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#### SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOLOGY

##### The Work of A.H. Almaas

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My starting point for this inquiry into the work of A.H. Almaas was to pursue a question that became a burning one for me after many years of involvement in the teachings of J. Krishnamurti. And the question was: Why are so many people attracted to Krishnamurti's teachings, and yet there have been virtually no transformations in individuals in the manner that Krishnamurti indicated? In tandem with this question was a prejudice in myself for the whole field of psychology as it relates to self-realization. Again, this attitude can be traced to my 'conditioning' by Krishnamurti's teachings about the whole psychological enterprise; an attitude that had been fairly intransigent, and one that was subtly supported by the traditional rejection of psychology as a tool for ontological inquiry, and further entrenched by mainstream psychology's dismissal of the spiritual dimensions of being.

It was thus with great interest that I read Almaas' first book, *The Elixir of Enlightenment*, published in 1984, in which he addresses the very question that had been plaguing me.

Krishnamurti's teaching, although it is simple, elegant and true, proves to be not relevant to most people who listen to him. They cannot understand him, because they need to understand many other things about themselves and their minds before they can even relate to what he says. His words do not penetrate them, his teaching does not relate to their personal lives. Many of them understand him intellectually, but that is not real understanding, and they believe what he says, but it does not transform them.

Krishnamurti says his teaching is simple and direct. He has said that a person can listen to him and understand him, and be transformed right there, before leaving the lecture hall. This is all very true, but it is simple and direct only to Krishnamurti's own perception. The state he is describing is experienced as simple. It is simple, and ordinary, and very near to the individual. It is, in fact, the very nature of awareness: simple, empty, clear.

But his teaching does not take into account the state of consciousness of most of his listeners. Their minds are preoccupied with other things, are full of all kinds of concerns and conflicts that they are not about to give up. These concerns and conflicts make up not only their lives but their very identities. They cannot therefore just be simply aware.

Krishnamurti is in fact asking his listeners nothing less than to give up their ego and their sense of self identity. But there is a lot involved in this sense of self and much of it is unconscious, not available to awareness. It is the sense of self that still governs the mind, the movement of thoughts, the focus of attention. (Almaas, 1984:16-17)

The above, somewhat lengthy, quotation encapsulates Almaas' concern - the 'situation' as he terms it - for which he also provides a possible solution. And the solution, in Almaas' view, is the cultivation in the individual of essence.

To gain a more precise understanding of the situation, and to personalize the teaching, we need first to understand the personality and how it is related to the free reality, the being – what we call essence. Our true nature, our essence, what is real and unconditioned in the human being, does not exist in some mysterious realm, waiting for us to attack and slay the inimical ego, and then show up in glory. Our being, our essence, the divine within us, is connected to our personality in a very complex and intimate way. (Ibid., 29)

To achieve essential development by clarifying and refining the personality, Almaas has turned to the tools of psychology, especially depth psychology, to bring clinical precision to bear upon the endeavor of self-exploration. As a theorist his work is an elegant mapping of the human psyche with very detailed, clinical observations, born of years of inner inquiry and working with hundreds of students, as well as grounding himself thoroughly in

psychological theories pertinent to his undertaking. Almaas also displays a rare understanding of all the great spiritual traditions, using the genius of each to sharpen his own tools of inquiry.

Almaas' writings fall into three categories: detailed technical works that advance the ontological perspective with the technical, objective, rigor of scientific inquiry, which at the same time contribute significantly to the contemporary body of psychological knowledge; transcripts of his talks where the language is less formal, displaying the flavor of a spontaneous discourse coming from the heart but without losing the thrust of penetrating inquiry; and his own personal, no holds barred meditations on his inner life - where the states experienced are intensely observed and commented upon. While Luminous Night's Journey, an example of the latter, falls more within the category of mystical writing, it is nevertheless a unique development of this genre because it is approached with the same rigorous precision that is to be found in the very much lengthier, technical works.

Almaas calls the work he does the Diamond Approach, to reflect the multi-faceted approach to spiritual awakening. In an interview Almaas says:

"In the Diamond Approach, the psychological and the spiritual are so interlinked that they're really indistinguishable," explains Almaas. "It's not like you do psychological work for psychological issues, and spiritual practices to attain spiritual states. The psychological work is the actual practice that brings about the spiritual states." (Flory, 1990)

It is my feeling that future movements in psychology, especially in the transpersonal arena, will single out Almaas for his contribution to our understanding of essence in the process of self-realization:

True, the mind must respond, must see and understand, for there to be a transformation. Otherwise it will block the force of essence. The mind does part of the work, but cannot do the whole work. The other half of the work, the more fundamental half, is done by essence itself, by its very presence. Essence is the transformative agent. (Almaas, 1984:44)

In his own landmark work, *The Eye of Spirit*, transpersonal theorist Ken Wilber makes special mention of Almaas' work:

The Pearl beyond Price is one of the truly great and pioneering books of the East/West dialogue.... It remains to be seen, of course, just what fate our culture will deal a postformal and post-post conventional approach. Historically – and in almost any country – postformal consciousness has been crucified. Once a group, grounded in such, starts to become "popular" and "noticed," a whole host of background cultural forces swing into play, even in pluralistic, tolerant societies that share the values of the Western enlightenment. It is thus with the very best wishes and encouragement, and slight trepidation, that I watch the future unfolding of the Diamond Approach. (Wilber, 1997:372-373)

In fact, what Wilber is saying about our cultural consciousness and its anticipated reaction, is exactly the observation that Almaas brings to the reactions of the personality in the face of teachings that go beyond the personal. It erects barriers against the imagined terror of dissolution, even though, paradoxically, it may make great effort to achieve the state of egolessness. However, if time shows that Almaas' work yields greater results precisely because of the technical precision that he brings to the task of human transformation, then perhaps this very precision will negate the cultural backlash that Wilber fears.

In an introductory article as general and brief as this, one cannot hope to begin to capture the enormous depth of work of someone who is not only a genuine mystic, truly embodying the non-dual state, but also a teacher and theorist far ahead of his times. And maybe Almaas' lack of any formal training in both traditional spirituality and psychology provides a key to his achievement.

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About A.H. Almaas (taken from the Ridhwan Foundation Web Site [www.ridhwan.org](http://www.ridhwan.org) )

A.H. Almaas is the pen name of A. Hameed Ali, the originator of the Diamond Approach. Born in Kuwait, his academic background is in physics, mathematics, and psychology.

Ali has developed the Diamond Approach over the last 25 years. He discovered, through self exploration and work with others, that the ego, or personality, is not only an impediment to growth and happiness, but also covers up vital aspects of us that we need if we are to feel fulfilled or at peace or to acquire the ability to be present and operate in the real world. He and his students have learned that these aspects of essence are still available to us and that the personality offers a path to rediscovering them. Aspects of this development are explored in the 1995 book Luminous Night's Journey. In 1975, Ali founded the Ridhwan School in Boulder, Colorado and Berkeley, California. The school now has about 900 members around the United States and abroad, with students in Canada, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and other countries.