

## Foreword to *Healing the Split* by John Nelson

John Nelson has written an enormously impressive, profound, and important book, which takes as its simple starting point the fact that Spirit exists. This might seem an utterly obvious place to begin, except for the fact that Dr. Nelson is a member in good standing of the mainstream psychiatric community, and modern psychiatry, for all the relative good it has managed to accomplish, is still by and large totally ignorant of the spiritual and transpersonal dimensions of the human experience. This is all the more curious, in that psychiatry, whatever else its mission, has been understood from its inception to be the "science of the soul." And yet of the human soul and spirit, modern psychiatry has been strangely silent. Even worse, most of the genuine human experiences of transcendental Spirit have been not just ignored but rather violently pathologized by modern psychiatry. The easiest way to be labeled "schizophrenic" in our society is to let it be known that you feel that in the deepest part of your being, you (and all sentient beings as such) are one with infinite Spirit, one with the universe, one with the All, an insight that every wisdom culture the world over has held to be, not the depths of mental illness, but the pinnacle of human insight. This intuition of the Supreme Identity, shared by all beings, is not the ultimate pathology but the ultimate liberation.

The Supreme Identity of the human soul and the transcendental Divine is the cornerstone of the perennial philosophy and the defining insight of the world's greatest mystics and philosophers. As Aldous Huxley put it: "Philosophia perennis--the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in

the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all beings--the thing is immemorial and universal." Erwin Schroedinger, the founder of modern quantum mechanics and himself a profound mystic, explained that if you carefully look through the world's great spiritual and mystical literature, you will find "many beautiful utterances of a similar kind. You are struck by the miraculous agreement between humans of different race, different religion, knowing nothing about each other's existence, separated by centuries and millennia, and by the greatest distances that there are on our globe." This perennial philosophy, as Arthur Lovejoy pointed out, "has, in one form or another, been the dominant philosophy of the larger part of civilized mankind through most of its history" and has been embraced "by the greater number of speculative minds and religious teachers." And so Alan Watts draws the obvious conclusion:

Thus we are hardly aware of the extreme peculiarity of our own position, and find it difficult to recognize the plain fact that there has otherwise been a single philosophical consensus of universal extent. It has been held by men who report the same insights and teach the same essential doctrine whether living today or six thousand years ago, whether from New Mexico in the Far West or from Japan in the Far East.

The only major culture to ignore or devalue the perennial philosophy has been, alas, our own modern culture of secular materialism and brutish scientism, which has by and large, from the eighteenth century onward, been dominated by that which can be seen by the senses and manipulated by measurement. The Great Chain of Being--which maintains that men and women have at least five major levels of being: matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit--was reduced to mere matter and body. First spirit, then soul, and then mind was rejected by modern psychology and psychiatry,

with the disastrous result that men and women were held to be nothing more than sophisticated bundles of material atoms in vaguely animate bodies. Thus our modern "science of the soul," almost from the start, has been a science merely of the physical and bodily components of the entire human being, which has proven itself to be a reductionistic cultural catastrophe of the first magnitude.

In just recent times, however, the school of Humanistic Psychology has succeeded in re-introducing mind to psychology, thus supplementing and surpassing the empirical-physicalistic schools of behaviorism and the instinctual-bodily-emotional schools of psychoanalysis. And even more recently, Transpersonal Psychology has gone further still, and reintroduced the dimensions of soul and spirit. The result is a comprehensive or full-spectrum view of human psychology that includes matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit, both in their normal and pathological manifestations.

The aim of Transpersonal Psychology, then, is to give a psychological presentation of the perennial philosophy and the Great Chain of Being, fully updated and grounded in modern research and scientific developments. It fully acknowledges and incorporates the findings of modern psychiatry, behaviorism, and developmental psychology, and then adds, where necessary, the further insights and experiences of the existential and spiritual dimensions of the human being. We might say it starts with psychiatry and ends with mysticism.

And that is exactly the value of John Nelson's book. It presents one version of a full-spectrum model of human growth and development, a model that incorporates the vast richness of modern psychiatry and then supplements it with transcendental and spiritual dimensions. And one of its chief attractions, as I have said, is that it is authored by a member in good standing of the mainstream psychiatric community. In this regard Dr. Nelson joins the ranks of such pioneering transpersonal psychiatrists as Stan Grof, Stanley Dean, Roger Walsh, and Seymour Boorstein. It is

an utterly welcome addition, for John Nelson discusses these topics with enormous insight, clarity, and above all, I think, a truly heartfelt compassion, genuine and tender and compelling.

Not all of his theoretical conclusions, of course, will be accepted by all transpersonal theorists. The field is young and there is plenty of room for healthy disagreements. Although this is somewhat technical, I think the following points of potential disagreement should be very briefly spelled out, because they are rather important:

1. Dr. Nelson's use of the term "the Spiritual Ground" is, I believe, slightly misleading. He speaks of the Spiritual Ground--that is, infinite Spirit--as "interacting" with the ego or the individual self; he speaks of "the energies of the Ground" and of "the relentless pressure of the Ground." But infinite Spirit, precisely because it is infinite, doesn't interact with anything. That which is infinite is not set apart from anything, including the ego, but rather pervades equally all that is, like the water of the ocean pervades each wave. We don't say that water interacts with waves; rather, each and every wave is a form of water, just as each and every manifest thing is a form of Spirit. There is no separation between the finite and the infinite such that any "interaction" could occur (interaction happens only between finite events). Likewise, infinite Spirit does not contain "energies" or exert "pressure," any more than water exerts pressure on waves. To maintain that the Ground is set apart from the ego and interacts with it is a very subtle but pernicious form of dualism (a mistake, I believe, that Nelson inherited from Washburn's otherwise perceptive and important writings).

2. Rather, Nelson is using the term "Spiritual Ground" in a very loose sense to mean all the various higher levels and dimensions generally referred to as "spiritual" or "transpersonal." As he himself says, the Ground is actually "composed" of various bands or wavelengths. These higher bands or levels are sometimes referred to as the psychic, the subtle, and the causal dimensions of

existence, but even they are not to be confused with the ultimate, or infinite Spirit itself, which is no particular level or dimension at all, but rather the reality or suchness of each and every level. Thus, when Dr. Nelson speaks of the interaction of "the Ground" with the ego or the individual self, he is really speaking of the interaction of one of the subtler levels of existence (psychic, subtle, or causal, which he calls the fifth, sixth, and seventh stages of development) with the ego or individual self. Indeed, most of what Nelson refers to as "the Ground" is really the psychic or beginning dimension of transpersonal existence, which does interact with the ego, and does contain energies, and does exert pressure on the ego (none of which the infinite does).

3. And in particular, the infantile self is not "more open" to infinite Spirit than is the adult self. In fact, the opposite. The infantile self is embedded in the material and bodily levels of development, and because its self-boundaries are very weak and fluid, it is open to a dramatic and enormous influx, not from Spirit, but from the immense material and biological energies of those primitive levels, from the overwhelming energies of elan vital, prana, libido. The fact that these energies are overwhelming does not mean they are spiritual. Nelson (following Washburn) maintains that the infantile self is one with infinite Spirit (albeit unselfconsciously). But infinite Spirit is one with all levels--matter, body, mind, soul--and thus if the infantile self were one with Spirit (in a way that the ego-mind is not), it would also have to be one with all levels. But that is impossible, since in the infantile self the symbolic, mental, logical, and conceptual levels haven't even emerged yet. No, the infantile self is one with, or fused with, the bio-material world in general and the mothering one in particular. I believe this early stage is just as important as Dr. Nelson maintains that it is, but not because it is more in touch with Spirit, but because it is lost in the lower and oceanic spheres of existence with feeble and easily-overwhelmed self-boundaries.

And, in fact, the material and bodily levels are less in touch with Spirit than are the mental levels, which are less in touch than the soul levels.

4. Dr. Nelson speaks of the fifth level of development as the home of creative genius and the sixth level as the home of paranormal abilities. While these are fine as a first approximation, they are slightly problematic. Most transpersonalists do not see creativity or paranormal abilities as an actual stage of growth, because a stage by definition is something that everybody must proceed through invariably, and it is simply not the case that all mystics, even if enlightened, necessarily go through a period of highly developed paranormal abilities. Most, in fact, do not. Rather, creativity and paranormal abilities are something that may, or may not, develop at various stages of growth, and are not themselves a particular stage of growth.

Those are all important points, I think, but in the larger view, they are also just nit-picking. John Nelson has succeeded in writing an enormously important and helpful book, a book that has gone farther than any other, I think, in directly grounding transpersonal psychology in the research of modern medical psychiatry and psychiatric psychotherapy. If this type of book were required reading in all psychiatric schools in this country, we would soon be rejoining the ranks of a common humanity that everywhere and everywhen has unmistakably found in the human soul "something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality." And John Nelson will have helped that long-overdue return to basic sanity in a major, and profound, and compassionate way.