

## **Jonathan Reynolds' JFK PERSONAL STATEMENT/APPLICATION for the GRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY**

### **Personal Statement Essay**

Over the past 12 years I have practiced and taught the mindfulness disciplines of meditation and yoga. In working through my own personal and impersonal histories, and in witnessing, listening to, and supporting students in doing this same inner work, I have discovered no greater joy than to be a steward of another's liberation - the liberation of the heart from that which binds it - be it a story with some bit of truth, or a worn out memory that no longer serves. To be of service, and to help ease the inner suffering that so many unnecessarily experience, is my life's work as a facilitator of awakening to presence.

This program appeals to me due to the fact that I want to continue the work that I've begun, and to do so with the added social credibility of a degree in the field of counseling psychology; I hope also to eventually continue on in this field and to receive my PhD. And as we all know, a professional degree can only make one a 'psychologist' in the eyes of others, and it is my hope that this newly acquired role will ultimately support me in offering to the community the very real and alive inner psychologist that has accompanied me for my entire life. From my perspective, the birth of this next expression of my innermost authenticity acts as an opportunity to serve and support in a truly sustainable and reciprocal manner, and this fact has been integral in inspiring this application at this time in my own history – it is an affirmation of my own ripeness and committed desire to further heal personally.

In addition to the desire to be of service and to ease inner suffering, I am also drawn to this program and field due to the fact that many of my own personal meditation teachers are licensed psychotherapists; and as you must very well know, there is a growing synthesis between the mindfulness meditation community and psychotherapy - they are a match made in heaven when undertaking the exploration of the psyche. Furthermore, transpersonal psychology is of special interest to me as in my opinion this particular field truly encompasses the many dimensions and expressions of living life as a fully integrated human being – I have thus been especially drawn to the writings of people like John Welwood, Mark Epstein, Eugene Gendlin, and Peter Levine's 'less explicitly transpersonal' trauma-focused work.

When I consider my own strengths and weaknesses in relation to psychology and therapy I can't help but find some clarification via the Buddhist model of the 'near enemy'. The near enemy is the understanding that each beneficial quality, each quality that is our true nature, also has the potential to 'slide' into a less than beneficial, yet closely related, form or expression of atrophy. So, what does that mean for me? My strengths are also my greatest weaknesses. My ability to see things clearly and simply, if gone unchecked, can easily become 'right' or righteous, even judgmental or critical. Another seeming beneficial quality, that of knowing each being's infinite potential as readily available, can degenerate into my own impatience with its (the infinite potential's) lack of expression – this born out of my own unconscious habit of 'ideal-making' or perfectionism. Also, my own profound openings and experiences – the very

things that will allow me to hold a skillful space of presence in sessions – can very likely create a feeling of ‘future leaning’, agendas, and subtle manipulations in the hopes of recreating what I personally think is most desirable, but in reality will very likely not serve the healing of another, or may at times even create its undesirable opposite effect. In addition to these specific examples, as I embark upon this new lifetime profession I must also come to terms with the fact that this brief list is just the beginning, the tip of the iceberg, and the infinity of subtle expressions that each of these challenges will inevitably display will ask of me an always careful diligence and evolving maturity.

My professional clinical plans are to offer mindfulness-based psychotherapy primarily to adults. I hope to realize this end, but also look forward to being surprised by the elements of psychotherapy that I have yet to encounter. I am open to growth; and just as past students and future clients must also know on some deeper level, I know that each being can be free from suffering, this freedom is their very nature, their ground of being; or what Jack Kornfield calls each person's 'original goodness'.

I've already seen the beautiful release into true freedom in others so many times, and I want to continue to spend increasing amounts of my own time, both personally and professionally, in the 'healing space' that is created by deep, careful, and kind listening. To this end, I have founded a San Francisco-based nonprofit called the '*Learning To Listen Yoga & Meditation Center*' ([www.learningtolisten.info](http://www.learningtolisten.info)) that offers tools that promote conscious living, psychotherapy being a clear example of this 'promotion' to greater awareness.

Ultimately it is an increased awareness in each of us that is self-liberating, that frees us from some old habit or pattern. What work could possibly be more important in the world than supporting people to know true self-acceptance and freedom from that which binds them? If I had an answer to this question other than the work that psychotherapy addresses, I surely would not be writing this essay. My practice, experience, and insights have let me know quite clearly that this is the work that I have been born to do.

I look forward to the possibility of working together, and even though we have not yet met physically, I hope you feel a kinship to me as well - for we are all family; this is the true seed of service, which is not bold, grand, smug, nor charitable, but rather is the natural response to our interconnectedness and to each other's struggles.

Be well,

Jonathan Reynolds, June 2009