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EDITORIAL

Gejza M. Timčák

The question of true meaning of birth and death as well as the meaning of our coming to this world is a subject that interested humanity since its appearance on Earth. Almost equal importance was given to enquiry into how to get back to the “*original state of being*”. Spiritual traditions of Christianity and Judaism speak about the *Tree of Life* in the Garden of Eden. In *Genesis* 3:24 cherubim guard the way to the Tree of Life at the east end of the Garden. The *Book of Proverbs* (9:11) declares in relation to the Tree of Life that “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom” meaning that “obedience to God’s will” is the message of the Tree of Life. In Judaic *Kabbalah’s Tree of Life* we see ten Sephirot concepts, through which the Ein Sof – the unknowable Divine – manifests the Creation and thus also man. Saint Augustine in the *City of God* (xiv. 26) tells “man was furnished with food against hunger, with drink against thirst, and with the tree of life against the ravages of old age”.

In contrast, in Jewish tradition, the *Tree of Knowledge* and the eating of its fruit represents the beginning of the mixture of good and evil together. In Christian theology, consuming the fruit of the *Tree of Knowledge of good and evil* represents the “*original sin*”. The same tradition describes how humans, after consuming the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, were expelled from Eden into the present environment, which is characterized by birth and death.

Thus coming to this world is the result of “consuming the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge”. It means we are curious and try to learn, try to know so many things, some of which are good, some bad. Still, after enjoying the gifts of nature, culture and technology we feel that it always ends in some “dead end”, beyond which is the Unknown and unknowable, where time and age are irrelevant and where we rejoin those who exist in flow with the Will of Absolute – manifest or unmanifest. But we cannot access this region through our will. We have to learn where to find the fruit of the Tree of Life, which enables us to stay still and do what the Will of the Absolute indicates and what our *karma* needs us to do, if we are to reassume our original state of being. Even in meditation when we reach the upper edge of *dhāranā*, we have to be taken into the states of *dhyāna* and *samādhi*, where

our will is no longer a determinant, and we have to lay it down and accept the Will that is described in various traditions differently, but is the governing power of the created and uncreated universes. This is why before enlightenment one has to “die” in the sense that nothing can be brought to the area of highest Being from over here. When this happens, we are re-born into a state of being where the flow along the Will of the Absolute is the only “thing” we have to maintain. In between these ways of life there are levels, which are there to aid our becoming more and more simple and integrated.

The papers in this issue are devoted mostly to these processes and we can only hope that the informed readers will find a number of inspiring impulses for one’s own spiritual life.

THE EXPERIENCE OF DEATH AND DYING PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses some psychological, philosophical, and spiritual aspects of the research on death and dying. The author challenges materialistic understanding of death, based on metaphysical assumption inherited from the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm that had become one of the leading myths of the Western science, according to which consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter, a product of the physiological processes in the brain, and thus critically dependent on the body. By reviewing the existing data and observations from various fields of research he points out to the fact that there is no proof for such a reductive claim.

The research of the psychological, philosophical, and spiritual aspects of death and dying discussed in this paper offers considerable theoretical and practical implications, enabling the refusal of materialistic interpretation of death as the final end of human existence and conscious activity of any kind.

*You grieve for those that should not be grieved for.
The wise grieve neither for the living nor the dead.
Never at any time was I not.
Nor thou, nor these princes of men.
Nor will we ever cease to be hereafter.
For the unreal has no being and the real never ceases to be.*

Bhagavad Gita

Key words

Transpersonal psychology, consciousness, consciousness research, death

1 Introduction

It would be hard to imagine a subject that is more universal and more personally relevant for every single individual than death and dying. In the course of our life, we all will lose acquaintances, friends, and relatives and eventually face our own biological demise. In view of this fact, it is quite amazing that until the late 1960s, the Western industrial civilization showed an almost complete lack of interest in the subject of death and dying. This was true not only for the general population, but included also scientists and professionals involved in disciplines that should be interested in this subject, such as medicine, psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and theology. The only plausible explanation for this situation is massive denial of death and psychological repression of this entire area.

This disinterest is even more striking, when we compare this situation with the ancient and pre-industrial cultures and realize that their attitude to death and dying was diametrically different. Death played an extremely critical and central role in their cosmologies, philosophies, spiritual and ritual life, and mythologies, as well as everyday life. The practical importance of this difference becomes obvious when we compare the situation of a person facing death in these two historical and cultural environments.

A person dying in one of the Western industrial societies typically has a pragmatic and materialistic worldview or is at least very profoundly influenced by the exposure to it. According to mainstream academic Western science, the history of the universe is the history of developing matter. Life, consciousness, and intelligence are more or less accidental and insignificant side products of this development. They appeared on the scene after many billions of years of evolution of passive and inert matter in a trivially small part of an immense universe. In a world where only what is material, tangible, and measurable is real, there is no place for spirituality of any kind.

Although religious activities are generally permitted, or even formally encouraged, from a strictly scientific point of view any involvement in spirituality appears to be and is interpreted as an irrational activity indicating emotional and intellectual immaturity – lack of education, primitive superstition, and regression to magical and infantile thinking. Direct experiences of spiritual realities are seen as manifestations of a serious mental disease, *psychosis*. Religion, bereft of its experiential component has largely lost the connection to its deep spiritual source and as a result of it has become empty, meaningless, and increasingly irrelevant in our life. In this form, it cannot compete with the persuasiveness of materialistic science backed up by its technological triumphs.

Under these circumstances, religion has ceased to be a vital force during our life, as well as at the time of dying and death. Its references to life after death, the posthumous adventures of the soul, and the abodes of

the Beyond, such as heaven and hell, have been relegated to the realm of fairy tales and handbooks of psychiatry. The entire spiritual history of humanity has been pathologized. At the cradle of all the great religions of the world were transpersonal experiences of their founders, prophets, and saints. We can think here, for example, about Buddha's encounter with Kama Mara and his army or his reliving of various episodes from his past incarnations accompanied by "tearing of the karmic bonds". The *Old Testament* describes Moses' vision of Jehova in the burning bush and the *New Testament* Jesus' temptation by the devil during his stay in the desert. Islamic scriptures portray the journey of Muhammad through the seven heavens, paradise, and hell in the company of archangel Gabriel. According to traditional psychiatry, all these experiences are indicative of severe psychopathology, mental disease of the individuals involved.

Psychiatric literature abounds in articles and books discussing what would be the best clinical diagnosis for various famous spiritual figures, some of them of the stature of the Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Ramakrishna, or Saint Anthony. Visionary experiences of the transpersonal realms are usually attributed to severe psychosis of the schizophrenic type or to epilepsy, as it is in the case of Muhammad. Saint John of the Cross has been labeled "hereditary degenerate" and Saint Teresa of Avila a "hysterical psychotic". Mainstream anthropologists have argued whether shamans are psychotics, hysterics, or epileptics. There is even a paper applying psychopathological criteria to meditation. It is entitled "Buddhist Training as Artificial Catatonia", and its author

is the famous psychoanalyst and founder of psychosomatic medicine Franz Alexander (Alexander 1931).

According to Western neuroscience, consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter, a product of the physiological processes in the brain, and thus critically dependent on the body. The death of the body, particularly of the brain, is then seen as the absolute end of any form of conscious activity. Belief in the posthumous journey of the soul, afterlife, or reincarnation is usually ridiculed as a product of wishful thinking of people who are unable to accept the obvious biological imperative of death, the absolute nature of which has been scientifically proven beyond any reasonable doubt. Very few people, including most scientists, realize that we have absolutely no proof that consciousness is actually produced by the brain and not even a remote notion how something like that could possibly happen. In spite of it, this basic metaphysical assumption remains one of the leading myths of Western materialistic science and has profound influence on our entire society.

This attitude has effectively inhibited scientific interest in the experiences of dying patients and of individuals in near-death situations until the 1970s. The rare reports on this subject received very little attention, whether they came in the form of books for general public, such as Jess E. Weisse's *The Vestibule* (Weisse 1972) and Jean-Baptiste Delacour's *Glimpses of the Beyond* (Delacour 1974), or scientific research, such as the study of death-bed observations of physicians and nurses conducted by Karlis Osis (Osis 1961). Since the publication of Raymond Moody's internation-

al bestseller *Life After Life* in 1975, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, Ken Ring, Michael Sabom, and other pioneers of thanatology have amassed impressive evidence about the amazing characteristics of near-death experiences from accurate extrasensory perception during out-of-body experiences to profound personality changes following them.

The material from these studies has been widely publicized and used by the media from TV talk shows to Hollywood movies. Yet, these potentially paradigm-shattering observations that could revolutionize our understanding of the nature of consciousness and its relationship to the brain are still dismissed by most professionals as irrelevant hallucinations produced by a biological crisis. They are also not routinely recorded and examined as an important part of the patients' medical history and no specific psychological support is being offered in most of the medical facilities that would help to integrate these challenging events.

People dying in Western societies also often lack effective human support that would ease their transition. We try to protect ourselves from the emotional discomfort that death induces. The industrial world tends to remove sick and dying people into hospitals and nursing homes. The emphasis is on life-support systems and mechanical prolongation of life, often beyond any reasonable limits, rather than the quality of the human environment. The family system has disintegrated and children often live far from the parents and grandparents. At the time of medical crisis, the contact is often formal and minimal. In addition, mental health professionals, who

have developed specific forms of psychological support and counseling for a large variety of emotional crises, have given close to no attention to the dying. Those facing the most profound of all imaginable crises, one that affects simultaneously the biological, emotional, interpersonal, social, philosophical, and spiritual aspects of the individual remain the only ones for whom meaningful help is not available.

All this occurs in the much larger context of collective denial of impermanence and mortality that characterizes Western industrial civilization. Much of our encounter with death comes in a sanitized form, where a team of professionals mitigates its immediate impact. In its extreme expression, it includes post-mortem barbers and hairdressers, tailors, make-up experts, and plastic surgeons who make a wide variety of cosmetic adjustments on the corpse before it is shown to relatives and friends. The media help create more distance from death by diluting it into empty statistics reporting in a matter of fact way about the thousands of victims who died in wars, revolutions, and natural catastrophes. Movies and TV shows further trivialize death by capitalizing on violence. They immunize modern audiences against its emotional relevance by exposing them to countless scenes of dying, killing, and murder in the context of entertainment.

In general, the conditions of life existing in modern technologized countries do not offer much ideological or psychological support for people who are facing death. This contrasts very sharply with the situation encountered by those dying in one of the ancient and pre-

industrial societies. Their cosmologies, philosophies, mythologies, as well as spiritual and ritual life, contain a clear message that death is not the absolute and irrevocable end of everything, that life or existence continues in some form after the biological demise. Eschatological mythologies are in general agreement that the soul of the deceased undergoes a complex series of adventures in consciousness. The posthumous journey of the soul is sometimes described as a travel through fantastic landscapes that bear some similarity to those on earth, other times as encounters with various archetypal beings, or as moving through a sequence of *non-ordinary states of consciousness* (later NOSC). In some cultures the soul reaches a temporary realm in the Beyond, such as the Christian *purgatory* or the *lokas* of Tibetan Buddhism, in others an eternal abode – heaven, hell, paradise, or the sun realm.

Pre-industrial societies thus seemed to agree that death was not the ultimate defeat and end of everything, but an important transition. The experiences associated with death were seen as visits to important dimensions of reality that deserved to be experienced, studied, and carefully mapped. The dying were familiar with the eschatological cartographies of their cultures, whether these were shamanic maps of the funeral landscapes or sophisticated descriptions of the Eastern spiritual systems, such as those found in the Tibetan *Bardo Thödol*. This important text of Tibetan Buddhism represents an interesting counterpoint to the exclusive pragmatic emphasis on productive life and denial of death characterizing the Western civilization. It describes the time of death as a unique

opportunity for spiritual liberation from the cycles of death and rebirth and a period that determines our next incarnation, if we do not achieve liberation. In this context, it is possible to see the intermediate state between lives (*bardo*) as being in a way more important than incarnate existence. It is then essential to prepare for this time by systematic practice during our lifetime.

Another characteristic aspect of ancient and pre-industrial cultures that colors the experience of dying is their acceptance of death as an integral part of life. Throughout their life, people living in these cultures get used to spending time around dying people, handling corpses, observing cremation, and living with their remnants. For a Westerner, a visit to a place like Benares where this attitude is expressed in its extreme form can be a profoundly shattering experience. In addition, dying people in pre-industrial cultures typically die in the context of an extended family, clan, or tribe. They thus can receive meaningful emotional support from people whom they intimately know. It is also important to mention powerful rituals conducted at the time of death designed to assist individuals facing the ultimate transition, or even specific guidance of the dying, such as the approach described in the *Bardo Thödol*.

An extremely important factor influencing the attitude toward death and the experience of dying has been the existence of various forms of experiential training for dying involving NOSC. The oldest among them is the practice of shamanism, the most ancient religion and healing art of humanity, the roots of which reach far back into the Pa-

leolithic era. Among the beautiful images of primeval animals painted and carved on the walls of the great caves in Southern France and Northern Spain, such as Lascaux, Font de Gaume, Les Trois Frères, Altamira, and others, are figures that undoubtedly represent ancient shamans. In some of the caves, the discoverers also found footprints in circular arrangements suggesting that their inhabitants conducted dances, similar to those still performed by some aboriginal cultures for the induction of NOSC. Shamanism is not only ancient, but also universal; it can be found in North and South America, in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and Polynesia.

Shamanism is intimately connected with NOSC, as well as with death and dying. The career of many shamans begins with the "shamanic illness", a spontaneous initiatory crisis conducive to profound healing and psychospiritual transformation. It is a visionary journey involving the visit to the underworld, painful and frightening ordeals, and an experience of psychological death and rebirth followed by ascent into supernal realms. In this experience, the novice shaman connects to the forces of nature and to the animal realm and learns how to diagnose and heal diseases. The knowledge of the realm of death acquired during this transformation makes it possible for the shaman to move freely back and forth and mediate these journeys for other people.

The anthropologists have also described rites of passage, elaborate rituals conducted by various aboriginal cultures at the time of important biological and social transitions, such as birth, circumcision, puberty, mar-

riage, dying, and others. They employ powerful mind-altering technologies and the experiences induced by them revolve around the trias birth-sex-death. Their symbolism involves different combinations of perinatal and transpersonal elements. Clinical work with psychedelics and various non-drug experiential approaches (such as the *Holotropic Breathwork*) has helped us understand these events and appreciate their importance for individuals and human groups.

Closely related to the rites of passage were the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, complex sacred and secret procedures that were also using powerful mind-altering techniques. They were particularly prevalent in the Mediterranean area, as exemplified by the Babylonian ceremonies of Inanna and Tammuz, the Egyptian mysteries of Isis and Osiris, the Orphic Cult, the Bacchanalia, the Eleusinian mysteries, the Corybantic rites, and the mysteries of Attis and Adonis. The mysteries were based on mythological stories of deities that symbolize death and rebirth. The most famous of them were the Eleusinian mysteries that were conducted near Athens every five years without interruption for a period of almost 2 000 years. According to a modern study by Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck, the ritual potion ("kykeon") used in these mysteries contained ergot preparations related closely to LSD (Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck 1978).

The sacred literature of the various mystical traditions and the great spiritual philosophies of the East is of particular interest for transpersonally oriented researchers. Here belong the various systems of yoga, the the-

ory and practice of Buddhism, Taoism, the Tibetan Vajrayana, Sufism, Christian mysticism, the Kabbalah, and many others. These systems developed effective forms of prayers, meditations, movement meditations, breathing exercises, and other powerful techniques for inducing NOSC with profoundly spiritual components. Like the experiences of the shamans, initiates in the rites of passage, and neophytes in ancient mysteries, these procedures offered the possibility of confronting one's impermanence and mortality, transcending the fear of death, and radically transforming one's being in the world.

The description of the resources available to dying people in pre-industrial cultures would not be complete without mentioning the books of the dead, such as the Tibetan *Bardo Thödol*, the Egyptian *Pert Em Hru*, the Aztec *Codex Borgia*, or the European *Ars Moriendi*. When the ancient books of the dead first came to the attention of Western scholars, they were considered to be fictitious descriptions of the posthumous journey of the soul, and as such wishful fabrications of people who were unable to accept the grim reality of death. They were put in the same category as fairy tales – imaginary creations of human fantasy that had definite artistic beauty, but no relevance for everyday reality.

However, a deeper study of these texts revealed that they had been used as guides in the context of sacred mysteries and of spiritual practice and very likely described the experiences of the initiates and practitioners. From this new perspective, presenting the books of the dead as manuals for the dying appeared to be simply a clever disguise

invented by the priests to obscure their real function and protect their deeper esoteric meaning and message from the uninitiated. However, the remaining problem was to discover the exact nature of the procedures used by the ancient spiritual systems to induce these states.

Modern research focusing on NOSC brought unexpected new insights into this problem area. Systematic study of the experiences in psychedelic sessions, powerful non-drug forms of psychotherapy, and spontaneously occurring psychospiritual crises showed that in all these situations, people can encounter an entire spectrum of unusual experiences, including sequences of agony and dying, passing through hell, facing divine judgment, being reborn, reaching the celestial realms, and confronting memories from previous incarnations. These states were strikingly similar to those described in the eschatological texts of ancient and pre-industrial cultures.

Another missing piece of the puzzle was provided by thanatology, the new scientific discipline specifically studying death and dying. Thanatological studies of near-death states by people like Raymond Moody (*Life After Life*, Moody 1975), Kenneth Ring (*Life at Death and Heading Toward Omega*, Ring 1982, 1985), Michael Sabom (*Recollections of Death*, Sabom 1982), Bruce Greyson and Charles Flynn (*The Near Death Experience*, Greyson and Flynn 1984) showed that the experiences associated with life-threatening situations bear a deep resemblance to the descriptions from the ancient books of the dead as well as those reported by subjects in psychedelic sessions and modern experiential psychotherapy.

It has thus become clear that the ancient eschatological texts are actually maps of the inner territories of the psyche encountered in profound NOSC, including those associated with biological dying. The experiences involved seem to transcend race and culture, and originate in the collective unconscious, as described by C. G. Jung. It is possible to spend one's entire lifetime without ever experiencing these realms or even without being aware of their existence, until one is catapulted into them at the time of biological death. However, for some people this experiential area becomes available during their lifetime in a variety of situations including psychedelic sessions or some other powerful forms of self-exploration, serious spiritual practice, participation in shamanic rituals, or during spontaneous psycho-spiritual crises. This opens up for them the possibility of experiential exploration of these territories of the psyche on their own terms so that the encounter with death does not come as a complete surprise when it is imposed on them at the time of biological demise.

The Austrian Augustinian monk Abraham a Sancta Clara who lived in the seventeenth century, expressed in a succinct way the importance of the experiential practice of dying: "The man who dies before he dies does not die when he dies." This "dying before dying" has two important consequences: it liberates the individual from the fear of death and changes his or her attitude toward it, as well as influences the actual experience of dying at the time of the biological demise. However, this elimination of the fear of death, also transforms the individual's way of being in the world. For this reason, there is no funda-

mental difference between the preparation for death and the practice of dying, on the one hand, and spiritual practice leading to enlightenment, on the other. This is the reason why the ancient books of the dead could be used in both situations.

As we have seen, many aspects of life in pre-industrial cultures made the psychological situation of dying people significantly easier in comparison with the Western technological civilization. Naturally, the question that immediately arises is whether this advantage was to a great extent due to lack of reliable information about the nature of reality and to wishful self-deception. If that were the case, a significant part of our difficulties in facing death would simply be the toll we have to pay for our deeper knowledge of the universal scheme of things and we might prefer to bear the consequences of knowing the truth. However, closer examination of the existing evidence clearly shows that this is not the case.

The single most important factor responsible for the most fundamental differences between the worldview of Western industrial cultures and all other human groups throughout history is not the superiority of materialistic science over primitive superstition, but our profound ignorance in regard to NOSC. The only way the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview of Western science can be maintained is by systematic suppression or misinterpretation of all the evidence generated by consciousness studies, whether its source is history, anthropology, comparative religion, or various areas of modern research, such as parapsychology, thanatology, psychedelic therapy, biofeedback, sensory deprivation,

experiential psychotherapies, or the work with individuals in psychospiritual crises (“spiritual emergencies”).

Systematic practice of various forms of NOSC that characterizes the ritual and spiritual life of ancient and aboriginal cultures inevitably leads to an understanding of the nature of reality and of the relationship between consciousness and matter that is fundamentally different from the belief system of technologized societies. I have yet to meet a single Western academician who has done extensive inner work involving NOSC and continues to subscribe to the current scientific understanding of consciousness, psyche, human nature, and the nature of reality taught in Western universities. This is entirely independent of the educational background, IQ, and specific area of expertise of the individuals involved. The difference in regard to the possibility of consciousness after death thus exactly reflects the differences in the attitude toward NOSC.

Ancient and pre-industrial cultures held NOSC in high esteem, practiced them regularly in socially sanctioned contexts, and spent much time and energy developing safe and effective techniques of inducing them. These experiences were the main vehicle for their ritual and spiritual life as a means of direct communication with archetypal domains of deities and demons, forces of nature, the animal realms, and the cosmos. Additional uses of NOSC involved diagnosing and healing diseases, cultivating intuition and ESP, and obtaining artistic inspiration, as well as practical purposes, such as locating game and finding lost objects and people. Accord-

ing to anthropologist Victor Turner, sharing in groups also contributes to tribal bonding and tends to create a sense of deep connectedness (*communitas*).

Western society pathologized all forms of NOSC (with the exception of dreams that are not recurrent, or nightmares), spends much time trying to develop effective ways of suppressing them when they occur spontaneously, and tends to outlaw tools and contexts associated with them. Western psychiatry makes no distinction between a mystical experience and a psychotic experience and sees both as manifestations of mental disease. In its rejection of religion, it does not differentiate between primitive folk beliefs or the fundamentalists’ literal interpretations of scriptures and sophisticated mystical traditions and Eastern spiritual philosophies based on centuries of systematic introspective exploration of the psyche. This approach has pathologized the entire spiritual history of humanity.

Let us now briefly review the observations from various fields of research that challenge the materialistic understanding, according to which biological death represents the final end of existence and of conscious activity of any kind. In any exploration of this kind, it is important to keep an open mind and focus as much as possible only on the facts of observation. An unshakeable a priori commitment to the existing paradigm that characterizes the approach of mainstream science to this area is an attitude that is well known from fundamentalist religions. Unlike scientism of this kind, science in the true sense of the word is open to unbiased investigation of any exist-

ing phenomena. With this in mind, we can divide the existing evidence into two categories: (1) experiences and observations that challenge the traditional understanding of the nature of consciousness and its relationship to matter; (2) experiences and observations specifically related to the understanding of death and survival of consciousness.

2 Experiences and observations challenging the traditional understanding of consciousness and its relationship to matter

The work with NOSC has generated a vast body of evidence that represents a serious challenge for the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm of materialistic science. Most of the challenging data are related to transpersonal phenomena that represent an important part of the spectrum of experiences observed in NOSC. They suggest an urgent need for a radical revision of our current concepts of the nature of consciousness and its relationship to matter and the brain. Since the materialistic paradigm of Western science has been a major obstacle for any objective evaluation of the data describing the events occurring at the time of death, the study of transpersonal experiences has an indirect relevance for thanatology.

In transpersonal experiences, it is possible to transcend the usual limitations of the body, ego, space, and linear time. The disappearance of spatial boundaries can lead to authentic and convincing identifications with other people, animals of different species,

plant life, and even inorganic materials and processes. One can also transcend the temporal boundaries and experience episodes from the lives of one's human and animal ancestors, as well as collective, racial, and karmic memories. In addition, transpersonal experiences can take us into the archetypal domains of the collective unconscious and mediate encounter with blissful and wrathful deities of various cultures and visits to mythological realms. In all these types of experiences, it is possible to access entirely new information that by far surpasses anything that we obtained earlier through the conventional channels. The study of consciousness that can extend beyond the body, William Roll's "*theta consciousness*" or the "*long body*" of the Iroquois, is extremely important for the issue of survival, since it is this part of human personality that would be likely to survive death.

According to materialistic science, any memory requires a material substrate, such as the neuronal network in the brain or the DNA molecules of the genes. However, it is impossible to imagine any material medium for the information conveyed by various forms of transpersonal experiences described above. This information clearly has not been acquired during the individual's lifetime through the conventional means that is by sensory perception. It seems to exist independently of matter and be contained in the field of consciousness itself, or in some other types of fields that cannot be detected by our scientific instruments. The observations from the study of transpersonal experiences are supported by evidence that comes from other avenues of research. Challeng-

ing the basic metaphysical assumptions of Cartesian-Newtonian thinking, scientists like Heinz von Foerster (von Foerster 1965), Rupert Sheldrake (Sheldrake 1981), and Ervin Laszlo (1994) seriously explore such possibilities as “*memory without a material substrate*”, “*morphogenetic fields*”, and the record of all events from the history of the universe in the subquantum “*psi-field*”.

Traditional academic science describes human beings as highly developed animals and biological thinking machines. Experienced and studied in the everyday state of consciousness, we appear to be Newtonian objects made of atoms, molecules, cells, tissues, and organs. However, transpersonal experiences in clearly show that each of us can also manifest the properties of a field of consciousness that transcends space, time, and linear causality. The complete new formula, remotely reminiscent of the *wave-particle paradox* in modern physics, thus describes humans as paradoxical beings who have two complementary aspects: they can show properties of Newtonian objects and also those of infinite fields of consciousness. The appropriateness of each of these descriptions depends on the state of consciousness in which these observations are made. Physical death then seems to terminate one half of this definition, while the other comes into full expression.

3 Experiences and observations specifically related to the understanding of death and survival of consciousness

3.1 Phenomena on the threshold of death

Researchers have reported a variety of interesting phenomena occurring at the time of death. Here belong, for example numerous visions of people who just had died that are reported by their relatives, friends, and acquaintances. It has been found that such visions show statistically significant correlation with distantly occurring deaths of the appearing persons within a twelve-hour period (Sidgwick 1889). There also exist reports of unexplained physical events occurring at the time of death, such as watches stopping and starting, bells ringing, paintings or photographs falling of the wall, and others, that seem to announce a person’s death (Bozzano 1948). Individuals approaching death often experience encounters with their dead relatives who seem to welcome them to the next world. These deathbed visions are very authentic and convincing; they are often followed by a state of euphoria and seem to ease the transition. A number of cases have been reported, in which a dying individual has a vision of a person about whose death he or she did not know; these have been referred to as “*peak in Darien*” cases.

Of particular interest are *near-death experiences* (NDEs) that occur in about one-third of the people who encounter various forms of life-threatening situations, such as car

accidents, near-drowning, heart attacks, or cardiac arrests during operations. Raymond Moody, Kenneth Ring, Michael Sabom, Bruce Greyson, and others have done extensive research of this phenomenon and have described a characteristic experiential pattern that typically includes a life-review, passage through a dark tunnel, personal judgment with ethical evaluation of one's life, encounter with a radiant divine being, and visit to various transcendental realms. Less frequent are painful, anxiety-provoking, and infernal types of NDEs.

In our program of psychedelic therapy with terminal cancer patients, conducted at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore, we were able to obtain some evidence about the similarity of NDEs with experiences induced by psychedelic substances. We observed several patients who had first psychedelic experiences and later an actual NDE when their disease progressed (e.g. a cardiac arrest during an operation). They reported that these situations were very similar and described the psychedelic sessions as an invaluable experiential training for dying (Grof 1976).

The most extraordinary and fascinating aspect of NDEs is the occurrence of "veridical" *out-of-body experiences* (OOBEs), a term used for experiences of disembodied consciousness with accurate extrasensory perception. Thanatological studies have repeatedly confirmed that people who are unconscious or even clinically dead can have OOBEs during which they observe their bodies and the rescue procedures from above, or perceive events in remote locations. Current thanato-

logical research now focuses on confirmation of some preliminary observations of these experiences occurring in congenitally blind persons. Classical descriptions of OOBEs can be found in spiritual literature and philosophical texts of all ages. Modern thanatological research thus confirms the descriptions in the Tibetan *Book of the Dead (Bardo Thödol)*, according to which an individual after death assumes a "*bardo body*" which transcends the limitations of time and space and can freely travel around the earth.

Veridical OOBEs do not occur only in the context of near-death situations, vital emergencies, and episodes of clinical death. They can emerge in the sessions of powerful experiential psychotherapy (such as primal therapy, rebirthing, or *Holotropic Breathwork*), in the context of experiences induced by psychedelics (particularly the dissociative anesthetic ketamine), and also spontaneously. Such events can represent isolated episodes in the life of the individual, or occur repeatedly as part of a crisis of psychic opening or some other type of spiritual emergency. The authenticity of OOBEs has also been demonstrated in controlled clinical studies, such as the experiments of the well-known psychologist and parapsychologist Charles Tart with Ms. Z. at the University of California in Davis (Tart 1968) and perceptual tests conducted by Karlis Osis and D. McCormick with Alex Tanous (Osis and McCormick 1980).

OOBEs with confirmed ESP of the environment are of special importance for the problem of consciousness after death, since they demonstrate the possibility of consciousness operating independently of the body. Ac-

According to the Western materialistic worldview, consciousness is a product of the neurophysiological processes in the brain and it is absurd to think that consciousness could detach itself from the body and maintain its sensory capacity. Yet this is precisely what occurs in many well-documented cases of OOBEs. Naturally, people who have had OOBE might have come close to death, but did not really die. However, it seems reasonable to infer that if consciousness can function independently of the body during one's lifetime, it could be able to do the same after death.

3.2 Past life experiences

There exists a category of transpersonal experiences that has very direct relevance for the problem of survival of consciousness after death. It involves reliving or remembering vivid episodes from other historical periods and various parts of the world. The historical and geographical universality of these experiences suggests that they represent a very important cultural phenomenon. They also have critical implications for understanding the nature of consciousness, psyche, and human beings and for the theory and practice of psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy.

For the Hindus, Buddhists, and also for open-minded and knowledgeable consciousness researchers, reincarnation is not a matter of belief, but an empirical issue, based on a variety of experiences and observations. According to Christopher Bache, the evidence in this area is so rich and extraordinary that scientists who do not think the problem of reincarnation deserves serious study are "*either uninformed or thickheaded*" (Bache 1988).

The nature of the existing evidence that one should be familiar with before making any judgments concerning reincarnation is described in a mythological language in a passage written by Sholem Asch, a twentieth century Hasidic scholar: "Not the power to remember, but its very opposite, the power to forget, is a necessary condition of our existence. If the lore of the transmigration of souls is a true one, then these souls, between their exchanges of bodies, must pass through the sea of forgetfulness. According to the Jewish view, we make the transition under the overlordship of the Angel of Forgetfulness. But it sometimes happens that the Angel of Forgetfulness himself forgets to remove from our memories the records of the former world; and then our senses are haunted by fragmentary recollections of another life. They drift like torn clouds above the hills and valleys of the mind, and weave themselves into the incidents of our current existence."

Naturally, we need more than a poetic reference to ancient mythology. Careful study of the amassed evidence is absolutely necessary to make any valid conclusions in this area. As we will discuss later, this matter is of great importance, since the beliefs concerning the issue of reincarnation have great ethical impact on human life and possible relevance for the situation in the world and its future.

3.2.1 Spontaneous past life memories in children

There exist many instances of small children who seem to be remembering and describing their previous life in another body, another

place, and with other people. These memories emerge usually spontaneously shortly after these children begin to talk. They often present various complications in the life of these children and can be even associated with “carry-over pathologies”, such as phobias, strange reactions to certain people, or various idiosyncrasies. Child psychiatrists have described cases like this. Access to these memories usually disappears between the ages of five and eight.

Ian Stevenson, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA, has conducted meticulous studies of over three thousand of such cases and reported them in his books *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, *Unlearned Languages*, and *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (Stevenson 1966, 1984, and 1987), reporting only several hundred of them, because many have not met the highest standard. Some of them were eliminated because the family benefited financially, in terms of social prestige, or public attention, others because Stevenson found a connecting person who could have been the psychic link. Additional reasons were inconsistent testimony, cryptomnesia, witnesses of questionable character, or indication of fraud. Only the strongest cases were included.

The findings of Stevenson’s research were quite remarkable. He was able to confirm by independent investigation the stories the children were telling about their previous lives, often with incredible details, although he had eliminated in all the reported cases the possibility that they could have obtained the information through the conventional channels. In

some cases, he actually took the children into the village that they remembered from their previous life. Although they had never been there in their current lifetime, they were familiar with the topography of the village, were able to find the home they had allegedly lived in, recognized the members of their “family” and the villagers, and knew their names. To illustrate the nature of Stevenson’s material, I will present here a condensed version of the story of Parmod Sharma, one of the twenty subjects described in his early publication.

Parmod Sharma was born on October 11, 1944, in Bisauli, India. His father was Professor Bankey-behary Lal Sharma, a Sanskrit scholar at a nearby college. When Parmod was about two and a half, he began telling his mother not to cook meals for him any more, because he had a wife in Moradabad who could cook. Moradabad was a town about a ninety miles northeast of Bisauli. Between the ages of three and four, he began to speak in detail of his life there. He described several businesses he had owned and operated with other members of his family. He particularly spoke of a shop that manufactured and sold biscuits and soda water, calling it “Mohan Brothers”. He insisted that he was one of the Mohan brothers and that he also had a business in Saharanpur, a town about a hundred miles north of Moradabad.

Parmod tended not to play with the other children in Bisauli but preferred to play by himself, building models of shops complete with electrical wiring. He especially liked to make mud biscuits, which he served his family with tea or soda water. During this time, he provided many details about his shop, including its size and location in Moradabad, what was sold there, and his activities connected to it, such as his business trips to Delhi. He even

complained to his parents about the less prosperous financial situation of their home compared to what he was used to as a successful merchant.

[*Parmod's uncle had been temporarily stationed as a railroad employee in Moradabad when Parmod was very young. Because of Parmod's interest in biscuits, his uncle had brought him biscuits from the "Mohan Brothers" shop. The biscuits had the shop's name embossed on them, and although Parmod could not yet read, the biscuits might have stimulated associations for him. Interestingly enough, Parmod's mother says that Parmod did not recognize the biscuits. His uncle had not been in Moradabad when Parmanand was alive, nor did he have any personal acquaintance with any of the Mehra brothers. He was not familiar with the family's business affairs.]

Parmod had a strong distaste for curd, which is quite unusual for an Indian child, and on one occasion even advised his father against eating it, saying that it was dangerous. Parmod said that in his other life he had become seriously ill after eating too much curd one day. He had an equally strong dislike for being submerged in water, which might relate to his report that he had previously "died in a bathtub". Parmod said that he had been married and had five children – four sons and one daughter. He was anxious to see his family again and frequently begged his parents to take him back to Moradabad to visit them. His family always refused the request, though his mother did get him to begin school by promising to take him to Moradabad when he had learned to read.

Parmod's parents never investigated or tried to verify their son's claims, perhaps because of the Indian belief that children who remembered their previous lives died early. News of Parmod's statements, however, eventually reached the ears of

a family in Moradabad named Mehra, which fit many of the details of his story. The brothers of this family owned several businesses in Moradabad including a biscuit and soda shop named "Mohan Brothers". The shop had been named after the eldest brother, Mohan Mehra, and had originally been called "Mohan and Brothers". This was later shortened to "Mohan Brothers". This shop had been started and managed by Parmanand Mehra until his untimely death on May 9, 1943, eighteen months before Parmod was born.

Parmanand had gorged himself on curd, one of his favorite foods, at a wedding feast, and had subsequently developed a chronic gastrointestinal illness followed later by appendicitis and peritonitis from which he died. Two or three days before his death, he had insisted, against his family's advice, on eating more curd, saying that he might not have another chance to enjoy it. Parmanand had blamed his illness and impending death on overeating curd. As part of his therapy during his appendicitis, Parmanand had tried a series of naturopathies bath treatments. While he had not in fact died in a bathtub, he had been given a bath immediately prior to his death. Parmanand left a widow and five children – four sons and one daughter.

In the summer of 1949, the Mehra family decided to make the trip to Bisauli to meet Parmod, who was a little under five years old at the time. When they arrived, however, Parmod was away and no contact was made. Not long thereafter, Parmod's father took him to Moradabad to explore his son's compelling remembrances first hand. Among those who met Parmod at the railway station was Parmanand's cousin, Sri Karam Chand Mehra, who had been quite close to Parmanand. Parmod threw his arm around him weeping, calling

him “older brother” and saying “I am Parmanand”. Parmod had not used the name Parmanand before this meeting. It is for Indians common to call a cousin “brother” if the relationship is a close one, as was the case for Parmanand and Karam. The intensity and genuineness of the emotions this reunion generated seemed in itself to be as important a piece of evidence as verification and information about external objects and events.

Parmod then proceeded to find his way to the “Mohan Brothers” shop on his own, giving instructions to the driver of the carriage, which brought them from the station. Entering the shop, he complained that “his” special seat had been changed. In India it is customary for the owner of a business to have an enclosed seat – a *gaddi* – located near the front of the store where he can greet customers and direct business. The location of Parmanand’s *gaddi* had in fact been changed some time after his death. Once inside, Parmod asked: “Who is looking after the bakery and soda water factory?” This had been Parmanand’s responsibility. The complicated machine, which manufactured the soda water, had been secretly disabled in order to test Parmod. However, when it was shown to him, Parmod knew exactly how it worked. Without any assistance, he located the disconnected hose and gave instructions for its repair.

Later at Parmanand’s home, Parmod recognized the room where Parmanand had slept and commented on a room screen that he correctly observed had not been there in Parmanand’s day. He also identified a particular cupboard that Parmanand had kept his things in, as well as a special low table, which had also been his. “This is the one I used to use for my meals,” he said. When Parmanand’s mother entered the room, he immediately recognized her as “Mother” before

anyone else present was able to say anything. He also correctly identified Parmanand’s wife, acting somewhat embarrassed in front of her. She was, after all, a full-grown woman and he was only five, though apparently possessing at least some of the feelings of an adult husband. When they were alone, he said to her: “I have come, but you have not fixed *bindi*,” referring to the red dot worn on the forehead by Hindu wives. He also reproached her for wearing a white *sari*, the appropriate dress for a Hindu widow, instead of the colored *sari* worn by wives.

Parmod correctly recognized Parmanand’s daughter and the one son who was at the house when he had arrived. When Parmanand’s youngest son who had been at school showed up later, Parmod correctly identified him as well, using his familiar name, Gordhan. In their conversation, Parmod would not allow the older Gordhan to address him by his first name, but insisted that he call him “Father”. “I have only become small,” he said. During this visit, Parmod also correctly identified one of Parmanand’s brothers and a nephew.

Parmod showed a striking knowledge for the details of Parmanand’s world. While touring the hotel the Mehra brothers owned in Moradabad, the Victory Hotel, Parmod commented on the new sheds that had been built on the property. The Mehra family confirmed that these had indeed been added after Parmanand’s death. Entering the hotel, Parmod pointed out to some cupboard and said: “These are the *almirahs* I had constructed in Churchill House.” Churchill House was the name of a second hotel the Mehra brothers owned in Saharanpur, a town about a hundred miles north of Moradabad. Shortly after Parmanand’s death, the family had in fact decided to move these particular cupboards, which Parmanand had built for

Churchill House, to the Victory Hotel.

On a visit to Saharanpur later that fall, Parmod spontaneously identified a doctor known to Parmanand in that city. "He is a doctor and an old friend of mine," he said. During that visit, he also recognized a man named Yasmin who, as he insisted, owned him (Parmanand) some money. "I have got some money back from you," he said. At first, Yasmin was reluctant to acknowledge the loan, but after being reassured that the Mehra family was not going to press for repayment, he admitted that Parmod was quite right about the debt.

The reason why the children remember their previous life might be the circumstances of death, particularly those involving shock that "can possibly break through the amnesia"; the most vivid memories involve events leading up to it. Typically, these children do not know anything about events that occurred in the former personality's life after his or her death. This is an important point in deciding whether they are unconsciously reconstructing the details of this life by telepathically reading the minds of those who knew the deceased or possess these details as genuine memories. Possibly the strongest evidence in support of the reincarnation hypothesis is the incidence of striking birthmarks that reflect injuries and other events from the remembered life.

In evaluating this evidence, it is important to emphasize that Stevenson's cases were not only from "primitive", "exotic" cultures with a priori belief in reincarnation, but also from Western countries, including Great Britain and USA. His research meets high standards and has received considerable esteem. In the

year 1977, the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* devoted almost an entire issue to this subject and the work was reviewed in the *JAMA*.

3.2.2 Spontaneous past life memories in adults

Spontaneous vivid reliving of past life memories occurs most frequently during spontaneous episodes of NOSC (spiritual emergencies); however, various degrees of remembering can also happen in more or less ordinary states of consciousness in the circumstances of everyday life. Academic psychiatry and current theories of personality are based on the "one-timer view". Traditional professionals are aware of the existence of past life experiences, but treat them indiscriminately as indications of serious psychopathology.

3.2.3 Evoked past life memories in adults

Past life experiences can be elicited by a wide variety of techniques that mediate access to deep levels of the psyche, such as meditation, hypnosis, psychedelic substances, sensory isolation, bodywork, and various powerful experiential psychotherapies (primal therapy, rebirthing, or *Holotropic Breathwork*). They often appear unsolicited in sessions with therapists who do not aim for them and do not even believe in them, catching them completely off-guard. Their emergence is also completely independent of the subject's previous philosophical and religious belief system. In addition, past life experiences occur on the same continuum with accurate memories from adolescence, childhood, infancy, birth, and prenatal memories that can

be regularly reliably verified. Sometimes they coexist or alternate with them (Grof 1988, 1992).

There are important reasons to assume that past life experiences are authentic phenomena sui generis that have important implications for psychology and psychotherapy because of their heuristic and therapeutic potential. (1) They feel extremely real and authentic and often mediate access to accurate information about historical periods, cultures, and even historical events that the individual could not have acquired through the ordinary channels. (2) In some instances, the accuracy of these memories can be objectively verified, sometimes with amazing detail. (3) They are often involved in pathodynamics of various emotional, psychosomatic, and interpersonal problems. It seems to matter little to the psyche whether the pathogenic forces are related to events from ancient Egypt, Nazi Germany, prenatal life, birth of the individual, or from the infancy and childhood in the present lifetime. (4) They have a great therapeutic potential, more powerful than memories from the present lifetime. (5) They are often associated with amazing meaningful synchronicities.

The criteria for verification are the same as those for determining what happened last year: identify specific memories and secure independent evidence for at least some of them. Naturally, past life memories are more difficult to verify. They do not always contain specific information that would render itself to a verification procedure. Evidence is harder to come by, since they are much older and involve other countries and cultures. It is

important to consider that even our current memories cannot always be corroborated, only some of them. Most evoked memories do not permit the same degree of verification as Stevenson's spontaneous memories, which are typically more recent. However, I have myself observed and published several remarkable cases, where most unusual aspects of such experiences could be verified by independent historical research (Grof 1985, 1987).

I am including two of these stories to illustrate the remarkable nature of this material. In the first of them the karmic pattern started to emerge during sessions of primal therapy and continued in sessions of *Holotropic Breathwork*.

At an early stage of his therapy when Karl was re-living various aspects of his birth trauma, he started experiencing fragments of dramatic scenes that seemed to be happening in another century and in a foreign country. They involved powerful emotions and physical feelings and seemed to have some deep and intimate connection to his life; yet none of them made any sense in terms of his present biography.

He had visions of tunnels, underground storage spaces, military barracks, thick walls, and ramparts that all seemed to be parts of a fortress situated on a rock overlooking an ocean shore. This was interspersed with images of soldiers in a variety of situations. He felt puzzled, since the soldiers seemed to be Spanish, but the scenery looked more like Scotland or Ireland.

As the process continued, the scenes were becoming more dramatic and involved, many of them representing fierce combat and bloody slaughter. Although surrounded by soldiers, Karl experienced

himself as a priest and at one point had a very moving vision that involved a bible and a cross. At this point, he saw a seal ring on his hand and could clearly recognize the initials that it bore.

Being a talented artist, he decided to document this strange process, although he did not understand it at the time. He produced a series of drawings and very powerful and impulsive finger paintings. Some of these depicted different parts of the fortress, others scenes of slaughter, and a few his own experiences, including being gored by a sword, thrown over the ramparts of the fortress, and dying on the shore. Among these pictures was a drawing of the seal ring with the initials.

As he was recovering bits and pieces of this story, Karl was finding more and more meaningful connections with his present life. He was discovering that many emotional and psychosomatic feelings, as well as problems in interpersonal relationships that he had at that time in his everyday life, were clearly related to his inner process, involving the mysterious event in the past.

A turning point came when Karl suddenly decided on an impulse to spend his holiday in Western Ireland. After his return, he was showing in the family for the first time the slides that he had shot on the Western coast of Ireland. He realized that he had taken eleven consecutive pictures of the same scenery that did not seem particularly interesting. He took the map and reconstructed where he stood at the time and in which direction he was shooting. He realized that the place, which attracted his attention, was the ruin of an old fortress called Dunanoir, or Forte de Oro (*Golden Fortress*).

Suspecting a connection with his experiences from his inner exploration, Karl decided to study the history of Dunanoir. He discovered, to his enormous surprise, that at the time of Walter Ra-

leigh, the fortress was taken by the Spaniards and then besieged by the British. Walter Raleigh negotiated with the Spaniards and promised them free egress from the fortress, if they would open the gate and surrender to the British. The Spaniards agreed on these conditions, but the British did not hold their promise. Once inside the fortress, they slaughtered mercilessly all the Spaniards and threw them over the ramparts to die on the ocean beach.

In spite of this absolutely astonishing confirmation of the story that he laboriously reconstructed in his sessions, Karl was not satisfied. He continued his library research until he discovered a special document about the battle of Dunanoir. There he found that a priest accompanied the Spanish soldiers and was killed together with them. The initials of the name of the priest were identical with those that Karl saw in his vision of the seal ring and depicted in one of his drawings.

The following illustration is one of the most unusual coincidences that I have encountered during my LSD work. The phenomena involved have an ambiguous quality, since they have the combined characteristics of ancestral and past-incarnation experiences. This example shows clearly the complexity of this area of research. It is taken from the treatment of a patient suffering from cancer-phobia.

In the advanced stage of Renata's therapy, an unusual and unprecedented sequence of events was observed. Four consecutive LSD sessions consisted almost exclusively of scenes from a particular historical period from the Czech history. She experienced a number of episodes that took place in Prague during the seventeenth century. This time was a crucial period for the Czechs. After the di-

sastrous battle of White Mountain in 1621, which marked the beginning of the Thirty Years' War in Europe, the country ceased to exist as an independent kingdom and came under the hegemony of the Habsburg dynasty that lasted 300 years.

In an effort to destroy the feelings of national pride and defeat the forces of resistance, the Habsburgs sent out mercenaries to capture the country's most prominent noblemen. Twenty-seven outstanding members of the nobility were arrested and beheaded in a public execution on scaffolding erected on the Old Town Square in Prague. During her historical sessions, Renata had an unusual variety of images and insights concerning the architecture of the experienced period and typical garments and costumes, as well as weapons and various utensils used in everyday life. She was also able to describe many of the complicated relationships existing at that time between the royal family and the vassals. Renata had never specifically studied this period, and I had to consult special books in order to confirm the reported information.

Many of her experiences were related to various periods in the life of a young nobleman, one of the twenty-seven members of the aristocracy beheaded by the Habsburgs. In a dramatic sequence, Renata finally relived with powerful emotions and in considerable detail the actual events of the execution, including this nobleman's intense anguish and agony. In all these scenes, Renata experienced full identification with this individual. She was not quite clear how these historical sequences were related to her present personality and what they meant. She finally concluded that these experiences must have been relivings of events from the life of one of her ancestors, although this was against her personal beliefs and philosophy.

Being a close witness of this emotional drama, I shared Renata's bewilderment and confusion. Trying to decipher this enigma, I chose two different approaches. On the one hand, I spent a considerable amount of time trying to verify the historical information involved and was increasingly impressed by its accuracy. On the other hand, I tried to apply the psychoanalytic approach to the content of Renata's stories hoping that I would be able to understand them in psychodynamic terms as a symbolic disguise for her childhood experiences or elements of her present life situation. No matter how hard I tried, the experiential sequences did not make any sense from this point of view. I finally gave up on this problem when Renata's LSD experiences moved into new areas. Focusing on other more immediate tasks, I stopped thinking about this peculiar incident.

Two years later, when I was already in the United States, I received a long letter from Renata with the following unusual introduction: "Dear Dr. Grof, you will probably think that I am absolutely insane when I share with you the results of my recent private search." In the text that followed, Renata described how she had happened to meet her father, whom she had not seen since her parents' divorce when she was three years old. After a short discussion, her father invited her to have dinner with him, his second wife, and their children. After dinner, he told her that he wanted to show her the results of his favorite hobby, which she might find interesting.

During World War II, the Nazis issued a special order that every family in the occupied countries had to present to the German authorities its pedigree demonstrating the absence of persons of Jewish origin for the last five generations. Working on the family genealogy because of existential

necessity, Renata's father became absolutely fascinated by this procedure. After he had completed the required five-generation pedigree for the authorities, he continued this activity because of his private interest, tracing the history of his family back through the centuries, thanks to the relatively complete system of birth records kept in the archives of parish houses in European countries. With considerable pride, Renata's father pointed to large and carefully designed ramified pedigree of their family, and showed her that they were descendants of one of the noblemen executed after the battle of White Mountain.

After having described this episode in the letter, Renata expressed how happy she was to have obtained this independent confirmation of her "gut feeling" that her ancestral memory was authentic. She saw this as a proof that highly emotionally charged memories can be imprinted in the genetic code and transmitted through centuries to future generations. When I got over my initial amazement regarding this most unusual coincidence, I discovered a rather serious logical inconsistency in Renata's account. One of the experiences she had had in her historical LSD sessions was the reliving of the terminal anguish of the nobleman during his own execution. And, naturally, physical death terminates the possibility of further genetic transfer; it destroys the biological hereditary line. A dead person cannot procreate and "genetically" pass the memory of his terminal anguish to future generations.

Before completely discarding the information contained in Renata's letter as supportive evidence for her experiences, several facts deserve serious consideration. None of the remaining Czech patients, who had a total of over two thousand sessions, had

ever even mentioned this historical period. In Renata's case, four consecutive LSD sessions contained almost exclusively, historical sequences from this time. It is practically out of question that something like this is a mere meaningless coincidence. The absence of a conventional pathway for biological transfer of this information and the independent confirmation of Renata's experiences by her father's independent genealogical quest suggest a situation that characterizes past life experiences. In any case, it is hard to imagine any plausible explanation of this astonishing coincidence that would not violate some basic assumptions of traditional Western science.

3.2.4 Attempts at experimental verification of past life experiences

Some interesting experimental work has been done with hypnosis aimed at obtaining verifiable data about reincarnation. The objections against this kind of research emphasize the danger of suggestion. However, a strong case can be made for information that comes from a skilled use of hypnosis and is verifiable. Helen Wambach regressed 750 subjects into various past lives and employing a detailed sociological questionnaire, she collected from them specific information about costumes, food, weapons, money, and other aspects of the periods involved. She has often found verification even in the smallest details. Interestingly, the balance of males and females was maintained in her work, except during wartime when women were more numerous than men. Famous personalities were not more frequent; most

were lives in poverty, boring, and without color. There was not a single case of a famous historical person (Wambach 1979).

3.2.5 Tibetan practices relevant to the problem of reincarnation

Tibetan spiritual literature describes some interesting phenomena, suggesting that certain highly developed human beings are able to gain far-reaching knowledge related to the process of reincarnation. This includes the possibility of exerting influence on the time of one's death, predicting or even directing the time and place of one's next incarnation, and maintaining consciousness through the intermediate states (*bardos*) between death and next incarnation. Conversely, accomplished Tibetan monks can through various clues received in dreams, meditation, and through other channels locate and identify the child who is the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama or a *tulku*. The child is then exposed to a test during which it has to identify correctly from several sets of similar objects those that belonged to the deceased. Some aspects of this practice could, at least theoretically, be subjected to a rather rigorous testing following Western standards.

3.3 Apparitions of the dead and communication with them

Direct experiences of encounter and communication with deceased persons do not occur only around the time when these people died or as part of the NDEs, but also at a later date, spontaneously or in the context of NOSC induced by psychedelics, experiential psychotherapies, or meditation. Naturally, the

data from this area have to be evaluated particularly carefully and critically. The simple fact of a private experience of this kind does not really amount to very much and can easily be dismissed as a wishful fantasy or hallucination. Some additional factors must be present before the experiences constitute interesting research material. And it is, of course, important to make a distinction between those apparitions that seem to satisfy some strong need of the percipient and others, where any motivation of this kind cannot be found.

It is important to mention that some of the apparitions have certain characteristics that make them very interesting or even challenging for researchers. There exist a number of cases reported in the literature that describe apparitions of persons unknown to the percipient, who are later identified through photographs and verbal descriptions. It also is not uncommon that such apparitions are witnessed collectively or by many different individuals over long periods of time, such as it is the case in "haunted" houses and castles. In some instances, the apparitions can have distinct distinguishing bodily marks accrued around the time of death unbeknownst to the percipient. Of particular interest are those cases where the deceased convey some specific and accurate new information that can be verified or is linked with an extraordinary synchronicity. I have myself observed in LSD therapy and in *Holotropic Breathwork* several amazing instances of the second kind. Here are three examples to illustrate the nature of such observations.

The first of these examples is an event that

occurred during LSD therapy of a young depressed patient who had made repeated suicidal attempts.

In one of his LSD sessions, Richard had a very unusual experience involving a strange and uncanny astral realm. This domain had an eerie luminescence and was filled with discarnate beings that were trying to communicate with him in a very urgent and demanding manner. He could not see or hear them; however, he sensed their almost tangible presence and was receiving telepathic messages from them. I wrote down one of these messages that was very specific and could be subjected to subsequent verification.

It was a request for Richard to connect with a couple in the Moravian city of Kroměříž and let them know that their son Ladislav was doing all right and was well taken care of. The message included the couple's name, street address, and telephone number; all of these data were unknown to the patient and me. This experience was extremely puzzling; it seemed to be an alien enclave in Richard's experience, totally unrelated to his problems and the rest of his treatment.

After some hesitation and with mixed feelings, I finally decided to do what certainly would have made me the target of my colleagues' jokes, had they found out. I went to the telephone, dialed the number in Kroměříž, and asked if I could speak with Ladislav. To my astonishment, the woman on the other side of the line started to cry.

When she calmed down, she told me with a broken voice: "Our son is not with us any more; he passed away, we lost him three weeks ago."

The second illustrative example involves a close friend and former colleague of mine, Walter N. Pahnke, who was a member of our

psychedelic research team at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore. He had deep interest in parapsychology, particularly in the problem of consciousness after death, and worked with many famous mediums and psychics, including his friend Eileen Garrett, president of the American Parapsychological Association. In addition, he was also the initiator of the LSD program for patients dying of cancer.

In summer 1971, Walter went with his wife Eva and their children for a vacation in a cabin in Maine, situated right on the ocean. One day, he went scuba diving all by himself and did not return. An extensive and well-organized search failed to find his body or any part of his diving gear. Under these circumstances, Eva found it very difficult to accept and integrate his death. Her last memory of Walter when he was leaving the cabin involved him full of energy and in perfect health. It was hard for her to believe that he was not part of her life any more and to start a new chapter of her existence without a sense of closure of the preceding one.

Being a psychologist herself, she qualified for an LSD training session for mental health professionals offered through a special program in our institute. She decided to have a psychedelic experience with the hope of getting some more insights and asked me to be her sitter. In the second half of the session, she had a very powerful vision of Walter and carried on a long and meaningful dialogue with him. He gave her specific instructions concerning each of their three children and released her to start a new life of her own, unencumbered and unrestricted by a sense of commitment to his memory. It was a very profound and liberating experience.

Just as Eva was questioning whether the entire

episode was just a wishful fabrication of her own mind, Walter appeared once more for a brief period of time and asked Eva to return a book that he had borrowed from a friend of his. He then proceeded to give her the name of the friend, the room where it was, the name of the book, the shelf, and the sequential order of the book on this shelf. Following the instructions, Eva was actually able to find and return the book, about the existence of which she had had no previous knowledge.

One of the psychologists participating in our three year professional training had witnessed a wide variety of transpersonal experiences during the Holotropic Breathwork sessions of his colleagues, and he had a few of them himself. However, he continued to be very skeptical about the authenticity of these phenomena, constantly questioning whether or not they deserved any special attention. Then, in one of his holotropic sessions, he experienced an unusual synchronicity that convinced him that he might have been too conservative in his approach to human consciousness.

Toward the end of the session, he had a vivid experience of encountering his grandmother, who had been dead for many years. He had been very close to her in his childhood and he was deeply moved by the possibility that he might be really communicating with her again. In spite of a deep emotional involvement in the experience, he continued to maintain an attitude of professional skepticism about the encounter. Naturally, he had had many real interactions with his grandmother while she was alive and theorized that his mind could have easily created an imaginary encounter from these old memories.

However, this meeting with his dead grandmoth-

er was so emotionally profound and convincing that he simply could not dismiss it as a wishful fantasy. He decided to seek proof that the experience was real, not just his imagination. He asked his grandmother for some form of confirmation and received the following message: "Go to aunt Anna and look for cut roses." Still skeptical, he decided on the following weekend to visit his aunt Anna's home and see what would happen.

Upon his arrival, he found his aunt in the garden, surrounded by cut roses. He was astonished. The day of his visit just happened to be the one-day of the year that his aunt had decided to do some radical pruning of her roses.

Experiences of this kind are certainly far from being a definitive proof of the existence of astral realms and discarnate beings. However, these astonishing synchronicities clearly suggest that this fascinating area deserves serious attention of consciousness researchers.

Of special interest is the quasi-experimental evidence suggestive of survival of consciousness after death that comes from the highly charged and controversial area of spiritistic seances and mental or trance mediumship. Although some of the professional mediums have been caught cheating, others such as Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Leonard, and Mrs. Verall, withstood all the tests and gained a high esteem of careful and reputable researchers (Grosso 1994). The best media have been able to accurately reproduce in their performance the deceased's voice, speech patterns, gestures, mannerisms, and other characteristic features.

On occasion, the received information was unknown to any of the present persons or even to any living person whatsoever. There

also have been instances of sudden intrusion of uninvited “drop-in” entities whose identities were later confirmed. In other instances, relevant messages were received in “proxy sittings”, where a distant and uninformed party sought information in lieu of a close relative or friend of the deceased. In the cases of “cross correspondence”, bits and pieces of a comprehensive message are conveyed through several mediums. An interesting innovation in this area is the procedure described in Raymond Moody’s book *Reunions* (Moody 1993). Using perceptual ambiguity involved in mirror gazing, Moody induces in his subjects convincing visionary encounters with deceased loved ones.

Some of the spiritistic reports considerably stretch the mind of an average Westerner, let alone a traditionally trained scientist. For example, the extreme form of spiritistic phenomena, the “physical mediumship”, includes among others telekinesis and materializations, for example, upward levitation of objects and people, projection of objects through the air, manifestation of ectoplasmic formations, and appearance of writings or objects without explanation (“*apports*”). In the Brazilian spiritist movement, media perform psychic surgeries using their hands or knives allegedly under the guidance of the spirits of deceased people. These surgeries do not require any anesthesia and the wounds close without sutures. Events of this kind have been repeatedly studied and filmed by Western researchers of the stature of Walter Pahnke, Stanley Krippner and Andrija Puharich.

A relatively recent development in the efforts to communicate with spirits of deceased

people is an approach called *instrumental transcommunication* (ITC) that uses for this purpose modern electronic technology. This avenue began when in 1959 filmmaker Friedrich Juergensen picked up on an audiotape human voices of allegedly dead persons while recording the sounds of passerine birds. Inspired by this event, psychologist Konstantin Raudive (Raudive 1971) conducted a systematic study of this phenomenon and recorded over 100 000 multilingual paranormal voices allegedly communicating messages from the Beyond.

More recently, a worldwide network of researchers, including Ernest Senkowski, George Meek, Mark Macy, Scott Rogo, Raymond Bayless, and others, have been involved in a group effort to establish “*interdimensional transcommunication*”. They claim to have received many paranormal verbal communications and pictures from the deceased through electronic media, including tape recorders, telephones, FAX machines, computers, and TV screens. Among the spirits communicating from Beyond are supposedly some of the former researchers in this field, such as Juergensen and Raudive (Senkowski 1994).

4 Individual and social implications of the research on death and dying

The research of the psychological philosophical, and spiritual aspects of death and dying discussed in this paper has considerable theoretical and practical implications. The experiences and observations I have explored

certainly are not an unequivocal "proof" of survival of consciousness after death, of the existence of astral realms inhabited by discarnate beings, or of reincarnation of the individual unit of consciousness and continuation of its physical existence in another lifetime. It is possible to imagine other types of interpretation of the same data, such as extraordinary and amazing paranormal capacities of human consciousness (*superpsi*) or the Hindu concept of the universe as *lila*, the divine play of consciousness of the cosmic creative principle.

However, one thing seems to be clear: none of the interpretations based on careful analysis of these data would be compatible with the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm of Western materialistic science. Systematic examination and unbiased evaluation of this material would necessarily result in an entirely new understanding of the nature of consciousness, its role in the universal scheme of things, and its relationship to matter and, more specifically, the brain. Mainstream academic science has been defending, often quite aggressively and authoritatively, its basic metaphysical assumption that human consciousness is the product of neurophysiological processes in the brain and is fully contained inside the skull. This position inherited from seventeenth century philosophy and science has thus far been impervious to modern discoveries ranging from transpersonal psychology and various areas of consciousness research to quantum-relativistic physics. It can be maintained only by systematic suppression of a vast amount of data from various disciplines, a basic strategy that is characteristic for fundamentalist religions,

but one that should not exist in science.

Beside their theoretical relevance, the issues discussed in this paper have also great practical significance. I have explored at some length in other publications (Grof 1985, 1987) the importance of death for psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy. Our past encounters with death in the form of vital threats during our postnatal history, the trauma of birth, and embryonal existence are deeply imprinted in our unconscious. In addition, the motif of death plays also an important role in the transpersonal domain of the human psyche in connection with powerful archetypal and karmic material. In all these varieties, the theme of death and dying contributes significantly to the development of emotional and psychosomatic disorders.

Conversely, confronting this material and coming to terms with the fear of death is conducive to healing, positive personality transformation, and consciousness evolution. As we discussed in connection with the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, this "dying before dying" influences deeply the quality of life and the basic strategy of existence. It reduces irrational drives ("rat race" or "treadmill" type of existence) and increases the ability to live in the present and to enjoy simple life activities. Another important consequence of freeing oneself from the fear of death is a radical opening to spirituality of a universal and non-denominational type. This tends to occur whether the encounter with death happens during a real brush with death in an NDE, or in a purely psychological way, such as in meditation, experiential therapy, or a spontaneous psychospiritual crisis

(spiritual emergency).

In conclusion, I would like to mention briefly some of the broadest possible implications of this material. Whether or not we believe in survival of consciousness after death, reincarnation, and karma has very serious implications for our behavior. The idea that belief in immortality has profound moral implications can be found already in Plato, who in *Laws* has Socrates say that disconcert for the post mortem consequences of one's deeds would be "a boon to the wicked". Modern authors, such as Alan Harrington (Harrington 1969) and Ernest Becker (Becker 1973) have emphasized that massive denial of death leads to social pathologies that have dangerous consequences for humanity. Modern consciousness research certainly supports this point of view (Grof 1985).

At a time when a combination of unbridled greed, malignant aggression, and existence of weapons of mass destruction threatens the survival of humanity and possibly life on this planet, we should seriously consider any avenue that offers some hope. While this is not a sufficient reason for embracing uncritically the material suggesting survival of consciousness after death, it should be an additional incentive for reviewing the existing data with an open mind and in the spirit of true science. The same applies to the powerful experiential technologies involving NOSC that make it possible to confront the fear of death and can facilitate deep positive personality changes and spiritual opening. A radical inner transformation and rise to a new level of consciousness might be the only real hope we have in the current global crisis.

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EXPLANATION FOR THE MYSTICAL PRACTICE I.

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ABSTRACT

Joyfulness is not only an emotional state. It is a tingeing factor, which will take hold of a human being as an object and transform it; and this transformation of the being is actually the point.

Key words

Yoga, mystical practice, moral practice, joyfulness, concentration

1 Why to develop joyful mood

We cannot imagine the advancement towards redemption otherwise than that it must be happening through joyful states. People who are not able to rejoice are actually pessimistic and by that, they are closer to the ideas about hell than about heaven. We know about heaven, that it is a place of joy and, on a higher level, even a place of bliss. About redemption we subsequently know, that it is a state beyond celestial states and definitely not to be found beyond some culmination of obstinacy, dark mood and gloomy thoughts.

Joyfulness will not “fall into the lap” of anyone. Therefore everyone has to strive, to come, by the very developing of joyfulness, internally closer to celestial states; that is a practical path to heaven as a between state on the path towards salvation from the natural, perhaps human state.

The human state is characterised by changes. It is typical for people to swing from the states of literally crazy elation to desperation again. Between these extreme inner states, there is an ideal equilibrium, which can be classified as a pure original humanness; this humanness suffers from the fact that it has to counterbalance that crazy joyfulness by subsequent desperation. What follows from that is, that to let oneself drift by the state of humanness doesn't lead to anything good.

From cradle to grave, the crazy joyfulness interchanges with inner pains up to desperation and due to that it happens that a human remains only a human, from birth until death.

Emotional experience and moods are thus delimited in this way; although this delimitation is physically impalpable, it is solid, as if a person was internally enclosed by a fortress wall. Hope that an easy escape from this iron cell exists, is indeed unavailing, even though to countless people it seems like their spatial demarcation in psyche is chimerical, insubstantial.

Because of this reason, it is essential to understand the psychological setting of physical beings as very solid and starkly real, no matter how unlimited we may find our possibilities are to supply ourselves with predominantly sensory joys.

However, mystical development thrives only through a causeless joyfulness, produced and maintained by will, wanted and resisting every influence by which the Nature or worldly fate-related accidental events, would want to change this state. This kind of joyfulness is thus no longer produced by some change in the being – some feeling, some event, which then later only manifested itself by an overpowering, a carrying away of the person's psyche. On the contrary, it is a joyfulness always guarded by will, which is always ready to intervene in a moment, when, due to some outer reasons, it weakens or disappears.

In psychological terms this means that a person has internally taken hold of themselves and finally started to rule their psyche, while until then they were only a plaything of forces, which were rippling their psyche. From a straying, staggering, or "tossing" of their psyche, a direction has arisen, whose goal is a consolidation of joyfulness, which must no longer be for them "within the reach of their psychological arm", but a state, which imprints optimism in the mind and consciousness and drives out every trace of pessimism.

Mystically, this state means the attainment of a platform of experiencing of either paradisiacal or celestial, or supercelestial beings, according to the depth and purity of his or her joyfulness, as all beings of these three supertelluric spheres are categorised by the very degree or quality of their joyfulness.

A human being has, perhaps due to their physical set-up, also a possibility to penetrate through the states of joyfulness into the superjoyous world, which is, from a mystical point of view, a state of salvation. However, this doesn't depend on their will to set this target and then to reach it, for, to leave this world is never that easy. As, the path has to be determined by the moods of the being and not by the will. All joys, which were the ideal of a person, have to be experienced, even though they were superworldly joys and no matter how remote they were from sober reality. Due to this reason, yogic or in general every method of spiritual development, shortens the way to absolute emotional satisfaction of every individual by a systematic bathing of the body in supersensory bliss; only then a person finds themselves on a so-called spiritual path, on a path of spirit, which sinuates above the level of every kind of feeling.

Those who would like to avoid this "roundabout way", marked only by mood states,

the roundabout way on the so-called Direct mystical path, will be thrown down by their own being, by themselves, because they will surely cling to one of the new, and, till this time unknown joys, which are developing on the Direct mystical path.

An unwise lay person can thus think about the path of mystical and spiritual development whatever they want, but they can never avoid the fulfilment of all of their desires reaching for pleasures, perhaps sensory, perhaps supersensory, which are, despite everything, only sensory pleasures. For, this is the reality, stemming from a psychological law. From this very psychological law it follows, that a life process can never be finished by an intervention of will, but always only by living through, and perhaps even living-out everything, which was predetermined by the arisen desires.

Even the most sophisticated forms of Indian asceticism failed due to the lack of knowledge of this fact. They were conceived to suppress the driving forces of being and these forces have always slipped out of the hands of the will of every ascetic, like snakes with a slippery skin. Even when these ascetics engaged against them ardent suffering, they didn't succeed because, by that, they have only developed feelings of suffering, which were a process by which hellish states were realised, and never the heavenly or superheavenly ones.

The knowledge, which created this opinion about asceticism, however doesn't mean the approval of apolausticism. Apolausticism is only something like an allopathic treatment of the soul deeply diseased with sensory desire, and thus has nothing in common with the intended mystical joyfulness. The latter results from inner freedom or from inner freeing, the basis of which is the flight of a healthy spirit into the far-flung inner spaces. Only when a person, by admitting the influences of continual sensory stimulation will become ill in their spirit, sensory cravings unfold in them, and these will replace the inner freedom of an emotionally and mentally healthy human, uncorrupted by sensory wanting.

When a person loses this inner health, they will start to constantly seek sensory excitements, which make the body vibrate with an emotional or tactile gratification. When this happens, the joyfulness of an internally relaxed person will disappear from their memory. They will then start to believe only in a substitute of the true joyfulness, in the sensory excitements. These, as indulging in physical feelings, do not make them stronger and healthier, but are driving them into a hangover by whose repetition they will get extensively ill in mind, body and spirit.

Therefore it is common, that those who start to search for solutions of the problems of life on the paths of mysticism, first have to heal themselves from an incorrect conception of the idea of joyfulness. They have to strive for distinguishing between that substitute springing from gratification of unbridled sensory desires, and the true joyfulness, which, in turn, springs from the overcoming of sensory desires. This however requires renunciation of the world, an asceticism of its kind, which follows from a genuine absence of craving. For, those who do not overcome sensory cravings in the broadest extent of this task, will never find the mystical goal. Only those, who have cured themselves from sensory desires by their total extinguishment, will.

The joyfulness required by mysticism is thus a causeless joyfulness, and such joyfulness is a production of work, often of very hard work, since human nature does, due to its karmic set-up, neither always wants to rejoice, especially without a cause, nor, of course, to suffer. It is even so bad, that it is impossible to find out what human nature does in fact want. This was perhaps described aptly only by Buddha, who talks about lepers, who alleviate their severe suffering by burning their sores above fire. Burning above fire is pleasant for this state, but for a truly healthy person it is a horrible suffering, by which only a suffering of another kind is alleviated.

We were, however, speaking about a causeless joyfulness. A wise analyst, who will use this method in an effort to climb up to spiritual perfection, will recognise that also their body is directly resisting this joyfulness. Namely, it prefers the peace of a lazy person who, due to their laziness, agrees with repeated falling into suffering for a few, quite rarely occurring almost absolute moments of sensory pleasures.

By this, the path of necessary and rigorous applying of causeless joyfulness in the process of usual human experiencing, is indicated, and determined. When, after a shorter or longer time, a person will push through this causeless joyfulness in themselves, they will arrive at an evident finding, that they have reached that first Buddhist jhana, by the further development of which they will go through further jhanas up to the state of indifference through which the radiance of spirit glows.

To prevent someone from thinking that I am inventing new, non-traditional and therefore perhaps also untrue theories, I will quote from the canonical texts of Buddhism:

“When a monk finds out, that by efforts to maintain a virtuous life he overcame the five hindrances (sensory desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and speculation, doubt), a feeling of contentment will arise in him. When he is content, joyfulness will arise in him. When he attains joyfulness, his body will calm down. Calmness of the body induces a feeling of happiness. Through the feeling of happiness his spirit will concentrate. And then he will dwell free from cravings and from unfortunate states in the first level of concentration, in the *first jhana*, which is, however, accompanied by impressions and thinking, which have arisen from solitude and are therefore accompanying this jhana by zealous interest and joyous happiness.”

“When, with continuous spiritual efforts, the impressions and thinking start to cease, a monk will attain inner peace, unity of spirit. Here he will be already dwelling in the second level of concentration, in the *second jhana*, which is free from impressions and thinking and which has arisen from concentratedness; then he will be filled with zealous interest and joyous happiness.”

“When the zealous interest ceases and the monk starts to dwell equanimous, fully conscious and vigilant and he will physically feel that joyous happiness, about which the noble monks say that equanimous and insightful monk is abiding happy, then he is dwelling in the third level of concentration, in the *third jhana*.”

“When a monk overcomes both joyous happiness, and all suffering, when the earlier satisfaction and solicitude disappears out of him, he realises the fourth level of concentration, he attains

the *fourth jhana*, which is experienced as suffering-free, pleasure-free and made clear by indifference and turning inwards.”

However, let us return to the requirement of the mystical teaching that a human is to be joyful.

We have already said that the mystical goal is beyond the celestial worlds, which in humans are symbolised by joyfulness and supersensory happiness. Joyfulness, as well as supersensory happiness, is physically felt just like as obstinacy, pessimism, anger and other negative inner and mental states. A person formed internally in the usual way is, however, always closer to these negative inner and mental states than to the states of causeless joyfulness. He or she is even hardly able to understand why they shouldn't rather get angry than rejoice without a cause, since, for their anger they have mostly immediate and real reasons.

However, here we are talking about mysticism and its goal. As, from the perspective of mysticism, those immediate and real reasons for their anger are also relative. Even if we leave aside the fact that the anger of a person always springs from their selfishness, by their sensory cravings, a general relativity, which also includes burning personal pains, pains which are flamingly urgent and according to their manifestations real, still remains.

It is a matter of fact, that a person can laugh even at these pains and, very often, when they already laugh at them, these pains will themselves prove to be relative. As, on the other hand, we can often observe in others that there is no more reason for their suffering, but, nevertheless, they still suffer because, to speak with irony, they fell in love with their suffering. After all, a rational person can always well understand that life consists of both pleasant and painful moments of emotional experience. When they understand this, they are already close to a philosophical discovery, that suffering as well as crazy joyfulness is only a matter of spirit and thus no one needs to suffer, but only to rejoice.

However, this is not the aim of mysticism, since it is an entirely factual teaching. It only has in view the fact that the mystical goal is even beyond the celestial worlds, into which a subject can get only by causeless joyfulness. From that follows, that, as the usual human set-up shows evidence of oscillation from suffering to some pleasant sensory excitements, this has to be altered by laying down only one line for it, a line of causeless joyfulness, which is a path to heaven.

A student of mysticism necessarily has to rejoice, because it means to get from the path of ascending towards joyfulness and then again descending into multiple hardships, to a path which is always ascending, first towards the consolidation of joyful moods and later to heavenly, and then super-heavenly states.

However, the passage from the fluctuating path, to the path which is constantly ascending requires an intervention into the innate laziness or a seeming inability to govern one's own states, one self. That is, though, difficult. Experience will, however, show that this difficulty isn't great. For, when a habit of rejoicing is created, the joyfulness will often seize a person and then it only suffices to be attentive, not to let it disappear in the flood of accidental daily events and circumstances.

When a person is able to easily watch over it, they will arrive at an evident discovery, that they have entered an ascending path in emotional experience, moving toward higher and better states of the spirit. There will be an evident finding that they are going towards heaven and this is then a result of walking a constantly ascending path through life. Even the sense of vision will develop for this perception. Those joyful states, mirrored only in feeling, will suddenly reveal themselves as a path leaving human life, which sinuates from suffering to pleasures, and then entering paradises, which, if they aren't visually perceived immediately, will begin to be gradually perceived more and more.

After stabilising themselves on the ascending path of developed causeless joyfulness, everyone will be able to clearly detect, that they are on a path into sensorily perceivable heavens. If they behave correctly, they will learn that even heavenly experience isn't in essence a desirable experience; that only peace above joys is acceptable, because it is a state of inner inexcitability, while joys occurring from the subhuman states up to the heavenly ones contain something imperfect and disintegrative in them.

But, joyfulness is not only an emotional state. It is a tingeing factor, which will take hold of a human being as an object and transform it; and this transformation of the being is actually the point. For, no matter what philosophies exist about the solving of life, psychological and philosophical problems, the unchangeable fact remains, that the mind and consciousness are only filled with that, with which the qualities of the body are filling them. In this regard, causeless joyfulness, which has filled up the body by means of will, begins to have a feedback effect. If this joyfulness corresponds qualitatively to heaven or heavenly states, however high they might be, it will always internally fill up the person. This is the basic condition of an evident certainty, that a person is already released from inner contents belonging to humanness and often literally overwhelmed by inner contents qualitatively corresponding to heaven.

No. Mysticism really isn't concerned with chimeras or some philosophy which will in the end suggest to a person some peculiar thoughts, images, convictions and other similar things of a psychological character. The point in it is only a change of the inner content, which is in the common humanness documented by fluctuation of the consciousness from sensory joys, which have a character of sensory excitements, to experiences of suffering, which are perceived as reality. Therefore, the mystical practice is about an attack of will on the existing inner set-up, which lets us oscillate from sensory pleasures of a dubious value, to suffering. The will is forcing causeless joyfulness on the being for so long till the being accepts this content and begins to have an effect with it into the consciousness, where it will then manifest itself as a new content, in this case always superteluric and spiritual, though usually with a touch of supersensory happiness.

Because of this reason, practical mysticism can be classified into the scientific system of psychological forming, which, through the use of joyfulness, reshapes the whole inner beingness. It will change its emotional states and by means of qualitatively improved joyfulness will raise it in an objective sense, from sensuality into transcendence. The only point is thus joyfulness, predominantly a causeless one. Those who do not apply this joyfulness, because they believe that it is not the right

effective means in the order of psychological things, will not be successful in raising themselves into the transcendental world, no matter what philosophical system of spiritual education they may turn to.

The means in mysticism are as simple as the lived sensory life itself. Correctly used causeless joyfulness leads to knowledge, only out of which the philosophy known as spiritual grows. If this philosophy doesn't spring forth from this joyfulness, it is always only a series of speculations, which will lead their wearer to a spiritual, and oftentimes general, ruination.

Therefore, it is necessary to rejoice. The very joyfulness, in particular the causeless one, is that spiritual arrow, by which it is possible to bring down the seemingly uncontrollable human nature, which once wants to rejoice, and then after saturation by joyfulness again suffer, to never leave the fluctuating path and to prevent a person from ever escaping from suffering forever.

2 Why to concentrate

Concentration serves, above all, to the obtaining of knowledge. Thus, if even the most scatter-brained person has some knowledge, it means that they, now and then, settle on the perceived things for a while; only these fleeting moments of interest in something, thus actually moments of concentration, bring them knowledge.

We can deduce from this fact, that if such fleeting moments are sufficient to obtain some relevant knowledge, then a longer settling on the observed things will provide one with a knowledge, which is deeper. This logic holds true in the practical psychology.

However, we have in mind mysticism – a teaching, which can be considered, in the first place, a deep practical psychology. It is known in it, that each piece of knowledge, obtained by the settling of attention on the outer objects, is limited by the duration of this settling. This gave rise to the idea of concentration – how this term is understood in its conception. The experience with concentration has brought to the light of logical considerations an idea to use concentration for penetration beyond the curtain of the usual sensory perceptions.

In the initial stages of the mystical training, the results in the form of knowledge – especially outer knowledge – are not thought of. Only the need to prevent wandering of the mind is taken into account, in order for the knowledge not to become mingled with ideas produced by the inner, and in particular, psychological, structure of the beingness. These ideas have a direct relationship to the karmic contents of the being, which were obtained by birth. Therefore, when using the concentration of thinking, the only aim is to remove the mental wandering in order to achieve the platform needed for the pilgrimage along the mystical path all the way to its highest goal.

However, this platform would never be achieved if the concentration of the mind was too intensive; the goal is only to achieve an inner stability, which a mentally restless person lacks.

A mentally restless person can never be, and never will be a mystic. This statement cannot be refuted by the fact that most of the lay mystics are mentally restless people who largely speculate. These people have, also, actually brought out, to the level of the daily consciousness, their various hidden inclinations, whose excess makes them suffer; therefore their restlessness is their characteristic which makes them unable to remain with all senses on the ground. Given the diffuse character of their mind, only fantastical matters suit them. The common ignorance considers fantastical matters to be the mysticism in its true conception.

To concentrate is supposed to mean, in the first stage, retention of the reflexive functions of the mind and, in the second stage, its focusing or fastening. The initial stages of the mystical efforts should have no other aims. Therefore, by focusing of the mind, only its holding back is meant, when it tries to escape from the sober reality to fantasies. When a person succeeds in holding it back, they should let it rest on one object, which can be some place on the body; the mind's potential restlessness will not allow this state of it to continue for long, in any case; therefore this whole process is repeated over and over again.

After a long period of such constant striving to hold back the uncontrolled activity of mind, the mind will certainly stabilise. This is already concentration, by which the mystical path begins, but not at all the mystical development, because, it is only a state of mind which allows observing with sufficient attention in order for a person to obtain knowledge about things that they see around them, which they have earlier always only seen. In another sense, it means that he or she begins to walk the path of obtaining knowledge about the world and that their spirit will no longer be benumbed by the narrowing of consciousness, which occurs so easily when the so-called powerful or intensive concentration is used – i.e. a powerful concentration of the mind on one point or a sole object.

As soon as the mind, by the holding back of its spontaneous activity, becomes capable of a continuous maintaining of its calmness, while the developed observation ability, which brings the knowledge of the phenomena of the surrounding world, does not disappear, but on the contrary, it develops further, the mind can be led to concentration. For this, caution and forethought are needed, because, with the intensity of the mind's concentration, the danger of its fixation and narrowing of consciousness grows too, both of which usually accompany it.

It has to be achieved, that the attention, which is bringing thorough cognition of the things of the surrounding world, is maintained and even intensified, but only with regard to the concentration on a sole object, because, only a mind capable of illuminative observation of the outer phenomena is a terrain on which it is possible to build an all-penetrating concentration, which is a tool helping the person to penetrate all the way to the centre of all existence, without the mind being paralysed by narrowing resulting from fixation.

Let us, however, return to the initial stages of the methodical sequence of steps towards the concentratedness of mind. Its purpose is to turn a wandering mind into a mind, which does not wan-

der. When this is achieved, a person has gained a great benefit, because, it is precisely the wandering mind that is the cause of the inner conflicts and big difficulties which one encounters in their life. A wandering mind causes one to forget what should not be forgotten and to speculate, not only unrealistically and without success, but even in a way which gives rise to damage by means of various flaws in behaviour; it causes that things, which could be useful, escape the person's attention and that this even causes a lot of inner suffering, whose basis is inner chaos.

However, even though we know that the overcoming of the wandering of mind can be the basis of successes in the usual life, still we do not pursue this goal by it. We are adhering to the intentions of the mystical teaching which has in mind, in the first place, an improvement of the subjective state of a person – creation of his or her inner peace and, in the second place, the mystical knowledge which lies beyond the border of all usual life and emotional experience. Between these two poles, one finds also, all that which can make their life successful. Thus, from the beginning of the mystical training, when one begins to strive for the holding back of the functions of the ever-oscillating mind, all the way to the results which are apparently mystical, they gain a lot of the so-called good which relates to the outer things of their living.

Due to all this, mysticism is a teaching, which leads a person predominantly and all the time on the ground. It never leads them through the sphere of illusions, where live the fantasists and the seemingly mystical poets and in general everyone whose thinking, reasoning, feelings and view of life reflects their extravagant inner disposition, their idealism and ecstasiness.

However, we must complete our talk about concentration.

We correctly sense that mysticism has its goal somewhere in the transcendental sphere. It allows its followers to penetrate into it precisely by concentration. However, this only happens after the wandering of mind was overcome and when the mind has got used to a calm and factual observation of, and thinking about, everything that surrounds a person and belongs to their surrounding world. Only then it recommends using concentration of mind which, by means of the degree of its intensity, becomes a tool for penetration into the world of the physical qualities. According to the mystical teaching this means to penetrate into the world of forces which is, in another conception, the causal world in relation to everything which exists and is in the world.

What does this mean in practice?

When the mind has become accustomed to be calm and non-wandering, a person should devote themselves to its concentration. But, no matter which means to determine the aids for its concentration are used, the aim is always for it to penetrate beyond the borderline of all natural phenomena, in particular in the qualitative conception of this matter. A thorough awareness of oneself during this work with the mind is supposed to create a bridge for the consciousness; the latter one is required to, at all times, register the place and state of the mind without losing from its attention the "I" in the form of an idea of "I".

After this has been achieved, a person is well prepared for the stay on the borderline of two worlds,

the transcendental one and the immanent one, or, in one of them for the purpose of exploration and obtaining knowledge.

No. No one whose mind escapes to some far inner spaces where it can gather some evanescent and seemingly superworldly ideas and dreams, is a mystic. Only that person is a mystic, who is able to, with a rational conception of everything and with thinking of the same nature, move in the spheres of the so-called "only indicated phenomena", thus actually seed phenomena, out of which the phenomena only form. Therefore, mysticism is a psychology and not at all a system of peculiar disciplines which brings peculiar results. It is thus inappropriate to judge it to be a nebulous teaching, or even a confused doctrine for spirits blundering around in the fuzzy ideas out of which nothing concrete ever comes. The concentration of mind is supposed to do the opposite – to uproot this blundering. This is clearly indicated by the fact that it is supposed to be a conscious thinking, which uses its supports only to deepen the concrete thinking, to develop and improve it.

However, in the highest conception, concentration is both the Aqua regia and the analyser of the material and physical phenomena; these are means with which a person arrives at the knowledge of the universe both in the small and the grand scale, thus of the microcosm as well as of the macrocosm and by that also to the solution of the entire problem of suffering. However, I am repeating that concentration is like this only in its highest conception, because, the concentration of mind of the beginners on the path of the mystical initiation does not lead to anything like this. The reason for this is that their concentration is continuously polluted by a mixing in of emotions and various stimuli, which overshadow their "observer" by inner tensions, which constitute the efforts to obtain things, which are pleasing for the senses and gratifying cravings.

Therefore, this mixing in has to be taken into account. When it is not taken into account, then, although a person can take up a practical concentration of mind, still they, almost exclusively, continue to create relationships to the world, or, they continue with speculations, which will mix in their concentration as a consequence of the inborn emotional nature, which continues to be alive. Particularly with regard to this, it is necessary to consider the enlightening concentration to be only a conscious and vigilance-full focusing of the mind on one single thing. This thing is supposed to be, above all, the state beyond both all happening and all processes, by both of which the usual living of all creatures is characterised, including such a person who strives for his or her enlightenment, and uses for it not fully understood mystical means.

Due to all this, a person must train themselves towards concentration. Initially, they must focus their mind only cautiously. It is supposed to be a concentration, by means of which they are supposed to create the necessary conditions for a thorough observation of all processes which take place in their being and, furthermore, in the entire everyday living, however, primarily in themselves. Only then he, or she, can burden their consciousness, by means of the intensive concentration, with reactions, which are brought about by the direct and "hard-core" mental concentration to which they will devote themselves and by which they can attain enlightenment.

The reactions to the direct and hard-core mystical concentration are powerful. Every strained concentration has a danger contained in it that the consciousness will narrow down and then, instead of the development of the ability to obtain knowledge, only a property to become fixed will develop. This is though, a ground for the development of overwhelming emotions and drives, and also of the emotional clinging; by their action a person transfers from the path of knowledge to a path of indulging; however, in this case only a dreamlike indulging which is thus very far from reality.

This ending of, possibly even good, initial mystical efforts is quite a usual phenomenon. It is caused by the dilettantism, with which the mystical training is approached. Well, nothing can be done. Mysticism is not a scientific discipline and therefore we can find, even among the inexperienced mystics, a lot of seeming authorities whose work is now funny, now harmful and now malign. It is necessary to achieve a concentration, which will become the Aqua regia and the analyser of everything that exists and which must never become the causative agent of experiences, regardless of whether they are mystical, or only emotional.

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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.

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.

KUMĀRAJĪVA'S MEDITATIVE LEGACY IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The article shows that in China and other Far East countries, where Chinese Buddhism spread at the early stages of Mahāyāna Buddhism, traditional methods of Buddhist practice, as explained in the *Āgamas*, were in practice, but reinterpreted from the Mahāyānistic understanding. Eventually, in the periods following the decline of the Tang Dynasty those practices were mostly abandoned and replaced by pure Mahāyānistic meditation practices, especially those of the Chan (Zen) and Pure Land schools. It can be clearly seen from the meditation treatises discussed in this article, which are attributed to Kumārajīva, the most popular translator of Indian Buddhist literature in China. Actually, as Western researchers show, these treatises are likely to be notes of Kumārajīva's disciples, introduced into meditation by him.

Key words

Kumārajīva, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, meditation treatise

1 Legacy of Kumārajīva

All schools of Chinese Buddhism can claim link to the works translated by Kumārajīva, consisting of almost forty titles that are included in the *Chinese Tripitaka*. Some of them remained the most widely read and commented Buddhist scriptures in the Far East to the present day.

The profound influence that Kumārajīva exerted on Chinese intellectuals and yogis can be explained not just by his linguistic talents, but it must also be attributed to the power of his practice, which is unquestionable. There is a story about him saying that after his return to Kucha from Kashmir, where he went through his studies, a daughter of the king whose preceptor he was, fell in love with him and he consented to marry her. When his perplexed disciples enquired whether they should follow guru's example, he is said to have swallowed and digested a hand full of sharp needles, proclaiming that anyone who

can perform the same deed can indeed follow him.

In his late years, while translating Buddhist literature in changing, he is said to have been attempted by swarms of a beautiful female attendance presented to him by the emperor, who did not hinder in any way his working vigor, which is indeed prodigious. Kumārajīva is known in Chinese history especially as the translator of Mahāyāna sūtras, of which his translations of the *Lotus Sūtra* (T.262), the *Sūtra of the Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (T.475), the *Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra* (T.642), the *Daśabhūmikā Sūtra*, and the corpus of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (T.223, 227, 235, 245) remain some of the most commented works.

His translations of philosophical treatises like Nāgārjuna's *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra* (T.1509), *Mūlamādhjamika Śāstra* with Piṅgalacakṣu's commentary (T.1564), *Dvādaśamukha Śāstra* (K.1668), *Daśabhūmivibhāsa Śāstra* (K.584), Āryadeva's *Śataka Śāstra* (T.1569) and Harivarman's *Tattvasiddhi Śāstra* (T.1646) led to a foundation of different philosophical schools.

His translation of the *Amitābha Sūtra* (K.192) and some other works related to the visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Light (T.382, etc.), and his personal engagement in the Pure Land practice, contributed to the foundation of the Pure Land school, the most popular cult in the Far East to the present day.

His translation of the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa Sūtra* (K.198) and other works related to the cult of the Maitreya (K.195, etc.) also exercised a profound influence on many Buddhist thinkers and yogis.

His translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* in ten recitations (K.810), the *Sarvāstivādapratimokṣa Sūtra* (T.1436), the *Mahāyānavinayabrahmasāla Sūtra* (T.1484), and many other works on Vinaya (K.527, 539), some of which, like Buddha's *Dispensation Legacy Sūtra* (K.453), are still regularly recited in Chinese monasteries, greatly contributed to study of Vinaya in China and to establishment of a separate Vinaya school. These great contributions of Kumārajīva to Chinese Buddhism are well known to all students of Buddhism in the Far East.

In order to understand how Kumārajīva managed to combine many aspects of the Buddhist learning into a harmonious whole for achieving the aim of Buddhist study, namely to benefit oneself and others, it is worthwhile to study one of the least known part of his work, his translation of the meditation treatises.

Most of them are grouped together in the *Chinese Tripitaka* under the numbers T.613–616, and we shall devote this study to descriptive analysis of them. They show clearly how the Vaibhāsika Sautrāntika meditation methods coexisted from an early stage with a new Mahāyāna Mādhyamika ideological outlook forming a convergent whole.

The Mahāyāna teachings were at first addressed to Śrāvakas well versed in the traditional Buddhist lore with the aim to enlarge the horizons of their understanding of already well-known practices. The success of Mahāyāna in China in the period when the so called *Hīnayāna Canon* was already known is practically due to the skill with which the traditional stuff was presented in the new

Mahāyāna containers emphasizing *bodhicitta* and a deeper understanding of Emptiness.

Kumārajīva, who is also the translator of treatise *On Arising Bodhicitta* (T.1659) and the propagator of *bodhicitta* in China, was especially skillful in preserving the old wine in new barrels, and the following treatises on meditation are witnesses of his skill.

The first meditation treatise we propose to discuss here is entitled *The Sūtra Concerned with Samādhi in Sitting Meditation* (坐禅三昧经, T.614, K.991). It is called *sūtra*, but in fact it is a typical treatise on meditation, which may have been compiled and taught by the translator himself.

After a masterly presentation of the theme of impermanence and urgency with a brief mention of the need of purification by morality and repentance for sin, the author introduces five practices leading to *samādhi*.

They are to be chosen after investigating, which of the three poisons is prevalent in the yogis. It is to be decided after a study of inclinations manifested in behavior. If craving is prevalent, it is to be countered by *contemplation of the repulsive* (*aśubhabhāvanā*). If it is hatred, it must be countered by *meditation on love* (*maitrī*), and delusion is countered by *contemplation of causality* (*pratīyasamutpāda*). To counterpart useless thinking, there is the *mindfulness of breathing* (*anapānasmṛti*), and finally for yogis of all inclinations, to purify the mind from past sins, there is the *recollection of Buddha* (*Buddhānusmṛti*).

There are seven innovations this treatise brings about in dealing with well-known material. To start with it extends the traditional

division of yogis into beginners (初习行), advanced (已习行) and well versed (久习行), used normally (see *Abhidharmakośa*, *Samyuktābhidharma*) for contemplation of the skeleton (白骨), to all meditation themes presented.

So in case of the *loving kindness meditation*, the beginner contemplates with *maitrī* persons dear to him, an intermediate those neither liked nor disliked, and only an advanced yogi brings enemies to mind.

As for the *contemplation of causality*, a beginner contemplates just two links, first and last. An intermediate contemplates the first ten links, and only an advanced yogi extends his meditation to all twelve links in three times. In *mindfulness of breath*, a beginner does counting, an intermediate follows the breath in whole body, and an advanced yogi calms the breath by entering successively the *four dhyānas* and does the transitional sixteen exercises to get the mastery of the object. In the *recollection of the Buddha meditation*, a beginner trains in concentration on an image of Buddha, an intermediate contemplates the primary and secondary marks of great man, and an advanced yogi extends his contemplation to countless Buddhas in all directions and listens to them preaching the Law. He contemplates both their *physical bodies* (身身) and their *body of Law* (法身), seeing one Buddha as endless Buddhas and innumerable Buddhas as one. After explanation of these five meditation topics the treatise examines the practice of five worldly supernatural powers followed by a brief mention on insight meditation by contemplation of sixteen aspects of the *Four Noble Truths*.

Next topic is a successive realization of the *four roots of merit* (四善根), leading through the path of seeing and meditation to the attainment of Arhathood. Following this, the author explains three kinds of realization: *Śrāvaka*, *Pratyekabuddha*, and *Bodhisattva*, and praises the practice of bodhicitta, leading to the attainment of Buddhahood.

The last part of the treatise takes us through the first three practices counteracting greed, hatred, and delusion, but with a perspective of the highest realization. Here, the Bodhisattva with craving being predominant, contemplates the thirty-six bodily parts until he becomes disgusted with body. When disenchanted by it, he gives rise to a great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) and bodhicitta. Then he takes vows to save himself together with all sentient beings from suffering caused by rejoicing at bodily impurities and other perversions, such as seeing permanence in impermanence and self in non self.

With the deepening of his contemplation he attains the true mark of all phenomena, Emptiness. In it all distinctions between pure and impure cease to exist.

If a Bodhisattva inclines to hatred, he meditates on love (*maitrī*), being its opposite. When he succeeds to spread it in all directions without getting involved in discrimination between different kinds of individuals, he takes a vow to save all beings without difference by leading them to the ultimate happiness of Nirvāṇa. Due to this practice his mind becomes like a great ocean, which cannot be affected by little dirt or burning afflictions that harm other beings, and he learns to practice the perfect *maitrī samādhi* of Bud-

dhas that is without object and continuous (*apranihita samādhi*, 无缘三昧).

A Bodhisattva with the predominance of delusion, after mastering the *samādhi on the twelve links of interdependent origination* together with the *practice of the thirty-seven factors of Enlightenment*, contemplates the *absence of self-existent nature of all entities* (*niḥsvabhāva*, 无自性), while cultivating bodhicitta. Thus he learns the *middle path* as being non different from Nirvāṇa, the true state of all beings.

Besides these we find several other innovations, making it different from the standard Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna literature. So, for example, we have a division of the objects of the concentration of the repulsive dead bodies according to seven kinds of thirst (*trshna*) instead of the usual six or four (see *Abhidharmakośa*, *Yogācārabhūmi*, etc.). The objects of *maitrī meditation* are three, as in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, but the first, sentient being is related to the practice of Śrāvakas, the second, dharmas is related to the practice of Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas, while the third, objectless maitrī refers to the practice of Bodhisattvas only.

The second meditation treatise (T.616) entitled *A Basic Explanation of the Methods of Meditation* (禅法要解) is about the same length as the previous work. It emphasizes the practice of the *eight attainments* (*samāpattis*) as a base for insight meditation. After it supplies a rather detailed description of the practice of the five worldly supernatural powers with a Mahāyāna emphasis on using them for realization of Emptiness.

The treatise starts with a brief reminder of

importance of morality, then it handles the meditation on impurities as the first contemplation, because sensual desires, which it counters, are said to be the main obstacle of deep meditation. This meditation is of two kinds, with repulsive feelings, that is *meditation on dead bodies in different stages of decay* (*avijñānaka*, 无识身), and *meditation on the thirty-six bodily parts* (*savijñāna*, 有识身), and *without repulsive feelings* (非恶严). The second is *meditation on bare bones* (白骨), particularly on a spot between the eyebrows, which leads to higher absorptions in subtle forms (*rūpa dhyānas*, 色界禅).

The meditation on dead bodies is divided into six groups in accordance with six kinds of desires, which it counters. It is said, together with the contemplation of the thirty-six bodily parts, to lead to disgust not only with sensual desires, but also with the whole sphere of perceptions dominated by them (*Kāmadhātu*, 欲界). In this connection verses attributed to Maudgalyāna, one of the foremost disciples of Buddha, are quoted.

He is said to have uttered them to a beautiful woman trying to seduce him. They make an interesting comparison with the verses we find in *Theragāthā*.

After describing the *practice of understanding and leaving the five obstacles to meditation* (*nīvaranas*, 五盖), the treatise leads us from the first to the fourth *dhyāna* with some interesting discussions on the difference between the five factors of absorption (*dhyānāṅga*, 禅支). It lays a particular emphasis on the mastery of the *fourth dhyāna* as the base for the attainment of all important dharmas of meditation, naming the *Four Divine Abodes*,

four foundations of mindfulness, four formless meditations, four truths, and the six supernatural knowledges.

The second set of themes, discussed as most suitable objects for the attainment of appeasement, are the Four Divine Abodes (*brahmavihāras*), where only the description of *meditation on loving kindness* (*maitrī*) is more detailed. The treatise proclaims that a yogi practices the *maitrī* meditation until he can actually see all beings happy due to the power of his loving kindness determination. There a question arises, if so, can it be considered a perverted view (*viparyāsa*)?

The answer is no, because a Bodhisattva has to practice two kinds of *samādhi*, namely that of seeing of the true characteristic of all things, i.e. their Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and that, which sees things in accordance with their use in benefiting oneself and others (观法利用). This is an interesting variant of two kinds of attention often discussed in Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna literature (see *Abhidharmakośa*, *Tattvasiddhi Śāstra*, *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra*, etc.), namely attention in accordance with facts (*tattvamanasikāra*, 真理作意), and attention according to one's determination (*adhimokṣikīmanasikāra*, 胜解作意).

The treatise emphasizes that a Bodhisattva should practice loving kindness to make happy even the beings in evil states of existence, and to avoid being harmed by others. Then he practices compassion, identifying himself with the suffering of all beings and actually seeing them suffering, but this is to lead him to the realization that all dharmas have no fixed nature, they change according to the conditioning of the mind.

If he can see this truth clearly, the supreme Enlightenment becomes easy to achieve, not to speak of all the other dharmas. Thus contemplating the impermanence of all feelings, he masters all feelings by means of the elevated feelings of the Four Divine Abodes. Their mastery leads to a perfect detachment with equanimity. The equanimity (*upekṣā*), which leads to the state of awakening, is, however, mastered by a Bodhisattva only after attaining the perfection in the previous three abodes. After discussing the absorption in the realm of subtle forms (*rūpa dhyāna*) with the help of the two above-mentioned themes, the treatise discusses formless absorption (*arūpa dhyāna*). It says that in the sphere dominated by sensual desires (*kāma*), the aggregate of corporeality (*rūpa*) is dominant. In the sphere of perception dominated by subtle forms (*rūpa dhātu*), the aggregate of feelings is predominant, while in the formless sphere, it is the aggregate of consciousness that dominates. Thus the experience of all three is important.

After experiencing all planes of perception, a yogi is led to contemplate all the compounded as sickness, prison, etc., and to insight meditation with the penetration into the Four Noble Truths. According to the state of a yogi, the Four Noble Truths are said to be of two kinds, namely truths and Noble Truths. The first belong to the unenlightened persons, while the second are realized after the path of seeing. The treatise is concluded with a rather detailed description of the *practice of the five supernatural knowledges* (*abhijñā*, 神通).

In the explanation the emphasis is on the Bo-

dhisattva practice of benefiting others while contemplating Emptiness, where all things remain in the state of being free from all real characteristics (无相). Thus, for example a Bodhisattva, while practicing the divine seeing, sees all sentient beings as being reborn and dying in accordance with their karma, but never gives rise to the concept of beings. He sees their corporeality without grasping the sign of corporeality, etc., and in the same way for all the other phenomena of perception, including the perception itself.

The third treatise on meditation (K.1010) entitled *A Brief Consideration of the Essential [Meditation] Methods* (思维略要法) can be described in terms of eleven themes, starting with emphasis laid on one's own effort without which much learning is said to be of no use.

After that, the first meditation introduces the readers into the *practice of the Four Divine Abodes* (*brahmavihāras*). The treatise proclaims them to be the first meditation to be practiced by all wishing to attain the supreme Enlightenment. However only the practice of loving kindness is dealt with in this part. It is said that by meditation on breath the boundaries between those who are liked, disliked or neither liked or disliked, a yogi can easily get an intuitive understanding of the sameness of all dharmas with certainty concerning the *non arising of dharmas* (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*, 无生法忍).

The next meditation discussed is the *contemplation of the repulsive* (*aśubhabhāvanā*) in terms of thirty-six bodily parts that are said to lead for a Mahāyāna yogi to a rebirth in the Tusita heaven at the presence of Buddha Maitreya.

The next topic is *meditation on skeleton* (白骨), connected with perception of light inside and outside, which leads to such a clarity of vision that the continuity of impermanent mind appears in the purified skeleton as clearly as a thread inside a bored jewel. (Well-known comparison appearing in the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, and elsewhere.) Afterwards, the *practice of recollection of Buddha* (*Buddhānusmṛti*, 佛随念) is discussed, being the main meditation theme of this treatise, with which all other topics are connected.

Here, the first meditation is a visualization of a Buddha image, where a yogi is led to keep it in front of his mind continually, in whatever posture he may be. This will lead him to an intuitive understanding that the clarity of the image is due to the power of concentration.

Next meditation theme is the *visualization of the born body of Śākyamuni Buddha* (生身, i.e. *nirmānakāya*) with the marks of the great man and with a visualization of the important events of his life. It is said to lead to a limitless joy, and it is connected to the next *meditation on the dharma body* (法身).

This body, however, is not understood as suchness in the Mahāyānistic sense, but refers to unthinkable qualities of Buddha like ten powers, etc. A concentrated contemplation of these qualities is said to lead away from the bondage of *saṃsāra* to the realization of certainty of non-arising.

Next mediation starts with the visualization of one Buddha in the East direction, sitting in the lotus posture and preaching the Law, increasing the number by ten, hundred and so on until infinite Buddhas are seen. The same procedure is to be adopted for the south and

all other eight directions.

The next meditation is the *recollection of the Buddha Amitāyus and his Pure Land*. It is to be visualized step by step by those of dull faculties, while a yogi of sharp intellect is to visualize bright space in front of him with a Buddha seated in its middle with determination to be born there.

Next meditation is on the true characteristics of all dharmas (*śūnyatā*). A yogi contemplates all dharmas as born of causes and conditions without his free choice. They are to be seen as illusionary names and concepts without any dwelling of their own, unborn in reality and therefore uncompounded and ultimately pure. This is to lead to certainty of non-arising. However, if a yogi does not succeed to attain it, he is to contemplate all arising and passing away of phenomena as a disease, cancer etc., till his mind becomes so subtle that all kinds of colors radiate from his body. This is to be seen as a true nature of all things inside and outside. He visualizes Amitāyus Buddha in this radiance, contemplating the *saṃsāra* as unreal, like a dream, giving rise to compassion for all caught in it due to their perverted minds. This is said to lead to two certainties (忍), the certainty as to sentient beings as non-arisen (众生忍), without giving rise to any false views, and the certainty as to dharmas non-arisen (法忍), seeing them as ultimately pure and empty. He transfers his merits to all sentient beings with the determination to be reborn together with them in the Pure Land of Amitāyus.

Finally the meditation leading to the *samādhi of lotus flower* is discussed (法华三昧观). Here, a yogi visualizes the Śākyamuni Buddha sit-

ting together with the Buddha of Many Jewels (多宝佛) in a stūpa made of seven precious substances on the vulture peak, preaching the *Lotus Sūtra* and revealing Infinite Buddha lands in all directions. He preaches one vehicle for all beings, which is the ultimate appeased nature of all dharmas. They all possess one characteristic – a complete purity. If a yogi practices in this way, all desires and obstacles are said to disappear naturally, effortlessly.

The last sūtra belonging to this group of meditation scriptures, expounding the Mahayana ideas on the bases of the traditional meditation methods, is entitled *The Sūtra of the Secret Principles of Meditation* (K.798) (禅密要法经, T.7613; K.798). It is the longest scripture in this group, consisting of three scrolls. The description of the great variety of meditation techniques and stories that it contains is beyond the scope of this paper; nevertheless a brief note of its interesting structure can broaden our understanding.

The meditations expounded here are loosely related to three topics expounded by Buddha to three monks on three different occasions. They are the *contemplation of the repulsive*, the *mindfulness of breath (anapānasmṛti)*, and the *analysis of the four elements* (大分别). These three expositions form a background to further discussion on more than twenty other meditation topics addressed to Ānanda, and are interspersed by other questions to Buddha asked by yogis – such as how beings in the future are to purify themselves from sins. In connection with the contemplation of the repulsive, a yogi is led to visualize various kinds of worms inhabiting the human body.

Then he meditates on light emitted from his skeleton, illumining beings in all the Buddha regions. This is followed by samādhi contemplating the selfless nature of all phenomena, where the scattered thoughts are visualized as fires burning ones body and emptiness as refuge from them. Various kinds of other contemplations on the repulsive are then linked to the meditation on the four elements, connected again to contemplation of the selfless nature of all corporealities (*rūpas*) and to their mastery by such techniques as the exchange of oneself for others and enlarging objects to infinite dimension and focusing them at one point alternatively.

After that we find an exposition on meditation on loving kindness and the Four Noble Truths, and another long exposition on analysis of the four elements related to meditation on their essential purity. Here, a yogi visualizes a lotus in the heart along with elements originating from it one by one filling the universe and returning back to it again. This is followed by contemplation on unreality of the *four elements* and of the *five aggregates of existence* in general, as they are bound to them. They are all to be seen as mere names, results of causes and conditions, and empty of an independent nature. After this, a yogi is led to visualize the four elements again, going out from all pores of his body into emptiness, which is extended to all universes. This visualization is linked to an exposition on the *three liberating samādhis*, the *three doors to Nirvāṇa* as they are often called, that is the *samādhi of Emptiness* (空三昧), *desirelessness* (无愿三昧), and *signlessness* (无相三昧), by the realization of which a yogi is led to realize the perfect state of neither rejoicing in Nirvāṇa

nor disliking samsāra. On the other hand, the meditations connected with objects, like the meditation on impurities, on breath or on the elements, are said to lead to rebirth in Tusitain presence of Maitreya.

The treatise ends with a long prediction of the future decline of the Law.

2 Conclusion

The present article is to show that at the early stage of spreading of Mahāyāna teachings in China traditional Sarvāstivāda methods of meditation were used together with the new Mahāyānist methods and evaluations that became eventually completely predominant by the end of the Tang Dynasty and in the period of five dynasties following it.

The emphasis on analytical meditations characteristic for the early history of Buddhism in China has been gradually abandoned in favor of meditations emphasizing the Buddha nature and Pure Land contemplation. The study of treatises translated by Ven. Xuan Zang and Kumārajīva, which put emphasis on the practice of the *four foundations of mindfulness*, were discontinued in most of the monastic institutions in China. The revival of this tradition appeared only by the end of Qing Dynasty, when many Chinese monks, such as Ven. Tai Xu, but especially lay followers like Han Qing Jing or Liang Qi Chao or even Chan masters like Xu Yun, pointed out their importance for understanding of Buddhism in general.

The meditation treatises attributed to Kumārajīva represent a transitional period in Chinese Buddhism, when the so called *Hīnayāna scriptures* were still widely studied

and appreciated. In that period of history, even in the first motherland of Buddhism, in India, there seems to have not been any significant rift between the communities of monks practicing the path to Arahathood, and those practicing the path of Bodhisattvas. This fact is well attested by travel reports of Chinese monks visiting India at that time like Ven. Fa Xian and Xuan Zang.

The meditation treatises discussed in this paper seem to have served as notes by disciples of Kumārajīva to his teachings on meditation. It seems that neither them nor Kumārajīva himself were interested in drawing a sharp line between the so-called Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, and purposefully avoided any conflicting views. If emphasizing the path of Bodhisattva, they did it without belittling the achievements of Arahats as in the later period. They rather, as in the early teachings of the *Transcendental Wisdom sūtras*, put emphasis on a unitary nature of all Buddhist teachings, only trying to show the advantages of the teachings emphasizing Emptiness.

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Ven. Dhammadipa (1949) has been a Buddhist monk since 1986 in both Southern (Theravāda) and Northern (Chinese) traditions of Buddhism. He has published several books in Chinese, which are collections of his teachings in Taiwan collected by his students, mainly concerned with meditation in the Theravāda Abhidharma tradition such as: *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, *The Introduction into Abhidharma*, *The Four Noble Truths*, *The Four Divine Abodes*. He also translated Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* into Czech, and some other treatises like Aśvaghōṣa's *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* from Chinese, and Mahāyāna *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* also from Chinese to be published next year. He also translated *The Short Introduction to Meditation Methods* by Kumārajīva, which is briefly discussed in the present paper.

Dhammadipa has been teaching Buddhism at several Buddhist institutes and universities such as Fa gu shan, Fa guan shan, Yuan guan in Taiwan, Hong Kong University, Pune University, Somaiya University in Mumbai, and Nalanda University in India.

THE LIFE MODEL OF NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ AS INTERPRETED BY RAMESH BALSEKAR

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ABSTRACT

Ramesh Balsekar (1917–2009) was a disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981). Nisargadatta Maharaj lived in Bombay and taught what he realized: For doing our *dharma* everything is provided for us. Thus we can focus our attention on discovering “Who one is” and let life flow. In 1996 the author of this article had a short conversation with Ramesh Balsekar, who presented his way of understanding the teaching of Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Key words

Nisargadatta Maharaj, Ramesh Balsekar, submission to God, Self-enquiry, life flow

1 Introduction

Usually we consider “free will” to be granted. The level of freedom in applying free will differs from school to school, but is usually the motivation towards making effort related to achieving the aims of life. It is specially so, if the aim of life is defined as to get to “know one-self”. Ramesh Balsekar shows a different approach. Life (*prarabdha karma*) puts us at a given moment to a family, situates us at a given place in a given time. It also gives us a certain personality and the greater en-

vironment, where we have to participate in life processes. On the way, we either move along without creating new *karma* by following our *dharma*, or we pave our way with a lot of new karma that are related to differences between the ideal dharmic activity and acting in a way that does not take into consideration one’s dharma.

Yoga, for that matter, developed an amazing set of processes that could help soothing our tendencies and get sufficient energy for stilling the mind and achieving Self-realization. It defines the principles of *yama* and *niyama*, which could form a basis for interpersonal interactions. It assumes, that with effort we can change also our life circumstances and eliminate also our various counter-produc-

tive mental tendencies (*vāsanās*).

Nisargadatta Maharaj, however, feels differently (Nisargadatta 1994). What he realized upon practicing “*ātma vichara*” as given to him by his Master Siddharameshwar Maharaj, is that the Universe provides everything that we need for life – be it a famous, rich, average life, or life in poverty. Thus we should have faith in the universal system, which provides us with exactly what we need or deserve. If we accept it, then our energy can be fully invested into Self-discovery.

The need to know our Self (*Ātman*) as a goal of life is not a new notion, as even the basic Indian life model assumes that apart from living in accordance with the concept of dharma, having appropriate degree of wealth, and having suitable enjoyments, one has to achieve also *moksha* – “liberation” (Self knowledge). But as regards reliance in God’s provision, Ramesh Balsekar conveyed a model that is not easy to put into practice.

2 The dialogue

The original English sound track on a cassette got lost and so the text given below is retranslated to English from the Czech translation of the dialogue by Ivo Sedláček.

The dialogue happened during the visit of Gejza [Geza] M. Timčák (Q) and Ivo Sedláček at the home of Ramesh Balsekar (A) in Bombay, India. We are both grateful to Ramesh Balsekar for his willingness to have this dialogue. Regretfully, Ramesh Balsekar is no longer with us, so we could not consult him further, regarding the points that were raised by him.

A There is one single basic question: whose will prevail in your own life (forget the rest of the world). Was it your will or God’s will? All is directed to this basic question. It cannot be that it is your will a bit and a bit of Divine will. This cannot happen. [Laughter] You cannot bargain with God – like that he will have a 80% will and I a 20% will. It is either your will or God’s will.

Q **But surely there exist something that could be called grace of God.**

A Yes.

Q **But this is like a lottery – one can win or one does not win.**

A Absolutely correct. Look for example to this: You were born in Czechoslovakia. [Note: I was not born in Czechoslovakia, but from the point of view of this conversation it is irrelevant.] Still for that matter, you could have been born in Ethiopia and be hungry.

Q **Naturally, it could have happened.**

A But instead of being hungry you have a quite comfortable life in Czechoslovakia. And I also have a quite comfortable life in India.

Q **It is true. Nevertheless, in order to win a jackpot in a lottery, one would have to buy a lottery ticket. Thus one has to do at least something in order to open this potential possibility.**

A Yes, yes. But tell me frankly: does everyone buy lottery tickets?

Q **Of course not.**

A So, even if someone buys a lottery ticket, it is a matter of his predestination or fate. Is it not so? [Laughter] Whether he gets a winning

ticket or not is another issue, but even the purchase of the ticket is a part of his path. Buying a lottery ticket itself is a grace of God. To phrase it differently – more than the grace of God, it is a part of your destiny. If you have to buy the ticket, you will buy it whether you want it or not. If you are to win the first prize, buying a ticket is a part of your destiny.

Q Still, if we take the grace as something that is outside the usual logical life process of the Universe, then there is a certain unpredictability...

A Yes – unpredictability is the very basis of all life. Nothing really is predictable. This is also a finding of modern science – like *the uncertainty principle* (see Heisenberg's uncertainty principle; Clark 2015), when describing the path of atoms and electrons. The scientists declared that everything should be predictable; every movement of elementary particles within an atom, the world would not exist.

Q But the practical question is: Is it possible to attract Grace?

A If it is to happen, why not?

Q Still, Grace does not belong to the deterministic processes, and it is more a probabilistic process.

A Yes. But first of all, there should be someone, who should get this Grace. Geza should get God's grace. But is there a Geza? This is the key problem. Everything that exists here, is an organism formed of body and mind. It is in a way programmed according to its natural characteristics. This organism is in its essence a programmed device. And how could a programmed device get Grace? If you would

make a computer and fit it with a programme, how could that computer, which you have programmed in an exact way obtain or not obtain your grace? It is impossible. It is impossible to attract grace. The only thing you can do is to pray. Nevertheless, you cannot know, whether your prayer will be successful or not. Thus the only thing that is open to you is to pray, to ask. But whether your prayer will result in God's grace will depend on your destiny or predestination. So finally we arrive to the conclusion that God's will and God's grace depends on your destiny and predestination. Some seek power, others money. Others still seek God. What I want to say is this: it is only because God wants you to seek him that you seek him. Seeking God and wisdom was not your choice. Even the one who seeks money does so not because it is his decision. He collects money because God wants him to collect money. Someone wants to have power, because it is God's will that he strives for power. And it is the will of God that you seek spiritual things, that you seek the Truth or God, as God wants you to do that. When one understands this, one can tell only that: I seek God, but because of this I do not look at others, who seek worldly things as standing at a lower level. Should you think that you seek God and that it is your choice, then you would say: the others opted for money or power and so I can look at them from above. But as I know that the others do things that God wants them to do, I cannot consider them as ulterior, but have to consider them as fully equal. All are tools in the hands of God. You can call that God, Highest Consciousness, Absolute, the Highest or in whichever way – it does not matter.

The only real path to real Knowledge and comprehension is to fully subject oneself to – and to accept God’s will. To subject yourself, give your “free” will to God. I accept the fact that I am only a miniscule part of the infinite non-personal Consciousness. This is one way – *jñāna*. The other way is *bhakti*: “O God, I am nothing, you are all.” Do what You want through me – this is the ultimate submission to the Will of God. But if you pray for something, then it is only a conditional submission. It is more of a bargaining with God: “O Lord, I now pray to you, but you have to do for me this or that.” Thus this would be a bargaining, not submission. Only a full submission would create the conditions for real inner wisdom to happen.

Q It looks as if this would be the easiest thing to do, but it is the most difficult one.

A It is not easy. But for whom is it not easy? Geza, understand please what I want to say: God does everything. Why should I even to want something? Why should I want to get the ultimate knowledge? If the ultimate realization is to happen, surely it will happen. The best thing I can do is to walk through life and to accept all that it brings to me, to be grateful to God for all the good that I have, for the favourable conditions that were given by Him and which others – for example in Ethiopia – do not have. Indeed I can say: “O God, you gave me life, you gave me a certain role to play, and I simply accept this role, and I play it, and move within the given limits. You placed me into certain conditions, relationships and situations. And I live within these limits in a way, which this frame enables me to live.” Everyone of us plays, and

has to play a role. If we accept this role as the will of God, then there is no real problem. Life becomes simple. I do not say that it becomes easier. Every life contains a number of difficulties and usual problems. Nevertheless, it becomes simple inasmuch I will understand that I cannot do anything else than to float along the flow of life. If I am able to live in this way, the mind is unable to create problems.

How does the mind create problems? There is a certain situation. The mind starts creating problem within this situation. The situation itself allows one to pass through it the best way possible. Then there is no problem. Really, it is only the mind that can make the situation worse.

Q Yes, in a way it is certainly easier, as the mind creates a lot of unnecessary problems.

A There has been a research project in this direction. The results have shown that 93% of all worries that we have, never materialize. 93%! If we accept the will of God and tell to ourselves: “O Lord, do what you consider fit to do,” then try to imagine the amount of energy you save. 93% of mental energy is consumed for forming imaginary problems. Only 7% of our worries will materialize. Let them happen. What if they happen? We will solve them. When the problem appears, we will start seeking a solution.

But why should we create non-existing problems in our mind? What is the principle of creating problems in our mind? It is drawing something from the past and projecting it to the future. Problems in the mind relate only to the future. The present moment does not contain many problems. All the problems

created by the mind relate to the imaginary future. If we fully accept that, which is in the present moment, life becomes incomparably easier. If there is a problem in the present, OK, we shall deal with it. We should not, however create problems through imagining the future. Let us live in the present moment. To live in God and to live with God means to live in the present. If we live in the present moment, the "I" or the ego ceases to function. The ego and the individual mind can function only in connection with the past or future. It is only when all the present moments are horizontally linked into time that the mind starts to exist. But if we exist only in the present, where is the ego and where the mind?

3 Discussion

At a first glance, the proposition of Balsekar looks fatalistic. [Note: It may have been influenced also by experiments of Benjamin Libet in 1981.] It looks like some of the modern *mahāvākyas*: "Do not do anything, just be." But in reality, it is like the case of monkeys in the Skinner boxes – the one that was nervous as it wanted to avoid the mild electric shock by pressing a lever at a right (but random) moment, died early of stress. The one that did not have the possibility to try to avoid that shock, got used to it. Even this is not a full implementation of the presented model as it also advises to use the provided resources that are granted for achieving our mission on Earth.

What is our mission? It can be known only moment to moment and it may change, so no simple model would be able to describe

it. So that "mission part" is to be dealt with, which the flow of life brings to us. We can strive for getting to know the Absolute, but the success depends on the provision of conditions, which depends on the will of God, and also on our karma. The karma is created through departure from dharma. But are we responsible if it is the will of God that puts us into the life situations? Well, we are responsible for our responses. We are responsible for the problems that the mind creates when our attention does not rest in the Present. Giving up our "free will" in favour of God in situations when we are not the masters of the processes is fuzzy as at moments, when those 7% of problems arise, we have to apply our mind, and thus we seem to have to depart from staying in the present moment. Sri Ramakrishna asked a disciple of him [note: Girish Chandra Ghosh], who was not able to do his spiritual practices regularly, to give him the power of attorney. He will do the spiritual practices for him, but under the condition that in every step of his life, he will cease to do, speak or think in the way "I will do it" and instead, he was asked to do it like "I will do it, if it is the will of God". The disciple acknowledged, that he thought it would make his life simpler, but giving up his "will" was one of the most difficult tasks of his life. Nevertheless, he did not regret it (Saradananda 1952, 328–329; Nikhilananda 1965, 956). A similar idea is expressed also in the *Tragedy of Man* (Madách 1962), where in the tenth scene, it is acknowledged that humans are subtly forced to do the Will of God. The final advice of God to humans represented by Adam is: "I told you, man: strive, be trustful and trust," meaning that whatever life brings

us, we have to get through it, subtly listening to the silent voice of God (i.e. devoid of life expressions).

Baleskar's comparing a man to a "robot" is incomplete, as robots do not have consciousness, whilst men have. In the *Vicharasangraha* (Maharshi 1994, 2–3), Ramana Maharshi when asked: "How to enquire 'Who am I,'" recommended the following: "making the corpse-body [note: devoid of life expressions] remain as a corpse, and not even uttering the word 'I', one should enquire keenly thus: What is it that rises as 'I'?" In this case, even though the body is regarded as "dead", i.e. a robot-like, the conscious choice of the *sādhaka* is to do this enquiry with mind kept unmoving, and when pure Consciousness is experienced, it causes the "ego" to "get destroyed" [note: which means, it will lose its dominance and will only serve as needed by life situations]. It means that if the karma of the *sādhaka* allows it, he/she can recognize the body as a "robot" and the Source of life as shining Consciousness.

Further, the prayer may be called meditation, if it does not formulate any personal wish except, e.g., that of being able to merge with the absolute Consciousness. So the areas that are difficult to cross are the individual wishes that we would direct to God for getting them fulfilled, whilst the wish to be able to realize the Absolute through staying in the Present, and thus out of reach of ego, mind, and time, seems to have a higher probability to happen. The individual karma, however would do as much as possible to prevent this from happening.

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EGO – OUR ENEMY OR FRIEND?

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ABSTRACT

The ego is a concept that in yogic contexts is having a low value as something that has to be get rid of as soon as possible. Still, the ego or *ahamkāra* is a part of human structure, which has a determinative importance in our life. The paper aims at giving some thoughts to this question, since it may point to possible misconceptions.

Key words

Ego, *ahamkāra*, yoga-darśana, *sāmkhya darśana*, *jñāna*

1 Introduction

The ego – *ahamkāra* has a noble position in the *sāmkhya* model of the manifested world. It is born in the *Mahat*, the great principle that appeared as the result of the reflection or creative throb of *Purusa* and of the form giving processes belonging to *Prakṛti*. The literature on yoga sometimes mis-assesses the *ahamkāra* and shakes off this concept like the physicians used to do with the appendix, which they considered as “useless” and fit for removal.

2 The history and role of *ahamkāra*

The ego in general can be defined as the organized part of the personality structure that includes defensive, perceptual, cognitive, and executive functions. Conscious awareness resides in the ego, although not all of the operations of the ego are conscious. In yoga ego is termed as “*ahamkāra*”. *Ahamkāra* is an entity that in practical yoga is usually taken as an entity to be “eliminated”, “conquered”, etc. In fact *ahamkāra* is one of the *antahkaranas*, together with *buddhi*, *chitta* and *manas*. *Ahamkāra*, as we know it, “evolves” from *Mahat* (termed also as *Buddhi*). *Ahamkāra* gives rise also to the five *tanmatras*, which then give rise to the five *bhutas* (Hariharananda 1984). The appearance of the *ahamkāra* is linked to a two-fold process. A “creative” re-

flection of Purusa gives rise to the possibility of I-am-ness (*asmita*). A devolute of the Prakṛti is Mahat, the first “created” entity that has definable properties and which gives rise to ahamkāra. Thus ahamkāra does not have the possibility of direct contact with Purusa. From ahamkāra – on the *tāmasika* (inclined to “materialize”) side, the *tanmatras* (properties of *tattvas*) and *tattvas/bhutas* evolve. They give rise to substance-like appearances that we may perceive as “matter” (Friedman 2015). On the *sattvic* side, from ahamkāra the instruments that are needed for perceiving the world are “created”: *manas* – mind, five cognitive senses, and five active senses (Bharati 2015). This is all what we need to move around on this *Bhu-loka* (i.e. the “material” universe that we perceive), sphere of our existence, where we experience our present life. *Bhu-loka* is the seventh existential level, and according to mystical sources (Vay 1923), humans started their existence on the level of *Jana-loka*, which is positioned five existential levels higher. The ahamkāra, when it started accumulating information on the life of the individual, contained all the data needed for “creating” our inner and outer appearance. Even though the Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* do not speak about this explicitly, the identification with the mind content (*vṛttis*) ties one to the “form and nature of *vṛttis*” (*Yoga Sūtras* I. 4). In verse I. 5 Patañjali speaks about *vṛttis* that produce *samskāras*. The *vṛttis* are formed by individual *kleśas*, “afflictions”, that stem from *karmāśaya* – the “domain of karmas”. *Samskāras*, the “unconsciously stored past impressions”, force the *vāsanās* – personal propensities – to appear (Bharati 2015). In this way Patañjali describes an analogous

stream of modifications to the one mentioned above.

To sum it up, the ahamkāra (ego) contains all the energies and information needed for creating an individual appearance. For every life span there is a portion of *karma* – effects of past lives – that have to be processed. By this it is meant that we are born into a pre-arranged environment – regarding social aspects (parents, family, colleagues, friends, etc.), spatial aspects (where are we born), temporal aspects (when are we born), etc. This is done from a position that takes time as a variable, which makes it possible to predict the type of events and situations, into which one is “led by the force of karma”, in order to learn to have the proper reactions that would not cause new karma to be formed and would free us from the pressure of past karmas. The information, which is channelled through ahamkāra, creates a personality type, a bodily outlook etc., using the *sattvic* instruments mentioned earlier. An even greater wonder is the “environment” where we are seamlessly inserted for a given life. Here every event that relates to us is shared by others and vice versa.

Knowing this, we should approach our own ahamkāra with awe. All the problematic *vāsanās* as well as the positive ones projected by the ahamkāra into the perceptible area of inner and outer events, are simply the expression of our (immediate or distant) past and when our relevant karma segment becomes ready for our understanding it, our perception related filters allow at first to feel the issue that is there to be solved and later – when we are ready to untangle our attention

from them, we can move towards solutions and absolutions.

Sri Ramana Gita (Ganapati Muni 1966, VII. 9–10) tells about this the following: “One whose mind is pure through *upasana* or other means, or by the merit of his deeds in past lives, whose mind perceives the imperfections of the body and sense objects and feels utter distaste whenever his mind has to function among sense objects and who realizes that the body is impermanent, he is said to be a fit person for *Self-enquiry*.”

Here the element of “distaste” is given, but is it not necessarily a negative sign, only the said person is interested in the discovery of the source of his consciousness, and thus all the rest are simply not interesting for him.

The same feeling is described in *Aparokshanubhuti* (Shankaracharya 1982, V. 4): “The indifference with which one treats the excreta of a crow – such an indifference to all objects of enjoyment from the realm of Brahma to this world (in view of their perishable nature) is verily called *vairāgya*.”

If our system gets ready for such dive inside, then anything else is a simple distraction which cannot really attract our attention and lessen the energy which we use for getting the chitta (i.e. working space of mind) still, so that it becomes transparent and we can realize what is beyond it. [Note: this paper pertracts only selected aspects of this process.]

Thus all our perceived properties – pleasant or unpleasant, kind, or arrogant, etc. – are only surface ripples on the scene projected by our ahamkāra (see Figure 1). When they no longer bind our energies, they become

powerless and the less “person-specific” aspects of I-am-ness get manifested.

Here the problem of free will may come to mind. If we are presented with such a well-designed set of life situations, what can we do about it? [Note: A short discussion on some aspects of this issue is given in the BBC documentary “Do you really make your own decisions”, but it discusses the issue in a “horizontal” way, not considering the “vertical” aspects displayed in Figure 1.] Is it something that we can influence? The dialogue with Ramesh Balsekar (Timčák 2015) indicates that we can rely on this “karmic arrangement” that provides us with all, what we need for this life and devote attention to recognizing and resolving the counter-productive reactions coming from our *vāsanās*.

Still, what can we do as regards “pulverizing the ego”, “annihilation of the ego”, etc.? In fact, from the above it follows that should the ahamkāra be annihilated, we – as we know ourselves – would cease to exist as all the information on us as an individual would get demodulated. When pondering upon this, whether it is good or bad, we can assume that as the ahamkāra does not have the possibility to come to direct contact with Purusa, we would perhaps exist only as a deleted file in a computer. We could get perhaps undeleted on the level of Mahat, but some of our history could be already lost. Thus our life would lose its justification. In any case we would disappear from the Bhu-loka and get into a space of frozen energy field, where those are finding themselves, who want to get out of the universal flow of life (Vay 1923).

The Chinese “*Jesus Sutras*” from the seventh

century (Palmer 2001, *The Sutra of Cause, Effect and Salvation* 4:17–20) advises: “But to change your karma, you must exist in this physical world. A person can only change his karma residue by being born again into this world. Do good and you will live to be in the world beyond this world. The other world can be found by doing acts of karma in this life, by living properly in this world.”

Thus the key to a meaningful life is not to “pulverize” the ego, but to understand its messages, the life situations, which it co-creates and to learn to act in a way that is dharmic, i.e. does not create new karma. In this way we can slowly find the way to our real home – the Jana-loka. Therefore we can say that the ahamkāra is our friend and guardian, who coaches us through countless lives until we learn to flow with the currents of universal life that relies on the information and energy coming from That which alone IS.

This is also a way, how we can understand the term *samādhi* – one of the highest goals of yoga training. *Samādhi*, in the above context, does not mean that the ahamkāra is dissolved, but that all the energies and information that bar the re-emergence of the Ultimate state of living in full consciousness of the Being-Consciousness-Bliss (*Sat-Chit-Ānanda*) are cleared and what emerges is accepting any life processes that are projected by the ahamkāra, perceiving it as a “play of shadows” and never losing the anchoring in the *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. This is what the *Yoga Sūtras* describe in I. 3. “Then (upon dissolution of *vrttis*) the seer’s remaining in his own nature (is maintained)” (Bharati 2015). *Sri Ramana Gita* describes this state as

“[t]he enlightened one (*jñāni*) is unfathomable; he abides always in the Self (*Ātman*) only. He does not consider the universe as unreal, or himself different from the universe (*vishva*)” (Ganapati Muni 1966, I. 11). So the ahamkāra becomes a servant, who will serve the *jñāni* in whatever way it needs to happen and never appears as a “master of events”.

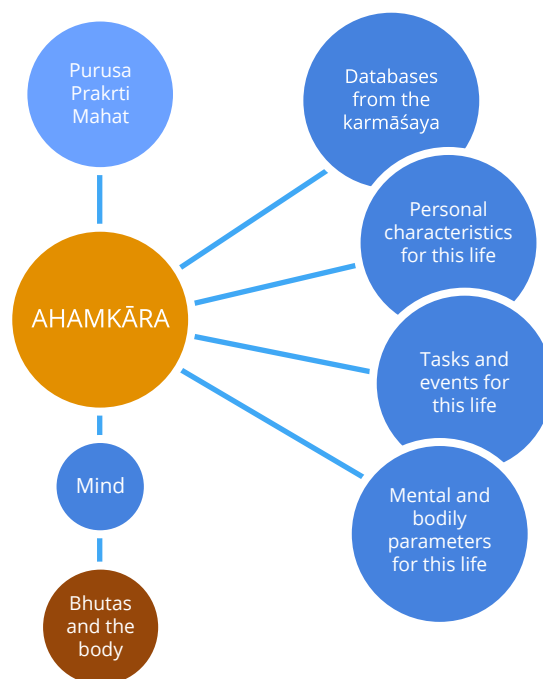


Figure 1. The way how ahamkāra comes into existence and how it is the key of our manifested existence. (Click to enlarge)

3 Conclusion

Ahamkāra is not at fault when we do things which are improper or do not fit into the “world of a yogi or yoga practitioner – *sādhaka*”. Its role is to keep, update and present information, which the personalized consciousness either identifies with, or keeps the position of witness, which can let those things and processes to happen, that are dharmic, i.e. do not produce new karma and are beneficial to

any given situation. So it is a state described in the *Yoga Sūtras* I. 3, in *Sri Ramana Gīta* and other yoga texts. Therefore it is imperative to come to an understanding what ahamkāra is doing for us and learn the lessons presented by it internally and externally. Then we are able to realize the real wonder of all beings seamlessly woven into the manifested world on the level of Bhu-loka [note: this leads to real *Īśvarapranidhāna*] and beyond.

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I AM WHO I AM

MYSTICISM OF GOD'S NAME AND THE QUESTION OF "WHO AM I"

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ABSTRACT

The paper interprets, in an original way, a connection between the Biblical name of God "I am who I am" and the mystical search of human identity. It presents God as the "author", "director" and "player" in His world "drama", while His human "co-actors" are not cognizant of their true identity as they are fully identified with their roles. According to the author, the idea of imitation of Christ points mainly to the discovery of this lost identity by following the question of "Who am I".

Key words

Mysticism, name of God, imitation of Christ, Self-enquiry

1 Where is Charles Bridge in Prague?

Imagine that a friend is calling you on your cell phone. He's just arrived in Prague and has a few hours of free time to spend and is in a hurry, "Hurry up! Where's Charles Bridge? What's the shortest way for me to get there?" In order to help him, what will your first question be?

This is not a catch question, just reply with

the first thing that crosses your mind. Obviously, it will be something like: "Where are you calling from?" or "How far have you got?" Alternatively, "Where do you want to set off from?"

Similarly, when someone calls an ambulance, the main thing is to respond to the questions quickly: "Who are you? Where are you calling from?", and then to tell them what has actually happened, despite the urge to start with what is happening at the moment.

And now let us assume that someone is urgently calling the Lord for help. If this individual had been listening well – which is hard for him, because something is bothering him – the first questions that he would have

heard, would have still been the same: "Who are you? Where are you calling from? How far have you got?"

You can raise the objection: "After all, the Lord must know this very well, so why would He ask these questions, moreover in a situation when one is sick?" The answer is: "Since His very question provides great relief to us all, actually the greatest that God is ever able to offer!"

How is this possible? Is the main concern of God not what is actually happening to us? Not really! That is not the cause of our misery at all! The real cause lies in how far we have come, from what distance we are calling Him, and finally, the crucial point – who we consider ourselves to be – in essence, who we actually are.

One may assume that there is no one more lost than the person who does not know where he or she is, who is completely lost. Only when one realises where one is, so that you are able to stick a pin on the map at the spot, does one have a much better chance of finding your way.

One can even say that if you could truly ask the fundamental question "Who am I?", you could find the key to knowing the answer to every other single question. Even if you aimed very high, such as to ask "Who is God?", this is also where the question "Who am I?" leads you, in fact, even by the shortest way.

However, this fundamental question is nothing new. It influenced our present destiny as early as three thousand years ago. At that time, God's help was needed not by a single individual, but by a whole nation, which was

groaning under foreign rule, lost in a foreign country.

2 God's drama

The whole history of the Israeli nation is a drama in which God is the main character. Initially, He is merely an "author", later also a "director", and eventually enters the play as the main "actor", and He also finds His life's "role" in it.

What exactly do we mean by a *role*? The word comes from an actual roll of paper with the text on it that actors would receive to know what their respective roles were. There were often only basic points on it and so an actor had to improvise for himself. Later, the role was identified with the person whose task was described by this role. In fact, the concept of a person arose from the theatre. Originally the concept meant a mask that had a hole in it for sound *per-sound* – hence *per-sona*, i.e. *person*. Like the role, the mask is also identified with the person it represents.

Thus, the actor has a role to play and the mask (nowadays, more a costume) signifies what appearance he is meant to have. However, let us return to God's drama. In the past, as well as today, genuineness and impressiveness are displayed by individual actors, not knowing that God is covertly present in each of them. They play out their life's roles, thinking that they themselves are the persons they are dressed to play, separated from others and from God. They have no idea that the original, the real Actor in them is no other than God Himself, now long forgotten, hidden behind the mask of a human face and

deeply rooted in the human role.

After all, they ended up here in the real world. The real world is no stage whatsoever! After all, they have their own head, hands and feet, their own thoughts, pain, and joy. They are hungry and thirsty, rejoicing in food and property. So, why the fuss about "Who am I?" "I'm a human, of course!" Certainly that is true, but it's only because no one would ever suspect that, on the stage of God's drama, to *be* a human is to *play the role* of a human *wearing a mask* of a human.

Should anyone manage to catch a glimpse of this fact, even just for a moment, he would previously have had to overcome another difficulty – in addition to his life role, there are other social roles to be played in human life: for example, one is a rabbi, whereas another is a beggar, another a widow or a queen. And as their social roles become firmly intertwined with their basic life's roles, then it undoubtedly really seems as if one has nothing in common with the other deep down inside.

Apart from assigning the actors in God's drama their life's roles and human masks, God-the-Director also assigns names to the actors. They have these in order to distinguish them from each other even more easily: you are as strong as a lion, your name will be Ariel, and you, in turn, are as meek as a lamb, your name will be Rebecca. Then, no one even suspects that he or she has been given a name that is *not his/her name*. A person immediately turns around on hearing this name, only proving how attached he/she has become to a name.

3 Who are we?

However, participants in God's drama are not only individuals but also entire nations. If an entire nation bursts on to the scene, then it must also be able to be distinguished. It must have its own identity. Initially, it is sufficient for its members to know each other by their names. Later, however, as their number increases, they need some common cultural symbol. Such a natural symbol may, for example, be a *totem* – a raised object people collectively look up to, often located at some frequently visited gathering place, named collectively after this place.

A totem is just a mere item. For the Israelites, it was supposedly dangerously close to the golden calf. But, an idol, in general, was forbidden! Therefore, an alternative option of identity became a priority for them, and that was *a common ancestor*. Every Israelite believed in his pedigree that had to extend somehow as far back as one of Jacob's sons. In this way, it was stipulated to an Israelite who was his neighbour and who was not, at least physically. Let us once more return to God's drama. If an Israelite had not realised that God was within him, would he ever have thought of God being in his neighbour as well, or even some day also in a man who was not his neighbour at all? Not directly, but via a mediator, this was surprisingly possible!

For the Israelites, from a common physical forefather there was only a small step to even more advanced identification – to a spiritual identification – and that is the mutual God. Thus far, they had no idea of God's presence in each human, so God showed up on the scene as another person –

with the advantage of being the same for everyone. This is how God Himself enters into His own drama. At first very distantly, but at this point visibly. Or is He instead dragged into it, being unable to resist out of love? Difficult to judge, it progresses slowly. From a completely hidden author, God-the-Creator manifests Himself partly as a director, as an empowering God, with the miraculous power to intervene and change the way the story goes at the last minute, whether at His own discretion or in response to an impassioned plea for help from the participating actors.

4 You are our God

“Who are we? We are the ones who have claimed allegiance to you.” To whom? “The one God, who is not an idol, nor does He have to look like a person or an animal. He who has no face is surely untouchable and that is why He is the mighty God! When foreign priests turn up with another god, we have two options for them: if their god has some form, then it’s an idol, and that makes it the kind we reject. Alternatively, they turn up with a god without a face or form and then we will try to convince them he is actually our God, and they will join us...”

Therefore, a nation espousing a single God must necessarily be favoured, if it persists in its trials and does not lose faith. Dramatically speaking, until such a nation betrays its God. From this point, the whole of the history of the nation of Israel is a riveting drama of loyalty and betrayal, of courage and cowardice.

“Lord, who are you? You are the one who chose only us.” What does it mean to be cho-

sen? To be paid particular attention to, to be showered with love. This is actually a continuation of a child’s relationship with its parents. Of course, to be “the chosen one” does not necessarily result in exceptionality, since after all, almighty God can surely pay special attention to everyone... However, this is once again shrouded in ignorance! And so the child has the impression that at that moment he or she is the only one in the world beloved by the father. And it is not only a child who has that kind of impression...

That makes the entire drama of God even more real, more genuine: not only have I no idea that God is within me, but I even rejoice that the single, great and immensely distant God pays attention solely to me! Greater tension can hardly be created. It is only now when God’s drama gains the proper momentum.

5 True name of God

Nevertheless, the Israelites had the most difficult problem in learning what the name of the true God was. There were two ways of solving this: either admit that a single God can have many names, as, for example, is acknowledged in India to this day. However, it would be difficult not to confuse Him with foreign idols: “Idols, after all, have their own names and having the name of some idol coinciding with the name of our God, that’s something we could not bear!” So there was only one option left: to find an exclusive name that belonged to no idol. That is exactly what the nation of Israel opted for.

However, who would dare to defend the

knowledge that the name of God can be declared a unique name? And most importantly, who would guarantee that someone else would not come up with a better name, causing a split in the whole nation? That would be a great excuse, after all...

Fortunately, God really loved His little children, as they still were at that time, so He offered them a truly regal solution: "So you don't know my name? Then, why don't you ask me, if you trust me?"

Do you see how God's play naturally works? Indeed, like hearing Dad speaking to his kids. But it was not that easy... In the next scene of His drama, God complained: "None of you wants to listen to me! Are any of you listening to me at all?"

And that brings us slowly to the climax of the *Old Testament's* act of the drama: Who would dare to address the distant God to ask Him what His real name is? The real name, this means who God is. The real, the shortest question is: "Who are You?" Who are you really? Not what I think of you, what you seem to me, how I would like you to be, but who you really are. Alternatively – Lord, I want to get to know you. I am deeply interested in you, because I love you deeply.

God, the author of the drama, knows very well that this role will be played in an endless number of reruns, both here on Earth and anywhere else and that it will never grow old. However, God-the-Director found things a lot more difficult back then. For the purposes of the nation of Israel, God had to cast this role for a single man and He was not sure whether it would not end up in being howled down, as he had to choose from rank amateurs, not

from the professionals. It surely could not have been any other way, because all his former premieres had thus far ended up as failures, and this one had a slim chance of being the first successful one.

6 This is how it was

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush,

"Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am."

Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings. (...) Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should

go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM". And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'."

Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" (...) But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."

Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. (...) He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. (see Exodus 3:1-7; 3:10-14; 4:1; 4:10-16)

7 Ingenious simplicity

In the blend of stories and legends of the *Old*

Testament, a wonderful message was unexpectedly being revealed. Not only did Moses hear it from God, but he also succeeded in delivering it to the entire nation. The *Old Testament* states quite clearly what God chose for Himself in reply to Moses's question about His true name: The answer was, "I AM". Or, in the extended version (perhaps from a different source), it was "I am that I am" or, in the modern English version: "I am who I am."

It was brilliant and yet so simple. No one had succeeded, nor ever would succeed in building an idol to compete with the "I am" simplicity of God. An idol always had to have something extra, some specific quality, and this "extra" was always its weakness.

No other name can be compared to God's "I am", since anything else is derived from "I am": "I am" will always be the first. There is "I am" at the beginning of the whole world. And when we go back to God from anywhere in the world, every journey to Him must somehow end up in the intimate experience of God's "I am".

To record God's name "I am that I am" in the Hebrew back then, only four consonants YHWH [*Yahweh*] sufficed. For the ease of correct reading, vowels began to be marked in the Bible much later. For the people of Israel, this true name of God is so sacred that, from as early as the second century BC, nobody even dared to pronounce it. To this day, "*Adonai*" has been used instead. Respect is a beautiful thing. That is why it makes sense even to people today.

8 I am not a mere character

Initially, God, coming out of anonymity and revealing who He really was in His own drama, did not appeal to everyone. Only those who were able to experience God's presence, to really meet Him, could fully grasp the meaning. It was as if God was saying:

"For you, now I am here your God because I entered our common drama, but from the beginning till the end of time I am the only one who is. Remember, in our drama, I am not a character, but the one who is acting it. You only see my mask, only hear the words of my role intended for you to understand. However, I am none of those things – I am the only one who is."

For the people of today, it is also something very difficult to grasp, because they themselves do not comprehend it either. Just like the Israelites in past times, each of us has adhered to his or her role and has identified with our own role so deeply that we believe that the same holds true for God. God is great, powerful, loving, jealous, forgiving... But these are all just additional roles of a father or a mother which we project on to Him! The true God is just who He is. The other things are just how WE want to see Him because that's the way we want to see things.

And what if we do not want to see it this way? This is even more common today. As the abundance of traits traditionally ascribed to God becomes a hindrance, we become scared and reject God Himself: "How could God be jealous? That's a clear case of selfishness!" And yet, we really do not mind God Himself, but only His all too human mask,

which He put on in the Old Testament times, and moreover, only out of His love.

9 A distant God

If God had revealed Himself immediately as not being the one man considered Him to be, at that actual moment He would probably have lost His authority which was firmly associated with His paternal role. If He had been free to say something like:

"Look, I'm not just your dad, I'm everyone's dad. And actually, that's also just your imagination. To be a father, I would have to be a human like you."

But this is taboo! Intimate confessions and authority are mutually exclusive, especially to children who have not yet come of age to be able to play the role of a father or a mother themselves. Back then, the whole of the Israeli nation were children of God.

Therefore, Moses needed to go to Mount Sinai again, this time under all the people's eyes. Even then, he encountered God in intimate proximity. However, in the people's eyes, the very same scene observed from afar looked quite different:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of

a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. (...) The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them." (see Exodus 19:16–19; 19:20–22)

Such a role had to be played by a distant God! No intimate confession, but a huge detachment. No burning bush within arm's reach, but an inaccessible mountain top. No name quietly whispered, but resounding threats. Only then did the nation of Israel come to believe in this God, only then was His paternal authority resumed. But at what cost? At the cost of immense alienation, ranging from future violence and bloodshed among the faithful and the unfaithful Israelites, to the blood spilled on the cross by Jesus, to the present day mass loss of faith.

Thus, the true name of God will remain hidden behind a patriarchal mask that He is going to wear for many other acts to come in His drama.

10 The toughest role

Neither did Moses reach the Promised Land. He was only allowed to see it. It seems that although he knew who God was and was able to listen to Him carefully, he was only allowed to peek into the Kingdom of God, just as into the Promised Land. He was still not at home

there. Nevertheless, Moses was a great and respected teacher.

Let us recall how hard it was for the Israelites to cope with the fact that in their drama neither God-the-Author nor God-the-Director had any shape or form, although they had an admirable advantage over neighbouring nations. However, it was impossible for them at that time to comprehend and to be able to experience the fact that even God-the-Actor did not have any form or shape.

However, God's drama continues. Will anyone accomplish more? After more than a thousand years, the time is finally ripe for God-the-Actor Himself to appear directly on stage as a loving and suffering human. A burning bush or a mighty voice from above, once these attributes belonged to God, the distant God. Now, however, the time has come for God to play the role of a close God, a God capable of sharing joy and sorrow with a human – capable of looking like a human, able to laugh and cry like a human, in short, to be human.

Why is it that not everyone is like that? It has moreover been stated that God is covertly present in every human. How we look, what we do and who we consider ourselves to be are mere masks and roles played by one common actor in God's drama. So what remains? Why is each one of us not God directly?

Because we do not want this at all! It would be too little for us to be just "the one that is". Instead, a human prefers to identify with his or her role in life, with the man or woman he or she was born to be and gradually to identify with other social roles. In addition to those roles, a human also identifies with

a property, knowledge or skills and with many other things. We cling to them, not being able to let go, we ourselves being completely forgotten in all of this. We can make sense of it with the original sin or count on letting all our attachments go one day in Paradise. But who knows if we wish to go there at all, if a kind God confiscates all our toys? Let's face it: which one of us at this very moment feels like giving everything away and asking for nothing in return?

And so, unlike all the roles God and people had learned to play up to the present time, this new role was absolutely exceptional. It was a tremendous challenge: the person who accepted it, could not forget all the way down the line who he or she really was, could not blend in with the role. The individual had to prove to be both one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man at the same time, without any tricks, either spiritual or physical or anything in between.

So who was going to attempt this? At first, it would be an unknown man from Nazareth, who had been teaching people wisdom and love, who had healed the sick, although he could have done more. All the people who Jesus loved managed to play only their own roles: the fishermen played fishermen, customs officers played customs officers, Israelites played those who hated the Romans, and the Romans those who condescendingly ignored it. And no one was allowed to be robbed of his or her role, as such a person did not believe that he or she was capable of playing any other role. Even when Jesus tried to take a sick man's role off and offered him the role of a healthy man, He was denounced

by the man! It was only Jesus who was never attached to His role. He was unhesitatingly willing to swap the role of the respected and beloved teacher for the role of a condemned criminal, and finally, willing to give up His very life's role on the cross, if God's script went that far.

It was the total devotion and detachment from His own role which enabled Jesus to know absolutely who He really was, that is never to forget His Father, the writer and the director of the drama. And it was also supreme love which bonded him with His beloved Father and reminded Him, even during the hardest moments:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Phillip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Phillip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (see John 14:6-10)

It seems that not even Jesus' closest disciples could comprehend immediately who they had before them. Even the intelligent Phillip apparently failed to grasp the point. At that time, how could he have recognised that He was God? Indeed, He looked like an ordinary person! He had all the human thoughts, all the human emotions, suffered like a human,

loved like a human. How was it possible that He was God Himself?

This is the key to understanding the mystery of Jesus: "How is it possible that He's a man like us, and also God at the same time?" And yet, it's quite simple: unlike all the others living in oblivion, Jesus knew that He was God! He realised and experienced deeply without any doubt that now He was indeed a man, but it would not take long before He would be back again in perfect unity with His Father – the eternal author, the director, as well as the actor in God's drama.

11 Follow me

In the beginning, we stated that the actuality and impressiveness of God's drama are enabled by the actors not knowing that God is present covertly in each of them. All the protagonists are, ergo, lost in their own world, forgotten in their own play. But what happens if one of them is fed up with it? What if, in desperation, one of them dials the emergency line to God one day to hear His words: "Hello! Answer me! Who are you really – not the one who you are playing? Where are you calling me from? How far have you got?"

However, that's either simply what no one hears, or is unable to answer. How far has one got in one's own role? Was the role always so strictly assigned? And if, at least for a moment, one ventures off course, who would one really be?

Or quite simply: What would have happened if you had not been afraid to ask the basic question "Who am I?", and to follow this idea

as far as you possibly could?

The first thing that would have pulled us up short is that we are unsure about the definiteness and changelessness of our roles. First of all, of those social roles: I am a father and have two children... I am a medical student with only two semesters to go... This is true, but could it not be different? Even then, we would feel exactly the same as before!

By keeping a distance from one's role at least for a moment, one is able to look around and stop being lost. "Then who am I really? Is there actually something like a fixed point?"

That is already the first success. And now let us try to attack the life role as well: "Would it do me any harm if I managed to empathise fully with someone else? If I, figuratively speaking, swapped or exchanged my cross with him? Would I like to play a homeless person or an abused child? Playing his or her life's role means being him or her one hundred percent, with no escape. And why not? Am I so satisfied with my own role? Really?"

That is when we either get frightened and run away, or bear it and our attachment to our role eases off even more. If we stand the test, we feel free and suddenly want to fly, give everything away, hug everybody...

And this is when we try to stake everything: what about doing it like Jesus did – to love the Father deeply and to experience the role of a man at the same time, being aware beyond any doubt that this man is a mere character in God's drama! To be aware of it every single moment, every single day, mindfully and clearly, with enormous kindness. Including even the crucifixion, if it is in the script... What

would be the result? A change? A miracle? Or even nothing at all?

For the answer, we have to go back to the beginning once again, when a friend calls us to ask where Charles Bridge is. We suggest that the fundamental question, "Who am I?", holds the key to every answer. Even if we aim very high, such as asking, "Who is God?", this is also where the question "Who am I?" would lead us, and even by the shortest cut.

They say in jest that Moses wandered about so long because he had forgotten to pack the map and consequently was embarrassed to ask for directions. After more than three thousand years in our present act of God's drama, we already have that map. Even an excellent one, and to the Promised Land of the one who is called "I AM". At least, it is worth seeing, or perhaps even being at home in this land.

So let us attempt the first step: "Who is God?" But we've just disclosed it! He is the only author, the only director and the only actor in God's drama and is called "I AM".

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About the author

Ing. Petr Pavlík, CSc. (1949) is an expert in mathematical forecasting and a lay Buddhist and Christian author. For several decades he presented his talks on the spiritual practice Buddhist Evenings (Lotus) and Mystical Eve-

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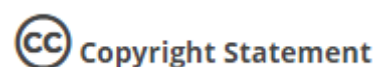
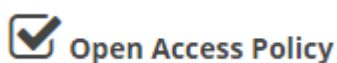
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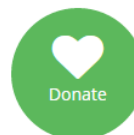
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