

# Integrating Transpersonal Experiences

— A PSYCHOSYNTHESIS EXERCISE —

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

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

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

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

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

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**Note:** In Stage II of the exercise in this article, the instruction is to dialogue with a “Wise Old Man” about your experience and the meaning of it. Today, this suggestion has been amended. We now suggest entering into a dialogue or some form of communication with your spiritual source, whatever or whomever it to be. — A.G.

STAGE I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## STAGE II

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Other Applications

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

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

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

from their openness to experience of a transpersonal nature.

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

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

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

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

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

#### Patterns to Watch For

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

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

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

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