Transpersonal Life: The Embodiment of Nonduality

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Opinion

Over the last decades, there has been a gradual shift from the patriarchal spiritual organizations of the last two thousand years into a more balanced approach which integrates both masculine and feminine qualities. We are less interested in leadership, dogma, hierarchy, idolatry and secrecy, and more open to friendship, equality, gentleness, compassion and availability to all. There is less duality between sacred and profane, between holy and evil, between philosophy and religion, between science and spirituality. Nonduality seems to be a bridge between all these apparently opposite views. Nonduality postulates that the ultimate reality cannot be cut in two—except by the mind. Everyone and everything is in fact an expression of a single timeless oneness. But how can we integrate the wisdom of nonduality in everyday life?

Transpersonal life is a term to describe a hybrid life which integrates the insights of nonduality with the apparent dualities in everyday life. It integrates so to speak the religious and mundane, the personal and the impersonal. Our ‘personal life’ is the story of our egoic personality. The ‘universal’ life, however, is egoless and timeless. The latter refers to the white paper on which our personal story is written. Those who practice Yoga or meditation may have had a taste of this ‘state’ which goes beyond (trans-) the personal realm. Although personal and impersonal seem to be incompatible, we should keep in mind that these two are not separate. Personal life is only a smaller part of impersonal life. A telling metaphor is the wave and the ocean. The wave is the human part of the human being, the ocean is the being part of that term. The wave stands for the story of the person, the Ocean refers to nondual Beingness. And we write Ocean and Beingness with a capital to describe their impersonal, timeless and borderless nature.

This so-called transpersonal adventure originates from the dance between the personal and the impersonal, between the wave and the Ocean. It usually starts with curiosity about the mystery of life, some deep spiritual experience of unconditional love and/or the sense that something fundamental is still missing in life. These are also the reasons why some people go to a temple, synagogue, ashram or church. But here, no dogma is accepted, no holy books are needed, no blind belief is required. We simply rely on direct experience. We start from a very basic idea, the childlike wonder of being. Just the sense ‘I am’. What do these two words really mean? Are we appreciative of our existence or do we take life for granted? Only a few people wake up in the morning with the thought, “I am grateful that I exist”.

Our conditioned mind doesn’t like such a statement. The egoic mind will reply, “Yes, I am alive, I exist, but I am suffering from back pain. And I might lose my job next year. I have other things on my mind than appreciating my aliveness. And I don’t see the benefits of that gratitude”. These are the typical reactions of the conditioned egoic mind. Most of us have such voices in our heads. The egoic mind is a master in ruminating and complaining—usually by creating all sorts of doom scenarios. And these narratives show up without any invitation. We describe these voices as the parrots in our heads. These parrots repeat the ideas, stories and dogmas we have learned from parents, grandparents, priests, friends, teachers at school and also from books, movies, newspapers, television programs, websites and social media. We are not referring here to practical knowledge like geography, mathematics and the weather broadcast because that information is neutral and practical. We are pointing to recurrent thought patterns which are always labelling everyone and everything. Usually, these voices are not bringing us inner peace and contentment but rather a sense of lack, separation and frustration. These voices are usually based on judging, expecting and comparing—not on observing with a clear unconditioned mind.

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But what is this Beingness then? It is impossible to describe and yet it is everywhere. Nobody is excluded from being, no matter if one is a Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jew or atheist. The ‘I am’ is universal. This being is so simple and so available without any effort, and yet it is usually overlooked because we are distracted by the voices in our head. A transpersonal life starts from the insight that the voices in our head are overshadowing ‘our’ Beingness. And this view can give us neutrality, stability and inner peace. This is also one of the major themes in nonduality.

But we may end up in a cold state of mind, which is sometimes found in certain nondual traditions where everything which is personal is neglected or suppressed. When we realize that our essence-Beingness is the same in all human beings, something else may become clear. We describe it as the awakening of the universal center in the chest. Nonduality is not only understood but it is also felt in the heart center as a deep sense of completeness. We first recognize the Heart in ourselves as a vibrant openness and then we realize that this same Heart is residing in the chest of every other human being we encounter. This Heart is like one universal Space. And we are not referring to the heart as an organ nor to the turmoil of personal emotions. It is a Space that doesn’t exclude anyone. This felt recognition is a good basis for a natural sense of unconditional love and compassion for everyone. Contemporary Buddhist teachers such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nath Hanh are beautiful reminders of the full blossoming of the Heart center.

But the Heart is apparently covered up in most individuals by past experiences when the heart was injured when we were young. So, when our hearts start to blossom, we may in the beginning encounter several old injuries coming up, like feeling unloved or excluded. What has been suppressed for decades, may now suddenly come to the surface. When the heart area is more or less free from these, the flowering of the heart can be palpable. Sometimes the nondual recognition can sink in even deeper. Then the embodiment is reaching the level of the belly. This may create a grounded sense of gratitude for the intrinsic power of life itself. When the belly is opening up, we may encounter old somatic contractions coming to the surface, such as feeling frightened, unsafe or unworthy. When the belly is more or less free from these, there is a natural sense of deep contentment and a joy for no reason.

When being witness of clarity in the head, compassion in the chest and a contentment in the belly, we should not take these personally. These are only descriptions of experiences which come and go. They are not personal experiences in the traditional sense but perfumes of the embodiment of nondual wisdom. They are transpersonal expressions of That which can never be felt, seen or described. The egoic mind has no access here. All these phenomena come and go, but the pure Beingness cannot come and go. And that impersonal Beingness is what we really are. It is fully present right now, even when we don’t sense its presence in the heart or belly. Nothing is ever lacking. And that is exactly what nonduality is pointing to.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

References

1. Jan Kersschot (1960) is a Belgian physician who wrote several books on medicine and nonduality. His books are available in more than seven languages.