

## An Integral Approach to Our Psychic Center

This chapter integrates two diverse streams of psychology: western and eastern. Each of these streams has made profound discoveries about the psyche, human consciousness, the nature of fragmentation, and the possibilities for wholeness. Yet psychology in the west and psychology in the east have traveled from two different directions and developed very different areas of knowledge. This chapter begins with a broad characterization of these two streams of psychological thought in order to highlight these differences.

Psychology in the west looks from the *outside in*, whereas psychology in the east looks from the *inside out*. These two perspectives give two very different views of psychology. By looking from the *outside in* western psychology has developed very detailed, precise maps of the outer being, the body-heart-mind organism and the self; whereas eastern psychology's view from the *inside out* has generated very detailed maps of our inner being and the spiritual foundation of consciousness. Each has essential knowledge about human existence, yet each focuses on only half of this psycho-spiritual totality. Each requires the other to complete it, and only in bringing them together does an integral view of psychology emerge.

Western psychology ascribes our lack of wholeness and painful fragmentation to the universal experience of psychological wounding. *We do not know the fullness of who we are because our wounding makes us unconscious of it.* While some people are wounded more severely and some less, we all are wounded. To be born into this world is to be emotionally hurt and scarred growing up. Our response to this wounding is to push it down, contract, and develop a defensive structure in which large portions of our very self become unconscious. We become lost, isolated from others, cut off and alienated from our own deeper self. Western psychotherapy is an attempt to understand and repair this fragmented wholeness.

Eastern psychology sees a different cause for our fragmentation and suffering: *we are cut off from the spiritual ground of our being.* We identify with the surface life of our body and ego – our desires,

feelings, sensations, thoughts – and so are unconscious of our spiritual source. Eastern psychological practices aim at bringing peace and harmony into our living so we may go deeply inside to find the true fulfillment intrinsic to our spiritual core.

The human predicament, then, is characterized by a double fragmentation. It is a dual diagnosis we suffer from – a psycho-spiritual fracture – and dual therefore must be the path to wholeness.

It must be conceded from the outset that while western psychology has generated a great mass of detailed knowledge of the surface of the psyche, it has failed to penetrate its deeper mysteries, for even depth psychology is but a psychology of the frontal self and its unconscious processes. Western psychology has only explored the surface of consciousness because its instruments of investigation are fragmentary and limited. Further, a postmodern perspective raises the question of what becomes “knowledge” in psychology. Historically what constitutes psychological knowledge has been narrowly western and excluded cultures in which the depth of psychological thought in significant ways surpasses the west.

As science so often reminds us, real understanding comes only when we look past the surface appearance of things into their deeper nature. Otherwise, for example, we are led to believe the initial view given by our senses that the sun travels around the earth. Just as we need to look beyond first appearances in astronomy, physics, and other hard sciences, so we need to look deeply in psychology. As more sophisticated instruments have advanced the hard sciences – microscopes, telescopes, particle accelerators – so more sophisticated methods of consciousness exploration has allowed eastern psychology to come upon a deeper, wider, more fundamental knowledge of the psyche than western psychology.

To understand the depths of human consciousness, the instrument of exploration can only be consciousness itself. The west’s “outside in” approach of external observations, brain imaging instruments such as MRIs, fMRIs, EEGs, PET scans, etc., and even the surface introspective methods of depth psychotherapy, helpful as they are, will only take us so far. To bring about a more complete understanding, well defined methods of inner exploration must be employed, and it is in this area that

the eastern meditative traditions excel, for eastern spiritual systems are the result of centuries of rigorous, precise applications of methods for examining inner states of consciousness.

India has made a highly disciplined study of consciousness and the psyche for millennia. Although traditional western psychology has relegated eastern psychological thought to philosophy or religion, a current appraisal of psychology must include eastern cultures' contributions to psychology. As globalization increases, the current western-centric view of psychology (Cushman, 1995) is being counterbalanced by developments such as the recent movement of "Indian psychology" (Cornelissen & Joshi, 2004), which seeks to re-own Indian psychological insights and situate them in their proper field of psychology. From a global perspective, a strictly western definition of psychology that excludes the east's profound discoveries appears to be a rather parochial view of psychology.

### **The Meeting of East and West**

East and west come together in the melding of eastern spiritual wisdom with western scientific knowledge. The east has looked inside to discover the ultimate spiritual truths of existence. The west has looked outside to discover the powerful but relative truths of science. As psychology represents the west's scientific effort to understand the inner psyche, it becomes the common ground where these two great streams of knowing join, the natural meeting place of east and west.

To understand the depths of the human psyche, traditional psychology is necessary but not sufficient. Academic and scientific psychology in the west have made a massive study of the outermost surface of the body, heart, and mind, and the depth psychologies fill out a deeper picture of our frontal organism. For the most part western psychology has now moved beyond the mind-body split that characterized much of psychological discourse during the first two-thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to see this outer identity in holistic terms, that is, as an organismic, body-mind unity.

From an integral perspective this is true as far as it goes. It does well represent our surface experience. But as we look further, a more complex picture reveals itself. The self is only the outer edge of consciousness, where many inner strands of experience meet and fuse into a totality of organismic experiencing. But as eastern psychology insists, a deeper, spiritual core manifests this outer mind,

heart, and body. The frontal organism we identify with and call ourselves is an expression of our deeper being, and only in reference to this deeper foundation can there be a more complete psychological understanding.

## **The Mystery of Our Psychic Center**

The finding of our true psychic center together with practical means for unveiling it are perhaps the most significant contributions of integral psychology to human welfare, for the discovery of our psychic center profoundly changes the entire experience of living. Instead of the stressful play of opposites that characterizes normal living – pleasure and pain, frustration and satisfaction, hope and despair – there is a steady light of inner guidance, a peaceful, loving presence that is ever fresh, ever new, a joyous, self-existent bliss in the center of our being.

It is an extraordinary notion that the essence of our deepest identity is a self-existent joy, an immense peace, an unfaltering guidance and discernment, an inexpressible sweetness, love, and light. This view runs so counter to prevailing psychological thought as to be revolutionary. Yet this is precisely what eastern psychology has confirmed for thousands of years. Integral psychology reorients psychology from its exclusive preoccupation with the frontal self and organism to include the deeper, guiding psychic center within.

## **The Central Being**

According to Indian psychology, our fundamental identity is spiritual, and in Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga this central spiritual identity consists of two aspects, called by various names: spirit, atman, Self, Buddha-nature on the one hand and soul, psychic center, psychic being, *antaratman*, *chaitya purusha* on the other. The Self or atman is our eternal, unevolving oneness with Brahman, the Divine. It stands outside the evolution – silent, detached, impartial, and unaffected by life. The soul or psychic center, however, participates in the evolution and itself undergoes a dynamic development. It is both immortal and growing in the evolution, developing new powers and capacities in each lifetime, actualizing new potentials in its journey toward maturity.

“The ancient, effulgent being, the indwelling spirit, subtle, deep-hidden in the lotus of the Heart, is hard to know. But the wise person following the path of meditation, knows him and is freed alike from pleasures and pain.”

*Katha Upanishad*, pp. 17-18

The Upanishads are generally regarded as the high point of vedantic philosophy, and in the Upanishads it is the *chaitya purusha* located in the secret cave in the heart that corresponds to the psychic center.

“According to the ancient teaching the seat of the immanent Divine, the hidden Purusha, is in the mystic heart, -- the secret heart-cave, *hrdaye guhâyâm*, as the Upanishads put it, -- and, according to the experience of many Yogins, it is from its depths that there comes the voice or the breath of the inner oracle.”

(Sri Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 149)

It must be remembered that the psychic center is not located in the physical heart or in the heart *chakra*, though it is often confused with this heart center. It is located behind the heart *chakra*, deep within on an inner plane. The many images of the Christ pointing to his own open heart confirms Christ as the great western teacher of this inmost soul within the heart, for the opening of the heart *chakra* is a precondition for the full emergence of the psychic center.

“The psychic being in the old systems was spoken of as the Purusha in the heart (the secret heart -- *hrdaye guhayam* ) which corresponds very well to what we define as the psychic being behind the heart centre. It was also this that went out from the body at death and persisted -- which again corresponds to our teaching that it is this which goes out and returns, linking a new life to former life. Also we say that the psychic is the divine portion within us -- so too the Purusha in the heart is described as Ishwara [Personal Divine] of the individual nature.”

(Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, p. 289)

All theistic traditions focus on the centrality of the soul – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, *bhakti*

schools of Vedanta. All theistic traditions view our inmost identity as an immortal soul. What integral yoga adds to these descriptions is the evolutionary aspect of the soul. Sri Aurobindo's writing is unparalleled in their rich phenomenological descriptions of the actual experience of the soul or psychic center. The significance of the soul as our evolutionary guide could not have been appreciated by the earlier theistic traditions because the evolutionary nature of the cosmos was not yet discovered. The significance of the psychic center as the evolutionary principle within us becomes clear only as the evolution of consciousness is seen as the great theme of world existence. However, even as far back as the Vedas there was an awareness of the soul's upward movement and of the importance of the soul's guidance in this process.

The evolutionary nature of the soul can be confusing, for it is both eternal and an indestructible portion of the Divine and simultaneously a growing, developing center of consciousness. It is initially a seed of potential that contains all Divine possibilities within it. Its growth is a process of unfolding these latent powers. The psychic center is spirit in manifestation, ever alive, ever whole, ever pure yet also progressing as it evolves new abilities out of itself. We are accustomed to think that eternal = static or pure being, but this applies only to the atman, the immobile, non-evolving portion of our spiritual nature. Eternal can also be in the mode of becoming, and it is this becoming that completes our spiritual identity and fulfills the evolutionary movement of the Divine creation. We are both an eternal *being* and *becoming*, at one level a static, silent witness that supports all impartially while simultaneously an evolving becoming, a divine participant on the world stage growing toward fullness.

“It is necessary to understand clearly the difference between the evolving soul (psychic being) and the pure Atman, self or spirit. The pure self is unborn, does not pass through death or birth, is independent of birth or body, mind or life or this manifested Nature. It is not bound by these things, not limited, not affected, even though it assumes and supports them. The soul, on the contrary, is something that comes down into birth and passes through death – although it itself does not die, for it is immortal – from one state to another, from the earth plane to other planes and back again to the earth-

existence. It goes on with this progression from life to life through an evolution which leads it up to the human state and evolves through it all a being of itself which we call the psychic being that supports the evolution and develops a physical, a vital, a mental human consciousness as its instruments of world-experience and of a disguised, imperfect, but growing self-expression. All this it does from behind a veil showing something of its divine self only in so far as the imperfection of the instrumental being will allow it. But a time comes when it is able to prepare to come out from behind the veil, to take command and turn all the instrumental nature towards a divine fulfillment. This is the beginning of the true spiritual life. The soul is now able to make itself ready for a higher evolution of manifested consciousness than the mental human – it can pass from the mental to the spiritual and through degrees of the spiritual to the supramental state. Till then there is no reason why it should cease from birth, it cannot in fact do so. If having reached the spiritual state, it wills to pass out of the terrestrial manifestation, it may indeed do so – but there is also possible a higher manifestation, in the Knowledge and not in the Ignorance.”

(Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, pp. 438-9)

In the spiritual history of humanity it appears that full enlightenment, or the permanent realization of atman or Buddha-nature, is exceedingly rare. There are probably no more than a handful of fully enlightened beings on earth at a given time. However, consciousness of the psychic center is a far more available and common experience, and its realization leads not away from the earth plane but to an active involvement with earth’s ongoing evolution. As the quote above implies, the psychic realization is the flowering of the evolutionary journey and the beginning of another step in humanity’s evolutionary progress. Such a transformation requires a continuity in identity, and this means the realization of the soul, our true spiritual individuality.

Integral yoga psychology begins with the assumption this universe does have a purpose, so that simply to nullify existence through nirvanic extinction cannot be the entire meaning of life. In seeing

our life's journey as an evolution of consciousness, discovering our psychic center assumes the highest importance since it is through our true identity that we can more consciously and creatively participate in the miracle of this living universe. The increasing influence of the psychic center is not only accessible to ordinary people, it is also the path of fulfillment in daily living, for it holds the key to finding our way amidst the confusion of the world around us.

## **The Nature and Growth of Our Psychic Center**

The experience of the psychic center is of a self-existent bliss, an intense inner happiness. A very palpable sense of joy is usually the first thing that greets us as the psychic center awakens. This strong joy is in no way dependent upon outer circumstances. It is intrinsic to the psychic being. Its essential nature is ever possessed of an exquisite, indescribable contentment and utter fulfillment.

This is a fulfillment that is unlike any other, for it is a fulfillment that does not simply bask in itself or remain static. This is a dynamic fulfillment that is energizing, inspiring, and seeks creative expression and further divine fulfillment. The experience of this inherent joy far surpasses the fleeting, surface satisfactions of regular life. Although people seek satisfaction through people and things, religious traditions suggest that it is this inner, spiritual wholeness that is being sought through these outer pursuits. A single taste of this psychic happiness can be enough to change the direction of a person's life, for it opens us to possibilities undreamed of before. For many people it is just such an experience that marks the beginning of the spiritual journey.

Along with this unparalleled contentment comes an inner quietude and deep peace, in the biblical phrase, "the peace that passeth all understanding." This peace comes from deep within, and when it extends to the surface it brings a tranquility and calm to the mind and heart. This sense of peace brings an overpowering relief from the stress and anxiety that so pervade everyday life. It brings a comfort and solace which relieves our cares and burdens.

Spiritual traditions also concur that to experience soul is to experience a vastness of love and compassion that makes the ordinary experience of these feelings pale in comparison. Jesus Christ is the

best known exemplar in the west of the realization of the soul and the possibilities that can manifest with the psychic transformation. Christ emphasized the power of love in the experience of the soul, and it is no accident that all theistic traditions have a strong orientation toward the heart together with practices of love and devotion. In experiencing the vastness of spiritual love we see what a diminished figure love assumes in everyday life, even as it originates from this deeper, purer immensity. The psychic center feels a loving kinship with all other beings and the whole of creation. And most of all the psychic center feels a loving relationship with the Divine, for it brings an awareness of the Presence of the Divine. A portion of the Divine, it aspires for full union. As the experience of the psychic center grows, so does the awareness of the Divine grow stronger and more clear and definite.

The psychic center moves always toward harmony, truth, beauty, goodness, and tenderness. Its intrinsic nature is spiritual, and to these higher spiritual values it is irresistably attracted. But at first its voice is overshadowed by the clamor of the body, heart, and mind.

Every living being has a spark of the Divine within. This spark soul is present in every bacteria and unicellular organism. The atman at this beginning evolutionary stage is identical to the atman at all other evolutionary stages, but the psychic center, though its potential is fully present, has yet to be unfolded and actualized. In plants this psychic presence becomes stronger and more developed, but it remains a spark. In the animal this psychic presence becomes stronger and better defined, as anyone sensitive to animals can feel. There is a beginning of mind in animals and therefore a greater means of expression than in plants, but in animals this mentality is still barely developed and imprisoned by the senses.

Psychic development reaches a new stage in human beings. Here the spark has become a flame, a definite psychic center has been formed though it is still far from maturity. In the first stages of human evolution this psychic center continues to focus on building up the body, heart, and mind and has little influence on the life of the person. Developing the frontal, instrumental nature is its first task, as the outwardness and density of the surface instruments obscure the soul's inner intimations. During these first stages of the human level the person is almost completely lost in the outer world, seeking

only to satisfy physical, emotional, and mental desires. The surface instruments run the whole show.

As the psychic center progresses it works to refine and purify this frontal nature so that body, heart, and mind will be responsive to this light and take their true place as instruments that express the inner soul. The guidance of the psychic center is a direct form of spiritual knowing, for the psychic has within it a discernment that is not misled by outer appearances but can see beyond to the deeper truth that surface appearances often hide. In our life journey, our psychic center is our true guide.

As the psychic matures and grows stronger, it exerts an increasing influence upon the frontal nature, and the person begins to turn inward, to experience a greater depth in living rather than being confined to the superficial life of the surface. Our psychic center draws us toward higher, more noble things in life. It is what attracts us to genuine love, to truth, to beauty, to peace, to bliss, to people whose hearts are open and whom we feel nourished by, to real tenderness, to shining joy and exuberance, to honest, truthful people, to those who strive for a higher way of life, to authenticity, to health, to wholeness. Sometimes, especially when the psychic center is less developed, we are attracted to an image of these things and get lost in the outer appearances, such as sentimental piety, proclamations of love but not its inner feeling, raucous energy, blind passion, moralistic rules or even repressive Puritanism. But such mistakes are necessary in the soul's growth, for by trial and error we learn the difference between surface appearances, desires and our deeper psychic guidance.

Through this the psychic becomes stronger, more insistent, more able to influence the frontal self. It acts to edify and cleanse our frontal nature so that we can choose more freely and clearly, less enslaved by the insistence of our impulses and emotional nature. As the psychic center awakens, it brings a guidance, a light, a new and deeper perspective that changes the orientation of the person and leads him or her inward.

“There are always two different consciousnesses in the human being, one outward in which he ordinarily lives, the other inward and concealed of which he knows nothing. When one does sadhana, the inner consciousness begins to open and one is able to go inside and have all kinds of experiences there. As the sadhana progresses, one begins to

live more and more in this inner being and the outer becomes more and more superficial. At first the inner consciousness seems to be the dream and the outer the waking reality. Afterwards the inner consciousness becomes the reality and the outer is felt by many as a dream or delusion, or else as something superficial and external. The inner consciousness begins to be a place of deep peace, light, happiness, love, closeness to the Divine or the presence of the Divine, the Mother. One is then aware of two consciousnesses, the inner one and the outer which has to be changed into its counterpart and instrument.”

(Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, p. 307)

At first these are two seemingly unrelated worlds – the inner spiritual world and the outer world of regular life. Though the inner light seems faint at first, gradually it becomes brighter. Over time this light shines farther outward and begins to illumine our way in the outer world, even as it is still easily overshadowed by our mental patterns and emotional preferences and habits. Indeed, as we shall see, it is our wounding, our unconscious defenses, and our emotional reactivity that are the greatest barriers to the psychic light. To fully liberate this light is a goal of integral psychology.

This process of psychic emergence, of living in two parallel worlds or consciousnesses is difficult to navigate at times. It is easy to doubt or dismiss what is occurring when the inner world is just starting to open because it is so easily overcome by the momentum of the frontal self. For a long time these two worlds may seem very distinct and separate, like oil and water. But through sustained practice and aspiration, the psychic light grows stronger. Progressively it becomes a guiding force in daily life, not separate from but part of outer living. Finally, as the psychic influence pervades the body, heart, and mind and transforms these surface instruments, at last the psychic center comes to the front of the consciousness and takes direct charge of the organism, opening the person fully to the spiritual realm.

“As the crust of the outer nature cracks, as the walls of inner separation break down, the inner light gets through, the inner fire burns in the heart, the substance of the nature and the stuff of consciousness refine to a greater subtlety and purity, and the

deeper psychic experiences, those which are not solely of an inner mental or inner vital character, become possible in this subtler, purer, finer substance; the soul begins to unveil itself, the psychic personality reaches its full stature. The soul, the psychic entity, then manifests itself as the central being which upholds mind and life and body and supports all the other powers and functions of the Spirit; it takes up its greater function as the guide and ruler of the nature. A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation: every region of the being, every nook and corner of it... is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed; all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order. This process may be rapid or tardy according to the amount of obscurity and resistance still left in the nature, but it goes on unfalteringly so long as it is not complete...

This is the first result, but the second is a free inflow of all kinds of spiritual experience, experience of the Self, experience of the Ishwara and the Divine Shakti, experience of cosmic consciousness, a direct touch with cosmic forces and with the occult movements of universal Nature, a psychic sympathy and unity and inner communication and interchanges of all kinds with other beings and with Nature, illuminations of the mind by knowledge, illuminations of the heart by love and devotion and spiritual joy and ecstasy, illuminations of the sense and the body by higher experience, illuminations of dynamic action in the truth and largeness of a purified mind and heart and soul, the certitudes of the divine light and guidance, the joy and power of the divine force working in the will and the conduct. These experiences are the result of an opening outward of the inner and inmost being and nature; for then there comes into play the soul's power of unerring inherent consciousness, its vision, its touch on things which is superior to any mental cognition; there is there, native to the psychic consciousness in its pure working, an

immediate sense of the world and its beings, a direct inner contact with them and a direct contact with the Self and with the Divine, -- a direct knowledge, a direct sight of Truth and of all truths, a direct penetrating spiritual emotion and feeling, a direct intuition of right will and right action, a power to rule and to create an order of the being not by the gropings of the superficial self, but from within, from the inner truth of self and things."

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, pp.907-8)

The psychic transformation occurs by degrees. First there is an opening to our psychic center, an experience that profoundly reorients our life and direction. Difficulties, pain, trials, suffering still come as they do to everyone, but there is center of bliss inside that no outer event can touch. Mistakes are still made since we cannot listen perfectly to the deeper guidance and the surface self's habitual reactions have a strong forward thrust. But slowly, as the psychic center awakens, it becomes a guiding force in our lives. This inner guidance also protects us from the dangers of the inner journey, for in integral yoga psychology the psychic center brings discernment (*viveka*) and is the only part of the being that cannot be touched by the tempting powers of the intermediate zone. As this proceeds our life harmonizes with our inner being so that all parts of our existence become increasingly aligned with our deeper psychic center -- our work, our play, our relationships, our diet, our exercise, our entertainment, the books we read, the influences and experiences we open to. In this process the ego becomes more and more transparent, purified, receptive to the psychic's direction. The frontal self undergoes a psychic transformation that thoroughly alters its make-up.

In western psychology, however, our psychic center is viewed from the perspective of our ordinary, frontal self. To more clearly understand the psychic center or true soul, it is necessary to consider what it is confused with by western psychology and hides it -- the ego, the self.

### **Western Understandings of Our Psychic Center**

We all experience life from the perspective of a subjective self, an ego, the sense of "I". It is a fact of our daily life. What is the essence of this "I"-ness? It lies in this: the feeling of identity, of being a

person, a subjectivity. It is not only a sense of presence or being or existence but of being *a* presence, *a* being, *an* existence, the experience and feeling of, “I am, I exist.” Where does this fundamental source of selfhood come from?

What western psychology has studied in great detail is the self, the ego. In conventional psychology the ego is generally regarded as the center of psychological life. Psychoanalytic theory even goes so far as to define the ego as “the seat of consciousness”. Further, it delineates numerous characteristics and functions of the ego, such as reality testing, memory, the control of motility and impulse control, orientation in space and the center of perception. It integrates the demands of external reality with inner psychological life, resulting in the development of the unconscious, for the ego controls the unconscious defense mechanisms that keep unacceptable feelings and parts of the self out of awareness.

Yet despite how much psychology has learned about the self, there remain fundamental questions that cannot be resolved within the paradigm of conventional psychology. For western psychology, like all of science, starts from the surface appearance of things and tries to understand the deeper structure from without. But this method has definite limits in the field of psychology. Traditional psychology has been unable to plumb the inner depths of the psyche because its methodology of empirical observation can only go as far as the physical mind can go. It is unable to see beyond into our deeper being. The self, for all that psychology has learned about it, remains a mystery.

### ***Svabhava***

From an integral perspective both the sense of self and the sense of continuity emanate from our psychic center, our true soul. Without reference to this eternal soul the experience of selfhood cannot be understood. Object relations and Buddhism are committed to world views that exclude the soul and are therefore unable to grasp central aspects of the experience of self. Here we find that psychoanalytic self psychology provides some help.

Self psychology accepts the reality of the self more fully than object relations or intersubjective

approaches that see only self-other images. Kohut defines the self as “an independent center of initiative that is continuous in time and space.” (Kohut, 1971). While contemporary trends in self psychology focus more on self experience than on meta-psychological theory, traditional self psychology fleshes out three lines of development as especially important. There is a line of expansive ambitions, an area of skills and talents, and a line of ideals and idealization (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1984.) This recasts the psychological content of Freud’s tripartite id-ego-superego while discarding the clumsy mental apparatus model of the mind that became so theoretically problematic for conventional psychoanalysis (and both Freud’s and Kohut’s models can be seen as a way of describing the lower emotional, central emotional, and higher emotional levels of the heart.) But where does this “center of initiative” come from?

Self psychology reaches to what Kohut called the “nuclear self”, a seed of potential that the self emerges from. Unfortunately, this concept is limited by Kohut’s tether to his roots in classical psychoanalysis in its attribution of the origins of this seed to the earliest relationship with the mother and father. The “nuclear self” contains the “nuclear program” for the self, the capacities and direction for life that requires sustaining, supporting human relationships in order to unfold throughout the life cycle. Self psychology is not alone in looking beyond the self for the source of the self. Most depth systems use some version of this explanation. In gestalt therapy the self emerges from the organism, and as Perls (1969) said, “The ego knows very little, the organism knows everything.” Existential therapy speaks of the “authentic self” which emerges from the ground of being. Jungian psychology refers to the archetype of the Self as the organizing principle for the ego. All of these are powerful speculations that seem to point to something similar, namely a source beyond the ego of identity and potential, some greater ground of wisdom from which the self emerges.

These theories begin to touch upon the outer half of a more precise vedantic conception of *svabhava*, defined earlier as intrinsic nature, essential self, or natural constitution. Vedantic psychology holds that our true psychic center is the soul, called the *chaitya purusha* or *antaratman* in the Upanishads, and is the real spiritual person within, our evolving soul. Each unique “soul is a force of self-

consciousness that formulates an idea of the Divine in it and guides by that its action and evolution, its progressive self-finding, its constantly varying self-expression... That is our Svabhava, our own real nature." (Sri Aurobindo, (*Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 502.)

It is from our psychic center that our sense of self ultimately derives. The psychic center manifests this instrumental nature and infuses our organismic existence with its sense of identity, and the various self-images and identifications form its outward skeletal structure. The psychic center fills in this skeletal structure of the self-image to provide the feeling of being a person, a being. It is because of the deeper soul that we have the phenomenological experience of being an existence, a presence, instead of being an empty succession of images with no person within. Integral psychology suggests that the self's sense of stability and continuity is present because it reflects a deeper spiritual fact of our existence, the eternity of our soul. Continuity and stability are facts of our deepest, most essential being, and reflected on our surface experience, animate and fill out the self-image to produce the feeling of stable, continuous selfhood.

Conventional psychology looks to the body, heart, and mind to explain our sense of selfhood and aliveness, but this fundamental sense of being transcends and is not reducible to physical sensations, emotions, or mental images. It resides deeper in our spiritual center. Our uniqueness and most essential identity is our soul, our true individuality, and all theories of the self which leave this out will be lacking. A more comprehensive psychology is necessary, one which is not afraid of all things spiritual lest it appear unscientific, for if spirit is the fundamental nature of reality then both reason and science demand that we pursue this wherever it may lead us.

If, as the highest wisdom of eastern (and western) cultures have affirmed for millennia, our psychic center is an eternal spiritual being, if our frontal organism is only a temporary vesture worn by our deeper soul for this brief lifetime and not our basic identity, this radically changes our conception of who we are. The mystery of the psyche cannot be uncovered through outer means or through an introspection that fails to penetrate past the frontal self. Understanding of the self and psyche must come through a deepening inner vision of which only the spiritual traditions have been capable of so

far, an inner sight which extends all the way to our psychic center.

At present, most human beings are identified with their frontal being. It is in this atmosphere that western psychology has grown up – a nearly complete identification of the self with the instrumental nature. Though our identification with our frontal self and organism is almost total, most everyone has had some glimpses of the greater possibilities of our inner being. Freeing ourselves from this preoccupation with our frontal nature and finding our true identity is a key goal in integral psychology.

Western psychology helps to identify and engage with our self. It maps the self's powers and realms. It has captured the skeletal outlines of the self but not its flesh and blood or inner psychic essence. From the perspective of western psychology the self will always remain a mystery. As Kohut put it,

“The self... is ...not knowable in its essence....We can describe the various cohesive forms in which the self appears, can demonstrate the several constituents that make up the self...and explain their genesis and functions. We can do all that, but we will still not know the essence of the self as differentiated from its manifestations.” (Kohut, 1977, pp. 310-12)

Kohut is correct, so far as he goes, but integral psychology goes farther. What animates the self, what gives it its distinctive individuality, is not simply the nuclear self (or Jung's “Self” or gestalt's “organism” or whatever we choose to call it.) What is possible, even certain at some point in our development, is to directly experience the psychic center from which our self derives. This is our true individuality, our very soul and deepest self. Integral psychology provides a satisfying answer to the puzzle of selfhood, to what the inmost core of subjectivity is, the sense of being a being. Until we find and experience our psychic center, we will not know who we most truly are.

If psychology is to be a discipline that goes beyond the surface to include the full range of the psyche, then it must incorporate eastern discoveries about human consciousness. Acknowledging that the deeper nature of psychic life is ultimately spiritual brings about a paradigm shift that fundamentally

changes the field of psychology.

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