

*The
Light of Consciousness*

Explorations
in
Transpersonal
Psychology

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PREFACE

We create, and we are created by, our myths. It is through our personal and collective myths that we explore our own identity, the nature of the world around us, and our connection with past and future. Transpersonal psychology is a myth in the making—a myth that captures the central meaning of the many lives being transformed through self-discovery. The bond I now feel with those who write in transpersonal psychology is formed by a sense of our moving along convergent routes toward a common goal.

It wasn't long ago, however, that I felt compelled to take issue with someone who was talking about her life, first as a psychologist in France and later as a devotee of an Indian spiritual teacher. I interrupted in order to put on record one of the central assertions of my own world view: "Well, I don't believe in God or anything like that." I expected some sort of controversy to ensue, but she just laughed and said, "Oh, I understand, but what I mean by God is just whatever one spends the greatest amount of time thinking about. So, really, everyone has some god or other, don't you think?"

I had to agree, and later, when I pondered what my own god might be, I saw how intensely I had concentrated upon and indeed deified certain "factors" in group process. I had worked for twenty years at Harvard and Michigan, studying and interpreting the latent causes of what was happening in T-groups, classrooms, and self-analytic groups. The "cause" for which I was always probing, beneath

the surface layer of denials and avoidance, was anger. Only when anger or resentment had been identified as a major cause of what was happening could I conclude that the group and I had arrived at the object of our inquiry. Anger, it appeared, was certainly pervasive and powerful enough to be the god of my interpersonal reality.

As I pondered this, the mists cleared, revealing an Olympian hierarchy of gods. How puny my god—anger—seemed to be, how dwarfed by other gods far more fundamental and worthy of the constant focus of my attention. Love, freedom, truth, and peace were among the higher gods overshadowing this minor god of anger to which I had devoted so much of my adult life. The myth that had served me so well seemed suddenly unnecessary and ready to be discarded. But how?

The process of reshaping my personal myth was greatly affected by a series of encounters with a great Indian saint, Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri. This book is an effort to portray the interaction of two world views, his and mine. To present his, I have chosen a series of events that document his spiritual evolution and transformation. These events are drawn from his autobiography, *Play of Consciousness*. In the primary sequence of this text he describes his direct and shifting meditative experiences of what he calls "the Blue Pearl."¹

In presenting the second world view, my own, I have followed two approaches: first, to explore my reactions to and understandings of the Blue Pearl narrative; second, to clarify the approach and the potential of transpersonal psychology and to join with others in creating this new form of psychology. Transpersonal psychology suggests at once a new and an ancient vision of reality. It is a psychology that honors all the world's great spiritual traditions and their mythic portrayal and appreciation of the divinity of each human being—the inner Self. Thus, transpersonal psychology extends our sense of the full course of human development to include intuitions of our essential nature and of ways in which that nature might be more fully revealed, realized, and enjoyed.²

The term "transpersonal" calls our attention to the largest possible context in which we live and move and have our being. A "transpersonal psychology" would thus be one that comprehends the figural events of our individual lives by remembering, as context, the very ground of existence. Such a psychology would explore not only

how the wholeness of humanity, past and present, affects us but also how an unchanging reality, the absolute, manifests in our thoughts and actions. In addition, the term "transpersonal" calls our attention to a state of consciousness that enables some human beings to experience reality in ways that transcend our ordinary "personal" perspectives. Therefore, a transpersonal psychology would also be one that acknowledges the possibility of going beyond the limited outlook of everyday awareness. Such a psychology would be prepared to learn from any persons capable of sharing their evolved state and teaching others how to launch forth on the transformative journey.

If we regard the lives and teachings of the world's great spiritual figures as significant data, then we must reconsider our methodological stance. Transpersonal psychology cannot preserve the objectivity of scientific inquiry and still hope to learn what great teachers have to offer. The effect of the teachers and texts we might study depends in large part upon our willingness to be changed by what we learn. What happens as they teach goes far beyond the transfer of information. We learn by means of our unique responses to first one part and then another of what is being communicated. The research method of transpersonal psychology is thus far from the scientific ideal of detached and interchangeable observers. Rather, it suggests that we maximize our engagement and take careful note of our response, assuming that others will do likewise in relation to other teachers and other texts.

The body of understanding in transpersonal psychology will grow through the efforts of many learners and seekers. As we explore both the uniqueness and the commonalities of our diverse experiences, we will slowly fashion a new vision of human nature and human potential. The result, I am convinced, will provide a much needed corrective to the assumptions and understandings of contemporary psychological thought.

The teachings described in the Blue Pearl narrative and Muktananda's direct, personal interventions have illumined, confronted, and changed my own world view. These changes are reflected in my effort, in the last chapter, to present a more systematic overview of transpersonal psychology. This permits me to discuss some of the features of my current mythic rendering of who I am, who we all are, and what our experience reveals about reality, about how and why we change and in what direction.

PREFACE

I continue to be an academic psychologist and to honor the work and company of my colleagues, whose sturdy, useful world view I carry within me. Although our capacity to contain multiple perspectives and divergent myths is impressive, even if sometimes quite disorienting, an effort to resolve these divergences underlies this book. This effort leads to a recurrent self-inquiry: What would have to change in the psychology I have learned and taught for thirty years if it were to expand to provide a comfortable, even a central place for such notions as the sacred, the absolute, the unmanifest, and the Self? Another question follows: How would I have to change in order to replicate in my own life experience the full course of the transformative process? This book is an attempt to answer these questions. To me, transpersonal psychology is a peculiar and exhilarating arrangement in which each of us can be both researcher and subject, at the same time.

From this perspective, I am impelled to include enough of the primary text, the Blue Pearl narrative, to enable others to form and ponder their own reactions to the transformation of one who has reached the traditional goal of his culture: liberation and final realization of the Self. The central three chapters each present a long selection from Muktananda's narrative. Together, they reveal the evolution of one man's guiding myths through the long and ultimately successful process of inner transformation. His shifting world view focuses our attention on issues we all face in the construction of our own personal and shared myths. We are turned toward exploring the ways in which we view ourselves and those around us and the central images of the ground and cause of all we can ever know.

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This book is dedicated to Swami Muktananda. His arrival in Ann Arbor and my subsequent encounters with him fulfilled my longing for a teacher. His life showed me what amazing levels of freedom and joy are humanly possible. The primary text for this study in transpersonal psychology describes his evolving meditative vision of the Blue Pearl. I am deeply grateful that he so graciously permitted me to reprint a series of quotations from his autobiography. His successor in the Siddha lineage, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, has been very helpful throughout this project, and I appreciate her support.

The personal experiences to which I turn throughout the book in an effort to understand the text and my reactions to it are drawn from my involvement, over the past nine years, in Siddha Yoga. Whatever perseverance it has required to keep moving forward in the face of unfamiliar and often confusing events and whatever understanding has emerged from those experiences I attribute in large measure to the great good fortune of having a perfect companion on the journey: my wife, Jean Bisson Mann. The processes of personal transformation that I have come to appreciate over the years have been made real and even delightful by the opportunity to share and observe these changes in the context of our marriage and family. We have learned from each other and from our sons, Larry, Ned, and David, just how immediate and exciting the process

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of inner development can be. I am particularly grateful for Jean's insightful, comprehending, and helpful responses to the various stages of writing this manuscript.

I have been extremely fortunate to have had fine students and colleagues in my teaching at the University of Michigan. The heads of the Psychology Department, Bill McKeachie, Warren Norman, and Al Cain, and of the Program on Studies in Religion, David Noel Freedman, have been exceptionally kind in their support for this considerable revision in my academic interests. The process of teaching my course, Psychology and Religion, has clarified many things, not the least of which is that, if I stay within certain bounds of appropriateness, I can count on students and colleagues for frank, energetic, and helpful reactions in the service of our common quest for understanding. I attribute much of the pleasure and the learning I have derived from the course to the talented teaching fellows who have worked with me: Deborah Chandler, Harry Cohen, Ali Naqvi, Tony DaSilva, Duke Hill, Barb Branca, Lew Okun, Mike Sayama, Colin Horn, Jan Brink, and Sallie Martin Foley. In the process of working on the Sanskrit text, preparing the Glossary, and writing some technical notes on *yoga* and the Indian spiritual tradition I have had the invaluable assistance of Ahmed Narvil (Devala). My colleague, Madhav Deshpande of the Linguistics Department, has helped me settle on a modified system that provides sufficient, but not excessive, diacritical notations for the Romanized Devanagari script.

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