

# Seven levels of significance: Significance and meaning as an organising principle of consciousness

Dr. Tim Read

*'the farther up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets, the inside is larger than the outside.'*

*'Its like an onion, except that as you go in and in, each circle is larger than the last.'*

C.S.Lewis. *The Chronicles of Narnia*

## Introduction

An emerging model of the universe has three basic elements namely soma, energy and significance <sup>1,2</sup>. The soma is the physical domain, our everyday world as shown to us by our perceptual apparatus. It is our familiar world governed by the forward march of time, the laws of cause and effect and Newtonian physics.

The second element is the quantum world of information and energy; everything is connected with a constant interchange between the clusters of energy. It is like a web and everything in the physical world, including ourselves, are clusters of energy in this web.

The third element may be pure consciousness functioning as the organising principle which collapses the web of energy at the quantum into the entities of our knowable world. Thus our everyday reality is the precipitate of consciousness organising the web of quantum energy. The nature of the organising principle may have something to do with meaning. If this is correct, then consciousness and its expression as significance and meaning is inherent in everything as a basic substrate of existence. Matter and meaning are inseparable.

The aim of this paper is review some of the ways in which meaning and significance permeate and organise our universe, to find a simple and useful system of classification for the different levels of meaning and significance ranging from the personal to the transpersonal and to look at its applicability to dreams and other non ordinary states of consciousness.

## The psyche as a sense organ

The psyche could be seen as a sixth sense organ. It is a psychological apparatus for feeling states and meaning, which we use to interact with our environment and the people within it. Used in conjunction with other sense organs, it adds a texture and nuance to our world and further organises our consciousness. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that in the same way there are scales that the eye cannot see, scents that we cannot smell, frequencies that we cannot hear and touches that we cannot feel, that there are meanings and ranges of meaning that we cannot usually gather.

David Bohm, the Nobel Laureate, described the external world which we see, touch and feel as just an impression of an underlying reality that we are able to perceive with our sense organs, which we cannot comprehend. He calls this deeper 'non manifest' level *the implicate order*, within which everything is enfolded. Unfolded versions of this implicate reality become 'explicate' for our experience. Bohm believes that consciousness is primarily located in the

implicate order. He emphasized that the usual dualism and separation between mind and matter was outdated and introduced a term 'soma significance' to highlight the unity between the two, with meaning being inherent in the physical structure of the universe. Thus soma, which is physical, and significance, which is mental, are not separate but are but two aspects of an all embracing reality.

Bohm suggested that as explicate order moves to the implicate, meaning and significance could be infinitely extended to ever greater levels of subtlety and complexity<sup>3</sup>. The brain, being a finite structure, would not be able to grasp the more subtle levels of significance, but there may be levels of consciousness which are not dependent on the brain and which may take us further.

This leads us to one of the central questions concerning the nature of consciousness. The 'productive theory' proposes that consciousness is a product of neural process and cannot persist independently of brain. The 'transmissive theory' posits that consciousness is inherent in the cosmos and is independent of our physical senses, although it is mediated by them in everyday life. Thus the brain and psyche may act as a lens through which consciousness is experienced.

I suspect that both theories have validity and that the boundary between the theories will eventually dissolve. I am reminded of the debate between biological and psychological theories of mental disturbance over the last century. Like the contemporaneous cold war, the apparent mutual exclusivity of the arguments faded and is gone. We know now that the brain is a much more plastic and responsive organ, one which is structurally changed by environmental influences so that nature and nurture are intertwined and inseparable. Similarly, there may be some aspects of consciousness that are more biologically determined and which arise from our physiological process and other transpersonal levels of consciousness, which derive from outside of our brain and our skin encapsulated ego.

It may be that there is no real division between productive and transmissive, personal and transpersonal elements of consciousness, that the boundaries that we make are arbitrary and that the transpersonal permeates the personal like a submarine mountain range, so only the peaks are visible. Perhaps the transmissive element is in active mirroring partnership with the productive element through the use of meaning and symbols rather than words and this is brought to us, if we are receptive, through dreams, visions, synchronicities or altered states of consciousness.

### **The brain and psyche**

Neuroscience and psychoanalysis are both 'productive' theories, which have generated useful models showing how the significance of events in the everyday world plays a role in shaping the development of the psyche.

Survival is dependant on recognising and classifying risk from the immediate environment and taking appropriate action. We have brain mechanisms that have evolved to this end. The mesolimbic dopamine system is a nerve tract in the brain responsible for attributing significance to bits of information captured by the sensory system<sup>4</sup>. Thus dopamine mediates the attachment of importance or salience to anything interesting or unusual. This information is given a positive or negative meaning that influences goal

directed behaviour because of its association with reward or punishment. The dysfunction of this system so that undue significance is connected to all sorts of insignificant events may play a role in the endogenous psychoses.

One of Freud's lasting achievements is the general acceptance by western thought of his concept of the Unconscious. The 'Unconscious' that Freud brought to our attention is a more subtle, less visible layer of consciousness which permeates and organises our attitudes, relationships and behaviour.

Psychoanalysis proposes a model where the psyche is built up through a web of internalised mental representations of significant relationships. The formative experiences and the broad brushstrokes in the development of the psyche are thought to be the early intense relationships, charged with meaning that the infant and child has with important figures and experiences in the environment. The intensity of meaning, the duration of exposure to powerful and shaping relationships and reinforcement from other experiences determine the evolving psychological architecture. This is a 'bottom up' model, so that the way in which we relate to the world about us is seen through the lens of these internal psychic structures, mostly shaped by early development experiences.

The transmissive theory represents a 'top down' model, where our psyche becomes more open and receptive to different ranges and octaves of meaning. These transpersonal experiences may be accessed in meditative states or in non-ordinary states of consciousness using certain drugs or techniques. They may occur spontaneously. The focus of attention, ordering of priorities and mode of perception in these states are different to our everyday reality. Aldous Huxley<sup>5,6</sup> found that mescaline induced a state where the mind seemed to move to a different value system and did its perceiving in terms of profundity of significance, intensity of existence and relationships within a pattern. The mind's attention switched from a concern with measures and location to 'being' and meaning. Meaning becomes the organizing principle. This state is not conducive to executive function or negotiating the demands perils of everyday life and Huxley concluded that the psyche and brain acted as a filter or reducing valve to diminish the intensity of consciousness, so that the level of meaning and significance was gathered around practical aspects of everyday life.

### **The chakra system and meaning**

It seems that we need a model that captures the different octaves of meaning and significance, from the more mundane zone of the productive theory to the numinous zone of the transpersonal. One possible model could be loosely based on the chakra system. The traditional understanding of the chakra system is as nodal points in our energetic body, but they can also be understood as psychological archetypes<sup>7</sup>. Although there are other ways of subdividing the spectrum of significance, the chakra system has the advantage of relative simplicity and familiarity and lends itself well to the specific task of addressing subtlety and significance instead of a hierarchy of development. The levels of consciousness represented by the chakras represent a deepening of meaning and significance, through explicate to implicate order, from the manifest level of the first chakra where issues of survival are paramount, to the infinitely subtle realm of the seventh.

The first level or root chakra symbolizes the basic and instinctive drive to survive. It concerns survival and response to danger, as well as the feeling of groundedness and security. It concerns the maintenance of the body, hunting, feeding and its modern day equivalents. The way in which the survival drive is expressed depends on the sophistication of the organism and ranges from the suckling and crying of the newborn, the instincts of the hunter and the tenacity of the will to live. Our biology has evolved so that powerful threats will mobilize the full neuroendocrine response of heightened arousal. This is the least subtle or most explicate, according to Bohm's terminology, and forms the foundation on which everything can be built. It is the level that binds and grounds consciousness into the demands of physical reality.

The second level of significance corresponding to the genital chakra is to do with the perpetuation of the species, coupling, sexual energy, appetite and generativity. The expression of this energy will be highly variable according to time of life and the modifying effect of other physical and psychological factors.

The third level or solar plexus chakra is concerned with power, will, hierarchy and issues of social organisation in individuals and groups. It is the most worldly level, the concerns are domination and submission, manipulation and the erection of structure. The issues of significance concern role, status and station in life.

The middle level or heart chakra is a transitional point between the personal and transpersonal, where further development depends less on intellectual or rational knowledge of a scientific kind and more on 'Gnosis Kardias', the knowledge of the heart <sup>8</sup>. There is often a crisis and a turning point as survival, procreation and status no longer dominate the agenda, different values are sought and the demands of the ego begin to give way to higher emotional functions with the affective tones of altruism, love, compassion, grief and joy. As the ego begins to fade there can be an opening to the transpersonal domain. Consciousness increasingly takes up the position of an observer and witness of the mind and becomes less identified with it. This represents a radical shift in perspective and is the basis of the mystical and contemplative traditions. There is a dis-identification with 'me' (egocentric) to identification with 'us' (ethnocentric) and beyond to an identification with 'all of us' (worldcentric) and ultimately to identification with 'the All' (kosmocentric <sup>9</sup>).

The fifth level or throat chakra holds an awareness that is no longer confined to the individual ego. There is an opening to a reality which transcends everyday life so that spirit begins to suffuse the self and earthly or material goals become less relevant. This is the level of consciousness associated with creative genius. A composer may talk of a mysterious process where the music is gleaned from the ether. Much of art concerns an attempt to communicate a different reality. Aldous Huxley described a process where light seems to spill out from the interior world to the exterior world <sup>6</sup>. This is a kind of visionary experience which people have with their eyes open and which consists of a transfiguration of the external world so that it seems overwhelmingly beautiful and alive and shining.

Glimpses of this fifth level occur not infrequently in everyday life in quieter contemplative moments. The intensity may vary from being moved by music or feeling at one with nature to a powerful numinous and unitive

experience. The glimpses may be fleeting, but if the intensity is high and if the experience is supported and integrated, the impact may be profound.

The sixth or brow chakra is the realm of the transpersonal, where space time is transcended and consciousness is no longer experienced as arising from the self. This is a level where all things seem connected. This is also the realm of the archetypes, the akashic field and past life experiences. There is access to universal knowledge and unitive insight into the true nature of all things. The opening to this level can be perilous for the uninitiated but pregnant with potential. Jung's creative 'illness' emanated from this level, where he experienced visions and non-physical guides. The insights that Jung obtained from this level informed and illuminated his work for the rest of his life <sup>8</sup>.

The seventh level is the merging with the Source, the level of infinite meaning, the state of bliss or samadhi described by the mystics and contemplatives who have direct experience of this level. Here there is no duality, no observer and observed. There are no boundaries and no thoughts. There is just unity. This is a state so full of meaning that no manifestation can contain it. This is Bohm's implicate order, where significance is experienced at its most meaningful and subtle level.

### **Seven levels of significance**

The first three chakras deal with the development of the personality or ego, from the undifferentiated consciousness of the newborn to the complex forms of the mature adult. They could be termed the 'egoic' levels and cover the realm of practical significance or salience. They have been largely charted by the western scientific approach and we have an understanding of some of the brain mechanisms and psychological structures involved. The current models most in favour refer to the mesolimbic dopamine system for the development of behaviour by the attribution of salience, and modern psychodynamic theories about the development of the psyche. Clearly the first three levels are part of animal life in varying degrees of complexity. The first level may also apply to plant life as polygraph experiments have demonstrated a response to harm or threat of harm to the plant being measured – as well as plants in the vicinity <sup>10</sup>. There are tantalizing questions as to whether higher levels are experienced in the animal kingdom and how mind relates to inanimate matter

The last three chakras are the levels of spiritual awakening which move progressively to domains which are not governed by our conventional sense of space and time. At these levels the significance has less practical use in everyday life and is less 'salient'. These levels of significance are not recognized by most models of western psychology but would be familiar to spiritual traditions. Psychoanalysis has the aim of strengthening the ego and releasing it from the tyranny of id and superego. In contrast, Buddhism has the concept of Anatta, which explores the levels beyond ego. An analogy used in teaching mindfulness meditation is that watching thoughts is like watching clouds in a vast blue sky. Western psychology has studied the clouds in great detail but tends to be blind to the spaciousness of the surrounding sky.

Spiritual traditions describes a cyclical process where a fragment of consciousness buds from the unity, the lower chakras chart the fall away from

the Source and represent the differentiation of the ego and the development of boundaries. The higher chakras chart the return journey home towards oneness with a transcendence of ego and the dissolving of boundaries. A similar archetypal sequence can be found on an individual (birth, death and the hero's journey) or collective level (tribe or species), with movement from primordial unity through alienation to liberating resolution <sup>11</sup>.

From this more archetypal perspective, the chakras are layered so that continuing through the chakras is a little like going through stages of development. All levels are of importance and the use of the term 'higher' and 'lower' is a descriptive device only. According to Wilber <sup>9</sup>, people functioning on the lower levels can have fleeting experiences of higher levels. This can produce a crisis, but has the germ of transformation by dislodging the identification of consciousness with the egoic levels and the world view that is based on it and having experiences suggesting the possibility of a higher level and the gradual disidentification with the old level. so that a new world view is developed. Higher levels are only sustainable when grounded in the lower levels. Each level is best built on the lower one and enfolds it. Enfoldment and folding are concepts used by Bohm to try to describe the way in which a more subtle level can suffuse and colour the expression of a less subtle level.

### **Transference and synchronicity**

There are many ways in which there can be a significance-orientated interchange between the psyche and the environment. The internal and external worlds dynamically reflect each other. Some of the ways in which this occur are recognized by science and some are not.

Transference mechanisms are mediated mainly by the ego and describe the phenomenon of how the internal world laid down in the psyche by formative past relationships becomes translated to the stage of the external world and is re enacted in current relationships. Thus new information is perceived through the distorting lens of the psyche. An element of transference is inherent in every human relationship and we all have characteristic dominant transference patterns. The influence may be mild and mostly available to consciousness or it may be sufficiently severe to dominate the way in which relationships are approached and may be largely unconscious.

People and groups of people can also use transference to elicit responses in the external environment that recreate certain situations reminiscent of the original relationship that caused the initial state. For example, a person with a history of abandonment will have a tendency to attract further abandoning relationships. On the other hand, a person with secure and stable attachments in formative years will introject these relationships, which are then likely to be repeated in adult years. The external world tends to be shaped according to the internal world and this is organised around meaning. This transference-related correspondence of internal and external environments through projection, projective identification and counter-transference is well known to psychiatrists and is related the egoic and personal themes of the lower levels of significance.

Synchronicity is a higher level phenomenon, first described by Jung <sup>12</sup> where meaningful coincidences link the world of dreams and visions in the internal world to happenings in everyday life. Synchronicity represents a

communication between higher and lower levels using the language of symbolism, which can seem fuzzy and difficult to interpret in comparison to the straight-line rationalism of the lower levels. At the everyday level of consciousness, there is little effect but as the psyche becomes more open to signals from the higher levels, events become more clustered by significance, the veil between the personal and transpersonal becomes more permeable and synchronicities occur.

Synchronicities are more likely to occur in major life transitions such as midlife<sup>12</sup> or during psycho-spiritual transformation involving ego death and rebirth<sup>13</sup>. Meditation predisposes to synchronicities as the stilling of the chattering brain opens the mind to signals and frequencies of the higher levels that are normally too subtle to be perceived.

Memorable synchronicities usually have a numinous quality like a mutative dream and may be a measure of psychological and spiritual health. They are associated with spiritual openings and higher level states where the transpersonal domain breaks through our normal filters and organisers of consciousness. They are usually easily distinguished from the delusional mood or ideas of reference found in psychotic states where the focus is on the external world rather than an inner journey.

If the universe has meaning ingrained within it, then some other phenomena begin to make a little more sense. The various techniques of divination use synchronicity to channel into consciousness bits of symbolic information from higher levels relating to everyday matters, which are ordered and sorted by significance so that like and like come together as if by a sort of gravitational force. Could astrology be seen as a synchronicity between the astronomy and archetypal patterns affecting human consciousness? The philosopher Richard Tarnas<sup>14</sup> notes that it is not that the planets are causing anything to happen anymore than the clock face is causing the time. Rather the planetary positions are telling a different sort of story and are indicating the state of archetypal forces active at the time.

## **Dreams**

If the seven levels of significance were to be a useful classification system, it would need to be relevant in the understanding of non-ordinary states of consciousness, dreams and experiences of other non-physical worlds. This raises some interesting questions. Dreams range easily and obviously across the lower three levels with issues and vicissitudes of survival, lust and social standing. There can be glimpses of higher levels, since dreams can range from banality to being rich and pregnant with meaning. Sometimes these dreams can have an extraordinary prescience and guiding quality that emanate from higher orders of significance. Rarely, dreams may show synchronicities and herald something imminent in waking life. Dreams condense meaning so that a number of areas of significance can be wrapped around one theme. The significance of dreams is mainly found in the symbolism which can be very complex. Freud thought dreams were 'the royal road to the unconscious' and psychoanalysts will often study dreams in great detail, peeling away different layers of meaning. Clearly there is a higher level of subtleness and organisation of meaning in the dream state than is usually available to us in the wakeful state.

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of dreams is that they seem to

perform a homeostatic mechanism that is essentially growth orientated. A dream will often show a situation demonstrating a difficulty or conflict but will also provide a compensatory shock to challenge it, stimulate a reconfiguration of consciousness regarding that situation and ultimately move towards wholeness. How does this happen? How can it be that the language of complex symbolism is shaped around our experiences in such a helpful way? This brings us to the concept of the 'Self' (Jung) or the 'inner healer' (Grof), where the collective unconscious and transpersonal layers of significance become available for our development. This is the part of us that guides the mutative dreams and is to the higher levels of significance what the ego is to the lower levels. It has the goal of working towards the integration of the whole personality including all biological and mental processes, the phylogenetic and spiritual and draws us towards our deepest ground. Perhaps the same function applies for other adventures in consciousness.

When we dream, the reality that we experience in the dream seems very real - the sights we see, the sounds we hear, the feelings we feel, the sensations, the thoughts we have. And yet when we wake, it doesn't seem so real. It may often have a relationship to our waking reality but we think our waking reality has more validity and the dream state is 'all in the mind'. Clearly there is more than one reality.

There is a burgeoning range of psycho-spiritual technologies for the exploration of different forms of reality and higher levels of significance which are difficult to study in our everyday reality. The works of Huxley, Grof, Woolger and Monroe are some examples. It is curious that the scientific and intellectual establishment is so disinclined to take advantage of the opportunities these pioneers present to expand our understanding of different layers of consciousness. The ontological status need not be the primary concern. Perhaps the first stage of research in these explorations is to be more like a naturalist surveying the landscape. It is not immediately necessary to decide whether these are dream-like states or represent a reproducible reality. Indeed it is possible that they may be both as the boundary blurs and dissolves between productive and transmissive paradigms. Jung initially understood archetypes as projections from the psyche but then modified his views, considering that they existed in their own right but were reflected in our psyches as archetypal images.

### **Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness**

The psychiatrist Stanislav Grof follows in the lineage of Huxley and Jung as a latter day Gnostic, convinced that direct personal knowledge of the higher levels of significance is available to us. The technique of holotropic breathwork was systematically developed to facilitate this by inducing and supporting non-ordinary states of consciousness. In these states, the psyche seems to become much more sensitive and there are two main consequences. Firstly there is an intensification of feeling and meaning, connected with memories of biographical events that relate to the lower egoic levels. Secondly it becomes possible to travel vertically up the levels gaining direct experience of the transpersonal domain. The linking mechanisms enabling the vertical travel up and down the levels are the emotionally charged memories from different periods of our individual, collective and mythic existence, which resemble each other in the meaning and significance



that they share. Jung considered that these 'complexes' of experience clustered by meaning resulted from a blend of archetypal core and human experience and act as major organising principles of the psyche.

Grof found that particularly intense meaning and feeling states such as experiences of birth, trauma and death provide the greatest opportunity to access the transpersonal levels of a complex. Grof uses the term COEX (systems of COndensed EXperience) to expand the concept of the complex to incorporate more archetypal and other 'past life' elements with the same feeling and significance state. Past life does not, of course, necessarily imply ownership of the past life experience, which may be more like a dream or indeed someone else's life which one is accessing through a resonance of meaning.

In a session of holotropic breathwork, it is not uncommon to have the reliving of certain emotionally charged parts of a life, including an intense experience of being born that would act as a gateway to transpersonal experiences. These could include past life memories, animal identification, mythological sequences, meetings with archetypes and indescribable experiences where our notions of time and space no longer hold true.

These journeys into higher levels can be pointless or even perilous but if well supported and integrated can have healing and creative potential. Grof claims that non-ordinary states can help resolve psychological pain and conflict since working through the dramas of a complex on a deeper level will tend to permeate and change the psychological structures of the same complex in the more superficial layers. This illustrates the way in which the transpersonal suffuses the personal.

As with internal object relations theory, there is a dynamic interplay between our complexes and the external world. Our complexes make us perceive, behave and react in such a way that we recreate some of their core themes in our life in the external world. Transference and similar mechanisms translate internal processes to external reality for lower levels. The higher level mechanisms are less well understood, but the idea that the universe has significance embedded in its form and structure can add new vistas and ranges to our conceptual understanding of our environment and how we interact with it. Perhaps archetypes are like the lesser gods which permeate our lives like the writing in a stick of rock. They act as strange attractors in chaotic systems and are like hidden gravitational forces having an organising effect on consciousness for our species. Thus psychodynamic factors push the complex from behind, while archetypes pull it forwards.

### **Birth, death and non physical worlds**

The transpersonal perspective holds that consciousness is not only dependent on living brain cells but also open to the possibility that the human life cycle is more complex than simply the passage from conception to death in the physical world. This is in tune with much of eastern thought and according to the Bardo Thodol or Tibetan book of the Dead, the state of mind at the time of death, which serves as a birth into the bardo, may act as a template to some extent for further development. This may be similar to the effect that birth trauma can have on the development of the psyche in lifetime<sup>15</sup> and shows how karmic currents can cross the boundaries of birth and death.

Roger Woolger and Robert Monroe are two prominent explorers of the non-physical world of the bardo. They use different methods, Woolger using hypnotic regression and Monroe exploring out-of-body experiences. Woolger has explored mostly the lower level of significance connections between life and the bardo <sup>17</sup>. He found that feeling states or complexes can be transmitted between lives and the non-physical world and influence the type of life that is used. Monroe found different layers or 'rings' of consciousness in the bardo that may correlate approximately to the levels of significance.

Jung considered that complexes behaved 'like independent human beings' especially in abnormal states of mind, when they take on ego character <sup>16</sup>. Clearly this is one partial explanation for the phenomenon of past regressions and how these experiences are so resonant with personal issues and current complexes. But it may be more complicated than this. Woolger describes how a person with powerful complexes that remain prominent in the bardo would tend to gravitate towards situations in life that would have a similar emotional resonance <sup>18</sup>. Thus ambivalent mothers tend to attract ambivalent souls who don't know whether they really want to be born. Happy mothers attract to them happy souls with a history of landing on their feet and being in the right place. Thus meaning as an organiser may have a role in our selection of parents, mother and uterus. There may be other factors which influence birth choice but Woolger suggests that the magnetic attraction of similar complexes between accumulated karmic material of the incarnating soul and the dominant complex of the mother may be the default option.

Thus there may be a coming together of the psychology of the mother and her supporting cast and the psychology of the foetus with its accumulated psychological issues. The two sets of complexes tend to mirror and perpetuate each other and this sets the scene for further experiences. The complexes and psychology of the developing mother foetal dyad may influence the birth process which, because of the powerful shaping effect of the perinatal experience <sup>15</sup> may in turn serve as a re-enactment and reinforcer of the complexes of the individual.

Monroe communicated a different sort of map of the after-death dimension during his forty years of exploration of out-of-body experiences. He also developed a technique to enable repeatable experiences with co-workers. In three books <sup>19,20,21</sup> he describes a complex and highly stratified environment with people at different levels of development occupying different realities in this interlife zone, which represent the hidden part of our natural life cycle. One level, which he calls the 'belief system territories' is a plane of existence where people know they have died and engage in activities that reflect their specific interests and abilities. Thus a psycho-plastic environment is created in accordance with the way in which their consciousness was expressed and focused when they were alive. As occurs in life, there are opportunities that could take their development upwards.

There are similarities between the levels that Monroe describes in the afterlife state and the levels of significance. In the afterlife state, Monroe describes a series of concentric 'rings', which are not actual places but states of consciousness. After death, people will usually go to a level that corresponds to the level that they attained in life, although some factors, like a sudden or traumatic death, may cause them to get stuck at a lower level. In

the lower levels of the bardo state, the egoic personality belonging to the previous lifetime is maintained as the working identity. But in the higher levels, the beings Monroe describes are increasingly complex and 'larger' in that they are the conscious integrations of many different experiences of being human.

Monroe describes a 'null point' which broadly corresponds to the middle or fourth level of significance. Below the null point the bardo state is dominated by space-time experience and it resembles in varying degrees the physical world they left behind. Beyond the null point, experiences become less easily described as space time falls away and reality becomes increasingly subtle, complex, intense and numinous. Shapes become more like energy and light. Boundaries soften and dissolve towards a unity. Bache<sup>22</sup> describes how in the higher levels of Monroe's rings that there is a 'melding' or confluence of individual units of consciousness (souls) into a more comprehensive pattern of integrated awareness.

### **A synchronous universe**

It is likely that consciousness is far more complicated than our present models allow, that meaning and significance is inherent, that direct experience of non-ordinary states may take us forward and that the journey towards wholeness will be productive. Man is probably in the early stages of the exploration of mind and consciousness and so we tend to think we have the central role in the production of consciousness in the same way that we once thought that the earth was the centre of the universe. Mainstream psychology and psychiatry has yet to progress beyond the Newtonian paradigm and evidence of the transpersonal tends to be denied<sup>13,17,22</sup>. Paradigms are inherently conservative and defend their territory but Jung, the Western pioneer of the transpersonal perspective, would probably feel that progress has been surprisingly slow, despite the coming together of insights from physics, transpersonal psychology and the increasing array of psycho-spiritual technologies which can advance the paradigms by we live.

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