

TRANSPERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN CHILDHOOD

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For the most part models of human development which have arisen within transpersonal psychology have tended to assign childhood experience to the matrices of traditional Western developmental theorists such as Werner (1948), Sullivan (1953), Erikson (1963), Freud (1966), Arieti (1967), Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), Mahler (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975), Loevinger (1977) and Kohlberg (1981).

The list of transpersonal theorists who have applied non-transpersonal conceptualizations to childhood is a long and distinguished one. James, considered by some to have been the first transpersonal psychologist, studied religious experience in adulthood (1958) but conceived of the infant's perceptions as a "blooming buzzing confusion" (1983, p. 462). Jung valued certain aspects of the child's encounter with the infinite (to be discussed below) but generally saw true spiritual experience as something that occurred only during the second half of life (Jung, 1930/1960). He noted that "in the early years of life . . . at most there are islands of consciousness which are like single lamps or lighted objects in the far-flung darkness" (p. 390). Grof's research in LSD psychotherapy (1975) has placed childhood experience at the level of psychodynamic understanding (" . . . to a large extent in agreement with the basic concepts of classical psychoanalysis", p. 45) while designating as transpersonal those experiences which precede the birth event during regression. More recently, Wilber (1979, 1980a, 1981b) has described a comprehensive model of individual

*non-
transpersonal
conceptualiza-
tions of
childhood*

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development which includes transpersonal realms but which relegates childhood to "pre-personal" and "personal" (egoic) levels. Other theorists with transpersonal orientations who have conceived of developmental schemes which likewise exclusively or primarily utilize traditional Western developmental models in explaining childhood experience include Heard (1963), Maslow (1971), Gowan (1972), Rudhyar (1982), and Johnson (1983).

*childhood
as
emergence
from a
sea of
unconsciousness*

Most of the above writers share the view that childhood represents a time of emerging from an undifferentiated sea of unconsciousness on the way to developing an ego which can come to grips with the demands of societal realities. Transpersonal issues become a concern only when the individual has achieved a fully matured personality and begins to experience a need to transcend the limitations of personal boundaries. Contemporary transpersonal thinking has therefore often turned to ego psychology, cognitive psychology, and other non-transpersonal models of development for an accurate description of childhood processes. These contemporary Western psychologies have evolved sophisticated theoretical models of child development based upon exhaustive clinical and experimental data. Their research represents a formidable body of literature (a part of which has been summarized and synthesized by Wilber, 1980a).

The child clearly must develop ego structures. As pointed out by Meher Baba (cited in Wilber, 1980a):

The part played by the ego in human life may be compared with the function of the ballast in a ship. The ballast keeps the ship from too much oscillation; without it, the ship is likely to be too light and unsteady and in danger of being overturned (p, 56).

*minimizing
the
spiritual
dimension*

However, the efforts of the aforementioned theorists to ally themselves with the principles of ego psychology and other traditional developmental models where the child is concerned have tended to minimize the importance of spiritual dimensions within the child's being. At the same time, those who have argued for the possibility of transpersonal experience in childhood have generally not gone beyond the level of poetry and metaphor in elaborating their views (*see*, for example, Wordsworth, 1975; Traherne, 1965).

I would like to argue in this paper that transpersonal experiences *can* and *do* occur in some children just as they occur in some adults. These experiences can co-exist alongside of pre-personal and personal stages of development and can be

documented empirically and described theoretically in ways which are as sophisticated as the methods and theories of traditional child models or transpersonal adult models of development.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

The evidence for transpersonal experience in childhood comes from three basic sources: biographical and autobiographical material of extraordinary individuals; research studies examining contemporary adult memories of religious experience in childhood; and finally, reports of children concerning their inner spiritual lives.

The Lives of Extraordinary Individuals

Transpersonal experience is a common occurrence in the childhoods of individuals who, later on in life, have achieved spiritual greatness. The nineteenth-century Bengali saint Ramakrishna had his first experience of "spiritual ecstasy" at the age of six or seven:

*saints'
and
teachers'
childhood
experiences*

One day in June or July, when he was walking along a narrow path between paddy-fields, eating the puffed rice that he carried in a basket, he looked up at the sky and saw a beautiful, dark thundercloud. As it spread, rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes passed in front of it. The beauty of the contrast overwhelmed the boy. He fell to the ground, unconscious, and the puffed rice went in all directions. Some villagers found him and carried him home in their arms. Gadadhar said later that in that state he had experienced an indescribable joy (Nikhilananda, 1970, pp, 3-4).

Iyengar (1952) reported on the childhood spiritual practices of The Mother, chief disciple and successor to Sri Aurobindo:

She used to sit quiet in a small chair with a little back specially made by her parents for her, and she would experience as she meditated the descent of a great brilliant Light upon her head producing a turmoil inside her brain. She had the feeling that the Light was continually growing in length and size, and she wished it would possess her completely (p. 4).

In his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda (1969) told of being a child of eight stricken with a life-threatening disease. His mother implored him at bedside to gaze upon a picture of Lahiri Mayasaya, a spiritual master revered by their family:

I gazed at his photograph and saw there a blinding light, enveloping my body and the entire room. My nausea and other uncontrollable symptoms disappeared; I was well. At once I felt strong enough to bend over and touch Mother's feet in appreciation of her immeasurable faith in her guru (p. 10).

Other historical spiritual figures and mystics who had transpersonal experiences or displayed evidence of spiritual insight in childhood include: Jesus at twelve (Luke 2: 41-50), Dante at eight (Sayers, 1950), Khan at fourteen (de Jong-Keesing, 1974), Blake at eight (Gilchrist, 1973), Black Elk at nine (Neihardt, 1961), Gurdjieff (Bennett, 1973), Meher Baba (Hopkinson & Hopkinson, 1981), Blavatsky (Meade, 1980), Shankara (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1970), Krishnarnurti (Lutyens, 1975), and Boehme (1958).

Research Studies of Religious Experience

*systematic
survey
research
through
adult
memory*

Attempts to systematically research religious experience in childhood through adult memory are rare. However a few studies do exist which verify that the kind of experiences reported above do occur in a cross-section of the general population. The Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford England, conducted a survey which began with the placing of an ad in a public newspaper asking "all readers who felt that their lives had in any way been affected by some power beyond themselves" to write an account of their experience. Fifteen percent of the respondents referred back to childhood for their experiences. These individuals were then sent a questionnaire to complete and the results were tabulated and presented in a remarkable book entitled *The Original Vision* (Robinson, 1977). Some of the accounts are presented below:

The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was very young-s-between four and fiveyears old.... My mother and I were walking on a stretch of land in Pangbourne Berks, known locally as "the moors." As the sun declined and the slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground. . . . Suddenly I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells, appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded, appearing here and there as a shining focus of energy in that more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things, animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong, and utterly good and beneficent, The vision has never left me. It is as clear today as fifty

years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good (57-year-old female, pp. 32-3).

During the year when I was 8, . . . as I stood dressed to go out on one of those interminable and awful walks through the country lanes, I was actually thinking and considering my position, something like this-"Here am I, a little boy of *seven*; I wonder where I was eight years ago." At that tremendous thought I stood rooted to the carpet (remember I was alone in the room), with a wave of tremendous feeling sweeping over me. I suddenly felt old and aware of being somebody very ancient, weighed by Time, of almost unbeginning individuality. Eight years ago, thought I, why not eighty or eight hundred? I felt ancient and old and full of Time. Nowadays, of course, I cannot find the wording *to* state clearly what I mean. I remember it quite exactly, nevertheless (75-year-old male, p. JIS).

I was under a year old-and unable to talk or walk. I was crawling on the floor and sat up to listen to a record that was being played on the gramophone . . . I went into a trance state but much of it I remembered after. In trance I "touched Heaven"-I became aware of an absolute totality and the magnificence of the ordering power-also a complete oneness. I was God and Totality in that instant and knew all. As I came out of the trance, I was acutely aware of myself as an isolated part of the total that I had just been aware of. This trance is probably the greatest single experience of my life. It is extraordinarily difficult to describe and probably only lasted for seconds (47-year-old female, p. 116).

Similarly profound experiences were reported by Paffard (1973) in an English survey of transcendental childhood memories in a population of adolescents and young adults, and by Hollander (1982) in a survey of "unchurched" parents.

Child Reports

The final and perhaps most significant source of information concerning transpersonal experience in childhood comes from children themselves. Wickes (1963, 1966) noted some of the "big dreams" of children which suggest contact with a numinous or transpersonal source. For example, the following dream was reported by a small girl:

*direct
reports
from
children*

I was on a beach with my nurse, only she wasn't there. A big wave came in and I ran away. When I came back, there were lots and lots of things on the beach and lots and lots of starfish, but one starfish was a *blue* starfish and he had an eye right in the middle of him, and he looked at me and he knew me-me-myself, I mean, and he was my starfish because he knew me-myself. So I took him home. And then I woke up (Wickes, 1963, p. 83).

The starfish, a symbol of wholeness and colored the blue of spirituality, saw not merely "me" but "me-myself," indicating a deeper level of identity than the child's emerging ego structures. Peterson (1976) reports the following vision of a thirteen-year-old who was attending a summer camp in Pennsylvania:

.... [he] was meditating one day and suddenly had a vivid vision of the entire mystic scheme of creation, including seeing and feeling himself evolve his consciousness through a succession of physical forms beginning at the stone stage. Then he "saw" himself being reincarnated in human bodies countless times before beginning the journey back to the source of Ufe-God-through various stages of expanding consciousness. He said, however, that he was "blasted" out of the vision just as he was on the mountain top and about to lift his eyes up "to see God" (p. 317).

*near-death
experience*

Morse (1983) recently related a near-death experience of a seven-year-old girl from a Mormon background:

The patient said that the first memory she had of her near-drowning was "being in the water." A woman named Elizabeth appeared, and the tunnel became bright. The woman was tall, with bright yellow hair. Together they walked to heaven. She stated that "heaven was fun, it was bright and there were lots of flowers." She said that there was a border around heaven that she could not see past. She said that she met many people, including dead grandparents, her dead maternal aunt, and Heather and Melissa, two adults waiting to be reborn. She then met the "heavenly Father and Jesus," who asked her if she wanted to return to earth. She replied, "no," Elizabeth then asked her if she wanted to see her mother. She said "yes" and woke up in the hospital (p. 960),

While some of the child's experiences were in accord with her religious background and training, several other elements were not and seemed consonant with reports of adult near-death experiences as reported in the literature (Moody, 1975; Ring, 1980). Kubler-Ross (1983) noted that children with life-threatening illnesses can possess a deep awareness of death and what lies beyond the grave. Transpersonal symbols often appear in the artwork of these children (Simoneaux, 1984; Center for Attitudinal Healing, 1979).

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

The "varieties of religious experience" in childhood described above seem to go beyond existing models of religious development (Fowler, 1981; Goldman, 1965; Harms, 1944; Pitts, 1977) as well as other stage-specific models of child development in

Western psychology. Interestingly, the experiences seem to disregard age differences and developmental levels except in their ability to be communicated. Yet they *can* be explained utilizing many of the same concepts as those used to describe trans personal experience in adulthood. I would like to focus on three primary levels of interpretation: *psychological, meta-physical, and mythological.*

The Psychological Level

On a psychological level, these experiences might best be explained in Jungian terms as a manifestation of Self (Jung, 1959c) within the limited individuality of the child. Jung himself became aware of this possibility after examining certain "big dreams" of childhood similar to the dream cited above by Wickes. He noted that these dreams contained archetypal material which at first seemed to be reflections of the parental unconscious but which he later came to recognize as genuine experiences of the child's own Self (1928/74; 1938/39; 1961). This view was subsequently confirmed by clinical observations of analytical psychologists including Fordham (1969) who saw evidence of psychic wholeness in children's artwork, Kalff (1980), who observed in sandtray psychotherapy "how close the child's psyche is to spiritual and healing forces" (p. 65), and Wickes (1966) who commented:

*experiences
of the
child's
own
Self*

Experiences of timeless realities may come to the very young child As the child grows older, problems of the outer world press upon him. His ego must grow to meet the demands of greater consciousness and numinous experience may appear to be forgotten by the ego, but it is remembered by the self-that sage who from the beginning lives in the psyche of the child and speaks the defining word in times of peril (p, ix),

Psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965) would tend to describe these experiences as manifestations of the "higher self" or outpourings of the higher unconscious within the personal awareness of the child, Assagioli noted the possibility of this occurring within certain very gifted children:

Super-gifted children show at a very early age an interest in philosophical, moral, and spiritual subjects. They often possess real intuition and spiritual illumination (1960, p, 8).

Canfield and Klimek (1978) have utilized principles of psychosynthesis in helping normal populations of children establish contact with an "inner guide" or "wise person" representing their higher nature,

Wilber (1979, 1980a) has postulated the existence of an "emergent-unconscious" which contains all higher deep structures of the evolving individual consciousness yet to emerge as actualized developmental stages. For the child who in Wilber's model is at an early egoic level of development, the emergent-unconscious would contain all later egoic stages as well as transpersonal realms (subtle, causal, and ultimate). It is important to note that Wilber regards the "emergent-unconscious" as *potential* consciousness. However, his model provides a structural basis for the possibility of pre-adult transpersonal experience in the following passage: ". . . the subtle may emerge from the ground unconscious usually after adolescence. *but rarely before* [italics added]" (1979, pp. 16-17). It would seem that the cases reported in this paper are of this type.

experiences
of the
"open
ground"

A final psychological interpretation comes from Welwood's (1977a, 1977b) reinterpretation of Western models of the unconscious. Rather than regarding the unconscious as a "realm" or "place" experienced by an ego or observer, Welwood has sought to convey the idea that unconscious processes operate as "grounds" or "fields" that interact in flexible and dynamic ways with conscious processes of focalized awareness. The broadest layer of background awareness Welwood has termed "open space" or the "open ground": "pure, immediate presence before it becomes differentiated into any form of subject-object duality" (Welwood, 1977a, p. 17). Welwood has noted:

It seems that children, especially before the consolidation of their sense of personal identity, live closer to open space than adults in many ways. They change quite rapidly, incorporate all kinds of contradictions, and do not need a consistent *persona* to refer everything back to. They have frequent "lapses" into what appears to be "empty-mindedness," which might be called "spacing-in." The child's spacing in is different from distracted "spacing out" . . . in that the child is naturally close to an open ground, which gradually becomes more and more obstructed as he gets older" (Welwood, 1977b, p. 109).

It could be that many of the reports cited above were in fact experiences of the open ground or the somewhat less diffused transpersonal ground described by Welwood (1977a).

Each of these psychological perspectives are rooted in a view of the child as a being who is greater than simply the developing individuality defined by contemporary Western developmental psychology. While Western models conceive of the infant as a *tabula rasa* (behaviorism), a primitive bundle of instincts and urges (psychodynamic psychology), or a rudimentary col-

lection of simple sensori-motor structures (cognitive psychology), this more transpersonal perspective of child development conceives of the infant as developing within the context of a larger whole, which under certain circumstances the child is capable of perceiving.

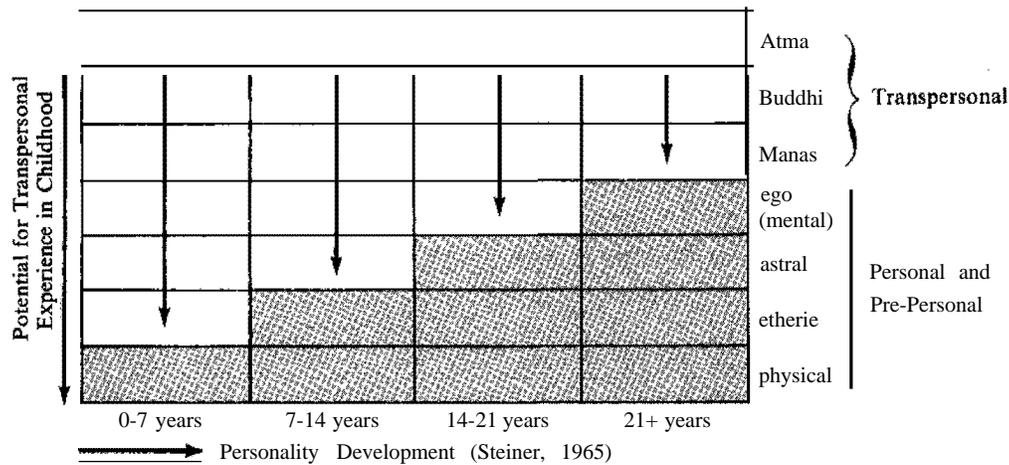
The Metaphysical Level

The psychological view finds its corresponding expression on a metaphysical level. In the metaphysical or esoteric perspective, the person is conceived of as possessing several interpenetrating vehicles, bodies, sheaths, or fields of energy (Lesley-Smith, 1975; Kunz & Peper, 1982). Table I shows the correspondence of terms between several esoteric and transpersonal psychologies with respect to these different levels.

*metaphysical
or
esoteric
perspectives*

Various esoteric writers have delineated the growth of the personality levels of self during the child's development into maturity (Bailey, 1954; Bendit & Bendit, 1977; Heindel, 1973; Steiner, 1965). Figure 1 illustrates the unfolding of these "lower vehicles" of the self allowing for the possibility of contact with the transpersonal or "higher vehicles" at any point during that process of development.

FIGURE 1



To a remarkable degree the unfoldment of personality corresponds to the stage-specific models of Western psychology (see, for example, Wilber's [1980a] charts which outline some of these correlations). However, what makes the metaphysical models different from traditional Western developmental maps are their recognition that the child brings into a lifetime not only the capacity for developing the "lower vehicles" but also

ADVAITA VEDANTA (Deutsch, 1969)	THEOSOPHY (Blavatsky, 1889)	NED-THEOSOPHY (Leadbeater, 1969)	ANTHROPOSOLOGY (Steiner, 1965)	AUROBINDO (Dowsett, 1980)	TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY (Wilber, 1980a)	TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY (Green & Green, 1971)
Brahman-Atman	Atman	mahaparanirvanic para-nirvanic	Spirit Man (Atma)	spiritual	ultimate	level 7
anandamayakosha	Buddhi	nirvanic buddhic	Life Self (Buddhi)		high causal	level 6
vijnanamayakosha	Manas	higher mental	Spirit Self (Manas)	psychic	low causal	level 5
					high subtle	intuitional
					low subtle	
					centaur	
manomayakosha	Kama-Rupa	lower mental	Ego	mental	mature ego	mental
pranamayakosha	Linga-Sarira	astral	astral	vital	middle egoic	emotional
	Prana	etheric double	etheric		membership	etheric physical
annamayakosha	Rupa or Sthula-Sarira	physical	physical	physical	axial-body	dense physical
					pleromatic	

TABLE I
CORRELATIONS OF LEVELS OF SELF BETWEEN ESTOERIC AND TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGIES

the potential for contacting the "higher vehicles" (which generally remain latent within the child's being).

The unscreened area in Figure 1 shows this potential for contact at each stage of the child's development. The transpersonal experiences presented in this paper may represent this kind of connection between the limited personality of the child and its own "higher self" as represented in subtle, causal, or ultimate levels of consciousness.

The Mythological Level

The final level of interpretation to be explored in this discussion of transpersonal experience in childhood is mythological in scope. It is based on what has come to be known as the *infant exile motif*. This motif finds its expression in myths which recount the births of children descended from nobility who are abandoned (thrown in bodies of water, left on deserted hillsides etc.) only to be found and adopted by animals or persons of humble origin and raised to maturity, at which time they discover their noble origins and fulfill their destiny as heroic figures. This theme is found in one form or another in thousands of myths worldwide (Campbell, 1974). Rank (1964) and Jung (1936/1971) noted that the motif occurs in the fantasies of disturbed young children,

*the
infant
exile
motif*

who, believing themselves to be infinitely finer and greater than their parents, imagine that they must actually be of noble, even divine, descent, but exiled or lost, and only adopted by this coarser pair that they have been taught to revere as parents (Campbell, 1914, p. 44).

Rank (1964) provided a psychoanalytic explanation which viewed the child as desiring his parents to become as they were during pre-Oedipal times "when his father still appeared to be the strongest and greatest man, and the mother seemed the dearest and most beautiful woman" (p. 71). Laing (1976) noted the similarities between this mythological motif and prenatal development. However it seems possible that this motif can be rooted, as well, in a deeper transpersonal conception of human origins. In this perspective, the memory of noble parentage is a remembrance of one's own spiritual nature, and the exile represents a "forgetting" of those divine origins. This process of spiritual exile is described in detail in Tibetan Buddhism which views the reincarnating individual as passing through three primary "bardos" (or transition states) between lifetimes. The first of these bardos is termed the Chikhai Bardo and includes a confrontation with The Clear Light of Pure Reality. The

Tibetan Book of the Dead (Evans- Wentz, 1960) serves as a guide to be read to a person shortly after physical death. When the Chikhai Bardo is confronted immediately following death, the transiting soul is instructed as follows:

O nobly-born (so-and-so) listen. Now thou art experiencing the Radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality. Recognize it. O nobly-born, thy present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or colour, naturally void, is the very Reality, the All-Good. Thine own intellect, which is now voidness, yet not to be regarded as of the voidness of nothingness, but as being the intellect itself, unobstructed, shining, thrilling, and blissful, is the *very consciousness*, the AU-good Buddha. . . (pp, 95-96).

*an
"exile
from
paradise"*

If this experience is not immediately grasped and identified with (thus releasing the soul from the wheel of births and deaths), a lesser Clear Light is encountered. Failing to catch hold of this secondary Light, the soul is blown by the "winds of karma" to each succeeding bardo until finally, failing to identify with each of these transitional stages, the soul finds itself back in a physical body. This process seems to describe a certain kind of "exile" from Paradise, where the noble parentage is in fact one's own Selfhood (Mother-Father). It may be that some of the experiences of "light" and insight described earlier in this paper are in a sense memories of those noble origins and represent once again a momentary flash (or memory) of the Clear Light of the Chikhai Bardo or related phenomena occurring during the transition between physical incarnations. It should be noted that the usual pattern is for the person to forget these experiences upon taking birth. However, the potential for remembrance is present in all humans (see Wilber, 1980a, pp. 175-77), and this potential seems to have been actualized at early developmental stages in the examples surveyed above.

IS CHILDHOOD REALLY TRANSPERSONAL?

Now I would like to turn to a discussion of certain objections which have been raised concerning childhood experience being compared to transpersonal states (Maslow, 1971; Wilber, 1980a, 1980b). First, it is important to note that I am not claiming *all* childhood experiences are transpersonal, only a certain as yet undefined portion of them in selected individuals. It seems important that we be able to make distinctions between different levels of experience in childhood just as we do with respect to the life span as a whole. This view implies that transpersonal experience is not to be solely limited to the

"farther reaches" of the chronological spectrum of individual development but that it be considered as something that can occur *at any time* during a human life. Edinger (1972) commented upon this point in responding to the traditional Jungian view that ego-Self separation occurs in childhood and ego-Self re-union (individuation) takes place during the second half of life:

This formula, although perhaps true as a broad generality, neglects many empirical observations made in child psychology, and in the psychotherapy of adults. . . . The process of alternation between ego-Self union and ego-Self separation seems to occur repeatedly throughout the life of the individual both in childhood and in maturity (p. 5).

It appears that the transpersonal experiences described above represent a very special kind of ego-Self integration early in the life span of the individual and that these experiences can co-exist alongside of other more limited (ego-Self separated) developmental states. In addition, as we shall see below, transpersonal childhood experiences are to be distinguished from the original ego-Self union described by Neumann (1970, 1973) and others.

The „Pre-Trans“ Fallacy and Transpersonal Childhood Experience

Wilber (1980b, after Wescott, 1972) has made a very important distinction between "pre-" and "trans-" experiences in human development. He was correct to point out the tendency among theorists to confuse the two experiences, either through reduction of transpersonal experiences to pre-personal realms (Freud, 1930/1961, pp. 64-73; Rizzuto, 1979) or the exalting of pre-personal states to transpersonal realms (Groddeck, 1967; Wilber, 1977, 1978, 1981a). However, it is important not to fall into another kind of confusion which fails to differentiate pre-personal unity from authentic transpersonal experience *within childhood* itself. By failing to make this important distinction, there is a danger that true spiritual experience in childhood will be reduced to pre-personal status, just as transpersonal experience at the adult level frequently has been infantilized by traditional Western psychology.

*pre-
personal
and
childhood
transpersonal
experience*

How then can we make a proper distinction between these two very different kinds of unitive experiences? It would seem best to begin with a discussion of two fundamental patterns, implicit within the growing child. Hodson (1981) alludes to this dichotomy in his summary of the theosophical view of the

nature of the child: "The child, like all human beings, is primarily dual: an immortal spiritual being in a mortal material body" (p. 98). Esoteric psychology speaks of two processes at work in the incarnation of an individual: the descent of the soul (a process governed by spiritual principles) and the preparation of the material body (a process governed by biological/ hereditary laws). It would seem that the experience of "pre-personal fusion" described by Neumann (1970) as the uroboros, by Mahler (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975) as normal autism, and by Piaget (cited in Wilber, 1980a) as the "material self," is in fact rooted in the material/ biological aspect of development. Jung (1959a) echoes Piaget in summarizing the nature of the psyche at this primitive level:

The deeper "layers" of the psyche lose their individual uniqueness as they retreat further and further into darkness. "Lower down," that is to say as they approach the autonomous functional systems, they become increasingly collective until they are universalized and extinguished in the body's materiality, i.e. in chemical substances. The body's carbon is simply carbon. Hence, "at bottom" the psyche is simply "world" (p, 173).

Jung refers here to the foundations of pre-personal consciousness (what Wilber has termed the pleromatic self, 1980a) which is essentially a *material* unity.

*memories
of
past
lives*

However, there is a second dimension to consciousness in infancy which seems to be rooted in a spiritual, not a material, unity. It is represented by that aspect of self referred to as "Soul" "Self" or "Spirit" in many esoteric and spiritual traditions. It is this dimension of self which it is said retains memories of past lives as acquired wisdom, experiences continuity between physical births, sees the Clear Light of the Chikhai Bard o, and /or encounters various other forms of prenatal phenomena. Khan (1971) referred to this aspect of consciousness in describing the experience of the new-born:

The infant that is born on earth brings with it the air of heaven. In its expression, in its smiles, even in its cry you hear the melody of the heavens. The Sufi point of view is that an infant is an exile from heaven, and that is why its first expression on earth is a cry (p, 25).

This "heavenly" or spiritual consciousness becomes veiled or forgotten as it is embedded within material form during incarnation (the initially undifferentiated physical matter of its own body and the body of the mother). The embedded consciousness (which is really a kind of unconsciousness) is the "pre-personal unity" described in the writings of Wilber, Neumann, Mahler and other Western developmental theorists.

On the other hand, the spiritual or heavenly consciousness which is forgotten and sometimes remembered in childhood, forms the basis for the authentic transpersonal experiences described in this paper.

Another way of looking at this dichotomy is in terms of an evolutionic/involution model of individual human development such as that described by Wilber (1980a). In this perspective, evolution describes the journey of the child *from the body up* and the subsequent engagement of the child with that materiality through the processes of ego development, adaptation to society, and the gradual unfoldment of emotional, mental, and spiritual forces within the context of that material/cultural matrix. Involution, on the other hand, describes the journey of the child *from the spirit down*, in terms of an underlying unity with Self. Western developmental psychology has generally been concerned exclusively with the evolutionary aspects of child development, whereas the involutory dimensions of child development have been suggested by the kinds of experiences presented in this paper. The evolutionary journey of the child has its origins in the pre-personal; whereas the involutory journey finds its source in the transpersonal. The evolutionary starting place of the child has been described by Neumann, Mahler and Freud, while the involutory starting place has been suggested by Wordsworth, Traherne; and Khan.

a
journey
from
the
spirit
down

One frequently cited objection to comparing childhood experience with transpersonal states is that children cannot transcend what they have never possessed. This argument implies that one must have a personality before one can transcend it. Maslow (1971) suggested that the child,

. . . is innocent because he is ignorant. This is very, very different from the "second innocence" or the "second naivete," as I have called it, of the wise, self-actualizing, old adult who knows the whole of the Dsrealm, the whole of the world, all its vices, its contentions. poverties. quarrels, and tears. and yet is able to rise above them, and to have the unitive consciousness in which he is able to see the B-realm, to see the beauty of the whole cosmos, in the midst of all vices, contentions, tears. and quarrels (p. 256).

The difficulty with this position is that it is based on a conception of childhood similar to the *tabula rasa* image of Locke and the behaviorists. This view implies that the child comes into life empty of experience, and in the course of life acquires those experiences necessary for later transcendence. It ignores a fundamental principle of child development which has long been recognized by many Eastern traditions: that the child comes into life with a rich storehouse of innate knowledge

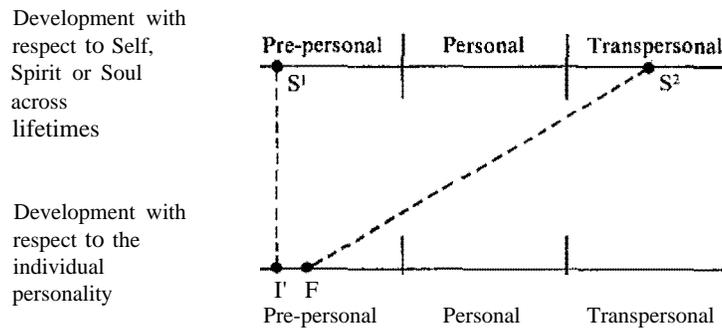
which may be the result of having experienced previous lifetimes or existences (see, for example, Trungpa, 1971, for a description of the selection of Tibetan lamas in infancy which is based on this belief). Western psychology has been slow to accommodate this perspective. Jung was one of the first Western researchers to intuit this view when he noted:

The pre-conscious psyche—for example, that of a new-born infant—is not an empty vessel into which, under favorable conditions, practically anything can be poured. On the contrary, it is a tremendously complicated, sharply defined individual entity which appears indeterminate to us only because we cannot see it directly. But the moment the first visible manifestations of psychic life begin to appear, one would have to be blind not to recognize their individual character, that is, the unique personality behind them (1959b, p. 77).

*sophisticated
consciousness
before
birth*

More recently, psychologists and psychiatrists have accumulated clinical data which supports the existence of a sophisticated consciousness before, during, and shortly after birth (Chamberlain, 1982, 1983; Verny, 1981; Wambach, 1979; Shettles & Rorvik, 1983). Stevenson (1966, 1975, 1977a, 1977b, 1980, 1983) has gone even further to suggest that some children retain memories of a previous physical existence. Stevenson has interviewed children in several countries around the world who have reported memories of a past lifetime. He has then sought to corroborate their stories through exhaustive investigative research. His findings lend credence to the idea that children, although new to this lifetime, are old with respect to a broader developmental spectrum. In this view, certain children would qualify as having authentic transpersonal experience on the basis of having acquired access to transpersonal levels of development in the course of previous lifetimes. Such a perspective requires a reconceptualization of human development to account for the possibility of authentic transpersonal experience in childhood. Figure 2 suggests one way this might be done.

FIGURE 2



In this diagram, Wilber's life cycle (1980a) has been simplified into its three primary stages—pre-personal (subconsciousness), personal (ego-consciousness), and transpersonal (superconsciousness). Development is portrayed as a linear process since transpersonal stages do not change back into pre-personal stages upon completion of the "cycle." The bottom horizontal line represents the individual developmental model adapted from Wilber. The top horizontal line indicates the more global evolution of the "Self," "Spirit" or "Soul" across several lifetimes or existences. It should be noted here that reincarnation is by no means the only way of accounting for this broader developmental spectrum; this spectrum could also very well describe a person's alignment or openness to his or her own deeper Self without reference to any previous existence. However, in the discussion which follows, the reincarnation hypothesis will be utilized as an aid in facilitating an exposition of the relationship between "soul" or "self" levels and "personality" levels. S¹ and S² represent individual Souls with respect to their alignment in this broader sense. I¹ and I² represent those same souls with respect to their incarnation into specific lifetimes as individual personalities. In this diagram, S¹ has just begun its journey in human form whereas S² is a very old Soul who has traversed the successive stages of human development and achieved transpersonal levels of experience over the course of many lifetimes. The dotted lines describe the incarnation of each Soul into a specific lifetime. Whereas individual Souls can be placed at any stage depending on their level of evolution/involution, *all* Souls must and do begin at the pre-personal level with respect to an individual lifetime. In the cases cited, I¹ will have very little chance of gaining access to the transpersonal during pre-personal or personal stages of any given lifetime. I² on the other hand will have a much greater chance of experiencing transpersonal levels during pre-personal and personal stages of development in a specific lifetime, since pre-personal and personal levels have already been navigated and the transpersonal level has already been consciously experienced in previous lives. This scheme provides the beginnings of a developmental basis for transpersonal experience in childhood which answers the objections of theorists who claim that the child has nothing to transcend.

*beginning
Souls
and
old
Souls*

A final objection to comparing childhood experience with the more mature mystical states of adulthood concerns the quality of those respective experiences. In this view, it is argued that the saint or sage is able to perceive higher levels of reality on a continuous basis, in a way which is integrated with all previous levels, and frequently in such a way that it can be articulated to others. The child on the other hand, if experiencing higher

*variability
in the
integration
of
transpersonal
experiences*

states at all. does so only for brief periods of time. in ways which are frequently not integrated with the rest of his or her primitive personality, and in a manner which cannot be easily communicated to others. Although these distinctions seem to be generally accurate. it would appear that even here there may be examples of children who have experienced transpersonal levels continuously and in a totally integrated fashion (for example, perhaps certain child avatars). This point, however, must not be taken as an argument against children having transpersonal experiences, only that their experiences are not exactly like those of fully illumined saints and sages. There are many adults who have had transpersonal experiences which were transient, difficult to integrate, and hard to articulate. Bucke (1969). James (1958), and Underhill (1955) have described several instances of mystical experience in adulthood bearing these characteristics. Many of the childhood experiences related in this paper compare very favorably in essential details with the kinds of experiences described in those works. At the same time, some of the childhood experiences described in this paper *were* well articulated (*e.g.* the child's dream), and many of the experiences, although not immediately integrated, *became* integrated in the course of the individual's lifetime. An example of this is found in Wickes' (1966) account of a "big dream";

Such a dream came to a three-year-old child and lived on in the psyche of an old, old woman until it blossomed into a faith by which, in her old age, she lived; a faith in life itself, to which she sought to give testimony, She did not tell the dream; she knew that her life must be a revelation of its truth if she would give testimony to its reality. if it were to live.... All the details are forgotten. Only the final picture remains clear. "I am in a high meadow. unknown yet strangely familiar. In its center is Behemoth: huge, terrifying. evil. By his side, unafraid and rooted in its own serenity, is a single bluet, that smallest flower of meadow or woodland, tiny, fragile, perfect in its four-petaled innocence To the child become an old, old woman who still held the dream in remembrance. it became a symbol of the faith by which she lived (pp. 257-58).

This dream seems to have come from a place outside of the child's tiny ego structures. It inspired and informed early as well as later stages of development. Although the context within which the image was held changed continuously and the image's meaning deepened with the development of personality, the image itself did not change and continued to hold its original numinosity over the years. It is in this sense that transpersonal childhood experience can be compared to the more mature mystical states of adulthood: the contexts are different, yet many of the child's transcendent experiences

would seem to stem from the same origins, flow from the same higher vehicles of the Soul, or Self, and emerge from the same transpersonal well-springs as those of the more mature spiritual individual.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Many issues remain to be explored with respect to transpersonal experience in childhood. For one, it is presently unclear how frequently these experiences occur in the general population. Because there are no clear maps for making sense out of transpersonal childhood experiences, it seems quite likely that when these experiences *do* occur, they are ignored, reduced, or even suppressed by parents, teachers, and other adults. This issue is complicated by the fact that there are many different kinds of transpersonal experiences, and it has yet to be decided how these various experiences are to be differentiated from one another at the childhood level (and from various forms of pre-personal and personal experience). In addition, there exists a whole dimension of childhood phenomena which was left out of the present discussion: the realm of psychic experiences. There is a growing body of literature having to do with the child's experience of telepathy (Ehrenwald, 1978a; Schwartz, 1971), telekinesis (Ehrenwald, 1978b; Manning, 1975; Pearce, 1980) and clairvoyance (Peterson, 1974, 1975, 1976; Scott, 1971; Young, 1977). These phenomena seem to stem from a different level of being than the kinds of experiences reported in the present study. They appear to be associated more with the "lower vehicles" of personality (especially the etheric and/ or astral levels of esoteric psychology or the pre-personal and personal levels of transpersonal psychology), particularly with regard to their connection to the parental and/ or collective unconscious. However, there may be significant overlapping between "psychic" and "spiritual" experience (as, for example, in the near-death experience described in this paper) which further research could help to articulate.

*no
clear
maps*

Ultimately, the recognition of authentic transpersonal experience in childhood promises to provide a whole new dimension to the field of child development, requiring a re-working of traditional development models to take account of these kinds of experiences in childhood. In a sense, this quest is not unlike Piaget's attempts to decipher the structure of our highest abstract intellect by following it back to its origins in infancy. So too, this adventure seeks to unravel the riddle of spiritual life by returning to its source within the mystery of the child's inner being.

*a new
dimension
in
child
development*

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