

# RECONSIDERING A. REZA ARASTEH: SUFISM AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

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*ABSTRACT:* Four decades ago, A. Reza Arasteh combined Westernized psychology with Sufism to emerge as an important voice in the integration of psychology and religion. Arasteh's writings have remained largely unnoticed by the psychological community; however, we believe that it is time to reconsider his ideas. This article presents Arasteh's main ideas about the relationship between human development and transcendence. We believe that his work has much to offer to those interested in psychology and religion. The authors argue that Arasteh's trans-cultural state and normative psycho-cultural analysis offer a unique perspective to Western developmental and psychotherapy models. Implications for psychotherapists are also discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Nearly 150 years have passed since the discipline of psychology first provided a viable alternative to the then prevailing religious paradigm for explaining the human condition. This emergence offered scholars and laypersons alike a secular system whereby human consciousness, thought, intention, and values were understood apart from the influence of God and religion (Miller & Delaney, 2005). According to Rieff (1979), Sigmund Freud played an influential role in the *deconversion* of society and replaced *religious man* with *psychological man*. Freud (1927), essentially, viewed the belief in God as the yearning for a father figure. Jones (1991) suggested that Freud saw religion as a recapitulation of childhood and thus another form of transference. As a result, religion—and transcendence for that matter—was inaugurated as nothing more than mentalistic phenomena that failed to satiate psychological needs.

This adversarial posturing has diminished in the last two decades based on integrative efforts that have focused on exploring the similarities and differences between psychology and religion (see Browning & Cooper, 2004; Jones, 1991; McMinn, 1996; Miller & Delaney, 2005; Richards & Bergin, 1997). For example, in *Judeo-Christian Perspectives on Psychotherapy*, Miller and Delaney compared and contrasted psychology with Christianity and Judaism, specifically focusing on human nature, motivation, and change as areas of investigation. In *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Jones

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challenged Freud's claim that religion was nothing more than transference and the defense mechanism of projection whereby childhood conflict is projected onto a "blank screen." In *Religious Thought and Modern Psychologies*, Browning and Cooper analyzed the "deep metaphors" and religious assumptions embedded in current conceptual systems of psychology from Christian and Jewish perspectives. In *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*, McMinn offered strategies for integrating Christian principles such as forgiveness, confession, and redemption into psychotherapy. Finally, in *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Richards and Bergin presented an empirical, eclectic, and ecumenical spiritual strategy for mainstream mental health professionals.

Nevertheless, we argue in this article that many attempts to integrate psychology and religion lack what Arasteh (1965) called an *Unterbau*, the German word meaning "infrastructure" or "common denominator." In other words, many of the burgeoning efforts to integrate psychology and religion have elucidated more points of divergence than convergence. As a result, there remains a theoretical divide that must be crossed so as to depolarize these two historically quarrelsome camps. The purpose of this article is to reintroduce the work of A. Reza Arasteh to discussions on the integration of psychology and religion. In our position, Arasteh has offered a developmental model for a balanced psychotherapy. Arasteh's (1965) amalgamation of psychology and religion, which predates most other integrative efforts, offers a much-needed "infrastructure," or "common denominator," and properly addresses humankind's need for cultural transcendence. This article presents A. Reza Arasteh's writings pertaining to the convergence of Western psychology and Eastern religion in order to consider a renewed dimension of integration. The goal is threefold: (a) to give an overview of the historical context of Arasteh's writings, (b) to review Arasteh's critique of Western thought, and (c) to examine Arasteh's alternative to this Western perspective. Throughout the article, page numbers for paraphrased Arasteh (1965, 1972, 1980) material are included in order to help the reader locate this information, if so desired, in that some of Arasteh's books lack indexes.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ARASTEH'S FINAL INTEGRATION

Abdol Reza Arasteh, Ph.D., was a student of Sufi mysticism, Islamic scholar, psychologist, and professor at the University of Tehran, Princeton University, and George Washington University during the twentieth century (1927–1992). He combined religious concepts of the East (i.e., cultures originating from Asia and Eastern Europe) with psychological concepts of the West (i.e., cultures originating from Western Europe) to emerge as a pioneer in the field of *integrative psychology*: the dialogue between psychology and religion. In 1965, Arasteh released *Final Integration in the Adult Personality*. This groundbreaking work, while relatively unknown to some, presents an integrated theory of personality development that takes into account a universal understanding of both humankind and culture. Still, to the authors' knowledge, a thorough explication of Arasteh's (1965, 1972, 1980) major integrative writings remains

absent from the current literature—we conducted an electronic database search using *ProQuest*, *PsycINFO*, and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*, which yielded no references to his work, aside from a book review from the 1960s (see Jourard, 1967) and our brief discussion of Arasteh’s critique of Freudian psychoanalysis (see Welsh & Knabb, 2009).

In any case, Arasteh’s ideas were a product of many different influences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Born in Shiraz, Iran in 1927, Arasteh witnessed the modernization of Iran under the Pahlavi Dynasty. As a result of this modernization, Arasteh was educated and later taught at the University of Tehran, Iran. During these years, Arasteh was deeply influenced by Persian culture, and more specifically Sufism and Rumi—the thirteenth century Sufi teacher, poet, and mystic.

### *Sufism*

The Sufis are a group of mystics who originally analyzed the underlying realities of religion, science, and philosophy in order to uncover the mysteries of humankind’s psychic structure (Arasteh, 1980, p. ix). Historians have commonly referred to Sufism as the mystic core of Islam (Fadiman & Frager, 1997). Although Sufism is most prominent in the Middle East, and most major Sufi Orders originated in the Near East, Sufi groups have existed for centuries in North Africa, Europe, Central Asia, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and China (Fadiman & Frager, 1997; Renard, 2005). The word *Sufi* can be traced back to either the word *فوص*, the Arabic word for wool, which referenced the simple cloaks the early Muslim ascetics wore, or the word *افص*, which literally means “purity” (Renard, 2005). These two Arabic words were combined by the tenth century Sufi al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, who said, “The Sufi is the one who wears wool on top of purity” (quoted in Kabbani, 2004, p. 647).

The central concept in Sufism—and in the writings of Rumi—is love (Chittick, 1983). Specifically, Sufis believe that God is love and the single and unified source of everything. Rumi explained the Sufi understanding of love with the following: “Since I have heard of the world of love, I’ve spent my life, my heart, and my eyes this way. I used to think that love and beloved are different. I know they are the same” (quoted in Fadiman & Frager, 1997, p. 124). What is more, the Sufi poet Attar explained the Sufi concept of God, i.e., the “unified source,” by suggesting, “Tear aside veils of all you see in this world, and you will find yourself apart in solitude with God” (quoted in Fadiman & Frager, 1997, p. 233). In a slightly different fashion, Renard (2005) defined the Sufi reality of God by explaining, “If God alone is ‘the really real,’ all things beside God have no independent claims to existence” (p. 50).

The essence of God (i.e., love, truth, being) is both devoid of form and quality and inseparable from material and spiritual phenomenon. In other words, “At the origin stands the source of all existence, the Absolute, which is at once Being and above-Being” (Nasr, 1973, p. 129). The chief aim of Sufism is to let

go of all duality, including the individual self; instead, the Sufi strives to realize the divine unity of truth (i.e., oneness with God)(Al-Qushayri, 1990).

Rumi—a celebrated Sufi born Muhammad Jalal al-Din in Balkh in 1207 A.D.—was an Islamic scholar who was reported to have had some 10,000 followers before giving up his renown and conventional values to pursue his real self (Arasteh, 1972, p. 28). Rumi was initially able to conform to the cultural traditions of his time, follow a religion, pursue intellect, and practice Sufi truth (Arasteh, 1965, p. 206). Yet, he began to feel deeply dissatisfied and confused with conventional life. Of this growing discontent, Arasteh (1965) explained, “It would seem that during his last years as a spiritual leader he grew critical of the traditional ways of his life” (p. 210).

In the year 1244 A.D., Rumi met Shams al-Din of Tabriz, a master Sufi, who was “already aware of the limitations of conventional life” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 212). Shams was a traveler who “freed himself from all kinds of authority, internal and external, and frequently criticized traditional scholars and theologians who merely repeated other’s opinions” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 212). Because of his relationship with Shams, Rumi’s life was transformed forever (Chittick, 1983). In *Maqalat*, which described the first few months of their meeting, Rumi depicted Shams as “a man of clarity, sincerity, simplicity, and maturity” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 214). He described his burgeoning relationship with Shams as follows:

When he stimulated my thought from the depth of my psychic sea, the phantom of light arose. Shams was the light of the eye, the clarity of reason, the brightness of the soul and the enlightenment of the heart. Shams was a universal man who took away my reason and religion. He was the form of every happiness. (quoted in Arasteh, 1972, p. 39)

In a similar way, Chittick explained of this salient and pivotal friendship, “Shams-i Tabrizi’s influence upon Rumi was decisive, for outwardly he was transformed from a sober jurispudent to an intoxicated celebrant of the mysteries of Divine Love” (p. 3).

Hence, Rumi set out on a journey—with the help of Shams, his “light of the path” or guide—to give up his conventional self in order to pursue a cosmic, or universal, self. Arasteh (1972) explained,

Rumi came to believe that his real self was not what his father or the environment had developed in him, but what the universe had created in him. Therefore, this real self can henceforth be called the cosmic or universal self, in contrast to the phenomenal self, the product of culture. (p. 42)

The conflict between Rumi’s conventional and universal self resulted in both an outward and inner struggle. The outward conflict “appeared between that which was related to his new orientation and that which the public demanded, that is, between his path toward change and that of traditional ways” (Arasteh, 1972, p. 46). In terms of an inner conflict, Rumi had to deal with who he was

and who he saw himself becoming. Said differently, he faced a conflict between “the limited ‘self’ given by his training in culture, and that self which would be the outcome of his relatedness to the universe” (Arasteh, 1972, p. 46).

At last, with Shams as his constant companion and new object of desire (see Arasteh, 1965, p. 229), Rumi experienced a *rebirth* in love and creativity; this rebirth allowed him to discard the old (i.e., phenomenal) self, which only temporarily felt joy and happiness. By ridding himself of cultural constraints and ideals, Rumi was able to embrace his cosmic, or transcendent, self in order to find true love, joy, and happiness. According to Arasteh (1972), “[Rumi] found that true love is the activity of the innermost part of the soul, a function which man engages completely” (p. 73).

Unfortunately, in 1247 A.D., only a few years after their requisite union, Shams mysteriously vanished (Chittick, 1983). Some reports, however, suggest that jealous Rumi devotees murdered him (Chittick, 1983). In either case, Shams remained in Rumi’s heart and was the subject of, and inspiration for, several of Rumi’s *ghazels*, i.e., love poems (Chittick, 1983). A. Reza Arasteh was deeply impacted by this idea that one could transcend culture so as to attain a more existential purpose; this impact would later influence Arasteh’s understanding of both culture and human development.

Arasteh subsequently immigrated to the United States in the 1950s to pursue graduate studies in psychology at Louisiana State University. As he revealed (Arasteh, 1965, p. 7), while pursuing postdoctoral studies at the University of Chicago in the 1950s, he was heavily influenced by the Human Development Department that was housed there. During this time, Arasteh began to focus on the concept of *maturity*: the final stage of human development. As a result of this focus, he wrote *The Progress of Human Growth*. As he discussed, this work—written in Persian in 1955 and never translated into English—was inspired by the writings of American developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson and attempted to interpret the stages of human growth through the lens of Western developmental psychology. When he came to discuss the concept of maturity (i.e., the final stage of human development) in *The Progress of Human Growth*, however, his unconscious thinking led him away from Western thought and back to Sufism and Rumi. It was at this point—in 1955—that Arasteh first began to integrate religion of the East with psychology of the West in his understanding of human development. Specifically, Arasteh saw Rumi’s cultural transcendence as a necessary stage of human development and maturity.

Due to his studies in the United States, Arasteh (1965) found many of the Western schools of thought to be partially true when examining specific areas of investigation (e.g., human development, evolutionary biology, psychoanalytic theory), yet fragmented when applied to humankind as a whole (p. 8). This fragmentation was due to the emergence of many new Western theories of humankind in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These competing worldviews, according to Arasteh, were constrained by the social reality—or culture—of the individuals who developed them (p. 38). For example,

Freudian psychoanalytic theory was a product of Victorian Europe, which promoted a rigid religious moralism of self-restriction that prohibited the public expression of emotions, desires, and sexuality. Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922) presented what is commonly known as the sex or life instincts and the death instincts; these two unconscious forces are said to influence the actions of the individual. Moreover, Darwin's evolutionary biology was a product of the natural history movement found in nineteenth century English universities; this movement sought to discover evidence of design by a Creator based on the teachings of William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802/2006). Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), based on evidence collected on his voyage of the *Beagle*, proposed that populations evolve over the course of generations through a process of natural selection. Finally, Karl Marx's communism was a product of the *historical materialism* of his day; or, the idea that social existence determines humankind's consciousness rather than consciousness determining the existence of humankind. Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* proposed that class struggle is at the root of human history (Marx & Engels, 1848/2009).

These differing theories of humankind, which emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, lacked what Arasteh (1965) called an *Unterbau*—the German word meaning “infrastructure” or “common denominator” (p. 38). All of the theories of the time needed a common denominator, or universal theme, to tie them all together. Arasteh (1965), influenced by many of the great minds of the previous two centuries, concluded that the common element behind the social and cultural realities of the time was “an invisible force which is inherent in creation, man, society, and the universe” (p. 46). This nameless creative force is neither material nor spiritual and specifically mentioned in Sufi literature—the fourteenth century Sufi Al-Ghazzali referred to it as “dark mist,” whereas Rumi described it as “essence” (see Arasteh, 1980, p. 104). What is more, this “dark mist” or “essence” is seen in Freud's biological drives, Darwin's theory of evolution, and Marx's cultural drive in the social state (Arasteh, 1965, p. 46). Because of these noted influential theories, as well as his exposure to Western human developmental models, Arasteh set out to develop his own model of human development.

In 1965, organized around Freud's structure of the personality (i.e., the id, ego, and superego), and influenced by Sufism, Arasteh (1965) formulated a comprehensive theory of personality development that involves three universal stages: *natural*, *cultural*, and *existential*. Similar to the driving force behind Freud's id, Darwin's evolution, and Marx's communism, Arasteh's *natural state* consists of natural drives related to a “nameless creative force,” i.e., “dark mist” (p. 47). According to Arasteh, this is the first stage that an individual goes through in life. Specifically, in the first year of life the infant exists in a state of undifferentiation (i.e., oneness) with his or her environment and seeks the satisfaction of drives (e.g., hunger, sleep)(Arasteh, 1965, p. 54). The second stage, labeled by Arasteh as the *cultural state*, is characterized by the growth of cultural patterning; this second stage is comparable to Freud's superego, which, essentially, is an internalized representation of culture (p. 49). In this stage, which starts in the second year of life and extends well into

adulthood, the individual utilizes culture and reason as a way to control the ego and the natural state (Arasteh, 1965, p. 73). Arasteh, however, integrated a third and final stage into his theory of personality development; this stage, entitled the *existential state*, or the creative stage, pertains to the ability to rise above culture in order to fully mature (p. 50). Arasteh developed this third stage based on the model of Sufism, and more specifically Rumi (p. 205). In this stage, the individual recognizes the limitations of culture in his or her developmental process and seeks a more universal state, i.e., the cosmic self, which provides certainty and insight. In sum, Arasteh's *Final Integration in the Adult Personality* was a result of many different influences during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in both the Western world and his Persian culture-of-origin.

#### ARASTEH'S CRITIQUE OF WESTERN THOUGHT

Arasteh's formulation of a universal theory of personality development was also based on several broad generalizations he made to differentiate between Western and Eastern modes of thought. Specifically, Arasteh made several criticisms of Western thought (i.e., Western developmental psychology, Western philosophy, Western culture), which he distinguished from Eastern thought (i.e., Eastern religion, Eastern philosophy, Eastern culture). And although generalizations such as these tend to gloss over the diversity of thought within each respective region, Arasteh (1965) considered these generalizations instrumental in "developing a new therapeutic technique for rebirth in final integration, for the improvement of psychotherapy, and for transcending the present concepts of developmental psychology" (p. 72). As a side note, for the purposes of this article, the term *Western* refers to cultures originating from Western Europe, whereas *Eastern* refers to cultures originating from Asia and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, among the limitations Arasteh (1965) perceived in Western thought are (a) the West's emphasis on ego objectivization rather than ego liberation (p. 73), (b) the West's focus on knowledge and instruction rather than intuition and insight (p. 120), and (c) the West's limited understanding of identity, or a final state of maturation (p. 21). These limitations directly contributed to Arasteh's creation of an alternative developmental theory that incorporates a crucial existential developmental stage neglected by Western thought and culture; this existential stage is based on Arasteh's Eastern influence (e.g., Sufism, Rumi).

One of the criticisms Arasteh (1965) made of Western thought (i.e., Western developmental psychology, Western philosophy) pertains to its objectivization of the ego. Within Western thought, the ego is objectified, whereby voluntary behavior is subject to the control of reason and universal values (Arasteh, 1965, p. 73). Both culture (i.e., the superego) and natural drives (i.e., the id) are guided and controlled by the ego (i.e., the conscious self). Arasteh suggested that Plato, the founder of a systematized school of philosophy, Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, Max Scheler, an innovator in the field of phenomenology, and other great Western rational thinkers erred in concluding that the ultimate goal in human life is for voluntary behavior to be guided by,

and under the control of, reason (p. 73). Ego objectivization, according to Arasteh, produces fragmented individuals (p. 75). For example, Freud proposed that unconscious forces (i.e., the id and superego) are to be brought into awareness and controlled by reason (i.e., the ego). Arasteh suggested that this attempt to negativize unconscious forces and bring them under the control of thought and reason has produced fragmented personalities whereby thought and emotion are considered antithetical and deemed adversaries (p. 75). This is in sharp contrast to Eastern thought (i.e., Sufism, Zen Buddhism), whereby objectivization of the ego is not the final state of personality development. Within Eastern thought, individuals become autonomous and liberate themselves from natural and cultural forces (Arasteh, 1965, p. 77). Instead of being guided by reason, the individual frees him- or herself from its control. By doing this, the individual becomes a creator rather than a chooser; or, the liberated ego is able to invent rather than select (Arasteh, 1965, p. 77). Essentially, the liberated ego is its own measure, whereas the objectified ego is simply directed by reason and thought (Arasteh, 1965, p. 77).

In addition to the West's failure to liberate the ego, Arasteh (1965) criticized Western thought (i.e., Western philosophy) for placing too great of an emphasis on instruction and knowledge and neglecting intuition and insight (p. 120). In Western thought, abstract knowledge is valued; thus, the individual, as per Arasteh, is far removed from real life experience (Arasteh, 1965, p. 120). Effectively, the Western attempt to know oneself, rather than decipher oneself, has prevented the individual from experiencing life on a deeper level. Thus, "Knowledge of oneself does not provide enough motivation for the individual to put it into action" (Arasteh, 1965, p. 77). In contrast, and in Eastern thought (i.e., Sufism, Rumi), intuition is favored above knowledge and instruction. The intuitive individual is aware of the duality of thinking: "that which is made by the mind and that which is made by the heart" (Arasteh, 1965, p. 122). The heart, according to Arasteh, is the power that utilizes all other faculties as its servants or instruments (p. 123). Fundamentally, Eastern thought recognizes the limitations of instruction and knowledge and places an emphasis on experience and the heart; Western thought, however, lacks this emphasis, which limits real life experience.

Finally, Arasteh (1965) criticized Western thought (i.e., Western developmental psychology) for failing to grasp a final state of identity, or final maturational state, which requires the individual to rise above the limitations of culture. Arasteh argued that both Erik Erikson and Harry Stack Sullivan were incorrect in their understanding that maturation takes place when one successfully passes through adolescence and is socialized into society (p. 21). Moreover, Western thought, according to Arasteh, erred in suggesting that identity is contingent upon a social reality and cultural values (p. 25). Instead, Arasteh asserted that, according Eastern thought (i.e., Sufism, Taoism, Zen Buddhism), maturity is born in humankind's individual and inner experience, which requires both growth in, and liberation from, society (p. 26). All in all, Arasteh believed that full maturation and identity formation can only take place when one transcends society; Arasteh referred to this transcendence, as previously stated, as the final stage of development, i.e., the existential stage

(p. 26). Summarizing his position, Arasteh maintained, “although man is born in a society, he is not able to live securely with satisfaction in interpersonal situations unless he develops his ability to live in isolation, free from anxiety...[which] requires both growth in and liberation from society” (p. 26).

#### ARASTEH’S ALTERNATIVE

Arasteh’s *Final Integration in the Adult Personality* (1965) attempted to formulate a universal developmental theory of humankind. Arasteh used the word *integration* to refer to the merging of the adult personality (i.e., the id, ego, and superego) into one unified and integrated whole (p. 79). The word *final* refers to the end of vertical (i.e., developmental) growth of the adult personality and the beginning of its horizontal expansion into creativity (Arasteh, 1965, p. 128). Arasteh’s developmental model requires movement through three stages: (a) the natural stage, which is similar to Freud’s id (i.e., biological drives) and Rumi’s “essence” (i.e., “dark mist”); (b) the cultural stage, which is similar to Freud’s superego (i.e., internalized representations of culture and tradition); and (c) the existential stage, which Arasteh referred to as the *trans-cultural state* (p. 48). Arasteh’s trans-cultural state signifies the ability to transcend culture; this transcendence allows the individual to shed culturally derived *objects of desire* (e.g., wealth, power, prestige) so as to attract a new and universal object of desire (e.g., love, creativity). Objects of desire are defined as an “endless chain of aims,” which serve to decrease humankind’s anxiety because of humankind’s original separation from Paradise due to original sin in the Garden of Eden (Arasteh, 1965, p. 190). In the trans-cultural state, the individual has forsaken all else and is entirely committed to the new object of desire (Arasteh, 1965, p. 128). To experience this trans-cultural state (i.e., the existential stage of development), three major steps are necessary: (a) detaching from a cultural state of being and the old objects of desire, (b) experiencing the existential moratorium, and (c) replacing the old objects of desire with a new object of desire (Arasteh, 1965, p. 153).

#### *Detachment from Culture*

The first step in achieving final integration revolves around detachment from a cultural state of being. This detachment takes place when the individual realizes the limitations of culture and tradition. One realizes that both culture and tradition have thus far been an inadequate means of security (Arasteh, 1965, p. 88). The individual has, up until this point, attempted to diminish his or her anxiety by embracing the culture in which he or she was raised and the traditions within it. Typically, however, this new awareness has arisen because forces within the society have been incompatible with the individual’s inner stability (Arasteh, 1965, p. 89). Because the individual has become aware of his or her ego and the social institutions he or she is a part of (i.e., objectivization of the ego), he or she is forced to find inner security via liberation of the ego (Arasteh, 1965, p. 89). Thus, the individual is required to look for existential answers to the problems of identity and the meaning of life. In essence, the

individual has seen the limitations of culture and uses his or her anxiety as a catalyst to transcend the limitations of that culture in providing lasting security and solace. Rumi summarized the limitations of culture with the following:

Meticulously, man ceaselessly engages in every kind of trade and craft; he busies himself in numerous types of office. He studies such fields as astronomy and medicine because he has not attained his object of desire. (quoted in Arasteh, 1965, p. 211)

Here, it is seen that, according to Rumi, unfulfilling objects of desire such as professional and academic endeavors fall short of satiating the inner self.

Arasteh (1965) explained that the individual's pursuit of culture in order to reduce anxiety has arisen because of his or her original separation from nature; or, his or her banishment from Paradise due to original sin in the Garden of Eden (p. 11). Because the individual has lost his or her relationship to nature, he or she has since been seeking a substitute (i.e., another object of love or orientation via culture); this seeking attempts to reunite him or her with nature and end the discontent (Arasteh, 1965, p. 11). Those who have objectified culture and discovered the artificiality of it, however, have been able to distance themselves from it so as to seek happiness from an existential source that transcends culture.

### *Existential Moratorium*

Once the individual separates from his or her culture because of its limitations, he or she goes through the second step—the *existential moratorium*—meaning he or she adopts an existential mechanism whereby (a) the individual detaches from the cultural state, (b) the individual experiences a vague awareness of the existential state, (c) the individual experiences increased anxiety and love for the existential state, and (d) the individual experiences effort, devotion, trust, and hope in identifying with the existential state (Arasteh, 1965, p. 153). This existential moratorium will look different in different cultures; in every culture, however, the existential moratorium is characterized by anxiety, which acts as the mechanism for change (Arasteh, 1965, p. 153). Speaking about anxiety, Arasteh suggested, “If a man faces his existential dilemma, then the task becomes, not one of giving three hours a week to a psychiatrist, but entering the state of anxious search, which requires complete concentration and entrance into an ‘existential moratorium’” (p. 152). Separating oneself from culturally derived objects of desire (e.g., tradition, wealth, power) produces a crisis resulting in a new search of unrelatedness. Rumi metaphorically explained the need to relinquish unfulfilling objects of desire with the following:

All these pleasures and pursuits are like a ladder. Because the rungs of the ladder are not a place in which to dwell but are transitory, happy is the one who awakens soon enough to become aware of this fact. For him the long

road becomes short and he does not waste his life on the rungs of the ladder. (quoted in Arasteh, 1965, p. 211)

Thus, those who enter the existential moratorium have realized the futility of temporary, i.e., cultural, objects of desire and are ready to discard them.

*Sufi Rebirth.* Sufism developed the art of *rebirth*—a type of existential moratorium—whereby the individual distances him- or herself from the culture along with a guide, or “light of the path,” in a *khanaqah*, or protected environment, away from daily obstacles so as to purify him- or herself and recapture life (Arasteh, 1965, p. 158). Within the Sufi culture, a *khanaqah*—Persian for “lodge”—was originally a Manichaean building, possibly a meeting place for lay members, first developed by the Sufi leader Kazaruni around the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Baldick, 2000). Currently, *khanaqahs* are found throughout the Islamic world and used as spiritual retreats, i.e., a location to participate in what Arasteh referred to as the *existential moratorium*. Acquiring this guide, i.e., *master* or *shaykh*, is necessary because the individual cannot objectively measure his or her own vices and undesirably acquired habits (Arasteh, 1965, p. 158). Thus, for both behavioral and mental change the individual must have a constant companion who guides him or her to transcend the self (Arasteh, 1965, p. 158). Characteristics of the *shaykh*—Arabic for “elder”—include the following: (a) he or she “knows the road perfectly,” (b) he or she can “appreciate and understand the novice’s waves of thought and guide him symbolically,” and (c) his or her “mystical experience is superior to that of the seeker” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 159). Sedgwick (2000), in a slightly different manner, suggested the Sufi is (a) obedient to the *shaykh*, (b) imitates the *shaykh*, and (c) loves the *shaykh*; the *shaykh*, effectively, is a “spiritual father” (p. 31).

The period of intentional isolation—spent with the *shaykh*—is essential to shed the cultural self and achieve rebirth. Elias (1999) explained, “The quest for spiritual understanding in Sufism is seen as a path, which each Sufi must travel under the guidance of a teacher or master” (p. 53). The “path” (i.e., the Arabic word *tariqa*) has many stages and may vary depending on the Sufi Order; however, the first stage is typically referred to as *dhikr* (i.e., the Arabic word meaning “repentance”). In this stage, the Sufi is “expected to repent of all the bad deeds he or she has committed in life and take a vow to avoid all earthly pleasures [i.e., objects of desire]” (Elias, 1999, p. 53). This is when the individual enters the *khanaqah*—or monastery—and relies on meditation, i.e., *dhikr*, to accomplish this task; examples of *dhikr* include repeating one of God’s names over and over and breath control (i.e., inhaling and exhaling)(Elias, 1999). As stated previously, throughout this process, the guide helps the Sufi to elucidate misdeeds, shed earthly objects of desire, and meditate so as to emerge in a state of unrelatedness. Abu Said, the Master Sufi, suggested that the whole process of rebirth in totality consists of two steps: (a) taking one step out of one’s self, and (b) taking another step into God (quoted in Arasteh, 1980, p. 50). In effect, losing the cultural self in order to take on the transcendent self requires both commitment and isolation via the existential moratorium.

### *The New Object of Desire*

The third step involved in the final integration in the adult personality requires the individual to replace the old culturally derived objects of desire (e.g., wealth, power, status) with a new object of desire that transcends culture (e.g., creativity, love, community, God). The act of separation from culture, coupled with anxiety, produces a sort of shedding of the old self in order to make way for a new reality. The anxiety that one experiences is embraced because it serves as a catalyst for change so as to acquire a new object of desire. As a result of the existential moratorium, and the acquisition of the new object of desire, the individual gradually experiences a rebirth in totality; this rebirth in totality produces a trans-cultural state of being. Arasteh (1965) explained, “the trans-cultural state of human growth is a universal state regardless of time, place and the degree of culture and it is characterized by satisfaction, certainty, and the search for truth” (p. 152). Common factors are the inner experience of life, certainty, positivity, and a mature attitude (Arasteh, 1965, p. 374).

### *Characteristics of the Fully Integrated Person*

There are several characteristics of the fully integrated person. First, there is recognition of the dual nature of the mind; the individual recognizes the limitations of thought and thus embraces insight and experience as alternatives (Arasteh, 1965, p. 362). Second, the individual recognizes the dual nature of essence versus appearance; in other words, the individual is able to recognize the underlying reality of life and all that is in it rather than its artificiality (Arasteh, 1965, p. 362). Third, the individual appreciates the dual nature of meaning versus oneness; or, the individual becomes one with the new object of desire rather than simply understanding the abstract meaning of it (Arasteh, 1965, p. 363). Summarizing the fully integrated person in the trans-cultural state, Arasteh offered the following:

...distance between subject and object once more disappears. Values, interest and action all submerge into one and behavior becomes spontaneous; the function of insight (sudden awareness) is rooted in the creative force which man’s essence shares with the cosmic essence. (p. 363)

Arasteh suggested that the fully integrated individual (a) finds joy in deeds that benefit others and have no reward, (b) has the ability to endure, (c) can tolerate solitude without boredom, and (d) can live in any community (p. 364).

### *Normative Psycho-Cultural Analysis*

Because Arasteh was a psychotherapist as well as academician, he produced an alternative form of therapy similar to classical (i.e., curative) analysis. Arasteh (1965) suggested that rebirth in a new psychical state emanates from an awareness of existing conflict and its resolution (p. 188). He was essentially concerned with how to provide the possibility of Sufi rebirth for the present-

day person. As a result, Arasteh developed *normative psycho-cultural analysis*. In general, this form of analysis utilizes all of the principles of final personality integration in order to achieve *inner metamorphosis*: (a) detaching from culture and shedding the old objects of desire, (b) the existential moratorium, and (c) embracing the new object of desire (Arasteh, 1965, p. 201). Arasteh suggested that *inner metamorphosis* takes place when the individual moves through the following three phases: (a) objectivization of the ego, (b) disintegration, i.e., removal of the social self, and (c) perception of creative love (p. 201).

Normative psychoanalysis attempts to discover past and present norms (i.e., objects of desire) that are related to the individual's state of being, whether pathological, normal, or superior (Arasteh, 1965, p. 190). It then seeks to remove impediments and mental blocks in order to promote further growth. The norms (i.e., objects of desire) that Arasteh referred to are natural, cultural, and existential in quality and typically outside of the individual's awareness (p. 193).

According to Arasteh (1965), the goals of the normative analyst are to (a) diagnose the degree of awareness of past and present norms, i.e., objects of desire, (b) identify past and present norms, (c) understand the underlying nature of the conflict stemming from past and present norms, (d) help resolve the conflict emanating from past and present norms, (e) elucidate proper norms, i.e., promote awareness of more meaningful and existential objects of desire, and (f) encourage union with a more transcendent object of desire (e.g., love, creativity, God)(p. 193). In other words, the therapist is to help the individual "remove and inactivate unsuitable and interfering objects of desire by providing more suitable norms related to the condition of the individual" (p. 190).

Normative psycho-cultural analysis, like curative analysis, focuses on unconscious forces and attempts to illuminate and ameliorate unconscious conflict via insight and action. The difference, however, is that normative analysis is "based on a greater number of unconscious forces, which, in turn, are derived from biological, cultural, and existential sources" (p. 193). In other words, Arasteh's form of therapy is discernable from other analytic approaches because of its focus on unconscious conflict surrounding the pursuit of natural and cultural objects of desire, i.e., norms. Furthermore, the anxiety that is created in the therapeutic process is encouraged. Anxiety helps the individual to enter the existential moratorium—which consists of a constant state of searching in the therapeutic environment—in order to experience the transcultural state (i.e., the existential stage of development) via merging with a new object of desire. Referring to the salience of anxiety in this process, Arasteh offered, "The individual is aware of his anxiety and does not flee from it; for to escape from it means a lack of worth in seeking the goal" (p. 188).

Arasteh recommended focusing on three specific areas in normative psycho-cultural analysis pertaining to unconscious natural, cultural, and existential conflict: (a) the principle of immediate creativity versus the principle of conventionality, (b) the principle of eternity of life versus the principle of the

mortality of humankind, and (c) the principle of unity of action (i.e., essence, oneness) versus the principle of diversity of form (Arasteh, 1965, p. 198). By resolving these areas of unconscious conflict, the analyst is able to help the individual move closer towards the trans-cultural state and a new object of desire. In other words, “the therapist must direct the person’s efforts to developing insight into the motives behind [these areas of unconscious conflict]” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 199).

The first of these unconscious conflicts—creativity versus conventionality—pertains to the dichotomous nature of humankind’s separation from nature (i.e., separation from “oneness,” “dark mist,” or “essence”) and humankind’s creation of culture. Here, the therapist should direct the individual’s efforts to understanding the motive behind the reality of culture, behind his or her being born, and behind history and evolution (Arasteh, 1965, p. 199). As an example, Arasteh suggested helping the aspirant to discover two basic issues. First, the psychotherapist should help the aspirant to understand the birth of reason (i.e., awareness) and humankind’s original separation from nature when humankind developed a quest for a new relatedness (Arasteh, 1965, p. 199). Second, the therapist “should provide a situation for the aspirant to discover the truth in this fundamental point by understanding children as they become more related to social reality and as they separate from their previous relatedness [i.e., environmental undifferentiation, ‘oneness’ with the environment]” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 199). As stated previously, Arasteh suggested that culture was created to reduce anxiety because of humankind’s banishment from Paradise; however, culture has fallen short of this lofty goal. Fundamentally, the therapist is to help the individual to gain insight into the need to transcend culture—evidenced in the life and writings of Rumi—in order to find a more satisfying object of desire. Arasteh suggested, “Through this process the therapist can stimulate the aspirant’s insight into developing his own creativity” (p. 199).

The second unconscious conflict—eternity of life versus mortality of humankind—relates to the conflict surrounding death. Resolving this conflict “depends upon an insight that man is an end, man is mankind, and his short life span is interwoven with human destiny” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 200). The individual is able to see life as continuous and extending beyond death in a transcendent fashion, i.e., the cosmic or universal self. The mortality of humankind is seen as a stepping-stone towards something greater than the materialistic world. In other words, the aspirant “can visualize himself and measure his death in terms of humanity foreseeing that death is not powerful when man becomes mankind” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 200). Again, the focus is on a more transcendent state—divorced from unconscious natural and cultural forces—whereby the individual realizes that a more existential purpose awaits him or her. After all, “The cosmic self [is] the image of the universe which must be unveiled” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 216). Likewise, when referring to death, Rumi powerfully declared, “Like a seed that dies and becomes a thousand ears, through God’s bounty I became a hundred thousand when I died...If He gives me death, let me die! That death is better than the breath of youth” (quoted in Chittick, 1983, p. 183).

The third and final unconscious conflict that is to be addressed in normative psycho-cultural analysis—unity of action versus diversity of form—concerns the distinction between seeing the cultural and natural world as separate and disconnected, i.e., “name” and “attributes,” as opposed to experiencing the world as a unified whole that emanates from a single source. As stated previously, the *Unterbau*, i.e., “infrastructure” or “common denominator,” behind everything is a nameless creative force, i.e., “dark mist” or “essence” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 38). Or, “the world of many (the world of form) is generated from the world of oneness and from the world of essence” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 200). Jami, the sixteenth century Sufi, explained “oneness” and “diversity of form” with the following: “In reality, there is but one sole Being, who is interfused in all these degrees and hierarchies which are only the details of the unity” (quoted in Arasteh, 1965, p. 114). Conflict resolution, then, is achieved by “asking the aspirant to contemplate, experience, and meditate in terms of process and action” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 200). As an example, the individual should contemplate the life history of artists, especially their process in creation, as well as the process of change in nature, so as to develop insight into multiple and converging realities (Arasteh, 1965, p. 200). This process helps the individual to embrace the “dark mist,” or “oneness,” behind insight and intuition so as to “penetrate the world of ‘name’ and ‘attributes’” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 200). Both “name” and “attributes,” after all, come from “oneness” and will return to “oneness” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 114). By embracing the world of oneness, the individual can truly merge with his or her object of desire (i.e., divine unity). Rumi, when describing his union with love, offered, “Oh, love, you are my beauty; I am you and you are me; you are in full bloom; happiness, joy and the pain of sorrow” (quoted in Arasteh, 1965, p. 248). In sum, the individual is to merge with his or her new object of desire; thus, there no longer exists a duality between the two.

By resolving these unconscious conflict areas, and merging with a new object of desire, humankind is effectively “born again” (Arasteh, 1965, p. 200). However, this rebirth does not happen spontaneously. Arasteh cautioned that gradual enlightenment occurs months or years after resolving these conflict areas (p. 200). Arasteh explained, “It is the subjective experience of the process of gradual enlightenment which elevates man above his social self and reintegrates him into the cosmos thus relating him to the non-human environment” (p. 201). Through this deep introspection on many levels of the individual’s being and through the individual’s act of self-analysis (i.e., resolution of internal conflict), he or she breaks down the boundaries of the unconscious and experiences a new harmony with the world (Arasteh, 1965, p. 201). By acquiring this new way of being, the individual has finally come full circle. Arasteh suggested the individual can claim, “I live, therefore I am,” rather than the cliché of the cultural state, “I think, therefore I am” (p. 201).

#### CONCLUSION

To date, many attempts to integrate psychology and religion have fallen short of their overarching goal of unification because they lack what Arasteh (1965)

called an *Unterbau*, that is, an “infrastructure” or universal theme, to tie them together. As a result, numerous working models appear to be unhelpful to either psychology or religion. Arasteh’s (1965) *Final Integration in the Adult Personality*, however, provides the integrative clinician with an “infrastructure” that incorporates into the therapeutic environment the ubiquitous need to transcend culture and attain a more fulfilling object of desire. Ultimately, the individual is innately designed to merge with an object of desire that provides lasting solace and security. If life is to be filled with creativity, love, spontaneity, and intentionality, there must be an inner metamorphosis so as to shed the old culturally derived objects of desire that fail to satisfy. The integrative clinician may wish to consider Arasteh’s normative psycho-cultural principles in order to help his or her client resolve natural, cultural, and existential conflict. By doing this, the client will be free to pursue—and merge with—the true object of desire in order to expand horizontally in love, community, and faith in the trans-cultural state of divine unity.

#### NOTE

The authors wish to recognize the use of non-gender-neutral language in numerous quotations throughout the article. However, the word “sic” was not added in such places so as to improve the article’s readability.

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