

The value of the Transpersonal in psychotherapy and in everyday life

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Abstract

A general outline of transpersonal psychology is presented and the definition of the transpersonal itself is suggested. The differences between the transpersonal, paranormal or extrapersonal are considered and both the benefits and dangers of transpersonal experiences are discussed. Finally, the value of the transpersonal in daily life is addressed.

Keywords:

Transpersonal psychology, archetype, higher self, extrapersonal, perception, cognition

Transpersonal psychology: an overview

The position of transpersonal psychology is interesting. On one hand, it is a culmination or, better yet, an inevitable result, of the development of mechanical behaviorist and psychoanalytic psychology. These have both been dominant psychological forces for more than one hundred years and while they are both quite valid from certain points of view, human nature is arguably much more complicated than these schools suggest. Transpersonal psychology provides an answer to the need for more precise and flexible psychology as it embraces states of awareness that are well beyond the scope of even the keenest intellect. Transpersonal psychology is a silent call for deeper understanding of higher, so-called mystical and spiritual, experiences such as have been known to mankind in both the East and West (India, China, Japan, Native America, Egypt etc...) for thousands of years.

We live in the world of thoughts or, as modern cognitive psychology states, we base our perception of the world on mental representations (Kellogg, 2007). As hard sciences like physics (Greene 2004) and neurobiology (Dispenza 2007) advance the understanding of the worlds within and without, so it seems does the descriptive

science (Lutus 2003) of psychology. When even hard sciences like quantum mechanics affirm that the observer influences the outcome of scientific experiments, it is rather shortsighted to deny the role which that exact observer plays in the perception of ourselves and the world we live in.

Sigmund Freud, an interesting man, developed a medical model of our psyche, and his psychoanalytical theory has been the predominant model for understanding human self for decades. While Freudian psychoanalytical psychologists were losing the war against the unconscious in the mid twentieth century, other research investigations in the late 1960s were setting the foundation for transpersonal psychology. Stanislaw Grof built on his discoveries on the therapeutic value of LSD (Grof 1979) and authored many other important works, and thus became one of the pioneers of transpersonal psychology.

Another pioneer, who is also known as the father of transpersonal psychology, is Roberto Assagioli. As early as 1934, Assagioli published the article in which he introduced a completely new term into psychology: The Higher Self. The Higher Self presented a sharp distinction between the Freudian unconscious and the transpersonal, a daring idea for that time. Not all archetypes are (pre)personal nor are they all transpersonal:

In reality there exists not only a difference but an actual antagonism between these two conceptions of 'archetypes' and from this confusion between them arise various debatable consequences, debatable at the theoretical level and liable to be harmful in therapy. (Assagioli 1967, p.8)

Abraham Maslow is another thought leader who has had a significant influence on the development of transpersonal psychology. Maslow's research on the peak experiences (Maslow 1962) is of great importance for all psychologists, for it shows that these profound experiences come from well beyond what psychoanalysts are able to analyze.

Maslow's focus on self-actualization is of great interest for me and my humanistic psychotherapy practice. Peak experiences bestow upon the person 'a deep sense of selfhood', as Dr. Rowan so neatly put it (Rowan 2005, p.44), and they offer the power to, and often do, turn the tide of the process of psychotherapy. I have witnessed it many times in my psychotherapy practice. One of my clients shared an experience that by any criteria very easily comes under the category of peak experiences:

"I was just waking up in the early morning and was about to think of the issues I have with my partner and was yet again just about to give in to the worries when a deep sense of complete self confidence started to grow in my chest, near the heart. I felt as though my whole chest is burning with this firm and yet loving inner sense of wholeness and completeness. Is that sense me? Yes, it is me, it has always been, I have just managed to cover it up with my worries..."

This particular client had a difficult road to travel up to this point in the therapy, but after that experience everything was much easier as we had firmer ground to build on.

Maslow describes the peak experiences quite interestingly:

"All peak experiences may be fruitfully understood as completion-of-the-act... or as Gestalt psychologists' closure, or on the paradigm of the Reichian type of complete orgasm, or as total discharge, catharsis, culmination, climax, consummation, emptying or finishing." (Maslow 1968, p.111)

This is rather eloquently put and is very close to what my client experienced. The experience was indeed the culmination of her efforts and a natural outcome of her opening up to deeper and greater authenticity in her life. She has already successfully faced her fears, self-manifested doubts, and made a huge step forward in expressing real emotions. She started pursuing her own authentic goals-as opposed to the goals set by her education, parents, partner, social position and so on. She began to believe in her dreams. Her self-awareness and assertiveness has grown quite a bit, and in social situations and relationships, her presence has become more powerful, more peaceful. Authority figures in her life have started to notice her, hear her. No doubt, the aforementioned experience was bound to happen.

Certain other peak experiences (Rowan 2005, p.44; Maslow, 1954, p.216) are of course not so dissimilar from any transpersonal experience that the wise men of old in most ancient cultures would have recognized as self-realization, enlightenment, illumination of awareness, encounter with the spirit, samadhi, satori, nirvana etc...

I have witnessed other people attain these transpersonal states of consciousness on many occasions. Satori state of consciousness happens when a person becomes aware of his own true nature, and this inherent true nature always turns out to be what has always been. Dr. Amit Goswami, a theoretical nuclear physicist with an obvious inclination to the transpersonal, defines *satori* in the controversial movie

What the Bleep Do We Know (2004) as "observer becoming aware of himself, as the observer".

There are many methods and paths that lead to such experiences, and one modern path is Enlightenment Intensive (EI)-in my opinion, a brilliant integration of ancient Zen Buddhist mental contemplation and modern focused communication. Explore the subject in Noyes' 1998 writings.

On one of my Enlightenment Intensives a person, right after experiencing satori, shared this:

"False ego is an illusion, it simply does not exist. And That who I am is Infinite and Eternal. There is no difference between you and me. Your ego, too, is an illusion; all of this is just an illusion. I am." (Cigale 1998, an unpublished script)

Such experiences are the transpersonal proper, as we see in Rowan (2005, p. 76).

Let me share one of my own experiences:

"I was not focusing on anything in particular; I only noticed a bug there in the grass that was emitting some sound. At that moment, everything just seemed to stop. My perception ceased to function. It was as though someone switched off the movie projector that was projecting images on the screen of my consciousness. Everything just stopped being-and then I knew. I knew that the sound the bug was producing; it was the song of love. I knew that there are really no differences between that bug and me, that there is only One Truth, One Existence. That Existence is living through that bug and through me as well. There were no points of reference whatsoever, only Love and the Awareness. No God up there in Heaven, no poor and insignificant humans down below on Earth-it was just Me. "My" heart was completely fulfilled, tears flowed without any control, "I" could not utter a single word. I only knew I "was." (Cigale, 1996, unpublished script).

That was an experience of the Causal transpersonal level, also called *samadhi*. The word *samadhi* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'One with' (*sama*) 'The Lord' or 'The Absolute' (*adhi*). There are various levels of *samadhi*, of course. Ancient texts differ in the descriptions of these levels. Ramana Maharshi (1975), a great spiritual master, has outlined three: *sabikalpa*, *nribikalpa* and *sahaja nirbikalpa samadhi*.

This level of our existence is described in numerous ways: formlessness, void, I and the Father are One, My me is God (Rowan, 2005, p. 76) and is not as unreachable as it may seem.

It is this level of my existence that colors the meaning of life for me. It rejuvenates my wonder and respect for life. It is this knowledge or state of being that I rely on when nothing else seems to soothe me. High winds, stormy weather, or dry summers-it does not matter really. All relative sensory input cannot compete with the strength of Being nor with the power of Knowing.

Andrew Neher (1980) thoroughly examines the wide range of spiritual experiences in his work and does not dismiss the notion of such experiences. Quite the opposite : "Thus, mystical experience can be more than temporary respite from the cares and worries of our everyday lives. Sometimes, in revealing a whole new order of things, it profoundly transforms a life." (Neher 1980, p. 130).

In this light, it is interesting to observe how the understanding of human nature has improved since the Freudian era. Psychoanalysis interpreted such mystical experiences as a regression into primary narcissism and infantile helplessness and even interpreted religion itself as an obsessive-compulsive neurosis of humanity (Freud 1924). Some psychoanalysts went even further than Freud and described states attained by Buddhist meditation as self-induced catatonia (Alexander 1931). Such notions are really intriguing, seen from a modern perspective. The psychoanalytic interpretation is especially questionable when we consider that one of the leading Buddhists in the world, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, is a perfectly normally functioning individual to say the least, and was awarded the Nobel Price for Peace in 1989.

And so transpersonal psychology acknowledges, regardless of various religious connotations, most of the authentic experiences acknowledged by all major spiritual traditions on Earth as genuinely spiritual or transpersonal.

The same cannot be said for psychiatry where certain transpersonal states of awareness are diagnosed as pathological. In actuality, certain experiences are so far beyond the reach of the psychiatric and Freudian psychoanalytic approaches that they simply cannot be understood or dealt with properly without the help of transpersonal theory and without a firm grasp of transpersonal experiences.

I came across one such situation a few years ago. My old friend's rather unfortunate tendency for sharing such experiences, when refraining from it would be wiser, played a crucial role in it. I have known my friend – let's call him Steven – since childhood, and he, was committed to a mental institution years ago due to the problems his LSD flashbacks caused in his daily life. He took LSD only once or twice

and, according to the local psychiatrist, it was enough to push him out of the 'normal' human behavior framework.

He had an appointment at the institution when he was getting better and while he was talking about the progress, he said: "Oh I healed my sister-in-law at a distance; her ear was infected. I was using Reiki. She is fine now." That was, it seems, too much for the good doctor and so Steven was put under some powerful antipsychotic drugs for three days in order to realign his perception of reality to the narrowed lens of the psychiatrist and his scientific grounding in psychiatry.

Months later Steven and I talked about this and had a good laugh when I said that if I had shared my own Reiki experiences with the doctor, he would no doubt have committed me for life.

The subject of Reiki is well beyond the scope of our theme, but let us take a glimpse at it nevertheless. While the usage of energy work like Reiki for therapeutic goals may even today be frowned upon by academia, many independent scientific researches with interesting results have been conducted over the years. The work done by Drs. Robert Becker, John Zimmerman, and James L. Oschman (Oschman, 2000) has shown that Reiki not only has positive and measurable effects on the human body but also that it can be successfully used as a complementary method for medical remedies.

Obviously, certain experiences may be well beyond the reach of the mechanical and speculative psychology, which sometimes are-from a psychoanalytical point of view-rather pathological in nature. Certain states of consciousness and consequent actions are quite impossible to comprehend without profound insights into the innate nature of these levels of existence. An excellent example of this is Vamsidasa Babaji, a truly great Indian saint who was, recognized and acknowledged by most advanced scholars of his time. He was so extraordinary that in any Western culture, he would certainly have been committed or incarcerated for life (see Bhakti Vikasa Swami,1996).

Whatever can be said in praise of higher education and intellectual might, I would venture that mental speculation hard at work without transpersonal experiences can contribute very little to descriptive sciences like psychology. One such speculation is the extraordinary belief of some psychoanalysts that God (the transpersonal proper) and the Unconscious are the same thing:

"The aim of the Buddhists is often described as the attainment of Absolute Consciousness. From the point of view of modern psychology as influenced by Freud and Jung, the mystic appears to be exploring the depths of the Unconscious, while yet remaining wholly conscious. Timelessness, which is known on the mystical journey and in the sudden experiences of depth and meaning common to many, is one of the characteristics Freud discovered in the Unconscious. Another characteristic, the co-presence of opposites, parallels the paradoxes in which mystics very generally express their thoughts. For these reasons, among others, it may be proposed that the God of the Christian mystics and the Unconscious of (depth) psychology are substantially similar concepts. (Bomford 2002, p.340)

Dr. Rowan's comment on these thoughts is strong, as he points out that such statement can hardly be taken seriously (Rowan 2005, p.296). I am inclined, however, to share his observation that 'it is very easy to make obvious mistakes in this difficult area' (p. 296).

From my experiences as a Kriya Yoga teacher and an Enlightenment Intensive master, it really is difficult, if not impossible, to discern the personal (which would include Freud's unconscious) and the transpersonal. The only real and just authority, in my honest opinion, on such experiences should be the person who is having them.

We have seen, thus far, that certain experiences are quite distinct from the psychoanalytical Freudian inventions; but in reality, not all spiritual experiences are transpersonal, for they may be paranormal or extrapersonal in essence.

Paranormal and extrapersonal vs. transpersonal

Parapsychological researchers – Joseph Banks Rhine, Gardner Murphy, Charles Tart, Arthur Hastings, Russell Targ, to name only a few – have gone a long way in the precise scientific work that suggests the existence of telepathy, remote viewing, psychic diagnosis and healing, poltergeists and psychokinesis. And yet, Alyce and Elmer Green drew a distinction between the paranormal or extrapersonal and the transpersonal. This distinction suggests that in the transpersonal one can find a definite scent of the divine, whereas the extrapersonal is material or subtly material in essence (table 1. adopted from Rowan 2005, p.8).

| Extrapersonal | Transpersonal |
|---|--|
| Spoon-bending Working with crystals Clairvoyance Clairaudience Telepathy ESP – Extra Sensory Perception (Radin 2006) Radiesthesia Fire-walking OBEs Mind over matter Bloodless skin-piercing Energy healing work Lucid dreaming (LeBarge 1991) | Higher self Deep self (Starhawk 1989) Inner teacher Transpersonal self (Withmore 2004) High archetypes (Jung) The Soul (Hillman 1975) The supersconsciousness (Withmore 2004) Guidance self (Whitmont 1969) The Self Transfigured self (Heron 1988) |

In my previous work (Cigale 1996, ch.4) I drew a similar line between the Absolute consciousness or pure spiritual experiences (transpersonal) and the side effects (extrapersonal) of these elevated states of awareness, or 'plastic roses' as I call them. In my experience, extrapersonal abilities can be very useful and quite pragmatically employed in everyday life, especially in psychotherapy (ESP for example). But these abilities yield no real and deep self-knowledge nor are they of any firmly loving support when the inner skies are starting to turn gray. Quite the opposite, actually – in such high pressure situations, they can become a serious hindrance to progress.

Most humanistic psychotherapists have had various intense situations during sessions. Differing severely from impersonal and clinical psychotherapy, humanistic approaches with their soft, human touch tend to elicit deep and profound emotions from clients. I have witnessed such situations on many occasions. In most of them, my ESP abilities, empathy, and all intellectual speed are worth less than a dime. Only deep and clear awareness of the true transpersonal nature of us both, client and me, does get us through the stormy seas of past trauma, abuse and compromises.

The transpersonal experiences proper (they cannot really be called abilities), on the other hand, do offer inner strength, complete self reliance and a bottomless source of motivation. I find the words of Charles Berner (the originator of Enlightenment

Intensive) on the integration of the transpersonal experience (he calls it enlightenment, self-realization or satori) into everyday life, brilliant:

"You could just be happy with the fact that you at least now know who you are and can live your life from who you actually are instead of from a fake beingness or personality; that you can now take any growth technique or spiritual practice and make excellent progress with it because of this conscious, direct knowledge of yourself; that you can now know where you are coming from in life."
(Berner 2005, p.201)

Conscious, direct knowledge of one's true, absolute self-as opposed to relative selves or masks; in ancient Greek, *persona* signifies the mask that actors wore on stage-is what makes the transpersonal so different from extrapersonal or paranormal experiences. Benefits of transpersonal experiences can be profound. I must admit that in my case, I have not really lived nor authentically perceived the world prior to experiencing the true transpersonal Self. For me, the satori experience was a definite wake-up moment. It was as though I was viewing my hands for the first time, tasted sounds around me afresh, and knew the meaning of being awake clearly and deeply.

It is important to note that *transpersonal* is not a synonym for *spiritual*. *Spiritual* too is quite vague a word, a very general one at best. As we have seen so far, the transpersonal is not personal (as delineated in the mainstream psychology), it is not prepersonal (if we use Jung's terms), and not even paranormal or extrapersonal (as outlined above). However, it is also distinct from 'spiritual'. 'Spiritual' is very broad- a word which can and does signify most of the experiences we do not really want to accept as genuinely transpersonal. If we did that, we would risk the misinterpretation of quite mundane insights for the transpersonal ones. Dr. Rowan makes this quite clear when he says that the transpersonal (the Causal level) is the source of all mystical experiences (Rowan 2005, p.272). Put in plain words, we may feel very elevated and profoundly touched when singing in a church. We may think we are Dalai Lama-like when we experience the power of non-violence for the first time. We might even think we are standing right next to the God when extrasensory perception reveals itself as a precognitive dream. However, with all due respect to these experiences, they are not transpersonal. The transpersonal has nothing to do with anything in the sphere of human personal or extra personal experience. The transpersonal just is-an Abstract potential, beyond words, thoughts, and deeds. It is the Source.

Transpersonal is also not the same as 'religious'. Moreover, a religion and the transpersonal stand on quite the opposite banks of the river of life. While religion has more to do with the vast masses and organized spreading of religious teachings, the transpersonal is very close up and personal. Transpersonal experiences are intimate insights into the absolute reality that may or may not be expressed within the framework and terminology of any existing religious doctrine. I concur with Dr. Rowan when he says: "In other words, the transpersonal is a realm of personal discovery, not something which one joins" (Rowan 2005, p.10).

I would suggest this is what the transpersonal really conveys: integration and harmony of inner and outer psychological forces, by making one become what one really is, has been and always will be. It is in this direction, I believe, that we should seek the precise definition of the transpersonal.

The dangers of the transpersonal experiences

The difference between the spiritual and the transpersonal has already been established above, but it is nevertheless worth mentioning the dangers of the so-called spiritual path.

Fukuyama and Sevig (1999) presented these dangers as the 'negative expressions of spirituality'. Let us take sunlight, for example. It is of critical importance for life on Earth, but when used in certain conditions, it can become very harmful. We may say that the same light in the form of laser-Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation-is a negative expression of the sunlight. I have seen most of these negative expressions in my private practice. Instead of facing and resolving personal issues, it seems so much easier to be "spiritual" (note the quotes). But the personal issues that are causing anguish and pain in daily life cannot be simply by-passed or effectively ignored. How could they? It is interesting how often this one fact is overlooked: the same issues in everyday life present very real obstacles in one's spiritual progress as well. Spirituality, as anything else, can indeed be defensive as well as transformative, as Rowan puts it (Rowan 2005, p.205).

I have yet to meet a person that has unresolved issues in daily life and who is, at the same time, genuinely spiritually advanced. Weinhold and Hendricks (1993) share these words: "As one of my clients put it: 'As soon as my ex-husband started meditating and doing The Course in Miracles, he stopped sending his child support payments.'" (p. 80).

We can see how easy it is to delude oneself about realized level of self-development, and we really don't want to believe that the more advanced one is, the easier it gets. Dr. Rowan has outlined the dangers that many unaware transpersonal seekers fall prey to: delusion and ego inflation, privation and pride, contempt for the world, fixation and fanaticism, presumption, to name only a few (Rowan 2005, p.272). It is at this stage of development, at Wilber's Causal level, where really subtle dangers present themselves. I have experienced some of them myself.

And what seems to be that danger? Transpersonal experiences have unique tendencies to pull the practitioner out of the world, as it were, by virtue of being in such stark contrast to the ordinary day-to-day life experiences: the sense of complete freedom, deep sense of wholeness, pure love, peace, joy and happiness, Oneness, Omnipresence, utter lack of any kind of reference - unlike anything experienced in the daily affairs.

These experiences can be so profound that a single second spent in such a transpersonal state can result in a strong detachment from everything material or non-transpersonal. I have been down this road a few times so far, and it is never pretty. I can remember the first few days after my first transpersonal experience: I was just sitting there in the living room with a blank stare, completely disinterested in anything happening at home. I am fortunate that my father was quite flexible and just left me be; it was what I needed, no doubt. I needed some time to get the normal perception going again. It was as though I had just awakened from a lifetime of watching an ongoing play on stage, realizing that the play I always took for real was, in fact, only a drama, an on stage choreography.

Of course, the same happened in my social life. I was withdrawn, seemingly detached, and disinterested in daily affairs. All of this made my life quite difficult at the time. Instead of facing life and especially others at their true value, I floated a few feet above the ground, avoiding the real issues I had in life. It was not pretty, yet it was unavoidable for me at that stage. It is my experience that only sincere and persistent work on grounding and bringing these transpersonal insights into the everyday experience can bring balance back into one's life. Practices such as diligently fulfilling one's duties in family life and the social arena, and following and realizing desires and dreams in personal and intimate life can enable a person to reach the important and balanced state: A life 'with the head near God and with the legs on the ground' as Yogananda (1946), a well known Kriya Yoga master puts it.

The transpersonal and its value in daily life

What is the pragmatic value of the transpersonal? Let's first examine the stages or levels of the transpersonal as per modern transpersonal theory.

Dr. Rowan dedicated the whole second chapter to The Basic Map, as he named it (Rowan 2005, p.55-88, examine it if interested). The transpersonal is divided into two levels by authors: Subtle and Causal (Wilber 2000), Transpersonal 1 or Soul and Transpersonal 2 or Spirit (Rowan 2005) and Transcendent and Unity (Wade 1996).

It is the Subtle (the Soul or the Transcendent) level that is quite readily utilized in our daily life, in my experience. According to Dr. Rowan and other aforementioned authors, it is at this level that we can find divine symbolism and transpersonal archetypes. All divine figures can be found at this level, all forms of God humanity prays to. It has been called The Higher Self in the past, a step deeper from the authentic state-in Rowan's map called the Centaur-on which humanistic psychotherapies work. In the authentic state, a person works on bringing about his genuine feelings, dreams, and inner goals by relying on his own personal strength; whereas, at the Subtle level, the same and much more can be accomplished by giving up the exquisite yet limited personal power by the virtue of surrendering to the transpersonal Self.

The Subtle level is the transpersonal proper from which a great deal of support and guidance can be drawn. A quiet and sincere prayer is an excellent example. It is important to note, in my opinion, that this state or level is not out of our reach in our daily awareness. It is not a state from without, but rather from deep within.

ThetaHealing™ (Stibal 2007) is another such example. In ThetaHealing™, the transpersonal through the doors of theta brainwaves is utilized. It is one of the methods that employ this level of our existence for advancement in everyday life. From theta state, with conscious connection to the transpersonal, ESP can be easily and quite pragmatically used; beliefs and emotion can be removed and replaced in an instant.

Vianna Stibal's diagnosis was terminal bone cancer-she had a tumor in her right femur). She tried to heal her leg using various complementary methods, to no avail. She was desperate but determined to find a way out. Eventually, she cured her cancer by lowering her brainwaves to theta and contacting the Causal transpersonal level of existence. The healing was instantaneous. Her words:

"...I thought to myself, 'It can't be that easy!' I stopped just before the door to my office and went out of my space from my crown chakra and prayed to the Creator. I then commanded the healing on myself, and it worked! My right leg, which had shrunk three inches shorter than my left leg, returned instantly to its normal size. The pain was removed, and my leg was healed. I was so incredibly excited about my healing that throughout the day I compulsively tested the strength in my newly healed leg, curious to see if the pain would return..."
(Stibal 2007, p. 4.)

Stibal's experience is a testimonial to the power of self to transform internal and external circumstances and realities. Another successful practitioner of the theta state and the transpersonal, is Sally. She was diagnosed with malignant melanoma arising from the back of her head. Using the theta technique, Vianna removed the brain lesions in the first session. Subsequent MRI's have shown the lesions gone. In another session, Vianna cleansed her blood 'and a special test from the John Wayne Cancer Institute has verified that there are no melanoma cells in my blood', Sally says (Stibal 2007, p.37).

The Causal transpersonal level can obviously be employed for medical treatments, with surprising results. It literally transforms people's lives.

Conclusion

Transpersonal psychology offers a great many valid insights into human nature, essentially because it is not confined by the intellect.

While transpersonal experiences can and do bring profound changes into the life of a practitioner and their benefits are well documented, the transpersonal itself is not without dangers. A balanced life is needed; a precise balance between personal and transpersonal forces in human existence. Surfing solely on the superficial waves of material existence can be, and usually is, a rather dry event, and diving intensely and too deeply into the transpersonal ocean tends to produce high waves on the surface. Extrapersonal abilities and even transpersonal experiences can certainly be of great assistance in everyday life; if and when a controlled and deliberate effort is made to solicit them.

As much as our intellect craves for distinctions and labels, I still maintain that it is far better to experience the transpersonal itself than to limit our perception of it with dry

definitions. After all, how can we relevantly portray something that is well beyond our very words and thoughts?

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