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# SELF-HELP

## A Paradigm of Guided Development

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by

**John Stear**

In the context of humanistic psychology self-help may refer to participants of self-help groups (ie those groups running without the presence of a trained professional); it may also refer to work which is done at home, or alone under the ongoing guidance of a psychologist (eg trying out different strategies in everyday life so as to alter fixed or destructive patterns).

However, I would like to explore here an account of that self-help which is an ongoing process in most people's lives. That aspect of self-help which operates at the interface between "religious" and "therapeutic" systems. Not that this is a straightforward area to explore.

Ken Wilber and John Clark are amongst those psychologists who have attempted to erect theoretical models which posit developmental stages through psychological and transcendental levels. This kind of endeavour may increase our awareness of the interrelatedness of religious experiences and practices such as yoga and meditation with the aspirations and ideas of the transpersonal approaches. Indeed the methods encouraged by a guru such as Rajneesh are often similar to those practised within the humanist psychology movement.

I will turn aside from this area briefly to consider a group of people who are rarely mentioned in the pages of *Self and Society*. These are parapsychologists. A curious anomaly seems to exist in the fact that this group who are attempting to prove that people have capacities which operate outside of our normal conceptions of space and time, seem to adopt an extremely behavioural approach. In fact, some literature suggests that most ESP experiments are much more rigidly controlled than their counterparts in behavioural psychology due to the extreme reluctance of mainstream scientists to accept the results of apparently successful experiments.

Are we to assume then that the humanistic approach takes no account of these phenomena? In fact, it is more likely that paranormal phenomena would be encountered through the development of the Self in a therapy context. It would seem commonsense to infer that a therapeutic discharge or heavily charged emotional patterns might be envisaged as a possible factor in allowing ESP faculties to emerge.

In these cases, given that humanistic psychology has a lack of a theoretical framework to include

such phenomena, it is more than likely that a mystical or religious framework will be used. This is the area of Self-Help that I am referring to here. In yoga "siddhis" (abnormal powers) are mentioned as accompanying certain stages of development. These powers (which have much in common with ESP are expected to occur naturally and to become an impediment only if the seeker becomes attached to them in themselves.

An important stage in development seems to occur when an individual, having overcome dependency conditioning, realises that the knowledge of the inner Self can provide the key to love and freedom.

This is where paradoxes start in our written accounts. This Self is alone (in a body) yet not alone (it knows unity with the Universal Mind). So is there any sense in discussing it at all?

An interesting feature of the last century has been the emergence of "channels" ie people who have claimed to have the ability to receive messages from various supra physical beings. Helen Blavatsky, the founder of the theosophist movement, and Alice Bailey both produced numerous volumes of text and instructions through 'psychic' sources.

Readers have noted the complex nature of the thought systems that were introduced in these books and the (to some) surprising internal consistency of the material. Certain sentences have a direct relevance to our times and these may give the critical reader some pause. For instance in the

introduction to my copy of "The Light of the Soul" published by Alice Bailey in 1927, the assertion is made that ". . . the tide of spiritual life has steadily flowed westward, and we may now look for a corresponding climax in the West which will reach its zenith between the years 2965 and 2025".

These writings have been of great use to individuals and groups who have been attempting to harmonise their self development with the guidance provided through the channels. They have had an influence on humanistic psychology in a similar way to the teachings of Gurdjieff.\* It can also be said that the theosophical movement did generate a teacher of outstanding importance and influence in Krishnamurti though his actions were not those that had been expected by the organisation which had so carefully groomed him for his role.

In recent years, Jane Roberts has produced volumes of work which purport to be drawn from an entity known as Seth. These books also display an amazing complexity and internal logic. "The After-death Journal of an American Philosopher" in which Seth provides the means for William James to express his current views on the progress of psychology contains the most lucid and penetrating account of the influence of Freudian thought on our culture that I have read anywhere.

The latest volume of such writings to make an impact in this country is that entitled "A Course of Miracles" which was apparently dictated to Helen Schucman, a medical psychologist at Columbia University during the years 1965 to 1972.

This book runs to over 1000 pages in length and its content is again a remarkably consistent and unusual system of thought with close links to transpersonal psychology and religion.

The correct understanding and use of the phenomena which can produce such works may be a transcendental version of the idea of Self-Help.

They can provide a directional fix which can inspire the individual to leap beyond conflicting theories to a new perception of an evolving planetary consciousness. It should not be forgotten that Eileen Caddy and David Spangler who were both instrumental in the development of the Findhorn community, acted as channels for the community blueprint as it emerged.

John Lilly, another influential figure in the present movement, has detailed his experiences with the "Guides" in his seminal book "The centre of the Cyclone". "...as part of your assignment you are to perfect your means. While staying in the body, of communicating with this space, with us. There are other methods than LSD plus solitude for achieving these results. There are other means than fright and pain".

Humanistic psychology has been much concerned with developing individual awareness by a variety of

#### **Source Reading and References**

- 1) Wilber K - The Atman Project
- 2) Clark J - A Map of Mental States. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984
- 3) Eysenk H. & Sargent K - Explaining the Unexplained. Weidenfield & Nicholson 1982
- 4) Bailey Alice - The Light of the Soul. (yoga Sutras). Lucis Trust 1927
- 5) The Authentic Yoga - Deshpande, P. Rider 1978
- 6) Foundation for Inner Peace - A Course of Miracles. Arkana Press
- 7) Lilly J. The Centre of the Cyclone. Paladin, 1972

different methods since Lilly's experiments of the mid sixties. We are all making our way through life and trying to make the best of the information at disposal. We encounter our fears - and threats to our prevailing belief systems. Often they are overcome and our belief systems expand leading to an enriching view of the possibilities that life has to offer us. This paves the way for a creative exploration of our own and each other's potential.

Most of the public research that has been done on mediums and channels has been centred around the question of "How does it occur?" Various explanations have indicated similarities to those cases of sub-personalities which are prominent in the literature, but they have failed to account for the scope and range of these 'psychic' writings.

It may be more profitable to make a close examination of the content of these sources. If this means a temporary suspension of our belief in "mechanisms" which "explain" these productions, this may not be a retrograde step but one which will allow an opening of our minds to hitherto unacceptable truths.

And in this state we may lose our childish fear of demons and begin to accept the idea that a guided development of receptive members of the human race towards a fuller actualising of their potential is no longer a mythological construct but a pleasantly surprising fact.