

Addiction and the Quest for Wholeness

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The global rise of addictions in the modern world is alarming. What the discipline of modern Western psychology fails to recognize is the connection between the loss of a sense of the sacred and the rise in addiction and mental illness. Due to the spiritual desolation prevalent in the present day and its traumatizing effects, the human search for wholeness and healing is all too often diverted into destructive and dysfunctional behaviors. It is only a spiritual approach to the *science of the soul* that allows psychology to restore the categories of Spirit, soul, and body, along with their corresponding degrees of reality. This paper examines the root causes of addiction in order to better understand the collective search for wholeness and healing. The framework employed for this study is the *perennial psychology* – an application of the universal wisdom found in humanity’s spiritual patrimony to the proper understanding of this burgeoning crisis. The objective of the study is to propose a more integrative approach to assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of addiction.





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*My body is in pain, my breath burning
Come and extinguish the fire of separation
I spend the nights roving about in tears.*
– Mīrābāī (1980, 74)

The soul finds rest in no one but God.
– Meister Eckhart (1986, 336)

The man of God realizes that all these desires are the desire for God.
– Rūmī (2004, 46)

We seek harmony with all creation.
– Fools Crow (in Mails 1990, 47)

1 Introduction

It is striking that in today’s *therapeutic culture*, the epidemic of addiction has become so commonplace that most people have become desensitized to it; to the degree that its prevalence has been normalized and its deeper dimensions, in large part, remain undiscerned. Life in modernity is out of balance because of its totalizing worldview, which is desacralized and materialistic to an extreme. It appears to be rapidly ravaging societies around the world by inciting endless desires that can never be fulfilled and which are fundamentally destructive to the human condition. It is as if the massive rise in addictions of every sort, now also referred to as *substance use disorders*, has always been the norm. Although addictions have always existed since the earliest times, the data on the human and social impact of addiction and its devastation across all cultures of the world is alarming. As such, this blight needs to be regarded not only as a public health disaster but, principally, as a spiritual crisis facing all

of humanity. For this reason, it has been rightly observed that “*addiction is the sacred disease of our time*” (May 1991, viii).

Contemporary psychology is, in many ways, an attempt to fill the spiritual absence – loss of the sense of the sacred – both in society and in the human microcosm. But without acknowledging and including the sacred, this discipline cannot provide holistic modes of treatment and healing. This loss of the sacred has left an epistemological and ontological void with severe consequences for our human collectivity that contemporary psychology cannot remedy, as it itself is a derivative of modernity’s desecralized worldview. We must not overlook the fact that psychology also contributed to the loss of faith we find in the present day and to what we might call the *trauma of secularism*. In sketching the secular trajectory that began with the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution and which led to the Enlightenment project, it becomes discernable how the steady decline of religion and spirituality brought about a psychological outlook devoid of Spirit. A proper *science of the soul* has been replaced with a caricature of how psychology was traditionally envisioned.

This paper surveys the origins of addiction in order to improve our understanding of this ubiquitous phenomenon. In doing so, it aims to promote a quest for healing based on holistic methods that are grounded in the traditional wisdom found among humanity’s spiritual traditions. The myriad addictions of the present day, when understood according to the framework of metaphysics, are a symptom of the pathology of fallen humanity within *samsāra*, which seeks to find wholeness in that which is unable to give it. The religions have understood and foretold that it is the increasing dissociation of the human psyche from the Spirit – which denies a connection acknowledged by the traditional cosmologies – that makes such attempts futile. It is through the religions and spiritual traditions that we can identify a metaphysical basis for a multidimensional understanding of addiction as well as develop methods for whole-person treatments and healing. An integrated understanding of the human person reveals that the exclusion of metaphysics from psychology is at the very root of its current crisis. This predicament stems from psychology’s inability to see that its overreliance on modern science reduces its sphere of authority merely to the empirical order – to what can be known through the

five senses and the faculty of human reason. In contrast, the perennial psychology is able to discern the tripartite constitution of human beings and that of the cosmos – of which we are but a mirror – consisting of Spirit, soul, and body; or the spiritual, psychic, and corporeal states. This paper examines the problem of addiction from the perspective of the world’s religions and their mystical paths. It is through an application – to the study of psychology – of the universal wisdom found in these sacred traditions that we may resurrect a *science of the soul* that affords a more profound understanding of the human condition. This approach is also known as the *perennial psychology*.

At the outset, it is important to begin any consideration of addiction by understanding that the phenomenon of addiction can be likened to an exaggerated condition that is common to all people. In a sense, we are all struggling with one form of addiction or another. Although not everyone will be diagnosed with a substance use disorder, there are certain dysfunctional dependencies that we can all identify within ourselves. They do not have to turn our lives upside down for them to be addictions; the important thing is to see the underlying process that drives them and how it informs our thoughts and behaviors.

Addictions were normalized by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who developed the psychoanalytic *talking cure* and laid the foundations for the discipline modern psychology: “*There is a general tendency of our mental apparatus... it seems to find expression in the tenacity with which we hold on to the sources of pleasure at our disposal, and in the difficulty with which we renounce them.*” (Freud 1953, 16). The irony is that no substance or outward activity can satisfy our inner feelings of emptiness or craving for meaning. In fact, to the contrary, as Aristotle (384–322) wrote: “*It is of the nature of desire not to be satisfied, and most men live only for the gratification of it.*” (Aristotle 1885, 46). In our fallen *samsāric* state, the following prognosis of the human condition is fitting: “*To be alive is to be addicted*” (May 1991, 11). And it is fairly easy to find examples of this just about anywhere we look.

2 The Misguided Search for Transcendence

We will now turn our attention to some examples of how the world's religions comprehend human suffering and how this informs their approach to addressing addiction. It is not the objects of our addictions that are the problem, but our clinging to them. The Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) explained: “*Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within that cause the damage when set on these things.*” (2017, 123). The Buddha taught that human existence consists of continuous ontological dissatisfaction, known as *dukkha* (Pāli; Sa. *dukkha*), meaning “suffering” or “pain”. The term *dukkha* can also be applied in a broader sense to anything that is unsatisfactory, including both bodily and mental illnesses. Closely related to suffering is *craving* or *desire* (Pāli *tanhā*; Sa. *trsnā*). At the heart of the Buddhist tradition is the teaching of *dependent origination* (Pāli *paticcasamuppāda*; Sa. *pratītyasamutpāda*), which describes the chain of causation that determines the causes of suffering and the conditions that lead to birth, old age and death, along with the Four Noble Truths: (1) the existence of suffering; (2) the cause of suffering; (3) the end of suffering; and (4) the path leading out of suffering. Buddhist psychology therefore aims to identify *dukkha* and eradicate it from human existence. This includes the *three poisons of greed* (Pāli *lobha*), *hatred* (Pāli *dosa*), and *delusion* (Pāli *moha*).

In Buddhist cosmology and psychology, there are six realms that constitute life in *samsāra* (the cycle of birth-and-death): hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, fighting spirits, and gods. The realm of the “hungry ghost” (Sa. *preta*) is depicted as populated by those who have an insatiable appetite for drugs, drink, sex, food, and material objects and are never satisfied that they have enough of these things. Hungry ghosts are traditionally portrayed as creatures with oversized, empty stomachs with minuscule mouths and thin, elongated necks that prevent them from consuming, thus keeping them in a state of perpetual hunger. Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Chögyam Trungpa (1940–1987) underscored (1987, 7) how

this tendency operates to varying degrees within everyone and why we struggle to obtain enduring happiness:

The joy of possessing does not bring us pleasure any more once we already possess something, and we are constantly trying to look for more possessions, but it turns out to be the same process all over again; so there is constant intense hunger which is based not on a sense of poverty but on the realization that we already have everything yet we cannot enjoy it.

It is the mindset of craving or desire, unable to discern what it truly wants, that causes the human being to suffer. The renowned Indian sage Śāntideva (685–763) realized that “*although they do not wish to suffer / They are greatly attached to its [note: suffering’s] causes*” (1992, 68). For this reason, the Buddha taught a path beyond craving or desire: “*From craving arises sorrow and from craving arises fear. If a man is free from craving, he is free from fear and sorrow.*” (Śāntideva 1973, 66). Similarly, Sufi poet and mystic Rūmī (1207–1273) avowed: “*For all pains arise out of the fact that you desire something, and that is not attainable. When you no more desire, the pain no more remains.*” (Rūmī 2004, 139).

Thus we glean the insight that this emptiness and craving is the underlying impulse for all addiction and, as such, we search for wholeness and healing through its eradication. It is the confusion of this yearning for the sacred that leads to the many pathways of harmful behaviors. The connection between trauma exposure and addiction has been well established, but through the secularizing trajectory of modernism and postmodernism – and the consequent loss of the sense of the sacred – great harm has been inflicted on the human psyche. With the rise of trauma-informed approaches, it is too often overlooked that the anguish of living in a world devoid of nourishing forms of religion and spirituality is tremendously detrimental, as these are invaluable supports for human resiliency and psychological well-being.

Saints and sages inform us that, if we embed our existence in the transient phenomena of this world, we will never find enduring happiness. Swami Ramdas (1884–1963) pointed out: “We may live for thousands of years and may obtain whatever we desire of the world, but we shall never be happy so long as our hunger for earthly things does not perish.” (Ramdas 2014, 12). The emptiness that is discerned in the external world is one and the same void felt by human beings. Many people find that the endless pursuits of worldly ambitions are radically unfulfilling; indeed, they can become a serious ordeal “when you’ve gotten to the top of the ladder and find it’s against the wrong wall” (Campbell 1991, 68). The search to remedy this sense of vacancy can either lead individuals on the quest for transcendence or to pursue the gratification of endless and destructive desires. Rūmī (2004, 198) poignantly outlined our hidden longing for wholeness in the Divine:

The human quest consists in seeking a thing which one has not yet found; night and day a man is engaged in searching for that. But the quest where the thing has been found and the object attained, and yet there is one who is seeking for that thing – that is a strange quest indeed, surpassing the human imagination, inconceivable to man. For man’s quest is for something new which he has not yet found; this quest is for something one has found already and then one seeks. This is God’s quest... for God has found all things, and so He is the Finder. Yet for all that God most High is the Seeker... O man, so long as you are engaged in the quest that is created in time, which is a human attribute, you remain far from the goal. When your quest passes away in God’s quest and God’s quest overrides your quest, then you become a seeker by virtue of God’s quest.

The Divine is therefore seeking us all the time, yet we remain oftentimes unreceptive to this call, continually distracted and forgetful of what transcends the sensory world and our involvement in it. The sapiential traditions remind us time and time again that “He is with you wherever you are” (Qur’ān 57:4).

Jean-Claude Larchet (2012, 81), an authority on the Patristic traditions of the Christian East, examines the existential malady that is attributable to our fallen condition:

Man believes he can remedy this frustration by the very means which in truth is its cause: instead of recognizing that the void he senses is the absence of God in him, and that consequently only God can fill it, he wants to see therein the call to possess and delight in new sensible objects that he believes could satisfy this void. So as to avoid the pain following every pleasure, and to put an end to the deep frustration of his desire for infinite delight, fallen man perseveres in his search for new pleasures, not resting in his unbridled running after desires. He gathers and multiplies his pleasures in an attempt to reconstitute the totality, continuity and absoluteness for which he is nostalgic, believing in his delusion to find the infinite in the indefinite.

2.1 Recovery and the Sacred

For the perennial psychology, it is essential to recognize that human beings were made for the Absolute and can only find peace in what transcends the psycho-physical realm. This in-born desire for the Divine was powerfully asserted by Christ when he said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:21). This longing is illustrated in the Psalms (42:1): “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.” St. Augustine (354–430) similarly affirmed that “[f]or Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee” (1959, 3). All attempts to seek wholeness in anything other than the Divine are bound to fail. As Julian of Norwich (c. 1342–c. 1416) explained: “Our soul may never have rest in anything which is beneath itself” (1978, 313). The Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) wrote: “The desire for... perfection... is that desire which always makes every pleasure appear incomplete, for there is no joy or pleasure so great in this life that it can quench the thirst in our Soul” (1887, 119).

In a letter written to Bill Wilson (1895–1971), co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) wrote about a former individual that he was treating (identified as Rowland Hazard III, 1881–1945) in a way that conveys the spiritual longing found within all human beings and how

this impulse can be confused with substance abuse: “*His craving for alcohol was the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: union with God.*” (Anonymous 1984, 384). William James (1842–1910), the father of American psychology, was an important influence on the development of Alcoholics Anonymous [1]. James (1982, 387) documented the connection between substance use and the search for deliverance:

The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes... Not through mere perversity do men run after it.

Substance abuse, like all forms of addiction, is a substitute for the sense of the sacred whose loss pervades the modern world. With this said, James acknowledged the role of the spiritual dimension in recovery: “*The only radical remedy I know for dipsomania [note: alcoholism] is religiomania.*” (James 1982, 268). Jung commented, “[a]lcohol in Latin is ‘spiritus,’ and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: ‘spiritus contra spiritum.’” (Anonymous 1984, 384). This formula, *Spirit against the spirits* is an important insight of which contemporary psychology has yet to take into full account: namely, that alcoholism, or any type of addiction, needs to embrace the spiritual dimension in its assessment, diagnosis, and treatment.

The question is asked, “[h]ow could a sober man know the drunkards’ intoxication?” (Rūmī 1983, 320). It is through metaphysics that we can comprehend the dialectic between sobriety and inebriation, and their ultimate resolution in the Absolute. In fact, we are informed by Rūmī that, in the essence of the Divine, both are to be found: “*I am the root of the root of sobriety and intoxication*” (1983, 266). Islam recognizes itself in *sobriety* (Arabic *sahw*), as conveyed in the Qur’ānic verse 4:43: “*O you who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when you are drunken until you know what you are uttering.*” However, within its inner or mystical dimension of Sufism, Islam claims both realms of *sobriety* (Arabic *sahw*) and *intoxication* (Arabic *sukr*). In the mystical paths, transcendence is associated with the former and immanence with the latter. Persian poet and mystic Ruzbihan Baqli (1128–1209) affirmed a unitive under-

standing of these concepts: “*Sobriety and intoxication are one, for the lover dives into the oceans of Greatness and Might, and there the intoxicated is not distinguished from the sober.*” (in Ernst 1985, 49).

Mystical traditions use the symbolism of *wine* for Divine Love and *intemperance* for union with the Absolute. There are also cautionary reminders about not abusing alcohol or substances: “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18). It is an error to confuse terrestrial wine with the celestial wine of the Spirit, which is the object of our search for transcendence. This understanding of reality differs from those who abuse alcohol or drugs, for the celestial wine signifies union with Divine reality, what in Hindu and Islamic traditions is regarded as being-consciousness-bliss (Sa. *sat-chit-ānanda*; Arabic *wujūd-wijdān-wajd*).

Altered states of consciousness may bear some semblance to the descriptions of mystical experiences found in spiritual traditions; however, there is an important difference in that *experience* here pertains to the limits of the empirical ego rather than pure immersion in the transpersonal dimension. The saints and sages were not interested in experiences as such, but in union with the Absolute. Śrī Rāmakrishna (1836–1886) once remarked: “*Communion with God is the true wine, the wine of ecstatic love*” (1977, 94). Śrī Ānandamayī Mā (1896–1982) urged us to “[b]ecome drinkers of nectar, all of you – drinkers of the wine of immortality. Tread the path of immortality, where no death exists and no disease.” (2007, 79). St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) spoke of this state as “*heavenly inebriation*” (1980, 244), and there are many other mystics who also experienced such religious ecstasy, such as St. Catherine of Alexandria (c. 287–c. 305), Hildegard of Bingen (c. 1098–1179), St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1182–1226), and St. Philip Neri (1515–1595). Śrī Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) went so far as to suggest that we are always already in a state of ecstasy (Sa. *samādhi*) and need not search for it: “*Actually, one is always in samadhi but one does not know it. To know it all one has to do is to remove the obstacles.*” (1985, 174). Prior to concluding this section, it needs to also be acknowledged that the spiritual traditions equate overindulgence in alcohol with ignorance. The Japanese Pure Land Buddhist master Shinran (1173–1263) spoke of those who were “*drunk with the wine of ignorance*” (2007, 197).

3 The Wholeness with Which We Were Born

The stopping of using substances or engaging in destructive behaviors does not resolve all of the issues, for the void within still exists and will not be satiated without engaging in a profound inquiry into *Who am I?* To be fully human is to recognize our fundamental relationship with the Divine, which is to say that our true identity *in divinis* is the “primordial nature” (Arabic *fitrah*), the “image of God” (Lat. *imago Dei*), “Buddha-nature” (Sa. *Buddha-dhātu*), or the “Self” (Sa. *Ātmā*). The doctrine of identity is unanimous across the traditions regarding our fundamental connection to the Divine, which is both transcendent and immanent. This is articulated in the Ashtāvakra Gītā of the Hindu tradition – “*You are what you think*” (1990, 3) – and in the Dhammapada of the Buddhist tradition, “[a]ll that we are is the result of what we have thought” (1965, 3), and additionally in the Christian tradition, “[a]s he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Both a horizontal and vertical understanding are needed to fully situate and comprehend the human psyche, yet mainstream psychology is for the most part confined to the horizontal dimension.

Abstinence from self-destructive behavior is imperative but it is only the beginning. The notion that we are in absolute control of our lives must be reconsidered before we can acknowledge our impotence and our reliance on the Divine. Twelve-Step Programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous point out that: “*We admitted* [note: that] *we were powerless over* [note: our addiction] – *that our lives had become unmanageable*” (Anonymous 2001, 59) and the need to, first and foremost, “*quit playing God*” (62). In this way, we come to see our “*spiritual bankrupt[cy]*” (287) and the need we have for a power greater than ourselves.

At this juncture, embracing a spiritual form becomes necessary in order not to fall into the trap of substituting one addiction for another, which can often make things worse. Wholeness and healing cannot be obtained by individual effort alone; they require an agency that is not subject to the profound limitations of the ordinary self. But neither should this suggest the opposite – that we ought to remain compla-

cent and indifferent to any effort, which is yet another trap. Due to the many misunderstandings of what religion truly is, it is necessary to recall anew that the etymological root of the English word *religion* is the Latin *religare*, meaning to “to re-bind” or “to bind back” – by implication, to the Divine that is at once transcendent and immanent. As it has been expressed in the Christian tradition: “*Without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5), but it is also said that “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Philippians 4:13). There is a similar Qur’ānic verse that conveys the need to rely on the Divine: “*Naught befalls us, save that which God has decreed for us*” (9:51). Shin Buddhism makes the distinction between *Other-Power* (JPN. *tariki*) and *self-power* (JPN. *jiriki*), which is to say the distinction between reliance on the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha, as opposed to our own efforts, to attain Nirvana. This awareness will help seekers turn to the Divine: “*When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me.*” (Qur’ān 2:186). The Divine’s remembrance of us is conditional on our remembrance of the Divine: “*Remember Me, and I will remember you*” (Qur’ān 2:152). The Sage of Arunachala conveyed our dependence on the transpersonal dimension: “*Divine Grace is essential for Realization*” (Maharshi 1996, 33).

Domination over oneself requires that which transcends the empirical ego or separate self. The futility of attempting to tame our desires by the ego alone was remarked by the 68th Jagadguru of Kanchi (1894–1994): “*While desire fulfilled leads to further desire, desire frustrated turns into anger, like the rebound of a ball thrown at a wall*” (2008, 138). It is through commitment to a spiritual form – and by adhering to its time-worn paths that – we can learn detachment. The Hindu tradition speaks of submitting ourselves completely to the Divine, in order to go beyond our temporal attachments: “*Only by love can men see me, and know me, and come unto me. He who works for me, who loves me, whose End Supreme I am, free from attachment to all things, and with love for all creation, he in truth comes unto me.*” (Bhagavad Gītā 11:54–55); and also, “[w]hen all desires that cling to the heart are surrendered, then a mortal becomes immortal” (Katha Upanishad 6:14). According

to Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), detachment “*enkindles the heart and awakens the spirit and stimulates our longings and shows us where God is*” (1981, 294).

A paradoxical characteristic of those who abuse substances is that they are always, albeit unknowingly, affirming the Divine. This will at first glance seem curious and even nonsensical, for it has been said that “[t]he worship of God is an abomination to a sinner” (Ecclesiasticus 1:32) and “[s]urely the soul commands to evil, save whom my Lord may show mercy” (Qur’ān 12:53). Metaphysically speaking, however, whether they realize it or not, everything affirms the Divine in every thought and act, as our entire existence is woven into the sacred. As Eckhart confirmed: “*Even he who blasphemes against God praises God*” (2009, 26). This statement does not, then, imply that we should continue in our excess or folly. For it has also been said, “[w]hat shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:1–2). The Qur’ān (39:53) exhorts us, “[d]o not despair of God’s Mercy,” as the Divine forgives all transgressions. In the Pure Land tradition of Buddhism, we find the following admonition: “*It is like offering more wine before the person has become sober or urging him to take even more poison before the poison has abated. ‘Here’s some medicine, so drink all the poison you like’ – words like these should never be said*” (Shinran 1997, 553).

Addiction can be understood from a metaphysical perspective as a deep-rooted form of idolatry. When anything is substituted for the Divine, it becomes an idol and an obstacle to the spiritual life. This is why it has been stated that “*no man can serve two masters*” (Matthew 6:24). Spiritual wayfarers are instructed to turn to the Divine by taking refuge in it: “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3–5). The Divine Unity is stressed in the Hindu tradition in the following verses: the “*one... without a second*” (Chāndogya Upanishad 6:2:1) or “*one God, the Lord of men*” (Rgveda 8:25:16). This testimony is also found in the essential declaration of faith (Arabic *shahādah*) in Islam, “[t]here is no god but God” or “[t]here is no divinity but the Divine” (Arabic *Lā ilāha illallāh*). It

is the Divine alone that will bring peace to the human soul; therefore, we need to sacrifice our dysfunctional dependencies to the Divine itself. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (11:5) expresses this requirement with this exhortation: “*Offer unto me that which is very dear to thee – which thou holdest most covetable. Infinite are the results of such an offering!*”

The spiritual traditions teach that there is a part of us which is always wedded to divine Reality. The dimension of ourselves that is caught in addictive tendencies or patterns can never compromise our primordial nature. An integral psychology informed by the perennial philosophy recognizes two distinct dimensions of human identity: one relative or horizontal, and the other Absolute or vertical (while never blurring or confusing the two). Kurt Almqvist (1912–2001) pointed out (1983, 194):

One of the most important themes in religion – the most important – is the confrontation between the two ‘selves’ in man: the inner, which partakes of God’s unconditional, infinite nature and is identical with his ‘kingdom,’ and the outer self, or human personality with a certain name. It is the intersection of these two dimensions that comprises the religious life. One sees man horizontally from the earthly side; the other vertically as a vehicle of divinity. The crossing point may be multiplied both horizontally and vertically, making a cosmic web formed in one direction of layered worlds or conditions and, in the other, of the beings embodied in them – horizontal and vertical, woof and warp.

Duo sunt in homine – “*There are two [note: natures] in man*” (Aquinas 1917, 336) was an axiom in the West prior to the emergence of the Renaissance that recognized an outer and inner aspect to our being. Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) pointed out that: “*In any definition of Man, his inner and outer aspect are both to be considered*” (1980, 73). The theomorphic essence is unconditioned and unaffected by the activities of the world: “*Everything a man does in the lower part of active life is necessarily exterior to him, so to speak, beneath him.*” (Cloud of

Unknowing 1978, 72). This was expressed slightly differently by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947): “*Our Inner Man is in the world but not of it, in us but not of us, our Outer Man both in the world and of it.*” (1978, 371). Mainstream psychology focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of the outer human being, unaware that its materialistic science, of necessity, excludes “*inward man*” (Romans 7:22) and has no framework to bridge the traditional doctrine of these two natures within us.

There are several texts in the Upanishads that speak of the “*two birds who dwell on the same tree*” (Mundaka Upanishad 3:1:1; Shvetāshvatarā Upanishad 4:6). These birds illustrate the nature of the human being: one of them eats the fruit of the tree, meaning that it engages in the world of phenomena, while the other looks on without eating – witnessing the transitory nature of all phenomena with equanimity. This describes the distinction between corporeal and spiritual nature that exists in all of us. This same teaching can be framed as the inner and outer dimensions of the human being which need not be opposed to one another; rather, they are interconnected and work together when integrated into our transpersonal presence. Eckhart (1981, 290) observed:

In every man there are two kinds of man: One is called the outer man, which is our sensuality, with the five senses serving him, and yet the outer man works through the power of the soul. The second man is called the inner man, which is the man's inwardness. Now you should know that a spiritual man who loves God makes no use in his outer man of the soul's powers except when the five senses require it; and his inwardness pays no heed to the five senses, except as this leads and guides them, and protects them, so that they are not employed for beastly purposes, as they are by some people who live for their carnal delight, as beasts lacking reason do. Such people deserve to be called beasts rather than men.

The perennial psychology provides spiritual teachings and methods to integrate our outer and inner selves. Again, in our true identity as the “primordial nature” (Arabic *fitrah*), the “image of God” (Lat. *imago Dei*), “Buddha-nature” (Sa. *Buddha-dhātu*), or the “Self” (Sa. *Ātmā*), we are the eternal witness that does not partake in the activities of the temporal world.

No matter how many transgressions we may incur in this life, it must never be forgotten that our primordial nature can never be lost or destroyed, as it contains within itself the transpersonal human archetype. It is our essential identity in the Divine that prevents our fallen or *samsāric* state from becoming absolute or terminal.

We are subjected to many trials in this life, making the path to wholeness and healing difficult; yet spiritual traditions confer on us the necessary discernment to traverse these hallowed paths. It is through the hardships faced in life that we discover who we are. Grace does not always come into our lives gently and can sometimes appear contrary to what is expected. Tibetan Buddhist master Gampopa (1079–1153) went as far as to say, “[o]ne must know that *misfortune, being the means of leading one to the Doctrine, is also a ‘guru’*” (Evans-Wentz 1967, 71). The Islamic tradition speaks about human beings’ misunderstanding of the deeper significance of trials and tribulations on the spiritual path: “*And when harm befalls man, he calls upon Us. Then, when We confer upon him a Blessing from Us, he says, ‘I was only given it because of knowledge.’ Nay, it is a trial, but most of them know not.*” (Qur’ān 39:49).

Rūmī (2004, 33) speaks about the importance of encountering ordeals in life and how they can catalyze the search for a spiritual path: “*It is pain that guides a man in every enterprise. Until there is an ache within him, a passion and a yearning for that thing arising within him, he will never strive to attain it.*” Again, without facing obstacles and ordeals, many people would not find their way to religion. Christian monk and ascetic Evagrius Ponticus (345–399) went as far as to suggest: “*Take away temptations and no-one will be saved.*” (Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 54). St. Anthony the Great (251–356) expressed something similar: “*Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*” (Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 2). It is through a correct understanding of trials that we can come to understand that, not only are we seeking the Divine, but the Divine also seeks us.

A way of overcoming our lower impulses has been known since the earliest times in the world’s valid traditions: namely, spiritual warfare. Ultimately, we are faced with a real con-

flict that is waged in the human heart and symbolized in the battlefield of terrestrial existence. For example, the Buddha himself confirms the following in the Dhammapada: “*One may conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, yet he is the best of conquerors who conquers himself.*” (Rahula 1974, 128). Within Christianity, this notion is expressed by St. Paul: “*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*” (Ephesians 6:12). This is also explicitly found in the Islamic tradition when the Prophet Muhammad refers to the “lesser holy war” (Arabic *al-jihād al-asghar*), which seeks to protect the lovers of God through social or military efforts, and the second and “greater holy war” (Arabic *al-jihād al-akbar*), which was considered to be the highest form of spiritual warfare – one that takes place in ourselves. The notion of spiritual warfare has also been used in the Shamanic or primordial religion of the First Peoples. Medicine man and Sun Dance chief Thomas Yellowtail (1903–1993) explained (in Fitzgerald 1994, 139–40):

The sun dancer and the Sun Dance itself will bless all of the tribe and all creation through the inner, spiritual warfare... The warrior fights an enemy who is on the outside; the sun dancer wages a war on an enemy within himself. Each of us must fight a continuing battle to keep to the spiritual values that represent our traditional heritage. If we fail to be continually alert in our prayers and our attitudes and to use good sense in all that we do, then we will fail in our interior war. In olden days, this interior warfare had the support of the whole tribe, and our life itself helped to guide us in our personal struggle. Nowadays, we must follow the Sun Dance way all the more carefully, because it contains the key to our sacred warfare.

The conflict between human beings and the world is, in reality, a spiritual battle between the higher and lower nature of a person; animality seeks the world of form by gravitating to the sensory, while our theomorphic identity seeks transcendence and gravitates to the Divine. The antidote for this spiritual warfare is exemplified by St. Paul’s exhortation (although its equivalent is found in all spiritual traditions): “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

3.1 The Need for a Spiritual Path

When we realize that addictions lead to a dead end and that alcohol or substance abuse will not fill our inner emptiness, we can then begin to take steps through a spiritual path to immerse ourselves in its teachings and practices. According to Twelve-Step Programs, many individuals need to “*hit bottom*” (Anonymous 2001, 187) before they are able to recognize the extent of their problem and to seek help. It is in reaching this nadir through excess that the following insight by William Blake (1757–1827) can be understood: “*If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.*” (1906, 14). A willingness to engage in reformatory changes is only the beginning. Spiritual traditions talk about what is traditionally known as “*the descent into Hell*” (Perry 1971) or when one “*falls into abysmal darkness*” (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11:3), for it is only through fully fathoming our desperate plight that “*the lower possibilities of the soul are revealed*” (Lings 2006, 80). For the bystander, change is logical and necessary; however, for the individual in the throes of addiction, change can be very frightening and painful, a hell-like experience. In the face of so much suffering and perplexities, we are all in a sense – like Job – crying out: “*Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?*” (Job 35:10). Some have compared this process with entering a “*dark night of the soul*” as taught by St. John of the Cross (1908, 84–85, 86):

The shadow of death and the pains and torments of hell are most acutely felt, that is, the sense of being without God... a fearful apprehension has come upon [note: the soul] that thus it will be with it for ever... It sees itself in the midst of the opposite evils, miserable imperfections and aridities, emptiness of the understanding, and abandonment of the spirit in darkness.

An essential facet of the world’s religions is principally affirmed in the injunction of *dying before dying*, illustrating the importance of attaining a *spiritual death* in this life. As Eckhart (1981, 216) made clear, “*a truly perfect man should be accustomed to regard himself as dead*”; or, as found in the Jewish tradition, one should aspire to the “*cessation or annihilation of existence*” (Heb. *bittul ha-yesh*) – by implication in the Absolute (Schaya 2014, 13). This teaching was made explicit in the renowned words of the Prophet of Islam: “*Die before ye die*” (Arabic *mūtū qabla an tamūtū*). Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000), renowned scholar of the Native American tra-

ditions and world religions, outlined the three stages of this *metanoia* or integral transformative process (Brown 2007, 34), which appear throughout all sapiential traditions:

All true spiritual progress involves three stages, which are not successfully experienced and left behind, but rather each in turn is realized and then integrated within the next stage, so that ultimately they become one in the individual who attains the ultimate goal. Different terms may be used for these stages, but essentially they constitute purification, perfection or expansion, and union.

Across the diverse religious and spiritual traditions of the world, these transformative stages are present in distinct forms: *“Despite the many differences of technique and approach in various paths of spiritual realization, there is in every process of realization the three grand stages of purification, expansion, and union. Something in man must die, something must expand, and only then the essence of man is able to achieve that union.”* (Nasr 1989, 330). If transpersonal union with Ultimate Reality or the Absolute is the final goal of all spiritual disciplines, then it is necessary that the impure not be rejoined with what is pure. For this reason, a process of purification is needed.

The necessity for a core transformation that can release us from addictive tendencies was noted by Thomas à Kempis (1905, 10) (c. 1380–1471):

The man who is not yet wholly dead to self, is soon tempted, and is overcome in small and trifling matters. It is hard for him who is weak in spirit, and still in part carnal and inclined to the pleasures of sense, to withdraw himself altogether from earthly desires. And therefore, when he withdraweth himself from these, he is often sad, and easily angered too if any oppose his will.

What secular psychology often overlooks is that individuals tend to be confused about the meaning of their lives and do not know what they need or what is best for them. This, in large part, due to the emergence of modernism and the secular worldview that has attempted to replace sacred epistemologies with profane culture. Perennial psychology, in contrast, directly tackles this confusion. For example, this predicament is clearly acknowledged in the Islamic tradition: *“It may be that you hate a thing though it be good for you, and it may be that you love a thing though it be evil for you. God knows, and you know not.”* (Qur’ān 2:216). It is by traveling the

spiritual path that we can obtain divine guidance, as Abba Poemen (c. 340–450) observed: *“Vigilance, self-knowledge and discernment; these are the guides of the soul”* (Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 145). At the same time, every human being is responsible for their own actions: *“No soul does evil, save against itself, and none shall bear the burden of another”* (Qur’ān 6:164). Ultimately, it is we who must bear the cost of our wrongdoings: *“And whoever commits a sin, commits it only against his own soul”* (Qur’ān 4:111).

As the saints and sages of all traditions attest, there is no addiction or trauma that cannot be healed and from which we cannot move beyond. We were, after all, born whole and complete, and it is this understanding that brings a sense of context that is very much needed. In the words of St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622): *“Do not lose your inward peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset”* (1871, 228). According to the perennial psychology, it is the way in which things are perceived that either supports our recovery and spiritual health or disturbs the equilibrium of the human psyche, rather than events in themselves. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (c. 50–c. 130) observed: *“It is not possible that that which is by nature free should be disturbed or thwarted by anything but itself. But it is a man’s own judgments [note: thoughts] that disturb him”* (1956, 131). We recall that *“God burdens a soul only to its capacity”* (Qur’ān 2:286), and, likewise, *“God... will not suffer you... above that ye are able... to bear”* (1 Corinthians 10:13). According to the perennial psychology as informed by the Islamic tradition, *“God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves”* (Qur’ān 13:11) and, according to a prophetic saying, *“for every disease there is a cure.”* Commitment to a spiritual tradition has been regarded as one of the most effective means of protecting and ensuring resilience and mental health. Although hardships occur, even traumatic events, it is through religion that one can receive steadfast support to gain perspective and persevere.

The need has been observed in Twelve-Step Programs for those struggling with addiction to associate with others to ensure recovery: *“Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics”* (Anonymous 2001, 89). Whether we are struggling with our addictions or mental health, we require supportive relationships to help us in our recovery process and to maintain and enhance our psychological well-being. We need one another, as no one is saved alone: *“We are members of one another”* (Ephesians 4:25).

Relationships encompass an indefinite number of states of consciousness and levels of reality—a sacred unity both within the created order and in what lies beyond it, as the Lakota saying reveals: *Mitakuye oyasin* – “*We are all related.*” The Hindu tradition has what is known as *satsang*, or an association with truth or reality, which consists of being in the company of saints and sages; however, it also signifies an ultimate encounter with our primordial nature or the Self.

The Buddha considered that “*the entire holy life... is, good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship*” (2000, 1524). Additionally, Confucius (551–479) stressed that the person who “*associates with those that possess the Way... thereby corrects his own faults*” (1938, 87). It is through intimate forms of spiritual fellowship that we can embark on a way of life that adheres to the middle path between extremes. This idea is found in the Gospel of Matthew (7:14): “*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*” In the Islamic tradition, this is known as following the “straight path” (Arabic *al-sirāt al-mustaqīm*; Qur’ān 1:6) and, for this reason, the “fellowship of Muslims” (Arabic *ummah*) is described as a “middle community” (2:143). As Buddha taught, the way of “[a]voiding... extremes, the *Tathāgata* has realized the Middle Path: *it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna*” (Rahula 1974, 92). Confucius also alluded to the middle way: “*To go too far is as bad as not to go far enough*” (1938, 156).

Akin to the Twelve-Step Programs adage of living “*one day at a time*” (Anonymous 2001, 293) we find that all the spiritual traditions teach us to live in the present moment, as life can only be truly experienced in the here-and-now. “*See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2). The present moment contains the whole of time, both past and future. This is why it is often referred to in traditions as the *eternal now*. The present moment is ultimately all that exists, as the past is no longer and the future has yet to arrive. To be mindful of the here-and-now is to enter the contemplative state of the Real, which is none other than this timeless present. Metaphysically, the whole of time, past and future, is contained in the *eternal now*, as Ānandamayī Mā teaches: “*In that supreme moment, all moments are contained*” (2007, 91). Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) conveyed a similar teaching: “*All time is comprised in the present or ‘now’*” (Cusanus 1954, 76). Within Islamic spirituality, there is a well-known saying that “*the Sufi is the son of the moment*” (Arabic *al-sufī ibn al-waqt*).

4 Conclusion

Psychology today attempts to assess, diagnose, and treat addiction without acknowledging what we have termed the *trauma of secularism*. Without understanding the historical developments that led to the world of modernity – the fruition of the Age of Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – it is difficult to understand how this profane trajectory radically undermined the collective psyche. The discipline of modern psychology has unapologetically participated in this anti-spiritual outlook which, paradoxically and unknowingly, it has also attempted to remedy since its inception. Deprived of metaphysics, contemporary psychology remains in a hopeless, self-contradictory predicament because it cannot be called what it alleges itself to be: namely, a *science of the soul*.

In an addictive state of mind, we are unable to get enough of what we do not need, and for this reason we remain unsatisfied even when we obtain the thing desired. Similarly, we cannot get enough of what we truly need, due to an inability to properly understand the underlying source of our addiction. What is forgotten or confused is that we are ultimately seeking transcendence and healing from our *samsāric* or fallen condition, as unambiguously taught in the world’s religions. To be human is to be called to the sacred, and our soul will not rest until it returns home, a journey supported by adhering to one of humanity’s divinely revealed sapiential traditions. It is through metaphysics that a multidimensional model for understanding the spiritual roots of substance abuse can emerge. Informed by the diverse epistemologies of the world’s cultures, we can better understand the underlying motives of addiction and the means to facilitate wholeness. To become what we are entails restoring our spiritual dimension, the *science of the soul*, for “*the way of healing is one of integration; resolution of the psychomachy [note: battle for the soul]; making peace with one’s Self*” (Coomaraswamy 1988, 231).

Note

- [1] “*He [note: Bill Wilson] would later say that [note: William] James, though long in his grave, had been a founder of Alcoholics Anonymous*” (Anonymous 1984, 124).

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