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INTERVIEW

The Cultivation of Wisdom: An Interview with Roger Walsh

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Roger Walsh, a foremost thinker in transpersonal psychology, is professor of psychiatry, philosophy and anthropology at the University of California at Irvine. He has published on psychology, philosophy, medicine, religion and ecology, and his books include *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*; *Meditation: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*; and *The Spirit of Shamanism*.

This interview with Roger Walsh took place on April 29, 1994,¹ at the beautiful San Francisco Bay Area home he shares with his wife Frances Vaughan. Roger greeted me warmly, and we began with a cup of herbal tea and a brief tour of the house. The decor of subdued earth tones and simple, modern woodwork created a well-lived, comfortable atmosphere, accented by a garden terrace window opening to a breath-taking view of the Bay. We stepped out into the terrace for a moment to admire the view and the abundant garden flowers that were blooming in spectacular colors. Roger spoke of the view and the flowers with great satisfaction and gratitude; it was evident that his appreciation for all this had lost none of its freshness in the sixteen years that he had lived here.

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Roger recently returned from a two-week long meditation retreat. A fluid, unassuming and open quality about him hinted at some of the benefits accrued from his years of meditation and contemplative practice. Before the interview started, he indicated that he might occasionally pause *for a minute to meditate and explained that clearing away thoughts may allow the answers to come with greater clarity and depth.* The occasional silent pauses during the interview did not feel awkward or disruptive of the flow of conversation. On the contrary, the shared silences seemed to create a feeling of ease that reminded me of Winnicott's image of the "good enough" mother who gives her child a gift of intimacy by allowing the child to ignore her and be fully itself in her presence. I shared this reflection with Roger who greatly appreciated it.

KP: You initially came to the United States to do a psychiatric residency. *It would seem a long way from a psychiatric residency to transpersonal psychology.* How did you become interested in issues that drew you to your current interests?

RW: I did my medical training and internship in Australia and came here to do a residency in psychiatry at Stanford in 1972. My primary intention was to continue my education, which I thought would lead to further research in neuroscience. But California has a way of changing people. I found myself doing psychotherapy with clients during my residency, even though from my survey of literature it did not seem particularly effective. But since I was doing it I figured I had a moral obligation to try it for myself. So I went into therapy with a superb existential-humanistic therapist, Jim Bugental, for what I thought would be a very brief, experimental period. Eighteen months later I staggered out, my entire worldview shattered and transformed. The central discovery was that there is an inner universe within us—as vast and mysterious as the outer—of which I had been totally ignorant. I had effectively lived my life on what felt like the top six inches of a wave of an ocean I hadn't even known existed. Jim introduced me to this inner world of subjectivity, and once I discovered this, it became apparent that many of my beliefs about myself, about human nature, about society, about our potentials and pathology were misguided and that I had missed an enormous part—perhaps the most important part—of life. So I began a concentrated attempt to plumb this inner subjective world both experientially and conceptually and went through workshops and trainings of all sorts, from the conventional to the wholly unconventional. With the help and guidance of many

people I slowly gravitated towards contemplative practices. I found myself engaged in meditation, even though I didn't quite understand why, and even though I thought that religion was the opiate of the masses. Then there was one blinding moment of insight that changed my life when I realized that there is a profound contemplative core to all the world's great religions—the so called perennial philosophy or perennial wisdom—which is vastly different and deeper than the conventional institutions, and that this core provides roadmaps and technologies for the induction of transcendent states of consciousness. Once I saw this, I had a radically new way of viewing contemplation, meditation, yoga, and the great religious traditions which led me to plunge intensively into meditative and other contemplative practices. I did a number of three-month retreats and also went to Asia to practice there for a while.

KP: When did all this take place?

RW: Well, I started doing intensive meditation practice around 1976, and since then I have tried to devote at least a couple of months each year to retreat experience. I went to Asia in 1981 to practice in Burma. I have practiced a variety of approaches, primarily vipassana (insight) meditation but have also explored other practices and traditions. These explorations have been motivated by many reasons. Partly personal satisfaction, partly desire for self-actualization, and partly I was driven by an intense intellectual curiosity about the nature of mind, transformation and transcendence. Of course, as you know, the practices are themselves self-rewarding and enormously satisfying. So it's been a wonderful process of continuously deepening exploration of mind and the great mystery of existence to depths that I don't think I could ever have plumbed without the aid of contemplative practices.

KP: You have undertaken a challenging journey in search of first-hand knowledge of the kinds of phenomena that are studied in transpersonal psychology. How important is it that researchers or theorists in this field have direct, experiential access to the phenomena they study?

RW: It has become painfully apparent to me that within the psychological and contemplative realms, the amount of direct, personal experience sets the limits to conceptual understanding. Without an adequate experiential base, our concepts remain vacuous, what Immanuel Kant called "empty." It is also apparent that profound ideas and concepts

have what philosophers call grades of significance; that is, the same idea can be understood at many different levels of meaning and interpretation. We can have an intellectual understanding of key ideas, but our understanding may in fact be overlooking higher grades of significance. Those higher grades of significance only become apparent once we have had the requisite experience. Time and time again I have had experiences of reading something in a contemplative text and saying, "that's ridiculous!" and six months later having an experience that makes it understandable and saying, "That's what they meant! Now I see what they are talking about!" And another year or two later: "Oh my goodness! There is even more to it. Now I see it." Profound ideas can open gradually to ever deeper levels or higher grades of significance.

KP: The deeper seeing or insight you describe sounds like the reverse of the postmodern, especially constructivist way of looking at things, namely, that presuppositions embedded in the cultural-linguistic context set the limit to what can be experienced. In the constructivist perspective, we may have new insights but they are all equally contextually limited and in this regard none is "deeper" or "higher" than the others.

RW: I think the constructivist notion that concepts set the limits to our experience and understanding is a useful idea but not the whole picture. I'd like to make a couple of points here. One is that in my understanding, systems of thought and belief are hierarchically ordered, and it is possible to unearth deeper and deeper presuppositions in such systems. The presuppositions can themselves become objects of awareness rather than be filters of awareness. Contemplative and therapeutic practices are ways of bringing those presuppositions into awareness and transforming them from things we look through to things we look at. This makes it possible for us to modify them. The second, perhaps more radical or fundamental point is that from accounts of contemplative experience, it seems possible to have experiences that are non-conceptual or, better yet, transconceptual, transrational. I realize, of course, that this is a major point of debate between the constructivists and the perennialists. But perhaps we don't have to take it to the extreme but can simply say that it is a common experience in psychological and contemplative work for people to step behind, to use a spatial metaphor, at least some of the beliefs that formerly structured and constituted our experience.

KP: The question on which constructivists and the perennialists seem to differ is whether there is anything to know or experience beyond the presuppositions.

RW: There is certainly a claim within the contemplative traditions that it is possible, and in fact highly desirable, to have experiences of a radically transcendental nature in which awareness is experienced as prior to, free of, and unconditioned by individual and cultural beliefs. And it is this claim that's the major argument between the constructivists and the perennialists. If you look at the arguments of the constructivists around this point, as far as I can see, they haven't provided a strong epistemological argument. It's more a presupposition, namely, "all experiences are constructed, therefore the mystics' claims of transconceptual experiences are erroneous." I have not seen an adequate epistemological justification for this constructivist argument.

KP: It's a paradoxical argument. It makes an absolutist claim about contextual relativism.

RW: Yes, the philosopher Donald Rothberg has written very persuasively, to my mind, against the epistemological assumptions of the constructivists. I don't think there has been sufficient amount of dialogue in the transpersonal community, though, to have a consensus on a position regarding this issue.

KP: You recently proposed a definition of transpersonal psychology as "the field that studies transpersonal experiences and related phenomena." you further proposed to define "transpersonal experience" as "experiences in which the sense of self or identity extends beyond the individual or personal." It appears that transpersonal psychology as a field of inquiry does assume that at least some people have transpersonal experiences.

RW: I think we now have enough cross-cultural, clinical, developmental, and phenomenological information available to be able to argue very strongly that transpersonal experiences (some but not all of which are also transconceptual) are widespread and very important. In fact in many cultures they are regarded as the summum bonum of human existence—the highest goal, the highest good of human life. Our culture is unique in having, at best, lost sight of the value of these

experiences and at worst, having confused them with pathology. So I would think that one of the goals of the transpersonal movement is to research and validate transpersonal experiences for our western culture. Subjectively, these experiences are regarded by those who have them as extraordinarily valuable, meaningful, insightful, life-affirming and direction-giving. Maslow, of course, was one of the first western psychologists to investigate those transpersonal experiences that he called "peak experiences." People described these as the high points of their lives, a kind of touchstone or guiding light. From sociological studies we know that people who have these experiences tend to be psychologically more healthy, to score better on a variety of scales of wellbeing, social contribution, and various other markers of social and psychological functioning. Developmentally, it seems that these experiences are connected with psychological maturity on a variety of dimensions, for example, cognitive, moral and egoic. It seems that transpersonal experiences may be healing and transformative, and there is increasing evidence that a variety of pathologies, such as addiction, may represent, in part, attempts at substitute gratifications to compensate for a dearth of transpersonal experiences. One thinks of Carl Jung's term "spiritus contra spiritum" which implies that spirit, alcohol, is a substitute for transpersonal experiences of one kind or another. So there is now a significant body of evidence supporting the importance of these transpersonal experiences. As for their importance to researchers investigating them, certainly, as with any experience, one can appreciate transpersonal experiences better to the extent that one has had them oneself. Just as anthropologists try to immerse themselves in a society so as to have firsthand experience of the culture they study, so too researchers of transpersonal experiences will understand them better to the extent they have had them. There is another line of argument that's important and adds support here, and that's based on the fact that transpersonal experiences are essentially altered states of consciousness. There is increasing evidence for the validity and power of state-dependency, that is, the notion that what is experienced in one state of consciousness may be best comprehended, remembered and communicated in that same state of consciousness. Without experience of that state, one's capacity to understand the insights it offers may be limited. The range and richness of one's own transpersonal experiences may therefore be a factor in determining one's capacity to truly understanding the significance, subtleties, and value of transpersonal experiences.

KP: What makes an experience an altered state? We have a variety of experiences that one might not fully appreciate until one has had them for oneself, such as an experience of a tribal culture, or an experience of swimming across the English Channel. But we would probably not think of such experiences as altered states. You have talked about transpersonal experiences as involving a shift of identity, from a "me" to whom something is happening or who is doing something, to a more expanded sense of self. Is this kind of shift what differentiates "altered" from "normal" states?

RW: I find the concept of altered state of consciousness extremely important, undervalued in our culture and difficult to define. Are you suggesting that a key determinant of whether a state is altered or not is a shift in the self-sense?

KP: Yes, a shift in the very structure of the experience, regardless of its content. Ordinarily, experience is intentionally structured, but it seems as though this structure somehow shifts.

RW: My sense is that altered states certainly involve a shift in the structure or processing of experience but that not all altered states involve radical shifts in the self-sense. Charles Tart has proposed a valuable systems model of consciousness that throws light on this question. He suggests that consciousness is a system comprised of several dynamic subsystems, such as attention, perception, self-sense, affect, cognition, etc, and that any of these subsystems may be altered somewhat independently in such a way that the functioning of the system as a whole will be shifted. In the systems metaphor, then, the shift in the functioning of the system as a whole represents an altered state of consciousness. Yet certain subsystems may change but others may not. So I don't think it is easy to define an altered state in terms of alteration of a particular subsystem—such as identity—though, a radically altered state probably involves some change in all of the subsystems. However, the defining characteristic of *transpersonal* altered states, at least as Frances Vaughan and I defined them in *Paths Beyond Ego*, is indeed a shift in the identity subsystem; in this case to produce a more encompassing sense or identity of self that extends beyond the individual to include wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos.

KP: The interest in altered states and transpersonal experiences has not faded away but seems to be growing ever stronger. Do you see a historical and cultural significance in this?

RW: That's an interesting question. I think that transpersonal psychology has arisen in response to a lack in our profession and our culture. Perhaps one way of looking at this lack and how transpersonal psychology attempts to compensate for it is to appreciate that our contemporary Western culture is what anthropologists call "monophasic," as opposed to many of the world's cultures, which are "polyphasic." This means that our culture values and derives most of its worldview almost exclusively from the usual waking state, whereas other cultures derive their worldview from a variety of states of consciousness, including dreams, contemplative, yogic, and other transpersonal states. One way of looking at what transpersonal psychology is trying to do is to say that it is trying to compensate for and correct the partial worldviews of our discipline and our culture, trying to shift them from *unistate* to *multistate*, or from *monophasic* to *polyphasic*.

KP: It seems to me that worldview has something to do with values and how to live in the world—with wisdom, really. How do you see the relationship between altered states and wisdom?

RW: Wisdom is a tricky thing to define and teach. Our educational systems are designed to impart knowledge and not wisdom. We know how to teach knowledge but not how to impart wisdom; you have to be wise to impart it. Knowledge is something you can have, but wisdom is something you must be. So wisdom requires a transformation of self. A significant number of altered states, though certainly not all, seem to facilitate the growth of wisdom, and there is a widespread claim within the contemplative traditions that certain specific states are particularly potent in cultivating wisdom, insight and understanding. Moreover, some of these states are said to give birth to wisdom of a radically different and tremendously important kind—wisdom that can be transforming and even liberating.

KP: I like your metaphor of giving birth to wisdom.

RW: Contemplative traditions claim that there are different levels of wisdom. There is an initial wisdom which gives insight into the

existential "givens" and uncertainties of life. This is the wisdom which sees, in the words of the *Psalms*, that "we are as dust," "our years come to an end like a sigh," "who can live and never see death?" Contemplative disciplines foster openness and sensitivity to this suffering in order to cultivate initial wisdom and compassion that motivate one to grow and mature and engage in contemplative practices so as to alleviate this suffering in oneself and others. Then there is what's called final wisdom or liberating wisdom. This is a direct, transrational, transverbal, transconceptual, intuition into the nature of consciousness, self and reality. The wisdom that results from this intuition is called by many names. In the East its known as *jnana* or *prajna*, in the Christian tradition as *gnosis*, in Islam as *ma'rifah*. Whatever the name, the idea is that it's possible for the trained mind in certain states of consciousness to have a profound and liberating intuition into the nature of self and reality, and that this intuition corrects prevailing individual and cultural distortions and erroneous presuppositions and allows us to "see things as they are." The actual intuition may be momentary, but it is said to be capable of effecting dramatic, enduring transformations in one's belief systems and behavior.

KP: So an insight that may occur in a moment of an altered state of consciousness can give birth to wisdom that endures beyond that moment, beyond that particular altered state?

RW: Exactly. I think you are hitting a key point there. Experiences come and go. What may be left are the insights and understandings or cognitive transformations that were gained in that state. Just as in pathology, say in schizophrenia, the acute schizophrenic state may resolve but paranoid delusions may resolve much more slowly. Likewise, on the healthy side of the spectrum, transpersonal states may result in insights which remain and can guide life long after the states are gone. A clear example here is the near-death experience. Considerable research shows that this belief experience usually induces long lasting, dramatic and beneficial changes in personality and behavior. However, there is a further step in contemplative practices. They aim not merely to induce altered states but to induce altered traits. In other words, the aim is to transform peak experiences into plateau experiences, or, as Huston Smith so eloquently put it, "to transform flashes of illumination into abiding light." This is the transformation of the Hindu *nirvikalpa samadhi* into *sahaj samadhi*, the Buddhist prompted

consciousness into unprompted consciousness; and the TM meditators' transcendental consciousness into unity consciousness. So, across various traditions we find that the goal is not only to experience an altered state and to have insights that one can retain as memories, but eventually to stabilize those states as traits and to have the perspectives they provide available more or less continuously.

KP: Is there today perhaps a greater appreciation of the importance of this last step, to stabilize the insights and gain enduring and life-transforming wisdom? It seems that in the earlier decades of transpersonal psychology there was a great deal of fascination with altered states and mystical experiences. Perhaps these states were a bit overrated, and there was a tendency to think that all you need is an altered state and then you'll be enlightened.

RW: I think that anyone who engages in a contemplative practice begins to appreciate, over time, just what an enormous undertaking it is, how vast the potentials are and, by comparison, how slow and difficult the process of transformation is, *ars longa, vita brevis!* Many of us, when we were first introduced to altered states assumed that if we could just have a mystical experience, everything would be transformed forever. Eventually we had them. We found that they are wonderful and we felt extremely fortunate, blessed and ecstatic. And then they went away! At best we were left with some pleasant memories and some new insights and perspectives. At worst we were left with ego-inflation and a case of the "dark night of the soul," hungering after what we had lost, but without the maturity to be able to re-access those experiences. It became increasingly clear that the path leading to awakening and liberation is an enormous, enormous challenge. It takes probably at least a life-time's work. The longer one engages in the pursuit, the more one is humbled by it and appreciates that it is something that requires we give as much as we possibly can to the process. And not as a sacrifice, but out of desire. Simultaneously, it requires that we relinquish our attachment to reaching some final goal or endpoint and appreciate that it is a journey, not a destination. It's a process, and what we are after is self-actualizing rather than self-actualization. It is such a trap to think that self-actualization or self-transcendence is something that's completed rather than something that can continue endlessly. As one Zen master said, people do not understand that even enlightenment can be deepened endlessly. That brings us, I think, to appreciate that there really isn't a split between

practice and one's life, that they become one organ hole. Each moment of interaction, each task, can be conducted either mindlessly, greedily, angrily, or it can be used as another opportunity for learning, awakening and service. So the dichotomy between practice and nonpractice gradually starts to break down. Perhaps another way of saying it is that practice begins to encompass all of life. Eventually there seems to arise an awareness that we always already are that which we are seeking, that the seeking and the seeker are the goal, and from that point the dualisms collapse, and life-actualizing-seeking-practice-service—all collapse into one, into this moment!

KP: Wisdom seems to be something that essentially and necessarily becomes a personal search—one has to be wise to teach wisdom, you said earlier. And it is also transformative; it changes one's life. How, then, does transpersonal psychology as a field of inquiry approach wisdom? Is the study and understanding of wisdom an object of inquiry for transpersonal psychology or is wisdom something that must be incorporated into its methodology?

RW: I hope it can be both! I hope that wisdom will be a central concern of the transpersonal enterprise and I think that the success of the discipline will largely be determined by the wisdom of the people who undertake it. Of course, there is no guarantee that transpersonal psychology will flourish. I think it is in grave danger right now of becoming popular and of being used and misused by people who label themselves as transpersonalists and then undertake and advocate a variety of not particularly wise things. It will be crucial for transpersonal practitioners to operate with considerable conceptual, experiential, ethical, scientific, and contemplative discernment if the field is to survive and flourish. There is a particular difficulty associated with the transpersonal exploration. Because it is currently to a certain extent outside the conventional cultural and disciplinary paradigm, a certain degree of open-mindedness is required to entertain and explore it. Unfortunately, open-mindedness is not necessarily associated with discernment. It is relatively easy to be open-minded, and it is relatively easy to be critical, but is hard to be both. Yet for exploring a nontraditional paradigm or area one needs both open-mindedness and critical thinking. I think that one of the ways in which the humanistic movement ran into real trouble was the espousal of open-mindedness which was unbalanced by sufficient critical thinking. And I fear that the transpersonal movement may run

the same danger. Perhaps we can learn from the difficulties humanistic psychology ran into, but I am not fully convinced. Another danger is that some of the experiences that emerge from transpersonal practices can be so powerful that they can temporarily overwhelm critical thinking, which can make people more vulnerable to the temptation to relinquish critical thinking inappropriately. I think what's needed is the capacity to both suspend and re-institute, as appropriate, critical thinking.

KP: When you say that the experiences are so powerful as to lead to suspension of critical thinking, do you have in mind individual researchers/practitioners or the field itself?

RW: Both! There is a related difficulty in that when one opens to unconventional perspectives, there seems to be a tendency to uncritically accept unconventional perspectives en masse. Unconventional ideas of very different types and quality can be lumped together and pre-conventional prerational magic or mythic thinking can be mistaken for transconventional, transrational wisdom, a conflation that Ken Wilber calls the pre/trans fallacy. We need to discern among them very, very carefully and put all truth claims to the appropriate tests. For example, if you look at the fields of transpersonal psychology and, say, parapsychology and astrology, all of which are nonconventional fields, you find very different research findings. There is now a large body of literature supporting the value and validity of transpersonal experiences and related phenomena. As far as I can assess the literature, there seems to be increasing evidence for the validity of some psi phenomena but increasing experimental evidence *against* the validity of astrology. The research shows that astrologists show almost no agreement among themselves about their predictions, that subjects who have been given a selection of astrological charts cannot pick out their own from other charts, and that astrologists do not predict at better than chance-level when asked under controlled, experimental conditions. Those are devastating findings. I use this just as an example of three unconventional paradigms in which the experimental evidence is going in very different directions. As William James said, "There is no source of deception in the investigation of nature which can compare with a fixed belief that certain kinds of phenomena are impossible." So we need to be open-minded to all possibilities but at the same time decide validity on the basis of evidence, not on the basis of presupposition or conventions, or anticonventions for that matter.

KP: Discernment would seem to be especially difficult to practice in a field such as transpersonal psychology that in certain respects seems to be truly a revolutionary science in the Kuhnian sense. The methodology, rules of evidence and so on are not yet firmly established for the investigation of altered states and mystical experiences. So the criteria by which to assess value or validity are not very clear and unambiguous. Because of this, discernment seems to become a much greater challenge than it is in an established or conventional science.

RW: Yes. One of the unique features of the transpersonal enterprise is that, alone among Western psychological disciplines, it is committed to a strong epistemological pluralism. It specifically employs, to use Ken Wilber's metaphor, the "three eyes" of the senses, the intellect, and contemplative intuition; and their corresponding epistemologies of science, philosophy and hermeneutics, and contemplation. Transpersonalists claim that without a balanced use of all three approaches, we get a very partial picture of human nature and that only the use of all three will allow us an adequate view of humankind and the cosmos.

KP: Moving up from the scientific through the hermeneutic to the contemplative, one moves into increasingly rarified realms, in more ways than one. For example, consensus decreases: almost everybody accepts the scientists' criteria provided by the sensorially-based epistemology; a smaller group which probably includes most humanistic and phenomenological psychologists and people from the other humanities are willing to extend the criteria to include those provided by hermeneutics and philosophy. But the transpersonalists seem to be alone and unique in that they accept criteria from contemplative practice.

RW: Well they are alone and unique in the West, but certainly not in the East. Many Asian psychologies and philosophies explicitly acknowledge contemplative practices as the source of their most profound and central concepts. However, as far as I am aware, it's only the transpersonal disciplines which advocate the use of all three eyes, and so that seems to be a distinctive feature of this discipline. As you say, the hard sciences rely primarily on empirical observation.

KP: At least they would like to think so.

RW: They would like to think so, exactly.

KP: The interpretive presuppositions of the hard sciences often remain, so to speak, behind the observer rather than become an object of observation and scrutiny.

RW: Yes. Very well said. Of course, the critique of behaviorism and Skinner, for example is that he incorporated all sorts of mentalistic presuppositions into his theories but did not acknowledge them. If we go to the other end of the spectrum, contemplative disciplines, such as Zen or yoga emphasize contemplation but they do not often appreciate, and don't incorporate, sensory-empirical scientific approaches. So, as far as I am aware, the transpersonal movement is unique — in East and West — in advocating a balanced use and integration of all three epistemological approaches.

KP: One reason why the other disciplines shy away from relying on the contemplative approach for methods and data of inquiry may be that it's an unknown territory. The domain of the empirical sciences is well charted with highways in all directions and road signs posted everywhere. The hermeneutical sciences, though not as well and unambiguously charted, still have enough signposts to have some degree of consensus. But the contemplative domain seems like virgin territory, or a jungle, where everybody travels on their own.

RW: I actually disagree with that. I think it's a common belief in our culture that in the contemplative realm everybody is on their own. But when one actually explores a particular contemplative discipline, one finds that, at least in the established traditions, there are clear guidelines as to how to proceed and what can be expected, and how one can be tested.

KP: The traditions do provide such guidelines. But there are a great many traditions available for a contemporary westerner. Which tradition to choose? That's left to the individual.

RW: Yes. We are in a new phase in human history. Never before have we had access to so many contemplative practices or disciplines. This is a new experience in human history — well, not entirely. There have been periods in history, such as in Alexandria in the early centuries of the common era, when there were many traditions and practices available and people such as Plotinus essentially synthesized them, just as, for example, Wilber is attempting a conceptual synthesis of a

variety of disciplines now. And you are right, we are largely on our own selecting among disciplines. One of the individual, social, and research challenges of future decades will be to figure out and draw guidelines for what practice is best for who, and at what stage. We may find something akin to what we found in psychotherapy outcome studies; that it's not at all a simple question. The old psychological question of which therapy is best is largely a nonsensical question. As we now know, the better question is, "what approach is best for what person at what phase and under what conditions?" we may well find that a person with a particular personality may be best suited for one specific contemplative practice whereas other people with different personality traits do badly with that particular practice. Also at a certain phase, a person might be better off switching to a different practice. We don't know. At the moment what we have is the kind of inherited intuitive wisdom of spiritual teachers and their own sense of appropriateness. It does seem that there is this kind of cycle that people go through in this historical time of contemplative overchoice. The first phase may be a kind of smorgasbord approach where people try out different things and feel what's best. But at a certain stage it seems that it's appropriate to engage a particular practice intensely and deeply in order to move past the shopping around phase. Then, after a while, one may again try other disciplines to broaden one's practice. In my own experience, it has periodically felt appropriate to try new practices as a way of balancing what I was doing, and also to break down established psychological sets and habits. So I find myself going through cycles of exploring varieties of approaches, then settling into one relatively intensively, then exploring again and settling in again.

KP: Quite apart from the question of which tradition or path is suitable to a given person at a particular time in his or her life, there is also the question of whether all of these traditions and the paths they offer are equivalent. How would we determine their equivalences?

RW: You are posing a crucial question which is going to engage us in at least a century of research. What you are essentially asking is how can we map and compare traditions and techniques. I think we will have to compare them on multiple dimensions. For example, it seems that there are both universal and unique components within each tradition. As far as I can see, there seems to be at least six universal components to authentic spiritual traditions. These are: a foundation of ethics, emotional transformation, attentional stabilization, a shift in motiva-

come. Mind about such a model is that it sets up criteria, or at least implies that there must be criteria, by which we discern how mature a person is, which is to say, how wise the person is. But who is qualified to set up and apply the criteria, since one has to be wise oneself before one can speak of wisdom with any authority?

RW: Yes, the suggestion that there are identifiable developmental stages beyond our own has been a controversial one and has led to charges that transconventional developmental models lend themselves to a variety of traps, such as elitism, marginalization and condemnation. But I think that there are a number of things that need to be recognized. The first is that we can't live without making value judgments, and those people who say, "we shouldn't make value judgments," are engaged in what's called performative paradox—doing exactly what they say we shouldn't be doing. Secondly, we need to recognize that a developmental hierarchy is not necessarily the same as a value hierarchy. A ten year-old is not necessarily better than a five year-old, though, a ten year-old who is functioning at a five year-old level is presumably in need of help.

KP: So the society or community as a whole is implicitly making value judgements. So long as we are members of society, we can't get away from making value judgements.

RW: We can't get away from it. Yes. It is somewhat challenging to believe that there are developmental stages beyond our own. But on the other hand, is it not remarkable hubris to think that we have reached the height of human potential and that it is impossible that anyone could develop beyond us? Aldous Huxley used to like to tell a story: Fifty thousand years ago, Cro-Magnon humans had a cranial capacity at least as large as ours, perhaps slightly larger. Presumably their IQs were, potentially much the same as ours so that there were probably Cro-Magnon geniuses. We could ask what would Cro-Magnon geniuses with IQs of two hundred would have looked like? They would probably have been pretty good berry-finders. Well, what potentials, developmental capacities, reside within us that are unrecognized, untapped, undeveloped? We may not have the faintest inkling of what our developmental capacities are so we need to be open to developmental capacities and stages far behind our own.

KP: Capacities that we already have as potentials, but have not yet actualized?

RW: Yes, latent but not actualized. So we need to be open-minded and to decide these things on the basis of observation, experiment, and research, rather than make premature cognitive commitments and presuppose that we are the sum total that humankind can be. There is also another important implication of the idea of transconventional developmental stages. This is that simply recognizing the possibility of those stages may be a powerful catalyst for their actualization. We are less likely to develop what we don't recognize we can develop. So we need to be open-minded about the possibility of these developmental stages, to research them and, if we agree they are latent within us, to develop them. We do have, from the world's contemplative traditions, claims across centuries and cultures that there are developmental stages beyond our own, and that these developmental stages can be fostered and catalyzed by appropriate practices. We now have people such as Ken Wilber and Dan Brown making cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary analyses showing what appear to be common descriptions of sequences of stages beyond conventional development. This has enormous implications. One is that what we take to be normality may actually be a form of shared developmental arrest. And if that's so, then this may explain an enormous amount of our individual, social and cultural pathology. I see the state of the world as a reflection of our collective adolescence. My personal belief is that human survival and planetary preservation may indeed depend on our individual and collective maturation. So I see the exploration and research of transconventional developmental stages as crucial both individually and collectively, psychologically and spiritually.

KP: But it remains a special challenge for the one who proposes and articulates such a transconventional developmental sequence to see whether he or she is wise enough for the task.

RW: Yes. Clearly wisdom is going to be a limiting factor in our capacity to identify and research transpersonal stages. But that does not mean that we can't make beginnings. And while none of us may be wise enough or mature enough to accurately map all these stages, that does not mean we can't begin. And it does not mean that collectively we can't gain valuable information just as in the same way we can study

tion up Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a refining of perception and awareness, and cultivation of wisdom. Although these may be universals, different practices focus on different elements. We can take as examples the four classical yoga. Jnana yoga works with understanding and wisdom, karma yoga works primarily with motivation, bhakti yoga works to transform emotions and cultivate love, and raja yoga works particularly with attentional stabilization in meditation. So each of them seems to facilitate transformation along all six dimensions, but each of them focuses on a different component and uses it as a kind of a cutting edge technique. Then there is the question, do the various disciplines and traditions all aim at the same developmental levels? Ten or twenty years ago a number of us proclaimed that they were all just equivalent paths up the same mountain that was a very neat but also very naive idea. What's particularly embarrassing is that one of the people espousing that idea was me! Now we are becoming increasingly aware of the wide variety of states, stages and experiences within and across traditions. We are beginning to see that, in point of fact, different traditions don't necessarily aim either at the same state of consciousness or the same developmental stage. Then, too, one can distinguish paths according to the methods they use. For example, there are paths that rely very much on relationships, while others are more oriented toward individual practice of mental techniques, and we can distinguish along numerous other dimensions as well. So I think we are beginning to see that the question, Are all the paths equivalent? leads us to the more precise and challenging question of "What are the similarities and differences among paths?" and to the very important but very challenging research enterprise of mapping and comparing paths on a variety of dimensions. I suspect what we will find is not only that different paths are best for different people, but that different paths change different aspects of personality to different degrees. That leads to the interesting question — which again may require a century of research — what aspects of personality and being are transformed by contemplative practices and what are left unchanged? There is a naive assumption — unfortunately another one that I shared — that if people did sufficient spiritual practice of one kind or another, they would, if not approach perfection, at least improve on practically all dimensions of personality and being. Now it's increasingly realized that people can have profound insights and understandings and even reach certain stages of enlightenment, yet still have significant areas of personality that remain relatively un-

touched. That is both a naturalistic observation and a research finding born out, for example, by the studies of Daniel Brown and Jack Engler using the Rorschach test. They studied advanced meditators and found some very interesting things. For example, people who had reached the first of the four stages of enlightenment in the Theravadin Buddhist model, showed Rorschach test protocols that seemed a first glance not all that different from those of ordinary people. These initially enlightened subjects had normal neurotic conflicts around issues such as sex, aggression and dependency. However, what was striking was that these conflicts were relatively encapsulated. In other words, they did not much affect or contaminate the remaining personality, so that these enlightened subjects were relatively unaffected by their neuroses. It wasn't that the neuroses had disappeared; it was that the subjects had come to terms with them. If you talk with some of these people you find that they are remarkably open and humorous about their won personalities and neuroses. They actually tend to use them as objects of humor and for teaching purposes. I find that very impressive. How much of that is specific to contemporary Western teachers I don't know but it suggests that the aim of self-actualization and self-transcendence is not so much to shape oneself into any particular mold but rather to accept oneself and one's full humanity, complete with all its foibles. This theme is of course reminiscent of Carl Jung's emphasis on wholeness rather than perfection, and among spiritual traditions is perhaps best exemplified by Zen.

KP: Yes, when one knows oneself deeply, including the shadow side, and accepts it all, then one can be at ease. There is a freedom in this kind of deep and knowing self-acceptance.

RW: Yes, exactly.

KP: I want to go back to the point you made that the various paths don't necessarily all aim at the same developmental level. I may be opening a can of worms here...

RW: I am sure your are!

KP: I think developmental models such as Wilber's continue to be a subject of controversy. Quite apart from the particulars of the model, just the idea of proposing developmental phases or stages beyond, let's say, the one where the audience to whom the model is proposed finds itself positioned, is bound to create controversy. One serious issue that

geniuses and learn from them, even though we are not geniuses ourselves.

KP: We are approaching the end of our time for this interview, so let me ask you, where would you like to see the focus and direction for the transpersonal field in the future, and what would you like to contribute to it?

RW: While any psychology and psychotherapy is a demanding enterprise and requires considerable cultivation of intellectual skills, I think that transpersonal psychology is uniquely demanding in that, ideally, it requires the cultivation of all three eyes—sensory observation and scientific research, intellectual hermeneutic-philosophical analysis, and contemplative training and insight. So, I hope those of us in the transpersonal movement, but not only those in the movement, can work to refine all three dimensions in ourselves. I'd like to see us engaged in contemplative practices so as to deepen our insight and understanding, sensitivity and wisdom. I'd like to see us learn as much as we can in a variety of disciplines, for example both mainstream psychology and philosophy and also contemplative psychologies, and philosophies. I'd like to see us refine our experimental skills so as to do really good research—rigorous experimental research—wherever it's appropriate. And I'd like to see us use these skills and methods to expand and enrich transpersonal disciplines and transpersonal vision, to connect more effectively with the mainstream, and to apply whatever we learn to the social and global problems that are pressing on us, and with particular sensitivity to the global crises we face. I am one of many people who believes that the global problems we are facing are at root psychological problems. Each and every one of these crises is a product of human behavior and hence we need, not only to reduce hunger, overpopulation, and pollution, but also to understand and transform the motives and behaviors that created them in the first place. Time is short! Unless we devote ourselves to understanding and alleviating the psychological roots of the global crises within the next few decades, we will probably have lost our chance, and the world may be reduced to a global Somalia. So I feel a great urgency about this. I think the transpersonal community has a unique opportunity to make a difference here. This is because of its interest in practices which have been specifically designed to cultivate concerns and emotions such as love, compassion, and identification with all humankind and all life. There is enormous wisdom in the contemplative

traditions which may be essential to our understanding and alleviation of the social problems and global crises we face, and transpersonal psychology is very appreciative of these resources. The transpersonal community therefore has a unique opportunity as well as responsibility. For myself, I hope that I'll be able to continue my own explorations contemplatively, intellectually and socially. I hope to be able to deepen my own meditative and contemplative practices because the depth of these practices clearly determines my capacity to understand and contribute. I hope I'll be able to study more deeply in a variety of areas where I feel deficient, particularly philosophy and comparative religions since I have no training in those areas, and yet I am increasingly impressed by their importance. And I hope I'll be able to research a variety of topics that feel exciting and important, such as, for example, the identification of the common elements in contemplative disciplines. I'd like to better understand, communicate and translate perennial wisdom into contemporary psychological language, so as to make the perennial wisdom of the various traditions available, comprehensible and even compelling. And I hope I'll be able to continue work in the social arena, calling attention to the urgency for all psychologists to become involved in working on the global crises.

KP: there is indeed plenty of work for all of us to do, and you have a vision of great scope to inspire it. Thank you very much.

RW: Thank you.

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