

The Transpersonal Model of the Psyche. Some implications for psychotherapy and psychiatry.

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Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all around it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence, but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness.

William James, Varieties of religious experience.

Introduction

Transpersonal Psychology represents a fundamentally different model of the consciousness. It incorporates existing models of psychology and adds the perspectives gained by studies of the perennial philosophy and modern experiential schools. It represents a serious attempt to integrate the scientific and spiritual traditions.

Traditional psychology sees the mind and consciousness as arising out of neuro-physiological processes and unable to exist independently of the living brain. Transpersonal psychology understands consciousness as not just a product of brain process but as independent of the brain. This is a seriously radical idea, perhaps of similar significance to the advent of quantum physics which totally revolutionized our understanding of the physical world and which found it to be so much more complex and difficult to understand than the more simple Newtonian model which had served for the previous few hundred years.

According to the transpersonal model, the brain and the senses are the hardware through which consciousness can be expressed and experienced. Some of the software (or the operating system) comes from outside of the brain. Consciousness is not limited to the bony confines of the skull but is the stuff of the universe and is immanent in everything. Sir James Jeans, distinguished physicist, astronomer and philosopher summarizing the implications of quantum physics noted that 'the universe looks more like a great thought than a great machine, mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought to hail it as the creator and governor of the world of matter' (Wilber 1984).

Mind from matter or matter from mind? This is one of those philosophical conundrums that are insoluble in debate. Science cannot conclusively help us, although there is more evidence in favour of the transpersonal perspective (see McTaggart 2003 for a comprehensive review). It usually boils down to a matter of belief. On one side are the rationalists who tend to think in Newtonian terms and who believe in a mechanical universe and the brain as a biological machine that is the fount of every aspect of mind. On the other side are people who tend to believe that spirit or consciousness is primary, that the brain is an organ for its

expression and that the material world we inhabit is a reflection of an underlying reality.

The transpersonal vision is broadly in tune with Plato's famous allegorical story about the cave. Plato likens our vision of reality to that of men sitting in a cave with their backs to the entrance. The sun casts shadows on to the back of the cave and we construct our version of reality according to the information that the shadows give us. Thus the world that we see around us is but a superficial translation of fewer dimensions of a deeper reality, which we cannot see directly. The traditional role of science is to study those shadows, to classify them and to try to interpret them. And the study of shadows will yield some interesting and useful information. But it is hardly comparable to walking out of the cave, standing in the sunlight and getting direct experience of the real thing.

Experience of the 'real thing' can be had. It may be watered down, it may be heavily filtered, but it is possible to access non-ordinary states of consciousness that seem to take us a little way out of the shadow world of the cave and have some experience of what it might be like to be in the light.

Non-ordinary states of consciousness

It is possible to gain some access to a wider and deeper experience of consciousness through a part of the self, which is usually hidden away in the recesses of our being. A non-ordinary state of consciousness (NOSC) can be achieved through a variety of methods. To arrive is to travel beyond the chatter and imperatives of our everyday life. These states are difficult to describe, partly because they are so unfamiliar while our vocabulary has developed to describe everyday reality. Historically, the spiritual and mystical traditions try to access, capture and translate this wider experience of consciousness.

Until the advent of industrial civilisation, almost all cultures held such non-ordinary states in high esteem for the experiences, wisdom and insights they convey and the powers of healing that become available. They possessed deep knowledge of these states, systematically cultivated them and used them as the major vehicle of their ritual and spiritual life.

Modern western culture has attached less value to these ideas. The huge technological and scientific superiority compared to previous eras has led to an assumption that other aspects of western thought such as psychology represent the pinnacle of human achievement and the insights of shamanic and mystical traditions have been dismissed.

Nomenclature is an issue when describing altered states of consciousness. Words such as spiritual carry a weight of associations, some of which may be unhelpful and prejudicial. The word spirit is derived from spiritus implies wind or breath. Thus spirit is a dynamic energy, as invisible as air but as powerful as the wind. But it is experienced as more than pure energy and loaded with information. Jung called this energy *the collective unconscious* and thought that it held the memory of everything that had ever happened. Access to this layer of consciousness was often pregnant with condensed meaning and Jung used the word 'numinous' to describe the sense of the Divine associated with these states. Jung's basic assumption was that the spiritual element or the

collective unconscious is an organic and integral part of the psyche that is independent of childhood programming and biological and biographical influences. Thus we all have layers of psyche that are predominantly conscious, unconscious and related to the collective unconscious. We can see elements of all of these levels in dreams.

There are many tools for accessing such non-ordinary states, some ancient and some modern. Historically, culture has used techniques such as sensory deprivation, fasting, breathing, chanting, movement, music and hallucinogenic substances to induce altered states of consciousness. Like any tools they can be used or abused. The use of hallucinogens or 'sacred medicine' has expanded consciousness since pre-history. Synthetic psychedelic drugs, the most powerful of which is LSD, made it possible to study such states easily and systematically from the 1950s. Stanislav Grof was a young psychiatrist in Czechoslovakia when the pharmaceutical company Sandoz was trying to find a use for this extraordinary new psychotropic drug and his research into the therapeutic use of LSD led him to develop an expanded cartography of the human unconscious (Grof 1975).

The doors of perception

Aldous Huxley (1959) described his experiences with mescaline in 1953 in 'The Doors of Perception'. Mescaline is derived from the peyote cactus, which had been used in American Indian rituals for centuries. Under the influence of mescaline, Huxley found that everyday matters such as place, distance and time ceased to be of much interest. The motivation that drove him to achieve and perform tasks fell dramatically, although the intellect was not impaired. 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.

Huxley found himself supporting the notion that function of the brain and nervous system was eliminative, that 'each person is at any moment capable of remembering everything that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening anywhere in the universe'. Huxley makes this extraordinary statement without any suggestion of a mechanism but saw the brain as a reducing valve, which made biological survival possible by shutting out information to stop us being overwhelmed by information irrelevant to our everyday task. Thus the nervous system acts as a filter to focus our attention on the aspects of the universe that have immediate relevance for the tasks that we need to perform. These tasks are primarily concerned with survival.

Terence McKenna (1999) was an explorer of consciousness who used psychedelic substances to access non-ordinary states. He described psychedelics as amplifying the leakage of information from this other dimension. He thought that consciousness had to be organized around survival since primitive man had to prioritise 'not being gored by a sabre-tooth and avoiding being trodden on by a mammoth'. Of course, the acquisition of a mate and the rearing of children to perpetuate the tribe were also important foci of attention.

Thus consciousness is focused through the lens that is of most practical use to us in our task of survival. The brain and body evolve according to Darwinian principles so that these priorities are highlighted. There are other more sophisticated and subtle influences moulding our consciousness. Thus consciousness is experienced through the lenses of the biographical, perinatal, cultural, zeitgeist, phylogenetic, and arguably the astrological and the karmic.

Thus there is an aspect of our existence that has potential to connect to the universe or collective unconscious, where meaning is the organizing principle and the practicalities of daily life fade into relative insignificance. However, this relationship with the universe and way of seeing the world is usually over-ridden, so that we can manage a more pragmatic relationship with the world. It as though our consciousness is usually shielded from the cosmos by extremely powerful dark glasses that filter most of the light. If the sunglasses are removed there energy that is suddenly made available may be too potent and damaging. The filter and defences are there for good reason.

Huxley thought that some people could partially bypass the reducing valve. This could be innate or could be acquired through certain practices such as spiritual exercises or the use of drugs. These bypasses would be of varying degrees of power and would allow through the valve something more than and different from the carefully selected highly filtered practical material which we usually consider to be a complete reality.

Shamans and sages

The Shamanic tradition uses various techniques to enter non-ordinary states of consciousness for brief periods of time, and retain and use the insights and perspectives to inform their everyday existence. This state of temporary immersion can be compared to a dial-up access with the techniques acting as a modem to gain access. Serious practice would involve appropriate preparation and integration of experiences and should be grounded in rigorous personal development such as daily spiritual practice or meditation.

After time and numerous repetitions there is a pattern of progressive disclosure, which deepens the person's experience and understanding of the numinous. Bache (2003) points out that for this progressive disclosure to happen, there are a series of trials and tribulations. It isn't easy, but there is a prominent school of thought that the disclosure is not haphazard; rather it is controlled and metered by some internal homeostatic mechanism. Bache also notes the difficulty of learning in altered states of consciousness and that he had to 'learn to learn'. The usual cognitive processes have to be adapted to new experiential frameworks that are radically new and devoid of any familiar frame of reference. This is one of the reasons why repeated experiences are necessary.

The Sage tradition is a path using contemplation and meditation to gradually work behind and beyond the consciousness that we use for everyday realities and gradually gain access to the transpersonal part of the self. Thus a hermit or someone in a prolonged meditative practice would gradually bring to awareness all of the layers of consciousness that are inherent in the hardware of the brain. These are the currents of thought necessary for survival, the anxieties,

the rhythms and flow that are part and parcel of our existence. Slowly and dimly there emerges an awareness of a deeper layer, a part of the self that is timeless and which is not concerned with negotiating everyday reality. This is the gateway to the transpersonal dimension and if the connection can be maintained through continuing practice, it could be likened to a broadband or 'always on' connection.

These Internet analogies can only take us so far. The Internet is man-made and comprehensible. It is rarely numinous and is an extension rather than an elevation of our normal consciousness, using the same dimensions that we usually inhabit. Continuing Plato's analogy, the Internet is a sophisticated device to increase our access to the multiplicity of the shadow world but it doesn't take us out of the cave.

Jung, archetypes, synchronicity and the collective unconscious

Experience of non-ordinary states of consciousness have often been hard to come by, but can happen spontaneously. This is always a powerful experience; it can be destabilizing and may lead to psychological disturbance or 'spiritual emergency'. If the insights are assimilated and integrated, they can lead to wisdom and status as a visionary, mystic or shaman.

Carl Jung had a four-year period of psychological disturbance in mid-life where he had visions, conversations with spirits and functioned less capably in his everyday life. His 'illness' does not fit the usual profile of common psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and the concept of spiritual emergence is much more useful in capturing the state of opening to other levels, the state of psychic fragility and potential for positive change. Indeed the term illness is not usually associated with an increase in health and creative vitality and there can be no doubt that Jung emerged enriched and integrated from his crisis as one of the giants of 20th century thought, who pushed forward the frontiers of psychology. One of his lasting contributions has been the concept of the collective unconscious.

The collective unconscious is the historical and cultural heritage of humanity. It is an ocean of material that is not organized with the same reference to time and space as our everyday reality. Meaning is an organizing principle, mediated through archetypes. Jung thought of archetypes as the basic building blocks of the human psyche, common to all mankind and he regarded them as universal expressions of the collective unconscious. Jung and the anthropologist Joseph Campbell (1968) have demonstrated that the same themes arise in the great stories or myths at different eras of history and different regions of the world.

An archetype is best understood as a force which is pregnant with meaning and which drives, structures and permeates the human psyche. In older civilizations the symbolism inherent in an archetype was crystallized in the worship of the gods and the flavour of each archetype depended on the seasoning given the by culture concerned. The archetypes are the most obvious and powerful clusters of meaning. There are many lesser ones or little gods.

Archetypes operate on many levels, affecting the inner and the external world. Thus the archetype of Mars, or the drive generating forceful and

aggressive behaviour, would take a different expression and depth depending on the stage of the life, whether infancy, childhood, adolescence, early adult life, parenting years, or older age. The expression of the same energy can be seen clearly in the vicissitudes of the political and historical world. And themes of Mars are everywhere in the mythological life of our collective unconscious.

Jung found that spiritual opening was often associated with an increase in meaningful coincidences or synchronicities. This is where the boundaries between the internal and external environment become blurred so that inner processes can become manifest in the outside world. As a person becomes more open to the transpersonal domain, meaning as an organizing factor becomes more manifest and there is a coming together of events ordered around significance.

Jung became a legendary figure of the 20th century by virtue of his insights and wisdom. His concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes have become common parlance but he was less successful than Freud in establishing a succession, and others, most notably Grof have taken transpersonal concepts forward.

Freud and ego psychology

It is a point of agreement between the different schools of psychology that the consciousness that is part of our ordinary perception is but a fraction of the whole. There is the layer of the personal and biographical unconscious explored by Sigmund Freud and his followers. There is another layer which is not related to the personal history of an individual but which is about the survival of the human species and which equates to the collective. And there may be other layers of consciousness, which offer access to other levels.

Freud was primarily concerned with exploring the personal unconscious. His genius lay in the rigorous method of his exploration, his clear and vivid descriptions, the clarity of his writings and his political prowess in building an organization that would survive him. His success can be measured by the extent to which the concept of the unconscious determinants of behaviour is generally accepted by western society. Although his early work was influenced by non-ordinary states such as hypnosis, Freud took great care to associate himself with the scientific method of inquiry and to dissociate psychoanalysis from any association with the 'occult', which he thought would be immensely detrimental to the prospect of his theories being received favourably.

Psychoanalysis is Newtonian in orientation. It believes that the unconscious determinants of human behaviour are understandable as being derived mainly from our attachment needs and its vicissitudes, and our need to maintain an emotional homeostasis maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. One goal of treatment is to enlarge the domain of the ego and diminish the influence of the id and superego. Freud dissected this area of human experience in brilliant detail. He thought he was describing the whole of human experience and fell out with others, most notably Jung, who found other layers and depths, which did not fit his model describing them as heretics. As Joseph Campbell remarked, 'Freud was fishing while sitting on a whale'.

Freud was on one hand a brilliant and innovative thinker who was able to review and modify his ideas within certain limits. On the other hand he was the dominating patriarch of a new school that fostered unwillingness to think outside the boundaries that he had ordained and having a strong pressure to conform. Psychoanalysis has tended to perpetuate these traits amongst its adherents so that more transpersonal concepts such as synchronicity, archetypes or the collective unconscious would not be taken seriously. The psychoanalyst tends to have the role of the wise initiate who 'knows' and disagreement would be seen usually as a defence or a manifestation of pathology. This is at odds with the transpersonal school, which most certainly does not 'know' but finds creativity in holding and exploring the mystery. Thus psychoanalysis has some similarities to the religious or theocratic tradition with structure and dogma. The transpersonal school is more rooted in the spiritual tradition and has less definition and dogma, with the emphasis towards opening to the spirit within and on direct experience of the numinous.

Foulkes and the matrix

Group analysis as developed by Foulkes moves beyond the skin encapsulated ego. Foulkes was a psychoanalyst who became interested in group psychotherapy and who developed the concept of a matrix. This is a transpersonal concept in that it proposes a link between people, which is outside of the normal limits of reality. Foulkes goes further, to imply that this link or communication is a more valid form of reality than the individual. Foulkes defines the matrix as the web of communication within a group, which ultimately determines the meaning and significance of all events and upon which all verbal and non-verbal communications rest. Foulkes seems to suggest that mind does not exist within an individual but only comes into being through interaction with others. This interaction or dialogue develops in the various group matrices within which the individual is a nodal element.

I spent some years in a therapy group and trained as a group analyst. Much of the material in a group is biographical material and is to do with the individual relating to the group in a normal way. This is the stuff of interpersonal psychotherapy and is helpful with the exploration and resolution of intrapsychic and interpersonal issues. At other times, it is as though there is a resonance and melody in the group, as ideas and feelings resonate around the group, the sense of being an individual is lost for a while and we seem to move to another level of being as a group. These are magical moments, which are nourishing and healing. I was often struck afterwards that the content of what was said during these transpersonal group experiences didn't seem to matter as much as the spirit of moving together with energy and harmony.

Experiences of 'oneness'

Psychologists of all persuasions agree that one the fundamental human needs is for attachment. We need attachment to other individuals, groups of people and to the world around us. Much of this need for attachment is for pragmatic reasons to do with survival, but there is an aspect of us that yearns for

a deeper attachment, something more like a state of fusion. We find this in various ways, such as falling in love or in making love or group activities, where the barriers separating people seem to fall away. This yearning has some roots in previous experiences that we had very early in our life when we were vulnerable, weak and dependent and our developing psyche was new and easily impressed with powerful new emotions, feelings and anxieties.

Understanding the deeper levels of the yearning for attachment and fusion is a point of disagreement between personal and transpersonal schools of thought. Psychoanalysts understand it in terms of an unconscious wish to regress to state of dependence at the breast or possibly in the uterus. Thus a mystical experience of unity would be seen as the residual longing of a return to the breast, projected or extrapolated onto a larger canvas. Psychoanalysis has traditionally seen meditation as a search for the gratification of this primary narcissism. This implies a pathological state involving regression to a state of undifferentiation seen in psychosis or personality disorder. Modern psychoanalysis has shifted towards recognition that there are different types of 'oneness experience', some of which can be healthy and which can lead to a shift the internal organization of the psyche (Falkenstrom 2003). The ability to experience both the merged state and the separate state is necessary for development and healthy adult functioning (Blass and Blatt 1996).

The next step is to try to distinguish between what may be healthy and unhealthy, progressive or regressive 'oneness states'. Here it is the attitude to 'oneness states' that is important and the effect that they have on a person's life and direction, how much a person seeks them or clings to them or how seriously they are taken.

A transpersonal perspective (Wilber 1980) is that we come from spirit, our true nature is divine and our essence is of a split-off fragment of an all-encompassing consciousness. Although the process of conception and birth separates and alienates us from our divine source, our awareness of this connection is never entirely lost. The constraints of our incarnate existence do not allow us to connect with experience of the divine source directly, but there is a part of us that is always looking for ways of doing this.

This has a number of effects. On one hand, the deepest motivating force on all levels of development is the craving to return to the embrace of the divine source from which we spring. We can see this in the flowering of consciousness around the arts, music, religion etc. On the other hand there are perverse and dysfunctional ways of trying to connect with something that is a poor approximation of the divine source, such as substance or alcohol abuse. Everything has its shadow.

There are many reasons why people get intoxicated, but one of them may be that it reminds them, at least initially, of an earlier experience of consciousness, which is less organized according to the demands and constraints of human existence. Intoxication can open a transcendent window to an experience of light and fire and energy. The tragedy of addiction is that the seeking of another taste of the light leads to a descent into darkness. This may explain why some addicts can respond so well to a transpersonal concept as part

of recovery.

Assagioli (1985), the father of Psychosynthesis, noted that unitive states were associated with a sense of love and joy. The exaltation doesn't last but while present, these energies have a synthesizing nature and tend to bring the personality to a higher state of organization. This higher state can be maintained to some extent if the connection to the transpersonal part of the self can be kept open, but this is rare. Usually the energy is withdrawn and the personality tends to revert towards its previous level of organization. But what remains, and this is the most useful part of the experience, is a model and direction, which a person can use to continue the transformation using their own methods.

Stanislav Grof and Holotropic states

The most complete modern expert in non-ordinary states is Stanislav Grof who has researched their effects and therapeutic uses for over 40 years. Since LSD was made illegal, he and his colleagues have developed a technique called Holotropic breathwork that uses hyperventilation and evocative music in a highly supportive environment to induce a non-ordinary state where the power of the filter is lessened. In breathwork sessions the breather can have a direct experience of the sort of world that Huxley was describing, but without having to take any drug or substance.

Grof coined the term Holotropic deriving it from the Greek words *holos*, which means whole and *trepein*, which is a verb for movement towards. The term holotropic means 'moving towards wholeness'. Grof's use of the concept of wholeness is similar to the Jungian term of individuation, in which different parts of the self are discovered, explored and integrated. Terms such as individuation, wholeness and enlightenment denote hypothetical end-states and the word holotropic is useful because it describes motion, the movement towards and a journey forward.

Grof has made a contribution to a number of important areas. He has highlighted the role of the perinatal period in forming an emotional template that persists powerfully into adult life. He divides the events around birth into four perinatal matrices, each associated with a characteristic set of feelings. The first matrix is when the person is undisturbed in the uterus. The second matrix is associated with the trauma of the onset of uterine contractions against a closed cervix. The third matrix is when the cervix is opening and there is the possibility of deliverance after a titanic struggle. The fourth matrix is the epiphany of birth. A sense of reliving parts of the perinatal experience is a frequent occurrence in holotropic states and can be experienced on a number of different levels ranging from the personal to the archetypal.

He also developed the notion of the COEX, or system of condensed experience, where events are clustered together according to the meaning state attached to them. The COEX will have different layers whether biographical, perinatal or archetypal and the advantage of the holotropic state is that all these levels can be accessed.

Grof gives many examples of transpersonal phenomena in holotropic states where people can experience states of existence that would not normally

be available. Thus a person can have an authentic experience of being a bird, an insect, or a spermatozoon. People can have an experience of being another person from a different era, and can have a direct experience of the numinous. It seems as though the whole range of experience germane to our existence is available.

Above all, Grof emphasized the healing potential of holotropic states and the capacity for growth and renewal. If holotropic states are entered for recreational purposes and treated lightly or even abused, the power can be neutralized or become damaging. But if the preparation, context and above all the integration of the experience is right, there is huge potential for internal realignment and psychological change. He uses the term 'inner healer' to denote a benign and growth-orientated aspect of the self that exposes and meters the raising of the veil according to what the individual needs, so that the experiences have the appropriate degree of power and are not overwhelming. This is a very interesting concept, a transpersonal part of an individual psyche that has control over the Huxley's 'valve' and which is benevolent and orientated towards our ultimate growth and development.

The hero's journey

The spiritual path or the holotropic journey is tortuous and like the Pilgrim's Progress or the Odyssey can be perilous. Many of the world's great mythological stories are about the journey towards spiritual growth, a symbolic death of an old way of existence and the birth of a new way of being. These stories can provide guidance for people entering non-ordinary states. People have great fear of the uncharted territories of unusual states of mind. The theme of the hero's journey acts as a map for the pull of the unknown, the tides and undertows, the need to rediscover an attachment to the divine and the trials and tribulations of the path. Joseph Campbell (1968), arguably the world's greatest mythologist, gives a detailed account of this journey as described in stories from around the world in 'The hero of a thousand faces'.

The hero's journey seems to follow a basic pattern. The hero (or heroine) is someone who hears a call and follows it. Usually the person is reasonably well adjusted but has a yearning for something different from the everyday realities of life. The call can take many forms and ranges in intensity from subtle to strident. It can't be ignored and is either acted on or squashed. Acting on the call means upsetting the status quo and precipitating a set of changes or crisis. The structures of a life such as family, income, mortgage, responsibilities and relationships have to be addressed and possibly disrupted before the hero can begin the journey.

Along the way, the hero gets help, often with mysterious synchronicity. He may receive gifts of power. Thus armed the hero goes to the threshold of another world, a gate, an entrance that is guarded by a guardian or demons (including the hero's demon's). A confrontation takes place between the hero and the guardian, which is somehow resolved and integrated so that the hero can continue through the threshold with the transformed guardian by his side.

The hero goes into an extraordinary place, the Mysterium, the enchanted

forest and experiences a different sort of reality. Feeling strengthened by the encounter with the guardian, he meets his supreme ordeal, the great battle. In facing his greatest challenge the hero finds the treasure or Holy Grail. This is a gift of life or rebirth and with it the hero leaves the Mysterium behind. He returns home, the awareness and insights of his voyage remain with him and he takes his place, enriched and reborn.

Spiritual emergency

When the valve is bypassed, the direct experience of the energy and the removal of the normal filters through which we see the world can be disturbing and destabilizing. As Ram Dass notes in inimitable style, 'if you were a toaster, it would be like putting your plug in a 220 volts instead of 110 volts and everything fries' (in Grof and Grof 1989). The energy is difficult to control and there are usually profound changes in mental state, sensory perception and thought processes. People can feel and behave as though they are going mad. If they were to go and see a psychiatrist, they would probably be diagnosed as mentally ill and prescribed medication. The medication would probably be helpful in suppressing the symptoms but nothing would be learned, and an opportunity for transformation would be lost. The explanatory model of 'mental illness' is not exactly encouraging.

Stan and Christina Grof have termed this process the 'spiritual emergency'. It is an emergence that may become an emergency or an emergency that could be an emergence. The point is that it is a transformational crisis that can lead to growth if the process is supported and facilitated. Suppression of the symptoms with medication is unhelpful unless the symptoms are too distressing or problematic. Western psychiatry is not good at differentiating between such spiritual emergencies needing understanding and support and psychotic illnesses, where symptoms are not helpful but are dysfunctional or even dangerous so that medication is more immediately appropriate.

The Grofs' take-home message about negotiating these turbulent times is one of support and context. Positive and unconditional support is essential and provides the crucible where transformation can take place. The level of support that is needed varies from individual guidance, friends and family and occasionally professional support. A positive context is essential which moves away from the concept of disease and towards healing, growth and transformation. When people are in a spiritual emergency they are raw and easily influenced by external circumstances. The quality of their eventual emergence is likely to be highly influenced by whether the attitudes of those surrounding them are nourishing and supportive or judgmental, critical or even fearful. Ideally they should have access to people who have some understanding of the territory of spiritual emergence.

Holotropic breathwork workshops and training modules run by the Grof Transpersonal Training offers a very high level of uncritical support, in which the breathers can feel safe to surrender to the process that emerges and know that there will be no sharp edges. In the raw and sensitive state in which people find

themselves when opening to the transformational process, even well intentioned interpretations can seem wrong and slightly abusive. So any comment or interpretation is usually avoided.

R D Laing, the Scottish psychiatrist and psychoanalyst thought that transcendental experiences sometimes broke through in psychosis. He emphasised the word sometimes. He tried to bring this to the attention of the psychiatric establishment and probably overstated his case so that little of his message survives in contemporary psychiatry. He thought that these transcendental experiences were the original wellspring of all religions, that some psychotic people have these experiences but he did not believe that the psychotic experience was any more valuable in this respect than a 'sane' experience.

Laing's perspective was that the unconscious realm was a primary reality of which we are mostly unaware and do not even usually realise that it exists. Many people enter it, unfortunately without guides and end up confusing inner and outer realities and generally lose their capacity to function in the everyday world. This needn't be so, but reflects the way in which contemporary society is so rooted in the practical world that we have lost the knack of navigating between the two worlds. The proper task of the psychotherapist, physician and psychiatrist is to be a guide between the worlds.

Laing saw the ego as a tool to enable us to live in the everyday external world and that the western world is ego-dominated to the point where losing the boundaries and structure provided by the ego now entails grave risk. He notes the artists who have become shipwrecked on these reefs such as Rimbaud, Van Gogh, Nietzsche and Munch and notes that those who survive are those who are streetwise. The survivors have exceptional qualities, a capacity for secrecy, slyness, cunning, a thoroughly realistic appraisal of the risks they run, not only from the spiritual realms they frequent but also from the hatred of their fellows for anyone engaged in this pursuit.

Transpersonal Psychiatry

Spiritual awakening and developing psychosis may have common roots in that both involve a decreased effectiveness of the filtering mechanism of the brain so that the quality and quantity of sensory input changes. The environment is a key factor in determining the outcome of the adventure.

The ideal way in which such an emergence could occur would be in a protected environment, shielded to a great extent from the demands of the outside world, with help and guidance from those who have trod the same path before. There would be a gradual and gentle unfolding at a pace that would not be overwhelming. New experiences and knowledge would be integrated. The initiate would feel part of a secure and valued tradition with wise and benevolent tuition and guidance. The environment would be friendly and containing. There would be some stresses and interpersonal issues but these would be relatively mild and there would not be many hooks for paranoia to attach to and grow.

Sadly this ideal is not easily available. Some individuals will be particularly vulnerable for reasons of genetics, personality development or environment.

People will often have experiences that may be drug related or which may arise spontaneously, where they do not have the benefit of help or of a supportive environment. The degree of exposure to a non-ordinary state, with the sudden loss of normal boundaries and reference points for consciousness, will be too abrupt and often terrifying.

Delusional mood is a psychiatric term used to describe a state of perplexity where the subject strongly suspects that something very unusual and significant is going on around him but doesn't know what it is. Dealings with everyday reality become suffused with meaning in a way which is often interpreted as dark and sinister and which is then transposed or projected onto the external world. In such a raw and sensitive state, threats to survival may be exaggerated, so that a glance from a stranger in a street may be interpreted as a threat. This heightens anxiety so that the person increases vigilance to further signs of danger, which are then more likely to be plucked from an increasingly hostile environment. The person may then behave in an unusual way, which in turn may elicit certain responses from the environment. And so a vicious circle propagates itself.

A person in this condition will become increasingly aroused but with impaired ability to discriminate between internal and external reality. This can be extremely dangerous. It is the foundation layer from which serious psychiatric disorder can result. The degree of agitation and terror may cause impulsive and dangerous behaviour. Persecutory anxiety from the psyche mixed with misperceptions of external stimuli may become organized into paranoid delusions. Auditory hallucinations may develop with derogatory or commanding content. This is the stuff of the psychiatric emergency room and once the situation has developed to this point, the person is usually unable to understand the difficulties in terms of an internal process and becomes a patient who progresses through the pathways of disease, treatment and recovery.

Some people may not recover. There can be a paralysis of growth as the hero's journey becomes stuck and enmired. Some may lose the ability to organise themselves in a way compatible with adult independent living. Some may develop chronic delusional systems, which become fixed and rigid. There may be permanent confusion of levels so that the symbolism and creativity of an internal process becomes lost and so that the external world takes on a form that mirrors the internal.

Each branch of psychiatry and psychology tends to over emphasise its importance. Biological psychiatry, with the financial might of the pharmaceutical industry behind it, believes that medication is the way forward and that the future is chemical. The various schools of depth psychology would be optimistic that psychotherapy of appropriate frequency and duration would enable the working through of most intrapsychic and interpersonal issues. The sociologist would point out the adverse effects of environment and deprivation and would look to politicians to make the necessary socio-economic adjustments. Clearly there is merit in all these approaches and a good psychiatrist will be familiar with a biopsychosocial model in trying to understand and help patients.

What is missing from the model is an understanding of non-ordinary

states, the healing power of these states and the potential for difficulties to arise in spiritual emergence. A biopsychosociospiritual model would enable a better understanding of some aspects of the psyche that are not well explained by accepted theories and a recognition that some states seen as pathological can be used for growth.

Institutions are conservative and people in institutions are suspicious of change and afraid of the implications for their status and income. But as the cracks emerge in the current paradigms dominated by the medical model and psychoanalysis, there is the potential for useful ideas from other paradigms to be explored.

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