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In Search of a Healthy Person

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> When the wren and cicada were told that there are birds which can fly hundreds of miles without stopping they quickly agreed that such a thing was obviously impossible. "You and I know very well," they said, "that the furthest one can ever get even by the most tremendous effort is that elm tree over there. . . . All these stories about flying hundreds of miles at a stretch are sheer nonsense."
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> Arthur Waley[1]

Are we all that we can be? Or are there greater heights and depths of psychological capacity within us, undreamed of by most, glimpsed by some, and nurtured and brought to fruition by but a few?

If such capacities exist, then what is their nature, how can they be recognized, how can we learn about them, and how can they best be cultivated?

This book was born out of a search for the answers to these questions.

THE SEARCH FOR SOMETHING MORE

The assumption that there are unexplored reaches of the human potential has been a theme expressed across cultures and millennia. Goaded from behind by an existential cry in the face of human suffering and limitations, drawn forward by a sense of something "more"—fueled by myth, legend, and occasional experience—individuals from all walks of life, on different continents, across centuries, have left the safety and comforts of home,

family, and security; have endured every conceivable natural and human-made hardship; have tempered and trained every aspect of mind and body; and have followed both the most degrading and the most uplifting of disciplines and leaders: all in an effort to reach or attain—what? That so many have endured so much speaks eloquently of the power that the desire for this "more" can assume.

This desire can be consciously cultivated. In several psychologies, such as humanistic psychology in the West and Hindu in the East, human motivation is seen as hierarchically organized, and the desire to actualize one's full potential and transcend our customary limitations is viewed as the peak of this hierarchy. Many psychologies which aim at actualizing this "more" regard the "purification" of the desire for it, both by cultivating the desire itself and by paring away competing pulls, as a central component of their training. They claim that a major, perhaps the major, prerequisite for attaining the very highest levels of psychological maturity and well-being, is that the desire to do so should be the central motive of one's life. For them, as for Kierkegaard, "Purity of heart is to will one thing."

For most people, such single-mindedness and intensity of interest are foreign, even incomprehensible. Yet almost all of us have some experience of this same pull, this same desire and curiosity to know and be all that we might become. Who among us has not puzzled over perennial questions such as, Who am I? What am I? Is this all there is to me—to life? and How do I fit into it all? Who has not made some tentative explorations, either theoretical or practical, external or internal, intellectual or experiential? And who has not found such questions uncomfortably disturbing, forcing us to reflect on the "unconscious" assumptions and habits which govern us and yet usually remain hidden from awareness beneath the busyness and routine of our daily lives? The search, and the means for avoiding it, can and do take many forms. This book attempts to explore the nature of this "more" and the paths which point towards it.

WHY HAS THERE BEEN SO LITTLE STUDY OF WELL-BEING?

One of the primary reasons for the existence of Western psychiatry and psychology would seem to be to contribute to our understanding of psychological well-being and to enhance our ability to realize it. Yet, paradoxically, there has been extraordinarily little research and thinking about the nature of psychological health. Rather, our Western clinical psychologies have been almost entirely pathology oriented. Why might this be so?

As a relatively young discipline born around the turn of the century, psychology sought to establish its respectability by emphasizing objectivity and

hard-nosed empirical criteria. In this it has been relatively successful, but the price has been a neglect of more subtle, subjective, and difficult areas which do not lend themselves as readily to objective measurement and criteria. Yet these areas include some of the most basic questions such as the nature of consciousness and of well-being. Joseph Royce[2] commented that in psychology some of "the most important issues go begging. I have a rough rule of thumb which says the more important the problem, the less we know about it."

For a number of reasons, the major emphasis has been on the understanding and treatment of psychopathology. This is hardly surprising since much psychopathology is obvious, readily observable and measurable, and so clearly associated with enormous suffering that its understanding and alleviation are obvious pressing needs, needs supported to some degree by most societies.

By comparison, the study of exceptional health, which faces a number of difficulties above and beyond those involved in the study of pathology, has been neglected. Perhaps the most fundamental of these difficulties are questions of definition, identification, and measurement of healthy people. If we don't know what psychological well-being is, then how do we recognize and measure it? The psychologically healthy do not wear name tags proclaiming their status. In fact, some traditions suggest they may tend to seek anonymity. Further, they are not thrust together in hospitals or outpatient clinics, and their sense of well-being may be manifested in relatively subtle changes which are hard to measure. Yet, in order to research the nature of well-being, we first need to know what it is; and in order to know what it is, we need to find subjects; and in order to find subjects, we need to know what qualities we are looking for. Thus, we may become caught in a catch-22.

Most observation and theorizing have therefore been on disturbed individuals with only occasional extrapolations to the healthy. Thus our major psychological models, which until relatively recently have been almost entirely psychoanalytic and behavioral, have been largely based on pathology. For example, the index to Freud's complete works contains over 400 references to neurosis and none to health.

The fact that our major psychological models have tended in the past to be pathology-based has a number of important and self-prophetic consequences because of the nature of models. For what is being increasingly recognized is that our models are powerful determiners of the ways in which we perceive and interpret our world and ourselves. They tend to act as filters, determining the ways in which we select, observe, analyze, and interpret phenomena, and it seems that they do so in self-fulfilling, self-prophetic ways. In short, we tend to see what is consistent with our models and to overlook or misinterpret what is not.

Consider the implications then, of the fact that our traditional psychological models focus primarily on pathology. Might they not tend then to overlook, or even to misinterpret and pathologize, well-being?

Such indeed seems to be the case. Consider, for example, the way in which psychoanalysis, which was for a long time our major personality theory, has viewed suggestions of "higher needs" such as the pull towards self-actualization and self-transcendence, and reports of practices designed to induce advanced states of consciousness and well-being. Recall that in the psychoanalytic model, the major human motive has been viewed as sexual and that psychodynamic conflict has been seen as a given, to be reduced but never fully relieved. From such a perspective, motives such as self-actualization and self-transcendence cannot be accorded independent validity but must be interpreted and diagnosed in terms of defenses against "real" drives. Here we begin to see a general principle: namely, that what lies outside the range of a model may tend to be pathologized and diagnosed away by it.

Thus, for example, mystical experiences have been interpreted as "neurotic regressions to union with the breast,"[3] ecstatic states seen as narcissistic neurosis,[3] yoga and Zen dismissed as artificial catatonias,[4] and enlightenment diagnosed as regression to intrauterine stages.[5] Thus some of our traditional psychological models, though having contributed much to our understanding of psychopathology and human nature, may have limited in some ways our ability to appreciate and understand well-being.

Another possible constraint lies in the personality, experience, and maturity of the investigators. It is an interesting question to what degree we can perceive and understand levels of well-being beyond our own. Our own psychological maturity might well set the limit to that which we can appreciate in others. Maslow's[6] concept of the "Jonah complex," the fear of our own and others' potential and greatness, may be relevant here. If, as Maslow and others[7,8] have suggested, we actively defend against our own higher aspects as well as the lower, then we may be incapable of seeing beyond our own level of development, partly at least, because we are unwilling to. We see what we look for. Eastern traditions offer a particularly powerful metaphor for this, saying that a pickpocket who meets a saint sees only pockets.

Cultural factors are also probably involved. For example, the success of science and technology has been so great in their fields that science has been termed the religion of our time. For most of us, well-being and "liberation" are assumed to be found externally through technological manipulation and mastery of the environment rather than mastery of our minds and ourselves.

In addition, many of the prevailing cultural values, goals, and myths are so clearly inconsistent with true well-being as to be culturally and individ-

ually damaging. To a sizable portion of the population, perhaps the majority, the material triumvirate of wealth, power, and prestige seems the dominant life goal, a goal symbolized by Hollywood stars and the super-rich, and fanned by a media which often caters to and cultivates the lowest and most powerful common denominators of greed and fear.[9] Much in our culture seems not only inconsistent with, but positively damaging to, the exploration and realization of true well-being.

WHY STUDY WELL-BEING?

Why study well-being? One reason is that speculation and extrapolation from the less healthy may not be capable of providing a complete picture of the human potential. Even healthier specimens do not necessarily show us the limits of full development since there always remains the possibility of further latent potentials.

This is not to deny that studies of psychological disorder can be valuable and suggestive. The error comes when we fail to recognize the possibility that the psychologically healthy may display capacities, ways of being, modes and depths of experiencing, interests, values, and motives that do not show up at all in the unhealthy. In addition, the very healthy may not do some things which are so widespread in the culture as to have been accepted as universal and intrinsic to human nature.

Indeed it is an interesting question to consider to what extent a truly mature individual might be recognized and understood by the rest of us, and to what extent he or she might appear, by our cultural norms, eccentric, irrational, and perhaps at times even disturbed. As the translators of Patanjali's yoga, one of the best known of all yoga teachings, remarked,

> The behavior of a saint is often very hard for us to understand; it seems strange, arbitrary, or capricious, precisely because it is not subject to our familiar compulsions.[10]

Only by direct study of such people can we find out if this is so. Probably no amount of theorizing from the study of psychological disability can give us a full picture of potential capability. Psychological well-being may therefore hold quite a few surprises for us.

Examining the very healthy should also give us some insights into not only what they are like, but also how they got there, why the rest of us didn't, and how, if we wish, we can begin to move in the directions they reveal to us. Let us list some basic questions which we feel need to be addressed.

For example, how do the very healthy achieve and express their well-being? What attitudes, values, and beliefs do they hold, what qualities do they

cultivate, what habits do they have, what emotions predominate, how do they interact with others, whom do they prefer to spend time with, and what types of relationships do they seek?

How did they get there? What family and social backgrounds and environments did they spring from and what can we learn from them about what Maslow[6] called "eupsychic" factors, i.e., factors which facilitate psychological well-being? What education, training, and disciplines, if any, appear to be necessary or effective in eliciting exceptional development?

What impact do the very healthy have on the rest of us, both personally and socially, and how can we best learn from them and use them?

How have the rest of us limited ourselves? Do we carry limiting beliefs and assumptions, recognized or unrecognized, about who and what we are and must be to function, succeed, and be happy? What cultural values, norms, and expectations have we adopted which are detrimental and limiting rather than, as we believe, helpful? How could our interactions and relationships foster rather than hinder the well-being of all participants? These are just some of the very practical questions which spring to mind when we consider a direct examination of positive health.

The study of psychological health may also lead to a productive cross-fertilization between traditional psychologies and those which have emphasized the study of well-being, such as humanistic and transpersonal psychologies in the West, and Buddhist and Sufi psychologies in the East. This is a useful antidote to our usual assumption that one psychological model, usually our own, must be correct and others necessarily wrong. Rather what is becoming apparent is that *any* model, including any psychology, is necessarily partial and selective, and that different psychologies may be partially correct and complementary rather than necessarily antagonistic.

An examination of other models and psychologies necessarily points us back to a fresh examination of our own. So many of our own hypotheses slip into unconscious assumptions and hence become filters from which we examine the world. The awareness of other perspectives and models helps us raise our own assumptions back into awareness and forces us to acknowledge the possibility that they are partial, and culturally and temporally relative, rather than being universal descriptions of human nature. Furthermore, with a deeper understanding of multiple psychologies and models, rather than just the one with which we are most familiar, it becomes possible to see commonalities and begin to build conceptual bridges from one to another.

In addition to the development of broader psychological theory, the study of the farther reaches of human development may well bring with it a deeper exploration and understanding of the practices which aim to induce it, for

example, meditation. In recent years, as mental health professionals have begun to practice and research these disciplines, they have begun to be at least partially understood in Western psychological terms. Goleman and Epstein provide one such interpretation in their excellent chapter on Buddhist meditation (see Chapter 9). There is now a rapidly expanding research literature which, although only in its early stages, does lend some support to ancient claims that meditation is a practice capable of eliciting a range of altered states of consciousness and enhancing psychological and psychosomatic health.[11,12] This seems to represent a fertile meeting place for Eastern practice and Western science.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY OF WELL-BEING

It has been frequently observed, and almost as often forgotten, that there exists a subtle and pervasive dialectical interaction between psychological systems and the individuals and societies in which they arise.[13,14] We would suggest that psychological assumptions and logics may be derived from, and may then feed back into and reinforce, the beliefs and cosmologies of the larger culture in which they originate. Cultural beliefs shape individuals and their self-images, including those of mental health professionals. They in turn may crystallize their own beliefs as formal models, and then project and look for support for these models in the individuals and culture from which they were derived. The crystallization and reification of cultural beliefs in the form of psychological theories may in turn tend to permeate back into the larger culture, thus effectively constructing and concretizing a social reality. Those aspects of formal psychological models which resonate, either immediately or eventually, with cultural beliefs may become accepted as reality and submerge into and as the cultural paradigm. At this stage the beliefs seem to be largely unrecognized for what they are, and people tend to accept them unconsciously and unquestioningly as statements of truth.

For example, it is probably difficult for any of us to appreciate the full extent of the influence of Freudian psychology on our culture and ourselves. So many of the tenets of psychoanalysis are taken for granted as truths by so many of us that it comes as a shock to realize that they are only beliefs, only one way of looking at things, only one possible perspective and model, and that other equally valid perspectives exist. For example, most people in our culture would probably accept almost without question the psychoanalytic hypotheses that the unconscious is largely driven by brutal id forces, locked in perpetual conflict, which can never be fully resolved or transcended; that motivation is largely or primarily sexually derived; and that defenses and some degree of continuous vigilance are essential in order to control and

manage the forces of the id. Furthermore, terms such as defenses, repression, projection, and unconscious, have become part of our everyday vocabulary.

In short, Freudian psychology seems to have played a significant but largely unrecognized role in shaping our individual and cultural beliefs about who and what we are and can be. On the other hand, other psychologies suggest very different views of human nature.

Now if everything we do, think, and say is a function of who and what we think we are then the question of the cultural acceptance of one view of human nature over another becomes extraordinarily important. If our prevailing cultural and psychological models have underestimated what we are and what we can become, then perhaps we have set up a self-fulfilling, self-limiting prophecy. In such a case, the exploration of extreme psychological well-being, and the permeation of that knowledge into psychology and the larger culture, becomes a particularly important undertaking. Indeed it may even be that shifting our self-concept may be one of the most strategic interventions for personal and cultural transformation. What is envisaged as possible may become a compelling vision and attraction.

THE VISION OF THIS BOOK

Several years ago when we first became interested in psychological well-being we were astonished at just how little was actually know about it and how little it was discussed in Western psychology. For although implicit and often unrecognized beliefs abounded, indeed whole schools of psychology and psychotherapy appeared to be based on them, there were few explicit models and statements, and even fewer hard facts. Therefore it seemed to us that the first task was to bring together the most advanced thinking on this subject and see what could be learned from examining and comparing a range of descriptions from the world's major psychological systems.

We were particularly interested in looking at the extremes of psychological growth, the farthest reaches, the greatest heights, the most stirring visions of human potential and realization. From these we hoped to extract and integrate general principles which would hold across traditions and cultures. Also we hoped that we might obtain an overview of current thinking and use this to point towards the future, seeing the most fruitful avenues for personal and social investigation and application.

With this vision in mind, several issues arose. The first of these was which disciplines to represent. Should we include all the major psychological systems or limit ourselves selectively? Our choice was to emphasize those which addressed themselves specifically to the nature of exceptional psychological well-being.

Prominent among such disciplines are various non-Western psychologies, and this raised the question of how best to introduce and incorporate them. Although attitudes are rapidly changing, for many of us in the West such systems have traditionally been viewed with suspicion. It is only in recent years that we have begun to recognize that certain of the non-Western systems may be psychologies which, in their own but quite different ways, represent conceptual frameworks as sophisticated as our own. Only with the recognition of phenomena such as paradigm clash and state dependency have we begun to be able to appreciate alternate models based on different assumptive frameworks. Therefore we felt it important to include a description (Chapter 3) of the nature of various non-Western psychologies in order to dispel many of these misunderstandings, as well as to demonstrate how theoretical clashes and inappropriate pathologizing interpretations can result if we are not aware of the biasing effects which our own beliefs and models exert on us.

Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, and shamanistic perspectives are presented in subsequent chapters. These are complemented by Western views on relationships, empirical research, and the development of consciousness, and by personal accounts of the experience of well-being described by noted masters. Because these maps and guides have remained largely separated from one another over the centuries, divided by language, culture, and parochial claims of superiority, it has been little appreciated how closely some of them converge in their deepest levels, displaying at their core tendencies towards a "transcendent unity" which Schuon[15] and others[7,8] have suggested as one of the hallmarks of the world's great psychological-religious systems. Holding these maps within the pages of a single book encourages us to look more closely beneath surface differences to extract the commonalities and parallels which run more deeply. Integrative chapters by Wilber, Shapiro, Walsh and Vaughan are devoted to just that task.

A statement which we encountered repeatedly in various disciplines was that intellectual understanding of them was dependent upon some degree of direct personal experience. This obviously limited the range of potential authors considerably. Few people indeed could meet the criteria of both intellectual and experiential expertise. Thus we found ourselves choosing from a small, in fact a very small, pool of people who were skilled communicators and had also attempted to live the disciplines they were describing. The authors of this book meet these two demanding criteria.

Here then is a collection of descriptions from many of the world's major accounts of the nature of the human potential. From this vision of who and what we might become may come the motivation to actualize it at personal and cultural levels and to expand our psychologies to describe and facilitate the emergence of this larger Self. The study of the psychologically healthy

may well swell their numbers. Such is our hope and the reason for this book.

The world partly . . . comes to be how it is imagined.

Gregory Bateson[16]

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