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TRANSFORMATION THROUGH LIVING IN TWO MODALITIES SIMULTANEOUSLY

I am learning to see. I don't know why it is, but everything penetrates more deeply into me and does not stop at the place where until now it always used to finish. I have an inner self of which I was ignorant. Everything goes thither now.

—Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

Those who wish to grow spiritually or assist the evolution of human consciousness have as their task at this time to “bring Light into the marketplace.” This means integrating the spiritual and the worldly in a most profound way. The “marketplace” refers not only to commercial activity or one’s job environment; it means mundane life on earth in all its varieties. This project involves living in a new consciousness in the totality of one’s life. We have examined elements of this consciousness: the linear, practical, discriminating, rational functions on the one hand, and the meditative, aesthetic, inclusive, and expansive functions, on the other. The challenge is to put them together, to live in a meditative awareness that includes one’s whole self, the love of God, and the vast context in which one’s life is occurring, while not losing one’s edge of practical focus or the ability to function in business, scientific research, athletics, etc. The goal is to synthesize all aspects of oneself.

This is an end in itself, a satisfying and encompassing mode of personal living. It is also a method to achieve the goals of personal spiritual transformation and of healing the rifts that beset our culture—rifts such as those that divide us from the natural world, religion from daily living, and politics from meaningful dialogue and problem solving.

It will be helpful to explore an example of such a method of synthesis. The purpose of the following illustration is to try to describe the

essential elements of the transformational process so the reader may use this description to determine the soundness of whatever system, approach, or discipline she may consider. In discussing this particular form of inner work, I'm not advocating that the reader take it up. While it's a valid and profound transformational process and the one I'm most familiar with and thus best able to use as an example, there are many others—happily so, because different personality types and orientations need different approaches.

Russell Schofield developed a form of transformational life-energy work designed for modern minds and life-styles. This teaches a person to go within to experience the life-energy (spiritual energy, also called light-fire or inner light) and enlightened awareness of his own higher self. It asks the person to pay attention to the mind's contents, the issues he faces, and every charged emotion, thought, and sensation. He works on himself by bringing all these together in a minute-to-minute interaction of the spiritual and the mundane. Spiritual awareness and energy exist within the self and are constantly available, but many people hold these separate from the routine aspects of life and the business of making a living, if these enter into awareness at all. They usually avoid or repress the more challenging manifestations of spirit.

Whenever a person brings spirit, in its functional capacities of love, life-energy, and enlightened awareness, into relationship with any aspect of her body, mind, emotions, or mundane life, transformations occur. It's difficult, however, to simultaneously hold both spiritual and mundane elements of life in mind; in fact, our rational minds are trained to avoid contamination by these non-rational, fuzzy elements, and many people feel that they shouldn't clutter their spiritual sensibilities with the chaff of daily living, much less pollute them with dark moods and thoughts.

Schofield laid out a system of inner focus that addresses this quandary by altering how the mind relates to experiences. In this method, one thinks of specific sources of spiritual energy in order to call them into play. One focuses this life-energy on a problem or a discomfort and then simply *lets go of the thought of doing that*, while staying fully present in order to observe and experience what transpires as the two elements interact. Further directive thoughts may be necessary as the stages of the work progress, in order to shift focus, redirect the energy, and release negative conditioning. It's the energy, however, not the thought or the finite mind, that does the work of clearing and transformation; thus, each time the thought has done its part (focusing), one again lets go of it and continues to stay with the experience. Focused observation grounds the power of the life-energy. One must always be ready to

move from one modality (thinking or experiencing) to the other, and not go too far into either.

Spiritual energy is always within us, even though we don't experience it (sometimes even when we begin to use it). This lack of experience of it and the fact that we may have little idea of what to do with it isn't a problem. The energy derives from infinite self, which knows how to use it and what it needs to do. The energy comes into play simply by our intent to invoke the energy. Infinite self then responds, using the energy to accomplish the work needed and gradually remove what kept the experience of the energy outside of awareness. (See chapter 20 for specific exercises and experiences you can explore.)

With practice, the two modalities of awareness become simultaneous experiences, so that the inner light or life-energy operates in the "marketplace" of the active mind. Life-energy by its nature functions in accordance with what Schofield called the "actual design" of the person who's working with the energy. Actual design is the innate healthy, purposeful, fulfilling nature of the person as created by the higher self. The practitioner doesn't need to figure out what the result of the life-energy work should be; it unfolds, leaving the mind free to observe the inner changes or to deal with life. Maintaining the activity of the life-energy in the marketplaces of the mind and the daily round of business produces gradual illumination and purification, so the person's actual design and potential more fully express in every aspect of life.

As one uses inner light, there's a growing awareness that one is the source of the energy and of the wisdom regarding how to use it, as well as the recipient of it. This inner light illuminates the fact that one is an infinite being that is constantly present in the finite body, mind, and emotions. One's sense of identity begins to expand to include much more than the previous identification with the body, mind, or feelings. Familiar but false or inadequate labels and definitions of self, around which one usually orients one's life, gradually lose their influence when experienced in the context of infinite self and can be dissolved by the life-energy.

Continued use of this also dissolves the conditioned, habitual patterns of behavior, thinking, and feeling that are the residue of experiences, recent or long past, particularly those that have been traumatic. The process of growing up, being educated, and seeking to establish an identity in the world leaves one with false pictures of oneself and limiting perspectives and ideas about the world. As life-energy removes these, one may feel a refreshing sense of freedom, meaningfulness, and ability to recreate how one lives one's life. In addition, there sometimes arises an experience of inner vastness, of immeasurable potential, and of having infinite value. Still, one continues to live in and attend to the mundane world, one in-

habits a limited body, and one's sense of value doesn't make one superior to anything else: everyone and everything is also of infinite value.

The experience of being both finite and infinite enables a person to feel at home in humanity's expanding awareness of the universe because it allows for a sense of a correspondingly vast microcosm within. An individual's inner world is as complex and interesting as the outer universe. Awareness of oneself as a microcosm in a macrocosm engenders an enhanced and transforming sense of the relationship that one has to one's entire environment and of how each action affects a much larger context than one's personal sphere, just as one's gravitational field literally moves all things in the cosmos, albeit minutely. The awareness that one's undertakings have surprising impact leads to heightened moral and ethical attentiveness, considerations that don't have a dogmatic basis but instead rest on an experiential foundation and are therefore more compelling.

Living in the two modalities simultaneously nurtures a persistent sense of the transcendent value and potential inherent within each act and every moment. This is a most significant and fulfilling development in a person's consciousness, yet any attempt to describe the experience inevitably creates a false picture of what takes place because it's usually not a distinct experience that begins at a particular time. Like other spiritual experiences, it may be hard to say when one first had it; the transformation often seems to have occurred outside of time. It's rarely an exalted event. It sneaks up on one, and yet one's sense of oneself has changed; one simply becomes aware that something has effortlessly and subtly occurred. There is more to one, and greater self-assurance. This addition exists at right angles to one's flow of awareness: a constant potential for unbounded amplification of meaning and experience. Daily life doesn't allow time for much musing on infinite significance; one needs to stay grounded and attend to business. Instead, the abiding experience is there beside one, within one, and backing one up, providing a sense of fullness and richness regardless of the particular circumstances of the day. It supplies a context within which to evaluate things; it helps one not to become too caught up in the frustrations of the finite. It advises that this too shall pass and points out what will persist, reminding that both the transitory and eternal are to be cherished.

Sensing One's Interface with the Infinite

The use of life-energy and the practice of focusing awareness bring finite self into closer relationship with infinite self. Finite self must experience the infinite in some kind of finite form, however rarefied, in order to register it. We may encounter this in dreams, in the form of

transcendent or religious experiences, in the recognition of a profound truth, or in the envisioning of our true purpose or life path. Of course, no form can encompass the infinite or fully express it. Infinite self gives us what we need of itself at every moment. This might be a revelation of the cosmic infinite, as expressed, for example, in the Buddhist Avatamsaka Sutra. As described by Thich Nhat Hanh, in the *Avatamsaka* realm, which is the infinite, each lotus flower comprises

more than one thousand petals, and . . . [each petal] is another lotus flower with one thousand petals. And each of those petals is also a lotus of one thousand petals, and those lotuses are not smaller than the first lotus flower. It continues on like that forever. . . . The ideas of bigger and smaller are just not present, nor are the ideas of one and many. . . . We see the many in the one and the one in the many. . . .

Indra's jeweled net. . . illustrate[s] the infinite variety of interactions and intersections of all things. The net is woven of an infinite variety of brilliant gems. . . . Each gem reflects itself in every other. . . . Each gem contains all other gems. . . .¹

Or, it may be a direct experience of our essence, as J. A. Symonds relates: "Irresistibly . . . [the mood] took possession of my mind and will, lasted what seemed an eternity. . . . It consisted in a gradual but swiftly progressive obliteration of space, time, sensation, and the multitudinous factors of experience which seem to qualify what we are pleased to call our Self. . . . At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract Self. The universe became without form and void of content. But Self persisted, formidable in its vivid keenness."²

This kind of experience, while not uncommon, isn't an everyday affair. Its most intense form can allow a finite self to starkly and totally feel infinite self and "download" knowledge at such a rate that a brief vision or other kind of experience informs and gives meaning, direction, and utter conviction to a person's whole life. Practiced attention, however, increases registry of more frequent, highly practical perceptions of infinite self interacting with finite self. Simply meditating on the presence of the infinite being within may yield sensations such as tingling of the skin, expansion, inner vibration, warmth, or a loving embrace. (By "meditating" on infinite self, I mean thinking of it, then releasing the thought, feeling what occurs, and accepting this without trying to imagine or create an experience.) Other experiences include lightness or being lifted, an impression or conviction of being exactly where one should be, awareness of being centered rather than imbalanced or pulled hither and thither, or a sense of repose and relaxation. Emotionally, one may feel joy, peace, unconditional love,

forgiveness, or great good humor regarding the absurdity of our paradoxical existence. One may register validation of self while at the same time feeling strongly moved to reach one's potentials. Any number of other sensations, emotions, or insights can occur. Uncomfortable sensations may come up due to feelings such as fear of something so incomprehensible and vast or from a mindset that denies the possibility of an infinite self. Negative emotions or beliefs may block the experience of the higher self. These might need clearing away before experience of infinite self is accessible; meditation or other inner work can help to accomplish this.

Our interactions with infinite self also commonly take the form of symbols. These arise in dreams or in waking visions, daydreams, intuitive flashes, the process of artistic creation, etc. Symbols mediate between the inexpressible infinite and our own modalities of experience. They can be extraordinarily useful as long as they remain adaptable and transparent, that is, as long as we can reach through them, so to speak, to feel the living, indefinable infinite. Jung emphasized the importance of symbols for providing "meaningful shape to life" and dealing with moral ambiguities by marrying polar opposites.³

A symbol must remain alive and fluidly adaptable if it is to convey the boundless nature of the higher self. The infinite has long been seen as creative and dynamic.⁴ Eastern mysticism, whether speaking of it as the "Emptiness" or "Void," whether conceived of as *Tao*, *Brahman*, or *Dharmakaya* (ultimate existence in Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, respectively), holds it to be infinitely alive, inventive, and generative. It comes into existence in countless shapes that then dissolve. We find consistent attestation of the relationship of *Brahman* with movement despite the fact that it is beyond form. Plotinus taught that each order of the divine naturally would emanate the next order. In modern physics, the quantum field creates and reabsorbs its endless array of virtual particles.

While the infinite is dynamic in giving us the created forms we need in order to relate to it, the experience is interactive. Just as physics demonstrates that the observer always affects the observed and that our theoretical approach determines what occurs in experiments,⁵ so we help shape what we experience of the infinite. We need to be deeply receptive to the dynamic, expressive nature of the infinite so that we are fertile ground for what it sows, but also we must be dynamic in response. If our response is true to what the infinite has sown in us, we'll find that the infinite is also most fertile, for what we release to it (if we do relinquish control) returns greatly increased. To maintain a relationship with the infinite requires creativity and a willingness to experience the ongoing tension of feeling, at the same time, both humble and filled with strength and authority.

Symbols in Need of Renewal

Representations of the infinite have a shelf life. Any such articulation in finite form, however true, is useful only for a generation, an era, or at best an eon. (I use eon in the Jungian sense of a period of about two thousand years; each eon has a specific psychospiritual organizing principal or archetype, experienced symbolically.) This also applies individually: we need to let go of our old ideas and experiences of the infinite or at least reexamine and deepen them periodically rather than trying to have repetitions of a previous experience, illuminating or uplifting as it may have been. In time, older symbols, individual or cultural, tend to become crystallized and opaque, no longer leading beyond themselves. They cloud the interface with the infinite, providing experiences only of themselves; we must discard or transform them. All formulations of religion and spirituality need periodic renewal. This doesn't necessarily mean abandoning the religion, only that old forms need release or development. For example, in the Middle Ages and later, profound mystical experiences, such as those of Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme, offered revivification for Christianity (though they were mostly ignored), as did Francis of Assisi's love for God's creation. Kabbalah provides a similar example in Judaism, as does Sufi mysticism in Islam.

As individuals, we have our own symbols of ourselves. These are mostly implicit in how we think of ourselves and are therefore unexamined. Some may be limited and limiting; based on our parents', friends', and teachers' hopes, fears, or needs, they often distort who we really are. Others may be actual expressions of our infinite self: penetrating self-perceptions that enable us to live deeply felt and richly textured lives with the flexibility that a living symbol allows. Our individual symbols and expressions of infinite truth, like those of religions, need renewal so they provide avenues for regeneration and growth. If we hold on to limiting symbols because they're familiar or safe, we will eventually feel out of sorts with ourselves, which may progress to feeling stifled or depressed or to a mid-life crisis.

Many individuals or groups, ranging from fundamentalists to New Age seekers, feel they have *the* truth in their dogma and symbols or in their rejection of doctrine in favor of open-mindedness to all spiritual expression. While most expressions do contain truths that are worthy of attention, no symbol, doctrine, or attitude can encompass the infinite or appositely formulate it for all people, and none can be an adequate window on the infinite for very long.

Our experience of these religious truths, whether sensory, emotional, or intuitive, can make it possible for us to determine their veracity and usefulness. We can similarly check out inner experiences, for in-

stance dreams or inspirations, by which we suspect the infinite is communicating with us. Actual communications, direct or symbolic, often feel radiant and alive and continue to unfold over time. As we penetrate them, they yield deepening, unexpected experiences; we may sense expansion, opening, connectedness, and inexhaustibility. Such symbols enhance each person's sense of self as an aware and growing being with potentials to discover and explore. Symbols that are past their expiration date leave an aftertaste of staleness, limitation, repetition, dampened enthusiasm, or closing off, though they also provide the comforts of familiarity and certitude.

Useful, living symbols, being impermanent, will not cause one to come to conclusions about anything—oneself, truth, or life. A conclusion is an ending, the shutting down of a sometimes unsettling process of questioning and questing. Living experiences such as symbols always leave one with the sense that there's more and that one had best not get too settled or comfortable with oneself or one's beliefs. Living symbols and visions empower an individual or group. With empowerment comes responsibility, for both individual and group, to recognize the limits of received vision, both in time and scope. When we sense the eternal verity of the divine truths illuminated by the symbol, we must not make the error of supposing that a symbol pointing to divinity partakes of divinity or eternity itself.

The Star of David symbol is a living and expansive form that symbolizes these essential qualities of symbols. We discussed one interpretation of it previously: the lower triangle as the earthly nature rising to know the divine, the upper as the divine penetrating into the earth to uplift it. A further meaning is that the descending triangle requires interaction with the lower, earthly nature or it will remain unformed, ungrounded, and immaterial; through the lower, it achieves substance. The lower triangle, earthly matter, requires interpenetration with the upper if it's to achieve meaning and purpose; without the expansive inflow of the upper (which enters our experience as the energetic qualities and consciousness of love, good will, etc.) it would congeal and become moribund. The six-pointed star represents two continuing movements, a ceaseless mutual penetration that transforms and evolves both.

We need continually to test symbolic forms to make sure they demonstrate the qualities of living symbols. Otherwise, we may live according to a symbol that was once a portal to infinite meaning but has gradually become dull and impervious, leaving only an image of the past. Worse, the psychic energies of fear, hatred, and outrage may co-opt symbols so that they become regressive, pulling us backward to what we've outgrown spiritually, culturally, or personally, as the Nazis did

with the ancient swastika sun symbol. These symbols may be attractive on the surface, evoke strong emotional responses, and often make excellent sense (from the standpoint of the old order of understanding) but also can lead to catastrophes such as the world wars of the twentieth century. They are identifiable by the way they feel: isolating, limiting of personal choice (offered in return for security and freedom from personal accountability), or excluding rather than inclusive. They are milky rather than clear, easily definable (black and white), forced, lacking deep resonance, smug and inauthentic, divisive of self or group, or energizing in a hyper sort of way rather than providing calm and lasting energy. People become numb to this sort of symbology, but as one begins to work spiritually, a vibratory difference in the energy of the symbols becomes apparent, and bodily reactions give overt clues.

Always Perceiving the Infinite

The idea that infinite self is within and throughout us raises several questions. If the divine is immanent, as theists, pantheists, and panentheists assert (see appendix 1), why do God and the infinite seem so difficult to perceive? In one sense, the answer is obvious: perception is the act of finite creatures, and the finite cannot apprehend the infinite. Why don't we experience it at least partially? We do, in all our experience; in the view of pantheists and panentheists, we perceive God whenever we experience anything at all, because all is of God. Why don't we recognize that we're experiencing the divine? We in fact can, with training or through grace, but mostly we don't because we're educated to discriminate—to distinguish this from that—rather than see the living whole. A further reason is that, trained as we are to think so analytically, worry so much, and consider the body unspiritual, we pay only perfunctory attention to our intuition and sense experience.

William Blake, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, urged consideration of the following:

- 1 Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of soul in this age
- 2 Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
- 3 Energy is Eternal Delight⁶ [*sic*]

Energy comes from the body that itself is a part of the soul accessible to the senses. We must return to our senses if we wish to enjoy eternal delight as well as to perceive our soul (not to mention the divine).

My favorite answer to the question of why we can't see God comes from a biography of a child of six or seven. Learning that we perceive an object's color because it reflects that color while absorbing all others, she realized that God, loving everything, reflects (rejects) nothing, and thus is invisible.⁷

Notes

1. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the Mind of Love: The Practice of Looking Deeply in the Mahayana Buddhist Tradition* (Berkeley, Ca.: Parallax Press, 1996), 80-81, 83.

2. Qtd. in James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 296.

3. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 338.

4. Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, 190.

5. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 143.

6. William Blake, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 181.

7. Fynn, *Mister God, This Is Anna* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 42-43.