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“Living Spirit: New Dimensions in Work and Learning

Facilitating Spiritual Development

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Abstract

This paper focuses on spiritual development, looking at some of the spiritual maps and developmental issues spiritual facilitators might need to pay attention to in their work.

The basic premise of this paper is that those who are awake to their spiritual nature and actively identify with being spiritual human beings are on a journey of spiritual development that can be called the ‘spiritual journey’ or the ‘Mystic Way’¹. This journey can take many forms from the social, the occult or contemplative practice and might be accompanied by many different experiences from deeply the transcendental, to other forms of peak experiences to nature mysticism to name a few. The concept of the journey is a metaphor to help conceptualise the depth of commitment and type of engagement the spiritual traveller makes.

In this paper I want to inquire into some aspects of the different spiritual journeys. What do they tell us about the development of the human condition and how can such processes be facilitated?

I will start this paper by stating that I am very tentative about seeking answers to these questions for myself and even fewer answers about how to facilitate these experiences in others. What is offered here is a summary of some of the literature on the subject and some ideas about how they might be applied. However I believe that self-facilitation is the most potent strategy for growth, while others may be helpful facilitators if they are also on the same spiritual journey, perhaps a step or two ahead of you.

Rationale for this paper

Many aspects of my spiritual experiences have fascinated me most of my life. The main fascination is linked to the sensations I often feel in my mind-body, which is expansive to the point of being painful and blissful at the same time. These sensations occur in many situations and all have a common feel of a great surge of energy, felt as love, linked to an expansion of consciousness of cosmic dimensions. More recently the experiences have mainly been a sense of emptiness; nothingness in a vast ocean of cosmic energy. I have chosen to interpret these experiences as indicative of a relationship I have with Divine Energy or a Divine Source, whatever that is.

The other fascination I have is asking the question “How can I maintain this expansiveness or continuous awareness of deep consciousness in myself and how can I share this with others? How do I create a continuous conscious

awareness of Divine Presence or Unitive Energy, which seems to instigate the sensations of emptiness I am experiencing? It is not the sensations per se I want to recreate continuously (although that would be nice) but rather the continuous conscious knowledge of Spirit or Unitive Consciousness. The reason for wanting this experience, or awareness, is that it helps me move out of personal anxieties; small-mindedness; interpersonal rankling and materialism to name a few of my traits, and allows me to be deeply engaged with human processes without having a great attachment to the outcomes. I also feel more loving and compassionate towards myself and other people. Most importantly I feel at one with an energy Source that seems too vast to comprehend. I celebrate not knowing yet feel compelled to seek understanding.

Being Spiritual

My bias is to use the verb (expression) 'being spiritual' where possible instead of the noun 'spirituality' as the latter does not give the essence of a living dynamic intrinsic to the experiences under discussion. Also I have difficulty defining spirituality but little difficulty in defining what being spiritual means for me. For me being spiritual means being is a sacred space or Presence where there is 'Choiceless awareness'². Buddha's message was that the heart of the spiritual practice was awareness. Awareness means "feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear."

A 'choiceless awareness' was the simple and only teaching of another great buddha, Krishnamukti. The nearest I can get to understanding this choiceless awareness is to constantly practice not taking a position between frames of references. To be multi-perspectival in an abstract way without any attachment, either emotionally or theoretically to any one position. This increases observational power whilst decreasing judgementalism.

Being spiritual has an in-built intentionality about it that gives it direction. Philosophically, intentionality means to 'stretch forth', when the mind reaches out towards stimuli that makes up the real world in order to translate them into its realm of meaningful experiences.³ As I understand it spiritual intentionality is when the 'stretching forth' is directed towards the metaphysical and divine realms. This seems like the spiritual consciousness described by Assagioli⁴ as "states of consciousness which differ greatly, in quality, intensity and effect from those that normally project their images of light and dark on the screen of human consciousness". (p19)

People experience being spiritual in many different ways; many speak of a transcendent quality, while others use an immanent metaphor to describe their locus of experience (Heron⁵ and others) The transcendent implies looking beyond oneself for spiritual emanation and dominion from a higher Order. Maslow⁶ states:

Transcendence can mean to live in the realm of Being, speaking the language of Being. B-cognizing, plateau living. It can mean the serene B-cognition as well as the climactic peak-experience kind of B-cognition. After the insight or the great conversion, or the great mystic experience or the great illumination,

or the great full-awakening, one can calm down as the novelty disappears, and as one gets used to good things or even great things, live casually in heaven and be on easy terms with the essential and eternal and infinite.

In the transcendent state of spiritual consciousness there is a perceived contact with a plane or sphere of reality which is 'above' or 'beyond' those which are normally regarded as real (or human)⁷.

Immanence, on the other hand, refers to the actualising tendency deeply embedded in the individual to become all that he or she is capable of becoming. This is the "capacity of feeling, working as a deep formative presence within us, the guiding voice of immanent divinity".⁸ According to Heron entelechy (as an ontological position) means the lower or formative potential of higher levels. This implies that divinity springs from within the person reaching out to Unitive Consciousness or unity with the world within One – Many Mind (to use Heron's phrase). According to Jane Houston (cited in Heron⁹) entelechy is:

That dynamic purposiveness coded in ourselves, longing for unfoldment and expression. It is the possibility of our next stage of growth and evolution entering into time.... This Entelechy Self is also the supreme orchestrator and ground of all one's other selves, and serves as a protector and provider of balance and mental health amid the complex and polyphrenic structure of one's inner life. It is the Root Self, the ground of one's being, and the seeded coded essence in you which contains both the patterns and the possibilities of your life." (Houston 1987: 31)

Entelechy seems like intentionality by another name.

Immanence addresses the potential of individuals to manifest their spirituality through their personhood and psychological growth. This is similar to Assagioli's¹⁰ personal self and Higher Self, where we raise our centre of consciousness, the self-conscious 'I', to levels above the ordinary, until we reach the sphere of the superconscious, the Higher Self.

For Mike King¹¹ one aspect of spirituality is about enlightenment. The aim of enlightenment seems to be the strongest current that flows deeply through the many spiritual journeys recorded throughout history. Enlightenment has as one of its characteristics mystical experiences: This is a discrete experience somehow standing out from the normal stream of consciousness, having a beginning and an end. Maslow's peak experience is often used as an example of this.

Another spiritual state is called a 'ground of being' or state of consciousness that mystics permanently possess, and which non-mystics do not, or are not aware of. Enlightenment is grey indicating that enlightenment is not a continual repetition of peak experiences, but a neutral state of some kind that is nevertheless highly valuable. Here is an example of the mystical continuum often referred to which extends from blissful states, to the dark night of the personality and further to the dark night of the soul, to a continuous 'ground of being'¹². The usual effect of mystical experiences is the transformation of the individual.

Much of the contemporary psychological literature refers to the spiritual as part of the discourse on transpersonal and consciousness studies. For many, transpersonal implies spiritual and Rowan¹³ (p. 6) uses Stanislav Grof's¹⁴ definition of the transpersonal which states: "Transpersonal experiences are: experiences involving expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual ego boundaries and beyond the limitations of time and space".

In summary, being spiritual can be experienced within the person as an expansive, altered state of consciousness which is attributed to connection with a Unitive Source or the One-in-the Many.¹⁵ The altered state of consciousness has many attributes, the most common being timelessness and spacelessness during peak or mystical experiences and a transformative change for the individual who never quite sees the previous world reality in the same way. However the source of this altered state can be experienced as immanent or transcendent.

Many exponents of spiritual development assert that spiritual growth goes hand-in-hand with personal development, which is not just psychological in the usual sense of that work, but is about the maturation of the whole person, psychical, cognitive, intuitive, emotional, moral and behavioural. The next section gives a brief résumé of some of the key issues in human development.

A General Map of Human Development

If spiritual development is linked to levels of consciousness and these levels of consciousness are linked with human development¹⁶ there is a need to understand the developmental stages that a person goes through. Firstly, for the purposes of this paper, the concept of levels of consciousness needs to be understood in its simplest sense. That is, that all human beings have four states; "waking, sleeping, dreaming and non-dual ever-present awareness, although sleeping and dreaming might seem less real to some people and the non-dual state may be latent in many. Therefore all people are deemed to have available to them this general spectrum of consciousness which manifest as different states".¹⁷

According to Wilber¹⁸ the body is the energetic support of the various states and levels of mind. Vedanta offers three different bodies which support these states, that is, the gross body of the waking state, supporting the material mind (the brain), the subtle body of the dreaming state supporting the emotional, mental, and higher levels; and the causal body of deep sleep supporting the spiritual mind. For our purpose what seems important is the structure of the different states, that is, the level of maturation of consciousness within the different states. According to Wilber, a structure is a sheath or level of consciousness or maturation of consciousness and he works mainly with two types. These are the structure in the basic level of consciousness, such as sensations, impulses, image, rule, formal operational, vision-logic, psyche, subtle and causal, and the structures in the developmental lines of consciousness, such as degrees of cognitive

development, degrees of emotional and moral development and so on. Wilber creates a continuum between these known stages of development and links them with spiritual stages of development. The linked areas are the areas of subtle and causal levels with the view of integrating them as part of human development. So one can display side by side, Piaget's cognitive stages, Kohlberg's moral stages, Erikson's psychosocial development stages and many others as well as various theories of emotional and spiritual development stages. These different states and stages give rise to different spiritual experiences and will be returned to later.

Wilber's¹⁹ archaeology of spirit therefore embraces matter to body to mind, to soul to spirit. It is impossible to cover all the various lines and stages of development he purports and the interested reader is encouraged to view Wilber's²⁰ charts (p197 to p217) for a lengthy list where the developmental lines are drawn, psychological defences are identified and spiritual development mapped out. It will be seen that models of development are common to a number of spiritual and non-spiritual traditions.

When we speak of the states of consciousness we are asking ontological questions, that is what is the nature of man and how can we understand this?

Wilber's²¹ integral psychology offered three main holistic perspectives or levels of human nature: the `I' -the beautiful, (the subjective truth); the `We' - the good (intersubjective truth) and the `It' - the true (Objective truth, individual and social, p73). These are ontological in that Wilber asserts that we need to understand man as being made up of four quadrants, The `I', the Interior-individual (intentional) being, the `We' interior-collective (Cultural) us. The `It' Exterior-individual (behavioural) being and the `Its' Exterior-collective (Social) beings. All four need to be considered when looking at the development of persons and how they relate to their environment.

Where does spirituality come into this?

For one, none of the attributes of the left-hand quadrants exist in simple location; they exist in emotional, spiritual, conceptual, cultural space. The quadrant pertaining to spirit is in the upper left-hand quadrant, where the full spectrum of consciousness, from body (feeling), to mind (ideas), to soul (luminosity) to spirit (all pervading) are situated.

Heron²² offers another model of human development in terms of personality structures, which he calls, states. His presupposition is that a person is a fundamental spiritual reality, a distinct presence in the world (p52). Heron's approach comes from an immanent perspective and focuses on the achievements of the person in his /her development through the various states.

The states are an up-hierarchy matching chronological and maturational development and are listed below:

- Charismatic person The psyche is a continuously transfigured, living Presence²³



- Self-transfiguring self The psyche realises its psychic and spiritual Potentials
- ↑
- self-creating person The psyche is autonomous in healing and actualising self
- ↑
- Conventional person the socialised psyche adopts cultural roles and Rules
- ↑
- Creative person The psyche is autonomous in external behaviour
- ↑
- Compulsive person The wounded psyche has defensive splits and repressions
- ↑
- Spontaneous person The uninhibited psyche expresses its innate impulses
- ↑
- Primal person Primordial fusion of the psyche and its foetal world

These are only two possible models out of many that attempts to explain human development in states or stages. These two have been chosen as a personal preference as I find them easier to understand than for example: Buddhist Vijnanas or the Kabbalah. That said, Susan Cook-Greuter's²⁴ Self-Related stages is very comprehensive and not unlike Heron's model.

The Chakra System is another model showing human development as energy states as well as emotional cognitive and moral stages of development, although this system is not stage specific in the way that many others are. (See Tosey's²⁵ interpretation of the Chakra System as a functional model of human behaviour.

Earlier the four states of consciousness were discussed briefly, these are: psyche [gross], subtle, causal and non-dual. These are linked with four manifestations of spiritual development and are described below. A reminder to the reader that mysticism is used here in its broadest sense meaning a spiritual connectedness to a Divine Source.

Natural mysticism tends to deal with the world that can be seen with the senses and is experienced in the gross-psyche state.

Subtle mysticism tends to deal with realms, states or `worlds' that cannot be seen with the empirical senses and are not normally found in nature. They are transnatural often involving God or some type of deity form(s), dakinis, subtle lights and energies, dreams and visionary states, archetypal imagery and so on. This is the domain of the subtle body.

Causal-realm spirituality is an experience of pure formlessness, Emptiness, the Void, the Limitless Ground, sometimes as a second theme, this is experienced as the formless Witness or pure Self that transcends all and is

detached from all, although it reflects whatever arises with equanimity. This is the domain of the causal body.

Non-dual mysticism is much, much rarer than any of the previous three states, simply because it included all three. Also it can be mistaken for type #1 or gross-real unity, because it involves a oneness with nature, but it also involves a oneness with subtle and causal while nature mysticism, by definition, does not. Non-dual mystical experiences usually begin with a strong experience of formlessness (Type #3) that eventually spills into all experienced worlds, spills into infinity, so that there is a radical union of Emptiness and All Form.

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(To follow)

¹ Happold, F.C. (1970) Mysticism: A Study and Anthology. London, Penguin Books.

² King, M. (2002) Do existing methodologies encourage religious experience as a for of spiritual materialism)

³ Tosey & Gregory (2002) Dictionary of Personal Development. London, Whurr Publications.

⁴ Assagioli, R. (1993) Transpersonal Development: The Dimension Beyond Psychosynthesis. London, Thorsons.

⁵ Heron, J. (1992) Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in Another Key. London, Sage

⁶ Maslow. A. (1973) p287) Cited in Rowan. J. (1993) The Transpersonal: Psychotherapy and Counselling London, Routledge

⁷ Assagioli, R. (1993) Transpersonal Development: The Dimension Beyond Psychosynthesis. London, Thorsons.

⁸ Heron. J. (1992) Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in Another Key. London, Sage

⁹ Heron, J. (1992) page 70)

¹⁰ Assagioli, R. (1993) Transpersonal Development: The Dimension Beyond Psychosynthesis. London, Thorsons.

¹¹ King, M. (2002) (Mike King in article: Do existing methodologies encourage religious experience as a for of spiritual materialism?)

¹² Happold, F.C. (1970) Mysticism: A Study and Anthology. London, Penguin Books.

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¹⁴ Stanislav, G. 1979) Realms of the Human Unconscious., (p155) Souvenir Press, London.

¹⁵ Heron, J. (1992) Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in Another Key. London, Sage

¹⁶ Wilber, K. (2000) Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy. Boston & London, Shambhala

¹⁷ Jefferson, M. (2002) Childhood Spirituality. Sidebar D. Ken Wilbers www....

¹⁸ Wilber, K. (2000) Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy. Boston & London, Shambhala

¹⁹ Wilber 2000 (2000, p89) Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy. Boston & London, Shambhala

²⁰ Wilber, K. (2000) Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy. Boston & London, Shambhala

²¹ Wilber, K. (2000) Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy. Boston & London, Shambhala

²² Heron, J. (1992) Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in Another Key. London, Sage

²³ Heron, J. p53)

²⁴ Wilber, K. (2000) p205. Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy. Boston & London, Shambhala

²⁵ Tosey, P. (2002) Energy Table – handout at conference