

And although I do not think that the world is entering anything resembling a "new age" or "transpersonal transformation," I do believe that transpersonal studies always will be that one beacon to men and women who see Spirit in the world and the world in Spirit.



The Adventure of Consciousness

Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan

A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

We have entered a new phase of the adventure of consciousness. Born humbly as an attempt to understand the peak experiences of exceptionally healthy people, transpersonal psychology has blossomed into an international, interdisciplinary movement. Transpersonal experiences, potentials, and traditions, long dismissed as fantasies, pathologies, or fictions, are at last being explored and appreciated. Each discovery unveils further possibilities.

This new appreciation is allowing us to draw upon the great reservoirs of transpersonal wisdom accumulated across centuries in many cultures. Viewing this wisdom in the light of modern research makes it understandable in contemporary terms and allows its true significance to be recognized.

Carl Jung spoke of the importance of gnostic intermediaries, those people who transmit a wisdom tradition by imbibing it themselves and then translating it into the language and concepts of another culture. Perhaps the transpersonal movement can function as a collective gnostic intermediary, whereby the timeless wisdom of traditional transpersonal disciplines can be translated, tested, and winnowed, and then can inspire and transform contemporary culture.

Yet the transpersonal movement is more than a gnostic intermediary. For in addition to translating knowledge it is actively involved in creating knowledge. New techniques are being devised, new data generated, and both ancient and contemporary claims are being tested scientifically, philosophically, clinically, and experientially.

The long-term effects of this enterprise may be far more than we can imagine. Already we have seen a shift to a more generous view of human nature and possibilities. We have moved from a perspective that encompassed only a single, healthy waking state of consciousness to a recognition of multiple states; from viewing normal development as our ceiling to seeing it as a culturally determined limit; from denying the possibility of lucid dreaming to exploring it in the laboratory; from regarding meditation as a regressive escape to appreciating it as a developmental catalyst; from dismissing mystical experiences as pathological to recognizing them as beneficial; and from devaluing non-Western psychologies and philosophies to appreciating that some of them are, in their own unique ways, highly sophisticated. These shifts and more may make transpersonal studies an essential cornerstone in the emerging paradigm.

These shifts also may change each of us, for what we do reflects our beliefs about who and what we are. The transpersonal vision of our possibilities may therefore call forth our individual and collective efforts to actualize them.

This actualization may be crucial for the survival of our planet and our species, for we have created a global situation that demands unprecedented psychological and social maturation. In the past we could consume without depletion, discard without pollution, multiply without overpopulation, and fight without fear of extinction. In other words, we could act out our immaturities whereas now we need to outgrow them. Our global crisis, like the transpersonal vision, calls us to grow up and wake up.

The need is great, but so too are the opportunities. For the first time in human history we have a transpersonal vision and all the world's paths beyond ego to help us awaken. This collective waking up is the adventure of consciousness, paths beyond ego are the means for the adventure, and the transpersonal vision is its guiding light.