

Can the rise in mental health illness globally be as a result of a mis-understanding of one's personal psycho-spiritual development.

Mental health disorders are on the rise in every country in the world and could cost the global economy up to \$16 trillion between 2010 and 2030 if a collective failure to respond is not addressed, according to an expert report on Tuesday. (Lancet Commission, 2019)

One in four people in the world will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Around 450 million people currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide. (World Health Organisation, 2019)

Could this be due to an inability to understand the psycho spiritual growth and development we are experiencing? In this context I intend to explore this through the development lens of Ruumets (2006) "Pathways to the Soul".

It is of utmost importance for our overall health and wellbeing to have a balanced integration of all of the modalities of the self, the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Yet "many of us have difficulty seeing and fully accepting the need to integrate our mental/physical/emotional/spiritual aspects into a balanced and functionally harmonious whole." (Ruumet 2006, p.7)

All of these aspects of the self are equally important in their own right their individual voice needed to be heard. However, the intellectual pressure and stimulation of the modern age of technology has fuelled an imbalance with the predomination of the mental or intellectual over the other modalities. Considering the integration of all of the modalities the importance of the intellect and mental is further appreciated when one considers for the most part we are conditioned to accept only that which we can understand. We must have a conceptual understanding of all of the modalities in the context of the integration of the whole which is where the development model enters.

Ruumet (2006) stresses the importance of having a conceptual understanding of life experiences for living a life of purpose and direction. Could it be that the absence of an understanding of the psycho-spiritual journey of personal development has led to the rise in mental illness and disease.? Could it be that an intellectual understanding of life is a pre-requisite for "dancing with life in a way that harmonizes body, spirit, and psyche into an integral whole" so as to embrace the journey of life? (Ruumet 2006, p.8)

The dance of life incorporates and necessitates "both the psychological and the spiritual" (Ruumet 2006, p.9). There is no depth or longevity or ultimate purpose in psychological development alone but the spiritual component must also be present in order for the development to reach a wholesome end. Moreover, spiritual development alone without the balance of psychological development can also be swayed off track into in-authentic ways.

Ruumet (2006) describes seven centers of psycho-spiritual growth and development with each having a certain level of consciousness and understanding. Each once experienced fully allows for a progressive entry to the next and expansion in psycho-spiritual growth and development. Each "move is transformational and entails major shifts in consciousness" (Ruumet 2006, p.20) and each progression to the next centre brings with it all of the learnings from the experiences of psycho-spiritual development from the previous. If same learnings

are not fully embraced and integrated they will carry forward as issues to be revisited and readdressed. The importance of this is that what is not known from one center stunts the development in that center remaining as a shadow of the self which will undeniably emerge elsewhere at some future point.

Bridging the gap between the psychological and spiritual often begins with transpersonal experiences and how we react to them can determine how we progress along the psycho-spiritual path. As Ruumet (2006) says "Our essence is transpersonal even as its expression is personal and always changing" (p.26) and as such it is important to have an understanding of transpersonal experiences.

The absence of this has meant that many who have had childhood transpersonal experiences suppress the experience altogether with emergent future shadows of the self.

The inability of society to present an acceptance of transpersonal experiences restricts the development of the growth from such an experience. This is exasperated by the fact that once we have tasted what is beyond the realms of our accepted conditioned reality there is "no way to authentically go back". (p.24)

Instead of embracing an expanded psychological perspective from the experience the growth can be lost if it cannot be conceptualised restricted by one's "internalized the boundaries of permissible perceptions" (p.24) as defined by society. Moreover, an imbalanced focus on the experience itself as opposed to growth from the experience can result in an obsession with the transcendent aspects of the transpersonal experience. Both are imbalances stemming from the absence of an understanding of the essence of the transpersonal experience itself.

What is important to understand is that we are essentially spiritual beings and as such are a personalised expression of spirit which can be best recognised throughout transpersonal growth and development. In the context of the various centers described by Ruumet (2006) this spiritual essence permeates through all of the centers expressing itself through personalisation within each center that the individual is engrossed within. The essence is spirit and the psycho-spiritual growth and development then comes from an understanding of the expression within each center. Once fully embraced the consequential expansion and progression is facilitated to the next center.

Considering Ruumet's (2006) first center, from the very outset our perception of basic physical survival and safety is determined on our arrival into this world. The birth experience depending on whether it was traumatic or nurturing leaves "a deep impression, imprinting in us a global, visceral sense of this new environment as safe or threatening, friendly or hostile, trustworthy or unreliable". (p.32) This is a crucial centre with an understanding of same essential for embarking on a healthy psycho-spiritual journey but for most is left unquestioned and un-contemplated. Many mental health challenges can stem from challenging experiences in our birth or upbringing left unaddressed.

The need and greed of Center 2 determines how we act in the modern world and the underlying element is the need to be loved. Any deprivation can invariably surface as insecurity, greed and taking advantage of others. Again in the context of this study many mental breakdowns develop from an insatiable hunger for more, propelling the individual through intense drive and ambition to eventual breakdown all stemming from deprivation of needs at this level.

Centre 3, the egoic center Ruumet (2006) aptly describes as “the cultural center of gravity today” (p.48) defining success for us and driving us to make a difference in the world. This is not restricted to the overly materially ambitious but can also include the spiritually driven vying to ‘save and transform the world’. Drive and ambition to make a difference or bring about change in the world can become an obsession leading to mental fatigue, burnout and breakdown as much from the spiritual as the material perspective. Additional pressure on mental health at this center come from conditioning at the preceding centers.

For example, success driven individuals conditioned by workaholic parents, the latter of whom may have authentically had to work day and night for the family to survive, can inherit the same drive without being conscious of the why. A “quest to ‘win’ at all cost becomes the prime goal of ego in all its manifestations” (p.50) with the definition of ‘win’ coming from family and close society. Important here for mental health issues is to examine one’s definition of success and whether the drive to make a difference is personal or an inherited trait embedded through early conditioning.

Through Center 4 is the realisation of the differentiation between the ego and the I. The former continues to be influenced by the conditioning of Centers 1,2 and 3 while the latter moves beyond the conditioned aspects of the self. This can be challenging to decipher especially when the intellectual genius of the ego manipulates even the transpersonal experiences using “genuine psychological and spiritual breakthroughs to polish its own image” (p.59).

This is where spiritually enthusiasts have to be careful to break away from the shackles of the ego which only serves its own survival instincts at any costs even that of personal mental health. Typical are those who have had a major transpersonal experience and are so moved that they miss the opportunity to personalise the experience and instead embark upon “a zealous campaign to induce others to join.” (p.59) This can lead to further imbalances and breakdowns as the growth and development from such a psycho-spiritual epiphany is bypassed.

In Center 4 resides the trans-egoic state where “personal power and self-enhancement are no longer primary” (p.70) and the person begins to see beyond the confines of the ego. But it is not yet transpersonal and so still possibly influenced by the elusive aspects of Centers 1-3. As such there is a danger of fighting the noble cause for the greater humanity but fuelled by early conditioned influencers and so ego determined to some extent. Those who immerse themselves in global causes without having completed the groundwork required to progress personally through Centers 1-3 can find themselves overwhelmed. Fully actualised at this center means recognising ones “own ultimate essence in everyone and everything” (p.73).

This is a major juncture and for some the impetus to ‘recycle’ is too strong and they regress back to earlier centers to “bypass the need to walk into unknown inner territory” (p.75). Mental breakdown as a result of defeatism from regression from the edge of transcendence and ultimate transpersonal transformation back to an earlier cycle can occur. In fact Ruumet (2006) says “much of what we decry as deterioration in today’s industrialized, technocratic societies is the result of a widespread flight” (p.75) from this level of psycho-spiritual growth and development.

A major aspect of the growth through this center is the development of the ability to let go. Having had the taste of the transcendent nature of the transpersonal experience we can crave more of the experience. Those who develop an insatiable thirst for the experience can develop “Burnout a sign that we have not yet mastered this freedom of both receiving and letting go” (p.76).

Often experienced at this juncture is a traumatic or other highly influential event which is the catalyst to growth and progression to the next level. However, many succumb to breakdown associating with the turmoil of the event as opposed to seeing the events turmoil as a catalyst to permanent change. Psychotherapy, Ruumet (2006) explains at this juncture only goes to serve the hypothesis that the event is causing the problems not the catalyst to overcoming the problems.

The call at Center 5 “toward authenticity in self-expression” (p.87) can be a blessing if ones circumstances allow for it to be embraced but if not can prove upsetting and may lead to mental illness. The calling is so strong that “Practical considerations are also somewhat peripheral to this task, though they can help or hinder our progress” (p.88). Important here is what Ruumet (2006) calls return cycles, going back to the other centers to ensure we have learned and integrated the growth and psycho spiritual development required to move onto the next center without baggage or residue.

This can be a truly challenging juncture for those passionate about the ‘seed within’ etc. often compromised by their circumstances in the world “the biggest obstacles and distractions in the people we’re closest to: spouse, partner, children, relatives, friends, co-workers.” (p.90)

At this Center 5 the challenge for our developing “consciousness is to distinguish what really fits our life here and now from what no longer does, or perhaps never did.”(p.97) which can involve major upheaval of our present positions in our lives. Here our shadows if not addressed can be exposed and relationships can be challenged by “overwhelming tension between the horizontal axis of relational demands and the problem of our own psychological complexes”. (p.99)

Some other cases of mental breakdown in those seeking the spiritual path at this center can be caused by the inability to truly embrace ones spirituality confused by the myriad of ‘promised lands’. With authenticity becoming more and more distant in contemporary spiritual leaders and teachers there is a risk of becoming a ‘spiritual junkie’ engulfing seminar after seminar, practice after practice and guru after guru. This is the common name for ‘spiritual bypassing’ further defined by Masters (2010) as “the use of spiritual practices/beliefs to avoid dealing with painful feelings, unresolved wounds and developmental needs.” (p.1)

Another tendency is towards “spiritual materialism” a drive towards a pseudo-spirituality fuelled not by the inner spiritual seed but by egoic ambition. As Ruumet (2006) says “focusing only on the spiritual and ignoring our psychological/emotional issues are strategies doomed to failure” (p.103). Depression can develop here and mental illness from this infatuation with the transpersonal or mystical experience without having done the preparation work or psycho-spiritual growth and development through the preceding centers.

This is a crucial juncture with spiritual bypass temptations very strong and if yielded to can be “detrimental to our psychological and spiritual growth”(p.105) adversely affecting mental health further. Ruumet (2006) describes it aptly as “What we seek is creative expression of

our transpersonal essence in whatever form has heart and meaning for us and our individual talents permit.” (p.106)

Another challenge many spiritual crusaders fall prey to is not accepting that “our Star does not have to be bright or light up the whole sky. It simply has to shine steadily in and through us, even if the human world can’t see it at all.” (p.107) Obsession with ‘being the shining light for all to follow’ can divert the spiritual seeker from looking within and addressing ones own inner spirituality to focusing on fixing everyone elses. The latter can lead to all of the negative aspects previously discussed bringing about mental illness.

Center 6 involves an acceptance of one’s immortality. There are less instances of mental illness at his juncture as progression to this level involves a lot of psychological growth and development and the challenges of the Ego have subsided for the most part. We “feel fully grounded in the earth and in our bodies” (p.114) without identifying with either and so beyond their influences. Here, the fully authentic spiritual teachers and leaders are found, though true to the characteristics of this center, they are almost anonymous such is their humility.

Here lies the dissolution of the Ego and embodied spirituality however a derailing can cause “precipitate depression, anxiety, and a variety of physical symptoms” mental illness being one. (p.118)

Center 7 is beyond the personal in the transpersonal realm and “without mental or emotional impediments” (p.135). As such mental illness or psychological breakdown has no place here and so lies beyond the terrain of this essay.

The benefits of an understanding of the development path through the centers is clearly evident as is an intellectual awareness of the psychological challenges that can be experienced through each. There are many instances where mental illness can develop throughout this journey of psycho-spiritual development and same minimised with the understanding of the process itself. Ruumets (2006) development lens as outlined in “Pathways to the soul” can provide the roadmap to navigate a successful journey.

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