

TRANSFORMATION AS PROCESS AND PARADOX

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ABSTRACT: Transformation happens; people change and grow. But how can this process be helped along? Exploring the paradox and process of transformation may offer some possibilities for an answer. The process of human transformation is activated by the force of creativity or creation and by an expansion of awareness. This article examines the following specific dynamics and activities involved in transformation: willingness and willfulness, the rhythm of shedding attachment, facing fear, developing discipline that leads to inner freedom, and transformation of self through an alteration of the experience of time and space.

To transform is to go beyond current form. Transformation manifests as both an outcome and a process; it is the push and the pulse that drives self-organization and self-transcendence, a movement pushing simultaneously toward increasing unity and toward diversity. In human development, it is the process by which we become more uniquely who we are, and through which we recognize how much we have in common with the universe and even recognize that, in a sense, we are the universe.

Transformation has two aspects. One is the activity of creation that produces new forms. For Whitehead (1929/1960), creation (and creativity) is the basic process of existence. In the context of human development, the activity of creation has been described as "personal reformation" (Swedenborg, 1985); as resurrection—a "migration into newness" (Pagels, 1979, p. 12)—by the Gnostic Christians; and as a simultaneous process of self-actualization and self-transcendence in which we actualize our ever-expanding potentials by transcending current self-structure (Maslow, 1968). Maslow's thinking is consistent with the notion that creation is an ever ongoing process, as evidenced by his preference for the active term "self-actualizing" over "self-actualization," which implies an end-state.

The other aspect of transformation is awareness. The creative process is also an opening up of consciousness, an adventure of "waking up," in Gurdjieff's words (Tart, 1987). According to Whitehead, awareness is coextensive with the creative process; even the simplest forms of existence "prehend," that is, manifest at least a glimmer of sentience. Each moment of transformation that goes beyond current form involves an expansion of awareness—to reveal more of "what truly exists" (Pagels, 1979, p. 12). In human development, awareness manifests as the freedom to consciously engage the process of transformation (Tagore, 1961).

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The dynamic of personal transformation creates energy that often catalyzes growth and expansion of awareness beyond the individual. Interdependence at all levels reminds us that social structures (e.g., slavery), cultural beliefs or values (e.g., prejudice), and consciousness of the universe as a whole may be changed as the ripple of individual transformation grows to a wave. Gandhi's personal awakening to injustice led to the transformation of a society. When a drunk driver killed one mother's child, she began an organization, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, that has helped to change attitudes and legislation about driving and sobriety. When enough women gained "liberation" individually, the momentum helped a great many more overcome gender oppression, and this has helped to shift oppression of the feminine even within the cultural unconscious.

THE DIALECTIC OF WILL AND WILLINGNESS

Transformation is a dialectic of expression and reception, contraction and expansion, self-separateness and union, autonomy and interconnection, intention and surrender, initiating and allowing, control and flow, structure and freedom. These are the yin and yang, or the masculine and feminine principles that underlie human growth throughout the life span. Their dynamic interplay gives transformation its power. For example, genuine creativity involves both perspiration (such as hard work, preparation, and intention) and inspiration (receptivity and communion with some vision). One moment or one era (Kegan, 1982) may be dominated by agency and independence and the next by receptivity and relationship. We *may* leap from one instant of willfulness (e.g., working toward some goal) to its opposite, willingness (e.g., letting go of our defensiveness and preconceptions in order to deeply commune with the moment). The energy for growth is activated by the dynamic interplay between these opposites.

Will involves agency, intention, direction, "doingness"; willingness consists of receptivity, openness, allowing. Will and willingness provide the active or functional principles of autonomy or agency on the one hand and receptivity on the other. Transformation involves both openness and engaging in a dialectic between will and willingness. Notice the dialectic between will and willingness happening even in the very description of the activity, at the meta-level, as it involves both openness and engagement. In the Christian context, for example, the paradox of effort versus grace is captured by Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits: "We must pray as if all depends on Divine Action, but labor as if all depended on our own effort" (May, 1982, p. 208). How do we balance these directives to both surrender (although prayer involves both intention and surrender) and labor, and how do we cultivate each in the service of transformation?

Will defines us as self-separate from our world. Its highest function comes from providing a sense of detachment, not only from the world but also from the contents of our own consciousness. Will involves the power of intention that throws (or holds back) our weight, our heart, and our effort, in one direction or another. However, the power of will alone is insufficient to sustain transformation; willingness is also necessary. Willingness or surrender says "yes" to belonging; it joins life as we give ourselves over to the flow of things and lean toward communion and unity. The wise use

of the will can move us to the edge of aligning with these currents, but joining with them occurs as a consequence of surrender. This has been described as aligning with *the* Tao, the life force, mystery, *God's* will, the divine will, transpersonal or universal will. It is explained with such paradoxical phrases as "choiceless willing" or is named as impersonal, implying not some cold sterile detachment, but a choice that takes us beyond the personal and individual. Eckhart (1981) says that while an individual may compel him or herself to love God, "detachment compels God to love me" (p, 286). This form of surrender is an act of faith and a statement of hope. It occurs out of both deep trust and sometimes out of great desperation, when we are brought to our knees to ask for help. In either case, we let go of control for a moment.

Seeing before believing is the credo of a rational-empirical orientation; however, at times it appears necessary to believe before we can see. More precisely, this means surrendering the rational attitude of disbelief and letting go of preconceived assumptions as to what would satisfy the demand of expectation for evidence or for whatever there is to see. This surrender builds a bridge between the known and the unknown, which allows us to cross into the not already known. Such a crossing is carried by faith, but a faith that does not involve the acceptance of some dogma. Instead, it involves a willingness to go past the limits of our knowing and enter the mystery: "Mystery sucks at our breath like a wind tunnel. Invites us into it. Let us pray and enter" (Richards, 1962/1989, p. 8). To let go your "will" is a paradoxical injunction. We are asked to muster our will to surrender this very will. We must be intentional as we move toward it, but we release control in the moment of surrender. Heidegger (1959/1966) referred to this as "releasement," and Taoism calls it "wuwei." It occurs subtly, unexpectedly, often with a "give." But our overly willful, in-control cultural norms often exclude the possibility of constructive surrender (May, 1982).

SHEDDING SKINS OF ATTACHMENT

Willingness is often associated with a kind of cleansing and clearing. Swedenborg describes the cleansing of his own mind in the following way, "This meant that my head was being put in order, and is actually being cleansed of all that might obstruct these thoughts" (Blackmer, 1991, p, 17). This is a profound reorganization of being, a clearing of the baggage obscuring the heart and mind. Underhill (1911/1961) describes this activity as self-knowledge or purgation, the second stage which precedes illumination in the typical development of the Christian mystics she studied (e.g., Teresa of Avila, Eckhart, Boehme, Dante). This cleansing and awareness is also described in her fourth stage, the "dark night of the soul" or surrender, which represents an even more profound purification leading to mystical union.

The normal rhythm of human development, including spiritual development, involves regularly shedding our snakeskins of knowledge, attachments, and identity to make room for expansion into a larger perspective and identity. Wisdom treats the self as a shell, a costume, a transitional object, the vehicle but not the driver, a lease, not a purchase for eternity. The mystics and many sages encourage us to not merely defend our position and our self but to regularly and naturally clean house, sloughing off rigid identity, reworking knowledge, refining intellect and understanding, transcending and including aspects of the self. (This includes developing

appropriate ego strength without ego fixation.) Transformation requires a conscious alignment with this rhythm, which is different from chronic fortification of the self.

Destruction, in the form of shedding old snakeskins, is necessary in any act of creation. The old way, form, limit, concept is often destroyed and used as rich compost for creation. In this sense, surrender is a mini-death. "Consult your death," Merton (1974) advises, because when we deeply experience impermanence we may stop wasting time defending and propping up the identity and "the stuff" (e.g., status and possessions) that inevitably passes away. Levoy (1997) writes:

We all owe God a death, Shakespeare once said, so we owe it to ourselves to practice for the occasion whenever possible. One way we do so is by tending to the small surrenders that come our way almost daily: letting go of a bad mood, making a choice or a compromise, forgiving someone, parting with fear and saying the truth in a moment, spending time with our children instead of working late again. (p. 11)

Paradoxically, when we face and accept our limitations, such as our mortality, the limits of our capabilities, our imperfection and fears, we open the possibility for transforming them. Instead of obstacles blocking change, limitations serve as portals to growth.

To effectively catalyze transformation, the act of letting go and the practice of openness is not only to some ascendant revelation but also to the shadow of our unconscious. As Jean Cocteau described it, "I do not believe that inspiration falls from heaven ... the poet is at the disposal of his night" (Ghiselin, 1952, p. 81). A willingness to explore the "night," the hidden recesses of self and shadow, serves transformation. Even when we do have a great vision or insight, Johnson (1993) suggests that its most important effect is actually to constellate the shadow, allowing us to recognize it more clearly.

FREEDOM AND DISCIPLINE

Transformation involves the growth of inner freedom, as ideas, actions, and self are liberated from present form. Emphasizing inner freedom does not underestimate the value of external freedom (i.e., rights and liberties). However, it suggests that the heart of transformation is an inner freedom that may, in turn, ripple toward the outside, into culture and society. Science frees us from some problems but it does not provide fulfillment; liberty allows us to choose our action as we wish, but it does not mean we choose wisely. In fact, sometimes we hear stories of radical freedom in the midst of complete external restriction. Aurobindo found inner freedom during his year in solitary confinement in the Alipore jail, Baha'u'llah essentially spent 2 years in a cave on his way to inner liberation, and St. Catherine cloistered herself in her room for 3 years. Some disciplines of growth are intentionally structured to evoke an opening or freeing of the inner space in part through controlling outer conditions. For example, a Zen Dai-sesshin provides nearly complete imposed external control and regulation:

The regulation of body and action ... is nearly complete. From wake up to bedtime, one's posture and movement is expected to conform to a meticulously prescribed form. Eyes are always to be downcast, hands in a prescribed mudra position when sitting, pressed together in gasho when bowing, and at all other times folded against the chest in sasho. The

silence is broken only by the sounds of various bells and clappers that announce the beginning or end of a sit, a walk.... The pace is fast thus curtailing the time left for hesitation or enactment of whatever feeling or attitudes may arise toward what is going on, (Puhakka, 1998,p, 144)

This structure intentionally limits one's typical choices so that one can then notice all the ego-generated resistance, compliance, or other reactions. This can lead to exposing and dissolving a fixated self (and even dissolve a fixation on no-self) that generates such reactions. In other words, "it gives us an opportunity to get unstuck" (Puhakka, 1998, p. 145). So, while sufficient external freedoms are crucial for daily life, it is inner freedom that serves as the axis of transformation.

Freedom, however, requires the kind of discipline that allows us to overcome habitual tendencies, and this includes the strength of the will. clarity of mind, and the power of critical dialogue. Goethe (1949) says, "whatever liberates our spirit without giving us mastery over ourselves is destructive" (p. 184). Transformation requires the tools and skills of discipline that enable us to avoid getting caught in our own little whirlpool of existence, so that we may live in the whole river of life. Inner freedom and self-discipline imply the assumption of responsibility for our own growth. The notion of change as only a possibility can delude us into believing that change is optional. We are a creative process in action; change and responsibility are inevitable. The opposite of responsibility is avoidance, which apathy and fear often engender. Our unwillingness to be honest with ourselves about the visions and shadows of our lives serves as the portent for the stagnation of person and society.

FACING FEAR

Freedom inevitably involves working directly with fear. Fear may engender anxiety and lead to avoidance of responsibility. Fear says you cannot trust what you do not know; it does not let love or joy guide you—you must, above all, remain self-protective] Fear says, "Stay low; grab what you can; do not take the risks necessary for understanding or freedom; fortify and concretize the small self at all costs." But fear cannot be ignored or swept away; it is a sign showing us where to pay attention. It gives itself away, saying "Look here, I have something for you. Here is where you need to look and work." This is a call that requires a response. Yet we do not often think to dialogue and partner with fear, but instead tend to resist and avoid it, creating a labyrinth of hiding places. The good news is that all that is necessary to confront fear is to be still and awake in the face of it. This means owning our shadow and taking back our projections. Easier said than done; but we may proceed bit by bit.

We are transformed, not by adopting attitudes toward ourselves but by bringing into center all the elements of our sensation and our thinking and our emotions and our will: all the realities of our bodies and our souls. All the dark void in us of our undiscovered selves, all the small light of our discovered being. All the drive of our hungers, and our fairest and blackest dreams. All, all the elements come into center, into union with *all* other elements. And in such a state they become quite different in function than when they are separated and segregated and discriminated between or against. (Richards, 1962/1989p. 36)

Practices such as mindfulness are so empowering to transformation because they provide a method for witnessing all these elements without being overly attached and therefore overwhelmed by them.

ALTERING TIME AND SPACE

Transformation involves freedom from time and space. Freedom involves living our questions more knowingly and honestly; we accomplish this by being present with them in the moment. As Whitehead (1929/1967) wrote, "The present contains all that there is. It is holy ground.... The communion of saints is a great and inspiring assemblage, but it has only one possible hall of meeting, and that is, the present" (p. 4). The nexus of the descent and ascent of spirit lies in this moment. So the invitation reads, "once an hour ask yourself softly, 'Am I here?' " (Rodegast & Stanton, 1989, p. 28).

For contemporary modern (rational-egoic) culture, time is viewed as continuous, sequential, quantifiable. From a rational-egoic perspective, time is generally seen as a sequential march into a future. However, the "magic" thinker (e.g., a 3-year-old), has little sense of clock time; a "mythic" point of view sees time in rhythms and cycles, such as another full moon, another spring, and so forth. Most of us "moderns," fixated in linear time, may notice when time, normally perceived as quantity or progression, is instead experienced as quality and intensity. We recognize how time becomes condensed in dreams; ecstatic and unitive events are represented as outside of time, timeless; important events seem to distort time. The cyclical or the linear nature of time does not disappear, our watches still work, the sun and the seasons still pass, but our anxiety in relation to our watches may shift. Rational modernist knowing looks to the future, the mythic world looks to the past, but in "time-freedom" (Gebser, 1949/1991) we live in the now. Time-freedom involves transparency of time, thereby unhitching us from its control. Perhaps this is what T. S. Eliot (1971) alludes to when he writes, "To be conscious is not to be in time" (p. 16). Essentially this means being present. Presence involves an ability to practice grateful satisfaction, "to absorb it [the world] thoroughly in each bite, each sip, each breath, each dose of fully experienced reality" (Needle, 1999, p. 11).

In addition to time-freedom, transformation also involves freedom from space or perspective. Modern transportation has made the world smaller (the other side of the planet can be reached in a few hours); satellite communication and the internet collapse space (and time) and create a virtual space; quantum processes, such as non-local influence, in which objects separated in space remain in some kind of connection or communication, alter the significance of space. Although these phenomena affect our relations with and presuppositions about the space around us, the space that is most profoundly transformed is the place where we stand and look from, i.e., our perspective. Typical rational-egoic consciousness allows events to happen "out there," in a space apart from us, as a subject views an object. When transformation occurs, there is a kind of freedom from spatial limitations or from fixity of perspective. When a belief gives way through an insight or an opening, the view changes. Usually, we experience this as an expansion or an opening up of awareness. Our self as a centerpoint of perspective becomes more fluid and may

seem to recede altogether. What we look at (e.g., a problem, the world) and the place where we look at it from alters in some way. We are freed from space as subject and object lose their fixity.

When individual development proceeds far enough—for example, beyond the limits of formal operational thinking—other kinds of space (perspective) open up. Gebser (1949/1991) describes postformal operational thought as integral-aperspectival; Wilber (1995) calls this vision-logic. With this capacity, perspective moves from a single vantage point to multiple perspectives, to aperspectival. We move from having a perspective to being able to move into many perspectives to holding multiple perspectives simultaneously to seeing through presuppositions to awareness. This involves an openness in which one is not located in a single or even in multiple locations, but perceives from within and without simultaneously. In this sense, "seeing" is not identification with the seer, or identification with the object (e.g., completely absorbed in emotions, or in dream content), but exists **in** the aperspectival space "between" the two. This becomes awareness rather than perspective (Gebser, 1949/1991; Puhakka, 2000; Wilber, 1995). The inherent nature of mind may require a subject-object perspective for daily operations; however, perspective can shift and open into aperspectival awareness. This begins simply by honoring diversity, "taking up space" in a variety of perspectives, and unpacking presuppositions of anyone position. Enduring aperspectival awareness may be reserved for a very few; however, momentary breakthroughs occur whenever we experience a freeing of perspective.

CONCLUSION

The question is not whether transformation happens; it does. We change and grow. Instead, a more salient question may be, How can we help it along? Exploring the process and paradox of transformation may offer some possibilities for an answer. Although an expanded awareness recognizes opposites as aspects of the same wave—an undivided unity-transformation—is engendered by holding and engaging the tension of the dialectic between masculine and feminine, agency and communion, will and willingness. Drawing from Ghandi's phrase, we might say that this dialectic is creatively practiced through experiments with truth which involve facing freedom, fear, and responsibility. In so doing, time, space, and self are transformed.

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