

LOSING YOUR SELF

Towards a No-Self Psychology

Ann Faraday

All my thoughts, hopes and fears about the future have changed radically since I fell asleep one night in October 1985 and woke next morning without a self. I don't know what happened to it, but it never returned.

This should have been an occasion for some regret, since I quite liked my self — a self born long ago when I first discovered that other people didn't automatically share my private inner space and couldn't intrude on it without my permission. Since then I'd worked hard on my self to make it a good one, mainly by praying to God to remove the bad thoughts and feelings surrounding it. I soon came to think in terms of my higher self and lower self — and hoped that God would always love and forgive me so long as I at least aspired towards the higher and abjured the lower. The higher self, I decided, was probably my Soul which would eventually unite with God and live happily ever after.



So it came as somewhat of a surprise in later life to learn that the Soul is not to be sought in the heavens but in the depths of the psyche, especially in the 'lower' or 'Shadow' part which I'd tried so hard to disown. Through psychotherapy and dream-work, I discovered that far from diminishing my self, all those buried fears, guilts and 'weaknesses' brought a welcome softness and subtlety to life. In fact they led me on to even deeper 'archetypal' encounters which expanded the boundaries of self into the greater collective psyche of humankind. What had begun as a journey of purification had become one of completion or 'individuation' and I looked forward to attaining what Jung called Wholeness/the Self/God before too

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long; all I needed, or so I thought, were just a few finishing touches.

In the meantime, in true human potential fashion, I was furthering all this growth by 'taking care of' and 'looking after' whichever self I happened to be into at the time. I no longer berated my self for making mistakes and was usually able to say 'no' without feeling guilty. All things considered, including many years of meditation practice, I rated myself at around level 3^{1/2} on the transpersonal ladder of enlightenment.

It was at this point in my imagined psycho-spiritual development that I lost my self. To compound the irony, before going to sleep that night in October 1985, I'd actually done a 'self-remembering' exercise for precisely the opposite purpose — to centre my energies in such a firm and clear sense of self that it would continue into the dreaming process instead of getting lost in it, thereby giving me a 'lucid' dream in which I was aware of dreaming. I went off dutifully repeating the words 'I am, I am, I am . . .' and was more than a little astonished to awaken some hours later laughing because the pundits had got it wrong: the truth was much more like 'I am *not*'. I was emerging from a state of consciousness without any 'I' or 'self' at all, a state that can only be described as pure consciousness. I can't even really say I experienced it, because there was no experiencer and no-thing to experience.

And far from being a matter for regret, this loss of self came as a distinct relief. In fact when bits and pieces of my old identity — hopes, fears, goals, memories, spiritual aspirations and all the rest — began to re-collect as I woke, I tried to fight them off, in much the same way,

perhaps, as the reluctant survivors of near-death experiences resist return to life's 'little boxes'. But unlike those survivors, I brought back no blissful sense of divine presence or of a mission to accomplish, nor even intimations of immortality — just a total inner and outer empty-ness which has remained ever since.

This may not sound like a happy state of affairs to psychotherapists, who would probably see it as evidence of mid-life crisis or incipient psychosis. But it is far more interesting than that. I experience this empty-ness as a boundless arena in which life continually manifests and plays, rising and falling, constantly changing, always transient and therefore ever-new. Sometimes I feel I could sit forever, knowing myself not only as a fluid manifestation of life within the arena, but also as the empty-ness which holds it. If this is psychosis, everybody should have one, and the world would be a far more serene place for it.

After all this, I see no special significance in the approach of a new millennium, but as a psychologist, my hopes would go something like this:

1) I would challenge the ancient creed that developing a strong self-sense is essential in rearing children with adequate strength for living. Surely it is possible to encourage them to find 'fluid identity' within the constantly-changing play of life, not seeking permanence of any kind, particularly that of self. Perhaps we could even teach them to see and enjoy themselves as unique 'non-entities', instead of separate hidebound selves obsessed with their own survival.

2) In psychotherapy, I would hope for a

radically new approach to those who suffer from 'inner emptiness'. Instead of working towards filling that void with new purpose, direction and meaning, I would aim to assist sufferers to go even deeper into that empty-ness and discover its true nature, I would actively discourage all ideas of 'inner journeying' towards wholeness, or 'paths to enlightenment'. These serve merely to postpone happiness here and now, and build up the self-illusion.

3) In the spiritual domain, I would fire all gurus and transpersonal psychologists who use stage-by-stage models of 'self-development' (explaining experiences like mine as fifth-level transient nirvikalpa-samadhi — or whatever). And I'd like to see the term Self with a capital S — Self-actualisation, Self-realisation, Self-tran-

scendence — expunged from psychological and spiritual literature, reserving the word strictly for the empirical self of everyday life. It is the whole obfuscating concept of 'self' which needs to be transcended, for in my experience there has never really been any self to transform, actualise, realise or transcend.

4) Finally, as a dream-researcher, I would like to see more work done on the liberating power of sleep (a condition much maligned in spiritual traditions, despite the Upanishadic statement that every night in deep sleep we go to the feet of Brahman). Shakespeare called sleep 'the death of each day's life' — and if there are occasions when the self-sense relaxes and the body-mind opens to empty-ness during sleep, as I now suspect, then it may well be 'chief nourisher at life's feast'.

A Transpersonal Model of Supervision

Alyss Thomas

As a recently accredited transpersonal psychotherapist (Karuna Institute) I have found a lack of both practical and theoretical approaches to transpersonal supervision. Psychospiritual material can get left outside the supervision room because a transpersonal model of supervision has not been consciously developed. Our models of supervision need to reflect

who we are as practitioners and this is a small contribution towards building a transpersonal model of supervision.

The BAC code of ethics for the supervision of counsellors states that 'the primary purpose of supervision is to ensure that the counsellor is addressing the needs of the client'. I think that in both transpersonal and humanistic supervision,

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