

PSYCHOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY – THE ESSENTIAL PARTNERSHIP

By Wendy Hill, M.A.

Your well being is determined by your willingness to take conscious charge of your life. Most people live unconsciously, never understanding what motivates them, never able to take real charge of their lives. To find happiness you must be willing to learn as much as you can about yourself. Make a conscious study of your thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions. The more you understand about yourself, the more you are able to take conscious control of your life. The more responsibility you take, the more you experience happiness.

In your search for happiness, there are two aspects of yourself that are important to understand and explore. They are your psychological nature and your spiritual nature.

Your psychological nature is what you believe and feel about yourself and others. It is also how you perceive reality. It is how you behave, react, and communicate. It is the choices and decisions you make in your everyday life. It is all your history- everything that has ever happened to you. It is your emotions and your personality.

Your spiritual nature is the part of you that knows through intuition. It is the part of you that understands the experience of love. It is your compassion. It is the part of you that knows of your true greatness. It knows and understands the true meaning of life and takes joy in that understanding. Your spiritual self sees all as equal and inter-related. It feels a connection with all. It knows the true experience of a higher power. It longs to be at one. It longs to be acknowledged and experienced by you.

Often people are left to the study of themselves without a clear understanding of how these two aspects of the self inter-relate. "Psychologists should discuss psychology and ministers should discuss spirituality." But in reality they should be understood within the context of each other. One cannot truly understand one without understanding the other. You must understand how both relate to you personally. You must understand your own psychological nature- your beliefs, attitudes, emotions, reactions, and behavior. And you must understand your own spiritual nature- your intuition, your highest self, your love and compassion.

It is also important to know that religion and spirituality are not the same. Religion is based on a spiritual philosophy that declares certain concepts to be true. These concepts are accepted by people that form a social and economic institution. Religion is the institution resulting from that philosophy. It is not spirituality itself. Spirituality is something that is within you and is natural to you. Spirituality is the personal and individual experience of the higher or divine self. It comes from within. Religions have evolved from perception of spirituality, but are not spirituality itself. Religion is introduced to you from the outside. For example, it may come to you from the teachings of another person, or from a book. True spirituality comes from within the self alone. People, religions, and books serve only to inspire and confirm what is already known from within.

It is necessary for you to explore your inner spiritual nature as a part of your psychological growth. You must learn to balance and know your entire self in your journey toward true happiness. Explore your psychology and your spirituality. Take the psycho-spiritual path. Now you can see yourself not just as a psychological or spiritual being. You can see yourself as a psycho-spiritual being.

Consider these aspects of your psycho-spiritual self. You have an adult self. This part of you is conscious of your present experience. You have within you a child self. This part of you is aware of all your past experience. Much of the memory of your child self is buried and not conscious. A part of your child self is calling out to you for help. This is the wounded child within you. We all have been wounded in childhood. This is natural. Childhood by its nature is difficult. You also have a high or divine self. This part of you is the most lasting and real part of you. This part of you is great and loving and wise.

You can learn how to inwardly communicate with each of these aspects of your self. For example, as you learn of your spiritual self, you can communicate that wisdom to your adult self. Your adult self can then communicate this wisdom to your child self. This communication to the child self can have a positive impact on your deepest beliefs. Old conflicting beliefs from the past can be altered, upgraded, and matured. This automatically changes your perception and feeling in the present. Automatically you begin to become more at one within yourself. Your sense of well being increases. You become more responsible. You become more in charge of your life. This wonderful change can happen only with the understanding and help of your spiritual self.

In your search for happiness you might try religion or you might try psychology. You might try health foods and exercise or higher education. None of these alone will work. All of these have healing qualities and can enhance your life. But each is only a piece of what is required for you to achieve happiness. You must find a balance. Learn how to give to yourself what is needed of each.

Each of us longs for the spiritual experience of love. No matter how educated, healthy, religious, or psychology smart you are, you need this experience in order to be happy. No healing can occur without this experience. The experience of love is not the thought of love. It is not the idea that you are lovable or the knowledge that you are loved. It is the *experience* of love. The experience of love gives you the courage to face what needs to be faced. The experience of love allows for good health. The experience of love sets you free and allows you to live and die in peace. The experience of love brings joy.

So many do not know how to experience love. Many have sought it through other people, money, achievement, or material things. Some tell themselves that they are loved, but don't feel it. Some seek it through religion. Others seek it through psychotherapy or the study of psychology. Love is a spiritual experience. To achieve this awesome and blessed experience, you must do your psychological work and combine it with your spiritual work. Learn to blend the two together. If you do not, you are in danger of living in partial truths that do not truly satisfy you.

Do not use the study of psychology or spirituality to hide from your problems. Use

both to help you face your problems. You must face what you fear. Understand and heal your childhood. Face with courage what confronts you in your adult experience. Own what you experience. Take responsibility for it. Feel your feelings, express them, and accept them. Learn to speak your truth. Learn to understand your mind, body, and emotions. Take responsibility for your experience. Denial of your problems only holds you prisoner. The process of maturing is long and often difficult. We are complex beings. Happiness requires a lifetime of commitment and courageous inner confrontation. This is the "hero's journey". It is the journey to the self. It is the process of self-realization.

Spiritually, you must be willing to open your heart and discover its contents. This, too, is a part of the hero's journey. This world is filled with contradictions and injustice. Sometimes it may seem insane to open up one's heart to give and receive love. Yet this is what we must do.

Psychology and spirituality are governed by different sets of rules or laws. The laws of psychology make logical sense. Psychology is the study of the natural progression of events in life and your response to these events. Spirituality is the experience and understanding of your non-physical soul self. Often spirituality does not seem to be logical. It is governed by a set of laws of its own. For example, forgiveness is illogical in the face of hate and danger. In order to forgive, you must know that you are safe, loved, and innocent in spite of adversity. This knowingness comes through the higher self alone. It is experienced on the spiritual plane. One cannot see, prove, measure, or touch the evidence of what is true. Yet it is known. This is why spiritual realization seems so secret and is often misunderstood when shared. Spirituality is, by its nature, a private experience and can be "proven" only to one's self. The "proof" cannot be transferred to another. Each must take the journey by his or her own self.

Psychology and spirituality are so intertwined, one cannot understand one without understanding of the other. You need both to be happy. You must do the work of finding and healing your inner child and accept adult responsibility. You must also find your heart and establish a firm relationship with your higher power. Do your psychological work. Do your spiritual work. Find the quiet amid the storm. Learn to master yourself.