

# SYNTHESIS



**SYNTHESIS**

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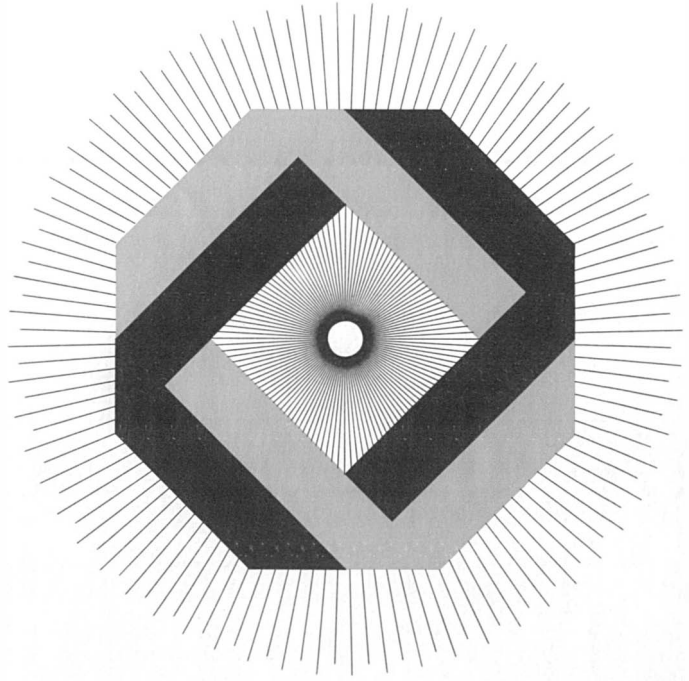
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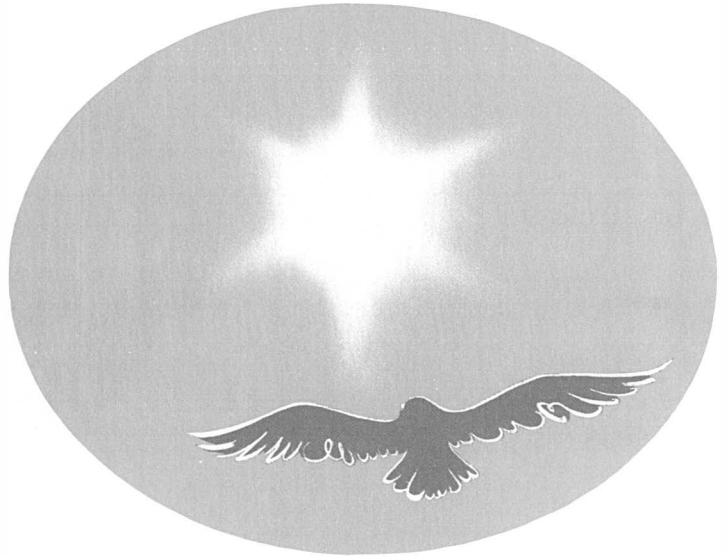
# **SYNTHESIS 3-4**

**The Realization of the Self**



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# SYNTHESIS 3-4



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## INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Aldous Huxley



INTEGRATED EDUCATION was the opening lecture in a series given by the English novelist and man of letters, Aldous Huxley, for his course, "The Human Situation," at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1959. It is published here for the first time. This course represented Huxley's most extensive and systematic discussion of the major problems of our times. His eleventh lecture of the series, "The Two Faces of the Human Unconscious," will appear in the next issue of SYNTHESIS. The entire set of lectures will be published this year by Harper and Row in the United States and Chatto and Windus in England, under the title "Man and his Planet."

\* \* \*

As we all know, a little learning is a dangerous thing. But a great deal of highly specialized learning is sometimes even more dangerous than a little learning. One of the major problems of higher education is how to reconcile the claims of much learning, which is essentially specialized learning, with the claims of little learning, which is the wider but shallower approach to human problems in general.

This is of course by no means a modern problem. I can quote a rather interesting example in this field from the case of my grandfather, T.H. Huxley,<sup>1</sup> a man who was never happy unless he was doing about three or four full time jobs at once. Among his full time jobs in the 1870's was the creation of modern English education. He worked a great deal on elementary and secondary

Specialization  
and integration

education in London and he did a great deal to turn London University into a modern university, that is to say into a university with a high degree of specialization in its various fields. The interesting thing is that he was already deeply preoccupied with the problem of excessive specialization in the early 1890's. About three years before he died he actually worked out a plan for trying to coordinate the various specialized departments in the University of London so as to create some kind of integrated education.

I need hardly say that the plans were never put into effect, and the problem of integrated education remains exactly as it was. It is a problem which concerns everybody in the field, and a number of attempts have been made to solve it. Most of the attempts have been unsatisfactory: there is the attempt of simply adding pieces of humanistic information to the specialized scientific information; there is the attempt to coordinate science and the humanities by means of an historical approach to the subject, which has certain merits, but I don't think is completely satisfactory; then there is the rather closely related attempt to use the *Hundred Great Books* to do the same thing: again, I don't think it is altogether satisfactory.

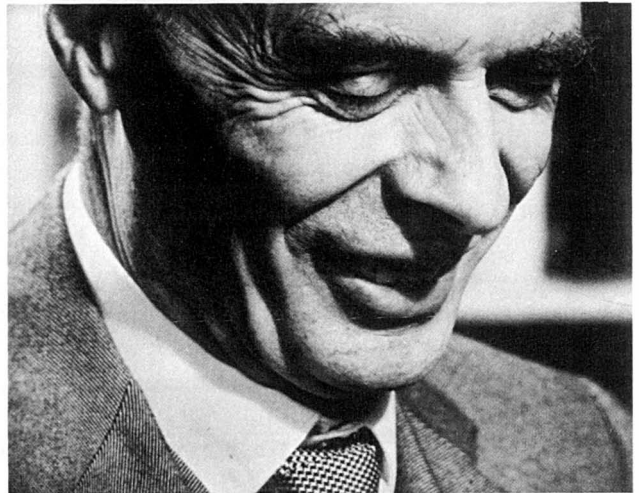
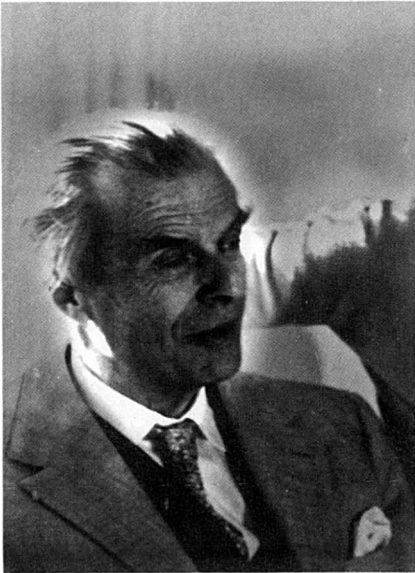
Need for a  
deeper approach

My own feeling is that an ideal integrated education calls for an approach to the subject in terms of the fundamental problems. We should start with fundamental human problems, such as: Who are we? What is the nature of human nature? How should we be related to the planet on which we live? How are we to live together satisfactorily? How are we to develop our individual potentialities? What is the relationship between nature and nurture? If we start with these problems and make them central, we can obviously bring together information from a great number of disciplines that are at present completely isolated. My own feeling is that it is probably only in this way that one can create a thoroughly integrated form of education.

Meanwhile, however, this integrated education doesn't really exist. Here I think may be found the reason why a person like myself, who has what may be called a kind of encyclopedic ignorance in many fields, may be of use. A man of letters can perform a valuable function in the world at present by bringing together a great many subjects and showing relationships between them: it is a question of building bridges.

We have an interesting word, *pontifex* or bridge builder. It is the Latin name of the college of priests in Rome, and the head of the

college was called *pontifex maximus*. *Pontifex* is a very interesting and satisfactory word, because it means in a religious context that you make a bridge between Earth and Heaven, between the material and the spiritual, the human and the divine. The whole idea of the *pontifex*, the bridge builder, is a very profitable one, and we can meditate upon and make use of it in a very productive way.



The function of the literary man in the present context is precisely to build bridges between art and science, between objectively observed facts and immediate experience, between morals and scientific appraisals. There are all kinds of bridges to be built, but there are great problems facing the man of letters who tries to build them. It is interesting to go back into the history of literature and to see that this problem was considered quite carefully by Wordsworth at the end of the eighteenth century, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth has a very interesting passage where he says that the remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, the

## Scientific poetry

mineralogist will become for the poet a subject matter no less suitable than any other, on the condition that these subjects become interesting to human beings at large and can be considered in the context of what they do for men as “enjoying and suffering beings.”<sup>2</sup>

Value and  
meaning in art

This is profoundly true. If the effects of science are to become incorporated into art, they must in some way become something more than mere facts, and scientific theories must become something more than mere abstractions and generalizations: they must become facts of direct experience, facts which mean something, facts which have an emotional content. Here we are up against a vicious circle, for it is quite clear that on the one hand the facts of science cannot become suitable material for poetry and literary art in general until they become emotionally tinged and involve us as persons. On the other hand, it is also clear that it is very unlikely that they will become so emotionally tinged and involved in the general feeling tone of humanity until they have been expressed in artistic form, because the function of the artist is to make available for the rest of the community large areas of value and meaning. You can say in a sense that the emotional and value patterns of people's lives are largely created by the artist, who finds the suitable expression and suitable form of words for making known and interesting what was previously either unknown or uninteresting. Therefore, we are on the horns of this dilemma: we need to have the facts of science become tinged with emotion before they can become the material of art, but we need to have them already transformed into material of art before they can become fully valuable for us in emotional terms.

The question is one of finding a suitable vocabulary in which to deal with these problems. At present we have a large variety of vocabularies: we have the vocabulary of ordinary speech, we have the vocabulary of prose literature, we have the heightened vocabulary of poetry, and we have the abstract vocabulary of scientific theory, and the absolutely catastrophic vocabulary of textbooks, which I find extremely painful to read. No wonder that, given such vocabulary, these scientific facts and theories are not felt to be relevant to us as “suffering and enjoying beings” or they are perhaps only as suffering beings, but certainly not as enjoying beings.

One cannot overstress this necessity of words. At the present time how can we attempt to describe, for example, a mystical experience? What we need is some kind of language, which will have

Need for  
an integrating  
language



Overcoming  
artificial divisions.

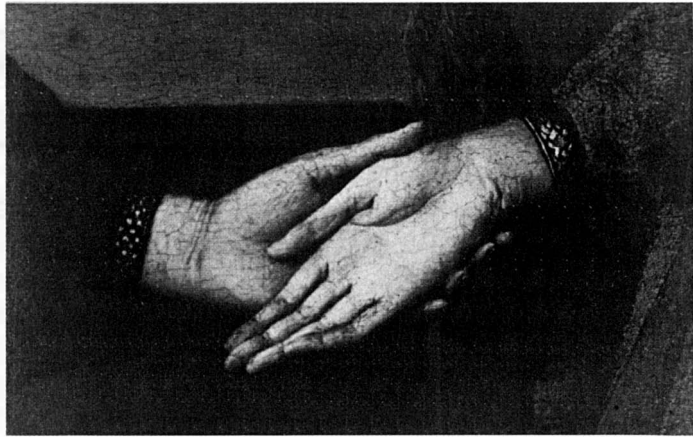
to be created. Such a language will permit us to speak of this profoundly personal experience in terms of philosophical concepts, in terms of biochemistry, and in terms of theology. At present these are three totally separate and unconnected vocabularies, and our problem is somehow to discover a vocabulary which shall make it possible for us to pass without any serious jolt from one point of view to the other, from one universe of discourse to another universe of discourse.

Let us now speak about a very expressive metaphor, one where somebody protested against what he called the "celibacy of the intellect." The trouble with all specialized knowledge is that it is a whole organized series of celibacies. We have subjects living in their monastic cells, apart from one another, and simply not intermarrying and producing the children that they ought to produce. The problem is to try to arrange marriage between these various subjects, in the hope of producing a valuable progeny. The celibacy is not only of the intellect—and this is a very characteristic feature of contemporary literature—it is a celibacy of the passions, a celibacy of the instinct. If one goes to see plays for example by Tennessee Williams, a dramatist of enormous talent, which I greatly admire, one sees an almost complete celibacy of the passions. These passions exist in a chemically pure state without any connection with the intellect whatsoever. They are living a life entirely of their own, and if you were to take these plays as a serious picture of contemporary life, you would certainly be extremely deceived. The very fact of producing the play, which required such an immense combination of people using their intellects, and their responsibility, and keeping their will firmly fixed on the subject, was itself a complete denial of the reality of this picture of life in which the passions are divorced from the intellectual and voluntary life of human beings. What we need to do is to arrange marriages, or rather to bring back into the originally married state these different departments of knowledge and feeling which have been arbitrarily separated and made to live in their own monastic cells in isolation. We can parody the Bible and say, "That which nature has brought together let no man put asunder;" let not the arbitrary academic division into subjects tear apart this closely knit web of reality and turn it into nonsense.\*

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\*The "arranging of a marriage," or the harmonizing and integrating of feelings and intellect is one of the vital tasks of self-actualization. As Huxley

Here we are up against a very serious problem, because any form of higher knowledge requires specialization. We have to specialize in order to penetrate more deeply into certain separate aspects of reality. But although specialization is absolutely necessary, it can be, if carried too far, absolutely fatal. Therefore, we must discover some way of making the best of both worlds, of making the best of the highly specialized world and of what may be called the married world of immediate experience, in which nothing can be separated, because it is all there: we are both intellect and passion, our minds



Both experience  
and understanding  
are needed

have both objective knowledge of the outer world and subjective experience. We must discover methods of bringing these separate fields together, by showing the relationship between the world of objective observation and intellectual abstraction, and the world of immediate experience. This is, I feel, the most important problem in current education.\*

I would like to quote a very beautiful and interesting sentence which occurs in a letter written by my grandfather to Charles Kingsley<sup>3</sup> on the occasion of the death of Huxley's small son, aged

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suggests, this integration is mediated and facilitated by the action of the will. The integration of mind and feelings, and the development of the will, will be the topics of future *WORKBOOKS*. [Ed.]

\*Since Huxley spoke these words, much educational work has attempted to unify the cognitive and affective domains of education. Outstanding examples in the United States include Confluent Education, as developed by Professor George I. Brown at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the work of Professor Gerald Weinstein at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. [Ed.]



four. Kingsley had written a letter of sympathy, and my grandfather wrote back at great length on the whole problem of immortality and the position of the scientists in the modern world. In that letter this very interesting sentence occurs:

Science seems to me to teach in the highest and strongest manner the great truth, which is embodied in the Christian conception of entire surrender to the will of God. Sit down before fact like a little child, and be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing.<sup>4</sup>

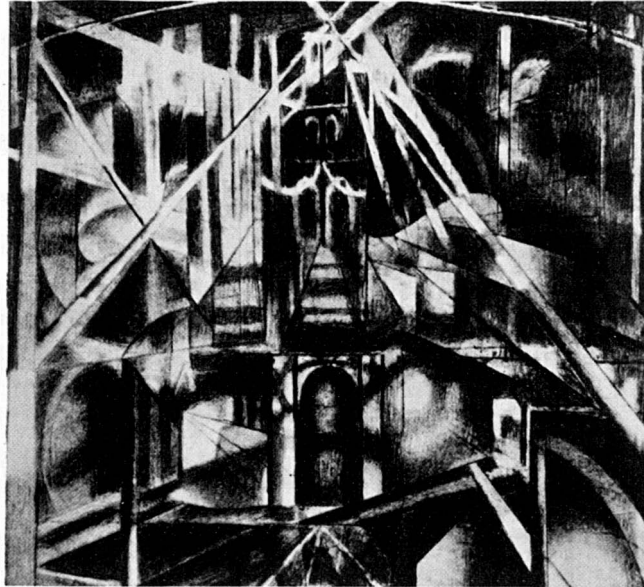
Learning  
through humility  
and open-mindedness

One sees here that the whole scientific process is intrinsically an ethical process, and this is a side to science which is insufficiently stressed at present. The humility of the scientist in the face of fact and observation is a thing of tremendous importance from an ethical point of view. This was seen very clearly as long ago as the time of Francis Bacon, who did lay down a number of general ideas of extreme importance for the development of science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What Bacon was chiefly hostile to was above all the scholastic philosophy and even the Greek philosophy which presumed to make statements about the universe without taking the trouble to observe what the facts really were. Bacon was hostile to the scholastics and, in rather an unjust way, both to Plato and even to Aristotle who, after all, was a very important scientific observer. There is a famous passage in *The Advancement of Learning*, where he speaks about the scholastics being like spiders, weaving webs out of their own heads without any consideration of what was going on outside. The webs were admirable for the fineness of the thread and the workmanship, but without any substance and without any fruit.<sup>5</sup> And in the same way he speaks in the preface to one of his minor books, *The History of the Winds*, in a very eloquent and powerful way, about the ethical quality of science. I think I would like to read this passage, which is a very beautiful one. He says,

The ethical quality  
of science

Therefore, if we have any Humility towards the Creator; if we have any Reverence and Esteem of His works; if we have any Charity towards Men or any Desire of relieving their Miseries and Necessities; if we have any Love for natural Truths; any Aversion to Darkness; and any Desire of purifying the Understanding; Mankind are to be most affectionately entreated and beseeched to lay aside, at least for a while, their preposterous, fantastick and hypothetical Philosophies (which have led Experience captive, and childishly triumphed over the Works of God;) and now at length condescend, with due Submission and Veneration, to approach and peruse the Volume of the Creation; dwell some time upon it; and, bringing to the Work a Mind well purged of Opinions, Idols and false Notions, converse familiarly therein.<sup>6</sup>

This is a splendid passage, and one which should be meditated on, because it is precisely this reluctance to accept preconceived notions and to turn your opinion into a thesis rather than a working hypothesis, which is the hallmark of a genuine scientist and which constitutes the essential ethical nature of scientific activity. Bacon felt very strongly that one of the values of science was in its fruits, that it could do a great deal to lessen human wants and lessen human suffering. As we know, it certainly can do this, but it can also do other things of which we are painfully aware at the present moment.



Corruption  
of knowledge  
without love

Here again we see another urgent need for bringing together the humanistic, the religious and the ethical on the one hand, and the objective and the scientific on the other. As Bacon was never tired of saying, knowledge without love can be profoundly corrupt and even evil. It is for this that he blamed philosophers who had pursued knowledge purely for the sake of intellectual satisfaction – not with the motive of love, in order to help human beings, nor with the humility to study objective facts and base their reasoning upon those facts.

At present time the shoe is rather on the other foot: the overweening philosophers are members of the scientific school who have forgotten scientific humility. We are all familiar with the extreme bumptiousness of the early behaviorists. When one reads some of

the early writings of Watson,<sup>7</sup> one is absolutely flabbergasted that anybody who professed to be scientific could have made statements so widely sweeping, and to have dismissed so cavalierly enormous areas of human experience. To these people certainly Bacon would have brought a reproach that they were (a) overweening, and (b) lacking in love which alone can make knowledge precious and valuable. Our problem, then, is somehow to find these various bridges between the different aspects of the world as we know it, and to recreate the married state of which direct experience makes us familiar.

Two aspects  
of one reality

We are all the time familiar with the fact that the world of concepts and abstractions is balanced by the world of immediate experience; and that the inner experience is there at the same time as the objective description of nature built upon inferences. What is the philosophical relationship between these two sides of our knowledge, the inner and the outer? I am inclined to think that philosophically minded scientists like Max Planck are right in conceiving the two worlds, the inner and the outer, as being simply aspects of the same reality. That basic Reality is a neutral monism which is seen from one point of view, for example, as atomic physics, and from another point of view as immediate experience of emotion, value, and love.

\*       \*       \*

*Though the problems of cultural fragmentation articulated by Huxley in these lectures almost twenty years ago still exist—the fragmentation between common experience and science, ethics and fact, feelings and thought, among many others—a way toward their solution seems to be arising, as Huxley predicted, through the emergence of a common language. This language is the language of energy.*

*At the turn of the century, physics showed that our world could best be understood in terms of energy—as a system of streams and patterns forming a great, unified whole. This new understanding of the universe gave a prodigious impulse to the physical sciences. But unfortunately, it was not extended to our understanding of man. An early, parallel attempt to view man as a system of energies did emerge, for example in the work of Kurt Lewin and of the Gestaltists. But the energetic conception of the human being was never integrated into the mainstream of psychology, education and the*

*other disciplines concerned with the nature and the inner life of man. Consequently, we may have missed the opportunity to make a step forward in our understanding of human nature which would have been comparable to the step that was made in understanding the physical world. Today, as a result, we still see ourselves as isolated, Newtonian individuals, and as a consequence face the impossible struggle of trying to find our place in a unified, Einsteinian world. To this perceptual disparity can be traced much of today's pain and frustration, as well as the inability to understand some of our major contemporary problems.*

*But in the past two decades, vocabulary, metaphors and symbol-ogy expressing psychological states in terms of energy have begun to pervade our language. Increasingly, as Huxley anticipated, they are being used freely by scientists, artists and laymen alike to describe inner realities: from mystical experiences to the everyday processes of the personality. Unfortunately, a truly adequate scientific understanding of such experiences and processes is lacking, and this will very likely be so until an energetic view of man is accepted as a serious hypothesis worthy of being actively investigated. Consequently the emerging language of energy, and the concepts with which it is associated, are often used in a loose, confused fashion—without the precision that comes as the result of thorough scientific understanding. This confusion can cause justified questioning of whether we are dealing with the valid expression of an inner reality, or merely with the latest fad. Yet such terms as, for example, “having an intuitive flash” are used not only by laymen but by scientists—whose intellects are highly trained in the observation of facts—to describe what they experience as an inflow of creative energy. And the concept implied by more popular terms such as “vibrations” or “being in tune”—that is, the possibility of interaction, by means of energy, of an individual with other individuals or with the environment—is nothing more than the extension to the psychological domain of types of interactions that, with the developments of quantum theory, have been recognized as thoroughly commonplace in the domain of the physical and biological sciences.*

*This is not sufficient, of course, to prove that psychological interactions of this kind, based on energy, do in fact occur. But it indicates that they are possible. And, if they help to understand a range of otherwise unexplained experiences and processes, that they are probable. Certainly, there is already more than sufficient evi-*

*dence to affirm that the view that psychological and spiritual processes are interactions involving energy systems, is as valid an hypothesis as any other conception of the human being.*

*From the vantage point of a truly scientific attitude, such an hypothesis is a thoroughly appropriate subject for scientific investigation. And from the vantage point of today's world, and of the fragmentation, estrangement and isolation of the individual human being, the collective and personal exploration of this hypothesis — and of its vast possibilities for harmonization and unification — is not only appropriate but vital.*

---

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2. W. WORDSWORTH: Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.
3. C. KINGSLEY (1819-1875): English clergyman, writer and teacher most famous as the author of the novel, *Westward Ho!*, was one of the first churchmen in England to welcome the work of Charles Darwin and attempt in his writings to reconcile science and religion. [ed.]
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Aldous Huxley was born in 1894 in Godalming, Surrey and died in California in 1963. He was the author of many novels, volumes of essays, and works on religion, psychology and philosophy. As a critic of modern culture he is best remembered for such novels as *Point Counter Point* (1928), *Ape and Essence* (1949) and his most famous novel *Brave New World* (1932). *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), his collection of mystical writings, points at the unity of experience underlying the major philosophies and religions throughout history. A late novel, *Island* (1962), sketched the outlines of a new civilization founded upon a higher view of man.



## THE PURPOSEFUL IMAGINATION

# CREATIVITY

James Vargiu



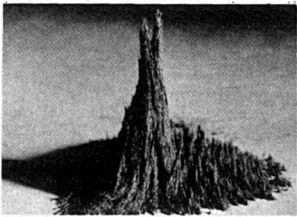
SUDDENLY, IN TIMES OF FRUSTRATION OR OF QUIET, during the heat of a discussion or while driving on a highway, a flash appears unexpectedly in our mind and forms a new pattern of associations, a new idea, a new vision. Whether it is a simple solution to a trivial problem or a deep intuition that will transform our life, something new has been created. Though it is elusive, we receive it with joy. Though it is imponderable, we may consider it most precious. This moment of insight, this “Aha!” experience, is the central phenomenon of the creative process.

Today there is much exploration *around* the creative process. We are beginning to find ways to prepare for it, to evoke it, to utilize it. We are searching for what helps it and what hinders it. Yet the central phenomenon remains one of the mysteries of nature, just like the ultimate constitution of matter or the ultimate nature of electricity.

Physicists have gradually developed a deepening and increasingly useful — although still imperfect — understanding of the fundamental nature of matter and electricity. Much of their work has been

Confronting  
a mystery

An act  
of coherent  
interplay



Patterns  
in common

based on the use of models.\* In this article we will explore the mystery of creativity in a similar way. We will present a model that will enable us to penetrate more deeply into the fundamental core of the creative act itself. This model shows that the creative act emerges out of the close and purposeful interplay among our main personality functions — mind, feelings and imagination — so as to tap the energies that make up our superconscious or transpersonal processes. Most importantly, the model will allow us to develop methods for increasing and expanding our creative abilities.

### HOW IT HAPPENS

“Suddenly, somehow, it all was clear in my mind.”

“I became very confused, and just as I decided to forget about it, it began to make sense.”

“Whenever I can’t figure it out, I relax and wait for a flash that will show me what to do.”

“Something tells me when my idea is too complicated, and I just stop and let my mind find a simpler way.”

“I play around with ideas in my mind, until a force in me takes over and finishes the job for me better than I would be able to do it.”

I collected these and many similar statements over years of association with research engineers and scientists involved in creative activity, and later in work with highly gifted adolescents.<sup>2</sup> Such statements are consistent with general descriptions of the creative process, which typically include some or all of the following stages: *preparation, frustration, incubation, illumination, elaboration.*<sup>3,4,5</sup>

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\*In this sense a model is an artificial construction — a construct — that will behave in the same way as the natural process we wish to study. Inherently, such a model cannot be a perfect replica of the process.

Gordon Allport has said that “There is . . . no such thing as a correct or incorrect definition. Terms can only be defined in ways that are useful for a given purpose.”<sup>1</sup> The same is true for models. A model is not correct or incorrect, but more or less useful for the purpose for which it was conceived. And quite different models of the same process can be used in different frameworks, or for different purposes. A useful model should account for much or all that is already known about the process itself, and enable us to predict and discover aspects of the process not yet known. And as more is observed and understood about the process, the model can be modified and improved.

Conventional  
attempts

When we want to solve an intellectual problem or one about our personal life, what do we do? We usually begin by consciously and purposefully trying to put together an answer, a solution that fits. This first stage of the creative process can be thought of as if we were manipulating mental elements — bits of ideas — such as symbols, images, abstract concepts, etc. By manipulating such mental elements, we attempt to put them together in the right combination in order to arrive at a solution that fits our problem — that has the right “shape,” one might say.

Yet we may find that, using this kind of mental activity, we are not able to arrive at the solution we need. Arthur Koestler calls this a “blocked situation.” In his colorful words:

A blocked situation increases the stress of the frustrated drive. When all hopeful attempts at solving the problem by traditional methods have been exhausted, thoughts run around in circles in the blocked matrix like rats in a cage. Next, the matrix of organized, purposeful behavior itself seems to go to pieces, and random trials make their appearance, accompanied by tantrums and attacks of despair — or by the distracted absent-mindedness of the creative obsession. That absent-mindedness is, of course, in fact single-mindedness, for at this stage — the period of incubation — the whole personality, down to the un verbalized and unconscious layers, has become saturated with the problem, so that on some level of the mind it remains active, even while attention is occupied in a quite different field — until either chance or intuition provides a link to a quite different matrix, which bears down vertically, so to speak, on the problem blocked in its old horizontal context, and the two previously separate matrices fuse. But for that fusion to take place a condition must be fulfilled which I call “ripeness.”<sup>6</sup>

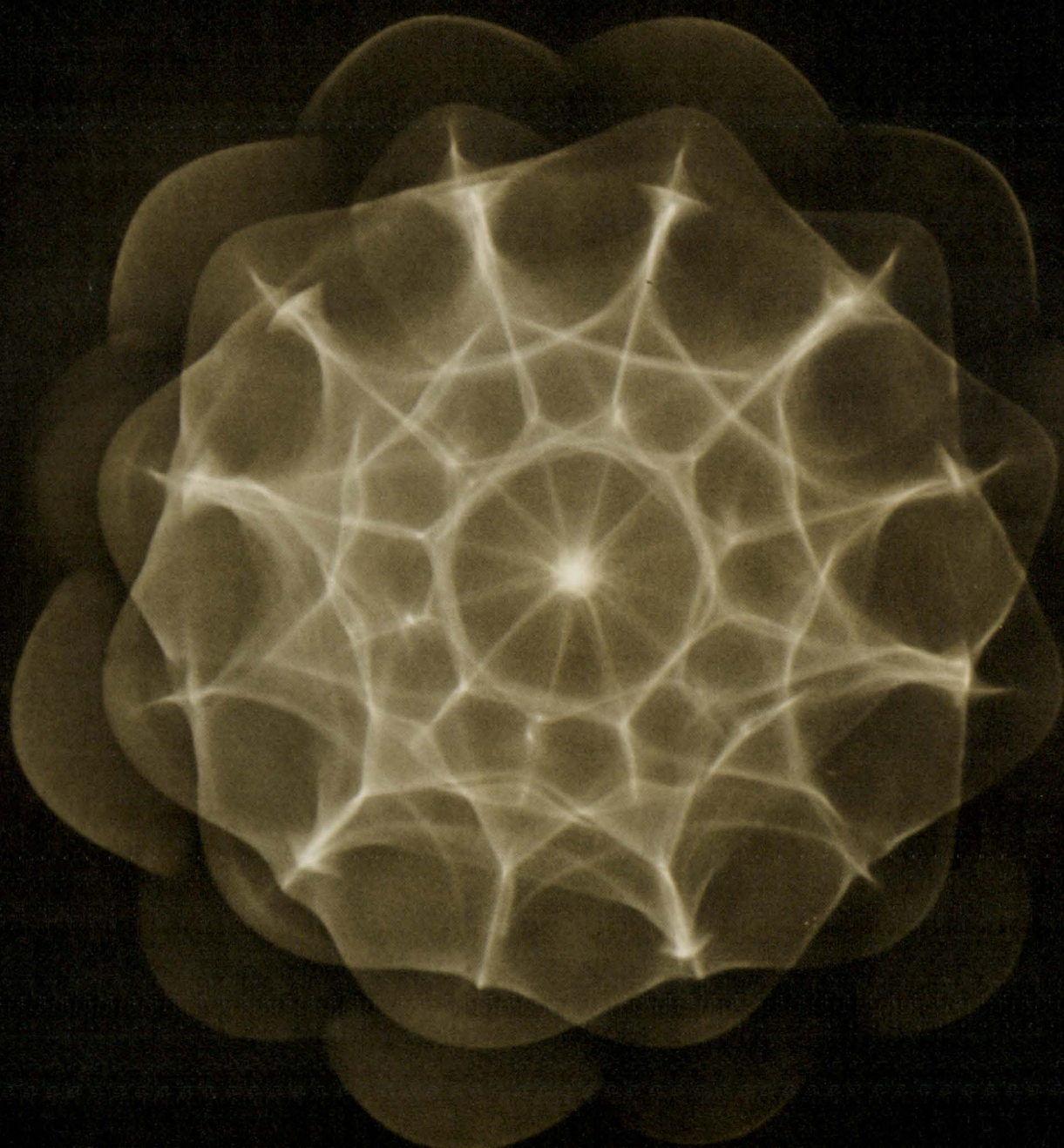
The core  
of the process

The core of the creative process, and the most inaccessible to our understanding, is this fusion, the stage of illumination. Let us consider it in some detail.\* Mary Austin describes it this way: “Genius shows itself in the individual by the sudden appearance of ideas

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\*Recently there has been a tendency among some researchers to move away from the stage conception of the creative process. This has been largely due to the influence of logical positivism, and the resulting technical problems involved in arriving at operational definitions of such terms as “incubation.” But this tendency, and the studies emerging from it, have the unfortunate effect of dismissing broad areas of human experience (see Huxley, pp. 13-14, this issue), including the actual accounts of the majority of highly creative individuals, who report their experiences in ways consistent with the five stages described above. We may say then that such studies are not actually dealing with true creativity but rather with *productivity* — eliciting a proliferation of imaginative output with emphasis on mere quantity, rather than quality.





or concepts . . . seeming to come not by way of observation or cogitation, but from somewhere above or beyond him, with sourceless connotations of authority . . .” This can be seen to be parallel to Koestler’s “quite different matrix” which “bears down vertically” and produces a “fusion.”

A pervasive  
influence

Whether we use the term “genius” or “matrix” or any one of the many other names developed by as many thinkers in a frustrated attempt to grasp the intangible, we recognize the influence of a mysterious principle which, apparently originating from “outside,” suddenly pervades the elements and images within our mind. After we give up our laborious efforts to manipulate those mental elements one by one or a few at a time into a really meaningful combination, this principle takes over. Acting *simultaneously* on all these elements, it combines them in a pattern which is often of meaningful harmony, great simplicity, and considerable beauty.

This quality of simultaneity which characterizes the creative insight is in contrast to the largely sequential nature of ordinary thought. The importance of simultaneity has not yet been recognized by researchers, even though it is the critical aspect of the illumination stage. Yet it is clearly apparent from the accounts of creative people who consistently use such words as “fusion” or “flash” or “sudden appearance” to describe their creative experiences. It is simultaneity that will give us the clue to penetrate more deeply into the nature of illumination. So to attack the problem of creativity head on, we need to isolate the principle that can act on a large number of “substantial” elements simultaneously, coherently, and according to a single impulse, so as to combine and organize them into one coherent and meaningful pattern.

The unifying  
principle

Such a principle is an *energy field*.

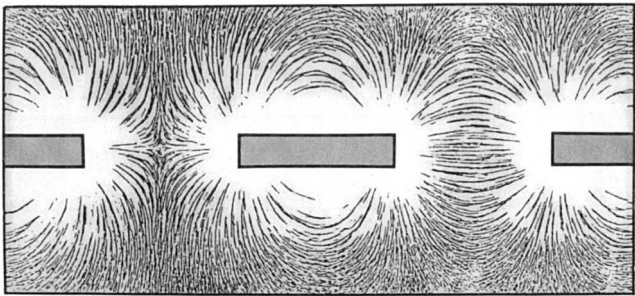
## FIELDS AND PARTICLES

The study of energy fields is today at the very foundation of science, and of the conception of reality evolved by modern physics. Initiated only a century ago with the pioneering work of Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell, it has produced our fantastic electronic technology and our worldwide communication network, and yielded our deepest understanding of the universe. By observing variations within energy fields, we have been able to follow the evolution of the most distant galaxies and the pulsations within the

very heart of the atom. We have found that energy fields are an integral part of all forms of organic life, and determine the beating of our heart and the activity of our brain. It should not surprise us, therefore, to find that energy fields have an important function in the creative process as well. But the technical study of fields is hidden in some rather intricate mathematics and is the domain of relatively few specialists.<sup>8,9</sup> For the present purposes however, we can circumvent this difficulty by developing an intuitive grasp of such fields and of how they interact with elements of substance. We can do this by examining some specific *effects* of energy fields.

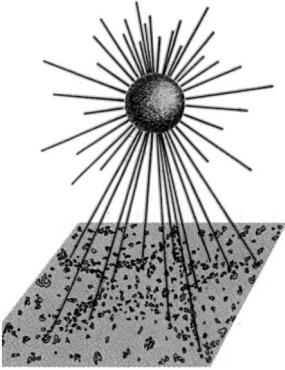
Some visible effects

If we sprinkle some fine sand on the sounding box of a violin and draw the bow once lightly over one of the strings, the energy field produced by the vibrations will arrange the sand into various patterns — such as a square, a triangle, an ellipse, or even snowflake-like patterns of great beauty, reminiscent of crystal forms. This principle was utilized with most interesting results by Hans Jenny. He immersed a medium of fine powder granules or of liquid in a simple energy field made up of sound waves. By varying the direction, intensity, pitch, etc. of the field, he caused such intricate and beautiful patterns to appear.<sup>10</sup> As can be seen in the photographs of his work reproduced here, these patterns, often characterized by harmony and simplicity, may take various geometric shapes, strongly suggest natural forms of organic growth, or resemble some common symbols known to emerge from man's unconscious.<sup>11</sup> This same sort of interaction between particles and an energy field can be demonstrated by placing a magnet under a surface covered with iron particles. The magnetic field, acting on all particles *simultaneously*, will arrange them to form geometric patterns corresponding to the intensity patterns of the field itself. An example of this is shown below.

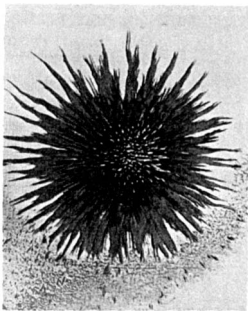


Drawing on these analogies from the world of physics, we can tentatively define our model of the creative process as:

*A LARGE NUMBER OF SIMPLE "MENTAL ELEMENTS" WITHIN THE BOUNDARY OF A "CREATIVE ENERGY FIELD," WHICH HAVE SUCH PROPERTIES THAT: 1) EACH MENTAL ELEMENT WILL RESPOND TO THE INFLUENCE OF THE CREATIVE FIELD, AND 2) ALL MENTAL ELEMENTS CAN INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER.*



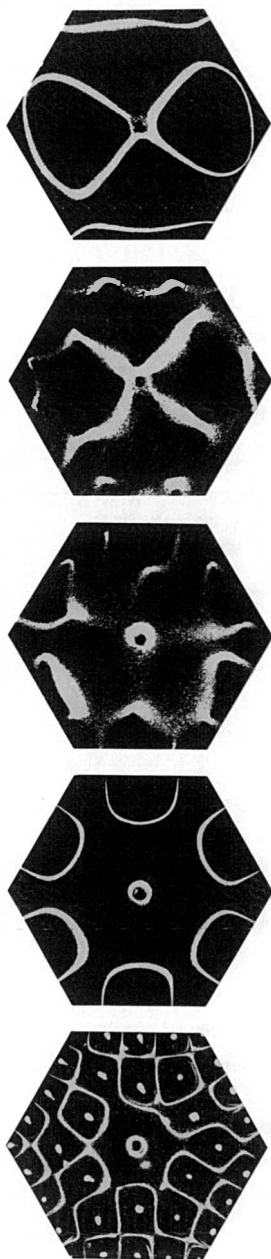
How energy  
is transferred



We can gain considerable understanding of the way in which mental elements respond to the influence of the creative field by using our previous example and examining in more detail the interaction between the magnetic field and the iron particles.

We know that the iron particles will react to the magnetic field in such a way as to become themselves magnetized by induction. That is, they become little magnets, which then generate their own microscopic magnetic field, and attract or repel one another. It is thus that patterns like those on pages 18 and 20 are formed. It can be proved mathematically, and may be perceived intuitively, that among all possible physical arrangements, the final pattern will be the one in which the iron particles are most intensely magnetized. But for the iron particles to become magnetized, some of the *energy* of which the magnetic field itself is formed must flow from that field to the iron particles, so that they can use it in turn to produce their own smaller magnetic fields. Because this final pattern produces the most intense magnetization, it also causes the *maximum energy transfer* from the field to the particles of which the pattern is formed. We will see later the fundamental importance of this fact.

Now imagine that we place a magnet first far away, then gradually nearer a thin layer of iron filings. For a while nothing happens. Then, suddenly, the pattern springs together in almost complete form. Let us try to understand this startling event by observing it in slow motion. At first, the field is too weak to set the iron particles in motion. They are held in position by friction. As the intensity of the magnetic field increases, some of the iron particles overcome friction and begin to move, interacting with the nearby granules in a way that increases the overall magnetization. This in turn sets other particles in motion, accelerating the process and starting an "avalanche effect" or "chain reaction" which causes the pattern to suddenly form itself, independently of any further approach of the magnet.



Patterns of sand on a vibrating plate, at different intensities of vibration

Let us assume that the *mental* elements in our model of creativity behave in a similar manner. We are now ready to answer some of the central questions about the creative process: Why is the preparatory stage frequently unsuccessful by itself? Why is it often necessary to go through a period of frustration or confusion? What happens during the mysterious phase of *incubation*, when our conscious thoughts are focused away from the problem? How does illumination actually occur? What produces the frequent feeling that an insight is correct beyond any doubt? What are the conditions needed for the occurrence of the creative insight? And finally, how can such conditions be enhanced, so as to increase our creative abilities?

### HOW IT WORKS

We described the initial or preparatory stage as conscious and purposeful manipulation of mental elements, in the attempt to form the desired patterns. In our model, this type of mental activity would correspond to arranging the mental elements one by one, or a few at a time, hoping to assemble mosaics of particles whose shapes will eventually correspond to the needed solution. The influence of the creative field is negligible at this early stage. In even moderately complex situations, such an endeavor is bound to be just as frustrating and unsuccessful as if we tried to arrange our granules of iron filings with a tweezer to create patterns similar to those formed by the magnet—without actually knowing what those patterns are.

The opposite situation occurs at the stage of illumination. The creative field has reached sufficient intensity to override both friction and any “mechanical” activity of the type previously described, and to act simultaneously on all the mental elements, arranging them in well-defined shapes which correspond to its own harmonious patterns.

We can now recognize that the suddenness of illumination is due to such an “avalanche effect.” Thus the illumination comes to our consciousness as something new, something unexpected. It is produced by the creative field, of which we are not aware, and when it occurs it is beyond our conscious control. So it generates in us the unique and paradoxical impression of an unknown source that leads to deeper knowing, of a blinding flash that leads to clearer vision, of a loss of control that leads to greater order. Because the quality of



this experience is so profoundly paradoxical, we are only able to describe it partially and inadequately by such terms as “descent of a flash,” “a quite different matrix . . . producing fusion,” or “sudden appearance of ideas . . . from somewhere above or beyond . . . with sourceless connotations of authority.”

Understanding  
our confusion

The phase of confusion and frustration is more complex. Considerable insight into this aspect has been achieved by the French mathematician Henri Poincaré. In his “Mathematical Creation” he describes a conception of the creative process with which the atomistic aspect of the present model has many similarities. In dealing with “that preliminary period of conscious work which always precedes all fruitful unconscious labor” he first describes “the future elements of our combinations as something like the hooked atoms of Epicurus.” He then says that “during the complete repose of the mind, these atoms are motionless, they are, so to speak, hooked to the wall.” And he asks:

What is the role of the preliminary conscious work? It is evidently to mobilize certain of these atoms, to unhook them from the wall and put them in swing. We think we have done no good because we have moved these elements a thousand different ways in seeking to assemble them, and have found no satisfactory aggregate. But after this shaking up . . . these atoms do not return to their primitive rest. They freely continue their dance.

But Poincaré does not recognize those holistic aspects of creative activity that imply the presence of an energy field. He states that the “atoms” consciously chosen are those most likely to be needed in the desired solution, and which therefore have “a reasonable probability” of forming the desired combination during the subsequent unconscious process, after a number of random impacts.<sup>12</sup>

Random chance  
is not a factor

In our model, we replace the statistical chance of random impact with the holistic action of the creative field, transforming a rather doubtful probability into a certainty. During the preparatory phase we manipulate the mental elements one by one or a few at a time, and attempt to combine them in a pattern that will constitute a useful solution. Even though we are not successful, nevertheless we form various combinations of atoms, like sub-assemblies, or building blocks. As we try harder, we may attempt to build too complex a structure, or to deal with more elements than we can “hold in mind,” and thus go through a stage of confusion. This is likely to be followed by frustration, and the “tantrums” described by Koestler. After this we “let go” of the mental construct, and may go for a walk, take a shower, or go to sleep, according to our disposition. In

our mind, but now out of range of our conscious attention, are left the debris of our unsuccessful cogitations. Within the debris are certain fragments which will be the “seeds” of the eventual solution.\*



Moving “landscape” of lycopodium powder in an acoustic energy field

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\*Let us see how these seeds are formed, by taking a closer look at our debris. First of all we notice a number of mental elements moving somewhat chaotically, and at different rates, but no longer hampered by friction. Therefore they are free to respond to even the weakest influence of the creative field. Then we perceive larger fragments, left over from our attempt at building a structure. Some of these fragments are lopsided, others show some symmetry. Some are loosely put together and will disintegrate further, others are closely knit and have stable form. These last represent the portions of our attempted structure on which we had concentrated the most, and which therefore contain the important elements, or boundary conditions, of our original problem. During this period of random motion our conscious attention is focused elsewhere, and does not interfere. Gradually, the whole of the “debris” slows down its movement, so the influence of the creative field, although weak, can now begin to build up, to become cumulative. Its greatest effect is on some of the larger surviving fragments, those corresponding to the important elements of the problem. Of these larger fragments, the ones containing elements of symmetry most similar to the patterns of the creative field will be magnetized with the greatest intensity, and will become like the seed crystals in a saturated solution. They will attract around them other smaller fragments and single elements, starting an avalanche effect, at the end of which they will be at the center — or at the pivot points — of the newly created pattern.

Letting go

The initial part of the creative process — from preparatory activity to confusion and frustration — can thus be seen as having a three-fold purpose: supplying material on which the creative field can play; overcoming friction by setting this material into motion, thereby making it more responsive to the influence of the creative field; and providing conceptual “seeds” through which the creative insight relates to the problem. It is common knowledge among creative people that the intensity of the preparatory stage often determines how closely the insight will fit the problem. The stages of confusion and frustration have only a subsidiary function, but are psychological means we may need to justify saying what amounts to “the hell with it,” and turning our attention elsewhere. We then move on to the incubation stage, the crucial and delicate period during which the often very weak creative field can act on the mental elements without the disturbance of our conscious manipulation, and therefore in the cumulative, coherent fashion that leads to illumination.

## HOW DO WE FEEL ABOUT IT

In describing these insights, creative people often have used terms having strong and positive emotional connotations, such as “a moment of sudden elation” or an “Aha! experience.” Archimedes’ “Eureka!” is the classic example. Even in the highly intellectual field of pure mathematics, the same phenomenon is observed. Poincaré remarks:

Aesthetic appreciation

It may be surprising to see emotional sensibility evoked apropos the discovery of mathematical demonstrations which, it would seem, can interest only the intellect. This would be to forget the feeling of mathematical beauty, of the harmony of number and forms, of geometrical elegance. This is a true aesthetic feeling that all real mathematicians know, and surely it belongs to emotional sensibility.”<sup>13</sup>

DeHaan and Havighurst describe the creative insight as the moment when “a solution . . . may suddenly appear in almost complete form. The emotional balance of the individual, upset by the period of frustration, is thereby restored and a good deal of positive emotional energy is released.”<sup>14</sup>

While creative people generally realize this emotional, affective aspect of the process, there is a great deal of confusion about its function and very little is known about its origin. Let us use our



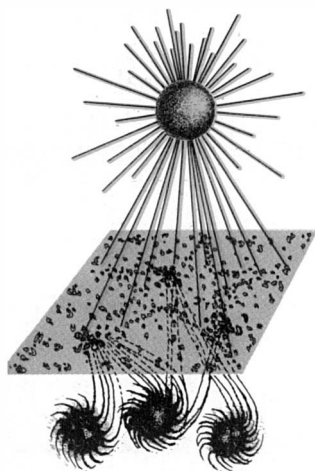
The role  
of our feelings

model to clarify the situation. We have seen that with the formation of a creative insight — that is, of a mental pattern corresponding to the pattern of the creative field — energy flows from the creative field to the mental elements. Thus the mental pattern itself reaches a point of intense magnetization, thereby generating its own smaller energy field. When this latter field reaches a certain intensity, it begins to radiate, to “spill over” into our feelings, pervading and harmonizing them. This is the energy that causes the deep emotional conviction of the correctness of the solution. This conviction normally *follows* the mental recognition of the insight, but *precedes* intellectual reasoning, or the elaboration phase. Here is the source of Mary Austin’s “sourceless connotations of authority,” and of the mathematician G. Polya’s affirmation that “when you have satisfied yourself that the theorem is true, you start proving it.”<sup>15</sup>

Looking at our model from this new angle, we can consider the pattern of mental elements (while still in process of formation) to be like a musical instrument being tuned to the particular pitch of a tuning fork, or a television antenna being adjusted for maximum signal from a weak station. In other words, the mental pattern becomes a *reverberating device* which is progressively tuned to the rate of vibration of the creative field, so as to maximize the amplitude of the reverberation.\*

We can now expand our model of creative behavior to include an *emotional field*. This, like the creative field, can interact with the mental elements, and will tend to organize them into configurations which correspond to its own energy patterns. When these emotional energy patterns interact also with the creative field, that interaction can be either harmonic or discordant. In general “higher feelings,” such as joy, a sense of harmony, of beauty, of love, etc. will be in a harmonious relationship. Instead negative or undesirable feelings, such as anger, frustration, fear, shame, anxiety, or guilt, will be in a discordant relationship.

We all have experienced how feelings tend to produce correspond-




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\*Just as there can be different musical instruments producing the same pitch but different timbre, so we can have many different patterns corresponding to as many solutions of the same problem. Each pattern absorbs a different amount of energy, gives rise to an “Aha!” of varying emotional intensity and quality, and will be a different solution — one that will be more or less satisfactory in a particular context.

ing thoughts and images in our mind.<sup>16</sup> In terms of our model, these feelings organize the mental elements into shapes that reverberate to their particular energy patterns. It is thus, for example, that repressed negative feelings produce in the mind a channel or path through which they can emerge, and their energy be dissipated. This interaction between the emotional energy field and mental elements explains many of the events of our psychological life. It is also the foundation of a large number of psychotherapeutic techniques (from free association to catharsis), and the mechanism by which many therapeutic insights are produced. For example, an emotional catharsis—which is an explosive release of repressed, or accumulated, discordant emotional energy—is usually associated with mental images and visual memories that often lead to insights about the originating circumstances and causes of the repression.

The nature  
of the imagination

From a broader point of view, *the interaction between the mental elements and the emotional field constitutes the very essence of that personality function which we call the imagination*. The imagination is the bridge between our mind and our feelings. Images are formed in the mind and are energized by feelings. Therefore, it is through the mediating function of the imagination that we can set up communication and interchanges between mind and feelings, resolving conflicts between them and harmonizing these two major aspects of our personality. For example, by the purposeful utilization of mental images and symbols we can release blocked emotional energy, transform it when released, and also develop or evoke feelings which are most in tune with our best values and goals (e.g., serenity, harmony, beauty, joy, courage, and so forth).

The healing function  
of images

The process of purposely releasing or transmuting the discordant aspects of our emotional field, and of orienting this field in a harmonic relationship with the mental patterns and with the creative field, is at the foundation of the techniques based on the imagination, which are generally known as “mental imagery.” If we look at descriptions of the imagery that develops in a “Guided Daydream,” for example, it will be apparent how that imagery is the effect of streams and kernels of emotional energy which, as they are gradually released and transmuted, form a related sequence of mental patterns.<sup>17</sup> This same process of transmutation and harmonization can be seen at work not only in the Guided Daydream, but also in other mental imagery techniques such as the “Dialogue with the Higher Self”<sup>18</sup> and “Answers from the Unconscious.”<sup>19</sup> Thus all approaches to mental imagery play, in one or more ways, on the

interaction between mental elements and the emotional field.

As a result of transmuting discordant emotional energies and their accompanying negative mental patterns—whether by means of mental imagery, other psychological techniques, or by the normal process of growth—a stable harmonic relationship can develop between emotional and creative fields. The emotional field then begins to resonate to the creative field, and therefore to act as a mirror. It reflects the energy of the creative field, and this establishes between the two fields a sort of *standing wave* of increasing intensity, in which the mental elements are immersed. The mental elements, following the increased influence of the field, then form a more highly reverberating pattern, increasing even further the purity of the standing wave and therefore the positive quality of the emotional field.\* This can lead to a state of deep inner harmony, where feelings, mind and creative field are *aligned* with one another. It corresponds to those peaks of profound illumination that have been known to dramatically change a human being and his subsequent life.<sup>20,21</sup>

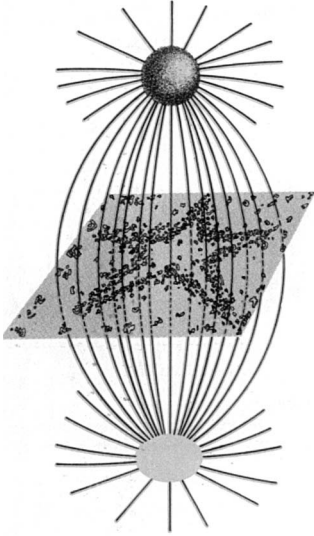
A less intense but more familiar experience of the same process has happened to many of us after getting the first glimpse of a solution to a complex question. It is not rare in such instances for one's entire personality to be further energized, and made increasingly harmonious and coherent. As soon as our mind begins to apprehend the sought-for insight, a sense of elation pervades and focuses our feelings, generating renewed desire to arrive at a solution and a strong expectation for that solution to appear. These emotional energies then stimulate and focus our mind, giving it increased power and clarity. This in turn further intensifies our emotions, accelerating the flow of creative ideas. With great rapidity, piece after piece of the answer falls into place and a new creation is formed.

### SCIENTIST OR ARTIST

Having expanded our model of the creative process to include the emotions and their relationship to the mental elements and the crea-

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\*Those familiar with the workings of lasers and their many useful applications will no doubt recognize the similarity between this interaction and the way in which the very pure and harmonious coherent light of lasers is produced.



A new  
creation

tive field, we are ready to recognize that there are two distinct – but not separate – modes of creative behavior. We can loosely call them “conceptual” and “affective” creativity.

Until now we have primarily been examining “conceptual” creativity. In it the attention of the creative person is focused on the mental aspects of the process. We have seen that this process consists in the organization of mental elements in order to arrive at a particular pattern having the needed properties. Accompanying this there is also emotional activity stemming from the desire to arrive at a satisfactory solution. But this desire is usually taken for granted, and is often unconscious. The fundamental creative activity is based on the interplay between the mental elements and the creative field. The emotional field may have a definite influence, but is subordinate to the mental activity.

#### Two modes of creating

With affective creativity on the other hand, the focus of the process and the attention of the individual are centered on the emotional field, *which may or may not be in harmony with the creative field*. A kernel of emotional energy of a particular quality seeks a channel through which to flow, to be expressed, and mental activity then becomes largely responsive to this emotional urge.

Conceptual creativity is typical of the scientist and affective creativity is typical of the artist, but both modes are usually present, although in varying proportions, within both kinds of creative person, and in the best circumstances, the two modes complement each other.

In examining conceptual creativity, we saw that it is primarily determined by the extent of the interaction between mental elements and the creative field. When we consider affective creativity, we can see that it is determined by *two* distinct interactions: the extent of influence of the emotional field on mental elements, and the extent to which the emotional field is in relation – and in harmony – with the creative field.

Whether only one or both kinds of interaction are present has a profound effect on the *quality* of affective creativity. This distinction can be seen clearly in artistic expression, and may illuminate more traditional distinctions in literary criticism and aesthetics. The interaction between the emotional field and mental elements alone corresponds to what the Romantic poets and aestheticians, for example Wordsworth and Coleridge, described as mere “fancy” as opposed to “Imagination” (with a capital “I”). This Imagination

A distinction  
of levels

reveals the combined interaction of emotional field, mental elements, *and* the creative field. Along similar lines Neo-classical writers, Pope for example, characterized the products of the different kinds of artistic work as “False Wit” and “True Wit.” For Pope, True Wit is “the fusion of all the best aspects of the human mind in right proportion.”<sup>22</sup> It is the product of true creativity, because it is the revelation of “Nature . . . what oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d; Something, whose truth convinc’d at sight we find, That gives us back the image of our Mind.”

It can be seen therefore that the forms produced by the effect of the emotional field alone on the mental elements (when, that is, the influence of the creative field is missing) are not strictly speaking “creativity.” A more appropriate term would be “imaginative productivity.”\*

In the greatest artists of all times, the influence of the creative field is present to a high degree and is expressed in their artistic creations. In lesser artistic expressions it is primarily the interaction between the emotional field and mental elements which is present. In this latter case the artist is more or less limited to conceiving and creating forms through which he expresses his feelings: whether to simply release such feelings—as in the case of art therapy—or to objectify them, clarify them, communicate them, and evoke them in others.

The emotional field  
at work

Let us examine an account of affective creativity, one in which the creative production seems to take place in the interaction between emotional field and mental elements alone. This is Dorothy Canfield’s description of her approach to story writing:

No two of my stories are ever constructed in the same way, but broadly viewed they all have the same genesis . . . that of a generally intensified emotional sensibility. . . . This unusual sensitivity often leads to an “emotional tide” from which a story can develop. [On many occasions, the] saturated solution of feelings does not happen to crystallize about any concrete fact, episode, word or phrase, [and is gradually dissipated. But at other times, when this] more than usual sensitiveness to emotion . . . encounters the right focus (and heaven only knows why it is the “right” one) I get simultaneously a strong thrill of intense feeling, and an intense desire to pass it on to other people. This emotion may be any one of the infinitely

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\*See footnote p. 19. But since the word “creativity” is by now generally adopted to indicate both kinds of expression, I will continue to use it here.

varied ones which life affords, laughter, sorrow, indignation, gayety, admiration, scorn, pleasure. I recognize it for the "right" one when it brings with it an irresistible impulse to try to make other people feel it. And I know that when it comes, the story is begun. At this point, the story begins to be more or less under my conscious control, and it is here that the work of construction begins.<sup>23</sup>



Engraved bronze mirror  
1st Century A.D.



Rotating vortices in a liquid medium, excited by acoustic energy field

On the other hand, in creative situations which include the harmonious interaction of both emotional and creative fields, the emotional field will form a pattern of mental elements that resonates to the creative field, and thus can draw energy from it. This energy, as we have seen, intensifies the emotional field, making it even more harmonious. It can establish a standing wave of the kind previously described. This in turn generates the profound illuminations on the mental level and the ecstatic states on the emotional level which are reached by the greatest artists, and are reflected in their work.

Synthesis  
is the goal

We have said that in actual practice both conceptual and affective modes of creativity are present, in varying proportions, within each individual. In an ideal situation both modes occur simultaneously, to their fullest extent. We have then a true synthesis between the artist and the scientist, as is exemplified by a Leonardo. A definite trend in this direction can be seen with the most advanced scientists and artists of today.

### IF IT'S SO EASY, WHY IS IT SO HARD?

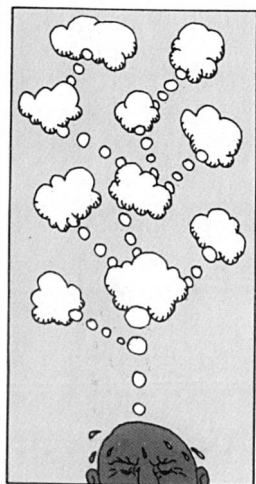
The creative  
paradox

One characteristic paradox of the creative process is the striking contrast between the spontaneous, effortless, and joyful stage of illumination, and the deeply demanding work that usually must precede it. This paradox, together with the lack of understanding of the mechanism of the creative process, has led erroneously to the almost universal (though often unconscious) expectation that if the truly creative moment is so effortless *we should not have to work so hard to achieve it*. So as we struggle, we begin to feel that we struggle because something is wrong with us: "Perhaps I have been lazy, and did not take enough time to learn about the problem. . . . Perhaps it is my 'bad day' . . . or maybe I am just dumb!"

People are often amazed when they learn that they are not alone in feeling this way—that such feelings of self-doubt, depression, failure, inadequacy, shame, guilt, fear, etc. have been known to beset even the greatest thinkers, as they approach their creative moments.

The emotional stress of these feelings is usually overcome in a variety of ways by such great thinkers—though even they may be somewhat hampered by them. Most people, however, deal with them less successfully. Relatively few individuals have the determination to persist and overcome the feelings of inadequacy that clamor to call a halt, to put a premature end to the creative struggle, and thus end the unpleasant emotions evoked by it. And when creative people "run dry," it is often because those negative emotions have increased beyond the level at which they are willing or able to deal with them.

These feelings of inadequacy and the severe emotional blockages they produce are often hidden from ourselves. When we inwardly acknowledge them, they are likely to cause us deep embarrassment,



Revolt  
of our feeling  
nature

and so we avoid discussing them. The lack of open discussion reinforces our illusion that we are alone in our sufferings.\*

Recognition:  
the first step

This illusion and the general lack of awareness about these feelings and their widespread existence is regrettable, because in most instances the way out is relatively easy. The first step is to consciously recognize such feelings in ourselves. This can be done rather simply by taking a look at how we feel at a moment when we are struggling to find some creative solution, especially if we have reached the point where we feel like giving up.\*\* The next step is to recognize that these negative feelings are of two distinct kinds, which must be dealt with in different ways. We will call these two kinds of feelings *primary* and *secondary*.

Primary feelings are the *direct* effect of giving our energies to the creative process. In many situations, the creative process is likely to be more challenging the more it is worthwhile, and primary feelings will then arise. They can include confusion, frustration, impatience, anger, pain, fatigue, eventually even exhaustion and despair. In fields other than creative work—for example studying for a difficult exam or undertaking a demanding physical task—we generally accept such feelings as part of the bargain. Yet in creative work, we often take them as indications that something has gone wrong.

Personality  
reaction

Secondary feelings, on the other hand, are not directly caused by the creative effort. Rather they arise *as a reaction of our personality* to the misinterpreted experience of the primary feelings. Their source is the illusion that the road leading to the illumination should always be as effortless as the illumination itself. As a consequence we are led to *blame and doubt ourselves* for any difficulty

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\*Let us be clear here that the feelings of inadequacy of which we speak are primarily feelings of mental inadequacy—feelings that we are not “as good as we should be” in using our mind in a creative, original way. These feelings can then trigger and mobilize more general feelings of personal inferiority. Accordingly, it becomes vital to deal with the feelings of mental inadequacy lest the whole creative process be immobilized by an overwhelming rush of negative emotion.

\*\*For those working with others in a teaching or guiding role, a very effective technique is to ask a person or group to work on a difficult problem, and after a suitable time unexpectedly interrupt them and ask them to become aware of, and then write or describe, how they feel.



we encounter. And so secondary feelings can include inadequacy, shame, self-doubt, guilt, and others of a self-deprecatory or self-accusatory nature.

Negative feelings of the primary type cannot be completely eliminated, but we can learn to deal with them more easily and alleviate them to a considerable extent, as we will see later on. Secondary feelings on the other hand are quite unnecessary, because they are merely the result of the *non-acceptance* of the primary feelings. Accordingly, it is relatively easy to deal with them so that they will cease to be a hindrance. Much can be done by simply keeping in mind, *while actually engaged in creative thinking*, that although the secondary feelings themselves are quite real, their depressing message ("You are doing it wrong," "You can't succeed," "You don't know how," and therefore "YOU SHOULD GIVE UP!") is false, and *we don't have to pay attention to it*.

This simple approach has remarkable results. It has been consistently useful in helping many individuals, who would not have considered themselves creative, to release or enhance what often turned out to be considerable creative ability. What happens is that normally the secondary feelings convince us that we have reached the limit of our resources, and therefore must stop, long before we actually need to, or should. In terms of our model, we stop before having set in motion a sufficient number of mental elements to allow the action of the creative field to bring about illumination. Actually in most creative situations the primary feelings are fairly mild, and we are quite willing and able to sustain them longer or in greater intensity. But we are stopped by the secondary feelings that mislead us into believing that something is very much the matter, and there is no point or no hope in going on. Therefore just remembering this *at the right moment* can prove surprisingly effective.

But in some cases, if the secondary feelings are very strong, it may be hard to simply turn away from them. We can then deliberately *disidentify*\* from them when they emerge.

If disidentification is difficult to accomplish directly, we can first use one of the "answers from the unconscious" techniques

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\*The process of disidentification, and techniques for achieving it are a central topic of the *WORKBOOK* in *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 56-91 and 92-114.

A deceiving  
message

Useful  
techniques

described by Crampton. This technique is not to be used during the actual creative work, but at a different time. We sit quietly and, with our eyes closed, we begin by vividly recalling the negative feelings we usually experience when seeking a creative solution which is eluding our grasp. Then we “ask our unconscious” to let an image emerge into awareness which relates to those feelings. This image can then lead us (by a process of imaginative unfoldment) to the specific source of the troublesome feelings, and most likely to a core of repressed emotional energy – which can gradually be understood, released, and largely alleviated. From then on, disidentification from secondary feelings will be considerably easier to achieve. Such techniques can be used at even greater depth with the help of an experienced guide. They are very suitable for therapists working to enhance the creativity of their clients.<sup>24</sup>

### LEARNING WHEN TO STOP

Dealing with primary and secondary feelings in these ways enables us to persist much longer in our creative thinking. The complimentary task then, is to learn at what point it is appropriate to stop our conscious effort, and rely on the creative field to complete the task in the depths of our unconscious. Exactly when to stop is an individual matter, varying from person to person. But we can learn to develop a sense for when we have carried out a sufficient amount of mental activity, and in particular, when we have achieved a point of focused “mental tension” so as to establish a satisfactory interplay with the creative field.

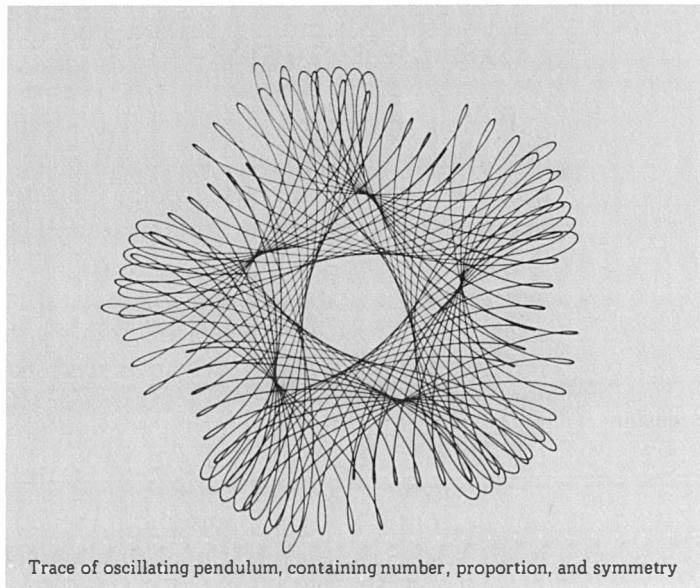
The point  
of creative tension

This *point of mental tension* needed for creative activity should not be confused with emotional tenseness. Creative mental tension is the result of concentrating mental power on whatever the mind is turned toward. Thus mental tension can be described as a calm, alert and sustained *attention*, and need not be associated with tenseness of any kind.

If we fail to sustain sufficient tension during our mental activity, the creative solution which arises may be too narrow, or superficial, or may not occur at all. On the other hand if we hold the point of tension for too long, either our mental elements may undergo excessive turbulence, or they may combine in shapes that are too rigid and difficult to modify. Either way, the mind will be less *responsive* to the creative field, thus making its action more difficult or slower. Fortunately, in each individual there is a broad range of creative

tension between these two extremes where effective and valuable creative work can be done.

One practical guideline in stopping ourselves from going too far is this: if we have been pouring all our energy into a problem for a considerable time without making progress, without being able to perceive new elements or discover a fresh point of view, it may be time to consider suspending this deliberate phase of work, returning to it later if needed. Stopping is especially indicated *when fatigue results in progressively diminishing mental attention*, and the work becomes increasingly difficult without much happening. Of course this is only intended as a general suggestion, and one needs to develop for oneself, by trial and error, a sense for when to keep going and when to stop.\*



Trace of oscillating pendulum, containing number, proportion, and symmetry

#### WHAT NEXT?

As we have seen, after the conscious mind starts the creative process in the preparatory phase, it often must get out of the way be-

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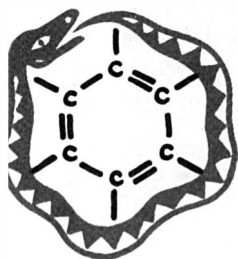
\*Interestingly enough, sometimes the simple inner act of deciding to stop will immediately precipitate the long-delayed solution. In such a case, one may mistakenly conclude that "I almost missed the answer by stopping too soon . . . next time I must push farther on!" In fact, the opposite is the case. It is the decision to let go that precipitates the solution.

fore the best work can occur. With smaller problems we may get our answers while the mind is purposefully active. But with larger creative issues we usually need to let go of mental activity and go through a period of incubation, before the creative insight can appear. However as we study certain accounts of creative individuals, we see that sometimes they experience intriguing variations on the usual pattern of incubation. These variations give us the clue to a further stage in developing our creative abilities.

A window  
on the unconscious

Poincaré, who almost invariably needed to precede his insights with a phase of unconscious incubation, tells us that after having spent fifteen days working unsuccessfully on a problem, “. . . one evening, contrary to my custom, I drank black coffee and could not sleep. Ideas rose in crowds; I felt them collide until pairs interlocked, so to speak, making a stable combination.” By morning he had the solution, and quickly wrote it down.<sup>25</sup>

Creative people, if asked to search their memory, will sometimes recall that they have had such occasional experiences of *conscious observation* of the phase of the process normally hidden in the unconscious. Often these last only a few fleeting moments, although at times they can be quite extended. Perhaps the most famous instance comes from the 19th century chemist Kekulé. In his account he says:



Again the atoms were gamboling before my eyes. This time the smaller groups kept modestly in the background. My mental eye, rendered more acute by repeated visions of this kind, could now distinguish larger structures, of manifold conformation; long rows, sometimes more closely fitted together; all turning and twisting in snakelike motion. But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its own tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes.”<sup>26</sup>

This experience gave him the long sought for clue to the closed structure of the carbon ring, which became the foundation of organic chemistry.

Becoming  
a spectator

So it is possible to watch the “unconscious” process of creative combinations as it happens. This is a distinct advantage, for the conscious mind is then more readily available and better prepared to receive the insight, once it is formed. But to do this, we must learn a new skill. After we have consciously manipulated our mental patterns and formed various combinations for a while, we must deliberately “let go” and watch what happens to those patterns without interfering further. We need to deliberately suspend conscious mental activity while at the same time maintaining a point of

Coherent  
participation

alert and calm mental tension. We may then see the many elements begin to move purposely and coherently as if becoming animated, and easily fall into place, culminating in a form of simple beauty and harmony.

But we can go even further. After having learned to be quiet enough to watch the show, we can learn to *participate* in it. We must first learn to “listen,” as it were, to the creative field; then to recognize, cultivate and develop that *emotional* sensitivity which responds to its energy. With that sensitivity, we will become aware of a creative pattern not only after it is tuned to a peak, but also as it is *approaching* the point of optimum reverberation to the creative field. We will be able to tell whether a specific change is for better or worse, in other words, to sense the influence of the creative field on a pattern *while* we are consciously forming it. We can then learn to establish a working relationship with our conscious mind, our feelings, and the creative field, and thus maintain full consciousness throughout the creative process. Those rare flashes of insight, once the outcome of frustration and struggle, will become more frequent . . . more profound . . . and ultimately our normal state of consciousness. The joy they bring will then flow continuously to our feelings, and their beauty and harmony will pervade our mind.

A spiritual  
approach

This attitude of serene attention has been emphasized by the spiritual teachers of all ages. They have stressed the importance of developing “receptive” qualities such as calm, quiet, and serenity, as well as the “active” qualities of focused attention, deliberate effort, and conscious awareness. A central purpose of their teaching has been to educate men and women to consciously build mental patterns in tune with the creative field—in other words, to develop the proper mental habits and emotional attitudes needed for creativity in general, and for that particular creativity which is associated with life changes and personal transformation toward spiritual goals. These habits and attitudes are in fact fundamental in the major approaches of meditation, such as Raja Yoga or the methods of Christian mystics.\*

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\*The principles and practice of meditation will be a central subject in the next *WORKBOOK* of *SYNTHESIS*. Interested readers can find reference to Raja Yoga in *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 45, and information about Christian meditation practices in the numerous works of St. John of the Cross and Thomas Merton, among others. [ed.]

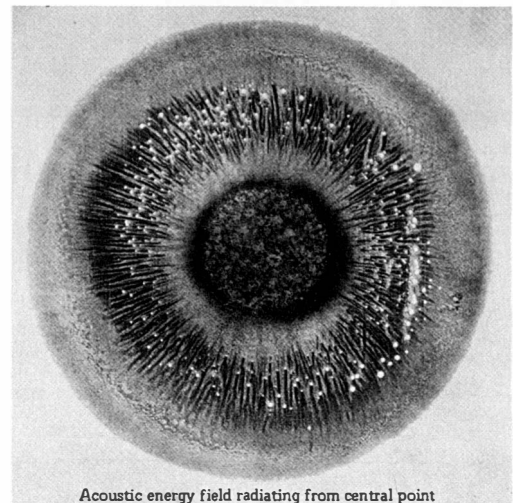
The classical stages of meditation – reflective meditation, receptive meditation, contemplation and discrimination – are quite parallel in nature to the stages of the creative process. Thus meditators can be seen as being creative workers (in a particular mode) and creative thinkers can be seen as practicing a definite kind of meditation. Such strong similarities between meditation and creative activity suggest that we are in fact dealing with two approaches to the same path of human development. These approaches, although starting from very different points of departure, are in fact converging toward the same goal: the development of a new mode of awareness and inner activity which may well be an important next step in human evolution.

### THE CREATIVE FIELD ITSELF

As yet, we have said nothing concerning the actual nature and qualities of the creative field itself. This is a subject of a completely different kind from the consideration of the creative *process* and must be pursued differently, for a field can seldom be recognized directly. It is observed rather through the effects it produces, as in the case of electrical, magnetic, or gravitational fields. We need to use such an indirect approach to study the creative field. We must examine its effects – the creative *patterns* – and through them, as with the patterns of iron particles, attempt to discover as much as possible about the nature of the field that generated them.

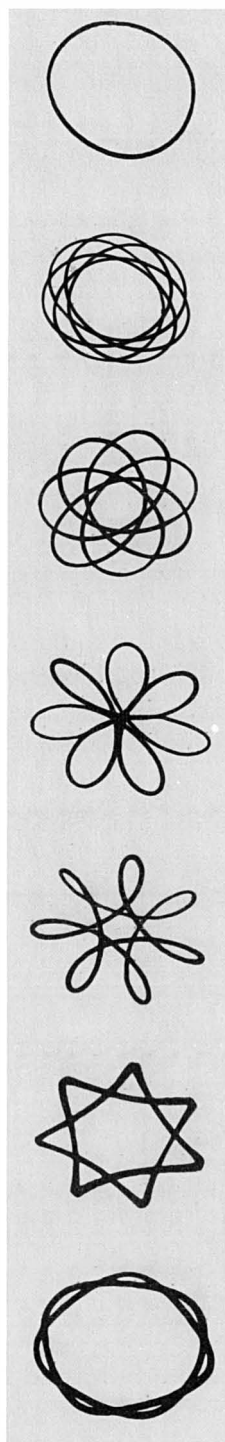
We can begin to do this most easily through a study of symbols – especially the major types of transpersonal symbols that emerge recurrently in human consciousness, and are considered therefore to have archetypal origins.\* Archetypes, as Jung indicates, are *patterns of energy* within the

Archetypes:  
energy patterns  
in the creative field



Acoustic energy field radiating from central point

\*See for example "Symbols of Transpersonal Experience" by Roberto



creative field itself. It is these energy patterns that, recurrently and universally,\* produce archetypal symbols in the mind by organizing mental elements in ways that correspond to their own configuration.

This interaction gives us the clue to tapping the energy of the creative field at will. By deliberately visualizing such a symbol, we form in our mind a pattern that is in tune with the creative field, and therefore can be brought to reverberate with it, and thus draw energy from it. We establish such a reverberation by concentrating on the visualized image *and its deeper meaning* with sufficient mental tension. The symbolic pattern within our mind thus absorbs a portion of energy from the field. It then transforms this energy, steps it down, and lets it flow to nearby mental elements, and eventually to our feelings. The particular kind of symbol or pattern chosen will determine the *mode* of the reverberation, and thus the particular *quality* of energy absorbed and the corresponding feeling evoked.\*

Thus symbols have both a transmuting and a selective property. Jung, one of the foremost authorities on symbols, stated that: "The psychological mechanism that transforms energy is the symbol."<sup>27</sup> Assagioli talks about symbols as "accumulators, transformers, and conductors of psychological energies," and goes on to explain how, because of these properties, symbols are well suited as tools to

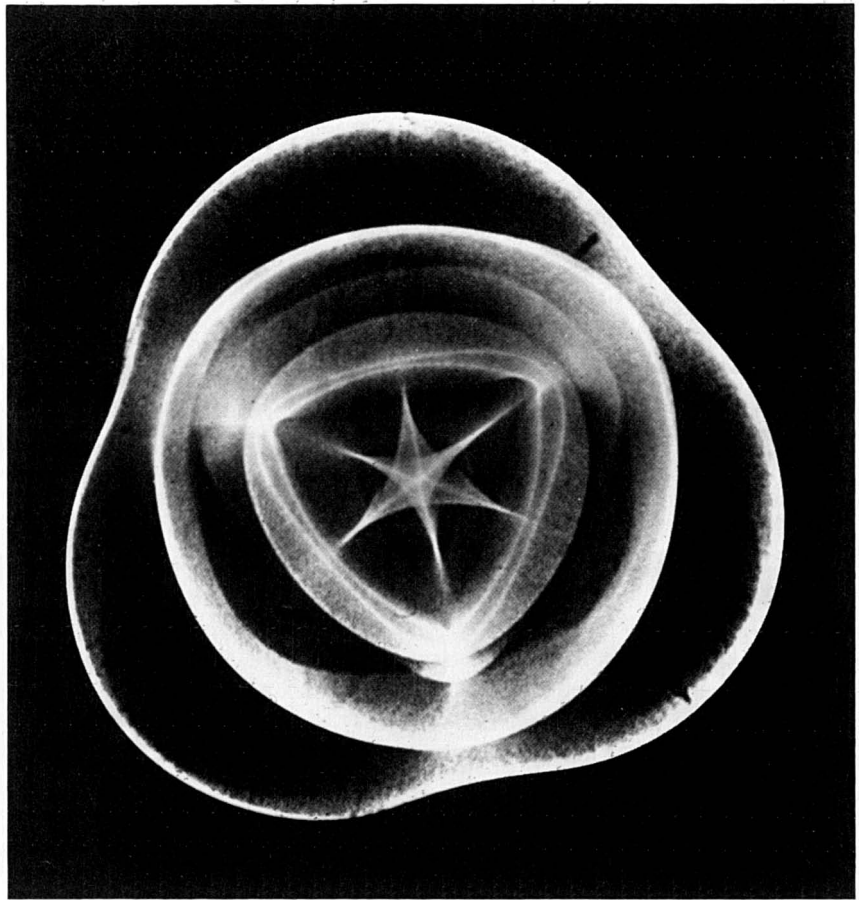
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Assagioli, Psychosynthesis Institute, San Francisco, California. In this article Assagioli describes fourteen categories of symbols: introversion, descent, ascent, expansion, awakening, illumination, fire, development, intensification, love, path, transmutation, rebirth, liberation.

\*The concept of *mode* or dimension of vibration, although quite simple, is little known outside the physical sciences. If you hold one end of a string with a weight attached at the other end and swing it, it will oscillate. If instead you twist the weight and then let go of it, it will also oscillate – but *in a different mode*. If the string were elastic and you were to pull down on the weight and then let go, still another mode of oscillation would occur. All these modes of course can occur simultaneously, and, furthermore, the *rate* or frequency of each vibration can be different. Clearly, if a plot were made of the path that the weight describes in space, all sorts of different patterns would appear. The patterns illustrated at left were produced in like fashion. Similarly, archetypes – that is patterns of energy in the creative field – can be seen as corresponding to distinct modes of vibration of the field itself. Assagioli's fourteen categories of symbols, referred to in the previous footnote, can therefore be considered to be manifestations of as many fundamental modes of vibration of the creative field. And a mental pattern can reverberate along one or several of such modes.

Pattern within a liquid medium produced by the energy field of a pure sound tone. A varying intensity of energy can produce reverberation along different modes, or harmonics. Thus with lower intensity of the tone, the pattern at the bottom of the next page was formed.

A higher intensity generated the pattern on page 20. The frequency of vibration, or note, of sound was unchanged. Similar progressions are shown on pages 24 and 48.



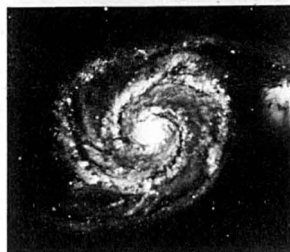
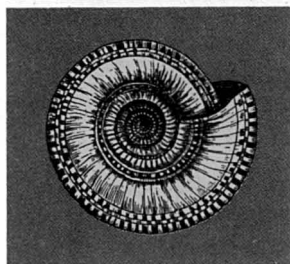
foster creativity, personality integration, and expansion toward the transpersonal dimension.<sup>28</sup>

We can see that the fundamental properties of symbols — through which, as we have said, we can learn much about the basic principles and qualities of the creative field — constitute a broad subject with far-reaching implications. It is a subject which, to be dealt with thoroughly, calls for a depth of analysis beyond the scope of this article.\* What we will do here is to consider three basic principles

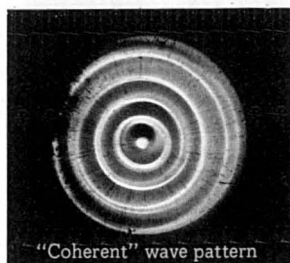
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\*A study of this kind will necessitate a careful examination of the many classes of symbols — and of creative insights — in terms of their most general properties, such as symmetry, simplicity, hierarchical framework, syntropy, organizing value, synthesis, universality, etc., to proceed as closely as possible toward their common essence without getting sidetracked or stopped pre-





One of the recurrent patterns in natural forms is the spiral



"Coherent" wave pattern

that derive from the creative field or are actually inherent in it, and that have practical implications for most of us.

The first is a little appreciated, but basic quality common to a large number of creative insights. This quality can be defined in terms of syntropy, or negative entropy,<sup>32</sup> but in plain language it is the concept of "*doing more with less.*" Some reflection will show that this deceptively obvious principle has been a major driving force of man's activity, and is the basis of the technological explosion of the past decades.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately this activity has been focused on the "doing more" side, on producing as much as we can by using all of the resources that we have available. But, as we are finding out, the results have been highly unbalanced. This one-sided orientation was perhaps unavoidable, because of the conditioning

maturely. Such an endeavor will parallel the attempt to understand the forces and fields that generate the many physical and biological forms of nature. Efforts in this latter direction have already been made, and can offer us much that is of value.<sup>29</sup> To proceed in this task will require such mathematical tools, well known to the physical scientist, as Fourier Transforms, Maxwell Equations, Group Theory, Topology, Non-Euclidian Geometry,<sup>30</sup> hypernumbers,<sup>31</sup> and in particular the growing knowledge about the properties of coherent energy fields that we have gained in recent years following the discovery of lasers. To those inclined to pursue such an endeavor, I would like to suggest as a hypothesis worthy of consideration that the energy of the creative field—and of our superconscious in general—is "coherent" in essence, like the light of lasers, although probably along many more dimensions.

For those not familiar with the concept of coherence, coherent vibrations can be roughly compared to the waves produced by a stone dropped in a still pool of water, while non-coherent vibrations are more like the waves of the sea. This property of coherence with its inherent harmony may well be the cause of the generally harmonizing quality of creative insights, and of the unitive, inclusive nature of the energies emanating from the superconscious—for example love, compassion, joy, or serenity. Furthermore, in terms of our model, when our mental patterns are in harmony with the creative field they will refract or transmit its energy, preserving some or all of its modes of coherence, and uplifting our feelings accordingly. If, on the other hand, the mental patterns are not in harmony, the creative energy will be scattered, like a beam of light going through a frosted glass, and its coherence, its inherent harmony, will be lost. Thus negative feelings, which are often separative and characterized by conflict, can be generated or energized. Conversely, the little understood principle of sublimation of feelings can be seen, in this light, as the process by which some specific type of *non*-coherent emotional energy is either made coherent, or is replaced with its coherent counterpart.

acquired through ages of economic scarcity. But also unavoidably, it has led us to the present crisis, energetic, ecological, and otherwise. Yet as we recognize that the problem is not in our technology, but in the unbalanced use we have made of it, we can turn our creative powers from “doing more” to “doing with less” — that is doing well whatever we truly need while using the least necessary amount of our effort and of our resources. Many of the foremost contemporary thinkers, such as Buckminster Fuller,<sup>34</sup> have consistently pointed out that in such a shift of values and of purpose lies the solution to many of our major problems.

The power  
of simplicity

Striving to do more with less is a natural, although not always active, tendency of the human mind, and in periods of creative activity it becomes sufficiently strong to condition our thought processes. It can be easily recognized by comparing different accounts of creative experiences. We will find, in general, that when the action of the creative field is most intense, the solution it generates is not only most effective and most relevant, but also most simple. And its effectiveness is often due to its very simplicity.

A second principle stemming from the influence of the creative field has to do with how we react to the experience of cognitive dissonance.

#### DON'T CONFUSE ME WITH THE FACTS . . . I'VE MADE UP MY MIND

It is well known how we all have a strong emotional distaste for cognitive dissonance, and an equally strong drive or *need* to eliminate or reduce it. Kurt Lewin defined “need” as “stress of the field within psychological space.”<sup>35</sup> This fits very well with our model, and also with the analogy of the magnet and of the iron particles. If two iron particles within the magnetic field are close together, they will attract each other, and increase the stress in the region of the field that is between them. This additional stress supplies the “locomotive” energy with which the particles will then move toward each other, combine, and thus reduce the stress within the field. This is how closure is produced in a mental pattern. But as we will see, it is often produced in a premature or faulty fashion.

The open  
and the closed  
mind

The most creative people can allow mental elements, singly or in small aggregates, to remain disconnected in their mind, within the influence of the creative field, for a long enough time to allow a harmonious and well-integrated pattern to form; that is, until they

have found the best reasonable way to fit their ideas together. On the other hand, many others succumb to the need of making everything fit together as soon as possible, even though the pattern may be far from ideal. What doesn't fit is swept under the rug. Thus either *simplistic* or *unnecessarily complicated* concepts are created, and much new and potentially useful information is not accepted.

A necessary  
stress

Most of all, we have the greatest resistance to breaking down already formed patterns of ideas in order to rearrange them into something that is better integrated, more synthetic. The engineer attempting to find out how to improve a mechanism so that it will do more with less parts is, within his mind, taking apart an old pattern which represents a prior creative insight in the hope of rearranging it in a combination that is simpler and more harmonious — that will be more in tune, and therefore absorb more energy from the creative field. While he does this he destroys the gestalt and cuts the pattern off from the energy flow, generating a high level of stress in his mental field: a condition such as that produced by cognitive dissonance. This mental stress produces a reaction in the emotional field, giving rise to negative primary feelings. Thus confusion, frustration, and “tantrums of despair” are quite understandable, and have been well compared to the labor preceding physical birth.

The factor  
of time

A major cause of the mental stress itself is the clash between two conflicting forces: the drive toward rapid closure, and the drive toward greater simplicity. Both drives originate from the same urge to tap the energy of the creative field, but clearly, *the drive toward rapid closure is conditioned by the time element, while the drive toward greater simplicity is free of it*. To maximally actualize one's creative potential one must therefore be able to temporarily inhibit the drive toward immediate closure. This is consistent with the findings of Frank Barron, a well-known researcher in creativity. One of the “distinct traits” he has identified as the “mark of the highly creative person” is “perceptual openness, or resistance to premature closure.” Another “has to do with the relationship of complexity to simplicity, and of order to disorder. . . . Creative individuals seem to be able to discern accurately more complexity in whatever it is they attend to” but deal with it by seeking “the single synthesizing image that will unite many diverse elements.”<sup>36</sup>

Keeping things  
open

The ability to resist premature closure can and should be made an important subject of training in education. We have already identified two of the necessary skills. The first is learning to deal effec-

tively with the primary negative feelings, while avoiding generating secondary negative feelings; the second is developing the ability to reach and sustain a point of serene mental tension. By these and other means we can resist premature closure, so as to release more of our creative potential and also to improve our functioning in ordinary life. Not only does the drive toward premature closure inhibit our creative work, it can push us into the most striking irrationalities in our daily experience. This has been shown experimentally in a number of studies. One classic example is the work done by Asch in which subjects in a group, after discriminating between lines of clearly different length, were asked to state their observation — which, they were led to believe, was contrary to that of the majority. As many as one out of three subjects preferred to go against what they saw with their own eyes!<sup>37</sup>

It may be illuminating to consider the attitude of a highly creative thinker in such a situation. He accepts the dissonance *temporarily*, without yielding to emotional turmoil, but rather as a potential opportunity to learn something new. Then he confidently looks for ways to discover the reasons for the apparent dissonance. Such an attitude has produced many discoveries of great consequence, including Einstein's theory of relativity. While working toward his discovery, Einstein felt that "a certain region in the structure of the whole situation was in reality not as clear to him as it should be, although it had hitherto been accepted without question by everyone, including himself. . . . During this time he was often depressed, sometimes in despair, but driven by the strongest vectors." His questioning went on for seven years without producing fruitful results. Then, after he re-examined the generally accepted concept of time, he developed the theory of relativity in five weeks.<sup>38</sup>



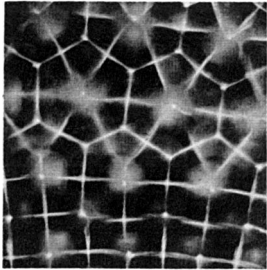
### INDIVIDUAL OR UNIVERSAL

A third basic principle of the creative insight is its orientation toward universality, the overcoming of successive boundaries toward ever-growing expansion, inclusion and identification. This is frequently apparent, at least to some extent, and can be most clearly seen in the works of men like Einstein, Leonardo, or Beethoven. Maslow describes it as "the fusion between the person and his world which has so often been reported as an observable fact in creativeness, and which we may now reasonably consider to be a *sine qua non*." He suggests that it is "an isomorphism, a molding of each to

each other, a better and better fitting together or complementarity, a melting into one.”<sup>39</sup>

Buckminster Fuller tells us:

The most poetical experiences of my life have been those moments of conceptual comprehension of a few of the extraordinarily generalized principles and their complex interactions, which are apparently employed in the governance of universal evolution. It is an intuitive realization of the indescribable magnificence and exquisite lucidity of the intellect conceiving and inventing these . . . principles, which generates the sublimity of the poetical moments of man’s fleeting glimpses of the omniscience-omnipresence. . . .<sup>40</sup>



Transitional pattern between  
two modes of vibration

Statements such as these lead us to postulate the existence of a *universal* creative field, the creative activity of which we have recognized in the world as the process of evolution. This universal creative field acts—again, simultaneously—on all elements and groups of elements in the universe. But its action will be stronger on those classes of elements that form more highly organized patterns, because they are the ones that reverberate more intensely and to a greater number of modes of vibration of the field itself. This explains why evolution, which took uncountable eons to develop the earliest and simplest forms of life, has been increasingly accelerating its pace with the more highly organized forms . . . culminating, today, with humanity.

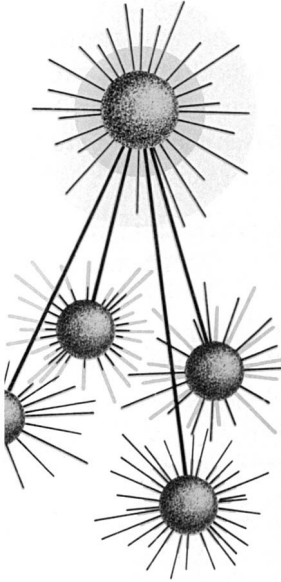
Many thinkers, among them Teilhard de Chardin, Henri Bergson, Sri Aurobindo, and Albert Szent-Gyorgyi<sup>41</sup> have arrived through widely different lines of thought at the same inescapable conclusion: that behind the evolutionary thrust of nature there must be an underlying unifying principle such as a universal creative field. Scientists and mystics alike have called it the Universal Mind, and already thousands of years ago the great Indian sage Patanjali described the patterns within it as “the raincloud of knowable things,” a primary source of creativity for mankind.

On this basis, we can expand our model by one order of magnitude, and consider each human being—as the most highly organized entity we know—to be one of a large number of elements within the influence of the universal creative field. The creative field of each human being—the *individual* creative field—is thus *induced* by the universal creative field, just as the field of our magnet induced a little magnetic field around each iron particle.\*

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\*In terms of the diagram given on p. 146, the individual creative field is an

This individual “microcosmic” field must be, therefore, a homomorphic replica of the universal field, in the sense that *all its properties must also be properties of the universal field*, though the reverse need not be true. In other words, individual creative fields have both individual differences and basic similarities, because they are formed by the influence of the same universal field on different individuals.



This expanded conception shows how energy interactions such as exchange, cross-fertilization, and even group formation of creative patterns, can occur. They can occur horizontally between the creative fields of different individuals. They can occur vertically, between different levels of organization within the universal field. They can also occur between each individual or group of individuals and the universal creative field itself. This conceptual framework can thus account for a very wide range of phenomena. Examples of these are interactions such as empathy, telepathy, or clairvoyance, which in most cases are horizontal; peak experiences and creative illuminations, which are primarily of a vertical nature; and group phenomena, which also can be horizontal—such as certain aspects of crowd behavior and of mass consciousness—or vertical, such as the formation of an illumined group mind.

How do we, as individual human beings, fit in this complex system of interactions? Our conscious mind acquires information—and generates patterns—in two independent ways. One, as we have seen, is by reverberating to the individual creative field, producing patterns which are therefore *partial representations of the universal field*. The other, and for most of us still the predominant way of acquiring information, is *through the input of the senses*. Our senses produce mental patterns representing the objective world—a world in which the evolutionary patterns of the universal creative field are emerging. Therefore not only our creative patterns, but also our sensory patterns are partial representations of the universal creative field. Thus definite similarities exist between the two. But profound differences are present as well.



The mental patterns derived by our senses reproduce the organizing effect of the universal creative field on all the elements of our external world, *up to the present*. Because of this influence of the

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aspect of the superconscious—the higher region of the individual's psyche. The universal creative field is an aspect of the higher *collective* unconscious, which exists beyond the individual.

sensory input on our mental elements, when the personal creative field acts on them, they already have formed sensory patterns – and therefore building blocks – that correspond to the present state of the world. So *the individual creative field acts on our sensory patterns in the same way as the universal creative field acts on the present patterns in the universe*. Coleridge calls this “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.”<sup>42</sup>

But the individual creative field can act on our sensory patterns with a vastly accelerated time scale – much more rapidly than the universal creative field can act on the patterns of the external world. Therefore the resulting creative patterns in our consciousness *relate to the future*, while being based on the present and the past.

Primordial  
stress

This difference between the sensory and the creative patterns in our mind – between present and future – produces a fundamental cognitive dissonance, and therefore a stress which, although largely unconscious, deeply conditions our lives. As we become aware of it, we describe it by such terms as “divine discontent,” “feeling of emptiness,” “search for deeper meaning,” or that more general “something missing” that we have almost come to believe is the unavoidable condition of being human.

Whichever the term, once we find the strength to accept this stress as part of our nature we find also that it generates an impelling, irresistible urge to improve, reconcile, harmonize, and ultimately unify the two patterns projected by the one transcendent source: the perception of an imperfect present, and the partial vision of a more perfect future. In this relentless effort is the whole drama of human existence – because to reach this goal man must change himself and change his universe.

The unique  
opportunity

This is the present challenge and opportunity. Will we have the courage to sustain simultaneously the stark perception of what today imperfectly exists, the triumphant vision of what can be, and the awareness of the chasm in between? Will we have the strength to sustain the tension and the stress produced by these two images, without submitting passively to the one or escaping into the other? Will we have the patience and the determination to take the needed and measured action so that step by step, beginning from where we are, we can build a path to bridge the gap: a path leading to greater harmony, more profound wisdom, and continuing growth?

This is the issue today. It is an issue that by its very nature transcends our own individual existences, an issue that has concerned

many students of man. In the words of Willis Harman,

The portentous impact of the new technology is the heady yet sobering realization that we have the future in our hands, that man recognizes his role as, to use Julian Huxley's phrase, "a trustee of evolution on this earth." The challenge of our time is whether we make "the step to man" or whether our Faustian powers prove our undoing...<sup>43</sup>

Buckminster Fuller states:

The history of man seems to demonstrate the emergence of his progressively conscious participation in theretofore spontaneous universal evolution. My continuing philosophy is predicated on the assumption that in dynamic counterbalance to the expanding universe of entropically increasing random disorderliness, there must be a universal pattern of convergent, progressive orderliness, and that man is that anti-entropic reordering function.<sup>44</sup>

As Teilhard de Chardin has told us, the greatest glory of man will be in accepting his natural place not at the center of the universe, as was once believed, but as its fulcrum, the pivot point, the bridge, the lifeline, the agent through whom the energy of the universal creative field can flow, and by means of whom one day all, including the least significant element in the universe, will be integrated into one perfected synthesis, with the Source.





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# Psychosynthesis Workbook

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# How to use it

The *WORKBOOK* section of *SYNTHESIS* is the reader's opportunity to apply some of the major ideas presented in each issue toward the practical task of his or her own personal development.

This third *WORKBOOK* enables you to build on what you already have done and to move forward in your process of self-discovery and integration. The *Principles* section, "Dimensions of Growth," is a broad overview of the major aspects

of growth — *personal* and *transpersonal* — the problems associated with them and strategies for their resolution. It deals with such central concepts as "the search for meaning," "the existential crisis," "the energies of higher human experiences," and "Self-realization."

Here we will consider the fundamental problem of relating our daily life and personal growth to our higher impulses — those transpersonal moments that give us our largest vision of what is possible for ourselves and the world. So often we experience a split in ourselves: between our need to painstakingly master mundane skills and a sense of our vast potential, between our behavior and our values, between our desire to be involved in the world, and our desire for transcendence. These are the dimensions of human growth — personal and transpersonal, behavior and values, self and universe. To reconcile these apparent contraries is the patient work of our individual synthesis.

The *Practice* section forms the most practical part of the *WORKBOOK*. It contains techniques for harmonizing the personal and transpersonal dimensions, for "connecting," in E. M. Forster's phrase, "the poetry and the prose of life." The exercises, "The Blossoming of the Rose," "Integrating Transpersonal Experiences," and "Inner Silence" are designed to help us tap more reliably the energies of our higher nature, and then bring those energies into expression in the world in which we live. The final section, *What Is Psychosynthesis?* describes the general framework of thinking underlying all the *WORKBOOKS*.

Different readers will want to use the *WORKBOOK* in different ways. Many will want to use it fully and systematically. Others may be familiar with part of its content, and will want to pick and choose. Still others may already be fruitfully following a specific path in their self-development, and may choose to integrate what they find here with their own approach. Each person needs to make his or her own judgement about what to use, and in which order to work with the different sections. But as a suggestion, we recommend the following general sequence.

First, do the brief version of “The Blossoming of the Rose” exercise which follows. This will help you move toward contacting your own superconscious nature. As such, it can be a useful experiential introduction to the central topic of the *WORKBOOK*.

Then we suggest you read the *Principles* section. It traces a comprehensive map of how we grow from meaning to meaning, from childhood to maturity, from a sense of separation in our lives to a more and more inclusive synthesis. Here you will recognize many of your own experiences, and since this is a map of the whole

territory of human development, you will also recognize the ways other people grow. This can give you more understanding of others, their feelings and thoughts, behavior and needs.

Next, go to the *Practice* section. In a personal sense, this is perhaps the most important part—the one which actually gives you a chance to introduce in your everyday living the concepts you have read about. The exercises in this *WORKBOOK* refer back to those in earlier issues, and together they provide a basis for your continuing psychosynthesis work.

We suggest also that after a while, you go back and re-read the *Principles* section with some care, because it is designed to provide ongoing guidance in your efforts. You may also want to re-read the earlier *WORKBOOKS* on “Subpersonalities” and “Identity and Personal Freedom” in the light of what you have seen about the relation of personal and transpersonal growth. The earlier *WORKBOOKS* will assume deeper meaning when considered as part of a larger perspective of growth—one which includes the higher dimensions of human nature and the impulse toward helping to shape and serve the world in evolutionary ways.

# The Blossoming of the Rose

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## A PSYCHOSYNTHESIS EXERCISE

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This simple exercise uses the dynamic symbol of a blossoming flower to help you

stimulate and experience your own superconscious processes. The heightened aware-

ness of transpersonal energies and qualities it often evokes may be helpful to you

in relating experientially to the discussion of human growth in the following article.

1) Sit quietly and comfortably. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and relax your body.

2) Imagine a rosebush with many flowers and buds. Now turn your attention to one of the buds. The bud is still enclosed in its green leaves, or sepals, but at the very top a rose-colored point can be seen. Focus on this image, holding it in the center of your awareness.

3) Now very gradually, the sepals start to separate, turning their points outward and revealing the rose-hued petals, which are still closed. The sepals continue to open until you can see the whole bud.

4) Next, the petals also begin to unfold, slowly separating, until a beautiful, fully opened rose is seen. At this stage try to smell the perfume of the rose with its characteristic and unmistakable scent.

5) Imagine that a ray of sunlight shines on the rose, giving it light and warmth. Take a few moments to experience the sunlit rose.

6) Finally, *identify* yourself with the rose; imagine that you become the rose or that you take the whole flower inside yourself. Symbolically, you *are* this flower, this rose.

7) Take some time to experience the rose within you, with all the richness of its qualities. Be aware that the inner rose is always there, and that you can get in touch with it and draw on its qualities whenever you choose. The same life that animates the universe and has created the rose is enabling you to awaken and develop your innermost being and all that radiates from it.

8) You may want to write about what happened, describing the process of opening, its meaning, and your experience as you took the rose inside you.



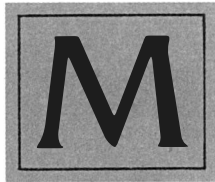
Principles:

Dimensions of Growth



## DIMENSIONS OF GROWTH

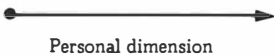
John Firman and James Vargiu



Modern life has failed to meet the human need for meaning. The experience of meaninglessness, the lack of values and direction, has reached epidemic proportions. And yet our underlying need persists, the urgent questions remain: "What is really meaningful in life?" "What is truly important for me to achieve?"

We need to find two different kinds of meaning: the meaning of *our own individual existence*, and the meaning of *the world we live in—ultimately of life itself*.

Our first concern as developing individuals is the search for meaning in our personal existence. Whether as a child learning to walk, as a student struggling with a mathematical problem, or as a businessman closing an important deal, our experience of this personal meaning is similar. When we succeed in achieving a goal, we experience ourselves and our lives as having greater significance and value. Accordingly, we seek to accomplish larger and more important goals, and in so doing we develop our capacities and add to our skills and knowledge. This pursuit of personal meaning and goals leads us to grow as human beings, to form an increasingly well-integrated, creative personality which is more and more effective in the world. This process takes place along what we may call the *personal dimension* of growth.



But as the scope of our active involvement in the world increases, we find that our sense of world meaning also needs

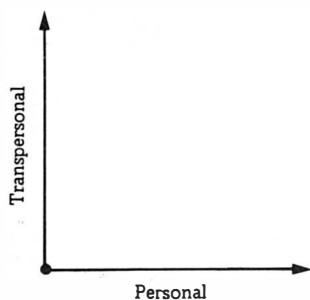
to grow. We leave the shelter of home and go to college, or we leave school and go to work, we get married and raise a family, we seek to make a worthwhile contribution. At each step, experience calls on us to clarify and deepen our values, to explore, to re-examine the beliefs we live by. If we respond to this call and pursue the quest far enough, we will eventually be concerned with such self-transcendent questions as: "What is the true nature of the world?" "Can there be a peaceful and loving humanity?" "What are time, space, consciousness, good and evil?" "Is the universe evolving in a positive direction?" We may approach questions of this sort intellectually, seeking insight into the truth, or we may reach for a direct experience, an expanded awareness that we hope will reveal the meaning and purpose of the larger reality. This search will lead us to the *transpersonal* or *spiritual dimension* of growth.



Transpersonal dimension



### ONE DIMENSION OR THE OTHER



Two views  
of one reality

The personal and the transpersonal dimensions are *distinct but not separate*. Both are natural to human unfoldment. But generally a person will tend to be more in touch with one dimension, experiencing it as more real, more important. He may then tend to undervalue the other, and even to be critical of someone else who is oriented toward it.

Think of how a successful businessman and the follower of a spiritual movement might look at one another. The businessman, who has spent years creating a life for himself and his family by working hard to accomplish his practical goals, may look at the follower of the spiritual movement and say, "Why doesn't he come down from the clouds and *do* something with his life? All this talk of love and peace is just a way for him to avoid facing reality." At the same time, the spiritual disciple may look at the businessman and say, "He is too bound up in his ego, seeking power, prestige, and material success. All this is an illusion he must let go of so that he can surrender to God."

This tendency to favor either dimension is often reflected in approaches to growth currently offered in our own culture. Many of them have been categorized as following one of two general orientations, which have been loosely described as "eastern" and "western."

The "western" view values most highly the person who is a strong individual, who can fully invest himself in his activities, function effectively, accomplish tasks and in general demonstrate skill and success in handling the practical realities of life. With his strong intentionality, he orients all the many aspects of himself toward a unified focus. He wastes little time and effort in internal conflicts, ambivalence or confusion. Accordingly, he has much energy available for the business of achieving a rewarding and productive life. To him the transpersonal dimension is likely to be a secondary concern, possibly considered a distraction from what is most important.

On the other hand, what is commonly described as the "eastern" view values most highly the individual who cultivates the inner, spiritual life. Emphasis is placed on achieving clarity of vision, serenity, love and compassion, a sense of joy and harmony, and ultimately oneness with all life. To reach these goals the individual develops the ability to master his inner processes and to expand

his awareness. It is considered necessary to simplify or even largely transcend daily life and the material world, attachment to which is seen as a distraction from what is most important. Thus the person who leads a contemplative life is most revered and valued—the wise sage, the guru, the ascetic.

Despite the age-old tendency of people—and even whole cultures—to emphasize one dimension to the exclusion of the other, the possibility of unifying both has been splendidly realized by certain individuals throughout history. The foremost mystics, for example St. Francis of Assisi and St. Teresa of Avila, having achieved illumination, actively expressed their vision and their values in the world. One may also think of the great world teachers—for example Christ, Buddha, or Moses—all of whom became actively involved in the practical realities of their day. On the other hand, many of those most successfully concerned with the study of the material world—great scientists such as Newton or Einstein—were led by the very nature of their explorations into higher and higher spiritual realms.

Such illustrious figures of the past have pointed the way toward the needed synthesis. In our own times, increasing numbers of the many people involved in spiritual life are realizing the need to develop well-integrated, capable personalities in order to make their spiritual values work. And more and more people who have been successfully expressing themselves in practical ways are reaching for the transpersonal to find deeper meaning, more certain direction, and greater effectiveness.

### UNIFYING THE TWO DIMENSIONS

In the last decades a growing number of psychologists have said that both dimensions are essential to full human growth, and have begun to explore the relation between them. Andras Angyal, for example, discusses not only the individual's need to achieve autonomy, but also his need for the experience of "homonymy," of union with a greater whole.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Roberto Assagioli has recognized and developed two inter-related aspects of psychosynthesis: personal psychosynthesis which aims at fostering the development of a well-integrated, effective personality, and spiritual psychosynthesis which leads to realizing one's higher nature.

Unification  
is possible



Both dimensions  
are needed

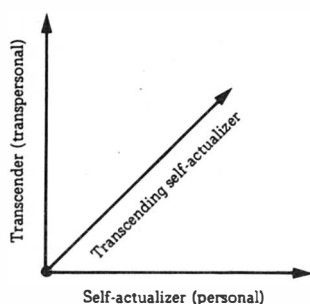
Abraham Maslow, who introduced the term “transpersonal,” arrived through his observations at parallel conclusions.\* In his later work Maslow recognized three groups of people whom he called respectively: *self-actualizers*, *transcenders*, and *transcending self-actualizers*. Self-actualizers, Maslow found, are “essentially practical, realistic, mundane, capable and secular people,” pragmatically concerned with “growth toward self-actualization and freedom from basic deficiency needs. Such people live in the world, coming to fulfillment in it. They master it, lead it, use it for good purposes.”

“Transcenders” are non-self-actualizers, “who have important transcendent experiences,” and a strong contact with the spiritual dimension, but whose personalities are often underdeveloped. When compared to the transcenders, self-actualizers “tend to be ‘doers’ rather than meditators or contemplators, effective and pragmatic rather than aesthetic, reality testing and cognitive rather than emotional and experiencing.”<sup>2</sup>

But Maslow found it necessary to differentiate between *two* kinds of self-actualizing people: those who were clearly healthy but with little or no experience of transcendence, and those in whom transcendent experiencing was important and even central. These he called “transcending self-actualizers.”

Transcending self-actualizers *in addition* to being well-integrated, healthy and effective, possess a number of other characteristics. (Maslow lists 35 groups of them.<sup>3</sup>) For example, they are innovators and pioneers; they have a stronger sense of self, and yet at the same time are capable of transcending the limitations of personal identity; they have a sense for eternity, for “the sacred”; they value and are more easily aware of truth, beauty, goodness, unity.

Clearly, in order to realize more and more of our essential humanness, we need to include both the personal and the transpersonal dimensions. As personal meaning and world meaning develop and then fuse, as both the scope of our vision and our ability to express it expand, as our sense of individuality and of universality



\*The similarity between Assagioli's and Maslow's conceptions is especially interesting, because while both men were deeply concerned with the spiritual nature of man and based their work on strong empirical foundations, they worked in very different environments and at different periods of time.

blend—we find that we move toward a lived unification with our higher human nature, toward realizing our true Self. Therefore *Self-realization*, the realization of our Transpersonal Self,\* involves the progressive unification, at higher and higher levels, of the two dimensions of growth.\*\*

Unification  
through balanced  
development

But before we can unify the two dimensions in ourselves, we need to *develop* them. Whether we develop both simultaneously or first develop one and then the other will depend on many different factors, such as our individual makeup, our awareness, our environment, and so on. In practice, people often tend to proceed a long way primarily on either the personal or the transpersonal dimension before even becoming aware of the existence of the other.

If we feel more drawn toward one of the two dimensions and this seems right and fulfilling to us, clearly it is the path for us to follow. But at the same time, we will find it helpful to develop and maintain throughout, the *awareness* of the other dimension.

Experience has repeatedly shown that if we proceed too far in one direction only, sooner or later we will need to become more inclusive and bring in the other. When that time comes, we can do so through a conscious, deliberate choice, provided we have the awareness and



Avoiding  
a crisis

the understanding needed to recognize what is missing. Otherwise we may fall into a *crisis of reorientation*, one which will eventually

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\*For discussions of the Transpersonal Self, see "What is Psychosynthesis?" pp. 144-147. Also, Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 1965, pp. 18-19; *The Act of Will*, 1973, pp. 118-122; Betsie Carter-Haar, "Identity and Personal Freedom," *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 89-90; and Stuart Miller, "Dialogue with the Higher Self," *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 131n.

\*\*It is important to remember that Self-realization is not something we should "do" or "make happen." Self-realization is a natural process, and it occurs spontaneously. On the other hand, we can learn to better understand the process and thereby cooperate with it and facilitate it.

An inclusive map

lead us to the missing dimension, but often at the cost of much time, effort and pain.

So whatever path we may be following as individuals, it is best to keep in mind the whole picture—the entire “territory” of human growth.

In this article, we will look more closely at both the personal and the transpersonal dimensions of growth: at how we experience them; at the crises of reorientation that may occur if we proceed too far along one dimension exclusively; and at how we can increasingly unify the two dimensions in our lives.

\* \* \*

## Part One

### THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

From the moment of birth we experience urges and needs which motivate us into activity. What motivates us at any moment is the sense that there is something worth achieving, something that has value and meaning. Our first and most basic meaning lies in simple physical survival. However, when this need is satisfied we do not merely sink into contented satiety. Rather something else arises, some new goal that has a different, or greater meaning.

To fulfill these goals we successively develop various aspects of our personality. As children we see that it is meaningful to master our body, to have physical competence, so that we can act effectively. The child's relentless urge to gain the ability to walk, his persistence through frustration after frustration, and finally the joyful elation that comes with success is a beautiful example of this process.

As we grow older it becomes increasingly meaningful to establish satisfying and warm relations with others. We learn to experience and share sensitive, deep emotions. During adolescence, relations with our peers, and particularly romantic relations, become the most significant focus of our life, and consequently the subtlety and richness of our feelings may flower.

During later adolescence, in response to the desire to understand ourselves and learn more about the world, our interest often





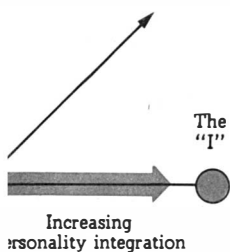
Integrating  
our personality

shifts to developing the mind. At first, this motivation is likely to be based on simple curiosity. Gradually, however, we may become more and more involved in the pleasures of learning, and develop increasing mental discipline. When this happens, the mind takes a central place in our life.

With adulthood, we may find that in order to most effectively achieve the goals we set ourselves—whether pursuing a career, raising a family, or attaining success of any kind—we need to *coordinate* and *integrate* all our inner resources, so that they are working in a unified way and in line with our aims.\* Our feelings must be developed and harmonized so that we can avail ourselves of their energy and relate to other people in a satisfying way. Our mind must be further trained so that we can think creatively, flexibly, and with the power to do broad planning as well as work with specific details. Finally, body, feelings and mind must be harmonized and integrated with one another so that they can work synergistically.

#### GROWTH ALONG THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

In practice, development and integration of the personality does not always take place so easily or so completely. The body may be unhealthy, lethargic or hyperactive. The various feelings may be in conflict, they may be underdeveloped or overly intense, they may be ridden with inhibitions, anxieties, depression and fears—all of which interfere with full functioning. The mind may be too rigid or too unstructured, it may be untrained, overactive, out of balance toward the abstract or toward the concrete. Finally, all of these functions may not cooperate with one another. The mind may ignore both the feelings and the body. The feelings may cause stress and strain on the body, or might struggle with the mind about what is important, and so on. The full, harmonious integration of the personality functions is a long process, a goal toward which most of us are still working



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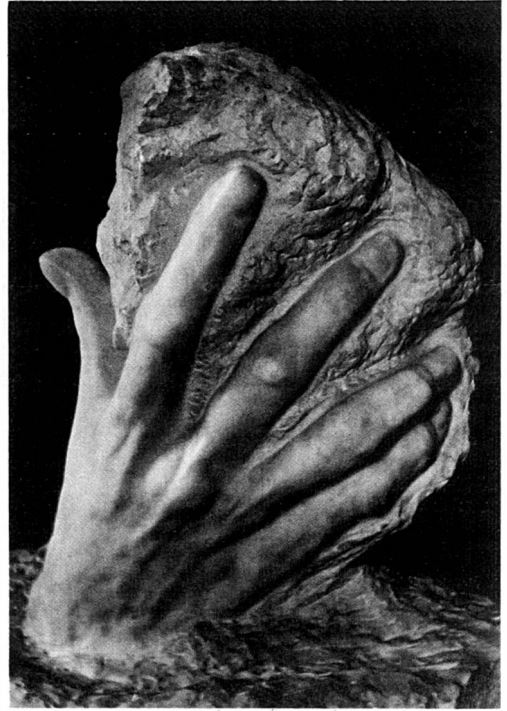
\*This process of personality harmonization, seen in terms of subpersonalities, is discussed in James Vargiu, "Subpersonalities," *SYNTHESIS I*, pp. 60-63 and 73-89. The "stages" he describes can be applied not only to subpersonalities but also to the integration of body, feelings and mind, and of any other personality element.



### Psychotherapy and self-actualization

and moving. It is this process of integration which is represented by the horizontal arrow in our diagram.

There are many approaches available to assist the various aspects of personality integration. The central concern of most forms of psychotherapy is to deal with deficiencies of specific personality functions, or with conflicts between them. The best approaches to self-actualization that have appeared in recent years generally aim at the positive development of particular aspects of the personality, and contribute to their gradual integration into a unified, dynamic whole. There is as well the growing recognition that self-actualization consists not only in the harmonization of all the aspects of the personality, but also in the gradual *emergence and empowering of the "I,"* the center of personal identity. It is through the action of the "I" that the personality aspects are harmonized, so that the integrated personality gradually forms around it.\*



### A natural process

As we have seen, whether or not we deliberately seek self-actualization by means of the various approaches available, it goes forward naturally through the pursuit of meaningful goals. In recent times, more and more people have achieved a high level of

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\*The two preceding Workbooks provide many resources for this dual process of self-actualization. The Workbook in *SYNTHESIS 1* focuses on the harmonization of the personality through the integration of subpersonalities – the many characters on our inner stage. The Workbook in *SYNTHESIS 2* deals with the means by which we can achieve the discovery of, and our identification as, the "I" – the center of personal identity, awareness and will.

a disappointing  
paradox

self-actualization, and have become able to reach their goals with increasing success. This has led to an interesting phenomenon. Many people, when they have attained their personal or career goals, find that the satisfaction, the value, the meaning of these goals is *less than they expected*, and so eventually abandon them. And they often abandon them just when things seem to be going best for them, when they appear to be the most successful. Often, such people may take up a new, perhaps completely different pursuit—one that they believe will be more meaningful than the previous one. But as each new goal is successfully achieved, it also is likely to encompass only a limited or temporary satisfaction. Paradoxically, the greater the success, the more one is faced with the experience of finding that what was expected to be highly satisfying turns out to be uninteresting and empty.

After this happens a number of times, one may begin to simply *imagine* himself seeking new goals, pursuing new avenues to their conclusion, and realize before he even begins his pursuit that he will find no more meaning in it than in the previous ones. It is here that one enters a difficult period. If he has not yet made contact with the transpersonal dimension, the stage is set for what may be called the *existential crisis*: the crisis that challenges the meaning of one's very existence.\*

The experience  
of emptiness

The person now begins to wonder if he is ever going to find fulfillment. An increasing sense of meaninglessness pervades all of his normal activities. Pastimes and interests which he formerly found rewarding do not bring the same pleasure they did before. His family, friends, and career simply do not interest him as they had. As this progresses, the person may experience at various times apathy, fear, and even despair. What is missing in his life? He has a strong identity, a well-integrated personality, and can function very well in the world. He is not neurotic; he has more than

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\*Viktor Frankl has written a great deal about the experience of emptiness and meaninglessness. He describes this experience as the "existential vacuum" which arises from the frustration of the "will to meaning." See his *The Will to Meaning*, New American Library, New York, 1970, pp. 83-98, and *The Unconscious God*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1975, pp. 89-103. Roberto Assagioli also has dealt extensively with this important topic. See for example, *The Act of Will*, Viking, New York, 1973, pp. 106-113, and his article "Self-Realization and Psychological Disturbances," pp. 148-171, this issue.

The deeper  
questions  
emerge

successfully attained the level of functioning termed “normal” by modern mental health standards. Logically he should be happy.

But although he can seemingly accomplish almost anything he chooses, he now finds himself at a loss as to *what* or *why* to choose. “I have been able to create a fine life for my family and for myself, but to what end? What does it mean?” As the educator and Gestalt therapist George Brown puts it, “After the individual can stand on his own two feet, what does he do then? Just stand there?”<sup>4</sup>

### THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

The nature of this crisis and the pattern which leads to it is illuminated by Leo Tolstoy’s striking account of his own struggle.

Five years ago something very strange began to happen to me. At first I experienced moments of perplexity and arrest of life as though I did not know what to do or how to live, and I felt lost and became dejected. But this passed, and I went on living as before. Then these moments of perplexity began to recur more and more often. . . . They were always expressed by the questions: What is it for? What does it lead to?

At first it seemed to me that these were aimless and irrelevant questions. I thought that it was all well-known, and that if I should ever wish to deal with the solution it would not cost me much effort: just at present, I had no time for it, but when I wanted to I should be able to find the answer. The questions however began to repeat themselves frequently and to demand replies more and more insistently. . . . I understood that it was something very important; and that if these questions constantly repeated themselves they would have to be answered. And I tried to answer them. The questions seemed such stupid, simple, childish ones; but as soon as I touched them and tried to solve them I at once became convinced, first, that they are not childish and stupid but the most important and profound of life’s questions; and secondly that, try as I would, I could not solve them.

Before occupying myself with my Samara estate, the education of my son, or the writing of a book, I had to know *why* I was doing it. As long as I did not know why, I could do nothing and could not live. Amid the thoughts of estate management which greatly occupied me at that time, the question would suddenly occur: Well, you will have 6,000 desytinas of land in Samara Government and 300 horses, and what then? . . . And I was quite disconcerted and did not know what to think.



Or when considering plans for the education of my children, I would say to myself: What for?

Or when thinking of the fame my works would bring me, I would say to myself, "Very well, you will be more famous than Gogol or Pushkin or Shakespeare or Molière, or than all the writers in the world—and what of it?"

Elusive  
answers

And I could find no reply at all. The questions would not wait, they had to be answered at once, and if I did not answer them it was impossible to live. But there was no answer.

All this happened to Tolstoy at a time not only of enormous personal success, but also of great vitality and capability.

All around me I had what is considered complete good fortune. I was not yet fifty; I had a good wife who loved me and whom I loved, good children, and a large estate which without much effort on my part improved and increased. I was respected by my relations and acquaintances more than at any previous time. I was praised by others and without much self-deception could consider that my name was famous. And far from being insane or mentally diseased, I enjoyed on the contrary a strength of mind and body such as I have seldom met with among men of my kind; physically I could keep up with the peasants at mowing, and mentally I could work for eight and ten hours at a stretch without experiencing any ill results from such exertion.

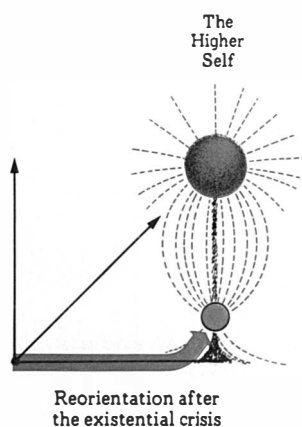
Yet, in spite of this fruitful life and his remarkable talents and abilities Tolstoy says,

I felt that what I had been standing on had collapsed, and that I had nothing left under my feet. What I had lived on no longer existed, and there was nothing left.

The depth  
of the crisis

My life came to a standstill. I could breathe, eat, drink, and sleep, and I could not help doing these things; but there was no life, for there were no wishes the fulfillment of which I could consider reasonable. If I desired anything, I knew in advance that whether I satisfied my desire or not, nothing would come of it. Had a fairy come and offered to fulfill my desires I should not have known what to ask. If in moments of intoxication I felt something which, though not a wish, was a habit left by former wishes, in sober moments I knew this to be a delusion and that there was really nothing to wish for.<sup>5</sup>

Tolstoy's account describes the existential crisis with penetrating clarity. It is a crisis in which the very basis of one's existence—an existence which had been unfolding primarily along the personal dimension—comes into question. The map of the two dimensions of growth suggests the basic strategy for the resolution of the



crisis. This resolution is found when the individual is able to *expand the meaning of his existence beyond the boundaries of his own personality*, so as to purposefully participate in the life of the whole. This can begin as he reorients his attention toward the greater life revealed by exploration of the transpersonal dimension.

The period of the existential crisis is a particularly appropriate time to seek or renew contact with the transpersonal. Seen from the vantage point of the Higher Self, *the existential crisis is precipitated by an increasing flow of superconscious, or transpersonal, energy directed by the Self toward the personality.\** In particular, as the energy of the Self increases, it attracts the personal self or "I" toward it. Before the existential crisis, the "I" was attracted primarily by the pull of the personality life and of the environment.\*\* The existential crisis occurs when the increasing pull of the energy of the Self becomes equal in intensity to, and therefore *neutralizes*, the pull of the personality/environment. Therefore this is a period of transition. It is like being suspended in space at a "zero gravity" point, in which the earlier meaning of the personality life has vanished and a new meaning has not yet appeared.

So as the superconscious influence increases, the previously adequate sense of meaning begins to fade away, and a growing sense of "something missing" develops. What is missing is the realization of one's relationship with the greater life — a relationship that now needs to be recognized and acknowledged.



This reorientation toward the transpersonal dimension can take many forms. For some people, superconscious energies break through to their consciousness suddenly and spontaneously — sometimes with great intensity — and then lift them out of the crisis into what can become a major, life-changing experience. Such a dramatic, spontaneous resolution is, however, relatively rare.

More often, the reorientation is gradual and involves our conscious and purposeful participation. Frequently, as the intimations

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\*For a discussion of the superconscious and its relation to the personality, see "What is Psychosynthesis?" pp. 144-147 and Roberto Assagioli's *Psychosynthesis*, New York, 1965, pp. 16-21.

\*\*See "Identity and Personal Freedom," *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 75n.





of the approaching existential crisis are increasingly felt, past transpersonal experiences—which had been forgotten or even repressed, and had therefore gone unused—return to consciousness, and their meaning can now be actively explored and understood. This reowning of past peak experiences can provide a door into the transpersonal dimension and help one reduce the intensity of the crisis or even resolve it altogether.\*

Yearning for something more

As the crisis develops, people often experience a conscious urge for something beyond the world view they have previously accepted. They may develop a growing curiosity about spiritual matters, philosophy, the metaphysical implications of modern physics, parapsychology, the occult—anything that, being mysterious, one hopes will contain answers to the basic unsolved questions of life.

Discrimination and motives

It is important to realize that only some of the directions in which such a quest can be pursued are likely to be fruitful. Here, as spiritual teachers of all times have stressed, *discrimination* and *motives* are critical determining factors. In pursuing one's spiritual path, one needs to practice discrimination in a number of areas, for example interpreting transpersonal experiences and inner messages, determining the suitability of working with a teacher, the appropriateness of particular spiritual practices to one's needs, the usefulness of advice from friends and family, and the value of other influences and potential resources.\*\* As for motives, to the extent to which one is seeking spectacular phenomena, whether for their own sake, for a kind of materialistically motivated need for reassurance, or for selfish or dubious purposes, to that extent the quest is not a genuinely spiritual one. When instead one is seeking for a fuller understanding, an enhanced apprehension of values, a heightened realization of that intrinsic harmony which is ever emerging, then the quest is indeed along spiritual lines.

If such a quest is pursued far enough, it will result in a reorientation toward the transpersonal dimension, and the existential crisis can then be overcome. Its resolution is found in an expan-

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\*As we shall see, most people have had transpersonal experiences of some kind. The exercise "Integrating Transpersonal Experiences," in this *WORKBOOK*, p. 129, is designed to help us recall such experiences and integrate them into our daily lives.

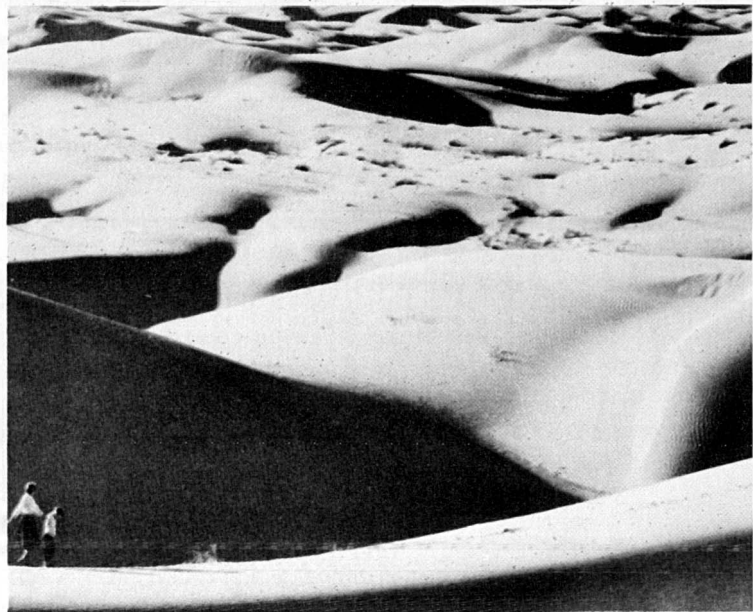
\*\*The matter of discrimination has been considered in "Dialogue with the Higher Self," *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 131-132.

The turning point

sion of our perception of who we are and of the world we live in. In other words, we begin the process of *disidentifying from our personality* and of achieving a broader, more inclusive state of awareness and identification,\* one that *includes* our personality *within a larger context*. It is from this larger context that, as individuals, we can begin to meaningfully participate in the greater whole. This expansion of identification is the turning point in the crisis.

Letting go

Most often the first experiences of disidentifying from the personality and expanding one's identification to more inclusive levels occur *after* some contact with the transpersonal dimension has been made, whether through a peak experience, or through a quickening of interest in spiritual matters. For when the transpersonal influence is consciously recognized, the expansion of identification is greatly facilitated. But sometimes, especially if the personality's attitude is *opposed* to spiritual matters, disidentification from the personality needs to occur *before* conscious contact with the transpersonal can be made. This can make the resolution of the existential crisis considerably more difficult. One has to let go of past satisfactions and pursuits, the fruits of many years of growth — all that one was attached to — because it has turned gray and barren, and there is simply nothing else



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\*The process of disidentification and identification is the topic of the



to do. And the difficulty is that this must be done even though at the time there seems to be nothing of value to put in its place. At this point one may feel that his life has been wasted, that all he has achieved is empty. The fear one then faces is that one's very identity will be lost.\*

Extensive  
preparation

But although disidentifying from the personality under such circumstances is a difficult step to take, we have in fact been prepared for it by a long sequence of lesser events that life provided for us. Whenever in the past we have given up an interest or a goal because it turned out to have insufficient meaning, we have in reality disidentified from it, and shifted our identification to a new one. With the advent of the existential crisis, we reach a further stage of this same process. Now the task becomes to disidentify from our personality as a whole. In this period of darkness, it is of great value to realize that we are already familiar in some ways with what is required of us, having successfully accomplished similar tasks in the past.

Disidentification from the personality needs to be clearly understood. It does not imply in any way, as some mistakenly believe, that we are to destroy our personality, "kill our ego," give up all our activities, resign from life, or take any similar action that would impede or even reverse the natural process of our growth.

Disidentification  
leads to fuller  
expression

Disidentifying from the personality means recognizing experientially that our personality is not what we *are* but what we *have* — not the *source* of our identity, but our *means* to express that identity in the world. By disidentifying from it, we do not destroy or abandon it, rather we transcend its *limitations*, and the self-centered and separative tendencies they bring.

An attitude that can be of considerable help in disidentifying from the personality is to deliberately accept as a possibility — as a hypothesis to be entertained and verified — the existence of a realm of higher meaning we do not yet perceive. We can purposefully decide to turn from a relentless insistence on meaninglessness (like that of certain existentialists) and in an open-minded way, look to see if there is something greater than ourselves. This attitude is no

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WORKBOOK in *SYNTHESIS 2*. The WORKBOOK includes a full description of this process, its right timing, and practical ways to accomplish it.

\*On the fear of losing the sense of personal identity, see *SYNTHESIS 1*, p. 53.

less realistic than the physicists' search for the unseen principles of nature and the universe.

Participating  
in a unified  
world

Countless people have borne witness to the fact that as we attempt to disidentify from the limitations of our personality and search for what is more than ourselves, we become increasingly able to see the world as an interconnected and unified whole – one in which our personality can find its rightful place, just like everyone else's. Then all which *as an end in itself* had lost its meaning, acquires a new and much greater meaning, because it is now recognized to be an intrinsic part of the larger whole.



A new awareness  
of life

For Tolstoy, light broke in on his despair as he walked one day alone in a forest. He tells us that he began thinking about his life and that which was greater than his life, as yet undiscovered, the lack of which was the source of his despair. There, in the naturalness of the woods, he sought to trace in himself this sense of something greater. Suddenly, he experienced the first awakenings of a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in life. This something greater was life itself, and it was all around him. He was filled with an appreciation of the richness and depth of life, and of his own place in it. After this experience, Tolstoy wrote,

Things cleared up within me and about me better than ever, and the light has never wholly died away. Just how the change took place

Unique  
opportunity

I cannot tell. As insensibly and gradually as the force of life had been annulled within me, and I had reached my moral deathbed, just as gradually and imperceptibly did the energy of life come back.

So the existential crisis is, fundamentally, an opportunity to expand our sense of reality. Once resolved, it allows purpose, meaning and values to become part of our lives in a new way — as our personal life takes its meaning from a more universal, inclusive and lasting source.\*

## AFTER THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS: PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES

But what happens next? What happens after the self-actualizing individual has begun his reorientation? Through a transpersonal

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\*When one reaches the existential crisis it is possible, although rather uncommon, for the personality to be impervious to the influence of the superconscious. This is especially so when a strong, well-integrated personality is fed by an overweening drive for personal power, and such power is seen either as the source of meaning or as the way to gain that which one considers to be meaningful. In such a situation, the existential crisis probably will not be felt very strongly, and the personality is likely to be well equipped to resist it. The resistance of the personality is greatly increased if one is working with a guide who does not recognize the crisis for what it is, and thus fails to encourage, or even allow, the emergence of the superconscious energies. (See also Roberto Assagioli, "Self-realization and Psychological Disturbances," pp. 167-168, this issue.) One's development may then tend to continue solely along the horizontal dimension. If followed for too long before making a stable connection with the superconscious, this path leads one in an antisocial direction, to seek more and more personal power, and can be harmful both for oneself and others. In extreme cases it can even lead, eventually, to draw on superconscious energies and use them to achieve personal, separative goals, thus perverting their essential nature.

Dangerous  
sidetracks

There can also develop, as Assagioli says, (see pp. 155-156, this issue) a confusion of levels and an illusion, by which one attributes to his personal self, or "I," the qualities of the Transpersonal Self. One then unwittingly arrogates to himself — and *himself only* — those powers which justly belong to the Transpersonal Self: the transcendent focus in which *all* humanity participates. In other words, such a person sees his personal identity as the ultimate reality and, to use a current phrase, "goes on a power trip." He increasingly perceives other people and his environment as mere objects to be used in support of his personal identity, and may even go so far as to see them as extensions of himself. A most extreme example is that of a political dictator who has exaggerated his sense of identity to the extent that he sees it as absorbing even his country — such as Hitler who stated, "I am Germany."

The process  
of transformation

awakening, whether gradual, or more dramatic like Tolstoy's, he has seen the need to achieve the synthesis of the transpersonal dimension with his practical life in the world. This is a most rewarding enterprise – perhaps the most fascinating of all human adventures. As we take our first steps toward such a synthesis, even what may appear to be relatively small accomplishments are significant, because we are becoming the conscious agents of that creative energy which underlies the development of nature and man. The great cosmic play of creation, one pole infusing and transforming the other, is being visibly enacted in our ordinary lives.

Practical  
difficulties

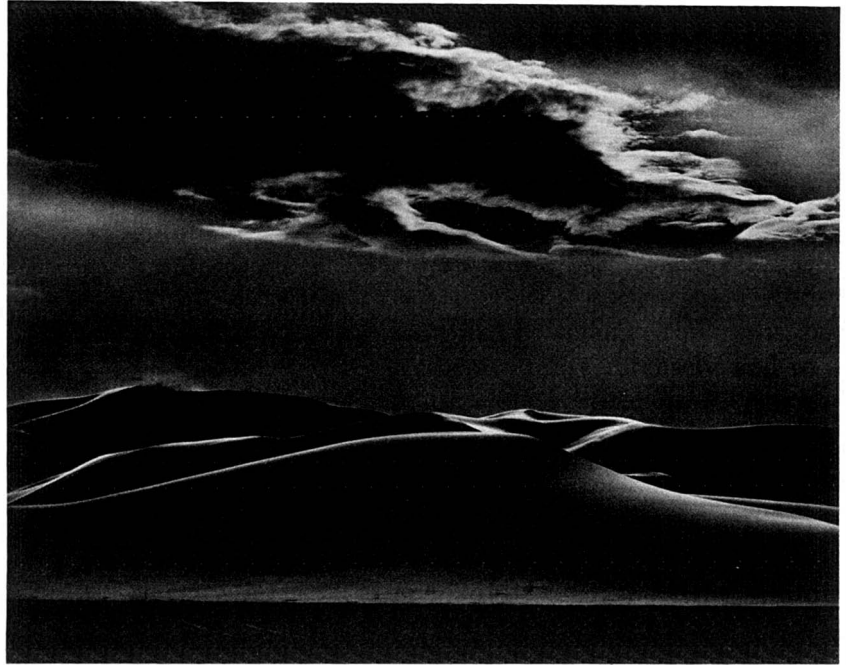
Much more could be said about the joys of such accomplishments, increasing as they do with the magnitude of the reconciliations we are able to bring into being. But there is also another side to things, one which can accompany or alternate with the new sense of progress. At first, one's contact with the transpersonal is necessarily imperfect, and therefore can generate difficulties of various kinds. Sometimes a transpersonal vision may be powerful and seem complete when it occurs, but later turn out to be lacking some all-important aspect, or be very difficult to interpret in practical terms. At other times, the vision may simply begin to fade and become more and more remote without one's knowing how to recapture it. In other cases, rather than a sudden and full picture, one may have received only a sequence of faint hunches, flashes of insight, glimpses that appear sporadically over a considerable period of time, so that one can barely recognize or grasp them. Or still again, a sense of joy, harmony or love may pervade one and lift him so he can see life as more than the problems, the struggles, the doubts of his everyday existence. But then gradually this exalted state may fade, and things *apparently* revert to just what they were before – with an added sense of loss.

It is generally realized that these periods of darkness, of aridity, doubt and uncertainty are common phases of spiritual unfoldment. But what often is not understood is that they are valuable and necessary to our development. In fact they are brought about, in many cases, by the Transpersonal Self in order to facilitate the eventual fusion between our personal and transpersonal natures.

This is an important insight, because all too often our tendency is to feel that such withdrawal of energy is unnatural and therefore must be a punishment for, or at least the consequence of, our having failed in some way. This can cause us to search – sometimes frantically – for the mistake we need to correct. These difficult

### The ebb and flow of our inner life

phases may in fact be the result of wrong action — or of failing to act on what we know is right — and identifying the cause and correcting the situation will then usually reestablish our super-conscious connection. But at least as often, periods of darkness are normal phases of growth — analogous to the natural cycles of day and night. If we can recognize them as such, we will see that they



are useful opportunities, and will be able to use them most effectively and also, in many cases, shorten their duration. While the specific purpose of such periods is unique in each situation, three common patterns are worth mentioning.

### A stable orientation

In the early stages of transpersonal contact, the withdrawal of energy often serves as motivation for the individual *to reorient his personality* more firmly and decisively toward the transpersonal realm. When, after his first awakening, the individual is thrown back on his own resources, he may understandably find himself unsure of his future direction. He may distrust his earlier more self-centered or socially determined habits and impulses, without yet knowing which behavior would be more in line with his new perspective. He may be afraid to use his personality, his old powers, in case what he uses them for be inadequate or even contrary to his vision. He may even experience guilt at not know-

ing what to do.\* It will become apparent to him before too long that he needs, with enduring determination, to seek and apply the best available means of contact with the transpersonal. His personality can then be increasingly guided and transformed, as the light of what the transpersonal reveals becomes a steadier source of direction for him.\*\*

Refining  
our higher  
sensitivity

Later, once this transformation is well underway, the purpose of periods of aridity is often to *increase the sensitivity* of the personality to transpersonal intimations. This the Self does, not by remaining completely silent, but rather by “whispering,” by sending us insights or hunches that appear when we least expect them, and that are barely above our “hearing threshold.” This leads us to pay closer attention, and develop an increasingly keen sense for such messages as we “hold still” trying to hear them.



Finally, especially in the more advanced stages of development, an already well-established contact with the transpersonal may disappear altogether – sometimes gradually over a long period of time, sometimes suddenly at a crucial moment. When we need to act in such a situation, we have to depend only on our personality, without being able to tap the higher sources we had become accustomed to rely on. We need then to draw on our past experience, and on our best understanding of what we have already learned about the transpersonal realm. Fundamentally, it is a matter of asking, “If I were to face this situation with the benefit of the wisdom and love of the Higher Self, what would I do?” and of acting as much as we are able, in such a way. The purpose here is *the re-orientation and eventually the unification of the personal will with*

Alone  
but not alone

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\*Assagioli discusses in depth the reactions to spiritual awakening and methods for dealing with them in his article “Self-realization and Psychological Disturbances.” See pp. 148-171, this issue.

\*\*Practical methods for this purpose are considered below, pp. 116-144 and will be further elaborated in forthcoming issues. [ed.]

*the Transpersonal Will.* \* This unification is a culmination of the process of Self-realization – a process which began with the reorientation of the personality toward the superconscious.

\* \* \*

## Part Two

### THE TRANSPERSONAL DIMENSION

Experiencing  
our higher  
humanity

The reorientation that saved Tolstoy from his “moral deathbed” is a dramatic example of one person’s encounter with the transpersonal. It should not be thought, however, that transpersonal experiences are only the results of life crises, of pain and struggle, or that they are reserved to the exceptional few – great artists, scientists or religious figures. In actual fact, experience of the transpersonal dimension is nothing exotic or unusual. It is a characteristic part of being human.

Recently, social scientists McCready and Greely conducted a research study on mystical experiences in which they interviewed 1400 persons chosen as a representative sample of the population in the United States.<sup>6</sup> To a key question, “Have you ever felt as though you were close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?,” as many as thirty-five percent replied “yes.” Of these, half also indicated that such experiences had occurred “several times” or “often.” Almost as many said that they had experienced “feelings of peace, a certainty that all things would work out for the good, a sense of need to contribute to others, a conviction that love is at the center of everything, and a sense of joy and laughter.” Twenty-nine percent also stated that during their experience they had “a sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it.”

Their findings, which are consistent with those of a recent Gallup Poll,<sup>7</sup> are of considerable interest because of the quantitative, statistical approach taken in researching these experiences, and because the study is based on a large cross-sectional sample of the

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\*See Assagioli’s *Act of Will*, pp. 106-131.

Widespread  
similarities

American population as a whole.\* It is also significant that the people surveyed described their experiences in ways that were similar to the autobiographical accounts of many great spiritual figures.

Description of Transpersonal Experience	Percent of those reporting experience
"A feeling of deep and profound peace"	55
"A certainty that all things would work out for the good"	48
"Sense of my own need to contribute to others"	43
"A conviction that love is at the center of everything"	43
"Sense of joy and laughter"	43
"A great increase in my understanding and knowledge"	32
"A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it"	29
"A sense of a new life or living in a new world"	27
"A confidence in my own personal survival"	27
"The sense that all the universe is alive"	25
"A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical"	22
"A sensation of warmth or fire"	22
"A sense that I was being bathed in light"	14

The following report of one woman's peak experience shares many of these characteristics:



I was sitting quietly in the kitchen after getting the kids off to school. I was alone in the house and in the quiet I began thinking about my life, where I was now, and where I was going. Gradually, I began seeing my life as one flow, a flow which was only one stream in the larger flow of life in the universe. Suddenly I was unexpectedly overwhelmed by an intense feeling of joy; I felt intensely alive and saw my life filled with meaning and direction. Mixed with the joy was a deep love—a love for my life, my family, and a love for humanity as a whole with its struggles to grow and change. I felt that all of us were moving toward this joy and love.

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\*There have been many other studies of transpersonal experiences from the point of view of the psychology of the normal individual. This tradition in psychology, which goes back as far as Richard Bucke<sup>8</sup> was carried forward by William James,<sup>9</sup> Roberto Assagioli, Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, and others. A good description of the characteristics of transpersonal experiences by Maslow is to be found in his previously cited article "Various Meanings of Transcendence."<sup>10</sup>



Clearly, during her experience she moved into a state of consciousness beyond her everyday awareness, in which she saw deep meaning not only in her own life, but in the life of humanity as well. The experience was indeed *transpersonal*; in it she transcended her normal identifications, saw her connection to a larger system of life, and a deep sense of love and joy arose from feeling this connection.

Many expressions  
of one reality

The orientation toward the transpersonal may begin in different ways and at different times. The various periods of life — childhood, adolescence, and adulthood — all have typical patterns of transpersonal activity that are well-known, although not often recognized for what they are.

That the child is often a “philosopher” has been observed by such widely disparate figures as Piaget and Wordsworth. Wordsworth’s description is classic:

Thou best philosopher . . . Seer blest!  
On whom those truths do rest  
Which we are toiling all our lives to find . . .<sup>11</sup>

A child’s intense curiosity and wonder about life as he sees his first snowfall or takes apart a flower are often examples of natural

Innocence  
and depth

early interest in the transpersonal dimension. Even a very young child may sometimes seem the true philosopher, delving into the meaning of things, the nature of birth, death, space and time. An example was shared by a mother whose five year old son came home from school one afternoon, dropped his jacket and lunch box



on the kitchen table and asked, “Is there anything to eat?” She gave him some cookies and as he finished eating, he very matter-of-factly asked, “How did *all this* begin . . . I wonder if it will ever end!” And then in the next breath said, “See you later, Mom, I’m going out to play.” And he was up and gone almost as quickly as he had mused about the nature of the universe.

Spiritual orientations also frequently arise during adolescence,

The quest  
for understanding  
and meaning

as a teenager becomes increasingly interested in the meaning and possibilities of life. His interest may be kindled while experiencing an expansive and joyous wave of feelings, or when faced with a life situation or a philosophical question that he thought he knew the answer to but found he really didn't. He may become aware, sometimes acutely, of the confusion, pain and disorder in the larger world. He realizes more and more that the answers he had been given are no longer always right, or not always right for him. So now he must find new answers. He may seek out parents, teachers, friends, and others he trusts, to guide him and help him understand these mysteries. If his experiences and questions are treated seriously and with respect, his interest will be nurtured and grow. Then the emergence of his higher values and ideals can occur smoothly, and as his transpersonal nature develops, he can more easily integrate it with his personality. Too often, though, his questioning is responded to with embarrassment, condescension or even ridicule. When this is the case, he will feel that it is better not to bring up such concerns, and may keep to himself or even repress this whole area of his life.

Converging  
orientations

Transpersonal awareness in adults emerges in different ways and at different times. It is important to realize that the spiritual quest is not always along traditionally religious lines. A physicist may search for meaning by attempting to unlock the mysteries of matter, time and space; a biologist the inner workings of life and evolution; an artist the experience of transcendent beauty; a historian the underlying patterns and forces which have determined the development of mankind; a dancer the more profound rhythms of life; a psychologist the true nature of consciousness. In many cases, after a long process that builds up in the unconscious, spiritual realizations arise spontaneously as peak experiences.

It is also not unusual for transpersonal interests to be kindled by a serious disruption in a person's life, one that compels him to disidentify from much that he was attached to. A divorce, an accident, a natural disaster may shake apart so much that seemed stable and certain, that one is forced to ask, "If this can change, then what is it all resting on? What, if anything, can I be sure of?" Similarly, experiences through which a person comes close to his own death will cause him to question the significance of his life and to look for answers beyond himself.

In general, transpersonal experiences have a reality about them which seems deeper than our normal day-to-day existence. They

Reinforcing  
the connection

carry an intrinsic validity — a noetic quality — and convey a broadened sense of meaning and values. \*

On the other hand, it is well-known that the transpersonal dimension is a subtle one. Our connection to it can be tenuous at first, and may have to be nurtured and deliberately strengthened. We can do this by first learning to *recognize* such experiences when they occur, then exploring the experience, whether through meditation, introspection, or other means, and finally, as we have said, by *integrating* the experience, by *expressing* in our life and activities what it brought us.

## THE PATH OF TRANSCENDENCE

When people turn to pursue their search for meaning along the transpersonal dimension, the results will vary greatly. For some the

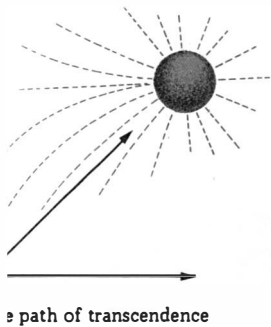
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\*Simultaneously with this sense of greater reality may come a seemingly paradoxical sense that one cannot possibly speak about the experience, that words fall short and can only point to the understanding. William James described this as the *ineffable* quality of the spiritual dimension. A word of clarification on this point is needed. Many of the greatest mystics agree that experiences that reach a certain level — that of the Transpersonal Self — are suprarational, above the level of the mind (see *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 43n), and therefore impossible to communicate in words or even to conceptualize correctly.

Expansion  
of our awareness

But this fact has been confused with another phenomenon — the difficulty or the inability to describe, *at first*, transpersonal experiences which are well within the reach of our cognitive ability, but which by their very nature expand our awareness, perhaps for the first time, into new regions of our mind. In such situations we feel unable to describe or even conceptualize an experience not because it is ineffable in essence, but simply because we do not yet have at our command the symbols, concepts and words needed to first interpret and then express it. Many people report, for example, that they have had an experience which seemed to them completely indescribable, only to later find it beautifully described in someone else's writing — whether poet, psychologist, mystic, or physicist. This question of relative versus absolute ineffability is a complex one. It has been considered in detail by Charles Muses<sup>12</sup> who goes as far as affirming that no experience is ineffable in an absolute sense. From a practical point of view, the act of conceptualizing and expressing our transpersonal experiences is of great value, as a most effective means of facilitating further experiences, of increasing our working understanding of the spiritual dimension, and of developing the higher, more inclusive regions of our mind. (See "Keeping a Psychological Journal," *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 110.)

attempt is slow and laborious. For others the process moves quickly and spontaneously. Whatever the rate of progress, many people sooner or later go through a phase where they are able, for a time, to have increasingly frequent transpersonal experiences with decreasing effort.



But because these experiences of transcendence are so fascinating, gratifying, even ecstatic, some people are gradually drawn more and more toward them, and may in the process turn away from their personality development and participation in the world. By comparison, the world and one's personal existence in it may begin to look drab, ugly, even unreal. If at this point the individual's personality is not sufficiently integrated, he may tend to increasingly neglect everyday life and activity. Eventually he may come to ignore his personality and its further integration altogether.

This of course tends to further increase the imbalance between personal and transpersonal development. His whole life may become devoted to penetrating into more and more exalted super-conscious levels. In his attempts, such a person will often find that he can best further his climb along the vertical dimension by utilizing *one specific aspect* of his personality — usually the one he is most identified with. If, for example, that aspect is his feeling nature — as is often the case — he will work single-mindedly on purifying, transmuting and harmonizing his feelings, and focusing them upwards towards the transpersonal. This is an approach which has been successfully used by the mystics of all cultures — and it can, indeed, result in ecstatic experiences of great power and meaning.

**Drawbacks  
of excessive  
specialization**

In general, working for a time primarily on purifying, transmuting and harmonizing the feeling nature can be a valuable phase in the growth of almost anyone. But to more easily accomplish this, an individual may also push the other aspects of his personality — such as his physical needs, sexual drive or intellectual curiosity — out of the way, ignoring them, quieting them, or even forcibly repressing and “starving” them. The integration of the personality may then come to a stop — or may even regress. The mistaken assumption behind such a course of action is that if one can experience the transpersonal intensely enough, he will be able to maintain that state indefinitely, and live all his life in the higher consciousness thus achieved.



Elusive  
goal

One young man reported his difficulties in pursuing this exclusively vertical direction. He had a peak experience in which, he said, he perceived a transcendent goal, an ultimate reality, a point of consummation toward which he was moving. As he felt he was on the verge of becoming one with it, it eluded his grasp. Afterward, he was filled with reverence and longing for that vision. He felt enriched by it — was a more complete human being for the experience. He also had a strong sense that if he could only have “another experience like that,” he would actually achieve union with that transcendent focus, he would *become* it and be completely and permanently transformed. In fact, after strenuously following various spiritual disciplines, he eventually did have another experience where, in his words, he “went much higher” than in the first one. But still he was unable to fully bridge the gap between himself and that transcendent focus. He pondered his disappointment and took stock of what had been gained. The sense that one more such experience would lead to a permanent unification was even stronger in him. However, when the third experience at last occurred, despite the fact that “its beauty and power were far beyond” the previous one, the final consummation that had appeared “almost within reach” was not any closer than at the beginning.

He realized then that no matter how much further he might go, and no matter how vividly he might see the grandeur of the universe, he would never “get there” in this way, never achieve the state of being he sought. As he recognized he was making no real progress toward the goal he had set himself, he entered a deep crisis, finding it unbearable that what he saw as the ultimate reality seemed to be forever beyond his grasp.

This kind of experience — the futility of trying to achieve transcendent unity by leaving behind the everyday — is not uncommon. It is as if one sees an image, a reflection of the Self and moves directly toward that, not realizing that it is a reflection, that the real state of unity inherent in the Transpersonal Self, and the joy, the serenity it brings about, must necessarily include the integration of what one is trying to leave behind.

Some people who pursue the path of pure transcendence can be, temporarily, more successful than the young man we have just described. They may be fortunate enough to actually bridge the gap and have the experience of unity with the Transpersonal Self. But when the unity is achieved in this way, the experience is only

a transient one, and is inevitably followed by the same profound and painful sense of loss. Assagioli points out that "one cannot go to the Goal directly, except momentarily. In a moment of ecstasy, it can be done. But one must distinguish between mountain climbing and airplane flights. You can fly to the top, but you cannot remain always on the airplane, you have to go down. The flight



The need  
for a solid  
foundation

is very useful in order to show you the reality of the mountain-top, inasmuch as there are clouds and mists which prevent one from seeing it from the plain. One also sees the road better, the different steps, and so on. But eventually one has to come down, and go through the laborious process of gradual, organic development, of real conquest."<sup>13</sup>

If one persists exclusively along the path of pure transcendence, the increasing awareness of what appears to be an unbridgeable gulf between oneself and the transcendent goal will lead to the *crisis of duality*.

#### THE CRISIS OF DUALITY

Like every other crisis, once correctly understood, the crisis of duality is fundamentally an opportunity for growth. The one-

## A natural reorientation

sided, single-minded focus along the path of transcendence that leads to it can be a necessary, appropriate and even important phase of development. But sooner or later, the inevitable pull of nature to reestablish balance will require the shift of one's orientation to include the personal dimension as well.

The first sign that one is entering the crisis of duality is an ever-increasing difficulty in proceeding further along the vertical dimension. The difficulty, and the ensuing realization of the need to include the personal dimension, can be experienced in a number of different ways. One we have seen—the young man who could never quite achieve the experience of unity with the transcendent. Others report that eventually their higher experiences stop happening, and after a period of depression they realize both the necessity and the wisdom of accepting their personality and the world in which they find themselves. After this acceptance, contact with the superconscious gradually returns.



## Recognizing our fullest humanity

Other people experience that, beyond a certain point, the way is barred as long as they tread it alone. Yet others see the way to be wide open before them, but out of a powerful, deepening love and compassion for humanity and its suffering, freely make the choice to turn back toward the world and help others in their own journeys. Still other people, by proceeding in this direction, recognize that the transcendent unity toward which they are yearning is the culmination of a process of unification in which *all* mankind participates. So they see that without “getting there” all together, getting there has no meaning. Attempting to reach and maintain this unity by oneself is seen to be not only a

practical impossibility, but a contradiction in terms.\*

Another experience of reorientation — one that is perhaps most characteristic, that gives the best insight into the nature of the reorientation itself — has been reported by a mystic who had reached great purity in his love and devotion. The more he gave his love to God, the more that love brought him nearer to Him. One day, as he was projecting his love upwards, he heard God explain, with great gentleness, that in fact He was the Source of Love, and the mystic was actually receiving it from Him and reflecting it back. So He did not need the mystic's love, but humanity did. And now that he had learned to receive it so well, God said, it was time for him to learn also to *transmit* it to other human beings — to give it to those who were further away from it, or not yet able to reach for it directly themselves.

A new  
direction

#### AFTER THE CRISIS OF DUALITY

Once having made the decision to reorient his life to include the personal dimension, the individual typically encounters a number of problems and opportunities.

After making significant progress in exploring the trans-personal realm, he has now turned to the task of expressing his vision in the world. Full of that vision of the way things could be, he may approach the task of transforming the world with great confidence and enthusiasm, assuming 1) that he can do it alone and 2) that he can do it this week. At first, he may believe that all he needs to do is tell others what he has seen of the right way to do things, and they will speedily and gratefully follow. When they do not respond, he may begin to become more zealous,

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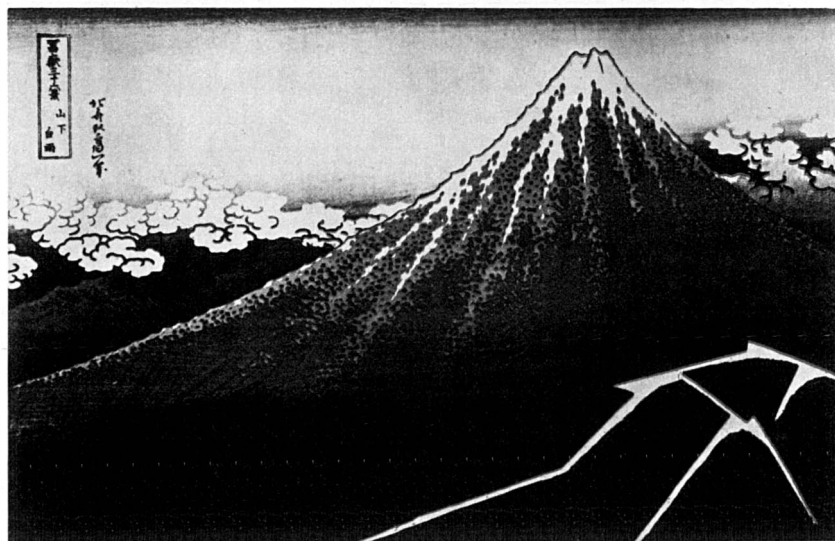
\*There is a fascinating paradox involved here. Because the Higher Self is in fact our true being, and transcends normal time and space, there is a sense in which "we are there" already and eternally. From this very high point of view there is nothing to seek, nowhere to go. There is, however, the gradual process of *becoming aware* of who we really are — and of *learning to act* accordingly. The apparent paradox is resolved by distinguishing between what in philosophical terms can be called "life" and "consciousness": what *is*, and our *awareness* of it. The process of reaching toward the Self is thus a very real one: one that involves the expanding of our consciousness to become increasingly aware of that which eternally is.



assailing and haranguing them. With the best of motives, he may even get angry, take a militant approach, and proselytize to the point of fanaticism. Clearly, if he is to make progress and be effective, he must accept that the world is slower and more resistant in responding to his vision and ideals than he had expected.

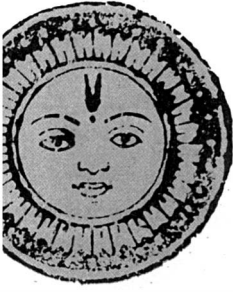
A sense  
of proportion  
is essential

This naive expectation is most often due to the lack of a working *sense of proportion*. A good sense of proportion is always important, but at a certain point in our lives it becomes essential. It derives from such factors as a clear sense of values, an understanding of the relationship between causes and effects, a recognition of the various patterns and levels of organization, and a sense for the meaning of the various trends and processes that are emerging in ourselves and in the world. Developing a working sense of proportion is as essential to expressing our vision effectively as knowing the scale factor of a map is to the successful completion of a traveller's journey.



Learning to read  
our inner maps

The parallel is important because from one important point of view, transpersonal experiences often are *visions of a map, plan, or "ideal model"* and not of the actual territory that needs to be traversed. This fact often goes unrecognized, however, because transpersonal visions can be so vivid, immediate and all-engrossing that they are likely to be experienced as much more real than "ordinary reality". Here again is the underlying paradox: what we experience may in fact exist *now* in the transpersonal dimension, although it may be only an ideal, a *potential*, in the dimension of



Intense  
but naive  
idealism

daily life. So at first we may not perceive correctly the proportion between the *experience* of the vision (the map) and the scope of its *expression* and implementation in the world (the territory). For example, one may suddenly have the direct and powerful experience of love as the sustaining and unifying principle in the universe, together with the clear, intense, and quite accurate perception that in order to cure the ills of the world what we need to do is to "be more loving." But then as a result one may expect to make this happen simply by telling everybody to do it.

Unfortunately, as has been repeatedly shown, this won't work. Expressing a transpersonal vision requires considerable skill and experience, as well as a well-integrated personality. So it is understandable that people who have focused their attention mainly toward the transpersonal are especially prone to such difficulties. This is the case with many idealistic people, and tends also to be a common pattern in the young. Often young people have not yet had the chance to develop through life experience the needed sense of proportion, the inner resources and the necessary worldly skills. At the same time, they have an intense idealism, which often has its roots in a great sensitivity to the transpersonal: a sensitivity that gives them a strong feeling for the potential richness and beauty of human life, but at the same time the acute and often painful realization that this potential is not yet being actualized. One young man expressed his dilemma by saying: "How can I know beyond any doubt that I am one with the Universe and still get uptight talking to my mother on the phone!"

So it is important to recognize the need to cultivate a sense of proportion and *patience*, and then set about the task of actualizing one's vision in a realistic and effective way.

As our sense of proportion develops, we become better able to see that many needed changes are already taking place, that the world *is* evolving, and that there are many forces at work for positive transformation. One woman, deeply impatient with the world, had an imaginary dialogue with it. The world told her, "You don't need to feel responsible for solving *all* my problems — I'm already working on my problems — but I could use your help." In examining the world from this perspective, one can get a clearer sense both for the positive trends that are already occurring and for the further steps that are needed. Then one may see how he can contribute to this process and what changes he needs to make in himself in order to make that contribution possible. Thus the individual

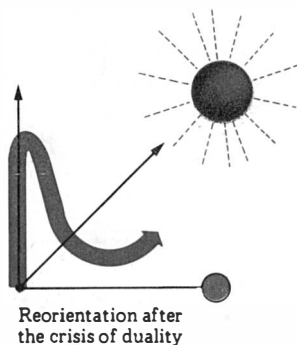
Making  
a realistic  
contribution

A gradual  
process

who becomes filled with a love for mankind, or who has clearly seen that all people need to become more loving, may discover that it takes considerable examination of the nature of love, and many changes in his own life for him to actually become more loving himself. For example, he may discover that he needs to overcome his fear of loving and being loved, and choose to do work on personality patterns developed in childhood. Clearly, *experiencing* love in a peak experience is very different from making one's personality and life an *expression* of love.

To take another example, the person who has a vivid insight into what society would be like if it recognized our deeper humanness, may see the need to improve our social structures. In looking carefully, he may see that one of the things needed is a more positive approach to the development of the human being. He might then decide that if children were raised with their higher potential in mind, many of the ills in society would fall away, as we produce healthier human beings. Understanding now the scope and the complexity of the task of actualizing his insight, he might start by searching out the best of what is already known in psychology and education, and begin to develop his own understanding and knowledge with which to create a better educational approach.

By developing a realistic plan in this way, the person who had been oriented toward the transpersonal dimension moves closer to making his vision happen. While taking time to balance transpersonal growth with personal development may seem, at first, to be a sacrifice of the glories of transcendent experience, as the needed personality functions and skills are gradually developed and the vision begins to become a reality, one will gain access to vaster reaches of the transpersonal than ever before, as well as an increased communion with his fellows and a sense of lived, personal participation in the evolution of the larger whole.



Towards  
synthesis

## THE DYNAMICS OF OUR HIGHER ENERGIES

As we have seen, no matter which path we have been following, sooner or later we experience a compelling pull to include both the personal and the transpersonal dimensions of meaning—the horizontal and the vertical, self-actualization *and* transcendence. Adopting such a fully integrated approach to living, encompassing both dimensions and uniting them in one's life, is nothing less than

reaching toward Self-realization. To best proceed along this new, most inclusive path we will need to comprehend the underlying relationships between the personal and the transpersonal aspects of our nature.

Energy:  
the unifying  
principle

Major psychological thinkers from Kurt Lewin to Sigmund Freud have repeatedly pointed out that all psychological relationships are fundamentally energetic in character. Thus the fundamental interaction between the personal and the transpersonal can itself be best understood dynamically, in terms of energy. Let us consider in some detail the phases of superconscious energy flow through our personality, and the means by which that energy can be enhanced, enabling us to move toward Self-realization.



*Self-actualization* — growth along the horizontal dimension — consists essentially in coordinating and integrating the energies of the personality, and in the emergence of a strong self-identity, or “I,” capable of effectively expressing those energies.

*Transcendence* — progress along the vertical dimension — consists primarily in reaching for the energies of the superconscious, which then flow into, and pervade, the personality.

Growth toward *Self-realization*, then, occurs as the personality becomes both well-integrated in itself, and in harmony with the

A bridge between  
two worlds

transpersonal, therefore *capable at the same time of receiving the superconscious energies, and expressing them in action.*\*

Development along the path of Self-realization is a process full of adventure and joy, one which results in a continuous, unimpeded flow of higher energies *through* the personality and into the world. This has been recognized from earliest times as the developmental goal of the human personality. It is implicit in the etymological meaning of the word “personality” itself, which goes back at least as far as the masks of ancient Greek drama. It derives from *per-sona* — “to sound through” — thus implying the flowing through the personality of a more essential, or higher energy.

To follow the path of Self-realization, then, it can be seen that we have three fundamental tasks:

I. *To eliminate the obstacles within our personality* so that the transpersonal energy can flow through more freely and without distortions.

II. *To reorient our personality patterns and habits* in harmony with the superconscious, so as to reach upward and increase the flow of the energy that can be received.

III. *To develop the needed channels and skills* by means of which the energy can be harmoniously expressed.

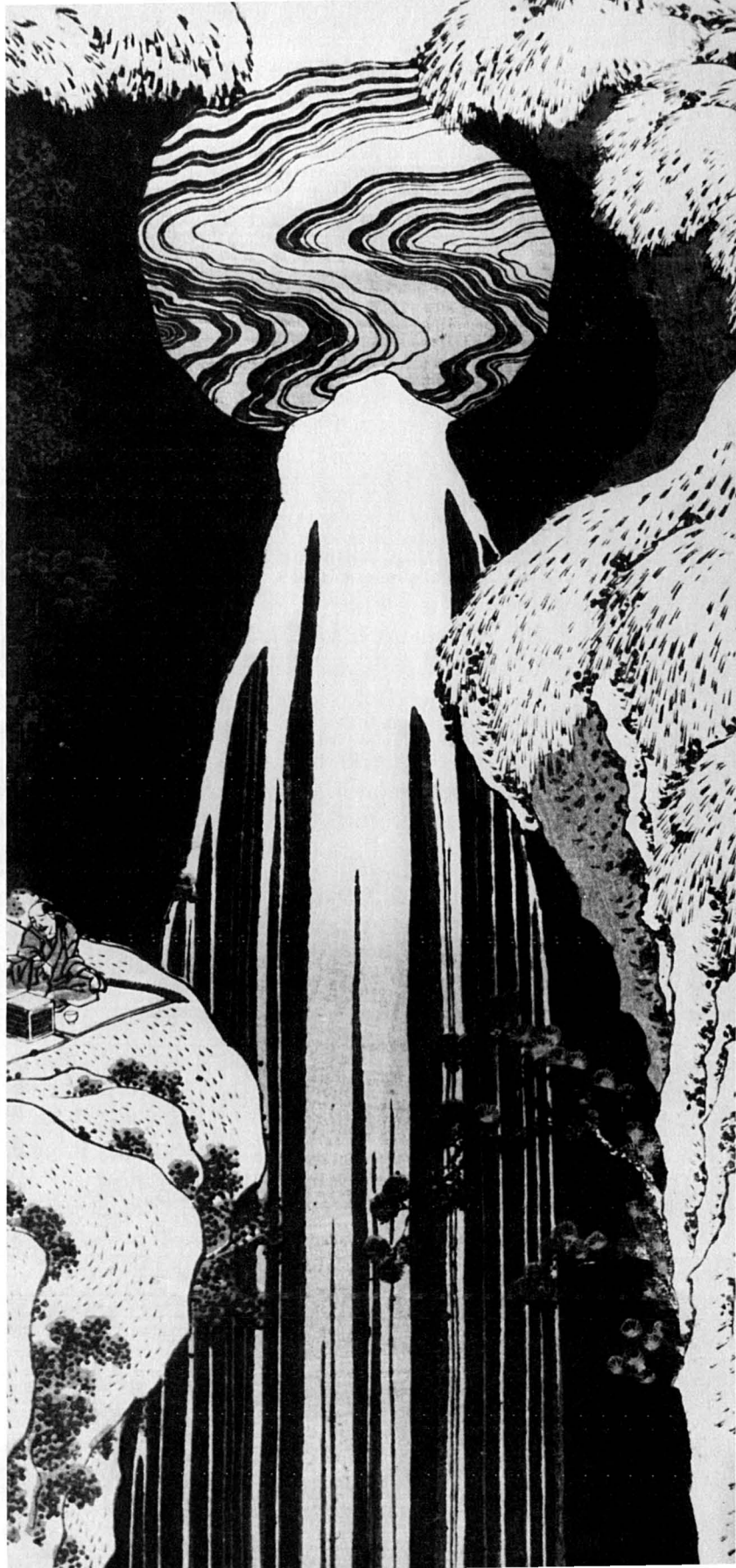
## ELIMINATING THE OBSTACLES

Superconscious  
processes

The energies of our higher nature, such as love, joy, compassion or serenity, are always present, and are continually being generated in our superconscious. However when they first begin to flow toward our personality, they are often stopped from reaching it by psychological “blocks” of various kinds. So they remain in our superconscious, where they steadily build up and form actual *reservoirs of accumulated energy*. As time goes by these energies will slowly but, happily for us, inevitably, increase

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\*Parallel to this transformation of the personality is a growing intensification of the “I,” and its gradual disidentification from the personality itself. This, in turn, leads to the experience and recognition of one’s personal will as distinct — and free — from the often separative desires and urges inherent in the personality. This process of increasing inner freedom culminates as one achieves the capability of aligning one’s *personal* will with the *transpersonal* will — the will of the Higher Self.



their *potential*, and thus their pressure against the obstacles that are in their way.

## The nature of peak experiences

As the accumulated energy increases, it may *gradually* surmount an obstacle, just as a mountain lake fed by a spring will gradually rise, overflow its boundaries, and flow onward into the valley below. On the other hand, an obstacle to the flow of superconscious energy may be removed suddenly by the mounting pressure of the superconscious energy sweeping it away. Such a *breakthrough* can also be produced by a life experience, the action of a therapist, or some initiative of our own. In such a case, a sudden and greatly intensified flow into the personality occurs, until the accumulated energy is spent. These abrupt eruptions of energy constitute the “peak experiences” described by Maslow and others. It has been repeatedly observed that peak experiences often occur spontaneously after a catharsis or other psychological breakthrough by which a personality “block” is removed. And after the accumulated energy is released, the *decreasing* flow that inevitably follows is often experienced as the depression, or “let down” known to frequently occur after a peak experience. It is interesting to observe that many times peak experiences following this pattern occur even though the person involved has no expectation of them, and even no belief in, or knowledge of the transpersonal dimension.\*

## Common obstacles

But what are the obstacles to the flow of superconscious energy? They can be the problems and difficulties dealt with in psychotherapy (fear, doubt, shame, guilt, a sense of inferiority, and other complexes, phobias, undesirable patterns, or such larger formations as subpersonalities at certain stages of their development). Or they may be the barriers to spiritual experience which are commonly defined in many religious and ethical traditions (for example pride, anger, sloth and the like in Christianity, or the “fetters and hindrances” in Buddhism, and so on).

These patterns and traits can be conceived of as organized structures in our personality which resist the flow of higher energy. Rather than transmitting the energy in its original form, they *absorb* it and break it down into “lower” forms. For example, an

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\*A belief *against* the existence of the transpersonal dimension, however, does in itself form a serious obstacle to the inflow of superconscious energy, and thus can inhibit peak experiences. Consequently, the importance of an open-minded attitude when exploring the transpersonal dimension can not be overstressed.

Higher  
and lower  
energies

inferiority complex can absorb and transform the superconscious energy of love into feelings of possessiveness.

Causes  
of pain

This *de-gradation* of energy has many well-known counterparts in the physical world.\* If, for instance, the plug of a heavy electric appliance is poorly connected to its wires, it will warm up, sometimes considerably, as some of the electricity flowing through it is absorbed and transformed into heat. To use another such example, the food inside a microwave oven absorbs electromagnetic energy and so becomes hot, while the oven walls, being metallic and good conductors, present little resistance to the energy flowing through them, and remain relatively cool. In our personality, the process analogous to this “heating up” is usually experienced as *pain*, in one of its many forms. Often, through this pain we gain an *enhanced awareness* of the undesirable habit pattern or other trait which absorbed the energy, and which therefore needs to be changed or eliminated.\*\*

Preparing  
the way

A growing awareness of undesirable traits to be corrected is often a first sign that superconscious energy is beginning to flow into the personality. If we do not take adequate steps to correct such limitations, more and more of these higher energies will be absorbed and transmuted into painful “lower” feelings, for example shame or guilt. Such feelings of inadequacy, sometimes developing to an acute stage, are frequently reported by many people as having preceded some of their most important spiritual experiences. Often, as the intensity of these negative feelings grows, it forces us to mobilize our resources and eliminate the undesirable patterns from which the feelings originate. But even if we are unable or unwilling to do what is needed, the process of eliminating obstacles can continue, and be achieved in another way. As the “heat” continues to increase, it eventually can reach the point of a real *burning away* of the obstacle – the actual breaking down of the pattern. Interestingly enough, the symbols of “purifying fire,” the “burning

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\*It can be seen to be the psychological counterpart of the principle of entropy expressed by the second law of thermodynamics, according to which physical energies are transformed into heat under the effect of friction.

\*\*Psychologically, energy degradation has its converse in the process of the sublimation of energies. (See Roberto Assagioli, *The Act of Will*, pp. 62-65.) Thus, while degradation is entropic, sublimation is anti-entropic, or syntropic, (see *SYNTHESIS I*, p. 12 and 18n).



### Metaphors and reality

ground,” and other beneficial aspects of fire in general, are very common in certain kinds of transpersonal experiences and in much mystical literature. And in alchemy, fire itself is a fundamental principle of transmutation and sublimation. Spiritual “fire” can thus be considered not only as a metaphor but also as a psychological reality, a true correspondence to the physical process of combustion.

It should be pointed out that we experience this process as painful only as long as we are either unaware of the undesirable pattern needing to be changed, or psychologically identified with that pattern. Thus psychological pain is often simply an alarm bell, a means of capturing our attention, a warning that all is not well and that creative action of some kind is needed. Once we recognize the cause of the pain, succeed in disidentifying from its source, and cooperate with the forces within us which aim at remedying the situation, then the same process is experienced as liberating, uplifting and joyful.



### Understanding and transcending pain

## REORIENTING OUR PERSONALITY

We have seen how energy accumulates in the superconscious when its flow is impeded by obstacles. The amount of energy that is stored, and the ways it can be released by removing the obstacles, differ for different individuals. Two factors are important: the extent to which the Transpersonal Self turns its attention “downward” toward the personality thus directing more superconscious energy toward it, and the extent to which obstacles in the personality resist the flow of that energy.

### A basic interplay

Some thinking will make it clear that when in an individual there is both a strong superconscious influence *and* a highly resistant personality, large amounts of energy will be present – but blocked – within the superconscious. This is in fact the situation for many people in our Western society, at the point when they consciously orient themselves toward spiritual pursuits. Because of obstacles caused by the materialistic influences of our culture, many people

Contemporary  
patterns

will turn to the transpersonal only after considerable pressure has built up within them. This is why techniques to remove obstacles and release blocked energy, and emphasis on catharsis, breakthroughs and peak experiences, have become increasingly widespread and successful in recent years. For many, such approaches have been appropriate first steps in purposeful spiritual development.

But eventually most of the superconscious reservoirs are discovered, and the energies stored in them released. Today, increasing numbers of people have reached this stage. They have had a sequence of breakthroughs and peak experiences which helped them, sometimes considerably, in their growth, but after a few months or years the intensity of such experiences has tapered off. None of the familiar techniques now yields the old results, and gradually the process comes to a halt. What is needed now is to reach beyond the spent reservoirs, to the *actual sources of energy* in the superconscious and increase their flow — while continuing to eliminate new obstacles to that flow as they become apparent.

A new approach  
is needed

One now enters upon a new mode of development, one that will tend to be less dramatic and may *appear* to be more laborious, but which will produce over the long run steadier and more serene progress, and ever more significant and rewarding results.

The difference is due to the special dynamics by which the release of transpersonal energy occurs. Fundamentally, this release is beyond our *direct* control. This is in sharp contrast to the more familiar process of personality growth and self-actualization. Especially in its more advanced stages, personality growth — including the elimination of undesirable patterns — is more and more the direct result of conscious decisions and deliberate action, of which we become increasingly capable as we realize our identity as the “I,” the personal self.\* From the vantage point of the “I,” we see a personality pattern that needs to be changed, and can then take direct action to make that change.

Transpersonal unfoldment is different. While we can do much to deliberately facilitate the superconscious energy flow and to maximize its beneficial effects *once it has been released*, the

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\*The functions of the “I” in regulating and promoting the growth of the personality are more fully discussed in Betsie Carter-Haar, “Identity and Personal Freedom,” *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 74-81. [ed.]

From active control  
to active trust

release itself is initiated by an act of the Transpersonal Self. This has been recognized in many spiritual traditions, and expressed with such concepts as that of *Grace*. But these concepts have frequently been misinterpreted – despite much experiential evidence and spiritual teaching to the contrary – as representing the action of an unknowable, unpredictable, mysterious and even capricious Source, which *may* bestow upon us its guidance and help, but which we can only wait for hopefully, without being able to influence its action in any significant way. Yet the similarities that cut across the many different types of spiritual experiences and methods of transpersonal unfoldment are a strong indication that the life and processes of the superconscious realm proceed according to universal principles and laws that are reliable and can be increasingly understood and *trusted*, just as is the case with the laws governing the physical world.

Realizing  
our true nature

One of these principles can be stated in this way: *the Transpersonal Self is, in its own high sphere, an Ontological Reality, a center of Being, awareness and will*. It is therefore more than a source of energy: it has intentionality – including the enduring intention to send us the energy we need to grow and evolve. In the deepest sense, *we are that Self*; it is our true nature, although we may not yet experience and live that fact. It is to bring us to this realization, to assist us toward eventual unification with it in consciousness and action that the Self wills us the energy we need.

Accordingly, the problem of how to “convince” the Higher Self to send us its energy is an artificial one. The Self already has the fixed intention to send us superconscious energy, and it will do so just as soon as we are *willing* to receive it and *capable* of using it constructively. So what is needed is to establish the right conditions, the right orientation in our personality – and over this we indeed have much real control. These facts have been repeatedly stated in the major scriptures and by the greatest mystics. In Christianity, for example, it is the fundamental meaning of the affirmation, “Seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, *as the personality orients itself toward the Self with sufficient intensity and focus, the response of the Self inevitably follows*.

Of course, like everything else in nature, the evocation of superconscious energy into the personality is a gradual process, one that proceeds according to the ebb and flow of inner rhythms of maturation. As a consequence, when we consciously and earnestly turn

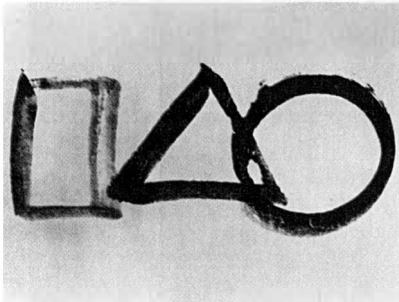


A greater  
wisdom

toward the Self, its response may not follow immediately, and may not be in the form we asked for. But when the response does come, it comes with the benefit of the Self's deep wisdom, and therefore — as many have had occasion to acknowledge after the fact — at the time and in the particular form we most need and would in fact have chosen if we had known enough.

Practical  
techniques

After we have made the decision to reorient ourselves toward the Self, there are many techniques we can use to achieve that goal. Let us consider the principle underlying many of the most common and effective methods: It is to *form in our consciousness patterns that can reverberate to corresponding patterns in the superconscious* and thus “evoke” their energy, and draw it into the personality. Establishing such a reverberation is a primary effect of all useful forms of meditation, prayer and certain types of imaginative techniques.\* A practical example is the technique of “Dialogue with the Higher Self.”\*\* Here the image of the Wise Old Man is a *mental pattern* which, experience has shown, can reverberate to the corresponding energy of loving wisdom in the superconscious. Our desire for the Wise Old Man's answer is emotional energy which radiates through the mental pattern to the superconscious. Our image of the Wise Old Man then becomes capable of being “heard” or “seen” by the Higher Self, which responds appropriately, making the image “alive” with its own energy.



The same reverberation can be set up along primarily cognitive lines, for example by reflecting upon the meaning of certain geometric symbols (three such symbols of profound integrating value are a square, a triangle, and a circle with a point in the center), or on the deeper meaning of suitable abstract words (such as “beauty,” “wisdom,” “universality”), or ideas (“Infinite space is the only space there is,” “Time must have a stop,” “The most incomprehensible fact of Nature is that Nature is comprehensible”).

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\*For an extensive description of how such inner creative acts are based on the formation of mental patterns that can reverberate to superconscious energy fields, see James Vargiu, “Creativity,” pp. 17-53, this issue.

\*\*See *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 122-139. This reverberation is also the basis for “The Blossoming of the Rose” and the “Inner Silence” exercises in this issue. Other practical examples of this process of reverberation are discussed later in this article.

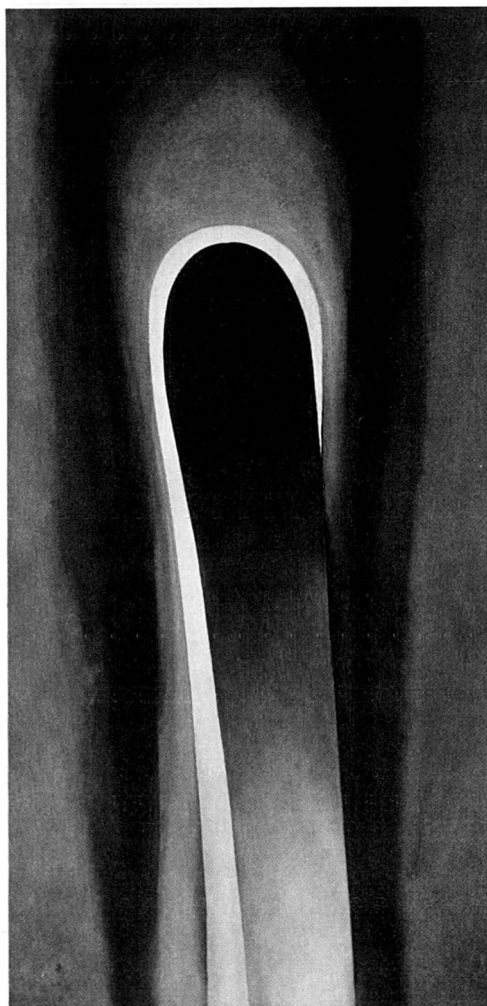
## A beneficent flow

This reverberation becomes a *channel* or path through which superconscious energy can flow. This energy then has an integrating, synthesizing effect. It strives to bring the personality — or that aspect of the personality into which it flows — to a higher level of organization, one that will contain patterns even more responsive to the superconscious energy itself.

The formation of reverberating patterns can also be initiated by our Higher Self. For example, it is well known that transpersonal symbols can emerge spontaneously in our consciousness — at times with dramatic effect. And as we have seen, at the core of the existential crisis is our experience of a spontaneous, impelling urge to find answers to the most basic, most universal questions.

But whether the process appears to be initiated from below, by action of the personality reaching toward the Self, or from above by an impulse of the Self sending its energy toward the personality, the result will be the same: action by one side will evoke the response of the other side, in a two-way interaction which builds upon itself. This leads to a “virtuous circle” through which personality and Higher Self interact more and more with one another, creating a growing reverberation, a path through which the superconscious energy increasingly pervades the personality, as the personality proceeds to reorient itself in harmony with the superconscious.

## Organic interplay



This deeply fulfilling interplay usually begins long before one recognizes it for what it is, although it may be apparent in its early phases to an experienced observer or guide. Much evidence, such as the Greely study discussed earlier, indicates that this profound interaction is in fact present and growing, although still largely unrecognized, in a considerable proportion of the human beings alive today.

Choosing  
our Self

There is also a complementary aspect to this fundamental reorientation. As we turn more and more *toward* the Self, we find that we need also to turn *away*, and disidentify from certain negative personality traits—for example selfishness, or pride—that form patterns incompatible with the flow of superconscious energy. Here a *choice* is required—a choice between two aspects of our nature that may be in conflict with one another. But choosing to align ourselves with the more spiritual aspect does not have to imply the rejection of the other. On the contrary, that choice often gives us the opportunity of transforming it, as we have seen, in such a way that it too can then become a channel for transpersonal energy.

The realization  
of the Self:  
a culmination

As we proceed in the work of reorienting our personality in harmony with our spiritual nature, we face many such conflicts, requiring us to make corresponding choices. Eventually, as we move closer and closer toward Self-realization, all the patterns and tendencies in our personality that remain opposed to the influence of the Self may be experienced as one purposeful, well-organized formation. At this very advanced point, we see that we have the choice to either acquiesce in its urgings, or to deliberately and irrevocably align ourselves with our higher nature. To bring about this culminating alignment we find that we need the help of our Higher Self—a help that we must ask for by drawing on the totality of our resources. In so doing we disidentify fully from those tendencies of our personality that would separate us both from our fellow men and our higher nature. Achieving this consummating act of disidentification—an act of will which is made possible by many earlier efforts and numerous smaller achievements—is the necessary condition which finally enables the Self to reach us with the fullest impact of its energy. As a result we achieve complete identification *as* the Self, and the realization of *Being*. The energy of the Self then pervades the remaining parts of our personality that still oppose it, transforming them, and integrating them with the rest into a harmonious, unified whole which becomes our willing instrument of expression in the world.

## EXPRESSING SUPERCONSCIOUS ENERGIES

The urge  
for a better  
world

Fortunately for us, we do not have to await this culminating transformation in order to express the energy of the superconscious: we can and need to express it as we go. We have seen that enabling such energy to flow *through* the personality is a basic aspect of the entire process of Self-realization. The expression of this energy may often be unconscious at first, in the same way as its reception can be. One of its first visible manifestations is a broadening of our sense of responsibility. Typically, this develops into a rising concern for, and dissatisfaction with, the existing state of things — whether in our environment or our personality — and a growing urge to improve them. This urge for improvement according to the best we know becomes increasingly conscious, taking on greater meaning, and becoming a central purpose of our life. Eventually, it is also recognized to be a central purpose of human and world evolution, of Life itself.\*

In essence, the way we express the energy of the superconscious is by making our *patterns of action* more and more consonant with the new vision and the transpersonal qualities which are becoming a normal part of our conscious existence. As we do so, we gradually transform the patterns of our environment, so that they too become more in tune with the superconscious



energy and better able to receive it. Whether it be the patterns of our relations with those near to us, of the groups to which we belong, or of the social institutions in which we participate, the influence we have on our environment becomes increasingly harmonizing and integrating. This is because *it is intrinsically the same as the influence that the superconscious has on our personality.*

Parallel  
transformations

We are dealing here with two successive phases of the same process: *the flow of energy between two reverberating patterns.* Our perception of this process is primarily from the *receiving* end of the

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\*This universal urge for improvement is beautifully described by Albert Szent-Gyorgyi in "Drive In Living Matter to Perfect Itself," *SYNTHESIS 1*, pp. 14-26.

flow in the first phase (from the superconscious to our personality) and from the *sending* end in the second (from our personality to the world). These two complementary vantage points give us a broader perception and a deeper understanding which has practical usefulness, because many of the principles, dynamics and laws that apply to one phase apply to the other as well.

Let us look at one such correspondence which is especially important. We have seen that if inner obstacles prevent the superconscious energy from reaching the personality, it will accumulate in “reservoirs” within the superconscious. But what happens if the energy is able to reach the personality yet lacks the channels to proceed further? As long as it is not expressed in action – keeping the flow through the personality going – the energy will, once again, accumulate – but this time *within the personality itself*. Eventually, it will create a congestion that will actually prevent further inflow from the superconscious.

A deceptive  
experience

Interestingly, this congestion is often experienced as a state of emptiness and aridity quite similar to the experience of being cut off from the energy source. This is because when we experience energy, what we experience is not so much its intensity as its *rate of flow*. \* And when the personality is congested no energy is flowing through it, *just as when it is cut off*. Understandably, we are then likely to mistakenly interpret the experience of a diminished rate of flow as a *lack* of energy. As a consequence we may seek to draw more energy from our superconscious, while instead what we need to do is to express the energy we have already received.

This important but little recognized fact can help us to understand and work through many common difficulties along the path toward Self-realization. It is a matter of determining whether the main obstacles to the flow of energy are *between the superconscious and the personality* or *between the personality and our environment*. The latter is usually the case when our orientation and the focus of our interest have been, for a considerable time, primarily toward the transpersonal dimension. In fact, the crisis of

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\*This is the case for the awareness of superconscious energies – which represent the majority of people’s transpersonal experiences. The experience of the Transpersonal Self (and of the “I”) on the other hand, is complementary: it relates not to the rate of energy flow, but to its *intensity* or potential. (See also *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 131n).



duality often turns out to be an extreme case of this situation: an acute energy congestion in the personality. As we have seen, it leads to a fundamental reorientation, through which the limitations to the *expression* of energy are recognized and overcome.

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## Part Three

### TOWARD SELF-REALIZATION

Throughout history, mankind has used a very wide range of methods to reach for superconscious energies and facilitate their flow and expression. Among these methods we find the myriad forms of prayer and of meditation; chanting, dancing and rituals; the many types of yoga; fasting, and other ascetic practices and disciplines for the body; purification and sublimation of the emotions; mental training; group experiences and activities; different kinds of psychotherapy and a variety of approaches to action and service to one's fellow men. In older times, such methods were known only to an initiated few, who were also limited by the cultural traditions of their particular society. Today, because of the rapidly growing knowledge in such fields as psychology, sociology, anthropology, history and comparative religion, combined with the modern communications explosion, these techniques are becoming increasingly accessible to every person, and in greater quantity than at any other time in history.

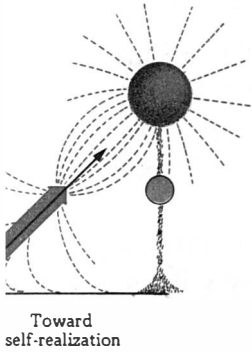
This unprecedented circumstance furnishes us with great richness of opportunity, but also presents its own unique problems. There are many methods, especially those of recent development, that tend to be relatively—or in some cases excessively—specialized, to address only one part of the overall process of Self-realization. Thus they may be very well suited to one's needs during a particular phase of growth, but not during another. Clearly, such techniques can be effective, but only temporarily.\* There is in fact today a growing number of people who have become involved in one meth-

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\*However, if the focus of a method is on shortcuts or quick results for their own sake, it may have dangerous or even harmful side-effects. For example, striving to increase an already adequate inflow of superconscious energy if we have not yet learned to utilize what is available, can be irresponsible and

A growing  
abundance

od of growth after another, often deriving benefits from each, but in each case eventually gaining all the particular method had to offer them, and finding the need to abandon it and look for something else.



To use the many available methods most effectively and according to one's individual need, it is most helpful, as we have seen, to have a basic understanding of one's development in terms of the energetic processes of human growth. A study of the great spiritual traditions and the lives of people who have followed them reveals that the integrative path of Self-realization has always taken into account all phases of the process of energy flow. This is true for example of the Raja Yoga of India, the Eight-Fold Noble Path of Buddhism, and a number of parallel approaches in the Judeo-Christian tradition. All these traditions show that as we proceed along the path of Self-realization we need to avail ourselves, *simultaneously but in various proportions*, according to our point of development, of the three complementary aspects of that path, corresponding to the three fundamental tasks outlined before. These are:

Reaching upward toward the superconscious, through various methods of meditation, visualization and prayer.

Understanding the nature of the superconscious, our personality and our world, so as to be able to increasingly harmonize them with each other.

Service, or the expression of the best we know so as to achieve the greatest good.

Let us examine each of them, and some of their main methods.

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dangerous – even though, because of the inherent synthesizing nature of the higher energies, the results may still turn out to be positive.

There are also popular methods, notably some which focus on the physical body (special diets, taking particular postures, and so on) that can have a useful part to play in *preparing* one's personality to handle superconscious energy, but cannot in themselves get that energy to flow. So these can be useful at the right time, if used in conjunction with other techniques. But by themselves they are eventually sterile, and often lead one either to discouragement, or to the illusion that just because one is making a considerable effort, he must be making progress.

Converging  
aspects

## REACHING UPWARD

Harmonizing  
our feeling  
nature

Prayer is a universal method of reaching upward. Seen psychologically — that is, independently of the validity or non-validity of specific religious beliefs associated with its particular forms — prayer can be described as that inner action in which our feeling function is directed toward our higher nature or, through it, to even higher realities or powers. It is a bringing together of the many divided aspects of our emotional nature, first through desire, then aspiration, affirmation, dedication and gratitude.

Consequently, prayer has a *harmonizing* and *transmuting effect* on our feelings. Whether or not in our prayers there is the conscious desire that we will obtain something or that it may “descend” on ourselves or others, the upward projection of our feelings has the effect of “lifting” our center of consciousness in some measure onto the subtler levels of our inner world. It is a process of *elevating* our feelings and desires, thus transmuting them into aspiration toward higher goals.

This elevating process can lead to an appreciation of the beauty and wonder of the world around us. We might call it “joyous admiration” of the unknown Life or Reality which has created and continues to sustain the universe and all its component parts — including ourselves. It is not surprising that many people who do not think of themselves as “religious,” or who would not literally subscribe to the beliefs inherent in many forms of prayer, do in fact pray.

A powerful  
tool

Imaginative techniques are another means of reaching upward to contact realms of superconscious inspiration and insight.\* These techniques are based on *visualization*, the conscious and deliberate use of images. It is by visualizing the appropriate image or symbol that we establish with the corresponding superconscious pattern a reverberation through which the needed energy can flow. The visualized image then takes a life of its own, and the energy reaches our personality with beneficent results.

This purposeful use of the imagination is particularly valuable owing to the breadth of its effects. Because it utilizes our mind as well as our feeling nature, it can tap a very wide range of superconscious energies, and can be used with great flexibility and precision. For example, while the symbols that are formed by our

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\*See the series of articles on *The Purposeful Imagination*, *SYNTHESIS 2*, pp. 119-151, and this issue, pp. 17-53.

Versatility  
and depth

imagination are often polyvalent — carrying many meanings, reverberating to many energies — and therefore full of surprises in their effects, they also can have selective properties and specialized uses, giving access to *specific qualities* of transpersonal energy. The ascending flame, the sturdy rock, the tranquil mountain lake and the energetic whirlwind, are four such symbols taken from nature which can be used to evoke and explore corresponding aspects of our transpersonal nature.\* Imaginatively evoking and then focusing on the flame can help give us insight into the aspiration in all things for what is better. Contemplating the symbol of the rock can put us in touch with the firm basis and order underlying the apparent flux of existence. The mountain lake may speak of the serenity behind all movement. And the whirlwind may call up that great power and motion of which we are all a part. What we visualize conditions and affects our feelings, thoughts, and actions. Therefore as we contemplate such symbols and experience their meaning, our own nature itself can be gradually transformed.

Meditation, in one of its most basic forms is well described in the following account about Robert Frost, written some time ago when the poet was still alive.

When Frost was a freshman in college, his fraternity brothers worried about him because he took long walks alone in the woods. Finally a delegation of seniors waited on him and after some fumbling preliminaries, one asked, 'Frost, what do you do walking by yourself in the woods?'

Freshman Frost looked at them and replied, 'Gnaw bark.' Thereafter, they left him alone.

Actually, what Frost was doing in the woods was meditating. He still takes long walks and he still meditates. In part, it is his ability to do so which makes him America's greatest living poet.

There is one kind of meditation which is passive, a quiet sinking into the self, a sort of contemplation. But with most of us, what passes for thought is a purposeless stream of consciousness, like an uncut motion picture with our own confused inner dialogue attached.

Robert Frost's kind of meditation is neither passive nor meaningless. It is directed, tenacious and purposeful. He is able to take a word, or an idea, and hold his mind to it while he looks it over from all angles, turns it inside out, dissects it. By doing so, he sees new aspects, new meanings, new beauties even in tired and timeworn phases.<sup>15</sup>

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\*For a more complete list of the main categories of transpersonal symbols see Assagioli, "Symbols of Transpersonal Experience," available from the Psychosynthesis Institute, San Francisco, California.

This focused and purposeful type of mental activity is one of the most effective forms of meditation. It has enabled men like Einstein or Teilhard de Chardin to gain direct awareness of what they called the “Universal Mind.” Its patient and regular application has proven invaluable in establishing a rich and reliable channel between the personality and the superconscious.



Awakening  
to the greater  
whole

This channel can enhance our perception of reality in many ways. When the energy induced by contact with the superconscious flows into our minds, we experience flashes of intuition, illuminations and a wider and more inclusive understanding. Our consciousness is lifted toward this broad perspective, and the events and problems of our own existence and of the world then make increasing sense as we begin to recognize the deeper patterns underlying them. We begin to see the evolving whole, its meaning, and the meaning of our role in it as individuals.

But meditation can lead to more than purely mental activity. For example, it frequently calls down energies which are also received in our feelings—energies which can uplift our emotional nature. Through meditation we can come in touch with such transpersonal qualities as joy, beauty, compassion or serenity, and we can contact the underlying vitality and sweetness of life. Meditation, increasingly sustained by the power of our will, can be delib-

erately combined with the focused energy of our feelings in a powerful and synergistic method that enables the fullest kind of access to our higher nature.\*

## UNDERSTANDING

Discovering  
a world  
of meaning

The development of a reliable and inclusive understanding, which grows as we grow, is the second essential aspect of the integrative path of Self-realization. It is the understanding of the nature of the transpersonal realm, of ourselves as personalities, and of the world in which we live, in light of our best awareness of the purpose of the larger whole. It can be achieved by seeking the deeper meaning, the hidden causes of outer events. If, for example, we understand the world as moving toward transcendent unity, then we will examine particular events to see how they relate to that unity. Do they, as is true in the case of many historical occurrences, reveal obstacles to evolution with which individuals and society must deal? Or do they indicate positive and growing trends which we will choose to encourage and support? Events having great impact on society — like the Renaissance, the American Revolution, the Great Depression, and such contemporary ones as the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, or Watergate — can be examined in this way, as can events and turning points of a more personal nature.

Practical  
understanding

It will be seen then that study of the outer world and the inner world are parallel and complementary. We can then use our understanding more and more to bring our personalities and the world into meaningful correspondence, or reverberation, with transpersonal reality. In this way, the generalized visions we have attained in our transpersonal experiences become particularized, and can be practically applied to ourselves, society in general, and our part in it.

But in order to build this progressive and dynamic understanding, our thinking must be, in the most profound sense, our own. For much of our lives our primary source of learning has been what we absorb, as if by osmosis, from the ideas, feelings and actions of others. Through this contact we gain access to the

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\*A brief exposition of techniques for such a unified approach to meditation can be found in Roberto Assagioli, *The Act of Will*, "Thinking and Meditation," pp. 218-231. Meditation will be treated extensively in a forthcoming issue of *SYNTHESIS*.

Awareness  
and choice

combined experience and understanding of humanity over many thousands of years. This is both inevitable and good, provided that this great richness is neither lightly accepted nor automatically dismissed. Rather, at each important step, we must strive to be aware of what we are exposed to, what idea or new knowledge is becoming available to us, and decide whether or not we want to accept it. We need to develop the awareness of what flows into us and the capacity to regulate that flow.\* The issue is not only whether a certain idea, principle or value is good or bad, true or false, but even more, that *we cannot truly make it our own, if we absorb it without understanding it.*

Toward freedom  
and responsibility  
in action

It is interesting to observe that many spiritual guides of the past, whose followers were oriented primarily along the vertical dimension – the path of transcendence – emphasized devotion, unquestioned belief, acceptance of the teacher's authority and obedience to his wishes and precepts. Today, as more and more people reach the path of Self-realization, spiritual guides are increasingly abandoning such approaches, and adopting techniques more appropriate to this path. Rather than asking for unquestioned belief and obedience, they stress the importance of clear thinking, of ascertaining for oneself what is true or false, important or trivial, and of acting on what one sees. They emphasize the individual's inner resources and responsibility, and guide him to rely more and more on himself, and eventually on his Self. While this orientation is rapidly spreading today, it is far from new. It has always been at the core of the greatest spiritual teachings, and was, for example, a central teaching of the Buddha at least twenty-five centuries ago:

We are earnestly enjoined to accept nothing whatever on faith; whether it be written in books, handed down from our ancestors, or taught by sages. The Buddha has said that we must not believe in a thing said merely because it is said; nor in traditions because they have been handed down from antiquity; nor rumours, as such; nor writings by sages, merely because sages wrote them; nor fancies that we may suspect to have been inspired in us by a Deva (that is, in presumed spiritual inspiration); nor from inferences drawn from some haphazard assumption we may have made; nor because of what seems an analogical necessity; nor on the mere authority of our own teachers or masters. We are to believe when the writing, doctrine, or

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\*Just as regulating this inward flow is our responsibility to ourselves, so regulating the *outward* flow is our responsibility to others. This is the significance of such traditional spiritual watchwords as "right speech" or "harmlessness."

saying is corroborated by our own reason and consciousness. "For this," says he in concluding, "I taught you not to believe merely because you have heard, but when you believed of your consciousness, then to act accordingly and abundantly." <sup>16</sup>

## SERVICE

This action, abundant and according to one's best vision, is the essence of service. It completes the path through which the superconscious energies can flow, in the same way as completing the circuit at an electrical power station energizes and illumines a city.

Just as breathing is a natural activity of our body, service is a natural activity of our Higher Self—and at a certain point of development, it becomes natural to the personality as well. It's precursor in the personality is the urge to make things better. This is perhaps our most human tendency, that which most clearly distinguishes man from animal. And as we make contact with the superconscious and begin to understand the larger whole as it is and as it is evolving, we are spontaneously drawn to use our energies to assist that evolution, to help the gradual work of perfecting man and his world. We recognize that service in line with our transpersonal vision is the most effective way to make things better—therefore the best, the most meaningful thing to do.

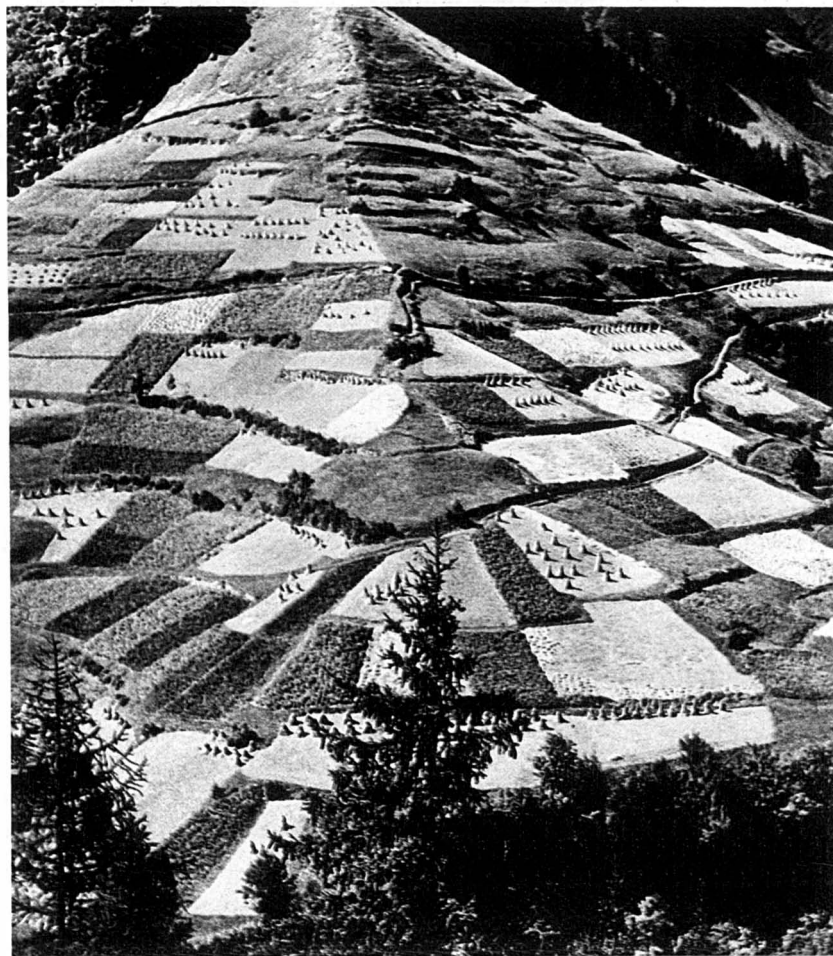
We can also be drawn to service before having made a clear contact with the transpersonal, perhaps out of a sense of obligation or guilt, or following the example of others, or feeling for the pain of those in need. Many people are motivated in these ways at first, and much that is good and of real value has been accomplished out of such motivations. But in the long run, if the transpersonal energy is missing, difficulties will occur. If one gives more and more of one's energy, the need to refill oneself will inevitably emerge. If one acts only out of an emotional urge, without a clear vision and plan, one may find that the results, although worthwhile, may not be commensurate with one's effort. Increasingly, there will develop the sense that our work is more difficult, more unconnected than we instinctively know it should be. We feel that something is missing, which needs to be found. What is missing, of course, is our connection with the transpersonal vision and source. And as we search for what is lacking, we will reorient our personality and make that connection possible. As our vision and know-

A natural  
activity

Toward  
a stable  
connection



ledge of the whole then become clearer, and we become able to express the energies of our superconscious as well as those of our personality, we can serve more freely and energetically. We see the forward moving currents in the larger world and we are nourished, sustained and strengthened by them – and by the knowledge of their inevitable triumph. Our feelings and our mind become aligned with each other and with our higher nature, and the work of perfecting the whole then becomes at the same time the most reasonable and also the most desirable thing we can do with our lives.



This leads to a new and more realistic perspective on our own growth. We discover that there is no contradiction between serving the whole and developing our individuality, because as we

A change  
in priorities

serve the whole we also develop our unique gifts and overcome our particular limitations. Gradually, our individual growth becomes integrated with our commitment to do useful work in the world. But no longer will we strive to improve our personality *for its own sake*. We see clearly that our personality could be improved, but we also see that there is an almost endless possibility for improvement. Although there are many ways our personality could grow, and many limitations we could get rid of, we find it most practical to work on some and postpone dealing with others on the basis of what specific service seems particularly right for us to do. The man who is shy but who sees that having direct contact with people is an intrinsic part of his next contribution, will choose to work on his shyness. But another shy man, one who sees that writing is *his* next best vehicle, may ignore his shyness for the moment, and work on other limitations like a lack of persistent will.

The synergy  
of service

Interestingly enough, people invariably report that after having made their individual growth dependent on the needs of their service, not only did that growth not slow down but rather it gained increasing breadth, momentum and ease. The apparent paradox is resolved if we keep in mind that the commitment to serve our larger vision and express our transpersonal values in action calls for the sustained flow of superconscious energy through our personality and out into the world. Thus service becomes the most effective and most direct way to organize the patterns of our personality in harmony with the superconscious, so as to best transmit its energy. And that energy will now work with us – and also spontaneously, by itself – to remove blocks and clear the way.

The integrative path of Self-realization has in it, then, an inherent *joyousness*. It is the joy of becoming who we really are by living our higher values – the joy of *Self*-expression. It arises from the increasingly immediate sense of our true identity, as we learn to manifest it in daily life. We realize that as the Self, we are one with the larger whole, that our essential nature is what we would have to describe by such words as “transcendent,” “immortal,” “divine.” Yet we deal with such joyous realizations realistically, because we also understand our need to progressively cooperate with and find our place in the larger context, as it is continuously revealed to us.

With this double perspective, this “bifocal vision,” we see our own spiritual dignity and essential divinity on the one hand, and

on the other our need to grow in order to express those qualities. We see the essential divinity underlying the whole of the world's process of growth, and the fundamental rightness of helping that



Balancing  
and synthesis  
of opposites

immense work forward as best we can in the time we have. As we bring that knowledge into our lives, what results is a spontaneous resolution of contraries. Work and play were earlier experienced as antagonists, then we “time-shared” between them, and now they tend to merge so that one’s work in service comes to seem more “right,” more authentic, and at the same time more satisfying and enjoyable than anything else. The dichotomy between self and others, between responding to others’ needs and taking care of one’s own disappears, as one acquires the practical wisdom to see the intrinsic legitimacy of both and the relative priority of each, from an objective perception of the circumstances at any given moment.

With all this comes maturity – not the drab and mere “getting older” that is often falsely taken to be “maturity,” but something rich and ripe – an enlightened maturity, full of joy and will, acceptance and discrimination, wisdom and love.

We may well end with Goethe’s thought: “Everything that changes is a symbol.” In other words any action, habit pattern, feeling, thought or word, all processes, indeed our life as a whole, can be seen as symbolic patterns. As we learn to live the patterns of our life according to our best values and vision, these patterns become more attuned to the higher patterns of our superconscious energies. The Hermetic aphorism, “As above, so below” becomes then not only an inclusive description of reality, but also a fundamental method of individual unfoldment, and at the same time an affirmation, an imperative, a way of life. As we increasingly identify with the whole and help to create it, any sense of separateness, of alienation, gradually fades away and is replaced by a certain knowledge of being at home, indeed, of being at one, both with ourselves and with the world.

Lived  
unification

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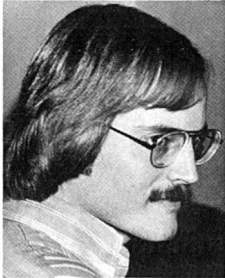
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## PSYCHOSYNTHESIS WORKBOOK

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# Practice:

Earlier *SYNTHESIS WORKBOOKS* have presented many exercises aimed at developing the personal dimension of our growth. The three exercises in this *WORKBOOK* complement the earlier ones, by helping to evoke *transpersonal* energies and then providing ways to begin to integrate these higher energies into our daily life and the larger life of which we are a part.

“The Blossoming of the Rose” is an expanded version of the exercise given earlier, at the beginning of this *WORKBOOK*. “Integrating Transpersonal Experiences” is a useful technique for recalling important past transpersonal experiences, which we may not have fully used in our lives. “Inner Silence” is a basic exercise that can be used, by itself or in combination with other techniques, to evoke superconscious energies. It is also a valuable preparation for many kinds of meditative approaches.

These exercises, and others like them, have proven effective in enabling people to build an increasingly stable connection to their superconscious. Many people have reported using them to contact their inner wisdom, their sense of compassion, of love for others and the world, their higher motivations and impulses, and other transpersonal qualities innate in each of us.

Some readers may be surprised and deeply affected to find these wellsprings so readily available within themselves. And certainly the cultivation of such inner riches is important, giving us strength, deeper self-knowledge and hopefulness. But equally important is the integration of these inner qualities into our daily lives and outer pursuits—

as family members, as workers, as members of our larger community and of society itself. It is worth stressing again that this process of integration requires calm persistence and patience. So moving may be the revelation of our inner riches and so compelling the visions of how things would be improved if we could externalize them, that we may be tempted to hurry what often needs to be a process of gradual transformation—both of our personality and of the way it operates in the world. That the integration of the transpersonal into everyday living is a gradual process is worth recalling deliberately as one does these exercises. Above all, we should beware of any subpersonalities (such as “The Perfectionist,” “The New Age Top Dog,” “The Judge,” “The Transpersonal Critic”) that would castigate us for being unable to transform self and environment overnight. The process of psychosynthesis has its moments of sudden breakthrough, but is typified by steady progress toward its high goals.

On the other hand, our intention to contact superconscious energies and the actual achievement of that contact may be separated by a delay. For example, we may evoke superconscious energies by doing the exercises, but not experience these energies until the next day. Or we may receive them indirectly, in some unexpected and even unrecognized form. Occasionally it may take more time before results will become apparent, because exercises of this kind foster an inner process that has its own rhythms of maturation, whose ebb and flow will be different for different people. Again, a persistent and watchful patience is called for.

**General Suggestions.** Each of these exercises has a series of steps to complete. One way you can work with them is to read one step at a time, complete that step, and then read and complete each succeeding step until you have finished. Or you may want to read the exercise through a few times, and then do it all from memory. You can also tape record yourself reading the exercise, and then play it back as you do it. In this case, be sure to leave long enough pauses for you to actually do what is called for. If you have the opportunity, the easiest method is often to have another person read the exercise to you slowly, step by step, as you do it.

It is essential to the effectiveness of these exercises to complete each in one time period, without interruption. Stopping in the middle of an exercise interferes with the momentum, interrupts the awareness and the realizations that can emerge. However, in the “Integrating Transpersonal Experiences” exercise, while we recommend that Stage I and Stage II be completed at one sitting, they can also be treated as two consecutive but distinct exercises and done at different times.

As you will see, some of these exercises can be used regularly — others lend themselves to only occasional use. In any case it is most helpful to establish a routine for doing psychosynthesis exercises from this and previous issues. This may mean, as much as possible, setting aside some time in the same quiet place, and preferably at about the same hour. Doing so every day is best, but once or twice a week will also give quite satisfactory results, as long as a regular rhythm is

established. Such a routine builds up a continuing pattern of experience where insights from one day can more easily evoke and feed successive ones.

Writing down one's experiences with the exercises in this *WORKBOOK* is also strongly recommended. Readers may wish to refer to "Keeping a Psychological Journal," in *SYNTHESIS 2*. This is a guide to an ongoing program of writing about the important aspects of one's inner life. Keeping such a journal of personal reflections and experiences can yield significant long-term benefits. It enables us to get the most out of all the inner work we may be doing and to reflect more deeply on our life experiences. Over time, it provides an increasingly rich tool for the consideration and refinement of our process of growth.

**Visualizing.** Many of the exercises ask you to visualize various imaginary objects, a rose, for example. For most people, visualizing is interesting, enjoyable and generally easy to do. Yet some find it

difficult, not because they are unable to do it, but because of a mistaken idea of what is expected. You do not have to literally "see" the image or symbol on your mind's screen, although some people do visualize in this way. Merely *thinking about* what you intend to visualize, or *remembering* it, or in a general way, *sensing* it, is all that is needed. In other words, what is most important is not the steadiness or vividness of the images you "see," but the dynamic process you are experiencing. For some specific "warm-up" exercises in visualization that can be done if you feel you are having difficulty, see *SYNTHESIS 1*, pp. 91-92.

One final suggestion may be helpful. The exercises in this *WORKBOOK* make use, in each case, of the technique of inner dialogue with our imagined Wise Old Man. You may find it useful at some point to briefly review the article, "Dialogue With the Higher Self" in *SYNTHESIS 2*, which fully discusses this technique.



*"... the Rose Eternal, which, in bright expansiveness,  
Lays forth its gradual blooming,  
Redolent of praises to the never-wintering sun."*

DANTE, PARADISO,  
CANTO XXX

## The Blossoming of the Rose

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A PSYCHOSYNTHESIS EXERCISE

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The following exercise is an expanded version of the one which began this *WORKBOOK*, and is suggested for continuing work in experiencing and using your superconscious energies. Here the earlier version is combined with the technique of "Dialogue with the Higher Self."\* The dialogue part of the exercise will help you deal with specific life questions by setting

up a channel of communication between your superconscious and your more everyday levels of awareness, thereby drawing on your own inner source of wisdom.

The setting up of this communication channel is greatly facilitated by the power inherent in the symbol of the rose. From earliest times, certain flowers have been regarded as symbols of the Self in both the East and West. In China one finds the "Golden Flower," in India and Tibet the lotus, in Europe and Persia the rose. Examples are to be found in the *Roman de la Rose* of the French Troubadours, the "Rose Eternal" so exquisitely evoked by Dante, and the rose at the center of the cross that is the symbol of a number of spiritual traditions.

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Adapted by Lenore Lefer from "The Blossoming of the Rose," Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques*, pp. 213-216. Lenore Lefer is a Senior Associate of the Psychosynthesis Institute, and co-ordinator of the Institute's Counseling Service.

\*For a complete description of this technique, see "Dialogue with the Higher Self," *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 122-139.

Generally, the Self has been symbolized by the already opened flower, and although this is a static representation, its visualization can be quite stimulating and evocative. But even more effective in stimulating our superconscious processes is the *dynamic* visualization of a flower—that is, its development from a closed bud to the fully opened bloom.

Such a dynamic symbol of develop-

ment corresponds to a profound reality that underlies human unfoldment and all of nature's processes. That is the intrinsic vitality or "livingness," working with irresistible pressure *from within* to produce ongoing growth and evolution. This inner life force is the agency that ultimately liberates our consciousness from its entanglements and leads to the revelation of our transpersonal center—the Self.

\* \* \*

1) Sit quietly and comfortably. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and relax your body.

2) Imagine a rosebush, with many flowers and buds. . . . Now turn your attention to one of the buds. The bud is still enclosed in its green leaves, or sepals, but at the very top a rose-colored point can be seen. Focus on this image, holding it in the center of your awareness.

3) Now, in a slow movement, the sepals start to separate, turning their points outward and revealing the rose-colored petals, which are still closed. . . . The sepals continue to open until you can see the whole bud.

4) Next the petals also begin to unfold, slowly separating . . . until a fragrant, fully opened rose is seen. . . . At this stage try to smell the perfume of the rose with its characteristic and unmistakable scent.

5) Now imagine that a ray of sunlight shines on the rose, giving it light and warmth. . . . Take a few moments to experience the sunlit rose.

6) Look at the very center of the rose. You will see appearing there the face of a wise old man, full of understanding and love for you.

7) Talk to him about whatever is important in your life now. Feel free to ask him questions about what is meaningful to you: life issues, direction, or choices you may need to make. Take the time you need to communicate with him in this way. (If you like, you can

pause at this point and write down what happened, amplifying and evaluating further whatever insights were gained.)

8) Now *identify* yourself with the rose: imagine that you become the rose, or that you take the whole flower inside yourself. . . . Be aware that the rose – and the wise old man – are always within you and that you can get in touch with them and draw on their qualities whenever you choose. . . . Symbolically, you *are* this flower, this rose. The same life that animates the universe and has created the rose is enabling you to awaken and develop your innermost being and all that radiates from it.

9) Now, imagine that you become the whole rosebush. . . . Be aware that you are firmly planted in the earth, drawing nourishment from it. . . . Your leaves and flowers are growing upward, nourished by the energy and warmth of the sun's light.

10) Become aware of other rosebushes, other plants and trees – all animated by the same life energy, all part of the same planet, of the greater whole. Take some time to experience this. . . . Then, whenever you like, open your eyes.

11) You may want to write about what happened, paying special attention to your dialogue with the sage, and to any insights that the exercise brought you.

Much could be said about the secret of self-actualization and Self-realization – of the ordinary personality considered as a “seed” of what one can become. There is, in this sense, a profound similarity between the growth and blossoming of a flower and the process of unfoldment in ourselves. The blossoming rose can be considered to be a symbol both of normal development from childhood to adulthood, and of the development of the adult toward Self-realization.

The rose has its roots in the earth, uses water to grow, and flowers into the air, responding to the action of the sun's rays. A parallel can be drawn to the human being, in which the physical body corresponds to the earth, the feelings to water, and the mind to air. The growth of the flower and then its opening, brought about by the nurturing of the sun, corresponds to the process of actualizing the personal self or “I” and linking it with the Higher Self, of which the sun is a

symbol. And the fragrance given off by the flower into the surrounding air, corresponds to the development of the intuition and the enhanced creativity it brings about.

Practicing the Rose Exercise daily or twice weekly in the same quiet place can help you in this process of realization. And when superconscious qualities such as those evoked by the symbol of the rose—for example, beauty, peace or harmony—are experienced, there is a tendency, an urge, to express them in our lives. The exercise is especially effective when you are able to identify with the rose, to experience the living symbol, so that it works creatively within you.

### Other Applications

Consideration of what happens as the rosebud opens may reveal significant information about your growth patterns, attitudes, self-image and world view.

One man reported being unable to keep the rosebud from “popping” open suddenly; he simply could not slow the process down. He spoke of his impatience with the closed bud and of his desire that it be fully open, perfumed and beautiful without his having to spend the time needed to allow it to grow. As he reflected on this reaction to the exercise, he realized that this was a general attitude of his, prevalent in many aspects of his life. In his case, the source of this attitude turned out to be an impatient subpersonality\* that was unwilling to

allow him sufficient time for his own gradual unfolding.

He decided to practice the opening of the rose daily in a slow, calm way, trying as much as he was able, not to rush through the exercise, or let the rose “pop” open. As he began to try this—and it was difficult for him at first—he realized that his impatience was rooted in the fear that he couldn’t trust the natural progression of his growth process, but had to “make it happen” himself by pushing and striving to grow. As he continued to visualize the slow, sure opening of the rose, he experienced increased trust and a growing calmness and patience in his everyday life.

A woman reported some resistance to having the rosebud open. She said she really didn’t want it to open at all, that she was afraid the rose would not be perfumed or beautiful enough. When exploring further, she saw this fear as relating to her own self-doubts, her own sense of unworthiness in relation to others. She discussed these fears and feelings with her therapist and then was asked to practice visualizing the rose as having an *increasing* fragrance and beauty. Over time, she reported a gradual increase of confidence in her own ability to grow, to become more beautiful, and a lessening of her fear of relating openly to other people.

Another woman saw the closed rosebud gradually open and then close right up again. She felt this mirrored her own process and spoke of her ambivalence and doubt about being “open” so much of the time. She said she appreciated the value of the *closed* bud as a necessary

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\*For a discussion of subpersonalities, see *SYNTHESIS 1*, pp. 52-90.

stage in the continuum of the growth process. When she was asked to explore further her feelings and thoughts about what being “open” and “closed” meant to her, she said that being “open” meant having to “give all the time,” and to be with other people more than she wanted to be. For her, being “closed” meant focusing on inner activities such as reading or meditation, or just simply withdrawing briefly from her daily routine. She realized that she had not given herself enough time to go within, and that this more inward part needed to be accepted and nourished. In doing the exercise once again, she focused on allowing the bud to remain closed for a longer period while receiving nourishment, and then on its continuing to receive nourishment as it slowly opened. After some time she decided that she wanted to make more room in her daily life for being quiet and alone, so that when it came time for her to relate to her family and friends she could do so willingly, more fully and without resentment.

These individuals’ experiences show that by examining what was spontaneously evoked, one can uncover potential or existing blocks or difficulties in one’s growth process. They show, too, that the exercise can be used purposefully and in an active way to counteract particular patterns by introducing new ones—first at a symbolic, and then at a real-life level.

**Groups and Clients.** The Rose Exercise can be used very effectively in groups, or by a therapist with a client. The leader or guide reads the exercise as the group or

client listens with eyes closed, going through the various steps in the visualization. It is useful, after the exercise, to allow sufficient time to write down the experience, before moving to a discussion of what happened and what insights were gained. Participants can be invited to share their experience of the super-conscious symbols, of the energies and qualities they contain, and to consider how these can be incorporated into daily living. The group members or client can then continue to practice the exercise at home, as seems appropriate.

## Variations

Other symbols may be used as alternatives to the rose, for example the beautiful lotus flower. Here you can imagine the bud of a lotus opening, with its roots in the ground, its stem in the water and its flower in the air. You can then visualize the wise sage at the center of the lotus and enter into a dialogue with him.

Another variation which symbolizes unfoldment can be based on the growth of a seed. What develops from the seed—a flower, a majestic tree, a fruit-bearing plant, a blade of grass, etc.—is related in various ways to the individual’s personality and his self-image. The symbolism of these various forms is often apparent and easy to interpret.\* Its meaning and practical usefulness in an individual’s life can be explored along similar lines as the examples in the previous section.

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\*See “Answers from the Unconscious,” *SYNTHESIS* 2, especially pp. 142-145.

# Integrating Transpersonal Experiences

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A PSYCHOSYNTHESIS EXERCISE

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Each one of us has had moments in our lives that were very special; times when we may have had a particularly heightened sense of ourselves or of the world around us.

Such experiences are varied. They may include an appreciation of beauty while watching a sunset, a sense of love and compassion in witnessing a friend confronting an inner fear, an expression of wonder while contemplating the night sky, or even an understanding of the essential unity of all humanity during moments of cooperation and goodwill. These experiences can be intensely exciting or quietly calming; they can have a most profound meaning and an intensely practical application. People variously report them with such descriptions as “communion with something greater than myself,” “a shock of joy,” “love in its fullest sense,” “a tremendous sense of life worth living,” “extreme clarity,” or

“knowing the rightness of who I am.” Experiences of this kind are often described as transpersonal, superconscious, or “peak” experiences.

Despite our sense of the special value of these moments, much of the insight and inspiration they bring is often lost to us. This loss can occur for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it happens because these experiences are so fleeting; sometimes because we do not grasp their meaning; more frequently it is because we have simply never realized they can be integrated into our day to day living.

The following exercise is designed to guide you in the exploration of a transpersonal experience that you have had. Stage I gives you the opportunity to recall such an experience, to become more aware of the meaning that experience had for you. Stage II helps you develop ways for integrating the experience into your present life. We recommend that you complete both stages of the exercise at one sitting. You will need to have pencil and paper at hand.

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Prepared by Ann Gila Russell. Ann Russell has completed Advanced Training at the Psychosynthesis Institute, San Francisco.

STAGE I

1) Find a quiet place and sit in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and relax your body.

2) Gradually allow your mind to become quiet. Then ask your unconscious to evoke the memory of some past transpersonal experience, perhaps one which you have forgotten. It may have lasted just a moment, or it may have continued for a long time. You may have been alone, or with others. Take the time you need to get in touch with it again.

3) Recreate this experience in your imagination. See yourself in the setting in which it occurred. Re-live the experience, with as much detail and vividness as you can. Let yourself experience again the thoughts you had, the feelings you felt, and the insights you gained. Give yourself time to re-experience this special moment.

4) Now, continue your recollections, and focus on what happened in the hours and days after this experience. What meaning did the experience have for you? What understanding and insights did it bring? How did you feel about it? Was there anyone with whom you tried to share it? If so, did they understand? In following days, did it make any change in your life?

5) When you have fully explored the experience and what happened afterwards, slowly bring your awareness back to the room you are in and open your eyes.

6) Now write down what you have recalled in some detail. Pay particular attention to the meaning of the experience, and to the thoughts and feelings you had during the experience itself and in the days afterwards.

In the re-living of a transpersonal experience of the past, such as one that occurred during childhood or adolescence, some people will recall that they were able to integrate aspects of their experience into their lives, and share it with

others. If this was so in your case, take time to write about how this happened.

It is not unusual, however, to re-experience the frustration or pain that may have occurred if one was unable to share the experience, or to apply it in everyday

life. If this happened to you, gently acknowledge these feelings and include them in your writing.

Record the experience and what followed thoughtfully, and when you feel finished with your writing, go on to Stage II.

## STAGE II

1) Again, find a quiet place, sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and relax your body.

2) Now, let yourself go back to the experience you recalled in the first stage of the exercise. As you do so, gradually focus your awareness on the most meaningful aspects of that experience, on the central quality that the experience had for you. When you have a sense of this, you may find it useful to look for a way of summarizing it — a phrase, a symbol or a word (such as serenity, love, wonder, joy, understanding, etc.)

3) Now, return in your imagination to the present, and visualize yourself standing at the very top of a mountain on a clear, sunny day. In your imagination, look up and see the sun shining overhead.

4) Visualize a ray of light coming from the sun and shining on the ground next to where you are standing. Now you can see in the sun a very Wise Old Man whose eyes express great love for you. Gently and slowly, this Wise Old Man comes down the sunbeam, and soon is standing next to you on the mountaintop.

5) Tell the Wise Old Man about your experience, and its meaning. Find out what he has to tell you about it. Then ask him how you can make it a part of your life now. Listen to his suggestions, and ask for clarification if necessary. If you have any further questions about the conversation, go ahead and ask them, too.

6) And now, in your imagination, turn toward your present life. Visualize yourself expressing the quality of that experience, or the understanding which came from it, in specific circumstances. Simply watch this happening, and if you have any difficulty with this, stop and talk about it with the Wise Old Man. He will have suggestions to help you get beyond the difficulty.

7) When you feel finished, gradually bring your awareness back to the room that you are in, remembering that the Wise Old Man is



always in you, and that you can speak with him again any time you choose. Then slowly open your eyes.

8) With paper and pencil beside you, begin looking at your present life—the work or activities in which you are involved, the personal relationships you have, your plans for the future—and see *where* you would like to begin expressing the quality of your experience or the understanding that came from it. In what situations would you like to do this? Also ask yourself *how* you would want to do this. And *when*. As you examine the various possibilities, be sure you consider the realities of your circumstances, the opportunities and the limitations inherent in them. Try to develop a realistic sense of what practical steps you can take to gradually introduce the fruits of your experience into your present life. As what you would like to do becomes clear, take some time to write it down.

9) Looking at what you have chosen to do to begin expressing this new way of acting or being, *resolve* and *affirm* to yourself that you will do so.

In Stage II of this exercise you developed ways for integrating the quality or meaning of your past transpersonal experience into your life. Frequently, these ways can be improved or new ways discovered by repeating Stage II, either the next day or a few days later. Consulting the Wise Old Man again in this manner can be especially helpful after you have tried to apply the suggestions you first received. Each time write down what you come up with, make a clear choice among the various possibilities, and affirm those you decide to act on now (steps 8 and 9).

It will also be helpful to cultivate each day a systematic awareness of when and how you are actually expressing what you learned from your transpersonal ex-

perience. For this purpose, the technique of “The Evening Review,” (*SYNTHESIS I*, p. 103) is useful. Each evening you can review your day with an objective and non-critical attitude, focusing on the quality that you have chosen to express. In this way, you regularly maintain the goal in your awareness, reinforcing your decision. “The Evening Review” will also serve to reveal any obstacles—for example, subpersonalities that may hinder your expression and are perhaps in need of special attention.

## Other Applications

Too often, as has been said, we insufficiently understand or use our transpersonal experiences. At times, we even tend to repress them (see Haronian, “The Re-

pression of the Sublime,” in *SYNTHESIS 1*, p. 125ff). Frequently social customs and institutions actively feed this tendency, by discouraging their recognition and appreciation. The resulting loss in positive creative energy, not only to ourselves but to society as well, is considerable. By consciously and deliberately cultivating the awareness of our own transpersonal experiences and then working to integrate them into our lives, we develop a greater appreciation and understanding for similar experiences that others may have. We can then better help them understand and utilize their experiences as they occur. Accordingly, this exercise is of general use for all who would better prepare themselves to help others — teachers, parents, psychotherapists, and so on.

It is especially important to be able to appreciate and support these experiences during the formative years of childhood and adolescence. I have watched a friend who is the mother of three children, and who is quite in touch with her own transpersonal experiences, listen to and validate such experiences in her children. Whether it is joining them at the window to watch the power of thunder and lightning, going outdoors together after a storm to look at the beauty of a rainbow, or gazing at the stars in the evening and marveling with them at the vastness of things, she has been available to appreciate and foster their inner experiences of wonder and awe. Similar support and encouragement can be given to children when they entertain — as they do — questions of life meaning, musings about the profundities of kindness and affection, or other realizations arising

from their openness to experience of a transpersonal nature.

**Groups.** This exercise can be successfully used in groups. The group leader can read it aloud, making sure, at the appropriate point, to allow adequate time for members of the group to write about their experiences. A variation of the exercise, especially helpful in assisting group members to share experiences and their meanings, follows. The group leader reads the first three steps of Stage I, and adds:

“Gradually turn your awareness to the most meaningful aspects of that experience, to the central quality that the experience had for you. When you have a sense of this, find a word or phrase — such as serenity, love, wonder, joy, understanding and so on — which best seems to you to capture the essence of the experience.

“Now, keeping our eyes closed and staying in touch with that central quality of our experience, each one of us in turn, beginning with me, and continuing with the person on my left, will say aloud the word or phrase that best describes this quality.” (Here the group leader shares his quality, and each group member shares his quality in turn. After this is completed, the group leader continues . . .) “In the same way that the sun radiates its warmth and light, imagine that you are radiating your quality outward toward the other members of this group . . .” (Here the leader pauses and allows time for the members of the group to do this.) “Now slowly begin to radiate your quality beyond this group into your environ-

ment . . . and gradually to the whole world.” (The leader pauses again, and after a while suggests that whenever they are ready, the participants may open their eyes.)

This should be followed with a discussion of the *meaning* of each person’s experience, the understanding it brought, and how it can be relevant to each person’s life. From here group members can go to the third step of Stage II, and continue to the end. They once again write down the results of the exercise, and then can share it either in the group as a whole, or in smaller groups of three or four members.

## Patterns to Watch For

Because these moments are very special and valuable, many people try to re-live their experience by actually replicating the conditions or circumstances surrounding it. One usually finds it impossible to “go back” in this way. We need to distinguish between the actual experience and the *circumstances* in which it occurred. Some of those circumstances may be relevant to the experience, others may not be. For example, one may have a spontaneous transpersonal experience while walking along the beach and in that moment have a deep sense of serenity. Clearly he cannot walk along the same beach the next day or the following week confidently expecting to have a similar experience. While it is possible that the solitude or the quiet he found on that beach may have offered his superconscious the opportunity it was seeking to express itself, the point is that when transpersonal experiences happen *spontaneously*,

they are the result of profound inner processes. Most of the outer events associated with them are largely coincidental, although occasionally they might act as triggers.

Another tendency to watch for is that once we have recognized the importance of transpersonal experiences, we may make the mistake of pursuing new ones for their own sake. A generation of people who tried to “get high” in various ways showed how one-sided and largely fruitless this tendency can become. Clearly, the need is to balance transpersonal experiences with the practical expression of the quality or meaning of these experiences—in other words to *use* our transpersonal experiences. In this way, rather than living in an inevitable succession of peaks and valleys, we move toward the synthesis of the “vertical” and the “horizontal” dimensions of individual unfoldment described in this *WORKBOOK*.

We also want to be watchful if the attitude of the Wise Old Man appears to take a critical or judgemental tone. This is not the genuine voice of our higher nature. It is more likely to be a subpersonality masquerading as our inner sage. It may give us messages in the form of “shoulds,” presenting our growth as a set of obligations rather than opportunities. The genuine Wise Old Man is not coercive or harsh. Therefore, it is important to examine the advice we may receive with discrimination, asking ourselves if the information is indeed right for us. For a detailed discussion of this point, see “Dialogue with the Higher Self,” in *SYNTHESIS 2*, pp. 131-133.

# Inner Silence

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## A PSYCHOSYNTHESIS EXERCISE

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The ambivalence of contemporary man toward *silence* is well known. On the one hand, we yearn for peace and quiet, for rest, for a cessation of the noisy activities of modern life. So we look forward to vacations, we dream of a house in the country, we fight to preserve peaceful natural environments. On the other hand, we seem to love activity and the excitement that activity brings, we build more and more communication into our lives, we travel farther in search of new people, new sights and sounds. What often lies behind this complex ambivalence is a tension parallel to the one described in "Dimensions of Growth:"\* a dual need for both transcendent perspective and involvement in the world.

To fulfill this need, our habitual alternations of outer retreat and outward activity are certainly useful and have their place. But the real resolution must eventually come from *within*. By bringing

silence, peacefulness and clarity into the noise of our inner lives, we develop a calmer and more accurate perspective on outer events. With this clearer vision, we are free to act more wisely and effectively. Our actions can become infused with patience and ordered rhythm, and be based on a better understanding of ourselves, other people and our environment. Gradually, our inner silence externalizes itself into our outer world. Silence, therefore, in no way negates meaningful outer activity, nor causes stagnation. Real silence is a positive and dynamic energy, one that leads to purposeful vision and action.

The positive effects of silence are based on the fact that every activity — inner as well as outer — can be said to have its own *sound*. The deliberate cultivation of silence means suspending normal activities and noise *so that other more subtle sounds can emerge*, be heard and recognized.\*

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Prepared by Heidi Hills Sloan. Heidi Sloan is Associate Editor of *SYNTHESIS*.

\*pp. 60 to 120, this issue.

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\*See, for example, Chaudhuri's account of the deliberate cultivation of silence at the Aurobindo Ashram in India, *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 30.

Practically speaking, the technique of inner silence aims first at temporarily suspending the *independent* and *uncontrolled* activities of our personality functions: the restlessness of our emotions, the fidgeting of our bodies, and the chattering stream of our thoughts. In the resulting silence of our personality, we can begin to listen for, or otherwise become aware of, the more subtle qualities and sounds of our transpersonal or superconscious nature—those to which we aspire, or that are just emerging and we wish to cultivate. When they first emerge, these new qualities are generally faint, and liable to be drowned by the clamor of our habitual rhythms and activities. Consequently, their beneficent influence and potential often go unrealized, because we are unable to *hear* them or evoke them at will. It is not surprising, then, that many people report how the purposeful cultivation of

inner silence leads them to an apprehension of deeper harmonies, an enhanced sense of purpose and direction, and often an awareness of the next steps in their own growth.

Accordingly, the following exercise for developing inner silence is an important basic technique, one that helps us evoke and then express the energies and qualities of our superconscious. It is also a valuable preparation for many kinds of meditative techniques. Like the preceding exercises, it uses the purposeful imagination to create symbolic images (a mountaintop, a temple) that evoke superconscious energy—in this case, the energy of silence. In several steps we are drawn into the experience and meaning of silence. A second stage of the exercise uses other images (the sun, a wise old man) to call additional superconscious material into our awareness.

## STAGE I

- 1) Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Place paper and a pen or pencil within easy reach. Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. Slowly take a few deep breaths, allowing your body to relax.

- 2) Now imagine that you are in a meadow, standing at the foot of a mountain, on a beautiful sunny day. You can feel the warm rays of the sun. There is a path that leads from where you are up to the mountaintop. As you look up, you can see that at the top of the mountain there is a clearing and at its center is a temple, the temple of silence.

- 3) Begin to climb the path toward the summit. This may require some effort, but it is not difficult. As you climb higher, let yourself experience the increasing sense of elevation and expan-

sion . . . (pause). . . As you approach the clearing at the top, you begin to sense the stillness, to experience the energy of silence radiating from the temple.

4) Enter the clearing surrounding the temple and let your body become filled with silence, so that it becomes quiet and relaxed . . . (pause). . . Then move slowly toward the entrance to the temple. As you enter the temple, allow the energy of silence to permeate your feelings, making them calm and serene . . . (pause). . . The area at the center of the temple is open to the sky. As you reach this area, silence pervades your mind, so that it becomes still and at the same time clear and alert . . . (pause).

5) At the very center, a beam of sunlight is shining down. It is from this central light that the energy of silence is radiating. Walk into the sunlight, and allow silence to fill your whole being. Turn toward the sun, and open yourself to the energy coming from above. . . . Let yourself experience its quality . . . take as much time as you like to do so.

6) Gradually, at your own pace, and holding the awareness of the silence that is now in you, become aware once again of your body . . . then of the room that you are sitting in . . . of your surroundings . . . and whenever you like, open your eyes.

7) Write down what happened. Some aspects you may want to explore in your writings could be: What was most meaningful about your experience? Is there a word or perhaps a phrase which captures the *essence or quality* of this experience? What is now your understanding of what silence is? What would your life be like if the quality of this experience were more present in you?

There are wide variations in people's experiences within the temple of silence. For some, the experience can be quite powerful and even dramatic. For others it can be faint at first, and build up gradually as the exercise is repeated. Often the awareness of silence leads to the

experience of still other transpersonal qualities. This is especially likely to happen upon entering the central beam of sunlight (step 5). One person reported: "Everything was very quiet and yet somehow full with sound. I tried to listen to what the sound was and at first I just heard

a full, steady hum. Gradually, I realized that this sound was the sound of everything—of the whole universe. And then tears came and I was filled with joy.” Others describe a heightened sense of aliveness, an understanding that silence is not simply the absence of sound, but rather the presence of a living energy. For many, being in the temple evokes a sense of peace and calm; for some the stillness and solitude lead to a sense of awe or reverence. People have also described the experience as profound, in that it intimated the beginning of a new clarity, an assurance of being, and a broader perspective. Frequently, the quality which emerges from this experience—whether joy or serenity, wisdom or patience, courage or compassion—is precisely the one most needed in one’s life at the time, perhaps to solve a conflict within one’s personality or to reach further toward the transpersonal dimension.

Often, by simply viewing problems from this still place of heightened awareness and perspective, we can see answers and solutions that normal activity may exclude from view. For example, as one man was writing about the *calm* and *pa-*

*tience* he experienced in the temple, he saw an image of himself running rapidly in circles, completely exhausted—an apt symbol of his hectic work routine. He realized that the calm he experienced was indicative of his deep need for rest, and that the patience was needed for him to succeed in slowing down to take that rest. It is often quite useful to reflect in this way on how the essence of your experience of silence and the qualities of the energy you came in touch with may be useful in dealing with difficulties you might be having, or in facilitating the direction you are following.

The extended version of this exercise, which follows, is designed to help you use transpersonal qualities in this fashion. In it, your superconscious energies are directed toward coordinating and harmonizing one or more of your subpersonalities.\* Before using this stage, you might want to practice Stage I for a few days so that you are familiar with it and can use it easily and confidently. Such repetition leads to fuller understanding, helps solidify the experience, and may also broaden it considerably through the addition of new elements.

## STAGE II

- 1) Retrace your journey up the mountain and into the temple of silence, and enter the beam of sunlight shining down into the temple (steps 1-5). Allow the silence to fill your body, calm your feelings, and still your mind. Be aware of the peace and the clarity that silence evokes in you. Remain with this experience for a few

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\*For a complete discussion of subpersonalities and additional exercises for working with them, see the *WORKBOOK* in *SYNTHESIS 1*.

moments . . . let yourself enjoy being there.

2) Now look upward toward the opening from where the beam of sunlight is coming. There is a staircase that leads up through the opening and onto a roof terrace. Climb the stairs to the terrace . . . and into the sunlight . . . (pause). . . Now turn toward the sun. . . . Open yourself to its energy. . . . Let yourself experience it. . . . Take as much time as you like to do so.

3) Now, in the center of the sun, you will see appear a very wise old man, whose eyes express great love for you. Perhaps he has something to tell you. Or there may be something you would like to ask him. Engage this wise old man in dialogue: use his presence and guidance to help you understand whatever questions, directions or choices you are currently dealing with. Take all the time you need in this dialogue, and when you feel finished, ask him to stay in contact with you.

4) As you look down at the mountaintop, you will see a flight of stairs that leads up to where you are. You can see there a number of your subpersonalities—some that you know already, and some that may be new. Take some time to look at them. Then ask one that seems especially important right now to climb the stairs and come up on the terrace with you.

5) Begin to relate to this subpersonality. See what you have to say to one another.

6) Ask the subpersonality what it *wants*. Then ask it *why*. See if you can find out what it actually *needs* and why. Wants and needs are different and the different answers to these questions are important.

7) Now let yourself *become* the subpersonality. Identify with it. What is it like to be this subpersonality? How do you feel about yourself? What is the world like to you? As the subpersonality, ask yourself, “What do I want?” “What do I need?” “What would I like to do?” How do you feel about the person in front of you? Is there anything you want from that person? Is there anything about yourself that you want that person to know? If so, go ahead and tell him or her.



8) Now be yourself again. . . . See the subpersonality in front of you and ask yourself, “What would my life be like if that subpersonality fully had its way, if I *were* the subpersonality all the time?” Now take another look at the subpersonality and be aware of both what you dislike and what you appreciate about it. Then see if you can talk together to bring about a better relationship between you.

9) Become aware once again of the sun and the wise old man. Open yourself to the energy of the sun . . . let it flow in you . . . and send it from you to the subpersonality. . . . If you need to, ask the wise old man for his help.

10) As you reach some sense of closure, ask the wise old man to send a special beam of sunlight down to the terrace, that will envelop both you and the subpersonality in light and warmth. Let the subpersonality move closer to you. Be aware of any changes that take place.

11) Whenever you feel ready, open your eyes, and write an account of what happened. Some questions you may want to answer are: How did your connection with silence, the sun, and the wise sage affect your relationship with the subpersonality? Were there any changes that took place standing together in the sunlight? What was the essence of that experience? Was this different from other dialogues you have had with your subpersonalities? In recalling your dialogue, focus on the resolution you came to, and how it can be applied to your everyday experience.

After this exercise, one woman wrote: “I felt so serene when I was in the temple and so filled with energy being in the sun and talking with the wise old man. I didn’t want a subpersonality to invade this space. The wise old man said to me, ‘compassion’ — nothing else, just that one word. When the subpersonality came up, it was an old familiar part of me—a frightened, sorrowful little girl. I usual-

ly see her as a bottomless pit of neediness. But something was different this time. I discovered I had the answer for dealing with her — compassion — and that loving her didn’t mean giving her everything she wanted. We talked about how what she really wanted was to grow, and how I could help her by my caring. Before this I had tried just to keep her out of my way. During this experience

I saw that that wasn't me at all, but another subpersonality: perhaps I could call it "the judge." I consulted with the wise old man and he said compassion was what the judge needed also. When we were in the sunbeam, I began to have an idea that they could get together, and of what it would be like once they did. I could have the sensitivity of the little girl and the clarity and strength of the judge at the same time. And it would be love and compassion that would bring this about."

This expanded version of the exercise can of course be used for talking and working with any other subpersonality, or other personality element you consider appropriate.

### Variations and Other Applications

**Becoming the Sun.** As you turn your attention toward the sun, you may feel as though you are rising or floating upward toward it. It is natural to be drawn to the source of energy, and if it happens spontaneously it is good to go with it. The effects can often be illuminating and beneficial.

You might also choose, if you like, to try it deliberately as a variation. After step 5 in Stage I, simply allow your awareness to move up the beam of light toward the sun. Its magnetic field will attract and gently pull you along. As you reach the sun, you may enter into it, perhaps even merge with it. It is useful and meaningful to identify with the sun at this point, to imagine that you *become* the sun. Actually experience yourself as the emanating source of energy and light, and notice how the earth and

all the living things on it respond to your radiation. When you feel finished, be sure to allow yourself plenty of time to move back down the beam of light and reconnect with the earth.

**Contacting Silence at Will.** There are times during the day when you may feel the need for inner silence, or perhaps another quality you contacted in your experience. It need not take a long time to re-connect with it. You can simply imagine you are in the temple and that the needed energy is flowing in you. Later, as your experience in this state of consciousness increases, you can skip the imagery and simply recall and experience the desired quality itself.

**Groups and Clients.** The "Inner Silence" exercise can be effectively used in groups or by a therapist with a client. The leader or guide begins by reading the exercise as the group or client listens with eyes closed, attempting to grasp the meaning experientially. The two Stages can be done with a break in the middle to allow time for writing and discussion, or the exercise can be done without a break, moving naturally from Stage I, step 5 into Stage II, step 2. After both parts of the exercise have been completed, it is of real value to encourage individuals to share what doing the exercise was like for them. The questions at the end of each Stage can act as a useful focus for discussion. Afterwards, the client or the individual group members can continue to work with the exercise at home. Naturally, any person who wishes to use the exercise with others is urged to practice it himself as well, in order to best be

able to help others get most from the technique.

## Patterns to Watch For

**Passivity.** As in other receptive techniques for tapping the superconscious, an important element for the successful use of the “Inner Silence” exercise lies in maintaining an attitude of alert *attention*. This is especially important at the points in the exercise when one “opens oneself” to the energy of silence. One should avoid a dreamy, relaxed abandonment to the experience, maintaining instead *receptive but alert poise*, a sense of anticipation and interest. An attitude of passivity, or any tendency to “go to sleep” dulls the experience and diminishes one’s ability to productively use the insights that it brings.

**Resistance to the Self.** If as you do the exercise you choose to move toward the sun, but experience difficulty and don’t wish to continue, simply imagine that you are moving back down the beam of light. Movement toward the sun is a symbol of the personality’s reorientation toward the Self, therefore difficulty along the way may relate to letting go of some part of the personality which tends to block this experience. If this does occur, it will be useful at some point to ask yourself the question, “Which part of me did not want to continue?” Often the cause of the resistance is a subpersonality who is afraid of what might happen – and this fear needs to be understood and taken care of. Stage II of this exercise provides a useful structure for exploring the difficulty. “The

Door” exercise (*SYNTHESIS 1*, pp. 93-96) is another. You might also want to read the article, “The Repression of the Sublime” (*SYNTHESIS 1*, pp. 125-136).

**Getting Lost in Images.** Some people have an extremely rich inner world of images which arise easily, rapidly and spontaneously. When this is the case, one is likely to become distracted, to pay undue attention to any image that comes up, and thereby to attach excessive importance to what is peripheral to the purpose of the exercise. If you find yourself getting lost in particular imagery before getting to the temple, or if the journey up the mountain itself becomes your primary focus, simply remember that your goal is to reach the temple and to experience silence. You can regain focus by affirming the central issue and moving in the needed direction. This simple re-focusing of your attention is often enough to help you move on.

**Overstimulation.** Some individuals who have a very strong superconscious connection may experience a great deal of energy during the exercise, and thus need more time to re-orient to their surroundings at the close. There are several ways to deal with this. One way is to allow yourself to go very slowly in ending the exercise. Keep your eyes closed and take a moment to experience your body; moving and stretching are helpful. Then in your mind’s eye recall the room you are in: the furniture, the colors, the lights. And then open your eyes.

Similarly, if you are feeling too much energy either in the temple or coming

back, you can simply imagine that the energy turns itself down. You can also imagine energy flowing outward from you toward someone you might like to share it with or who may need it, or even toward humanity as a whole. Often experiencing too much energy is the result of not expressing it sufficiently, so that the channels are blocked. Sending the energy outward toward others is a

symbolic way of opening those channels. If these problems are persistent, it may be good for a period of time to suspend activities which evoke superconscious energies and to practice the "Identification" exercise. (*SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 101-108). In this way, you will be developing a strong personal center which can act as a firm and stable anchor for the energy.



# What is Psychosynthesis?

In its most basic sense, psychosynthesis is a name for the conscious attempt to *cooperate* with the natural process of growth — the tendency in each of us and in our world to harmonize and synthesize various aspects at ever higher levels of organization. Albert Szent-Gyorgyi in his article (in *SYNTHESIS 1*), describes the “drive in living matter to perfect itself.” In human beings, this drive becomes conscious — we feel it as an urge and decide to implement it, to make its progress easier.

Cooperating with evolution in this purposeful way requires conceptual understanding, a framework, and a range

of practical techniques. Psychosynthesis integrates both concepts and techniques into a broad framework, designed to facilitate the natural human drive toward development.

As an inclusive approach to human growth, psychosynthesis dates from 1911 and the early work of the Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli. Though one of the pioneers of psychoanalysis in Italy, Assagioli maintained that Freud had not given sufficient weight to the higher aspects of the human personality, and recognized the need for a broader concept of man.

Eastern disciplines often have tended to emphasize the spiritual dimension, while Western approaches usually have focused on the personality side. But the human being must be viewed as a whole and each aspect accorded its due importance. Psychosynthesis recognizes that each of us has a transpersonal essence, and at the same time holds that our opportunity in life is to manifest this essence, or Self, as fully as possible in the world of everyday personal and social existence.

From this beginning, Assagioli and an increasing number of psychotherapists, physicians, educators, social workers, clergymen and others have worked to develop and refine this view of human growth. The task is considered to be an open one, one that will never be ended.

Over the last sixty years, a number of conceptual points and methods have proven themselves to be fundamental. These provide a working structure for psychosynthesis.

### THE SUPERCONSCIOUS

Traditional psychoanalysis recognized a primitive, or “lower” unconscious—the source of our atavistic and biological drives. But there is also in us a higher unconscious, a *superconscious*—the realm from which originate our more highly evolved impulses: altruistic love and will, humanitarian action, artistic and scientific inspiration, philosophic and spiritual insight, and the drive for purpose and meaning. We can suffer not merely from repression of our basic biological drives, as Freud pointed out, but can be equally crippled by “repression of the

sublime”—the failure to accept our higher nature. Thus psychology must be concerned both with integrating material from the lower unconscious and with realizing and actualizing the content of the superconscious.

The superconscious is accessible, in varying degrees, to each one of us, and can provide a great source of energy, inspiration, and direction. To this end psychosynthesis offers a wide range of techniques for contacting the superconscious, for establishing a bridge with that part of our being where true wisdom is to be found.

### THE SELF

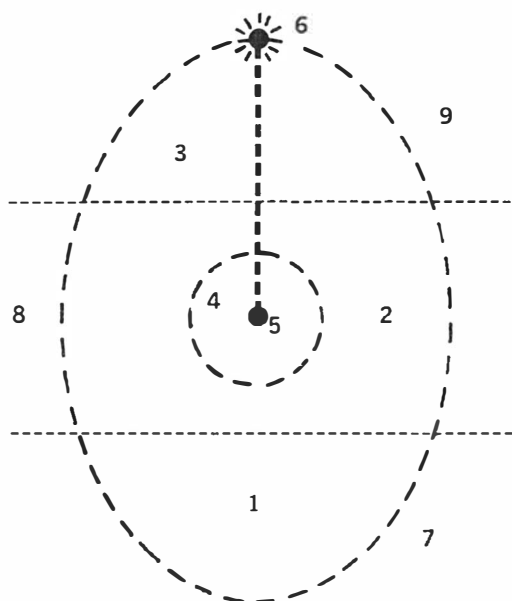
The concept of the self as an entity supraordinate to the various aspects of the personality, such as body, feelings and mind, is to be found not only in Eastern philosophy and the major world religions, but also in more and more branches of Western psychology. If we examine the concept of the self empirically, we find first of all a center of awareness and purpose, around which integration of the personality takes place. This is the “personal self,” the “I,” the center of personal identity.

The two central functions of the personal self are *consciousness* and *will*. With the consciousness of the self one can be clearly aware of what is going on within and around him, and perceive without distortion or defensiveness. This has been called the inner “attitude of observer.” To the extent that one is able to achieve this vantage point, the claims of the personality and its tendency to self-justification no longer stand in the way of clear

vision and effective action in the world. There are a variety of techniques to help gain access to this centered vantage point, from which the most fruitful work on oneself can be done.

An important distinction needs to be made between the personal self and the “Higher” or “Transpersonal Self.” The Transpersonal Self is the focal point of the superconscious realm. It is a deeper and all-inclusive center of identity and of being, where individuality and universality blend.

The following diagram illustrates some of what we have been describing.



1. The Lower Unconscious
2. The Middle Unconscious
3. The Higher Unconscious or Superconscious
4. The Field of Consciousness
5. The Conscious Self or “I”
6. The Higher or Transpersonal Self
7. The Lower Collective Unconscious
8. The Middle Collective Unconscious
9. The Higher Collective Unconscious

## FALSE IDENTIFICATIONS

To act in a centered way can be difficult, as we have all experienced. One major difficulty is the large number of *false identifications* we make with specific elements within ourselves. We may identify, for example, with a temporary feeling such as fear or anger, and thus lose or distort our true perspective. Or we may become identified with one of our “subpersonalities”—our inner cast of characters. These are semi-autonomous and often conflicting formations in our personality that are variously evoked by different sets of circumstances.

We need to recognize our subpersonalities and learn to harmonize them. We are then no longer helplessly controlled by them, but can bring them increasingly under our conscious direction. Doing this involves learning the fundamental process of “*disidentification*” from all that is not the self, and “*self-identification*,” or the realization of our true identity as a center of awareness and will.

## STAGES IN PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

In the overall process of psychosynthesis we can distinguish two stages—*personal* and *transpersonal* psychosynthesis. In personal psychosynthesis, the integration of the personality takes place around the personal self, and the individual attains a level of functioning in terms of his work and his relationships that would be considered optimally healthy by current standards.

In the transpersonal stage of psychosynthesis, the person learns also to achieve alignment with, and to express the energies of, the Transpersonal Self,

thus manifesting such qualities as a broad sense of responsibility, a spirit of cooperation, altruistic love, a global perspective, and transpersonal purpose.

Often the two stages overlap, and there can be a considerable amount of transpersonal activity even in the early phases of personal psychosynthesis.

#### METHODS EMPLOYED IN PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

To be maximally effective in our own psychosynthesis or in helping others, we need to have at our disposal a broad range of methods. As each person is a unique individual, it is important to choose, out of the range of methods available, the ones that are best suited to each person's existential situation, psychological type, specific goals, desires and path of development. A few of the techniques commonly used are guided imagery, self-identification, meditation, development of the will, symbolic art work, journal-keeping, ideal models and development of the intuition, though a complete list would be much longer. The emphasis is not on the techniques, but on fostering an ongoing process of growth that can gain increasing momentum.

#### THE WILL

As this process goes forward, it entails developing one's personal will—the will of the personal self. Through this development, we acquire the ability to regulate and direct our many personality functions. We gain the freedom of choice, the power of decision over our actions, and become increasingly able to

follow a path in accordance with what is best within each of us.

And as we reach toward the Transpersonal Self, we liberate more and more the synthesizing energies that organize and integrate our personality. We can make increasing contact with the will of our Transpersonal Self, which provides ever clearer meaning and purpose in our lives. We become able to function in the world more serenely and effectively, and to relate to our fellows in a spirit of cooperation and good will.

#### SYNTHESIS AND THE PSYCHE

Psychosynthesis, in its fundamental nature, is synthesis of and through the psyche. Here psyche is understood to be not only the human personality, as usually implied by conventional psychology, but much more inclusively, the Psyche or Soul of the ancient Greek philosophers: the Higher Self. Therefore *psychosynthesis* is that form of synthesis which expresses the will of the Higher Self, and is achieved through wisdom and love—the two fundamental qualities of the consciousness of the Higher Self.

Thus, in its broadest sense, psychosynthesis is a point of view and an attitude, from which to act with wisdom and love. As such it is well suited to psychology, education and medicine, and also to religion, the social sciences, philosophy, and all other aspects of society and of our world in which *the consciousness of the individual human being* plays a role.



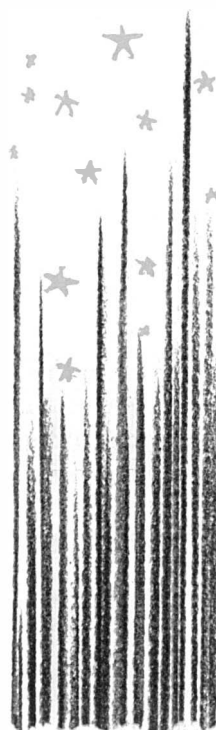
# SELF-REALIZATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTURBANCES

Roberto Assagioli

Higher  
human values

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT is an arduous journey, an adventure full of surprises, dangers and even dangers, and even dangers of potential- the raising of consciousness- drastic transmutation of the personal- along a new inner di-

I am using the term in its broad connotation, and all empirically observed in this sense, "spiritual" experiences traditionally considered religious but to *all* the states of awareness, all the human functions and activities which have as

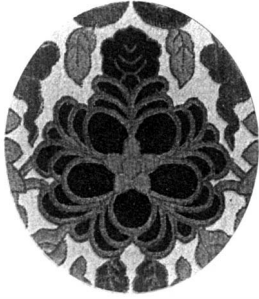


MENT is a long and venture through strange joy and beauty, difficulties hitherto dormant, access to new realms, a state of the "normal" element, and a functioning dimension.

"spiritual" in its broad ways in reference to human experience. It refers not only to experiences

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This article has been revised based on conversations with Roberto Assagioli, and on his unpublished material. The revision was made by the Editorial Committee which Assagioli appointed before his death to prepare, edit, and present to the public the material he would leave behind, according to his indications. The Editorial Committee consists of Frank Hilton, James Vargiu, and Susan Vargiu. *SYNTHESIS* will continue to publish the material prepared by this committee, as it becomes available.



their common denominator the possession of *values* higher than average—values such as the ethical, the aesthetic, the heroic, the humanitarian and the altruistic.

In psychosynthesis we understand such experiences of higher values as deriving from the superconscious levels of the human being. The superconscious can be thought of as the higher counterpart of the lower unconscious so well mapped by Freud and his successors. Acting as the higher unifying center for the superconscious and for the life of the individual as a whole is the Transpersonal or Higher Self.\* Thus spiritual experiences can be limited to superconscious realms or can include the awareness of the Self. This awareness gradually develops into Self-realization—the identification of the “I” with the Transpersonal Self. In the following discussion I shall consider the various stages of spiritual development including the achievement of Self-realization.

We should not be surprised to find that so fundamental a transformation is marked by several critical stages, which may be accompanied by various mental, emotional, and even physical disturbances. To the objective, clinical observation of the therapist, these may appear to be the same as those due to more usual causes. But in reality they have quite another meaning and function, and need to be dealt with in a very different way.

The incidence of disturbances having a spiritual origin is rapidly increasing nowadays, in step with the growing number of people who, consciously or unconsciously, are groping their way towards a fuller life. Furthermore, the greater development and complexity of the personality of modern man and his increasingly critical mind have rendered spiritual development a richer, more rewarding, but also a more difficult and complicated process. In the past a moral conversion, a simple whole-hearted devotion to a teacher or savior, a loving surrender to God, were often sufficient to open the gates leading to a higher level of consciousness and a sense of inner union and fulfillment. Now, however, the more varied and complex aspects of modern man’s personality are involved and need to be transmuted and harmonized with each other: his fundamental drives, his emotions and feelings, his creative imagination, his inquiring mind, his assertive will, and also his interpersonal and social relations.

Increasing  
complexity  
and richness

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\*The terms “Self” and “Superconscious” are more fully explained in “What Is Psychosynthesis?”, pp. 145 to 147, and illustrated in the diagram on p. 146, where it can be seen that the Self is at the apex of the superconscious realm. [ed.]

For these reasons it is useful to have a general outline of the disturbances which can arise at the various stages of spiritual development and some indications about how best to deal with them. We can recognize in this process four critical stages, or phases:

- Crises preceding the spiritual awakening.
- Crises caused by the spiritual awakening.
- Reactions following the spiritual awakening.
- Phases of the process of transmutation.



I have used the symbolic expression “awakening”\* because it clearly suggests the becoming aware of a new area of experience, the opening of the hitherto closed eyes to an inner reality previously unknown.

### I. CRISES PRECEDING THE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

In order to best understand the experiences that often precede the awakening, we must review some of the psychological characteristics of the “normal” human being.

One may say of him that he “lets himself live” rather than that he lives. He takes life as it comes and does not question its meaning, its worth, or its purpose; he devotes himself to the satisfaction of his personal desires; he seeks enjoyment of the senses, emotional pleasures, material security or achievement of personal ambition. If he is more mature, he subordinates his personal satisfactions to the fulfillment of the various family and social duties assigned to him, but without seeking to understand on what bases those duties rest or from what source they spring. Possibly he regards himself as “religious” and as a believer in God, but usually his religion is outward and conventional, and when he has conformed to the injunctions of his church and shared in its rites he feels that he has done all that is required of him. In short, *his operational belief is that the only reality is that of the physical world which he can see and touch* and therefore he is strongly attached to earthly goods. Thus, for all practical purposes, he considers this life an end in itself. His belief in a future “heaven,” if he conceives of one, is altogether

Only the tangible  
is “real”

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\*See Assagioli, “Symbols of Transpersonal Experience,” Available from the Psychosynthesis Institute, San Francisco, California, p. 8. [ed.]

theoretical and academic — as is proved by the fact that he takes the greatest pains to postpone as long as possible his departure for its joys.

The existential  
crisis

But it may happen that this “normal man” becomes both surprised and disturbed by a change — sudden or slow — in his inner life. This may take place after a series of disappointments; not infrequently after some emotional shock, such as the loss of a loved relative or a very dear friend. But sometimes it occurs without any apparent cause, and in the full enjoyment of health and prosperity. The change begins often with a growing sense of dissatisfaction, of lack, of “something missing.” But this “something missing” is nothing material and definite; it is something vague and elusive, that he is unable to describe.\*

Search  
for deeper  
meaning

To this is added, by degrees, a sense of the unreality and emptiness of ordinary life. Personal affairs, which formerly absorbed so much of his attention and interest, seem to retreat, psychologically, into the background; they lose their importance and value. New problems arise. The individual begins to inquire into the origin and the purpose of life; to ask what is the reason for so many things he formerly took for granted; to question, for instance, the meaning of his own sufferings and those of others, and what justification there may be for so many inequalities in the destinies of men.

Temporary  
reactions

When a man has reached this point, he is apt to misunderstand and misinterpret his condition. Many who do not comprehend the significance of these new states of mind look upon them as abnormal fancies and vagaries. Alarmed at the possibility of mental unbalance, they strive to combat them in various ways, making frantic efforts to re-attach themselves to the “reality” of ordinary life that seems to be slipping from them. Often they throw themselves with increased ardor into a whirl of external activities, seeking ever new occupations, new stimuli and new sensations. By these and other means they may succeed for a time in alleviating their disturbed condition, but they are unable to get rid of it permanently. It continues to ferment in the depths of their being undermining the foundations of their ordinary existence, whence it is liable to break forth again, perhaps after a long time, with renewed intensity. The

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\*This “existential crisis” and the steps toward its resolution are described further, in considerable detail, in “Dimensions of Growth,” pp. 69-82, this issue. [ed.]



state of uneasiness and agitation becomes more and more painful, and the sense of inward emptiness more intolerable. The individual feels distracted; most of what constituted his life now seems to him to have vanished like a dream, while no new light has yet appeared. Indeed, he is as yet ignorant of the existence of such a light, or else he cannot believe that it will ever illuminate him.

The crisis  
deepens

It frequently happens that this state of inner turmoil is accompanied by a moral crisis. His value-consciousness awakens or becomes more sensitive; a new sense of responsibility appears, and the individual can be oppressed by a heavy sense of guilt. He judges himself with severity and becomes a prey to profound discouragement, even to the point of contemplating suicide. To the man himself it seems as if physical annihilation were the only logical conclusion to his increasing sense of impotence and hope-

lessness, of breakdown and disintegration.\*

The foregoing is, of course, a generalized description of such experiences. In practice, individuals differ widely in their inner experiences and reactions. There are many who never reach this acute stage, while others arrive at it almost in one bound. Some are more harassed by intellectual doubts and metaphysical problems; in others the emotional depression or the moral crisis is the most pronounced feature.

Misleading  
resemblance

It is important to recognize that these various manifestations of the crisis bear a close resemblance to some of the symptoms regarded as characteristic of neurotic and borderline psychotic states. In some cases the stress and strain of the crisis also produce physical symptoms, such as nervous tension, insomnia and other psychosomatic disturbances.

To deal correctly with the situation, it is therefore essential to determine the basic source of the difficulties. This is generally not hard to do. The symptoms observed isolatedly may be identical; but a careful examination of their causes, a consideration of the individual's personality in its entirety, and — most important of all — the recognition of his actual, existential situation, reveal the different nature and level of the underlying conflicts. In ordinary cases, these conflicts occur either among the "normal" drives, or between these drives and the conscious "I," or between the individual and the outer world (particularly people closely related to him, such as parents, mate or children). In the cases which we are considering here, however, the conflicts are between some aspect of the personality and the progressive, emerging tendencies and aspirations of a moral, religious, humanitarian or spiritual character. And it is not



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\*One of Assagioli's major interests, and an important theme in his unpublished writings, was the social correspondences to the patterns of the individual's journey. Looking at society as if it were a person (see Donald Keys, "The Synthesis of Nations," *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 8), the symptoms of the individual crisis described in the last paragraphs are familiar: indeed, they characterize much of the behavior and collective states of mind of present-day society. Taken together, these social symptoms can be seen as the manifestation of an existential crisis in society itself. This crisis points to a spiritual awakening of society as a whole — an awakening observed by an increasing number of people. Viewed from this perspective, it may be of value to consider the many social difficulties with which we are all so familiar in the light of the patterns and suggestions that Assagioli outlines for the individual in this article. [ed.]

A higher  
reality

difficult to ascertain the presence of these tendencies once their reality and validity are recognized rather than being explained away as mere fantasies or sublimations. In a general way, the *emergence* of spiritual tendencies can be considered as the result of turning points in the development, in the *growth* of the individual.

There is this possible complication: sometimes these new emerging tendencies revive or exacerbate old or latent conflicts between personality elements. Such conflicts, which by themselves would be regressive, are in fact progressive when they occur within this larger perspective. They are progressive because they facilitate the achievement of a new personal integration, a more inclusive one, at a higher level – one for which the crisis itself paved the way. So these crises are positive, natural and often necessary preparations for the progress of the individual. They bring to the surface elements of the personality that need to be looked at and changed in the interest of the person's further growth.

## II. CRISES CAUSED BY THE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The opening of the channel between the conscious and the super-conscious levels, between the "I" and the Self, and the flood of light, energy and joy which follows, often produce a wonderful release. The preceding conflicts and sufferings, with the psychological and physical symptoms which they generated, vanish sometimes with amazing suddenness, thus confirming the fact that they were not due to any physical cause but were the direct outcome of the inner strife. In such cases the spiritual awakening amounts to a real resolution.

But in other cases, not infrequent, the personality is unable to rightly assimilate the inflow of light and energy. This happens, for instance, when the intellect is not well coordinated and developed; when the emotions and the imagination are uncontrolled; when the nervous system is too sensitive; or when the inrush of spiritual energy is overwhelming in its suddenness and intensity.\*

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\*This is why a certain amount of personal psychosynthesis – the integration of the personality around the center of identity, or "I" – needs to be undertaken before or concurrently with spiritual psychosynthesis – the fusion of the personality with the superconscious energies, and of the "I" with the Transpersonal Self.

Ego inflation

An inability of the mind to stand the illumination, or a tendency to self-centeredness or conceit, may cause the experience to be wrongly interpreted, and there results, so to speak, a “confusion of levels.” The distinction between absolute and relative truths, between the Self and the “I” is blurred, and the inflowing spiritual energies may have the unfortunate effect of feeding and inflating the personal ego.

The author encountered a striking instance of such a harmful effect in the Psychiatric Hospital at Ancona, Italy. One of the inmates, a simple little man, formerly a photographer, quietly and persistently declared that he was God. Around this central idea he had constructed an assortment of fantastic delusions about heavenly hosts at his command; at the same time he was as peaceful, kind and obliging a person as one could imagine, always ready to be of service to the doctors and patients. He was so reliable and competent that he had been entrusted with the preparation of medicines and even the keys to the pharmacy. His only lapse in behavior in this capacity was an occasional appropriation of sugar in order to give pleasure to some of the other inmates.

Therapists with materialistic views would be likely to regard this patient as simply affected by paranoid delusions; but this mere diagnostic label offers little or no help in understanding the true nature and causes of such disturbances. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to explore the possibility of a more profound interpretation of this man’s illusory conviction.

The inner experience of the spiritual Self, and its intimate association with the personal self, gives a sense of internal expansion, of universality, and the conviction of participating in some way in the divine nature. In the religious traditions and spiritual doctrines of every epoch one finds numerous attestations on this subject — some of them expressed in daring terms. In the Bible there is the explicit sentence, “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” St. Augustine declares: “When the soul loves something it becomes like unto it; if it should love terrestrial things it becomes terrestrial, but if it should love God does it not become God?” The most extreme expression of the identity of the human spirit in its pure and real essence with the Supreme Spirit is contained in the central teaching of the Vedanta philosophy: *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou Art That) and *Aham evam param Brahman* (In truth I am the Supreme Brahman).





A fundamental  
distinction  
of levels

In whatever way one may conceive the relationship between the individual self, or “I,” and the Universal Self, be they regarded as similar or dissimilar, distinct or united, it is most important to recognize clearly, and to retain ever present in theory and in practice, the difference that exists between the Self in its essential nature — that which has been called the “Fount,” the “Center,” the “deeper Being,” the “Apex” of ourselves — and the little self, or “I,” usually identified with the ordinary personality, of which we are normally conscious.\* The disregard of this vital distinction leads to absurd and dangerous consequences.

The distinction gives the key to an understanding of the mental state of the patient referred to, and of other extreme forms of self-exaltation and self-glorification. The fatal error of all who fall victim to these illusions is to attribute to their *personal* self, or “I,” the qualities and powers of the Transpersonal or Higher Self. In philosophical terms, it is a case of confusion between a relative and an absolute truth, between the empirical and the transcendent levels of reality. Instances of such confusion are not uncommon among people who become dazzled by contact with truths too great or energies too powerful for their mental capacities to grasp and their personality to assimilate. The reader will doubtless be able to record instances of similar self-deception which are found in a number of fanatical followers of various cults.

Clearly, in such a situation, it is a waste of time at best to argue with the person or ridicule his aberration; it will merely arouse his opposition and resentment. The better way is to sympathize, and, while admitting the ultimate truth of his belief, point out the nature of his error and help him learn how to make the necessary distinction of levels.

There are also cases in which the sudden influx of energies produces an emotional upheaval which expresses itself in uncontrolled, unbalanced and disordered behavior. Shouting and crying, singing and outbursts of various kinds characterize this form of response. If the individual is active and impulsive he may be easily impelled

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\*This distinction between the “I” and the “Self” and the relationship between them is illustrated in the diagram on p. 146, and discussed in Betsie Carter-Haar’s article, “Identity and Personal Freedom,” *SYNTHESIS* 2, pp. 89-90 [ed.]

Discrimination  
is needed

by the excitement of the inner awakening to play the role of prophet or savior; he may found a new sect and start a campaign of spectacular proselytism.

In some sensitive individuals there is an awakening of parapsychological perceptions. They have visions, which they believe to be of exalted beings; they may hear voices, or begin to write automatically, accepting the messages at their face value and obeying them unreservedly. The quality of such messages is extremely varied. Some of them contain fine teachings, others are quite poor or meaningless. One should always examine them with much discrimination and sound judgment, and without being influenced by their uncommon origin or by any claim of their alleged transmitter. No validity should be attributed to messages containing definite orders and commanding blind obedience, and to those tending to exalt the personality of the recipient.

### III. REACTIONS TO THE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

As has been said, a harmonious inner awakening is characterized by a sense of joy and mental illumination that brings with it an insight into the meaning and purpose of life; it dispels many doubts, offers the solution of many problems and gives an inner source of security. At the same time there wells up a realization that life is one, and an outpouring of love flows through the awakening individual towards his fellow beings and the whole of creation. The former personality, with its sharp edges and disagreeable traits, seems to have receded into the background and a new loving and lovable individual smiles at us and the whole world, eager to be kind, to serve and to share his newly acquired spiritual riches, the abundance of which seems to him almost too much to contain.

Such a state of exalted joy may last for varying periods, but it is bound to cease. The inflow of light and love is rhythmical, as is everything in the universe. After a while it diminishes or ceases, and the flood is followed by the ebb. The personality was infused and transformed, but this transformation is seldom either permanent or complete. More often a large portion of the personality elements involved revert to their earlier state.



Effects  
of superconscious  
energies

This process becomes clearer if we look at the nature of a peak experience in terms of energies and levels of organization.\* Because of their synthesizing nature, the superconscious energies act on the personality elements in ways that tend to bring them to their next higher level of organization. When this higher level is reached, synergic energy is released and this energy in turn produces the ecstasy, elation and joy characteristic of such experiences. Depending on the amount of superconscious energy radiated by the Self, on the responsiveness of the personality at the time, and on many other factors, this higher level of organization may or may not be stable. In the majority of cases, it is maintained only as long as the Self keeps radiating its energy. But once this energy is withdrawn – as it eventually is because of the cyclic nature of the activity of the Self – there is a more or less pronounced trend in the personality to revert toward its previous level of organization. For purposes of clarity, we can consider three different possible outcomes which typify the results of this process:

1. The energy of the Self is strong enough to achieve this higher personality integration and, also, to transform or break down the patterns and tendencies inherent in the personality that would tend to have it revert to the previous state. The new integration is then permanent. This outcome is relatively rare and is exemplified by those instances in which an individual's life is suddenly and permanently uplifted and transformed as a direct and immediate result of a spiritual awakening.

2. The energy transmitted by the Self is less intense and/or the personality is less responsive, so that although a higher level of organization is reached, only some of the regressive tendencies and patterns in the personality are fully transformed, while most of them are only *neutralized* temporarily by the presence of the higher energies. As a consequence, the higher integration achieved by the personality is sustained only as long as the energy of the Self is being actively transmitted. Once this energy is withdrawn, the personality reverts toward its previous state. But what remains – and this is often the most useful part of the experience – is an ideal

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\*Additional information on the concept of levels of organization can be found in "Drive in Living Matter to Perfect Itself" by Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, *SYNTHESIS* 1, p. 14. [ed.]

model and a sense of direction which one can use to complete the transformation through his own purposeful methods.

3. The energy transmitted by the Self is not sufficient to bring about the higher level of organization. The energy is then absorbed by the hidden blocks and patterns that prevent the higher integration. It has the effect of energizing them and thus bringing them to light, where they can be recognized and dealt with.\* In such cases, the experience is usually of a painful quality and its transpersonal origin often goes unrecognized. But in reality it is just as valuable, because it can show the individual the next steps he needs to make to achieve the same goals and states of being as in the other cases.

Of course, it is important to remember that a person's experience does not usually fall neatly into one of these three clear-cut categories. Most spiritual experiences contain a combination in various proportions of permanent changes, temporary changes, the recognition of obstacles that need to be overcome, and the lived realization of what it is like to exist at this higher level of integration. It is this awareness that then becomes an ideal model, a luminous beacon toward which one can navigate and which one can eventually achieve by his own means.\*\*

But experiencing the withdrawal of the transpersonal energies and the loss of one's exalted state of being is necessarily painful, and is apt in some cases to produce strong reactions and serious troubles. The personality re-awakens and asserts itself with renewed force. All the rocks and rubbish, which had been covered and concealed at high tide, emerge again. Sometimes it happens that lower propensities and drives, hitherto lying dormant in the unconscious, are vitalized by the inflow of higher energies, or bitterly rebel against the new aspirations and purposes that are constituting a challenge and a threat to their uncontrolled expression. The person, whose moral conscience has now become more refined and exacting, whose thirst for perfection has become more intense, judges with greater severity and condemns his personality with a new vehemence; he is



An ideal model

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\*This is described in greater detail in John Firman's article, "Dimensions of Growth," pp. 98 to 100, this issue. [ed.]

\*\*This process of evoking an ideal model is often used intentionally by spiritual teachers to foster the growth of those whom they are guiding. See also *SYNTHESIS* 2, p. 40. [ed.]

apt to harbor the mistaken belief of having fallen lower than he was before.

Attempts  
at denial  
are futile

At times the reaction of the personality becomes intensified to the extent of causing the individual to actually deny the value and even the reality of his recent experience. Doubts and criticism enter his mind and he is tempted to regard the whole thing as an illusion, a fantasy, or an emotional intoxication. He becomes bitter and sarcastic, ridicules himself and others, and even turns his back on his higher ideals and aspirations. Yet, try as he may, he *cannot* return to his old state; he has seen the vision, and its beauty and power to attract remain with him in spite of his efforts to suppress it. He cannot accept everyday life as before, or be satisfied with it. A “divine homesickness” haunts him and leaves him no peace. In extreme cases, the reaction can be so intense as to become pathological, producing a state of depression and even despair, with suicidal impulses. This state bears a close resemblance to psychotic depression – once called “melancholia” – characterized by an acute sense of unworthiness, a systematic self-depreciation and self-accusation, which may become so vivid as to produce the delusion that one is in hell, irretrievably damned. There is also an acute and painful sense of intellectual incompetence; a paralysis of the will power accompanied by indecision and inability to act. But in the case of those who have had an inner awakening or a measure of spiritual realization, the disturbances should not be considered as a mere pathological condition; they have different, far deeper causes, as has been indicated by both Plato and St. John of the Cross with similar analogies.

Plato, in the famous allegory contained in the Seventh Book of his *Republic*, compares unenlightened men to prisoners in a dark cave or den, and says:

A transition  
of darkness  
and light

At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck around and walk toward the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which, in his former state, he had seen the shadows.

St. John of the Cross uses words curiously similar in speaking of the experience which he called “the dark night of the soul:”

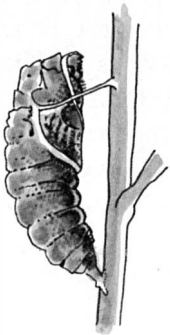
The self is in the dark because it is blinded by a light greater than it can bear. . . . As eyes weakened and clouded suffer pain when the clear light beats upon them, so the soul, by reason of its impurity, suffers exceedingly when the Divine Light really shines upon it. And when the rays of this pure Light shine upon the soul in order to expel impurities, the soul perceives

itself to be so unclean and miserable that it seems as if God had set Himself against it and itself were set against God.

The process  
of purification

St. John's words about the "light" which "shines upon the soul in order to expel impurities" deal with the essential nature of the process. Even though from the limited point of view of the personality it may seem a setback, or an undesirable phase — "as if God had set Himself against it and itself were set against God" — from the much broader perspective of the Transpersonal Self this phase, often rightly called "purgation," is in fact one of the most useful and rewarding stages of growth. The light of the Self shines on the "impurities" and brings them to the consciousness of the individual to facilitate his process of working them out. Although this process can be, at times, a laborious one, it is a basic aspect of a reliable and permanent channel of contact between the individual and his transpersonal or superconscious nature.

The proper way to deal with someone beset by this type of crisis consists in conveying to the person a true understanding of the crisis' nature. It is as though he had made a superb flight to the sunlit mountain top, realized its glory and the beauty of the panorama spread below, but had been brought back, reluctantly, with the rueful recognition that the steep path to the heights must be climbed step by step. The recognition that this descent — or "fall" — is a natural happening affords emotional and mental relief, and encourages the individual to undertake the arduous task of confronting the path to Self-realization. Ultimately, the crisis is overcome with the realization that the true and deepest value of the experience is that it offers, as I have said, a "tangible vision" of a better state of being, and thus a roadmap, an ideal model toward which one can proceed and which can then become a permanent reality.



#### IV. THE PROCESS OF TRANSMUTATION

This stage follows the recognition that the necessary conditions to be fulfilled for the high achievement of Self-realization are a thorough regeneration and transmutation of the personality. It is a long and many-sided process which includes several phases: the active removal of the obstacles to the inflow and operation of superconscious energies; the development of the higher functions which have lain dormant or undeveloped; and periods in which one can let the Higher Self work, being receptive to its guidance.

The dual life  
of Self-  
transformation

It is a most eventful and rewarding period, full of changes, of alternations between light and darkness, between joy and suffering. It is a period of transition, a passing out of the old condition without having yet firmly reached the new; an intermediate stage in which, as it has been aptly said, one is like a caterpillar undergoing the process of transformation into the winged butterfly. But the individual generally does not have the protection of a cocoon in which to undergo the process of transformation in seclusion and peace. He must—and this is particularly so nowadays—remain where he is in life and continue to perform his family, professional and social tasks as well as he can. His problem is similar to that which confronts engineers in reconstructing a railway station without interrupting the traffic.

Inner  
and outer  
mastery

Despite the challenges of the task, as he does his work he is conscious of gradual, increasing progress. His life becomes infused with a sense of meaning and purpose, ordinary tasks are vitalized and elevated by his growing awareness of their place in a larger scheme of things. As time goes on, he achieves fuller and clearer recognitions of the nature of reality, of man, and of his own higher nature. He begins to develop a more coherent conceptual framework which allows him to better understand what he observes and experiences, and which serves him not only as a means of guidance to further knowledge but also as a source of serenity and order in the midst of life's changing circumstances. As a result, he experiences a growing mastery of tasks which formerly seemed beyond him. Operating, as he increasingly does, from a higher unifying center of personality, he harmonizes his diverse personality elements into a progressive unity, and this more complete integration brings him greater effectiveness and more joy.

Such are the results, over a long period of time, which one generally observes to arise from the process of transmutation of the personality under the impulse of superconscious energies. But the process does not always proceed with absolute smoothness. This is not surprising, given the complex task of remaking the personality in the midst of the circumstances of daily life. As a general rule, some difficulties are almost always experienced, and one can observe temporary stages which manifest conditions the reverse of what I have just described. This often occurs immediately after the flood-tide of exaltation has passed, and the individual settles down to his dual task of self-transformation while meeting life's many demands. Learning the skill of using one's energies in this fashion

### Temporary setbacks

generally takes some time, and it may be a while before the two tasks are implemented in a balanced manner, and ultimately recognized as one. As a consequence, it is not surprising to find stages in which the individual may become so engrossed in his task of self-transformation that his ability to cope successfully with the problems and activities of normal life may be impaired. Observed from the outside and gauged in terms of ordinary, task-oriented efficiency, he may seem temporarily to have become less capable than before. During this transitory stage, he may not be spared unfair judgment on the part of well-meaning but unenlightened friends or therapists, and he may become the target of pungent and sarcastic remarks about his "fine" spiritual ideals and aspirations making him weak and ineffective in practical life. This sort of criticism is experienced as very painful, and its influence may arouse doubts and discouragement.

Such a trial, when it occurs, constitutes one of the tests that may have to be faced on the path of Self-realization. Its value lies in the fact that it teaches a lesson in overcoming personal sensitivity, and is an occasion for the development of inner independence and self-reliance, without resentment. It should be accepted cheerfully, or at least serenely, and used as an opportunity for developing inner strength. If, on the other hand, the people in such an individual's environment are enlightened and understanding, they can help a great deal and spare him much unnecessary friction and suffering.

This stage passes, with time, as the individual learns to master his dual task and unify it. But when the complexities of the task are not recognized and accepted, the natural stresses of growth that are involved in the process can be exacerbated, last for long periods, or recur with an unnecessary frequency. This is especially so when the individual becomes too engrossed in the process of self-transformation, excluding the outer world with a single-minded and excessive introversion. Periods of healthy introversion are natural in human growth. But if they are carried to extremes or prolonged into a general attitude of removal from the life of the world, the individual may experience many difficulties not only with impatient and critical friends, coworkers and family members, but also within, as natural introversion becomes self-obsession.

Similar difficulties may arise if the individual does not deal with the negative aspects of himself revealed in the process of spiritual awakening. Rather than transmuting these, he may flee from them into inner fantasies of achieved perfection or imaginary escapes. But





Personal  
limitations  
must be faced

the suppressed knowledge of actual imperfections haunts him, and those around him challenge his fantasies. Under such dual stress it is not unlikely for the person to succumb to a variety of psychological troubles, such as insomnia, emotional depression, exhaustion, aridity, mental agitation and restlessness. These in turn can easily produce all kinds of physical symptoms and disorders.

Many of these troubles can be greatly reduced or altogether eliminated by pursuing one's growth process with energy, dedication and zeal, but without becoming *identified* with it. This cultivation of a dis-identified commitment allows a person the flexibility needed for the optimal pursuit of the task. The individual can then *accept* the necessary stresses of the new and complex process; he can refuse to fall into a self-pity born of frustrated perfectionism; he can learn to view himself with humor and be willing to experiment and risk changes; he can cultivate a cheerful patience; and he can turn with self-acceptance of his present limitations to competent people — whether professional therapists, counselors, or wise friends — for help and guidance.



Reorientation  
of natural  
drives

Another set of difficulties can be caused by an excessive personal effort to hasten higher realizations through the forceful inhibition and repression of the aggressive and sexual drives — an attempt which only serves to produce intensification of the conflicts and their effects. Such an attitude often is the outcome of too rigid and dualistic moral and religious conceptions. These lead to condemnation of the natural drives as “bad” or “sinful.” Today a large number of people have *consciously* abandoned such attitudes but still may be *unconsciously* conditioned by them to some extent. They may manifest either ambivalence or oscillation between two extreme attitudes — one of rigid suppression, and the other of uncontrolled expression of all drives. The latter, while cathartic, is not an acceptable solution either from the ethical standpoint or the psychological. It inevitably produces new conflicts — among the various basic drives or between these drives and the boundaries imposed by social conventions, and by the demands of interpersonal relations.

The solution lies, rather, along the lines of a gradual reorientation and harmonious integration of all personality drives, first through

Evoking  
the pull  
from above

their proper recognition, acceptance and coordination,\* and then through the transformation and sublimation of the excessive or unused quota of energy.\*\* The achievement of this integration can be greatly facilitated by activating the superconscious functions and by deliberately reaching toward the Transpersonal Self. These larger and higher interests *act as a magnet which draws up the "libido" or psychic energy* invested in the "lower" drives.

A final kind of difficulty which deserves mention may confront the individual during periods in which the flow of superconscious energies is easy and abundant. If not wisely controlled, this energy flow may either be scattered in feverish excitement and activity or, on the contrary, it may be kept too much in abeyance, unexpressed, so that it accumulates and its high pressure can cause physical problems. The appropriate solution is to direct the inflowing energies purposefully, constructively and harmoniously for the work of inner regeneration, creative expression and fruitful service.

### THE ROLE OF THE GUIDE

These are times in which more and more people are experiencing spiritual awakening. Because of this, therapists, counselors, and others in the helping professions, as well as informed lay persons, may be called upon to act as resources and guides to people undergoing a spiritual awakening. It may be useful therefore to consider the role of the individual who may be close to someone else going through the process and some of its problems.

First, it is important to remain aware of the central fact that while the problems which may accompany the various phases of Self-realization can be outwardly very similar to, and sometimes appear identical with, those of normal life, their causes and signifi-

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\*The stages of recognition, acceptance, and coordination have been extensively dealt with in relation to subpersonalities in *SYNTHESIS I*, pp. 77-84. These same principles apply equally well to the integration of drives and many other elements of the personality. [ed.]

\*\*See Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis, A Manual of Principles and Techniques*, Viking Press, New York, 1971, pp. 267-277, and M. Crampton, "Psychological Energy Transformations," available from the Psychosynthesis Institute, San Francisco, California. [ed.]



cance are very different, and the way to deal with them must be correspondingly different. In other words, the existential situation in the two instances not only is not the same, but it is, in a sense, opposite.

The psychological difficulties of the average person have generally a *regressive* character. These individuals have not been able to accomplish some of the necessary inner and outer adjustments that constitute the normal development of the personality. In response to difficult situations, they have reverted to modes of behavior acquired in childhood or they have never really grown beyond certain childhood patterns whether they are recognized as such or are rationalized.

Two opposite  
problems

On the other hand, the difficulties produced by the stress and strife in the various stages towards Self-realization have, as I said earlier, a specifically *progressive* character.\* They are due to the stimulation produced by the superconscious energies, by the “pull from above,” by the call of the Self, and are specifically determined by the ensuing conflict between these energies and the “middle” and “lower” aspects of the personality. This crisis has been described in striking terms by Jung:

To be “normal” is a splendid ideal for the unsuccessful, for all those who have not yet found an adaptation. But for people who have far more ability than the average, for whom it was never hard to gain successes and to accomplish their share of the world’s work—for them restriction to the normal signifies the bed of Procrustes, unbearable boredom, infernal sterility and hopelessness. As a consequence there are many people who become neurotic because they are only normal, as there are people who are neurotic because they cannot become normal.

“Higher”  
neurosis

It is obvious that the way to help the two diverse kinds of individuals must be altogether different.

What is appropriate for the first group is likely to be not only unsatisfactory, but even harmful for the second. The lot of the latter is doubly hard if they are being guided by someone who neither

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\*Often the situation is complicated by the fact that there is an admixture of “regressive” and “progressive” factors. In such cases, individuals may reach a high level of development with some parts of their personality and yet be dominated by unconscious conflicts or handicapped by certain infantile fixations.

understands nor appreciates the superconscious functions, who ignores or denies the reality of the Self and the possibility of Self-realization. He or she may either ridicule the person's uncertain higher aspirations as mere fancies, or interpret them in a materialistic way, or persuade the person to harden the shell of the personality against the insistent knocking of the Transpersonal Self. This course can aggravate the condition, intensify the struggle and retard the solution.

The value  
of understanding

On the other hand, a guide who is spiritually inclined, or has at least an understanding of and a sympathetic attitude towards the higher achievements and realities, can be of great help to the individual when, as is often the case, the latter is still in the first stage, that of dissatisfaction, restlessness and unconscious groping. If he has lost interest in life, if everyday existence holds no attractions for him, if he is looking for relief in wrong directions, wandering up and down blind alleys, and he has not yet had a glimpse of the higher reality – then the revelation of the real cause of his trouble and the indication of the unhopd-for solution, of the happy outcome of the crisis, can greatly help to bring about the inner awakening which in itself constitutes the principal part of the resolution.

Assisting  
the re-entry

The second stage, that of emotional excitement or elation – when the individual may be carried away by an excessive enthusiasm and cherishes the illusion of having arrived at a permanent attainment – calls for a gentle warning that his blessed state is, of necessity, but temporary; and he should be given an indication of the vicissitudes on the way ahead of him. This will prepare him for the onset of the inevitable reaction in the third stage, which often involves, as we have seen, a painful reaction and sometimes a deep depression, as the person “comes down” from his high experience. If he has been forewarned, this will enable him to avoid much suffering, doubt, and discouragement. When he has not had the benefit of a warning of this sort, the guide can give much help by assuring him that his present condition is *temporary* and not in any sense permanent or hopeless as he seems compelled to believe. The guide should insistently declare that the rewarding outcome of the crisis justifies the anguish – however intense – he is experiencing. Much relief and encouragement can be afforded him by quoting examples of those who have been in a similar plight and have come out of it.



In the fourth stage, during the process of transmutation — which is the longest and most complicated — the work of the guide is correspondingly more complex. Some important aspects of this work are:

To enlighten the individual as to *what is really going on* within him, and help him to find the *right attitude* to take.

To teach him how, *by the skillful use of the will, to wisely control and master the drives* emerging from the unconscious, without repressing them through fear or condemnation.

To teach him the techniques of the *transmutation and sublimation* of sexual and aggressive energies. These techniques constitute the most apt and constructive solution of many psychological conflicts.

To help him in the proper *recognition and assimilation* of the energies inflowing from the Self and from superconscious levels.

To help him *express and utilize those energies in altruistic love and service*. This is particularly valuable for counteracting the

The phases  
of harmonization

tendency to excessive introversion and self-centeredness that often exists in this and other stages of self-development.

To guide him through the various phases of the *reconstruction of his personality around a higher inner center*, that is, in the achievement of his spiritual psychosynthesis.\*

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Throughout this article I have stressed the more difficult and painful side of spiritual development, but it should not be inferred that those who are on the path of Self-realization are more likely to be affected by psychological disturbances than other men and women. The stage of most intense suffering often does not occur. In many individuals such development is accomplished in a gradual and harmonious way so that inner difficulties are overcome and the different stages passed through without causing severe reactions of any kind.

On the other hand, the emotional disorders or neurotic symptoms of the average man or woman are often more serious, intense, and difficult for them to bear and for therapists to deal with, than those connected with Self-realization. It is often difficult to deal with them satisfactorily because—the higher psychological levels and functions of these individuals being not yet activated—there is little to which one can appeal to show the value of making the necessary sacrifices or accepting the discipline required in order to bring about the needed adjustments.

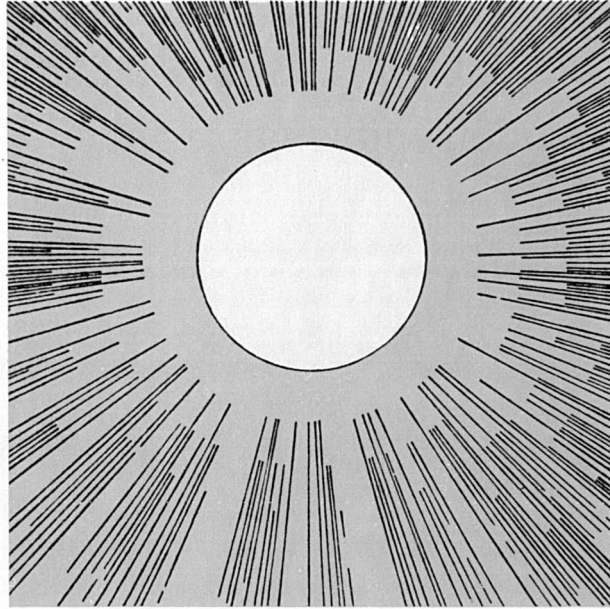
The physical, emotional and mental problems arising on the way of Self-realization, however serious they may appear, are merely *temporary* reactions, by-products, so to speak, of an organic process of inner growth and regeneration. Therefore they either disappear spontaneously when the crisis which has produced them is over, or they yield easily to proper treatment. Furthermore, the sufferings caused by periods of depression, by the ebbing of the inner life, are abundantly compensated for by periods of renewed inflow of super-conscious energies, and by the anticipation of the release and enhancement of the whole personality to be produced by Self-realization. This vision is a most powerful inspiration, an unfailing comfort and a constant source of strength and courage. Therefore,

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\*The entire process is necessarily complex and lengthy and I have dealt with it in more ample detail in my other writings.

Cultivating  
the vision  
of the goal

as we have said, it is most valuable to make a special point of recalling that vision as vividly and as frequently as possible. One of the greatest services we can render to those struggling along the way is to help them keep the vision of the goal ever present before their eyes.



Thus one can anticipate, and have an increasing foretaste of, the state of consciousness of the Self-realized individual. It is a state of consciousness characterized by joy, serenity, inner security, a sense of calm power, clear understanding and radiant love. In its highest aspects it is the realization of essential Being, of communion and identification with the Universal Life.



Roberto Assagioli was born in Venice in 1888. Despite his formidable age he continued active as a psychiatrist and in a variety of other professional activities until his death in 1974. One of the pioneers of psychoanalysis in Italy, he began to formulate the concept of psychosynthesis as early as 1910. He argued that psychoanalysis was not an incorrect approach but rather that it was a partial one. From those early days, he spent his professional life elaborating a comprehensive psychology of man that he has called "psychosynthesis." He wrote more than three hundred papers and several books including *Psychosynthesis* and *The Act of Will*. He was Chairman of the Psychosynthesis Research

Foundation in New York, and President of the Istituto di Psicointesi in Italy.



## PERSONAL GROWTH AND THE FAMILY

### A Conversation with Virginia Satir



OME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ways we approach our growing—ways that are as essential to our personal development as vitamins are to our bodies—treat the highest aspects of our being, prepare us for a distant flowering, work toward a major synthesis of our personal and transpersonal lives. But so much of our life takes place in everyday settings and involves relating to others—especially people close to us. So it requires a daily effort at expressing in practical activity the higher selves that we know ourselves to be.

Virginia Satir's work takes us into the world of this daily existence—the social and especially the family existence, in which, to use Milton's words, "our virtue is tried, not without dust and heat." To the world of daily human relations, Virginia brings insights, methods and tested theories that have assisted hundreds of thousands of people. As therapist of the troubled and counselor of those who would grow, she has developed practical ways of helping all of us toward right human relations, and the satisfaction and personal growth that come from them.

Virginia Satir is a pioneer in the field of family therapy. Originally working with individuals, then as a family therapist, she has now evolved into a teacher of others who are using her methods and ideas. She has taught at many universities, including Johns Hopkins,

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This interview was conducted by Jim and Susan Vargiu. Jim and Susan Vargiu are Editors of *SYNTHESIS*.

*and the University of Calgary. As she states later in this Conversation, she has worked with some 300,000 individuals. She flies yearly to give seminars and lectures throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico, as well as Europe and Israel. Her teachings are further spread in her two books—Conjoint Family Therapy and Peoplemaking—which have served as a source of practical inspiration to both professional and lay persons. She is committed to the proposition that people can grow and develop, that it is natural for them to do so, and that they can do so within the context of their most challenging and rewarding relationships—their families. As she says: “All of the ingredients in a family that count are changeable and correctable—individual self-worth, communication, systems, and rules—at any point in time.” She sees the intimations of spirituality naturally arising from authentic intimate relations.*

*Being with Virginia Satir is a nourishing experience. One is struck by her confidence, her fearlessness. Her being and presence express her conviction that growth is possible, is natural. One person who recently met Virginia for the first time described her this way: “Focused, energetic, confident, bright. There is an energy that derives from, and expresses her vast experience with human beings, a faith in people that has been earned. She is tough, witty, and full of laughter—at her self and at all of us. She knows our foibles, our hopes, and our potentialities. I knew, when we met, that she was coming from one airplane trip and about to depart, within a couple of hours, for another. Her professional activity is enormous and her energy seemingly boundless. But when she was with me, I seemed to be the only person in the world for her. For her, I was fascinating, intriguing; she cared for me. She is as far from boredom as people can conceivably get.”*

*Though she is perhaps the most famous family therapist living, Virginia’s work, like her personality, emphasizes not sickness but health. She is interested in people and the relationships between them that promote or hamper their progress. This SYNTHESIS interview introduces some of her main ideas, ideas that are useful to anyone interested in the processes of human communication and development—mental health professionals, teachers, executives, parents . . . all of us.*

**SYNTHESIS:** In the last few years many people have become interested in family therapy, including the professional community.

Exploring  
and understanding

You've been working in this field for 25 years. Can you tell us how your interest in family therapy started and how it developed after that?

VIRGINIA: I think that the roots of my work come from my mother's own attitudes when I was a child. She had a "no-blame" attitude about everything and a genuinely exploratory approach to life. She never listed the taboos. I can never remember her blaming; I seldom remember her saying to me "No, Virginia, don't look, don't do. . . ." Rather, it was always, "See what happens, try it out."

As a child, there were all kinds of mysteries I wanted to understand, and also all kinds of discrepancies. It all added up to my wanting to understand *people* more than anything: to understand myself, my parents and others.

After college I taught in the public schools. It was, I remember, during the first day of school that I thought to myself, "Well, I've got to know these kids' families." Nobody told me, it just seemed like a sound principle, because now I was part of their lives. The first day of school I told the kids: "I'd like to come and meet your families. Who would like to take me home with them tonight?" So I went trooping home with one little boy, and his mother opened the door and said, "What, the first day of school and he's done something wrong!" I said, "No, no. I just wanted to come and meet you."

As the days went on, I went home with each child, and when I got around the group I started all over again. Of course, because I saw all the families from the beginning, they were with me. Because I *knew* them all, I had few behavior problems with the children. We had a very great *esprit de corps* and when things came up they could usually be resolved, because the kids, the parents and I were all together in it.

But there were some problems that were very difficult. I had one little child I remember particularly. I looked at him one morning: he smelled bad and he wasn't able to work. Afterwards he told me that he had slept out in the fields all night. He said he had been turned out of the house by his father and his father drank too much. So I began to see a whole other level of things: helping people meant more than simply encouraging and being connected with them. These were first steps, but I had more to do. So I went into social work, and started working in clinics. My questions and concerns sharpened: What made beautiful miracles of people get off the path of human growth? What made them crazy? What made them murder,



and not learn, when they had all their equipment?

My own search for some of the answers to these mysteries led me back again to the family role in therapy and growth.

SYNTHESIS: Can you recall when you moved from individual therapy to the family unit? When was the first time you worked with an entire family?

VIRGINIA: In 1951 I met a girl who had been through individual therapy with several other people, but was still in desperate straits. I worked with her for about six months and things were going well. Then, one day, I got a phone call from her mother. She wanted to sue me for alienation of affection!

Responding  
to the plea

I don't know what happened that day, but you know how sometimes you hear things that you never noticed before? This time behind the threat in her words I heard the *plea* that was underneath. And I chose to respond to the plea. I made up my mind I would *not* be defensive when she came in. For me, this became one of the main secrets of working with people: you ignore the threat and you respond to the plea. You'll never get anyplace if you close down.

When the mother came in, I was struck by recognizing in her all the same symptoms I had seen in the daughter. I said to myself, "Well, there sure is something else going on here." So I invited the mother in with the daughter and I started to watch. I was fascinated. My whole picture changed once I began looking at the way these two "clued" each other. Later that day, I was ruminating . . . I love to ruminate . . . things come to me . . . and I figured out that she has a father! (laughs) "She's got a father," I thought, "she must have." So I inquired and sure enough she had one. He was living, and he was living in the house. I said to myself, "Well, why don't you ask him to come in?" And when the father came in, the picture was still different. I was beginning to see the pieces.

You see, I reserve the right to be a slow learner, but educable. (laughs) At some point I began to ask, were there any other people in this family? They told me there was a brother. So I got them all in. That was the first time I can remember working with a whole family in a treatment task. These seeds were the beginning of my understanding family systems, of my communications theory, and much more.

It's just like anything else. When you get one piece, and you can feel where it belongs, you are able to open up to something else. You

## SYNTHESIS - A Conversation with Virginia Satir

The family:  
a living organism

keep going with the connections until you finally get to the universe. But you've got to be an explorer to do it – you've got to be free to discard, add, try out, give up, let go, all of that.

SYNTHESIS: In your books you talk about your realization that the family is actually an entity, with a life of its own. Would you say some more about this?

VIRGINIA: The family is a living organism: expanding, contracting, responding, initiating on many levels. Compare it to an orchestra: each of the instruments makes its own sound, but if the symphony is going to come off successfully, the instruments will have to play in harmony. Each one can play by itself, but none can make a symphony by itself.

Integration  
of the individual  
is essential

In the same way, each individual within the family entity is also composed of different elements. Each has body, feelings, mind and soul, all needing to be integrated. This integration of the individual is at the foundation of the successful family and larger communities. We can't get far in life generally unless we have community with other human beings. But we can't achieve authentic community unless we are individually nurtured, physically, emotionally, mentally, and so forth. I think it fair to say that creating this nurturing context is the primary task of the family.

Frequently, when people adopt a more expanded view and see the family as a developing entity, they also begin to see themselves and the other members of the family more adventurously. Their context becomes richer, things are not so tight, and they become freer and more expressive.

Now, in many families, people have a static, a non-organismic view of things. For example, they often behave as though there is only one priority for all time – for instance, only one important person in the family (the man or the woman or the child). Other people will act as if there is only one important action, and that's whether or not you leave your clothes lying on the floor. Still others will consider the most important thing is not to let the kids die, or to make them successful, and so on.

Changing priorities

But if people want to have a better understanding of the family and a better life in the family, they need to remember that the priorities of every moment are changing and that no priority is for all time. They need to learn to be responsive to these changes and not to hold on to any one priority. There is a constant action and interaction, and a constant ebb and flow.

These and so many other things about the family seem simple and obvious, once you think about them. But in the hurried pace of daily life we may not take time to think about them. Or if we do know them, we may often neglect to remember them and put these principles to work. I had a call recently from a woman whose family I worked with fifteen years ago. One of the things she had been upset about was that her child—who was eight at the time—had such terrible table manners. I remember saying to her, “Why are you so concerned about this?” And she had replied, “When he’s twenty he’ll go to a state dinner and not be able to eat.” My answer was: “What? You mean in twelve years he won’t learn any better?” When she called a few months ago she said, “You know, I just thought I’d tell you. I laugh when I remember what you said to me fifteen years ago. My son is a graduate psychologist.” I asked, “Does he still eat with his fingers?” She said, “No.”

Then she said to me, “You know, I was so preoccupied then with whether *I* was any good or not if my kid ate with his fingers, that I left no room for the fact that *he* could evolve. I really wasn’t talking about him, I was talking about me.”

So the life of a family is a constantly evolving thing and our attitudes toward its evolution affect our behavior as parents and spouses. Nothing stays the same for all time—*unless*, of course, we work very hard at reinforcing it. This reinforcing what we’re used to is not an unusual pattern. You can be a cripple in your family all your life by first of all announcing that you are, somebody else saying, “Yes, you’re right,” and then everyone picking out—from all the thousands of things that you do—only the things that relate to your “crippledness” to talk to you about. Finally the world knows that you’re a cripple, and they relate to you as a cripple, and there you go.

**SYNTHESIS:** You touched on the relation of the individual to the family and the community. In your books, you say that the family is the “critical intervening variable” between the individual and society. Can you elaborate on this?

**VIRGINIA:** What makes the family the “critical intervening variable” between the individual and society is that the family receives a new human being on its journey toward full participation in society, when that human being is *not in a position to manage for itself*. Therefore, the family is the unit in society where one human being is in a life-and-death relationship with another. We can create this relationship in other places, but the family is the prototype. If I let

Reinforcing  
the status quo



Fostering  
autonomy

you get too cold, you'll freeze to death. If I let you get too hot, you'll roast to death. If I don't feed you, you'll starve to death. We have a "loan arrangement:" you're my baby and I loan you my eyes, my ears, my hands, my know-how and so forth. But all this lending is to help you until you can do it yourself. The *quality* of my lending and especially how I observe what you need at a moment in time, will largely determine when you are ready to do things for yourself. And most importantly, the quality of my lending will have a major effect on the quality of your own participation in society.

SYNTHESIS: Would you say that the same processes of growth apply to the individual, the family and society?

VIRGINIA: Absolutely. The same vital ingredients are needed for growth on all three levels. First, a high sense of self-worth with a nurturing environment to support it. Then, having the freedom to take the risks necessary to correct whatever is really wrong. These two ingredients generally go together. People who are really successful at changing things are most frequently those who come from a nurturing, high self-worth position. These are people whose needs are really fed and who also have stimulation for being creative and getting things done. So the healthful growth of society depends on individuals who can grow and change, and the family, in turn, has a vital role to play in the development of those individuals. Here again the family mediates between society and the individual.

SYNTHESIS: Can you elaborate on the crucial importance of the sense of self-worth?



VIRGINIA: Certainly. Without a sense of self-worth, nobody does a damn thing except bootleg it from everybody else. If a person can't bootleg his or her sense of self-worth from somebody else he can drag it out of his or her money or success out there in the world. If the money and the success go, people get into the "blame-frame." Typifying the "blame-frame" is the pointed finger—pointed at someone else. "If *you* had been different, if you hadn't done it the way you did it, this wouldn't have happened to me!" There's a lot of that kind of thing going on in society, and a lot of unnecessary pain because of the pervasiveness of the "blame-frame."

Now I certainly wouldn't kid myself that the world can be without pain. There's the pain of living, the existential pain, and the pain when you say "no" to me. But that's not the blame-pain, the pain that you get from my saying, or implying or even habitually thinking that you're a son of a bitch because you did say "no."

Development  
of self-worth

SYNTHESIS: What are some of the ways we can best foster this needed self-worth in our children?

VIRGINIA: Children need the freedom *to see and to be seen, to hear and to be heard, to touch and be touched, to understand and be understood, to reach out and be reached out toward*. These are the five essential freedoms.

Think about it a minute. You've got a little kid.

The little kid calls out, "Ma."

Ma says, "Just a minute."

"Ma!"

"Wait a minute."

Now even though Ma is busy, the child may want to find out something important. What would happen if instead of worrying about having to get things done, this mother would turn to the child, give it full attention and say, "At this moment I can't attend to you. I've got to do something else. Can you wait?" What if she said it down at eye level where the kid can really be seen and heard?



The nurturing  
family

Think what it really means *to see and be seen*. It means that I *see* you. Then, I need to find out what *you* are seeing; and then whether I'm seeing what you are seeing. A family needs to take all the five freedoms in the same way, look at them, understand them, and live them. In the nurturing family, one finds the five freedoms. The troubled family tries to work without them. It's that simple.

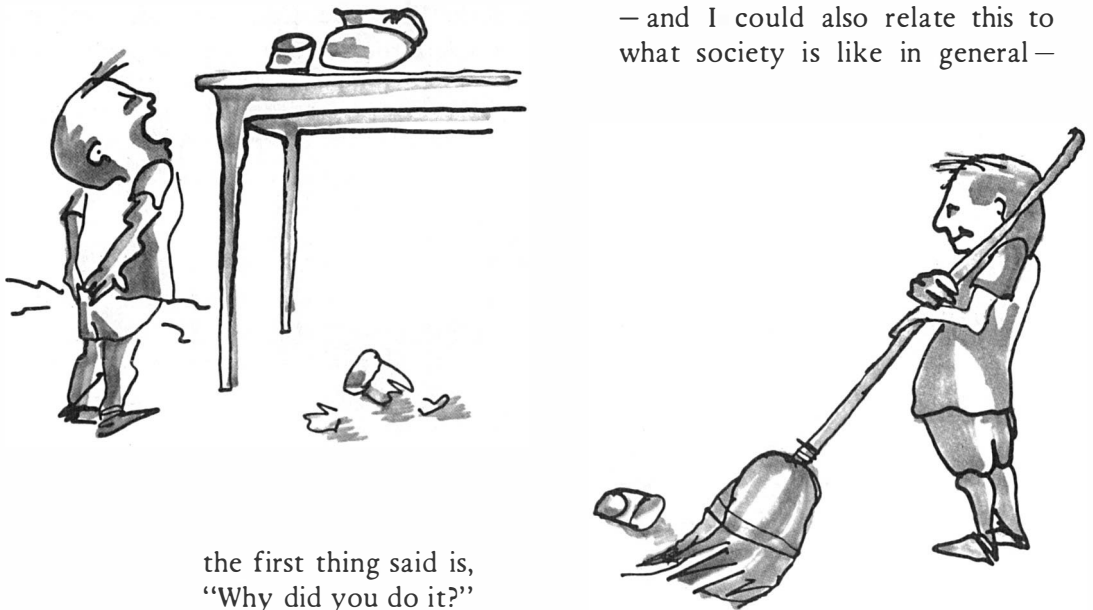
SYNTHESIS: What are some of the patterns in the troubled family?



Patterns  
of trouble

VIRGINIA: The questions people in a troubled family ask of one another are likely to be blaming “Why’s” – “Why did you do it? Why haven’t you got it done?” And the rules are likely to be of this kind: “*This* is what you have to do in order to be lovable. *This* is what you have to do in order to be successful.” The troubled family is loaded up with punishments and rewards, with trying to hold the status quo, to find the one “right way” and hang onto it. Life is based on clutching and maintaining the status quo, instead of welcoming change. Risk is given up in the interest of safety, so that we can’t try out our wings. People in troubled families tend to worry that if they take risks or don’t do the right thing, something terrible will happen. *Why* something happens becomes more important than looking at *what* is going on and *how* it might be changed. These are some of the typical patterns in a troubled family. Take the example

of a little child who spills his milk on the table. In a troubled family – and I could also relate this to what society is like in general –



the first thing said is, “Why did you do it?” And the child is punished, sent away from the table or scolded. He is held completely responsible for not fitting into the accepted, usual, and therefore safe, norm.

In a nurturing family instead, people say, “Oh, you spilled the milk. *What* can we do to clean it up?” Then they might ask, “*What* happened to you? Maybe you couldn’t hold onto the glass. . . .” There develops an *exploration* of what happened. Maybe the glass is

too big or too full or too slippery, or the child wasn't paying attention, or the table was too far away. These are the things the troubled family never gets to. In either case the tablecloth is already stained with milk. In the troubled family it may also be stained with blood.

SYNTHESIS: How can a troubled family become a nurturing family?

VIRGINIA: One basic process in turning things around is becoming aware of how things are actually changing, all the time, in every family and in ourselves. We need to learn to make room for change. And to make room for change, we need to find out how things really are at the moment, to see what's going on. Not what we want to go on, or what we hate that's going on, but what we can see is truly going on. It's a big help if the family takes periodic readings of their situation, with each member asking, "All right, what's going on? What am I doing? What's going on with everybody else in the family?" In this way people can get an emotional reading (what bugs them, what worries them, what they like), an intellectual reading (what sense do things make), a financial reading, and so on up and down the various levels of what's what. Just think how easily we could make fruitful changes if everyone in the family did this kind of thing periodically, talked about it, and then took this knowledge and tried to live by the five freedoms. Starting this process is what I try for in my work with people.

But you don't get real changes in the family merely by teaching techniques, however basic. At bottom, all real teaching amounts to showing ways of going, and the need for openness, so that each new moment can be met creatively. As one goes more deeply into working with the family, you see that there is a lot more to it than when you talk back to your mother, or who carries out the garbage.

Are you aware that what we are trying to do is to change a whole way of viewing people? Over and over, I have found that if you are going to get real changes in the family, what is needed is a change in the person—a fundamental change in the way he sees himself and others. People need to become willing to see themselves as basic miracles and worthy of love. And worthy of loving themselves. That's self-worth.

It's been my experience that the real turnaround doesn't come until people are able to find what I now call, for lack of better words, the "spiritual self." It is the spiritual self which ultimately contains the love of self. What is needed for the experience of true

Seeing  
and changing

A fundamental  
change

Manifesting  
the spiritual self

self-worth is getting in touch with the *source* of that self-worth. I mean, the deep inner source of a human's capacity to love, to be wise, to be real. The next step, of course, is manifesting this "spiritual self" in the family and in life generally. This is a complex process with all kinds of aspects—some of them pleasant and some unpleasant—but all of them honorable.

SYNTHESIS: You express a deeply felt hopefulness in your books, and in this conversation, about the possibilities of positive change in individuals and families. Can you say more about the source of your hopefulness?

VIRGINIA: The many, many families I have worked with are one source. I believe that to this point I've worked with about 300,000 people, and maybe more than that. And, of course, my own life is another source. I see from this evidence that all of us can grow. One of the problems I often have in teaching people is in helping them to have hope when they don't yet have this evidence. This is easily understandable: if some people have been banging their heads on the wall for thirty years, they've got a pretty well developed idea that life is all head-banging. Now the fact that these people also have their *backs* to the wall frequently escapes them. So they remain where they are, banging their heads. The question then becomes, how is it going to be possible for people like this to allow themselves to move away from the wall? Well, since they don't know that's possible, someone will have to help them see it. Somebody needs to say, "Look, if you stepped forward a little, when you moved your head you wouldn't hit the wall anymore, and you wouldn't have that terrible bump there."

Frequently, the person can see the idea right away. But acting on it is another thing. In those cases, I'll say, "Well, why don't you try now to move forward six feet and see what it's like."

The risk  
to change

Here is the point of risk and choice. The person's been head-banging for so long, he doesn't know what it will be like to stop. He may say, "Yeah, well, sure, you're right, but this is what I always do. And isn't it what everybody does?" Then I will say, "No, it isn't. It is one way, but let's see if you can open up some other ways." If the person is willing to try; suddenly the head-banging ceases, and a new way of living begins. In one sense, almost everything negative we do to ourselves is that absurd. But it only seems absurd after we realize what has been happening. When people be-

People  
need  
to see  
themselves  
as  
basic  
miracles  
and  
worthy  
of  
love."



Creative security

come willing to take the right risks, to let go of the destructive patterns that pass for "security," then they can let their security become rooted instead in their own creative processes. Then growth and change become possible.

**SYNTHESIS:** What you have said about the need for taking risks in the growth process raises a special question for parents. Parents have to decide over and over when to protect their children. How can they best decide when to protect them and when to let them take their own chances?

Real and “fancy”  
protection

VIRGINIA: The question can be seen as asking what constitutes real protection for the child and what is a kind of unnecessary, “fancy” protection. Let me go back to the five freedoms: When do you protect a child from looking at what is? Do you ever? When do you protect a child from hearing what is? Do you ever?

When do you protect a child from reaching out for what he wants? Well, that’s a simpler one to answer. A child needs primarily to be protected from *doing*, doing certain things: those things which either he himself cannot naturally manage, or that require training he has no way yet of receiving. A two-year-old needs to be protected from crossing a crowded street without help because of his size, because of lack of past experience, because of his inability to read the signals.

This means that when parents think about a child’s taking risks, they need to decide when the child can incur a struggle that he can plausibly deal with. It doesn’t have to be a pleasant struggle (the aftermath for example, may not be pleasant) but it must be a struggle he can actually deal with, like falling from a fence or from a tree. That’s a different story from, say, falling off an eighteen-story building.

Discrimination  
is needed

Discrimination is the key. The parent must discriminate between when the child’s struggle will help him find new growth and when the child will have to wait, because he hasn’t the right equipment yet to grow with. This is not always an easy discrimination to make, but it must be made on an individual basis, by looking at the particular child in a particular situation at a particular time. I have a feeling that many people have a list somewhere: if a child is four, he shouldn’t do this, if he’s two, he shouldn’t do that, and so forth. Such often unspoken general rules are frequently not applicable to a particular child. (They are also frequently not applicable to *most* two or four-year-olds, but that’s another matter). The thing, again, is to *see* where the particular child actually is. If he can walk, you don’t carry him. If he can talk, you don’t talk for him. And so on.

Teaching  
self-protection

As to protecting a child from what he sees, or hears, the general approach here is the same as with doing—to teach children the important function of protecting *themselves*, emotionally and intellectually, as well as physically. This can be done in such a way that it is a positive learning process for the child, a process which simultaneously encourages his exploration of new things, and helps him develop his *own* sense of what he can and can’t handle at any

given moment. So, instead of trying to erase a child's vulnerability, the question becomes when to allow vulnerability and when to be protective. If a child is protected to the point of invulnerability, he stops feeling, he stops reaching out, he may even stop looking at life.



SYNTHESIS: In *Peoplemaking* you said that at the root of over-protecting ourselves and others is the fear of a kind of "death." What did you mean?

VIRGINIA: Have you ever heard someone say, totally unrealistically, "I can't possibly even think of doing that because so and so will get mad at me or their feelings will be hurt"? Now that's a pretty powerful thing, isn't it? If you look closely into such statements you often find that it's almost as if the person were saying, "If I were to do it, he'd get so mad or hurt, I'd die." And so a grave fear frequently comes to block even the most harmless and relatively safe changes in our lives. But if I want to do something new and I don't do it simply because I'm afraid you'll get hurt, and then you'll drop dead or I will, what I'm really doing is dying a little myself. I'm not treating life as an active, open thing. Thus we can die our lives instead of living them. People are dying needless psychological "deaths" all the time.

SYNTHESIS: It would seem that these patterns of fear are also the cause of many problems between couples. For example, couples are

Symbolic death

Appreciating  
differences

often afraid of hurting each other if they feel differently about something. What can they do about this?

VIRGINIA: Couples first need to share what they feel differently about. Then they have to look at how they feel about the fact that there are real differences. So often we try to pretend that if we love each other, there will be no difference between us: love equals sameness. Of course, if you take that attitude far enough, you have people around who are exactly like you, and then probably you end up by wanting to cut their throats . . . or yours!

Many couples who talk about their "sex problem" or their "money problem" are just plain bored with each other. But appreciation of differences has in it the opportunity for excitement. It's an antidote for boredom. And, in actual fact, there is always difference.

The matter becomes a little more complex when one considers the categories of differences. There is the real but fixed difference, for example, if the husband is 6 foot 3 and the wife is 4 foot 11. That's a difference which will probably not change much. If you want to equalize it, I suppose you can get one a high stool, but that's about all you can do about it. But let's take another kind of difference. Let's say she hates spinach and he loves it and would like it for dinner. Well, those two could get into real trouble about their spinach. (laughs) Let me show you how this works.

Unspoken rules

He says, "I want spinach." Now, suppose there is an unspoken family rule between them, and the unspoken rule says: he gets what *he* wants. So she thinks to herself, "Spinach makes me absolutely ill, but I have to serve it or he'll be mad." Here we're already into the old international disease: If I tell you what I feel or think, your feelings will be hurt, and then I'll drop dead from grief, or you'll get mad and then you'll shoot me. So the best thing for me to do is close my mouth.

So she serves the spinach with clenched teeth. But it just doesn't work out that simply. He says to her, "What's the matter, don't you like the spinach?" (Meaning, "If you love me, you'll eat it.") So she'll swallow that, *and* the spinach, and be sick later – or be sick on him, if she gets the chance.

That's one way of handling a real difference in a couple, based on one set of unspoken rules. But take another couple with the same spinach but a different unspoken rule: *he* has to please *her*. Now he's never said that he wanted spinach, but she thinks that he *should* have spinach because it's "good for him." So she serves it to him.

She never asks him if he wants it. And he goes on eating it because he thinks doing so will please her.

Freedom  
to be different

So you can see how dealing with differences has to be looked at in the frame of the underlying rules between two people. Neither partner can begin to look at *options* for handling real differences until both can be free to tell one another how they feel about differences. And there needs to be agreement to give one another some real space to be different. When the couple arrives at this point, the couple's life together becomes vitalized, and then all sorts of problems become as easy as spinach problems. If he likes spinach, it's perfectly okay for him to eat it, and it's okay with him that she doesn't like it. Suddenly things become simple. She fixes spinach for him and cauliflower for herself and that's that. It is the *unspoken* rules about who must do what in relation to whom that are the basis of many problems in the couple. They are unspoken, but they might as well be written in blood.

SYNTHESIS: Are you saying that once the unspoken rules are spoken, they can be examined?

VIRGINIA: Surely. That's what I depend on. I ask people to write them down in black and white. It is really marvelous when a family systematically writes out their unspoken rules. When they finally get them down on paper, they look at them and say "*What? Those are crazy!*" (laughs)

Unreasonable  
demands

SYNTHESIS: You say in *Peoplemaking* that the marital relationship in our society is based almost completely on love, and that demands are imposed on it that love can never really fulfill. Can you say more about this?

VIRGINIA: Does loving her husband help a woman balance her checkbook? Yet I've heard this kind of thing a thousand times: a man says to a woman, "Well, my God, you're my wife; you ought to be able to do a little simple arithmetic!"

SYNTHESIS: If "you loved him."

VIRGINIA: Right! If you love him, you should be able to do anything.

There are all sorts of demands we put on love that have no business being there:

"If you love me, you won't do anything without me."

"If you love me, you'll give me what I want."





“If you love me, you’ll know what I want without my having to ask for it.”

These kinds of demands make love into a kind of blackmail, which I call “The Clutch.” What it boils down to is that if you are not eternally showing me that you live for me, then I feel like nothing. I have often seen this attitude strangle relationships.

Now this is how I think it should go: We love each other, and that means we build a nurturing context in which we can both grow. Within this context, neither of us is defined by the other. Rather, we create something more for both of us.

When one partner is sick, for example, that doesn’t mean the other one has to get sick too, or totally disappear into tending the sickness. You find out from your partner what best can help – because you’re willing to do it. At the same time, neither one of you, unless you were on your deathbed, would expect the other one to give up everything that he or she is doing. But you *would* expect your partner to include you in some way. That’s the kind of thing I’m talking about. Each one includes the other, but you don’t rely on that inclusion to define yourself.

Now love, by itself, doesn’t make all this happen. Love can create certain facilitating conditions, but then *you* have to *do* it. And doing takes thought, examining your values, courage and good will.

**SYNTHESIS:** What happens in a couple or a family, if one of the partners gets interested in developing his or her potential as much as possible, and the other one does not? What advice would you give them?

**VIRGINIA:** This is by no means an unusual situation. It’s as if two people start out for a walk together, then one of them starts running while the other keeps walking. They can plan a time when they want to meet: the one who gets there first can wait a while. That’s one possibility. But what happens if they go on the same walk, and in the middle of it one wants to go to the right? They have to separate. And what happens if they go on the same walk, and in the middle of it one sits down and says, “I don’t want to walk anymore”?

You see, I think that if people want to renegotiate their first decision to walk together, they can make room for the fact that they may want to go at different rates. Or they may decide while they’re walking, that they really don’t want to walk together anymore. I do not believe there is anything necessarily good or bad

Self-worth:  
a source  
of freedom

about people taking the same path. I think the problem comes when they don't let each other *know* what's going on as they are walking.

I don't work with families either to keep them together or to separate them, but to help them stand on their own feet and see what they want. For me, being together means the freedom to come close and to separate, without blame. So you see, again, how much of this family business goes back to experiencing self-worth, and living on the basis of the freedom it gives an individual. People often acquire their internal personal freedom slowly, but as they get it their relations with others become cleaner, more above-board, and more truly loving. You know my poem, don't you?

I want to love you without clutching,  
Appreciate you without judging,  
Join you without invading,  
Invite you without demanding,  
Leave you without guilt,  
Criticize you without blaming,  
Help you without insulting you,  
If I can have the same from you,  
Then we can truly meet and enrich each other.

SYNTHESIS: How do you see the women's movement? Do you think it is helping to lay the groundwork for better interpersonal relations along these lines?

VIRGINIA: This is an important question. Let's look first at some typical women's problems in pairing. Many women handle their pairing with the other sex by placating. This gambit developed out of a whole set of unspoken rules, like the early Romantic idea that women were fragile and had to be protected. It's as if, inside themselves, women were saying, "I feel worthless; without him I'm dead." The outcome of this attitude was that women often couldn't stand on their own, and they placated males in order to survive.

As a result of this pattern of placating, not only did women often suppress much of their individuality, but men got an extra burden of responsibility: the man became responsible for both partners.

Now a number of women reacted against this placating but got caught up in the opposite trap — the trap of power. They took up war with men — and with women, too. Other women tried to deny the problem with men, behaving as if it simply did not exist. These women tried to find a way to live and work without being involved



with men. And still other women chose to be trivial in their male relationships, to be the toys of men.

What I see happening with women today, as with every other group of people which has been under someone else's thumb, is that many are saying it is possible to be a whole person in one's own right. For the most part, I can only feel good about what is happening now. What I do feel bad about is the notion some women have that to get their own personhood, they have to kill men off, or deny their existence (and also in that funny sense, deny the existence of femaleness).

We are just beginning to learn on so many levels that we can be equal *and* different. It is vital to value differentness, and therefore to have the capability of connecting with our complementary uniqueness. Because there really are differences between women and men: physiological differences, and psychological correlates of the physiological differences.

But one must ask, "Do these differences have anything to do with value?" And I would say, "No, nothing." Intelligence has no sex linkage. Activity has no sex linkage. These various differences have no relevance to an individual's self-worth. I'm not better because I'm a woman and I'm not worse because I'm a woman. The real challenge is being able to make the most of the uniqueness that each sex has, without being limited by it.

So I think there's been a lot of fumbling in the women's movement, just as there always is when people are finding their way. But I think we're getting to a new place. Soon there will be the same sort of movement about children. Children are people; women are people; old people are people. We can not afford to keep any people from manifesting their unique potentials. I often wonder how much we've lost in the world because people were unable to manifest their potential. If history teaches us any lesson, it is that when a society or a group or an individual cuts off part of itself, we begin to lose our natural richness and creativity. We start signing our death-warrant.

Everything comes back to self-worth, integration and evolving — no fixed boxes, no hard categories. As each one develops his or her ability to affirm themselves in an open way and to make decisions, we create the conditions for deep social richness.

Fortunately, there are lots of ways now to develop this so-needed self-worth and centered openness; there are many good teachers,

Valuing  
uniqueness

books, journals, and therapists.

SYNTHESIS: When do you think an individual or a family should decide to go into therapy? When is it appropriate?

VIRGINIA: When you feel you need additional resources to deal with what's happening. When you find yourself continually going over the same old ground, and can see no new way out. When you feel that you can't quite see the light. That feeling doesn't mean you don't have the light, but simply that you are not in a place where you can see it. Then it's wise to seek someone's help to see it. Seeking help does not mean that you are giving up, or that you're no good, but only that things have worked out in such a way that you can not see clearly on your own for a while.



There is also another level of the growth process, another reason to look for help that has nothing to do with solving your problems. I refer to the seeking out of more active health, the search for growth, not because you have problems, but because you can see more potential for yourself. Fortunately, more and more people are beginning to understand what such active health is all about, and to see the place a therapist can legitimately have in the growth process.

SYNTHESIS: You have said, in your books, that the goal of growth is to develop the "total person." What do you mean?

VIRGINIA: I mean that human growth can not in the long run exclude any of the primary elements of the human being: body, feelings, mind, purpose, relations to others, to time and space, and to the larger life force.

For a while a thrust in the humanistic movement was to urge people to "get out of their heads." Remember that one? "Cut it off, just be in your feelings, kid." Now, that wasn't totally mistaken, I suppose, because a kind of sterile intellectualization had cut many people off from the feeling nature — which is a source of human vitality and satisfaction. But if you have ever seen a chicken with a freshly cut-off head . . . true, it presents lots of movement, but only for a short time and in no special direction. It seems to me that significant personal growth must take into account the whole of a person: not "either/or" but "both/and." My head *and* my heart *and* my body *and* my relationship to you *and* time and space *and* relatedness to the universal life force. If, as an individual, you give all that a place, then you can truly play your symphony.

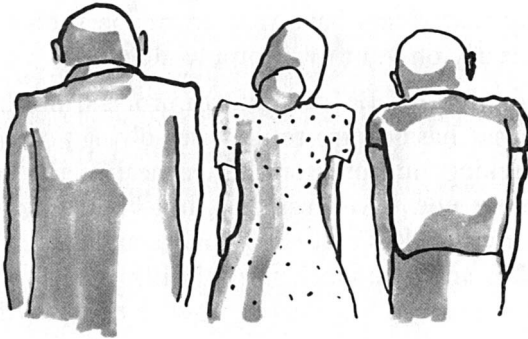
Inclusive growth

## SYNTHESIS - A Conversation with Virginia Satir

SYNTHESIS: When you speak of the “life force,” you seem to be talking about a spiritual dimension of personal growth.

A spiritual  
dimension of life

VIRGINIA: Yes, it always comes back to that. To me, life is essentially spiritual. To be personally connected with life gives spiritual power. I think a lot of my personal feeling of fearlessness has to do with the fact that I know we are all part of the same life force. Now you may manifest it differently, but because of this connection we can both go a lot farther together. Many of the problems of relations between races, groups, and generations would be more easily solved



Connectedness  
and cooperation

if we had a greater development of our spiritual power — our sense of mutual connection to the larger whole. Once we learn to know the connection, to feel it, and are willing to act on it, then we will no longer be as destructive as we sometimes are, and we will find it much easier to work together, to grow together.

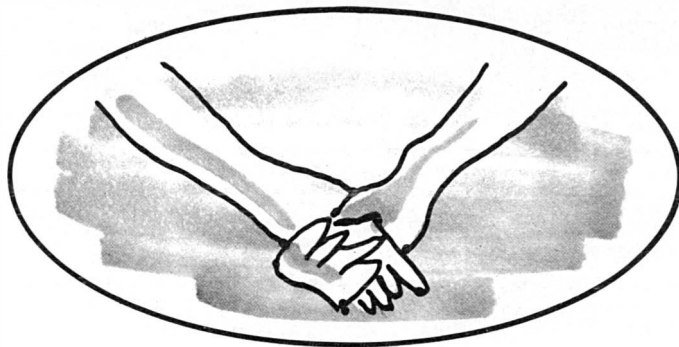
SYNTHESIS: How can people develop this sense of spiritual connection?

VIRGINIA: I think by really having first-hand contact with what human life is all about . . . the life of people. The life force is common to all of us, but we have to let ourselves really feel its commonality. This means daring the risks of real human intimacy. I'm not talking about sexual intimacy, I mean being able to touch another human being in an authentic way. For me, it's through human intimacy that the beginning touches of spirituality frequently come.

Now, intimacy requires a certain willingness to be vulnerable. But if you are only in touch with, say, your tenderness and not with your power, you can't risk vulnerability and intimacy because of a fear of what might happen. On the other hand, if you are only in touch with your power and not your tenderness, you can't even feel a connection. That's how I try to help people begin to experience their spiritual connectedness: by helping them come into touch with both their tenderness *and* their power. And I don't think there's such a thing as instant intimacy or instant spirituality — these are things that evolve in us. To reach them we need to view things differently. We need to see that we are not born in evil, *we are born to evolve*. And our evolving links us to the whole chain of life. It is a growing thing — and there is no fear in it.

So the quest for intimacy, fearlessness, and spirituality requires a turnaround in our thinking. Not that we haven't heard the message before. It's what Christ talked about, and Mohammed, and the Buddha, and others. But in the past most of us did a funny thing with this knowledge. We said, "They're beyond us, they're divine . . . we're nothing but humans, so we can't make the same connection." But now, we're beginning to know that we can.

Connectedness  
through love  
and will



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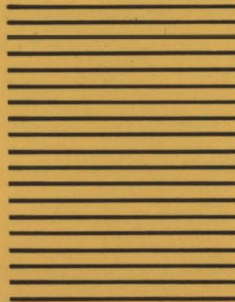
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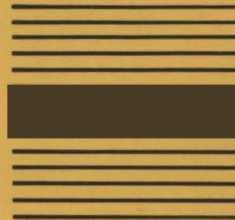
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