

On The Transpersonal and on Bowing

*“We have lost the path where the transpersonal is transparent”
Joseph Campbell*

On a hot day in Egypt in 1982 I made the long climb up to the main chamber of the Great Pyramid at Giza. Inside, there is nothing but stone walls and a solitary open stone sarcophagus. As soon as I arrived in the chamber I was transfixed by the atmosphere there. After a few minutes I was deeply immersed in the kind of ‘altered’ state that I knew to some degree from my meditative and creative practices, except that this was unusually intense. I closed my eyes and soon lost all sense of time and felt as if I was standing in the epicentre of an energy vortex. At one point a small group of other tourists arrived. They were irritated by the climb and within seconds of arriving one of the women proclaimed angrily “there’s nothing here” and stormed out, quickly followed by her companions.

This scenario perfectly captures a core aspect of our modern culture, in which the transpersonal is indeed so hidden and therefore so ‘untransparent’, that for most people it simply does not exist.

Yet every single culture throughout history has not only documented other dimensions of consciousness, but usually positions them as an essential of part of our nature, the loss of which is a portent of troubled times. Different names for these dimensions include the Tao, the Great Void, No-thing, Ein Sof, Wakantaka, and of course, God.

“There’s nothing here...”

That is really how it is as long as we forget that our intellectual, rational mind is supposed to be our *servant*, rather than the dominant function.

When we are constantly ‘mentalising’ the world, obsessively trying to analyse, understand and reduce everything to graspable certainties, even God, our nervous systems can never come into the kind of coherence and deeper settling in which the transpersonal naturally starts to become more transparent.

The Jewish mystical tradition gives us a powerful metaphor - when we look at a page in a book there are two parts to the page. One is the black letters, and one is the white page. Yet we have become completely fixated on the black letters. From an early age all our schooling conditions us towards this fixation, so how could it be otherwise?

Perhaps we need more than ever to remember Einstein’s famous dictum: “Our rational mind is a faithful servant, our intuitive mind is a sacred gift, but we have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift...”

Through our rational thinking we can NEVER access the transpersonal. We can think *about* it, but we will never feel its presence and its grace, because in the transpersonal domain there is really nothing to ‘understand’, and the more we try to analyse or rationalise, the further we push ourselves into exile from it.

Some people feel this exile as a kind of distant longing or ache, some sense that something is somehow missing, that there is an unnameable loss deep within. When we cannot bring this into

full awareness, we can easily fall into many kinds of unconscious ways to meet that ache, to fill that void. Power, status, money, sex, substances, dysfunctional relating become ways of compensating for the loss, but they will never come close to filling that gap.

The journey from the 'great forgetting' to the 'great remembering' requires us to engage two parallel paths. The first is a regular meditative practice that gradually deepens our access to the transpersonal. The second is a committed personal shadow work in which we work to integrate the unfelt, frozen layers of emotion that each of us carries within us in order that our nervous system can settle into a deeper coherence. These layers are rooted in our childhood, in our intergenerational lineages, and sometimes in more collective imprints.

Lastly, there is a threshold that is both one of the main relational responses to the transpersonal domain, and also one of the most challenging for our control based rational mind.

Because in the end, when the grace of the transpersonal descends, when we feel bathed in the deep Emptiness and spacious Silence of the Void, in the whisper of the Eternal, there is ultimately only one natural response - and that is to bow. Literally or metaphorically to bow our heads, to get down our knees, or to fully prostrate ourselves.

As people in every tradition have done for thousands of years....

Addendums

- 1) One of the ways many people come into contact with other dimensions of consciousness at least temporarily, and usually without understanding of a higher context, is what in sports is called 'the zone. For professional athletes this is a kind of holy grail, both for the exhilaration of the experience, and for the outstanding performance results it produces. In his 1979 book 'In The Zone' Michael Murphy documented hundreds of cases of sports practitioners experiencing altered states, many of which could easily be placed in the mystical category. These ranged from long distance swimmers floating along above the water, to football players who at times instantly knew the movements of every single player on the field, to weight-lifters who reported moments of seeing pure white light and said that these moments were what made all their painful training worthwhile.
- 2) With regards to 'God', we can note in passing that while many religious people had or have many experiences of the transpersonal, these land in their own developmental structure, which often sits on many layers of unintegrated personal and intergenerational trauma material. This brings consequences such as the need for many externally imposed rules and dogma, the escape into the 'spiritual' as a way of not feeling personal pain, as well as the descent into fundamentalism in which our 'God' is the only way.