

## Modern Psychology and Spiritual Development - Swami Omkarananda

### Humanity's Need for an Adequate System of Psychology

Any really adequate system of psychology is scientifically and philosophically inconceivable, unless it is founded upon ontological considerations, and until it seeks to make, in its theoretical formulations and practical applications, references not only to the primitive content in the 'unconscious' but also to the parapsychological levels of the mental reservoirs and manifestations.

### New Frontiers of Human Consciousness

With the appearance of the works of Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung, vast territories of human consciousness were made common knowledge of humanity. Parapsychology has uncovered other dimensions of human consciousness. But, do not our investigations render clear to us that there are still higher frontiers of consciousness of which neither modern psychology nor parapsychological studies have any real knowledge? For that knowledge there is the need for contact with men of God-Consciousness.

We include in our critical and painstaking study every field, frontier, dimension of consciousness in man.

### The Superconscious Being in Man

The superconscious Being in us knows things directly, immediately, by being the very heart and ensouling substance of that which it seeks to know. The superconscious Being in us knows all about fire by being fire, all about a tree by being that tree, all about a person by being that person, all about any period in human history by being that period. It has no limits to its extensions, either in time or in space. To it, the past, the present and the future are an open book. To it, all time is NOW, and everything anywhere in the world is HERE.

### Explore the Human Psyche, for the True Secrets of Man and the Universe

The secret alike of the inner nature of man and the inner constitution of the universe, lies locked up in the human psyche, of which the outer conscious mind is but a small formation, a feeble reed vibrant on the surface because of the seething energies beneath.

### Build up New Methods for Unfolding the Divine Potentialities from the Psyche

An applied psychology of, and many spiritual techniques for, the conscious manipulation of the depths, and the full manifestation of the divine potentialities, of the psyche, with

their immediate and practical results for the fullness of Self-Realization, we have to build up.

## Reflections on the Nature of True Psychology

### a) The Role of a Real Psychology

The function of any true psychology consists in approaching the phenomenon of the mind, with the high mission of discovering its limitations and discerning its subtler creative powers, and making it an instrument for the fulfilment of life in the experience of the all-creative divine Consciousness, the supreme Truth, the greatest Value, the highest Good.

The real fulfilment of life lies in the consummate God-Consciousness. It consists in knowing that which is the light and life of all that breathes and all that thinks, of the origin of all that discovers and creates, the source and womb of all forms of consciousness and enjoyment.

### b) The Genius of a Valuable Psychology

Wherein consists the genius of a true and higher psychology except in the body of its experimental techniques for shaping a soul, forming a great destiny, unfolding the highest powers of consciousness, and in rejecting those powers as dangerous toys, as valueless pomp in relation to the infinitude in existence, in knowledge, in delight, it surrenders to man as a right of his birth, as a gift to his epic triumphs and tragedies in a world of Einsteinian relativity, Freudian aberrations, dialectical materialism, economic struggles, philistine art, pornographic literature, abused technological wonders, insane scientific dynamisms, irrational tempers and a thousand inevitable 'injustices' from life, man and nature?

### c) Aspects of a Real and Dynamic Psychology

Wherein consists the genius of a real and dynamic psychology? It lies in the system of its psychological practice that purges perception of its illusions, judgement of its errors, sensation of its limitations, and instincts of their blindness.

It also takes away from knowledge its relativity and indirectness, from emotion its animal force and infatuation, from life its merely human nature and suffering, and from soul its insensitivity and earthliness.

Such a dynamic, practical, exalted and true psychology makes reason all-seeing, love all-embracing, goodness all-including, service a vast selfless and self-giving action. This is the divine psychology that we should build up, advocate and disseminate.

## The Nature of the Truly Dynamic Spiritual Psychology

At its very foundations, spiritual psychology is bound up with those processes that consciously initiate, and consciously govern, the evolution and the development of human awareness to its final status in the unlimited Existence-Delight.

Neither the ancient Greek philosophers, nor the medieval religio-ethical European writings, nor yet the contemporary American parapsychological works, furnish us with any elements comparable in the excellences of their insight into the fundamental spiritual nature of man, in relation to his basic empirical involvements, limitations and experiences, to those formulated in the traditional psychology of the spiritual and philosophic East.

In the East, whether it was during the dawns that preceded the rise of the Christian era, or in our own times when a dozen of the dynamic Western offshoots of Psychology are warring to dominate the general human life as appliances in its services, psychology has always remained a system of great scientific self-discipline subserving the aims of Self-realisation and a divine life lived from planes of consciousness distinctively supramental.

Till the terminal years of the nineteenth century, and the development and wide dissemination of the Freudian theories, Western psychology remained merely formal, an effete and purposeless speculative pseudo-science.

## The Value of the Classical European Psychology for the Evolution of the Human Individual

Among the forces that fashioned, in the field of psychology, the structures of classical European ethico-religious tradition, Plotinus and St. Augustine figure preeminent. Their pre-eminence consists in the extent of their contributions and the importance of their thought.

Plotinus the mystic and Augustine the saint - these two Westerners of exalted philosophic experience, have bequeathed to the world a perennial psychology that is full of noetic illumination and higher cultural import. Its value for the self-disciplines of individual human consciousness should not be underestimated, much less ignored.

## The Structure of Plotinian Psychology

The introspectionist Plotinian conception of psychology as a science concerned with the phenomena of consciousness conceived in terms of self-consciousness, comes closest to the Indian psychological standpoint, emerging from the fundamental notions of vidya and avidya, from a host of cognate concepts and practical techniques veering around them, and verging towards a mergence of the individual in the Infinite.

Plotinus, in his contention that the activity of the soul is the condition of our knowledge, and that the knowledge-process has for its climax a mystical communion with the ontological One beyond Nous,

in his argument that the 'different' souls of Plato and 'mental powers' of Aristotle indicate stages of degradation of the divine Person, that the connection of the soul with the body is descent, that the consciousness of self declines with the mind's increasing engrossment in external objects,

in his insistence upon the turning of the mind away from the inferior things of the senses toward the inner reality of the soul, the urgency of a transcendence of the multiple things of the realm of mind, the inner life of timeless meditation, and the pure and passionless contemplation of the ultimate God,

shows such indistinguishable resemblances with some important aspects of the Indian mind, that, were it not for the extraordinary comprehensiveness and richness, the astounding vitality and vigour, the yet higher metaphysical loftiness, the yet greater mystical power, the yet keener psychological penetration, of the Indian thought, -

he would have given himself to us, more totally as an ancient Indian seer awake and active in a modern sage, rather than remain a merely pagan occidental mystic that he is.

### The Provenance of Psychology and the Dignity of Philosophy

If right up to the beginning of the twentieth century, psychology was never accorded any honour as a science, nor permitted an entrance into the academic circles, much less accorded a prominent and proud place in the curricula of the institutions for higher education, it was for these two main reasons:

1. The achievements of psychology, till then, were too meagre and too poor to compel the attention of serious thinkers, thinkers who felt constrained to set aside anything that cannot be reduced to a system of thought based on valid knowledge and enduring laws and principles central to that system;
2. To the philosophic intelligence strong, profound, perspicacious, subtle, scientific that it is, the branch of psychology gave itself as nothing more than its handmaid. Therefore, no tasks beyond what are merely mental in manifestation, the merely psychological in expression - what is, though subjective, merely secondary, in experience, - could be assigned, and yet again for the reason that the discovery of the very laws and principles that underlie all mental processes and phenomena of consciousness, formed purely its own competent function.

The phenomenal progress the Western Psychology has made in all directions, does not implicate its intrinsic capacity to sound the depths of heights of mind, and to understand and utilize the foundations of the fields of its study.

What psychology discovers as an inmost cause of any particular mental phenomenon is found by philosophy to be an outer, or secondary, or intermediary, or instrumental cause, to a deeper cause that its insight and reliable techniques of speculative vision and perceptive experience hold.

The proper study of mankind is man. But, man is not mind alone.

Therefore, the field of psychology that concerns itself with some of the most dynamic workings of the human mind, cannot hope to aspire to an achievement of the dignity of the functions executed by philosophy whose primary task consists in a deep study of the fundamental principles of the very being of man.

The distinctive strength of Eastern philosophy over the modern European philosophy lies in its age-old truth which is the reverse affirmation of the Cartesian assertion, 'I think, therefore, I am'.

Whatever may be such differences in the relative strength and greatness between the philosophy of one culture and that of the other, philosophy holds, everywhere in the world, its own dignity as the earliest of sciences, as the science of sciences, as the parent of all modern fields of study, investigation and pursuit.

### The Rational Psychology

Contradistinguished from scientific psychology, the philosophical, or the rational psychology concerns itself with the derivation of the facts of consciousness a priori from the concept of the mind, and exercises its theoretical acumen over speculative problems, abstract interests, controversial issues which involve it in epistemological ramifications, logical presuppositions, and ontological references.

The wrangles over the genesis, the structure, the nature of the mind, the battles between determination and free will, the as yet unresolved riddle of body-mind relationship, the methodological problem, constitute some of the principal areas eliciting and keeping preoccupied the interest of the philosophical psychology.

We take our stand upon the point that in the interests of a more comprehensive and fuller knowledge of the human mind, and for a more adequate power and range of technique for dealing with the realities of life, we cannot dispense with a consideration, in psychology, of metaphysical themes, cannot isolate psychology from philosophy, and treat it separately.

Without philosophy, psychology has no history except from very recent years, and risky it is to reject all metaphysics from psychology and yet retain a position non-metaphysical. It is, formally at least, well known that psychology as enquiring into knowing as a fact is connected with philosophy on the epistemological side which concerns itself with the validity of knowledge, and on the side of metaphysics, psychology is related to

philosophy in so far as it submits the validity of its fundamental assumptions to the tests by metaphysics.

In all theories of man, in all problems of the Self, which cannot be shuffled from the field of philosophy, psychological issues are implicit and inextricable. But since psychology has sought severance from philosophy, a severance which it could not have achieved except by banishing the concept of Man or the Self, or the Soul, or Mind as such, and in the modernity of its mood made claims plainly too extravagant, and declaimed rational psychology, metaphysical psychology, in a manner quite dogmatic, irrational and unscientific, just where the defendant's tone has always been cautious, catholic, accommodative, and rarely obtrusive, we must emphasize the intimate relationship between, or rather the interrelationship of, philosophy and psychology and thus make most meaningful the facts of life, furnish more firm foundations for the science of psychology itself, and render it more useful for an understanding and conscious direction towards complete development of human mind and life.

### The Religious Psychology

The tripartite logical analysis by psychology, of the integral psychical existence, into cognition, conation, volition, and other specialized modern approaches to the vital problems of the inner life, have by encouraging a compartmental view of the synthetic unity of mind in its relations to the Divine, fostered misleading notions and dangerously inadequate and partial theories and treatment of the origin, processes and development of the religious consciousness.

### Psychology - Empirical and Transcendental

Apparently a victim of time, man enshrines the Timeless, and therefore, carries in himself the capacity to dissolve time and rule everything. The best way to prepare ourselves for a life of dignity, nobility, power, happiness, peace and progress, here on earth, is to prepare ourselves for Eternity, to live our life in the consciousness of, and in relation to, the Infinite and the Timeless.

Our life can have no real fulfilment here on earth, except by our hold on the Timeless, because, the outer is only an effect of the inner creative reality.

The effect is lesser than the Cause, and therefore, defective and exposed to difficulties, and has its salvation in that which is greater than itself, the Greatest, the Cause.

### Psychology - Secular and Divine

Our time-governed mind has behind it the timeless Dimension and creative Consciousness, with which meditation attunes us.

The mind in a genius is distinguished by serenity, silence, luminosity, freedom from the useless thoughts that dominate the normal human being and the subnormal individuals

who form the main subject of treatment for psychoanalysis and other depth psychologies of our age.

### Materialistic Psychology

Dominant in the Western psychology, the materialistic contention that mind constitutes but a product of matter, takes a standpoint that surrenders it to a logical parallogism in that it turns its back upon a cognition of the fact that matter, far from affording an explanation of, is itself explained by, mind.

### An Analysis of Modern Psychology

Comprising of many loosely-related 'inquiries and techniques', modern psychology is, as any critical intelligence can easily see, yet so very rudimentary and superficial, lacks essential worth and is limited in the scope of its utility.

Now a sneaking physiologist, now an apologetic biologist, now an unlicenciate and ill-equipped medical man, the Western psychologist is never a psychologist except in his old, worn-out self of the centuries that preceded the seventeenth and the eighteenth.

A deep analysis of the phenomenon of modern psychology drives us to the conclusion that such superficialities of human personality as behaviour, complexes, neuroses, psychoses dominate, blur and almost blot the vision of the Western psychologist to the true psychology of the inner being, the underlying and ever-persisting inner individual, that will, through its psychic entity, continue to project problems, or throw up healing forces.

### Four Fundamental Limitations of Modern Psychology

The excellent Western achievements in psychology, arrived at by painstaking labours of generations of great psychologists, deserve our admiration. Yet, certain important facts concerning this modern Western psychology have to be borne in mind.

They are:

one, there is no psyche in it, no soul, as William James has avowedly acknowledged; not even mind is central to it;

two, it has done away with the introspective method;

three, it is yet to discover, as a prominent historian of experimental psychology has stated, its own man of genius, a genius who, we would like to expect, would restore to it a truly psychological countenance, and

four, though a century old, experimental psychology for all its enormous achievements, and all too rapid strides in progress, is yet scientifically not mature, and whatever be the

utility of its application, it cannot justly bear a comparison in meaning, significance and value either to the traditional Western or Eastern psychology.

### Need for Revaluation of the Central Conceptions of Scientific Psychology and Psychoanalysis

Not merely a revaluation of the fundamental notions and the working hypotheses of, but also an assignment of fresh tasks and higher functions to, the contemporary scientific psychology is essential now, if psychology has to render more service and least disservice to humanity.

Advanced psychological investigation within the field of vital psychoanalytic studies, must concern itself primarily with all those perceptions and purposes that are bound up with the discovery of the true meaning of, and the giving of a right direction to, human life. The problem of the fundamental integration of the entire Man should engage its best attention and energies.

The fact is, the basic neurosis of the human individual is not so much biological or even psychological, but has its deep-laid roots in something essentially philosophical, and unless psychoanalysis takes note of this, and seeks to make a thorough examination and scrutiny of its nature and trend at its own levels, the discipline of psychoanalytical thought will gain no backbone and acquire no all-vitalizing, all-unifying, all-explicatory principle.

### The Extent of the Field, the Nature of Data and the Objective of the Functions, of Psychology in Behaviourism

Entrenching itself in mechanism, metaphysical materialism, psychological automatism and environmentalism, and resolutely excluding from the field of scientific studies and rational instrumentation, every phenomenon excepting the purely physical and the physiological, behaviourism coerces itself into the commitment of adumbrating that nothing mental is fundamental, will is ineffectual, reason has no freedom, deliberation and design are figments, ends have no reality, purposes no efficacy.

By that very entrenchment, behaviourism is further forced to assert dogmatically that no conscious intelligence superintends performance of the apparently purposeful actions, that thought never influences human behaviour, and that consciousness itself is an unneeded concept.

Thus, then,

one, by an otiose theoretical demonstration of the dependence of consciousness on the mechanism of the cerebral cortex and the nervous system, an equation of the incessant mental processes and experiences with sheer excrescences of the cerebral process, inconsequential in their influence upon the bodily behaviour,

two, by an explanation of the mental phenomena on a mechanical basis and in terms of mindless events,

three, by a justification of the untenable standpoint it is constrained to take up concerning the explicability of the vitally dynamic human organisms of the reflective intelligence, as determined in all their activities, even as motions of matter are determined, and as no more than merely complicated automata,

four, by a rejection of all considerations of assigning to mind any reality, much less any role required, in the interpretation of the distinctive, and insistent psychological nature of man,

five, by investing psychology itself with the sole function, and the sole aim, of establishing connections between stimulus and response, of tracing the cause for a given kind of behaviour through specifying the stimulus that produced it,

six, by describing all behaviour in terms of a response to stimuli, by setting aside all instincts, feelings and all subjective experiences as figments, and refusing to accept that they constitute reliable data for psychological investigations, -

behaviourism thinks it has rendered psychology scientific.

Behaviour, then, as behaviourism understands it, is established experimentally, demonstrably, scientifically, as the resultant of conditioned responses. In the interests of building up a true psychology, thinkers of great eminence in the fields of mental phenomena, need to subject the very vitals of behaviourism to a trenchant scrutiny.

#### What Should Be the Future Developments and Tasks of Modern Psychology

A true psychology would certainly seek to build up a comprehensive complexus of most profound perceptions into mind in itself, mind as such, mind as manifest in its fundamental movements, and as expressive in behaviour and the varied activities of life.

It would see the mind in its basic downward trends and also in relation to the possible lines of its spiritual ascent.

It should also build up universally valid methods for refining mind, for transforming its nature and energies, for heightening the powers of its self-transcending capacities, and for subjecting it to the touch of the divine Intelligence and accustoming it to the environment of divine Living.

#### The Metaphysical Psychology of Emotional Integration

Any real emotional integration in individual human life must remain impossible of effectuation unless we assign to human emotions an uplifting, sublimating, all-integrating

devotion to ideals that while lying outside the pale of immediate human grasp, yet influence and govern the perfection of the whole of human life.

What, then, is this devotion to ideals and values such as love, truth, beauty, delight, knowledge, but purely a religious phenomenon?

And when we refer to the word 'religion' here, we are concerned with the religion not as an institutional faith, but as a relation between man and that infinite Power which is enshrined in himself, in all humanity, in all nature, and which presents itself to the highest in his thought as Existence, Knowledge and Delight, as Truth, Beauty, Immortality. Nothing can satisfy human emotions for long; everything wears out its charm, appeal and hold; therefore, emotional integration is conceivable only by the pursuit of values which are eternal, timeless, and by that very reason, hold for man an unfading appeal and charm, pour into him an inexhaustible inspiration, delight, peace, power and perfection.

Ultimately, the human problem is a metaphysical problem, whose dynamic aspect presents itself as the religious problem. The remedy is not in any social adjustment, any grand intellectual achievement, any unusual economic opulence, but in tending towards something ideal, something infinite in its dimensions, supremely sweet in its nature, endless in its light, illimitable in its power, beautiful beyond all effability, and what is that, but God? Any type of approach to this supreme Value that the divine Being is, is religion, and the role of religion in the integration of human emotions and nature is fundamental and irreplaceable.

#### The Value of Religion for Emotional Integration

The twin-force that disrupts all emotional harmony, emerges from two fundamental urges in human nature, that is, self-preservation and self-reproduction, accompanied by desire for fame, power, money. The touch of religion exerts, among other things, the most sublimating influence upon these two dark forces in human nature. It alters his attitude to money and makes wealth a thing that is to be gained by right exertion, sacrifice, service, and used for purposes which make for human peace, happiness, progress, advancement, perfection; it transforms man's love for woman, makes it something exalted, human, noble, ideal, helps him perceive in her the beauty his better self seeks to love in something that is infinite, eternal. Religion, then, is the greatest of all factors, that make for the emotional integration of the human individual.

- Swami Omkarananda