

Awareness of inspiration

a transpersonal thesis



Paula van Rein – 2006

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Foreword.

This thesis is about becoming aware of the transpersonal in day-to-day life.

Sometimes we become aware of something because we feel we are lacking or missing it. It is as if our intuition tells us of a dimension beyond what we can see or touch. Although we live our lives without this mysterious “it”, we feel slightly restless, not complete. Some of us start searching, looking for answers, attracted to others who seem to be on the same journey.

I wrote this story long ago during one of my hypnosis classes:

Once upon a time there was a candle.

She lived with all her fellow candles in a beautiful but forgotten candle shop. It was one of those delightful old-fashioned shops, with dark wooden shelves – filled with all kinds of candles in different sizes and colors.

Our candle lived on one of the top shelves. Here the nicest and most exquisite candles were stored. She had lived there all her life, and there was really no reason for her to be unhappy... but she was. “I am a candle”, she mused, and “there must be more to life than being on this dark shelf”. She felt a longing she couldn’t explain.

One day she heard whispers coming from other shelves, whispers of something very wise candles revered to as “light. Nobody on her shelf seemed to care – they were only interested in their beauty and style. But our candle knew that this “light” had something to do with her purpose in life. So she decided to go on a quest.

First she moved to the shelves next to hers in search for information about this mysterious thing called “light”. Some candles had actually seen some of it, and their stories intrigued our candle. Then she came to shelves where candles had experimented with flames. These candles looked so beautiful to our candle; she admired their wondrous shapes and questioned them about their experiences. But although they could teach her how to light her

wick – they did not know how to sustain the flame. Our candle thanked these inspiring candles for their lessons, but she knew she had to move on.

She met all kinds of candles along her journey – and she could learn lots of techniques of lighting her wick, but no candle had found a way to keep a flame alive. Finally she reached the shelf nearest to the window. Here she found the most beautiful candles she had ever seen – their shapes and colors were so graceful and unique, they brought tears to her eyes. She knew she was getting close – here the ultimate secret of light was to be found. So she decided to stay and exercise her flame with the other candles in front of the window.

And then, one day, it came to her, such a simple idea... She opened the window, and as the fresh air streamed in, her flame burst into a beautiful light. As she felt her light shining from her, she turned around to witness a path of light coming to life all the way to the darkest corners of the room. As more and more candles lit their wicks the whole shop transformed into a sea of light.

In this thesis, I will describe what I found on my journey. I have no illusion to have opened a window, maybe we all have to do that for ourselves anyway, but somebody might hear my whispers....

Paula, April 2006

Introduction.

The theme of this thesis is the transpersonal.

My personal quest for “more” in my life evolved in an extensive exploration of many aspects of the transpersonal dimensions. In my training as a Gestalttherapist I learned about awareness. During Hypnotherapy classes I was inspired by the power of true connecting.

The courses at Atlantic University gave me ample opportunity to study the transpersonal in its various dimensions. It provided me with a context to experience and explore. Life challenged me to grow with what I assimilated.

At the end of my studies at Atlantic University I can see that my journey of learning was important to further awaken my awareness of my own transpersonal nature. The “more” I was looking for was already there; I simply needed to become conscious of it. I became aware that I was already aware of the transpersonal. I just did not know I was.

In this thesis I present this “*Awareness of Inspiration*”.

I will begin in the first chapter with a description of the original Gestalt philosophy as described in Perls, Hefferline and Goodman’s book: *Gestalt Therapy*^a. Although I realize psychotherapy is not the theme of this thesis, I thought it important to explain the origin of my concepts. Awareness is a major theme in Gestalt. The underlying idea is that *conscious* awareness gives us the possibility of a choice, a response-ability in our relation with the world around us. Some aspects of Gestalt seem to imply a transpersonal vision. One purpose of my thesis is to further explore and articulate these aspects and present them as an explicit quality Gestalt has to offer.

We will discuss the awareness of body and the awareness of mind in the second chapter.

We will observe that awareness is always there, but that it needs our focus in the here and now to become *conscious* awareness. We meet the observer, our inner witness. We will see

a Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy*, 1951

how we can look at our environment from different perspectives and thus create our own subjective version of reality. The awareness of our awareness – the Meta-awareness - enables us to focus on here and now, to look at life from a wider perspective and detach from the content of our thoughts.

In chapter three we arrive at our destination: the Awareness of Inspiration. I will illustrate what I mean with the help of metaphors and experiences many readers will recognize. We will see that the ability to be consciously aware of our transpersonal awareness comes to us naturally. We are aware; we just do not always know we are. We will discuss higher qualities, higher perspectives and God in this context. Only humans came up with myths telling stories of how a hero should act, what a wise woman should know and what a God should be like. This suggests that humans have an innate knowing of transpersonal potential or archetypal qualities.

In chapter four a further elaboration of the awareness of inspiration in day-to-day life is presented. How do we become aware of the transpersonal and how does it help us to know where we want to go? The metaphor of the little boat on stormy waters illustrates that to know the ways of the winds and the nature of the water enables us to handle our boats better. How wonderful would it be to be able to choose our destinations and reach our shores? In this chapter we will speak about self-realization and our sense of direction when we are choosing our foregrounds.

Chapter five is the most “scientific” chapter of this thesis. It presents a model that conceptualizes my transpersonal vision in a schematic way. I use it to explain the hierarchy of transpersonal perspectives we can experience as human beings. On the lower levels we are aware but not very conscious of it: this is the level of ego-consciousness or little self. The higher personal perspective is represented by the dimension of higher Self. Here we are consciously aware. The level of higher Self enables a transpersonal perspective in the sense

that this level transcends ego-self. The axis between self and Self is called the transpersonal axis in this model. Beyond Self is the domain of the Divine or Being.

It is my intention to illustrate how in a therapeutic context, as an example of an I – Thou relationship, an awareness of inspiration is generated. Both, therapist and client strengthen their transpersonal axis by connecting on this level. This chapter shows a visual representation of what I consider to be a transpersonal experience.

In chapter six I go back to the Gestalt philosophy and present several of its most important aspects in a transpersonal perspective. This is an important part of this thesis for me.

Although I realize this chapter asks much of most readers not familiar with Gestalt, for me it illustrates how our perspective transforms the way in which we perceive reality. It shows that conscious awareness of unconscious (implicit) qualities transforms those qualities into treasures. The philosophy Perls, Goodman and Hefferline present implicitly carries those transpersonal “treasures”. Once brought to the surface, as an explicitly essential part of Gestalt, they expand Gestalttherapy to its full potential.

In the next chapters in this thesis I will take a better look at this awareness of inspiration. I will explore the applications of consciously expanding our reality to contain the transpersonal. What happens when we look at our lives with a conscious awareness of our ground in Being beyond? What transformations can we expect when we perceive our lives from the perspective of Being, from a transpersonal perspective?

Chapter seven is dedicated to relaxing in Being. It explores this quality from different angles and elaborates on ego-transcendence and being without a story.

This chapter is about acceptance as well. This is an important perspective when you realize that it is only with an inner acceptance of *what is* that we can make a choice how to handle this reality. We will look at the acceptance of our own concept-making, at the acceptance of our responsibility and finally at the acceptance of Being itself.

In chapter eight the transpersonal sense of responsibility and the transpersonal sense of meaning are discussed. Edgar Cayce for instance, was quite clear on responsibility. His focus in many readings is on setting ideals and living according to them. We have free will and thus the choice, and thus the responsibility, to experience our lives as something we create ourselves. Once we discover that we are *more* than the image we project into the world, once we have sensed our potential beyond the ego-self, nothing is quite the same. We cannot turn our backs and go on with our lives as if nothing has happened. We want to discover this more. We feel an urge to be more like this more.

Chapter nine is close to my heart. It introduces the vision that enlightenment is a natural process. Many people seem to mature towards higher levels of consciousness. In this chapter I endeavor to explore the qualities that accompany this evolutionary process. I envision that we can actively mature toward enlightenment when we become more consciously aware. We can actively and positively participate in the human evolution when we are willing to face our world with more openness, with a keener knowledge of how our minds work and with a willingness to live in a world not fully explained. We will discuss various new and more enlightened ways to express ourselves. We will look at compassion, commitment and communion among other qualities that are in my view the most important keys to inspired living.

I present the Awareness of Inspiration throughout this thesis as an important ingredient in human growth. I am in the good company of visionaries like Carl Gustav Jung and Joseph Campbell and newer thinkers like Walter Truett Anderson and Ken Wilber, when I believe that the transpersonal dimension is an essential part of the human experience. It is time for us to explicitly acknowledge its implicit presence in our lives.

Chapter One: The Gestalt philosophy.

“Dealing with behavior out of the here-and-now is a waste of time.”

(Frederick Perls¹)

1.1 Introduction to Gestalttherapy: basic concepts

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, introduce a profoundly new approach to psychotherapy with their Gestalt Therapy². The focus is the client’s present experience, in the moment of contact and in the field that emerges when therapist and client meet.

Paul Goodman explains that “experience occurs at the boundary between the organism and its environment” and that “it is the contact that is the simplest and first reality”. The organism is the person; “self”, we say. The contact, the “place” where I (my self) and the environment (the not-self thus other) meet and become involved, is the primary site of psychological experience. Gestalt therapy names this the “contact boundary”: the fluctuating edge where self and other meet and something happens. This contact boundary is the process where awareness arises. This is where I become aware of my-self and the reality that surrounds me.

In therapy, where therapist and client^b meet, the therapist can intimately examine how the client meets her and responds to this contact. In Gestalt terms: how he forms “gestalts”. A gestalt is a whole, a complete figure formed against the background of the person/environment field.

^b In this thesis I use the word client. Perls, Hefferline and Goodman talk about the patient, coming from psychiatry. In psychotherapy however, we use the term client. To avoid using he/she or his/her, allow me to use the male form for the client and the female form for the therapist.

To experience the forming of a Gestalt, look at the familiar drawing in picture 1. One moment the observer forms the gestalt of a crone, the next the gestalt of a young women. Two different experiences of contact, two different gestalts formed out of the same background.



Picture 1.

The purpose of therapy is to witness how the client goes about forming gestalts. The therapist reflects this *how* back to the client, not only by giving her client the phenomenological description of what she witnesses, but also by sharing her awareness of it.

In this way she heightens the self-awareness of the client and gives him feedback on his behavior. In other words: she teaches him to become aware of himself, but also to become aware of his relationship with his environment; the interaction between himself and the other.

With awareness the client obtains the ability to shape his own experience: once he is aware that he is doing something in a certain way, he will be able to respond differently to a similar situation. He can choose to re-act in another way.

The contact boundary, where self meets other, is where growth occurs. Growth is seen as a process of assimilation.

In a healthy person the process of figure/background formation is the dynamic way in which the organism adjusts to its environment. The lived experience is creatively integrated, much like we integrate the food we eat and digest. The unknown (the novelty) is metabolized from the environment and made known. An aspect of the environment, of other, is transformed into an aspect of the organism, of self.

Imagine learning a language. At first you hear the sounds and intonations, but you do not understand what they mean, you do not know how to respond. After a while the language becomes familiar, the vocabulary you learned is yours to use and to express yourself.

Later in this thesis I will elaborate on these Gestalt notions where necessary.

In therapy the patient realizes that the reality he perceives is always and per definition a subjective reality, his “what I make of it” picture of reality. No two people experience exactly the same reality. A person “picks” his own gestalts; he translates what he perceives into something that makes sense to him. He transforms Reality into his reality, into something that has meaning to him.

In therapy the client learns to become consciously aware that he is forming his own gestalts, and in that sense he is the creator of his “own(ed)” reality.

1.2 Gestalt and awareness

Gestalt psychology provides an adequate theory of awareness, according to Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. Gestalt studies the phenomenology of awareness.

The self is “the contact-boundary at work” and is perceived as the integrator or the synthetic unity. The contact-boundary is the specific organ of awareness; here awareness arises.

In the moment of contact the organism makes a creative choice out of all its possibilities; it gives reality its form in a gestalt. The contact itself is thus the first moment of creation.

As we saw, conscious awareness of this process, conscious awareness of “how” we choose, or in other words, of “how” we create gestalts, give us the possibility of a conscious choice.

Conscious awareness allows us an active role in the creation of our reality. It gives us the possibility of a choice, a *response ability* in our relation with the world around us.

Gestalt therapy aims to give a client the instrument of awareness, or better of meta^c-awareness, as we will see in the next chapter. The client learns to become aware of his awareness. In other words: the client learns to become *consciously aware*.

A point of great value in the Gestalt approach lies in the insight that the interplay of organism (person) and environment; the organism/environment *field* constitutes the psychological situation. Neither the person nor the environment is taken separately. This unitary approach expands the focus in therapy to the dynamic relation of the client and his environment, of figure and ground, of foreground and context. The client learns how he connects and relates to his environment and realizes that the relationship itself has certain dynamics he was not aware of before. Furthermore he obtains a wider perspective from which to perceive his reality. He becomes aware of his experience as part of a larger “whole”. This is a self-in-relation approach as we will discuss later.

^c the prefix meta is mostly used as concerning the subject itself: meta awareness = awareness of awareness.

1.3 Gestalt and the transpersonal?

The presented aspects of Gestalt psychology already hint at the potential this approach has for an application in transpersonal psychotherapy. The way Gestalt perceives contact as a process, as dynamic and as played out in a larger “field”, signifies its readiness to expand its perspective.

In my view, there are some aspects in Perls, Hefferline and Goodman’s Gestalt Therapy that imply a transpersonal vision. Perls for instance, defines healthy growth as a process of creative adjustment towards wholeness and self-actualization. This natural process is in his view ultimately directed by a self-regulating system. Although he calls this “system” the psychological form of organismic self-regulation, the self is apparently seen as regulated by a system that is of a larger order than self. In my view the concept of a self-regulating system seems rather unbalanced without a direction; without an understanding of meaning, or without a vision of an underlying unity.

The terms wholeness and self-actualization again carry the potential of a transpersonal perspective. When this process is supposed to be directed by a self-regulating system, doesn’t this also suppose a “beyond” self, a transpersonal Self or Being?

As Perls, Hefferline and Goodman “only” mentions awareness on the levels of body (sensations) and mind (thoughts and emotions), the logical next transpersonal step would be to speak of the awareness on the level of soul, the awareness of a transpersonal Self, the awareness of spirit. This thesis is about this “awareness of inspiration”.

It puzzled me why the metaphysical is not explicitly mentioned in the Gestalt philosophy as presented by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. Maybe the main reason is that Gestalt therapy is primarily applied phenomenology. When we focus on what we can observe, the transpersonal is obviously not the subject. We see the same phenomenon in the original

Buddhist tradition; it approaches human problems as they present themselves, but stays away from any metaphysical discussion.

I found several Gestalt-writers who do elaborate on spiritual issues. It is interesting to see where the Gestalt-philosophy presents itself to be creatively self-regulating towards greater wholeness.

We will discuss this further in chapter six.

Chapter Two: Awareness.

“The limits of the possibility of dialogue are the limits of awareness.”

(Martin Buber³)

2.1 Awareness is there

In my experience awareness is *there*, as I will try to show, on all levels. To become aware however, to become “aware” of our awareness we need to shine the light of consciousness on it. In the Gestalt-view we become aware by contact: the creative and dynamic interaction between the organism and its environment. When we become aware a figure forms out of the ground, a Gestalt. This is the way we create what we experience, our reality.

Most of the time our consciousness is crowded with all kinds of input. We need to focus on the things at hand to function properly in our day-to-day lives.

If we want to become conscious of something we have to find a way to direct our consciousness to these areas of interest to “*become aware*” - this is how we use these words - of something. I am already aware, but “to become aware” in this sense is “to become *consciously aware*”.

2.2 The awareness of body and mind

The awareness of body. I experimented with this with my son. I put my hand on his arm: “are you aware of my hand on your arm?” Yes, of course. Now we talk about other things. The awareness is still there, but he needs to *focus* his consciousness on his arm again to “become consciously aware” of the sensation of my hand on his arm. In the “now” moment my son can consciously shift his attention to his arm and tune into his senses in order to experience my hand there.

The awareness of body is an important instrument. Our physical body is like an antenna; we obtain information from our environment through this instrument. Research shows that we humans have the ability to “tune into” more frequencies than we actually do and that we receive more information than we are consciously aware of. Through ages of civilization we were probably conditioned to ignore or overrule most of our inner signals, or we simply lost our sensitivity by lack of use of our senses.

The awareness of body is much more than being aware that you have a body. Awareness of our body is also more than being aware of how your body reacts to your environment, to what it experiences, to life. When you truly observe your body, you will notice that you can often “catch” what is going on outside, before you consciously figure it out with your mind. Maybe you recognize sensing a tightening of the muscles in your neck or your heart skipping a beat moments before you realize what causes this reaction. Or maybe you sometimes felt restless, or as if somebody pulled your plug, only in retrospect realizing what was going on? Did you know that in our spoken communications, the words spoken account for only 7% of the meaning inferred^d? Amazing, reckon how we could communicate when we would become *consciously* aware of more of our non-verbal signs and signals!

Now a working example of the awareness of mind. I sit with a friend, talking. I hear what she says, listen, feel empathy, respond.... then the phone rings. She talks and this conversation sets in motion a whole train of thoughts in my mind (emotionally charged). My friend hangs in and continues her story to me. I hardly hear her - I am totally immersed in my own thoughts. The sounds are there - my ears get them - my mind is getting the info, probably processing it (I know from hypnosis-training that indeed we process almost everything, a lot more than we are conscious of).

Somehow I step out of this process, into another position outside the stream of my thoughts where I realize I am not listening to my friend. I become *conscious* of what my mind is doing.

^d Professor Albert Mehrabian's communications model, 1967

As soon as I become consciously aware of my thinking process, I can choose to focus on my friend and on what she is saying again.

In this example I have to *wake up* from my own thinking, where my consciousness is crowded with thoughts and emotions, to re-focus. I need conscious awareness of my mind to do this, otherwise I would drift unconsciously further on the stream of my thoughts and feelings.

To wake up - to realize that I am not listening to my friend but immersed in thinking - I need to detach: to step out of the puddle of thoughts into a position *beyond* these thoughts.

Only in this observer - or "meta-position" I realize, or in other words *I am aware* - that I am interacting with/contacting my environment in a certain way.

In Gestalttherapy we offer the client the opportunity

- a. to learn to observe himself, his meta awareness
- b. to become aware of his way of contacting his environment and invite him
- c. to become aware of how his environment reacts to him

As we saw earlier, the underlying idea is that once we start to be consciously aware of how we interact with our environment, we can make *conscious choices* and *take responsibility* for our actions. When I observe myself and become aware of how I drift off in my own thoughts, I realize that I can do something else: I have a choice.

An example. In therapy I often invite a client to pay attention to his breathing.

When this person realizes he is for instance holding his breath, he can - "staying with it" (focusing on here and now) – listen to what this, up to this moment *unconscious* physical response, is telling him. He can for example become consciously aware of the fact that he is holding onto something; an emotional content or whatever this holding his breath is at that moment associated with, and use that information to make a more conscious choice; how to

act/behave/think etc. He can for instance choose to share what is on his mind, and realize that, although he needed some courage to actually confront his partner (or the therapist) with this thought, he actually feels better and breathes more relaxed now he has done so. To become aware of holding his breath this client needs *conscious* awareness of his body. To become aware his thoughts, he needs *conscious* awareness of his mind.

A Gestalttherapist teaches her client to pay attention to the perceptions he gets *here and now* from his body and his mind. The focus is always in the now, even when experiences from the past or future are discussed. We can only become aware in the present; all consciousness knows is this moment. Experience, *contact* in Gestalt terms, appears in consciousness now. Past and future can only be conceptualized, thought or in other words “imagined” in the present.

2.3 The meta-awareness and the observer

A therapist’s priority is to teach her client awareness. The only way to do that is to give the client the experience that he can observe himself. He can observe what is going on in his body and what his mind is doing. The primary focus is on awareness and not on the *content* of feelings, emotions or thoughts.

Once the client realizes he can simultaneously experience something, and witness himself experiencing it, he has gained the instrument he needs to steer his own boat.

A therapist gives her client the *tool* of his meta-position.

Gurdjieff used to tell his disciples, “When the arrow of your consciousness becomes double-pointed, when your consciousness begins to flower at both ends, you will become an enlightened being⁴.” When you look at something, look at it, but also keep looking at your own self. You are both, the knower and the known.

We are already entering the domain of the transpersonal here. When I observe myself sensing and feeling things, and when I observe myself thinking, I - the observer - am obviously “someone” beyond the one who senses, feels and thinks.

Most of us feel, at least during the times we *consciously* observe, that we are the observers. We look at life through the eyes of the observer; we seem to identify with this observer. Allow me to assume in this thesis that the I, I perceive myself to be, the I that is consciously aware (in the measure that I am aware) is the I in the position of the observer.

I will use “I” to indicate this position.

In my experience meta-awareness is not transpersonal *persé*. I see meta-awareness as the window I open to look at certain foregrounds that attract my attention. The observer seems to “look in” from positions along a “hierarchy” of levels or dimensions (a holarchy of holons in Arthur Koestler’s⁵ terms) that we could envision between unconscious awareness, conscious awareness and full consciousness.

Many visionaries have written about similar hierarchic concepts; Jung describes the ego-Self axis on his path to individuation, Cayce speaks about personality and individuality, Roberto Assagioli and many others talk about personal self and transpersonal or higher Self, Aldous Huxley calls his hierarchy the Great chain of Being.

I seem to perceive my reality from different positions on this conceptual hierarchy, from different perspectives. In a moment of contact when I am not consciously aware, I perceive the world from a perspective of ego, or self. When I am more aware, I can look at reality from a wider perspective, from a position of a higher dimension of self, or from a position of *the* higher Self in Assagioli’s terms. (This higher Self includes *and* transcends ego-self, this hierarchy is not a linear concept, but rather a symbolic representation that could be envisioned as stage-by-stage more-encompassing dimensions or holons). In a moment of

enlightenment I might look from the ultimate, divine point of view, from the perspective of Being (or Jung's Self).

In this vision, by becoming consciously aware self matures towards higher Self, and self, Self and Being ultimately fall together, unite we might say, in I.

2.4 Important aspects of Meta awareness

Awareness is there. So is full Consciousness.

I am not fully conscious, so I perceive a reality from the perspective of my level or dimension of consciousness in the moment of contact, the now.

In this view, my direction of growth is towards more consciousness.

When I develop the ability to perceive reality from a higher point on the hierarchy I, the observer, expands in the direction of higher Self, Individuality and ultimately towards a dimension that contains all of Being.

As we saw, conscious awareness of body and mind is a way to make conscious choices, to live our lives in an *aware* and thus response-able way.

I dare say most of us are not very aware. To become conscious of our own un-awareness is probably the first step we can take on our way to consciousness.

My clients are often shocked when they experience how unaware they are of their bodies.

Normally we hardly give any attention to our bodies unless we actually feel physical pain; a sure sign that we *should* pay attention. Massage or massage therapy is a way to become more consciously aware of our body. Yoga and other physical exercises that focus on the coordination of body and mind as well. I started a few months ago with lessons in Pilates "controlled movements engaging your body and mind" and I am amazed how unaware I am of some imbalances in my body. Gestalttherapy obviously helped me to pay attention to my physical reactions to others or my environment. I never focused however on a healthy

posture or on exercises to become aware of strain. Here too, awareness gives me an opportunity to do better.

There are several aspects of conscious awareness of mind we can look at:

- a. the focus on the here and now
- b. the wider perspective
- c. detachment, the neutral stance

a. the focus on the here and now

Many of us seem to spend a considerable amount of time thinking about past or future. In other words, we live a great part of our lives in our imagination. Conscious awareness however, forces us to focus on the now. Only in the here and now can we become aware of our sensations, our thoughts and our emotions. The flashlight of meta-awareness can only shine on now; I can only observe myself now, *I am* only now.

Thoughts are like clouds, drifting past. Meditation practices for instance can teach a person to witness his thoughts as passing clouds. The exercise is meant to train the student to focus on the now by becoming aware of his thoughts and then detaching from them before they “invade” him. We could also describe thoughts and emotions as visitors, coming to our house as guests. We entertain them, we are the host, and then they leave again. Good guests and “bad” guests alike. We need to remember we are the host, before our guests start acting as hosts.

Meditative (awareness) exercises or practice are a way to train oneself to stay in the here-now. Awareness wakes us up; it makes us realize that we were drifting off, daydreaming, forgot we are the host. With awareness we can choose to spend more time in the now, to be truly present, to become a *witnessing presence* as many describe it. There are several good books on this subject – Eckhart Tolle wrote “The Power of Now”⁶, Michael Brown developed the “Presence Process”⁷.

b. the wider perspective

Here we need to look at how we identify with our body and our mind. How many times do we catch ourselves in thoughts and moods we totally identify with? It is as if the actor forgot he was playing a role and starts to take the act, and his role in it, very personally. With meta awareness we actually step out of our identification with the roles we are playing. We realize that we, and the others around us, play our roles. We observe ourselves, fully knowing that we are all actors in the play. We can play angry, we can act sad, but we know we are not our roles. We distance ourselves from what we experience by *witnessing* it.

Therapy is a good way to become aware by witnessing ourselves *in contact* with others. In a non-therapeutic context everybody around us is probably just as “lost” as we are, and it is much harder to step out of our identifications. One of my teachers used to say: “there should be at least one adult in the room”^e. In therapy the therapist is (supposed to be) the adult – the one who is aware.

We could compare the stepping out of our identifications with waking up from a dream or nightmare. Once we realize we were dreaming, the lion we were fighting in our dream turns out to be - from a waking perspective - quite harmless. How often we experience, in retrospect that is, that our response to our environment “erupted” from us because we were identified with our fear or anger? Often the time elapsed gives us the “distance” we need to realize our “over-reaction”. Meta awareness does the same for us; it gives us the wider perspective we need to distance ourselves from our identifications with emotions and thoughts.

There is another aspect we need to discuss concerning distance. When I observe myself I put a certain “space” between myself and what I experience. The experience becomes less frightening when I experience myself in it, but also beyond it. From a position beyond it, I can

^e Marleen Mulder – HTI

observe the situation in a larger frame, I see the bigger picture and it automatically becomes more “survivable”. We all have this experience. Fear tends to narrow our sight, we only see what we fear and have trouble looking around it; we focus on the frightful object. Meta-awareness gives us per definition a look from a wider perspective – we see how this object or situation relates to other things, we see its context, we have much more information which generally lessens our fear.

c. detachment, the neutral stance

The art of witnessing is actually a spiritual method, a form of meditation devised by the ancient sages to help create awareness of the soul. From the point of view of the observer we can detach ourselves from the content of our thoughts and emotions, we can witness from a neutral, non personal stance. The idea is to “just witness” without judgment, to eliminate the usual bias, not to make assumptions and to observe without emotional involvement. This way of witnessing is often called meditative awareness, or meditative consciousness.

It reminds me of the phenomenological way of observing a Gestalt therapist uses when sharing awareness.

In my experience this *mode* of awareness is of great help in day-to-day life. Although I admit to learning detachment often only in retrospect (from realizing I could have handled something better), perseverance pays off. It is not easy to consciously witness oneself in action on a moment-to-moment basis; to *then* consciously choose one’s actions from a higher Self perspective is something one can hope to learn with practice.

Daily life gives us plenty opportunity to practice awareness. We will discuss these opportunities further in later chapters.

It is time for the next step.

Chapter Three: Awareness of Inspiration

“On the personal level the world is perceived as a multiplicity of objects and events, existing separately in time and space.

In transpersonal consciousness the underlying oneness of the universe comes into awareness and the ordinary confines of time and space are transcended.”

(Francis Vaughan⁸)

3.1 Awareness on the level of spirit

What about the awareness of inspiration - the awareness on the level of Spirit?

A metaphor is helpful here: imagine two icebergs floating in the sea. Only the tips of the icebergs are visible above the water level quite a distance apart, while their masses hidden beneath the surface almost touch. Seen from the tip of an iceberg each iceberg seems unique and floats as a separate unit in the sea.

Seen from the perspective of the sea however, these icebergs are just part of her whole.

Each iceberg originates from the seawater and will eventually dissolve into it again.

The sea perceives that all individual icebergs are part of the ongoing process of freezing and melting. The ice sea connects all icebergs; they are all equal; all made from the same stuff.

The sea knows, from her perspective, that she and the ice-bergs are ultimately one.

The ice-sea in which the icebergs drift is the underlying oneness of their existence, their "ground in being".

In my view, we humans are aware of our ground in Being. We know deep down that we are all part of the Being, the Spirit we emerged from.

In my view, we can become *consciously* aware of the underlying oneness of the universe, of Consciousness with a capital C, and indeed transcend our ordinary confines in doing so.

With this I don't mean the confines of time and space per se, but rather the confines of our ego, our personal or cultural limitations and in general our narrow perspective.

The theme of this thesis is this awareness of transpersonal consciousness. I called it the awareness of *inspiration*. The word "inspiration" refers to the level of spirit. It implies that we can sense to be "in Spirit", a part of a larger transpersonal whole. But the term also indicates that we are "in-spirited" by the transpersonal. I use the word inspiration to point to something that stimulates us to vitality and moves us to greater things.

I see inspiration as a source of creativity and an impulse to positive action.

3.2 The awareness of inspiration is there

It is important to realize that our ground in being is *there*, as is our awareness of it.

This third level of awareness, this *transpersonal* level of awareness, is also part of the human experience. It is this awareness of something bigger than us, which distinguished man from the animal, which made him truly human. For over 50,000 years^f, and probably much longer, humans created rituals to pay respect to forces that they felt transcended their own. Only humans make the difference between good and evil, search for meaning, make myths and use symbols. In my view these are signs of transpersonal awareness. It seems to me that man's ability to transcend time and space in his mind made him wonder about the reality beyond the one he could see. His capacity to conceive of a dimension beyond his here and now caused him to feel the need to know his place in the larger order of his universe.

Because he intuited this dimension and imagined it to be somehow regulating his life, he looked for ways to express his respect and honor its rules so he would guarantee the benevolence of this power. Of course man has always used the "spirituality" of his moment in history and his location on our planet. He time and again translated his awareness of a Spirit beyond into rituals that communicated in concepts he lived by. We probably would not think

^f In the Shanidar Cave in Iraq, 50,000-year-old Neanderthal skeletons were unearthed in 1957. Ancient pollen buried with them has been interpreted as evidence that these cave dwellers had developed funeral rituals.

of burying our dead with food for the journey, or coins to pay the boatman. We seem to have a tendency to think in terms of the ones who stay behind; interesting!

We *are* aware of our transpersonal nature, but rarely conscious of it.

William James⁹ talks about a universal feeling of uneasiness, a sense that there is something “wrong” about us as we naturally stand. Houston Smith¹⁰ writes about our “forgotten truth”.

We *are* aware of our transpersonal consciousness, we get glimpses of it and in those moments a new dimension opens for us.

For most of us the awareness of Spirit resides beneath the surface of our conscious awareness most of the time. Although we never truly forget our glimpses of this dimension beyond, their impression normally fades. Many of us recognize the feeling that something essential is overlooked, missing even, when we live our lives without it.

Hence our candle stories, our journeys, our searches, our quests for the Holy Grail.

3.3 The awareness of our ground in being

This concept of an awareness of our ground in being is not as far fetched as it seems.

In a therapeutic context we talk about the "field" when we describe the interaction between therapist and client for example. Field is not used in a spatial sense here, but encompasses both client and therapist and what is happening between them, process-wise. The therapist shares her awareness of this field with her client. In this way she invites him to become aware of the relationship they create together and he can observe how he reacts in/to that field. In this view it is the field that enables the therapist to "experience" what the client is experiencing.

We can talk about a *resonance* between people within the field of their relation. *Empathy* is a word we use; we can perceive and become aware of it because of the field that connects us.

Stone Center articles¹¹⁺¹² describe empathy as *relational awareness* in the larger context of

their self-in-relation (also a field concept) theory. Empathy is introduced as a concept of mutual relating much larger than a one-sided, separate-self quality of knowing and listening. I will come back to this in the next chapters.

We all have the experience of relational awareness. We can sense that we are part of a field that exists when we are relating to other people. We are sensitive to each others emotions, for instance we sense the mood of our children or the atmosphere in a room. We often surprise ourselves when we discover that we know more than we thought we knew about things going on between people. As we saw before, only an insignificant part of our communication is transmitted in words. We see, hear and scent each others other "emissions" too. We definitely have sensitivity to vibrations or energy, or however you want to call the "extra" that exists in a field.

Do you sense time? Can you sense space? Well, most people wake up just before their alarms go off and know when a certain amount of time has elapsed. When you step into your car, you know its dimensions just like a good captain knows the outline of his ship and can maneuver it relying on his sense of it.

Now to the next "level": the level of Spirit, of Being, of existence itself.

Paul Goodman articulates the Gestalt philosophy when he talks about self in relation/contact with its environment: an organism (person) is part of its environment and cannot be understood apart from it. For me this means that Goodman envisions a "field" in which organism and its environment relate, are in contact. Is it not a next and plausible step to stretch and expand this concept to a dimension that includes much more? An organism's environment is not limited to the dimension of the immediate physical world it lives in. We could define a person's environment to include the transpersonal dimension we sense to be there. We are all part of the "field of being"; the underlying unity from which we originate, in which we are connected. Like the sea from which all icebergs originate and in which they are all connected.

We cannot be understood apart from that field of being.

Just like we look from a meta position at the "field" uniting therapist and client to become aware of the process that enfolds between them, we should consider the *field* that unites person and environment in Being to become aware of the process that enfolds in us.

3.4 Awareness of inspiration and our higher qualities

When we consider William James's "uneasiness" (the sense that we have that there is something wrong with us) we could also detect an experience in human consciousness of being *less than whole*, less than what we are meant to be. Like the candle in my story who feels there is "more to life" than what she is living. It seems to me that the urge to search or grasp the *more-to-me* suggests an awareness of being *more*, an awareness of our transpersonal Self and its "higher" qualities.

As I mentioned before, through evolution as we know it, only humans came up with ideas of good and evil. Only humans came up with myths telling stories of how a hero should act, what a wise woman should know and what a god should be like. Archetypes and symbols live in our consciousness. I think they suggest a *transpersonal knowing* of (or the transpersonal potential for) universal qualities like harmony, love, wholeness or for instance beauty. We somehow have an innate sense of these virtues and higher qualities that runs deeper than what we have been taught by our society or culture.

Many spiritual traditions have spoken of these qualities; this is probably why they often speak of a *higher Self*. When referring to the transpersonal dimensions of Self, *higher* means *of a higher order* in an intuitively felt hierarchy. Higher also because these transpersonal qualities transcend the limited perspective of ego-self.

It is interesting to see how we are, often without consciously knowing it, inspired by our awareness of “our” transpersonal Self. An account of human evolution in this context is the book “God and the evolving Universe”, by James Redfield and Michael Murphy¹³.

When Edgar Cayce¹⁴ speaks of a spiritual ideal, I am convinced he is referring to a transpersonal, higher quality that manifests in a person’s consciousness and can become that person’s light to follow. Cayce advises us to become very clear about our spiritual ideal and focus on our personal cluster of qualities that makes us into what we are; a unique person with a unique “purpose” to pursue in life.

This is a transpersonal vision. It reflects a clear understanding of an underlying order in which each of us has his or her name *written*. I think we can become clear about our transpersonal ideal when we consciously focus on higher qualities we discover in ourselves. What is it that truly inspires us? What makes our hearts sing, what resonates with our innermost being? What shines through all our layers of cultural conditioning as our unique set of qualities? To become consciously aware of these higher qualities we carry deep within us and to see them in others, is another important aspect of our awareness of inspiration

3.5 The awareness of inspiration and God

In our western religious traditions God has been experienced as something existing outside ourselves, an external power rather. God has in these traditions been presented as an omnipotent Father-figure. The wide-spread interest in Eastern traditions probably stems from a need to explore other ways of experiencing Divinity.

An awareness of our transpersonal Self gives us the realization of divinity within our own experience. It gives us an awareness of our essence, our own divine nature. As I suggested before, this awareness is already *there*, we “just” need to become conscious of it. Maybe this is so hard because we made the experience of divinity into such a “holy” concept. “Enlightenment” is presented as such an elusive state that is rarely achieved by mere humans and quite unreachable for normal people. We will come back to this in chapter nine.

I think we all get glimpses of our transpersonal nature. We do experience the underlying vastness of our consciousness in moments of peace and stillness. We do experience our deeper connection with Being when suddenly touched by beauty in nature or for instance by compassion and love in our relationships. This is not beyond our experience, not something we are too “human” to perceive. On the contrary!

We might let go of our expectations and surrender to Being. We might intuit that enlightenment is not something to reach but merely something to realize; not mentally but by simply being.

We could “try” or better “practice” being still and present and recognize our transpersonal dimension when it dawns on us. We should develop our *awareness*; our awareness of inspiration. We will discuss potential ways to experience this in this thesis.

We need some caution with the evaluation of our consciousness: what is ego and what is Divine? Probably the emergency of the question itself indicates ego, doesn't it?

To me it is however obvious that an awareness of a transpersonal Self, and glimpses of God consciousness, exist in the human experience.

Personally I find the word “Divinity” quite overwhelming, an overburdened concept that lacks the clarity and simplicity I look for in this context.

I prefer to talk about *essence* or *Being*. The term “Being” makes the experience of our transpersonal Self into something that comes natural to us, the experience itself part of who we essentially are.

In the moments when we truly connect with who we essentially are, between the contents of our minds, we become aware of our deeper layers of consciousness. *Between* manifestations we realize we *are* consciousness. We are conscious of being conscious (Self) and ultimately of being Consciousness or Being. Then, in those moments, we experience ourselves being more encompassing than our ego-self – a higher Self rather. We observe our reality and ourselves from another order, from a higher dimension.

Can we agree that this kind of conscious awareness of a transpersonal Self gives a person a fundamentally different perspective on reality? The experience of our transpersonal dimension, the realization of our divine nature, transforms our relation to the God *beyond* who we address and answer to in our prays. The notion of a human ascent to God then correlates with an awareness of a Divine presence within (descend into) us.

Personally, I think this aspect (religious experience) fascinating but quite beyond the scope of this thesis. It is however essential to realize that the image we create within ourselves of God or of the Divine nature is influencing how we perceive reality. Later in this thesis we will discuss this further.

3.6 The awareness of the higher perspective

As we saw in our iceberg metaphor, the sea has a very different perspective of reality than the icebergs. She sees the bigger picture, not limited by concepts or theories made up for the parts that are not visible for the icebergs. She watches the ongoing, fluid processes beyond what the icebergs experience. She knows for instance that all is related and that separate-self is an illusion. And she probably witnesses all of it, all there is, with compassion and with a natural commitment to life and its creativity.

In my vision life is about becoming aware. We need to find ways to cultivate awareness, and not only of body and mind. With a more conscious awareness of our transpersonal Self, our outlook on life will transform dramatically. When we realize that we are neither our body nor our mind, we can truly take our place, namely of the one looking into the world through us. Once we realize that, we cannot avoid perceiving our reality from higher perspectives.

A gradual shift in position from the personal to the more transpersonal point of view will have far reaching effects. Not only on how we stand in life and relate to death for instance, but also on how we experience day-to-day life situations. Our relationships to others and our environment changes when we are able to consciously look from “higher”, that is ego transcending perspectives. Many aspects of life as we know it are already changing rapidly

and radically because more and more people are willing to live more consciously. Many of us do feel a responsibility towards our fellow humans. We do care about environmental issues and we know that we participate in the evolution of humanity and our planet. I consider *awareness of inspiration* essential and meaning-giving. It gives us a tool to *consciously* focus on our transpersonal ground in being and look at ourselves from a transpersonal perspective. Consequently this awareness shows us a way to Self (self-actualization), as I will elaborate in the next chapters.

Allow me to tell you the story of the twins in the womb: one day these two are happily floating around and discussing existence. They argue about the meaning of life. One twin is quite convinced that “this is it”. He thinks that the womb is their universe because that is what he can see. His purpose in life is to be good to his sister and enjoy his life. The other twin however senses a world beyond. She has vague intuitions about a Mother. She has visions of an omnipotent Being who somehow is their source and probably their destiny. She senses that the purpose of her life in this womb is to grow in such a manner that one day she will transcend the reality of the womb. Then she figures, she will see the light and unite with Her.

Chapter Four: Awareness of Inspiration in day-to-day life.

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

(Joseph Campbell¹⁵)

I think we feel, we are aware of *the rapture of being alive* when what we live resonates within our soul, within our Being. The awareness of what resonates within us is our sense of direction, our light to follow while maturing towards wholeness. Through a keener awareness of the rapture of being we will be able to respond to life and thus consciously *create* ourselves according to our own innermost being, according to what we in essence are. By becoming more conscious, we become more who we - on a transpersonal level – are; literally more Consciousness.

This hypothesis encompasses a transpersonal concept, a holistic view of who we are in the larger order of things.

4.1 Awareness of inspiration and the issue of self-realization

Frederick Perls speaks of self-realization as a goal of every living being. Carl Rogers writes: “The mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we discover so deeply as the curative force in psychotherapy – *man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities.*”¹⁶

Self-actualization is presented as a source of inspiration. The organism creatively forms “new” relationships to the environment in its endeavor to be most fully itself.

When we see Self-actualization as the *direction* of healthy growth, the awareness of our transpersonal nature (potential) gives us valuable information. We could see this awareness as the light we want to follow. The awareness of inspiration indeed.

It seems that we humans *need* a direction, an ideal (in Cayce's terms), a living myth¹⁷ (Joseph Campbell) or a spiritual example. Like Jesus, Buddha or a Guru in religious traditions.

I think that our choice of direction, the "ideal" we choose when we "endeavor to be most fully ourselves" is directed by what we subconsciously and intuitively experience as Self. Self in this context would point to our true nature: our essence and thus our potential.

This sense of Self stems from our awareness of inspiration:

- a. we make our choices and create what we create inspired by our own essence, and
- b. how and what we create reveals our true potential to us on a more conscious level.

That would mean that we can become aware of our inspiration by observing ourselves, by consciously taking the meta-position. We will talk about this.

How do we go about "realizing" ourselves, our Selves?

In my view, we need to experience our connectedness with our underlying ground in being to do this. How else would we know, or recognize and then express who we are?

Like the iceberg that realizes its essence in becoming aware of the sea, we can experience who we really are by becoming aware of our ground in Being, of Spirit. It is as if we recognize our Essence in the outside world, in our environment in Gestalt terms, and in that recognition sense our connection with and in Being. In those instances we realize we are indissolubly connected with all-there-is. The double arrow of consciousness we were talking about in the previous chapter expands to yet another level. We experience our unique individuality while at the same time realizing we are part of a much larger field, ultimately the field of Being.

This is a deeper sense of contact; a realizing of the uniqueness of one's own essence connected to a knowing of the origin of this essence in one's ground in being.

4.1.1. What resonates within our innermost Being?

How are we aware of this awareness of inspiration in day-to-day life?

This is a tough one to put in words. Even though every one of us shares the experience of the awareness of a transpersonal reality in everyday life, we do not really have the right words or concepts for it. Language is not the tool to describe what we feel. The experience transcends words and concepts as we know them. So allow me to use symbols. For instance the simple expression "what makes my heart sing"⁹. It beautifully describes my sentiment of the awareness of inspiration as something that resonates as "right" for me, something that belongs to me, something that deeply connects to who I am.

I suppose everybody has his own terms or symbols for those moments of true connecting. Joseph Campbell used the phrase "follow your bliss". His above mentioned quote talks about "the rapture of being alive" and a sense of "resonance".

I become aware of in-spiration when I experience beauty, for instance in nature, or in a person I truly connect with. I feel it when I experience compassion in our connecting. I sense it when I am passionate about something or inspired by someone. Or when I suddenly "know" things that are in any personal sense beyond my perception. It is a feeling of a glimpse of an extra dimension, almost illuminated, extra vivid in that moment of time.

Awareness of Inspiration for me is a sense of being touched, of making a connection *in the present moment*. It is the experience of a contact on an essential, even existential level.

I feel most *alive* when touched in this way. Time stands still and I seem to be *more* me, *more* present and *more* whole.

Lots of things touch me nowadays, but it always seems to be while connecting - when I "remember" to be present – consciously aware of the moment. When I do not, I "forget" parts of me and then just a part of me is living.

⁹ Gregory Deming first introduced me to it during my TS506

Sometimes my body is quicker than my mind in “catching” these moments.

I feel tears welling from my eyes, most of the times not even knowing what “hit” me.

Like in the example on page 15 (the client holding his breath) I recognize my tears as signals of something else going on. I realize that they are one of the ways my body is telling me to pay attention, to be alert and present, because this is a moment of *true connecting*. By consciously staying with those tears I can become conscious of the underlying message, the foreground that presents itself with such intensity that my “system” responds in such an expressive way.

I learned to listen to these signals of *being touched* and try to tune into whatever these flashes of consciousness of truly connecting, this awareness of inspiration, are telling me.

For me, the awareness of in-spiration has definitely something to do with making contact on an I-Thou level - in Buber's terms – with life, with *being* itself.

4.1.2. Separateness and relatedness

Do you recognize the feeling of really *being alive*? The sense that life is enhanced and your perception of reality is brightened much like when a light shines on an object.

All of a sudden you realize you feel very good about being who you are, where you are, doing what you do or how you do it. You feel at home in yourself.

I believe that in these moments we connect to *who we are*.

I experience myself as a separate being. In connecting, in making contact with the whole field of Being I *also* realize that I am inseparable from that whole.

Although we sense our own uniqueness we also become aware, recognize and awaken to our connectedness in Being.

The experience of our uniqueness coinciding with the experience of our connectedness in Being seems paradoxical, as Anne Mos points out in her article¹⁸: "*de ervaring van het samenvallen van fundamentele eenzaamheid en verbondenheid*" (the experience of the co-

existence of fundamental loneliness and connectedness) or in Buber's terms "separateness and relatedness".

Instead of seeing this as a paradox however we could also recognize the necessity of the polarity of separateness and relatedness at this level where no choice is required. Ultimately, in these moments of awareness of in-Spiration, an acceptance of and thus total relaxation in "Being" seems what is asked for. Any resistance gets in our way.

This awareness of inspiration (what makes my heart sing, rapture, resonance) gives me invaluable information about where I need to go.

I believe that in being aware I can make conscious choices towards a way of living that suits "who I am" more. In my view this is the way to self-actualization.

In following the lead (light) of our awareness of in-spiration we can make conscious choices towards self-actualization and thus healthy growth. This is a very Gestalt way of "using" awareness to live a healthier life.

4.2 Awareness of inspiration and the sense of direction

As we saw in the previous section, in the process of self-actualization, the awareness of inspiration gives us a sense of direction, a light to follow.

In writing this paper I suddenly feel that I am "on track", and the words enter my mind without effort - this is just the way I wanted to say this.

Sometimes I seem to have lost this connection to inspiration, and I feel lost for words, empty, and this whole project burdens me.

Awareness of inspiration in this sense is a way to know I am in the "flow" of what I want to say. It means that I connect and make contact with what is essential to me.

Maybe I could even suggest that what I write resonates with something within me. It almost is as if I am writing from a higher perspective and my writings come from a self that transcends my "normal" self. As a reader I have the experience of being touched by what I read. I intuit

that this is because what I read connects to something already within me. It sounds reasonable to suggest that inspired writing inspires readers.

I am also aware of inspiration when I feel relaxed, safe and comfortable with another person. When I can "be myself" without my usual armor or mask. Then I invite the other to be himself too. It is a different feeling of connection, a deeper sense of contact that gives our being together another dimension. A dimension in which we transcend our personal egocentric perspectives and appreciate our differences. In this relationship we both seem willing and able to let go of our fear (caused by the illusion of separateness) and allow ourselves to be present as *whole* persons.

Here we recognize each other as unique and separate, while we also acknowledge our relatedness and underlying common ground in humanity. We are aware of being separately together in this field we call Being. Making contact in this connected "I – Thou" way is healing, I think we all agree on that. A good book to read on this issue is Richard Hycner's ¹⁹ "Between Person and Person". In chapter five I will introduce a model to elaborate on this aspect of connecting.

I believe that awareness of inspiration shows us the way to Self or self-realization as Perls suggests. I realize the metaphor of light is new-age, but it suits: we need a light to follow to show us our direction. I believe we have access to a deeper level of knowing and that we can use this as our "light" to recognize our path. The candle in my story doesn't exactly know where she is going, but she listens to her intuition of a "more to life" and follows her inspiration.

In therapy, as in life, I discovered that inspiration is something we people are drawn to. I believe this is because we so dearly need it to give our lives expression, meaning and direction. By being inspired we inspire others. That makes it so important to be an inspired therapist. I believe our clients come to us for inspiration.

This is why I am committed to explore the awareness of inspiration. On all levels (body, mind and spirit), awareness gives us the choice and thus the responsibility to do what we do, and be who we are. The awareness of our inspiration gives us a great source of information: a tool to use in therapy and in day-to-day life.

Chapter Five: Model - the hierarchy of consciousness.

“Through encountering each other as truly human we can both place ourselves in the world and glimpse God.” (Martin Buber²⁰)

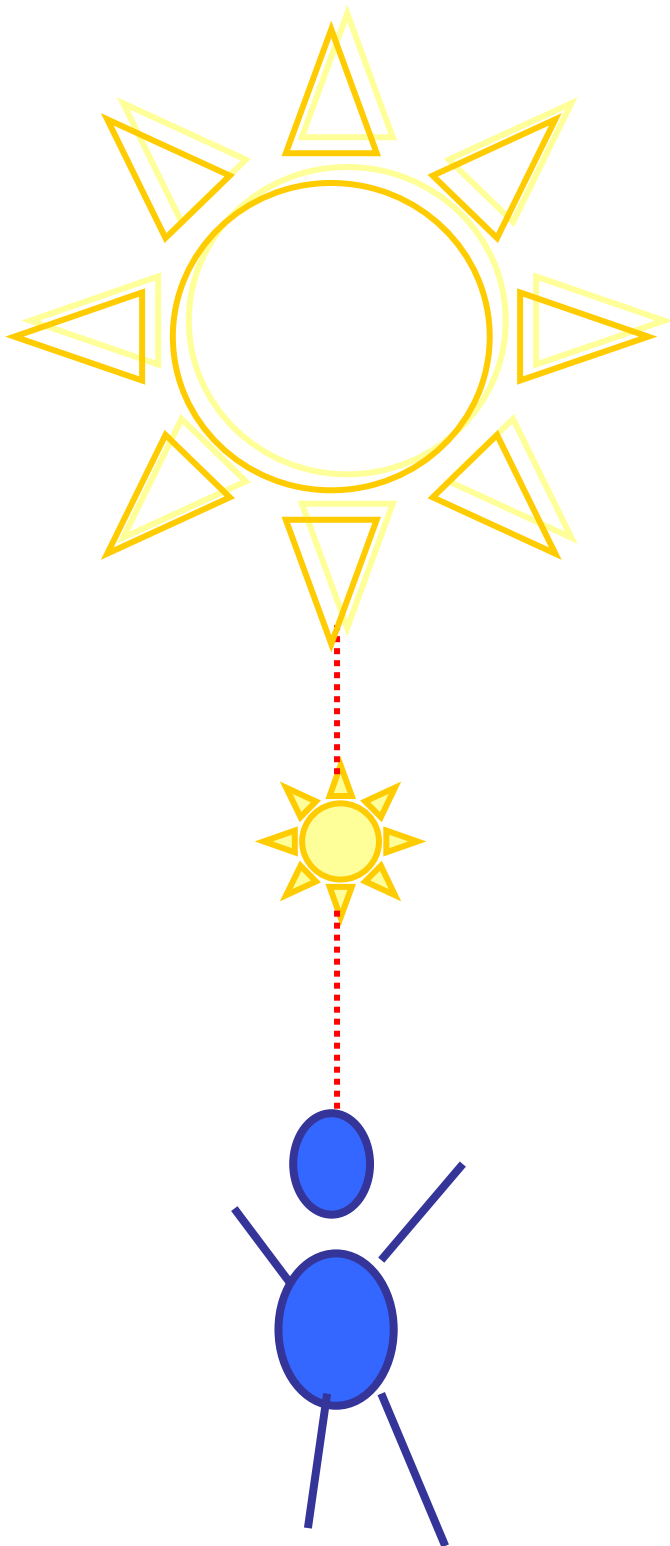
This model aims to illustrate the hierarchy of consciousness we talked about in 2.3.

I (the observer) look in from different positions along a “line” that connects the different levels or dimensions of *conscious* awareness. You could describe the observer as an enormous eye that looks into the world. The eye stays the same, but the lens through which it perceives reality determines its perspective. At lower levels the lens is not very flexible; it is thick and narrow and only allows blurred and limited views. At higher levels the lens evolves into a highly sensitive instrument, it thins and expands and the eye can see more clearly and from a wider perspective. Ultimately the lens is totally clear (dissolved) and the eye can look into the world and see what is.

5.1 The self-Self-Being hierarchy of consciousness

The lower levels of consciousness in this model are represented by the head of the figure in picture 2. This would be “the self” in Roberto Assagioli’s psychosynthesis²¹, “the Ego” in terms of Carl Jung and the “personality” Edgar Cayce describes. We could envision the body as the place where we are aware of body, the head where we are aware of mind. This awareness however is limited because it is barely conscious.

The head of the little figure represents the self (I). It is our point of self-consciousness where we are aware of the continuous stream of perceptions, feelings, thoughts and impulses.



Being – the Divine:
I look at reality from the perspective of Being
 (full consciousness)

*the self-Self-Being connection -
 the Transpersonal axis*

Self :
I look at reality from the perspective of higher
 Self.
 (conscious awareness)

awareness of transpersonal Self
*the Ego-self axis – the self-Self connection
 the transpersonal axis*

self:
I look at reality from the perspective of self or
 Ego.
 (limited awareness)

awareness of mind
 awareness of body

Picture 2.

You could see it as the screen on which we project our reality, the tip of the iceberg in our previous metaphor

The highest levels of personal consciousness are represented by the little sun. This dimension is called “higher Self” by Assagioli and “Individuality” by Cayce. This Self is our permanent centre, the field behind the screen, not touched by the stream of perceptions, feelings, thoughts and impulses. In terms of the iceberg metaphor we could think of the whole iceberg here. The largest part is immersed in the sea, melting and freezing in direct connection with the ice-sea.

We could also picture the self (the head) in this model as the three-dimensional hologram of the multi-dimensional Self (the little sun). Beyond the Self is the Transpersonal domain of the Divine. Self then is a multi-dimensional hologram of the universal consciousness which we call Being (the big sun); the sea.

In my experience, I (the inner witness, the observer) looks into reality from positions along the red line. At the level of the head, I look at my reality from the perspective of ego-self, where I have limited awareness thus limited perspective. On “higher” positions along the red line I look in from the conceptual Self, where I perceive reality from the perspective of my transpersonal Self. I could call the red line from self to Self “the transpersonal axis” of this conceptual hierarchy of consciousness.

Beyond Self, meta-awareness can move along the Transpersonal axis (capital T) to positions that are between Self and Being, truly beyond any personal identification. Ultimately in the experience of union of self and Being, I would perceive myself being the big Sun, or I am. For this thesis the most important aspect of the Transpersonal axis, and the ultimate dimension is the sense we experience of an underlying unity, a ground in Being that connects everything; all consciousness ultimately in Consciousness itself.

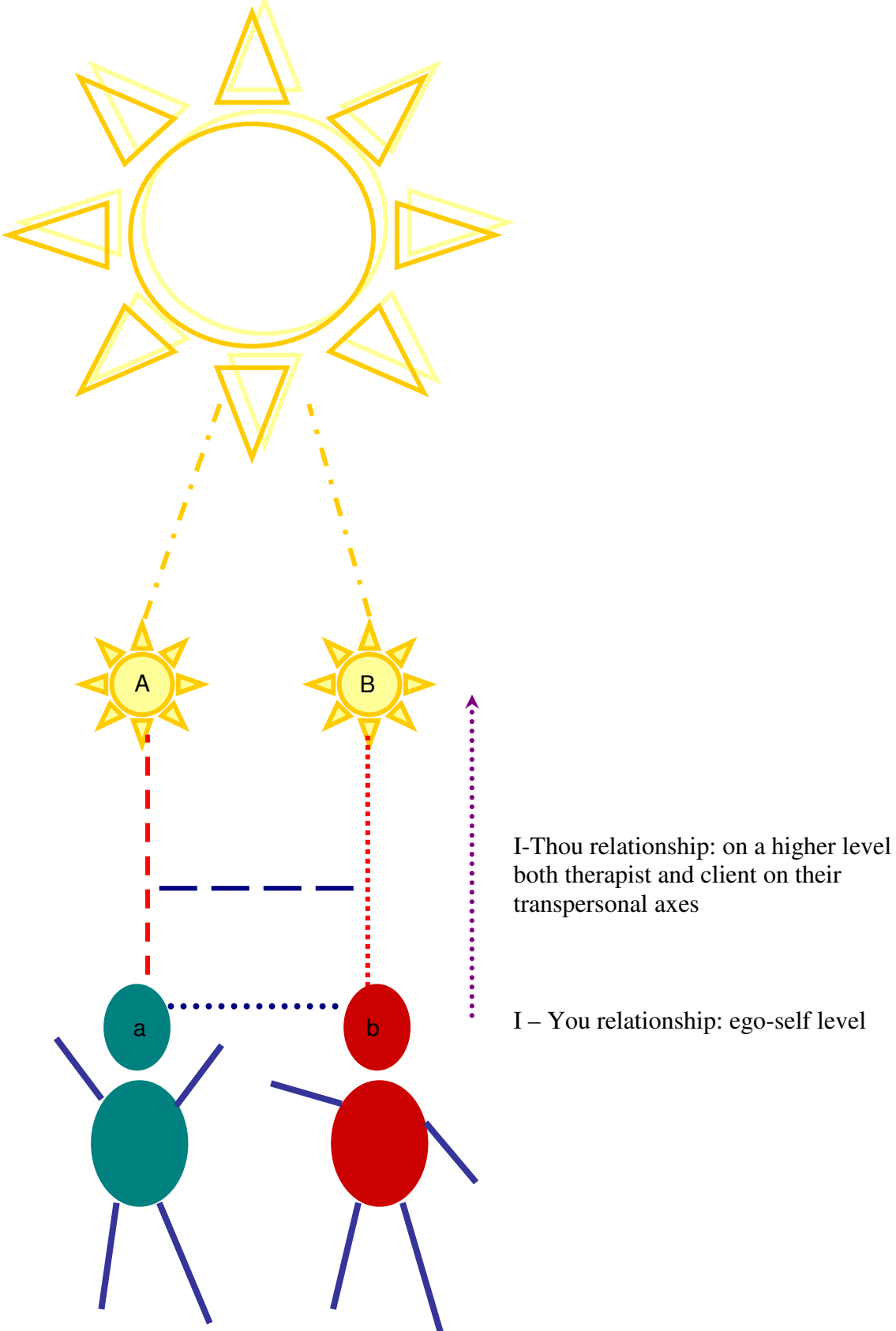
5.2 The transpersonal axis

As I suggested, the observer seems to look in through different lenses, shifting along the transpersonal axis in day-to-day experiences. Once aware of the inner witness, our ability to observe ourselves, we become aware of the hierarchy of perspectives we can “hold” to perceive our reality.

With more awareness we can choose to look from a higher perspective. As we will see in later chapters, although “being aware” sounds simple, in real life it is quite hard to do for most of us. We seem to be conditioned and programmed to “forget” to be conscious. What I believe however, is that a conscious awareness of the transpersonal axis (or just the image of it as a key to our ideal) helps us to gain consciousness. If we pay close attention to the shifts in perception the observer experiences, we become better sailors. We learn to read the maps and interpret the weather forecasts. We gain important insights about the movements of the winds.

In this model I suggest that the transpersonal axis is “strengthened” when we become aware of it and experience it. With more awareness of my (a stronger) self-Self axis, I gain ability to look in from higher positions/perspectives.

5.3 The model of self-Self-Being in the therapeutic relation



Picture 3.

Richard Hycner in his book “Between person and person” says: “it is not the therapist’s theoretical orientation that is as crucial in the healing process as is the wholeness and availability of the self of the therapist.” He introduces what I feel is meant by Martin Buber’s concept of I and Thou. Although neither auteur mentions it in this way, I think we are discussing a contacting between people on a transpersonal level here. In this model this means on a different “level” of self (see picture 3).

If I, as the therapist (a) allow myself to be totally present in this relationship, I shift along my transpersonal axis toward Self (A). In my experience, when I do this, I invite my client (b) to do the same, in a way that an I – Thou relationship can develop.

I don’t exactly know what happens, but I imagine that my “vibration” changes to a higher “frequency”, and somehow, by resonance, a Doppler-like effect, the client’s vibration shifts to a higher frequency too. It could also be that when I become more conscious I send my message on another frequency, communicate differently (probably mostly non-verbally, even unconsciously). My client receives the message and consequently shifts along his axis too in order to respond.

Now we can communicate on another frequency, both with another perspective, in another language even.

We actually do this tuning in, and adapting to the other’s frequency all the time. Every one of us has many modes of transmitting our messages. We address different people in different situations in very different ways, in different languages even. When I talk to my children we have our own intimate language. When I discuss a problem with a business associate, the language we use is unrecognizably different. The language I use in this thesis is again of an entirely other nature. Try expressing yourself in terms of self and transpersonal Self in a grocery shop.

When we realize that with more awareness we become more who we essentially are, the idea of a higher position on the transpersonal axis gets yet another flavor. When I am more present I probably am more open, more compassionate, accepting, patient etc., etc. (higher qualities I was describing in chapter 3.4). It seems quite logical that my client would feel invited to relax and to allow more of himself into this contact. When I become more who I essentially am, my client can relax and be more who he essentially is. I will get back to this when we discuss relaxing in Being in chapter seven.

I think we all have the experience of the shedding of our layers (of for instance our social or professional roles) when in true contact with another person. We seem to long for relationships in which we can make this kind of contact with others. It surely reminds us of our belonging, resonates with our wholeness in Being. It gives us a chance to relax for a short time from the fear caused by our concept of separateness. It allows us to forget for a moment the uneasiness James describes or our sense of limitedness. We yearn for the connection with others on a deeper level.

In real connecting, we transcend our ego-self and experience ourselves from a wider perspective. In relating our awareness widens from our separate selves, to include the between, to encompass the field we share. What happens between us becomes figure (content) against the ground (context) of Being. Stephen Wolinsky writes about this: "Real transformation occurs when we move from being the content, or the story of our lives, to being the context – or the space in which life occurs"²². This is clearly a transpersonal vision of a self that transcends the experience of ego-self.

In therapy the therapist lifts the connection to a higher level (A-B). Hycner, nor Buber talks about Self, but I feel they mean a connection between higher Selves. In my view a healing contact on this Self-level brings awareness to the connection the client feels with his higher

Self His transpersonal axis strengthens. Of course the same thing happens between people who are truly connecting in other situations.

On the next level the awareness of the Transpersonal axis comes into view. In truly connecting two people do confirm each other in their sense of being human, of Being even. The yellow lines in the model connect us with everything else, the whole of our environment of which we are part and apart from which we cannot be understood.

The true presence of the therapist, inviting the client to engage in a I-Thou dialogue, is in my view an experience resonating in the ego-Self transpersonal axis of the client, and thus awakening awareness of his transpersonal Self. The I-Thou contact is confirming the client in his uniqueness and in his ground in being. It strengthens the relation between self and Self for both client and therapist as we saw in the previous chapter.

Richard Hycner²³, in his exploration of the virtues of dialogical psychotherapy, writes: "...the therapist's self is the instrument that will be utilized in therapy. This instrument needs to be kept tuned in order to be responsive to the ever-changing rhythms of the human encounter.... Only then can there be a meeting of self and self. In that meeting wholeness is engendered in the client that was absent before this meeting."

The awareness of a reality beyond what I consciously experience as reality triggers a sense of responsibility towards my own individual development.

When "I" (my self) experience a dialectic relationship with my Self I become consciously responsive and thus responsible. When I communicate with Self, I am able to respond as an autonomous human being to my own process and thus I consciously take responsibility for my own life.

This is exactly "the Gestalt way" of creative adjustment Perls Hefferline and Goodman are talking about.

I am convinced that true contact occurs on the level of spirit.

Consequently, the more conscious we become of our awareness of inspiration as therapists, the more will we be able to assist our clients to realize who they are - or in Perls's words: to grow towards self-actualization.

As we become more conscious of our awareness of inspiration as human beings, we will be able to participate more actively in the evolution of consciousness as we will discuss in chapter nine.

Chapter Six: Awareness of Inspiration and the Gestalt Philosophy

“Awareness of and responsibility for the total field, for the self as well as the other, these give meaning and pattern to the individual’s life” (Fritz Perls²⁴)

6.1 The transpersonal in Gestalt: from implicitly present to explicitly essential

The term *transpersonal* means beyond the limits of the individual. It refers essentially to the experience that our existence is grounded in and permeated with the spiritual. It means that we are not isolated beings but rather part of a larger whole of existence and as such interconnected with each other. In a transpersonal perspective self-consciousness finds its roots within the larger context of Being or Consciousness itself.

It is essential to realize however that our experience of reality, thus also of our transpersonal reality, is per definition subjective. We experience what is beyond the personal *through* the personal and thus subjectively. As long as *we* experience *something* there is duality. Duality itself could be seen as the cause of suffering – the insight Buddha’s teachings clarified.

When we experience ourselves as separate from our environment fear is born. When our sense of self is that of a self that meets not-self, we feel we are in competition or need to wear armor or masks to protect our self from the *other*.

We could say that we reach for objectiveness by becoming more and more aware of the inner witness. We approach objectivity by observing reality from the perspective of higher Self. From higher positions on the hierarchy we realize that our separateness is an illusion. Consequently we can reconsider our fear. Is it necessary, useful or in certain situations a nonsensical product of our own blindness? Even our own house becomes a frightening place in the dark.

Only in the conceptual perspective of Being, of full consciousness “we are” in the sense that experience and experienter “unite” and thus become are one.

Gestalt is about awareness, and this is why for me the Gestalt philosophy and therapy are stepping-stones towards conscious awareness. Awareness is for me a definite key to human growth, a key even to human survival on this planet.

As I noted in the first chapter, the original Gestalt vision does not explicitly talk about the metaphysical. The spiritual dimensions of human life are not really taken into consideration. However, there are some Gestalt writers who recognize the transpersonal aspects in Gestalt. Professor Petruska Clarkson²⁵, for instance, writes that Gestaltists have almost always found it important to acknowledge the transpersonal aspects of the meaning-giving endeavors of people. “An approach which strives to deal with the whole person must take seriously the social need for religious experience however the individual defines his or her need for coherence.” Gestaltists seem to acknowledge this human need for religious or spiritual experience.

Clarkson mentions the compatibility between Jungian concepts and Gestalt. She also mentions Zen as an important influence on early Gestalt theory; this Buddhist religious tradition emphasizes an approach of direct, *intuitive* perception. The use of intuition as a source of direct perception is indeed very present in Gestalt. For me intuitive perception is neither an awareness of sensations or feelings (body) nor an awareness of thoughts (mind) but an awareness of a source of knowing beyond body/mind, an awareness of a transpersonal self. In Zen tradition direct intuitive perception is used to attain enlightenment, in Gestalt to grow towards self-actualization.

Modern Gestaltists, such as Claudio Naranjo and Ervin and Myriam Polster also value and include spiritual dimensions as part of the whole of psychological growth, change and development. Dr. Naranjo²⁶, one of Fritz Perls’s “successors”, addresses the transpersonal

aspect of Gestalt in a full chapter in his “Gestalt Therapy”. He writes “... the most distinctive features of Gestalttherapy are, properly speaking, transpersonal.” Awareness itself *is* transpersonal in his view. He talks about Fritz Perls and recounts how, when a client talked to him without making real contact he would say: “Are you talking to me? I don’t feel that you are addressing me.” Very subtle.

Naranjo writes, “Awareness, like the well-known hen of the golden eggs, is the ultimate transpersonal treasure.... I think that a shift in emphasis from mental contents to awareness itself may well be the most significant feature of today’s humanistic and transpersonal therapies...”. He concludes that the spirituality of Gestalttherapy is disguised, and I agree with him. Let us look at some aspects that are “typical” Gestalt and “*value their transpersonal treasure*”, as Naranjo puts it.

6.2 Foreground/background formation

The Gestalt philosophy is based on the premise that what becomes foreground is something that needs to be experienced in order to grow.

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman define: “Contact, the work that results in assimilation and growth, is the forming of a figure of interest against a ground or context of the organism/environment field ²⁷”.

As these founding fathers of Gestalt see the self as the integrator and the synthetic unity, the self plays the crucial role of finding and even originating the *meanings* that we grow by. “The self creates the experience it needs to grow and thus the interplay of figure and background is the process of growth and maturing.”

From a background a certain figure engages us, has *meaning* for us (we see for instance the young women in picture 1 – page 9). There is a kind of dialogue going on: this figure calls to something in us, as something in us addresses this particular figure and thus it becomes our foreground.

This is quite a transpersonal point of view. When I “translate” this vision from Perls, Hefferline and Goodman into its more transpersonal version I formulate: we experience life on a personal level (body and mind) while on a transpersonal level (spirit) we create the experiences we need to grow.

“The self is the system of creative adjustments”, say Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. It is self-regulating, and regulating itself spontaneously. Goodman shortly criticizes Wilhelm Reich's term "organismic self-regulation" as being conservative, p. 24, which is interesting in this context.

This is typical Gestalt: the self is seen as an integrative force and is considered creative. The present situation is regarded as a field of creative possibility. The potential of resolution, of a healthier and thus happier life, lies in increasing the areas of awareness and letting the self live out its own creative synthesis.

This again suggests a transpersonal self, doesn't it? The self lives out its *own* creative synthesis, or translated into transpersonal terms: self lives out to creatively synthesize into Self.

This is Self-actualization again but viewed from a transpersonal perspective.

In this vision it becomes increasingly important to become *consciously* aware of what this goal of Self, this “creatively achieved synthesis”, is. Or in other words, where the self-regulating system is pushing us, in what direction this system is headed.

Becoming *consciously* aware of what becomes foreground to us is probably the best way to become aware in a more or less *passive* way. Things are happening “to” us and by paying attention to what attracts us and what does not we realize we have choices and become aware of how we choose. We might even wonder what the message is these “things happening” have for us. This is not only interesting, this gives us important clues to where we “want” to go. Awareness gives us a part in the game – we become responsible for the roles we play.

I also consider a more *active* approach.

Instead of living the experiences that are happening “to” us, we should keep in mind that we are indeed more than passive players. As Perls, Goodman and Hefferline suggest; on another level (Self) we are the master of the game, the integrator and the synthetic unity. In actively developing our *conscious* awareness of our transpersonal Self (our awareness of being the game master in online gaming terms), we start looking for and recognizing foregrounds that show us who we essentially are. In this way we (self) can actively choose to pursue our own creative synthesis.

With active participation in the game we are one step ahead. Instead of “just” listening to Self, we enter into a dialogue with Self. A *self-Self dialogue* as for instance Jung proposes with his ego-Self axis and as I suggested in my model (the transpersonal axis).

I, self, become truly response-able to Self.

With awareness we become able to choose our specific foreground from all the potential foregrounds offered to us instead of feeling that a more or less random foreground chooses us. The choice becomes foreground and with it our response-ability to Self grows.

A personal example. My father was a business man and thought it economically wise to send me to a business school, overruling my insistent pleas to study Medicine. Although I succeeded quite well in school and later in earning a living, my heart was not in the business part of any of it. I never gave myself any credit for the successes we achieved with our business. I never felt fulfilled by making (and possessing) money or having “power” like the men and women in my life obviously did. I figured that something essential was missing. In retrospect I realize that my life’s foregrounds pushed me in a different direction from the start. They gave me the opportunities and the necessary learning to get to a place where I could become aware of my true inspiration and actively follow up on it. It is only in the past ten years that I discovered where my inspiration lies. By taking small steps in a direction that seems to flow from my choices, I find myself exploring transpersonal aspects in human

experience. This “makes my heart sing”, especially now that I begin to see the impact of my commitment to my explorations on my life and work. It is what I feel best with and at; this resonates with who I am.

So now I choose my foregrounds, wherever possible, more in tune with this awareness of what resonates with my innermost being and reality. Choosing “right” has indeed become a foreground. The awareness of the choices, the foregrounds that present themselves from the background, has become my key to growth.

It is a reassuring thought that Being presents us with *the foregrounds we need* to become who we are, to actualize our true essence. With such a vision we could project archetypal images of Father and Mother on Being and feel loved, supported and cared for. In this Being we would have a place, a role to fulfill, a *meaning* even.

Our existence is seemingly “written” for us in Being. With awareness we become the editors of what is published.

6.3 The direction of creative adjustment

As we saw in the first chapter, in a healthy person the process of figure/background formation (the forming of Gestalts) is the dynamic way the organism adjusts to its environment. We integrate what we experience, like the food we eat and digest. In this way we grow by assimilation; by *creative adjustment* as Perls, Goodman and Hefferline call it. The term *adjustment* seems to imply a direction, an adjustment to “fit” into a larger whole or an attunement to something beyond where we are now, a going with the flow even. Perls, Goodman and Hefferline do clearly *not* imply that self adjusts to its environment. Self rather assimilates its environment; by experiencing not-self it translates it into an aspect of self. Self becomes more aware of itself by meeting the world. By becoming more conscious, self expands towards a greater wholeness, towards self-actualization in Gestalt terms.

For me this is a transpersonal vision, pointing in the direction of a Self beyond what we experience to be our personal self. The human self seems to be a screen on which Consciousness becomes conscious.

Joe Wysong^h comments in the foreword to Joel Latner's book²⁸: "Gestalt therapy was the most practiced of the "humanistic" psychotherapies. Everyone was "doing" it. Sadly enough, few knew what it was they were doing"

In a way this comment describes an important characteristic of Gestalt therapy: "The Gestalt that can be described is not Gestalt", writes Clarkson²⁹.

The doing, *the experience* is what makes Gestalttherapy effective. The focus in Gestalt is not on the content of what is thought or said or its intellectual interpretation, it is on the *awareness* resulting from the experience. Direct experience "talks" to us in such a way that we get the message (the "Aha- Erlebnis"), *the awareness* and willingly adapt our view or response. After such an insight we adjust our self to the flow of our *being in the world*. In transpersonal terms: self transcends itself to become more Self.

Awareness, that is: true contact with our experience, enables us to feel the flow. The self-Self axis is the stream along which self seems to flow towards Self. The self assimilates from its environment, ideally in this vision *adapting* itself to resonate with Self.

The sense of choosing "right" I described in the previous chapter becomes articulated; *right* being what "fits" Self. The self adjusts toward Self, in creatively choosing its foreground in such a way that the experience resonates within our *innermost being and reality*. The experience and the awareness of this resonance give us the ability to creatively adapt and transform towards wholeness. This is much more so with direct experience than with knowledge persé.

The direction of creative adjustment is towards *the last Gestalt*: Self-actualization.

^h Gestalt Journal editor Joe Wysong about the early 1970's

When the relationship between self and Self (the self-Self, transpersonal axis) comes into our awareness; we become consciously aware of being inspired by Self.

This realization enables us to become active participants in this relationship and gives us the choice to develop a true dialectic dialogue between self and Self. Our self makes its choices between “right for me” and “not right for me” based on an inner resonance with and an inner awareness of Self.

In other words: our self is no longer limited to its narrow perspective but takes its meaning and direction from a much larger whole, our higher Self.

I can look at my life from different perspectives. I can take my experiences at “face value” - self-perspective - and regret certain developments as missed opportunities or even mistakes. Or I can view them from a “Self-perspective” and realize these events and these experiences have helped me grow to be the human being I am today. On yet another level I can phantom that even my Self/soul has learned/grown from my “creative adjustments” and all my “figure forming” towards its destination; wholeness.

In terms of “presence” and “acceptance of what is”, major objectives in any meditative practice, a higher perspective is definitely a key to living a happier life, as we will explore in chapter eight and nine.

6.4 Does self-regulation imply a transpersonal Self?

“Individuation seems to be the innate urge of life to realize itself consciously”, writes Edward Edinger, a classic Jungian and pre-eminent interpreter of Jung's work.

Individuation or self-realization in Perls, Goodman and Hefferline's terms is considered an innate urge of Self.

Is not this what Perls, Goodman and Hefferline *implicitly* imply when acknowledging the existence of a self-regulating system? If there is a system like this "who" directs it?

“Gestalt therapy provides a way of being authentic and meaningfully responsible for oneself”, Gary Yontef³⁰ writes. Again this double identity or duality: one being responsible for oneself sounds to me as: self is response-able to Self.

And what about meaning? For me the word meaning implies direction, a goal, even a deeper purpose for the whole exercise/experience we call "life".

Laura Perls³¹ states that the aim of Gestalt therapy is the awareness continuum:

“the freely ongoing Gestalt formation where whatever is of greatest interest and importance for the survival and development of the individual will become figure, will come into the foreground where it can be fully experienced and responsibly dealt with. Any fixed Gestalt in time becomes a block: a self-interference.”

The self interferes with Self??

She calls Gestalt a *holistic* concept (ein Ganzheitsbegriff) and considers self-regulation the postulate (hypothetic ground) of the awareness continuum, which however can go on only when excitement and interest can be maintained.

Again, looked at from a transpersonal perspective Laura Perls seems to say that whereas self-regulation is a given, we should focus on conscious awareness to grasp what attracts us in order to go and stay with the flow of its process of Gestalt formation.

Exactly my point: we need the awareness of our inspiration to tune into it, on our way to wholeness, full consciousness that is.

It is interesting when Laura Perls says that all the experience and learning that has been fully assimilated and integrated builds up a person's background. In her view, it is this background that gives meaning to the emerging Gestalts and thus supports a certain way of living on the boundary (ego being the boundary phenomenon) with excitement. This idea fits into the concept of the hierarchy or holoarchy we have been discussing; the self matures on the transpersonal axis. Laura Perls does not mention a person's background in Being giving meaning to our emerging Gestalt, supporting us with “inspiration”.

Let me consider this from yet another perspective: whereas Laura Perls says a person's background, the integrated learned and experienced, gives meaning to the emerging Gestalts, I think we should seriously consider the meaning these emerging Gestalts give to us as a "self in process". What does *what becomes foreground for me* have to tell me about where I need to go or what I need to do? My background consists of my background in life and my background in Being. And again I propose a true dialogue between self and Self; an active participation in the creation of self in its reality.

Gordon Wheeler comments on Goodman's limited concept of background: "*By concentrating on the urge in isolation, by ignoring the configuration of the structured ground, Goodman fails to realize the full anti-reductionist, anti-isolationist potential of the Gestalt model itself.*"³²

Why not see the structured ground that Wheeler is proposing as limited and lift the Gestalt model to its full potential, namely to include life's transpersonal dimensions?

In my view Gestalt (therapy) needs to *explicitly* take an extra step to make its Gestalt whole. Obviously this is the transpersonal step, the step beyond the personal level Laura Perls is talking about. It is the step beyond the body and mind approach most Gestalt writers describe in their books. The transpersonal is implicitly there, as I tried to show in these pages, I present it here as an explicit quality Gestalttherapy has to offer.

Chapter Seven: Awareness of Inspiration – a transpersonal perspective

*"Lord grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can, and
the wisdom to know the difference."*

(Saint Francis of Assisi)

This is the chapter for the success stories, for the do-this-and-your-life-will-change-instructions and for the visions of a transformed world where we all live happily ever after. Well, yes and no. I wish it were that simple to make our lives happier and our world a better place, but it hardly works that way. I can experience and even *write* that all is One, and that everything is Love with a capital L, but still; we live our lives in a world we conceptualize with our minds in the moment we perceive it. We experience our reality in subjective images created from the illusion that we are separate beings in a chaotic world where almost nothing is as it seems. Plus, we live in this world with others who are just as lost as we are within a “system” of labyrinths that seems designed to get and keep us lost.

7.1 Relaxing in Being

I can step into my day with a wholehearted willingness to face and enter my reality with compassion and my best intentions. But let's be honest: there is no guarantee I will get through this day without getting, or more exactly *experiencing*, hurt. I do not complain; my reality is probably among the nicest realities on this planet. I don't live in a war zone, there are no immediate threats to our lives, I don't have to worry about feeding my kids and (knock on wood) there are no personal tragedies in my life at this moment. But even so, it is hard for me to relax, to feel safe enough to simply be, to allow myself to surrender to what is.

And this is exactly where I feel that the awareness of inspiration, an awareness of our transpersonal ground in being, is an important key. It is essential to sense on our deepest levels that this life, this reality *is* “where we belong” for us. It is affirming to be aware of our transpersonal Self, of our “home” in ourselves and in the universe as a whole. It is inspiring to have a myth, an ideal or better even the *experience* that our being in the world resonates with who we in essence are. *Then* can we truly relax, feel safe, feel “home” in ourselves and (out of That) step into our world with a more deeply ingrained natural trust that whatever happens we will be okay.

When we experience life as something *ultimately benign* that manifests through us, we can surrender to what comes up, not afraid of getting hurt. It is so hard to explain, but does not simply the “aha Erlebnis”ⁱ of belonging, the experience of having and taking our place in a “good” whole not make the ultimate difference? With that realization we can observe our lives and allow Being to find its creative synthesis through us. As a child who feels part of a loving family and knows its place in it, we can explore our world with open hearts and open minds.

7.1.1. Being with Self and others

I envision awareness of inspiration helpful on several levels.

For example, with an awareness of our ground in being in a transpersonal Self, we can consciously choose to perceive the world from a perspective that transcends ego because we realize we are *not* ego.

When I relax in Being I *realize* that ego-self is my mask, my role, my protective shield in a for me “threatening” world. When I know this is true for me, soon the realization dawns that this is true for others and compassion arises. When I *know* that underneath the ego-selves of the people I meet are human souls, same as mine, I sense our connection. Furthermore I realize we are all in the same boat, reactive towards each other out of the illusion of separate-self.

ⁱ the experience of “aha” when you suddenly grasp an understanding, have an insight

We are “forced” by this image of self against other into comparison, competition and even hostility. When I realize I don’t need to take any reactive behavior *personally* – because it is not really personal, it is this person’s ego speaking - and I do not feel the need to defend myself, I transcend ego. My compassion has a chance to grow and consequently my reality transforms.

When bit-by-bit the *experience* of truly connecting with others strengthens my trust, I will be able to loosen up, relax and become free-er of my ego-defense systems and fear.

Awareness of what we are doing is a first step. Even if we only realize in retrospect that we tripped over our egos again, or see with hindsight that we could have handled a situation from a higher perspective, this is progress. We are on our way, we are learning, we are building a better way of living our lives and with it a better world for everybody to live in. The willingness to authentically look at oneself is a good start. Having relationships in which to openly “exercise” our ego-transcending qualities with others, including a sharing of feedback is probably the best way to actively pursue transcendence of our egos. We should be able to have this opportunity for growth in our relationships and openly “invest” in relationships that have such a potential.

But it is incredibly hard to keep a “higher”, transcendent perspective in the world we live in today. The fact that a movie like “Crash^j” wins the Oscars is however a good sign. At least we start to realize what we are doing to ourselves and to each other and how destructive our thinking really is. We start to get glimpses of what we are dealing with when we, all of us it seems, live with fear and anger like that.

And, don’t we all have the experience that we feel better, perceive the world as “brighter” and definitely more colorful when we experience kindness, appreciation and understanding for who we are. Compassion and love, especially in relationships with

^j Crash, writer/director Paul Haggis, 2004 – won 3 Oscars in March 2006

significant others in our lives, are so fundamental to our well-being that we seem to die, literally feel less alive, without them.

Martin Buber writes:

“The human being needs to be confirmed by others in order to know itself as a human being – once we have received this “Yes”, the heavenly bread of self-being, from others, we are then able to be sufficiently centered in our own existence to stand on our ground.”³³

In this sense confirmation, the acceptance of otherness and confirmation in our individual being, from another human being gives us the feeling of being seen and accepted as we are, in our essence. Confirmation however could in a more religious sense also mean an acceptance as a full member of humanity. In the Dutch language the word “bevestiging” not only means confirmation, but also a fastening, or an attachment to something bigger.

Emotions of fear and anger make us contract and tighten up. Don't you feel your “shutters” closing when you find yourself in a situation you experience as hostile? Love and compassion relax us; when we connect to others, or to nature or beauty in arts for example, we open our hearts. We relax (more) not only on a physical and mental level, but also on the level of being.

Imagine a flower opening and closing in response to warmth and sunlight.

With a relaxed stance in Being, we feel more connected and generate more compassion. We can be more present in the moment, because we can relax in being. Same thing.

With an awareness of being more than ego comes a sense of feeling safe. I can actively choose when to use my masks and roles and use my ego-self instead of it using me. I, the conscious observer, can move up on the transpersonal axis by choosing to get my ego-self to step aside, when appropriate, and make more space (in me) for Self, for my higher qualities. When I transcend ego-self and “choose” for Self to manifest in my life, I mature

towards my truer potential. I can then live from the wealth principle (Jung), from Being – needs in Maslow’s terms, where I *know* that I am more than just ego.

I know, I am aware that I am in-spirited by a transpersonal Self, and so is everybody else.

7.1.2. Being without a story

Another example of relaxing in Being.

When I relax in being I can allow myself to have thoughts or feel emotions without having to rationalize why I have them, without making a story. I can experience what I experience without the need to explain or defend myself *to myself* or others.

For example anger. Whenever we feel anger we automatically make up a story, for instance: “I am right and justified to be angry because... I don’t like... I feel guilty...” and so on, and so on. We could instead of all this story-making also allow ourselves this emotion: “Okay, I feel angry!”

You know from experience it will pass, so you don’t have to be afraid to feel anger. You don’t have to do anything with it. You can take real responsibility for your anger and say what you want to say or for instance use the extra energy to clean your house. You can observe your anger in the now and live it in this moment. You could even enjoy the feeling. With present moment awareness your sense of being alive is heightened, also when feeling anger.

We actively transcend ego when we refuse to play its games. We take the transpersonal perspective when we choose not to make up the stories our ego wants, but relax in allowing ourselves to experience the moment itself.

Michael Brown, a South-African journalist, created “The Presence Process”³⁴ to develop present moment awareness. He presents it as a way to consciously grow up. “Awareness of our Inner Presence”, he writes “is the rarest of treasures in a world that is consciously and unconsciously enslaved by the illusionary mental paradigm we call “time”.”

The awareness of inspiration is the same idea and envisions the same ideal.

Underlying our “normal” day-to-day outlook is often what seems to be a neurotic conviction of our own limitations. It has become almost impossible for us to actually feel that we are whole, and in essence perfect. Our feelings of limitedness tragically contradict the central truth of most religious traditions and human mystic experience. Tragically because we *know* from our own glimpses of conscious awareness that we are part of larger whole and ultimately wholeness itself.

When we can grasp this transpersonal wholeness, we make contact with an *acceptance par excellence*^k within. The experience of this ultimate acceptance defies any description in words or concepts. Probably a symbol like the empty sky that gives space to everything would explain it best. In my view it connects to an inner wisdom, a knowing that each of us has his or her unique role to play in the whole of Creation. Everything eventually falls into its place in the big puzzle of our life, whether we consciously understand it or not.

The transpersonal wholeness is our home, the “place” where we can surrender to being who we are, because that is exactly who we need to be.

The TV-series “the 4400”³⁵ gives us a vision of how any person with what he knows or with what she does can have a deciding influence on how humanity survives. The film presents an image of human interrelatedness and the wholeness transcending time and space beyond.

When we look at our life from a relaxed stance in Being, we can feel fundamentally safe in ourselves and built our trust in the underlying “system” that proves to be indeed benign and self-regulating (or better self-evolving?). I think this perspective gives us a ground in being that is essential when we want to put our minds at peace enough to truly experience life, and open up to its full potential.

7.2 Acceptance of the things as they are; knowing and loving life for what it is

Edward Edinger calls Self an organ of acceptance par excellence in his book *Ego and Archetype* (1972) p. 40.

We are already talking about acceptance/being on the transpersonal levels, but we also need to look at acceptance on the personal levels of our day-to-day lives.

It seems that most of our struggles with people or situations spring from our inability to accept life as it presents itself. We seem to have ideas, thoughts and stories about what our reality should look like and when it does not look like that we are upset, literally lost. Our reality seems out of synch with us, we do not understand it, and we feel threatened by it. Reality here and now becomes something to resist, to protect ourselves against, to run away from or even fight.

There are several aspects to be examined when we discuss acceptance of the day-to-day things as they are *with* an awareness of inspiration.

As we saw in previous chapters awareness widens our perspective to a level where we realize that our concepts of reality are just the “what we make of it” component of reality, our subjective gestalt formation based mainly on our personal background in life. We become aware that *we* are the ones who create the ideas, have the thoughts and make up the stories. The most important first step is to become aware how bad we make ourselves feel with our endless story-making and how we limit ourselves by it.

7.2.1. Accepting our minds

Our concept making is our way to handle our world. We make assumptions about our reality to make it into something we can know and understand. We create concepts about the things we perceive to simplify their complexity. We make our reality into something we can control, freeze-frame it into something that we can over-see and manipulate or into something that fits our needs.

We do this in our minds, but when we face the real world it often turns out to be something else.

Seen from this angle it is not so hard to understand why so many of us are so afraid, why we address our environment with so much anxiety and why most of us fear “the others”. It is as if

we walk into a familiar environment but do not know our way, talk to friends but realize they don't recognize us or take a bite off an apple and taste an onion. Is this a trauma humanity lives with after millennia of separate-self and the resulting mind-made world of illusion?

With the realization that we cause our own suffering with our concept making we have the potential and the tool to change how we conceive our reality. We realize we first have to perceive it as it is, accept it and then consciously use our tools of conception to choose (= create) the reality we want. From the field of potentialities we choose our reality. From the background one figure becomes foreground. With awareness we have this choice and become responsible for our own version of reality.

First rule: perceive and accept reality as it comes. Knowing and loving life for what it is³⁶! How liberating! Even when life deals us tough cards, we accept the cards in our hands. No choice but responsibility. We realize these are our cards and it is up to us to play them.

7.2.2. Accepting responsibility

What I learned is that, although my life is not “happily ever after”, the idea of being responsible for what my mind is creating is transforming in itself. I learn to pay attention, to be aware of my own story-making and the illusion I create with it. I am curious now to perceive the “real” reality. This has become my ideal in Cayce's terms. I know now that I can not see that reality with my mind, but that I can observe it from outside my mind. I can use my mind to translate it into something that works for me in this moment, knowing that all I see is my translation.

Now that I *consciously* experience that I *can* make choices, I can enjoy more of my journey. I can relax in an inner knowing that this reality is indeed my choice and my life.

It is hard not to write about this process in terms of learning, or becoming, or doing gradually better. We are so used to our concepts of success (and failure) as our way to fulfillment and

self-actualization. Even the process of becoming consciously aware is described in the goal to achieve more than in the acceptance of what is.

Your mind is not the place to change reality. Byron Katie³⁷ says: “When you argue with reality you loose - but only 100 percent of the time”. Well, reality *is* here and now, and because you cannot change that, the effort to do so in your mind is a waste of your precious time and energy. Acceptance of what is on the other hand gives you a confidence in Being and its opportunities to learn life’s lessons and realize Self.

In my experience we make our stories also as a way to make what happens acceptable to us. We seem to take our time to literally digest personal dramas. It is sensible to chew on less acceptable chunks of reality long enough to be able to swallow more ore less digestible pieces and to spit out what we really don’t want to take in. I guess some of the stuff that enters our experience is not that acceptable and we need a bit of story making to make it into something that we can accept. Otherwise we would feel no hope and probably give up. What is amazing though is that most of the stories we make up to accommodate our tragedies are good stories. They are the stories with a wider perspective, with transpersonal qualities and higher levels of acceptance. Maybe we could use time to mature our perspective.

7.2.3 Accepting Being

We can address the “acceptance par excellence” I was referring to before from another angle. The universal human religious experience is that God or Being (the transpersonal intelligence that is “regulating”) is ultimately benign. Many conceive compassion and/or love as Being’s true essence. Harmon Bro³⁸ describes this realization when he summarizes: “we are known, all the way. And not just by Cayce.” and “how we are loved!”

In this vision we are truly known and loved. We are compassionately accepted with all we are in our human manifestation. No wonder God/Being is through the history of humanity personified by an archetypal Mother or Father figure.

The notion that Being itself knows and compassionately supports us sounds probably too good to be true to any human raised in a western tradition. Just the idea of being loved by Being gives us a totally different view on our reality. When I can choose my ideal of reality, I like this one.

Chapter Eight: Awareness of Inspiration – a light to follow.

“Similar to the awareness that urges a sunflower to face the sun, our awareness of inspiration invites us, time and again, to turn towards the light.”

(Katja Paping-van Rein)

Carl Jung is the first to talk about the mythlessness of modern man and in his footsteps Edward Edinger writes, “With the loss of awareness of a transpersonal reality (God), the inner and outer anarchies of competing personal desires take over.”³⁹ Life has no meaning; there is no reason for being without a central living myth. Like a plant needs the light of the sun to grow and somehow always reaches towards this light, humanity needs the awareness (light) of a transpersonal reality. It serves as a point of reference in human evolution; something to reach for, to grow towards. I believe we would not feel this need for light if we would not intuitively feel our potential light, our transpersonal dimension. The candle in our story felt it; she knew there was more to her and she decided to follow her intuition to find it. The essential idea of Jung’s new myth is that the purpose of human life is the creation of consciousness. Well, this definitely feels right to me.

8.1 Sense of transpersonal responsibility

June Singer uses the metaphor of a boat when she talks about the individuation process: “In learning to sail you do not change the current of the water nor do you have any effect on the wind, but you learn to hoist your sail and turn it this way and that to utilize the greater forces which surround you. By understanding them, you become one with them, and in doing so are able to find your own direction – so long as it is in harmony with, and does not try to oppose, the greater forces in being.”⁴⁰

We talked about relaxing in being and accepting life as it presents itself. I believe there is also the aspect of taking responsibility for our own life, for our own boat, to address. As I

mentioned before a sense of transpersonal responsibility is not primarily a sense of duty but a sense of being able to consciously respond to life.

Edgar Cayce is quite clear on responsibility. His focus in many readings is on setting ideals and living according to them. We have free will and thus the choice, and thus the responsibility to experience our lives as something we create ourselves.

From Cayce's transpersonal perspective comes a practical guide for living; we need to transform ourselves, mature towards what we potentially are, come to *know* ourselves as God knows us. We live our lives on this plane to transform our personality towards our *individuality*, which is the personality of our soul.

"The more ye become aware of thy relationship to the universe... the greater thy ability to help... the greater thy ability to rely upon the God-force within; but still greater thy responsibility to thy fellow men..."⁴¹

I recognize the importance of our awareness of a transpersonal Self here in Cayce's teachings.

Furthermore Cayce urges us to accept responsibility to each other, not only as each others keepers but also in living as an inspiring example to others. Right action and responsibility in relation to others are key factors in how he believes humans should live their lives. This resonates with what I am experiencing in my life recently. I was never that aware of this particular responsibility. Of course I felt it towards my children (and other children) but as I have gathered some of life's wisdom I find myself in situations more often where I seem to inspire people to change their behavior or attitude. I believe any therapist should be inspiring to her clients, so in my work this is certainly a responsibility I feel. But also in my personal life I believe that by "right action", even in simple day-to-day living terms, one human being can inspire many to "better action" too.

We seem to move towards conscious awareness and our responsibility therein along two distinguishable tracks:

- a. the internal, vertical way to become consciously aware of our uniqueness, of Self beyond ego/self, and our engagement in the self-Self dialogue (transpersonal axis)
- b. the external, horizontal track to recognize our being part of our environment and our responsibility resulting from this realization of our interconnectedness

Once we discover that we are *more* than the image we project into the world, once we have sensed our potential beyond the ego-self, nothing is quite the same; we cannot turn our backs and go on with our lives as if nothing has happened. We want to discover this more; we feel an urge to be more like this more. We are in fact already more by this discovery of the more beyond; we have already outgrown our old coats, our old ego and it starts to limit our movements and becomes uncomfortable to us.

June Singer writes: "individuation is natural".

Our responsibility lies in our commitment to our dialogue with Self. This means to be present, to reign in our minds so that we can focus our consciousness on here and now. We have to allow ourselves to be open to life's experiences, look in from the highest possible perspective and feel what resonates in our innermost being as "right". We must learn to relax in being and trust the inner knowing that what makes our hearts sing is indeed what we need to do.

The responsibility to take one's place in life is not only a personal responsibility for one-self, but also transcends ego-self motivations and takes the form of a transpersonal responsibility for humanity as a whole. We take full responsibility for the way we respond to events and circumstances but also engage in our life in a way that we align our outer experience with our inner essence. Being response able seems a purpose in itself.

On the external track we recognize our responsibility in our community and also in many different fields that concerns humanity and our planet as a whole. Many of us feel this responsibility and translate it into “right action”, first on a small more personal scale, later on larger even worldwide scale. I can think of issues surrounding environment, education, healthcare and care for people in need in general. Surely politics, science and business ethics are just as important when we want to improve life on this planet. We individually feel in what areas we can make a contribution. What we need most are people who are willing to live out their true potential, people who are courageous enough to be the visionaries they are, the pioneers, the entrepreneurs, the prophets and the world-improvers, all of them are needed.

8.2 Finding one’s transpersonal purpose, a transpersonal meaning of life

It seems to me that all that is said in this chapter comes together in one single realization: Being is the background in which we create our personal foreground. A human being seems to contain both worlds: the ever-changing, physical manifest personality (human) and the eternal, limitless, formless transpersonal (Being). We have arrived at an era in our evolution in which we become more and in larger numbers conscious of our transpersonal nature.

Consciousness itself has become a purpose in life and gives it meaning.

Awareness of inspiration not only offers a perspective that generates trust and acceptance, it also gives us an expanded window of reference that puts the dramas of our lives into a cohesive framework with glimpses of their transpersonal meaning.

“There is no hiding place for the gods”, Campbell says in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces*⁴², and he means in the age of science with its searching telescopes and microscopes.

Now Man himself has become the crucial mystery. Instead of turning to the unexplained powers of the world or to the miracles of the spheres, Man needs to recognize the God in

himself. Where the psychological perspective sufficed in cultures with myths, modern man seeks a larger picture, he needs to go “universe-wide”.

The hero of today, it seems to me, can only move through the phases of his adventure and face his destiny if he is willing to depart from his identifications with the little self, the limited, fearful, greedy victim of his life. His calling is to return home, to seek atonement with his source and finally fully meet the “Thou” in himself. When Man is willing to accept Being as who he is, his perspective changes: the Ego psychology transforms and his world becomes spiritually significant too. Man will finally recognize the Thou in all of creation, he will see His image in all aspects and segments of the hologram of Being.

Chapter Nine: Awareness of Inspiration and Enlightenment.

It is not hard to do the right thing; it is hard to find out what the right thing is.

Once you found that out, it is hard not to do the right thing.

Many people are searching for ways to live their lives more fully, to grow or should we say *mature* to higher levels of an intuitively felt human potential. Humans always have tried to do this, but now for the first time in history we have access to the wisdom from all traditions and all cultures worldwide. Now we can look at the many different ways in which man has tried to reach for higher levels of consciousness and experience, compare and even combine them. Now we can go to the sacred places, study with the masters, experiment with substances and practice with any teacher in any esoteric tradition we fancy. We can make our own specific selection and taste everything we want just like we would at a walking dinner buffet. We seem to have matured through stages where other priorities dominated our life but now more and more people arrive at a level where consciousness has become their first priority. Even when they are not consciously developing Consciousness, many search for ways to develop their awareness of the dimensions beyond the limited personal perspective.

Human beings have always been looking for pathways to an ultimate human experience, but now we seem to realize that enlightenment encompasses not only a transcendence of the world of form, but actually also a way of living in it. We could even talk of an evolution of enlightenment. Humans seem to evolve towards their higher potentials and are maturing towards ways of living in the material world with an ability to manifest the formless, eternal qualities of Consciousness, of Being.

We can no longer believe in the Gods in Heaven, we no longer want our religious leaders to direct or to limit us with their rigid laws. But we do feel the need to express our transpersonal nature on a personal level, in our individual lives.

An awareness of inspiration guides us like a flashlight helps us through the dark. It reveals itself throughout this thesis as source of knowing, an inner compass and a light to follow.

9.1 Enlightenment and enlightened living

What used to bother me about many esoteric traditions and spiritual practices was that the ultimate achievement; “enlightenment” was presented as such an elusive state that it seemed virtually un-reachable for mere humans (before the Lotus sutra for instance, women could not attain Buddhahood because they were considered to be too weak⁴³). With enlightenment as such an important “goal” in spiritual life for so many religious seekers, this *masculine* concept of enlightenment¹ is understandably quite frustrating.

When we have to wait for transcendence to radically awaken us, it seemed to me that I was stuck in a prolonged “dark night of the soul”. There was not much for me to do but meditate and hope for the ultimate life-changing mystical revelation or peak experience that would wake me up for the rest of my life.

In my view this concept of enlightenment is rapidly transforming.

Walter Truett Anderson⁴⁴ for example suggests “enlightenment” is rather a natural process of human development:

- a. that does involve a radical shift of personal perspective but
- b. does not necessarily involve paranormal or supernatural experience and
- c. is potentially within the reach of all human beings

“It is more a maturation of vision, accompanied by a reorganization of conscious (and probably unconscious) thought, in which you see yourself and the world differently.”

In his book “The Next Enlightenment”, Anderson confirms many of my ideas. I agree with him that un-enlightened I-centered consciousness is only one way of organizing cognition and that other ways are available to us at all times.

¹ enlightenment in the traditional sense or the Eastern sense, which would mean a vertical lift-off, getting off the wheel of becoming, transcending this world absolutely, and leaving no trace (Andrew Cohen in a dialogue with Ken Wilber - November 2005 for WIE)

The term enlightenment^m has, when used in this context, evolved into a concept of growth, of maturation towards the human potential, a concept of human evolution even.

In this concept of maturation *life-transforming growth experiences* can occur in normal day-to-day life *outside* spiritual practice or religious awakenings. Many are considered wake-up calls; a life-threatening injury or illness, a near death experience, the loss of a loved one, any of these can work as a catalysts in our process of awakening consciousness. I believe that we can also *actively* mature, grow more aware and learn *by doing* on our own way to more enlightened ways of being in the world.

“Enlightenment” in this sense says something about the way in which we perceive the world and act in it. It describes the more transpersonal perspective we were discussing in this thesis; the manner in which we meet reality with an awareness of the true nature of Self. This means non dual enlightenment; the experience of the transcendent formless in the world of form. This is living with the awareness of inspiration. It means being in the world with the awareness of our ground in Being, in other words, living in an enlightened way. This is a different, connected-to-the-world (*feminine*) concept of enlightenment as a spiritual experience. It describes a state of *conscious* awareness that is no longer separate from the consciousness of our day-to-day existence.

In this chapter I want to look at how we could live our lives in a more enlightened way. We discussed how our view and thus our reality transforms when we observe from “higher” perspectives. We can also look at certain qualities that seem to develop naturally in people who live their lives from these perspectives. It is interesting to notice that many of these qualities that we intuitively consider “more mature” seem consistent with the higher stages of development.

^m enlightenment with an emphasis not only on transcending the world, but also on transforming it. The realization of emptiness and pure Being and the passion to become a radically and profoundly transformed human being who is an agent of the evolutionary impulse itself (Andrew Cohen in dialogue with Ken Wilber)

The “mature” *qualities of perception* prominently present in Anderson’s studies of people with higher degrees of “enlightenment” show up in Maslow’s explorations for his “growth motivation”-theory⁴⁵ as well. I encountered these evolutionary “higher” qualities also in my previous explorationsⁿ of ways of knowing and contacting reality that transpersonal psychology, quantum physics and the feminine self-in-relation perspective have in common.

In his new book “The Translucent Revolution”⁴⁶ Arjuna Ardagh, pretty much in Maslow’s footsteps, describes his view on the human evolutionary potential. He talks about the individual and collective awakening that has been going on during the past 15 years. Ardagh studied this phenomenon and interviewed and surveyed thousands of people with awakening experiences. The book is the result and gives an overview of human potential at its highest evolutionary levels. It explores the qualities “translucents”, people with an awakening experience, seem to share.

It is interesting to look at some of these “enlightened” qualities here, since I believe they show us the way to maturation of the human potential we have been talking about. When we want to *actively* grow towards more consciousness, these qualities are the challenges we face, the areas we can work on. Awareness gives us a choice. With more awareness of these higher aspects we have the choice to point our noses towards more enlightened ways of living.

When Edgar Cayce speaks of choosing an ideal, he almost always emphasizes two distinctive areas to consider:

- a. the individual/autonomous dimension: the *knowing* of Self, and the
- b. communal or even universal dimension: the *expression* of Self.

Let us look at the new and translucent qualities then in these two categories.

ⁿ I studied these parallel qualities of perception/expression in several courses in the A.U. program

9.2 Qualities of knowing

For me it comes natural to feel the need for growth. As long as I can remember I wanted to learn, to know more. From the moment I *consciously* discovered consciousness I wanted to be as conscious as I could possibly be. Even when I do not know what I am supposed to do with what I learn and have no real clue how to use what I become conscious of, I feel the need to mature towards something I cannot really put a finger on.

Could this urge to grow, this need to mature, be something that is born from an awareness of our transpersonal nature? Could it be an unconscious *knowing* on a deeper level that there is *a more* to grow towards? I believe it is.

So what are the more mature, more enlightened qualities we can develop to come to knowledge in order to grow, mature and evolve?

9.2.1 Perception vs. Conception: the willingness to perceive and experience instead of conceptualize reality

This quality is characterized by the openness of mind required to look beyond existing constructs and theories. It stems from the realization that our concepts are just the “what-we-made-of-it” aspect of reality and in that sense subjective as well as context-dependent and thus relative. This is the quality to quest for truth by opening up to a truth beyond the boundaries and limitations that traditional theories, their applications and even the language they use pose.

With this quality we dare to follow our intuition, listen to our inner voices and open up to clairvoyance and other “paranormal” experiences as part of our human existence. Our dreams become sources of inner knowledge and so do inspirational writing and other creative expressions. Images that enter our consciousness are taken seriously (visualization and hypnosis as tools to communicate with the unconscious) and we pay attention to signals from our body (bodywork, yoga, haptonomy). Of course in any dialogue with our inner voices or our unconscious symbols, archetypes and for instance myths become our allies. Their

meaning transcends our language and concepts. They seem to be the more appropriate tools to communicate on the level of the soul.

In my experience my awareness of my higher Self provides me with an internal compass. I can use it as a highly sensitive truth-detector and inner guidance-system. When I pay attention I often *know* what “fits” me and what does not, what makes my heart sing and what does not.

On a mental level this quality of perception could mean an open mindedness towards our paradigms and belief systems. This obviously asks for a conscious awareness of the way our mind works, and an acknowledgment of the limitations of the *what we make of it* component of our knowledge. For me it certainly means a willingness to question our concepts and where necessary drop or transform them.

Katie Byron’s “the Work”⁴⁷ and Eckhart Tolle latest book “A New Earth”⁴⁸ address our personal concepts and direct us to

- a. become aware of the ways our minds work,
- b. question the “what-we-make-of-it” and thus
- c. transform our concept-making towards direct perception

Awareness gives us a chance to question our view and to gain access to higher perspectives.

On a much larger scale, we could for instance re-consider and re-define traditional language and terminology in all kinds of fields, with a willingness to evolve our vocabulary by a continuously tasting and weighting of our concepts against what is experienced.

Ken Wilber is one of the pioneers in this arena. His new “Integral Model”⁴⁹ is based on a comprehensive cross-cultural, cross-historical study of the human potential. It is an attempt to create a composite map of the essential elements in human growth, or the “keys to unlocking and facilitating human evolution” as he describes them. Wilber uses the word

“integral” to indicate a new way of approaching a subject; you could say a new “standard” perspective.

With this model we can address every situation and draw a complete picture in order to respond to it in a more encompassing, *integral* way. What Wilber proposes here is a new and integral “system” to look at reality, a neutral framework with its own “new” language that could be shared by any discipline. It could provide a “tool” to make a fruitful dialogue possible “from medicine to art to business to spirituality to politics to ecology”. Interesting!

We are so caught up in our terms, concepts and systems that to realize they are “just” our fixed-in-time-and-place representations^o of an ever-changing reality that is not really graspable in words, concepts or systems is mind-boggling.

We have learned to connect to the world with words. Concepts give us our place in it. Now we seem trapped by our own tools, almost unable to see beyond their grasp. It is as if we continuously mistake conception for perception. The first step towards maturation is to realize that and open our minds to a true dialogue with reality.

To do this a certain degree of distance from our minds, an awareness of being beyond our minds (for instance through meditation practice) is certainly helpful. As is willingness, commitment even, to transcend ego and its limiting influence. One we realize we are not ego, but beyond it, we can build a relationship with ego as we would with a spoiled child. Now we are the adults in the room. We learn how this child manipulates us to get what it wants; we become aware of its vulnerability and its stubborn perseverance.

9.2.2 Meta awareness; to see reality and our knowledge of it as an ongoing, fluid process. This is the realization that we and our knowing are continuously developing, growing and evolving.

This quality is characterized by the willingness to shift our attention to what goes on beyond our perception. It contains the ability to realize we can actually get glimpses of the flow by

^o determined and colored by all kinds of historic, cultural, religious etc. etc. influences

watching the individual waves. It is the conscious endeavor to envision the parts of the iceberg beneath the water and perceive its interconnection with and origin in the sea.

Meta awareness asks us a level of detachment. We then see the processes, the cycles, the evolution, the micro reflected in the macro. This is where synchronicity becomes a graspable concept. With Meta awareness we see the underlying system in which separate events are meaningfully related. Astrology explores the reflections in life of the overarching constellations. The MARI^P is another example of an instrument that allows us to look at our consciousness from a wider perspective, perceiving the stages in which consciousness matures in cycles.

The I-Ching, numerology and the various Tarots are examples too.

I don't want to dive into these subjects now for lack of expertise and time/space, but I am intrigued by these scopes into the realms beyond and what they can teach us about ourselves on a personal level and about our world on more universal levels. It is interesting to note that all of these meta-views seem to make use of a more symbolic, archetypal language.

With this quality of meta-perception we also experience a fundamental trust in an underlying whole. With it we are able to become more open to outcome, less attached to the outcome favored by our personal preferences. It makes us more willing to recover the human resources of wisdom and objectivity that have been lost by too much attachment to our mind's constructs.

9.2.3 Not knowing; a willingness to live in a universe not fully explained – perhaps never explainable.

Our relationship with reality, and thus our coming to knowledge about it, is an ongoing process in which observer and observed are both part of the same field and consequently

^P Mandala Assessment Research Instrument, please see <http://www.maricreativeresources.com>

inescapably interconnected and interrelated. In this vision there is no absolute reality. The world of form is experienced as evolving, constantly changing and we realize our role in creation by becoming conscious.

Letting go of our need to know seems a logical, necessary step. The realization dawns that we have outgrown this stage of evolution where the emphasis is on science. We are maturing to a next level where we connect to the world with a different set of tools. We are willing to enter a dialogue with our experience without the need to fix or grasp reality with words, concepts or formula's. The individual dialogue with Self expands to a communal, even universal dialogue with Being.

With the quality of not knowing we are willing to accept and surrender to the reality that we do not know, probably can never know. We certainly can not *absolutely* know everything there is to know. Not even in our personal lives. With this quality we face each other without blame or judgment, with a truthfulness that stems from an authenticity of someone who surrenders to not knowing, not needing to know.

This seems a small step, but it is not. Maybe it is this sense of humility and reverence, a more or less conscious surrender to a larger order of things that makes a real shift in perspective possible. In accepting that man, separate as individual and seemingly autonomous as species, is actually "just" part of a much larger whole, calls for a major shift in consciousness.

It is interesting to notice how these qualities seem to flow together when you really look at them.

9.3 Qualities of expressing Self

One of the new qualities that seems to present itself in abundance is the willingness to embrace life, engage in its processes and be present with a passion to celebrate Being to its

and thus our fullest potential. The search for the “experience of being alive” Joseph Campbell mentions (chapter 4) translated into a perspective to live your life from.

This willingness to be consciously present and *actively participate* in Being seems to flow from a conscious realization that everything is indeed interrelated and interconnected combined with a perspective that our participation is important, a determining factor even. Our uniqueness realized as a necessary ingredient in the whole of Creation. Again we meet with a paradox; we feel we are asked to actively participate in an evolving consciousness, yet for it to evolve we need to relax, step back and let go of our “control” over reality and surrender to its processes.

An awareness of the distinct difference between my Self and my experience is needed to grasp the idea that Being itself participates when we allow it to flow through us. As Andrew Cohen suggests, “in this evolutionary enlightenment the significant element... is the surrender to the movement of an awakened compulsion to participate wholeheartedly in the evolutionary process for the sake of evolution itself”¹. This is interesting; the idea is that we, as the “vehicles” of nondual incarnation, live in the world of form that is unfolding, and that enlightenment, as the union of emptiness (formless) and form, actually evolves with us. Walter Truett Anderson writes: “The universe evolves, and we are it”.

Let us look at some of the qualities that surface in this process, which naturally seem to expand from a personal sense of transcendence towards a passion to actively participate in an impersonal evolutionary process of enlightenment:

9.3.1. Compassion – Presence – Openness of Heart

Compassion is a perspective really; we could have discussed it in chapter 8, because with an awareness of inspiration a person “automatically” becomes more compassionate. To look at the world and see it as part of self, and self as part of it, is transforming. Our cognition

¹ Andrew Cohen, November 2005

restructures and our perspective, and our consciousness widens. Separate-self becomes self-in-relation. We saw throughout this thesis that we grow in relationship. True contact and connecting with ourselves, others and our environment are our only way to become more conscious.

Angeles Arrien⁵⁰ writes inspiring books about authentic human wisdom. Drawing from the deepest mythic, archetypal roots of humanity she developed the Four-Fold Way, a training program in which she points out that it is valuable, necessary even, to express ourselves according to our innate principles in order to live in harmony and balance with our environment. Her newest “The Second Half of Life” explores other archetypal “passageways” to deepening our experience of life, specifically in our later years.

With compassion comes also a sense of enjoyment, aliveness and passion. Compassion carries the quality of Presence, your inner presence (Self) shared with the world. Authentic living belongs here. Honoring the small things, doing what you do with the compassion that flows from conscious doing. “The aim is not to see, but to realize that one is that essence; then one is free to wander as that essence in the world”. Joseph Campbell⁵¹

The quality of compassion also allows us to perceive our reality with our hearts. It tells us what has heart and thus “added” meaning in this new perspective. We were discussing “what makes your heart sing” as an indicator of meaning and direction. The “higher” qualities we discussed in this chapter could serve us well on our way to a more enlightened way of living.

As I suggested with my model in chapter five, compassion also seems to invite the other to higher levels of connecting.

9.3.2. Commitment; willingness to respond to the ever-changing world.

Humans have a natural tendency towards homeostasis. They instinctively resist change and want to create an illusion of security in an insecure universe. Chaos is frightening for most of

us, and the unlimited potential of life is often too overwhelming to face. We discussed how we use constructs to get a handle on our world with our minds. We also organize our lives in structures in time and space in order to avoid confrontations with too many uncertainties.

Among the surfacing mature qualities is a quality best described by the term adaptive intelligence. It is a commitment to transformation. It is a willingness to face changes in order to adjust to our ever-transforming world. This quality invites us to actively participate and adapt where necessary to the evolving knowledge, yet asks also for our willingness to let go of our “control” over reality and surrender to its process. We talked earlier about the creative synthesis and how self creatively adjusts to Self. This new quality seems to point in that direction; we are challenged to look at what comes up, at our experience in relation with the world we live in. We are invited to perceive our reality as participants, as the co-creators of this on-going process that is Being.

With this committed stance in life we are willing to confront what comes on our path and open to face what confronts us.

Cohen and Wilber discuss evolutionary enlightenment, and this openness to change as a commitment to *get your vehicle aligned* with the rest of the process of manifestation. Here our awareness of inspiration could serve as a barometer as well. We need to pay attention and make our choices based on what feels right, brings energy and activates growth.

With the quality of commitment to transformation comes a stance in life where we are willing to adjust our priorities and adapt our lives to them. I think it is important for instance to reconsider how we want to spend our time, our 24 hour per day. How much time do we need to commit to relating, to reading/writing, to contemplation, to our bodies, to nature, to creativity, to meditation or to just be? What time do we want to “invest” to develop awareness and integrate “newfound” consciousness into our being and our lives? It is my experience that it is important to create the time to pursue what is important, to align our outer circumstances and experiences with our inner purpose.

We should seriously consider rearranging our lives around our new priorities instead of trying to fit them into our old lives?

9.3.3. Communion – responsibility towards society – urge to be of service

The heartfelt willingness to take responsibility, not only for ourselves but for the world at large and all the creatures in it, is a quality that emerges in all studies of more advanced life styles^q. Service is generally acknowledged as a “higher” quality; ego transcendence naturally leads to ego transcendent concern and action. Service is more than an action to help others per se, it is the sense and willingness to be of service to the world, to advance the evolutionary process of the planet (of Being itself) or to improve the greater good.

This relational quality comes with a readiness to face life in a more open, more connected way. It certainly asks us to be present, to show up as authentic and vulnerable as we can, with an invitation to engage with people in order to enhance wellbeing and mutual growth. It demands our commitment to the relationship itself and invites us to take responsibility for the quality of connecting we express. Don Miguel Ruiz⁵²'s books show us honorable ways to take that responsibility.

The self-in-relation model of the Stone-Center came up in this thesis several times. It represents a new, and in this context more “enlightened” perspective that honors human interrelatedness and the interconnectedness of all in Being.

Many of the issues we discussed are relevant, but let us look at the one that strikes me as the most important in this context: the “new” sense of self. This self is experienced as inseparable from the dynamic interaction that results from attending to and responding to others and their feelings. The self-in-relation theory not only suggests that self develops in the context of relationships; it also emphasizes a two-way interactional model. Whereas separate-self theories look at self as a static, separate unit, the self-in-relation theory recognizes the self as a process, an ongoing evolutionary development with an emphasis on

^q For instance by Abraham Maslow, Walter Truett Anderson, Arjuna Ardagh and Eckhart Tolle.

assimilation, growth and change. Being in connection, in relation with oneself, others and nature is seen as a motivation in and of life. It is felt to be our natural way of being and acting. To feel more related to another person means to feel one's self enchanted and not threatened.

The realization that contacting others is a fundamental way of coming to know one-self and is, as such essential for our growth towards authenticity makes it an accurate tool in our search for wholeness, actualization and transcendence. When we add the self-Self relationship on the transpersonal axis, the self-in-relation perspective can expand to another level. Whereas the self-in-relation model in its original form emphasizes our connectedness to others as a source of meaning, a transpersonal perspective focuses on our connectedness as spiritual beings.

Combined with the transpersonal perspective, the self-in-relation model that defines humans as relational beings, expands to the larger framework of a transpersonal reality.

The process of relating is seen as having intrinsic value. Judith Jordan writes:

When empathy and concern flow both ways, there is an intense affirmation of the self, and paradoxically, a transcendence of the self, a sense of self as a part of a larger relational unit. The interaction allows for a relaxation of the sense of separateness; the other's well-being becomes as important as one's own.⁵³

Or put in another way:

"Empathy is central to an understanding of that aspect of the self which involves we-ness, transcendence of the separate, disconnected self. It is the process through which one's experienced sense of basic connection and similarity to other humans is established."⁵⁴

In our quest for wholeness and authenticity, compassion and empathy are the doorways to a deepening personal and relational awareness. As we humans exist and grow in the context of relationships, a stance of compassion allows us to sense a mutuality, a common ground with others ultimately in a transpersonal "ground in being". This can be a fundamental source

of validation, support and fulfillment. We are not alone in this; we are together. We share responsibility for ourselves, others and how we live together on this planet.

This self-in-relation perspective, especially when it is expanded to include transpersonal dimensions, offers a view of reality from a larger scope, discovering underlying principles inherent in what is. It gives us a means of looking differently at what we experience to be reality. It invites us to look further than the limited perspective older theories that are so deeply engrained in our ways of thinking, feeling and expressing ourselves. The basic premise of the (transpersonal) self-in-relation perspective is that separation is an illusion and that growth and development evolves through stages of ever-increasing levels of awareness and consciousness of the underlying connection, and ultimately the unity of all.

These “new” qualities of perception and expression are in my view the most important keys to living from a more enlightened perspective. The willingness to perceive *what is* in a different way, from an altogether different point of view combined with a readiness to accept our responsibility and act in an inter-active and adaptive way on what we perceive give me hope that we will be able to create our world into a better place.

Epilogue.

At the end of my studies at Atlantic University I realize this thesis is just the beginning of another journey for me. Researching the transpersonal dimensions in this way has proven exciting and extensive. There is so much more for me to explore and to discover.

The first papers about Awareness and Awareness of Inspiration I wrote during my Gestalt training have evolved into this *Transpersonal* Thesis.

It is as if this project has grown with me, as if it transformed with the experience and knowledge I gathered in life and in my studies. I discovered that I truly enjoy writing. For me writing is a way not only to express what I learned, but also to explore how what I assimilated has shaped my view. I loved to experience that insights when combined form new and deeper insights. It was inspiring to grasp these insights in words and images.

This thesis is about the Awareness of Inspiration. Conscious awareness transforms unconscious and implicit potential into conscious and explicit quality. With conscious awareness of our transpersonal nature we can mature into conscious humans who view reality from a transpersonal perspective.

This thesis has come to a completion. I see it as an important stepping stone. This work invites me to renew my commitment and to delve deeper into these transpersonal issues and their application in day-to-day life. My studies at Atlantic University have definitely opened a window for me and I am grateful. I will continue to exercise my flame in front of it.

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