

## JOURNEY INTO CONSCIOUSNESS

*Joan A. Groom*

If you are not happy in the heart of the earth, I bid you discover the reason and eliminate the cause of your unhappiness so that you will be able to have absolute peace in being in this earth plane. When you find the point of ultimate contentment where you are and are not moved by things that happen around you, you are almost to that God-realization of yourself-being of Brahman, as Brahman, in Brahman, through Brahman. Is this not a wondrous saying? Is it not a surcease from always desiring something else, striving for something beyond the self, always reaching out to God or this or that to find completeness? Is it not wondrous to simply let go and enjoy the God that you are?

Your heaven is your aura where you are right now. This is enough. It is the aura of God. It is the aura of the Divine Mother. It is a light so sublime.

Hercules

The journey into embodiment was a long and arduous one. I can only surmise that the time spent in the womb was as much a tour of conflict and ambiguity for the child as it was for the mother. And who can say which one held back more when the gestation period was over and it was time for the infant to emerge. For 36 long hours they both struggled with their fears and resistance, and when it was finally over—for some things, once having been set into motion, cannot be stopped—the mother never wanted to go through this birth-giving ordeal again, and the child possessed a lifelong fear of giving birth. And, for this child, a world of boundaries was already set into motion. There would be no sharing of this mother's body or breast or milk; no soothing for the separation and confusion that was this child's instant reality; no response to cries of loneliness and isolation;

no indication that contact from without could become a shared reality.

I have seen photos of this child at various stages throughout her childhood and there was not a smile in any of them. Rather, the head was almost always tilted to one side, the brow furrowed, and the face frozen into a sad, confounded expression. The first glimpse of a smile came in a photo taken around age 12 in which she was holding five parrots on her arms, shoulders and head. She always loved birds and sometimes thought that if she hadn't been a person, she would have liked to be a bird. It was no wonder, then, that she had many times experienced herself flying at night, intoxicated by the beauty of the earth beneath her. She often wished she could experience such natural intoxication with life in her waking hours. She recalled rare occasions in her early teens when she was alone in her room feeling an almost miraculous love for all of life while at the same time realizing how difficult it was to be with those around her. She sometimes attempted to unravel the dilemma of these feelings but without success. But she was grateful for these moments of embrace because she intuitively knew it meant something within her was alive.

She always felt rather melancholy. Her father called it moodiness and denounced it. Her first therapist called it a sign of repressed homosexuality and taunted her about it. I think it was a natural result of her longing for physical and emotional contact and nourishment. As the years unfolded, she turned more and more inward, finding her solace in a fantasy world that provided what her immediate reality lacked. But, realizing that this fantasy would not suddenly become reality, she placed her hope in a God who would one day—even if in another realm—fulfill her deepest longings. And so her deepest longing came to be desiring union with this God.

This God also became the depository of an ethical code—social and sexual—that became her guiding force and source of value. It was adopted—unconsciously—primarily as a protective measure and while it certainly fulfilled that task, it also bounded her world and curtailed her experience. Basically, her life became one of either trying to gain in the present what had been ungiven in infancy and childhood or projecting into a future

where all would be spiritually fulfilled. The present moment remained mostly lost in past or future, holding little significance of its own unless, as would occasionally happen, it became filled with some unexpected meaning. Such moments were cherished and relived within herself. They, too, meant something within was alive.

This woman's life is a good example of Ken Wilber's theories of boundaries and what he calls the "Pre/Trans Fallacy." Wilber outlines his thoughts on boundaries primarily in two books: *Up From Eden* and *No Boundary*. The former seeks to explain the evolution of humanity in terms of the evolution of the individual. In other words, just as an infant ideally first experiences itself as one with its mother, so our first human ancestors first experienced themselves as one with their environment. Problems began to arise when they realized they were different from their environment. Differentiation translated into separation, which escalated into us versus it or them. Thus were boundaries formed externally. As the awareness of humankind grew, this sense of separation spread between humans themselves and then within individuals themselves: mind versus body, ego versus psyche, etc., until humankind became divided and bounded within and without, and the path of evolution became undoing or dissolving the boundaries through recognizing the Oneness of all creation and that differentiation does not make one adversaries.

Wilber says that human evolution followed individual evolution but as the separations multiplied on a human scale they also more readily multiplied individually until today separation between parent and child can occur so quickly, as in the example above. With the erection of boundaries there arose fear of death. Somehow, according to Wilber's synopsis, separation came to mean the threat of death, and humankind began and has continued to devise schemes to avoid, or at least put off, death. For primitive humans, death daily presented itself as a threat from the environment—attack by wild animals—or the simple lack of food. As humans began gathering and sharing food supplies and learned to protect themselves from their environment, the threat of death was put off a bit. Down through the ages, we have acquired many techniques for lengthening life—or putting off death.

However, on an internal level, it is a battle against ourselves, for the flip side of fear of death is fear of life, and this fear of life has turned us against our own organisms—which just proves that war with any part of life is really war with ourselves and will ultimately evolve into just that. What is without is within and vice versa. The two cannot be separated. And so it occurs to me that this fear of death is enhanced by feelings of deadness already existent within contemporary humankind, for so many of our extravagant exploitations are surely largely an attempt to dispel the deadness within.

Wilber does not explain the why of this, but somehow at the beginning of human life when humankind first differentiated itself from its environment the perception was that the environment had somehow pulled away (abandonment) and turned against humans (the threat of extinction). Whatever set this negative mechanism in motion, it seems clear that humankind lost its ground of beingness in that instant and has been struggling ever since to regain it. While it is tragic—so it seems to me—that the path of evolution included total abandonment of self and one’s organism, perhaps it was the only path that could throw humankind most deeply back into the ground of its own being to discover itself wholly.

In the example of the woman presented above we can see how this scenario immediately took effect upon birth. After nine months of being at least physically one with its environment in the womb, this organism was thrust into separation (abandonment) and a lack of responsiveness that surely aroused fears of death at whatever level an infant experiences that fear. The core energetic theory of characterological development separates issues of existence and abandonment, putting the origins of the former within the first six months of life and the origins of the latter immediately after between roughly six to eighteen months. According to this theory, the arousal of these two issues leads to the development of the schizoid and oral character defense systems respectively. There are three other major character structures whose etiology is farther along in the developmental scale. Although there are rarely pure characterological types and most people are a combination of two or more, it is very common to find people with both schizoid and oral defenses. After reading

Wilber, my conclusion is that this is because the origin of these two is really the same. Stephen Johnson in his book *Characterological Transformation* calls the schizoid structure the hated child and the oral structure the abandoned child. Is it possible to be hated without also being abandoned? I think not. And both hatred and abandonment mean one thing to an infant—threat of extinction. So the root of both schizoid and oral defenses lies in the existential dilemma hatred and abandonment foster upon the newborn. As in Wilber's evolutionary scheme, it begins as a struggle with (separation from) its environment but gradually becomes an internal battle to survive the self-hatred and self-abandonment into which it is transformed in order to preserve some form of existence.

Now what happens with both of these characterological structures is that they begin closing themselves down because at such a ripe young age there is no way the organism can deal with the tremendous feelings these fears and threats arouse. So an infant in such a situation is at once at war with its environment and with itself. Unfortunately, since it perceives that it is more threatening to be out of harmony with its environment, it becomes mostly inharmonious with itself. In short, it loses (abandons) its self in an effort to save its life. But in doing this, it also loses its life because it shuts down the life force within which is the seat (and soul) of its power and uniqueness, of its connection to life and the universe. It does to itself what had been done to it—ah, how quickly we learn to conquer only to find later that there are no victors in battle, only sadder and poorer survivors. But then, survival has become the name of the game, hasn't it? Put in Wilber's terms, survival has become a substitute gratification for abundant life.

So the woman in our example was immediately thrown into a life of embattlement within herself. She could not bear the intense feelings in her body and so she abandoned her body, and with it her source of energy, her feelings, her sexuality. She set up her boundaries within and without. She neither let anything come in nor go out that seemed even remotely threatening to her. So she survived and she lived, but she had no life that was her own. And yet something within her remained alive and she secretly waited for the time when all that was repressed could be

expressed. Her hope for such an awakening became, as indicated above, all wrapped up in her spirituality and perceptions of God.

Which brings us to Wilber's pre/trans fallacy. By this Wilber means that there is confusion between a prepersonal stage of regression to an early stage of infantile fusion and a transpersonal state of spiritual union. This confusion often occurs because these stages may look externally similar, but in actuality they are very different. The former is a dependent (symbiotic) stage and the latter both autonomous and all-encompassing, for it manifests as a life lived in internal and external harmony. And in between there is an important personal stage which is often overlooked or skipped, as in the example above. Wilber's contention is that the personal stage cannot be skipped. One cannot go from infantile fusion to transpersonal union without going through the personal any more than one can move from childhood to adulthood without going through adolescence.

And yet this is exactly what our subject sought to do. She avoided as much as possible the personal because all of her withheld feelings were threatened on this level. Instead, she sought, particularly in therapy, to have her unmet infantile needs fulfilled. Before she began therapy—at age 40—she had blocked out most of these longings and had unconsciously sought their fulfillment vicariously through seeking out and joining religious communities that supported her defenses and were in alignment with her visions of God and the salvation that would one day be bestowed upon her. So her life was basically lived on a prepersonal level, with her aspirations lying in the transpersonal realm. But there was little desire for the personal because too much pain, unhappiness, and unfulfillment were too possible on that level. Better to remain withdrawn, concentrating on the one thing she believed without a doubt: that she would ultimately become one with God. This was her ultimate substitute gratification. Her whole prepersonal relationship to life was another, for she did not yet realize that true gratification lie in expressing everything she was suppressing.

As her years of therapy unfolded, she began to be able to touch the intensity of her feelings more, to be aware of her body more, to open to her sexuality, and to experience God more as being within than without. She ultimately concluded that her salvation

and her riches lie within and that her path must be one of self discovery. She found this was easier contemplated than done. Oh, there were so many intense feelings inside, many of which she wanted little to do with because they conflicted with the self image she wanted. How difficult it is to be rid of concepts and just open to what is and let it be without judgements. She read about the Buddhist ideal of just letting what was happening (your feelings) happen and then let it pass. This seemed like an impossible task. How could one possibly just happen to notice that one was feeling intense anger, for example, breathe into the feelings, and then let go of them? But then one night she did it. She was in the midst of something when she received a phone call that evoked instant rage inside. She thought she would not get another thing done that night. But she sat there for a while, both feeling and noticing her anger and letting the pain and tears involved with it come, and then it passed and she went on with what she had been doing. This rather amazed her.

But by far the most difficult task seemed to be to let go of her prepersonal longings. Even after inwardly acknowledging that, yes, her therapist was right that holding her wouldn't solve the problem, the longing was still there as well as the rage that accompanied it. Even when she let herself engage more in the personal, the fulfillment she sought was often lacking. And most often the conflict she felt about it all was excruciating. Sometimes she wondered if she would ever truly go beyond the prepersonal enough for it not to be such a dominant backward pull in her life. More and more she longed to be in the present and struggled to stay there.

Gradually, she realized that her task was to become a welcome receptacle for her feelings—all of them—a container that would neither shatter from the intensity of these feelings nor suppress being filled to the brim with them. One day she sat with a friend listening to a song the friend had written. The friend's two young children danced nearby to the music. She was so moved by the song and the scene. She experienced her friend's soul. But as her emotions rose and tears came to her eyes, so did fear and the thought she couldn't let herself cry. How many times she had been told as child not to cry—now it was automatic to immediately want to turn off such emotions. A little later she looked at

her friend and felt so much love that she wanted to put her arms around her and say how much she loved her, but she became immobilized. As soon as she left her friend, she became so upset that she hadn't been able to let her feelings flow and express themselves.

Each night as she lay in bed she recalled the moment—during a meditation—when she had felt that deep within herself was the safest place in the world. She also thought about the dream that followed a month later:

I was up on a mountain, not at the top but pretty far up.

As I stepped onto a path, my foot hit something and I looked down to see a large pink rose which I at first thought was artificial but when I knelt to feel it, I discovered it was not only real but rooted right into the ground. The dirt was very soft and I easily pulled it up with its root. I walked forward a little, looking at the rose in wonder. Then I gazed up and to my right was a large tree with a broad trunk and thick roots going into the ground. Along these roots were more roses such as I held in my hand. "This is amazing. I've never seen roses growing on the ground like this before," I thought.

I walked passed the tree and looked down a long space of vibrant green grass with rows of tree on either side.

Beyond the green all was bright blue and I felt that I was looking at all the mornings of the world. I walked a good ways down on the grass, carrying my rose, sat down and opened a book that appeared out of nowhere. It was a book that someone had told me about. I read the first chapter and was enthusiastic with the contents, although I can't remember what it was about, except that the phrase 'all the mornings of the world' appeared in it. I put the book aside and looked down the mountain. At the bottom was a beach, which I had not seen before. I walked down to the beach, carrying my rose, and by the time I reached the beach I was an infant, a naked toddler.

The waves were very clear and high. I waded into them unafraid. I became aware of the presence of my parents although I did not see them. I could hear my mother's disapproving thoughts: "Now why is she

similar confoundedness and disapproval. Somehow, being aware of my parents' feelings didn't deter or affect me at all. I continued about my business, still holding my rose.

Then I turned and looked up the beach and felt that I was at the dawn of creation. Then, from somewhere within my subconscious, a telephone rang—one ring—and I awoke. I just lay there, being filled with my dream.

And as she lay there with these remembrances, she asked to be able to live from that safe place within herself and to manifest her dream: to be grounded in her beingness and spirituality and to not be moved by the currents surrounding her, for she always felt so affected by everything. For a long time this caused great upsetness with herself. Then she began to think that all these reactions were a necessary part of her unfolding, of coming out of the suffocation of her prepersonal experience and greeting the life that was in and around her. She discovered and meditated upon the words of Siddhartha:

I learned through my body and soul that it was necessary for me to sin, that I needed lust, that I had to strive for property and experience nausea and the depths of despair in order to learn not to resist them, in order to learn to love the world, and no longer compare it with some kind of imaginary world, some imaginary vision of perfection, but to leave it as it is, to love it, and be glad to belong to it.

This, she finally concluded, was the path she must embrace to unlock the true consciousness within. And thus is she currently engaged.

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## References

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