



## 9. THE ART OF FLEXIBLE INTEGRATION

*Somewhere in the heart of experience, there is an order and a coherence which we might surprise if we were attentive enough, loving enough, or patient enough. Will there be time?*

—Lawrence Durrell: *Justine*

The process of personal integration is one of containment, not of elimination. We have integrated a healthy ego when we comfortably contain the full spectrum of our thoughts and behavior, both the positive and the negative, i.e. "I am much more assertive now but occasionally still passive." We are hard on ourselves when we demand total elimination of all our shortcomings.

Integration is a human not a mechanical process. It has a unique timing over which we have no control. Integration does not mean that a problem has been totally solved and will never recur, e.g. "My becoming more aware of your feelings does not ensure that I will be there for you every time."

To integrate is to contain comfortably both ends of the spectrum of change. For example, we will become authentic in our self-presentation and at the same time we will still occasionally dissemble. Integration is not total anything; it is simply a rearranging of the proportions of life. Now we are more open and less guarded but both styles still appear in our overall behavior.

While in a monogamous relationship, I have sexual desire for someone else. Integration does not mean violating my experience by rooting out the desire. I contain the desire, but instead of acting on it, I look into what it may be saying to me (and us). In this way, I am faithful to my inner life *and* to my relationships.

Once we acknowledge that true change does not have to mean becoming totally different we become lighter and happier.

We are satisfied simply with increasing positives and decreasing negatives. We are more respectful of the graceful and inscrutable seasons of human transformation, always one part effort and one part timing. We acknowledge and ask others to acknowledge this in us and in themselves. "The wisdom of equanimity, imbued with generosity, sees all situations equally as ornaments of being," as the Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, observes.

*I am my present and my past so new insights will coexist with antiquated beliefs. Instead of attempting to rid myself of my old beliefs, I simply no longer act on them. I allow the atavistic beliefs to be present and I act more and more in accord with the new, better informed, convictions. I contain new behaviors simultaneously with old beliefs and habits:*

1. *I accept challenges while still feeling afraid.*
2. *I trust someone while still doubting.*
3. *I choose pleasures that may have an element of risk.*
4. *I let go of punitiveness while still feeling vengeful.*
5. *I ask for what I want generally while still allowing this strong desire to remain a wish.*
6. *My self-esteem coexists with occasional self-reproach.*
7. *I feel anxious without taking it out on anyone.*

If the ratio always remains the same or keeps altering in favor of what is negative and self-defeating, we are not evolving. If the ratio is changing in favor of the positive—even a moment or inch at a time—we are growing.

We know we are not integrating the full spectrum of our feelings when we keep reducing them all to a single judgment. For example, "I am emotionally stuck," may also mean: "I am depressed and grieving and self-pitying and refusing to self-activate." Or "I am a loving father" may need to be expanded to "I am a loving father in many ways and there are also times when I am controlling and put my own expectations ahead of my children's needs."

Noticing when we disregard the full spectrum of our feelings

and behavior and then acknowledging our missing predicates may enrich our sense of our own depth! "From now on, every time I judge myself (or others), I will use the technique of adding four more adjectives that are also somehow true!"

Acknowledge openly to others that sometimes you succeed and sometimes you fail; sometimes you come through for them and sometimes you let them down. You offer to come through for someone just one more time than you let someone down. You offer not perfection but commitment to make amends for failures, to make restitution for losses. This is a *flexible* (and therefore adult) presentation of your self. It preserves you from the expectation by others that you can be counted on absolutely, or the verdict of others that you be discounted absolutely. "To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often," as Cardinal Newman so wisely remarked. It would be a great violation of humanness to be rigidly perfect in conduct. The repressive vigilance such white-knuckling requires does not signify an achievement but a self-defacement.

If our self-actualization means that our inner work must all be done and we must be perfect, we are choosing never to be happy. No human being is perfect like that, except momentarily. If integration means wholly containing a process, then, as St. Catherine of Siena says, "All the way to heaven is heaven." We are complete now and all along the path.

The hero's journey metaphor powerfully illustrates this. Every step on the path is sacred: the original crossing of the threshold, the struggle, the return with higher consciousness. The hero is always complete because he is acting in accord with here and now unfolding challenges. The struggle is thus equal in value to the prize because both honor what that moment can offer. Full self-esteem thus is ours while we confront our fears, work on them, and integrate them. Then "wholeness is completeness, not perfection," as Jung noted.

Chemical elements cannot be transformed into something new while they remain carefully separated and distinct. When they

are mixed together—contained—in a vessel, they become something more than both originally were. The psyche is that vessel accommodating disparate thoughts and feelings that coexist in us, no matter how unlikely they seem for union. How fitting that the “sacred marriage of opposites” is such an ancient and universal symbol of spiritual fulfillment!

*I try to help people . . . experience their spiritual connectedness by helping them get in touch with both their tenderness and their power. I don't think there's such a thing as instant intimacy or instant spirituality—these are things that evolve in us. To reach them . . . we need to see that . . . we are born to evolve. . . . It is a growing thing—and there is no fear in it. Not that we haven't heard the message before. It's what Christ talked about, and the Buddha, and others. But in the past most of us . . . said, “They're beyond us, they're divine . . . we're nothing but humans, so we can't make the same connection.” But now, we're beginning to know that we can.*

—Virginia Satir

## 10. BEFRIENDING THE SHADOW

*We meet ourselves in a thousand disguises along the path.*  
—Jung

The Shadow is the archetype of the unconscious that represents the feared, denied, unaddressed, forbidden, and excluded parts of ourselves. Joseph Campbell calls the Shadow “the inconvenient or resisted psychic powers that we have not dared to integrate.” We project these powers (characteristics) onto others of our same sex and react strongly to them.

The negative Shadow is composed of our own unacceptable and disowned defects that we strongly condemn in others. What we are unconscious of in ourselves, we become emphatically conscious of in others.

The positive Shadow is composed of the good qualities hidden in us that we strongly admire or envy in others. We consciously respect in them what we inwardly disavow in ourselves. “In every work of genius, we can recognize our own rejected thoughts. They come back to us with a certain alienated majesty” (Emerson).

### *I and It*

The Shadow turns some of our “I” (what is really ourselves) into “It” (which seems to exist only in others). Befriending the Shadow means restoring our “I” to its wholeness by taking back—recollecting—all our projected, banished parts. “Where It was, there I shall be” (Freud).

What we exclude and disown becomes larger than life. It turns on us and scares us. We are then hurt by an un-lived part of our very selves. To recollect or integrate our projections is to acknowledge them and let them back in. Then we contain all the