

THE OUTER MASTER AS THE INNER GUIDE: AUTONOMY AND AUTHORITY IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

Dick Anthony
Berkeley, California

INTRODUCTION

The following autobiographical interview was given by Dick Anthony as part of the visiting scholars program at the Center for the Study of New Religions at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. The Graduate Theological Union is an ecumenical divinity school which conducts joint Ph.D. programs in religion with the University of California at Berkeley. The Center for the Study of New Religions was established there as a non-partisan clearinghouse for research and scholarship upon non-traditional contemporary religions and consciousness groups. Jacob Needleman is its overall director and Dick Anthony was for several years its research director.

*a non-partisan
clearinghouse
for studying
contemporary
religions*

During the years 1980-1983 the Center's activities are centered around a visiting scholars program supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The purpose of the program is to bring leading scholars from a variety of disciplines to the Center for a year of residence, so that they can intensively explore scholarly issues involving new religious movements. Selected scholars from the San Francisco Bay area are also invited to participate in projects involving visiting scholars. In the 1980-81 academic year the visiting scholars program focused upon the issue of mental coercion (or "brainwashing") and spiritual authoritarianism in new religions. Visiting scholars that year included: Nevitt Sanford, a clinical psychologist who co-authored *The Authoritarian Personality*, a landmark study of "authoritarianism"; Benetta Jules-Rosette, an anthropologist

who is an expert on African religion; and Connie Jones, a sociologist of religion who has specialized in feminist religious concerns.

*defining the
legitimacy of
religious
authority*

As part of the year's activities Dick Anthony moderated a bi-weekly seminar which focused upon developing criteria which could aid prospective converts in discriminating legitimate spiritual authority from spiritual tyranny in new religious movements. A secondary focus of the seminar was the issue of the "reduction" of religious significance when studied from secular psychological and social science perspectives. To aid in the exploration of these themes a group of transpersonal psychologists were invited to participate in the seminar, along with representatives of more conventional "reductionistic" perspectives. The invited participants included both local and visiting scholars, and all were asked to write individual essays at the end of the seminar on the issue of criteria defining the nature and limits of legitimate religious authority. These essays were presented at a national conference on the topic of legitimate vs. illegitimate religious authority in new religious movements which was conducted by the Center for the Study of New Religions in June of 1981. (The conference was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.) Some of these papers and others presented at the conference are being collected into a book entitled *Conversion, Coercion and Commitment in New Religious Movements*, which is being edited by Dick Anthony, Jacob Needleman, and Thomas Robbins. It will be published by Crossroads in late 1982.

During much of the year the seminar's evening meeting was structured around a two-hour group interview of a representative of one or another new religion. At the end of the interview the guest would leave and another hour was spent in discussion of its contents by seminar participants. About two-thirds of the way through the year Dick Anthony conceived the idea of the seminar interviewing its own participants as a way of making the implicit reductionistic assumptions in the format more explicit. That is, when the seminar concentrated upon interviewing "outsiders" who were then asked to leave before their contributions were discussed, it was natural for semi-conscious reductionistic assumptions to be maximized because the person being interviewed had no chance to refute them. If the seminar were to interview its own participants, he reasoned, such biases would tend to be exposed. Consequently, he offered himself as the first interview subject under the proposed format, resulting in the following interview. (Subsequently, several other seminar participants allowed themselves to be interviewed also.

In retrospect, the new format was felt by most participants to have been quite valuable with respect to the goals of the seminar.)

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS SEMINAR-MARCH 26, 1981

Members Present:

Dick Anthony	Lewis Rambo
Arthur Deikrnan	Paul Reismann
Etta Deikrnan	Nevitt Sanford
Bruce Fireman	Frances Vaughan
Arthur Hastings	Roger Walsh
Connie Jones	John Welwood
Michael Murphy	Philip Zimbardo

Members Absent:

Claudio Naranjo	Jacob Needleman
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Dick Anthony: I had pursued various guests for this evening, and for one reason or another everybody sort of fell through. And while I was in pursuit, I talked to various people who are involved in this seminar, including John Welwood and Mike Murphy and Frances Vaughan and Jerry Needleman, Ken Wilber, and it started to seem like a consensus that an issue that's been latent should emerge at this point. While we were interviewing people from groups that are sort of generally regarded as problematic-s-e.g .. Synanon, the People's Temple, the Unification Church-people who are coming from a transpersonal perspective and people who are coming from a more secular perspective could make common cause fairly easily. Both groups of scholars tended to go towards somewhat reductionistic analyses. But now that we're starting to interview people from groups that are widely admired (by transpersonal people, at least), such as the San Francisco Zen Center or the Tibetan Buddhist groups, it seems that there is a lack of congruence between the types of analyses that are being offered by people from the transpersonal as opposed to the secular perspectives represented here. The transpersonal participants have tended to use concepts that are intrinsically religious in commenting on interviews of people from the latter (Zen, Tibetan, etc.) groups. You secular scholars, on the other hand, have tended to explain away the religious significance of these interviews as well by reference to social scientific or psychological concepts such as "anomie" or "authoritarianism."

*reductionism
in
transpersonal
and
secular
perspectives*

a
transpersonal
tradition
and an
invitation
to
analyze
it

Since one of the two primary functions of this seminar, as I had originally conceived of it, was to create a dialogue between people from transpersonal and secular reductionistic perspectives, I thought we might use this evening as a way of bringing those implicit models of human nature into a more active confrontation or dialogue. And, J conceived the idea of doing that by using myself as an interview subject, talking about my own relationship to a transpersonal tradition and a religious group, and to invite people to reduce my religious experience. In other words, I'll welcome reductionistic analyses, so don't be shy. In fact, I think the transpersonal people may want to do that as well, since even though I share a transpersonal orientation with the transpersonal people, it's notorious that transpersonal people don't always see each other's gurus as models of transpersonal consciousness, or each other's religious paths as exemplary of the ideal transpersonal orientation. So I'm assuming that I'll be throwing myself open to everybody, whatever your orientation, and the image just flashed before my mind of those clowns in the carnival, where you throw baseballs, and if you hit a bullseye, they get dunked in the water. I'm sure I'll get dunked a few times this evening, but I think I know how to swim, so I'm willing to chance it. What I'd like to do is just tell my tale, and then throw it open for discussion, and I'll respond to questions. Towards the last hour or so, I have some general points that I want to make, and I'll sort of reemerge as a member of the seminar, and try to reflect on my own experience as a social scientist. That is the plan.

Michael Murphy: That was a rather alarming introduction.

Anthony: I'm trying to create some drama.

Arthur Hastings: Can we take before and after pictures, as in Rolfing?

Anthony: Sure. Take a mental snapshot and then I'll begin. I'll start with the time when I was a 19-year-old college sophomore in 1957, having gone to the University of Michigan from a small town in Michigan. I was well indoctrinated in the conventional middle-class framework of assumptions, from a midwestern, Protestant family, fairly ordinary from most psychological or sociological perspectives. I was more or less committed to something that I think of now as American civil religion, and my family was a good" Republican one, as was every family I knew. At the university I suddenly was encountering a lot of surprising sort of attacks on

my frame of reference, religiously, politically, and philosophically. Eventually, some time during my sophomore year, I entered into a period of intense introspection. During this time I was examining the premises which seemed to structure my ego, psychologically, religiously, politically. Eventually I came to a phase where it seemed like everything was arbitrary. All the assumptions that I had made, which seemed so fundamental to my life, seemed extremely arbitrary; they were just matters of historical accident; I just happened to have been born in a particular place in a particular time. And it seemed even more that everything one could fasten onto as a set of beliefs to structure consciousness were themselves arbitrary. Arbitrariness seemed the essence of existence.

*a phase
where
everything
seemed
arbitrary*

I became a kind of existentialist, and in fact, I was reading a lot of existentialism at the time, and so I looked more and more closely at the assumptions that were structuring my consciousness, and eventually it started to seem as if even the use of language was extremely relative and arbitrary and that the meaning that was encoded in language was arbitrary, until finally it seemed that even the concept of personal identity, the notion of an "I" or an ego, was extremely arbitrary and built on sand. And then that came to a conclusion. My intense questioning seemed to be winding to an end. So I went through a month or two, or maybe three, where I was somewhat emotionally disoriented, but not so you could tell it by looking at me. My social adjustment was normal.

*examining
assumptions*

That summer, when I was working at a steel mill in Chicago, and walking down the street pondering these issues, I experienced a sudden transformation of everything. The arbitrariness of my existence disappeared and it seemed-it's hard to describe these experiences in language-but suddenly it seemed like I was part of an interconnected, harmonious, integrated world, which was transcendently valuable and meaningful, and in which my consciousness was just one aspect of the meaningful whole. It wasn't subtle; it was dramatic. One second I was in one world, and the next second I was in a transformed one. And, that sense of that harmoniously interconnected world that I was an aspect of stayed with me for a year or two.

*a
sudden
transformation*

When I thought what the difference was, one difference was that up until that moment in Chicago I had never been *present* anyplace. I had always either been regretting the past or anticipating the future. I had never been in the present. And when I came into the present, everything

seemed so rich with significance and meaning. Part of what going into the present in that way involved for me was repudiating the Protestant ethic, American civil religion, and a concern with personal success as the center of my existence. When I went into this other way of relating to the world, I lost interest in status concerns. When I went back to college, I dropped out of my college fraternity, and I was much more relaxed about getting good grades or being ambitious in a worldly sense.

Arthur Delkman: You said the experience lasted for about a year or so?

Anthony: About two years.

A. Deikman: At the same intensity?

Anthony: Yes. My ability to relate to other people empathically was incredibly improved; I was much more sensitively aware of other people's feelings and more tolerant, kind, altruistic, *etc.* It was quite a startling change; those who knew me were aware of it, and I was Likeda lot more. All in all, it looked like a good change, from a variety of perspectives ... from everybody's perspective except my father's. He was concerned that I wasn't so eager for success-he's a very success-oriented person. Anyway, after a couple of years, that state of awareness sort of faded away, much to my chagrin and surprise, because I thought it was a permanent state. I thought it was something that I had just fallen into and that it was mine; that somehow this was the truth, and the past was error, and once I saw my way through error, then why would I go back to error? But somehow, I lost the capacity to be in this state, and I switched my major and went into psychology, because I thought psychology might help me to know how to regain this state, and to keep it as a permanent state of awareness. That was my senior year, and I took all psychology courses and went off to graduate school in clinical psychology.

*attempts
to regain
awareness*

Well, obviously psychology let me down; it didn't help much. But, while I was there, in clinical psychology graduate school, I went into psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy. I thought I might as well clean up whatever pathology was there, and thereby I might get to the transcendence, It didn't work out that way. I was in that therapy for about four years. It did clean up some stuff, but it didn't get me anywhere near any kind of transcendent experience. After two or three years, I got involved with human potential kinds of activities, encounter groups, and psychedelic

drugs, and various kinds of meditation. I was very close at that time to a man named John Heider, and the two of us were the radicals in Duke University's clinical psychology graduate program, and he and I did various experiments on consciousness. It was fun and seemed interesting, and it promised some kind of transcendence, but nothing happened. I didn't go back into that former state, although I would get hints of it when I would take LSD or take part in some of these other activities, but it really didn't accomplish much.

After I'd been there for four or five years, friends of mine started getting into various kinds of mysticism. I was a skeptic about supernatural matters. I didn't believe in reincarnation or masters; I didn't believe that there were people who could manipulate karma. It sounded crazy to me. I did have a good friend who spent a weekend at a place called the Meher Baba Center, and he seemed to be in a good space when he came back. It didn't sound particularly attractive to me, but he did *really* seem to be in a good space. So, one weekend I was working on my Ph.D. dissertation, got extremely bored, and I decided to get out of town for a weekend. The way this Center was described made it seem like a good place to go for a kind of relief. It was 500 acres of virgin forest, with a fresh water lake, a few little cabins in the middle of the forest, and a mile of ocean beach, and not very many people went there. It was relatively deserted.

So, I called up to find out if I could go there for the weekend, and I could, and I went there, and I was the only person on the place. There were two elderly ladies who lived in a house on the edge of the 500 acres, who had lived in India with Meher Baba for a number of years, had come back and had started this center. In the middle of the 500 acres were all these little cabins, and they took me to a cabin, and left. Here I was in the middle of all these trees. It was great. I looked around, looked at different buildings, and decided it was a nice place. After a while I went into this one little cabin in which Meher Baba had held private interviews with his disciples when he was there; he had stayed at this center twice for two or three weeks at a time. When I went into that cabin, something started to happen. The next thing I knew, Meher Baba was present in the cabin. Now, I'll just describe this experience, talking in ordinary language, even though it seems bizarre to describe it in this way. It didn't seem bizarre to me at the time; it only seemed so afterwards.

*experiencing
Meher Baba's
, 'presence'
in the
cabin*

Somehow it didn't occur to me as being strange at the time. His, some presence, came into the cabin, which I somehow

*how to
regain
transcendence*

knew was Meher Baba. I didn't see anything visually, but there was some striking presence there, which started to talk to me. And, there was a feeling of great attractiveness and peacefulness and a sort of loving quality, and the discussion was somewhat philosophical. It had to do with what it was that I was looking for, how to regain transcendence, and how it related to various social concerns. He was very persuasive and convincing and it went on 15 to 20 minutes to a half hour, I'm not sure exactly.

But, no matter how persuasive the conversation seemed, it eventually occurred to me that these arguments he was using seemed to contain an implicit background assumption, which was that if you accepted them, you would also accept him as a master. That was so outlandish, compared to anything I could imagine myself doing, that I eventually thought, well, it doesn't matter how interesting these arguments are, I could never follow a master. It's crazy; I'm an existentialist.

*"I'm not
outside
of you"*

So I said to him, "Well, this is all very well, but I could never follow an external master." I was just going to terminate the "interview" and walk out at that point, and leave the center. Then he responded to me, "I'm not outside of you; I'm inside of you." When he said that phrase, there was an uprush of consciousness from some very deep level of my being. It seemed much deeper than I had ever felt before, and at that level of consciousness, everything seemed unified. The distinction between inner reality and outer reality fell away and separative consciousness seemed illusory. At that level, he seemed, with his presence, to be the reality that made that unity the truth. That phrase, "I'm not outside of you, I'm inside of you," dissolved the distinction between myself and himself, myself and all other selves in general. The notion of an external master was no longer meaningful; he didn't seem to be separate from myself, so my objections to following him seemed ridiculous. I was swept away into a feeling of love and reverence.

*"I'm inside
of you"*

So, this experience initiated another period of a kind of transformed consciousness, similar to the period which began in Chicago at age 19, but it seemed deeper and more real. I went back to Chapel Hill where I lived and where I was still in psychoanalytically oriented therapy. I discussed this experience with my therapist, who said it sounded crazy, and that it sounded like I was handling grandiosity. We discussed for two or three months whether it was crazy. She eventually said it was her conclusion that, whatever it was, I was in such good condition that it didn't make any

sense for me to be in therapy. All of my problems and anxieties that she had regarded as neurotic weren't present anymore, and there wasn't anything to work on in the therapy. We discontinued the therapy.

I felt good, even wonderful, for some period of time. But it was only for about six months. Then various things happened which produced a challenge to this state of consciousness, and it didn't survive the challenge. It turned out to be partially dependent upon various social supports which were taken away, among which I dropped out of graduate school, and as a result my parents got up-tight again. About a year later, Meher Baba died. I still remained committed to Meher Baba as a master even after this state of consciousness left. There remained a residue of conviction that this state of consciousness existed, and that my best chance of attaining it as a permanent state involved somehow focusing my meditation on Meher Baba. During his last year I planned to see him, but he wasn't allowing people to come to India. I did write him though, and he confirmed that the original experience had taken place, and said that he would continue to guide me as an internal master. I asked him various questions about what I should do with my life—should I be a psychologist, should I do this or that—and he said in letter reply that he wouldn't answer those questions directly in the letter, but rather he would continue to guide me as an internal master. He would answer that way.

*guidance
as an
internal
master*

I had felt guided since our original inner meeting, and this letter gave me greater confidence in that sense of inner contact with him. He had refused to let people come to India to see him for about ten years before he died, and this was during that period. He was in seclusion, as it was called, with just a small number of intimate disciples; he didn't see other people at all. It was rumored that he was going to break the seclusion at any moment, and in fact he did schedule a time when people would come to meet him, called *darshan*, mass darshan, where his followers could come from the West.

I made plane reservations, and I was ready to go, as were various friends, when he died. This was in 1969. After he died, some disciples decided to hold the darshan as if he hadn't died. Various cryptic things he had said before he died made people think that he was going to make his presence available to people, even though he was no longer in the body. So, I went to India, not knowing what to expect, and not expecting anything very much.

*a journey
to India*

But there was an increased sense of contact with him, and of his being present among us. It was light, and joyous, and satisfying. We were only supposed to stay for ten days, and after six or seven days, we went way out in the barren Indian countryside, where Meher Baba's tomb was. There were these simple kind of humble buildings where he had lived most of the time. We were there just to visit, to see what it looked like. I didn't expect much from the tomb because I didn't think he was in the tomb in any real sense. People got in line, and filed into the tomb, and filed out. When it came my turn, I went into the tomb, and nothing special happened, and I came out. As I came out of the tomb and took a step or two, I suddenly fell to the ground in a very intense state of consciousness.

*a world
without
substance*

In this state of consciousness, there were three interconnected aspects that I was simultaneously aware of. One was a sort of divine wind, that was blowing through my consciousness from the back, somehow, and it had a sense of omnipotence and benevolence, perfect benevolence, and of being capable of blowing any obstacles away—it seemed totally powerful and totally benevolent at the same time. At the front of my consciousness—these terms seem weird, but that's how it seemed—all of the physical world seemed to have become totally without substance, and, to have only two dimensions. It had no real weight or substance. It was paper-thin, a mirage.

*the appearance
of omnipotent
benevolence*

And this divine wind and the mirage of the material world were interconnected, totally, such that everything that happened in the external world was totally determined by the divine wind, even though nothing was really happening in the external world. It had that kind of a paradoxical quality to it. Therefore, it was ridiculous to worry about anything that happened in the external world, because nothing was happening there anyway, and even the *appearance* of what was happening there was totally determined by omnipotent benevolence. This seemed true in an absolute way.

Then the third focus of my awareness was my ordinary consciousness, which is the one I'm in right now. It was thrown into such relief by the total lifting of any kind of worry, that it went into a totally spasmodic sobbing, with relief. I mean, I hadn't known I'd been worrying about anything, but it turned out that my whole normal consciousness was totally determined by worry, as it seemed, and that when it suddenly stopped worrying, it just became massive sobbing. This wasn't unhappiness at all; it was just the reverse.

So there I was, lying on the ground in the dust, outside this tomb, my body wracked with sobs. People were milling around me—and this is the oddest part: Nobody saw this happen. I was surrounded by a crowd of thirty or forty or fifty people, some of whom were walking on me and stepping on me. At one point, there was a lady standing on my hand, and I reached over and lifted her leg off, and she still didn't see me. It went on for quite some time. People were filing into the tomb, filing out of the tomb, stumbling over me as if I were a log or something, and nobody seemed to see me for 10 or 15 minutes.

*laying
sobbing
on the
ground*

One person, a close disciple of Meher Baba's, eventually did see me, came over, picked me up, and carried me over to a fountain and started washing my face with water. He started talking to me, and slowly, as I started attending to what he was saying, I came out of this state, whatever it was, and came back to some sort of normal state of consciousness, in which I was left with just *the* body, which had been wracked with sobs, which was very shaken, and would not go back into that tomb, not for love nor money. I associated what had happened with going into the tomb, and I wasn't anxious to repeat such a cosmic earthquake in the foundations of my awareness, at least until I had a chance to evaluate it.

So I didn't go back into the tomb again on that visit. However, thereafter I was again in an exalted sort of transcendent state for several years, eventually lost it again, and went back to India again. When I went into the tomb again, to see if it would happen again, nothing much happened.

At that time, I'd rejected psychology, psychotherapy, and human potential interests. I thought it was not interesting to me because I was now a spiritual aspirant. I was pursuing exalted states of consciousness. I was celibate, and became ascetic and lived very simply. This continued for five years or so after the experience at the tomb. But the last *two* or three of those years, my consciousness began to seem rather thin and uninteresting, not exalted at all, and my inner contact with Meher Baba seemed not so very lively or real.

*becoming a
spiritual
aspirant*

One weekend, on an impulse, I went to a Gestalt therapy weekend that a friend of mine was conducting. At that weekend, I was the first person to work in the "hot seat" (the person receiving the group's attention), and I popped open like a boil. Much personal, unfinished psychological business leapt into my consciousness. There were Oedipal dynamics in relation to my parents, suppressed sexuality,

anger, all kinds of things that I had not dealt with throughout this period of asceticism. It now became apparent that I needed to reconnect with these feelings in order to be a real person, and not a cardboard spiritual aspirant. It seemed relatively easy to do, and shortly after that I started spending a lot of time with a woman, Louise Barrie, to whom I am now married. I got interested in psychological orientations again, and did various kinds of therapy, among which were some body-oriented therapies.

*a
body-oriented
therapy*

About two or three years ago, I had some further dramatic experiences in a body-oriented setting, in which I deepened my capacity to be in touch with Meher Baba on an inner level. Again, I went into a period of relative transcendence, which has now somewhat faded. Now I have gone into private practice doing a type of body-oriented therapy, a type that I think of as transpersonal, I'm managing to stay in some kind of "flirtatious" relationship with this feeling of transcendence, partially by virtue of practicing this particular kind of therapy, which helps me to keep my own body relatively open. Well, I've skipped over a lot of my spiritual autobiography very lightly, but I wanted to hit the high points, 80 as to give us some personal data to use as the basis for reflection.

*four
models
of human
functioning*

The goal of this seminar, from my point of view, and what I'm really interested in, is distinguishing between four types of processes, or four models of human functioning, or four types of social organizations. One is conventional secular rationality, which I have talked about under the label of American civil religion. Another is a process of mystical transformation or transcendence to which esoteric religion is pointing. A third is false or inauthentic models of exoteric religiosity, or American civil religion, such as the People's Temple, or Synanon, or perhaps the Unification Church. The fourth state would be false or inauthentic models of mystical transformation or transcendence. I think we need to distinguish between these four different types of reality because an ideal of mystical consciousness may deviate from conventional consciousness in ways that may have some vague similarity to the ways that inauthentic civil religion, for instance, deviates from conventional reality.

Recently I was at a conference where anti-cult people were debating with other people who thought there was value in new religious movements, and one of the lawyers there told how he'd won a case concerning somebody who had been kidnapped and deprogrammed because the person had dropped out of medical school, and spent his time working

as a janitor and meditating under the influence of involvement in a new religious movement. That served as evidence in a court of law that this young person had been brainwashed by a cult into a mentally unbalanced state. In effect the court allowed the deprogramming because the person had deviated from the norm of ordinary consciousness, and supposedly had become mentally off in some way.

But how can we distinguish between socially unconventional behavior that is determined by the inappropriate influence of an illegitimate civil religious cult on the one hand, and that associated with authentic mystical awakening on the other? I, for instance, dropped out of graduate school shortly after my first contact with Meher Baba and spent a year writing mystical poetry and supporting myself working as a clerk in a bookstore. How could the outside observer distinguish between me and the person who the court removed from a cult because he had dropped out of medical school? I don't approve of the court having done it in this case either, by the way. I think the constitutional protection of freedom of religion should be pretty nearly absolute.

*distinguishing
between
authentic
mystical
awakening
and
unconventional
behavior*

I know of at least one case where a 30-year-old woman, a follower of Meher Baba, who was Livingand working on her own at a good job in New York City was kidnapped by a well-known deprogrammer. He attempted to deprogram her because her small-town Christian fundamentalist parents were frantically anxious to have her return to their own more restricted way of seeing the world. The problem of distinguishing between genuine transformation and some sort of socially influenced, religiously rationalized regression to a more primitive stage of ego functioning is very complex.

Even a genuine mystical opening is usually mixed with uncompleted neurotic elements which may interact with the mystical insights and produce problems, such as ego inflation for instance. My own therapist probably detected something of the sort when she accused me of grandiosity after my original inner meeting with Meher Baba. With respect to my own experience, it seems to me it is not so simple to know what part of it is genuinely mystical and what part of it just reflects my own mental pathology. When I look at my experience, it appears that I had not become totally self-actualized, eliminating my neurotic patterns and reaching a point at which I was no longer neurotic, thus becoming somebody who was in the process of being transformed. It didn't happen in neat stages, nor has it happened yet. I'm

still mundanely neurotic in various ways, but still think that I have had some contact with a form of experience which seems intrinsically valid to me and was not determined by my neurosis. It occurred independently of any neurosis, and can't be explained totally by reference to it. That's my argument.

Connie Jones: When you said that in the five years after the tomb experience, your internal relationship with Meher Baba changed, became less intense, would you explain what that ongoing internal relationship was?

*a sense of
inner
dialogue*

Anthony: At the time I originally had the experience in the cabin at the Meher Baba Center, there was an identification of Meher Baba's personality with a certain state of consciousness occurring in me. Since then I've come to identify meditation on the person of Meher Baba as continuing to evoke in me some version of that inner experience which I originally had. And I have a sense of a dialogue continuing to occur between me and this personality. Sometimes it's more vivid, sometimes less so. The way that I see myself as continuing on some kind of path, or involved in some process of transformation, is that I attempt to do things or conduct myself in such a way that this inner relationship continues to become more vivid. It feels to me that he's guiding me to go in a particular direction. I tend to think of my Lifeas being guided by an inner awareness of this person, who is simultaneously a kind of state of consciousness for me.

*effect of
intense
intellectual
activity*

But it waxes and it wanes. A year or two after I'd had that experience at the tomb, it started to wane, and then when I had the experience in the Gestalt therapy group, again it was very intense for about six months. When I started writing some very intellectual articles against deadlines, it started to wane again. For some reason, intense intellectual activity usually causes me to lose some of my contact with this state of consciousness. I might say here that it's relevant that my body had become more and more defective during that five-year period of asceticism. I developed muscular aches and pains and actually reached the point where I was almost crippled. I had extensive muscle tension in my back. My mother died of cancer during this period, and I was supposedly relating to it very spiritually. But when I went back into therapy, and particularly into the body-oriented therapy, I became conscious of this tremendous guilt, grief and sadness about my mother's death. Then the muscular tension and pain went away. In one of the therapy sessions I reexperienced the experience at the tomb in an extremely

vivid way, which ushered me into another year of relatively transcendent consciousness, during which I was very together and productive.

A. Deikman: Could you say more about the body therapy in which you are currently involved?

Anthony: Several years after I had that experience at the tomb, I went *into* therapy with a physical therapist in Oakland. She's in her mid-sixties and she's been doing a sort of experiential body work since she was trained as a young woman in Germany by a student of Else Gindler's. She has modified Gindler's approach and now does a form of therapy which involves gentle "hands-on" manipulation of the client's muscles while the therapist talks to the client about the images that emerge. As she does that, the therapist tends to affirm states of awareness which seem transcendent. She also works with the breath.

*a form of
experiential
body work*

I can't talk about it in too much detail, because it would take a long time. But anyway, it interested me, and I started training with her, to learn how to do it, and then after I had that experience, reliving the experience at the tomb, it seemed that I could do it, suddenly. And, for me, it's different than for her. I do something that's different than what she thinks of herself as doing. But what I do is that I'm conscious of energy flowing in me in a way that I wasn't conscious of before, and when I put my hands on somebody, I can feel the energy in them flowing, and where it's blocked in muscles that are tense, and somehow by letting the energy in me flow into my hands, I can relax the character armor or blocked muscles, and the energy flows in them and then they tend to become conscious of it and to have an experience of reintegration. I also discuss with them images, memories, feelings that emerge during this process. It sounds vague, but *it* (joes work after a fashion, much of the time.

*being
conscious
of energy
flowing*

*images,
memories, and
feelings
emerge*

As you recall, when I originally encountered Meher Baba, I repudiated my former interests in psychotherapy and human potential techniques: The state of awareness I had glimpsed through his intervention seemed to be very far beyond any that I had experienced through such means. Therefore, I thought for a time that transpersonal or human potential approaches and following Meher Baba were probably incompatible with each other. Involvement with such techniques might sidetrack one from the process of genuine awakening by draining off energy that could be better employed in drawing closer to the master.

*integrating
spiritual
intuition
and
mundane
emotional
needs*

Subsequent events showed that, in my case at least, the situation was not so clear-cut. When I repressed my mundane emotional needs in favor of my spiritual interests, I found that my inner awareness of Meher Baba began to lack vivacity. In my case, overly ascetic suppression of mundane emotion began to block my capacity for spiritual intuition as well. Subsequently I have worked on integrating the two realms rather than suppressing one in favor of the other. If I had a toothache, Meher Baba would probably recommend that I go to a dentist to get it repaired. Similarly, I now believe, if I have physical aches and pains which are caused by emotional blockage, Meher Baba would have me go to a body therapist (or some other kind) for aid in the process of emotional reintegration.

It has become an issue not of avoiding therapy because of higher spiritual concerns, as I formerly thought, but rather of being involved in it in a way which is in conformity with those concerns. As always, I go in the direction which seems to maximize my sense of inner contact with the divine beloved. In my case that has brought me back into the world of therapy, first as a client, now as a practitioner, which I had formerly rejected.

It might be different for different people, of course. One shouldn't exclusively equate the higher spiritual concern with a particular means that is aiding in its pursuit in a concrete instance. That would involve the sin of idolatry, that is, the identification of a concrete symbol of transcendence with ineffable transcendence itself. The concrete occasions aiding transcendence are myriad, but only the Avatar himself is invariably both concrete and transcendent, finite and infinite.

*transcendence
and the
effectiveness
of therapy*

In this connection it seems to me important to distinguish clearly between a transpersonal therapist and a transcendent master. I have come to believe that therapy that takes transcendence somehow into account can be more effective than secular psychotherapy even with respect to apparently mundane emotions. This is because all the impulse life is interconnected and at its deepest levels involves a striving for ultimacy. Emotion is more fully integrated therefore when this dimension is admitted into consciousness. From my point of view, the materialistic bias of secular psychotherapy involves systematic repression of this deeper level of symbolic apprehension.

This potential advantage of transpersonally oriented psychotherapy is negated, however, when the therapist who

has not himself achieved transcendent realization allows his clients to identify his personality with ineffable transcendence. This usually occurs because of some unconscious ego-inflation on the therapist's part which, in turn, may be based upon episodic spiritual experiences which are themselves quite genuine. Such mistaken identification of the concrete personality of the therapist with transcendence itself greatly complicates the therapeutic process. One of the most valuable goals of therapy is to invite ego regression and the consequent projection of unresolved dependency needs onto the therapist so that they can be worked through and transmuted. If the therapist allows himself to be seduced by such idealization into "playing the guru," such working through of the transference cannot occur.

*mis-identifying
the therapist's
concrete
personality*

Unfortunately, in my view, this problem is common in transpersonal and human potential contexts. The notion that emotional development and mystical transcendence are interconnected-the "One Quest" idea-has been accompanied too often by the notion that the transpersonal therapist and the spiritual master have the same roles to play. But only the "unattached" personality of the transcendentially realized master can safely be equated with transcendence itself. Only in this case do the symbol and its object become one.

When an unrealized therapist "plays the guru," the problem of idolatry occurs and the client mistakenly equates "attached" aspects of the therapist with ultimacy itself. He has no means of ascertaining which aspects of the therapist are developed and which undeveloped, and he ends up valuing as ultimacy that which is at least partially deluded and finite. He also projects infantile delusions of grandeur onto the therapist, thus vicariously satisfying them with the therapist's covert encouragement, all the while believing that he is humbly abandoning ego-attachments thereby. He then develops ego-defenses around the relationship to the therapist which becomes a symbiotic partnership in selfishness. That relationship which should aid in liberation from attachment to the concrete becomes itself the greatest focus of such attachment. That person who should fend off the client's attachment by rejecting it on behalf of ultimacy instead may seize onto such attachments either by not denying them or by claiming to be ultimacy personified. I have seen such nearly inextricable transference situations develop with some frequency and have seen much trauma and harm occur to even sophisticated individuals thereby-harm to guru-therapists as well as clients.

*mistaking
attachment
for
ultimacy*

*warding of
mistaken
idealizations*

It seems to me that my relationship with Meher Baba helps me avoid this situation to some extent at least. The glimpses of transcendence which he has given me undoubtedly help me to recognize and support such openings in my clients. Yet my awareness of his perfection helps to remind me of my own imperfection and helps me to ward off the mistaken idealization of my own personality by clients. And Meher Baba's assertion that his present manifestation as Meher Baba is merely one of the Avatar's guises prevents me from placing imputations of exclusivity or uniqueness on my own relationship to him and thus helps me to avoid subtler pseudo-humble self-idealization as well.

At this point, at any rate, doing therapy is for me one of the best avenues of feeling close to Meher Baba, whom I believe is the Avatar and thus a perfect synthesis of a finite symbol of ultimacy with ultimacy itself. For this reason I am spending more and more time in my private practice and less and less time in purely academic pursuits.

Frances Vaughan: I'd like to know more about the original motivation for the period of asceticism you were involved in.

*changes
in sexual
behavior*

Anthony: Part of the motivation was a reaction against a former period of casual sexual experimentation. At least, my period of sexual celibacy resulted from such a reaction. After I started following Meher Baba, I was still somewhat relaxed about sexual matters, but I began to become more aware that sleeping with women casually was in neither my nor their best interests. It started to seem alienating, inappropriate, and inconsistent with a sensitive appreciation of the complexity of human experience. I didn't know anybody that I wanted to be married to, however, at that time. So I decided slowly, over a period of a couple of years, that it would be better not to have sex unless I met somebody I did want to be married to. Moreover, this decision conformed to Meher Baba's written statements on the issue of sex in which he recommends either monogamy or celibacy.

In looking back, I can see that I was toying with the notion that I had somehow transcended sexuality and that celibacy rather than monogamy would be my path. Meher Baba had said that at a certain stage in spiritual evolution there comes a time when spontaneous renunciation of sexuality occurs and you're no longer interested in it. I thought that perhaps I'd reached that stage... erroneously, as it turned out. I was just repressing my sexuality.

The other parts of the asceticism were connected to a longstanding preference for a somewhat simple lifestyle, especially since that original experience when I was 19. I was making my living, during this whole period, writing grants to study new religious movements. It offered a way to live simply. I'd write a grant and receive funding for three years. I didn't have to teach any classes, and didn't have any obligatory duties other than to write a couple of papers a year, and supposedly do participant observation study of religious movements, which just amounted to wandering around and talking to people once in a while. That went on for seven or eight years. I led a rather quiet existence compared to the more socially frenetic one I had been used to during my graduate school years. I had a good income. I had plenty of spare time. About this time I began to paint very intensively. I found that painting helped to put me in touch with this state of consciousness that I was seeking, so I spent most of my time painting.

*evolving
a simpler
lifestyle*

John Welwood: Were you involved in any Meher Baba groups?

Anthony: Yes. I always have been somewhat involved in Meher Baba groups, In Chapel Hill, I helped to start a little group, and then in New York, I went to a group when I moved up there, and in Berkeley I've been involved in a group called Meher Baba League. In fact, I'm the president of that group, and have been for a couple of years. Baba groups generally tend to be extremely egalitarian and democratically organized, and except for one little group I know of, "Baba lovers" by and large don't see themselves as being spiritually advanced relative to other people, nor to each other, so there's no hierarchy. Leaders of such groups do not see themselves as having spiritual authority of any sort. Their roles are administrative only. I feel quite comfortable about that.

*Meher Baba
groups*

Jones: Are your experiences common to other members of the group?

Anthony: Not so very common. Many members have some experience of inner contact with Baba, but usually of a less dramatic type. The dramatic experiences do occasionally occur, however. Baba lovers characteristically don't talk about having had mystical experiences and in fact tend to de-emphasize them, as Meher Baba did. When he was alive, he said that he occasionally gave people that type of experience, but that it wasn't to be regarded as indicating any type of spiritual advancement. In fact, the way he

describes it is that he does it to people who are tough nuts, are hard to reach in any other way. It's not something that is emphasized very much at all.

Welwood: Is there any practice involved?

*meditation
on the
master

a belie/
in the
active
intervention
a/the
master*

Anthony: There is no systematic practice which is recommended for everyone. We emphasize focusing on the personality of Meher Baba, who is regarded as a kind of eruption into *maya*, or pure God, somehow, such that meditation-but a kind of casual and unsystematic meditation-on the master is regarded as all that's necessary for spiritual progress to occur. I guess that the meditation common to most people involved is the practice of regarding their lives as being directly determined by Meher Baba's active intervention. There is a concept that Meher Baba is the "provisional ego," so that you regard everything that you do, either good or bad, as Meher Baba doing it through you. That's what most Baba lovers have in common. There are certain paradoxes or psychological dilemmas that result as one does that, and working through these dilemmas or paradoxes seems to be the essence of what people have in common who call themselves Baba lovers.

Paul Riesman: You've been describing experiences which certainly do contradict the "secular" religions. Could you say to what extent this has been a comfort to you?

Anthony: [like that question, because there is a part of me that's very attached to secular humanism and is extremely skeptical about the value of mystical experiences. For instance, after that first experience, which occurred when I was 19, had faded away, I became very skeptical about mysticism. After encountering Meher Baba a part of me was often saying, This is craziness. What delusional system have you allowed yourself to be indoctrinated into?

This tendency has faded with time and at this point is not a very prominent aspect of my awareness. My own experiences in relation to Meher Baba have been relatively private, and not socially created, so I've never thought of it as something that could be explained on the basis of brainwashing, or something like it, or even on the basis of various kinds of sociological conversion theories. After the first experience, I never discussed these experiences much with people who called themselves Baba lovers. I didn't discuss the first experience at the Meher Baba Center with them for three or four years. So, **if** it's craziness, it's the kind of craziness that I think of as an intrapsychic eruption of some

sort. And I've looked at it from every conceivable direction in the last 20 years or so. After about 14 years of being a Baba lover, and having had that other experience eight years before that, there's about 22 years to talk about. What's clear to me is that the deeper I get into this kind of experience, and the more securely that I find myself established in it, the better off I am, even from a secular humanist perspective. The last three or four years, say, from every direction I'm more healthy than I ever have been-I have a regular job, I'm married, I'm very productive, I'm socially responsible. I don't see anything to object to even from a secular humanist perspective.

A. Deikman: At one of our first meetings, you handed out an introductory paper you had published about why people join new religions. And I commented that I was struck that in all of the factors you listed you didn't list" ... because there's something real out there, that has some sense in it, that these people are moving towards." I mean, you gave every kind of sociological reason. Hearing all this, now I'm wondering what kind of compartmentalization you've set up. Why would you write something like that in which the issue of a transcendent reality doesn't appear?

Anthony: A good question. For the last ten years or so, I've been laying the groundwork for talking about the notion of transcendence and the notion of the evolution of consciousness and of culture to a new stage, a stage that I would call intuitive. I want to do this in a way that will be interesting to people other than those people who have themselves already become committed to seeking some kind of transpersonal awareness. It interests me to attempt to talk to secular humanists about transcendence. I've published something like forty papers as well as three books, that are now appearing, which all sort of establish a context for what I now want to say about contemporary possibilities for transcendence. I haven't said it yet, but now I'm starting to say it in what I'm writing right now. My future publications will say it very clearly, I hope.

*an evolution
of consciousness
and culture
to an
intuitive
stage*

A. Deikman: So you're establishing your credibility?

Anthony: It wasn't even primarily establishing credibility. It was thinking through certain problems myself in a clear enough way so that I felt that I could talk about how those problems interrelated to the issue of transcendence. For instance, the introduction to my book that you read (Robbins & Anthony, 1981) talks about the decline of civil religion in its relation to an emerging interest in various types of

new religious groups, including mystical groups. I believe that in my own case, various assumptions of the American civil religion were undermined in me by various intellectual and social currents, which are modernist currents, which have now become dominant in the culture. I believe that it's those currents which in fact have contributed to the interest in new religious movements, by undermining interest and commitment to that now obsolescent model of consciousness. I intend to talk about that in a lot more detail in future writings, but I don't at all regard what I've written thus far as false. Not at all. It's true.

Riesman: I think you've kind of slipped away a little bit from the question that I asked, that you were answering. You were saying how you approach certain things that the liberal humanists consider good. But, what about the underlying notion of reality? Would you say that you've really changed, or do you feel in two minds about this?

*the notion
of reality
underlying
secular
humanism*

Anthony: You could say I feel in two minds. First, I think the notion of reality that underlies secular humanism is a limited one, although it has some validity, particularly relative to pathological states. But it's somewhat limited. An analogy occurs to me. Newtonian physics is an accurate model of physical reality as far as it goes. At a state of development where all that there was to physics was mechanics, Newtonian physics seemed to be an absolutely true model of reality. But as physics evolved and relativity theory and quantum mechanics emerged, Newtonian physics came to seem to be just a special case, a kind of accident. It looks true only if you don't know a whole lot about subatomic physics or relativity theory. Similarly, the model of reality that secular humanism points to is both partially true and partially false in a way that's analogous to Newtonian mechanics. For instance, the ontological assumptions underlying contemporary secular humanism are historically relative. They result from a secularization of the Protestant ethic. Secular humanism has taken a model of human nature from the Protestant ethic which assumes that competition is inevitable, and is sort of the bottom line. The only reason that society isn't a war of all against all, to use Hobbes' terminology, is that people are socialized and learn certain restraints upon their competitive individuality. Supposedly they make a sort of grudging bargain with society so that society will give them some things they need. In return they will be less war-like and less competitive than they would by preference.

This being an uncomfortable bargain, the best that ordinary consciousness can hope for is a somewhat non-ecstatic, non-transcendent state. Freud's articulation of that particular model has been very influential, as have various sociological versions of it. Even people who think of themselves as having outgrown the supernaturalistic premises of the Protestant ethic and as having embraced a purely rational world view from my point of view are embracing the Protestant ethic in another, more intellectually acceptable form. This more intellectual form of the Protestant ethic is also somewhat arbitrary and incomplete.

On the other hand, what becomes apparent from a transcendently oriented frame of reference is that there's some benevolent process at work in the world. By coming into the present, one can start to live in an active relationship with it, such that one is not always trying to defer gratification because gratification is continuously available. From this perspective the model of deferring gratification as the basis of a healthy ego makes no sense, because the competition for a limited amount of gratification disappears. One can vicariously experience other people's gratification in such a way that one can be gratified with very little. Simple contact with other human beings is somehow ecstatically satisfying. The model of society which involves the competition of the many for a limited amount of material goods is seen as part of a socially conditioned illusion.

*deferred
and
vicariously
experienced
gratification*

I mean, people get socialized into the illusion that the only way that they can have value is to have some status position, and have a certain amount of material goods as the evidence of that position. Then material goods seem to become essential. It looks as if there's not enough to go around, and then it becomes very rational to compete and to have to defer gratification in order to be more effectively competitive. It's all an interconnected set of illusions there, which drop away almost totally just by having a glimpse of another way of being in the world.

*socially
conditioned
illusions*

Etta Deikman: I'd like you to clarify something because my memory and my information doesn't seem to jibe with yours. If you would say psychology or Freud, or nineteenth-century rationalism, I would agree with you, but not Protestantism. The Protestant ethic isn't what you're describing as far as I'm concerned. I mean, what I've learned of the Protestant ethic isn't what you describe. It started out as being a direct relationship to God. That's why it was a protest. There was certainly a work ethic, but not

one of "myself against the world and each person for himself," that we're basically evil, and things have to be delayed.

*the
Protestant
ethic*

Anthony: The concept I refer to is the Protestant ethic as Max Weber describes it in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. He argues that the Protestant ethic, as articulated when the Puritans came to seventeenth-century America, was an unstable point of view. I have some other reasons besides Max Weber's reasons why I think it was an unstable point of view. I think it was the triumph of sectarianism over the medieval model of reality, and I think of it as a stage on the way towards secularization, and I have an argument about why that's so, but it would take some time to discuss it. At any rate, the Puritan ethic interacted with utilitarianism in such a way that it evolved into what could be called the spirit of capitalism, or the success ethic. That synthesis between Protestantism and capitalism is what most sociologists mean by the Protestant ethic.

Bruce Fireman: Is the idea of ecstasy or gratification from contact with people, in contrast to competition with them, a central teaching of Meher Baba?

Anthony: Yes. The notion that we are all one, that there's an underlying unity of human consciousness which one can live in relationship to, is central. It is a view of humankind as evolving towards that state of consciousness individually; also, that society is evolving towards that state of consciousness as a cultural ideal. It also assumes that there's an obsolescent model of human consciousness, which is at the present time dropping away, which is the model that I have just sketched here, which I have called the model of secular rationality. Also it anticipates that there will be a cultural ideal of this sort of transcendental unity, which will become the dominant model for a while, a few hundred years, and then it will decline.

*a model
of
religious
evolution*

Meher Baba has articulated a model of religious evolution in which the Avatar appears in different guises such as that of Buddha, Christ, Mohammed or Krishna. A religion then forms around the image or symbol provided by this manifestation of transcendent reality, and the culture goes into a glorious period, where a sense of unity is experienced. Then there's a decline into a form of secular rationality in each of these civilizations, which is then eventually replaced by a new model of religious consciousness provided by an avataric manifestation. Each avataric appearance is accompanied by an unleashing of spiritual energy in the world such

that these supernatural notions seem to have some kind of existential meaning for a period of a few hundred years. Then that spiritual energy kind of drains out of the world and that results in the onset of a period of secular rationality. There are various degenerate religions along the way which signal the onset of such a period. I believe the Protestant ethic was such a degenerate semi-secularized religion. As I said earlier, another central aspect of Meher Baba's teachings includes the notion of cosmic unity as an underlying metaphysical reality which is available to consciousness under certain conditions.

Welwood: What's the role, in this system, of a spiritual master?

Anthony: I think it's interesting to think about what distinguishes a shallow, narcissistic version of mysticism from one which supports a real maturation of consciousness and how a master contributes to that. I think one difference between groups which are narcissistic and those which are deeply mystical is the way that they distinguish between exalted consciousness and mundane consciousness. From my point of view, a spiritual master, that is, somebody who's really attained transcendent consciousness, is not like others. He or she can be judged by extremely demanding criteria of human development and survive the judgment. People in movements which center around a master who can survive that kind of judgment are forced to realize that their own consciousness is extremely fallible and mundane, even if they've had little glimpses of transcendent consciousness. This prevents sliding into narcissistic self-involvement, which is at best stagnant and doesn't involve any kind of true growth.

*distinctions
between
narcissistic
and
deeply
mystical
groups*

Ne vltt Sanford: Earlier you practically urged someone to attempt a reductionistic explanation, and it probably could be done. I mean, I can make all sorts of comments about the first experience that you had in college. You know, it was as if all of a sudden you convinced yourself that your father's authority had been overthrown, or something of that kind. But the question I have is, suppose this had never happened. You could not then have had the experience with Baba when you were in North Carolina if you hadn't had the first experience. And you couldn't have had that first experience except for what you were hinting at, this revolt against the family unit in which you were involved in a traditional way. But does that make the experience of transcendence that you achieved any less valuable or interesting?

*comprehensive
knowing
that includes
secular
rationality*

Anthony: Well, that interpretation contradicts the felt sense of what the experience was in a way that seems to me to miss the point. I didn't find it congenial to explain it by reducing it to such mundane factors. Nor do others who have had similar experiences. Such explanations seem plausible only from an external perspective, rather than from the perspective provided by the experience itself. The experience feels like a more comprehensive knowing, rather than something that can be explained in terms of some sort of lack of knowing. In other words, it feels very conscious. It feels like it includes the previous state of secular rationality as a special case, and much more as well. Explanations of it in terms of some defect of secular rationality seem confused.

Sanford: How about saying that some people have a talent for this kind of thing, and others don't? I mean, I could never imagine myself having some of the experiences that you had.

Welwood: How do you regard it? Do you think of it as slightly aberrant, or

Sanford: Well, it certainly seems to be a very dramatic experience of a kind of conflict, which I should think is rather common. This pattern of going from acceptance on faith of the family values, ways and beliefs to relativism, to a very complete relativism, is kind of the norm in college, or it was in the '50s. For some, it's so much more dramatic.

Anthony: I don't think so. I know that's an explanation that might come to mind for somebody defending a secular rational viewpoint, yet experience is so tricky. It's very hard to develop criteria for evaluating it which are independent of the experience. There is a kind of notion that everything that isn't rational is mystical, that all direct experience involves the repudiation, falling away or letting go of a model of psychological reality based upon a combination of will power and rationality. Yet artists have commonly repudiated that model of human reality for two or three hundred years. Since the romantic poets, there's been a theme in literature and the other arts as well which pokes fun at a bourgeois rational model of reality, and holds out the notion that there is a transcendent state that can't be explained in secular rational terms. There has been a popularization of that point of view which expressed itself in the hippie movement in the '60s. It now has been partially absorbed by the culture as a whole, and has been expressed in many new religious movements. In one of my papers, I call it

"psychedelic utopianism," and in another of my papers I call it "one-level monism," It's a cheap form of mysticism which may involve psychological regression rather than transcendence, Yet I don't think that what happened to me was regressive. I think it involved a degree of genuine transcendence, I also think that there's a real distinction between transcendence and regression.

Sanford: Is genuine transcendence similar to what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus?

Anthony: I would argue that something did happen to Saul, and that it wasn't simply a loss of his faculty of rationality-it was something real, it was real transcendence,

Sanford: The question I have-I mean, Arthur suggested that one explanation of this is that you say it's true, you know, that that's the way things really are. But then I have the question of how alternative competing versions of transcendence get along with each other, Is there any competition among the Baba lovers and other people who have other gurus or masters? I mean, is there any argument at all as to whether my master can lick your master?

Fireman: Such as mine is the Avatar, and yours is less.

Anthony: One way to put it is to ask that if a thousand years from now all of world culture isn't centered around Meher Baba, or around his message as the central cultural influence, would I regard him as having been repudiated or proven to be a phony. Now, I have to say that the notion of Meher Baba as the Avatar, and this whole concern with cultural transformation and so on is a relatively small part of the experience for most Baba lovers. They tend not to be very interested at all in proselytization. In fact, they do no active proselytization whatsoever. The meetings are open; anybody can come, but people won't go out on the street and try to get you to come. And there's this notion that imperfect consciousness has no real rights, as far as affirming reality in any ultimate sense is concerned. In other words, Meher Baba says he's the Avatar, but my consciousness is very imperfect, so, what do I know? All I know is Meher Baba says he's the Avatar. I don't know he's the Avatar; if he is the Avatar, only he could know he was. What I know really is his impact upon my own consciousness. Based upon that, I have love and reverence for him and tend to accept what he says about his status as true. But I cannot really be said to know that it is true in the sense that he does,

*knowing
limited
by
imperfect
consciousness*

A person with unperfected consciousness cannot be said to know very much about it, really, in that objective sense.

Sanford: Isn't this outlook quite unique?

*confrontations
over
masters*

Anthony: No, there are other groups who think their leader is the Avatar, but since there is a provision that everything I know, I know imperfectly, and it always involves my interpretation of what Meher Baba has said anyway, it doesn't really bring me into confrontation with other people who think their master is the Avatar. It may bring them into a confrontation with me, and sometimes it does. But it doesn't start with me, and it doesn't produce tension in me,

Sanford: It could become a really serious question, I suppose, if Baba lovers believed he was the true master and all other masters were somehow false.

*beliefs
about
reality*

Anthony: It's not a serious question, but it's interesting why it isn't. You see, following Meher Baba does not involve belief in any serious way. There's a repudiation of the whole notion that reality is attained through having correct beliefs about reality, I mean, that's part of secular rationalism. This is a different framework. Here reality is attained through certain experiences or glimpses of higher states of reality, and you only have that reality while you're having that glimpse anyway, and belief isn't part or that in any serious way.

A. Delkrnan: But the basic thing asserted to be true, as it translates into belief systems, is pretty common to almost all the systems: the notion of a channel or access to a knowledge that isn't mediated by logic or reason, and doesn't have to be; the issue of unity, of a different time and scale and frame of reference; of something that goes to the higher level of evolution-this is just the basic view that's processed out in the regular system. There is no particular conflict at that level of belief systems, either. If you get down to who's the bigger guru, that's something of a peripheral issue.

Sanford: Well, it's a really marvelous idea. I mean, you couldn't possibly say, "Those guys can't get to heaven," could you? You know, people who have a different system,

Welwood: I think one of the most horrific things to secular rationality is the idea of obedience or devotion to a spiritual master. The idea of obedience to a master contradicts the

modern theme of the separative autonomy of the individual ego. Thus it flies in the face of secular rationality completely. I'm just wondering what is your experience of that, or your sense of devotion to a master.

Anthony: Most of my experience following Meher Baba has been since he died. However, when he was still in the body-while he was still alive-I asked him in my letter to tell me what to do and he refused. At least, he refused in the letter. He said he would guide me internally. And that was fairly typical of him. He didn't do a lot of external telling people what to do. But, there was the notion that if he did, that you would be better off to do it. There's this conception that he's the Avatar-he reads your past lives and your present state of karma; he knows what would be uniquely desirable for you to do at anyone point, so that if he was willing to suggest something for you, you would be a crazy fool not to do it. The people who lived with him on a day-to-day basis, the small number of people who were allowed to live with him, did obey him in that specific sense. Other followers who didn't live with him would have if they could have. So, for a certain lucky few, it came up as a daily issue. For most who followed him, it was more of a symbolic issue, such as: "I wish he would tell me what to do, because if he would, I would do it. I would accept it." And, I certainly go along with that. Of course he left discourses which express general spiritual principles, and his followers do their best to apply them in concrete situations, so this involves a kind of obedience, I suppose. Many experience some sort of inner guidance from him as I feel that I do, and this involves a sort of obedience as well.

*obedience to
and
guidance
from
a master*

We/wood: How do you feel about the general idea of devotion to a master?

Anthony: It's been a sticking point for me, because I've never liked doing what people told me to do. I've not gotten along well with authority figures, and it's been one of my social problems, to the extent that I've had any. But, once Meher Baba did that thing in the little cabin at Meher Spiritual Center, I felt differently. Now I try to figure out what he wants me to do. It's a constant theme in my life: What does he want me to do, what is it at every moment? You know.

*devotion
to a
master*

We/wood: How would you distinguish that from, say, Jim Jones' (People's Temple) followers saying the same thing. For instance, what about the man who passed the kidney

stones and believed that Jim Jones knew it, and must be God, and therefore, what he told him to do must be right?

Anthony: I think that Jim Jones pretended to be some kind of avatar, but he wasn't. It wasn't a good idea to do what he told you to, because he didn't know what was the right thing for you to do. There are more refined ways in which you could start to develop criteria for evaluating various "master's" and distinguishing those who seem wise from those who aren't, but that's a sort of gut-level determination.

We/wood: Is it your feeling that if one has a true spiritual master, there should be no personal resistance to being devoted to that person?

*determining
a perfect
master*

Anthony: Yes, once the master has survived the initial test, which Meher Baba says that it's appropriate to make. You should initially go through a period of trying to discredit the master every way that you can figure out. Finding that you can't do it, that he survives the test, that he's a perfect master, if you think he is, then you should obey him as someone who has gone through all of his personal karma and transcended it such that he's now a perfect embodiment of love in the world. If you decide that that is true of him, at that point you would be crazy not to do anything he told you to do, because his consciousness is perfected; yours isn't. That's the whole reason to have a master. The notion is that an ordinary person's consciousness is clouded by selfishness, by incompletely worked-through karma, in a sense, by not seeing things truly. The reason to have a master is to have someone who does see things truly, and-it even goes beyond that-who *is* truly, who acts truly, who embodies truth. When everything that you see about him is truth, the notion of doing what he tells you is the least of it. Even the way he moves his hand, you know, learning something from that. And, the way he shakes his head, the way he laughs, the little things that he says-all of that is something that you attempt to drink in, to get the perfume of it somehow.

Murphy: Dick, have you ever worried that you might be misinterpreting his instructions to you? As in the Zen stories, where the master is scolding the disciple and says, "No, that's not what I meant."

Anthony: Yes, I worry about it. But it seems that his instructions to me are themselves a sort of koan, actually. He phrased them as seven things which were individually numbered, one through seven. They're short, pithy little things.

Deikman: He sent these to you in the letter?

Anthony: Yes. Among those things were that he was happy with my love for him; that he sent his love and blessings to me, and he wanted me not to worry; and NOT was written in big capital letters. He wrote that he was pleased with my desire to spread his message of love; that he wanted me to solve my problems on my own, and he would guide me internally; that he wanted me to remember him wholeheartedly as often as possible, and come to love him more and more; and that there were no end to questions and answers. That was the last statement. It answered the end of my letter in which I said, I accept all of this, but I don't understand it all yet, and I assume you'll fill me in in time, or something like that. All those things he said in response to me were pointed responses to my tendency to constantly try to undermine my own intuitive experience by questioning it rationally, wondering whether I'm interpreting it correctly, an obsessive-compulsive doubting pattern that is a prominent aspect of my personality. He undermines my capacity to worry that I'm not interpreting him correctly, because he told me not to worry, and he told me he would guide me internally. And if he is who he says he is, then he is guiding me internally, and he is guiding me to think that he said he would guide me internally, and not to worry about it. Around and around and around it goes, and where it stops nobody knows.

*not
to
worry*

Arthur Hastings: In one sense, one might say that your allegiance to Meher Baba comes not through a devotion to him as a man, but rather because he is the focus of an experience of transcendence for you.

Anthony: There may be some truth in that.

Hastings: Does that suggest perhaps that your feeling that he's a true master may be a rationalization just so you can continue to get the experience via him? Where did the belief in him as a true master come from? Or is it simply inferred on the basis of the experience?

Anthony: It sounds a little strange to call it an inference that he's a true master, because the essence of the original experience was that he is the deepest level of my own consciousness. And since I define being a true master as somebody who is the deepest level of one's own consciousness, the experience was self-validating. It was what it was. That *was* the experience, that he was the true master. But the notion of him as an external master or somebody differ-

*the master
as the
deepest level
of
consciousness*

ent from myself is an illusion. Another way of putting it is that the deepest level of myself is a true master.

Frances Vaughan: Does your devotion to him, then, interfere with your acknowledgement of your own mastery?

Anthony: No. Not at all. I'm much more confident.

Vaughan: Does it facilitate the recognition of your own mastery? Or does it become dichotomized as being other than yourself?

*continuity
and
structure
for the
ego*

Anthony: The dichotomy is that *sometimes* I'm at my best and sometimes I'm not. I put a gold star beside that which I think I realize when I'm at my best, and continue to affirm that perspective, even when I'm not in touch with that state of consciousness in as vivid a way. It gives a certain continuity and structure to my ego. I mean, I think one danger of a shallow mysticism is impulsivity, a tendency to act out, a lack of structure for time, and for the person in time. This approach helps me to avoid being that way.

Sanford: Does it trouble you at all, Dick, that from the point of view of secular rationality it looks as if this happened by chance? You see, that it just so happened, that you heard about this place when you were at Chapel Hill. You know, it was like luck. Or is it you were being guided by Baba already to go to that place, where you had this experience, that you were ready for it. I mean, it was a case of chance and the prepared mind.

Hastings: The first one was even more by chance. Walking on the streets, and suddenly having this breakthrough with no figure of Meher Baba or anyone. So, you didn't work for it, you didn't prepare; how do we know that it wasn't something you ate that morning?

*overcoming
contingency
and
giving up
control*

Anthony: From the standpoint of secular rationality, the issue of contingency is an important issue. The quest for meaning within the rational framework is a quest to overcome contingency in a way, and to construct the just society and to acquire some kind of control over one's fate. It is having the interconnected controlled fate of the whole group follow some principle of justice. That is a question that would occur from that perspective. From within this other frame of reference, or this other state of consciousness, it doesn't seem terribly meaningful. Everything seems totally determined. Contingency doesn't exist. Everything seems totally determined by a benevolent and omnipotent force. The tendency to see things as contingent and requiring con-

trol to avoid arbitrariness and injustice seems like part of the state of consciousness that's transcended. This may sound callous and narcissistic. Yet the paradox is that the more nearly one's consciousness approximates the state I am describing, the more altruistic one seems to become, even by secular rationalist criteria.

Sanford: I don't understand that, but I assume everybody else does.

Murphy: Because so many people are concerned with the issue of contingency and fate-control, they've worked out these elaborate philosophies to decide how people at different stages of awareness should act in the world. Because they've had those moments of awareness of unity, the neo-Platonic philosophers worked on these hierarchies, which extended between the realm of complete unity on the one hand and the sensible realm on the other, and where you might be located. That was their solution-and there are many other solutions. But it is a big problem.

*stages of
awareness
and acting
in the
world*

Anthony: Weber pointed out, for instance, that most religions seek to solve that problem. Such solutions are called "theodicies." A theodicy is a way of explaining God's ways to man so that the problem of evil is dispensed with. The classic one in Eastern religions is the karma and reincarnation theodicy, which does explain it rationally, and which I agree with. For instance, my encounter with Meher Baba in this life may have been prepared for by former lifetimes of seeking such contact. And this explanation is supplemented, of course, by the notion of God's grace which descends as it will and can't be completely accounted for by rational principles.

Hastings: In the transpersonal realm one would say that your first experience was a natural experience, one that didn't necessarily connect with Meher Baba or anybody. There's a dimension or domain in which people have those kinds of experiences, It probably related to your earlier introspection and concern, which prepared you for letting go of a lot of material that would otherwise load your system and keep you enmeshed in this reality. It's a loading factor. But then, after one experience, you are in a sense more available, or more accessible. So that any channel then is more open for you-you're more drawn to it or you're more open to it, whether it's Meher Baba or possibly some other form. And you don't have to work for those experiences, necessarily. That probably relates to the concept of God's grace, as you say, which is part of a very long tradition. You know, you just had it. The experience was a transcendent

*being
accessible
and the
concept of
God's
grace*

one, so it transcends rational explanation also. So, whether it is the grace of God or not, that may just be another way of explaining it in some system. The only thing you can say is, yes, it grows, just like trees and plants grow.

*allowing
growth*

Vaughan: Not only does it grow, but there may be negative consequences from not allowing it to grow. In other words, if you attempt to shut it off and pathologize it, or deal with it in the way that you experienced in your original therapy, the possibility of its evolving further into a genuine transpersonal experience could be thwarted.

Anthony: Yes, I think that therapy was harmful to me from that point of view.

Sanford: Which therapy?

*self-imposed
asceticism*

Anthony: The psychoanalytically oriented therapy I want to come back to the use of the term "asceticism," because taking it in an extreme form, it might mean living in a cave or something. As Weber uses the term, and in Freud, too, there's the notion that the capacity to have control and to structure the ego in time involves the sublimation of sensuous appetites, in a partial form. It's important to submit yourself voluntarily to frustration, because according to Weber, this is how the modern ego evolves. It didn't exist in the middle ages. And according to other scholars, people were much *more* impulsive in the middle ages and had *to* have their behavior controlled by social constraints much more. The Protestant ethic involved a self-imposed asceticism which developed an ego which was capable of structuring itself in time. It seems *to* me that there is some kind of asceticism, a moderate form of asceticism, which is supported in many of the mystical groups that I admire.

A. Deikman: Could the term "self-control" substitute for asceticism?

*appropriate
sexuality*

Anthony: Perhaps. Take my example of evolving out of a stage of casual sexual experimentation. It was an important transition, and one that was supported by everything that I could learn that Meher Baba said about sex and the role of sex in human consciousness. I took it farther than was appropriate for me, given my state of development. I took it all the way to celibacy. But, Meher Baba has written discourses which say that chastity or the appropriate expression of committed sexuality is preferable from a mystical point of view to impulsive sexuality. We have several chapters in Meher Baba's discourses about why that is so, and it has to do with the development of consciousness. It's an

argument for a form of asceticism as being essential to a mystical aspirant.

Riesman: You've asked people to reduce what's happening to you to some other explanation. It might be helpful to turn it around and say, could a lot of people like you make a society?

Anthony: That's a good test.

Riesman: Is there a conflict between the requirements imposed by the fact of living in society and the kind of self-realization which you were talking about? Most people are simply not going to be able to do this. Not because they may lack the inner capacities, but because in order to make society work, they must refrain from doing it.

Anthony: I don't agree with that at all. I don't even see where you get that idea. For instance, Meher Baba almost always completely discouraged his followers from withdrawing from normal social commitments. Only the few people who actually lived with him were allowed to withdraw from conventional social roles. Yet they and Meher Baba himself spent a great deal of their time in charitable activities with the poor, lepers, the mentally ill, and so on. Everybody else had to go out and get a job and earn a living and satisfy the requirements of citizenship in a normally satisfactory way, and they all do it. I don't see the problem from that point of view.

*normal
social
commitments*

Riesman: But in those religious groups where the people do not depend upon one another economically, there is less likely to be corruption.

Anthony: Perhaps. But, of course, most Baba lovers, although not dependent on one another economically, are involved with each other in other ways. Three-fourths of my friends are Baba lovers; I have relationships that are rather intimate with them. You might say that the sharing of a framework of spiritual assumptions helps to promote intimacy and understanding, I'm not a loner. Yet there is the distinction of having a consciousness that's not totally dependent on social confirmation. That does seem to be a desirable tendency in a religious group—a certain balance between social involvement and individual autonomy. I'm quite comfortable with most Meher Baba groups from that point of view. I don't think most Meher Baba lovers are either dependent on each other or independent of conventional social confirmation in a way that makes them a poor citizen of society. I think that it would be a better society if

*balancing
social
involvement
and
individual
autonomy*

everybody were involved in a genuine mystical quest. not a worse one. I apologize for all this self-advertisement, but in the logic of the evening, I feel it is appropriate to present my experience and point of view, and I am very grateful for our time together. The next time we meet, someone else will have this opportunity.

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Requests for reprints to Dick Anthony, 814 Evelyn Ave., Albany, CA 94706.