

Uncovering the Unconscious

Milwaukee author seeks *Path to the Soul*

by Dave Lührssen



Path to the Soul

a book by Ashok Bedi

A&E

Many of us have a moment of epiphany, a flash of insight that illuminates our purpose in life, perhaps even our destiny. For Ashok Bedi, a psychiatrist and Medical College of Wisconsin faculty member, that epiphany came during his first year of college in his native India. While watching an Indian movie about a physician who gives up a lucrative practice to establish a clinic for impoverished tribal people, Bedi was inspired to follow that fictional role model. He became a physician, and eventually a Jungian psychiatrist, out of a sense of vocation more than a desire for a career.

Not that Bedi hasn't enjoyed material success since moving to Milwaukee in 1976. He was a clinical director at Milwaukee Psychiatric Hospital for many years, and has since built a thriving private practice. He's also done brisk business on amazon.com with his book, *Path to the Soul*, which integrates East and West, Hinduism and psychoanalysis, within a Jungian framework.

It's not a bad life. But in talking to Bedi, one can believe that for him, the best part has been the satisfaction of being helpful, having a positive impact on lives in the classroom, in hospital wards and in therapy. At times the results of Bedi's work have been quantifiable. One of his early tasks after coming to Milwaukee involved interviewing the 800 inmates of the old mental asylum called Southern Colony. "Many of them had been forgotten or kept on medication they didn't need," he recalls. Most of them were discharged following his examination. Other times Bedi's impact has been quieter, but no less dramatic in the lives of patients who, under his patient questioning, began to fathom the reasons for their ill behavior or their private, all-consuming obsessions.

Stand Aside, Freud

Like most psychiatrists trained before 1980, Bedi was educated according to the

teachings of Sigmund Freud, which are preoccupied with repressed sexuality and early childhood development. But he soon became dissatisfied with the narrow scope of Freudian dogma, despite its passages of insight. "Freud is too far removed from the spiritual and existential concerns of postmodern men and women," Bedi says. "His theories of sex are passé."

To put it another way, the Oedipus complex can go only so far in explaining the great intensity and variety of human experience. Anal fixations happen, but, for many of us, it's not the dark pole star of our lives.

Bedi found himself remembering the parables his grandmother told him over the kitchen table, rather than Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, when grappling with his patients' problems. Soon enough, he gravitated to Freud's erstwhile disciple and, later, bitter rival, Carl Jung. "Jung gave me a useful template with which to make sense of my Eastern approach," Bedi explains.

Jung and Freud, whose careers can be used to illustrate the idea that opposites attract but also repel, had more influence on the 20th century than any other philosophers or writers, and, perhaps, as much impact as the greatest dictators and statesmen. Both were fascinated by that largely unmapped ocean called the unconscious and convinced that in its depths lurk the cause of neurosis. For Freud, that cause was repressed memories; the cure was illumination through psychoanalysis, certified by a satisfactory heterosexual relationship. For Jung, neurotic symptoms, along with dreams and mythology, were the reefs and islands marking the sunken continents of a collective, universal unconscious. The goal of Jungian analysis is to help patients recognize those signs of the archetypes underlying our consciousness, and to integrate their lives around this insight.

Bedi compares the theories of Freud to the 17th-century physics of Newton and Jung to the 20th-century concepts of Einstein and

Heisenberg. Newton tried to squeeze the universe into a reductive, mechanistic blueprint well-suited to the dictates of the Industrial Age. Despite their differences, Einstein and Heisenberg shared a less certain, more open-ended, postmodern conception of the cosmos. To Bedi, Freud was the analog to Newton, Jung to Einstein. "For Jung the unconscious is the soul, which is the source of the id, instinct, but also of many other things. The unconscious can manifest itself in sexual ways but also in creative or spiritual ways," Bedi says.

Prozac Nation?

Jungian analysis is taught nowadays at Harvard, but in Milwaukee, Bedi has been among its few advocates in a wilderness where the tattered remnants of Freud have often been supplanted by an easier prescription than talk therapy, one that's more readily understood by HMOs—medication.

"The old medical establishment is resistant to Jung," Bedi says. "But there is a very brisk, warm reception from a new generation of physicians and psychiatrists. Finally, this last year, the Medical College of Wisconsin capitulated and accepted my course in Jung."

To the Prozac Nation, Bedi cautions that though "pharmaceuticals can be a means to create a safe environment to reach the soul, it shouldn't be the end but only the means." That is to say, a person is more than the sum of her chemical composition and nerve endings. Drugs can treat symptoms. The causes lie deeper within.

"Jungian analysis helps the patient decode the whispers of their soul. The soul speaks to us through illness, dreams, fantasies, hang-ups, through our creative drives. Successful adaptation to modern life has meant that we've become narrower and narrower, further removed from our soul—alienated," Bedi says. "It has been the price tag for modern life, a disconnection from our archetypal roots and bearings."