

Rites of Passage in Our Times

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It seems that Rites of Passage have historically been very prominent in cultures and that in modern day, many people feel there are only vestiges left that are more of a celebration or party than a Rite of Passage (i.e., confirmations, Bar Mitzvahs, weddings, graduations, etc.). Many modern practitioners of Rites of Passage and some historians agree that this loss is a catastrophe for humanity.¹ In their attempt to reintroduce Rites of Passage into contemporary life, practitioners and researchers have turned to anthropological studies, to direct contact with traditional cultures, to distillations of transpersonal psychology, and to their own common sense and intuition. Something notable has occurred due to these endeavors and there has been a slow but steady resurgence of interest in Rites of Passage.² As many of the modern re-creations of Rites of Passage have been grass roots and highly diverse, a description of the basic tenets and elements of Rites of Passage seems called for. This paper is in response to that call and hopes to add to the dialogue by attempting to define Rites of Passage and to understand what they claim to accomplish. From this it follows that one would need to look at the basis of these claims and what, in fact, their value is.

In this paper I will discuss the nature of Rites of Passage inclusive of their

structure, intent and value. I will cite such diverse sources as researchers in Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, Carl Jung, physics, chemistry, spiritual philosophy, Rites of Passage practitioners, and holistic education, because it is they who often have most articulately expressed intents and values found in Rites of Passage. From this I will present the contention that, done correctly, Rites of Passage appear to create opportunities for the emergence of self-knowledge. I will further discuss how Rites of Passage have historically been used as a means of transitioning into new perspectives on life; perspectives that are taken to be more mature or more profound, and which are felt to be necessary for full human development. Many holistic educators, for example, as well as Rites of Passage practitioners, are of the opinion that direct experiential contact with a sense of the sacred is a positive response to mainstream education's neglect of this aspect of being human. I will conclude with references that the effect Rites of Passage make possible self-organization at greater levels of complexity.

Rather than resist the new growth and change in us, Rites of Passage have historically offered a way to encourage and mark change.³ Usually, the format of Rites of Passage tend to gather our closest community together to

recognize, be part of, and celebrate that growth.

Self-knowledge

It has been noted by many that as humans grow we need to ripen into new perspectives on life and new ways of being. Friends and trusted loved ones often continue to treat us as though no change has occurred which often makes change more difficult. Philosophers and psychologists have told us for centuries that we depend on the feedback of others to help us define our lives and ourselves. In most theories of social construction there is a common theme that, "we tell ourselves, or perhaps story ourselves, into being"⁴ in relationship with others. In *Growing Critical*, the well known developmental deconstructionist John Morss makes a strong case that humans create the reality they experience through social construction.⁵ He hearkens back to L. S. Vygotsky, who had stressed the social origins of thinking and the self.⁶ It is in relationship, Morss and Vygotsky posit, that we define who we are. What we are told about ourselves is often what we become. Although there undoubtedly is much truth in this, it leaves important questions unanswered. Is it only by social construction that we come to know who or what we are? Many proponents of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, holism, holistic education, and the many

spiritual traditions claim that there is an “inner” self or essence which needs to be discovered or uncovered, and only the social persona is socially constructed. Rites of Passage are intended to create opportunities for the emergence of self-knowledge of both a social and “inner essence” nature. Acknowledgement of the social aspect of self-knowledge in Rites of Passage is seen by the participation of family and community.

Built into the structure of Rites of Passage, and imbuing them with what proponents claim are extraordinary possibilities, is a face to face meeting with the unknown. This is so widely accepted by Rites of Passage facilitators that it would be very difficult to say that a Rite of Passage exists without some event intended to call forth this confrontation.⁷ For many contemporary western thinkers the expanded perspective and growth that are said to come from this confrontation are related to self-knowledge of the deeper aspects of the self and, from such knowledge, an openness to mystical or spiritual awareness.

Transpersonal Psychology claims that the whole psyche is involved with self-knowledge. It states that depicting the psyche as knowable by only parts of it (i.e., behavior, response to stimulus, social relationships, development, evolution, “higher” consciousness or pathology) is insufficient.⁸ Transpersonal psychology attempts to see the whole of it, which includes all the aspects and manifestations of the psyche as well as their synergistic interplay. This could be viewed as a reflection of a basic tenet of holism: The whole is more than the sum of its parts and the whole can

never be known by simply examining its parts.

Confirmation for the transpersonal approach to self-knowledge requiring knowing the “whole” of the psyche comes from many sources.⁹ Certainly humanistic psychology has contributed to the field. In his book *Towards a Psychology of Being*¹⁰ Abraham Maslow described concepts such as “peak experiences” and the human “hierarchy of needs” as involved in self-knowledge. His work is very well respected, with applications in such diverse fields as education and business as well as in psychology. Maslow said “it is reasonable to assume in practically every human being, and certainly in almost every newborn baby, that there is active will toward health, an impulse toward growth, or toward actualization of human potentialities.”¹¹ Maslow introduced the term “self-actualization”¹² and believed it an essential quality of human nature. He also felt that “the goal of education... ..is ultimately the ‘self-actualization’ of a person.”¹³ Carl Rogers, justly famous for his insight into “client centered” relationships and a highly respected educator, had a remarkably similar perspective. He spoke of the “fully functioning human”¹⁴ who is “able to select from the multitude of possibilities that behavior which in this moment of time will be most generally and genuinely satisfying... and is soundly and realistically social.” Both of these views support the importance of self-knowledge in life. For Maslow, “...self-actualization is not only an end state but also the process of actualizing one’s potentialities at any time, in any amount.”¹⁵ Both these men offer the perspective

that self-actualization is an ongoing process and one must stay engaged in “the holy curiosity of inquiry,” as Albert Einstein put it, in uncovering of self-knowledge.

Ken Wilber, an articulate modern spokesman for transpersonal psychology, also insists on the open-ended nature of the human psyche. Typical of the transpersonal approach, he ranges from the frontier of theoretical physics to the successively more complex levels of Buddhist and Hindu philosophy to make the point. He weaves Koestler’s notion of “holons” with Leibniz’s and Huxley’s insights known as the Perennial Philosophy.¹⁶ In this transpersonal attempt to account for the breadth of the psyche, there is again the open-ended, indefinite nature of the psyche. This leads to the question of how we, as individuals, can experientially know ourselves as open-ended. Rites of Passage claim to have the potential for just this, as well as transcending sectarian and dogmatic assertions about the psyche.

There are thousands of accounts of Rites of Passage. Contributions come from the Apache nation of southwest America, the Pacific Northwest Indians Nootka Nation, Buddhist communities of central Tibet, The Dagara people of west Africa, contemporary work by Maurice Gibbons with American high school students and many, many others.¹⁷ A careful reading of these accounts suggests that Rites of Passage help bring forth meaningful questions, rather than dogmatic answers, and help us see that life, at its core, is a mystery. Yet they prompt us to continue to ask questions rather than just accept “unknowableness.”

Speaking about the mysterious often means speaking about the unspeakable, and this is a delicate matter. Still, there seems to be an imperative to try. For instance, in the ancient book of Chinese philosophy, *Tao Te Ching*, the first two lines are; "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name."¹⁸ In his book *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* Michael Sells describes mystery or what is transcendent as "beyond names" and yet "in order to claim that the transcendent is beyond names, however, I must give it a name; the transcendent."¹⁹ Sells offers the word "mystery as a referential openness onto the depths of a particular tradition, and into conversation with other traditions. Yet as elusive as it is, mystery is in principle accessible to all."²⁰ Rites of Passage often call forth experiences that cannot be named, and so are, by Sell's description, "mysterious." Nonetheless, it is very important that some attempt to delineate them be made, and so I too must name what is beyond description. In referring to these experiences I use words such as "self-knowledge" as well as the terminology of other authors such as "mystery," "transcendence," "Ultimacy," "self-actualization," and so on. I am thus trying to avoid dogma and to avoid limiting Rites of Passage to any spiritual philosophy or tradition. As their history shows, Rites of Passage have, in many cases, fostered self-knowledge in people of many cultures, so any description of them should not be culturally bound.

Many Holistic thinkers²¹ emphasize that the wholeness of the psyche transcends social construction and

requires a sense of awe and wonder that can be said to be spiritual. Many of their ideas are incorporated into an understanding that, following the work of Leibniz and Huxley, is known as the Perennial Philosophy. Huxley's classic work, *The Perennial Philosophy*,²² claims to investigate a commonality of the spiritual core, the "thread running through the way" that is described through many cultural and religious descriptions.

There are many resemblances between what Perennial Philosophers regard as central to spiritual life and Rites of Passage. One, that I shall return to later, is the importance of an experiential relationship to the mystery.²³ Another is the belief that we must engage specific disciplines to awaken self-knowledge.²⁴ These disciplines include engaging struggle to overcome our ignorance and to know ourselves for who we are. Rites of Passage involve disciplines throughout the process, some of which are quite onerous. Further, the Perennial Philosophy points out that the disciplines chosen must coincide with the proclivities of the individual.²⁵ Here Rites of Passage tend to distinguish themselves for they seem to insist upon sensitivity to all participants in accordance with family and community. The knowledge of which disciplines provide the best chance for access to the mystery lies in the hands of those who know the child well and can thus choose those that are genuinely meaningful and relevant. Rites of Passage often insist that all participants (the person undergoing the rite as well as witnesses) explore meaning together without coercive agreement on the nature of

the meaning. We could say, a serendipitous consequence of this sensitivity is the relationships nurtured in family and community when significant family and community members of the person undergoing the rite are part of the rite.

Many contemporary Rites of Passage practitioners have contributed to the view that Rites of Passage done at certain junctures in life, with developmental sensitivity, offer a format for people to stay current with their own growth and the growth of those closest to them. During Rites of Passage the possibility arises of a type of silence²⁶ free of memories and associative thought. During this silence, meaning in life often "appears" that yields a larger perspective than one solely based on behavior or on the construction of social relationships. There are those who claim to have witnessed, in themselves and others, meaning and inspiration move from being an amorphous, foreign concept to becoming gradually integrated and carefully woven into the daily life of people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Structure of Rites of Passage

It is convenient to have a name by which we can refer to the person undergoing a Rite of Passage, be it adult or child. I have chosen the name "passager."

Across times and cultures there seems to be a very specific structure in Rites of Passage. Arnold Van Gennep, the turn of the century anthropologist who made an exhaustive cross cultural study of the structure of Rites of Passage, made three broad divisions in his structural analysis of Rites of Passage; 1) separation, 2)

margin or threshold and 3) aggregation.²⁷ Stephen Foster and Meredith Little, in their excellent ground-breaking book, *Running the Sacred River*, stayed with that same demarcation.²⁸ Van Gennep outlines each element of the structure as follows: 1) Separation from the tribe and purification ceremony is designed to empty the passager of false beliefs and pernicious conditionings. Separation is designed to involve the surrender of identity and dissolution of concepts carried by thoughts from the past. This often leads the passager into vulnerability and openness. In this “naked” openness, insights of self-knowledge frequently appear. 2) Threshold (the “ordeal”) is designed to be the twilight moment as the passager is given the opportunity to “step through,” crossing from one world into another. It is a moment when the old can be seen as residing in the past and the new has not yet dawned; a moment of limbo between two worlds. 3) Aggregation is coming together. Recognition of the new begins re-entry into the tribe or community with new respect, which entails, of course, new responsibilities.

These three structures can be and have been elaborated into six elements in one contemporary approach to Rites of Passage.²⁹ Separation is extended to include both an Acknowledgment of the Old and its Casting Off; threshold is the Gap; and aggregation is expanded to three ceremonies—the Acknowledgment of the New, Thanking and Celebration. These subtler distinctions are intended to allow the Rite of Passage to be customized to the needs of the passager and family. The idiosyncratic

nature of such customization seems necessary in contemporary western society as many of the communal identity constructions, shared meanings, and common cultural narratives of more traditional or indigenous societies are absent. Using the six elements, a coordinated series of events from the aforementioned structure can be created to match the individual psyche, yet intertwine to create an interconnected experience. Following is a further description of each of the six elements.

Acknowledgement of the Old

Aspects of self that the passager has outgrown are named and acknowledged. This is often a humbling process in which the passager accepts things “as they are,” without excuse or embellishment. The Perennial Philosophy claims that naming what is old must be done before it can be transcended.³⁰ With acceptance, resistance can be abandoned and an opening can be made for transformation to occur.

Casting Off of the Old

This ceremony is usually witnessed by loved ones or peers, reinforcing the social aspect of self-knowledge. As Van Gennep pointed out, it is important for the passager to voluntarily destroy the previous status, thus partially tempering them in preparation for what is to come.³¹ The Casting Off is not magic, but a reinforcement of vigilance to rout out what has been named as old if it should arise again. The old is often represented by icons and then destroyed by returning them to the elements of earth, fire, water or air. Common methods of casting off include making stick figures or

representational icons and burying or burning them, writing old character traits or old nick names on pieces of paper and throwing them into a fire, burning old baby pictures or giving away old toys. With this casting off, the passager’s intent is to be emptied of what needs to end and to be ready for the next step.

The Gap

Historically, this ceremony was seen as needing to be a powerful experience that demands the passager’s full engagement—physical, psychological and emotional. It needs to be carefully constructed with, and often demands, rigor in execution. It should call forth a complete attention to the moment, an attention in which there can be tremendous freedom. In this, self-knowledge is really seen as an uncovering by the individual of their inner essence. All spiritual traditions speak of the importance of “freeing the mind,”³² including being free of the tyranny of memories and the past. Maslow, in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, speaks of the “now-moment” when a person has the potential to lose the past and the future and live only in the now.³³ Suspension of time usually means something new is continually arising since there is no past to condition awareness.³⁴ This is said to open the doorway for change; for knowing oneself beyond construction.³⁵

Acknowledging the New

There are several steps in which the passager brings their new insight back to their everyday world. First, the passager is given the opportunity to contemplate that which they may have just learned. They then describe

their experience to themselves, family, friends and loved ones. This is a critical moment in a Rite of Passage and again, the insights need to be socially acknowledged. The interpretation of one's experience is often a large part of what will endure in the passager's mind. To the extent possible, the meanings of the previous events are considered, and aspects of the Gap that are not understood are encouraged to be left as questions to be investigated.

Celebration

"Celebration" comes from words that meant "frequented, or made famous" and indicates both public recognition and rejoicing. This was historically done through festivities or by offering respect. Community and friends are invited to join and celebrate the new person that the passager has become. The invitation is for the communal message to be "We do not want to hold you to the old ways. We respectfully honor you for what you have just experienced and we support your full growth into what you will uncover in yourself over the next period of time."

Thanking Ceremony

Many have noted that being loved and honored is important, but loving others in return may be even more important for emotional health. Louise Mahdi, Jungian psychologist and Rites of Passage researcher and author said, "...that when we receive an important understanding we can only hold on to it by being willing to give it away."³⁶ In spiritual traditions, ranging from Native American to Christian to Tibetan Buddhist, giving completes the cycle with an "immense will for the good of all,"³⁷

contributing to the perspective that as one offers to others one is again emptied, and therefore ever open and receptive. Thanking ceremonies often awaken the understanding that interconnectedness is expressed through offering appreciation for others. As William Blake said: "Gratitude is heaven itself."³⁸

Wholeness and Rites of Passage

There is a great deal of interest these days in exploring the nature of consciousness and especially in exploring unusual states of consciousness that have traditionally been greatly valued and continue to be greatly valued by those who have experienced them. There is also a great deal of interest these days in some of the more esoteric studies of physical matter, especially when there seems to be a link or a reflection of that which occurs with matter occurring in consciousness. This came to the public attention in this century through the work of Quantum Mechanics, Jung (work on synergy) and Ilya Prigogine. What is of significance in this, for the purposes of this paper, is that much that has been described in these highly valued states of consciousness and much that appears in these more esoteric studies of matter are often reflected or echoed by many accounts of Rites of Passage. It is, in fact, such links that draw many people to be involved in Rites of Passage. A brief description of these links would seem to be helpful.

It could be seen that the entire process of Rites of Passage offers the passager an opportunity to experience aspects of themselves which they had not been in touch with previously. Each element in a Rite of Passage

could be viewed as a whole unto itself, with all six together comprising a holistic process. Holistic means the inclusion of all aspects of our being—physical, emotional, intellectual, familial, communal, psychological and spiritual. As stated earlier, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The Old can bring remembrance of who we were, the Gap offers the opportunity to experience mystery and the New is the beginning of sensing who we are becoming. It is no surprise to find that Rites of Passage are thought by many to be consistent with the most penetrating and revered insights from the world of spirituality. They can be seen as a pure example of "the pattern that connects," to use anthropologist Gregory Bateson's term.

Many practitioners believe that Rites of Passage offer a sacred opportunity to connect with the whole of our being. Rachael Kessler, a pioneer in bringing Rites of Passage to mainstream education, speaks of this wholeness eloquently. Using words of her teenage students she says that an education which moves away from a reductionist approach and towards one that honors the whole human being necessarily includes the mystery that lies within us all. She adds that becoming intimately familiar with silence and the sacred is an essential aspect of health in the individual. "A rest for the nervous system, a respite from the demands of others, and a chance to visit one's own inner life"³⁹ she says is a lost but essential aspect of education.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has become famous for his articulation of flow theory. It is here that we find a clear connection between holism, psychol-

ogy and Rites of Passage. Extending the insights of Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi details the way in which peak experiences, or the flow, occur. He cites these characteristics of the flow experience: 1) Clear goals and immediate feedback. 2) The opportunities for acting decisively are relatively high, and they are matched by one's perceived ability to act. 3) Action and awareness merge. 4) Concentration on the task at hand. 5) A sense of potential control. 6) Loss of self-consciousness. 7) Altered sense of time. 8) Experience becomes autotelic, or worth doing for its own sake.⁴⁰ Being in the flow, according to Csikszentmihalyi, means nothing less than transcendent health for the individual and for society.⁴¹

People often refer to Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine who showed, in his work in chemistry, open systems in free flowing communication with their surroundings self-organize at greater levels of complexity.⁴² This seems to be valid for any system, including humans. Csikszentmihalyi gives many case histories in *The Evolving Self* that experiences of flow lead to the "increase of complexity in consciousness."⁴³ He describes in detail how "flow not only helps the individual self to evolve, but it also provides the energy and direction for some of the most important transformations of technology and culture."⁴⁴ Flow theory seems close to a description of the dynamics in a Rite of Passage. When carefully examined, one can observe how every one of the eight characteristics (named above) that comprise beings "in the flow" are said to be intact during the passage. The passager is continually offered opportunities to

open to more spacious environments, both within themselves and in relationship with others. In many Rites of Passage, the passager frequently expresses new understanding of the meaning and purpose of their lives. Many feel this greater understanding of the complexities of their world is one of the benefits offered by the Rite of Passage format.

The choreography of the steps in a Rite of Passage, inclusive of careful support, are designed to offer an optimal opportunity for direct experience of emptiness, of the unknown, and perhaps, therefore, of spirit. While no one can, or should, guarantee this type of experience, adhering to the elements with developmental sensitivity is felt by many to move the odds from possible to probable, and perhaps to altogether likely. Many contemporary practitioners feel Rites of Passage create a viable opportunity in our times and culture to potentially experience transcendence and reconnection to this natural aspect of ourselves. It could be seen that this offers assistance in avoiding the unnecessary suffering that arises when we do not use all our capacities in life.

Many holistic educators as well as Rites of Passage practitioners are of the opinion that direct contact with the mystery through the opportunity to experience transcendence can help redress some of the flaws in the education process that neglect this aspect of the human. Rachael Kessler offers the perspective in her book, *Soul of Education*, that of all the sacred values trashed in the modern and post-modern world, none has more dire consequences, or is more sorely missed, than an opportunity for submergence

in the ocean of transcendence.⁴⁵ Maslow felt that modern children have built up defense mechanisms that have rendered them unable to trust themselves or the "values or virtues" of their elders.⁴⁶ It is the opinion of many that direct experience of the sacred, of mystery could positively effect our entire well-being and help remedy that problem.

Rites of Passage offer experiential learning. The value of this can be gleaned from the doctoral thesis of Scott Forbes, a former headmaster of the Krishnamurti school in England. Forbes contends that "Ultimacy" is the aim of all holistic education. He defines Ultimacy as "the highest state of being that a human can aspire to."⁴⁷ He describes how experiential knowledge is "fundamentally different from knowledge acquired through abstractions or representations"⁴⁸ and is an essential component of Ultimacy and, therefore, of holistic education.

As stated earlier, Rites of Passage offer the opportunity for self-knowledge and as J. Krishnamurti, the philosopher and educator, has illustrated many times in his books and talks, "self-knowledge is the cornerstone of freedom."⁴⁹ From the time we are born we are conditioned by culture, nationality, class, tradition, religion, language, education, literature, media, art, custom, convention, propaganda, economic pressure, the food we eat, the climate we live in, our family, our friends and our experiences. Krishnamurti, in line with many spiritual philosophers, points out that freedom from this conditioning allows for immediate connection with the "self." This can create an oppor-

tunity to be open to meaning and purpose in life.

Carl Jung spoke at length about the need of each human to “individuate.” In an interview, Jung pointed to social pressures which make people “stupider and more suggestible” and which work against individuation. When asked how this unfortunate gullibility could be cured, Jung responded that part of the solution lay in developing “education for fuller consciousness.”⁵⁰ Rites of Passage claim to offer a format inclusive of experiential opportunities toward this type of education. The link between self-knowledge and understanding others was well known to Jung. He claimed that self-knowledge is needed in order to understand others, and understanding others is an important part of living.⁵¹ Consider also the piercing question posed to us by Carl Rogers: “How does it happen that the deeper we go into ourselves as particular and unique, seeking for our own individual identity, the more we find the whole human species?”⁵²

Rites of Passage celebrate who we are, and offer us an opportunity to see who we might become. They bring opportunity to be intimate with oneself and one’s world. Naturally, this

intimacy can and often does extend to relationships with friends, family, loved ones and community.

Abraham Maslow and many others have pointed out to us that the process of “self-actualization is not a matter of one great moment, but an ongoing process.”⁵³ He goes on to say that the potential of this engagement is nothing less than what have been called “eternal values” of Truth, beauty and goodness.⁵⁴ “These are the most inspiring values of life; these are the ones that people are willing to die for... These are the definitions of the higher life of the good life, of the spiritual life, and I may also add, they are the far goals of psychotherapy, and the far goals of education in the broadest sense.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

In their book *Between & Between*, Mahdi, Foster & Little conclude in one account of an initiation,⁵⁶ “The journey of life is one for which they have been prepared.” In the simplest terms, a Rite of Passage is a carefully constructed series of elements which offer an opportunity for individuals and communities to engage transitions in the growth process for their mutual benefit. Their value could be seen as profound when that change

is a whole-being experience. This is in accord with the perspectives offered by most of the aforementioned authors, philosophers, educators and spiritual traditions. Rites of Passage are respected by many as offering the opportunity to touch the very depths of human possibility, known by many of those who have undertaken them, as a breathtaking adventure that, when done carefully and correctly, has nothing less than wholeness and health as the goal.⁵⁷ Because of this, they offer one possible response to the lack of meaning and purpose that seems to pervade the post-modern world. It is indicated by most of the former authors that Rites of Passage have the potential to contribute important insights into the discourse of transpersonal psychology, holism and holistic education, by offering participants an avenue for direct experience with that mystery which cannot be spoken. As stated in *The Crossing Point*, “Real change is inner change... It is a matter of awaking within The Source.”⁵⁸ Or, in the words of J. Krishnamurti from *Education and the Significance of Life*, “The ignorant man is not the unlearned, but he who does not know himself ...for it is within each one of us that the whole of existence is gathered.”⁵⁹

Endnotes

¹ (Mahdi and Meade 1996) See, for example Meade’s introduction in *Crossroads*, 1996.

² (Luvmour 1999) In *Metamorphosis*, the authors list 63 organizations in the United States whose sole purpose is to facilitate Rites of Passage.

³ (Mahdi and Meade 1996) “These rites are vessels of crucibles for change.” p. 415

⁴ (Morss 1996) “For a number of writers, the term ‘social construction’ expresses a cohesive point of

view on human experience across the life-span. It places emphasis on the role of interpersonal negotiation in constructing the social world. For Kenneth Gergen, Rom Harré and John Shotter, in particular, face-to-face human engagement must be seen as the most significant arena for the construction of identity and subjectivity. We tell ourselves, or perhaps story ourselves, into being.” p.27

⁵ (Morss 1996), “By social construction was meant the interpersonal processes through which humans cre-

ate the reality they experience. Through interaction, and particularly through language and other symbol systems, people make sense of themselves and of each other. People’s lives and identities, and much of what we call people’s development, are negotiated through interpersonal activity. This social construction work appealed to certain claims of Vygotsky and of the philosopher George Herbert Mead, who like Vygotsky had stressed the social origins of thinking and the self.” p.6.

⁶ Vygotsky is probably best remembered for his reconceptualization of the cognitive psychological approach in the representation of knowledge. Although other scholars included that the social world plays a primary role in the development in children's cognitive growth, Vygotsky was more concerned with the interrelationships between the macro- and micro-social influences. Vygotsky emphasized more than other thinkers the links between social factors of cultural and historical nature and those of a more interpersonal nature. He believed that language was not only a cognitive tool of communication, but that the use of the tool has shaped our cultural evolution. Institutions, tools, and symbol systems are, therefore, products of human beings, developed in various ways by different and diverse cultures over historical time. One can observe the influence of a psychology grounded in the dialectical historicism of Hegelian and Marxist/Leninist theory. Vygotsky illustrated the complex dynamics of cultural and historical development as follows: "Culture creates special forms of behavior, changes the functioning of mind, constructs new levels in the developing system of human behavior... In the process of historical development, a social being changes the means and methods of his behavior, transforms natural inclinations and functions, develops and creates new, specifically cultural, forms of behavior" (Vygotsky, 1983).

⁷ (Turner 1989) Turner called this confrontation "liminality". It is known more commonly as the threshold or the gap phase of a Rite of Passage.

⁸ (Walsh 1993) A good collection of essays to introduce and establish Transpersonal Psychology.

⁹ Using the respected academic framework to justify and express their findings, researchers such as Ellen Langer of Harvard, Phillip Wexler of the University of Rochester and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi of the University of Chicago validate both the extraordinary expanse of the human psyche and the inevitable health that results from accessing higher consciousness. Langer's well known book, *Mindfulness*, documents the power and intelligence that arises when one is truly engaged in the moment. From the aging to the workplace, Langer cites experimental evidence that demonstrates increased productivity, creativity and health when one practices mindfulness. What is mindfulness? It is relationship to one's life such that new information is welcome, new contexts and events are sought, and the processing of the information is more important than any outcome reached. Mindfulness means that we drop preconceptions and engage our environment with openness and inquisitiveness. Wexler, the Dean of the Graduate School in Education, calls for the "resacralization of education". He believes that modern education is

but a fragment of what a genuine holistic education would be. A Philosopher and social theorist, Wexler weaves secular, existential and esoteric understandings into an educational paradigm that would allow both teacher and student ever deeper contacts with their Being (their essential, or higher self).

¹⁰ (Maslow 1968), "The peak-experience is felt as a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it". (author's italics) p.79, "Not only are these his happiest and most thrilling moments, but they are also moments of greatest maturity, individuation, fulfillment—in a word, his healthiest moments." p.97 Also, (Maslow 1971), "The term peak experiences is a generalization for the best moments of the human being, for the happiest moments of life, for experiences of ecstasy, rapture, bliss, of the greatest joy. I found that such experiences came from profound aesthetic experiences such as creative ecstasies, moments of mature love, perfect sexual experiences, parental love, experiences of natural childbirth and many others." p. 105

¹¹ (Maslow 1971), "All the evidence that we have (mostly clinical evidence, but already some other kinds of research evidence) indicates that it is reasonable to assume in practically every human being, and certainly in almost every newborn baby, that there is active will toward health, an impulse toward growth, or toward actualization of human potentialities." p. 25

¹² (Maslow 1971) "...self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption." "...To make the growth choice instead of the fear choice a dozen times a day is to move a dozen times a day toward self-actualization. Self-actualization is an ongoing process" p. 45

¹³ (Maslow 1971) "Stated simply, such a concept holds that the function of education, the goal of education—the human goal, the humanistic goal, the goal so far as human beings are concerned—is ultimately the 'self-actualization' of a person, the becoming fully human, the development of the fullest height that the human species can stand up to or that the particular individual can come to. In a less technical way, it is helping the person to become the best that he is able to become." pp. 168 & 169

¹⁴ (Rogers 1983) "It appears that the person who emerges from a theoretically optimal experience of personal growth, whether through client-centered therapy or some other experience of learning and development, is then a fully functioning person. He is able to live fully in and with each and all of his feeling and reactions. He is making use of all his organic equipment to sense, as accurately as possible, the existential situation within and without. He is using all of the data his nervous system can thus supply, using

it in awareness, but recognizing that his total organism may be, and often is, wiser than his awareness. He is able to permit his total organism to function in all its complexity in selecting, from the multitude of possibilities, that behavior which in this moment of time will be most generally and genuinely satisfying. He is able to trust his organism in this functioning, not because it is infallible, but because he can be fully open to the consequences of each of his actions and correct them if they prove to be less than satisfying. He is able to experience all of his feelings, and is afraid of none of his feelings; he is his own sifter of evidence, but is open to evidence from all sources; he is completely engaged in the process of being and becoming himself, and thus discovers that he is soundly and realistically social; he lives completely in this moment, but learns that this is the soundest living for all times. He is a fully functioning organism, and because of the awareness of himself which flows freely in and through his experiences, he is a fully functioning person." p. 290

¹⁵ (Maslow 1971) "...self-actualization is not only an end state but also the process of actualizing one's potentialities at any time, in any amount." p. 47 "Self-actualization is an ongoing process..." (author's italics) p. 45

¹⁶ (Wilber 1995) pp. 3-279. The same points are made throughout his *Spectrum of Consciousness and The Atman Project*.

¹⁷ (Farrar 1987) as cited in (Mahdi and Little 1987) pp.239-263, (Cameron 1986), Personal communication and slide show by Choegon Rinpoche, (Some 1994), (Gibbons 1990) Gibbons' main work is in creating academic learning environments that use the Walkabout model of a Rite of Passage. The Walkabout course for high school seniors is conducted as individual challenges, with various themes that last from one to several weeks. Combining classroom and fieldwork, the course includes training in decision-making, planning, problem solving, self-knowledge and much more. Journals and portfolios provide the basis for evaluation. It also provides a model of how to use the great Rites of Passage work done, and done so well, by other cultures.

¹⁸ (Tsu 1972)

¹⁹ (Sells 1994) The transcendent must be beyond names, ineffable. In order to claim that the transcendent is beyond names, however, I must give it a name, "the transcendent". Any statement of ineffability, "X is beyond names," generates the aporia that the passager of the statement must be named (as X) in order for us to affirm that it is beyond names. p.2

²⁰ (Sells 1994) "A key component of mysticism in apophatic writings is the location of "mystery."

- Mystery is neither a set of abstruse doctrines to be taken on faith nor a secret prize for the initiated. Mystery is a referential openness onto the depths of a particular tradition, and into conversation with other traditions. Yet as elusive as it is, it is in principle accessible to all." p.8
- ²¹ (Smith 1976)
- ²² (Huxley 1945) This book offers the excellent compilation of the similarities in all approaches to higher consciousness. Huxley's conclusions (which seems inevitable), are that higher consciousness exists, that all may access it and that it remains similar across time and culture. These conclusions have led to a philosophical synthesis of great magnitude.
- ²³ (Huxley 1945) Consider this quote by M. Eckhart as cited by Aldous Huxley in the *Perennial Philosophy*, p. 162, "A man has many skins in himself, covering the depths of his heart. Man knows so many things; he does not know himself. Why, thirty or forty skins or hides, just like an ox's or a bear's so thick and hard, cover the soul. Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there."
- ²⁴ (Huxley 1945) Consider that in the *Perennial Philosophy* the chapter on *Spiritual Exercises* pp.273 – 292 is the longest and contains twenty-two quotes from most known spiritual traditions as well as two essays by A. Huxley himself.
- ²⁵ (Huxley 1945) "With the best will in the world and the best social environment, all that anyone can hope to do is to make the best of his congenial psycho-physical make-up; to change the fundamental patterns of constitution and temperament is beyond his power." p. 147 Another simple way to understand this, perhaps, is from the Hindu tradition. "In Hindu thought the outlines of this completer and more adequate classification are clearly indicated. The ways leading to the delivering union with God are not two, but three—the way of works [Karma Yoga], the way of knowledge [Jhana Yoga] and the way of devotion [Bhakti Yoga]." p. 148
- ²⁶ (Krishnamurti 1999) "This is important, because thought, being limited, the limitation there has its own space, its own order. When there is cessation of the activity of the limited thought then there is space, not only space in the brain, but space. Not the space that the self creates around itself, but the space that has no limit. Thought is limited and whatever it does will always be limited because in its very nature it is conditioned. When thought discovers for itself its limitation, and sees that its limitation is creating havoc in the world, then that very observation brings thought to an end, to discover something new. Then there is space, and silence." pp. 108 & 109.
- ²⁷ (Turner 1989) "Women's cults have the tripartite diachronic structure made familiar to us by the work of van Gennep. The first phase, called *Ilembi*, separates the candidate from the profane world; the second, called *Kunkunka* (literally, "in the grass hut"), partially secludes her from secular life; while the third, called *Ku-tumbuka*, is a festive dance, celebrating the removal of the shade's interdiction and the candidate's return to normal life. In *Isoma* this is signaled by the candidate's bearing a child and raising it to the toddling stage." p.14
- ²⁸ (Little 1989) pp.21 through 24.
- ²⁹ (Luvmour 1999)
- ³⁰ (Huxley 1945) See chapter six. P.96 - 125 The points are made throughout this chapter and are encapsulated in this sentence, "'Our kingdom go' is the necessary and unavoidable corollary of 'Thy kingdom come'. For the more there is of self, the less there is of God. The divine eternal fullness of life can be gained only by those who have deliberately lost the partial, separative life of craving and self-interest, of egocentric thinking, feeling, wishing and acting." p. 96
- ³¹ (Turner 1989), VanGennep as quoted by Turner, "The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character, to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges." p. 103
- ³² (Krishnamurti 1996), "But to free the mind, there must be great intensity; there must be this continual alertness, observation, which itself creates conflict. this alertness itself produces a disturbance, and when there is that crisis, that intensity of conflict, then mind, if it is not escaping, begins to think anew, to think creatively, and that very thinking is eternity." p. 51
- ³³ (Maslow 1971), "The creative person, in the inspirational phase of the creative furor, loses his past and his future and lives only in the moment." p. 61
- ³⁴ (Krishnamurti 1996), "To experiment, mind must be continually freeing itself from the environment with which it conflicts in its movement, the environment which we call the past. There can be no creative thinking if mind is hindered..." p. 45
- ³⁵ (Wilber 1977), "...thought looks to the past for its substance and the future for its consequence. Thought is time, and hence the time-less Now is the thought-less Now..." p.325
- ³⁶ (Mahdi and Meade 1996) p. 219
- ³⁷ (Aurobindo 1976) "But the most intimate character of the psychic is its pressure towards the Divine through a sacred love, joy and oneness... ..It plunges the nature inward towards its meeting with the immanent Divine in the heart's secret center... .. It opens to a universal Divine Love, a vast compassion, an intense and immense will for the good of all..." pp. 146 & 147"
- ³⁸ (Erdman 1988) January 14, 1804—The Letters: To William Hayley Esqre Felpham near Chichester, Sussex, p. 740
- ³⁹ (Kessler 2000) p. 38
- ⁴⁰ (Csikszentmihalyi 1988), Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Csikszentmihalyi, I., eds. *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* contains articles of sociological, historical and psychological applications of flow theory. pp. 178-179
- ⁴¹ (Csikszentmihalyi 1993) "People who spend more time in flow generally report higher self-esteem. In addition, directly after a person has been in flow, his or her self-esteem is higher than at other times. After being in flow people report being more successful, they feel better about themselves, and they feel that they are living up more to their own and others' expectations. This finding has been replicated in several studies..." p. 194 "...freedom does not apply to doing, but to being." p. 269 (author's italics). "A good society makes it possible for each person to develop the skills necessary to experience flow in socially productive activities." p. 269
- ⁴² (Bohm 1981) Takes the position that consciousness actually determines the life form, rather than vice versa. He also discusses this point in his scintillating dialogues with Krishnamurti, a small portion of which are recorded in *Krishnamurti and Bohm, The Ending of Time*, (Bohm 1985). This point about consciousness and matter is also Goswami's central theme in *The Self-Aware Universe* (Goswami 1993).
- ⁴³ (Csikszentmihalyi 1993) "[in flow] Often we feel a sense of transcendence, as if the boundaries of the self had been expanded." P. xiv. "... Some of these persons were homeless drifters while others had suffered devastating tragedies like blindness or paralysis: yet all had been able to transform seemingly hopeless conditions into a serene, joyful existence." p. xv In chapter eight, "The Transcendent Self," he discusses some case studies of individuals whose lives have changed: "These are people who enjoy everything they do, who keep learning and improving their skills, and who are so committed to goals beyond themselves that the fear of death has little hold on their minds." P. xviii
- ⁴⁴ (Csikszentmihalyi 1993) pp. xvii and 252 through 276
- ⁴⁵ (Kessler 2000) In *The Soul of Education*, Rachel Kessler shows us that the thirst for transcendence or going beyond the limits of the known is present in

- every teenager. Transcendence offers the individual a new way of seeing which dawns from within. Young people are curious about but vulnerable in regard to these things: "If we do not guide young people into this domain, they will go there without us – and many lose their way" (p.134; author's italics).
- ⁴⁶ (Maslow 1971) "One defense mechanism that is not mentioned in the psychology textbooks, though it is a very important defense mechanism to some youngsters of today. These youngsters (people) mistrust the possibility of values and virtues. They feel themselves swindled or thwarted in their lives. Most of them have, in fact, dopey parents whom they don't respect very much, parents who are quite confused themselves about values and who, frequently, are simply terrified of their children and never punish them or stop them from doing things that are wrong. So you have a situation where the youngsters simply despise their elders. Our kids have desacralized sex, for example. Sex is nothing; it is a natural thing, and they have made it so natural that it has lost its poetic qualities in many instances, which means that it has lost practically everything. Self-actualization means giving up this defense mechanism and learning or being taught to resacralize." p. 49
- ⁴⁷ (Forbes 1999), "'Ultimacy' as a term has been used by several writers... ..but in slightly different ways. 1) the highest state of being that a human can aspire to, either as a stage of development (e.g., enlightenment), as a moment of life that is the greatest only rarely experienced by anyone (e.g., grace), or as a phase of life that is common in the population but usually rare in any particular individual's life (e.g., Maslow's peak-experience): and 2) a concern or engagement that is the greatest that a person can aspire to (e.g., being in service to something sacred)." p. 12
- ⁴⁸ (Forbes 1999), p. 45
- ⁴⁹ (Krishnamurti 1996), "The beginning of freedom is self-knowledge... ..and it is only through self-knowledge, seeing ourselves exactly as we actually are, undistorted by any interpretation or judgment, that the mind becomes quiet, still." p. 181 (Krishnamurti 1953) Freedom comes into being only through self-knowledge in one's daily occupations, that is, in one's relationship with people, with things, with ideas and with nature... ..It is the understanding of the total process of existence that brings integration. When there is self-knowledge, the power of creating illusions ceases, and only then is it possible for reality of God to be... ..Love is essential to the process of integration. To be integrated there must be freedom from fear." p. 46
- ⁵⁰ (Forbes 1999), (Carl Jung 1977b) as quoted in Forbes. p. 88
- ⁵¹ (Jung 1977) Jung, C.G. 1977, *Attitude Change Conducive to World peace*. In *The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous writings*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull Edited by H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler. 20 vols. Vol. 17, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p.611
- ⁵² (Maslow 1971) Carl Rogers as quoted by Maslow. p.187
- ⁵³ (Maslow 1971), "One cannot choose wisely for a life unless he dares to listen to himself, his own self, at each moment in life" p. 45 "Put all these points together, and we see that self-actualization is not a matter of one great moment. Self-actualization is a matter of degree, of little accessions accumulated one by one. People selected as self-actualizing subjects, people who fit the criteria, go about it in these little ways: They listen to their own voices; they take responsibility; they are honest; and they work hard. They find out who they are and what they are..." p. 50
- ⁵⁴ (Maslow 1971), "...what have been called the eternal values, the eternal verities. We see here the old familiar trinity of truth, beauty and goodness. These characteristics are what the great religionists and philosophers have valued, and this is practically the same list that most serious thinkers of mankind have agreed upon as the ultimate or highest value of life." p. 108
- ⁵⁵ (Maslow 1971) p. 109
- ⁵⁶ (Mahdi and Little 1987) p.469
- ⁵⁷ (Mahdi and Meade 1996) "These common elements have to do with the making of an adult, a real man or a real woman, as understood by a given culture. The whole person can live his/her vision; the half being is not fully awake of conscious". p.415
- ⁵⁸ (Richards 1966) p.21-22
- ⁵⁹ (Krishnamurti 1953) Chapter 2 "The Right Kind of Education" pp. 17-50

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About EnCompass

EnCompass has been facilitating relationship with children and within families since 1985.

Through fresh insights, experiential learning and the creation of community we at EnCompass seek to offer the best path to conscious and effective parenting now available. Our commitment and dedication is to knowledge of children, family and self toward self actualization and the cultivation of substantive social change.

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For more information about EnCompass and Natural Learning Rhythms, please go to the EnCompass web site:

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