

An Introduction to the Spiritual/Transpersonal Path for the Scientifically “Handicapped”

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It is a great honor, and pleasure, to be part of this historic event, the first International Transpersonal Association conference to be held in Eastern Europe.

Why are we holding this conference? Because we live in a world that has been in crisis for a long time, a crisis that steadily worsens. There are many positive things about our world, but the threat of losing these is very real. Besides our old enemies such as greed, hatred, war, and fear, people have become more and more materialistic, increasingly believing that happiness comes exclusively from possessions and use of material things. All over the world, people want to have the life of rich Americans and Western Europeans.

Now, there is nothing wrong with that desire: it is natural for people to want the things they believe will produce happiness. In reality, however, the combination of the overpopulation problem and the finite limits of material resources means that much of the world's population cannot match extravagant Western lifestyles and so are doomed to disappointment. Further, the Western lifestyle is greedy, destroys the environment, and must be cut back substantially anyway.

With intelligent planning *and* the proper values, however, all of the world could have a materially comfortable, if not rich, lifestyle.

The greater problem, which I will focus on, is that current materialism is coupled with a widespread *spiritual poverty* that keeps us from developing the intelligence and altruistic values that could bring greater happiness to most of mankind.

Happiness is only partly dependent on external conditions, such as material riches and pleasures. More importantly, it also depends upon one's internal attitude, one's psychological state. Thus, we are here today at this conference because we recognize that the world is suffering primarily because of a lack of appropriate, spiritual values. We are here because we hope that the developing field of transpersonal psychology can lead us to a clearer understanding of our true nature and what values we should cultivate, and help us to actually transform ourselves and live these more spiritual values. This hope is a general one for all mankind, and a personal one for each one of us individually. Thus my talk will be both about transpersonal psychology as a field and the spiritual path each of us is looking for.

Preview

To preview what I'll cover, I shall begin by briefly discussing what transpersonal psychology is and what it is not. Then I will discuss the obstacles that an apparently scientific, yet

very materialistic Western culture creates that make it difficult for us to actually develop a spiritual life. Note that from now on when I use the term *Westerner*, I use it to include Eastern Europeans and Russians as well as Western Europeans and Americans because we deal with problems inherent in all these cultures. These obstacles may be very apparent if one works in a role that defines you as a “scientist”—thus this title, “An Introduction to the Spiritual/Transpersonal Path for the Scientifically ‘Handicapped’”—but these are actually obstacles that affect anyone born in our modern world. We are all scientifically “handicapped” in our personal spiritual search to some degree.

The main part of my talk will then focus on the outline of an intellectual justification for seeking spiritual experience and values. I do this because so many people want to lead a more spiritual life yet feel guilty, feel they are being irrational or “unscientific.” Actually, you can follow both the spiritual and scientific paths with pride!

Finally, I will describe a few of the methods I have personally found useful in following a spiritual path while still remaining committed to being a good scientist. I shall have to focus on negative aspects of science at first, the way in which its current form, sci-

entism, acts as an obstacle, but there is a tremendous amount of good to be found in properly done science.

What Is Transpersonal Psychology?

The prefix “trans” in transpersonal psychology is the key to defining the field: it means “beyond.” Our ordinary sense of who we are is very limited. It is limited to our physical body, for example: I am inside this bag of skin, even though I try to reach out to something greater. The “something greater” that people reach out for is generally ordinary: your spouse, your children, your friends, your fellow workers, perhaps your country. We reach out for meaning, for something that makes us feel part of something greater than ourselves.

This reaching out at an ordinary level has been studied for a long time in the conventional field of psychology and sociology. The reaching out in transpersonal psychology goes much farther. It is a reaching toward our ultimate nature, toward our soul, toward our place in the universe beyond the body, beyond our personality, beyond our social roles. The phenomena of transpersonal psychology cover what are loosely called “mystical experiences,” those transient experiences of *knowing*, at the deepest levels, who you really are, the rightness of the universe, the universality of love, and so on. Besides the dramatic but transient experiences, the transpersonal can transform our everyday lives.

The English poet William Wordsworth described how such a transformed life might be in the first verse of his “Intimations of Immortality.”

There was a time when meadow,
grove and stream,
The earth and every common sight
To me did seem
Appareled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a
dream.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to feel like that? Wouldn't it encourage an attitude of tolerance of and caring for our fellow man?

Yet that verse does not describe our usual state, his next verse does.

It is not now as it hath been of yore.
Turn whereso'er I may,
By night or day,
The light which I have seen
I now can see no more.

This is the realm of ordinary psychology, ordinary existence, of being “normal.”

Terminological Considerations

Why this fancy new term of “transpersonal psychology”? Why not just refer to the “religious” or the “spiritual”?

“Religion” will not do, as it means areas that may once have been transpersonal but which are now, for the vast majority of people, social and personal control mechanisms, dogmas, not living experience. “Spiritual” is better, as it tends to imply the actual experiential, transpersonal realities behind the social facade of organized religions, but in the West, there are still too many negative connotations of “spiritual.” Let me tell you a story.

In 1975, I had completed an anthology that I called *Spiritual Psychologies*. Besides some theoretical writing by me, it consisted mainly of chapters by people from a variety of spiritual disciplines, such as Sufism, yoga, or the Gurdjieff work, in which they described the psychology implicit in their spiritual tradition, a psychology usually hidden behind religious dogma. The idea was to make this psychology accessible to Westeners, especially psychologists.

Just before the book was to be published, I received a telephone call from my editor. A psychological book club was interested in making a bulk purchase of the book to be a monthly selection for their members, mostly psychologists. “But,” the book club representative said, “psychologists are prejudiced against the word ‘spiritual,’ they will not buy the book with that word in the title. Could we change the title?”

So we changed *Spiritual Psychologies* to *Transpersonal Psychologies*, as transpersonal psychology was such a new field at that time almost no psychologists had heard of it and so

wouldn't have any prejudice against the term!

I tend to use both “transpersonal” and “spiritual,” even though I should be more consistent. When I use “transpersonal,” I usually mean the field of scholarship known as transpersonal psychology, and when I use “spiritual,” I usually am speaking more personally, about *my* or *your* spiritual path.

So in one sense, transpersonal psychology is a field of scholarship: what *exactly* do people experience that they vaguely call mystical experience, for example?

In an even more important sense, transpersonal psychology is intended to become a *scientific* field, not just a collection of scholarly papers. Why scientific? Because many of the reports of transpersonal experiences we have are distorted by the individual reporter's beliefs and conditionings, by the particulars of the social reality he/she lives in. Because, to put it harshly, much of the religious tradition passed down to us as explanation of the transpersonal is mainly superstition, is non-sense. Some of it was intended to be as clear an understanding and reporting as possible, but the times have changed, words don't mean the same thing, people don't perceive in the same way. And some of it has been severely distorted to support particular secular needs of the times, such as the temporal power of a priesthood.

Thus, scientific method, with its emphasis on empirical study taking precedence over belief and theory, is necessary to start weeding out the solid information from the imagination, the wheat from the chaff. Transpersonal psychology as a field of study is very young, of course, so this is primarily an aim, rather than an accomplishment.

It is important to note that transpersonal psychology is not a religion, not a collection of “truths” or dogmas. Most transpersonal psychologists will personally practice some traditional spiritual discipline but, as transpersonal psychologists, they will not try to convert others to this particular system, but will see it as one of

the many ways that people have tried to develop their higher abilities. What is an efficient system for one person may be a waste of time or psychologically unsuitable for another.

Finally, in our consideration of what transpersonal psychology is, we should note that it is primarily about internal *experiences* that people have, as well as the transforming effects these experiences have on life. Much of the most important data of the field, as it were, is inside: if you cannot contact your internal psychological processes, if you are "scientifically handicapped" in this way, you are in a poor position to understand and practice transpersonal psychology. Similarly, the practical application of the transpersonal depends on having certain kinds of experiences yourself and helping others to have them. If all you have are *ideas* about the transpersonal, instead of experiential knowledge, you are seriously handicapped.

Now let us look at the apparently scientific obstacles that handicap us.

Consider this question: Why does the idea of a great scientist becoming a great saint seem absurd? Let us take a deeper look at the traditional conflict between science and religion.

Scientism as the Problem

I believe that much of the traditional conflict between science and religion has not been between proper science and the best of religion but between a rigid, psychologically insecure manifestation of science that has been termed *scientism*, and second- or third-rate religion, religion that has become dogmas and social control mechanisms rather than genuine transpersonal experience.

Any "ism," any branch of knowledge that becomes rigid, that becomes part of personal psychological and social defense mechanisms, has inevitable conflicts with other "isms." The less experiential contact we have with our deep transpersonal self and the more we psychologically identify with our limited ordinary self, the more rigid we become, the more we fear the dynamic, changing reality of life. Thus, great religions start from

the transpersonal experiences of their founders but, unfortunately, quickly degenerate into rigid "isms" that attack other religions and systems of thought.

Why are we so insecure that we must try to control and fixate other people and the world around us, instead of trusting our own deeper nature?

Enculturation

Much of my early psychological work was concerned with the exotic, with altered states of consciousness (ASCs) like hypnosis, dreaming, and drug-induced states. Gradually, I came to wonder more and more about so-called ordinary consciousness, this condition we spend most of our lives in and take for granted. Let me quickly summarize what I have learned about its development, as it casts light on why we are insecure and blocked from the transpersonal.

We enter the world at birth with a certain kind of purity, what Gurdjieff called "essence." As Peter Russell remarks in his new book, *The White Hole in Time*:

One almost universal characteristic of young children is their purity. What parent has not looked at her young child and marveled at the light that shines through him? Children have an innocence that adults have lost. . . . This purity seems to be something innate. Children do not learn it from their parents—on the contrary, parents frequently find their children to be the teachers in these matters.

Our particular culture does not leave us alone, though. Culture shapes, rejects, reinforces, and biases the infant until he or she becomes "normal." Normal in terms of that particular culture. As Russell continues talking about purity in the above quote, he adds: "Nor is it something they are educated into—if anything, they are educated out of it." We "evolve"—although "devolve" is a better term in some ways—in a way such that essence shrinks to be replaced by "false personality," a culturally shaped, semi-arbitrary psychological construction that we identify with as "me." Our ordinary perceiving, thinking, feeling and acting

takes place in a psychological state that I have called "consensus consciousness," since our personal psychological experiences embody much of our culture's consensus about what is "normal."

The enculturation process is very deep. The way we see the world is partially controlled by it, so that our very perceptions seem to validate what we have been conditioned to believe.

Thus, while a primary goal of transpersonal psychology is to transcend the limits of our particular culture (while still appreciating its strengths and beauties), this is very hard to do. Our "normal" state is one of being unconsciously and mechanically driven by insecurity, which alienates us from our spiritual depths, which creates more insecurity, and so on. We may try to hide this alienated condition under a frenzy of materialistic pleasures and gratification, but it is there.

Science as a Way of Transcending Our Shortcomings

I mentioned earlier that there is a great positive side to science. Scientific method can generally help us transcend the shortcomings of our individual and cultural limitations. Let me describe basic scientific method, before it marries with a philosophy of materialism and becomes *scientism*.

Basic scientific method starts from an attitude of humility and curiosity. We would like to understand how the world works, why it works the way it does, and we have sufficient humility to know how little we already understand. So we are ready to work at gaining knowledge.

Why do we want to gain more knowledge? Partly simple curiosity, partly a desire to find happiness through greater understanding and control of our world, plus other assorted motives.

Basic scientific method is a four-step process, a cycle, which repeats over and over. You start with observation: What can I actually observe, what is the data? Can I find better methods of observations?

But one is seldom happy with just data, just observations. *Why* do things go together the way I observed? So we come up with theories about why, about the hidden factors that control what we see. We try to be logical in our theorizing, using an appropriate logic, such as mathematics.

At the same time, one of the properties of the human mind is its ability to make apparent sense out of anything, to rationalize, even if that theory has no actual relation to the facts. So in formal science we discipline ourselves to test our theories. If my theory has validity, if it truly describes the hidden mechanisms behind appearances, it should make predictions about things I haven't observed yet. It is my duty, as a scientist, to make those predictions and test them empirically. If the predictions don't work out, it's too bad for my theory. It doesn't matter if my theory was intellectually elegant, seemingly flawless, logical, or whatever: if it doesn't make correct predictions, it at least needs modifications, and perhaps is totally wrong. In principle, any theory is always subject to further test, in spite of the intellectual and emotional attachment we may have developed for it.

The fourth aspect of basic scientific procedure is a social one. Any one of us individually may be a flawed observer, a flawed theorizer, a flawed predictor and tester, so we share all the elements of science, our observations, our theorizing and testing, with colleagues. Our colleagues may not be perfect either, but they are probably not biased in exactly the same way we are, so they can tell us if they can't repeat our observations or can add some new, relevant observations. They can check the logic of our theorizing, finding logical flaws or perhaps extending our reasoning. They can check our predictions and perhaps find other ways of testing our theory.

The constant recycling of this process is basic science. We start from crude observations and theories and constantly refine them with the help of colleagues. Slowly we become better observers, our theories become

more precise, cover more phenomena, and pass the test of making empirical predictions. There are fashions in scientific communities that may bind all scientists to certain aspects of reality at times, but, hopefully, the cyclic refining process leads us toward the truth.

Note that my description of basic science, although shared by many scientists, is not universal. I give priority to observation and experience. Some scientists give priority to theory, seeing science as a way of fitting in new data with apparently true, already existing theory, like mathematics, or materialism. I can't agree with that approach, especially when it effectively throws out much of the most important data of human life, namely, transpersonal experiences.

The scientific process may compensate for the biases of individual scientists and their cultures in the long run, but today, we have an "official" science, scientism, in which materialism—a philosophy, not an integral part of the scientific process—dominates, and the transpersonal is rejected. Thus most scientists are quite biased: they don't want to observe transpersonal phenomena; if they do, they think about it in biased ways so as to *explain it away* rather than deal with it seriously. Indeed, modern science puts such a premium on thinking, theorizing, that this constant intellectualization makes it difficult for a modern scientist to have a transpersonal experience, further locking him or her into materialism.

Effects of the Western Creed

I have said earlier that most of the important data of transpersonal psychology are experiential in nature. Mere ideas about the transpersonal (or any other area) are easily come by. So I have said that modern Western society is dominated by materialism, by scientism. But this barrier to spiritual experience has to be grasped more deeply than just intellectually in order to motivate us to fight against it.

In doing long workshops on transpersonal psychology, I sometimes have participants take part in a *belief*

experiment, an exercise in which I ask them to believe in something I tell them, as much as possible, for ten minutes, and then to observe the emotional effects on themselves of such an experimentally adopted belief. We don't have time to actually do such a belief experiment now, as it requires time for people to share their feelings with each other, but I want to describe a particular belief experiment, "The Western Creed," that brings home to people how deeply scientism has insinuated itself into our being.

After having people get permission from their deeper selves to participate, to believe for ten minutes, I have people stand in orderly rows, at attention, and then put their right hands over their hearts. This is the way people pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, so I deliberately use this social conditioning to increase the impact of the belief experiment. Then they recite, in unison with me, the Western Creed cited below. I ask that those of you who are Christian not take offense at this creed: its form is deliberately parallel to the Apostle's Nicene Creed, but it is done for educational purposes to show people how deeply scientism has penetrated, not to make any negative statement about Christianity. The Western Creed presents what people think is scientific truth about reality, but baldly stated as a belief system.

Here is what people recite together.

I BELIEVE—in the material universe—as the only and ultimate reality—a universe controlled by fixed physical laws—and blind chance.

I AFFIRM—that the universe has no creator—no objective purpose—and no objective meaning or destiny.

I MAINTAIN—that all ideas about God or gods—enlightened beings—prophets and saviors—or other non-physical beings or forces—are superstitions and delusions. Life and consciousness are totally identical to physical processes—and arose from chance interactions of blind physical forces. Like the rest of life—*my* life and *my* consciousness—have no objective purpose—meaning—or destiny.

I BELIEVE—that all judgments, values, and moralities—whether my own or others—are subjective—arising solely from biological determinants—personal

history—and chance. Free will is an illusion. Therefore, the most rational values I can personally live by must be based on the knowledge that for *me*—what pleases me is Good—what pains me is Bad. Those who please me or help me avoid pain are my friends—those who pain me or keep me from my pleasure are my enemies. Rationality requires that friends and enemies be used in ways that maximize my pleasure—and minimize my pain.

I AFFIRM—that churches have no real use other than social support—that there are no objective sins to commit or be forgiven for—that there is no divine or supernatural retribution for sin or reward for virtue—although there may be social consequences of actions. Virtue for *me* is getting what *I* want—without being caught and punished by others.

I MAINTAIN—that the death of the body—is the death of the mind. There is no afterlife—and all hope of such is nonsense.

Now, even though I have not had you do the Western Creed in the powerful way I do it in workshops, I suspect many of you are somewhat depressed just hearing it, especially those of you who have suffered for so long under materialistic Communism. I have brought some copies of this creed with me, and, as an experiment, I suggest you do it with a group of friends, properly, as I described, and take lots of time for your friends to share their emotional feelings afterwards.

It is usually depressing and somewhat frightening to see how much of your mind believes this Western Creed, this creed of scientism, even though consciously you may be spiritually inclined. It is cathartic to work this out.

Note that the views expressed in the Western Creed are not quality science, but scientism, scientific method perverted through a nonscientific commitment to a materialistic philosophy. But given that it permeates the mind and being of almost everyone raised in the West, is it any wonder that we find the idea of a scientist becoming a great mystic rather preposterous?

Please stop believing in this Western Creed! I want to show you one major example of why it is poor science, and then move on to what we can do as Westerners to socially and

personally develop a transpersonal life!

Primary Example of Why Scientism's Rejection of Transpersonal Psychology Is Wrong: Parapsychological Phenomena, psi

One of the most glaring examples of scientism's inadequacy is the area of psychic phenomena, parapsychology, to use the modern Western term. These phenomena refute a materialistic view of being total and comprehensive, and they demonstrate, with the most rigorous sort of scientific methodology, that there is a real basis for transpersonal phenomena.

Over a thousand rigorous laboratory experiments have established the reality of four basic psychic phenomena.

First there is *telepathy*, mind to mind communication. If you physically separate people enough so there is no way ordinary physical energies can carry information between them, but then have one try to mentally "send" randomly chosen target material to the other, you will get statistically (and sometimes practically) significant results showing some information is coming through. The target material was classically the order of a thoroughly shuffled deck of cards, looked at one by one. Telepathy only works part of the time, but when it does, it demonstrates that there is some kind of mental communication channel that transcends anything we currently know about the physical world.

Second there is *clairvoyance*, a direct perception of hidden aspects of the physical world not known to any other person at the time of the perception. The target material can be a thoroughly shuffled deck of cards whose order is not known to anyone. Clairvoyance works about as well as telepathy, in terms of information transfer rate.

Third we have *precognition*, the ability to predict the future when there is no available information from which to predict. The typical classical experiment was predicting the order of a deck of cards that was

to be thoroughly and blindly shuffled at some time in the future.

Fourth we have *psychokinesis*, the ability of the mind to sometimes influence the physical world just by willing it. Classical laboratory experiments involved influencing the way dice fell.

Precognition and psychokinesis are generally rather small-scale, unreliable effects in the laboratory, yet they happen often enough that there is, to my mind, no reasonable doubt about their existence. There are other apparent psychic phenomena, but these four are the most well established.

Scientism, claiming to be objective, scientific, as we saw in the Western Creed, reduces mind to nothing but electrochemical firings in the nervous system, an objectively meaningless set of events that has no purpose in a meaningless material universe, and that ends at death. The data of parapsychology, properly using the most rigorous kind of scientific method, shows that sometimes man's mind can reach out to other minds and the physical universe, transcending limits of space and time, in ways for which there is no plausible material explanation.

This is what I mean in saying that the findings of parapsychology provide a basis for believing that at least some transpersonal experiences are more than just subjective experiences. If, as part of a mystical experience, for example, someone reports they felt connected to all of the universe, is this merely subjective, or might it involve some form of clairvoyant knowing?

Why aren't the findings and implications of parapsychology more accepted? Why are they irrationally rejected by much of the scientific establishment? Why is there a group of people, claiming to be scientific in their approach, who basically attempt to stop all research in this area? That is too big a question to go into in this limited time, but it shows how deeply materialistic philosophy, selectively drawing from poorly done science, has indeed become a rigid "ism," defending against "heresy" instead of looking for the truth.

What happens when we try to explore the transpersonal, beyond dogma?

Earlier I described basic scientific method, before *scientism* spoiled it. Now I would like to describe a basic approach to exploring the transpersonal that is quite parallel. This approach is not some sort of rigid standard in the field, but one I believe will be very useful and that is implicit in what many transpersonal psychologists do.

Basic transpersonal/spiritual method, like proper science, also starts

start with observation: What can I actually observe, what is the data? Can I find better methods of observation? This observation includes internal experiences and intuitions, yet we must also recognize that we are often lost in imagination and fantasy. How can we learn to separate true intuition of higher things from imagination, fueled by our hopes and fears?

As in science, however, one is seldom happy with just data, just observations, just experiences. *Why* do things go together the way I observe? So we come up with theories about

duty, as a scientist, to make those predictions and test them empirically.

This kind of discipline is especially important in transpersonal psychology because our “theorizing” often has the form of a transpersonal experience, a mystical experience, in which the “Truth” is overwhelmingly clear to us. Let me illustrate with a story, perhaps a legend, perhaps true.

In the early days of LSD research in America, a research team of two psychiatrists decided to do research on LSD. The drug was already controversial, with one camp declaring that it made you insane, probably with lasting brain damage. No researchers who wanted to be objective about studying it would take it themselves. The other camp argued that the effects were beyond the understanding of the ordinary mind, beyond consensus consciousness, and you had to have personal experience, otherwise your research on others would be shallow and misguided.

The psychiatrists were puzzled. Should they or shouldn't they have personal experience with LSD before doing their research? They decided to compromise. One would have an LSD experience, the other would not. Then working as a team, they could hopefully compensate for the “insanity” of the one and the “shallowness” of the other.

They flipped a coin to decide who would have an LSD experience. The chosen one (I don't recall whether it was the “winner” or the “loser” of the coin flip) had an intense LSD experience. During his experience, he also had a “mystical” experience: while in a small room off the laboratory, he saw a sign on the wall that struck him as a revelation of all the truth needed for life. This was gnosis, ultimate knowing, and needless to say, impressed him tremendously. The sign said, “Please flush after using.”

While I can read a good deal into such a sign from my own memories of laboratory sessions with LSD, I don't think it covers all one needs to know. It illustrates that just because a transpersonal experience *seems* absolutely true, it doesn't mean it *is*. The quality

Basic transpersonal/spiritual method, like proper science, also starts from an attitude of humility and curiosity.

from an attitude of humility and curiosity. We would like to understand how the world works, why it works the way it does, its connections to a greater world of the spirit. As in science, we have sufficient humility to know how little we already understand. So we are ready to work at gaining knowledge.

Why do we want to gain more knowledge? Again, it is partly simple curiosity, partly a desire to find happiness through greater understanding and control of our world, but also a longing for meaning, or perhaps the stimulus of a personal spiritual experience, or perhaps a dim memory, as Wordsworth described, of when

[t]here was a time when meadow,
grove and stream,
The earth and every common sight
To me did seem
Appareled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a
dream.

Basic transpersonal method, like basic scientific method, is a four-step process, a cycle, which repeats over and over. There is actually a fifth step, which I will mention later. You

why, about the hidden factors, both mundane and transpersonal, that control what we experience. We try to be logical in our theorizing, using an appropriate logic. We must also recognize the limitations of ordinary logics, that all logics are sets of arbitrary assumptions. It is fine to use logic when it works. When it doesn't, we can search for other types of “logic,” and/or simply recognize that some of the things we experience go beyond logic. They are not necessarily *il*-logical or *irr*ational, but *a*logical, *ara*tional, real but outside of systems of logic and ordinary rationality. What is experienced is data, whether it fits one's logic or not.

Recall that in formal science, we had to worry about the ability of the mind to rationalize anything, whether the theory really explained things or not. We love it when things “make sense,” when the puzzling or troubling apparently is explained by our theories. So, just as in formal science, we must discipline ourselves to test our theories. If my theory has validity, it should make predictions about things I haven't observed yet. It is my

of revelation, of absolute, soul-stirring truth, seems to be attachable to almost any content—thus the need in transpersonal psychology to work out the consequences of theories and test and modify them. Attachment to any transpersonal experience probably guarantees that it will not lead to full enlightenment.

The fourth aspect of transpersonal investigation should be, as in basic scientific procedure, a social one. Our hopes and fears, our personality, our cultural conditioning, can make any one of us a flawed observer, a flawed experience, a flawed theorizer, a flawed predictor and tester, so we should share the elements of observation, theory, and testing with colleagues.

There is a special problem with the social aspect of transpersonal psychology not faced in ordinary science, namely, much of the experiential data and knowledge is *state specific*. That is, one must be in a particular altered state of consciousness in order to experience and grasp certain things. It can't be done in an ordinary state. I have discussed this some years ago in my proposal for establishing *state-specific sciences*. Thus, the training of a transpersonal psychologist is not just a matter of imparting external knowledge, but training the consciousness and being of the person.

The constant recycling of this process will constitute transpersonal psychology as a scholarly and scientific discipline. As with ordinary science, we must constantly try to refine all aspects of the practice. Above all, we must be open-minded and aware of the reality of the moment, for the sophisticated spiritual traditions do give us reliable advice that we should avoid fixating on any particular belief or experience.

Walking the Spiritual Path

Now I want to get more personal, and illustrate two of the kinds of problems that make us scientifically trained Westerners handicapped on the spiritual path, namely, pathological doubt and intellectual drunkenness.

Doubt

A formal part of scientific methodology is *disciplined* doubt, the injunction to assume nothing, to have all ideas open to question. Used in this way, deeply examining your assumptions, doubt is a powerful and constructive tool. Many advances have been made by scientists who have doubted something that everyone else in their field took for granted.

Although we think of religions as calling for a faith that is the opposite of intelligent doubt, a blind faith, the best spiritual traditions also call for intelligent doubt. Consider this injunction of Gautama the Buddha from the Kalama Sutta:

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it.

Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations.

Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and rumored by many.

Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books.

Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.

But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason, and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

The kind of doubt that is a real problem on the spiritual path, however, is not intelligent, disciplined doubt, which widens one's view, but what we might call "consensus doubt," a pathological doubt that saps energy and attention. If you are trying to learn concentrative meditation, for example, and keep doubting that you can do it, whether it's worth while, whether you deserve to learn it, shouldn't you be using this time to do something socially useful, people will laugh at me for doing this, et cetera, you are not learning concentration. Scientism, our materialistic society, has conditioned us to have many doubts about spirituality. These doubts, incorporated as semi-automatic mechanisms into our individual minds and personalities, create great difficulties, often enough so that people give up the transpersonal quest. I

personally know this kind of doubt all too well, in spite of years of trying to follow a spiritual path.

There is no simple answer to dealing with pathological, automatized doubt. The correct procedures vary from person to person. But I will share one method that I have found helpful.

Some years ago I attended one of Michael Harner's weekend introductory workshops on shamanism. We spent a lot of time lying on the floor listening to the beat of a drum and "journeying" to "other realms" where the "spirits" live, finding a "spirit helper." Part of my mind immediately began to doubt the sense of this. "It's all imagination, there's nothing real about it, you know of hundreds of ways people can fool themselves like that, and soon I realized that I could quickly guarantee that I would experience nothing unusual by letting this train of thought go on, as I had done so many times in the past. So I said to my mind, "Look, I already know you are a brilliant mind, a brilliant doubter, you can tear anything to pieces, you don't have to prove that to me. I recognize and value your brilliance. But, would you mind waiting until Monday morning to do this? Take a little vacation for the weekend, and you can be brilliant Monday morning!"

It worked, and has usually worked since then. I had some important experiences with shamanistic journeying. I don't fight the doubting part of my mind, I genuinely respect it, and it has valuable roles to play in my life. But I can "park" it at times and focus on psychological work without my attention and energy being distracted. You might find this technique useful. Then, if you must doubt, you can have actual experiential material to work with.

Intellectual Drunkenness

For most of my life, I have been intellectually drunk, and many others are that way also. As a child, I discovered that a good way to deal with pain and unpleasantness was to distract myself with thoughts. Thought takes some energy away from perception

and emotion. Indeed, if I thought clever thoughts, I felt mild emotional pleasure at my own cleverness. Quickly I learned to live in a constant state of fast, clever, emotionally pleasing thoughts which seemed to buffer me from much stress and unpleasantness. I have spent most of my life in a state of intellectual and emotional drunkenness.

While a person drunk on alcohol may feel good, there are serious costs. An alcoholic drunk is relatively insensitive to the reality around him, thus acting from poor judgment that, in turn, may create pain and unpleasantness, and a drunk is acting with reduced skills. Similarly, my lifelong intellectual drunk seemed to protect me from much unpleasantness, but I paid heavily at times through being insensitive and unskilled, especially in relating to other people. I never really appreciated how much a constant intellectual drunkenness—which is one category of what Gurdjieff called being “asleep”—cost me until I began making efforts to sober up and awaken.

The great spiritual traditions speak of ordinary people living in illusion, in *maya*, to use the Sanskrit term, or *samsara*, to use the Buddhist term. Most of us live in this kind of intellectual or emotional drunk. It is, unfortunately, “normal.” It consumes our energy, leaving little or none left over for transpersonal work, as well as creating active blocks to transpersonal experiences.

True, some transpersonal experiences can force themselves on people. Nearly dying has almost a fifty-fifty chance of producing the mystical experience we know as the near-death experience, for example, but the “near” part is tricky, so I don’t recommend this method. Emotional stress, psychotherapy, growth work, and psychedelic drugs may also force transpersonal experiences: these can be very useful, but they are not very feasible for day-to-day living.

Traditional spiritual systems recommend that we learn concentrative meditation and insight meditation. Concentrative meditation is for quieting and stabilizing the mind, sobering

up from our intellectual and emotional intoxication. Then, with insight or attentiveness meditation, we can begin to examine the nature of our mind and being. My personal experience has shown me the value of these practices for daily life. Because my intellectual drunk was so intense, it took me years to begin to sober up enough to have a little success with meditation, but now I value it highly.

I have found the practice of mindfulness in the midst of everyday life also of great help, along the lines taught by Gurdjieff, but we do not have time to go into that here.

General Advice

I will begin to close by giving three pieces of general advice, intended for both the field of transpersonal psychology generally and each of us individually, as we seek to journey on our spiritual path.

First, accept the fact that, with our Western cultural background, there will be a lot of conflicts between official culture, pervaded by scientism, and our spiritual explorations. This is a cultural heritage built up over centuries and conditioned in us when we were children. It won’t go away overnight. So relax as much as possible when you are in conflict. You certainly aren’t alone. Look for solutions patiently while being gentle with yourself.

Second, share your difficulties and doubts with selected friends. Don’t share them with those who will simply automatically scoff because of the nature of their conditioning—you already have enough conflict—but with those who are open-minded. A shared burden is a lighter burden.

Finally, ask for help. Don’t be too proud to admit to confusion or psychological pain, we all have it. Others—friends, colleagues, open-minded psychotherapists, humanistic facilitators—can often help.

Because we are working with transpersonal psychology, asking for help is more than just asking people. Although one could not say transpersonal psychology has “proven” the existence of higher beings, people certainly have experiences of contacting

and receiving help from them. Be open to the possibility, even if you are skeptical. If your skepticism is strong, you can still pray something like “Dear God—if that’s a proper term for you and you actually exist—guide me towards wisdom.”

I, like many of you, like to feel strong and tough: I can do it with my own efforts, I don’t need anyone! I know that for me part of that attitude is neurotic, stemming from my own problems with relationships. So I have always been fascinated by a little maxim of Gurdjieff’s: “Work as if everything depends on work. Pray as if everything depends on prayer.”

Asking for help from a higher source, whether you think of it as external or some aspect of your own higher self, is the fifth element of transpersonal method.

Conclusions

I’ve spent much time discussing how scientism, a perversion of science, inhibits our progress in both developing transpersonal psychology and in having and learning from our own transpersonal experiences. But I’ve also indicated that, used correctly, basic scientific method runs parallel to a powerful transpersonal method and can help us separate some of the wheat from the chaff in this field. Developed correctly, science and transpersonal psychology can potentiate each other.

We went through a light version of my Western Creed exercise to illustrate some of the debilitating effects of scientism. To close, I want you to lightly experience an antidote to the Western Creed, what I call a basic transpersonal creed. It’s not something to be literally believed, but an inspiration to take with you to the rest of our historic conference. I’ll read it to you as my last comment.

A Transpersonal Creed

I BELIEVE that the universe is spiritual as well as material, controlled by a combination of both physical and spiritual laws.

I AFFIRM that human beings are part of an integrated Order of Life; that we have the potential to evolve toward higher levels of this Order; and

that seeking such evolution is one of the highest values of human life.

I MAINTAIN that there are higher spiritual beings and enlightened humans. Life and consciousness seek to evolve toward these higher, nonphysical manifestations, even though currently rooted in the physical. Like the rest of life, my life and my consciousness share this purpose and destiny.

I BELIEVE that some judgments, values, and moralities are based on valid intuitions of higher possibilities. Satisfactory personal values and morality must be based on a continual dedication to understanding and living my and others' higher possibilities. Those who help me understand and develop the higher are my friends and teachers; those who hinder me should be helped as much as possible. Insofar as all Life may be one Being, in a real and spiritual sense, we should seek to maximize

our love of and minimize our harm to all Life.

I AFFIRM that churches or other spiritually oriented activities may sometimes be useful for aiding my and others' spiritual evolution; that there are actions that are objectively wrong, and that I should avoid committing once I understand their nature; that there is a real and objective sense in which harming others harms myself and life; that the universe is lawful on mental and spiritual levels as well as physical levels, so all acts have consequences that must eventually be faced. Virtue for me is loving and helping myself and others, so I and Life may evolve.

I MAINTAIN that the death of the body may not be the death of the mind. While hope of an afterlife can be a rationalization for lack of evolutionary effort in this life, the reality of spiritual levels of existence not dependent on a

physical body means that individual life is much greater than physical life.

These have been words about the spiritual, the transpersonal. Now I pray that you will go out and turn these into realities.

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