



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Self & Self #5

Psychology & Spirituality

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What's the difference between psychology and spirituality? I wondered about this for years. As a spiritual seeker and a student of psychology, I was getting something from both areas. Yet neither alone satisfied me, not until I found yoga's profound teachings. Yoga clearly defines the difference, while warning of the traps in each approach.

Psychology is the study of the mind, while spirituality is about getting beyond your mind. Psychology analyzes mind and emotions. By contrast, seekers are trying to get past their mind. They seek a spiritual experience, an expansive and blissful moment, something that transports them afar. Yoga says neither is enough. What you really want, and what you really need, is to know your expansive inner essence, even while you use your mind. The point is to live in your own multi-dimensionality all the time.

The word "psychology" comes from "psyche." The ancient Greeks worshipped the goddess Psyche, a human girl who became immortal. Always depicted with the wings of a butterfly, she embodied the divinity in every soul. We also see the word psyche in the New Testament, used 95 times. It is translated into English as "a living soul," "the soul that can attain its highest end and secure eternal blessedness," and as "an essence which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death."

Since psyche means soul and -ology means "the science or the study of," you might expect psychology to study the soul. How did they come to focus on mind and emotions? Again we turn to the ancient Greeks. Socrates taught that the soul is immortal. His student Plato described soul as the essence of a person — non-physical, eternal and reincarnating.

However, Plato's student Aristotle argued against the psyche or soul being separate from the physical body. He concluded in his treatise, *On The Soul*, that the human intellect is immortal. Thus the focus turned to the mind. Unfortunately, the tool you use to study your mind is your own mind. Pitfalls ensue.

Yoga looks at the mind from a deeper vantage point, from the inner dimension of pure Beingness, your own Self. This is deeper than your mind, even deeper than soul level, for the soul reincarnates through many lifetimes. The deeper dimension of your own existence is Existence-Itself, that which is being all that exists. This is the One Self being all, including you.

It's very good news when you realize that you are not your mind. Neither are you your body. You are not even your mind and your body put together. You are more, so much more. That "more" is Self, your own immortal essence. Your body and mind are made of the same primal substance of which everything is made.

citireva cetana-padaad avaruu.dhaa cetya-sa.mkocinii cittam.

— Pratyabhij~nah.rdayam 5

Supreme Consciousness becomes the individual mind, by descending from the plane of pure Consciousness, contracting in accordance with the object perceived.

Though your mind is made of Consciousness, it is a contracted form of Consciousness. Like a mirror, it reflects the objects it perceives. It can even reflect them when the object is absent, which is memory or fantasy, even worry. Your mind has the creative power of Consciousness, but uses it to create limited scenarios and lopsided narratives. Then it obsesses on them.

Psychology studies the scenarios and narratives, not the Consciousness that creates them. Like in any science, they analyze similar patterns that are presented by different people. Then they categorize and label them, hopefully leading to useful therapies. In college, I was fascinated by this, which led me to take psychology classes and try out encounter groups. Eventually I found yoga, and saw that I was trying to understand my own mind's patterns, specifically so I could get beyond them.

citi-vahnir avaroha-pade channo'pi maatrasyaa meyendhana.m

plu.syati. — Pratyabhij~nah.rdayam 14

Like fire burns fuel, Consciousness burns away the limitations born of delusion.

I had been looking for the “Aha!” When a therapeutic process works, what happens is that you get beyond the narrative you’ve been stuck on. It dissolves, burned into ash, like a stick of wood in a fire. It is Consciousness that burns it up.

How do you get there? In psychology you analyze your story enough times that you get beyond it. In yoga, you dive deep within your own being, so that Consciousness can arise within and burn away all your limitations. They are incinerated because they came from the delusion that you are not Consciousness. When you experience your own Self as Consciousness-Itself, nothing can limit you.

I'll use another metaphor to describe the same thing. Yoga's sages often compare your mind to the waves on the ocean's surface, while spirituality is found in the depths of the sea. Psychology has you analyze the waves' size, shape and direction of movement.

By contrast, seekers want to dive into the ocean's depths, to experience the vast, liquid stillness within. Of course, after some time they run out of oxygen and have to return to the waves of their churning mind. Still, the brief inner experience was profoundly nurturing. Most meditators approach meditation this way, “I'll escape inside for an hour (or maybe 10 minutes), then I'll go back to the real world again.”

Yoga honors and celebrates both of these approaches, yet offers another option. Instead of studying the activity of the waves, see what they are made of. Instead of escaping in the ocean's depths, see what it is made of. What is this thing we call mind, ocean, Consciousness? What is this thing we call small-s self and Capital-S Self? Ask yourself, even out loud, “Who am I really?”

Every answer you offer is accurate. You may respond with who you are in relationship, like mother, son, customer or boss. More answers could name where you live, where you come from, even where you aspire to be. Your body-centered answers include gender and self-image. Your mind-centered answers span from the past into the future, with all possibilities in between. How many different shapes can an ocean wave take on? You've got them all, yet there is more to you.

You might even answer, “I am the whole of the ocean of Consciousness!” True, but still incomplete. For where there is ocean, there is sky. You are the ocean and the sky; you are the land that surrounds the ocean and is under it. You are all, you are beyond all and you are the source of all. You are Shiva. You are Self.

While being Self, you continue to have a mind. When you use your mind, don't leave the ocean of Consciousness. Stay wet. When you look up into the sky, or even fly high, you are still you, oh Shiva. You are the whole, the source of it all, and every one and every thing. Every blade of grass is like a hair on your head. Every star is another twinkle in your eye. You are cosmic, even while being logical, practical and grounded. Live in the multi-dimensionality of your own Beingness.

This is your future. If you do this yoga, you will come to know who you really are. It begins as brief glimpses, subtle knowings, inner impulses, flashes of insight and currents of bliss. They grow on you; they grow in you. Shaktipat is the key that opens the doorway inside. Then you do your part by focusing on your own Divine Essence.

Instead of analyzing the waves that churn across the ocean's surface, be the one who has the waves. You are not your mind. You have a mind. Just like with a pair of your shoes, you are not your shoes; you are the one who has the shoes. The one who says “my mind” is necessarily different from the mind that you have.

So when your mind is doing what it does, simply own it. Say, “My mind.” You are not your mind; you are the owner of your mind. You are not the waves; you are the whole ocean and beyond. When you know who you are, you are free from your mind. You can still see what your mind does, but you are the one who has a mind. You are your own Self. This is yoga. Do more yoga.

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