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THE HEART OF LETA S. HOLLINGWORTH

She was short, dark, lithe, graceful, and physically strong. She was full of enthusiasm and animation, unpretending and friendly. To her pupils she came across as a quiet, unassuming person. One of her colleagues said he often went to see her "to renew the inspiration of even a brief contact with a rare person. Always I find more than I expect in this little three-cornered office. It may be the smallest office in Teachers College, but no room is more significantly populated" (Hollingworth, 1943, p. 193).

People who can be inspiring to such a degree as was Leta S. Hollingworth are rare. Inspiration, like wine, is intoxicating business to those who drink it but not to the wine itself or to the one who pours it out. We do not know how a person becomes endowed with this quality. We can only note the remarkable attributes of personality and sometimes those rare moments, if they are recorded, when some inner ray bursts forth or destiny chooses to speak.

Imagine a child not yet 10 years old who reads that life follows in stages. This child then takes a look at her life and decides that to give it full value, she ought to trade part of her childhood. She decides to grow up on the spot. In Leta's own words (Hollingworth, 1943):

When I was less than ten years old I had taken a look at life and decided that...some period of it must be left out. I had read in some book that man's life is divided into stages and this put the uncanny idea of omitting one of them into my head...that if I left out part of childhood I should be granted other values which seemed more to be desired. So, having a very immature conception of relative values, I decided to grow up, then and there, solemnly renouncing the rest of childhood. I sat in an old weather-beaten sleigh and made the

compact. Strangely enough, life went on in the pathway where I set it. (pp. 44, 189)

Self-actualizing people have a sense of mission in life (Maslow, 1970). Here the sense of dedication to a higher purpose is evident. Lovecky (1986) termed this quality "entelechy," a vital force directing a person's life to become all the self is capable of being. All Leta's high school teachers saw in her the promise of a life of special achievement and contribution to society (Hollingworth, p. 87). Another telling moment in her life was when, at age 16, she was on her way to Lincoln, Nebraska, to enter the university.

I shall never forget a certain "immediate" moment which touched the consciousness as the train took me to Lincoln for the first time. The journey...had made me dead tired, and I laid my head down on the window-sill and felt the grind and the movement of the whole thundering train. An "emotion" of the irresistible swept over me, an "impression" of inevitable moment and destination....And the thought flashed through my mind that my life must always be like that, and the thought bound itself with the visual memory of a red sun setting across farms....! have always remembered the strange "immediacy" of that moment. (Hollingworth, p. 60)

At age 20 she wrote that above all things she wanted her life to "be absorbed by human beings, just to give as much as I have to people." She shuddered at the thought of a life spent in self-protective interest in the pursuit of financial security or catering to one's health: "Such things seem to me so pitifully futile, but there is more comfort in the thought of life being absorbed by life again. So I should prefer to give what I have to human beings, since give it somewhere we all must" (Hollingworth, p. 96).

This sense of destiny, of being able to decide where to dedicate one's life, is not treated by any psychological theory--not even by Maslow in his description of self-actualizing people. Thus Lovecky's concept of entelechy is very useful here.

That Leta Hollingworth was a self-actualizing person there can be little doubt, as I shall try to demonstrate. There are important "family resemblances" with Eleanor Roosevelt and Mohandas K. Gandhi. They were mahatmas or "great souls." It is striking how getting acquainted with them, one can see how unique each of them is and yet how much in common they do have (Gandhi, 1924/1963; Roosevelt, 1960).

What follows is based exclusively on Harry L. Hollingworth's biography of his wife, which includes several personal letters written when Leta was in her early 20s. Harry's reticence to share anything of their personal life--"this half of the story shall remain our secret" (Hollingworth, p. 196)--severely limits the material that would permit more insight into the workings of Leta's inner being. Nevertheless, what he does make available closely fits the characteristics of self-actualization as described by Maslow and as amply documented in Eleanor Roosevelt's life (Piechowski & Tyska, 1982). Knowing that self-actualization

corresponds to Level IV in Dabrowski's theory (Piechowski, 1978) warrants the hypothesis that within that framework Leta Hollingworth represents a high level of development.

The Traits of Self-Actualization

The traits of self-actualization may be organized into six groups: autonomy and superior perception of reality, problem centeredness, spontaneity, Gemeinschaftsgefühl (a sense of kinship with all people), interpersonal relations, and imperfections. The first four have a number of components. About Leta's Imperfections nothing can be said, for lack of information.

Autonomy and Superior Perception of Reality

1. More efficient perception of reality and more comfortable relations with it. This is the first component of autonomy and a superior perception of reality, as formulated by Maslow. Leta's motto, which she was fond of quoting was, "Test all things." She was guided by a sense of truth. She was fully aware that our perceptions and our ideas about the world are heavily colored by our typology and that to be truly objective, we have to transcend it: "Perhaps no human being will ever be able to throw off his limitation of personality and be able to behold the Universe uncolored and unchanged by his own type....Some have come very close to this supreme vision. Christ stood high in its pure light, as did Plato, and to me (perhaps not to you) Ruskin did....Will it ever be possible for any man to step forth from the influences of his own types, and interpret the Universe as it is?" (Hollingworth, p. 85).

Although many analytically inclined people argue persuasively that we can never transcend the multitude of perceptual universes (Goodman, 1960; Kuhn, 1962), that there is no underlying ultimate reality, the intuitive and mystical types, claiming a more direct perception, feel otherwise (Bucke, 1923; Huxley, 1944). When Leta was 22, she wrote to this point (Hollingworth, 1943):

And how truly has this belief in "things not seen" served me all my days! For, my God! supposing I had believed only in things seen, where would I be now? Supposing I had accepted only the facts of the existence and the environment where I was obliged to grow up! What would have become of me? But I perceived, somehow, the intangible essence of "spirit" in the world, and I followed it away from the facts by which I was surrounded, and how true that "spirit" has always been to me. (p. 87)

Even though eminently capable of abstraction, self-actualizing people never see things in generic terms because they never lose sight of the individual. This was true of Gandhi, and of Eleanor Roosevelt and it is equally true of Leta Hollingworth, who insisted on direct study of the child and scorned statistical studies of "vague masses of children" that were not backed up by clinical observations (Hollingworth, p. 146). Evaluation of her work by others provides further testimony to how efficient her perception of reality was and how consistent she was in

applying it in her work. General Secretary Moulton of the American Association for the Advancement of Science said about her: "She was always frank, intelligent, kindly, never evasive, and always devoted to the advancement of truth and real service to children. We shall not see her like again soon, I fear" (Hollingworth, p.193).

The comment on her contributions to the psychology of adolescence encompasses everything Maslow (1970) put in describing a "more efficient perception of reality": "Her description of the adolescent period does not conform to any school of thought, nor does it follow any 'authority.' It is notable for simplicity of style, methodical and well organized thinking, reliance upon objective, statistical or experimental data, common sense, freedom from popular but untenable hypotheses, and, finally, concern with the practicable and workable" (Hollingworth, p.194).

Hollingworth dealt with opposition to her views and ideas by the same principles of noninjury and truth as Gandhi. Like him, she placated and soothed those who stood against her in interpretation of facts, who held untested notions (today we call them "myths"), or who were unwilling to change unreasonable policies (Hollingworth, p. 116).

A sense of truth had another expression for her as The Law--which was the law of kindness and generosity. In her reflections, gentleness, compassion, and consideration for the feelings of others came up often as basic principles of human relations. But she could not absolve those who broke "God's holy laws." She could not forgive them "until they paid." Like Eleanor Roosevelt, she did not look upon as enemies those who disliked her or tried to harm her, because they had the right to differ.

When people break The Laws, as it is writ large on the world for all, I want them to suffer. I have a perfect passion for wishing to see them "pay." If they seem not to suffer retribution, I feel somewhat cheated. I cannot "from my heart" forgive them and wish them to escape consequences. Oh, it is easy enough to speak with them, as usual, to regard them without malice, to treat them conventionally. But I do not absolve them; I can't forgive them till they have paid.

Now you see...I don't mean at all my "enemies," that is those who may dislike me, or harm me, or differ from me in values or opinions. Bless you, no! I can absolve them easily enough; or rather, I can't, for there's nothing to forgive them for. But those who "offend against God's Holy Law," for instance against the law of kindness, or of meekness, or of generosity, I just delight in seeing them suffer the penalty. (Hollingworth, p. 86)

Unkindness, injustice, withholding help, inaction when action was called for offended her democratic sense and her sense of kinship with those in need. Yet she did not claim to see The Law clearly, at least not when she was 20: "But I think I see The Law in fragments only,

and that is why I cannot but feel the oppressive burden of 'the brokenhearted and them I that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.'" (Hollingworth,

She took on the responsibility to financially help many people and to enable students to finish their studies. Harry reports that "in her last years she wrote out documentary contracts with her personal assistants and with those she had undertaken to support through courses of study, specifying always that in the event of her death the obligations thus incurred should become a charge against her estate" (Hollingworth, p. 184). This is so much like Eleanor Roosevelt, who supported many causes, charities, and people. When she lost a major portion of her income from her daily column and radio appearances because she expressed an unpopular opinion, she made every effort to earn the money in other ways so as to continue her support unbroken.

Leta was also "the chief support of an array of helpless persons for whom, on one ground or another, she had an affection" (Hollingworth, p.183). This is yet another measure of her compassion and sense of responsibility, and the belief that immediate action is simply an effective way of improving the world.

2. Acceptance (self, others, nature). Maslow described this component as acceptance of life, nature, and human nature, and distaste for the fake and artificial. Leta's conception of acceptance was both poetic and profound. She wrote in October 1906 (Hollingworth, 1943):

Whenever I stand under trees on a silent autumn day I find myself listening as the leaves flutter down, half-expecting some outcry as they flutter, but none ever comes. And again and again this thought recurs: How even the leaves shame us in their mute submission to the Laws of Life.

That I should even expect a protest shows in me the everlasting human "resistance," human imperfection of sight, human lack of transcendent faith. (p. 92)

Harry notes more than once her intolerance of bigotry, pomp, and bluff, aversion to charlatans, pretenders, and inflated egos, anyone or any group that sought personal advantages by evading what she called "the rules of life" (Hollingworth, 1943, pp. 27, 184).

3. Quality of detachment. Leta was a gregarious person. She did not seem to need to isolate herself physically to find privacy and solitude. Her powers of absorption were such that, when reading or writing, she was totally oblivious to the world around her. Likewise, when listening to music or reading poetry, she suspended all outer attention. But in the final weeks of her life, she was planning with a friend a trip "for long rest, with no human contacts" (Hollingworth, p. 188).

4. Autonomy; independence of culture and environment; will; active agents. "Resolute independence was one of her outstanding traits" (Hollingworth, p. 184). In describing these

characteristics, Maslow included being self-governed and relying on one's own inner potentialities for personal growth, being ruled by the laws of one's own character, and being not against fighting but against "ineffective fighting." Leta believed in active participation. She appeared before hospital boards, boards of education, before the state legislature, and before various commissions. Psychological examiners came to turn to her at once for advice and direction when in their particular situations they experienced difficulties in making themselves understood and getting the cooperation they needed. She threw herself into these campaigns with all the intrepidity and vigor that were so characteristic of her whenever she became convinced of the justice of a cause in a field in which she felt herself competent to know and to speak. (Hollingworth, p.104)

Under "autonomy" and "will" Maslow comes perhaps closest to what Lovecky (1986) proposed as "entelechy," the vital force that inspires the life of a highly gifted, self-actualizing person. The pioneering nature of her clinical work and research stands as abundant evidence of her autonomy and independence. And such was her vision: "I shall never cease to rejoice that I was born on the limitless prairies. To grow up on their expanse means to 'see in long stretches,' to scorn boundaries, to go "free" all one's life" (Hollingworth, p. 52).

Problem Centeredness

In addition to "focusing on problems beyond themselves," Maslow included "discrimination between means and ends, between good and evil," the sense of mission in life, living in the widest frame of reference and universal values, being strongly ethical, having definite moral standards. And, further, a manner of affecting others that is uplifting.

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