

# ***Liberation and Limitation: The Polarities of Being***

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Spirituality and psychotherapy both offer the gift of enlightenment. They both seek to gain a deeper understanding of the life process — being born, living and dying. Despite differences, both systems attempt to provide individuals with more meaning in their lives. Spiritual life often involves renouncing worldly life, becoming an initiate, a monk or a nun, living in a temple or forest, advocating celibacy and denouncing material wealth. In many traditional yogic systems (though not the most ancient) energy is diverted from the first three chakras. These three lower centres symbolise the personal and worldly experience; they are to be overcome and energy channelled into the four higher centres. The belief is that by controlling the lower centres, energy is available for prolonged spiritual experience.

Esoteric doctrines and practices were once the domain of the initiated only, whether an initiate of a tribe, church or cult. Only a select few had access to the secret knowledge. Today there is a desire amongst many people to achieve spiritual wisdom without renouncing worldly life. People are less prepared to renounce the first three chakras (which are the needs for material goods, sexuality and personal

power) to become enlightened. Instead there is an aspiration towards enlightenment while keeping both feet firmly planted on the earth. (The earth is the element corresponding to the first, root, chakra). This aspiration is my interpretation of the New Age. The need to embrace the earth, our mother, and reach for the heavenly father. A uniting of the Earth Goddess and the Sun God. What this really means is a union of the lower/personal and the higher/universal forces within the individual. A marriage of heaven, our liberation, and earth, our limitation; a bringing together of polar opposites.

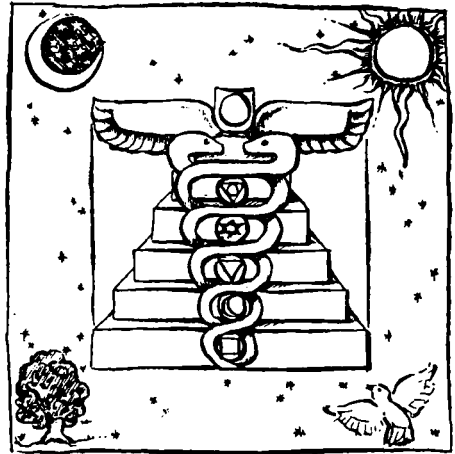
It appears that spirituality deals with liberation while psychotherapy deals with limitation. Liberation refers to my own recognition and acceptance of that which is not contained within me, but larger and all powerful, something that reaches beyond space and time. This is my freedom, my liberation or, to use Maslow's expression, my peak experience. It is also the place of healing inside me, where being and not-knowing are okay, where I can be lifted and held as the spirit moves through me, mapping the direction of my journey. Yoga has helped me most in experiencing and knowing this aspect of my

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being. Meditation, ritual, body awareness and ancient yogic philosophy have all played a part in moving me to a place where I can experience and trust my liberation, my spirituality.

Yet somehow this was not satisfying. What my spiritual practice had failed to accept was my limitation. By limitation I refer to my physical body, the crystallisation of spirit. My separation from the divine source creates feelings of isolation, loneliness and fear. Limitation also embraces my physical and material needs and desires. Recognising the lower self is what psychology and psychotherapy do best. They focus on the individual perceiving the world in their own unique way. They aid the process of identifying and accepting basic needs; needs such as security, sexuality and self esteem have real importance; they do not have to be sublimated as in some spiritual traditions.

Some years ago I was engaged in a theoretical research programme concerning the chakras and psychotherapy. During this time, which followed years of personal work on the chakras, I concluded that psychotherapy and spirituality together in a therapeutic relationship were incompatible. A spiritual guide could not be a psychotherapist and vice versa. But by holding this somewhat academic view I was restricting my work and not really working from the centre of my being. More recently I have reached a new understanding. The wisdom of times past is becoming apparent to me. Now my workshops are a celebration of the marriage of heaven and earth. The spirituality in my work fertilises the psychotherapy. Together, they create an environment that has no fear of our liberation and connec-



tion with the great spirit, while still recognising our separation from the oneness and therefore our limitation.

In many ancient traditions, particularly those of the ancient Egyptians and the Dravidians of central India, the world view knew no separation. Psychology and spirituality went hand in hand along with mythology, politics, philosophy, healing and social laws. All were contained within a common knowledge. What links them all is people. Any in-depth understanding of human beings and our life process, must by its very nature help us organise all the above. To divide them is to split off parts of ourselves. Only when a system accepts both liberation, the higher self, and limitation, the lower self, can people be facilitated towards wholeness. What is required it seems is not so much New Age, but a rediscovery of the ancient age.

There is a need for spirituality and psychotherapy to go hand in hand. We should not however plunge in without due care and responsibility. To quote Ashley Montague: 'Non-swimmers should not be lifesavers'.