

# Trauma, Transitions, and Thriving

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Abstract: Transitional experiences, what happens between states when someone changes developmentally, are special windows of opportunity for growth. They can be viewed in the microcosm of one's moments or in the macrocosm of an individual's life. We explore varieties of transitions, such as incremental or abrupt (intentional/ revelatory), transcendent or immanent, the ecstatic "aha experience" or trauma. The potential for growth increases with the "seismic" proportions of the precipitating event, shaking the foundations of the individual's assumptions about life, and perhaps shattering them. Our reactions to transitions range from avoidance and denial, delay and ambivalence, to "comfortableness at the edge of the unknown abyss." Choosing the path of traumatic growth leads to thriving in one's life. We explore common impediments to navigating these transitional windows and also the best known methods for facilitating transitions. We present a model for understanding these methods of facilitation, namely that they provide anchors (transitional objects) to help navigate the transition, and include, for example, rites of passage, pilgrimage, rituals, initiations, symbols, connectedness to the environment, remembering "how not to," staying conscious, mindful, and transcending complacency. The anchor is always connected to staying true to one's "true self," being intentional about what part of myself I choose to identify with, and thus with integrity, morals, values, and priorities. We review the necessity of unlearning, deintegration, and unintegration in any growth process, for example in meditation, near-death experience, pre-conception experience, the lucid dream state, and the shamanic journey state.

We propose that there is a process of development for every individual toward the "optimal expression of being human," and that, as with other developmental lines, it proceeds in sequential stages, each one building on and incorporating the earlier stages in such a way that no stage can be skipped and the sequential order of the emerging stages is a relatively fixed aspect of the human experience. In between these stages are transitional experiences, special windows of opportunity for transcendent growth. It is these transitional spaces that we will focus on.

Transitional space, or potential space, can be instigated by trauma or ecstasy, or can result from steady intentional growth work. We will explore the common elements of transitions, identified in myths of the "hero's journey." We present a model for understanding the importance of *anchors*, or *transitional objects* to help navigate the transitions.

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The beginning of that journey, daily and throughout the lifespan, is the consciousness of deep sleep. Our development through dream sleep and the ego state progresses through achieving a greater sense of *differentiation* of self, contracting the self-identification. Potentially, we may progress beyond the ego-identification into existential and transpersonal realms through realizing a greater sense of *integration*, expanding the self-identification. Inadequate integration leads to repression, fragmentation, and dissociation; inadequate differentiation results in fixation, arrest and fusion of ego states into role rigidity (Lemke, 2005; Wilber, 2000).

## Outline

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*Stages in the development of consciousness*  
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### II. Avoiding transitions: Impatience, denial, delay and ambivalence

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*Transition from the transpersonal level to unity (oneness): mortido*

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### *Stages in the development of consciousness*

There have been many formulations of stages in the development of consciousness, or spiritual development, or development toward the optimal expression of humanity. In this article we will utilize several of these conceptualizations in pursuit of our actual focus of attention: the *transitional states between* stages in development. We will examine optimal development as a “developmental line” in the sense suggested by Anna Freud (1965). Anna Freud proposed the concept of “developmental lines” to explain how pathology can result from a failure in normal human development in one or more areas of growth, i.e., developmental lines. Under the various formulations of developmental lines, each line of development charts the emergence of a specific developmental potential through a sequence of stages of growth. For example, there is a separate line of development for the consolidation of a sense of self (Kohut, 1971), for affect (Brown, 1985), and for the defenses (Vaillant, 1977). Ken Wilber (2000) postulates roughly two dozen developmental lines: “morals, affects, self-identity, psychosexuality, cognition, ideas of the good, role taking, socio-emotional capacity, creativity, altruism, several lines that can be called ‘spiritual’ (care, openness, concern, religious faith, meditative stages), joy, communicative competence, modes of space and time, death-seizure, needs, worldviews, logico-mathematical competence, kinesthetic skills, gender identity, and empathy” (p. 28).

Another formulation of categories of development is offered by Gardner (1983, 1999), who recognized that humans have not just one but multiple intelligences, and speculated about the following ten possibilities as discreet intelligences:

- *linguistic/verbal intelligence*, involves sensitivity to spoken and written language and the ability to learn languages;
- *logical/mathematical intelligence*, involves the capacity to analyze problems logically, solve math problems, and investigate issues scientifically;
- *musical intelligence*, which refers to skill in the performance, composition and appreciation of musical patterns;
- *body-kinesthetic intelligence*, using the whole or parts of the body to solve problems or fashion products;
- *spatial intelligence*, which is the ability to recognize and manipulate patterns in space;
- *interpersonal intelligence*, which is the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and work effectively with them;

- *intrapersonal intelligence*, which is the capacity to understand oneself and to use this information effectively in regulating one's life;
- *naturalist intelligence*, which is expertise in the recognition and classification of the flora and fauna of one's environment;
- *spiritual intelligence*, the ability to master a set of diffuse and abstract concepts about being, and also mastering the craft of altering one's consciousness in attaining a certain state of being. It is an "intelligence that explores the nature of existence in its multifarious guises" (1999, p. 60); and
- *existential intelligence*, "the capacity to locate oneself with respect to the furthest reaches of the cosmos—the infinite and infinitesimal—and the related capacity to locate oneself with respect to such existential features of the human condition as the significance of life, the meaning of death, the ultimate fate of the physical and the psychological worlds and such profound experiences as love of another person or total immersion in a work of art" (1999, p. 61).

Wolman (2001) has researched the nature of spirituality and devised the PsychoMatrix Spirituality Inventory (PSI) to assist people in assessing the focus and pattern of their spirituality. He suggests these seven factors together comprise the spectrum of spiritual experience and behavior:

- divinity, the sense of connection to a God figure or Divine Energy Source;
- mindfulness, an awareness of the interconnection of the mind and body, with an emphasis on practices that enhance that relationship;
- intellectuality, a cognitive and inquiring approach to spirituality, with a focus on understanding sacred texts;
- community, the quality of spirituality enacting connection to the community at large, e.g., in charity or politics;
- extrasensory perception, spiritual feelings and perceptions associated with nonrational ways of knowing, e.g., prophetic dreams and near-death experiences;
- childhood spirituality, a personal, historical association to spirituality through family tradition and activity; and
- trauma, a stimulus to spiritual awareness through experiencing physical or emotional illness or trauma to the self or a loved one.

We are interested in studying the process of development toward the optimal expression of humanity. It may be conceptualized as a combination of developmental lines, or perhaps as a combination of spiritual and existential intelligences. Call it the *transcendent function* (Jung) or *transcendent formation* (van Kaam). We propose that, as with

other developmental lines, this “process of development toward the optimal expression of humanity” proceeds in sequential stages, each one building on and incorporating the earlier stages in such a way that no stage can be skipped and the sequential order of the emerging stages is a relatively fixed aspect of the human experience. In other words the stages are hierarchical, and development proceeds by transcendence and inclusion (Wilber, 2000). Each stage steps significantly beyond its predecessors, while including them in an expanded experience of self.

We suggest using the concept of *infrastructure* in the process of consciousness transformation (Blatner, 2004), because it conveys this hierarchical, transcendence, and inclusion aspect, and also reminds us that personal transformation occurs within a social system. We stress the importance of social interactions to reinforce personal development, and will discuss the place of connectedness and community later in the article.

“. . . several of my clients seemed to have identified with their problems to the point that symptomatic improvements were frightening assaults on identity. When I asked one chronically depressed man what he thought it would take for him to change, he answered, ‘I guess I would have to be someone else’ “ (Mahoney, 1982, p. 107).

The process of *becoming someone else* is the focus for this article, and in particular the aspects of that process that occur in between states, the transitional experiences. These are special windows of opportunity for growth and development which we will be exploring. These transitional windows of opportunity can be viewed in the microcosm of one’s life, as moments within the context of everyday life, within the process of psychotherapy, and within the practice of spirituality. These transitional windows of opportunity can be viewed in the macrocosm of an individual’s life, as conception (transitioning from spirit world to earthly life), birth (transitioning from womb to life outside the womb), or death (transitioning from earthly life to spirit world). In the words of Ram Dass (1998, p. 161):

All throughout our lives, we have windows of opportunity to wake up. These catalysts for growth come in various disguises, as both painful traumatic events and times of bliss and ecstasy. Most of the time, though, we awaken a bit, and then we go back to sleep. At the time of death, though, the windows open much wider, and a person who’s done spiritual practice throughout life and has already opened up to expanded awareness will experience the process of death with grace and equanimity.

We will be exploring the varieties of transitions; for example, incremental or abrupt (intentional/ revelatory), wounding or ecstatic, crisis or opportunity, transcendent or immanent. Some transitions are the “aha experience” of peak experiences or revelation. Some are traumas, failures, or disappointments. Our reactions to transitions are avoidance and denial, delay and ambivalence, or perhaps a knowing embrace. Common impediments to navigating these transitional windows are, for example, an arrested development in one’s “optimal developmental line,” identification with a false-self, or the inability to mourn for the losses inherent in “moving on.”

We will explore the common elements of transitions, identified in myths of the “hero’s journey.”

We will also explore the best known methods for facilitating transitions, for taking optimal advantage of the opportunity presented by the transition. We present a model for understanding these methods of facilitation, namely that they provide *anchors* (in the language of NLP) or *transitional objects* (in Winnicott’s language) to help navigate the transition, to arouse from the amnesia and inertia of everyday life. Examples are rites of passage, pilgrimage, rituals, initiations, “crossing the threshold.” Symbols are helpful. Belonging to community, experiencing connectedness to the environment, is helpful. Remembering “how not to” operate is helpful in navigating; remembering that one path in a maze leads to a dead end narrows one’s choices to more productive possibilities. That remembering requires paying attention, staying conscious, mindful, and transcending complacency. The anchor is always connected to staying true to one’s “true self,” being intentional about what part of myself I choose to identify with, and thus with integrity, morals, values, and priorities.

### *Traumatic growth*

One of the known “windows of opportunity” is traumatic experience. When an individual encounters adversity, be it accidental or malicious, sudden or lingering, there are at least four potential consequences (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995). One possibility is a downward slide in which the initial detrimental effect is compounded and the person eventually *succumbs*, defeated. A second possibility is that the individual *survives* but is diminished or impaired permanently. A third potential outcome is that the individual returns to the pre-adversity level of functioning, that is to say he or she *recovers*. The fourth possibility is that the person may surpass the previous level of functioning, and he or she *thrives*. The thriving outcome

has been studied extensively, and is generally called *traumatic growth*. The following graphic representation (Illustration 1) is taken from Carver (1998), who adapted it in turn from O’Leary & Ickovics (1995).

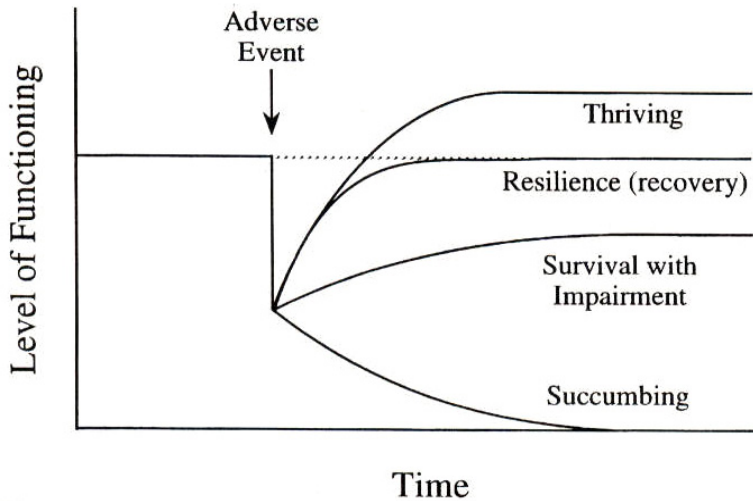


Illustration 1. Four Outcomes of Adversity

There has been significant research over the past decade into the phenomenon of a growth “benefit” resulting from traumatic experience. After difficult life experiences, some people express ways that they have benefited from their misfortune, finding “a silver lining in the cloud.” The most common perceptions of benefit reported by survivors of trauma are strengthened family relationships, positive personality changes, and changes in life priorities (Affleck et al, 1991). Not surprisingly, those who perceive themselves as stronger as a result of surviving abuse have higher self-esteem than those who don’t (McMillen et al, 1995).

Therapists are universally aware of the individuals who succumb or survive with impairment. “The ramifications of the trauma—the lack of a secure base, the psychic split that exiles the wounded parts of herself, the creation of an insubstantial false self, the negative introjection of the perpetrator, and the permeation of shame and guilt into core aspects of herself—combine to form a seemingly impenetrable and often undecipherable wall between the survivor and her significant others” (Fisher, 2005, p.24). However, healing does occur, and with resolution of the traumatic wounding comes the potential to thrive.

“Unresolved traumas affect the spiritual and psychological development of children. In contrast, children who had no trauma, or whose traumas have been resolved, are clearly unique in the following ways. They are more spiritually evolved, manifest higher levels of human potential, and are developmentally precocious. They exhibit higher self-esteem and intelligence test scores, and they are more empathic, emotionally mature, cooperative, creative, affectionate, loving, focused, and self-aware than untreated and traumatized children (Emerson, 1993)” (Emerson, 1996).

Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) report that perceived growth from traumatic events tend to fall into three general domains: (1) changes in perception of self, to more self-reliance and capability of coping with difficult challenges; (2) changed relationships with others, to an increase in interpersonal emotional closeness, an increase in one’s freedom to express emotion, and an increase in sympathy and understanding for others’ suffering; and (3) changes in philosophy of life, to a deeper appreciation for life, new life directions and priorities, increased experience of existential wisdom, and greater interest in and openness to spiritual and religious matters. They indicate that the precipitating event, which can lead either to traumatic distress or traumatic growth, must be of sufficiently “seismic” proportions to shake the foundations of the individual’s assumptions about life, and perhaps to shatter them. The potential for growth lies precisely in the need to reevaluate and rebuild one’s basic assumptions about and view of the world.

Experiences sufficiently “seismic” to shake or shatter the foundations of the individual’s assumptions about life call into question his/her understanding of meaning, or meaninglessness, in life. This signals a direct appeal to one’s soul to awaken and engage.

“Soul, according to [James] Hillman, is most apt to emerge in those chaotic, ‘pathological’ moments when we experience the disintegration of our beliefs, values, and security. For it is in such moments that our imagery, emotions, desires, and values are heightened and we have the fullest awareness of the psyche in its essential form. Indeed, for Hillman, the very point of deconstructing our fixed ideas in psychology is paradoxically to provide us with the conditions for the revelation of psyche itself” (Drob, 1999, p. 58).

Park and Folkman (1997) have focused their research on concepts of meaning that are relevant to the process of coping with stressful experiences. Meaning, as used here, refers to perceptions of significance.

Their model distinguishes two levels of meaning: global meaning and situational meaning. *Global meaning* refers to the most abstract and generalized level of meaning: people's basic goals and fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and expectations about the world and one's purpose for existence. *Situational meaning* is the meaning that is formed in the interaction between a person's global meaning and the circumstances of a particular event or occurrence. Global meaning is comprised of beliefs regarding order (organized around beliefs about the world, beliefs about oneself, and beliefs about the relationship between oneself and the world), and regarding life goals and purpose. Beliefs about the world involve beliefs about safety, justice and fairness, the degree to which the world is predictable, understandable, and controllable. Global beliefs about the self include self-worth and perceived control. Self-worth consists of evaluations of one's essential goodness and morality, and evaluations of the effectiveness of one's actions, one's competence and worthiness. Beliefs about control refer to the extent to which people believe they are in control of their destiny. Beliefs about the relationship between oneself and the world relate to optimism or pessimism, i.e., expectations of whether situations will work out favorably or not.

Meaning described in terms of purpose refers to beliefs that organize, justify, and direct a person's striving, their motivations.

There is general agreement that global meaning is built through an accumulation of life experiences (Catlin & Epstein, 1992; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Singer & Salovey, 1991). A child's view of the self and the world originates in the infant's early experiences, which center on interactions with a caregiver. The child learns trust, benevolence, values, self-worth, and an understanding of person-outcome contingency (Bowlby, 1969; Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983; Klinger, 1977). Over time, the infant's experience becomes integrated into an organizing subjective perspective through memories that integrate the diverse features of lived experience. These earliest mental structures are refined and embellished by experience throughout childhood and adolescence, and changes are much less likely to occur in adulthood (Park & Folkman, 1997, p. 119).

Experiences sufficiently "seismic" to shake or shatter the foundations of the individual's assumptions about life also conjure associations with death, and recapitulate the individual's previous unresolved brushes with death and their sequelae. Those will almost certainly include prenatal experiences and the birth experience.

Lifton (1979) suggested that trauma survivors, forced to relinquish certain types of behavior, may experience a "symbolic death and psychoformative disintegration." Vaughan (1985) acknowledges that when

cherished yet limiting beliefs must be transcended, the individual may experience “ego death” and the fearful clutching that may accompany it. She suggests that the negative experience of that death may be ameliorated through the awareness that what has “died” is not simply discarded but becomes incorporated into the new expanded sense of self. If the traumatized individual’s identity is based largely on his/her interaction with the world, an existential stance of isolation, then the losses inherent in trauma may be overwhelming. If the traumatized individual’s identity is based also on something transcendent to himself and the world, a stance of spiritual connectedness, then the losses inherent in trauma may become psychical building blocks of transformation.

Herein lies a key to understanding the distinction between posttraumatic devastation and posttraumatic growth. We will discuss this distinction next.

There exist two distinct levels, two degrees of severity, of traumatic encounters. Decker (1993, p. 25) summarizes these two levels of trauma:

Traumatic change requires a belief of the self as being more than either the ego or the existential self. Vaughan proposes a Jungian concept of the self as an organizing principle rather than a definite structure. The transpersonal identity is a process, not a system of interacting parts. Here, the self has emerged from the ego, responded to the need for authenticity, and is confronted by evil (i.e., trauma).

In Jung’s (1958) system of individuation, we must face our personal shadow, our individual awareness of the unknown to develop psychological health. However, trauma is the discovery of the archetypal shadow. As Jung states, “In other words, it is quite within the bounds of possibility for a man to recognize the relative evil of his nature, but it is a rare and shattering experience for him to gaze into the face of absolute evil” (Jung, 1971, p. 148).

These two levels of trauma (the archetypal and the personal) have been conceptualized by Urban (2003) as wounding to the self and wounding to the ego, or sense of self.

Trauma involves a wound to both the self and the sense of self, and both must be addressed in treatment. The wound to the ego means the sense of oneself is susceptible to unbearably low esteem, and to omnipotence that can mask not only helplessness but also humiliation . . . Helping the patient manage feelings of shame is essential to further development. The wound to the self, in contrast to the sense of self, is an impairment of reintegration, resulting in part of the self being split off from the personality, affecting further deintegration and therefore impeding the individuation process.

The levels of trauma are reflected in the degree of disconnection from oneself, from one’s identity. That is, in being forced to reevaluate my beliefs about myself in relation to the world, my worldview, how deeply

within does the necessary renunciation go? “The psyche’s normal reaction to a traumatic experience is to withdraw from the scene of injury. If withdrawal is not possible, then a part of the self must be withdrawn, and for this to happen the otherwise integrated ego must split into fragments and dissociate. . . . a violent affair – apparently an active attack by one part of the psyche on other parts” (Kalsched, 1996, pp. 12-13). Thus, when the wounding is at the level of ego, of the sense of oneself, the pain requires me to split off part of my identity, the part that is unacceptable to my conscious self-image, and send it “into internal exile” (Metzner, 1985, p. 44).

When the wounding is at the level of self itself, the disconnection is at the level of the soul (i.e., spiritual). Kalsched (1996) refers to fragmentation at the soul level as *archetypal defense*. This level of estrangement leads to a feeling of disembodiment: a lack of *indwelling* (Winnicott, 1989, p. 271). Indwelling is the process by which one’s ‘true self’ (an individual’s ‘inherited potential’) incarnates to become actualized in a ‘personal body scheme’ (Winnicott 1965b, p. 46).

Atwood and colleagues (2002) describe the extreme state of disconnection that arises from the failure to achieve indwelling: vulnerability to states of depersonalization and mind-body disintegration. Kalsched (2003) suggests that if indwelling fails, then the disincarnate spirit remains a ghost, stranded in the oblivion of a ghostly archetypal realm. This level of wounding is what we refer to as shock, wounding beyond the level of trauma (Castellino, 2000; Emerson, 2002).

With no self-reflective observing ego to provide even the rudiments of containing, meaning, and structure to the traumatic events, the child remains in a timeless, objectless, and selfless nightmare of unending pain, isolation and ultimately psychic dissolution (Davies & Frawley, 1994, p. 45).

Kalsched (2003) offers this clear example of the tragic intergenerational wounding from one ghost (a parent who failed to indwell) onto another (the child he abuses):

The ‘unremembered past’ of the parents is their trauma history - their un-humanized archetypal affects - their ‘possession’ by primitive unconscious energies, and hence daimonic. These are more than personal complexes in the parents’ unconscious . . . they are complexes Jung described as collective in nature, full of archaic affects, idealized and diabolized imagery, trauma-generated abusive enactments - possession by a Spirit. An alcoholic father who is ‘beside himself’ with rage is possessed by a daimon. He may ‘channel’ these demons directly into the unconscious of his child whose unimaginable anxiety in the face of demonic rage will initiate the child’s own daimonic possession. The

child's soul falls through the earthquake fault into archetypal defences - into the daimonic, now employed as self-care in the absence of parental care. A pact with the Devil is signed. Life can go on, but the lost innocence of the self will be turned over to a 'malevolent ghost'.

Here we see the pact every trauma victim signs with the Devil. It's as if the demonic object says, 'You can go on living, but you owe the baby - the true self - your life's potentials, to me'. I will hold your innocence for you, but the price you pay is that your true potential will be anaesthetized, frozen, suspended in a kind of permanent trance.

Another way to conceptualize this process is offered by Ferenczi (1933). He suggests that when a young child is traumatized, the child splits, with one part regressing back to the place of innocence prior to the traumatic experience, and one part progressing, i.e., growing up too fast. The progressed part then caretakes and defends the regressed part, but also persecutes it due to an identification with the aggressor.

Healing such a deep wounding requires "soul retrieval" efforts within the context of shamanic intervention. Here we will explain a distinction to be used throughout this article, between soul and spirit. We will follow the terminology of Carl Jung, James Hillman and Thomas Moore: spirit is that within us which descends from above seeking unity and harmony; soul is that within us which ascends from the depths of our being. The soul belongs to the night, to the world of dreams. What we mean by "soul retrieval" is to seek out that element of self that disconnected and fragmented, and has become estranged, and to reconnect it.

We have been discussing the damaging effects of trauma. Now we will briefly explore the positive outcomes of overcoming adversity. Typically posttraumatic growth is associated with positive religious coping, religious openness, readiness to face existential questions, religious participation, and intrinsic religiousness (Shaw et al., 2005). Posttraumatic growth is manifested in an increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) developed the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory to measure the positive or negative changes resulting from traumatic experience. Five separate domains are identified; an individual may experience growth in one or more domains, while experiencing no change or negative change in others. The domains are New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, Appreciation for Life, and Spiritual Change.

*New Possibilities* includes items describing positive new directions in life, e.g., “established a new path for my life”; *Relating to Others* describes positive changes in interpersonal relationships, e.g., a greater “sense of closeness with others”; *Personal Strength* contains items such as “I discovered I am stronger than I thought I was”; *Appreciation for Life* contains items reflecting “an appreciation for the value of my own life”; and *Spiritual Change* is reflected in the item “a better understanding of spiritual matters” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 362).

What is wisdom, and in particular *existential wisdom* (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991)? What is *spiritual intelligence* and *existential intelligence* (Gardner 1999)?

Emotional and spiritual intelligence are connected to the specific skills of metaphoric and imagistic thinking, appreciation of dream nuances, understanding of the body-mind boundaries, intentional dreaming, openness to guidance, and empathy. Dreams are intimately related to the unfolding of self, and the sustained practice of dreamwork leads to the development of these skills (Deslauriers, 2000). We will discuss dreams and the dream state later in this article.

One way of conceptualizing spiritual intelligence is offered by Adams (1995) as a devotion to discovering, exploring, and living in accordance with the *depth dimensions* of existence. The depth dimensions are ways of being that transcend our usual ways, defenses, identity, and beliefs about self and world.

Next, we will identify the states of consciousness that people encounter and inhabit as they develop. These states are obviously to be viewed as energetic levels of activation of conscious awareness, constantly shifting. We will base the general format of the organization of these states on Maslow’s (1943, 1954, 1968, 1971) Hierarchy of Needs (see Illustration 2). The stages are set out in a hierarchical sequence (the first four were identified in work published in 1943 and 1954, the remaining levels were identified in work published in 1968 and 1971):

- 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.
- 2) Safety/security: out of danger
- 3) Belongingness and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted
- 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition
- 5) Cognitive: to know, to understand, and explore
- 6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty
- 7) Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one’s potential
- 8) Transcendence: to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential



Illustration 2

### *Jung's Alchemical process of Individuation*

Jung considered that the process of individuation is difficult to discuss in precise terms. He found that symbols and dreams provide accessible ways of working with the process of individuation. Another of the ways he found to conceptualize it is through the symbology of alchemy (1963). He suggested, using alchemical terms, that there are three stages of development of consciousness: nigredo, albedo, and rubedo.

Nigredo, the first period of development (extending from birth to about eighteen) is one of increasing separation from the collective unconscious and from the mother. This time, from the beginning of life through childhood, is one of relative darkness and narcissism. Consciousness discovers its own world, the Real Self, and the "soul predominates in this period while the forces of spirit are germinating" (Cavalli, 2002, p. 180).

This first level of transformation is characterized by these capabilities (Masterson, 1988):

1. capacity to experience a wide range of feelings deeply with liveliness, joy, vigor, excitement and spontaneity
2. capacity to expect *appropriate* entitlements (things like food, clothing and shelter that we naturally expect to be given as conditions of early life)
3. capacity for self-activation and assertion
4. acknowledgment of self-esteem
5. ability to soothe painful feelings
6. ability to make and stick to commitments
7. creativity
8. intimacy
9. ability to be alone
10. continuity of self (knowing and maintaining who we really are regardless of who we are or what circumstances we happen to be in)
11. recognition of the shadow
12. identifying the inferior function

The second stage of development of consciousness, albedo, begins as the individual transcends the narcissism, shifting from merely existing in the world to responding to the demand to become more productive. Rather than separating from the world, one now must engage it, forging a relationship with the world. Albedo is a time of great awakening to the world beyond one's ego and family; consciousness discovers the world of others, the Individuate Self. Spirit begins to awaken as well. His second level of transformation elevates conscious functions to the level of transcendence, a temporary experience of an enlightened condition of conscious development, characterized by:

1. ability to regulate real self
2. beginnings of object love (withdrawal of projections)
3. coordination of all four psychological functions (feeling/water, sensate/earth, intellect/air, intuition/fire)
4. meaning/aliveness
5. synchronicity
6. creative use of dreams
7. vision/imagination

In the rubedo period of later life, vision enlarges, imagination is freed, consciousness expands, bondage to the fear and anxiety regarding mortality is vanquished, and the descending spirit unites with the

ascending soul. Consciousness discovers the divine world, the Divine Self, the permanent, living manifestation of god expressed within and through the human psyche, characterized by:

1. stable individuated self
2. compassion/grace
3. equanimity
4. bliss/ananda
5. non-dual being
6. multiplication (ability to continue one's transmutation indefinitely)
7. transcendent functioning

### *Hierarchy of Exploration of States of Consciousness*

The following hierarchy is suggested as an elaboration of Jung's three stages of development of consciousness, and a parallel process to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We are suggesting six stages. The first, dreamless sleep, represents the ground from which the soul begins its ascent in the form of libido or kundalini rising. It is not only the origin from which consciousness emerges, it continues to provide a daily respite in which it may again repose. The second, dream state, provides a direct connection with our ancestral heritage, the collective unconscious. Again we are afforded a daily infusion of reconnection, as well as the necessary deintegration "unlearning" that occurs in dream sleep. An important function of dream (REM) sleep is to remove certain undesirable patterns in networks of cells in the cerebral cortex (Crick & Mitchison, 1983). This active process is the opposite of learning, it is un-learning or reverse learning. Together these two stages correspond to Jung's nigredo stage.

Our third stage, ego self, corresponds to the beginnings of Jung's albedo stage. The transitional space between dream state and ego state is disintegration. To enter dreams requires us to fragment consciousness, to expand our normal ego boundaries, to split into parts. Emerging from dream state into ego state requires just the opposite function: contracting ego boundaries and merging the parts.

Existential self, our fourth stage, completes Jung's albedo stage. It is a time of integration and self-actualization. The transitional space between ego and existential selves is deintegration, in which unlearning must occur to allow for learning on a new level. Here one unlearns the lessons that were so hard-won in the previous state: reversing the drive toward separation into an embrace of community. Actually, the unlearning of deintegration occurs in *every* transitional space. The question is what needs

to be unlearned in order to move forward? Or alternatively, what has been dysfunctionally unlearned that is inhibiting forward movement?

Transpersonal self, our fifth stage, begins Jung's *rubedo* period, the discovery of the Divine Self. Here one begins to open up to transcending all that has come before. And the transitional space that opens one up is unintegration, in which the personality dips into formlessness for rest, tasting the state of unity which beckons us to move ahead into oneness and conscious non-existence, i.e., non-identification with ego.

The hierarchy of states of consciousness are presented as:

- 1) **Dreamless sleep:** Non-existence (mortido drive toward oblivion, dreamless sleep, death)
- 2) *transitional state* Libido energy, shakti, the eruption into life
- 3) **Dream sleep:** experiencing the unconscious without lucidity
- 4) *transitional state* Disintegration: the confusion of splitting into pieces or shattering apart. Self-boundary is expanded beyond that of the normal ego self through ego inflation
- 5) **Ego self:** Focus on self as separate and personal, self-preservation drive toward security, absolutes, certainties, the known and knowable.
- 6) *transitional state* Deintegration: de-constructing the ego, letting go , suspending controls with pleasure, permit ideas and visions to emerge playfully, allow necessary "unlearning" to occur
- 7) **Existential self:** Integration, self-actualized consciousness, libido drive toward satisfaction and passion in life
- 8) *transitional state* Unintegration: sublime peacefulness, personality dips into formlessness for rest, taking time off from self, in a state of *unboundaried radical connectedness*. Stretching the ego identity, losing oneself without feeling lost.
- 9) **Transpersonal self:** transcendently experience the self expanding into unrealized potentials for the good of all
- 10) *transitional state* Lucid dream state, NDE, shamanic journey state, profound feelings of peace, bliss, joy, and a sense of cosmic unity
- 11) **Unity (oneness) experience:** the void of openness, psychic dissolution into unity with all that exists

These stages and the transitional states between them are presented in Illustration 3.

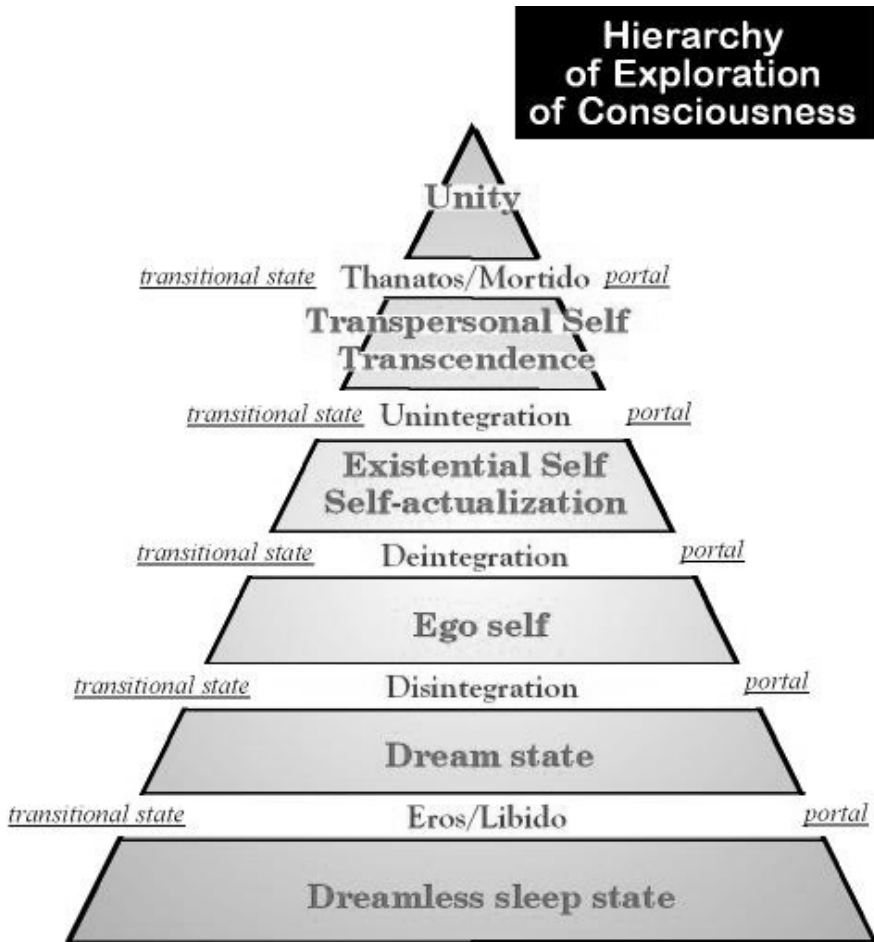


Illustration 3

*Ego, existential and transpersonal psychotherapy*

The ego level is organized around the self-image of 'I' as separate and unique from all that is 'not I.' Work at the ego level builds boundaries, integrates polarizations, replaces nonfunctional concepts of self and others, and modifies character structure for more fulfillment. "Once individuals have developed a more cohesive egoic identity, they can embark on a process that takes them further on the journey of self-discovery, that of

unfolding their existential self, or their true inner individuality” (Wittine, 1993, p.167).

The existential level is organized around life on earth itself and the social, cultural and spiritual ramifications of it, that is, the “human condition.” People’s existential issues are related to their mortality and impermanence, their experience of freedom of choice (or lack of it), their sense of worthiness, and their sense of separation/ connection with others. Work at this level is to loosen the rigidity of the self-image, to expand the relationship to the sacred, and to integrate one’s relationship with death. Five themes pervade the existential experience of self (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2003): (1) meaning in life is found in the living of each moment; (2) passionate commitment to a way of life, to one’s purpose and one’s relationships, is the highest form of expression of one’s humanity; (3) all human beings have freedom of choice and responsibility for our choices; (4) openness to experience allows for the greatest possible expansion of personal expression; and (5) in the ever-present face of death itself, we find the deepest commitment to life itself.

The transpersonal level is organized around the parts experienced as ‘not I,’ including rejected and repressed parts, introjected and attached energies, and the unrealized potentials. The work at this level includes identifying and healing repressed shadow parts, often easily accessed through one’s projections, and identifying and reclaiming the transcendent parts hitherto beyond reach (such as archetypal, past life, preconception, prenatal, perinatal, and death experiences).

These three major levels of development are similar to those proposed by Wilber (1977) as the pathological, existential, and transpersonal. We suggest two states of being that precede the ego state developmentally and in level of awareness: dreamless sleep and dream sleep. The dreamless sleep state is one of non-existence, reflected by the mortido drive toward oblivion and death, and the absolute need for regular and frequent periods of non-existence. The dream sleep state is one of direct experience of the unconscious, both the personal and the collective unconscious, also absolutely needed by human beings on a regular and frequent basis.

Finally, a state exists that is the experience of life beyond earthly life, that is to say of death and life after death. It is approached in near-death experience, or interlife experience in hypnotherapy. This state is beyond transcendence. Joseph Campbell wrote of the transitional approach to the state and of the state itself, the source of the “undifferentiated substratum of being.”

The function of ritual and myth is to make possible, and then to facilitate, the jump – by analogy. Forms and conceptions that the mind and its senses can comprehend are presented and arranged in such a way as to suggest a truth or openness beyond. And then, the conditions for meditation having been provided, the individual is left alone. Myth is but the penultimate; the ultimate is openness – that void, or being, beyond the categories – into which the mind must plunge alone and be dissolved (Campbell, 1973, p. 258).

### *Transitional states*

The work of growth from one level to a higher level, i.e., of transformation, must occur in a suitable holding environment, providing in Winnicott's terms a *transitional space* for stepping from infantile ego dependence into ego autonomy, and eventually from ego autonomy into ego transcendence. The transitional object (teddy bear, stuffed animal, blanket) constitute a first step in the child's separation from mother, a substitute for the mother's care that provides a feeling of safety for the child. The transitional object allows the child safe and supported space within which to move from a purely subjective experience to one in which there is a clear distinction between "me" and "other." The transitional object enjoys a special in-between status, neither "me" nor "other," but somehow both.

For the developing adult, a supportive environment serves to create the transitional space for stepping from the current level of functioning into a new higher level, offering sufficient ego security to allow for risking the ego, offering order and simultaneously accepting chaos: "Order within disorder, stability and instability side by side – herein lies the developmental riddle" (Mayes, 2001, p. 168).

Transformation only occurs in a transitional space, the *liminality* or *threshold* present in any rite of passage. Risking passage across the threshold is possible only with a high degree of ego security, allowing for an openness to the unknown and the unknowable. That openness is manifested within the context of meditation, lucid dreams, ecstatic experience (e.g., orgasm), hypnotic trance states, shamanic states, sacred or mystical moments. We refer to this tendency for psychological material (imagery, ideation, affect, and perception) to cross thresholds into or out of consciousness with ease as *transliminality* (Thalbourne, 2000). And Thalbourne's research documents that people who are highly transliminal also score high on the 'Big Five' personality dimension of openness to experience (McCrae, 1994). The transitional state always requires some element of surrender, and that resembles the process of death (Tulku, 2000,

p. 280). The death process is one of dissolution from a solid gross level state of being to an ethereal energy level. What dissolves are the “everyday ego consciousness” beliefs in absoluteness and solidity of material existence, beliefs in separateness and boundariedness between oneself and everything else, beliefs in the linearity of time and fixity of space.

Transliminality allows migration of information across the threshold in both directions. Therefore, subconscious, or subliminal, material is allowed into consciousness. Extreme transliminality may have negative as well as positive outcomes. High levels of transliminality could account for mystical experience, for example. However, excessive transliminality may allow unrestricted subliminal material into consciousness, or too much material too soon. An example is mania, with its flight of ideas, overly optimistic elation, and delusions of grandeur. Another is depression, in which highly unpleasant memories and morbid delusions rise up again and again. Drugs such as lithium and the antidepressants might all be described in general as antitransliminals, and their principal intended action would be to put a lid on the excesses of subliminal activity and migration of conscious thought across the threshold.

What are the attributes of the positive experience of extreme transliminality?

The individual experiences a dissolution of the identification with the solid, boundaried self, as one opens to unity, noetic experience, transcendence of space and time, the sense of sacredness, bliss, paradoxicality, ineffability, impermanence. Identifying with the ego is what creates the ultimate anxieties: fear of life (separation) and fear of death (union). Dissolving the identification evaporates those fears.

“. . . the concurrent state of being can not be changed without first being annihilated, and then reborn. . . . In general, this initiatory ‘death’ and implicit purgatory period is imperative for the beginning of a new life” (Roman et al., 1973, p. 83). Laing (1968) describes the process of psychological healing as “a voyage from outer to inner” and back again “from inner to outer,” culminating in an “existential rebirth.”

The expressions in various languages for orgasm reveal this graphically. In French, the word translates as “little death.” In Chinese, it is “having a high tide” (Epstein, 1998, p. 47). Both reflect the self being submerged or dissolved, without a foothold or point of reference. The word for death in ancient Aramaic, the native language of Jesus, *maw’ta*, literally translates as “not here, present elsewhere.”

Grosso (1998) discusses the work of Dr. William Roll on the consciousness that may survive bodily death, calling it *theta consciousness*. Theta consciousness extends beyond the body, into the “long body,” a term he borrowed from the Iroquois Indians. The long body exhibits itself, according to Roll, in out-of-body experiences, transpersonal and mystical states, deathlike or near-death states, and presumably consciousness after physical death. Singh (1998) suggests that we may approach this same theta state in meditation as well.

These transitional states are known to most people, but perhaps only rarely or subliminally. Both spiritual and psychotherapeutic growth require the building of transitional or potential space within which to do necessary integrative work. Transitional space is a personal space between security (secure attachment) and autonomy (freedom to explore), and can be one of harmonious balance or of terrifying chaos.

Humans in general prefer constancy and status quo to instability and change, and therefore when change inevitably comes, attempt to avoid the transition between the status quo and whatever comes next. The avoidance can come in the form of indecision, ambivalence, and procrastination. It can come in the form of impulsive jumping headfirst. In either case the underlying fear driving the avoidance is of unpredictability, disorder, and confusion: chaos.

The Chinese character Kun (Chaos) is a pictograph representing a plant struggling to break through the hard ground in its growth journey to gradually rise above the surface (see Illustration 4). Before a great vision can become reality, there may be difficulty. Before a person begins a great endeavor, he/she may encounter chaos. As a new plant breaks the ground with great difficulty, foreshadowing the huge tree, we must push against the difficulties in bringing forth our dreams. Out of chaos, growth to a new dimension is born. Chaos is where great dreams begin.



Illustration 4

Effective change, including any developmental growth, requires some degree of chaos. Therefore, we must become clear about what that necessary chaos really is in order to successfully resist the attempt to avoid it. Effective change, such as developmental growth, requires a willingness to deintegrate or unlearn, to journey to the source, to recognize and neutralize any guardians defending the threshold through which that journey must cross, and to understand the magical nature of creation in order to return from the journey successfully. Remember that we are investigating the process of *becoming someone else*, and in particular the aspects of that process that occur in between states, the transitional experiences. We will now explore the origins of the principles involved, using Greek mythology as a vehicle for that exploration.

### *Chaos vs. order*

Before anything was, before the beginning of everything, according to Greek mythology, there was the Void, the pregnant open emptiness: *Chaos*. Chaos is the creative void, the formless source of all form. From this Void issued *Gaia*, physical existence and the living spirit of the created world; *Tartarus*, the underworld; *Nyx* and *Erebus*, female and male personifications of primordial darkness; and *Eros*, the spiritual medium connecting Chaos and Gaia, the creative impulse of love, desire, and enchantment. Eros emerges into manifestation from the Void, and thus provides humans with their reach back up to Spirit. Eros is creativity; it is the expansion of possibilities that comes through passionate participation. This is a two-fold focus: spirit and drama, pleasure and pain. Eros implies the intersection of the lover, the beloved, and that which separates them. A dynamic tension is held in the in-between space, the space separating lover from beloved, separating soul from spirit. “One moment staggers under pressure of eros; one mental state splits” (Carson, 1998, p. 4).

From *Nyx* and *Erebus* issued *Charon*, the ferryman who would transport the souls of the dead across the River Styx to the entrance of the underworld; *Hypnos*, the god of sleep, a gentle and benevolent force who brings the restorative gift of sleep to mortals and gods alike; and *Thanatos*, god of death who reverently carries the dead body away when it has been discarded by the departing soul. Refer to Illustration 5. A complex interrelationship exists between Chaos, Gaia, and Eros, dating to the Paleolithic period. “The word *Chaos* first appears, along with Gaia and Eros, in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, as the three cosmic principles from which all

else derives. These three constitute what might be called the *Orphic Trinity*” (Abraham, 1994, p. 81).

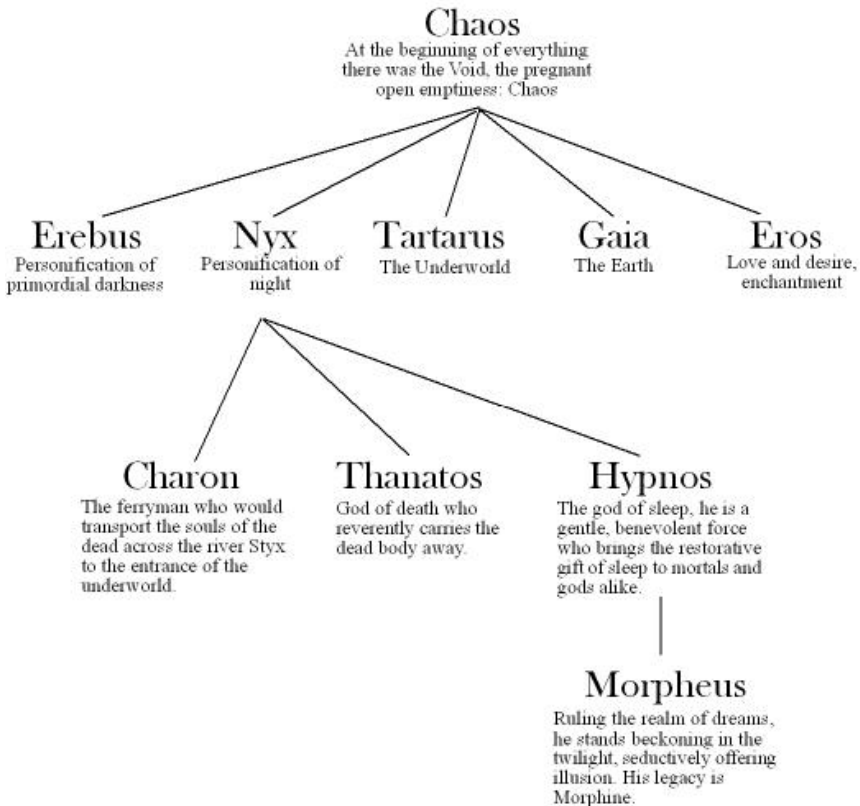


Illustration 5

From Chaos emerges Matter and Spirit (Gaia and Eros), Darkness and Light, Night and Day. From Gaia, the *Anima Mundi*, or soul of the world, comes mountains, sea, sky, and of course human beings. Eros, being not female but androgynous, has no direct prodigy. From Eros comes engagement and embrace of experience, enchantment with existence, passion for life. Rollo May (1969) speaks eloquently of eros as the power which attracts us to become involved in life, to grow toward “union with our own possibilities” (p. 73), which impels people toward health in

psychotherapy, a “continuously replenished urge which impels the individual to dedicate himself to seek forever higher forms of truth, beauty, and goodness” (p. 77). Eros is the personification, the archetype, of libidinal energy within the human being. That energy is necessary to impel us toward growth, and eventually to provide the raw materials for our transformation and transcendence.

The concept incorporates formlessness and the ever-present potential for explosive or catastrophic bifurcation (the Big Bang). Chaos was experienced to be dancing in partnership with Order (Cosmos). The sun, by most myths, was born in darkness and when it arises it brings with it some of that darkness. Shadow is the invisible aspect of the sun, just as chaos is the invisible *and essential* aspect of order. This mythical understanding from early in human history recognizes the intimate connectedness between all things, and spawned the profound “mystery sciences” of shamanism, metaphysics, alchemy, Kabbalah, yoga, and theosophy. This mythical understanding also represents personally and psychologically the most profound level of human consciousness, uncontaminated by unworthiness, power struggles, and confused identity.

We can find this archetypal wisdom in the creation story of the Bible, in Genesis 1:1-4 (King James Version):

1. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
2. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
3. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
4. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

Creation here follows the sequence of first being formless and void, and then taking form in duality. The Hebrew phrase used in the creation story is *tohu vavohu*, translated as *chaos and emptiness* by Graves and Patai (1964, p. 21), as *unformed and unordered* by Schochet (1979, p. 134), and as *empty and void* by Niditch (1985, p. 12). Kabbalists suggest that *tohu vavohu* carries the meaning of *nothing and the potential for everything*. The term *vohu* is linked to the Greek term *hayuli*, or *hyle*, Aristotle’s word for “prime matter.” It has the connotation of something which gives birth, which brings into existence, like a womb. The cosmos, the universe, is composed of an original substance (*hyle*) that is alive, timeless, has no limits and no shape, but is material. It is not composed of

any of the known elements; it is chaos, a mixture of all of them, known and unknown ones, but not in their pure known form. Chaos is a mythical concept, conceptualised as a material essence, without characteristics, without limitations or specific conditions, common to all things, out of which all of them come into existence.

This provides us with a fascinating recipe for the process of creation, the process of *becoming someone else* conveyed in the myths of the hero's journey or in Jung's alchemical transformation metaphor. First one must recognize and access the source of anything new, that which is nothing and the potential for everything. Development is transcendence into what is imagined and faithfully held as possible. "If you can conceive and believe it, you can achieve it" is an affirmation attributed to Napoleon Hill.

Historically, about the time that patriarchal domination was established in most societies, Chaos began to be seen as engaged in a mighty struggle with Order, and in that battle Chaos was valued as Bad and Order was valued as Good. Joseph Campbell (1983) identified the Cosmos/Chaos battle theme as the origin of the mythical concepts of heaven and hell. Two views of God evolved: Chaos, the pregnant open emptiness, the creative void; and Chaos engaged with Cosmos (Order), usually in conflict for dominance. The synthesis of these two views recognizes God as both chaos (the infinite field of possibilities) and the process of communication by means of which cosmos arises from chaos. God creates and emerges from original chaos. God creates both in the past and in the present. The creative act of divine self-communication, of continuously bringing about the patterns of harmony and intelligence that constitute the cosmos, this constitutes God's own being (Huchingson, 2001).

What difference does it make? The creation myths provide us with the most primordial template for our process of transforming into something new and unknown, that which only exists now as formless potential. To the extent that chaos is judged to be regrettable and bad, we are likely to continue to avoid change and the transitions inherent in change. To the extent that we are able to accept the realities presented by both ancient wisdom and the newest theoretical physics, that chaos is essential to creation and preservation of life, we are more likely to embrace the uncertainties of change. In Abraham's words:

This truth has been banished to the collective unconscious for all these centuries. From the shadows of the unconscious, it pushes forth into our consciousness and literature in poetry and song, romance and struggle. It erects heretical monuments in the history of our art, architecture, music, science, and philosophy. The myth of evil chaos threatens our

future, inclining us always and everywhere to try to impose on Nature an unhealthy, orderly state. The excessive order of our agricultural techniques, for example, contributes to global environmental problems. Our challenge now is to restore goodness to chaos and disorder to a degree, and to reestablish the partnership of Cosmos and Chaos, so necessary to nature, to health, and to creation. This requires a major modification to our mythological foundations, unchanged these past millennia, and this is *no mean feat* (1994, p. 141).

The loss of Chaos and Gaia to the collective unconscious has left us with a weakened Eros (1994, p. 151).

Gaia is our physical origin, nourishment, and life support. Gaia is also our primary access to splendid and intimate modes of divine presence, i.e., to inspiration and revelation (Amidan & Roberts, 1987). Conjure an existence without sunsets and fragrant flowers, titanic oceans and towering redwoods, summer breezes and plants growing through concrete. Now imagine how often we live amidst these indescribable wonders *without experiencing them*. The great Earth Mother offers opportunities for accessing transcendent consciousness, yet we revile her, pollute and pillage her, and deny not only her divine intermediacy but even our dependency on her life support. Gaia through these two aspects offers balance between *immanence* in this time-space and *transcendence* beyond it.

Gaia is conscious. Nature exhibits great awareness of and adaptation to the surroundings, and communication with it. Plants exist and operate in an intermediate realm that melds mind and matter; they are conscious (see the discussion of ESP, plants that read your mind and react to your emotions, and plant auras in *The Secret Life of Plants* by Peter Tompkins). Inanimate objects, too, operate in that intermediate realm, exhibiting characteristics of consciousness (see the discussion of bells, atoms, diamonds, clocks, and mountains in *The Nature of Things: The Secret Life of Inanimate Objects* by Lyall Watson). Recognizing one's connectedness with nature, with Mother Gaia, provides access to immense resources of instinct, intuition, animal and elemental spirits, and much more.

We originate from Chaos through Gaia, and we return at the end of life to Gaia, with the potential for an ultimate return to Chaos, the vast creative void. This, too, describes our journey up the hierarchy of levels of consciousness: from deep sleep through an increasingly individuated ego self to an ultimate return to unity with the Primordial.

Replacing the mythological foundation of dominance with the more ancient one of partnership requires accessing what has been buried deep within the collective unconscious. That is, in fact, one of the most valuable assets of using altered states of consciousness in the healing and growth

process. Hypnosis and meditation, lucid dream state and shamanic journey state provide that access in a partnership of intention and surrender.

On a personal and psychological level, the meaning of these two viewpoints is clear: healing and spiritual growth can be approached in one or the other. In the dominance approach, one uses the rational functions of the ego to attempt to separate the light and the shadow, chaos and order, to pick sides between them, and to attempt to annihilate the “bad” aspect. In the partnership approach, one uses resources beyond the reach of ego to embrace and integrate the light *and* the shadow, chaos *and* order.

St. John of the Cross described this work as the dark night of the soul. Darkness has no reality, being only an aspect of (the absence of) light. As such, however, “it absorbs light, projections, images and fantasies. If we are unaware of these characteristics, the mind automatically projects its fears onto the blank screen of the unknown, giving it a power it does not inherently possess” (Cavalli, 2002, p. 240).

### *Potential space and possible selves*

Potential space, or transitional space, as exemplified by the mythology of creation, is important to us because it is in this space that change occurs, where growth manifests through transcendence beyond what has existed in the past. This transformational process can be observed on several levels; three identified by Guernsey (1995) will be explored here. Additionally, we review the origins of possible selves within the context of potential space, and the conscious creation of potential space as a portal to transpersonal experience.

One level is interpersonally. Potential space originates in the mother-infant relationship, an imaginary space constructed and occupied by both self and other, where the infant’s self and nonself are only partially differentiated or where the boundaries between reality and fantasy are not fully established (Grolnick, 1990). This intermediate area is neither inside the individual (i.e., personal or psychic reality) nor in the outside world of shared reality (i.e., actual world). Its foundation is based on the infant’s experiences of trust and confidence in the mother during the separation-individuation stage of development (i.e., that she will not fail to be there if she is needed). As the toddler becomes aware of the mother’s separateness, of her capacity to go away and to resist the child’s omnipotent control, the child attempts to fill the space between self and other with a “transitional object” - a blanket, a pillow, a piece of cloth, perhaps a teddy bear. This

object serves as a symbol both of the actual mother in her absence and of the lost “mother-as-connected-to-the-self” (Guernsey, 1995).

Potential space, then, is the psychic space filled by the child’s representation of the mother-infant relationship and played out in reality with the transitional object. Potential space compensates for the gap between mother and child as real space opens up between them (Winnicott, 1957, 1971), and becomes the prototype for later interpersonal spaces. Transitional space and transitional objects indicate the infant’s transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being something outside, separate, and in relation to the mother. Here we see the first two stages of the hero’s journey, *departure* past the threshold of identification with mother and entry into the in-between space where *initiation* occurs, foreshadowing the third stage, a *return* or rebirth in a new transcendent form.

A second level of the potential space phenomenon is that of psychic spaces to be populated by introjects - internalized representations of important others (Winnicott, 1971). The introjected parental qualities and beliefs, which originate in the other, are transferred and assimilated in the potential space where the self and the other meet and intermingle. The quality of the child’s experience of potential space contribute to formation of his/her boundaries and capacity to be alone (at first with the aid of the transitional object), to be intimate with others, and to play with spontaneity. These capacities are contingent on the survival of the “as-if” attitude, as well as the secure attachment, first available to the child in potential space.

Third, potential space is the space of the sacraments and rituals and initiations, in which material objects or natural phenomena, acting as transitional objects, conjure sacred experience. The experience of sacredness, or spiritual intimacy, emerges from this imaginary space constructed and occupied by both self and spirit (at first with the aid of transitional objects). A person discovers elevation and transcendence in the space between self and Divine Other, the potential space where the self meets the Divine psychically. Success in finding this transcendence in adulthood is a direct descendent of the child’s experience in the separation-individuation stage of development. In the words of Galligan (2000):

When the intermediate area is intact and the inner and outer realities are interrelating with one another, the individual is provided with special ways of knowing (Schwartz, 1992). The transitional process provides a psychological space that is between the subjective internal world and the objective external world. This psychological space is a place where the

individual can use objects from the outer world to enhance growth in the inner world (Jones, 1992). In essence, an individual's capacity to play in this intermediate/cultural area demonstrates a capacity for blending illusion and reality and is representative of ultimate human development and health, because it signifies the ability to live creatively and to feel real (Abram, 1996; Meissner, 1992).

The child who fails to gain sufficient trust in the first two years to enter into potential space with an adequate caregiver has a devastating developmental arrest to overcome. Winnicott observed that when an infant is left too long alone without human contact the child's experience can only be described as "going to pieces; falling forever; dying and dying and dying" (Winnicott, 1965b). Another way to say this is that growth and transformation require the capacity to experience the "as-if attitude," which is first available to the child in healthy potential space (Chodorow, 1978). Trauma of any kind jeopardizes the child's opportunities for meaningful play experiences because the child's emotional memories remain arrested at the developmental stage in which the traumatic event occurred. The child feels insecure and unprotected, having lost trust and confidence, and development itself is associated with the traumatic event (Norton & Norton, 1997).

These infants are born to what Green (1983) calls "The Dead Mother Syndrome." Although the mother is alive, due to trauma or depression or mental illness she has withdrawn emotionally from her child. The child identifies with the depressed or emotionally absent mother and his/her psychic development becomes founded upon this loss. Such infants are rarely held. Their mothers' gaze looks outward; these mothers avoid looking into their infants' eyes because they will see only a reflection of their own inadequacy. These babies are born into a void, with no containment, no stimulus barrier. The whole environment is overstimulating. There are no encircling, protecting arms of the mother, only the harsh realities of a cruel and unfriendly world. Smolen (2003) has studied homeless mothers as an example of this kind of parenting.

Other influences that become easily accessible in transitional spaces are the individual's collection of self-conceptions and self-images, including the good selves (the ones we remember fondly), the bad selves (the ones we would just as soon forget), the hoped-for selves, the feared selves, the not-me selves, the ideal selves, the ought selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These can also be conceptualized as autonomous complexes (Jung) or working models functioning automatically (Bowlby, 1980).

Possible selves represent how individuals think about their potential and about their future, what people believe is possible for themselves (positively and negatively), who you want to be, or who you are afraid of becoming. "Possible selves are the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming. The possible selves that are hoped for might include the successful self, the creative self, the rich self, the thin self, or the loved and admired self, whereas the dreaded possible selves could be the alone self, the depressed self, the incompetent self, the alcoholic self, the unemployed self, or the bag lady self" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Possible selves are the cognitive manifestation of one's hopes, fears, goals, and perceived threats. As such they function as incentives for future behavior (i.e., they are selves to be approached or avoided).

Past selves, the person I was at age three or fourteen or forty, can also be possible selves. While I am not a three-year-old child, some critical aspects of that child self may remain within my self-concept as a possible self (Block, 1981; Brim & Kagan, 1980).

"The inclusion of a sense of what is possible within the self-concept allows it to become dynamic. Some possible selves stand as symbols of hope, whereas others are reminders of bleak, sad, or tragic futures that are to be avoided. Yet all of these ideas about what is possible for us to be, to think, to feel, or to experience provide a direction and impetus for action, change, and development. Possible selves give specific cognitive form to our desires for mastery, power, or affiliation, and to our diffuse fears of failure and incompetence" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 960).

Rather than conceptualizing the self as a single underlying authentic self that is the essence of the person, it may make more sense to conceive of a self-concept that is diverse and multifaceted, a collection of possible selves. Seeing people in this way emphasizes the vital importance of the transitional spaces between these possible selves, the "changing rooms" in which the person modifies which aspect of himself to identify with next. Clearly, one's highest expression is found in relaxing into an immersion in the transitional space, loosening one's rigid identification with the status quo, and flowing in unintegration.

This begs the question, How do we consciously utilize such a 'changing room' for transformation to a higher level possible self, a self-actualized self, or a transpersonal self? Consciously created transitional space can be a portal through which to enter transpersonal experience. The capacity to be alone, to be intimate with others, to play with spontaneity, to

blend illusion and reality, first available to the child in healthy potential space, offers the possibility of ultimate human development. Examples of “intermediate/cultural areas” for adult growth, reliant on these capabilities, are hypnosis, breathwork, the “shamanic state of consciousness” (SSC), out-of-body experiences (OBE), near-death experiences (NDE), and the lucid dreaming state.

These states share the same EEG pattern of high-voltage, slow-wave delta frequency as that predominant in the womb and through two years of age. Each of these states generates an increase in primary process thinking, a feeling of acute increased awareness, a lowering of perceptual boundaries, and shares a unique psychobiological signature, namely high-voltage, slow-wave hippocampal-septal hypersynchrony (HSHH). These states are associated with meditation and a transcendental state of consciousness (Wilbur, 2000), and with restorative and regenerative processes, deep creativity, hyper-learning and hypnotic suggestibility (Robbins, 2000). These states are the frontier meeting ground of waking and dream states, the balance of sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems (reaction and maintenance). A full discussion of this topic is found in Zimberoff and Hartman (1999).

### *Metaphors for transitional spaces*

Transformation usually follows a predictable pattern of transitions: an ending, then an intermediate zone, then a new beginning. At times of new beginnings, we often feel uncertain or anxious about choice and commitment. In the intermediate zone, we feel confused and ungrounded. When something ends, we are afraid of loss, separation and death (Bridges, 1980).

The intermediate, transitional moments provide unique opportunities for immediate dramatic change; these are moments of potential transcendence. “These are borderline states; they are times of crisis, when the tension is at its peak, but which are also most pregnant psychologically, since they are times when change can most readily occur. Inherent in such states is the opportunity for transformation. In the crack between two worlds - of the living and the dead, of death and rebirth - lies the supreme opportunity” (Moacanin, 1986, p. 67). This crack appears whenever we expand our experience of who we are, embracing parts previously suppressed, or disidentifying from limited self-definitions. These moments occur in experiential transpersonal psychotherapy, in shamanic work, in soul retrievals, in meditative states, in ritual rites and other spiritual

ecstasies. These moments offer death to the outdated, and liberation from captivity to the soul.

*The Hero's Journey.* Transitions can also be seen through the perspective of the hero journey (Campbell, 1973). An individual, in the course of becoming a hero, makes a pilgrimage which involves (1) separation, a departure; (2) an initiation; and (3) a return or rebirth. One departs from home, from the familiar, the everyday, the consciousness shared by the community. There comes a time for this leaving, when the individual has prepared sufficiently and is ready. Then, before receiving the initiation, he/she must cross the first threshold, descending into the darkness. At the entrance to the zone of magnified power, he encounters the "threshold guardian." Guardians can appear to be magicians, tricksters, demons or dragons. This threshold signifies leaving the hero's present realm, beyond which lies darkness, the unknown, and danger. "The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades" (Campbell, 1973, p. 82).

Most commonly, one of two fates befalls the adventurer at the threshold. One is to be cut to pieces by the guardian dragon, only to be reconstituted in a "new improved" form, stronger and wiser. Of course, the unsuccessful adventurer, who turns out not to be a hero, is defeated at the hands of the conquering dragon and does not transcend the death. The other potential outcome is that the adventurer kills the guardian dragon, and proceeds to drink its blood, i.e., to assimilate its powers and thus become "new improved," stronger and wiser. It is a great error, and a huge waste, to kill the dragon and *not* drink its blood, i.e., to believe that one can defeat and master one's dragon defenses without incorporating them in some very real way. Nietzsche supposedly said, "Be careful lest in casting out your devil, you cast out the best thing that's in you."

As a metaphor for our growth and transformation, these two alternatives offer ways for us to deal with our "dragons," our "shadows," the guardian defenses against crossing the threshold of a "new improved," stronger and wiser me. If only we will set out to find and encounter the dragons at the periphery of our conscious everyday experience, anyone with competence and courage will prevail. And become stronger and wiser for the encounter.

Journeying beyond the threshold and into the zone of magnified power, the hero finds and claims a treasure. That treasure could take many forms,

but it is always something of great value, and tangibly useful, to the adventurer. Having journeyed to claim this treasure, he/she must recognize the object of the pilgrimage among all the many objects competing for attention. There are distractions that can lead one astray from the original mission. Recognizing and claiming the treasure is an initiation into a new and higher level of existence.

Once initiated, the hero must return home, crossing the return threshold. Standing guard at this threshold, protecting the homeland, are conventions, popularly accepted beliefs, and the demands of conformity. So the transition back from foreign lands to one's homeland "is the hero's ultimate difficult task. How render back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark? How represent on a two-dimensional surface a three-dimensional form, or in a three-dimensional image a multi-dimensional meaning? How translate into terms of 'yes' and 'no' revelations that shatter into meaninglessness every attempt to define the pairs of opposites? How communicate to people who insist on the exclusive evidence of their senses the message of the all-generating void?" (Campbell, 1973, p. 218).

The irony of the hero's journey out of the land we know into the land of darkness, from the world of the human to that of magnified power, of the divine, is to discover upon the return that the two worlds are actually one. "The realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the world we know" (Campbell, 1973, p. 217). The task on return is one of integration, of expanding one's paradigm to incorporate the new perspective with the old wisdom.

*"Old-old" to "old-new" to "new-new."* The process of transitioning from an existing pattern to a new pattern can be conceptualized in the developmental systems self psychology terminology presented by Shane et al. (1997). Developmental systems self psychology is a variation of self psychology that incorporates ideas from attachment theory, neurobiology, and nonlinear dynamic systems theory. Successful transition requires a corrective experience which bridges the threshold ("old-new") standing between the existing pattern ("old-old") and the new desired pattern ("new-new").

With parallels to the hero's journey, this approach suggests a three-stage healing process that occurs in therapy, based on the therapeutic relationship which develops in a nonlinear fashion. Initially, the client experiences life, including the therapy relationship, based on the deeply-embedded memories of trauma and their generalizations (beliefs). This

Shane et al. refer to as the “old (traumatized) self,” reflexively and unconsciously in relationship to the projected “old (trauma-producing) other,” i.e., the abuser. Such a configuration of relationship they call “old-old.” This may occur either acutely in a flashback state, or continuously in a chronic state of traumatic hypervigilance (Wolf et al., 2000).

Through positive new experiences with the therapist, the client begins to enter a second phase of healing: the “old-new” configuration. Positive new experience is defined as experience that moves the client along the trajectory of developmental progression from an old traumatized self in relation to an old trauma-producing other to a healthy new self in relation to a new development-enhancing other (Wolf et al., 2000). The client, still suffering in the “old” traumatic state, perceives the therapist as a “new” non-traumatizing, appropriately responsive and safe relationship. Finally, the client experiences a shift in the self to a “new” non-traumatized, secure state, capable of accepting healthy relationship with the “new” non-traumatizing other: a “new-new” configuration.

The transitional space between the old and the new is guarded by defenses, is facilitated by a transitional object, and demands on return the task of integration, of expanding one’s paradigm to incorporate the new perspective.

*Jung’s process of individuation.* The hero’s pilgrimage is mapped out for us as well within Carl Jung’s transformational process of individuation. In the beginning stages of psychological transformation, one must find the true limits of his/her psyche, the “boundaries of the soul,” and then collect within that boundary the “lost or vagrant or unrealized bits of psychic material which can hardly be called psychic contents as long as they exist only in projected form” (Harding, 1973, p. 418). The disconnected parts of self that are reclaimed in this way often feel incompatible, and must be reconciled and welcomed home, fused into a whole.

*The shaman’s initiation.* Just as the hero’s journey involves overcoming great danger to return triumphantly home, albeit a home expanded in paradigm, so the shaman’s initiation requires suffering and transcendence. Induction into the shamanic world requires leaving behind the mundane “normality” of consensus consciousness, conventions, popularly accepted beliefs, and the demands of conformity. “Without tragedies, near-death experiences, traumata, death/rebirth experiences and shocks we cannot escape from this generally accepted normality. Once again we encounter the theme of shamanic suffering – a suffering intense enough to kill” (Kalweit, 1988, p. 240). The threshold to be crossed is a

dying experience, death of the subjective ego and breakthrough to a new transpersonal self.

*Transitional moments in the stream of consciousness.* Another instance of transitional states, or another way to conceptualize them, is the “transition between subselves” (Tart, 1993, p. 158), between one’s various ego states. The customary defense against fully experiencing or acknowledging the unacceptable in us is to identify solely with the acceptable ones and avoid directly being in an unacceptable state. That effectively avoids any transitional state between the acceptable and the unacceptable, or the reverse. However threatening it may be, the moment of transition, brought to awareness, offers an opportunity for choice, for transcendence. That is why we help the addict, for example, to focus conscious attention on the actual transitional experience, just as the urge emerges and before it is acted on.

On an even more micro level, we know that we have transitional states of “no-thought,” or undifferentiated spaces, between articulated thoughts, similar to pauses in speech denoted by a comma. Welwood (1976) refers to these undifferentiated moments of consciousness which have no formal content or structure as “emptiness.” He suggests, however, that the emptiness is pregnant with a “diffuse richness” which contributes significantly to one’s experience. Thoughts and perceptions derive their full meaning from their relationship to the “empty” spaces around them. William James (1890) was particularly fascinated with these transitional moments as they occur in the stream of consciousness, referring to them as “transitive parts.” He also appreciated the difficulty of observing them.

Now it is very difficult, introspectively, to see the transitive parts for what they really are. If they are but flights to a conclusion, stopping them to look at them before the conclusion is reached is really annihilating them. . . . The attempt at introspective analysis in these cases is in fact like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks (pp. 243-244).

In order to discover and observe these moments, one must relax focal attention and shift to a diffuse form of attention that allows “the seeing of things in their holistic complexity *all at once*” (Welwood, 1976, p. 94).

*Bardos.* Another elaboration of how to navigate transitional space is the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of bardos, which means a transition, a gap between the completion of one situation and the onset of another. The Tibetan system is exquisitely elaborate, encompassing the transitional

spaces of death, the interlife, and rebirth, as well as transitional moments in the stream of consciousness.

Sogyal Rinpoche, in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or Bardo Thodol* (1993), discusses the inclusion of death as an experience in this lifetime:

At the moment of death, there are two things that count: Whatever we have done in our lives, and what state of mind we are in at that moment. Even if we have accumulated a lot of negative karma, if we are able really to make a change of heart at the moment of death, it can decisively influence our future and transform our karma, for the moment of death is an exceptionally powerful opportunity for purifying karma (p.223).

And this is why, rather surprisingly, it is said in our tradition that a person who is liberated at the moment of death is considered to be liberated in *this* lifetime, and *not* in one of the bardo states after death; for it is within this lifetime that the essential recognition of the Clear Light has taken place and been established. This is a crucial point to understand (p. 107).

Even though this life itself is considered a bardo, to most people it seems as if it must be more than that, more than just a gap between conception and death. It is nothing more, however, “compared to the enormous length and duration of our karmic history” (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993, p. 103). Even so, bardos and the opportunities they present are plentiful throughout the lifespan. For example, every day we experience sleep and dream states that correspond with the three bardos associated with death. Sogyal Rinpoche (1993, p. 344) explains:

The three phases of the process we see unfolding in the bardo states in death can be perceived in other levels of consciousness in life also. Consider them in the light of what occurs in sleep and death:

1. When we fall asleep, the senses and grosser layers of consciousness dissolve, and gradually the absolute nature of mind, we could say the Ground Luminosity, is briefly laid bare.

2. Next there is a dimension of consciousness, comparable to the bardo of dharmata, which is so subtle that we are normally completely unaware of its very existence. How many of us, after all, are aware of the moment of sleep before dreams begin?

3. For most of us, all that we are aware of is the next stage, when the mind becomes yet again active, and we find ourselves in a dream-world similar to the bardo of becoming. Here we take on a dream-body and go through different dream-experiences to a great extent influenced and shaped by the habits and activities of our waking state, all of which we believe to be solid and real, without ever realizing that we are dreaming.

It is important to emphasize that “in reality bardos *are occurring continuously throughout both life and death*, and . . . are particularly powerful opportunities for liberation because there are, the teachings show us, certain moments that are much more powerful than others and much

more charged with potential, when whatever you do has a crucial and far-reaching effect” (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993, p. 11). Thus, the essence of bardo can be applied to every moment of existence: “The present moment, the now, is a continual bardo, always suspended between the past and the future. . . . Wherever there is the death of one state of mind, there is the birth of another, and linking the two there is bardo” (Fremantle, 2001, p. 54-55).

### *Forms that transitions can take*

Some transitions from one state to another are gradual, some are planned and navigated, some are sudden and spontaneous; all involve some form of unlearning or deintegration. One way to conceptualize this is the scientific term *bifurcation*, which implies a fork in the road. The term is used in mathematics and physics to describe the process of change in any dynamic system. The point at which stress causes the system to destabilize is called a *bifurcation point*. When a system bifurcates, the previous stable form dissolves, and a new order begins to evolve. As the instability of a system grows, it enters bifurcation, which appears to be a chaotic state. The importance of this transitional chaotic state is that it permits the destabilized elements to interact in new ways, thereby enabling a system to adapt and to evolve.

Miller (1999, p. 372-373) states the case this way: “From a dynamic systems perspective, the aim of psychoanalytic treatment is to transform rigidly ordered, closed systems into more open and adaptive states. Treatment endeavors to alter the organization of a system, to increase the flow of energy and information between the system and its environment, so that the system can evolve toward increasing complexity and adaptive fittedness. The process of change centers on destabilizing or loosening the connections between the elements that form a rigidly ordered system.”

There are three forms that such a change can take (Abraham, 1994): *subtle bifurcation*, a gradual change in the dynamics of a system, such as a change from rest to subtle vibration; *explosive bifurcation*, an unsubtle change in which the equilibrium of the system suddenly increases, such as when an engine breaks, resulting in a sudden increase in the noise made by the engine; and a *catastrophic bifurcation*, the disappearance of equilibrium in the system, followed by a rapid fall to a new equilibrium, such as turning on or off a light switch.

The transitions between states of consciousness, the in-between experiences of any growth process, can be subtle, explosive, or

catastrophic. Subtle growth processes are the gradual, methodical use of prearranged experiences. Psychotherapy consists primarily of such experiences, building one change in pattern on another to create a new pattern. There are segments of experience in psychotherapy that are explosive as well: cathartic release, or obtaining a new memory of early abuse, or a sudden insight about the etiology of one's behavior, or a dazzlingly ecstatic moment of bliss. Catastrophic experiences in the growth process would be found in the traumatic incidents instigating traumatic growth: death or loss of a loved one, or a violent assault, or a near-death experience.

An example of explosive bifurcation in personal change is spontaneous mystical experience. Underhill (1911) studied the Christian mystics St. Theresa, Catherine of Genoa, St. John of the Cross, Jacob Boehme, and George Fox, identifying five altered states of consciousness in the process: (1) Awakening of the soul, (2) Purification of the soul, (3) Illumination or the plateau of serenity and certitude, in which the soul is taught and illumined, (4) Dark Night of the Soul, and (5) the Unitive Life, in which duality fades into the experience of being in unity and harmonious relationship with everything in existence. Myers Owens (1975) elaborated on the first stage by designating eight elements of which the Awakening is comprised: death of the ego, oblivion to one's surroundings, beholding a subjective light, union with ultimate reality, ecstasy, purification, intuitive insights, and oneness.

### *Integrating the transitional experience*

Transitional experience is often disruptive of the person's previous mode of consciousness and degree of ego identity, especially when they occur in the transcendent and mystical realms. Boundaries have been crossed into unexplored territory, bringing new insights and knowledge, expanded self-concept, and greater challenges to deal with. The individual has pierced any veils and dispatched any guardians that protected him/her from adventuring into the zone of magnified power. Yet this person must continue to live life, honor family and social commitments, and in general contend with the guardians at the threshold of returning to the community: conventions, popularly accepted beliefs, and the demands of conformity. The transition back home is the hero's ultimate difficult task. Following the deintegration of old patterns, how does one reintegrate at a new level of thriving?

Research (Waldron, 1998) indicates that there are three general phases of integration of transcendent experience. The first is coming into balance with the initial impact of the experience. Transitional space is often chaotic, and balance is most easily found when a solid infrastructure of support exists, both intrapsychically and socially.

The second phase is integrating the experience and its meaning into the individual's life. He/she moves toward enhanced psychological health and increased participation in life. Many such people report a negative-to-positive change, understanding their experiences as "life turning-points, that is, watersheds leading to underlying long-term internal change, with a sense of before and after which is of high significance" (Ahern, 1990, p. 41). People tend to reorganize their lives around the meaning of their transcendent experience.

The third phase of integration is creatively expressing the meaning in the world, in some form of action that would directly or indirectly be helpful to others. Integrating the experience and reorganizing their lives usually involves contributing to society. Sutherland (1995) has studied the integration of a particular transcendent experience, near-death experience, into the experienter's life. She identifies an "integration trajectory" that begins with the transcendent experience and continues until the person feels that the experience has become an integral part of their lives. "Integration can be said to have occurred when the trajectory and biography of the near-death experienter are congruent" (p. 205).

### **Avoiding transitions: Impatience, denial, delay and ambivalence**

Transitional times offer opportunities. However, to be present for those opportunities one must stay present in the transition rather than impatiently "getting on with it" and moving through to the next thing, whatever that may be. This approach is what leaves "unfinished business" that results in regrets which must be dealt with later; for example, unresolved grief, grudges, lingering resentments, unfulfilled promises, or unexpressed but somaticized anger. Such an individual was intimidated by the guardian defenses at the threshold of resolution, i.e., fears and shame, and turned back from making the hero's journey at all.

Humans in general prefer constancy and status quo to instability and change, and therefore when change inevitably comes, attempt to avoid the transition between the status quo and whatever comes next. The avoidance can come in many forms of indecision, ambivalence, and procrastination. It

can come in the form of reflex, habitual responses that allow one to act on automatic pilot, and thus avoid any conscious experience of the transitional space. It can come in the form of impulsive jumping headfirst. It can come in the form of entering the transition and never leaving it, staying constantly in chaos, “hiding out” in drama. It can take the form of retreat into shock. In any case the underlying fear driving the avoidance is of “losing the way it is now,” unpredictability, disorder, and confusion: chaos.

The mechanism for avoiding transitions, in addition to fear of future instability and change, is refusing to grieve the losses that will inevitably result from moving forward. People can hold themselves back because they don't want to lose the very obstacle keeping them from moving forward: an inordinate need for security, or for control, or the status of the social role that has become suffocating, or the belief that they are irreplaceable. “Who will I leave behind if I move on? How will they ever make it without me?” Some may stop themselves with the fear that a growthful choice will later be regretted.

In addition to fear of moving forward and of grieving losses, what are people holding onto that keeps them from moving forward into the new? In most cases, it is fantasy: confusing and replacing primally awesome metaphor or archetype with fantasy derived from wishful thinking. Fantasy is the sugar that helps the medicine of resignation and accommodation go down. For example, an abused or neglected child mistakenly replaces the archetype of “good mother” with a fantasy that her own flawed mother must be good, and therefore introjects the “badness” in her mother, blaming herself for her caregiver's abuse. The fantasy that my mother is good is easier to tolerate than the reality that my mother is a threat to my existence, even if the cost of maintaining the fantasy is a self-sabotaging self-concept.

This example illustrates an important characteristic of transitional spaces, namely that usually present is a trickster. The trickster plays a vital role in change, transition, and transformation. The archetypal trickster may appear as the fool, the holy clown, the magician, the king's jester. “Trickster speaks the language of the land, dressed in colorful garb, and juggling morals, opinions and eternal truths” (Cavalli, 2002, p. 124). We all know how cleverly the trickster can lead us to self-delusion. That same trickster, however, also serves to connect the realms of heaven and earth, reminding the people how *not* to be, how to laugh at themselves, how to question the status quo, and ultimately how to expand beyond traditions when they no longer serve to advance the health of the individual or the

community. The universal trickster serves up an endless supply of “silver platters” to each of us to trigger the issues that remain unfinished and are still in need of healing.

In addition to tricksters, other influences are present in the transitional spaces, other energies who serve to connect the realms of heaven and earth. Call them angels, guardian spirits, or in Jungian terms, *daimons*. In its original Greek form the term daimon meant some division in consciousness through which ‘divine’ activity could be glimpsed - either for good or for evil. Possession by the daimon could be the experience of being ‘seized with rage,’ but it could also be the experience of an awareness of the soul’s ‘inner companion’ or ‘genius’. Daimons are intermediate beings, envoys between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the heavenly gifts and instructions.

Plato in the *Symposium* cites Eros as a mighty daimon, halfway between God and man. Eros, always present in the unconscious background of the psyche, animates the inner world and keeps the channels open between the ego and the unconscious (the collective psyche), in a potential space Jung called the ‘transcendent function’ (Kalsched, 2003).

Your daimon is a spirit, an invisible assistant, that accompanies you throughout your life. “Our *daimons* are catalysts we can use to get in touch with our inner genius. They act as a bridge between the four functions [thinking, intuition, feeling, sensate] and the transcendent function. In this way we are able to elevate the conscious mind beyond the boundaries of ego” (Cavalli, 2002, p. 57).

Remember, however, the pact every trauma victim signs with the Devil (Kalsched, 2003). That pact fulfills the daimon’s function of providing the transitional space to connect the ego with the unconscious; the messages coming from the unconscious, however, preach a fire-and-brimstone message of worthlessness and self-loathing. The envoys between heaven and earth have become indentured to the dragon defenses of shame and self-sabotage.

We have been discussing ways that people may turn back from the hero’s journey (the healing journey, the spiritual path). But most people keep themselves safely ensconced in the everyday familiarity of the shared consciousness within the community. They are enchanted and preoccupied by the vagaries of mundane living. Joseph Campbell (1972) writes:

what is keeping us out of the garden [of Eden] is not the jealousy or wrath of any god, but our own instinctive attachment to what we take to be our lives. Our senses, outward-directed to the world of space and time, have attached us to that world and to our mortal bodies within it. We are loath to give up what we take to be the goods and pleasures of this physical life, and this attachment is the great fact, the great circumstance or barrier, that is keeping us out of the garden. This, and this alone, is preventing us from recognizing within ourselves that immortal and universal consciousness of which our physical senses, outward-turned, are but the agents (p. 28).

These, then, are the mechanisms of turning back from the hero's journey. One may be intimidated by the guardian defenses at the threshold of leaving the status quo, by fear of success, fear of failure, shame and unworthiness, or by unwillingness to grieve losses or accept the mission of transcendence. Or one may be enchanted and preoccupied by the status quo, dismissing any predilection toward such a journey as irrelevant, or as itself a distraction from the living of life in the everyday familiarity of the consciousness shared by the community.

### **Facilitating transitions: Anchors to help navigate**

An anchor is any stimulus that evokes a consistent emotional response pattern from a person. Installing an anchor is the process of associating such an internal response with some external stimulus or 'trigger,' similar to classical conditioning. Knowing that times of transition are the most challenging for people to maintain healthy patterns, especially newly created ones, it is prudent planning to have anchors to call on in these times of need. As well, when we become enchanted and preoccupied by something that is, in fact, a distraction from our real purpose, we need a way to remind ourselves, an alarm clock to awaken us from the trance. Following is a discussion of some anchors that have proven most helpful throughout history and throughout the world on journeys of growth and transformation.

#### *Rites of passage*

Rites of passage and rituals enable one to pilgrimage, to "cross the threshold" of any change in life with conscious awareness of what has been departed from, and with a roadmap to facilitate navigating the terrain between here and there, between what has been departed from and what lies ahead.

The common elements in a rite of passage, or a pilgrimage, are to (1) accept the call to journey for a specific purpose; (2) find the faith in one's

vision needed to set out; (3) learn how to invoke the strength of spirit; (4) learn how to allow the spirit to speak and work through you in order to persist; (5) gain control over the obstacles, the spirit shadows whose intentions are to slow you down or to stop you; (6) to perform the appropriate rituals, enact the mythology, and connect with the transcendent self, upon arrival at the destination of the pilgrimage; and (7) to return to one's home community, bringing back the blessings obtained.

A striking example is offered by Ring (1987), in which he suggests that the Osirian temple rites of ancient Egypt may have involved ceremonial procedures deliberately calculated to induce a near-death experience. Initiates into those mysteries were able to discern for themselves a fundamental principle of many of the wisdom schools of antiquity: there is no death. We know of many other examples of an initiation ritual or rite of passage involving simulated death, including the shamanic death initiation worldwide, and the Native American Sundance ceremony. "The Sundance is a way of sacrificing for the privilege of having a direct connection with the Creator" (Twofeathers, 1994, p. 1). The ancient Inca people required a rite of passage before entering the City of Light:

according to their traditions, you could not enter Machu Picchu until you had died, till you were a person that's already dead, that has no fear of death. There's a death stone outside the city, shaped like a canoe, pointing to the west, that the shamans would come and lie on, and would actually separate their physical bodies from their energy bodies, which would be launched to the west in a journey of symbolic death, taken by the spirit of this jaguar that came and took you, ripped you out of your body, and took you through a complete circle around the earth and brought you back from the east (Villoldo, online).

These ceremonial rites build into the experience anchors of remembrance to keep the initiate from losing his way. On another level, the rite itself becomes an anchor for the initiate's future development, a reminder of basic truths that can be forgotten in the confusion of daily life.

### *Symbols*

Symbols have a remarkable capacity to arouse the passions of human beings, including the passion for transcendence. Symbols provide powerful reminders of what we may tend to forget. Fischer and Landon (1972) showed that the introduction of a highly significant, arousal-inducing symbol can further increase the already existing level of arousal, while a symbol of low significance is capable of decreasing the existing level of arousal. Fischer (1975-1976, p. 364) concludes, "State-bound memories,

then, may be ‘flashbacks’ either on an individual or species level and they refer to that Platonic knowledge, ‘which is already there,’ the human program laid down in not more than a dozen or so (archetypal) great stories, pictures, statues, and songs which are re-created, written, composed, sculpted and sung by each generation.”

*Community, radical connectedness*

Connection to something outside oneself is one of the most trusted ways of reminding oneself of an important truth when it has been, or may be, forgotten. “Remind me not to indulge my weakness for sweets,” someone might ask of a friend before walking into a party.

Deikman discusses these two forms of cognition as basic modes of consciousness: instrumental and receptive. In the instrumental mode we automatically perceive boundaries, discriminate between ourselves and others, and are wedded to linear time. Above all, we perceive the self as an object, separate, competing with others, dependent on others, acquiring, defending, controlling. All these functions are necessary, but they have their price. Because it forms a barrier to experiencing the connectedness of reality, instrumental dominance leads to meaninglessness, alienation, fear of aging and death.

A different mode of consciousness is needed to take the step of transformation, one responsive to reality in its connected aspects. Receptive consciousness is the mode whose function is to receive the environment, to relax boundaries, to allow past and future to fade away. As boundaries diminish, the sense of self becomes less distinct and less contained. “Now” and “merging” are the dominant aspect of receptive experience.

*Mindfulness, transcending complacency*

When we become enchanted and preoccupied by the vagaries of mundane living, we may need a reminder of what is truly most important in life. The endeavor of attention to the moment also requires a non-defensive willingness to confront what one encounters. We direct attention to what obscures accurate perception (defenses and resistance). We also expand our awareness to incorporate the what otherwise goes unnoticed: influences of the past (developmental arrests), the influences of the unconscious (what have been unconscious motivations), the influences of the future (apprehensions, plans, worries), and the environmental influences (subtle and interpersonal energies).

### *Remembering “how not to”*

As therapists, we often see people who make the same mistake over and over again, each time forgetting that they had encountered the lesson previously, and apparently not having learned from it. A powerful and extremely useful anchor is to remember what didn't work in the past, and thus to avoid repeating it again.

### *Staying true to one's “true self” identity*

An anchor that we commonly try to teach adolescents as they encounter temptations to enter into choices that they will later regret is to “Stay true to yourself.” In other words, don't let lesser motivations (such as what others think of you or embarrassment about being different) override more fundamental ones (such as what I think of myself). Of course, staying true to oneself requires clarity about who and what that “true self” is.

### *Integrity, morals, values, priorities*

The reason that people, and groups of people, set goals is so that they can have a benchmark by which to know whether they are on track or have strayed off track. Integrity is the quality of consistent strength throughout, no matter how the set and setting may change. In times of transition one needs the underlying foundation of basic principles to defend against the seduction of distractions which are always competing for attention.

### *Transitional objects*

We have seen how vitally important transitional objects are in successfully navigating transitional space. For example, the therapist is an ally and intermediate step in moving from “old-old” to “new-new” patterns.

### *The Buddhist metaphorical anchors*

In the Buddhist psychology of spiritual development, there are six “worlds” or realms. Each realm has a known anchor to assist the person to awaken, thereby escaping his illusionary prison, and fulfilling the opportunity presented in that realm.

The lower realms (the Animal Realm, the Hell Realm, the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts) are concerned with unacceptable desires. The God Realm and the Realm of the Jealous Gods are the province of ego functions and their temporary dissolution. The Human Realm is the realm of the self

hiding from itself in a constructed “false self,” and then searching for its “true self.”

In the Animal Realm (ignorance), the Bodhisattva of Compassion offers a book, which represents the capacity for reflection and insight that is lacking in our animal natures. In the Hell Realm (anger), the Bodhisattva of Compassion offers a mirror, or a purifying flame, indicating that this suffering can only be alleviated by seeing clearly the unwanted and denied emotions. In the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts (greed), the Bodhisattva of Compassion offers a bowl filled with objects symbolic of spiritual nourishment. In the God Realm (pride), the Bodhisattva of Compassion offers a lute, awakening those stuck in this realm from their slumber of intoxication, their complacency. In the Realm of the Jealous Gods (jealousy), the Bodhisattva of Compassion offers a flaming sword, symbolic of discriminating awareness. And in the Human Realm (desire), the Bodhisattva of Compassion appears as the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, who is depicted with the alms bowl and staff of an ascetic engaged in the search for identity.

### **Transitional states between the states of consciousness**

Sleeping, dreaming, and waking are the first three states of consciousness that we will explore. There is some evidence to support the proposition that a single, undifferentiated state of “pure” consciousness exists within human beings, and exactly that state is accessed in the transitional moments between these three states (see Illustration 6, from Travis, 1994). Fred Travis (1994; Travis & Pearson, 2000) has documented with EEG research a common experience available at these transitions, an underlying field of transcendental consciousness, and shown that the same experience is achieved in certain meditation states. With a similar combination of alpha and delta brain waves, it may also be the ‘fetal behavioral state 3’ of *quiet wakefulness* (Nijenhuis et al., 1982), to be discussed later in conjunction with the state of unintegration (pages 70-71).

Waking, sleeping (non REM), and dreaming (REM) “emerge out of a pure consciousness, a silent void. Where each state meets the next there’s a little gap, in which Travis postulates that everybody very briefly experiences transcendental consciousness. When we go from sleeping to dreaming, or from dreaming to waking, these little gaps or junction points occur” (Gackenbach, 1997, p. 109).

“This is quite similar to a Buddhist explanation of these little interludes of the clear light of sleep,” (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 109). “This is precisely the continuity of the very subtle mind.”

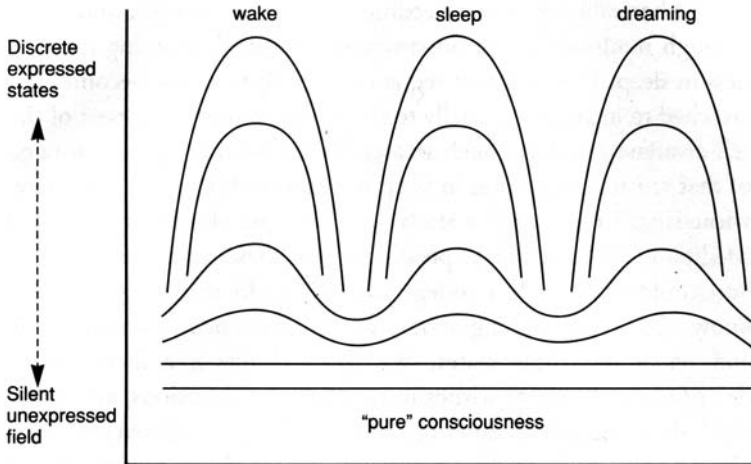


Illustration 6

#### *Transition from the dreamless sleep state to the dream sleep state*

A force of cosmic proportions must surely intervene in the dreamless sleep state to awaken the consciousness into dream sleep state or into waking state. What force initiates existence from the depths of non-existence, brings forth something from the (pregnant) open emptiness of potential? It is the energy of life itself, the source of life's quickening, and we call it alternatively libido, shakti, neshama, prana, or holy spirit. In the sacred moment of transition from non-existence to *unconsciousness*, the force of *mortido* toward oblivion surrenders to the force of *libido*. Eros enchants. The deep sleep state is, in a sense, the home of the Self, to which we all must return nightly. It is the Void from which arises dream sleep state.

We use the term “resistance to life” to describe the tendency toward refusal to join with the drive to emerge from the void into being. That resistance is based on a need to return to earlier unresolved experience, a pull back from being present. Resistance can manifest at embodiment (divine homesickness, divine exile, regretful choice, foreboding), conception, implantation, discovery, birth, or childhood traumas.

In the development up the hierarchy of states of consciousness, libido and mortido play a crucial motivating role. It is libido that rouses the soul from deep sleep, Eros that emerges from the depths of the void Chaos. And ultimately it is mortido that surrenders the isolated individual ego back to the great void in a monumental act of courageous transcendence. Ken Wilber (1998, p. 164) concludes that “profound regression *must* occur in all spiritual development,” a regression in service of the ego, prelude to transcendence of ego.

In general throughout life there are three primary drives: libido, mortido, and self-preservation. The libido drive is toward existence, satisfaction, passion, life, and growth. The mortido drive is toward non-existence, oblivion, dreamless sleep, death. The self-preservative drive is toward security, absolutes, certainties, the known and knowable. The relative balance between libido and mortido, existence and non-existence, determines the activity of self-preservation.

Libido is an energy of attraction and openness to life and growth, leading to increasing differentiation, variety, complexity, and organization. Libidinal energy draws other elements closer; it is integrative and tends to bind elements together into more complex entities. It activates the principle of Eros, characteristically moving *toward* something else. It is similar to centripetal force, expanding outward with boundless excitement.

Mortido is an energy of withdrawal, disintegration, and resistance to life and growth leading to regression, dissolution, arrest. Mortidinal energy is disintegrative and tends to separate complex entities into simpler elements, pushing other elements away. It activates the principle of Thanatos, characteristically moving *away from* something else. It is similar to centrifugal force, drawing into the dense energetic quicksand of a black hole.

These ten observations help to describe the relationship between these two forces within the human experience (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2004):

1. Passion is a truce between libido and mortido.
2. Hope is a mitigating agent in the often hostile conflict between libido and mortido.
3. Creativity results from the tension between libido and mortido.
4. The origin of shame lies in ascendance of destructive forms of mortido.
5. Aggression is an attempt to forcefully resolve the conflict between libido and mortido.

6. Intrapsychic conflict among different parts of the personality provide the battleground between libido and mortido.
7. Repression belies a quest for oblivion, i.e., mortido.
8. Ambivalence is *stalemate* between libido and mortido.
9. Avoidance is *denial* of libido and mortido.
10. Control is *defiance* of libido and mortido.

These potential interactions are called into play at moments of stepping through the threshold from the known to the unknown, moments of awakening. We may be excited to rouse from slumber, entranced by the possibilities. We may want to pull the covers over our head and retreat back into oblivion. We may be ambivalent, trying to have both, and neither, by pushing the snooze button.

In psychobiological terms, the process of transition from deep sleep is one of *feedforward* (as opposed to feedback). Feedback is a process of “detection and utilization of the consequences of past action for the sake of preservation of homeostasis” (Davidson & Davidson, 1980, p. 22). Feedforward is a process of “generating images of future behavior,” focusing intentional choice on what has not yet happened, what has no form or substance yet. The creation myth has a direct application here. The role of intention and imaging, volition and awareness, is inspired by the libido force of Eros, conjures the template of what will become, *hayuli*, and is central to some of the known methods of entering altered states and transitioning from one state to a higher state, e.g., shamanic journeying, meditation and yoga.

#### *Transition from the dream sleep state to the ego state*

The threshold between dream state and everyday “waking sleep,” as Tart (1993) calls it, can be treacherous.

Discussing the crisis preceding a spiritual awakening, Assagioli (1986) explains how a “normal man” becomes surprised and disturbed by a change in his inner life. The change may be sudden or slow, may take place after a series of disappointments or an emotional shock, such as the loss of a loved one. Sometimes it occurs without any apparent cause. The change often begins with a growing sense of dissatisfaction, of lack, of “something missing.” Ordinary life may begin to carry a sense of unreality and emptiness. Frequently this inner turmoil is accompanied by a moral crisis. The individual experiences an “increasing sense of impotence and hopelessness, of breakdown and disintegration” (Assagioli, 1986, p. 23).

Disintegration is the process of splitting into pieces, shattering apart. Venturing into such an opening can only lead to the ultimate fear: annihilation. Acknowledging the mere possibility of it is so threatening to a human being, it usually creates catastrophic despair and all manner of defenses. And the experience of disintegration is one of suffocating self-consciousness.

In the words of Carl Jung, “Whenever the narrowly delimited, but intensely clear, individual consciousness meets the immense expansion of the collective unconscious, there is danger because the latter has a definitely disintegrating effect on consciousness” (Jung, 1962, p.108). He goes on to elaborate how elements of the collective unconscious, brought into conscious awareness, can appear to become autonomous psychic contents. Jung names them complexes, and asserts that “the essential autonomy of these elements can be observed in the affects of daily life which obstinately obtrude themselves against our wills, and then, in spite of our earnest efforts to repress them, overwhelm the ego and force it under their control. No wonder that the primitive either sees in these moods a state of possession or sets them down to a loss of soul” (Jung, 1962, p.110).

“. . . activated unconscious contents always appear first as projections upon the outside world. In the course of mental development, consciousness gradually assimilates them as projections in space and reshapes them into conscious ideas which then forfeit their originally autonomous and personal character” (Jung, 1962, p.110-111).

Lowe (2000) notes that chaos theory demonstrates that complex systems are creative only when they operate right at the edge of system disintegration. Lowe asks the question, “Can a person exist in the highly creative edge of system disintegration without toppling over into madness, and how does the ego develop to allow such an existence to occur?” She studied individuals who are engaged in the unfoldment of high creative life, moment by moment, and found several themes emerged. They find a comfortableness at the edge of the unknown abyss, observing each experience bring new possibilities. These individuals used the anchors of heart-centered awareness and mystical archetypes to engage these levels of creativity at the edge of disintegration. The heart-centered focus is based in the mid-point chakra and involves a transcendent shifting of consciousness; the mystical archetypal image leads to an expanded perceptual state of consciousness, the transcendent function.

Disintegration can be growthful and creative. It is helpful to understand the sequential stages of this growthful disintegration that were advanced by Kazimierz Dabrowski in what he called the Theory of Positive Disintegration (1964), suggesting that the disintegration process is necessary for attaining higher levels of human functioning. Dabrowski postulated five qualitatively different levels of human development, ranging from egocentric at one end of the spectrum to altruistic at the other. He observed that each level was transcended through the inner conflict generated by a disintegration process (Nelson, 1989). The levels range from a primitive, egocentric orientation at Level I through disintegrative processes leading to a higher integration characterized by authenticity, altruism, and universal values at Level V. The disintegration refers to one's primitive ego; it is at first spontaneous and eventually self-directed. Development refers to expansion of worldview.

Disintegration describes the transition in either direction: awakening from dream state to waking state, or descending from lucidity into hallucinatory fantasy. Awakening can be consciously conjured by reversing the disintegration process, that is to reassemble parts that were split off or shattered. For example, the belief in the Jewish tradition is that the soul travels to God during sleep, and needs to be recalled upon awakening each morning with a prayer of gratitude to God for bringing back the soul: "I offer thanks to you, living and eternal King, for you have mercifully restored my soul within me; your faithfulness is great."

### *Transition from the ego level to the existential*

The transition from the ego level to the existential requires the ego to occasionally *deintegrate*, or de-construct. In ego terms, it is the capacity to let go, to suspend controls with pleasure and to permit ideas and fantasies to emerge in a regressed state thus furthering imagination, play, humor, inventiveness, and creativity. The concept of deintegration is suggested by Fordham (1976) to describe the process in which the self allows a disruption of a previous state of integration while a pattern incorporating new material and new understanding is forming.

In normal development, deintegration is "in the service of the ego." That is, the self recognizes on a deep level that in order to grow and develop, it must sometimes "stand aside" to allow a deeper and more expansive self to emerge. Deintegration leads to an expansion of experience, a widening of consciousness, a deepening of self concept, an opening to a new identity, and thus to a new level of integration.

Successive deintegrations are necessary in the developmental process to allow for new growth, and for consolidating that growth. Fordham and his colleagues observed the process of deintegration and reintegration in newborn infants within days of birth (1976; Sidoli, 1983), i.e., the current notion in attachment theory of *affect synchrony* between the infant and mother, breaks in that attunement, and subsequent repair of the breaks.

It is a healthy function of the ego called adaptive regression (“stretching the ego” and “taking time off from self”), relaxing secondary thinking, increasing awareness of previously preconscious and unconscious contents, and increasing primary process thinking. An adaptive regression is a partial, temporary, and controlled suspension of other ego functions, and serves to heighten creativity and induce new cognitive or affective configurations (Fromm, 1977; Harrison, 1984). In the words of Maslow (1968, p. 33), “What we take to be our ‘self’ and feel to be so present and real is actually an internalized image, a composite representation, constructed by a selective and imaginative ‘remembering’ of past encounters with the object world. In fact, the self is viewed as being constructed anew from moment to moment.” To advance beyond the current constructed ‘self’ we must allow a partial and temporary deconstruction, and a reconstruction at a new higher level.

Adaptive regression in the service of the ego is, in fact, one of the twelve recognized healthy ego functions (Bellak & Goldsmith, 1984): the capacity to let go, to suspend controls with pleasure and to permit ideas and fantasies to emerge in a regressed state thus furthering imagination, play, humor, inventiveness, and creativity.

Sogyal Rinpoche (1993, p. 39-40) summarizes the predicament of facing the next quantum leap in personal transformation, and the immense opportunity it contains:

The fear that impermanence awakens in us, that nothing is real and nothing lasts, is, we come to discover, our greatest friend because it drives us to ask: If everything dies and changes, then what really is true? Is there something behind the appearances, something boundless and infinitely spacious, something in which the dance of change and impermanence takes place? Is there something in fact we can depend on, that does survive what we call death?

Allowing these questions to occupy us urgently, and reflecting on them, we slowly find ourselves making a profound shift in the way we view everything. With continued contemplation and practice in letting go, we come to uncover in ourselves “something” we cannot name or describe or conceptualize, “something” that we begin to realize lies behind all the changes and deaths of the world. The narrow desires and distractions to which our obsessive grasping onto permanence has condemned us begin to dissolve and fall away.

In Buddhist terms, this might be called *mindfulness*, breaking through habits of stereotyped perception. We utilize such a purposeful de-habituation by continually observing the first phase of perception, when the mind is in a receptive state, before it moves into becoming reactive. If mental comment or judgment is stimulated, these are themselves made objects of bare attention.

Spinelli (1997) explored the clinical approach he called “un-knowing,” the attempt to view the “seemingly familiar as novel, unfixed in meaning, accessible to previously unexamined possibilities” (p. 8). He uses this method of keeping his mind open as a clinical tool. This is similar to the unfixed attentional state of “evenly hovering attention” advocated by Freud (1925). Bergantino (1981) reports that Wilfred Bion, the English psychoanalyst, felt the therapist’s mind should always be in a state of chaos to create an openness to fresh experience instead of stereotypes of reality.

At this point in one’s experience, a new level of psychological development begins. Earlier, on the ego level, the processes of attachment bonding, separation-individuation and identity formation were necessary steps toward healthy functioning. Now, healthy functioning requires reversing (retraversing) the processes into nonattachment, selflessness and identity deconstruction. At the earlier stage of development, progress was built on striving (desire) for sensory gratification (attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain), the desire for existence and becoming (to perpetuate life and self, and avoid death). The process of constructing a self, then, was to experience an event as pleasurable or unpleasurable (“I experience”), and add the experience to the self-representation (“I am”). “I experience praise as pleasurable” became generalized to “I am the person I want to be when I experience praise.” My self-perpetuation, my self-preservation, became linked to and dependent on the experience of praise. And when I experienced blame instead of praise, my self-preservation felt threatened, my desire for immortality denied, and I constructed defenses against the fear of annihilation (of the ego, the constructed self). The defense was some form of either grasping onto an external object/event (doing anything to get praise) or withdrawal from the external object/event (doing anything to avoid blame).

At the new stage of development, progress is built on letting go of striving (desire) for sensory gratification (attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain), and releasing the desire for self-perpetuation (of the ego, the constructed self). The process becomes one of de-constructing the self,

i.e., experiencing an event as pleasurable or unpleasurable (a purely spontaneous sensation of the experience), without responding to that sensation with approach or avoidance, grasping or withdrawing. What had become conditioned and reflexive responses now are returned to voluntary control, i.e., spontaneity.

Hanna (2000) gives a clear account of the process and experience of such a de-construction:

Through my study and practice I eventually learned to undo anything that the mind created. Of course, I still managed to make foolish mistakes, and occasionally become confused. But I had realized beyond reasonable doubt that consciousness had the capability to alter and dissolve virtually any image, complex, thought, or trait. Indeed, it became obvious that consciousness was the ultimate source of all such mental constructions. In my practice-inspired interpretation of Patanjali's Yoga, this action is called *pratiprasava*. After seven years, I had found an effective tool to approach centeredness I had sought for so long. I simply uncreated, deconstructed, or dismantled any mental construct that intruded into awareness (p. 128-129).

Integrally related to transitional space is the concept of *containment*, as presented by Mawson (online). It is based upon the intrinsic need for the infant to find a place to put unwanted parts of him/herself-in-distress. Melanie Klein found that the infant can in unconscious fantasy life split off part of itself, as an early and primitive defense mechanism for the protection of the precarious infantile ego threatened with disintegration, and project these parts of the self together with the associated distress, into an object of perception outside the self. The concept of containment suggests that the attentive mother provides such a function by means of her capacity for attention, or 'reverie' (Bion, 1962). This is a state of mind implying considerable freedom from anxiety in the mother, in which she is open to the baby and willing to take in and reflect on what the baby projects into her, with a readiness to notice when the baby might be receptive to her conveying back to him the sense that those anxieties and communications of them are in fact bearable and have meaning,

It is the internalizing of this process, time after time, and the subsequent anticipation and utilization of mother's containing function, that promotes the growth of the child's own innate capacity to contain and process his/her own emotions. This strengthens the emergence of the individual's capacity to be receptive to the emotional impact of new experience without being completely disrupted by it, i.e., to deintegrate and reintegrate smoothly.

The requisite attitude for providing containment, either by the caregiver or the therapist, depends on restraint from grasping prematurely at what is going on in the child's mind. When a child is in the middle of a storm of painful emotion, when we share her pain and confusion, it can be very hard to stay present and receptive for the child, to resist reassuring prematurely, i.e., rescuing.

When the ego is not strong enough to withstand the "stretching" of deintegrating, it breaks instead, or *disintegrates*. The primary, archetypal images and drives that are activated with deintegration may then be experienced as overwhelming. That is a maladaptive regression, "abandoning the ego" to overwhelming archetypal forces. This regression is a transitional state between the unconscious (personal and collective) and the ego self. For such a person the experience of letting go feels too undefended, unstructured, unbounded, too open, and is equated with annihilation: *ego-chill* or *angst*. Erikson (1958) called the experience *ego-chill*, "a shudder which comes from the sudden awareness that our non-existence . . . is entirely possible." To defend oneself from the resulting feelings of catastrophic despair, annihilation, and disintegration, the individual develops primary defenses in the unconscious, which Fordham calls *defenses of the self* (1974).

In other words, sometimes a child takes the risk of deintegration but fails to subsequently reintegrate because the experience is too traumatic to assimilate. The child then becomes less open, more rigidly identified with the current self-concept, and less willing to risk deintegration in the future.

A story related by Epstein (2000) illustrates the distinction between stretching the ego and abandoning it, between deintegration and disintegration. James Joyce asked Carl Jung what the difference was between his own mind and that of his schizophrenic daughter. "She falls," Jung is said to have replied. "You jump!"

### *Transition from the existential level to the transpersonal*

"Transcendent formation is a slumbering power deep within each one of us. We cannot compel its awakening. We can only promote or hinder its course, foster favorable conditions or allow unfavorable ones to delay its flight to the heights of humanness" (van Kaam, 1994, p. 12). What are the favorable conditions for this transition, and how do we foster them? Clues come to us from many sources regarding these fundamental questions, not the least of which is Jung's work on the transcendent function.

The transition from the existential level to the transpersonal level, i.e., transcendence formation, requires the ego to occasionally *unintegrate* (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 61). The experience of this transitional space is awareness without self-consciousness, unity with the external world in a state of *unboundaried* radical connectedness, sublime peacefulness, as if the personality is taking time off from being self and dipping into formlessness for rest. It can be accessed in many diverse ways, e.g., through pleasant task absorption, sexual union, insightful therapeutic self-awareness, or spiritual meditation and prayer.

Schachtel (1959) coined the term *openness to experience* to describe an individual's willingness to utilize primary processes (pre-conscious psychic content and expression) for personal and personality growth. The implication is that the ego chooses to relinquish some degree of control, in order to promote spontaneity, creativity and novel experience: "regression in the service of the ego" (Kris, 1952). Fitzgerald (1966) further defined the concept of openness to experience, proposing measureable components of the concept.

Taft (1969) suggested another name for the personality trait of openness to experience, calling it *ego permissiveness* in order to convey that the ego tolerantly relinquishes some of its power in order to allow the actualization of the potentialities of the pre-conscious and unconscious aspects of the personality, just as a permissive parent or leader takes the repressive pressure off subordinate elements in the system so that they can grow. Ego permissiveness connotes a reduction of ego control in the interests of self expression and growth. Taft (1969, p. 36) explains:

A permissive ego, thus, without abdication or dissolution, permits the expression of unanalyzed thoughts, intuitions, unconventional and novel associations, the expression of free-floating emotions and all sorts of intimacies and participations with 'lower caste' elements of the personality such as impulsive drives to action, automatic behavior, fantasies and wishes. Keniston [Keniston, 1965, p. 377] in a chapter titled 'The Dictatorship of the Ego' states that 'creativity, fantasy, direct feeling, immediacy of experience, openness to the sensual, biological and animal, capacity to full sexual enjoyment or easy childbirth, ability for play, humor, adult childishness, even the ability to sleep and dream . . . all require an ego which can leave the stage.'

What, then, are the component elements of ego permissiveness, or openness to experience? Fitzgerald (1966) depicted the following aspects of personality as components of openness to experience:

- Tolerance for regressive experiences (affects, childishness, fantasy, daydreaming, etc.)

- Tolerance for logical inconsistencies (seeming impossibilities or bizarre implications)
- Constructive use of regression (uses fantasies in a creative way)
- Altered states (inspirational experiences with relative breakdowns of reality orientation)
- Peak experiences (seeks experiences which are overwhelming, enrapturing, and thrilling)
- Capacity for regressive experiences (inquisitive into the unusual, with rich imagination, and not bound by conventional categories of thought)
- Tolerance for the irrational (acceptance of things which violate common sense or science)

Unitive experience is one of the defining elements of an unintegration experience. Chirban (2000) quotes Gerald May, who characterizes unitive experience as a state in which no self-defining activities take place: “[During the unitive experience] all the activities that serve to define oneself are suspended, yet awareness remains *open, clear and vibrant*. For the duration of such experiences there is no self-consciousness, no self/other distinction, no trying-to-do or not-to-do, no aspiration, labeling, judgement, or differentiation.”

In his classic work that began the modern psychological study of religious experience, William James (1961) identified four hallmark qualities of a transcendent experience: (1) *ineffability* – the inadequacy of words to express the extraordinary quality of the experience; (2) *noesis* – receiving knowledge by direct and instantaneous perception; (3) *transiency* – the typically momentary quality of the experience; and (4) *passivity* – having little or no control over the experience.

Compare these qualities of a transcendent experience with the nine core characteristics of *mystical* experiences identified by Pahnke and Richards (1972):

1. *unity*: internal (“the usual sense of individuality falls away”) or external (“one’s identity merges with the sensory world in recognition of an underlying oneness”)
2. *noetic quality of experience*: direct insight into the nature of being, accompanied by the certainty that such knowledge is truly real and not delusion
3. *transcendence of space and time*: the experience of time and space altering their usual parameters
4. *sense of sacredness*: a nonrational, intuitive, hushed response to inspiring realities

5. *deeply felt positive mood*: feelings of joy, love, blessedness, bliss, peace
6. *paradoxicality*: experience of unity of opposites is felt to be true in spite of violating normal logical principles
7. *ineffability*: the inability to adequately express the experience in everyday language
8. *transiency*: the transient nature of the experience relative to the apparent permanence of everyday consciousness
9. *positive change of attitude or behavior* resulting from having had the experience

“Mild mystical experiences” have been studied by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He calls them “flow”: a joyous and creative total involvement with life. His research has shown that these experiences occur to people in the course of many surprisingly commonplace activities: working, dancing, climbing a mountain, gardening. For some people, inner anxiety and self-consciousness disappear when they become deeply engaged in such pursuits. “What slips below the threshold of awareness,” he says, “is the concept of self, the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. xi). Csikszentmihalyi also has found evidence of a range of experiences in which people’s identities seem to merge with something else - a sailor with his boat, a violinist with her instrument. The fluidity in distinction between self and other and loss of self-awareness are unintegration experiences.

Csikszentmihalyi has distilled these eight components of the experience of *flow*:

1. *engagement in a challenge* for which the person has the necessary skill to excel
2. *absorption* in which one’s awareness merges with one’s actions
3. *setting of clear goals* that are unambiguous even though they may be complex
4. *presence of feedback* that the goals are being reached
5. *attenuation of one’s usual concerns* while one is absorbed in the challenge
6. *opportunity to exercise control*, to be proactively involved
7. *loss of self-awareness* which involves the sense of individuality melting away, and is sometimes accompanied by an *identification or merging with one’s environment*
8. *freedom from the uniform ordering of time*, with hours passing by unnoticed

Each of the states discussed - ego permissiveness, transcendent experience, unitive experience, mild mystical experience (flow), and mystical experience - seem to be closely related to the experience of unintegration, and therefore to the transitional space leading to transpersonal consciousness.

There exist many ways to access the unintegration transitional state. Examples include meditation, near-death experience (NDE), the pre-conception experience, the lucid dream state, and the shamanic journey state. They all represent an awareness without self-consciousness, and a sense of unity with the external world in a state of *unboundaried* radical connectedness. One of the defining similarities of these particular methods is each one incorporates a *loss of body awareness* ("enstasis"); however, differences between them rest largely on whether it is an *out-of-body* experience (near-death experience, pre-conception experience, lucid dream state, and shamanic journey state) or not (meditation).

*Meditation.* Gifford-May & Thompson (1994) have identified three major common constituents of deep states of meditation:

1. transcendence beyond the normal physical and mental boundaries of the self (absence or transformation of the self, expansion from the center of being);
2. a different sense of reality (sense of space, timelessness, sense of something larger than oneself, a unitary experience); and
3. positive emotion (deep sense of calm associated with stillness, internally generated energetic joy, bliss, expansive joy and openness associated with the unshackling of the ego)

In Buddhist terms, the depth of meditation beyond mindfulness is called *insight*, corresponding to the progression from deintegration to unintegration. Mindfulness matures into insight when the meditator reaches several realizations: the impermanence of all things; the unreality of what one had previously identified oneself to be, i.e., "not-self"; awareness of arising and passing away of each successive mind moment. This describes unintegration.

*Near-death experience.* Most people who have had near-death experiences (NDEs) report "profound feelings of peace or bliss, joy, and a sense of cosmic unity" (Greyson & Bush, 1992, p. 95). Moody (1998) summarizes the near-death experiences of many thousands of accounts,

consistently as “one of the most wonderful experiences of their life.” A definite progression of events tends to unfold, including the experience of vibrancy and aliveness; a passageway to go through leading to an experience of great love, acceptance and peace; being met by known loved ones; and a non-shaming life-review process that emphasizes the impact of one’s thoughts and behaviors on all others who were effected. Ring (1998) relates the near-death experiences of children as evidence of the authenticity, universality, and spirituality of NDEs. The accounts of very young children, some under two years old, are very similar to those of adult NDE reports.

The aftereffects of a NDE tend to be generally quite similar for most people, and very positive (Ring, 1986). Those aftereffects fall into three categories. The first is changes in self-concept and personal values. People emerge from the NDE experience with a heightened appreciation for life, greater feelings of self-worth, a greater responsiveness to the beauty of nature, and a pronounced tendency to be focused intently on the present moment. They tend to have increased tolerance, patience, and compassion for others, and an increased ability to express love. In general, people-oriented values rise, while concern over material success plummets. The second area of aftereffects is change in religious or spiritual orientation. These people tend to seek a deeper understanding of life, and tend to describe themselves as more spiritual, feeling much closer to God than they had before, although for many the formal, external aspects of religious worship have weakened in importance. The near-death experience often draws people to a belief in the universality of the world’s religious traditions. The third domain of aftereffects of NDEs is changes in psychic awareness. The near-death experience seems to trigger an increase in psychic sensitivity and development, with people claiming to have more out-of-body experiences, more precognitive experiences (especially in dreams), and a greater awareness of synchronicities. “A near-death experience certainly tends to stimulate a *radical spiritual transformation* in the life of the individual, which affects his self-concept, his relations to others, his view of the world *and* his worldview” (Ring, 1986, p. 81).

Greyson and Bush (1992) discuss near-death experiences that are partially or entirely unpleasant or frightening. There appear to be 3 distinct types, involving (1) a similar experience to peaceful near-death experiences but which are interpreted as unpleasant, (2) a sense of nothingness or of existing in an eternal “meaningless void,” or (3) an ‘inverted’ encounter with hellish landscapes and entities. These

experiences are reminders that transitional spaces into the transpersonal realm can be traumatic as well as idyllic.

*Pre-conception experience.* The pre-conception experience can take a number of different forms. For example, one can access memories of the experience in spirit world before conception into earthly life in hypnotherapy, and it often happens spontaneously in young children. The experience of being in the soul state, in the spirit world, contemplating or approaching embodiment at conception is truly a life-changing experience. Some experience excited anticipation, others dread.

It may come in the form of “announcement dreams” in which the unborn soul makes contact with the parent(s)-to-be in a strikingly vivid dream (Widdison, 1998). Contact from the unborn soul may come in a vision experienced in the waking state.

*Lucid dream state.* The lucid dream state is one in which the dreamer is aware that he/she is dreaming, is likely to act deliberately (LaBerge & Gackenbach, 2000), and to feel that what is happening is as real as waking experience (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990). The connection between lucid dream state and the transitional portal to spiritual transcendence is the intention of the lucid dreamer to maintain an unbroken continuity of consciousness throughout the waking state and the dream state. That is true in the western dream research labs at UCLA (LaBerge, 1985), in Yaqui shamanism (Castaneda, 1972), or in Tibetan dream yoga (Evans-Wentz, 1974).

The practical application of knowledge about the lucid dream state is captured by Jonté (1978-79, p. 305): “the steps in learning to dream lucidly follow the same sequence (in reverse order) as that manifested in the changes in ego functioning during sleep onset mentation.” In sleep onset, the individual’s ego functioning tends toward more regressive mental content and a loosening of reality contact, whereas in lucid dreaming one’s ego transitions toward a greater degree of contact with reality and volitional control over the mental content, still within the context of the transpersonal dream state.

In the Yaqui tradition, the object is to recognize waking and dreaming as the same, and that therefore both states offer equal opportunities to develop one’s shamanic powers. The lucid dreamtime experience frees the personal power and creativity to pursue shamanic development.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the object of lucid dreaming is to come to recognize waking and dreaming as the same, that both are illusion, and that conscious dreamwork can lead one to the realization of wholeness, perfect balance, and unity. There are three types of dreams, according to Tibetan tradition. The first is ordinary dreams that everyone is familiar with (called “karmic dreams”), which arise from the day’s activities, from the subconscious, as well as from archetypal elements and previous life experiences. The second is “clear light dreams,” which bring energy openings, prognosticatory dreams and omens, and spiritual visions and blessings. These dreams hint of other worlds, other lives, and offer a glimpse of the afterlife. The third type is lucid dreams, in which one is aware of dreaming. With practice, one develops the capacity to become lucid during clear light dreams, making them radiant, luminous, spiritual dreamtime experiences. This frees the mind, through realization of the transparent, dream-like quality of all experience, both waking and sleeping.

*Shamanic journey state.* The shamanic journey state is one in which the individual deliberately alters his/her consciousness for the purpose of traveling in otherworldly realms to interact with spirits in service to members of the community. The shamanic experience is generally one of concentration, and the sense of self is that of a soul or spirit that has been freed from the body.

The shamanic access to an altered state is induced through ritual which can include rhythmic stimulation through dancing, drumming, or breathing, or the use of psychedelic substances. That state provides a reawakening, renewed contact or deeper connection with creative and spiritual resources that are normally inaccessible.

*Transition from the transpersonal level to unity (oneness)*

The transition from transpersonal self to the highest state possible for humans is in a very real sense the reversal of the initial primordial step to emerge from deep sleep. That call into being was an inspired rousing of libido enchantment energies (Eros) in defiance of the morbid inertia toward oblivion and death (Thanatos). Movement toward greater individuation, separation, and autonomy was declared. From the vantage point of a transcendent transpersonal self, the final expression of that evolution is to come full circle. The force of Thanatos, no longer in opposition to Eros, carries the now-superfluous ego-bound nature into oblivion, allowing his brother Charon the Ferryman to transport the

enlightened one across the River Styx to the home of the Self. The unlearning process is now complete, with the realization of the impermanence and unreality of all things, including the self, the ultimate surrender of infantile narcissism. What remains is awareness of arising and passing away of each successive mind moment without self-consciousness and the experience of *unboundaried* radical connectedness with all that is. The separate and masterful ego is ready to make the unintegration experience permanent, to finally step aside. Having practiced at taking time off from self, it is now time to retire.

The Chinese Buddhist concept for the enlightened self is *wu hsin* (no-mind) and *wu nien* (no-thought): emptiness, transparency, “the open dimension of being” (Batchelor, 2000, p. 27), a state of consciousness wherein thoughts move without leaving any trace.

We will briefly discuss “thinking,” “not-thinking,” and “without thinking.”

“Thinking” is our habitual tendency to stay in the mode of conceptualizing thought, in which we are an active subject thinking an object. We do not experience the object *immediately* but only through the thoughts we have of the object. We do not experience the object in its *fullness*, but only as filtered through our thinking about it.

“Not-thinking” is our being an active subject seeking to suppress its thinking and thereby to bring an end to its own agency.

“No-thought” (*wu nien*) or no-mind (*wu hsin*) is pure *immediacy* in the *fullness* of things as they are.

Wallace Stevens’ poem “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (1990) contains the following verse that speaks to the experience of such a non-existence:

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

A Thai monk, teaching meditation, described this state of mind beyond unintegration in response to the question, “What do you mean by ‘eradicating craving’?”

Achaan Chaa looked down and smiled faintly. He picked up the glass of drinking water to his left. Holding it up to us, he spoke in the chirpy Lao dialect that was his native tongue: “You see this goblet? For me, this glass is already broken. I enjoy it; I drink out of it. It

holds my water admirably, sometimes even reflecting the sun in beautiful patterns. If I should tap it, it has a lovely ring to it. But when I put this glass on a shelf and the wind knocks it over or my elbow brushes it off the table and it falls to the ground and shatters, I say, 'Of course.' But when I understand that this glass is already broken, every moment with it is precious" (Epstein, 1995, pp. 80-81).

We can only view the highest level of spiritual development as a form of non-existence. The fetus, identified with its limited environment, must cease to exist in order for the human baby to be born with its vastly expanded environment. Just so the human being must surely cease to exist in order for the quantum step of growth to occur leading to birth into *enlightenment*, *satori*, or the equivalent. The ceasing to exist does not mean a physical death; it means a disidentification with the old and resisting the temptation to identify with something new. "The experience of merging back in God is not one of annihilation where we lose our identity. Rather it is one in which we become all-consciousness. We gain all the Light, all the love, all the knowledge, all the bliss that is God" (Singh, 1998, p. 143).

Earlier in development, a profound fear haunts the individual: Kohut called it *disintegration anxiety*, defined as the "unnameable dread associated with the threatened dissolution of a coherent self" (Kalsched, 1996, p. 1). This provides one of the most recalcitrant obstacles to growth and transformation: we are fearful of giving up the old dysfunctional patterns because we have identified so personally with them. To let them go is to cease to exist.

Epstein (1998, p. 86) tells a story about a student asking the Tibetan lama Chogyam Trungpa the question regarding egolessness, "Well then, if there is no self, what is it that reincarnates?" He laughed and answered without hesitation, "Neurosis." The Dalai Lama conveys the same message in this way: "rebirth is essentially self-created – rebirth is caused by the propelling forces of the continuation of mind under the influence of ignorance" (1998, p. 126).

A challenge in addressing the higher levels of transcendent experience was first identified by Wilbur as the "pre/trans fallacy." It would be a mistake to reduce transcendent experiences "to pretranscendent causes, such as symbiotic union, oceanic feeling, unconscious infantile fantasies, infantile omnipotence, repossession of the early gratifying mother, gratification of infantile sexuality, symbiotic togetherness of prenatal existence, symbiotic reunion or merger with the mother" (van Kaam, 1994, p. 16). Chirban (2000) relates this truth to transitional psychological spaces:

In Jones' (1992) discussion of sacred experience, he notes that mystical religious experience is the search for transformation rather than regression to an infantile state. It is a central part of the ongoing process of human development. Jones describes unitive spiritual experience as a 'unity in which selfhood is sustained, not lost' (p. 134). Jones bridges both the regressive and progressive aspects of religion when he says that sacred experience occurs in those transitional psychological spaces, continually reverberating with the affects of past object relations and pregnant with the possibility of future mentation (Loewald) and transformation (Bollas) that religion may evoke for us through word, ritual, or intense introspective discipline (p. 134).

Experiences of oneness, unity, expansiveness and radical unboundaried connectedness prepare the individual for re-emergence of identity with the soul liberated from the confines of earth, for merging back in God. This experience is impossible to describe in terms other than myth, symbol, and direct experience.

Moments of oneness experience occur when one's consciousness shifts and the self's boundaries are loosened. The self becomes fluid and unstructured. "Listening to a piece of music, feeling awe-struck by the magnificence of nature, experiencing the rapture and ecstasy of romantic and sexual love, and achieving spiritual union with a higher being are ineffable moments in human existence. These experiences provide opportunities to transcend the experience of the separate self and join in a sense of oneness with another. The loosening of the borders of the self's barrier to the boundless experience of unity with an 'other,' resulting in the reemergence of a self enhanced by increased vitality and more intricate integration is characteristic of the oneness experience" (Chirban, 2000, p. 247).

Chirban uses the term *idols* to distinguish oneness-like experiences with objects that claim to be transformative but are only partially so, such as drug use, cults, and gangs. These idolatrous experiences' promise of cohesion and integration of the self are false, and ultimately have a destructive impact on the integration of the self. She also distinguishes *regressive* oneness (*fantasy* or a longing for objects in the past) from *progressive* oneness experience. Progressive oneness is marked by deeper integration of the self, and is catalyzed by *timelessness*, being in the *present moment*, *absence of self-consciousness* and an *experience of unity* with an other. The movement from experiencing separateness to oneness and the return to separateness provides a transformational process that is progressive. The oneness experience is transitional, exists in the threshold

between the old and the new, occurring in the space between self and other.

During a unitive experience all self-definition is suspended, there is no self-consciousness, no self/other distinction, no trying-to-do or not-to-do, no aspiration, labeling, judgment, or differentiation. Awareness remains open, clear and vibrant, experienced as a purely present, timeless moment.

### **Developmental milestones for unintegration, transliminality, and transcendence**

What developmental experiences prenatally, perinatally, and in early childhood lead to a receptivity to the *vast openness* of unstructured being, to a readiness for the deintegration and unintegration experiences that propel one's adult development?

The methods adapted by a child for dealing with transitions, traumas, uncertainties and losses becomes a prototype for how to deal with change over the lifespan. The most dramatic moments of transition, creating the deepest layers of imprint, are conception (transitioning from spirit world to earthly life), birth (transitioning from the womb world to earthly life), moments of great loss (e.g., death or abandonment of a parent or loved one), moments of great trauma (e.g., physical or sexual abuse), spiritual devastation or awakening (e.g., the "dark night of the soul" that follows mystical revelation), and death (transitioning from earthly life to spirit world). In general, the earlier in this life that a defining moment of transition occurs, the deeper is the imprint as prototype for the ensuing lifespan.

Following is a discussion of some of those milestones.

(1) *the ability to relax and trust*. A high level of trust allows an individual to commit passionately to his/her path without attachment to the outcome. This attitude is captured in the Serenity Prayer from Alcoholics Anonymous: "Lord grant me the courage to change the things I can change, to accept the things I can't and the wisdom to know the difference." Children gain that sense of trust, or not, from their early experience with caregivers. "Relaxation for an infant means not feeling a need to integrate, the mother's ego-supportive function being taken for granted" (Winnicott, 1965a, p. 61). When the baby is allowed to experience such deep security, he/she is free to explore unrestricted, internally as well as externally.

(2) *the security to explore states of consciousness*. How does an individual develop a “comfortableness at the edge of the unknown abyss” (Lowe, 2000)? Such security develops early in life when, ideally, the child balances attachment (freedom from fear of abandonment) with detachment (freedom from fear of engulfment), resulting in liberation from the subjugation to either (the freedom to explore the external and internal worlds).

The mother’s function, at the highest level, is to create an environment for her baby in which it is safe to be nobody. Winnicott considered it vital in healthy development for the child to be allowed periods of time in unstructured states of being that he called “going-on-being” (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). “The mother’s nondemanding presence makes the experience of formlessness and comfortable solitude possible, and this capacity becomes a central feature in the development of a stable and personal self” (p. 193). In a state free of anxiety, each person is content to be alone without being withdrawn. Each person, totally secure in the availability of the other, has no need for active contact. There is no sense of aloneness, nor of intrusion. Each individual is momentarily undefended and at peace.

For Winnicott, it is important for the personality to be able to rest in unintegration, to float or drift between organizations, to dip into formlessness or chaos or nothingness. At this Sabbath point of personality, one takes time off from self. It is important to have time between choices, time simply to be. What a relief not to have to be this or that, not to have to force oneself into a particular shape (“shape up”) (Eigen, 1992, p. 272).

This unintegrated state of consciousness is observable in the fetus as well. Nijenhuis et al. (1982) identified four ‘fetal behavioral states’ that are stable over time and observed repeatedly:

State 1: Quiet sleep. Quiescence, with only occasional startles; no eye movements; stable fetal heart rate.

State 2: REM sleep. Frequent and periodic gross body movements; eye movements present; fetal heart rate shows frequent accelerations in association with movement.

State 3: Quiet awake. No gross body movements; eye movements present; fetal heart rate shows no accelerations and has a wider oscillation bandwidth than State 1. In newborns this state 3 always and only occurs in association with feeding (Pillai & James, 1990).

State 4: Active awake. Continual activity; eye movements present; fetal heart rate unstable and tachycardia present.

We are suggesting that fetal behavioral state 3, i.e., the quiet awake state, is in utero *and* in infancy, the transitional state of unintegration. A prenatally deprived of sufficient quiet awake space due to an anxious mother will inadequately develop the capacity for exploration of states of consciousness.

A similar progression of mental states is observable in meditation. Goleman (1972, p. 32) suggests that the EEG pattern of high-voltage, slow-wave delta frequency, previously referred to as predominant in the womb and through two years of age, accompanies the higher states of insight meditation and nirvana.

(3) *the ability to acknowledge and tolerate both positive and negative emotions toward the same person or object.* Synthesis on the ambivalence spectrum, i.e., “passionate commitment in the face of ambiguity,” flows from one of the most basic developmental milestones in emotional development, in the preschool period: the ability to acknowledge and tolerate both positive and negative emotions toward the same person or object. Maintaining a libidinal attachment even while experiencing frustration, requiring the synthesis of positive and negative affects and memories, is a requirement for the development of healthy relationship to oneself, others, spirit (or God), i.e., to this earthly life itself.

Failure to adequately develop this ability results in rigidity, an intolerance for ambiguity, and a tendency to reject transcendent experience in favor of simpler “normal” states. Qualities necessary for successful meditation, such as expansion of boundaries of the self and openness to the unshackling of the ego, may not develop fully.

(4) *object impermanence.* The infant treats absent objects as if they were destroyed or impermanent, and between the ages of 3 to 6 the child begins to develop the capacity to distinguish displaced from destroyed objects. The impermanence concept plays an important role in many aspects of human experience, including children’s conceptions of death and security (Greenberg, 1996).

(5) *noetic knowing.* Advancement of consciousness is based on a particular form of processing knowledge. Rather than an academic, intellectual, or rational approach, it is usually experienced as a direct apprehension of knowledge and understanding accompanying a

transcendent experience. One suddenly *knows* something intuitively that until that moment was unknown. This knowing offers “insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance” (James, 1961, p. 300).

The child who is encouraged to do so within a securely attached environment develops a trust in his/her own ability to know things in this way. Other children learn to question their ability to know reality, sabotaged by the confusing inconsistent signals they get from preoccupied or overly-intrusive caregivers.

Noetic knowing is intuitive knowing. In order to access one’s intuition, the constricted rational mental realm must give way to the *unconstricted* realm of un-knowing. For most people, a well-defended barrier exists to keep us on this side of rationality, and so dipping into intuitive knowing requires taking a momentary excursion across that barrier. My rational self steps aside, and its “absence becomes the presence we call intuition” (Billingsley, 1995). “You disappear in order for intuitive knowingness to appear.” She takes the concept one step further: “what we truly want is a dissolution of the barrier to the intuitive world.”

(6) *transliminality*. This is the tendency for psychological material (imagery, ideation, affect, and perception) to cross thresholds into or out of consciousness with ease. There is a clear developmental antecedent to adult transliminality: childhood trauma. Survivors of childhood abuse score significantly higher than others on these aspects of transliminality: the altered state of cosmic enlightenment, fantasy proneness, special wisdom, sensing an evil presence, absorption in nature or art, a transformative state of consciousness, mystical experience, hyperesthesia, and the sense of gaining or losing energy. “Childhood trauma seems predictive of the broad domain of transliminality” (Thalbourne & Crawley, 2003, p. 692).

Remember that with a high level of transliminality, the individual opens to unity, noetic experience, transcendence of space and time, the sense of sacredness, bliss, paradoxicality, and ineffability.

(7) *reaction to obstacles*. A fundamental difference between individuals who thrive and develop toward optimal expression of humanity and those who do not is the way in which that individual reacts to obstacles in their path. Children develop a relationship with their environment very early; some experience obstacles to fulfillment of their desires as a

personal affront, becoming frustrated and angry. This child may well have encountered an unwelcoming womb at conception, and a barren or rejecting uterine wall at implantation. The prototype was already established within days of the new life: I will always meet obstacles and I must overpower them to survive.

Another child recognizes obstacles as simply part of the terrain of the environment without taking them personally. Von Franz (1964) describes this attitude well using the analogy of a tree: it “does not get annoyed when its growth is obstructed by a stone, nor does it make plans about how to overcome the obstacles. It merely tries to feel whether it should grow more toward the left or the right, toward the slope or away from it. Like the tree, we should give in to this almost imperceptible, yet powerfully dominating, impulse – an impulse that comes from the urge toward unique, creative self-realization” (p. 164).

(8) *experience of oneness*. Transitional experiences also provide a bridge between the relational dimensions of the self and the structured aspects of the self (Chirban, 2000). That is, the individual approaches the threshold in relationships that provide enough security to proceed alone across the threshold, which in turn strengthens the individual to expand the sphere of relationships. Developmentally, individuals who engage in unitary experiences in the present, have had the luxury of a secure holding environment which catalyzes their *capacity* throughout their development. The capacity for a oneness experience with an other is central to the healthy evolution of the self. In order to achieve oneness experience, one must have had developmentally necessary oneness experiences to develop a cohesive self.

(9) *containment*. Containment is a fundamental requirement for healthy mental processes, especially exploratory ones. The concept of containment implies the ability to experience what is happening in oneself and in the other with accepting awareness, and being able to tolerate one’s direct experience without becoming defensive or acting to discharge the tension (Rand, 1996). Containment is a way of providing secure support and honoring the other’s boundaries. Winnicott (1965c) proposed the necessity of a positive and encouraging “holding environment” to provide a sense of containment for a child, enabling the child to form a sense of security in being held. He observed that, uncontained, the child’s experience can only be described as “going to pieces; falling forever” (Winnicott, 1965b).

Bion's (1967) containment model emphasized that it is through the mother's capacity for reverie that her infant experiences containment. A mother incapable of reverie fails to contain the infant's experience, leaving the child unprotected from immersion in a meaningless, powerless, omnipresent terror, a nameless dread of cosmic proportions particular to both the perpetrator and victim of violence. "In the individual psychopathologies of violent people and of victims, it is likely that the mother reverie was not present or was defective" (Twemlow, 2000).

(10) *self-reflection*. An individual must be capable, indeed, must devote attention to and practice self-reflection in order to progress in transformation of consciousness. It is a building block for mindfulness and for exploration of states of consciousness. Hillman (1978) speaks of the *soul* as a perspective, a viewpoint, that is reflective, that mediates events. "Between us and events, between the doer and the deed, there is a reflective moment," and in this middle ground resides the soul.

The emergence of a self-reflective capacity begins as a toddler learns about the psychosocial phenomenon called "play." At first, a toddler randomly tries different things in what Piaget called sensori-motor play. Soon the process becomes more socially interactive with an awareness of an audience, and the concepts of imagination, deception, and teasing develop. Exploring the possibilities of paradox, surprise, and pretense lays the foundation for the development of humor and role playing. A young child knows that she is not really the person she is pretending to be, that it is make believe.

This type of role playing develops further toward self-reflection as the young child learns to comment on the flow of the action, such as by saying, "Time out. I have to go to the bathroom." Such asides are understood as being separate from the roles being played, and are the beginnings of rehearsal and improvisation (Blatner, 2000). This role playing eventually evolves into real life roles that the toddler is expected to assume in various social settings, contributing to the child's learning rudimentary self-discipline. These self-reflection skills are learned implicitly when the toddler's parents provide the freedom *and* the security necessary for spontaneous play. If the parents are overly intrusive, squelching spontaneity and freedom, the child is too preoccupied defending against the violation to play. If the parents are overly distant, neglecting to foster a sense of security, the child is too anxious to play. Parental hyper-

criticalness and shaming easily lead to self-doubt or self-consciousness in their children.

(11) *God as a secure base for exploration.* For many, God or other forms of spiritual connection serves as a secure base from which to explore not only the physical world, but the transcendental domains of the psychic, mystic, and cosmic realms. Kaufman (1981, p. 67), a theologian, states, “The idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment-figure. . . . God is thought of as a protective and caring parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need.”

In research by Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992), participants with a secure attachment to God perceived God as more loving, less controlling and less distant than those with insecure attachment. Those with an avoidant attachment to God were most inclined towards agnosticism (indifference) while individuals with an anxious/ambivalent attachment to God reported the highest incidence of speaking in tongues as well as the greatest proportion of atheists and individuals describing themselves as anti-religious (ambivalent between these two extremes of being demonstratively religious or atheistic). Adult attachment style and attachment to God are strongly related for subjects reporting an insecure childhood attachment to their mothers. People whose parental attachments were disrupted by separation or loss in childhood are less likely to turn to God as an attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1999). Resolving early disordered attachment in psychotherapy may well result in removing the resistance or avoidance in an individual’s spiritual relationship, and this spiritual reconnection quite commonly occurs in our experience.

### **Clinical applications**

We will address several specific clinical applications of the concepts related to transitional space presented in this article. Following are brief comments on select presenting issues.

#### *Addictions*

The most critical moment in the experience of an addict or individual with compulsive behavior is *between* the urge and acting to fulfill it. Of course, the most effective treatment removes the urge. In most cases the most realistic point of access in that treatment is to intervene in the addictive behavior cycle precisely at the transitional moment that carries a

potential for conscious choice: that fleeting moment between the urge and indulging it. What can we do as therapists to facilitate the addict to be *present* for that moment instead of dissociating in the compulsive ritual? One important step is in assisting the addict client to slow that process down, to inject into the transitional space a self-reflective reverie, which helps him/her to develop the capacity for self-containment.

### *Death and dying*

Here we are dealing with the transition between transcendence and oneness. We want to help a dying individual to remain present for the transition, to make a conscious choice between the last breath and the reflex to act in fear. One of our most important tasks is to let the dying individual go into that transition unencumbered. "In India, there is a tradition: They say, do not grab onto the soul who no longer belongs to your time zone. . . . at death we are advised to let go, not to let our grief create tormenting ropes to tie down the psychic energies of the departed. Let him be free" (Arya, 1979, p. 60).

### *Healing dissociation and shock*

Healing dissociation and shock involves slowing the process down to allow the individual to stay present for the transition from trigger to numbness and shut-down. First, I want to distinguish between traumatic dissociation and the "soul-loss" of shock. A helpful aid to understanding that difference is an analogy of dissociation as slipping away from the triggering experience into dream sleep. It is creating a distraction to get caught up in, an escape that allows another, dreamlike, experience to replace the threatening one. The content of that dream may derive from the wallpaper next to the bed, or from the fantasied nurturing of a "good mother," or from the sense of belonging in interaction with an imaginary playmate. "I have abandoned *you*." In contrast, shock would be analogous to slipping into dreamless sleep, recognizing that there is no escape, nowhere to go to escape. It is thus not escape into an alternate reality but rather into the annihilative nonbeing of the withdrawal of one's soul: temporary oblivion. "I have abandoned *myself*."

Coming back from dissociation is relatively easy, and controllable, once we become aware of having drifted away into the dream state. It requires navigating the transitional state between dream and consciousness.

What does it take to come back from dreamless sleep? The transition is created through the re-enchantment of Eros, requiring "pulling myself up

by my own bootstraps.” The ‘I’ that has abandoned myself must step forward to reassure the abandoned one that it is safe to come back. In other words, I am present with myself in the excruciating experience of shock, of annihilation, of the “walking dead.” One must feel very, very safe to *stay present* for that transitional state. The feeling of safety must reach profoundly deep levels within, it must be kinesthetic, visceral, and energetic.

### *Mind/body issues*

The subtle realms where mind and body meet are transitional “goldmines” of opportunity for healing. Of course, in a very real sense there is nowhere in human existence that mind and body do *not* meet. However, we speak here of the occasions on which one becomes consciously aware of the intimate connectedness, and thus has access to each “separate” realm through the other. We access the mental and emotional vestiges of early traumatic experience through “body memories.” And we access the body’s own self-healing capacity through the power of the mind’s intention and connectedness with spirit.

Jung said, “The common background of microphysics and depth-psychology is as much physical as psychic and therefore neither, but rather a third thing, a neutral nature which can at most be grasped in hints since in essence it is transcendental” (1963, p. 538).

Fear not the strangeness you feel.  
The future must enter you  
Long before it happens.  
Just wait for the birth.  
For the hour of new clarity.  
- Rainier Maria Rilke

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