

NOK LAPJA: WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER OF HUNGARY

An interview with Swami Ajaya

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RELATIONSHIPS

What's the main difference between western psychology and Yoga Psychology?

Western psychologies tend to look at a human being either in terms of the past (what caused you to be the way you are), or the future (how you can become your ego ideal). Yoga psychology encourages you to explore the wonder of what is already here in the present moment. Instead of assuming something is deficient and trying to fix yourself, you open to presence and experience the formerly neglected magnificence of who you already are.

What does Yoga psychology teach about relationships?

Understanding relationships begin with exploring your relationship with yourself. Yoga Psychology encourages self-inquiry. You might begin by asking: How do I relate to myself: am I critical of my body, thoughts, feelings, or actions? How does it feel when I am judgmental of myself? How would it feel to be free of self-criticism, to really accept all of myself? If you are not at ease with yourself you cannot be at ease with others. Yoga Psychology leads you to a place within that is free from reactivity, expectations and demands of yourself and others, so that you can be present responsive, and open to life.

Marriages and long-term relationships seem to fail in Western societies. Why do you think this is happening?

When we come into this world as infants we are open and vulnerable. We gradually mimic and take on the attitudes and beliefs of the adults that look after us. We come to believe that we are what they attribute to us. If a father says, "you are lazy", or "you are stupid", we believe him. His actions towards us may demonstrate that we are not worthy of his unconditional love. Thus, we form a constricted and contracted identity. We believe that we are lacking in many qualities that are necessary to be a complete person. So, we seek out another person who seems to have those qualities that we think we need, perhaps someone that we imagine will love us unconditionally. We become wedded to that person. Eventually we realize that the person we chose does not possess the qualities of our ego ideal, so we try to change him in order to get our needs met. Most relationships involve a power struggle. Instead

of appreciating ones partner, each is dissatisfied and trying to get the other to “improve”. This sort of relationship is doomed to fail.

How can Yoga Psychology help these problems?

Satisfying relationships occur when we feel complete in ourselves and share our overflowing fullness with others. Looking for a person to make us feel complete is like trying to fill a bucket with a hole in it. Such a bucket can never be filled. We must go to the source of our underlying sense of inadequacy,

Yoga psychology shows you a new way of experiencing yourself. It leads you to become aware that you are not the contracted or limited self that you mistakenly believe yourself to be. One way it does this is by teaching you how to be here for yourself rather than being swept up by emotions, reactions and rigid beliefs and thereby losing your sense of self. For example, if you are feeling disappointment in this moment, you can become caught up in the melodrama that accompanies this emotion. You may blame another person for your feelings, try to control him, pretend to yourself that you are not disappointed, or try to manipulate others and yourself in order to avoid the feeling of disappointment. On the other hand, you can give attention to the feeling of disappointment as it is arising without becoming engaged in the story. As you give space for the pure feeling to be here, neither encouraging it nor rejecting it, it gets the attention that had been missing. When you react from disappointment you became stuck in it, but when you allow it to be without identifying with all of the melodrama that it can bring forth, surprisingly, its need for attention is easily met and it moves on.

Through this process of self-inquiry you begin to discover a previously unrecognized center of awareness that is more substantial than your contracted identity. You now experience a capacity to be lovingly present with yourself. This quality enables you to be lovingly present with others and serendipitously provides a model for others to emulate.

Many spiritual schools teach about relationships the following: if you don't love and respect yourself, you are not prepared for a relationship, because you will project your fears and problems onto your partner, etc. What does Yoga Psychology teach about this.

Yoga psychology would agree that developing love and respect for oneself is a necessary foundation for having satisfying relationships. We transition from self-deprecation to self-appreciation by getting in touch with loving feelings toward ourselves and allowing these feelings to spread into what has been unacceptable in us. This involves some retraining. Eventually, we discover that this unconditional positive regard does not belong to or emanate from us, that we cannot take credit for it. It comes from a source that is greater than our personality. We find that we no longer have to make an effort to love ourselves. Loving presence is already here and we need

only be open to it. With this realization, we experience an ease of being; the process of coming into wholeness becomes much simpler.

We now know that electromagnetic waves of various frequencies are all around us. They even pass through our bodies, yet we are not aware of them. A couple of hundred years ago humans did not even know that such waves exist. Once we became aware of them we could tap into them to our great benefit.

If we were to turn our attention from the content of our everyday involvements to the context or background of what is occurring, we would find that we also exist in another kind of energetic field. Like the radio waves these emanations surround and flow through us. But we are so caught up in our preoccupations that we do not even notice them. These waves have the quality of tender unconditional love.

Yogis have learned to tune into these pervasive waves of enveloping love. It is surprisingly easy to experience these emanations when we stop focusing on the ordinary content of our experience. When we let our attention rest on and participate in this welcoming background, the contracted I, with its worries and fixations, is nurtured and we awaken from the experience of separation and alienation. Now we cannot help but enter into intimate relationship with all that is.

In our relationships we try to measure up to many expectations and are confused when we fail. How can we change this attitude?

Most relationships are based on conditional acceptance. We are liked if we act in proscribed ways and are criticized when we behave in ways that are not condoned. We rarely find the unconditional love that we long for. We have many orphaned aspects within ourselves such as our rage, jealousy, and "selfishness", that lie hidden as we are trying to measure up to the expectations of ourselves and others. Expectations lead us to isolate ourselves from many aspects of ourselves that have acquired a bad reputation. This leads to inner conflict, for what is rejected doesn't disappear, it waits for an unconscious moment to express itself.

If you want to become whole, you must stop assigning the various aspects of yourself to categories like good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable; you must welcome all that you are. When welcomed, the formerly unwanted aspect of yourself no longer needs to be rebellious; it becomes integrated, part of your inner family, and contributes its naturally enriching function.

You heal yourself when you are present to the discomfort that expecting creates for you. Let your non-judgmental attention rest on your experience of expecting, rather than on *what* you are expecting. Stay with this exploration for several minutes and you will find that this acceptance of and tenderness toward "you who is expecting," will suffuse through this uncomfortable way of being and transmute its energy. Then, ask yourself, "What would it be like to let go of my expectations of others and myself?" Most of us have a fear that we would not be able to function as well in society if we reduced our expectations, but is this really true? Would you actually be more open and responsive in each moment?

One of your workshops is about sustaining relationships – As we are growing, we make strategies of self defense and finally these strategies kill the relationship”. How can we stop this?

Who is it that is making these strategies? It is the sense of I that has defined itself in a very limited way. When you believe that you are a separate individual you naturally want to protect yourself, for what is distinct from you can be overwhelming and threatening. So, you develop a protective shield. Unfortunately, this shield also prevents all that is tender, nurturing, and healing from penetrating. It separates you from your innermost self and from intimate relationship with another, with nature, and with spirit.

You cannot stop this. This is how the contracted identity copes with life. You cannot create a successful strategy to let go of “strategies of self-defense,” since that very attempt is itself a strategy for maintaining control and protecting yourself from vulnerability.

Some would say that release from strategizing happens through grace. Perhaps, in this state of pervasive threat you are fortunate to come across, be open to, and learn from someone who has a different sense of who he/she is, who does not feel so threatened by the world. Perhaps you get glimpses of feeling secure, or you go to a workshop where you discover how to shift your sense of I from the contracted self to the background of unconditional positive regard. Such experiences lead you to feel safe enough to question your defensive strategies and to gradually allow rigid positions to be met with tenderness. You discover something deeper in yourself than your usual contracted sense of yourself and you allow that to guide you. You begin to discover that letting go feels much better than continually being on the alert for possible threats to your self-definition, that you can live with a greater sense of spaciousness and ease than you previously imagined.

Why is vulnerability important for relationships?

It is important to understand what we mean by vulnerability. Vulnerability to life trumps vulnerability to another personality. Many of us mistakenly allow ourselves to become vulnerable to a cause or to a charismatic, duplicitous or captivating person who uses us for his own aggrandizement. When this happens it is because we are acting out of insecurity. We delude ourselves by looking for security in another person.

Real vulnerability is being open and vulnerable to what is true for you here and now, instead of creating a false sense of security by manipulating relationships. Giving up living from how you would like it to be or how you fear it will be, you become vulnerable to and intimate with what is actually being revealed in each moment. You allow the moment to have its way through you and to inform you. Then you can be flexible, establishing healthy boundaries with another, or dissolving boundaries when it is safe to do so. You can fully participate in relationships, conveying what you know to be true, without needing to defend yourself.

Vulnerable to experiencing what is, you find yourself in an intimate relationship with all of life, and life with a partner is continually fresh and alive.

Could you mention one example of how Yoga Psychology helped your patients?

I have a client from another country so we meet using Skype. She is married, has children, and is in her forties. As she talks to me she is panic-stricken, reacting to some events in her life that feel threatening. She is carried away by her emotional reactivity. In the past we have talked about what causes her to be so distraught, how she can shift the way she perceives what is happening in her life, and how she can calm herself through yogic breathing practices. But in this session I find the content of what she is talking about and even her emotionality to be less important than a quality that is present in the background. I am aware of a loving presence that surrounds her and permeates her in the midst of her distress. This loving presence is so palpable that I am moved to call her attention to it. I ask her if she can sense the nurturing quality that is here with her. After a brief time of sensing into her experience at that moment she acknowledges that she too feels this loving presence. I ask her to continue exploring this felt sense and how it is interacting with her distraught feelings. As we continue to explore the tender nurturing warmth spreads into the disturbed feelings and spontaneously provides relief. We have become aware of the context or background and have allowed it to be in the foreground of awareness, nothing more. As the session ends she feels calm and centered. In subsequent sessions emotional imbalance sometimes returns and we engage in a similar process. As we repeat this practice over several therapy sessions she becomes increasingly able to be aware of this milieu and to live in awareness of it. Her tendency to become carried away by her fears decreases remarkably.

What I have described is not a therapeutic strategy. It is a spontaneous recognition that has begun to come forth with certain clients in the past year. I have been surprised to experience a number of clients who have been released from long standing dysfunctional patterns of thinking and reacting through this simple process of becoming aware of unconditional positive regard that accompanies them in all times and places. After many years as a psychotherapist I am finding that less is more, less trying to figure things out, less trying to help someone to change, less effort and more vulnerability to what is already unfolding.