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Issue content

Editorial

Sometimes it is worth to ask the question: Do I live fully? If I feel that this is not the case, I can ask another question: What prevents me to live fully here and now? Disease, lack of time or funds, broken relationships? It is not primarily about whether our expectations are fulfilled, but whether we can face the challenges of life.

Spiritual traditions and their important representatives offered as an aid other questions that can become a light, which guides us on the way to find answers and strategies for fulfillment in life.

The first set of questions leads us inside: What is the content of my living out – of my consciousness, my perception of the outer and inner world? Is this process automatic or do I filter it somehow? How contributes it to the fullness of life? In this issue it is represented by three articles. Stanislav Grof deals with the theory of consciousness in relation to the transpersonal psychology. The article of Květoslav Minařík is a continuation of his articles from previous numbers and concerns concentration on flesh and the impact on the inner life of man. Sandó Kaisen speaks about understanding of Buddhist awakening.

The second group of questions is about communication: How do I communicate with others? How does it affect the opportunity to live my life fully?

Sharon Lauricella focuses on the importance of acknowledgement, of gratitude and of positive feedback in communication with others. Amir Azarvan is in turn concerned with the influence of the Christian eagerness on the way of communication about political beliefs.

I wish you all that reading of this issue would help you to a fuller living out of your everyday life, no matter where you are, with whom you are and what kind of challenge you face.

Adrián Slavkovský

Stanislav Grof

Ken Wilber's Spectrum Psychology: Observations from Clinical Consciousness Research

In his article Stanislav Grof evaluates the pioneering spectrum of consciousness theory of Ken Wilber and discusses its impact on the development of transpersonal psychology.
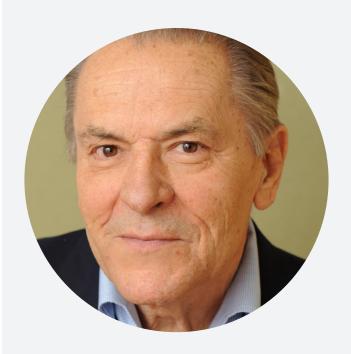
1   Introduction

When addressing the work of a theoretician whose pioneering work reaches the scope and quality achieved by Ken Wilber, even a critical essay has to begin with compliments and words of appreciation. In a series of books beginning with his *Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wilber 1977), Ken has produced an extraordinary work of highly creative synthesis of data drawn from a vast variety of areas and disciplines, ranging from psychology, anthropology, sociology, mythology, and comparative religion, through linguistics, philosophy, and history, to cosmology, quantum-relativistic physics, biology, evolutionary theory, and systems theory. His knowledge of the literature is truly encyclopedic, his analytical mind systematic and incisive, and the clarity of his logic remarkable. The impressive scope, comprehensive nature, and intellectual rigor of Ken's work have helped to make it a widely acclaimed and highly influential theory of transpersonal psychology.

However, for a theory of such importance, it is not sufficient to integrate material from many different ancient and modern sources into a system that shows inner logical cohesion. While logical consistency certainly is a valuable prerequisite, a viable theory has to have an additional property that is equally, if not more important. It is generally accepted among scientists that a system of propositions is an acceptable theory if, and only if, its conclusions are in agreement with observable facts (Frank 1957). Since speculations concerning consciousness, the human psyche, and spiritual experiences represent the cornerstone of Ken's conceptual framework, it is essential to test their theoretical adequacy and practical relevance against clinical data.

Ken himself does not have any clinical experience and the primary sources of his data have been his extensive reading and the experiences from his personal spiritual practice. He draws most of his clinical data from various schools, which use verbal methods of psychotherapy and conceptual frameworks limited to postnatal biography. For this reason, evaluating his ideas in the light of experiences and observations from modern consciousness research and from transpersonal therapy seems particularly important and necessary.

My own background and approach have been almost a polar opposite to Ken's and might thus serve as a useful complement to his theoretical work. For almost four decades, my primary interest has been clinical work exploring the healing and heuristic potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC). Whatever theoretical writing I have done over the years has been based primarily on the reports of the people I have worked with. An additional important source of

About the author

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information and inspiration have been my own experiences of non-ordinary states induced by psychedelics and various non-drug means. The choice of professional literature I have studied has been strongly determined by the observations from my clinical work and the need to put them into a larger conceptual framework.

The observations and data on which this paper is based come from two major sources – approximately two decades of clinical psychedelic research with LSD and other psychoactive substances, and another twenty years of work with holotropic breathwork, a powerful non-drug therapeutic method that I have developed jointly with my wife, Christina. It combines faster breathing, evocative music, and a specific form of energetic release work. The subjects in the psychedelic research projects were psychiatric patients with various emotional and psychosomatic disorders, alcoholics, drug addicts, terminal cancer patients, and "normal" volunteers – mental health professionals, scientists, artists, clergy, and

students. The breathwork sessions have been conducted in the context of a long-term training program of professionals and of experiential workshops with a broad cross-section of the general population. In addition to material from psychedelic and holotropic breathwork sessions, I am also drawing in this paper on my observations from work with individuals undergoing spontaneous mystical experiences and episodes of psychospiritual crises ("spiritual emergencies") (Grof and Grof 1990).

Over the years, Ken and I have exchanged some ideas, which involved both compliments and critical comments about our respective theories. During this time, the thinking of both of us has undergone certain changes and developments, as can be expected in an area as rich and complex as mapping the human psyche and exploring the dimensions of consciousness. I first addressed the similarities and differences between Ken's spectrum psychology and my own observations and theoretical constructs more than a decade ago. In my book, *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy* (Grof 1985), I dedicated a special section to Ken's spectrum psychology, where I briefly described where my own findings agreed and disagreed with Ken's theories.

In my critical comments, I addressed what I saw as logical inconsistencies in Ken's conceptual system (omission of the pre- and perinatal period and misrepresentation of the problem of death) and the lack of correspondence between his conjectures and the facts of clinical observation (concerning the dynamics of spiritual development, the nature of psychopathology, and the strategy of psychotherapy). In what follows, I will elaborate on the comments I made at the time and focus on a few additional areas. I will also reflect on Ken's extensive written reply to my criticism that has appeared in the notes to his recent book *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Wilber 1995).

2 Omission of the Pre- and Perinatal Domain in Spectrum Psychology

My main reservation about Ken's comprehensive and detailed theoretical system concerns what I perceive as his surprising conceptual blind spot in relation to the role and significance of *prenatal existence* and *biological birth* for the theory and practice of psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy. The discovery of the psychological and psychospiritual importance of these two periods of human development belongs to the most important contributions of experiential psycho-

therapy and modern consciousness research to psychology. The observations in this area have been so impressive and consistent that they have inspired the development of pre- and perinatal psychology, including regular international meetings and rapidly growing body of literature. These observations have been so convincing that they have profoundly influenced the actual birthing practices and postnatal care of many open-minded obstetricians and pediatricians. In view of these facts, I found it very surprising that Ken, with his meticulous and comprehensive approach, has completely ignored the vast amount of data from both modern and ancient sources suggesting the paramount psychological significance of prenatal experiences and of the trauma of birth, as well as their relationship to spirituality. This bias is evident in his writings focusing on cosmology, human evolution, developmental psychology, psychopathology, and psychotherapy.

Ken's description of the *evolution of consciousness* of an individual begins with the pleromatic stage (the undifferentiated consciousness of the newborn), and continues through the uroboric, typhonic, verbal-membership, and mental-egoic levels to the centauric stage. He refers to this progression, from the newborn infant to the adult with fully integrated functioning of the ego, persona, shadow, and body, as *the outward arc*. According to Ken, at the evolutionary stage of centaur begins the truly spiritual development, or *the inward arc*, that takes the individual to the lower and higher regions of the subtle and causal realms and finally to the boundless radiance of Formless Consciousness and the ultimate unity with the Absolute (Wilber 1980).

In his account of *cosmogenesis* or *consciousness involution*, Ken closely follows the highly culture-specific archetypal map from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *Bardo Thödol* (Evans-Wentz 1960), rather than creating a more general and universal description that would be applicable in any cultural and historical context. His account of cosmogenesis thus begins with the ultimate consciousness, the immaculate and luminous Dharmakaya, proceeds through the specific visions of the Tibetan bardo realms, and ends-like the *Bardo Thödol* – with the moment of conception when the individual who has missed all chances for spiritual liberation is facing another incarnation. This is perfectly logical and understandable for the Tibetan text, which describes the experiences in the intermediate state between death and the next incarnation. However, it results in a major logical gap in Ken's system that allegedly portrays the entire cosmic cycle of involution and evolution of consciousness.

By ending the process of the involution of consciousness at the moment of conception and beginning the account of

consciousness evolution with the undifferentiated pleromatic experience of the newborn, Ken leaves out the entire embryonal development between conception and the moment of birth. I find this to be an astonishing omission for a system that is otherwise worked out with meticulous sense for detail and has received much acclaim for its logical cohesion and clarity of thinking. Even if the fetus had no conscious awareness during these periods and the pre- and perinatal events were not recorded in the brain (a position taken, increasingly implausibly, by academic psychiatry), this omission would leave a strange gap in Ken's cosmic cycle. After all, we are talking here about a period of nine months of embryonal life during which the fetus undergoes a complex process of development from the fertilized ovum to a fully formed and differentiated organism. This is then followed by many hours or even a few days of a potentially life-threatening process of biological birth in which the fetus experiences a radical transformation from an aquatic organism to an air-breathing one.

However, there exists important clinical and experimental evidence indicating that the fetus might be conscious during these nine months, that pre- and perinatal events play a critical role in the individual's psychological history, and that the memories of these early experiences are available for conscious recall and reliving. The memory of birth represents an important reservoir of difficult emotions and physical sensations that can contribute later in life to the development of various forms of emotional and psychosomatic disorders. Reliving and integrating pre- and perinatal traumas can have very beneficial effects; it can result in healing and profound psychospiritual transformation. Therapists working with powerful forms of experiential psychotherapies, such as primal therapy, psychedelic work, rebirthing, and holotropic breathwork, or with individuals in psychospiritual crises, see these phenomena daily in their practices. Reliving of such events often is photographically accurate and occurs even in people who have no intellectual knowledge about their birth. The fact that it is often possible to verify various details of these experiences leaves little doubt that they represent authentic memories (Grof 1988).

In addition, episodes of this kind are often accompanied by various specific physical manifestations that can be noticed by an external observer. The postures and movements of the body, arms, and legs, as well as the rotations, flections, and deflections of the head, can accurately recreate the mechanics of a particular type of delivery, even in people without elementary obstetric knowledge. Many details of such experiences can be confirmed if good birth records or reliable personal witnesses are available. In his recent book, Ken calls

this evidence "controversial" (Wilber 1994, 585), which the practitioners of experiential therapies would certainly contest.

The fact that the psychological importance of prenatal and perinatal events has not been accepted by mainstream psychiatry reflects the rigidity of deeply ingrained beliefs rather than the ambiguity of clinical observations. The most important of these is the conviction that the brain of the newborn is not capable of registering the traumatic impact of birth because the neurons in its cortex are not fully myelinized. This is not a well-substantiated scientific fact, but a very problematic assumption that is in conflict not only with observations from experiential therapy, but also rich experimental data concerning prenatal sensitivity of the fetus and its capacity to learn (Chamberlain 1988; Tomatis 1991). In any case, it is hard to imagine that hours of dramatic and often life-threatening experiences during biological birth would be psychologically less important than the immediately following pleromatic experiences of the newborn which receive much of Ken's attention and have an important role in his scheme. We will return to this problem later in the section discussing Ken's ideas about psychopathology.

Besides leaving out the entire pre- and perinatal periods from his cosmic cycle of the involution and evolution of consciousness and ignoring the extensive evidence from modern experiential psychotherapies indicating the great psychological significance of these periods, Ken also fails to acknowledge the pioneering work of Otto Rank (Rank 1928), who emphasized the paramount importance of the intrauterine experience and of the trauma of birth. Rank is the only major figure in the history of depth psychology whom Ken treats in this way. Without any explanation, he neither incorporates Rank's work concerning the birth trauma into his scheme of spectrum psychology, nor subjects it to critical analysis.

In addition to ignoring all the clinical and experimental data concerning the prenatal and perinatal periods, Ken shows the same selective bias in regard to spiritual sources. Since in the discussion of cosmogenesis he draws so exclusively on Tibetan sources, it is particularly striking that he does not pay any attention to Tibetan texts that discuss in detail the challenges of prenatal development and birth (Sgam.po.pa 1971, 63–66). In Vajrayana, the intrauterine state is actually described as one of the six intermediate states or bardos (Evans-Wentz 1960, 102). And the Buddha himself made specific references to the trauma of birth as a major source of human suffering.

Ken responded to my critical comments concerning his omission of the pre- and perinatal period in the copious notes to his *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Wilber 1995, 585–8, 741–63). We have had some exchange about this issue over the years, but this was the first time that he formulated his reaction in written form. He expresses his amazement about the amount of difficulties that various people perceived in regard to the task of "integration of the Grof and Wilber models". According to him, such integration is actually a relatively simple matter. He points out that it was actually this lack of perceived difficulty, together with complications in his personal life, that prevented him from making the necessary adjustments in his theory at least ten years earlier.

Opening the discussion on this subject, Ken makes a vague reference to a "large body of theory and (controversial) evidence for the intrauterine state and the birth process (and birth trauma)" [Ken's parentheses]. And then, "having simply allowed that some of this evidence could indeed be genuine", he creates for this entire domain a new category in his developmental scheme – fulcrum 0 (F−0) preceding the fulcrum of the pleromatic stage (F−1) and the six subsequent ones (Wilber 1995, 585–88). At this point, I will not argue with Ken whether the evidence for the psychological importance of the birth trauma deserves to be considered controversial. I have addressed this problem earlier and will return to it in another context. Instead, I will briefly describe and discuss his proposal. He suggests that the new fulcrum shows the same general features as any other fulcrum, namely:

1. An initial state of undifferentiation or indissociation (in this case the prenatal state);

2. A period of intense and often difficult differentiation (the birth process/trauma itself);

3. A period of postdifferentiation and (post-uterine) consolidation and integration, in preparation for the next round of differentiation/ integration (F−1).

The extensive and complex experiential patterns associated with the consecutive stages of biological birth that I call basic perinatal matrices (BPMs) would thus simply become three subphases of fulcrum 0, with BPM II and BPM III both subsumed into a single subphase (subphase 2). BPM I would thus be subphase 1 of F−0, reflecting the oceanic indissociation experience of the fetus, both in its undisturbed and disturbed aspects. BPM II would be the beginning of subphase 2, or the differentiation process, that involves "cosmic engulfment" and "no-exit hellish pressure". BPM III would be the lat-

er stage of subphase 2, with the beginning of the expulsion from the womb, "volcanic" ecstasy, sadomasochistic pleasure/pain, experience of dismemberment, etc. And, finally, BPM IV would be subphase 3, the postpartum neonatal state, during which the child must integrate its new sense of separation from the mother. At the same time, this is the beginning of the pleromatic F-1, during which the infant with its new self-sense still cannot distinguish its own self-boundaries from those of the physical world around it.

As much as I appreciate Ken's acknowledgment of the existence of the perinatal level of the unconscious and its inclusion in his developmental scheme, I feel that the *ad hoc* addition of another fulcrum (F−0) and the fusion of two perinatal matrices into one of its subphases does not do justice to the importance of this domain. Although it might render an impressive graphic scheme that pleases the eye and satisfies the need for logical order, it fails to grasp the real parameters of the perinatal experience. The easy solution that Ken offers is in fundamental conflict with the facts of observation. First of all, the second and third matrix are related to two phases of birth that are in many respects radically different from each other, both physiologically and experientially. For this reason, lumping them together into one subphase of F−0 makes little sense.

In addition, the urgency and extreme intensity of birth experiences and their association with a serious threat to body integrity and to survival of the organism put them into a completely different category than the stages of postnatal development. A radical transition, from an aquatic form of life whose needs are being continually satisfied by the placentary circulation to the extreme emotional and physical stress of the birth struggle and then to a radically new existence as an air-breathing organism, is an event of paramount significance that reaches all the way to the cellular level. Even a relatively normal birth without complications is certainly a process of an entirely different order than learning to speak or developing an ego. This is clearly evident from the amount of time it takes in experiential therapy to bring the perinatal material into consciousness and integrate it. And a difficult birth and poor postnatal circumstances can constitute a profound trauma that colors the entire life history of the individual.

Much of what has been said above is related primarily to prenatal and perinatal events occurring in the context of the early psychobiological evolution of the individual. It seems that much of Ken's initial hesitation to include these stages in his scheme was based on his uncertainty whether the events from this time are consciously experienced by the fetus and/or recorded in the memory banks. However, this is

only one aspect of the problem. Perinatal matrices are not defined as stages of the psychobiological evolution of the fetus, but as experiential patterns that occur in self-exploration of adults involving NOSC. They are thus primarily related to psychospiritual evolution and only secondarily serve as indirect evidence for the importance of the early psychobiological events. In other words, they are much more than simple records of the original fetal experience. Besides containing distinct fetal elements, they also function as an important interface with the archetypal and historical domains of the collective unconscious and with species consciousness. For this reason, they cannot be simply reduced to a fetal fulcrum. I will return to this point later in this paper.

3   The Psychological Importance of Biological Death

Another major difference between my own observations and Ken's model involves the psychological importance of *biological death*, both in connection with the perinatal level and independently from it. In his early writings, Sigmund Freud expressed the opinion that the problem of death is irrelevant for psychology, since our unconscious does not know linear time and thus does not recognize and acknowledge our mortality and impermanence. However, later clinical observations related to the phenomena that seemed to challenge his concept of the "pleasure principle" led him to the conclusion that it is impossible to have a viable psychological system without including the phenomenon of death as an essential element (Freud 1955).

This realization represented an important turning point in Freud's theoretical speculations. To account for psychopathological disorders that seemed to defy the "pleasure principle" (such as sadomasochism, automutilation, and violent suicide), he formulated in the last two decades of his life a psychology that was significantly different from his early writings. In his final version of psychoanalysis, he described the psyche as a system reflecting the conflict between two opposing forces, the sexual instinct, Libido or Eros, and the death instinct, Destrudo or Thanatos (Freud 1964).

According to a statistical survey conducted by Brun (1953), ninety-four per cent of psychoanalysts refused to follow Freud in this final stage of his thinking. The observations from NOSC clearly show that Freud was essentially correct in his assessment of the importance of death for psychology, even though they do not specifically support his understanding of Thanatos. These new findings show that what Freud refers to as Thanatos is not a biological instinct, but a psy-

chological force reflecting the individual's encounters with life-threatening events from postnatal biography and, particularly, from the perinatal period. These connections make the element of biological death essential for the understanding of the disorders that defy Freud's "pleasure principle" and a variety of other psychological phenomena (Grof 1985).

In addition, the psychological representation of death has deeper sources in the archetypal domain of the collective unconscious in the form of eschatological deities and motifs and also plays an important role in karmic experiences. Freud saw Thanatos as a biological instinct and did not recognize the deep psychological connection between death and the trauma of birth. He also refused to accept Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and its archetypal dynamics. And, as a materialist, he wanted to anchor psychology deeply in biology and was not ready to give serious attention to the karmic dimension of the psyche. However, in his general awareness of the psychological importance of death and in his (unfortunately superficial and fleeting) recognition of the possible significance of birth, Freud was far ahead of his followers, whose writings Ken uses as his main sources.

Ken does not simply ignore Freud's later writings like the majority of his followers. He actually keeps the term Thanatos, but changes the meaning of this concept in a way that dilutes and trivializes Freud's insights. For Freud, Thanatos was a brutal force that operates throughout our life and finally reduces us back to the inorganic state. For Ken, Thanatos is a relatively meek evolutionary mechanism associated with the transformation of consciousness from one level to the next. It is instrumental in the process of abandoning one developmental stage and moving to the next one (Wilber 1980). This involves generally a long and slow transition that is part of natural evolution, a kind of psychological equivalent of the first and second teething. The problems that might occur during these developmental transitions have a different degree of relevance than acute emergency situations that threaten the individual's survival or body integrity.

In an extensive critique of the way various theorists use the term Thanatos and of the resulting confusion (Wilber 1983), Ken emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between biological death and the "ego-death", or "death" and "Death". However, he himself entirely misses the psychological importance of the experiences associated with life-threatening events and makes no distinction between "dying" to a developmental level and the experiences associated with biological death. He equates dying with abandoning the exclusive identification with a particular structure of consciousness, which makes it possible to transcend that structure and

move to the next level. This mechanism would thus apply to such extended and gradual processes as learning to speak and developing an ego.

The situation is further confounded by the fact that, in another context, Ken also sees Thanatos as the force that drives the involution of consciousness and thus cosmogenesis (Wilber 1980). In the outward and inward arc of consciousness evolution, Thanatos is, according to Ken, the principle that dissolves the structures associated with various forms and levels of what he calls the *Atman project*. It is the principle that is responsible for abandoning substitute selves and substitute gratifications and mediates the movement toward the Absolute. However, in the context of cosmogenesis, Ken equates Thanatos with the force that drives consciousness away from the reunion with the Dharmakaya and into incarnation. Here it thus allegedly prevents the only true gratification there is, which is the union with the Absolute, and drives consciousness in the direction of unsatisfactory substitute gratifications that characterize the *Atman project*.

The experiences of encounter with biological death receive no attention at all in Ken's spectrum psychology. This is in sharp contrast with clinical observations from deep experiential self-exploration and psychotherapy (primal therapy, rebirthing, holotropic breathwork, psychedelic therapy, and work with people in psychospiritual crises). In all these situations, memories of life-threatening events such as serious diseases, accidents, and operations in postnatal life, the process of biological birth, and crises of intrauterine life represent a category of special psychological significance. In NOSC, additional profound encounters with death occur in the context of transpersonal experiences, such as karmic and phylogenetic memories and archetypal sequences. This material clearly supports the view that it is essential to distinguish the process of transition from one developmental stage to another from the life-threatening events that endanger the very survival of the organism.

Learning to speak and thus "dying" to the typhonic stage of development or developing an ego and thus "dying" to the verbal-membership stage does not stand comparison with situations that threaten the survival or integrity of the organism, such as near drowning, a serious operation, a car accident, a difficult birth, or an imminent miscarriage. Equally powerful and compelling can be experiences of death in a previous incarnation, identification with an animal attacked and killed by a predator, or annihilation by a wrathful deity. Life-threatening experiences are of a different logical type and are in a meta-position in relation to the mechanisms involved in evolutionary processes on various developmental

levels that Ken describes as Thanatos. They endanger the existence of the organism as a separate biological entity without regard to the level of its development. Thus, a critical survival threat can occur during embryonal existence, at any stage of the birth process, or at any postnatal age, without regard to the level of consciousness evolution.

In my 1985 critique of Ken's views, I expressed my opinion that any model of human nature that lacks a genuine appreciation of the paramount significance of birth and death is bound to be incomplete and unsatisfactory. The inclusion of the perinatal level of the unconscious and of the phenomenon of biological death and acknowledgment of their relevance would give Ken's model more logical consistency and greater pragmatic power. However, since he lacks genuine understanding of the perinatal dynamics and does not appreciate the psychological significance of the experience of death, his model cannot account for important clinical data, and his description of the therapeutic implications of his model will remain the least useful and convincing part of his work for clinicians dealing with the practical problems associated with various emotional and psychosomatic disorders.

4 The Spectrum of Psychopathology

Ken's interpretation of psychopathology is another area, which is in fundamental disagreement with the observations from experiential therapies, psychedelic research, and work with individuals in psychospiritual crises. This is related to the fact that he uses as his sources schools of depth psychology (particularly classical psychoanalysis and ego psychology) whose members use verbal methods of psychotherapy, are conceptually limited to biographical models of the psyche, and do not have even an elementary understanding of the perinatal and transpersonal domains. Modern revisions of classical psychoanalysis that Ken heavily relies on have refined the understanding of postnatal dynamics and object relationships, but share Freud's narrow biographical focus.

Ken basically uncritically accepts the dynamic classifications of emotional and psychosomatic disorders developed by the pioneers of classical psychoanalysis beginning with Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham (Fenichel 1945) and later modified and refined by representatives of ego psychology, such as Otto Kernberg, Margaret Mahler, and Heinz Kohut (Blanck and Blanck 1974). The common denominator for the theories of all these authors is that they do not see biological birth – whether it has a normal or pathological course – as an event that has psychological relevance. They thus accept the per-

spective of academic psychiatrists who do not consider birth to be a psychotraumatic experience and fail to see that it has any implications for psychopathology, unless it causes irreversible damage to the brain cells. As I have suggested earlier, there is a general belief in official academic circles that the newborn child lacks consciousness and that the neonatal cortex is incapable of registering the birth process and store the information about it, because it is not fully myelinized.

Ken has essentially accepted this position and incorporated it into the main body of his work. At the time when he did most of his theoretical writing about psychology and psychopathology, his theoretical speculations about psychological development and its vicissitudes had their starting point in the pleromatic stage of the newborn. Even today, he does not have an adequate understanding of the perinatal dynamics, its deep connection with the transpersonal realm, and its role in psychopathology, as well as spiritual development. For this reason, he has not been able to notice this deficit in his sources. And although he has a deep and extensive knowledge of the transpersonal realms, he sees them as being essentially irrelevant for the development of the common forms of psychopathology.

Ken's conclusions are in sharp conflict with the experience of the practitioners of various experiential approaches, such as rebirthing, psychedelic therapy, and holotropic breathwork, who witness dramatic reliving of the birth process daily in their work. However, one does not have to have such first-hand clinical experience to be able to see the logical inconsistency in current academic thinking concerning the psychological impact of birth. The representatives of all the schools of dynamic psychotherapy attribute a critical psychological role to the early mother-child relation and to the subtleties of nursing. A good example is Harry Stack Sullivan who claims that the nursing infant is able to distinguish between the "good nipple" (the breast of a loving mother that gives milk), the "evil nipple" (the breast of a rejecting or nervous mother that gives milk), and the "wrong nipple" (a thumb or big toe that does not give milk at all). He sees such experiences as instrumental in the future development of emotional and personality disorders (Sullivan 1955).

And yet the same dynamic psychologists who attribute to the infant such sensitivity and discrimination deny that it can be in any way influenced by the experience of biological birth. We are asked to believe that it is possible for the infant not to experience and/or register in memory many hours or even several days of a highly taxing and life-threatening situation and then immediately after birth become a "connoisseur of female nipples" capable of differentiating nuances in the experience of nursing. This is hardly an example of rigorous logical thinking or a well-grounded scientific conclusion. It is much more likely a result of psychological repression and denial of this extremely painful and frightening event, rationalized by the use of scientific language.

The justification of this position by references to incomplete myelinization of the cerebral cortex of the neonate can hardly be taken seriously in view of the fact that the capacity of memory exists in many lower organisms that do not have a cerebral cortex at all, including unicellular life forms that possess primitive "protoplasmatic memory". The image of the newborn as an unconscious being who is incapable of registering and remembering the process of biological birth is also in sharp conflict with extensive research data showing extraordinary sensitivity of the fetus already during intrauterine life (Verny 1987). Ken, who is usually extremely astute, sharp, and discriminating, does not notice these extraordinary discrepancies and takes all the psychodynamic schools at their face value.

According to psychoanalysis and ego psychology, psychogenic disorders can be adequately understood in terms of postnatal biographical events and related psychodynamic processes. Different psychopathological syndromes are explained as resulting from problems in specific stages of postnatal libidinal development and from the difficulties in the evolution of the ego and of the object relationships. Psychoses thus allegedly have their origin in early infancy while neurotic or psychosomatic disorders are anchored in later childhood. Accepting this way of thinking, Ken sees psychoses (autistic psychoses, symbiotic infantile psychoses, most adult schizophrenia, and depressive psychoses) as results of regression to early developmental stages of postnatal development, and thus as fully pre-personal and pre-rational disturbances. He then associates various psychoneuroses with later fulcrums of postnatal development. By contrast, difficulties of spiritual development are for him transpersonal and post-rational disorders.

As I have already indicated, in the recent modification of his model Ken makes some concessions to perinatal dynamics by creating for it a new fulcrum (F–0) and briefly outlining his ideas about the implications of this revision for psychopathology (Wilber 1995, 585–6). According to him, the new fulcrum (F–0) would participate in the development of psychopathology in a way similar to all the other fulcrums. Developmental malformations of its specific subphases (disruption at the dissociation, differentiation, or integration subphase) would result in specific pathologies.

A fixation at the fusion/indissociation subphase might thus predispose a person to "somatic mystical" fusion with the world; a disruption at the differentiation subphase might create a predisposition to the "hellish no exit" vital shock, intense sadomasochistic activity, and involutional depression; and fixation at the integration stage might lead to delusional messianic complexes. Similarly, the formations and malformations at this F−0 would "incline (but not cause)" subsequent development to tilt in the same direction. Thus a profound "no exit" malformation of the differentiation subphase might, for example, create a strong disposition to depression, withdrawal, and inhibitions. Ken offers here a comparison with the formation of a pearl, where a grain of sand influences the shape of subsequent layers.

However, even with this modification, Ken does not begin to account in his theory for actual clinical observations. In experiential psychotherapies using NOSC, people working on various forms of depression, psychoneuroses, and psychosomatic disorders typically discover that these disorders have a multilevel dynamic structure. In addition to their connections with traumatic events in infancy and childhood, as expected by traditional academic thinking, these disorders have important roots in the perinatal domain and also beyond that in the transpersonal realm (Grof 1985). Therapeutic work on psychoneuroses and psychosomatic disorders, guided not by the therapist but by the spontaneous healing mechanisms activated by NOSC, will thus typically take the clients beyond postnatal biography to the perinatal and transpersonal domains.

Under these circumstances, the therapeutic process does not follow a linear trajectory. If it is not restricted by the strait-jacket of the therapist's professional convictions, it will freely move between the biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal levels, often even within the same session. For this reason, effective work with emotional and psychosomatic disorders requires a therapist who uses a framework that is open to all the bands of the spectrum. The idea of breaking the therapeutic process into stages during which he or she is seen by different therapists, each of whom is a specialist in fulcrum-specific treatment modality, is thus highly unrealistic. In addition, since both the perinatal and transpersonal experiences have the quality that C. G. Jung called "numinosity", it is impossible to draw a clear line between therapy and spiritual evolution. With an open approach, the process that initially began as "therapy" will often automatically change into a spiritual and philosophical quest.

The integral link between psychopathology and the perinatal, as well as transpersonal, domains is even more obvious in psychotic conditions. While in psychoneuroses and psychosomatic disorders the perinatal and transpersonal roots are not immediately obvious and have to be discovered in experiential therapy, in psychoses they often represent a manifest aspect of their phenomenology. Without this recognition, the phenomenology of psychotic experiences and their relationship to mystical states will continue to present a serious challenge for Ken's conceptual system. In discussing the relationship between schizophrenia and mysticism in his book *The Atman Project* (Wilber 1980, 152), he describes his position as being "somewhere between" the approach of traditional psychiatry for which both schizophrenia and mysticism as purely pathological and the attitude taken by researchers like R. D. Laing and Norman O. Brown, who see both as examples of ultra-health.

Ken accepts the position of Anton Boisen, R. D. Laing, Julian Silverman, and others who observed that, under favorable circumstances, the psychotic episode can actually result in healing and become a growth experience: by regression in the service of the ego, the psychotic patient returns to "a deep structure (bodyself or otherwise) that was 'traumatized' during its construction in infancy or childhood… and then, as it were, re-builds the personality, ground up, from that point… After re-contacting or 're-living' that deep complex or deep structure disturbance, then the upper layers of consciousness spontaneously reshuffle or rebuild themselves around the newly refurbished deep structure" (Wilber 1980, 157). According to Ken, this process of regressive healing and transformation remains restricted to the fulcra of postnatal biography.

However, the psychotic process is not limited to material from infancy and childhood. It also frequently includes the theme of death and rebirth and the specific symbolism characteristic of perinatal matrices. Should we believe that for some mysterious reasons the process of this reparative regression has to stop short of the split caused by the trauma of biological birth, Ken's new fulcrum 0? It certainly does not stop there in deep experiential work using NOSC. There this regression proceeds to the perinatal level where the process often connects to the transpersonal domain. John Perry's observations from many years of clinical work with psychotic patients clearly demonstrate that similar mechanisms operate also in the psychotic process. They show that the reparative regression and restructuring of personality typically includes the motif of death and rebirth as an essential element and reaches deep into the archetypal level to the Self or the "central archetype" (Perry 1953, 1974). John Perry's pioneering work that C. G. Jung welcomed as "a messenger of a time when the psyche of the mental patient will receive the

interest that it deserves" (Jung's foreword to John Perry's book *The Self in Psychotic Process*, Perry 1953) has unfortunately not been mentioned in Ken's discussion of schizophrenia and mysticism.

This brings us to the problem of the participation of transpersonal elements in the experiences of psychotic patients. While emphasizing that a sharp distinction between pre- and trans- is all-important for this matter, Ken admits that the disruption of the egoic syntax opens the individual not only to "mythic thinking and magical references", but somehow also to "invasion" of material from transegoic realms that can lead to valid spiritual revelations. He suggests that the disruption of the editing and filtering functions of egoic translation leaves the individual open and unprotected from both the lower and the higher levels of consciousness. As the egoic translations begin to fail and the self is drawn into pre-egoic realms, it "is also open to invasion (castration) from the transegoic realms" [Ken's parentheses]. He emphasizes that he personally does not see any other way to account for the phenomenology of the schizophrenic break than to assume that a dual process is set in motion: the individual begins to regress to the lower levels of consciousness while, at the same time, he is invaded by the higher (Wilber 1980, 152).

This peculiar mixture of regressive phenomena and transpersonal elements in psychotic (and mystical) experiences cannot be easily accounted for without understanding that the perinatal realm of the psyche is not just a repository of memories of biological birth, but also a natural experiential interface with the transpersonal domain. Without this realization, the fact that genuine spiritual insights can sometimes be channeled through psychotic personalities and experiences will have to remain for Ken's system "a mystery" – a fact that he himself admits. Similarly unexplained remains in his theory the observation that "true mystics occasionally reactivate regressive complexes on their way to mature unity states". In spite of the fact that Ken acknowledges frequent mysterious invasion of transpersonal insights in psychotic patients, mysticism remains for him miles apart from psychosis. It represents for him a purely transegoic progression, whereas psychosis is primarily characterized by a regression to early infancy in the service of the ego.

This is clear from Ken's interpretive comments to Erich Fromm's description of the psychotic experience that, at least partially, allows interpretation in perinatal terms: "He can be possessed by the passion to return to the womb, to mother earth, to death [pleromatic incest]. If this aim is all-consuming and unchecked, the result is suicide or insanity [plero-

matic castration]. A less dangerous and pathological form of a regressive search for unity is the aim of remaining tied to the mother's breast [maternal incest], or to mother's hand, or to the father's command [paternal incest]. Another form of regressive orientation lies in destructiveness, in the aim of overcoming separateness by the passion to destroy everything and everybody [what we call 'substitute sacrifices']" (Wilber 1980, 153) [Ken's parentheses].

The lack of recognition of the perinatal and transpersonal elements in the dynamics of unusual experiences leads Ken to simplistic interpretations that sometimes border on the bizarre and absurd. A salient example is his approach to the experiences of ritual satanic cult abuse, a complex and baffling phenomenon that in the last decades has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Ken believes that these experiences are nothing but distorted childhood memories and gives as an example a hypothetical situation where the source of the experiences of satanic cult abuse is the infant's observation of his or her mother carving the Thanksgiving turkey (Wilber 1994, 303). Any serious researcher of the UFO phenomena and of alien abduction experiences would also be surprised to find out that Ken believes that a similar misinterpretation of childhood memories could adequately account for the rich spectrum of fascinating and puzzling observations in their field. I feel that personal experience of working with clients suffering from problems of this kind would give Ken more respect for the extraordinary nature of these phenomena and the depth of the issues involved.

Ken actually uses his understanding of psychoses as F–1 pathologies as a theoretical justification for pharmacological and physiological treatments as primary therapeutic interventions in these disorders: "Most forms of severe or process psychoses do not respond well (or at all) to psychoanalytic therapy, psychotherapy, analytic psychology, family therapy, etc. – despite repeated and pioneering efforts in this area. These disturbances seem to occur on such primitive level of organization (sensori-perceptual and physiological) that only intervention at an equally primitive level is effective – namely, pharmacological or physiological (which does not rule out psychotherapy as an adjunct treatment)" (Wilber 1986, 127).

Ken does not mention here the possibility of successful psychotherapeutic work with many people who by traditional psychiatry are or would be diagnosed as psychotic. While the earlier psychotherapeutic interventions based on the psychoanalytic model were severely limited by the therapists' tendency to interpret all psychotic phenomena in terms of postnatal development, strategies using larger cartographies of the psyche and supporting the experiences of the clients

rather than discouraging or suppressing them are actually very promising (Perry 1974; Grof and Grof 1990).

The manifest content of many psychoses, as well as the material emerging during experiential work with them, shows preponderance of perinatal and transpersonal themes, such as experiences of diabolical torture, eternal damnation, hell, and no exit, identification with Jesus Christ, sequences of death and rebirth or destruction and recreation of the world, satanic and demonic elements, messianic ideas, encounters with archetypal beings, or past incarnation experiences. These are in no way occasional mysterious "infusions" or "transfusions" of archetypal material, but essential and integral parts of the psychotic process.

This is evident in the already mentioned work of John Perry who conducted systematic psychotherapy with people undergoing acute psychotic episodes untruncated by tranquilizing medication. He was able to show that the major themes and motifs emerging in their experiences were identical with those that played an important role in royal dramas performed in New Year's festivals of a large number of ancient cultures at a particular period of their history, the "archaic era of incarnated myth" (Perry 1974). This was a period when these cultures saw their kings as incarnate deities, as it was the case with the Egyptian pharaohs, Peruvian Incas, the Roman emperors, kings of Israel, Japanese rulers, and many others. Perry's work clearly reveals the important role that archetypal dynamics play in such episodes and shows their meaningful connection to the evolution of consciousness. The essential role of archetypal elements and the collective unconscious in many psychotic episodes has also been demonstrated by many other Jungians and Jung himself.

The two categories of theories of functional psychoses entertained by mainstream psychiatry and by the psychoanalytically oriented systems of psychotherapy fail to provide a believable explanation for these disorders. The advocates of biological schools of psychiatry propose that the nature and content of psychotic experiences can be understood as resulting from the interaction between a yet unknown organic process and the brain. Such an explanation might account for disorganization of mental functioning seen in schizophrenia simplex or hebephrenic schizophrenia and similar disorders. However, the idea that a yet unknown pathological process could by itself produce in the brain the often elaborate and comprehensive systems of "hallucinations" and "delusions", including perinatal and transpersonal experiences, is highly implausible. As Jungian psychology, as well as the work with psychedelic substances and powerful experiential psychotherapies have clearly shown, these experiences belong to

deep dynamics of the human psyche. Although they are not ordinarily available for conscious experience they can easily be made conscious with the use of various ancient, aboriginal, and modern techniques.

Representatives of many psychologically oriented schools believe that the dynamics of functional psychoses can be understood in psychological terms. The approaches that are acceptable in academic circles use for this purpose models limited to postnatal biography and the individual unconscious. The theorists in psychotherapeutic schools that Ken draws upon are trying to explain the psychotic process as a regression to early stages of the development of the libido and of the ego. However, psychodynamic explanations limited to postnatal biography cannot possibly account for the nature and intensity of emotions and the rich and intricate content of many psychotic experiences. There is a long way from the mind of a lonely or hungry infant to elaborate experiences of the sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*), identification with the death and resurrection of Christ, or a shattering vision of the Apocalypse and of the Last Judgment.

A comprehensive approach to functional psychoses, mysticism, and their mutual interrelations requires a vastly expanded cartography of the psyche that includes the perinatal and the transpersonal domains. As the work with NOSC clearly shows, the current academic understanding of psychoses and their relationship to mysticism is superficial and needs a radical revision. However, Ken's conceptual framework in its present form does not offer a viable alternative. With his linear understanding of the pre/trans fallacy, he sees psychotic states as essentially regressive and mystical states as progressive. This is in clear conflict with clinical observations that show a much more complex and intimate relationship between many psychotic episodes and mystical states. David Lukoff (1985) speaks in this regard about at least four possible combinations: mystical states, mystical states with psychotic features, psychotic states with mystical features, and psychotic states. In my experience, the problem of the mystical versus the psychotic is often a problem of coping with and integrating perinatal and transpersonal experiences.

The success of this integration seems to depend more on the history and personality structure of the individual than on the nature of the experiences themselves. In one place, Ken himself interprets schizophrenic break with religious content as a result of influx of material from the subtle level meeting the "false self" of an individual whose personality structure was developmentally compromised (Wilber 1980, 157). Traumatic experiences of the early stages of postnatal development that in various psychodynamic schools are

seen as the causes and sources of psychotic phenomena can certainly play an important role as factors interfering with the ability to cope with perinatal and transpersonal experiences, as well as the capacity for successful integration and adequate grounding of such experiences. However, early childhood traumas cannot possibly create the often rich and intricate content of psychotic experiences, which is clearly transbiographical in nature. To account for it, we have to consider such concepts as the transpersonal domain of the psyche, the archetypal and historical realms of Jung's collective unconscious, the Universal Mind (*anima mundi*), or cosmic consciousness.

This has its parallel in the differences in the capacity of various people to integrate such experiences in psychedelic sessions. The administration of psychedelic substances can account for the emergence of unconscious material from the depth of the psyche, but not for the specific content of the resulting experiences. The complex and intricate experiential sequences in psychedelic sessions cannot be explained simply as toxic artifacts of the interaction between the psychedelic substances and the neurophysiological processes in the brain. However, while the content of the experiences by far transcends the biography of the individual, biographical factors can play a very important role in the final outcome of this process. Depending on the history of the individual and on the set and setting of the session, these experiences can lead to personality disintegration and long-term psychopathology, or to powerful spiritual opening and personality transformation. Such observations show that postnatal events are not the causes and sources of psychotic experiences, but important contributing factors.

My observations of persons in non-ordinary states suggest that prenatal, natal, and early postnatal experiences encountered in regressive work have a distinctly numinous quality and freely merge with the elements from the archetypal and mystical realms. The memories of intrauterine life are not just episodes of primitive failure to perceive differences, as Ken suggests (Wilber 1995, 587), but are associated with profound mystical insights that reveal fundamental unity behind the world of separation. Similarly, the "no exit" stage of birth typically coincides with archetypal images of hell, the struggle in the birth canal is often accompanied by identification with archetypal figures representing death and rebirth, and the moment of birth and reunion with mother can take the form of divine epiphany, of an encounter with the Great Mother Goddess, or of mystical marriage. The presence of transpersonal elements on this level seems to be an integral part of this process, rather than a mysterious "infusion" of material from a remote part of the developmental spectrum.

When this understanding is applied to clinical work, the distinction between mystical states with an evolutionary potential and various psychotic states with mystical features does not depend exclusively on the nature and content of the experiences themselves and their association with radically different fulcrums of consciousness evolution. It is also important to take into consideration the overall context, the person's experiential style, and his or her ability to integrate the experiences into everyday life. In addition, the belief system of the surrounding culture and of the professionals treating the individuals involved should not be underestimated as factors that play a paramount role in shaping the nature of this process and its outcome. The therapeutic implications of this approach to mysticism and psychosis have been discussed in detail in publications specifically focused on the problem of spontaneous psychospiritual crises, or "spiritual emergencies" (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990).

5 The "Back-Door" and "Front-Door" Entry" into the Spiritual Realms

In his last book, Ken also addresses the problem of our disagreement concerning the "chronological order of the unconscious disclosures". He points out that in my theoretical system the dividing line between the personal and transpersonal appears to be on the level of the perinatal matrices, whereas in his map it is at the level of the centaur. This naturally constitutes a problem, since on his linear spectrum, these two domains are far apart. Ken's explanation for this discrepancy is that the observations on which my cartography is based come from regressive work. This process takes individuals from ordinary ego to Freudian childhood traumas and from there to the birth trauma and the intrauterine state. Ken suggests that at this point, "they may cease identifying with the physical body-mind altogether and thus fall into transpersonal, supra-individual states" (Wilber 1995, 587).

He emphasizes that his own map is based primarily on "broad-scale growth and development patterns" and thus runs in the other direction; however, he points out that it covers essentially the same general territory. It reflects the order in which "these domains enter awareness as a stable adaptation and not as a temporary experience". According to Ken, the work with NOSC forces its way to the transpersonal domain through the "backdoor", whereas he describes spiritual evolution that leads there through the "front door" and is conducive to stable developmental patterns.

The importance of distinguishing between temporary experiences and permanent structures was emphasized a long

time ago by William James (James 1961) and again by Ralph Metzner who discussed the difference between transcendence and transformation (Metzner 1980). While I certainly agree that it is important to distinguish between transient experiences involving various levels of consciousness, on the one hand, and reaching a certain evolutionary level as a stable personality structure, on the other, I have certain reservations concerning Ken's position and his formulations.

Ken's description of the mechanism through which the regressive process reaches the transpersonal domain via the perinatal process (through the "backdoor") is far from plausible or satisfactory. As I will show later on, the transpersonal realms that open up when an individual regresses to the prenatal state involve much more than a simple loss of connection with the physical body-mind. Such experiential identification with the fetus appears to be a genuine mystical state of a very specific kind that is often accompanied with rich archetypal imagery and profound insights of cosmic relevance. Episodes of undisturbed intrauterine existence can open up into culture-specific archetypal images of paradises or celestial realms, experiential identification with aquatic animals, or complex astronomical vistas. Experiences of intrauterine disturbances coincide with encounters with insidious demons and authentic identification with aquatic life forms in polluted waters.

Moreover, Ken's argument about entering the transpersonal, supra-individual space by ceasing to identify with the physical body-mind is further weakened by the fact that the encounter with rich archetypal imagery is not limited to the prenatal state, but occurs in connection with all the perinatal matrices, including those that deeply and painfully engage the body. The no-exit stage of birth (BPM II) is often associated with images of hell and archetypal figures representing eternal damnation, such as Sisyphus or Tantalus, as well as identification with victims of various eras drawn from the collective unconscious, and with corresponding past-life experiences. Typical experiential concomitants of the struggle through the birth canal are archetypal images of deities representing death and rebirth and scenes of revolutions appearing as collective or past-life memories. Similarly, the reliving of birth is accompanied by culture-specific images of the Great Mother Goddess and scenes of divine epiphany or sacred marriage (Grof 1975, 1987, 1992). These observations suggest an intimate and organic *a priori* association between the perinatal and transpersonal levels.

I would like to mention in this context the work of Christopher Bache, professor of religion and philosophy at the State University in Youngstown, Ohio, who has very creatively fur-

ther elaborated and clarified the concept of perinatal dynamics and made an important contribution to the understanding of the relationship between the personal and transpersonal dimensions of this domain (Bache 1995). Having analyzed many accounts of non-ordinary experiences with perinatal features, he concludes that the perinatal matrices, as I have described them, reflect an operational mode of consciousness in which the personal and transpersonal blend, sharing organizational patterns and structures.

By identifying with intense experiences of the fetus, the individual connects by resonance to the larger field of species consciousness that can be described in terms of Sheldrake's *morphogenetic fields*, of C. G. Jung's *collective unconscious*, or of the *Oversoul*. This involves experiences of wars, revolutions, and atrocities, as well as triumphs of humanity associated with emotions of unimaginable intensity. It is thus conceivable – and subjects frequently report this as their insights – that by experiencing the agonies and ecstasies on a collective scale that represent an integral part of the perinatal process, the individual heals not just himself or herself, but contributes to the healing of humankind itself in the sense of the Buddhist archetype of the Bodhisattva or the Christian archetype of Christ.

There are other important observations which support the notion that the perinatal domain represents an important interface with the spiritual domain. The perinatal experiences are a strange amalgam of three aspects of human life – birth, sex, and death – all three of which are known to be potential gateways to transcendence. Birth and death represent the beginning and the end of individual life and are thus natural frontiers with the transpersonal domain not only in experiential work, but also in everyday life. Delivering women and people in near-death situations often have profound transcendental experiences. Meditation with dying individuals and personal confrontation with death in cemeteries and burning grounds have been used in certain forms of spiritual practice as powerful catalysts of mystical opening. The transindividual nature of sex is evident from its critical role in species preservation and its potential as a gateway into the spiritual realm is best illustrated by the practice of *maithuna*, ritual sexual union used in left-handed Tantra (*Vamamarga*) (Mookerjee and Khanna 1977).

We can now return to the problem of entering the spiritual domain through the "back door" and the "front door". Many prominent figures in the spiritual history of humanity whom Ken uses as examples for his developmental stages, from shamans to saints, sages, and founders of the great religions, such as the Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Ramakrishna, St. An-

thony, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and others, all experienced powerful visionary states that initiated and catalyzed their spiritual development. These experiences typically involved perinatal sequences that were strikingly similar to those that can be regularly observed in psychedelic and holotropic sessions. Christopher Bache has clearly demonstrated this in his studies of St. John of the Cross (Bache 1991) and St. Teresa of Avila (Bache 1985). The reports from powerful experiential sessions often read like passages from the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, the *Pali canon*, the ancient books of the dead, the texts of Christian mystics, and other spiritual scriptures.

The above examples show that spiritual opening typically involves powerful NOSC, often with prominent perinatal features. These, of course, might or might not be followed by a good integration and stabilization on a new developmental level. It is certainly possible to have powerful mystical experiences that do not result in spiritual evolution. On the other hand, it is also questionable how much spiritual development can occur without powerful experiences of NOSC. Ken emphasizes that he is writing in his work about "broad-scale growth and development patterns", about a process through which "these domains enter awareness as a stable adaptation and not as a temporary experience".

However, he does not describe the mechanism that would be involved in such an evolution and transformation. If there is one, it would certainly not apply to most of the prominent figures he uses as examples. It is not clear what Ken's entry into the spiritual realm through the "front door" would actually look like. If it is something resembling William James' "educational variety" of spiritual development, where one would gradually open to the mystical dimension over a long period of time, in the way in which one learns to speak or develops an ego, it does not seem to be the mechanism driving the spiritual evolution of humanity. As the above examples illustrate, the spiritual opening of most famous mystics involved dramatic episodes of NOSC.

During my work with psychedelics and holotropic breathwork, I have been aware of the difference between mystical experiences and consciousness evolution. I have written in different places about the personality changes following spiritual experiences and paid great attention to the circumstances that are conducive to permanent beneficial changes and factors that facilitate good integration. I have not yet attempted to offer a comprehensive theoretical framework dealing with the problems of consciousness evolution that would summarize my observations over the years. However, these observations leave no doubt in my mind that under

good circumstances powerful "regressive" experiences can be harnessed in such a way that they actually result in permanent changes of the developmental structure.

At the core of our controversy is a disagreement concerning the nature of "regressive" experiences and the role that they play in spiritual opening. Ken criticizes the position of the people that he calls "peak theorists" who believe that the entire spectrum of consciousness is always available, fully formed but submerged. According to him, transpersonal experience might involve the "reentering" or "re-experiencing" of a prepersonal occasion, such as pleromatic indissociation, perinatal patterns, archaic images, phylogenetic heritage, or animal/plant identification. However, this for Ken does not mean that the transpersonal elements reside in these archaic structures. It is transpersonal awareness that is instrumental in this process, not the archaic structures themselves. In his opinion, not a single prepersonal structure can in and of itself generate intrinsic transpersonal awareness. It can become the object of transpersonal awareness, and thus be "reentered" and "reworked". It can then become a type of vehicle that is used, but never its source. Ken insists that in these cases the concept of the pre/trans fallacy, however occasionally paradoxical, thus remains firmly in place.

The critical issue here is that "regressive" experiences, not only perinatal and prenatal, but also ancestral, racial, karmic, phylogenetic, and even those that reach farther back into the history of the cosmos often seem to form an integral part of spiritual opening. Whether we interpret this fact as the transpersonal awareness re-entering these archaic structures, as Ken prefers to describe it, or as manifestation of transpersonal potential inherent within them seems less relevant. Since, according to perennial philosophy and Ken's own system, all of creation and the entire evolution in nature and in the cosmos is, in the last analysis, created by involution of Absolute Consciousness, I do not see any need to treat these elements as inherently different from the spiritual realm. The fact that superior creative intelligence guides the creative process and manifests on all its levels certainly leaves such a possibility open.

In any case, Ken severely misunderstands the nature of perinatal experiences if he sees them as nothing but a replay of the actual experience of the fetus. His main objection is that regression to the pre- and perinatal state cannot convey any revelations about existence, because "the fetus in the womb is not aware of the whole world of intersubjective morals, art, logic, poetry, history, and economics" (Wilber 1995, 755). I do not see, however, how this makes any difference, since in discussing perinatal experiences, we are not talking about

the fetus, but about an adult who is reliving the experiences of the fetus. This regression is experienced by an individual with differentiated personality and intellectual faculties that include and integrate the development through all the post-natal fulcrums. This vast amount of information is not lost during the regressive experience and forms an integral part of it. It certainly is conceivable that the NOSC facilitates an entirely new creative integration of all structures with the transpersonal domain, thus facilitating the unfolding of still new structures. Similar mechanisms have played an important role not only in religious revelations, but also in many scientific discoveries and artistic inspirations (Harman 1984).

Besides including the intellectual and emotional repertoire of the adult individual, regressive experiences also mediate direct extrasensory access not only to what Ken calls "intersubjective space" but also to information about various aspects of space-time and about the archetypal realms of the collective unconscious. I have made over the years numerous observations in this regard and reported them with many illustrative case histories (Grof 1985, 1987, 1992). In addition, the processes involved are characterized by multiple holographic enfolding and unfolding of space and time and escape any efforts of the intellect to arrange and categorize them into a neat linear system. Ken clearly does not understand the nature and complexity of the experiences involved, as can be illustrated by the example of the oak and acorn that he uses to criticize Richard Tarnas' application of the dynamics of perinatal matrices to the intellectual development of Western civilization (Wilber 1995, 755).

To ridicule the idea that regression to the womb could convey genuine mystical insights, Ken uses the image of an oak and the acorn from which it came. He argues that the regression to the fetal state cannot any more mediate a true mystical union with the world than an oak can unify its leaves and branches or become one with the forest by identifying with the original acorn. According to him, the "original union", whether conceived as the actual womb or as the pre-historical *participation mystique* of primitive cultures is not a union, but an undifferentiation.

This certainly is a logical conclusion we would be inclined to draw on the basis of external observation of these conditions when they occur in the context of linear individual and historical development. However, our only source of information about the subjective aspect of the original situations comes from regressive work. For this reason, all we will ever be able to say about them apart from what we learn from experiential work, will be educated fantasies and guesses, no matter how plausible they might appear to our logical mind.

Yet we have ample knowledge about the regressive return to these situations and we know that it is not a simple replay or unearthing of the memories of the original state as understood by materialistic science. The experiences involved represent extremely complex, multidimensional, and even paradoxical phenomena that transcend attempts to fit them neatly into linear schemes. Neither Richard Tarnas nor myself have ever thought, said, or written that the perinatal experiences are nothing but a mechanical replay of the original birth situation, yet this is exactly the way Ken consistently misinterprets these experiences.

To more adequately portray the nature of perinatal experiences and the insights that they mediate, the oak of Ken's simile would have to regress to the original acorn and, while experiencing its oak/acorn identity, become simultaneously aware of its entire (acorn and oak) environmental context involving the cosmos, nature, the sun, the air, the soil, and the rain. This would also be associated with a sense of its embeddedness in the forest and its descent from a line of preceding oak trees and acorns, as well as its entire development from the acorn to its present form. And an important aspect of such an experience would be its connection with the archetypes of Mother Nature or Mother Earth and with the creative divine energy that underlies all of the above forms.

If the nature of regressive experiences in NOSC is correctly understood, it does not seem surprising that they represent an important mechanism of spiritual opening and of spiritual evolution. Besides ample evidence from modern consciousness research, this notion can be supported by many examples from the spiritual history of humanity. The experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth, or "second birth", that is closely associated with the conscious reliving of biological birth, is an essential component in the ritual and spiritual life of many cultures. It plays an important role not only in shamanism, aboriginal rites of passage, and the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, but also in Christianity (as indicated by the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus about the importance of second birth, "birth from water and spirit"), Hinduism (becoming a *dvija* or twice-born), and other great religions. Some spiritual texts also indicate that – in spite of the obvious differences – there are certain significant similarities between the mystical state and the child's perception of the world ("you have to become like children to enter the kingdom of God").

There are other important aspects of spiritual development for which regression to earlier stages of evolution is absolutely essential. The most important of these are the

concepts of reincarnation and karma, ideas that seem to be surprisingly neglected in Ken's discussions of spirituality in spite of their paramount cultural significance. The concept of reincarnation and karma represents a cornerstone of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and Taoism. Various forms of belief in previous existences can be found in such historically, geographically, and culturally diverse groups as the Neoplatonists and Gnostics, various African tribes, American Indians, Pre-Columbian cultures, the Polynesian kahunas, and the practitioners of the Brazilian umbanda. Since such beliefs are based on experiences of events in other historical periods, they involve as a necessary prerequisite temporal regression of consciousness to earlier stages of human evolution.

Conscious re-experiencing of episodes from human history and from the evolution of the species, of the earth, or of the entire universe has been an important part of many mystical experiences resulting in spiritual opening and growth. The psychospiritual alchemical process has been described as *opus contra naturam*, working against nature, since it involves the discovery of the spiritual dimensions of existence by retracing not only one's own psychological history, but the entire history of creation and bringing its various stages to full conscious awareness (Fabricius 1976). Retracing the ancestral lineage and returning to the origins is an important part of the rites of passage of many aboriginal tribes. These observations suggest that spiritual evolution typically does not follow a direct linear trajectory from the centaur to the subtle and causal levels, but involves a combined regressive and progressive movement of consciousness with good subsequent integration of the experiences involved.

Deep experiential regression can lead to full conscious manifestation of the spiritual dimension of various stages of evolution, a dimension that was implicit and latent in them, but not consciously experienced at the time of the original unfolding of the evolutionary process in linear time. In this way, what was lost in involution, or cosmogenesis, is regained in regressive revisiting of its previous stages. A new creative synthesis of the historical and transcendental is then integrated into the present. Thus, the distinction between pre- and trans- has a paradoxical nature; they are neither identical, nor are they completely different from each other. The spiritual opening often follows a spiral trajectory during which consciousness enfolds into itself reaching back into the past and then again unfolds into the new present. Michael Washburn argues, correctly I believe, along similar lines in his book *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground* (Washburn 1988) when he emphasizes the "spiral concept of ego transcendence' versus Ken's 'ladder concept of ego transcendence".

The problem of entry into the spiritual realm through the "back door" or the "front door" is closely related to the question whether children can have transpersonal experiences and whether true spirituality can exist in cultures that are at what Ken refers to as the "magical" or "mythical" stages of development. If reaching the centauric level were a necessary prerequisite for the entry into the spiritual realm on the individual and collective level, transpersonal experiences should not be possible in children. The ritual and religious life of shamanic cultures and ancient civilizations at the mythical stage of development would then be interpreted as prepersonal activity that lacks a genuine spiritual dimension.

However, actual observations have shown that transpersonal experiences, both spontaneous and evoked, are fairly common in children. Ian Stevenson's meticulous study of spontaneous past life experiences in children involving more than three thousand cases is just the most salient example (Stevenson 1966, 1984, 1987). We have ourselves observed several clearly transpersonal experiences, including sequences of death and rebirth, in ten and twelve year olds who have participated in sessions of holotropic breathwork. Shamanic literature, as well as the personal experiences of many anthropologists with shamans, leaves little doubt that they regularly have spiritual experiences not only of the subtle realms, but also of the causal realms. For many shamans, the entry into the spiritual domain is mediated by the "shamanic illness", a spontaneous visionary episode with distinct perinatal features. It would also be difficult to deny that the Eleusinian mysteries of death and rebirth, conducted in ancient Greece regularly for a period of almost two thousand years, as well as other mystery religions in the Mediterranean area, were authentic spiritual activities (Wasson, Hofmann and Ruck 1978).

Although Ken himself admits the possibility of transpersonal experiences in children and shamans, he again considers them, like the transpersonal experiences of psychotics, as "invasions" alien to the corresponding fulcrums of his developmental scheme rather than natural and regular occurrences. As Roger Walsh pointed out in his study of shamanism, according to Ken's scheme, the shamans who have consistently subtle experiences would have to be shortcutting two major developmental stages, one of them actually being the rational one (Walsh 1991).

6 Spectrum Psychology, Archetypal Dynamics, and Transit Astrology

In conclusion, I would like to bring up another major point of disagreement between Ken Wilber and myself, namely the relevance of astrology, particularly transit astrology, for depth psychology and consciousness research. After almost four decades of research into NOSC, I have come to the conclusion that psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy could profoundly benefit, both theoretically and practically, from a creative synthesis of transpersonal psychology and archetypal astrology. Numerous observations made in cooperation with Richard Tarnas, who has been a great teacher for me in this regard, have convinced me that transit astrology is a tool (and the only tool I know) that predicts with extraordinary accuracy both the timing and content of spontaneous and evoked episodes of NOSC, such as mystical experiences, spiritual emergencies, psychotic breakdowns, and psychedelic or holotropic sessions.

In the early years of my professional career, astrology would have been the last discipline I would have possibly taken seriously into account. It has been a major irony of my professional life that after years of unsuccessful search among psychological tests of Western academic psychology for tools that would predict the nature and content of psychedelic experiences and other types of NOSC, I found the answer in transit astrology, a field that is even more controversial than psychedelic research itself.

Ken considers our respective perspectives on the value of astrology to constitute one of the "genuine disagreements" between us and has stated that he would probably never share my enthusiasm in this regard. I can easily understand the resistance against astrology that exists in academic circles, since scientists with conventional educational backgrounds, committed to the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm and materialistic philosophy, cannot accept astrology without undergoing a major conceptual cataclysm. However, Ken's unswerving resistance comes as somewhat of a surprise, since he has been able to accept many claims of perennial philosophy that are certainly not less extraordinary and challenging than those of astrology.

Introduction of the astrological perspective would help to clarify some of the points of disagreement between Ken and myself, such as the importance of perinatal dynamics, the relationship between psychotic and mystical experiences, the question whether the centaur or the perinatal domain of the unconscious represents the interface with the spiritual dimension, and the problem of the integration and stabilization of perinatal and transpersonal experiences. It would take a separate paper to explain the basic principles of the relationship between archetypal astrology, transpersonal psychology, and consciousness research. A convincing argument would require bringing in the remarkable evidence of a clinical, as well as historical and cultural, nature illustrating these correlations that Richard Tarnas has accumulated over the years.

I have had the pleasure of teaching with him a graduate course at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) on this subject and have been repeatedly impressed, even astonished, by the accuracy of astrological correlations for a wide variety of fields. The results of his meticulous research with hundreds of convincing examples will be presented in his comprehensive scholarly study entitled *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View* (Tarnas 2007), the astrological sequel to his book *The Passion of the Western Mind* (Tarnas 1991). I believe that this book will be a major contribution to both transpersonal psychology and astrology.

Forty years of research into NOSC have convinced me of the limitations and relativity of all models and theoretical constructs. As Thomas Kuhn showed in his groundbreaking work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 1970), the entire history of Western science could easily be written as a history of human errors rather than major triumphs. None of the theories considered definitive at any given time have survived later discoveries, except the most recent ones that are still waiting for it to happen. Reality is clearly much more complex than any of the theories that we make about it.

Whatever transpersonal psychologists have discovered and described during the first quarter of a century of the existence of their young discipline will necessarily be complemented, revised, and modified. The future will show how the upcoming generations of professionals will view the issues explored in this paper in the light of their own experiences and findings. They will very likely scrutinize the statements on both sides and change or adjust them to accommodate new observations and theories. I therefore feel very strongly that instead of engaging in the battle of models as if they were and ever could be definitive and all-inclusive, it is wise to do the best we can to improve them and bring them into consonance, but leave the field wide open for surprises and new discoveries.

Acknowledgement

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Sharon Lauricella

Acknowledgement: A Way Toward Spiritual Communication

Acknowledgement is a communicative act through which we confirm, affirm, or validate another (Hyde 2006). This paper is an autoethnographic account of my experiences in conducting a personal experiment in which I wrote letters to students, friends, colleagues, family, and even strangers in order to acknowledge them for the difference that they make to me and to others. I suggest, based on published literature and my own experiences, that acknowledgement is a spiritual act, and that by acknowledging others, we recognize the interconnectedness of our lives to those of others. I also argue that acknowledgement is an evolved form of gratitude, and offers a more sophisticated means of communication which focuses on equality and wholeness rather than hierarchy and ranking. The paper concludes with the experienced benefits of an acknowledgement practice, together with how future iterations of the project will be changed.

1   Introduction

When I was in the first grade, a friend quietly handed me a book that he had finished reading. It featured personified woodland creatures and, to my liking, was well beyond grade level reading. My six year-old self was not only appreciative but also somewhat surprised; I didn't realize that this fellow student had recognized my passion for both nature and reading. Many years later, when I first started teaching, a parent expressed her joy that her daughter – for the first time – enjoyed coming to school and was excited about learning because of the approach that I was taking to teaching the course. In that moment, it occurred to me that I was making a significant difference to a student, a family, a classroom. Most significantly, when each of my children was born, I looked into their eyes and felt seen, even recognized, in a way that I had never been noticed before. My very existence was legitimized, honoured, and entirely true. All of these instances demonstrate moments of being acknowledged. They are stories of caring or being cared for, respecting or being respected, appreciating or being appreciated, understanding or being understood. My examples are perhaps not different from others', though experiences of being truly acknowledged are unmistakably memorable, personal, and often these experiences are very moving.

I believe that acknowledgement is a uniquely spiritual experience. Acknowledgement is different from, for example, gratitude, which is a means or method of expressing thanks. Gratitude is arguably in its inexorable heyday, with self-help shelves offering an abundant supply of volumes outlining the benefits of gratitude (Emmons 2007) and ways to adopt an "attitude of gratitude" (Ryan 2009). I suggest in this paper that gratitude has its roots in acknowledgement – either *being acknowledged* or *acknowledging others*. When we are acknowledged or acknowledge others for accomplishments, kindness, achievements, thoughtfulness, or simply presence, the interconnectedness of life is seen and celebrated. This interconnectedness, when noticed and expressed, facilitates meaning – the very essence of human life, and constitutes a deeply spiritual moment.

I offer here my own experiment in acknowledgement. Two methodologies inform how I share this story. First, I incorporate Anderson's (2006) methodology of analytic autoethnography. This practice refers to research in which the author is (1) a full member of the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to a deeper understanding of the theory of social phenomena. Second, I embrace Hochheimer's (2010) theory of the Life Force. Hochheimer suggests that a theory of spirituality and

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communication is (1) grounded in the perception and expression of the "Life Force" which flows through and between all living things, (2) we have physical energy, though it also exists within us via prayer, meditation, and other spiritual activities, (3) the Life Force exists inside, outside, and amongst us, (4) spirituality by definition is when we sense this communal energy, and feel that there is something greater, deeper, or more profound. Hochheimer therefore argues that spirituality infers an understanding of interconnectedness, and an inherent element is the imaginative capacity to understand and express the connection between and amongst individuals. I seek to further Hochheimer's theory by suggesting acknowledgement as a practical means by which we can imagine, express, and practice spiritual communication.

2 My Acknowledgement Experiment

2.1 Why Acknowledgement?

As a full-time academic, I have met and come to know many students. Some I have known for the four years during which they studied at the university in which I teach and research. Others I met only in their final year, or if they took a course that I taught as an elective. There are many students with whom I have maintained close contact, often via social media, which helps in maintaining ties during a time when many young adults are travelling or moving in order to accommodate for new opportunities. As the fall, 2015 semester concluded, I wondered if my students knew how profoundly they had affected me. Did they realize that I remember so many of their contributions to class, experiences shared, challenges given and accepted? Did they know that I remember them, and think about them even many years later?

At the same time, I was particularly impressed with the convictions of a variety of people in my life. For example, a close friend embarked on a years-long dream of being an artist; she began painting, posting her work on Instagram and Facebook, and even sold much of her work. In another arena, a colleague had been tasked with a particularly important leadership role and was working with most admirable integrity and enthusiasm. In a more personal context, I observed an acquaintance who had what seemed to me a wonderful relationship with her husband – one which included trust and joviality, and for which I hope in my own life.

All of the people about whom I was thinking had done or were doing something noteworthy, admirable, and/or inspiring. I noticed them, their work, their beliefs, and their ways of conducting themselves. It became clearer and clearer to me that I needed and wanted to reach out to these people to tell them that I saw what they were doing, and that I admired them. The sentiment that I wanted to communicate was direct and unique to each individual. To them I wished to express some common sentiments:

I see you.
I remember you.
You make a difference.

2.2 Acknowledgement Versus Gratitude

As I reflected upon what I wanted to convey to my students, friends, family, and colleagues, I realized that what I wanted to communicate was not the same as gratitude. I believe that gratitude is a wonderful thing to practice, and it has provided significant benefit to many people. It has the powerful potential to turn one's psychology from negative to positive (for example, Kralik 2011; Bartholomew and Bartholomew 2013). However, my reflection led me to recognize that when expressing gratitude, one is focused upon oneself. For example, one may think, "I am grateful to have [some thing or some experience]". Gratitude may be for beautiful weather, a lovely meal, good health, the company of a good friend. All such things are of benefit to the individual – one is grateful for the positive asset as it relates to their own state of being. Gratitude focuses on "me" or "I".

By contrast, acknowledgement is not at all about oneself. Its focus is the recipient, and in context of respect and admiration – what Buber (1937/1970) calls a relationship with the "Thou". Buber illustrated the importance of relationships in context of the sacred by arguing that humans relate to others as either "It" or "Thou", the latter being a more reverent, meaningful relationship. When one considers others in context of "It", the other is independent of oneself, and one may experience, use, or relate to another as a distinctly separate individual. Rather, when one relates to another as "Thou", the relationship is one of reverence, and the interconnectedness between and amongst individuals is recognized. This interconnectedness is integral to the divine relationship, whereby the discrete boundaries between individuals are dissolved, and common humanity and spirituality is known.

This dissolving of boundaries and spiritual connection is what I wanted to achieve in my acknowledgement experiment. I sought to connect with others in ways that recognized that we are not bound by what Buber calls "subject-object" parameters. The subject-object relationship is one in which separateness is the pervading sentiment – each person is separate from all others. These parameters often exist in expressions of gratitude, in which one may do a favour for another and some benefit is exchanged. I sought to recognize the "subject-subject" relationship, whereby both parties are unified and mutual sharing is evident. I intended that the recipient of my expression of acknowledgement felt understood on a level far more sophisticated than in provid-

ing a meaningful task, completing a good deed, or even via extending a generous gift. The subject-subject relationship as Buber describes it was particularly important as I acknowledged students. I wanted my students – both current and former – to feel recognized and met as equals on a level far more important than an exchange of anything material or tangible.

My search for a framework for this spiritual experiment was not plentiful; there is indeed a dearth of literature on acknowledgement. The most helpful work was Hyde's (2006) monograph, which argues that acknowledgement is a communicative gift that bonds human beings together, and helps to create human solidarity. Hyde suggests that the fundamental element in acknowledgement is awe – being aware of others creates a sense of respect and wonder which serves as the foundation for acknowledgement. As a practice, Hyde adds cautiously, acknowledgement must toe the delicate balance of altruism and ego, whereby one benefits from being acknowledged, yet must be careful to not slip into selfishness. Hyde's work contributes to the area of communication ethics, and Arnett (2008) suggests that a study of acknowledgement deserves "ongoing consideration" (Arnett 2008, 28).

The other venue in which acknowledgment has been discussed is business and leadership. Umlas (2006) suggests that acknowledging others for their contributions leads to positive professional results, can neutralize jealousy, and build stronger relationships. She also argues that acknowledgement leads to increased engagement on the part of business employees, and leads to better results at work (Umlas 2013). I agree with Umlas's premises, though I suggest that acknowledgement as she describes it is too close to gratitude (the title of her second monograph, *Grateful Leadership*, is indicative of her perception of a very close if not inseparable link between the two concepts). In reading Umlas's work, it appears that she is focused perhaps too much on what someone has done for others – the notion of benefit appears too explicit. Acknowledgement, as I conceive of it, recognizes a quality, skill or ideal in someone that deserves positive remark whether it builds business performance or not. Certainly the practice of acknowledgement is well-placed in the business arena, though I suggest that Umlas is too focused on measureable outcomes than personal qualities.

Overall, I suspected that most of the people with whom I associated did not receive as much acknowledgement as they would have liked, and certainly not enough to create what Hyde describes as "excessive selfishness" (Hyde 2006, 220). I was particularly interested in qualities such as loyalty,

inclusivity, diligence, and patience – all of these qualities can lead to success, wellbeing, and even business performance or profit. However, I was interested not so much about what someone did to further measureable outcomes, but rather, a person's individual qualities, talents, or skills, without an explicit focus on outcome. Further, I certainly had a divine message that I ought to reach out to and connect with people in my life who had made a difference to me, to others, or to the community. Hence, my acknowledgement experiment.

2.3 From Start to Everyday Practice

In December, 2015, I began my personal inquiry into an acknowledgement practice. At this time, the fall semester was coming to a close, and I was beginning to plan the winter semester. My experiment fit with course planning for the winter term at the university. As part of the Nonviolent Communication course that I teach, students embark on a peace project: a self-directed personal experiment or project that they had never done before. The project must make a difference in their lives or the lives of others (some projects in the past included visiting a different place of worship every week for the whole semester, enlisting family members in an active recycling program at home, writing a series of short stories, or creating a series of works of art within a particular theme). Each year, I conduct my own project alongside students in order that I am an active participant in the course. In planning the 2016 iteration of the course, I decided that in keeping with my self-imposed expectation to complete a project, I would acknowledge at least one person a day until the completion of the winter semester (30 April).

My acknowledgement project held specific parameters, expectations, and processes. I felt strongly that my acknowledgements should be handwritten. Like Kralik (2012) embraced in his very successful report about his practice of gratitude, I believe that handwritten notes feel special and sincere. Advice on not abandoning the handwritten letter abounds (for example, Hall 2015; Post 2014); overall sentiments are such that the thoughtfulness and permanence of handwritten letters make them superior to often hastily-written, rather impermanent digital communication. Further, Hyde (2006) cautions that the line between acknowledgement and the self-centred demand for immediacy is thin; therefore he suggests being wary of overusing technology in communique pertaining to acknowledgement.

To this end, I retrieved my copy of Workman's (2015) *You Are Doing a Freaking Great Job* (which was already on my bookshelf – I purchased it on impulse in a bookstore several

months previously, knowing that it would have meaning and use eventually). The square, 4x4 volume contains beautifully illustrated inspirational quotes from both established and developing artists. I carefully removed pages from the book, trimmed edges nicely, and mounted them on complimentary card stock. I then wrote my acknowledgement message on the reverse. In each instance, I chose a quote that I deemed meaningful to the recipient. Figure 1 illustrates an assortment of my handwritten letters. These letters continued daily – even over the winter holidays.

Figure 1. Acknowledgement cards

Some of the acknowledgement letters were delivered via traditional mail service, while others were hand delivered. In order to retrieve postal addresses that I did not already possess, I found communication via Facebook messenger most helpful. Many of my former students were my Facebook friends, therefore connecting via the messenger application facilitated contact even with those who had moved subsequent to graduating from university. Similarly, some friends had moved across North America or overseas. Letters were mailed to San Francisco, New Orleans, Boston, and Dallas, amongst many other locations. In more local context, many of the recipients of my acknowledgements were friends from the yoga studio in which I practice; I hand-delivered most of these cards. Acknowledgements to current students were exclusively hand delivered.

The acknowledgements to current students were an important part of this project, though when I began the project I did not explicitly think that I would go in this direction. Early in January, I wrote a heartfelt acknowledgement to Dan, a former student, letting him know that I remembered the remarkable work that he had done in the Public Speaking class in which he was enrolled some five years previously. When

he was a student, I created certificates from an online template, and recognized every student at some point throughout the semester. For example, students received "awards" for creative delivery, an outstanding introduction, or a memorable conclusion to their speeches. Dan still had the award certificate that I had written for him five years earlier – he emailed me a photo of the certificate above his desk! I realized that these certificates were forms of acknowledgement, and decided to incorporate the same practice again in this winter semester. Throughout my acknowledgement experiment, I printed off a blank "award" and entered a custom statement, and then wrote, on the reverse and by hand, a letter to the student outlining what he or she had done that I found memorable or meaningful. Figure 2 illustrates a certificate to a first year student in the course of this project (for confidentiality purposes, an image of the letter that I wrote to my student is not included).

Figure 2. Acknowledgement certificate for a student

In creating both acknowledgement letters and student "certificates", I was mindful that the acknowledgement should be different from an expression of gratitude. I acknowledged students for excellent work, attitude, or participation. I acknowledged friends for inspiring conduct, decisions, or personal achievements. In a few instances, someone did something kind for me. For example, an academic friend, John, offered me very helpful feedback on a manuscript in progress. In this case, I could have written him a thank-you letter, as Kralik (2011, 2012) did in his gratitude experiment. Rather, I chose to recognize John's breadth of knowledge, willingness to spend time in reading and reflection, and his clear and kind way of expressing constructive comments on my work. In this manner, the letter was more about John and his skill and kindness rather than the benefits to myself. This is the spirit in which I conducted this experiment in its entirety.

3 What Happened?

3.1 Recipients

From 4 December, 2015 to 30 April, 2016, I wrote 148 acknowledgement letters – exactly the number of days in the approximate five-month period. After completing this iteration of the project, I quantified the proportion of recipients. The majority of recipients of my acknowledgements were students, at 61% of the whole (39% current students and 22% former students). Almost 20% were friends, 7% people I had never met face-to-face (in this case, academic professionals), 7% were colleagues, and a small proportion of individuals such as business owners/employees, parents of students, a teacher, a neighbour, and one family member. Figure 3 shows the categories of recipients, together with the percent in this project.

Figure 3.
Recipients of acknowledgement

Recipient	Number	Percent
Current student	58	39%
Former student	32	22%
Friend (yoga)	18	12%
Friend (high school, university, through family)	11	7%
Never met (Twitter contacts, academics)	11	7%
Colleague	10	7%
Businesses (local auto repair shop, local ice cream shop, local eye doctor)	3	2%
Parent of current student	2	1%
Teacher at child's school	1	1%
Neighbour	1	1%
Family	1	1%

3.2 Responses

More than half of the people who I acknowledged responded to my letter: 61% (90 of 148) contacted me either by Facebook messenger, text, email, with a letter in response, or face-to-face. I suspect that many people contacted me via Facebook messenger because it was the medium by which I initiated contact by asking for a postal address. Facebook messenger is also the second most popular mobile messaging app, with over 900 million users per month at April, 2016 (Statista 2016), indicating the ubiquity of its services. Further, I received four handwritten letters, 20 text messages, and 14 emails.

The depth of responses that I received to my acknowledgement letters was nothing short of remarkable. For example, a former student, Meghan, framed the mounted quote that I sent her and displayed it in her apartment, and also mailed to me a card that she had made herself. She wrote that reaching out to her with the letter and quote "meant the world" to her. A current student, Priyana, was in tears when she thanked me face-to-face for the letter that I had written to her. On her graduation day, just a week prior to writing this manuscript, I met her parents. They, too, thanked me for the letter that I had written to their daughter. Priyana's father wept as I recounted how impressed I am with his youngest child; he had to excuse himself and reorient in order to continue the conversation. In April, I sent a letter to a fellow academic with whom I had connected via Twitter. Though I hadn't met him face-to-face, I wanted to acknowledge his kindness in supporting my Twitter account. He replied via email, as I'd included my business card with his letter; in a series of email exchanges, it turned out that we have mutual friends and acquaintances, though being from different academic disciplines and geographic areas, we ourselves had never met.

Perhaps my favourite outcome of this project is the relationship that I formed with Lorraine, the parent of one of my daughter's sports teammates. Lorraine and her husband Ron express a wonderful relationship in which they are jovial, loving, and frequently open their home to others. Given that I was (and I am still) going through a challenging divorce, I found the relationship that Lorraine and Ron share particularly inspiring. Initially, I experienced moments of envy – while this is Ron's second marriage, and Lorraine's first, I wondered if I would ever find such happiness as they por-

tray, and at times felt angry that I was suffering. I began to think about what I sincerely admired about their relationship, and what, more specifically, I hoped for myself. To that end, I wrote Lorraine a letter which acknowledged her for being an example of what I hope for in my own life, and with vulnerability I told her of my personal situation (about which at the time she knew nothing).

For weeks, Lorraine and I attended our daughters' sports games, and for weeks she did not say anything about the letter that I had written her. We discussed the wellbeing of the girls in vague terms, she asked if I wanted coffee, and held the door for me on several instances. Given that we had not yet discussed the acknowledgement letter, I became convinced that she thought that I had overstepped my bounds, or had expressed too much of my personal admiration for her and her relationship with her husband. Then, a few weeks later, Lorraine sent me a message via Facebook. She thanked me sincerely for the letter, and said that she was afraid to discuss with me face-to-face because she feared that she would become too emotional. She felt honoured that I admired her relationship with Ron, and invited me and my children to their home for dinner. While there, I casually mentioned that the kids and I were dreaming of one day skiing nearby, and immediately she offered me her timeshare points at a resort. Together Lorraine and I planned several more gatherings of women, including a group that now meets about once a month for dinner and conversation. Lorraine and I agree that without having written the acknowledgement that I did, none of this would have come to pass.

4 Reflection

4.1 Recipients

Given that this acknowledgement experiment was completed during the academic year, it is not a surprise that a great deal of students (61% if current and former students are combined) were recipients of my acknowledgement letters. I included current students in the acknowledgement project because I wanted all of them to feel noticed and recognized. Many former students came to mind as I taught courses which I had instructed before; I was reminded of their contributions, and therefore my acknowledgements were directed to them while I was immersed in the academic semester. Although 61% of the letters in this experiment directed toward students may appear rather high, I believe that this was a product of the experiment being conducted during the academic year. If I participated in this project during the summer

months (as I intend to do, and discuss below), I suspect that more letters would be directed toward family and friends.

I sent about 20% of my acknowledgements to friends, including 12% to friends who are fellow members of the yoga studio in which I practice. As a member of a vibrant yoga community, the people with whom I practice are an integral part of my life, so I am again not surprised by this proportion of recipients. I see many of my "yoga friends" at least weekly; some are in the studio book club that I run, and several I communicate with every day. The yoga community is also a group which is very supportive and inclusive, and to whom spirituality is an inherent aspect in both the practice and in relationships.

I have a significant regret in the outcome of this project. I sent only one acknowledgement letter to a family member (my aunt). As I reflect upon this project and the people to whom I chose to write, I believe that I was not brave enough to write to more members of my family. If I had it to do again (which I will), I would acknowledge my father for his creative spirit and sense of humour which keeps our family laughing. I would acknowledge my mother for her steadfast dedication to keeping our family intact and facilitating communication between and amongst us all. I would acknowledge my brother for his business acumen and skill in visualizing a project finished before he even starts. I would acknowledge my eldest child for her talent and commitment to her sports, and my youngest child for her sense of playfulness that has the ability to send us all into fits of laughter at just the right moment. I would acknowledge my best friend for being a wonderful mother to her adopted child.

I therefore realize, upon reflection, that overall I did not write acknowledgement letters to the people closest to me. I wonder, why did I make this choice? I'm certain that all of my family members would feel pleased and honoured to receive an acknowledgement letter. Perhaps I feel that a single letter would not do my feelings justice: A written card certainly could not hold the depth of my feelings of awe, as Hyde (2006) describes, or so I thought. And so, I avoided it. I do not consider this experiment a failure, despite that I did not write to the people who are my most intimate soul companions. Rather, I will perceive of the first five months of my acknowledgement as a warmup – a priming of sorts. In my next iteration of acknowledgement writing, these people will be the first to receive recognition. Given the emotional proximity of these people to me, I will need to narrow my focus to perhaps one or two qualities in order that I can express myself appropriately in a card-length communique.

4.2 Responses and Reciprocity

While about 60% of the total recipients of my acknowledgement letters responded in some way to the letters, the remaining 40% did not. The rather large proportion of non-respondees correlates to the high proportion of students acknowledged in this project; if current students are removed from the data, then 79% of recipients of my acknowledgement letters responded directly. There are two possibilities for this outcome: current students may not have felt comfortable responding, or they did not feel the need to do so. Of the 18 current students who did respond to the letter that I wrote to them, all but one were fourth year students. In other words, of the 58 current students who received acknowledgement letters, 40 were first year students and 18 were fourth year students. Of the first year students, only one responded. This lends evidence to the premise that students may not have been comfortable responding directly to me as their instructor; fourth year students would arguably feel more experience in communicating with professors and may have been more willing to express their feelings upon receipt of a handwritten letter.

All but one of the colleagues to whom I wrote responded to my acknowledgement letters. It is perhaps more appropriate that a colleague would respond, for as adults in the same academic arena and as professionals, a response likely felt right for such recipients. I was particularly taken with the response from academics with whom I had never met; what ensued was correspondence characterized by humility, kindness, and open-heartedness. Given that acknowledgement by written letter is unusual, as is acknowledgement from someone the recipient had never met, I expect that many colleagues felt compelled to reach out in response. I also enclosed my business card with email and web address in order that the recipient could explore my identity and contact me if desired.

Like colleagues, almost all yoga friends responded to my letters. I was also not surprised by this outcome, for the yoga community in which I participate is highly communicative and positive. Only one yoga friend did not reply, and it may even be that the letter never reached him. My friend Lauren remarked how thoughtful was my letter, and Jamie, the artist, told me that it was just what she needed at the time because she was feeling in a creative rut. To my surprise, none of the business owners responded to the acknowledgement letters that they received, and neither parents of students to whom I wrote responded.

And yet, I suggest that receiving a response from a recipient of my letter is actually not terribly important. Certainly it is considered good manners to respond in some way to a communicative act. However, it is entirely plausible that the recipient, having internalized my letter, then communicated in a positive way to or for someone else, a la "pay it forward". In this case, I would have no way of knowing what impact my letter had upon the recipient (I suppose it is possible that the answer could be "none", though given that when current students are removed from the data, nearly 80% of people replied, this appears unlikely). I am therefore in keeping with Levinas (1984), who argues that it is the responsibility of, for example, an instructor, to teach both with and without reciprocity.

Further, and perhaps more importantly, I also felt the effects of writing a letter: I was able to express my appreciation, admiration, or respect for someone, and then know that I expressed what I wanted and needed to do. Weingarten and Worthen (2009) suggest that the mutuality of acknowledgement is important in ensuring that the giver of an acknowledgement is aware that the recipient is appreciative; this reciprocity is an "incentive to use acknowledgement" (Weingarten and Worthen 2009, 32). I respectfully disagree. Having done this experiment for five months, I did not feel rejected or even discouraged if someone did not reply. Certainly it was pleasant to receive an unexpected letter or digitally-mediated message. However, this was not my expectation. I wished only to feel complete in my expression of acknowledgement from myself.

Another potential explanation for the more frequent response on the part of colleagues, friends, and non-students in this experiment is that the act of acknowledgement is a means of spiritual communication. Acknowledgement expresses admiration and respect, and is an explicit recognition of the interconnectedness of the author and the recipient. In this case, the other adults in my life are peers, and thus may have felt more comfortable responding to a spiritually communicative act. Given that friends from my yoga studio and others who know me well are aware of my spiritual outlook, a gesture of spiritual communication would not have seemed out of place. Students, however, have a limited knowledge of my personal life, and quite likely have a less intent willingness to connect on a spiritual level with their instructor. While current literature (Baesler 2015a, 2015b) suggests that students and faculty can and do connect spiritually in an educational setting, a public, secular institution is arguably not fertile ground for developing spiritual communication between students and faculty.

4.3 Spiritual Communication: Finding the Life Force

It is nearly impossible to quantify the changes in my life having done this experiment. I gained new friends, made new connections, "broke the ice" for new relationships, and learned a great deal about what was going on in the lives of former students or friends. The depth of many of my relationships changed; a former student came to my home to visit for hours one Saturday, an acquaintance became a close friend, a student who never before felt acknowledged became much more participatory and talkative. These kinds of changes in my life cannot be measured. Rather, I can report that I feel more whole. I made myself vulnerable (Brown 2012), my life and circumstances changed, and so too have those of many of the people in my life.

Hochheimer (2010) suggests that the Life Force is a manifestation of spiritual energy in a variety of ways. Most obviously, the Life Force is found in the body (keeping one alive). However, the Life Force is also equally as important when perceived within ourselves through prayer, deep contemplation, ritual dance, and so on. Hochheimer argues that the Life Force is much like the "music between the notes" (Goodall 1996) – it is attention to and recognition of the inherent connections between and amongst individuals. I believe that acknowledgement is a medium through which the Life Force is very much apparent and recognizable. When writing a letter or expression of acknowledgement, I am recognizing the goodness, humanity, talent, or truth in another human. When someone reads and feels the acknowledgement, he or she feels honoured, seen, and accepted for who he or she is. Kabat-Zinn (2013) describes this as "being seen". Hanh (2012) calls this recognition and acceptance "interbeing". Acknowledgement recognizes one for being who he or she is, and encourages us to see others in the way they are, not how we desire them to be (or not be).

Acknowledgement is particularly important to finding and celebrating spirituality because humans are a meaning-making species. The primary means by which we create and understand meaning is through communication. Putting pen to paper, sending a message, making a phone call, or even making direct eye contact are all means of communication. Mediated communication is not perfect – it is "used by imperfect beings utilizing imperfect lenses in order to produce incomplete and provisional meanings" (Hochheimer 2010, 225). However, human efforts to close the gap between feeling incomplete and feeling whole are at the heart of the human experience. I suggest that a most meaningful way to express what lies "in-between" us is via acknowledgement. The ability to express and receive meaning to us and about us contributes to one feeling honoured and whole.

Spiritual communication via acknowledgement is also demonstrated via Buber's (1937/1970) "I-Thou" relationship. Further to suggesting that the "I-Thou" relationship is more reverent and divine than the separateness inherent in the "I-It" relationship, Buber suggests that there are three spheres of relationships within the "I-Thou" dialogue. He explains that we *exchange* language with fellow humans, *transmit* below language with nature, and *receive* above language with spirit. While dialogue with spirit is arguably the most difficult to comprehend, I suggest that it is quite attainable in the practice of acknowledgement. Examples of spiritual communication, according to Buber, include artistic inspiration, deep thinking, or intense study. In this way, one engages in spiritual communication by means of transcending a current state (i.e., "what is" via creative action in order to tap into the eternal or divine). In this case, writing an acknowledgement is an act of "I-Thou" communication in which the writer directly channels the divine in order to give meaning and love to another. So, too, is reading/receiving an acknowledgement: being receptive to a positive message is receiving a message from the divine and channeled through another. This spiritual address, or spiritual communication, is manifested very clearly via acknowledgement.

4.4 Gratitude and Acknowledgement as Spiritual Communication

I am very glad that, as a child, I was taught to write thank-you notes to family members and friends when they gave me a gift or did something special for me. Expressions of gratitude are an important form of politeness and such expressions are meaningful and well placed. While the traditional handwritten thank-you note is good manners, a great deal of literature has recently been published on gratitude and its potential to transform. For example, Kralik (2011) spent over a year writing thank-you notes and reported a remarkable shift in his relationships and life circumstances. Similarly, Hailey Bartholomew (2013), in an attempt to help herself through a depression, sought to photograph one item or event per day which made her grateful; her photo essay is published in conjunction with her husband and demonstrates a remarkable transformation toward happiness.

Gratitude has its roots in acknowledgement, though I suggest that it is arguably a less sophisticated human expression. Consider, for example, acknowledgement of a gift – perhaps for graduation, marriage, or another milestone. One

may write a lovely letter thanking the giver for the gift, and express how the gift will help to establish a home, purchase something, or look perfect upon the wall and the recipients will think kindly of the gift-givers when they see this particular object. However, acknowledging the giver for his or her careful choice, creativity, or thoughtfulness is a different kind of expression. In an evolved form of gratitude, one is not grateful so much for the material gift – he or she acknowledges the giver(s) for their generosity, care, or kindness. The highest form of gratitude is, indeed, acknowledgement.

Having done this acknowledgement experiment, I am uncomfortable with the hierarchy inferred by gratitude as it is discussed in contemporary culture. In the case of gratitude, one is thankful, humbled, or indebted to another. Acknowledgement, by contrast, is a state of being in which one human recognizes the humanity, goodness, and spirit in another. Perhaps Gloria Steinem (2016) said it best when she reiterated that, "[h]umans are actually linked, not ranked, and that a circle, hot a hierarchy, was the first and by far the longest-lasting human organizing principle". Acknowledgement completes the circle of humanity whereby one person (or perhaps group of people) do something kind or positive, and another person (or group of people) recognizes this kindness or generosity. In this manner, the energy expressed is met in reciprocity via acknowledgement: when one does something helpful or good, energy is returned. Therefore interconnectedness is expressed and recognized, and the "music between the notes" (Goodall 1996) is heard.

In the yoga community, practitioners use the expression "Namaste". An ancient Sanskrit word, which is still used as a greeting in India, *namaste* literally translated, means, "I bow to you" (Palkhivala 2014). An expression of acknowledgement is a material version of this greeting. The one acknowledging, by writing, speaking, or even making eye contact, figuratively bows to a fellow human. Common humanity and spirituality is recognized. I propose that acknowledgement is actually a form of service to others. By revering another human, we make ourselves responsible for finding and recognizing the beauty around us. Further, we may become more accountable for our own actions. As I conducted my acknowledgement experiment, I wanted to behave in ways which would make me worth an acknowledgement from others – and perhaps more importantly, from myself.

Acknowledgement is also central to spiritual leader Thich Nhat Hanh's (2008) *Four Mantras*. Outlined in his book, *Happiness*, Hanh suggests that practicing the Four Mantras can transform a situation immediately: (1) "Darling, I am here for you," (2) "Darling, I know you are there, and I am very happy,"

(3) "Darling, I know you suffer, that's why I am here for you," and (4) "Darling, I suffer, please help". Each of these mantras acknowledge the relationship between the speaker and his or her beloved (in this case, the beloved may be a child, friend, partner, or family member, for example).

In Hanh's first mantra, the relationship between the speaker and the beloved is acknowledged very clearly by expressing true presence. In the second mantra, the relationship is acknowledged with an additional expression of happiness. The third mantra, perhaps most powerfully, acknowledges the suffering of the beloved and the promise of presence on behalf of the speaker. Finally, the fourth mantra acknowledges the interdependence of both parties in the relationship, particularly when one party is believed to have caused harm. All of these statements embody the "I-Thou" reverence as outlined by Buber. The element of respect, admiration, and pure presence is inherent in Hanh's mantras, and are key principles in the acknowledgement letters that I wrote.

Hanh suggests that "To love means to acknowledge the presence of the person you love. You have to have the time, if you are too busy, how can you acknowledge his presence?" (Hahn 2008, 171). The writing of acknowledgement letters expressed Hanh's mantras, and in particular, the first three. Students, for example, learned that I was there to support them throughout their academic journeys, as I offered to write letters of reference or further advice throughout university and after graduation. My friends receiving acknowledgement letters from me understood that I recognized their efforts, their resilience in the face of challenge, or their accomplishments. Therefore the second and third mantras were practiced sometimes even in the same letter. The acknowledgement letters did not practice the fourth mantra, which is exercised when the person one loves causes pain or suffering. In this case, however, the relationship between myself and the recipients of my letters would have been strengthened, thus opening the opportunity to practice the fourth mantra should it ever need to be employed.

5   Conclusion: What Now?

As a communication scholar, I am particularly interested in the relationship between spirituality and the ways in which we relate to one another. After all, communication is the process of meaning making. Understanding and embodying meaning is rather existential, whereby one may wonder: Why am I here? What can I contribute? Acknowledgement is a way of finding meaning and answering these questions. We do this by means of perceiving and then expressing: I see in

someone a particular skill, talent, kindness, or quality. I then express the meaning that this person has to me, his or her environment, or even as I observe it relating to another person (as I noted with friends Lorraine and Ron). I argue in this paper that expression is vital to making meaning. Acknowledgement is essential for the *acknowledger* because he or she develops the ability to recognize and appreciate the importance of others in ways that celebrate who and what they are right now (not what they ought to be). Acknowledgement is similarly essential for the *acknowledgee* because he or she feels seen, appreciated, and has an augmented understanding of his or her meaning in the world.

I will continue this acknowledgement project. However, in its next iteration, I will make changes. I will acknowledge more family members and more close friends. I intend to conduct the subsequent iteration(s) of this project with additional courage and daring to make myself more vulnerable (Brown 2012) in expressing my awe of others. I will also set aside a semester in which I acknowledge exclusively students, and find ways to connect with every student enrolled in my courses. Educational psychology focusing on motivation (e.g., Schunk, Pintrich and Meece 2014) will be of particular importance in this iteration of the project. Further, I am presently conducting a research project involving participants' experiences in acknowledging others, thus significantly expanding the body of scholarly literature on the practice of acknowledgement.

A particular challenge with this experiment is that it is very difficult – if not impossible – to quantify the changes experienced by means of acknowledgement. My life has changed, the lives of the people I acknowledged changed, and the lives of individuals with whom we all interact changed as well. As a scholar and social scientist, I am tempted to at least attempt to measure and assess changes in context of an experiment. Given the nebulous changes and depth of responses on the part of both myself and recipients, I suggest that a deeper understanding of acknowledgement is to be found not via quantification, but in engaging in the practice and focusing more on feelings of connection, understanding, and finding meaning in one's life.

Research suggests that people are more apt to behave in socially responsible ways when they think others take notice (Ruvinsky 2014). Having done this experiment, it appeared that many of my students, colleagues, and friends felt as if others did not notice their contributions (at least as much as they would have liked). As the author of 148 letters of acknowledgement, I attest that my own feelings of being noticed were augmented; I became more aware of behaving in

ways that would warrant an acknowledgement from someone else. In this manner, acknowledgement is much more holistic than is gratitude; the former recognizes the individual for who and what they are, while the latter easily falls prey to hierarchical relationships and a focus on deeds or tasks.

Acknowledgement is a spiritual act. It finds and communicates the connections between and amongst people. It recognizes the reverent "Thou" as Buber (1937/1970) describes, and facilitates relationships between and amongst individuals that are not hierarchical, but rather, celebrate relationships of equality. The equality demonstrated by acknowledgement is not based on how one contributes to outcome or results, and is not based upon one person's seniority and praise of another's accomplishments. Acknowledgement is found when the interconnectedness and common humanity to be found in subject-subject relationships is seen and expressed. Mediated communication is by practice an imperfect means of expression, though I suggest that when one acknowledges another, meaning is not just expressed, but also made and felt. It is then that not just the "music between the notes" (Goodall 1996), but also an entire chorus, can be heard.

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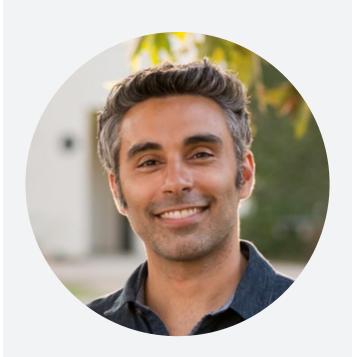
Amir Azarvan

Askesis and Politics: A Preliminary Look at the Impact of Christian Spiritual Practices on One's Political Outlook

Is Christian spirituality systematically associated with patterns in people's political attitudes and worldview? Are spiritually active Christians predominantly conservative or liberal? If so, does this imply anything about the correctness of their political views? Is greater spiritual involvement associated with a friendlier disposition towards those with whom one otherwise strongly disagrees on social and political matters? In my review of the Orthodox spiritual literature, as well as my survey analysis of Orthodox Christians throughout the United States, I make a preliminary effort to address these and other questions. I point to the importance of transcending the liberal-conservative ideological dichotomy when studying Christians' political outlooks. Communitarians, in particular, merit greater attention, given their apparently large size and high level of spiritual commitment. I also presents findings that suggest that spiritual commitment can result in friendlier attitudes towards those viewed as sociopolitical threats.

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1 Introduction

Is Christian spirituality systematically associated with patterns in people's political attitudes and worldview? Are spiritually active Christians predominantly conservative or liberal? If so, does this imply anything about the correctness of their political views? Is greater spiritual involvement associated with a friendlier disposition towards those with whom one otherwise strongly disagrees on social and political matters?

In my review of the Orthodox spiritual literature, as well as my survey analysis of Orthodox Christians throughout the United States, I make a preliminary effort to address these and other questions. I point to the importance of transcending the liberal-conservative ideological dichotomy when studying Christians' political outlooks. Communitarians, in particular, merit greater attention, given their apparently large size and high level of spiritual commitment. I also presents findings that suggest that spiritual commitment can result in friendlier attitudes towards those viewed as socio-political threats.

The next two sections expound on the transformative effects of involvement in the spiritual life, as well as their social implications. I then discuss caveats that ought to be borne in mind when interpreting the findings of empirical studies on spirituality. After elaborating on the research design and methods used in my investigation, I present and interpret my findings. The final section consists of a brief summary and suggestions for further study.

2 Background

St. Seraphim of Sarov (2009, 112) taught that "the true aim of the Christian life consists in [the] acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God". St. Paul observes that the "fruit of [and evidence of having acquired] the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). After a moment's reflection on today's politically polarized society, where opposing groups frequently mistrust, ridicule, and demonize one another, it would be difficult not to conclude that this fruit is quite rare indeed.

Such pessimism seems to have scholarly support. As Pildes (2011, 273) remarks, "we have not seen the intensity of political conflict and the radical separation between the two major political parties that characterizes our age since the late nineteenth century". While, from a Christian perspective, such conflict is an evil in and of itself, Zakaria (2013) alludes to the policy implications of our increasingly divided society: "The United States needs serious change in its fiscal, entitlement, infrastructure, immigration, and education policies, among others. And yet a polarized and often paralyzed Washington has pushed dealing with these problems off into the future." As I will suggest in the following section, the cause of, and solution to, to our increasingly divisive society is partly spiritual in nature.

2.1 Spirituality and Political Attitudes

In the Orthodox mystical view, the path to spiritual growth is what Markides (2001) calls the "Threefold Way", or the stages one must complete in order to directly encounter God. As Markides (2001, 213) explains:

"At first there is the stage of Catharsis, or the purification of the soul from egotistical passions. It is then followed by the stage of Fotisis, or the enlightenment of the soul, a gift of the Holy Spirit once the soul has undergone its purification. Finally comes the stage of Theosis [or, as it is called in the West, glorification], union with God, as the final destination and ultimate home of the human soul."

The remainder of this theoretical *cum* theological discussion is set against the backdrop of the Threefold Way. I will explain how askesis – the means by one is purified, according to the Orthodox Church – may produce socially beneficial effects.

2.2 Askesis and Society

"Perfect love does not split up the single human nature, common to all, according to the diverse characteristics of individuals; but fixing attention always on the single nature, it loves all men equally."

St. Maximos the Confessor

According to Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood 2009, 133), sincere love for others is predicated on *catharsis*, or, as he puts it, the cleansing of "one's heart from worldly plans and desires". "When the body is humbled," he maintains, "our thoughts become more peaceful..." (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood 2009, 136).

I argue that this teaching carries important sociopolitical implications. One may reasonably hypothesize that societies where more members undergo such *catharsis* tend to be more harmonious. Elder Thaddeus notes elsewhere that once "God's all-encompassing love manifests itself within us, we see no difference between people – everyone is good, everyone is our brother, and we consider ourselves to be the worst of men, servants of every created thing" (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood 2009, 120). Likewise, St. Maximos the Confessor expands on the message expressed in St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians (Gal 3:28):

"For him who is perfect in love and has reached the state of dispassion there is no difference between himself or another's, or between Christians and unbelievers, or between slave and free, or even between male and female. But because he has risen above the tyranny of the passions and has fixed his attention on the single nature of man, he looks on all in the same way and shows the same disposition to all" (1981, 70).

This idea seems to resonate with conclusions drawn in social scientific research. According to Lupfer and Wald (1985, 296–297), "people who do not subscribe to orthodox Christian beliefs [1] and activities are more likely to view humans as self-centered and deceitful" (Lupfer and Wald 1985, 296–297). As suggested above, such cynical views are all-too-commonly held, which implies the need for a "collective *catharsis*". The need seems especially pressing today, as tensions between Christians and Muslims are on the rise. St. Porphryios clearly explains the former's duty to the latter:

"Be a true Christian. Then you won't leap to conclusions about anybody, but your love will 'cover all things'. Even to a person of another religion you will always act as a Christian… You will care for a Muslim when he is need, speak to him and keep company with him… Just as Christ stands at the door and knocks and does not force an entry, but waits for the soul to accept Him freely on its own, so should we stand in the same way in relation to every soul" (Sisters of the Holy Convent of Chrysopigi 2005, 187) [emphasis included].

It should be pointed out, however, that askesis does not, in itself, assure such salutary effects. As the contemporary elder to whom Kyriacos Markides assigns the pseudonym "Fr. Maximos" explains:

"There are no practical methods, no specific exercises that will guarantee that the Grace of God will automatically be bestowed upon you. There is no formula involved here. A layperson with little or no askesis, but who may have already reached the depths of humility, may be visited by Grace. You cannot buy God's Grace through practical exercises" (Markides 2001, 208) [2].

This fact will hinder any effort to measure the effect of spirituality on political attitudes and outlook. Moreover, any particularly contemporary sample of Orthodox Christians may not provide an adequate glimpse of the transformative effects of the Threefold Way. While presumably not intending to provide a literal figure, Fr. Romanides (2008, 26) expresses the common view that it is increasingly rare to find genuinely illumined Christians: "A church sanctuary… might hold three hundred Orthodox Christians. Of that number, however, only five are in a state of illumination [i.e., *fotisis*], while the rest of them… have not even the slightest idea what purification [i.e. *catharsis*] is." Regrettably, it is not possible to determine whether such exceptional Christians are represented in my sample. Even if they were, moreover, it should not be assumed that they hold to more correct political views, as I explain below.

2.3 Askesis, Knowledge, and Political Ideology

It is argued that those who have completed the stage of *catharsis* not only adopt friendlier attitudes towards others, but may also attain knowledge of some sort. As Fr. John Romanides (2008, 94) notes, "if the contemporary Orthodox theologian is to acquire objectivity, he must rely on the experience of *theosis*". As it is evident that not all self-professing Christians have had such an experience, this statement implies that they will differ in their level of objective knowledge.

At this point, it is necessary to inquire on what sort of objectivity is imparted in the experience of *theosis*. Does it pertain to theological understanding, strictly understood as the knowledge of God, or to a broader theology that addresses how the believer ought to relate to her society and polity? If the latter is the case, then may we conclude that believers will differ ideologically according to how far they have advanced spiritually, such that the more advanced possess greater objective knowledge about political matters and, therefore, subscribe to ideologies that are more "correct"? It is arguable that Fr. Romanides rejects such a view:

"Can we Orthodox Christians claim… that someone who possesses noetic prayer [i.e., a spiritual gift typically received prior to the experience of theosis] is obligated to be on the Left or on the Right? Of course we cannot. So the science, which we call 'Orthodoxy', should never be associated with politics… When it comes to questions of ideology, Orthodox Christians are primarily concerned about whether the Church has the freedom to carry out Her work, which is to heal the sick in Her care. The Church must have this freedom." (2008, 184)

Similarly, Fr. Maximos argues that a saint "is not necessarily a scientist of the external world", and may err "on issues related to knowledge about worldly affairs" (Markides 2001, 161). After all, such a blunder would be "an intellectual mistake… not a mistake based on discernment about good and evil" (*Ibid*.). The sage goes on to point out that "after Pentecost, the disciples of Christ, being humble fisherman, did not all of a sudden become knowledgeable about this world" (*Ibid*.).

I conclude this section by calling to attention two caveats that the reader ought to bear in mind before drawing conclusions from my findings. First, there can be no guarantee that one's sample includes those who have successfully traversed the Threefold Way. Second, people do not necessarily possess greater objective knowledge on political matters due to their higher self-reported spiritual involvement.

3 Methods

3.1 Samples

A directory of Orthodox Christian parishes was used to compile a listing of virtually every Orthodox church in the U.S. for which there was a website [3]. On two separate occasions, I randomly selected 20% of these churches, and instructed research assistants to send a standard message to the rectors of each, asking them to invite their parishioners to complete a survey for a chance to win a $100 Amazon gift card. Thus, two rounds of this survey were conducted; the first round (i.e., Round 1) in the summer of 2014, and the second (i.e., Round 2) in the fall of 2015. Respectively, there were 102 and 76 respondents in total, drawn from all regions of the country. Where there are no significant differences between the rounds with respect to methods and findings, I limit my discussion and presentation of findings to Round 2.

3.2 Political Ideology

Ideology was measured in two ways. First, respondents were asked to place themselves on a 10-point ideological scale ranging from far left- to far right-wing. I adopted the exact wording used in the World Values Survey [4]. Second, they were asked to indicate how strongly they agree with each of 7 statements that form my Obnoxiously Short Political Ideology Test (OSPIT), which I designed for use in my American Government class (see Table 1). The test classifies one as a communitarian, conservative, liberal, libertarian, or a combination of two or more of these ideological types. The advantage of this measure is that it provides a broader range of possible results than those that compartmentalize people into either the liberal or conservative camp [5].

Table 1.
The Obnoxiously Short Political Ideology Test (OSPIT) [1]

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements?
Options: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
1.) There need to be stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment.
2.) The government should spend more on reducing poverty.
3.) Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry legally.
4.) Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.
5.) Abortion should be illegal in all or most cases.
6.) Generally speaking, the best way to ensure peace is through military strength, not diplomacy.

Note
[1] The exact wording in statements 1, 4, and 5 is borrowed from the Pew Research Center, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.pewresearch.org.

3.3 Attitudes Towards Perceived Sociopolitical Threats

From a list consisting of atheists, conservatives, immigrants, liberals, libertarians, neo-Nazis (right-wing extremists), religious fundamentalists and socialists, survey respondents were asked to identify the one social or political group they found the most threatening (see Eisenstein 2006 for a nearly identical approach). They were then asked questions designed to gauge their level of tolerance and acceptance of members of this particular group. Round 1 respondents were asked to express their levels of admiration, respect, hostility, friendliness, and hatred towards members of this group on 0–9 scales. These questions were adapted from Renfro *et al.* (2006) [6]. Round 2 respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they concurred with the four statements listed in Table 2.

Table 2.
Measures of Tolerance and Acceptance

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? **Options: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree**
1.) I sometimes find it difficult to see things from this group's point of view.
2.) I would be willing to befriend a member of this group.
3.) I feel anger towards members of this group.
4.) I feel hatred towards members of this group.

3.4 Measuring Spiritual Involvement

In order to assess the impact of spirituality, it is necessary to measure it according to each religion's unique standards of spiritual commitment, as these standards differ markedly across religious traditions. As Hill and Maltby (2009, 37) note, many measures of religiosity and spirituality "are culturally insensitive and do not generalize well to other cultures and religious traditions outside of that with which it was first created". Thus, it would be highly misleading to use a single, all-encompassing measure of spirituality.

Writing, as I am, from an Orthodox perspective, my method of measuring spiritual involvement involves drawing from the ascetical writings of the elders of the Orthodox Church. One such elder is the renowned monastic and bishop, St. Theophan the Recluse, who succinctly summarizes the prerequisites of spiritual growth:

> "These, then, are the activities and exercised which are the means of healing our powers and bringing them back to our lost purity and wholeness: fasting, labor, vigil, solitude, withdrawal from the world, control of the senses, reading of the scriptures and the Holy Fathers, attendance at church, frequent confession and communion" (St. Theophan 139).

I constructed an Index of Spirituality based on participation in most of these activities [7]. Table 3 lists the questions that were specifically asked of survey respondents.

Table 3.
The Index of Spirituality

1.)	How often do you attend church?
2.)	Outside of church, how often do you pray?
3.)	How often do you keep vigil (i.e., praying at night when one is typically asleep)?
4.)	How often do you fast according to the prescribed fasting days of the Church?
5.)	How often do you read Orthodox spiritual books (including contemporary books, books on the lives and teachings of the saints, and the Bible)?
6.)	How often do you go to Confession?
7.)	How often do you take Communion?

I calculated a percent score based on the frequency with which the respondent engaged in each of the seven spiritual activities referred to above [8]. The average of all seven scores was used to gauge the respondent's overall level of spiritual involvement.
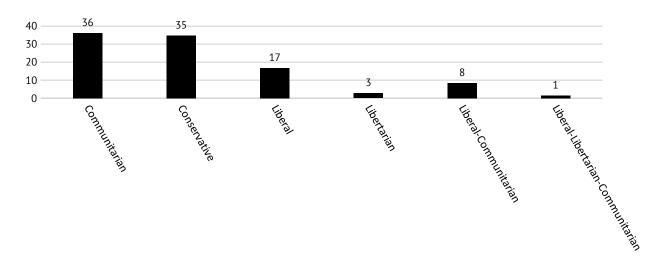
4 Findings

4.1 Responses to the OSPIT

On the one hand, respondents' answers to the OSPIT could be interpreted as evidence that they are ideologically inconsistent, holding to both liberal and conservative views (see Table 4). Like most liberals, they reported greater confidence in diplomacy, and believed that the government ought to ensure that all Americans have access to health care, as well as do more to protect the environment. More in tune with conservatives, however, they were opposed to same-sex marriage and abortion rights, and were more critical of government regulation of business. They were split on whether the government should spend more on alleviating poverty (although 60% of Round 1 respondents favored anti-poverty spending) [9].

Table 4.
Responses to the OSPIT

Statement	Agree	Disagree
There need to be stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment.	65	35
The government should spend more on reducing poverty.	49	51
Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry legally.	29	71
Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.	61	39
Abortion should be illegal in all or most cases.	76	24
Generally speaking, the best way to ensure peace is through military strength, not diplomacy.	27	73
The government should ensure that all Americans have access to health care.	64	36

On the other hand, such a conclusion only holds if we limit ourselves to the simple liberal-conservative ideological dichotomy. While respondents may not be consistently liberal or conservative, perhaps they are to some extent communitarian (that is, they are at once socially conservative and economic progressive). Indeed, communitarians were among the two largest ideological groups [10]. Liberals, "liberal-communitarians" (i.e., those who held both liberal and communitarian views), and libertarians formed much smaller groups (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Ideological Breakdown of Sample (Percentages)

4.2 Askesis and Ideology

On the 1–10 ideological scale, the average scores of my samples in Rounds 1 and 2 were 5.9 and 6.3 – in both cases indicating a center-right orientation (see Figure 2 for the distribution of self-reported ideological scores). In Round 1, however, the spirituality index was not significantly correlated with this particular measure of ideology. In Round 2, there was a positive association (the more spiritually involved, the further to the right one placed oneself ideologically), although the correlation was not particularly strong or significant at a conventional level (p < .1).

Those whose responses to the OSPIT placed them in one of the four "pure" ideological types analyzed in my study (i.e., the communitarian, conservative, liberal, and libertarian) varied considerably in their level of spiritual involvement. Communitarians and conservatives were the most spiritually active (see Figure 3). Liberals were on average 9 and 11 points less spiritually involved than their conservative and communitarian counterparts, respectively [11].

Figure 2.
**Distribution of Self-Reported Ideology
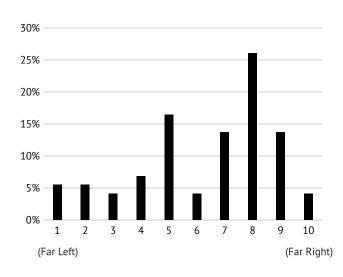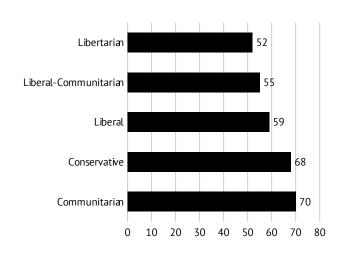on the 1-10 Scale (Percentages)**

Figure 3.
**Average Spirituality Index Score
 by Ideological Group**

Were there statistically significant relationships between spirituality and ideology? In Round 2, there was a positive and statistically significant correlation of nearly 26% between communitarianism and the spirituality index (p < .05), while, in Round 1, there was a significantly inverse correlation (also nearly 26%) between liberalism and the spirituality index (p < .05).

What accounts for the apparent link between liberalism and low spiritual involvement? Is it simply the case that awareness of the stark contrast between one's views on hot-button issues like abortion or same-sex marriage and those expressed in official Church statements discourage the average liberal from becoming actively involved in the life of the Church? Or, more controversially, does spiritual involvement foster objective knowledge on worldly (including political) matters, such that Orthodoxy and political liberalism are intrinsically incompatible? For reasons previously discussed, I have misgivings about drawing the latter conclusion.

One must also be careful about generalizing from the results of an online survey (Gideon 2012, 73). My particular sample appeared to be exceptionally well-educated. Whereas 47% of Americans had some college education, according to the latest round of the World Values Survey [12], the comparable figure in my survey was nearly twice as high (93%). It is likely that this skewed the political attitudes of my respondents towards the right end of the political spectrum, since more highly educated people tend be wealthier (United States Department of Labor 2014), and the wealthy in turn tend to favor conservative economic policies (Page, Bartels and Seawright 2013) [13].

4.3 Askesis and Attitudes Towards Sociopolitical Threats

In Round 1 of my investigation, prayer and spiritual reading were discovered to be significantly associated with one's friendliness towards the sociopolitical group he or she identifies as the most threatening (see Tables 5 and 6). A unit increase in spiritual reading increased friendliness by .67 points, holding age and sex constant [14]. The comparable figure for prayer was .58 points.

Table 5.
The Impact of Spiritual Reading on Friendliness towards Sociopolitical Threats (Multiple Linear Regression Model)

	Friendliness
Spiritual Reading	.665**
	(.314)
Age	*-.045
	(.018)
Sex	-1.020**
	(.556)

*p < .10; **p <.05; ***p < .01

Table 6.
The Impact of Prayer on Friendliness towards Sociopolitical Threats (Multiple Linear Regression Model)

	Friendliness
Prayer	.579**
	(.190)
Age	*-.043
	(.018)
Sex	-.896**
	(.556)

*p < .10; **p <.05; ***p < .01

In Round 2, I collapsed my measures of tolerance and acceptance into dichotomous variables, and ran binary logistics regressions to gauge probabilities of agreement with each of the four statements listed in Table 2. Holding sex and convert status constant [15], I discovered that one-unit increases in church attendance, spiritual reading, and taking communion increase the probability that one will be willing to befriend a sociopolitical rival by factors of .981, .988, and .978, respectively.

Interestingly, vigil-keeping appears to deviate from this pattern to some extent. For instance, this activity is inversely and significantly associated with the likelihood that one will be willing to befriend a sociopolitical rival (p < .1). It would seem that, for those living in the world, keeping vigil – a mainly monastic activity – may entail some risk. The consequent sleep deprivation may render one more irritable, and thus less tolerant of others. In a monastic setting, by contrast, there are certain safeguards that may mitigate or reverse this effect.

That said, it is arguable that certain spiritual practices have peace-inducing effects. This may come as little surprise to those immersed in the spiritual life. "Without prayer", an Athonite monk asks, "how can the monk love God and his fellowman?" For him, every cry to God constitutes one step towards the surpassing of egoism and the opening of one's heart to God and man (Fr. George Kapsanis, Date Unknown).

5   Concluding Remarks

This investigation is a preliminary attempt at understanding how spiritual practices might relate to political attitudes and outlooks. This study may be affected by selection bias, as it appears that my respondents were limited mainly to those Christians who were on priests' email lists or who attended church and learned of my survey through a church bulletin or announcement. If the population of interest is all self-professing Christians, then one's sample should include those who rarely attend church and are beyond the reach of their pastors or priests.

This issue aside, it is hoped that this study will contribute to a renewed appreciation for spirituality. Those of faith may not only extol the personal benefits that spirituality brings [16], but they may now also point to its potential *societal* benefits, for the findings of this study indicate that certain spiritual practices may enhance one's tolerance of sociopolitical rivals. This suggests that spirituality may bring greater harmony to what seems like an increasingly fractious society. These possibilities should be explored in future research.

Notes

[1] Not to be confused with Orthodox (or "Big O") Christian. Those Christians who are orthodox ("small O") include, but are not limited to, the former, and subscribe to such traditional doctrines as the Holy Trinity and the literal, bodily Resurrection of Christ.

[2] On a similar note, St. Seraphim (Moore, *An Extraordinary Peace: St. Seraphim, Flame of Sarov*, 112) taught that askesis is only a means "of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. But… only the good deed done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit".

[3] This directory is provided by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America at http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/directories/parishes/.

[4] World Values Survey. Accessed February 19, 2014. http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp.

[5] To access this test, please write to the author.

[6] The exact wording of this these questions was borrowed from James P. Clifton, "The Role of Intergroup Threat in Attitudes towards Same-Sex Marriage and its Beneficiaries" (MA Thesis: Humboldt State University, 2001). Accessed March 10, 2014, http://scholarworks.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/2148/710/James%20thesis%20-%20FINAL.pdf?sequence=1.

[7] Spiritual labors, solitude, and "withdrawal from the world" are, perhaps, less practical for non-Monastics.

[8] Regarding the frequency of keeping vigil, for instance, respondents are asked to choose from among five options, which are arranged in order of increasing frequency of participation in this activity. On this 1–5 scale, one's score is the quotient of the number corresponding to the respondent's choice and 5 (i.e., the highest number one may select, corresponding to nightly vigils). Therefore, one who keeps vigil nightly receives a score of 100% (5 divided by 5), whereas another who keeps vigil a few times a month receives a score of 40% (2 divided by 5).

[9] However, 60% of Round 1 respondents favored anti-poverty spending.

[10] The largest ideological group in the Round 2 sample were communitarians, followed closely by conservatives. The reverse was true in Round 1: conservatives comprised 32% of the sample, while communitarians formed 26%.

[11] It should be noted that only two respondents were classified as libertarians based on their responses to the OSPIT. Therefore, their average score should not be assumed to be representative of all Orthodox libertarians.

[12] See f. 5.

[13] Whereas the mean ideological score among Americans in the latest round of the World Values Survey was 5.76, the comparable figure in my sample was 6.32.

[14] Interestingly, female and older respondents were found to have less friendly attitudes.

[15] Converts and women were less likely to express a willingness to befriend a sociopolitical rival.

[16] To give but one example, Seybold and Hill conclude from their review of the psychological and medical literature that religion and spirituality have a "largely beneficial" impact on physical and mental health. See Kevin S. Seybold, and Peter C. Hill, "The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Mental and Physical Health," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 1 (2001): 21–24.

Acknowledgments

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Květoslav Minařík

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Explanation for the Mystical Practice III.

Concentration on feet and legs as a whole, with a special focus on their flesh, has an effect on the development of the intellect and deepening of the sensory discernment, because right here, in the legs, in the flesh of the body, the basis of the inner life is situated. The same concentration with a special focus on their bones – and in particular to the bones of knees – eliminates the instability of the usual attention; it is used to stabilize the entire inner life.

The current article is a continuation of *Explanation for the Mystical Practice I.* and *Explanation for the Mystical Practice II.*, published in the previous editions of Spirituality Studies.

4 A Warning

A mystic, who walks the path of the mystical development independently, must act wisely and not unwisely. By no means must they let their inner inspiration advise them. This inner inspiration seems holy to them and, as a rule, it appears when one reads books about the mystical practice. Even less may he or she let anyone, who is talking about mysticism, give them advice.

The mystical education must be based on the practical psychology and, moreover, on the mystical experiences of those who have already had a great success in the mystical practice. This, by itself, suffices for the advice that it is not correct to choose the mystical practices according to one's own discretion, if the mystical experience is lacking here. We have already seen results of that.

How easily did those, who were predisposed for mental illness, choose their mystical practices! The illnesses then broke out in them, because they, instead of the mental effort which would lead them to activity, devoted themselves to inner passivity which quickly facilitated the outbreak of their mental illness. Therefore, even if psychiatry claims that mysticism is a frequent cause of mental illness, it is not the case, because, in the true practical mysticism, the element of an active inner effort is always predominant. Only a dilettante mysticism does not pay attention to the difference between an active mental effort and an inner passivity. However, this mysticism does not lead to any positive results and, in general, to anything good.

The experts in the mystical development, for example, know very well that the path to the spiritual perfection can be very much quickened by means of dissociation of consciousness. Psychiatry perhaps knows about it only not more than that the dissociation of consciousness is a path to schizophrenia. However, is it really like this?

The training in concentration of the mind cannot go without a double awareness, namely, an awareness of the object of concentration on the one hand, and the outer things on the other, because, if it is not like this, the concentration very easily becomes a fixation of mind; this is, in turn, a fixed idea – a mental illness of its own kind.

Towards the double awareness, one proceeds step-by-step, in the mystical development. It is practiced in such a way that the student of mysticism focuses his or her mind on a sole object which is either imagined or real and, at the same time,

About the author

Květoslav Minařík, a Czech mystic (1908–1974), who, in his youth, learned in the deepest detail and in himself realised, the highest spiritual and mystic ideals of the East, without losing contact with the social and the working life. Later, he has formulated his experience into an original, authentic experience based spiritual teaching, based on the ways of thinking and psychology of a contemporary European. The teaching leads him or her through life, and perfects their being as a whole; it does not only deal with the physical, moral or mental component, it develops all three in harmony. Out of the great spiritual teachings of the world, his teaching is closest to the Mahayana Buddhism.

avoids losing the phenomena of the surrounding world from their evidence.

It is possible to practice it in this way or vice versa. In the latter case, the student of mysticism trains himself or herself in a precise perception of the outer phenomena, but, simultaneously, tries to be aware of some imagined object somewhere in their being or even only of a place on their, or in their, body.

The ability to perceive both kinds of phenomena improves with practice. When it improves, the student of mysticism will attain the ability to thoroughly perceive the outer world as

well as the inner object which initially serves the concentration and later, even an absolute control over all processes of their inner life. By that, the dissociation of consciousness has been accomplished.

The results of this dissociation are very interesting. In one of the later phases of this effort, the being will prove to be some kind of receiver which is continuously tuned to all electromagnetic corpuscular quanta which are produced due to the fact that a human being exists in a living environment – in the environment of people. These quanta, which are so distinctive, precisely flag everything that produces them, thus also people and their real character. The ability to perfectly register the influence of these quanta is called the psychic clairsentience.

However, this result means nothing from the point of view of the mystical development up to the spiritual perfection; often it is only the beginning of a constant inner troubling of the one receiving these impulses. If this interference wasn't a bearer of the experiences of the mystical growth, a person would not need to work with the dissociation of consciousness at all. Therefore, it does not need to be warned against, because, this "schizophrenia" is, indeed, a methodically induced pseudo-schizophrenia, and therefore a "schizophrenia" which is well controlled by the striving mystic. The mystic, who has arrived at it, could have attained it solely by powerful inner efforts, and therefore it will not happen that they would, so easily, mistake the real world for a visual one – a fictious one, and behave in it as a person who is mentally integrated, complete, but still mentally ill. Therefore, there is no danger of mental illness here. However, this danger exists elsewhere. It exists in an unprofessional selection of the imagined objects, or places in the body, for the concentration.

Once, there existed a public mystical school in our country, in which only two mystical practices were taught – the concentration of the mind into the breast with a mental image and the so-called "silent concentration" about whose mental anchorage I don't know.

These two kinds of concentration testified to the dilettantism of this mystical school. Due to the fascination with these two "practices" it left unnoticed a great danger which stems from a sinuous process of thinking on the one hand and from the change of the qualities of the mind on the other hand. Therefore, it used to happen that the beneficial focusing of thinking on an object, which is the body, was abandoned and, very often, a path of speculative and, eventually, wandering thinking was entered.

This speculative, as well as wandering, thinking, soon showed its evil face. Instead of mystics with a controlled and stabilised mind, mystics were occurring, who had strange views of the world and life and instead of mystics who would bear in mind the general good, mystics were occurring, who had a specific, but never a good, moral view and character.

In order for this wandering not to occur, every independently faring mystic must adhere to the effort to calm down the sinuous character of the mind, which is constantly being focused on an inner object chosen for concentration.

The best object for the concentration of mind is the lowest part of the body – feet and legs – the symbol of matter, or earth, which is the basis of the universe of phenomena. This universe must become known in its essence, if the mystical development is to fulfil its purpose – namely to bring knowledge and, by the means of it, liberation.

However, in most cases, those, who are engaged in mysticism, do not act correctly. Instead of adhering to the idea of attenuation of the mind's activity and, by that, of the entire inner life – of the inner activity, they succumb to a natural reaction of their own being to the effort to halt the inner life. They leave, in an uncontrolled way, the mystical path they have entered and then they only "train themselves" in the development of pointless thoughts, speculations, or wandering of mind.

This diversion from the begun mystical path is the most frequent. The striving for the real concentration is, often even due to a small resistance of the psyche which resists its own subordination, replaced with valueless thinking. This thinking seems to be of a higher quality, because it deals with abstract concepts or relationships instead of the usual straightforward thinking which is concerned with some material or sensorily gratifying result.

However, mysticism is a teaching which only concerns the real things. One strives in it solely for the attainment of the life experiences, in the form of mystical experiences, which will enlighten a person by an immeasurable knowledge or profound insight into the essence of things by which one also arrives at knowledge and liberation. Precisely at this intended knowledge, one does not arrive by the thinking of mystics who have left the path of the true mystical practice. By means of this thinking, they can only get to a perpetual wandering of thinking in a circle of useless thoughts. By this, the person will gradually weaken themselves so much that they will never be able to resume carrying out a correct work on the path of mystical perfecting.

Therefore, the image of mysticism, as a life in a circle of idealistic thoughts which internally carry a person away through the world of non-concretised ideas, is not valid. Those who already dwell in this "world of psyche" are, in the best case, dreamers and, in the worst case, mentally ill people who suffer from delusional ideas.

Precisely due to these two undesirable outcomes of the inner living, it is necessary to avoid the wandering of mind, into which the true spiritual or mystical effort turns so easily, if it is based exclusively on the concentration of mind. It is necessary to avoid it by consciously keeping oneself internally on the ground of reality. When this way of thinking joins the analysing concentration of the conscious thinking, one will enter the path of transformation of the entire being; only this path is the true mystical path.

Mysticism is, though, not like a practical school education. It does not have the tradition of pedagogy, methodology and school education in general. Therefore, everyone interprets its teaching in their own way and according to the imperative of his or her inborn relationship to the outer world, his or her inclinations and images of the human happiness. Internally directed by this, everyone, who strives for success in the practical mysticism, comes dangerously close to going astray in the form of losing the ability to see everything realistically and think about everything rationally. A result of this is a transparent valuelessness of their thinking, concepts and reflections.

It is thus possible to establish an assumption that only an attitude, which is realistic towards life and the world and enriched with the concentration of mind which later precisely analyses everything, is a reliable mystical path which will bring delightful results to everyone; not only in an abstract, but also in a concrete, sense.

There have been enough lunatics who were confusing the uninformed people that it is just them – these lunatics – who are the true examples of the practising mystics. However, how did they become these lunatics? – By, instead of devoting themselves to the concentration of mind by which they would attenuate its automatic activity as well as perception, they were, on the contrary, increasing this activity. They devoted themselves to thinking which was, after finishing concentration, bringing them a new kind of thoughts than those with which they were dealing before, in the period of the animal way of living. However, from the perspective of the heights of the mystical development, it is exactly the same, whether the uncontrolled and automatically active mind deals with the objects of sensory cravings or with spec-

ulations about the superworldly life and about a moral or immoral thinking and behaviour. The only thing that always decides, is whether a person brings the striving for mastering of the mind to its goal, namely to the destruction of the entire inner activity; of course, the reflexive and automatic activity, because, only in this way a person penetrates, by their perception, beyond the functional sphere of thinking and develops in him or her self an ability to discern the source of motives and to develop also the so-called direct perception, by which they penetrate beyond the curtain of illusion, which is created by the uncontrolled thinking.

However, people are internally weak and lack courage. When their effort for concentration of the mind arrives as far as to the natural reaction of their being which is defying the domination of will, or, when they discern that, by the destruction of the automatic thinking, they have arrived at the edge of a seeming abyss of inner inactivity which was brought about by the will, they run away from their original efforts and, since then, resort only to the processes of thinking of a new kind, which does not seem to have the signs of the thinking of an animal. By this, they enter the path of a valueless and purposeless thinking which will obstruct their way to successes on the path of the practical mysticism, and then, due to the fact that their thoughts are of a new kind, they conclude from it that they have achieved progress on their mystical path, although they have already gone astray.

Every student of mysticism should avoid this going astray by continuing to destroy the automatic thinking, even though they can, by that, often come to a supposition that "over there", further down this path of the destruction of the inner activity, there is just a dark abyss. The "non-thinking", which is a result of an intentional stopping and destroying of the inner activity, are the mystical depths, only in which the wisdom is born, because, wisdom is not a result of a mind which precisely speculates, but a result of the sensory discernments, purified from the mixing in of prejudice and preconceptions for, or against, something.

The mystical going astray commonly sneaks in to the mystical efforts softly and imperceptibly. The transition from a systematic stopping of the processes of thinking, by means of which the depths of the true mystical state will arise, to the purposeless thinking of a new kind – to the thinking of valueless mystical speculators – is gradual. Perhaps only an outer observer can see the, in this way, "turning aside" mystic – how the, possibly until now rationally thinking, person – a seeming mystic – becomes a speculator with abstract or even valueless contents of thinking. Therefore, there is no other option than, for every student of mysticism, to be atten-

tive to the changes of the state of their thinking. If it is, or is becoming, speculative, it is necessary to stop the existing mystical effort, to return to factual thinking and, after its desirable correction, to begin the true mystical effort anew.

This can be understandable for everyone who insists on preserving the factual thinking and I can tell such people: the results of the mystical effort are really factual. They manifest in the everyday emotional experience which qualitatively changes to the extent, to which the moral transformation of the entire being was realised; the transformation which was brought about by thinking which completely subordinated itself to the moral and mental instructions of the true mystical teaching.

5   Nirvana

In order for us to understand nirvana, we must define *samsara* – the state, which evokes an image of the wandering of souls through the world of sorrowful states.

In fact, we must characterise samsara only as motion. However, motion can apply to all phenomena out of which, in "our" sensory world, the highest ones are the physical phenomena, i.e. the electromagnetic quanta, if we understand them as phenomena with a corpuscular background. These quanta cannot be considered to be unchangeable formations or clusters; they change, strictly speaking, in accordance with their predetermination which is caused by their gravitational interrelations.

We can hardly imagine that the universe of phenomena is temporary, whereas the gravitation is "eternal", so, consequently, we have to understand the universe as a universe of "eternal" motion; thus, that the universe is an exclusively samsaric phenomenon. With regard to that, every phenomenon of the universe of forms and forces is all the more samsaric. Also the creatures are exactly such phenomena; they are formations existing in the gravitational field, let us say, in some initial stage of theirs, an initial stage in the gravitational field created by the galaxies.

Beings, as the inner formations of the universe, or, of the cosmic continuum, prove to be more sorrowful formations than, for example, the galaxies which are only subject to gravity – gravitation. It proves to be this way, because, the beings, as units of their own kind, are more crowded in the given space, in which, then, the gravitational lines create an environment which is more dense and by that, thus, more subject to the "crisis of gravity".

However, strictly speaking, the beings are a microcosm which contains qualities of various kinds, of which the highest one is the consciousness.

The consciousness can be, from this point of view, understood as a field, on whose walls the picture of the "magic of illusion", which is the universe of phenomena, is generated. The ability of the consciousness to identify this picture provides evidence that it qualitatively differs from samsara – the structure of the formation of phenomena – the forms which are so obviously in a permanent motion, thus forms which are samsaric. During a constant analysis of these qualities of microcosm and their constant mutual comparing, the consciousness is, in the end, identified as nirvana in its true essence.

It does not matter that the consciousness of beings becomes a mirroring principle, reflecting only the phenomena of the universe – the phenomena which are in a process – and therefore they are samsaric, because, it is possible to rid this consciousness of this seemingly natural function, i.e. the function to reflect phenomena, thus those quanta of the physical factors. When a person achieves this, the consciousness manifests its original nature, a nature of a cosmic mirroring principle, which can then be identified only as the "nirvanic state" which is in an empirical opposition to the "eternal forming", thus in opposition to the universe of happening, to the samsara.

The idea of the spiritual development is, for the aspirant of the spiritual perfection, to realise the original state of consciousness at the level of their own being. However, this requires a work of its own kind which is called, in summary, the mystical path.

Its beginning lies in the effort to exclude from the consciousness that "manifoldness" which is created by the heavy waves of physical quanta which generate formations of their own kind. This is carried out in such a way that a person will no longer allow their consciousness to mirror everything that can have an effect on it as the phenomena of the external world, but they will only allow it to mirror states and perceptions of one kind.

This means, in practice, that an aspirant of the spiritual perfection is supposed to chose joyfulness or elevation of the mind above the world of the external phenomena, according to whether they are under the influence of the worldly mind which is inclined to melancholy or of the inner suffering whose basis is a pessimistic view of the world. Exactly the joyfulness and a constant elevation of the mind above the

world of the external phenomena is supposed to become the means of keeping oneself above the world of happening, which means, above the world of ever-changing moods, changing from a deep melancholy all the way to crazy sensory joys.

When a person remains, for a long time, either in the joyful happiness, or in a state of mind elevated above the world of the external phenomena – in either case only in a state produced by the will – this state will settle in them or become a habit for them. When this state becomes to them the "carrier wave" of their inner life, they have eliminated the influence of samsara in its worst form – the influence that creates their moods, against whose pounding waves they are helpless.

From the point of view of the practical mysticism, the joyfulness produced by will and the elevation of mind above the world of the sensory perceptions are often used as realisable states. This means that a person must hold on to these states with the most intense straining of their will, until these states become part of his or her being in such a way that they are the carrier waves of their inner life to such an extent that if he or she would like to eliminate them, they would have to use an equally powerful pressure of will as when they were trying to produce and realise them. Only with the development of these states of inner forces and qualities, a person obtains a new psychological base, on which they can start to build a solid building of the spiritual perfection.

However, the way, in which the student of mysticism should act at this stage of the mystical practice, should be, in mysticism, determined by the guru. The new psychological base of being must be built from the mood elements in their precise proportion, in order to avoid the predominance of things of one or another kind and, by means of that, to avoid the arising of a situation which would, again, require an inner rebuilding, as in the first phase which was just mentioned.

It is necessary to point out right here, at the beginning, that the most experienced gurus lead their disciples in such a way that nothing is realised, but the various inner and psychological qualities of the individual are only mutually confronted in order for the "base of awareness" to move higher and higher on the level of psychological and physical qualities – as high as possible, in order for the so-called "first realisation" of a person to be as close to the state of salvation as possible. As, the lower inner and physical states must be realised, the harder is the creation of conditions for a further progress from this newly arisen base. Those who seek then

often have no more strength to get, from the states of the first realisation, higher on the still ascending mystical paths.

However, let us suppose that the student of mysticism has obtained a very experienced guru who is responsible in their field. This kind of guru can, as a rule, bring the student of mysticism to the realisation of a state which is actually just supernatural for the student. By that, the guru creates for the student preconditions for sensing even better states than those which he or she just realised and, at the same time, the guru helps them to preserve the potential possibility of, immediately, setting out further to the steeper slopes of the mystical path.

On these slopes, the students of mysticism obtain their own experience from the sphere of emotional experiencing, which means, for them, the ability to walk further alone, without "being lead by the little hand" and to avoid the realisation or getting stuck in any kind of state which does not allow them to get to know the absolute and to realise its state.

As a rule and, actually, in the best cases, the aspirant of spiritual perfection can, by avoiding all – even the very attractive – emotional states, get as far as the borderline between the immanent and the transcendental world – over there, where a living being stands at the doorstep of the absolute and, at the same time, has the knowledge of how to realise the state of absolute, i.e. the nirvanic state.

It appears, that reaching the borderline between samsara and nirvana, requires one to internally stop, i.e. to realise some relevant mystical state, as, it is necessary to have time to look around for the points of touch of these two extreme states of the cosmos as well as of the beings in their spiritual conception; for, the moment of this attainment is like walking out of the disease of the samsaric life to the doorstep of an absolute health which can be ensured only by the right way of acting. In this way, samsara and nirvana begin to be confronted in the state of humanness which, through the preceding process of the spiritual development, obtained an ability to differentiate between these two basic cosmic states, between samsara and nirvana, as the objects of realisation of every individual.

The path is unusual after this point. It is, indeed, contained in the constant confrontations of the states of samsara and nirvana, while attention is paid so that the immersion in nirvana does not distance samsara from a person to such an extent that it would not be possible to realise it again, and, on the other hand, that the immersion in samsara does not distance the state of nirvana from a person in such a way

that he or she would not be able to realise it any longer, because he or she has sunk too far into the emotional experiential living.

This careful and constant mixing of the two extreme states of the universe must happen – and it usually also does happen – with a tendency for the states of nirvana to have an adequate dominance over the samsaric states. In this way, it is possible to work through to the realisation of the absolute, of the nirvanic state, at the level of the being or its daily consciousness as differentiated phenomena.

Thus, in the universe, a possibility exists for a being – a living creature, to realise the state of absolute on its own level. It is certainly a superhuman objective; however, it is adequate for the deepest suffering of the subject. When such a person, due to the great amount of life experience, no longer believes in any exhilaration that a sensory craving, brought to success, could provide to him or her, then the absolute will not be to them an all-consuming bottomless pool, but only a place of peace, which becomes perfect exactly by the realisation of the absolute.

The realisations of a lower level than exactly of the absolute are the realisations of the celestial states, because, the mystical path always begins with non-gratification of the sensory desires and therefore it cannot aim at the sphere of darkness and aversion. A person on the mystical path always looks somewhere ahead and, according to their karmic maturity, either towards the sensory pleasures – towards the heavens of a various level, or, even beyond the sphere of the sensory pleasures towards the supercelestial spheres. However, these supercelestial spheres are also more than one, so, on the lowest level it is a sphere of peace beyond the complete living out of, or oversaturation by, the sensory pleasures, and on the highest one is it the extinguishment of every trace of differentiation. From the peace beyond the complete living out of the sensory pleasures or oversaturation by them, all the way to the extinguishment of every trace of differentiation, there are various degrees of emphasising one's own "I" of every pilgrim on the mystical path. Those, who are entirely satiated by the life experiences, have no interest in the preserving of their "I", because they are very well aware of the fact that the world exists only in contrast to this "I" In this way, a decision arises, to let come to an end both the "I" and the world – two seemingly individualised factors which are, though, in fact only one single thing in two seemingly different versions, namely the states of samsara and nirvana.

However, what about those life experiences? – During the phase of ignorance, as it is defined by the highest quality

mystical teaching, i.e. during ignorance that there are only two basic states of the cosmic continuum, these life experiences must be obtained only by means of the emotional experience. However, when a person is already able to enter the path of the mystical development, then a correctly raised and nursed disciple can bridge the sphere of emotional experience by an indirect obtaining of the life experiences – i.e. by means of a profound or penetrating insight.

This insight is something that is based on an inner detachment from that which is being experienced, that which is being known and from that which exists. A person no longer rushes to explore it by two senses of the direct experience, i.e. by touch and taste, or, in other words, by the emotional experience, but only by observation. In such a case, the relative sufficiency of life experiences will not bring a person to attachment. He or she is able to constantly observe everything that exists as an external phenomenon and, by means of the penetrating insight, also to get to know the nature of it. By this they cease to toil through the world of the emotional experiencing and they only journey through the world of obtaining knowledge, by means of which the states of samsara and nirvana are precisely identified, the two "eternal" phenomena of the external world of a person.

By the identification of the nirvanic state, the possibility, as well as the ability, to realise this state arises. On the path towards its realisation, all necessary life experience is completed – they secure a person against mistaking nirvana for the highest state of samsara and he or she will be able to accomplish the nirvanic state by a continuous confrontation of the states of nirvana and samsara, i.e. they will attain the extinguishment of the will to live and by that also of the involuntary wandering through samsara.

It is thus necessary to pronounce a warning: This result will not be attained by those who are still desiring the sensory experiences and sensations, whether the worldly ones, or the heavenly ones but only by those who understand that the true mystical goal is only beyond the sphere of these experiences and sensations. If a person, who is still yielding to the "taste for life", wants to define nirvana, he or she will always only define a state of blissful emotional experiencing – the higher samsaric states. Such a person is never a spiritually perfect person and thus nor a true guru of the ones who seek.

Acknowledgement

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* *A Small Mystical Encyclopaedia*, which was originally meant to be a glossary for his own books about mysticism, grew in the hands of Květoslav Minařík until it became a book of popular science, accessible to every person interested in the spiritual teachings. It explains the basic terms of the spiritual teachings and their relationships to other scientific fields.

Sandó Kaisen

Awakening: Saint Petersburg Talk

In the passage from his upcoming book Pure Vision, Sandó Kaisen discusses the nature of awakening in a classical metaphoric way of the Japanese Sótó Zen tradition.

Dear Audience,

Everything derives from our spirit. However, this spirit is not limited to us because it is also in everything, and there isn't a place from which it is absent. It is because we have reduced it to our little existence we call human that we search for it outside as Spirit, other and impenetrable.

You are running after what might be the best method to bring about your encounter with the divine, but you refuse to recognize this Spirit as your own. If you acknowledge this fact, then you won't be missing anything nor will anything be in excess. What you miss comes from the constant cravings you try to gratify by material or spiritual devices. Once rid of the first, you throw yourselves heart and soul into the second. Now, there are several sorts of errors:

The severely confused have lost their way in astrology, the art of divination, of symbolism, strange signs and magic. Some have convinced themselves that awakening can be obtained through reading, studying, philosophy and all the modern techniques that the world has instrumentalized. Others believe that the accumulation of merits, charity, prayers, rituals, subservience to Gods, Bodhisattvas and other Buddhas will lead them to awakening. Still others have thrown themselves body and soul into extreme practices. Without using the subtleties of their spirit, they stupidly repeat the errors of others or practice the Way according to their own interpretation, going astray and refusing the help of enlightened beings. Even though their approach appears to be sincere, they only transmigrate within the meanders of their limited comprehension. Lastly, others, as they do not obtain the object of their desire, eagerly look for a guru, and then for another, hoping the miracle will come true. Some, discouraged and disappointed, return to the materialistic world and pursue their desires on another level. Appropriation is what they all have in common. One wants something and wants to be sure of possessing it. This principle is valid for material questions as well as for spiritual questions.

Man is the greatest builder of crutches. But when death will come, on what crutches shall we lean?

Dear friends, when we walk, the entire universe walks. If this is so, what can I lean on?

Is there anything someone else can do in my place? Eating, defecating, walking, breathing, thinking, sleeping, sitting, moving this body, moving the spirit? I am alone in sickness, in suffering, in old age and death. There is no place,

About the author

Sandó Kaisen (1952) is one of the main representatives of the Sótó Zen Buddhist schools in Europe. It was spread through Europe in the 1960s thanks to the efforts of Master Deshimaru. The main practice of this school is the sitting meditation – Zazen, during which the position of the body, the respiration and attention are important. Master Sandó Kaisen introduced himself to the East of Europe in 1990. Since then, his books have been published there and people could have come to see him on several lectures and introductions to Zazen he has given there, and learn about him from various press articles and programs on the radio and TV. Master Sandó Kaisen transmits only one thing "from my soul to yours": to break through the shell of habits and securities that imprisoned the being, to touch the Way and make it real in pure consciousness of the body, so that we can understand the Spirit of Unity.

no time when I am not alone. We have invented notions such as friend and enemy, love and hate, good and bad, but no one can live my life in any of its details. And lastly, there is neither "this" nor "that". Life is such as it presents itself and such as it is, we must receive it. Good and evil have nothing to do with that, and the notions of friends and enemy have no place here, because everything that happens is a projection of the spirit. But in reality, there is no spirit which is mine or

other. With this understanding, all phenomena are the wonderful manifestation of the original Spirit. When I walk, the solitude becomes that of myriads of existences in one only presence. This uninterrupted current is the natural pace of all the vacuity-phenomena and, in this movement, there is perfect coincidence.

Like an echo, we can respond to circumstances. Everything, then, echoes itself.

As the mountain echoes
The white eagle,
The dark river echoes
The pilgrim trees.

As long as you are attached to the notions of "realization", "illumination", "ordinary" and "Spirit of the Buddha", you are losing your way on secondary tracks. You must leave the road that keeps you away from the great liberation. One must stop believing to be on a path, as wonderful as it may be, stop adopting a "special" attitude that defines you as a seeker, a disciple or a master. It is not necessary to define oneself, to want to convince, or have the desire to save anyone.

To say the truth, I have nothing to offer you, in the same way that the sun has nothing to offer the sun.

I have shown you the posture of zazen which my own Master showed me, so that you will actualize what you have always been. But if, after I have left, some come and talk to you about the life of the Buddhas as a goal to seek, or a state to reach by I don't know what kind of spiritual practice or other prayers, don't let yourselves be deceived by such words and don't fall into the thousand nets of ignorance.

When, suddenly, clouds unveil the transparent sky of the Reality, you discover that both subject and object are "you" and, this way, you obtain the mysterious, inexpressible comprehension. Finally, what counts before everything else, when one thought mingles with another, is to not be concerned with either of them.

Dear audience, for many years, I have done nothing else but transmit the Dharma of peace and happiness.

Once comfortably seated in the posture, let the body relax, shoulders released. Become "one" with the breathing, but not in a continuous way. Let the inspiration run its course and then disappear. Let the expiration run its course and then disappear. Leave the spirit aside by not participating in the actions of the thoughts. So, this way, they come and wear out

freely. Do not look for any particular state of mind. Become one with the posture and the breathing.
The spirit will then calm down of its own accord, becoming lucid and clear.

Do not focus on limpidity.

Do not fix your mind anywhere, on vacuity or anything else. Do not fabricate the natural. It installs itself naturally. To be vigilant does not depend on any special or voluntary concentration. Lucidity is present where there is calmness. Do not look for peace, it is where lucidity resides. There is no sacred action or anything to venerate, no prayer to address, no sainthood, no mobility or immobility. And, lastly, surrender to one's ordinary spirit.

Clouds in the sky and water on the earth.

The state of Buddha has no fixed form. If one becomes fixed on the sitting position or on the spirit, one will not harmonize with the Principle.

Some masters have said: "*The zen has nothing to do with the sitting position, lying or standing.*"

How true were those words! At the time, they were meant for those preoccupied with the sitting posture and seeking the Buddha there; unaware that the Buddha has no particular form. By sitting in the posture, we trace the Buddha sitting, by standing, we portray the Buddha standing.

To abandon all concerns is the fact of sitting with nothing special in mind, letting go of everything and, especially, abandoning even what we have abandoned…

Question:
But I have heard one has to make a great effort to awaken?

Answer:
One should not be on the alert in the manner of a hunter looking out for his prey. To be awake is simply to do what there is to do with the greatest simplicity, and a spirit of awareness. Awakening takes its source in the Spirit. If the spirit is free from all obstacles, awakening lights up of itself. It does not depend on effort or no effort. It is your own spirit!

The Buddha, is it enlightenment?

It is your own spirit!

Mission

Spirituality Studies welcomes original contributions from various academic fields reflecting the phenomenon of spirituality in its multiple forms as well as cultural and religious contexts.

At the same time, the journal provides a forum for sharing personal spiritual experience of spiritual practitioners of various backgrounds elaborated in a form of a scholarly article, essay or poetry. By combining both academic and experiential aspects of spirituality Spirituality Studies aims at providing an original and exceptional multidisciplinary and multidimensional platform for constructive dialogue between a variety of viewpoints, approaches, and methodologies in the study of spirituality.

Spirituality Studies covers a wide range of theoretical and practical (living spirituality) issues relating to spirituality, including an encounter among various spiritual traditions on personal, interpersonal and social level. Particular emphasis is put on the processes of spiritual or personal transformation as given in various forms of mysticism (Christian, Muslim, etc.) and traditions of yoga across the global cultural and religious spectrum (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, new religious movements, etc.).

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