

# PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

(Its contribution to mental health)

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As 'Life' is a very wide term, I have specified it in order to become more precise. I have concentrated in my article on mental life which forms an integral part of human personality. Hence my sub title: *'Philosophy and its contribution to mental health'*.

The word philosophy comes from the Greek words *'philein'* which means love, and *'Sophia'* means wisdom. "Philosophy has been both the seeking of wisdom and the wisdom sought."<sup>1</sup> Philosophy takes view of life and the universe as a whole as compared to other branches of knowledge such as biology, chemistry, physics which are sectional studies of reality from different angles. C.E.M. Joad rightly says that philosophy "takes into account all branches and aspects of human knowledge and experience. The inspiration of the artist, the vision of the mystic, the social urge of the reformer, the emotions of the lover, and the moral intuitions of the plain, man, all are grist to the philosopher's mill. He must also take into consideration the conclusions and discoveries of the scientist."<sup>2</sup>

It makes reasoned inquiry into and clarifies concepts to solve problems. To Ighal, "The spirit of philosophy is one of free inquiry. It suspects all authority. Its function is to trace the uncritical assumptions of human thought to their hiding places, and in this pursuit it may finally end in denial or a frank admission of the incapacity of pure reason to reach the ultimate reality."<sup>3</sup>

As such philosophy is very important in all the fields of Art and Science. But, to my mind, it has tremendous importance in building personality. Harold H. Titus pointedly says, "The life of a person who is matured

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<sup>1</sup> D.D. Runes, Dictionary of Philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> C.E.M. Joad, Guide to Modern Thought, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Iqbal, Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p.1.

mentally is integrated around a philosophy of life"<sup>4</sup> philosophy sets ends and purposes which, as Iqbal says, "form the warp and woof of conscious experience.... In fact, they constitute the forward push of our life, and thus, in a way anticipate and influence the states that are yet to be. To be determined by an end is to be determined by what ought to be."<sup>5</sup> Again, philosophy gives us values. Jacques Maritain justly observes that "men do not live only by bread, vitamins, and technological discoveries. They live by values and realities which are above time and are worth knowing for their own sake."<sup>6</sup> Next, philosophy helps man construct his beliefs with due deliberation and analysis which are the integral part of personality. According to Hugh Stevenson Tigner, "This capacity to believe is the most significant and fundamental human faculty, and the most important thing about a man is what he believes, in the depth of his being. This is the thing that makes him what he is; the thing that organises him and feeds him; the thing that keeps him going in the face of untoward circumstances; the thing that gives him resistance and drive. Let neutrality, confusion, indifference or skepticism enter this inner glance, and the very springs of life will cease to flow. Men will quit, lose heart, yield, give up, become bitter or cynical, become sunk in bleakness or emptiness, commit suicide, turn to criminality or retreat into a realm of phantasy." Further, philosophy constructs normal behavior by creating realistic attitude toward life. Normal life makes man live in the actual world. He does not live in a world of unreality or wishful thinking. He being develops balanced interpersonal relations with other human being. Harold H. Titus<sup>7</sup> expressly says, "A realistic attitude toward one's personal problems, toward one's relationship with other people and. toward the world is a condition of mental health."<sup>8</sup>

Here it appears necessary to mention that philosophy and religion are not poles asunder. Iqbal clarifies the position thus, "In its deeper movement, however, thought is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite in - whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are merely moments."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Harold H. Titus, *Ethics For Today*, p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> Iqbal, *op.*, *cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Maritain, *On the Use of Philosophy*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Stevenson Tigner, *No Sign Shall Be Given* (New York).

<sup>8</sup> Harold H. Titus, *Ethics for Today*, p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> Iqbal, *op.*, *cit.*, p.6.

To Dr. Mohammad Maruf this is the place where thought and intuition become identical.<sup>10</sup> "Iqbal, however, openly believes that philosophy and religion are complementary to each other. He says, "They spring up from the same root and complement each other. Both seek visions of the same Reality which reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life."<sup>11</sup>

These features of philosophy have great value in the field of psychotherapy. The need of this science or art of psychotherapy is increasingly felt day by day in the light of deplorable plight of the modern man. Fulton. J. Sheen regrets, "The modern man is no longer a unity, but a confused bundle of complexes and nerves. He is so dissociated, so alienated from himself that he sees himself less as a personality than as a battle field where a civil war rages between a thousand and one conflicting loyalties."<sup>12</sup> "He continues to say that even, the educated man has a smattering of uncorrelated bits of information with no unifying philosophy."<sup>13</sup> To Will Durant, "Without philosophy, without that total vision which unifies purposes and establishes the hierarchy of desires, we fritter away our social heritage in cynical corruption on the one hand, and in revolutionary madness on the other; we abandon in a moment our pacific idealism and plunge into the cooperative suicide of war; we have a hundred thousand politicians, and not a single statesman. We move about the earth with unprecedented speed, but we do not know, and have not thought, where we are going or whether we shall find any happiness there, for our harassed souls. We are being destroyed by our knowledge, which has made us drunk with our powers. And we shall not be saved without wisdom."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, to meet the challenge of present day, modern man should take cognizance of the situation in its wholeness, reset his goals, reconstruct his beliefs and values, and reorientate his attitude toward life and the universe. Without this change his plight is bound to change. A.H. Maslow rightly says, "When the Philosophy of Man (his nature, his goals, his potentialities, his

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<sup>10</sup> Or. Muhammad Maruf, Iqbal's Philosophy of Religion, p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> Iqbal, op., cit., p. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, Peace of Soul, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Will Durant, The Pleasures of Philosophy, p. xii-xiii).

fulfillment) changes, then everything changes. Not only the philosophy of politics, of economics, of ethics and values, of interpersonal relations and of history itself change, but also the philosophy of education, the theory of how to help men becomes what they can and deeply need to become."<sup>15</sup>

Philosophy, however, has tremendous power to contribute toward mental health. It not only carries a great curative value but also an immense preventive appraisal, which psychotherapy has so far deplorably ignored. It is why, regretting the little role played by psychotherapy on its preventive side Abraham Maslow pointedly says, "Psychotherapy is too good to be restricted only to the sick."<sup>16</sup>

**Preventive Value:** The irony of the modern society is that first it creates different complexes, mental troubles, and maladjustments because of different conflicts, frustrations, confused thinkings, lack of meaning in life, wrong attitudes and unhealthy ways of life; and then it comes forward with remedies through psychiatry and psychotherapy. But such remedies do not ensure the real well-being of a person. As 'prevention is better than cure' the importance of preventive measures should duly be realized. To my mind, most of the psychological problems of modern age will not arise if we reconstruct our-selves with sound philosophical assumptions. This will help save human personality from disintegration. For instance, many psychological problems can be removed if love to humanity is given due place in our heart and man creates harmonious relationship with his fellow men. A Reza Arasteh says, and rightly so, In the human situation love is a therapeutic means which prevents neurosis, greed, rivalry, and eliminates jealousy. In fact, true love does not stand in opposition to hate, as is generally thought, but absorbs it."<sup>17</sup>

Further, if attitude towards life is changed and Faqr is adopted in true sense many psychological problems, which are the result of our 'gold hunger'

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<sup>15</sup> A.H. Maslow, Article: "Some basic propositions of a growth and self-actualization psychology", in *Theories of Personality: Primary Sources and Research*, ed. by Gardner Lindzey/Calvin S. Hall, p. 307.

<sup>16</sup> Erving & Miriam Polster, *Gestalt Therapy Integrated*, p.23.

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<sup>17</sup> A Reza Arasteh, *Rumi the Persian*, p. 164.

die before they raise their heads. True Faqr is a way of living which is the result of a particular attitude toward economic and social aspects of life, irrespective of poverty or riches. It is neither segregation from community nor a way to passivity. It is full of struggle and action. It is probably in the context of such views that Raza Rasti limelighted Erich Fromm's remarks about Rumi's thought thus: "The principles that Rumi practised, are viewed by Erich Fromm as a necessary requirement for the development of a healthy and mature character."<sup>18</sup>

The value of preventive measures is enhanced to a great extent when we understand that even if one is successfully and easily cured one does not attain developed personality or mature character, because the absence of disease does not ensure such results. This is a fact which is acknowledged by prominent psychotherapists themselves. For instance, Erich Fromm 'does not believe that well-being is the absence of illness, nor does he limit the purpose of psychoanalysis to "the liberation of the human being from his neurotic symptoms, inhibitions and abnormalities of character", as did Freud. Rather, Fromm deduces his concept of well-being from the state of a matured and healthy man, that is, in the presence of joy'.<sup>19</sup>

Curative Value: In this respect also the importance of philosophy, due to its emphasis on goals, values, clarification of misconcepts and orientation of mental attitudes, is greatly acknowledge by modern psychotherapists.

To Rollo May, "There is growing recognition of the relationship between mental illness and one's philosophy of life."<sup>20</sup> Allport believes that no body can be understood in his entirety by separating himself from his philosophy. He said, "The philosophy, of the person is inseparable from the psychology of the person."<sup>21</sup> Abraham Maslow, who bases his concept of self actualized person on his philosophy of human nature, believes in the curative values of a philosophy of life. He says, "The state of being without a system or a framework of values, a philosophy of life.... The value-illnesses which result from valuelessness are called, variously anhedonia, enomie, apathy,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>19</sup> Referred to by Reza Arasti, Op., cit., p. 177-78.

<sup>20</sup> Rollo May, Existential Psychology, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Allport, C.W. Pattern and growth in personality, New York.

amorality, hopelessness, cynicism, etc., and can become somatic illness as well."<sup>22</sup>

Again, various movements of psychotherapy cannot do without recognizing the importance of philosophy. For instance, Logotherapy is largely based on philosophical assumptions. Frankl, the father of logotherapy, says about his system: In contrast to many other therapies, however, logotherapy is based on an implicit philosophy of life. More specifically, it is based on three fundamental-assumptions which form a chain of interconnected links: (1) Freedom of Will; (2) Will to Meaning; (3) Meaning of Life."<sup>23</sup> Frankl further says that "psychotherapy can only have an unconditional belief in the meaning of life, every life, if it starts with the right kind of philosophy, if it chooses the right philosophy."<sup>24</sup>

Even Behaviorism, which was strictly based upon scientific method, has changed its position. Arnold A. Lazarus pointedly remarks, "Because of earlier struggle to gain recognition as a science, many psychologists, particularly of behaviourist orientation, are suspicious of recent efforts by personality theorists to defy strict scientific methodology and reassert the philosophical character of psychology."<sup>25</sup> Lazarus further says, "The bulk of therapeutic endeavours may be said to centre around the correction of misconceptions. The people who consult us tend to view innocuous events as extremely noxious, and may disregard objectively noxious situations."<sup>26</sup>

Besides, the over all impact of philosophy on modern psychotherapy may not be lost sight of. Morris I. Stein openly admits that the philosophical orientations of our time have a great impact upon the contemporary development in psychotherapy. "The papers of Rollo May, Carl Rogers, and

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<sup>22</sup> A.H. Maslow, Article, op., cit., p. 312.

<sup>23</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, Psychotherapy and Existentialism, p. 2

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Engler, Personality Theories, p. 460.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold A. Lazarus, Behaviour-Therapy and Beyond, p. 165.

Otto Will hear the witness of having the philosophical influences of the modern movement of Existentialism. The influences of George Herbert Mead on Otto Will's approach and of transactional theory of Dewey and Bentley on Grinker's thinking are quite obvious."<sup>27</sup> It may also be noted that even in the field of medicine its curative value is recognized. Professor Fransworth of Harvard University remarks that, "medicine is now confronted with the task of enlarging its function. Physicians must of necessity indulge in philosophy."<sup>28</sup>

Even the earlier psychotherapists fully recognized the importance of philosophy. About Freud, for example, Barbara Engler remarks, "Freud acknowledged that philosophy was a goal that had beckoned to him all along, for in later years he suggested that his dalliance with science was a detour on the road to a more ultimate quest: a comprehensive philosophy of humanity. In the final analysis, the criteria that compelled Freud and compel many of his followers are largely philosophical."<sup>29</sup> About Jung, Barbara says that he "raised philosophical questions and suggested philosophical answers. To suggest that questions about human nature should be answered empirically is in itself a philosophical position.... For Jung, the fundamental power of self-understanding and cure stem from an appropriate.... philosophy of life."<sup>30</sup>

To conclude, philosophy has rightly been called love of wisdom. It is undoubtedly true that "good life is also the intelligent life."<sup>31</sup> Thus the importance of philosophy in the field of psychotherapy is acknowledged widely both for its curative and preventive values. But still philosophy

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<sup>27</sup> Morris I. Stein, ed. *Contemporary Psychotherapies*, P. 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Fransworth, referred to by Victor E. Frankl, op., cit., p-90.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Engler, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Engler, op., cit., p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Harold Titus, *Ethics For Today*, p. 492.

commands supremacy on psychotherapy because of its preventive value. I believe that philosophy has an inherent potentiality of becoming an independent school of healing. I take the opportunity to point out that it is practiced as such in most of the countries of the world. In the West, many thinkers have since made great strides successfully in this direction. During my stay in Europe and U.S.A., I met the upholders of such schools and discussed elaborately with them the theory and practice of these schools. They call it 'Philosophical Therapy, or 'Metaphysical Healing' or 'Healing by Positive Thinking'. In the East, such thinking is not new. Treatment by sufis, yogis, and other mystics is based on religious philosophy. I visualize that the day is not far off when philosophy will be widely recognized as an independent and one of the most effective schools of healing, besides the various schools of modern psychotherapy.