility of resistance to unanalyzed erotic transference. Though my primary impression continued to be of a positive developmental process, I had a hunch that he needed to be able to take me for granted as a stable parental figure who wouldn’t go away, as he had never been able to enjoy that necessary luxury of a healthy and happy childhood. Rather than forcing a premature interpretation on him to this effect, I just waited and continued to inquire in a curious, non-judgmental manner about what the meaning of his lateness might be. He was unconcerned and speculated that he was ‘unwinding’ for the summer and taking a ‘well-earned vacation’ from the hard but productive emotional work he had done in the previous two years of therapy.

It didn’t occur to me until several months later that in fact both my hunch and the patient’s own self-perception were correct, and that the Centaury remedy was working: the child in Mr. Jones had indeed been working hard to earn the nurturing he received from me as a parental figure, and he had been anxious to please me in order to keep that positive relationship. Centaury helped him to take the developmentally appropriate step of taking me for granted so that he could focus on discovering his own mission in life.
By the end of August he was recalling fond memories of a few positive things he had shared with his father, such as their mutual love of animals and working in the garden. Shortly thereafter he was finally able to say that he had come to see me as a substitute dad, and he realized that over the prior three months he had had feelings of wanting to be held, cuddled, and taken care of by me. Since then he has been coming on time, and he has sat back up in his chair; the infantile posture has stopped.

Recently, Mr. Jones added *Wild Rose* to the *Centaury* to help with a feeling of apathy around work, apparently with moderate positive effect. He also wondered aloud about why his spiritual opening faded, and during the two subsequent sessions I felt an intense descent of force into me as he talked about his current conflicts at work. Both times the force descended below my feet, into the region of the subconscious. Last time the associated ananda was so intense that I found it hard to keep listening and apparently nodded off briefly. “Are you okay?” Mr. Jones inquired, pulling me out of the unsolicited meditation. I said yes but offered no explanation. The next week he spontaneously spoke about his deep fear of death and his anger that he might not live long enough to realize his dream of becoming a vet.

As I have contemplated this significant turn in the therapy — this was the first time we were addressing the issue of death with real feeling it dawned on me that the two descents of force I felt into my own consciousness were not unrelated events. I think this may be an example of the higher range of counter-transferencing dynamics that we may encounter as we develop an integral psychotherapy. That is, the descent of force into my subconscious likely created a pressure in Mr. Jones’s consciousness, resulting in the emergence of perhaps his deepest subconscious fear — death. His apathy is likely due to his grieving about his mortality, and the *Wild Rose* seems to be helping symptomatically with that, although it is by no means erasing the underlying conflict.

I offer this second case as another example of how Bach flower remedies can be incorporated into the practice of psychodynamic psychotherapy. Again we see how Bach remedies can fit well with psychodynamic formulations and increase the depth of available process material, and both of these in turn can be contextualized in a larger consciousness framework of spiritual dynamics. A key point to note is that in therapy, a spiritual opening may not lead to a miraculous liberation from all problems, but rather herald a descent into the vital and subconscious yielding more material to work through, and that a successful working through in the psychotherapeutic sense constitutes only a partial transformation in the yogic sense. If both Mr. Jones and I were more consistently open to a psychic or overhead influence, presumably the process would go faster, dive deeper, and be more complete, yet of course the therapy is circumscribed by the limitations of each of our natures. Also, as the therapy is happening at a mainstream teaching clinic, I have not had the liberty to explore other treatment modalities, such as flower essences from the Ashram, bodywork, or a variety of energy-healing techniques that could be helpful.

Reference:


For other articles please visit [http://www.namahjournal.com](http://www.namahjournal.com)
Psychotherapy and Indian thought — I

Dr. Alok Pandey

Editor’s note
The Indian psyche has some special inherent features that act as checks to mental imbalance. This article discusses how they can be used in psychotherapeutic practice.

Introduction: the two approaches

If psychotherapy is the science and art of changing psychological patterns creating mental distress and disorder, then it must base itself on the most complete possible knowledge and understanding of what a human being is and can become. Much psychotherapy is, however, based on what a human being was, either in his remote past as a race or in his more recent infancy and childhood. Tracing the roots of our present problem in this way, it tries to put a corrective by setting things right there. The principle sounds good in its own right but there arise two fundamental difficulties. The first is about defining the past itself. In other words, how far back does our past go? The second is about the future. In other words, is the goal of psychotherapy to return the client to his past (when he was healthy) or maximum present possibility or is it to utilise his crisis for an inner evolutionary journey towards a more meaningful future? That is to say, can it be used as a learning experience for growth and progress? It is here that we come across divergent world-views of man and his goal, his destiny and scope, views which give a different understanding of his past and future. Broadly these can be divided into two main categories, though risking oversimplification for the sake of easier comprehension.

1. Man is a creature of the mud formed by a process of chance evolution. He is essentially a physical or perhaps even more a chemical being. Psychologically, he is nothing more than an outgrown animal or worm that has somehow managed to form itself through a series of random and accidental mutations. There is no essential goal or purpose in his life except to struggle and survive as other creatures do, and this tussle between an individual instinct to save himself and the social or collective instinct to save others, is the source of inner conflict. The crude animal is his past, the refined animal his maximum scope.

2. The other view holds man as a creature of heaven fallen here upon earth, high and sublime in his origin and parentage. Psychologically, he is a soul, a miniature divinity shut in a prison-house of matter seeking release and escape. His goal and purpose is to find his true spiritual self. An animal in nature but divine in essence, he is a cross between the two and that is the secret of his difficulty and conflict. The animal nature is the trap, freedom from this trap his hope of salvation.
As we can see, so different are these views, so disparate their understanding, that to think of a reconciling synthesis becomes nearly impossible. Therefore they have existed side by side in each civilization and culture in one form or another, but without any reconciling station. There have been compromises here and there, such as the one attempted by Descartes himself, giving each idea a scope in its own domain. Sometimes their fortunes seesawed. The sophist of old, latter-day positivist, and modern materialist each try to explain everything on the basis of our material sense perception and struggle of animal life, denying every other experience as hallucination or poetic imagination. Equally strong has been the rejection of material life by the anchorites and ascetics as a vanity of vanities, a delusion and nightmare of the soul.

The vedāntin’s solution

There has generally been a tendency to attach the term Indian thought to this world-view. Here, the māyāvadin and illusionist totally rejects the problem by labelling it as non-existent, a fever and malady of the soul which can only be cured by abolishing the world along with the problem. The solution therefore becomes a greater problem for those left behind, the cure so radical as to fell the body along with the disease. All life is summarily dismissed as painful illusion and escape from it the sole remedy. In its extreme outlook, birth itself is seen as an illness, the grand sire of all illnesses and human life a supreme opportunity to escape from this cycle of birth, death and all that lies in between. According to this view, the soul, or whatever else, (for some views do not admit the possibility of an individual soul though not denying it either) will continue to experience some form of psychological suffering as long as it chooses to be born upon earth. The reasons attributed to this suffering vary according to the different doctrines. Some blame it again on the past, not on the individual past in this life alone, but other lives as well. Others show some mercy on the soul, a learner prone to stumbles and falls in its heroic journey and attach the root-cause of suffering to the larger cosmic principle of Ignorance, avidyā. It is this child of māyā that clouds the soul and keeps it a slave and prisoner of Ignorance with its natural consequence of suffering. Still others speak of the cosmic principle of desire as the source of all misery and herald a cessation from desire, the state of blissful calm and freedom or Nirvāṇa. It may be noted that suffering, according to these conceptions, is not only the conscious suffering experienced by the mind but a deep unconscious and greater suffering experienced by the soul through being trapped in this meaningless world of Ignorance. Yet so long as the soul chooses to be part of this avidyā, it will continue to suffer in some way.

The task of a counsellor of this type, if there is one, is to awaken the soul out of this earthly nightmare and remind it of its essential nature. The only solution is to cease from the cycle of birth. The experience of conscious suffering is only used as a strong point of support, a lever to develop vairāgya, a state of detached indifference towards life and world, thereby leading to non-affliction. It is a kind of desensitisation or deaddiction programme for the world-addiction and craving for material happiness that brings so much suffering in its wake.

In actual practice, however, one does not take this extremist approach. The mind of the client is led through a cognitive framework, starting from its present crisis, to reveal the
transient rather than illusory nature of this world and its events. The mind is made to see the utter impermanence of things, here today and gone tomorrow, the riches and wealth, position and fame, the women and children one has, the fortune no less than misfortune, all are too little to grieve for. To this, the God-believer adds that the only thing worth pursuing in life is that which is eternal and imperishable, the soul in man, and the Divine above, or as some roll both these individual and universal aspects of the Divine into a single formula — Brahman. A common misconception needs to be clarified here in passing. Some modern writers tend to use the word Brahman as interchangeable with that later Puranic deity Brahma, the progenitor of our world. Brahman is not this or that god, though all the gods originate from It. Brahman is rather the stable, unchanging and eternal basis of all existence. Even if all creation is dissolved, including the trinity of the gods, Brahman would still remain, untouched as ever! One of the principle Upaniṣads, the Kena, describes, in a very forceful way, through the characteristically sublime poetry of the period, how everything originates from Brahman and therefore That alone is the object of our pursuit and not this that men seek hereafter. Tadevabrahman tvamviddhi, nedamyādi damupāsate: know That to be the Brahman and not this that men seek hereafter. Another Upaniṣad, the Kathā, describes through beautiful verse, the transient nature of attachment to worldly goods which brings only grief, suffering and ultimately death. Death, in these passages of exquisite beauty, lauds Naciketā, the young aspirant for his choice of sreyas, the truly worthy good of the soul, over preyas, the momentarily pleasant and transient worldly good. Thus, through examples and narrative, drawn both from the everyday life of the client, the crises he has passed through, as well as the cultural context, the person is gradually led away from psychological suffering and helped to focus his attention within, towards the true and ultimate goal. In its partial forms, even the first step is regarded as good enough, since by impressing the reality of impermanence upon the mind, he is able to detach himself from the malady and feel lighter and freer.

But one may precede a step further depending upon the receptivity of the client. One may, for example, help the person view the problem more objectively and stay detached from its emotional and other effects. A certain distancing is always known to help to understand the situation more clearly. Thus impermanence, far from being a cause for grief, becomes something positive since it also means that grief and unhappiness, tragedy, sorrow and suffering are not an eternal damnation or permanent doom. They are only a temporary setback or rather an inevitable learning experience for the soul in its brief sojourn amidst many lives. Through pleasure and pain, happiness and grief, success and failure, the adamantine march goes on. The journey of the soul does not stop at temporary stations but goes on and will go on, till one has reached the goal.

This much is common to all Vedantic systems. That is to say, that this world is not what it seems — that our values are misplaced and wrong due to the mind’s conditioning through centuries of evolutionary process. The psychotherapist corrects this cognitive error through a dialectic process involving thought and uses the experiences of the person to demonstrate this. But there is a later divergence too. It lies in the goal put forward before the soul, after it has disengaged itself and is able to look more dispassionately at the enigma of human life and its events. Though useful for a certain class of problems, it has its own drawbacks. Firstly, it almost presumes a certain degree

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
Integral Psychology

of intellectual development. Secondly, it requires a very forceful mind on the part of the therapist who should be able to logically lead the person from the surface event to the deeper phenomenon, from the apparent to the real. Thirdly, the solution, if taken to its logical extreme, may induce a tendency for total indifference to the world. While this may be appreciated by certain extremist schools, the seers who propounded this thought were careful enough not to create confusion in the minds of the average person. An overemphasis on this other-worldliness may well lead to inertia, justified under the holy name of vairāgya. One often finds such escapists, who have joined the Nirvāṇa bandwagon to avoid responsibilities. A visit to any such schools called āstāmas will reveal quite a few who, unable to bear the stresses and strains of life, have resorted to that jungle trail. Even those who have suffered disappointments, whilst superficially conceding the philosophy, nevertheless continue to nurture secret ambitions which they are unable to fulfil. This hypocrisy creates a serious dichotomy between thought and practice and may lead to its own complications as an aftermath. It may for example lead to unfitness for life itself with its many problems and complex situations, simply waiting for the Nirvāṇa boat to come to the rescue at the end of life. Such an outcome is obviously a most undesirable one. Individually it may induce one to lead a double life, even a sort of spiritual neuroticism. But, on a collective scale, it weakens the very fabric of the race, depressing its vitality and vigour, bringing inevitable decline. Even if there were a genuine individual victory, the doctrine is often misunderstood and used to justify many disparate things, leading to a collective defeat with its fallout of social and other abnormal psychological problems unique to such cultural traditions. Therefore there is an insistence in the wise not to delude those minds not ready for this, by enrolling all and sundry into such counselling.

There is another more serious difficulty. According to the vedāntin, most souls are trapped in the snare of worldly māyā. So how can the blind lead the blind or the trapped rescue the trapped? The average graduate in medicine opting for psychiatry as his field is not interested in high philosophy of life or its ultimate goal. The therapist like everyone else, client included, is caught in his own nightmare and delusion. Even if one were to intellectually undergo some course at school, it would not serve any purpose unless one was convinced, either through an innate sensitivity to deeper things or life experiences that awakened a deeper outlook. This imposes a serious limitation on who is really qualified to administer this form of counselling. It is evident that academic degrees and qualifications, even a crash course at a Vedantic school, would be of little value here. The only value is what is deeply lived and experienced. The rest only touches the surface mind and cannot bring any inner and radical change.

In other words, the doctrine requires such a high degree of inner development in the counsellor that even some pundits would be considered unfit to impart or facilitate any effective psychotherapeutic process through it. It is important to understand here that ancient Indian thought saw in this experience of impermanence only a passage towards a higher Permanence. The illusion was to be grasped then torn away only to reveal the Real and not rest in some halfway-house built

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
upon the sands of nowhere. But that needs effort, a strong predisposition, a positive seeking which few can command. Yet if the psychotherapist of this type can take this final crucial step in turning a negative experience into a positive seeking for the eternal then it can mean a great and true release for the client. An example of this appears in the classical treatise of Yogavasistha where the sage Vasishtha counsels Rama while the latter is experiencing a state of utter non-involvement towards life in the world.

This form of counselling, whilst useful for a select number of clients who chiefly suffer from depressions due to life situations, is of little use against other forms of psychological disorders. However, there may be partial use in counselling those who suffer due to the psychological suffering of their nearest ones. To take just one example, the depressed and suicidal mother of a mentally handicapped child was asked how she would have reacted if this child was her sister’s. The reply was: she would do all that she was doing now, perhaps even a few things more, but without the depression, perhaps even with a joy born from doing selfless good for someone. As she replied, she realized the obvious conclusion: to live in the world without a sense of attachment. A single short session was enough to change her perspective. She actually recovered and remained stable for years to come.

**Another Vedantic solution**

Indian thought is not only about mâyavâda and illusion. Despite the current emphasis on other-worldliness, there have been other equally powerful and positive streams in Indian thought. Indeed the mukti of the vedântin and Nirvâna of the Buddhist that discards the world as a nightmare are not the only ideals conceived by Indian thought. The *Vedic rûsis* provide an affirming example. In fact, there have been other equally powerful tendencies in Indian thought: views more positive in outlook, views that try to reconcile the material and spiritual existence. From a psychotherapeutic point of view, it is these that can even be more effective in dealing with problems of the mind. Some of these major trends are roughly described below.

**Inner purification**

According to this thought, psychological pain and suffering is close to pleasure. They are two sides of the same coin. To strive after pleasure only invites suffering in return. What is necessary is moderation and balance through enlightened reason and discrimination, sattwasûdhi. This is, in a sense, the ideal of sane moderation, some-thing similar to Aristotle’s golden mean. It is a conscious and deliberate cultivation of the positive qualities of mind and heart which help one grow into sukhamb or glad-ness and prakâśam or the light of wisdom. According to this view, the source of human misery comes from psychological states known as rajas and tamas. To put it in a nutshell, the human soul evolves through at least three levels in its several rounds of birth before it is ready for the highest spiritual good. The first of these levels is the tâmasic or darkened state of inertia and utter resistance to change. Here it is driven by the law of the masses, the rule of the herd, like a beast or half-conscious man. Next comes the râjasic or state of kinesis and dynamic movement. This second stage can be further subdivided into two. One is the preliminary or predominantly rajo-tâmasic, where the being is engaged in

For other articles please visit [http://www.namahjournal.com](http://www.namahjournal.com)
self-flattering gross indulgences of every kind. The other is the rajo-sattvic, where the individual begins to seek some ideal rule of inner law to govern his unruly nature which he begins to perceive as the source of internal disturbance. Finally the individual passes through the sattvic stage where he learns to subordinate his ego and take from life only what is rightfully his. One instinctively seeks harmony and is balanced in conduct and distribution of life-energies. In the primitive or tāmasic stage, there is not much conscious suffering in the individual though he may be a cause of considerable suffering in others. The need for violent sensations, just to feel a little alive, drives some to alcoholism or violent acts and practices. Others simply sulk in their depression, refusing to budge or outgrow their state. The rājasic individual has fiery pleasures and an equally swift swing to the blues. An inordinate self-seeking, an excess of ambition with its natural fallout of anger, fear, hope, expectations and frustrations, brings in its wake opposite reactions from the environment. This makes them extremely susceptible to misery. The suffering is perhaps Nature’s corrective. Lastly, after the soul has experienced these lesser rungs of existence and outgrown them, comes sattva, the great balancer.

A counsellor, who works along these lines, will first roughly evaluate the scale where the individual stands in his inner evolution. Elaborate descriptions abound in ancient Indian thought, especially the Gita and Ēyurveda, on the type of inner personality and constitution of these three gūnas (as these three evolutionary stages are better known). It may be mentioned that we are all a mixture of the three but there is a predominance of one or the other which leads to physical and psychological afflictions. The kind of therapy and advice given depends on the scale. So, while a sattvic person, who may also suffer due to sympathy for others, is advised and encouraged to develop a still deeper spiritual outlook, the rājasic man of a higher type is advised to do his work with a trust in God and according to the right inner law of his nature, svabhāva and svadharma. The lower type of rājasic man is counselled and helped towards moderation in life habits and outlook, to tone down the excessive onrush of desires that feverishly torment him. The unruly, uncontrolled energy that explodes in his nature is channelled into healthy activities like sport and vigorous games. One can learn from the army how well it uses the rājasic man to channel energies for war. For the lowest type very little will work through counselling unless something shakes him up, some terrible misfortune which personally affects him, arousing sleeping energies in him. Anything, almost anything, that can stimulate a will to work with concentration and perseverance is good counsel. Fine crafts, manual work requiring physical concentration can help this state as observed in some psychotics and those in extreme forms of depression. Also anything that can stimulate a sense of joy, like eating a relished dish that gives pleasure. The last category within this type is the meditative, false ascetics. They cling to inertia only to use it as an excuse to stay reclusive or stay addicted to drugs that can easily transport them to altered realms without any inner effort.

There are other subdivisions but they basically evolve along the lines of these three types. One can easily see the relevance of this typology in treating certain personality and behavioural disorders. It is also useful in understanding some of the conflicts that largely arise when an individual is transiting one level to another with consequent divergent pulls. The therapist’s task in these cases is to assist the full emergence of the higher type whilst working through the conflict. A detailed discussion of all possible

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
variations is beyond our present scope, but as is evident, this system has great practical utility. It also settles the previous difficulty of who is suitable for deeper spiritual counselling. Besides it does not require any deep philosophical capacity or outlook on the part of the client, though it needs a lot of inner tact and understanding on the part of the therapist.

**Processes for harmony of body and mind**

*Māyāvāda* (Illusions) is most commonly misinterpreted as solely representing Indian thought, and *yoga* exercises are the most commonly pursued process adopted in therapeutic purposes. The special forms of *Hathayoga* exercises (better termed *āsanas* or *yogāsanas*), *prāṇāyāma* and meditation are the most researched Indian exports that have already found a place in modern psychotherapeutic systems. Many researches done in the East and West from the sixties (perhaps even earlier) have demonstrated the efficacy of these simple stress-buster techniques. Theories differ on the exact mechanism of their action, but there is hardly anyone who denies their benefit in creating some sort of harmony between body and mind. Whilst the West predominantly searches for material explanations, it is interesting to know what the originators of these systems thought about the ‘mechanism’ of their action. This may help us to modify them according to our particular circumstances and unique needs.

First of all, these ‘techniques’ were not meant originally as techniques the way we understand them. These exercises were part of a larger movement of coming into contact with our own divine essence. Though they are now being seen as the Indian counterpart of behavioural therapy, they were not so in their true essence. Very few things in India were divorced from spirituality, least of all the systems of *yoga*. Even atheistic and agnostic conceptions have a spiritual element. In *Hathayoga* and *Prāṇāyāma*, the practitioner tries to first regulate and then still the otherwise restless physical and vital energies, but this is only a preliminary first step. The next and more important one is when he tries to gather and concentrate these energies in order to reach the divine source. Once this divine possibility comes out, and even much before that, the energies of the body and life-force become forceful, effective, balanced and harmonious. This is the secret of their curative power.

These methods are thus excellent for those not so psychologically minded and those less inclined to esoteric spirituality. They are besides quite effective for treating psychosomatic disorders. The disadvantage is a dependency on technique. These methods have to be regularly practiced to be fully effective. They consume a lot of time and often need the supervision of a qualified expert. They are best used as an adjunct against a wide range of disorders including psychosis.

Meditation is however slightly different, even though it comes under the broad categories of ‘techniques’ evolved by the Eastern paradigm, though nowhere with the wide range and variation as in India. It is a vast subject in its own right and we need not go into all the details of the different techniques and their relative efficacy. But, suffice to say, one of its well-known and recognised effects is that it tones down the response of our sympathetic nervous system. In this way, it creates a sense of calm on the most
Integral Psychology

physical level. There may be deeper reasons since the nervous system, and more specifically the autonomic nervous system, is a sort of interface between the gross physical energies and those of life and mind pouring upon matter and influencing it. Two techniques are specifically helpful. One is the Buddhist method of witnessing self-reflection and introspective meditation. This technique is quite useful in undoing certain habitual nervous responses, anxiety states and obsessive patterns of thoughts and behaviour in studying and thereby controlling oneself. The essential steps here are thought-observation, witnessing, control and mastery. But this is a little more difficult; it usually demands some isolation on the part of the practitioner, and needs a somewhat developed mind to be able to separate one part of it from another. The other, easier yet very effective technique, is that of dynamic meditation and its scientific child, guided imagery. This method relies on the faculty of imagination and can be considered a first cousin of autosuggestion. In fact the two are often combined together. The role is prevalent again largely in psychosomatic or anxiety disorders etc.

The thought of the Gitā

There remain two very powerful, widely used but often misunderstood, systems of ancient Indian thought. These two systems seem to move along very different lines though there is an unspoken occult and higher synthesis between them. First of these is the ideal of the Gitā, often misrepresented as the gospel of karma, and further reduced to mean an incitement to duty regardless of its effect. One can only smile at such summary assessment of a great scripture that has endured through centuries of invasion and corruption and still continues to inspire and change man-kind. What is the great secret of this word of God?

In fact there are not one or two, but quite a few words and sūtras in the Gitā that one can employ for counselling and therapeutic purposes. This is because the Gitā, unlike many other similar scriptures, is an attempt at synthesis of various truths then known. In addition, it enriched the old with a fresh insight. What are these sūtras?

First and foremost is the truth that a human being is essentially an imperishable soul who uses the body like a charioteer uses a chariot. This insight reverses the heavy psychological dependence on physical events and happenings by the knowledge that we are first and foremost eternal. This has such an impact, that it removes the grief and pain of death. Millions of people have used the Gitā in times of crisis and found solace and strength. This is its first note: that we are essentially souls that cannot be destroyed by the catastrophes of life and nature.

The second is that he can discover the soul through many ways. The Gitā outlines for different categories of people different ways, one such being the enlightened use of intelligent will. Instead of constantly turning the will outward and downward to satisfy desires, man’s intelligent will can be turned upward and inward to discover sublime realities which free one from bondage to grief, error, suffering and pain.

A third truth is that we are not helplessly abandoned upon earth without support. God is concerned with the march of civilisation towards some ultimate good. Also, each

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
Integral Psychology

element of the universe has hidden within it the divine superconscient. The Gitā clearly hints that divinity dwells in everything and it is the task of each one to bring it out rather than stifle it. This bringing out, is the great conflict going on at macro and micro levels. The principal conflict is between the cosmic principles and powers of Light and Truth against their opposites of darkness and Ignorance.

A fourth importance of the Gitā is that war and conflict are unavoidable necessities as long as earth and mankind are imperfect. Our inner conflicts are essentially evolutionary conflicts; our inner and outer crises are essentially cries for evolutionary change. Man can choose to remain in his darkened state where suffering pursues him until he goes beyond the strife to the eternal. The Gitā elaborately describes, in its closing chapters, the nature of the powers of light and darkness. So man, if he wants to be free of error and grief, has to consciously cultivate the qualities of light and truth.

A fifth element in the Gitā is the concept of nishkāma karma. According to this, everyday actions, even the most trivial, can lead us to a glad and happy state of being if we do them in a selfless spirit of dedication to the divine Master remaining unaffected by the fruits that they may bring. This stress upon a tranquil mind, equal in every circumstance, in the seemingly pleasant and unpleasant, in success and victory no less as in failure and defeat, is a great liberating truth that takes the wind out of much of our everyday psychological and even physical suffering. This equality is not indifference but a state of equal joy that comes by dwelling constantly in the Lord’s remembrance. Equanimity is therefore another very practical method prescribed by the Gitā that frees us from the stress of everyday life.

The greatest help of the Gitā comes towards the end with the great assurance that God will deliver us from all fear and evil if we learn to surrender to Him.

Modern psychology, born of a sceptical temper and suited to material pursuits, may have little sympathy with the idea of God. It may even regard it as blasphemous to talk of God in matters of science. But we must remember that psychology is not a physical science. It does not deal with physical but psychological phenomena and, whether we like it or not, the fact remains that the search for divinity is very much a psychological phenomenon. It will be a great loss to psychology if this great body of our psychological self-experience is neglected. It is surely not our scientific scruples but our blind attachment to Ignorance that prevents us from seeing this Light and closes the doors to a greater possibility in man. Whether accepted in scientific circles or not, the bare empirical fact is that faith in God has continued to relieve and cure many people around the world. As they say, the proof of the pudding lies in the eating. So let those who test the pudding do so and let those who taste and relish it, continue. Till we find that grand reconciliation, to each his own god. A god of science and the gospel of matter or a god of religion and the gospel of the spirit, it hardly matters, for both are at present two different ways of seeing the One Reality which exceeds and fulfils both.

A bold reconciliation

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
Reconciliation between the agnostic mind of science and the believer is possible. The first attempt to reconcile the two is through *Tantra*. The *Gitā* seeks to reconcile life in the world (the problem of the practical man) and spiritual realisation. The *Tantra* seeks to reconcile the energies moving the cosmos (the field of the scientist) and the Supreme Energy from which these lesser forms and forces derive. If that is so, then it is possible to master or conquer lesser energies by stronger and greater ones. This is the fundamental principle of *Tantra*: to understand, possess, control and master the forces and powers of nature as well as supernature. Seen in this way, it gets closer to our conception of science, though with a much wider application.

So while science studies and tries to master the physical energies of matter, *Tantra* goes deeper in studying and mastering other occult energies beyond the play of our material universe. It sees physical phenomena as a by-product or final end-result of still deeper, occult events happening on other levels of our consciousness. In the field of illness, for example, it sees entities and forces of disruption on which one can act directly if one has the necessary occult knowledge and so cure illness without any physical means. Unfortunately, modern insistence on physical causes alone has done much damage to this highly developed science which has its own rationale for working. *Tantra* itself fell into disrepute since many *tantrics* did not have the required inner purity to handle such intense forces. Many lapsed into the by-lanes of the inner life falling into the corridors of power. There were those attracted by power, yet unable to pay the inner price, who turned to lower and derivative stuff like black magic, witchcraft, etc. The worship of power, not backed by a solid footing in the highest knowledge, led to a further decline and admittance to all sorts of things which were more an occult quackery. Yet the opinions or limits of our understanding do not determine the truth. It stands in its own right.

When we turn to psychiatry there is a lot that *Tantra* can offer. This is not through the modern misreading of its hieroglyphs through the lens of psychoanalysis, but in understanding the subtler causes of illness. Thus, according to *Tantric* knowledge, insanity is due to possession by certain entities from the dark and hostile worlds. These turbulent energies first enter into the atmosphere of a person susceptible to them (through affinity in some parts of his nature). This is the prodromal stage when the first line of occult prevention can be achieved. Next they cast an influence, which usually takes the form of:

— some personality changes (concerning loss of faith and will, doubts, depression, confusion, perverted religiosity, excessive self-vanity, sexuality and other appetites, uncontrolled impulsiveness, etc.).

— epilepsy, which is more characteristically due to resistance by the affected person’s being against the force.

— hysteria, especially possession states, dissociation, multiple personality, etc.

— active communication with these dark entities through voices and other means.

— frank possession/incarnation of one of these stronger dark entities leading to a total perversion of thought, feeling, will, action and speech creating the cruel tyrant, psychopath and outright pervert.
These dark forces and beings have been elaborately classified in Tāntric literature. Some of these are the asuras (perversers or distorters of mind, specifically thought and speech), the rākṣasas (perversers or distorters of feelings and will), pisācas (perversers or distorters of sensations and physical instincts). There are other minor entities such as elemental beings called bhūtas, disembodied beings called preta who float in the vicinity of a deceased, especially one who has had a traumatic death. These beings and entities have been known everywhere and they are mentioned under different names in Western, Arabic and other spiritual literature.

Now the Tāntric, the occultist, shaman, thaumaturgist, call him whatever, knows about these forces and the ways to neutralise them, just as a modern scientist knows about the forces of wind, rain and fire and how to handle them. They are of two main types. The lower type have within their control a powerful entity from the same plane which can execute their will for good or evil purposes. The others have mastered the higher energies through sufficient purity and self-control. These then can neutralise the lower beings with a power of Light. Naturally, the last type is not only preferable but the work so done is also more permanent.

The lost knowledge of Tantra is now recovering, though in other forms more adapted to the scientific temper of our times. Reiki, prāṇic healing, working with body-energy and mind-energy, a study of the effects of thoughts and other vibrations upon the body and mind are examples of this. It is strange that for all the assault of our infant science, this grandmother of sciences is not dead. Rather, it is seeking rebirth through parapsychology and other such newer sciences. Physical science itself has entered the threshold of the occult and it would not be surprising if in time to come the old ghosts return in the garb of new names.

The two roads to the one solution

Before we move forward to a grand synthesis of all these diverse systems of Indian thought, we can just cast a look back. When we do, we discover that the practical side of Indian thought (with which we are more concerned here) can be broadly divided into two main categories. One, the more commonly known, is the way of knowledge or Vedānta with its child Yoga. The aim here is to rise above suffering by discovering some high station above and outside the sphere of our pain and suffering. By doing so, we may not be able to annul suffering or change the ground realities but we can surely rise above and transcend it. It is like a big spot becoming insignificantly small because the frame enlarges beyond anything we can imagine. This itself is a big gain and for many that is enough. They might say, let the stain remain, the imperfection of our earth-nature and its resultant suffering continue, it is enough that I can escape the psychological consequences. If others too do it, we can all collectively ascend to a level where suffering is not felt or experienced, even though all below may be disarray and strife. The other category is through the power of Śakti and its child Tantra. Here, there is an effort to understand the forces that create confusion and disorder, sickness and imperfection, suffering and pain. There is also some effort to conquer them, there-fore it is also known as the veer mārg or the hero’s path. But here too an inadequacy intervenes since power without knowledge is unsatisfactory. One cannot find the final cure if one does not
know its ultimate origin. The perfect knowledge of the origin of suffering, evil and imperfection can alone lead to a radical cure of these things. In other words, in their highest station, Vedānta and Tantra, the highest knowledge and the supreme power are essentially one. But somehow that grand reconciliation has been missing. The vedāntin, who knows but one half of the truth, simply dismisses the whole issue of suffering as an illusion without caring to find why this illusion was superimposed upon the Supreme Truth. The Śākta Tāntric has the power but also misses the truth since he does not know how this fall into error and confusion arose and lacks the means to rescue the energies that have seemingly deviated from their true purpose.

(to be continued)

Dr. Alok Pandey is a practising psychiatrist.
Alchemy of the soul

The process of integral psychology

Dr. Arya Maloney

Editor’s note
This article continues to explore a soul-centred psychology. This is the case of a woman who could heal her conflicts by going beyond a normal framework.

The following four stories illustrate the practice of gaining awareness of the full spectrum of consciousness in the healing process. In these stories, — birth, death, spiritual emergency, transforming trauma and contact with the transpersonal have become vehicles of conscious evolution that cross traditional and developmental boundaries. Each story reveals a personal process which unfolds in a new awareness of creative possibilities — an awareness accessible to all human beings.

These tales of transformation invite the reader into four unique worlds that unveil the interplay between personal and transpersonal realities. In lives that are distinctly different yet remarkably comparable, each individual has experienced a growth of consciousness from contact with personal and transpersonal dimensions. By accessing this integral wholeness, each person in his or her own way has transformed an obstacle, explored a higher aspiration and furthered the journey towards liberation. May their stories inspire and serve others on the same road.

Where are my children?

Opening the door, I find myself face to face with Joshua Callahan, newborn, nestled on his mother’s chest. Pushing a stroller, Patrick Callahan flashes a smile. Focusing on Joan’s shining face, my mind traces the torturous route leading to this happy scene.

After graduating from college, Joan entered therapy in 1987. Her first utterance, “I don’t know who I am,” told me that her journey was to be one of self-discovery. It took twelve years to realize this truth.

For two years we worked consistently on Joan’s relationship with her parents, and with the men in her life. We confronted her parents’ divorce, living with a depressed mother, a verbally abusive father and her role of ‘mother’ to her younger brother. Sobbing, she repeatedly voiced her lifelong dream: to have a child with a loving husband. I could not discover the root trauma responsible for her extreme longing. As early as age eight, she wrote passionately in her journal about a child she believed she could never have.

In 1989, Joan moved from New York to Sitka, Alaska. On the night of her arrival, she walked into a bar and met John, the man with whom she would spend the next ten years. Instantly, she recognized him. When he left the bar, Joan followed.

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
Uncharacteristically, she asked, “Are you shy, or are you married?” He said that he had been recently separated from his wife; then revealed that he had not left on his fishing boat that morning because he had ‘sensed’ her arrival. Roughly, he warned her, “If we are to have a relationship, it will be good for me and bad for you. You will have to do all the giving.” Eventually, Joan was to endure the truth of his prophetic prediction.

When they parted that evening, Joan experienced a familiar panic attack. Separation from a loved one had always triggered the feeling that she was going to disappear. Though she had just met John, she suffered the familiar numb tingling in her hands, and wept hysterically. At last he assented, and she moved into his house — initiating a relationship filled with pain and frustration. Though she took care of John’s two children, his ex-wife made all the decisions. Her sense of enslavement and John’s depressed, passive-aggressive behavior imprisoned her in a state of constant despair.

I worked with Joan eight years, primarily via phone and letters. During her rare visits to New York, our work centered on her relationship. Yet always, in the end, she could not leave John. “Somehow, I have to make it right with him,” she sobbed.

In August of 1997, Joan’s ninth year with John, I received a letter from her, “Living with John is killing me. But I cannot leave.” Desperate, she asked to visit me for prolonged intensive therapy. She needed to know what strange attachment kept her tied to John. Though overwhelmed by grief, she was keenly aware of the deep schism in her life — strength and self-direction in her work (as therapist, teacher and artist), yet utter helplessness in her relationship.

At the end of August, 1997, Joan arrived for our first three-day intensive, her leg infected, her feet covered with rashes, fungus and eczema. Once again, with a sense of powerlessness, she informed me that she could not leave John. Employing a series of Gestalt exercises (in which role-play evokes different parts of the personality), Joan contacted a part of herself which she identified as the ‘cowboy’. Though this inner figure gave her more freedom of expression, I sensed it would not solve her dilemma. I decided to use holotropic breathwork. Created by Stanislav Grof, breathwork employs deep, rapid breathing. Utilizing music/sound played at extremely high volume, an altered state of consciousness is induced. Memory of one’s personal/psychological history, of the time in the womb, even of the birth process itself may emerge, as well as mystical, shamanic, past-life or near-death experiences. The following sessions revealed two separate past-life stories, containing characters Joan had never met, in settings far removed. Leading her far beyond her conditioned reality, holotropic breathwork allowed Joan to glimpse, for the first time, the source of her suffering.

After five minutes of deep breathing, she shouted in a strong African accent, “Where are my children?” Two hours of perpetual movement (involving arms, legs, pelvis, shoulders, head) accompanied by an overwhelming anger, grief and terror. Awestruck, I witnessed the transformation of a white woman from a sophisticated New York into a black woman from a primitive village in Africa. Shrieking with agony, reliving the loss of her children, she stood up, ‘beat’ a drum, tore at her hair, begged to die and berated herself for being a bad mother. Joan was in an unusually deep trance. No one in an

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
ordinary state of consciousness could sustain this intensity of movement and feeling for two hours. Nor could they stand up without coming out of trance! (Except in cases of somnambulism, standing or sitting up will bring the person back to waking consciousness).

At the end of the session, shaken by her own experience, Joan related the following:

“I am a black woman living in a small village in Africa. I see my surroundings clearly and am immediately aware of grief and terror coursing through my body as I search for my three children. Again and again I shout, ‘Where are my children? Did you see my children?’ As I run along the dirt paths, I am aware that a stampede of wild elephants is headed for our village. We must leave or be trampled. My ten-year-old son, my six-year-old son and three-year-old daughter are nowhere to be found and I am faced with a terrible choice — leave without my children or be killed.

Ultimately, I am forced to leave with the other villagers, never having found my children, never knowing if they were alive or dead. Now I am on a dirt road beating my drum, calling, ‘We are leaving, where are you, my children?’ My feet and legs feel hollow since I have been separated from them. I can see my slender body, my long legs and arms, the pale palms of my hands and soles of my feet. I wear a brown fabric wrap and a short necklace of large, amber-colored beads. My hair is closely cropped. I cannot forgive myself for leaving. I should have stayed to be killed with my children. I imagine my eldest son returning to find his mother gone. I would rather he found me dead. ‘Oh! What kind of a mother am I?’

For many years, I play out my role in the community, but I am not alive inside. Repeatedly, I cry out to God, ‘I wish I had died instead of my children!’ Standing in front of our hut, I vow that I will find my eldest son. I vow that I will never leave him again. I vow that I will never leave anyone again!

I wait to die and finally see myself dead, floating on the water in a wicker/straw casket. I am lying on my back and see my hands with their long, thin fingers folded across my chest. Suddenly, I see a (white) brightness above me and I slip out of my body. I look down at myself floating on the water and repeat over and over, ‘I will never forget my children. I will never leave anyone again.’ My eldest boy’s face appears. I tell him how much I love him; that I will never leave him again.

Near the end of the session, as I open my arms to embrace him, I suddenly feel the spirit of my child-to-be and realize that there is no room for him in my present life. A profound ‘No’ arises from within. I cannot betray my first son again. If I let this new child in, I will lose my boy. I am very confused.

I experience great compassion for the African woman (who is I). But since she/I has not forgiven herself, what can I do in order to have a child in this life?”

On the third and final day of our work, Joan and I gathered together emerging threads of insight. Reminding her of her present dilemma (of living with a man who did not
want any more children) Joan cried, “I am in this relationship not because I want to stay, but because I cannot leave!”

Suddenly, reverting to her fear of having a child, Joan experienced a spontaneous vision of her oldest African son. The modality used to help her was process acupressure. As I applied pressure to the acupressure points along the meridians, Joan gained access to an emerging story.

As with the holotropic breathwork, Joan now returned swiftly to her life as an African woman. Once again she relived the crying, pleading and apologizing. This time, however, she not only identified with, but was witness to the African mother’s intense pain. This allowed her to bridge the relationship between the two lives. Realizing that the African mother’s guilt strongly negated her desire to have a child, Joan experienced the latter’s returning to her home with her three children.

“This is our story,” she tells them. “There is a white woman in a different lifetime who wants to have a child. This woman can be mother to you.”
The oldest boy, however, resisted. Trapped between two worlds, both Joan and the African woman could no longer evolve.

Despite her desire to bear a child, Joan was terrified of conception.

“I am weak. I’m not as strong as the African mother. I can’t do it.” Calmly, the African woman replied, “You are strong. You will be a good mother. I choose you!” At these words Joan, too, became calm. “You are right!” she cried. “I am strong! Allow me to be mother now! Forgive yourself and set us both free!”

Smiling, her arms wide, she said, “As I let go, I saw the African mother’s transparency enter into me! I had become the major figure.”

Joan left our three-day intensive awed by the depth of her experience: armed with new understanding, she returned to Sitka. Although apprehensive, she revealed everything to her partner.

“I told John about Africa, holotropic breath-work, process acupressure and souls. He listened intently, asked for details. Shedding tears, he reminded me of our uncanny recognition upon meeting. He talked of the white light I had seen; claiming that he also had seen this ‘great white light’ as a child. I was flooded with feeling; could it be that he was my eldest African son? Though he could not remember that other life, I begged his forgiveness; I spoke to his soul, not to his personality.”

Joan’s hopes kindled but four months later, old patterns surfacing, she returned. As in our first intensive, she adamantly refused to leave John.

“I owe him. I am responsible for him.”

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com
It was during this session that she spoke of her first love, Patrick Callahan (whom she had met at age seventeen).

“No one ever loved me so deeply.”

When she left for college, Patrick gallantly told her that he loved her, but she was not to feel guilty if she dated others. A year later, she broke his heart. For seven years, however, they kept in contact.

In September 1997, still in Alaska, Joan had a significant dream. She recognizes Patrick on a bus. Though he is with two children, she senses that he is unmarried. To whom did the children belong? Waking, she notes the time. 3:45 am. Checking her answering machine, she hears Patrick’s voice. “The time in New York,” he says, “is 7:45 am.”

In December 1997, Joan had a second significant dream in which Patrick urges John to end his relationship with Joan: he is the one who can offer her love, marriage and children. Upon waking, Joan again receives a phone call from Patrick, but this time, she returns it. While he tells her that two women are about to give birth to his children, he still reiterates his offer:

“Come back to New York. Marry me. I have a house and garden. We’ll have children together.”

Joan’s therapeutic process continued. Once again she returned to her African lifetime. Speaking in strong dialect, she pleaded with her elder son for forgiveness: as I encouraged her to let him go, familiar separation symptoms surfaced — panic, pain, intense tingling in her hands, but for the first time, she realized that she was holding him captive.

“You are free!” she cried. “Live your own life now!” As her sobs diminished, her left hand clasped her shirt. I applied pressure to this hand. “Is this where you keep your children?” I asked. Relief pervaded her body. “Now I will have a baby,” she said. “My African children will live in this child.”

Suddenly, she was back on the dirt road in Africa — her legs and feet, however, no longer hollow. “Bright, flashing, white lights circle my head!” she cried. Though she continued to communicate with the African woman, this session liberated her from the trauma of her past lifetime.

The synchronicity of Joan’s dreams and Patrick’s telephone calls at last broke a ten-year pattern of frustration. On the third and final day of our intensive sessions, Joan’s underlying anger surfaced. Recalling her mother’s fragility and her own hostility, she explored similarities between her mother and John, “I can’t trust either of them. I can’t trust anyone!” Lack of trust now became our major theme. During process acupressure, Joan moved from a mental to an imaginal level:
“A blue-green egg covers my womb. It is my shield.” “Can you imagine removing that shield?” “Only for Patrick, He is the only one I trust.”

After leaving, Joan called Patrick to probe his dilemma. While he did not intend to marry either woman, he still felt he must give their children financial/emotional support. Despite this entanglement, Joan knew that she wanted to see him again. She returned to Sitka apprehensive, but determined. Thus began the process of separation. Within a month Joan left John and flew back to Patrick in New York. Now, however, Patrick became ambivalent – resurrecting their relationship meant facing the wounds of the past. The birth of his first child, Justin, led to visitation, child-support, a second job and a hostile mother. Once again Joan was an outsider. The reality of two hostile mothers and their children exacerbated her core issues: she returned for another holotropic session.

The following is an account of Joan’s second past-life recall. Whether one believes in such recall or regards it as metaphor, its effect on the client is the same. After five minutes of rapid breathing, Joan began to cry desperately. Writhing in agony, she rose to a kneeling position and began to move sensually. Hand and arm movements synchronized with those of hips and pelvis, she displayed an amazing mastery of Middle Eastern dancing. Alternating between dancing and despair, she revealed the following story:

“I was a dancer in the Egyptian royal court. One night I was raped by the king and gave birth to a boy whom I named Niman. Believing I had betrayed him, my husband, Petak, gave the child to the childless queen. Hearing my child’s cries for me, when he was six, I plunged a knife into my heart. I died blaming myself for separation from my son.”

Joan instantly grasped the connection between her Egyptian and present life. The dancer was hated by the jealous queen; Joan was hated by two jealous women. The king’s first child was favored by his father; Patrick’s first son was favored by his father. After several months, she returned for a third holotropic session, re-entering her role as a royal dancer. She became keenly aware of her confusion about mothering children who are not her own and her feelings of inadequacy about being a mother. As a result of this journey Joan’s heightened awareness helped her to control herself. She returned in early November, 1999, for her last holotropic experience before conceiving. Here is her account:

“I began my last session with continuing memories of children lost. Flashes of light were accompanied by the familiar torture in my chest. Experiencing the pang of losing child after child (in different lifetimes), I actually saw their faces! I called out their names. When the African woman appeared, I begged her for help. Intuitively, I knew that the Egyptian woman would sabotage me. Once again, I relived the Egyptian lifetime. I experienced myself as Joan, lowering the Egyptian woman into a coffin. I said goodbye. Now the African woman became my guide. ‘Trust and love your husband,’ she said, ‘Take care of your feet.’ When I lost my African children, I lost all feeling in my feet and legs. In this lifetime, they have been covered with eczema, psoriasis and fungus —
which cleared up after I left John. Opening my eyes, I knew for the first time that I would have children.”

Joan went home, armored by self-belief. A few weeks later on December 15, 1999, she discovered that she was pregnant! Her story is a truly astonishing example of the power of transpersonal psychotherapy. A purely personal approach could not have accessed vital information from past births. Let me state again — for healing to occur, a philosophical/spiritual belief in reincarnation is not necessary (on behalf of either the therapist or the client). Whether viewed as stories from the unconscious, or as past-lives, the effect is the same.

In each story, Joan recognizes a character with whom she identifies. She also recognizes other characters as people in her present life. Although psychologists like Roberto Assagioli theorize about sub-personalities, Western psychology speaks of each individual as having one personality. Deviations are seen as pathological manifestations (of an alternate personality) or dissociation from the sense of self. In Joan’s case, healing demanded the accessing of various personalities and relationships (from different lifetimes). Carrying the personality of the African woman, she unconsciously created an obstacle to child-birth. When she entered into a relationship with her, she removed the obstacle. A psychology honoring the soul as the center of the being reveals both the African woman and the Egyptian dancer as vehicles manifesting the one soul.

“Man is in his self a unique Person, but he is also in his manifestation of self a multi-person; he will never succeed in being master of himself until the Person imposes itself on his multi-personality and governs it.. (1).”

From this perspective, Joan’s past-life exploration illustrates the effect of multi-personality manifesting in the service of the One Person.

Postscript

Joan’s work of clearing the transpersonal trauma opened the way for Joshua’s birth. However, his birth set the stage for confronting yet another trauma — the horror of her childhood. As a mother she stepped into a constellation of people and events that replicated her early life — a house in the suburbs, an absent husband, isolation, two angry women and fear of being alone with a baby.

Plagued by panic attacks whenever Patrick left the house, Joan returned to therapy. Following the process of the panic, she remembered being left with her depressed mother and younger brother; Joan was five, Eric, three. Her father’s departures set her on a survival course. How could she control both her brother’s and her own behavior so as not to disturb her mother, who beyond periodic trips to the kitchen for vodka re-fills, spent her days in a darkened bed-room? Any noise sent her into uncontrollable rage.

Joan’s strategies to keep the beast at bay included: playing quietly with Eric in her room, taking him outside, and entertaining him in the family car. Her mothering of Eric
paralleled her mothering of Joshua once her husband left for work. In a state of terror, Joan fled with Joshua, driving aimlessly until Patrick returned.

Then, one day, in therapy, Joan contacted the source of her trauma when she remembered playing in the car with her brother. Suddenly, her crazed mother appeared. Regressing to age five, Joan whispered, “Shh, Shh. Eric, get down....hide! No! Mommy, no, no....!” Screaming and flailing, she curled into the fetal position, clutching her throat and gasping for breath.

This was the beginning of accessing several traumas in which Joan had nearly died. Some were perpetrated by her mother; others by a sadistic nanny who attempted to smother and drown her. During these attacks Joan left her body. “I could easily have died,” she said, “but I had to return for my brother’s sake.”

Horrifying and incongruous, Joan’s experiences dramatically highlight the powerful connection between personal and transpersonal healing.

Reference


Arya Maloney is the co-founder of the Mindbody Centre in Kingston, New York and holds three graduate degrees in chemistry, theology and psychology. He has been teaching in colleges and universities.

For other articles please visit http://www.namahjournal.com