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May 1981

## THE SEVEN STEPS OF HUMAN DEEPENING

For a long time, I have been wanting to share what I have learned about the deepening of conscious life. Consciousness is the quality that most distinguishes the human being from all other forms of life. However "conscious" the higher forms of mamalian life may prove to be, human consciousness is a qualitative leap beyond them. Human deepening means the intensification of this uniquely human quality. The seven steps of human deepening I will describe are all steps in being and becoming more conscious.

Conscious behavior takes place in the overall milieu of instinctually driven behaviour and socially conditioned behaviour. For by "consciousness" I mean more than passive awareness: I also mean intentions--intentions that are not the result of either instinct or social conditioning. Consciousness is a wildness in relation to society. It is the creativity which built society and which will rebuild society in the future. Also consciousness is a strong natural drive, equal to or even greater than the instincts. Or perhaps we should expand the word "instinct" and say that consciousness is a very deep instinct of our human biology. The impulse to increase conscious is a drive that is strong enough to overcome intense dread and to risk sacrifices of life, pain, and discipline. The deepening of consciousness is the journey that makes human beings more human. And such human deepening is the key to both fulfilling our instincts and building societies which condition us better toward our true wellbeing.

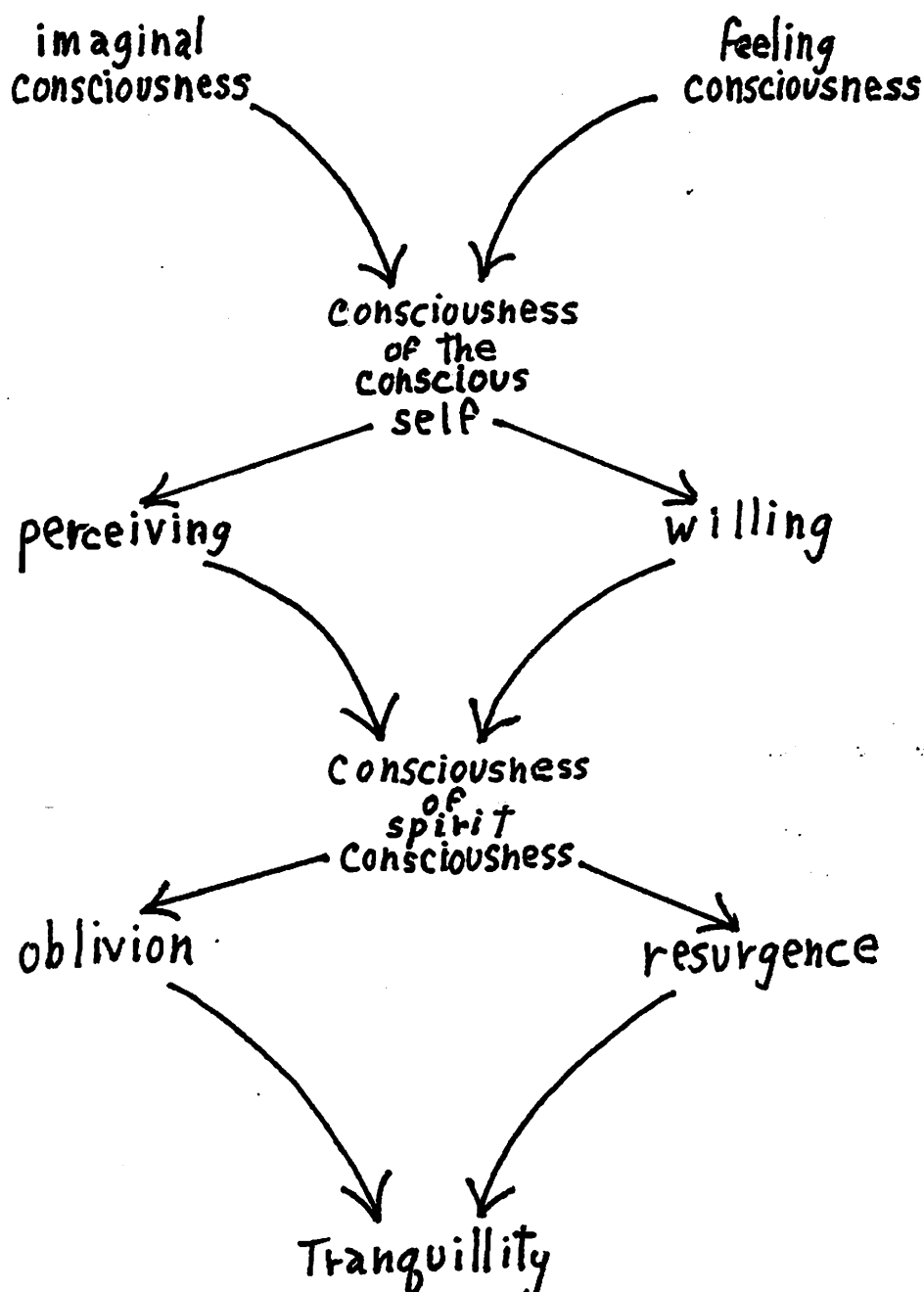
This emphasis upon consciousness does not mean that I deny that many of the functions of a human being go on unconsciously. Consciousness is an activity added to the already functioning activities of the mind and the body which in infancy are almost totally unconscious. Consciousness is the plus factor which renders human life a potentiality for lifelong deepening.

The first level of consciousness I will consider is consciousness in relation to the functioning of the mind. I will call that "imaginal consciousness." The second level I will consider is consciousness in relation to the functioning of the feelings of the body. I will call that "feeling consciousness." The next level, "consciousness of consciousness", is consciousness in relation to the functions I will call "perceiving" and "willing." And finally, "consciousness of spirit consciousness" is consciousness in relation to the functioning I will call "awe".

The following chart pictures these four as levels of depth and the side categories point toward the relationships between them.

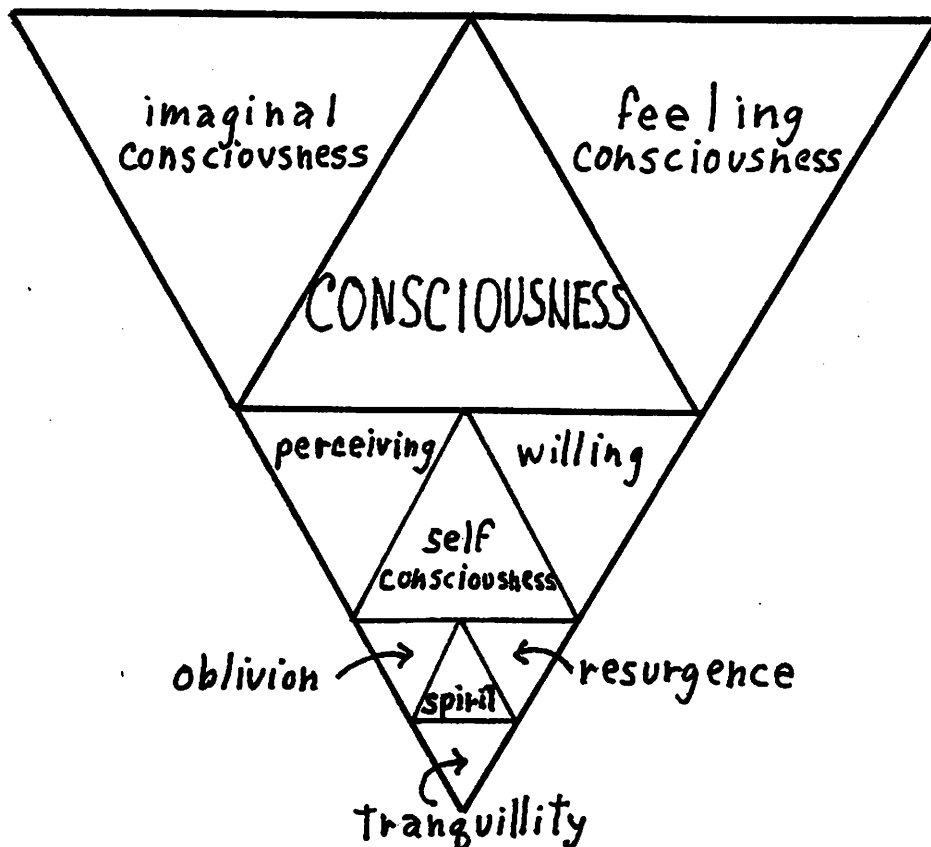
CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF REALITY	IMAGINAL CONSCIOUSNESS
	FEELING CONSCIOUSNESS
CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE EXPERIENCING SELF	CONSCIOUSNESS OF CONSCIOUSNESS
	CONSCIOUSNESS OF SPIRIT CONSCIOUSNESS

The next diagram illustrates the journey of descent into the deeps of consciousness as polarities which come together in a unity and then polarize again and then come together again, then polarize, then come together. Imaginal consciousness and feeling consciousness is the first major polarization. These flow together into an integration I call "consciousness of the conscious experiencing self." The next polarization divides consciousness of consciousness into perceiving and willing. Perceiving and willing are united at a deeper level which I call "consciousness of spirit consciousness". And finally, spirit consciousness has two major polar aspects which I call "oblivion" and "resurgence." And the final union at the base of spirit consciousness I call "tranquillity."



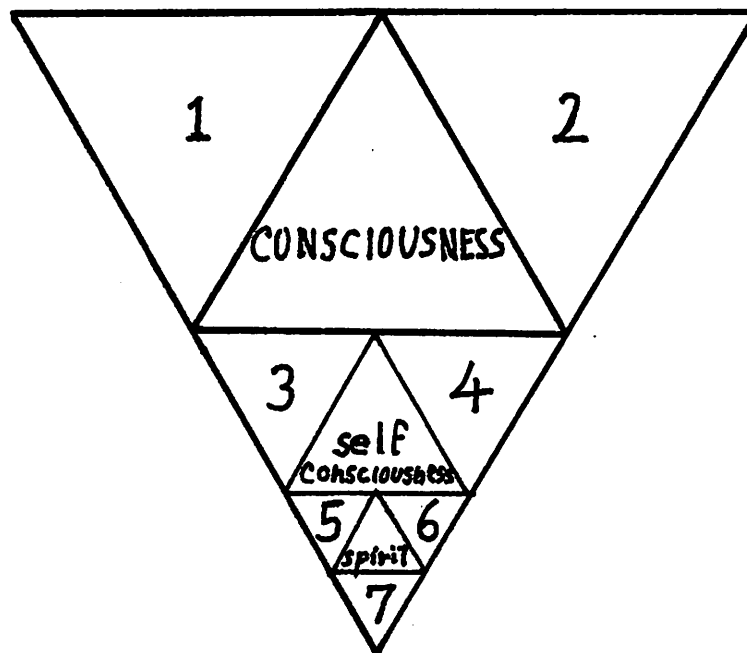


The following triangular diagram pictures these same aspects of consciousness as parts of the whole of consciousness. The largest triangle represents the whole and the smaller triangles inside depict the various aspects as functional sub-parts of the whole.



"Self consciousness" is short for "consciousness of the conscious experiencing self". It is the name of the entire bottom third of the master triangle. "Spirit" is short for "consciousness of spirit consciousness." It is the name of the bottom third of the "self consciousness" triangle.

On the following triangle, the numbers represent the seven steps of human deepening and show the arenas of consciousness in which each step takes place.



The following language describes consciousness as a journey with seven master steps:

- Step 1 The Conscious Awakening to the Force of Imagination.
- Step 2 The Conscious Appropriation of the Bodily Feelings.
- Step 3 The Conscious Awareness of the Relativity of Perception.
- Step 4 The Conscious Actualization of the Power of Intentionality.
- Step 5 The Conscious Contemplation of the States of Oblivion.
- Step 6 The Conscious Engagement in the States of Resurgence.
- Step 7 The Conscious Participation in the States of Tranquillity.

The poetry of the word "step: corresponds with the fact that consciousness is a journey from here to there. Consciousness begins, it moves, it deepens, it shifts focus. Consciousness can be said to take steps down a staircase into the deeps of consciousness. I much prefer the contemporary poetry of moving down into the profound "deeps" rather than the medieval poetry of moving up into the "higher" levels of consciousness.

Each step of consciousness is discontinuous with the previous step. Each step is a platform from which the next step drops off. And yet, unlike a staircase, each step, once taken, continues. Each step is a path that lasts a lifetime.

The first six steps can be seen as opposing pairs: steps 1 and 2: mind and feeling; steps 3 and 4: perception and intention; steps 5 and 6: oblivion and resurgence. The first of each pair is more associated with that dynamic of consciousness we call "knowing". The second of each pair is more associated with that dynamic of consciousness we call "doing".

Step seven is a bottomless pit of depth. Step seven is not an arrival in the sense of being "fully" conscious. It is a consent to be on perpetual journey into the endless depths of reality and consciousness. All seven steps are journeys that last a lifetime. This potential for unending expansion and deepening of consciousness is itself one crucial aspect of the very deepest essence of human "be-ing".

## STEP ONE: THE CONSCIOUS AWAKENING TO THE FORCE OF IMAGINATION

Step one is about what we sometimes call "an intellectual awakening." But what I mean by this awakening is something more than the acquisition of mental skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic, or like foreign languages, computer programming and atomic physics. Step one is not about improving our mental skills but about deepening our consciousness of our own mental processes. This deepening of consciousness may release the mind to function with new energy and power, but that is a by-product of this awakening. My awakening to the force of imagination means my becoming aware of my own image-making process and my beginning to assume responsibility for the images that govern my behavior.

What do I mean by "images?" I don't mean words or even linguistic ideas. I mean the kind of concrete pictures that appear in our dreams. I mean the kind of emotion-packed replicas of living that an artist is trying to create. Images are at the roots of all our mental life. Our environment is first presented to our minds through concrete images. Words or ideas are abstractions from these ordinary sensory images. Language is like a filing cabinet for ordering all our images. It is as if we have put many specific pictures of trees into one file folder and then labeled the folder "tree." Brain researchers are talking these days about the left brain's activity being the main seat of linguistic, linear, logical thinking and the right brain's activity being more strictly imaginal. The ingeniousness of the human mind is a result of the interaction of these two aspects of mind, not a result of linguistic thinking alone. Whatever our brain research may conclude and our philosophies of the mind clarify, the linear mind and the imaginal mind are both factors in what I am calling the genuine intellectual awakening.

A child learns images from the surrounding culture before he is conscious that there is such a thing as images. And his behavior is determined by those images. Life is perceived through those images and choices are made with the aid of those images. All this goes on quite unconsciously for a person until that fateful day when the inherited images become unsatisfactory to such an extent that one is motivated to undergo the disturbing experience of giving up old images and embracing new ones.

For example, part of the struggle of adolescence is giving up images that were appropriate to childhood but are no longer appropriate for adulthood. Being a child is a total way of life with roles to play that are very different from adulthood. Making this shift requires a revolution in most of a person's images of self and world. Probably children would refuse to go through the pain of growing up if the humiliation and isolation of remaining like children were not so much more painful.

Such shifts in our operational images take place in our adult life as well. For example, I used to think that there was a world of ideas which I experienced internally that was just as much a part of nature as the world of objects that I experienced externally. Then I came to see that ideas, all ideas, were created by human beings in their attempt to cope with their environment. The world of ideas was not part of nature but part of society. Hence the world of ideas was open to revolution just like any part of society. It is often a sad experience to retire old images that have served us for many years. And it is often a frightening adventure to embrace new images that we have not yet had much experience using.

All of us have lived much, if not most, of our lives without being radically conscious of our basic images and of this image change process. Such unconsciousness means that we have been robots of the culture that trained us in our operating images. I may not feel like a robot because the control is not external and may not be

particularly disagreeable, The control is inside. It is so familiar that I, the controlled person, may have the belief that there is no other way to operate--or at least no other way for me to operate. Others may operate differently, but this way of doing things is just me.

To be awakened from such a self-limiting state of self knowledge and to see that some entirely different way of doing things is my actual potential is an enormous awakening. Small image shifts out on the edge of my daily living may not seem enormous. But when this shifting of images takes place in the highly valued and long practiced habits of my life, the earth seems to quake, the whole scene becomes frightening and unfamiliar. I experience a moment of radical choice: whether to turn back into the old images, or risk an unknown future with images I can hardly grasp, much less trust. At this point, it is easy to believe that the old images are more true than the new--even though I know, at some level of my consciousness, that the old images are inadequate, and that the new images are more adequate to grasp what is actually going on, and hence more adequate to help me deal with my life.

The deepest level of this awakening occurs when I come to see that even my new images are not synonymous with the truth. They may be better, but there is no best. That is, there are no images in which I can rest secure forever. I am in a life in which images, like everything else, are finite. My images undergo old age and death. If I cling fast to my old images, my contact with living reality will decay with the decaying images. This awareness means that I begin to treat all my images with a certain detachment. My most passionate beliefs become provisional tools for this particular year or month or day of living. At any moment I may cast them aside and pick up other stronger tools to work with. In other words, I give up all thought of dying for my beliefs. Dying for my beliefs is really a form of suicide--not being willing to live in a world in which my beliefs are not true. Living with integrity the truth I know might mean risking my life, but that is an entirely different sort of thing than dying for my beliefs.

Seeing all my images, even my most precious beliefs, as functional tools created by human beings and chosen by me for my purposes places a very powerful force in my hands. When this intellectual awakening has happened to me, my mind is no longer merely a powerful collection of my cultural past. It becomes a locus of creativity for everyone's cultural future. Every awake person can create new forms, not just a few creative individuals. Even if the creativity of some is more amazing, every awake person re-creates the forms he gets from others. When step one has begun, the tyranny of existing culture over the awakening person is ending.

And it is a matter of utmost importance that the individual in our modern societies become a creative force in the building of new images for the whole global evolution of human kind. We live in a time when new images are replacing the old images of our societies at a rapid rate of speed. Many good books have been written to summarize these vast image shifts. Alvin Toffler's The Third Wave and Marilyn Ferguson's The Aquarian Conspiracy are two such books that have impressed me. I will not attempt to do that kind of overview of image shifts. I have set for myself a different task: to express clearly how taking responsibility for image change is one of seven crucial steps that each individual must pursue in order to be deeply conscious.

My designation of imaginal consciousness as the arena of step one does not imply that I think it less important than the other six. In fact, one of the tragedies in various contemporary movements for human deepening is the attempt to guide people into

the deep levels of "spirit consciousness" with the aid of images drawn from the middle ages of Western Culture or perhaps even the ancient period of Asian Culture. This causes a schizoid philosophy of life--an attempt to operate out of contemporary images in most life areas while employing a quite contradictory set of images to pursue "spirit" matters. The very word "spirit" is caught up in these confusions and rendered suspect to the committed contemporary thinker. One of the tasks of this essay will be to form contemporary images for exploring the arena of spirit consciousness. Creative imagination is an essential tool for enabling our journey on all seven paths of human consciousness.

## STEP TWO: THE CONSCIOUS APPROPRIATION OF THE BODILY FEELINGS

Step two is about feelings; but, more properly stated, it is about consciousness of feelings. I have called our journey for more feeling consciousness step two (and listed the journey for more imaginal consciousness as step one) because consciousness of feelings is a more difficult task for consciousness than consciousness of images. We tend to live within our presently operating images with some consciousness of those images. However, our consciousness of our feelings is usually restricted by our images. Often, we feel only what our thoughts allow us to feel, and the rest of our feelings are either suppressed or confused in some way. As a result, what we really and fully feel is seldom altogether conscious to us. When we are asked, "How do you feel right now?", we are often halting in our response; we may feel a little threatened even to be asked; and we often say something quite inaccurate about our feelings. An outside observer can sometimes see what I am feeling even when I cannot.

For example, my images of who I am might be: I am a quiet, calm and self controlled person. Then when I become deeply afraid my images do not allow room for the fullness of my fear to become conscious or active in my expression and behavior. Someone else may see how afraid I am, but I am not accurately aware of it. I may admit to some fear, but not to the full intensity of it. I might say in a soft voice, "This is scary", when I really would be more accurate to say, "I am terrified", in a full voice. This "cut back" expression is part of an overall behavior pattern I use to cut back my consciousness of my feelings in so far as those feelings don't fit into my images of what I think I am like or ought to be like. In addition to cutting back with my expression of my feelings I also may cut back with my total body activity. I keep my body from trembling or in any way looking afraid. Or if I am excited, I don't show it with vigorous movement, but behave in a blase manner. I may also "cut back" my feelings by being unclear about them. I give far-fetched explanations of why I am or am not afraid or excited or whatever. The total effect of my various ways of being unclear, unexpressive and inactive is that I don't fully feel my feelings and I don't make full contact with the other human beings who are associating with me. That is, I am not conscious of the feelings in my own body or of how my body is affecting others and being affected by them. I am "out-of-touch", as we say, with other human beings and "out-of-touch" with a dimension of my own being. All of this "out-of-touch" unconsciousness can go on at the same time that I am very conscious in other ways. A highly conscious social reformer, for example, can be disastrously inept in communicating immediate feelings to a spouse or a friend.

Considerations like these have moved me to call feeling consciousness step two rather than step one in the journey of consciousness. Obviously some people have intense contact with their feelings but relatively low consciousness about many of their operating images. Nevertheless, some imaginal awareness is a prerequisite to accurate feeling consciousness. For by feeling consciousness I do not mean the immediate expressive behavior of childhood. Children may be, in one sense, in touch with their feelings; but in another sense they are not yet consciously in touch with anything in their lives.

It is true that in the process of becoming more conscious a child may begin using images that separate him from parts of his bodily awareness that he or she naturally possessed as a child. But such phenomena do not indicate that children have better feeling consciousness than adults. Children have very little consciousness at all. Adults, as a rule, are more conscious even though their consciousness may be unbalanced or twisted in such a way as to obscure their natural bodily experiences, including those experiences they were open to as a child. This reflection on childhood helps me say more clearly what I mean by feeling consciousness. I mean a form of consciousness that exists alongside imaginal consciousness and functioning in constant dialogue with it. Any revolt against imaginal consciousness and structured society in the name of feeling consciousness and pristine childhood is naive. For both adults and children, an appreciation of language and logic need not mean a depreciation of feelings (or vice versa). The step of being conscious of our feelings includes learning to appreciate a deep tension in our human make-up: the tension between feeling consciousness and imaginal consciousness.

Why are feelings important? Feelings are our link with reality. Touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight are all ways that the body feels the world that is exterior to the body. Pain, pleasure, desire, are all ways that the body feels the functioning that goes on within the body itself. Emotions are ways that the body registers the challenges of the environment to the conscious self. My loss of contact with any of these feelings means a loss of contact with what is going on around me and within me. The feelings are the initial mediators of reality. Images and words are secondary: they give meaning and order to the sensations of the body. Without the functioning of images and language, the body's sensitivities to reality would be of no avail. But the converse is also true: images and language are a world of total unreality unless they are grounded in reality as it is being felt by the body.

It is of course true that the feeling processes of the body can become dysfunctional and therefore undependable guides to reality. Poor eyesight and hearing are one kind of example. Chemical imbalances that result in psychedelic trips or enduring schizophrenia are another kind of example. Still a third kind of impairment of our feeling processes can result from our use of various rationally constructed patterns to suppress feelings from consciousness. Not only sexual desire, but also fear, anger, humiliation, sorrow, and many other feelings have been thought to be bad, weak, unmanly, unwomanly, crass and many other negative judgements. Such decisions by consciousness to use thoughts to suppress feelings can become ongoing rigid attitudes in a particular person's living. Such attitudes shield me from being conscious of my feelings and therefore shield me from my experience of reality as well. In extreme cases, persons lose contact with reality altogether and live in a world of rigid rational patterns and behaviors. To some extent we all lose contact with reality any time our imaginal patterns no longer bend and adapt to the changing flow of experience and to the changing flow of feelings which accompany all our actual experience.

Some amount of feeling disorder is something every person has and will have until death. Consciousness of it and disciplined intent to live realistically in spite of the disorder does bring significant personality change. But total cure (so that I never have to be inflicted again by my lifetime habits of disordered feelings) is a wish-dream. Too often such a "cure" becomes a carrot held out to the naive by some quack who then enslaves the patient with a lifetime of false hope.

Nevertheless I can change my personality very much through becoming conscious of my own patterns of disorder and learning to take responsibility for those patterns and for their gradual step by step evolution into patterns that are better oriented to realistic living. Other people, skilled in this arena, can help me to do this.



And such help can be given by spouse and friends as well as by professional counselors. The healing of feeling disorders needs to become a normal part of the life of all the institutions of society.

This issue of feeling disorder raises an even deeper issue: to what extent can we trust our feelings, if they are so liable to disorder. The reigning answer in much of our society is: "very little". I wish to oppose this view very strongly. Each and every feeling is significant for relating us to reality. This is true even when the significance of one of my feelings is that I have lost contact with reality. Note that "I" have lost contact with reality. My feelings never lose contact with reality. When "I" have lost contact with reality, my feelings bear witness to that fact. All feeling disorder is such a witness. The disordered feeling may mean that my body chemistry is messed up or that my personality patterns are rigid and irrelevant or that I am refusing to be aware of something or take responsibility for it. The so-called "disordered feeling" is totally trustworthy. It is bearing witness that something is askew in my overall functioning.

And when my self conscious "I" is open to reality and willing to deal with it, my feelings mediate reality with great accuracy and power. The feeling potentialities of the human organism are so amazing that they can seem magical to our traditional mindsets. And it is high time for us to allow our feelings to challenge our traditional mindsets. For too long we have done the opposite: held on to traditional mindsets at the expense of discrediting our feelings.

Obviously, sorting out reality from unreality goes on all our lives. The cruciality of feeling consciousness is this: feelings are always messages from reality to our consciousness. It is our consciousness that gets mixed up about our feelings and about everything else. Losing touch with reality is a common experience, but our feelings and our marvelous bodies which produce them should not be blamed for our tours into unreality. Our bodies, through our feelings, are doing their best to keep us in touch with reality. It is up to the conscious "I" to learn to listen and interpret properly the wisdoms of the body.

It is not possible in a brief essay to cover all the ground in the vast arena of feeling consciousness. Literally thousands of books are being written on the subject. Useful clarity in this arena is a crucial edge in the whole progress of civilization. My intent has been to affirm the cruciality of this step in each person's journey of consciousness and to show its relationship to the other steps that comprise the total journey.

#### An Introduction to Consciousness of Consciousness and to Steps 3 and 4

Step one has to do with consciousness of images. Step two has to do with consciousness of feelings. Steps three and four have to do with consciousness of consciousness of images, consciousness of consciousness of feelings and consciousness of consciousness of any other reality. If consciousness of reality is pictured as a human being sitting on a chair looking out the window at reality, then consciousness of consciousness of reality is like that same person looking in a mirror and seeing himself sitting on a chair looking out the window.

The gaze of consciousness upon consciousness itself is never quite direct; it requires mirrors, just as my eyes require mirrors to see themselves. The mirrors for seeing myself are found somehow in the images of the mind, in the feelings of the body, and in the behavior of the whole person. Without being able to explain fully how I do it, I see myself. I see that I am the ongoing functions of seeing and willing. I see

my life and I will choices. I perceive reality and I decide to act upon reality. I am perceiving. I am willing.

Furthermore, I perceive that I have become a personality. I have a structure, a history, a future to my personal selfhood. I am an entity composed of all the perceptions and choices that I have participated in throughout my past and up to this present moment. I am in this present moment participating in and forging out perceptions and choices that will add to my personality still further structure, history, and qualities that I will then be in my future. I am a personality in process of becoming. Even more remarkable, I am one of the determining forces in that becoming. I choose in the midst of my concrete circumstances how I am going to consciously relate to those circumstances and thereby I also choose to set in motion new qualities in my personality. I am not the sole determiner of my life. Many factors in my society, in my biology, and in nature determine what I can do, can know, can become. But I add to all these determining factors yet another determining factor--namely, my self, my own capacity to choose and to perceive reality in order to illumine my choices.

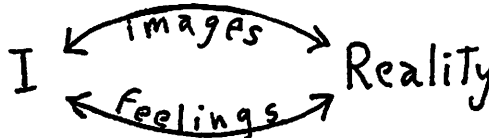
### STEP THREE: THE CONSCIOUS AWARENESS OF THE RELATIVITY OF PERCEPTION

Step three is a journey into the act and art of seeing reality. I have called the essence of this journey a journey of conscious awareness into the relativity of perception. I mean by this that all my seeing of reality is relative to me, the perceiver: who I am, where I am, when I am. What I see is relative to my location in space and time, in human culture, in youth or maturity, and all the other specifics of my life. Most crucial of all are the images I am currently using. My viewpoints, my philosophies of life form a set of convictions through which I see reality. What I see can change radically through a change in my convictions. What I see can also change radically through a change of my position within the whole of human kind.

It is reality that I see. But it is I who see reality. Both ends of this relationship have to be examined to grasp what perception is. Even our most faulty seeing is still some experience of reality. And our most realistic perceptions are nevertheless shaped by our own states of relatedness to reality and, hence, by all the finite factors involved. This journey of seeing reality is without any end point. There is always more reality to be seen. And there is always more sight to become.

In perception, I see reality, even though the reality I see is seen from my perspective. Reality is something objective to me and my perspective. Reality is a challenge to my perspective. Reality is capable of occasioning a transformation of me and my perspective. Reality is that "not I" which is encountering the "I" in the moment of conscious perception. The "not I" may be a rock or a tree. Or the "not I" may be a feeling or an image; for each feeling or image is part of reality. My feelings and images appear to my conscious center as empirical objects, that is, "not I".

Feelings and images are also means that my consciousness uses in order to perceive reality.



Without the mediation of feelings and images, I would have no connection to reality. Perception of reality is done through my images and through my feelings. Consciousness of myself as perceiving consciousness is a step deeper than consciousness of my feelings and consciousness of my images.

For example, when I say, "I see that you are sad", I may not feel sad; yet my feelings tell me something. I see your sadness through my feelings occasioned by your presence. I also see the expression on your face. My imagination interprets it as appropriate to sadness. But facial expressions are not what I see. I see sadness. And sadness is not an interpretation. I see it. I am aware of the sad person. I am affected by your presence.

It does not take away from this experience of seeing to say that I may come to see more and therefore see that previously I was not seeing as fully as I am now. It may happen that I am mistaken about your sadness. Perhaps you are not sad at all, but only acting. But then, I may see that you are acting. I may say, "That is not sadness, you are just putting on." Again, I may be mistaken, Perhaps you really are sad. Perhaps I see my mistake, and then see that you are truly sad.

Perception, as a journey of consciousness, is the training of our conscious gaze to see reality: (1) to see reality outside my skin, (2) to see reality inside my skin, and (3) to see reality inside another person's skin. Seeing the validity of all three of these realms of reality will require us to see reality as something different than the "facts" of scientific method.

One of the key philosophical questions being raised by the expansion of our consciousness of perception is: how are these elementary experiences of perception related to the scientific pursuit of objective knowledge? I will not attempt to explore this question exhaustively, but I will make a few crucial assertions in order to clarify how perception is the master dynamic of which scientific thinking is a sub-part.

The objective knowledge of science, as Karl Popper so clearly points out, is not something in the interior world of personal experience nor something in the exterior world of environmental processes. Objective knowledge is a third world of cultural forms. Objective knowledge exists as a personal and social memory bank of human inventions. The individual researcher adds to the memory bank, or perhaps criticizes and restructures it. Objective knowledge is a world of forms, very real, and in a very real process of being changed. The scientific method is a disciplined way for us to work together as a group on this memory bank of wisdom.

Are "facts" part of this objective memory bank of knowledge, or are "facts" something I perceive in the immediate environment? Facts are part of objective knowledge. That is, facts are creations of the human mind. Facts are always formulated within some hypothesis about reality. Then this hypothesis is tested by testing key facts against our immediate perception of reality. A fact that does not test out invalidates the whole hypothesis as universally applicable and challenges consciousness to create a better hypothesis and a better set of facts to test against immediate perception.

Science is not the discovery of the rational order of reality. Reality has no rational order save these hypotheses invented by the human mind. The scientific enterprise is a somewhat orderly way to build better and better pictures and formulae of reality. But it is also a journey into a deeper and deeper sense of the currently unknown within and surrounding our objective knowledge. Reality seems to have no end of resources for remaining beyond our knowledge. Our best scientists are those who have the humility to admit this. The objective knowledge of science is a product of finite consciousness. It is part of the unending human journey into that great sea of the unknown that will never become fully known.

These brief comments on scientific method and objective knowledge can help us to expand our consciousness of perception. Perception is perception of both order and chaos within reality. Order and chaos have to do with mental images: images order reality, and chaos is that part of reality that has not been so ordered. Perception is also intuitive and emotional contact with reality. Such contact has nothing to do with order or chaos. Our feelings can connect us directly with reality without our having to "stop and think" about order or chaos. Then out of our feelings our psycho-mental nature produces quick overall images of our immediate experience of reality. We call this intuition. Then we stop and think about these intuitive pictures. As we think, we construct hypotheses of order and test these bits of order against our experience. Perception is this whole experience which includes feeling and intuition as well as thinking. The scientific method is only part of the thinking process. Perception is the inclusive dynamic.

The journey of perceptive consciousness goes on with the aid of science, and it also goes on alongside science through art, intuition, human intimacy and the various awarenesses of the body. The full nature of perception is as boundless as any of the seven steps of human deepening.

#### STEP FOUR: THE CONSCIOUS ACTUALIZATION OF THE POWER OF INTENTIONALITY

Consciousness is more than passive awareness. It is also an active energy which chooses, decides and creates effects. Consciousness is intentionality. Unintentional processes are not of the nature of consciousness. We sometimes call them "unconscious". Unconscious can mean automatic processes like heartbeat. Unconscious can also point to a lack of attention. And unconsciousness can mean a negative intent of consciousness--like suppression--a choice or habit of choices to be unconscious of something of which I am at least partially conscious. Intentionality is conscious action, conscious willing.

The nature of life is constant activity. Intentionality is an activity added to all the other activities of living. For example, breathing goes on without the activity of the conscious will, but the will can hold the breath or use it for singing. Life never waits on the conscious will to act. Life is activity in continuous motion. The conscious will must leap up and add its activity to the already proceeding activity. Not only the body but also the mind is in constant motion. As consciousness sleeps, the feelings of the body are given form by the mind in dreams of which we may or may not become conscious. If we do become conscious of a dream, then we can add the conscious activity of finding meaning in the dream to the unconscious activity of dreaming. The conscious will is an acting capacity that can reinforce, override, or effect shifts in the ever-acting functions of mind and body.

The journey of step four is the journey of learning how to actualize the power of the conscious will. The power of the conscious will can be described as immediate attention, physical control and intentional commitment.

Immediate attention. Perception goes on perceiving whether the conscious will focuses attention or not. In the midst of this ongoing awareness, the conscious will can "pay attention" to this idea or that sensory impression. This intensifies perception. Perception becomes active through the power of consciousness to focus attention. This insight supports how true it is to say that perception and intentionality are two sides of the same reality--the conscious self.



Physical control is the power of the conscious will over the muscles of the body. This power is very great but not absolute, as any exhausted athlete knows. Nevertheless, the power of the conscious will over the action of the body is truly amazing. Certain aspects of this power are new arenas of exploration in our culture. For example, we know very little, really, about the ability of our conscious will to give images like "be a success" or "be a failure" to our sub-conscious nervous system. We are just becoming aware of how we "program" our body and how our body can then carry out that program with surprising little conscious supervision. Conscious action can program our bodies to work against us or for us.

Intentional commitment is the power of the conscious will to shape the overall direction of a person's life. A commitment is more than a desire, or drive, or want. It is a choice for a specific direction and an ongoing choosing to maintain that direction over a period of time. This commitment may be in agreement with certain desires, drives, or wants and it may be opposed to other desires, drives, or wants. In either case, commitment is a conscious power of the will, an activity added to these other propelling forces. My specific set of commitments comprise my specific personhood. I am this matrix of commitments. A shift in my commitments shifts who I am.

The content and strength of commitments differs widely from person to person. However, the following four arenas of commitment are dealt with by each person in some manner: (1) commitment to realize the potentialities of my own person, (2) commitment to a mate relationship, (3) commitment to my immediate community of friends, colleagues and acquaintances, (4) commitment to the broad human enterprise and to some specific work that contributes to it.

The journey into the power of intentionality will manifest itself in all four of these arenas. We often describe the power of intentionality as drive over against passivity. We may also describe it as discipline over against scatteredness. The journey of step four is the journey into becoming a person of ever deeper drive and discipline.

However, drive and discipline are not the whole story. Both Adolf Hitler and Mahatma Gandhi were persons of strong drive and discipline. If we consider Gandhi's humanity the deeper of the two, we do so from a different perspective than "Who had the greater power of intentionality?". As we explore the deeper levels of realistic living, we will gain the means to say how a Gandhi's life is deeper and more realistic than a Hitler's. We may also gain the means to say how a life like Gandhi's might be even deeper, more realistic, more human.

#### An Introduction to Spirit Consciousness and to Steps 5, 6, & 7

Our conscious life has memories and anticipations that give us a sense of continuity: we remember our friends, our work, our familiar places, and we expect to see them again. But life is also discontinuity: my dog dies, my friends move away, a particular work ends, I leave an old familiar place and go elsewhere. Each such experience jars me, no matter how courageous I am. And each such experience can remind me of the final discontinuity, my own death--that moment when I leave everything that is familiar to me and face the absolute unknown. Such a moment of awareness leaves me stunned with dread. I may turn my attention away and avoid the intensity of such moments. Or perhaps I become a little fascinated by the dreadfulness of my own death. Perhaps I learn to enjoy being wise about finitude and poeticize like this psalmist:

"For men are like oxen whose life cannot last  
They are like cattle whose time is short"--Psalm 49:12

Such knowledge of our finitude is a common experience of spirit consciousness. It is an experience in which the ordinary flow of our life is interrupted by a strong awareness attended by feelings of dread and fascination and calling upon new resources for courageous living. Any such state-of-being-conscious-of-reality I will call a state of being in awe. When I am experiencing awe I can discern these three closely related processes going on in my life:

- 1) A powerful "alien" image in my mental processes is cutting through my otherwise ordinary flow of thought.
- 2) A feeling of dread and also of fascination is interrupting my otherwise ordinary flow of feeling.
- and 3) Insofar as I pay attention and do not flee from the experience, a new resolve in my will is taking place, a new courage for realistic awareness and living is coming into being.

Awe happens to us whenever some aspect of our customary awareness or behavior is dying or whenever some new awareness or behavior is being born. Adolescence is almost always a time in which such happenings are going on. The images and roles of childhood are very different from the images and roles of adulthood, so the young person is literally forced to make an almost total change. Remaining a child is so painfully ridiculed that almost any alternative is better than that. So a death usually occurs and a new life of some sort is built. Whenever my particular personality is dying I am in awe. Most of us experience many significant periods of change and the awe which always attends these periods.

I have always loved the story of Noah. He so clearly experienced awe in both dying to the old and rebuilding the new. First he and his family had to leave behind everything and board the boat. However bad Noah's world may have been, it must have been rocking to leave it. It was the only past he knew. Noah had to be awe-struck by such a total destruction. Then after 40 days the boat was set back down on the earth. And what a scene that must have been! Dead animals and dead human beings all over the place, mud and rotting trees, and there was no one but Noah and his family to clean up the mess and start life on a new course. At this point, awe occurred again--a new sort of awe--the awe of forging a new human world.

In classical literature, spirit or awe is often pictured as a place where I, the ego, go on a visit. Perhaps I take a tour through hell and purgatory and heaven with Dante. Perhaps I visit rooms in a castle with St. Teresa of Avila, or perhaps I use the categories of some modern writer to name the "places" of my visit. But whatever poetry I use, what is such a visit actually visiting? Who is this "I" that takes this sort of visit?

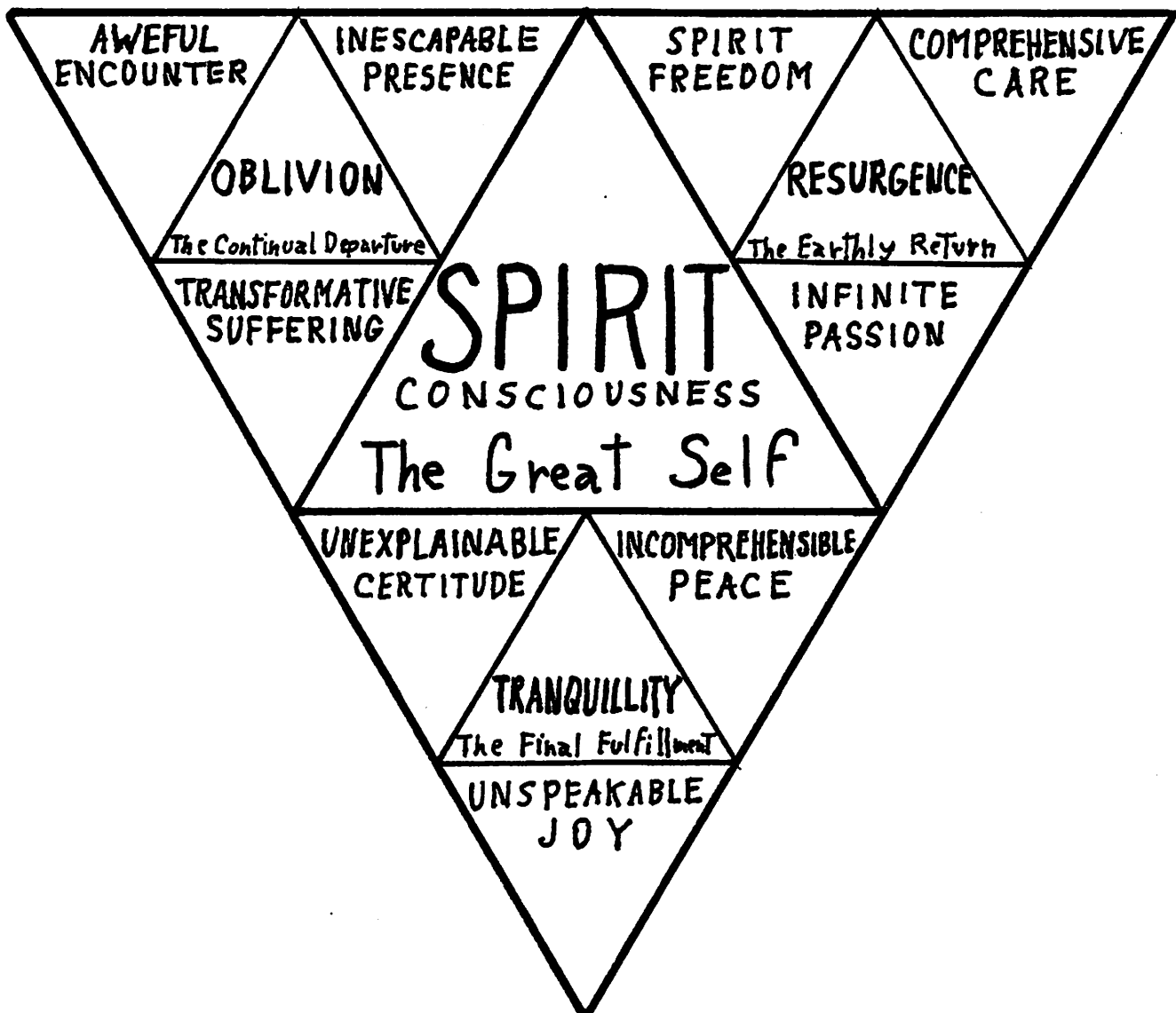
I, the ego, might be called the "becoming self"--the entity that has become what it is through my lifetime of relating to my environment and to my own functioning. My becoming self is the self that has developed since childhood into a particular personality, a particular accumulation of relationships with life which are fleshed out with all my skills, wisdoms, patterns, commitments, and familiar behaviors. Spirit consciousness is that immensity of self out of which new "becoming selves" are born. The "spirit self" includes the freedom to become a different becoming self. The spirit self does not become, but simply is. It is a constantly changing flow of awe occasioned by the actual flow of reality as a whole. It is freedom. It is care for all that has being. It is my "Great Self", the self I actually am, even though I behave most of the time from some very limited pattern of personality I have built up over the years. The

spirit self is my unrealized potential even when I, the becoming self, might be thoroughly shocked and terrified of my own experience of the spirit "me".

But the spirit self is not a goal that the becoming self can ever reach. It is the following dynamics within the ongoing life of the self: 1) the death of the becoming self to its old manners of being, 2) the resurgence of the becoming self into new manners of being, and 3) the happiness experienced when the self has become surrendered to be in this never ending process of dying and rebirth.

These three dynamics are the arenas of consciousness in which steps 5,6, & 7 proceed. In the description which will follow, I will use these three key words: "oblivion", "resurgence" and "tranquillity". Oblivion is the continual departure from life as we have known it. Resurgence is the earthly return to life as we have not yet known it. Tranquillity is the final fulfillment of human living to be found in the midst, and only in the midst, of oblivion and resurgence.

The following triangle pictures these components of spirit consciousness in relationship to one another and names three sub-parts of each. In the text that follows, I will describe each of these nine arenas of spirit consciousness.



STEP FIVE: THE CONSCIOUS CONTEMPLATION OF THE STATES OF OBLIVION

Ah, it is very hard to change and be different.  
It means passing through the waters of oblivion.

D.H. Lawrence, "Change"

God, but it is good to have died and been trodden out,  
trodden to nought in sour, dead earth,  
quite to nought,  
absolutely to nothing  
nothing  
nothing  
nothing.

D.H. Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth"

Aweful Encounter. Death is not simply the end of my life. Death is a quality of every single moment of living. Each moment passes away forever. Like the sound of a grandfather clock, my life is "tick, tick, tick, tick, tomb!" Death is a companion that walks with me on the entire path of my life.

Special events, like the death of a person close to me, or the loss of a valued possession, or the announcement of a terminal illness, may bring death to the forefront of consciousness. If so, such a moment is an awful encounter with the oblivion that surrounds my life at all times. In such moments, oblivion exists as a state of being, a state of being conscious of my actual life.

At a time of facing personal death, people may experience many things: frustration of their desires, sorrow over partings, rage at a disappointing life, anger at particular people who disappointed them, fears that have to do with memories of previous times of pain or helplessness. All these things, though wholesome and important, are not what I mean by the spirit experience of oblivion.

The following aspects of an experience of dying are what I mean by the awe of oblivion: stunned by the unyielding sternness of reality, sober terror over the inevitability of my own death, intense shock at the finality of non-existence, disorientation before the irrationality of such things. The question "Why?" receives no answer from the abyss of mystery that opens its mouth in front of me. My fragile life, stripped of all my familiar modes of operating seems absurd. I may also be fascinated over the sheer wonder of such a final boundary. And I may be intensely alert to the preciousness of the fleeting life that still remains. All these images and feelings connect me to the experience of oblivion. Such oblivion is not experienced by non-human life, and human beings often avoid the experience. Obviously many children, and some older people too, die without ever experiencing a conscious state of oblivion. On the other hand, it may be experienced daily, perhaps hourly, over the course of a long life. Every deep change entails a death to the old life as well as a beginning of something new. Every profound loss and every profound gain necessitates a deep change and therefore a death. So it is possible to experience, frequently, the awful encounter with oblivion.

Inescapable Presence. As the journey of consciousness proceeds, we enter even deeper awarenesses of oblivion. The oblivion experience grows into what seems to be a second world of reality penetrating each and every "when" and "where" of our specific daily living. Every "place" becomes a land of mystery. Every "time" becomes a moment of awe and wonder.



The prophet Amos told a story about a man who fled from a lion only to meet a bear. He fled from the bear, ran into a house, laid his hand against the wall, and a snake bit him. (Amos 5:19) The experience of oblivion, as consciousness increases, becomes like that. There is no place we can go to escape.

Where can I escape from thy spirit?  
Where can I flee from thy presence? Psalm 139:7

The meaning of this ancient poetry begins to reappear when we see that "thy spirit" and "thy presence" point to a tremorous experience of mysterious reality. In other words, the psalmist was saying, "How can I get away from all these dreadful awe-filling experiences of oblivion?"

If I climb up to heaven, thou art there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, again I find thee.  
If I take my flight to the frontiers of the morning  
or dwell at the limit of the western sea,  
even there thy hand will meet me  
and thy right hand hold me fast. Psalm 139: 9, 10

Up or down, east or west, everywhere awe meets me and grabs hold of me and will not let me go. Such intensity and constancy does not feel comfortable. I run away from it. But like the man racing in a field of tar, I am making no headway. The entire universe is haunted by the inescapable presence of oblivion. It's all around me everywhere; there is no place to go, there is no way to escape, and I'm absolutely vulnerable. I am caught in all my frailty and foolishness. The glaring light of reality gleams through all my proud explanations and arrogant behaviors.

So what happens in my life after such consciousness traps me? Through my experiences of this dreadful hound of reality, I become an adult on the journey of spirit consciousness.

Transformative Suffering. The more conscious I become, the more consciousness I have to give up in the next step into oblivion. The stronger my spirit consciousness becomes the deeper is my pain in accepting the weaknesses my finitude always entails. If consciousness were measurable, a "ten" might be tempted to think of himself or herself as some sort of infinite being when among mere "one's". But in the context of the whole journey of consciousness, a "ten" and a "one" are equal. Both experience the same amount of humiliation on their next step: total weakness, total death in the process of becoming something totally new.

So this is what the continuing journey into oblivion is like. At the very time when I see more reality than I have ever seen, I have an experience of blindness to what is really going on. At the very time when I am living a more meaningful life than I have ever lived, I have an experience of desert, a drying up of all meaning in my life. At the very time when I am sensing more authenticity than I ever have before, I have an experience of being alienated to the point of apostasy from what I know is real and good. It is as if all my confidence has suddenly become an endless sea of self doubt. Such experiences have been aptly called the dark night of the spirit journey.

These deeply humiliating states of consciousness feel somewhat like the following experience: I have been a trusted and honored part of an intense group of colleagues, who, while I was away, change everything. I return to find I don't know what is going on. All the language in changed. All the definitions of success are now different. Nothing I have done or have become is worth anything anymore. I feel injured and deeply resentful. Why wasn't I told? Why wasn't I consulted? I wonder if I have been secretly excommunicated from the group.



This story is an apt metaphor for how real life always runs off and leaves me. And I, thinking of myself as a person of considerable strength and wisdom, find this ignorance hard to take. I sometimes think there must be something wrong with me. But this sort of suffering is not an illness. It is health. It is just what profound spirit consciousness is like.

The journey into oblivion also affects my active life. I have no choice but to expend my days in some manner. The more deeply I open myself to what is taking place in my life, the more intensely I experience the dread of being insignificantly engaged. The more I attempt to participate in the fullness of the world and its history, the more I sense the ineffectiveness of all my deeds. Furthermore, I begin to feel like a wanderer on the face of the earth, living in the spaces left for people who do not belong anywhere. All my friends are only friends up to a point. The revolution I joined two years back is over now. The new revolution I am joining is not at home in the world and won't assure me a home in the future. Nothing is wrong with all this. It is just the normal suffering that goes along with increasing the depth of my realistic living. Finally, the very thought of responsibility for my deepest living is enough to make me weary. Sometimes my reading so strikes the edge of my struggle to be my deepest being that even my wide-awake mind and body grow tired with uncanny speed. Such weariness is not an illness. It is only a sign that deep action is being contemplated.

Intense action, in the midst of the hugeness and fullness of real life, is attended by a sense of ineffectivity, homelessness and weariness. If fulfillment means having a sense of success, roots and energy, then living the deep fullness of life gives us a sense of unfulfillment. We are always "on the way." We are never "there." The immensity of living always comes to us as a "greater distance to go." Such suffering might be characterized as being on a "long march."

The dark night and the long march are but two ways of talking about the spirit suffering that reaches its deepest point in what I will call the endless void. The endless void is the oblivion within oblivion. It is the experience of total non-existence happening to an existing ego. It is the emptying out of all temporal hopes and anxieties. It is the acceptance of total extinction. It is also tremendous relief. It is as if my whole life is a vacuum, a big empty receptacle cleaned out and ready for the fullness of profound living.

What poetry is adequate to talk of this extremity? I once watched a Hindu family cremate the body of their father on a huge pile of wood. I watched as one of the men broke the skull with a club so it would not explode. I was deeply gripped by the earthy drama of it all. Perhaps the endless void is like identifying with the small pile of ashes that remains at the end of such a rite.

#### STEP SIX: THE CONSCIOUS ENGAGEMENT IN THE STATES OF RESURGENCE

The ashes are beginning to burn.  
FIRE appears in an empty hearth.

The cosmic cringe at the weakness of ash  
Drove even the stalwart to sleep.  
Yet only from ash will the fire arise.  
The oblivion of strength is the spark.

The ashes are beginning to burn.  
FIRE appears in an empty hearth.

Gene Marshall, 1969

Ha, I was a blaze leaping up!  
I was a tiger bursting into sunlight.  
I was greedy, I was mad for the unknown.  
I, new-risen, resurrected, starved from the tomb.  
starved from a life of devouring always myself,  
now here was I, new awakened, with my hand stretching out  
and touching the unknown, the real unknown, the unknown unknown.

D.H. Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth"

Infinite Passion. Like the rising of the Phoenix bird from its own ashes, the flames of infinite passion only occur on the other side of an experience of oblivion. Only when spirit suffering has reduced the old self to total ashes does a totally clear vision of spirit passion emerge.

The flame of infinite passion is a deep love for the real. It is a passionate attachment to the wholeness and depth of reality. It is a strange love that extends to all components of living, including dying and death. It is a love for mystery. It is a passion for both the dreadful and fascinating. It is a yearning for mystery and for fellowship with the full mysteriousness of reality. And yet it is also a reluctant yearning, for reality in its fullness is dreadful and demanding and overwhelming.

Reality is not me. Though I am part of and participant in reality, reality is more, by far, than anything I mean by "me." Loving reality is like a mouse in love with an elephant. It is a strange match. For all practical purposes, reality is infinite, I am finite. There is an uncloseable gap between me and reality. Though I am closer to reality than my own breathing, I am also far away. My love of the real is constantly beset with a chronic sense of distance from the reality in which I delight. I am always yearning for reality as if it were somehow missing. I am thirsty with a thirst for reality that can never be quenched. I am longing for a union that never fully happens. I am on the road to a place that is infinitely distant. The longer I live with reality, the more mysterious it becomes. I never get used to mystery, for mystery moves on into deeper mystery and never quite feels like it used to feel.

Yet reality is my life. I have a passion to be real. I want to be closely in touch with reality, however new its sheer mystery, however intense the flame of increasing consciousness. Such passion is a fire that burns without my permission. I often wish it was not there. The feel of this passion is expressed in the words of this love song: "I don't know why I love you like I do". If the nature of loving a lover can be so described, how much more so this passion for the wholeness of reality with all its utter mystery, pain, grandeur, and immense impact on my every moment of living. Yet my life has no place else to go. This consuming passion for reality is my life. I want nothing else. I delight in it--however reluctantly. In the words of another love song: "You made me love you. I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to do it."

Secondly, infinite passion is an openness to reality, a trust of reality however mysterious reality may be. The flames of infinite passion arise in the knowing that I cannot trust anything else but reality. This trust of reality appears to be built into reality itself. I don't have to drum up trust in reality. I don't struggle for it. One day I just believe that real life is worth living. In spite of all the suffering, estrangement, misdeeds and struggles, life as I have it is worth living. My significance equals that of any human being that ever lived. I don't want one moment of my life to go to waste. The need to be somebody stops screaming at me. I am somebody. I just believe that all my suffering, all my wonder, all my very specific living and dying are significant beyond measure. Such belief has nothing to do with believing doctrines or

ideologies or any other type of beliefs. I am talking about discovering, in the depths of my self, my natural trust of reality.

Without such trust of reality, I will always twist reality into something I think I can trust. And I will similarly twist myself. Then as doubt enters into these delusions, I will openly despair over reality and over myself. Such despair will lead me to hate reality and hate myself. And I will further be consumed with anxiety that everything is getting worse and will never get better and that there is no way whatsoever out of this horrifying life. All this happens when I attempt to assure myself rather than noticing within myself that I just believe that life is worth living, that I am significant, that my past is just my past--reality holds no grudges against me, and that my future is open. Nothing stands in the way of my living boldly the reality that confronts me.

Thirdly, the flames of infinite passion are a power in my active living. In the movie, "Man in the Wilderness," the main character is left for dead in an open grave, his leg broken and his body mangled from his encounter with a bear. When he becomes conscious of his condition, he begins to crawl out to find water. I, watching the movie, heard myself saying, "Lie back down there. You deserve a rest." Then he catches a crawfish and eats it raw. He puts a splint on his own leg, hobbles after food, makes himself weapons, and eventually rejoins his companions--who fear him and wished him dead. I experience along with him that strange raw passion for living. The other men in the film experience his power, too, and shudder at it. They also follow him as their new leader. This portrayal of a man's experience of total oblivion and of getting up from such oblivion to live a new, unfamiliar, and difficult life, reminds me that I also possess such power to deal with my anxiety over death and my anxiety over life.

Infinite passion is also the power to live with and deal compassionately with other human beings. I have been made aware of this power on those occasions when my public speeches had a strange impact on others. It is as if reality were providing an echo to what I say. The simplest witness out of my own life turns out to be LIFE as everyone is experiencing it. Even the hostile listener may realize that I have expressed something real that he knows even though he avoids knowing it.

I have also become aware of this power on those occasions when I have carried out some task which had, in all my previous experience, seemed impossible to me. At the same places where I had been intimidated, I experienced the power to do what I deeply cared about. The same heavy responsibilities that had been crushing me were actually borne. Intense energy that I did not know I had, surged through me. It amazes me that the power to do the seemingly miraculous is a deep truth about my real life and every human life.

Comprehensive Care. Comprehensive care for humankind is a second major component of those "states of awe" I am calling "resurgence." Care for my own self and care for others is a fundamental consequence of the existence of infinite passion flowing through my life. Such care is not a moral demand I choose. It is a state of being that chooses me.

(a) Care for Self. First of all, spirit care is experienced as I, myself, caring for myself. Many moments of living jar me into the awareness that underneath all my grumbling and suicidal tendencies, I do appreciate the fact that I am. In spite of everything, I am deeply grateful that I did not miss the chance to live my life and die my death.



When I was in high school, I drove my father's car to a regional track meet in Tonkowa, Oklahoma. I was driving home to Stillwater with three other members of the track team when an Oklahoma rainstorm came up quickly. For a while it rained so hard the windshield wipers could not handle it. When the rain let up, we resumed our speed on the wet road. As we went around one car, a woman leaned out of her car window and yelled, "You boys better slow down or you'll get yourselves killed." The road had hills and deep dips. As we came up over a hill, we found water clear across the road in the next dip. The car hit the water and I lost control of it. At that moment, the words, "You boys are going to get yourselves killed," echoed in my ears. "Is this it?", I wondered numbly as my attention was fixed on each detail of keeping the car sliding smoothly. The car turned clear around on its wheels and slipped backward off the road into a six-foot drainage ditch. The back bumper was in the corn field and the front bumper was on the road siding. We opened the car doors over a small river of fast-moving water. As we slushed out through the soft mud, a wild disorientation consumed me. Am I alive? I am alive! I am ALIVE! I felt especially loved. In amazement I carefully avoided getting hit by passing cars. I was almost hilarious with gratitude for my frail existence.

I am often aware of this same gratitude--like every time the airplane I am on lands safely. Even in the midst of a dull meeting, I can sometimes hear myself say, "How good it is just to be a human being here alive this moment."

Years ago, as I and those other three young men surveyed the world that we were alive in, the conditions were oppressively real. The car was in the ditch, I was going to have to face my father's anger and my mother's upset. I didn't know what to do next. The woman came by in her car and yelled again, "I told you boys you better slow down." I was alive all right, but in no other situation than that. The life I am deeply grateful for always comes to me in a given situation. I can't start over. There is no better universe next door.

I am part of life. What an unexplainable wonder it is to be part of life. I made it, on this planet, with a lot of other people and even though everything about life is strange and often disagreeable, I appreciate it. I do care. Each of us does. We just do care for our own lives and for the many small and large factors which make life real.

Care for myself manifests itself in specific living. but it is a deep state of my interior nature. It is the same state when I experience it today as it was when I was a teen-age boy. People in every culture from Australian Aborigines to modern Europe or China experience such care for self in the specifics of daily life, and each people speaks of it in the poetry of their own cultural heritage.

(b) Care for Others. Not only do I care, in the sense of appreciating my own being alive, but I also care for other human beings. It is not that I have been trained to care by my parents or my society. I just am concerned about other lives. My cultural training may even get in the way of my care. Such training usually helps me carry out my care. But care itself is not learned; it is released, discovered, allowed to flow from the well-springs of real humanness.

One day it just happens to me that I experience how very much I care for others. Perhaps I am reading my newspaper about how an old lady in a nearby park was killed by two young men taking her purse. Suddenly all the dull data about crime rates and low police salaries and citizen fear and apathy explode into a personal occasion of anger and disgust over the present state of things. I want a new kind of neighborhood. I want law enforcement to work. I want some kind of wholesome ordering of this urban chaos.

Or perhaps I am walking down a busy street, and I pass a wild looking man, walking stiffly, waving his arms, and talking loudly to himself. Again, care breaks loose, yanking out of my memory the report that every fourth hospital bed is occupied by a schizophrenic. In my own family, and in most the families I know, at least one person is seriously disturbed by interior disorder. And furthermore, I am discouraged with almost all of our healing institutions. I want our society to do more about such intense and widespread suffering. I don't know what to do except cry.

Or perhaps I have the opportunity to visit some Asian, African or Latin American village where people are without adequate nutrition, health care, modern skills or a vision of any possible change. It may be days later before the dull pain of such encounters surfaces in my life and reveals to me that I care. It does not matter that solutions to such situations are difficult and long term. I care now. I do not wish to live in the dishonesty of some total toleration of abject poverty. My care has nothing to do with moral obligations to do something, or join something, or donate something, or give up something. I just care. What to do about it, if anything, is a totally separate issue.

"Love thy neighbor as thyself" is an empirical description of profound care. Only because that is true can the phrase also be an authentic command: be what you are-- care for self and others. When I pull back from my care of others, I become a narrowly focused person who is closed to much of my own experience. Similarly, a care for others which ignores care for self turns out to be a pride-filled practice of noble living which exalts myself at the expense of others and my true self.

People in every back corner of the world do care for the whole world even though they often lack a relevant way to express it. When we say that someone does not care, we may simply mean that he does not conform to an ideal we have of the way we think he ought to care. Care is not any sort of ideal behavior. Real care is wild and self-motivating. When we define how care has to look and then expect it to look that way in ourselves and in others, we find that we have to whip up enthusiasm for it. Real care does not need to be whipped up. It is so powerful we do not quite know how to express it. It is so powerful that we flee from it, lest it lead us into a style of living that is too much for us.

To have a role in life that means something is a primary drive of every human being, and a very deep one. Very few people have found an adequate outward expression for their care. The social reasons for this have been often spoken of, but the needed changes in society will be actually done only if people recognize that they do care,, that they are care. The social conditions that make it difficult for people to express their care will be changed by those who insist on acting upon their care and refuse to be intimidated.

In a modern telling of the ancient myth of Atlas, three boys are seeking their destiny. The third boy passed by silver and gold and finally came to where Atlas was holding up the earth. Atlas said he needed a drink of water and a short break. After some reluctance, the boy was persuaded to hold the earth temporarily while Atlas was gone. The first five minutes was exhilarating, even though the load was very heavy. "I'm holding up the earth!" But when Atlas did not return in fifteen minutes, the boy became irritated. "Where is he? I could have gotten six drinks of water by now. Perhaps he was hungry and had a quick meal. He'll be back soon." But after two hours, the boy began to howl with rage. "I am not able to do this much longer! Where is that guy? I have not been trained for this sort of work. There has been a horrible mistake made." But he was, in fact, holding up the earth and he couldn't in good conscience put it down. After several days, his dull trapped feelings turned into a sense of almost hilarious absurdity. "How did I ever get into this? Why me? I am being laughed at.

I am being ridiculed. I might have settled down for a quiet life somewhere and now look what has happened! I've got the entire world on my back." Still later, his whole life becomes a deep sigh. "Oh me! Atlas is never coming back." And still later, "it's up to me. I am it. I am Atlas, now."

Such deeply demanding care happens to very ordinary people in very ordinary circumstances. A secretary comes to realize that she is really in charge of what is happening to the whole business. A common worker suddenly sees that "the buck stops here," because there is no place to pass it. Not only do all of us stand on the shoulders of others, but we come to realize that we are shoulders on which others will stand. I take the baton and run my lap. I find myself "out beyond" all those I used to lean on. The ancestors are now counting on me to carry this task forward for the descendants.

One of the most accurate descriptions ever written of such care appears in J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings.

"All the council sat with downcast eyes, as if in deep thought. A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice. 'I will take the ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way.'"

Book II, Chapter 2, Page 354

Spirit Freedom. In this description of the states of resurgence, I have saved the subject of freedom for last in order to clarify more adequately the nature of freedom as a spirit reality. Spirit freedom is an empirical reality like the states of comprehensive care and infinite passion. What goes on in human life that we can call "spirit freedom"? Is there such a thing as:

- (1) freedom from my old images and freedom for creating new images?
- (2) freedom from my old patterns of suppressing my feelings and freedom for expressing my feelings fully?
- (3) freedom from my old perceptual viewpoints and freedom for new perceptual viewpoints?
- (4) freedom from my old commitments of will and freedom for new commitments of will?

Or, putting all four of these questions into one question: is there such a thing as freedom from my old finite self and freedom for the creation of a new finite self? Obviously, I am answering this question, "Yes!".

In my overall picture, spirit freedom is:

- (1) freedom from my old finite self and freedom for the creation of a new finite self.
- (2) freedom from the passivity of a wholly determined fate and freedom for the fate of creative participation in the determination of fate--for myself, for others, and for the planet as a whole.
- (3) freedom from all images of good and evil and freedom for a disciplined life of creating an ever expanding understanding of the good of realistic living.

(1) Beyond self: Christopher Fry in his play "Sleep of Prisoners" has his characters pronounce the word "freedom" FREE DOOM! There is a deep insight in this pun. Spirit Freedom only exists on the other side of death. Until the old ego has entered into oblivion, there is no spirit freedom; for each choice is determined by the set of the old ego. Perceiving options, having choices to make, struggling to make concrete decisions--all this goes on in the life of the self which is still bound to being itself, as well as in the life of the self which is free to choose to become a new self. The experience of spirit freedom is more than the experience of choosing. It is the experience of choosing a new self. It is the creation of a fresh departure in living that breaks with the patterns that describe the old self. Such freedom is an intentional embracing of death and an intentional embracing of new birth. It may be exciting. But it is also always dreadful and frequently downright terrifying. In other words, spirit freedom is always a state of being in awe.

In a powerful short novel called "The Ronin," the title character, a great swordsman, becomes finally disgusted with his whole life and throws his precious sword as far as he can throw it, crying out, "I did it. I did it all." And thereafter he does something entirely different. "I did it!" These three words stand out for me. I am the one who has been doing my life even though I have been unconscious of it. I thought I just was what I was. I thought other forces had made me do what I do. What a dreadful and exciting moment to see that I have been doing it and that I can start now doing something else.

Spirit freedom is always some kind of sharp corner in the course of living. It may be a seemingly small thing like admitting something rather than denying it. But that is a sharp corner. Each small step of change away from an old habit of living is a sharp corner. Such small steps are leaps into the unknown. Spirit freedom is an act of immense courage. Someone standing alongside me at such a moment may not see this clearly because they have not been the person I have been. They may say, "Well, it is about time you gave up so and so or started doing so and so." Clearly, it is one experience to watch someone else change and quite another experience to be myself in the full agony and excitement of elemental change.

Spirit freedom is self transcendence in the sense that it leaps beyond the self I am and have been and into the new and unfamiliar future of becoming literally a different me. Spirit freedom teaches me how totally fragile my selfhood is. The entity I am is the construction of all my previous choices to relate to the factors of my environment and my potentialities to cope with and change that environment. Now, in the moment of spirit freedom, I experience myself choosing to modify the entity I am. All my talk about "finding out who I am" or striving to "actualize myself" suddenly seems a little stupid. For such self discovery is merely a prelude to the real issue: what self will I now, at the moment, choose to become? Self discovery has taken on a whole new meaning: the discovery that I am freedom. Alongside the finite entity of my particular network of self-relations appears the "Great Self," the "Spirit Self," the Self which is freedom.

(2) Beyond fate: Spirit freedom is also a liberation from passivity toward the external factors that comprise my fate and a freedom for creative participation in the determination of fate in general. My life, and the life of humankind as a whole, is determined (that is, fated) by many factors. The natural environment, sun, rain, earthquake, storm, drought, animals, insects, birds, trees, ozone layer, the whole ecology of the planet, human society, all determine my life. Being born and having to die are two of the most obvious ways I am determined. Spirit freedom does not stop the fate of being determined. It adds an additional determiner to the network of



determining forces. My freedom, in some finite measure, determines how all the other determining factors will determine me and my impact upon the environment in which I am an active agent.

The discovery of this dimension of spirit freedom is like being elected president of the world. I am actually able to respond to everything and therefore I am response-able for the outcome of everything. The amount of power or impact I may be able to mobilize for each factor in my world may be minimal or it may be amazing. But in either case, the response-ability exists as a fact. Even if I do little, I can do what I can do as an example for others who can perhaps do much more. I can do. There is no excuse. This entire world is my house. I am its architect. I am its builder. I sustain it. I destroy it.

The world has many builders. I am in conflict with other freedom-bearing beings over the outcome of each factor. But this in no way lessens my freedom; it only provides the context in which the fruits of my freedom are limited or perhaps augmented by the power of others. Whatever be the situation, I have no one to blame for anything. I am inclusively response-able for the outcome of all things. Dreadful freedom!

(3) Beyond good and evil: Finally, spirit freedom is freedom from all images of good and evil and freedom for a disciplined life of creating an ever expanding understanding of the good of realistic living. I have phrased this sentence very carefully and repeated it at this point in the text in order to avoid misunderstanding on this often misconstrued dimension of spirit freedom.

Good and evil, right and wrong, and all statements of value, all statements of principle, are formulations of social wisdom. Good and evil is invented by human beings just like automobiles, cloth, bread, and atomic bombs. When I say "Something is good.", I simply mean, "I or we value it.". When I say, "Something is evil.", I simply mean, "I or we dis-value it.". When I say, "Whatever is real is good.", I mean, "I value reality: I am committed to realistic living.".

Spirit freedom exists in the consciousness that I am the inventor of good and evil. My conscience is given to me by no outside authority. I create my own conscience. True, my society created a conscience for me (several, perhaps), and many of my peers expect me to honor that conscience, but I may propose a new conscience for myself and for my society as well. Insofar as I live by society's conscience without choosing it for my own, I am not experiencing spirit freedom. I am a "robot" of my social training. A total robot would not be able to admit that. Such a robot would simply say, "I have the comfort of knowing what is good and evil."

Anyone experiencing spiritual freedom knows that no one knows what is good and evil in an absolute sense. Anyone who claims to know (however high an authority may be cited) is ignorant of reality. An absolute knowledge of good and evil is, for we human beings, a forbidden fruit. Eating it kills the spirit. Eating it means entering into an illusion that separates the eater from reality and from the reality of spirit freedom.

The experience of spirit freedom is like having broken through a police barricade. It is like reeling in the scandal of having done the last taboo. With all the old moralities screaming in our ears, we take forbidden steps one by one into an ever expanding wildness. This wildness may take the form of rebellion from parents or society at this point or that, but it is surrender to reality. My adolescent rebellion from parents and society is a necessary part of growing up and finding my own experience of reality. This sort of rebellion is far different than getting stuck in

some life-long rebellion against growing up or against some aspect of adult realism. Trying to remain a child all my life is rebellion against reality. Spiritual freedom is rooted in a love of reality. The forms which past generations invented to aid them in their realistic living tend to become strait-jackets to later generations. Hence, realistic living is perpetual rebellion from and perpetual re-creation of the images of good and evil.

We have already described how realistic living is care for all that exists, and passion for the always awesome wholeness of reality. Spirit freedom is part of this tapestry of realistic living. It is another component of conscious obedience to the way human existing actually goes on. Spirit freedom is disciplined commitment to the good of realistic living. Spirit freedom is absent whenever such commitment is lost. Illusions destroy freedom. Rebellion against the goodness of reality destroys freedom. Spirit freedom is the most radical obedience--obedience to the way life is. When I deny my reality, I become unfree.

Here is one of the key paradoxes of life:

Freedom is only freedom to be free.

The freedom to escape freedom is called "bondage."

Within this last statement is the key to an understanding of estrangement, spiritual unhealth, and the demonic forces in human life. Finite consciousness is not estrangement. We are always limited in our consciousness. Estrangement is the result of using the finite conscious freedom that we do have to twist existing consciousness into bondage. Bondage is the opposite of freedom. Freedom is always present, and is only present, when awe is present. So bondage is any state of life in which I am not in awe. I am always in some state of awe when I am in the presence of reality. So bondage is any state of life in which I am not in the presence of reality. Estrangement and bondage are two descriptions of the same thing. The demonic is any force in my life which is fighting against my being in awe, against my being realistic, against my being free. The demonic is any force which is taking me into or holding me in bondage.

Spirit freedom always happens to us as a deliverance from bondage into the wilderness of having to invent good and evil, into the wilderness of having to reconstitute ourselves, and into the wilderness of having to rebuild our environment.

Spirit Freedom and Comprehensive Care are both rooted in Infinite Passion for realistic living. These states of being in awe comprise the resurgence of humanness that appears on the other side of experiencing the oblivion that surrounds human finitude.

#### STEP SEVEN: THE CONSCIOUS PARTICIPATION IN THE STATES OF TRANQUILLITY

What poetry can I use to introduce this phenomena? In the midst of the most sober awe of oblivion, the deep silence of tranquillity will sometimes appear. In the midst of the most flaming passion of resurgence, the deep stillness of tranquillity will sometimes appear. Tranquillity is both a deep acceptance of oblivion and an active enlistment in the vocation of resurgence. Death and rebirth, oblivion and resurgence, these are the yin and yang of spirit consciousness. Step seven is about the union of these two poles. Tranquillity is the appearance of another quality of awe, bubbling up at the very place where the tension between perpetual dying and perpetual rebirth becomes extreme.

Incomprehensible Peace. Tranquillity is first of all a state of peace. In this deep state of peace, one has a sense of being without any problems. It is easy to think that I have problems. Perhaps my wife and I are having a fight. Perhaps my children are deeply troubled and I feel inadequate to help. Or I am stuck in old patterns I can't shake. Or my colleagues misunderstand my ideas and undervalue my work. Yet these are not "problems" that prevent me from living a full life. My life is a long list of such things, each of which tempt me into the illusion that I must live in gloom until this problem is solved. Incomprehensible peace is the ability to see that problems do not exist. All my "personal problems" are merely opportunities and challenges.

When I am working hard for something I care for and things are not working out, panic and hatred seem to be inevitable. Yet this state of problemlessness does happen. If it does, I have a strange sense of ease and rest right in the midst of my frustration, my passionate care, my urgent responsibility, the opposition of others. If I remain captured by the illusion that I have some serious problems, I find hatred of life growing up at the very places where I care the most. When problemlessness happens to me, I am content to live with and deal with my real life.

Unexplainable Certitude. It sometimes happens that a strange light breaks over everything. In spite of the finitude of all my knowledge, I am deeply assured that I know what life is about. Light shines over all my past and over all my future.

This state of being is like the lifting of a thick fog. "On a clear day you can see forever.", says the song title. Everything was in a muddle. But now, at such a moment, I just know, even though it is hard to say what I know. The colors of the trees and flowers and buildings look brighter. I watch people; I listen to the news; I read a book; I see a movie; and I surprise myself with insight into the meaning of everything. It is as if things came together in my sleep last night. Some illumination happened to me like a flash of light way beneath the level where mental effort even functions. I see where I used to be blind. I am absurdly assured. I didn't figure this out. Such wisdom came from nowhere. I still realize that I can never trust all of my intuitions, but it now seems to me that I can trust reality to keep me real; therefore, I can trust myself after all.

Unspeakable Joy. What does it mean to be happy and realistic at the same time? What does it mean to take real delight in the full agony and glory of realistic living? When I stop to think about it, I realize that I have lived most of my life in a fog of unhappiness, crying out, "I could be happy if I had:

1. A little more money.
2. Better health.
3. More esteem from certain people.
4. A wife who was not so x, y, and z.
5. Children who were less this and more that.
6. More time for a, b, and c.
7. More this or that in my personal strengths.
8. More noteworthy achievements."

Each of us has his or her own specific list. But such a list presupposes that I am unhappy. Yet no one of these items in my real life actually makes me unhappy. If I experience myself as happy and someone asked me to list all the things that make up my happy life, the list would contain the same items. If I am happy, I am not happy because of any of the specific items of my life. I am happy in and through all the specific items of my life. Every mundane and trivial thing is not really trivial; it is filled with reality. If I delight in the real, everything is part of my happiness.

I sometimes say, "Reality is too hard for me.". But reality is not too hard. We are made for it. Fleeing reality is the truly unbearable life. Reality cannot be fled, so my attempts to flee lead to despair. Reality cannot be willed away, so I am anxious if I try. The deep truth is that I want it real, even if it is not easy. Real life is happiness.

When I am living such happiness, I have a sense of being at one with the vital forces of nature. My heart dances on in the midst of sorrow or gladness. Everything seems a gift to me: the rainy day, the work, the unwelcome interruptions, the simple pleasures, the workmates. My life is full and running over with aliveness. Everything is worthwhile. If I must die at this moment, I would die a happy death. I would not want to miss even this dread moment of my life. I would play my last cards in an absurd exhilaration. My life and my death have an unassailable dignity. I am surrounded with happiness.

### General Conclusion on the Seven Steps

Each of the seven steps contains subject matter for many books. My purpose has been merely to paint an overview that is convincing. I have limited myself to being descriptive of the seven arenas of consciousness in which each of the seven steps proceeds. I have not devoted space to a discussion of the methods and disciplines needed to promote growth on each of these seven paths. Obviously, this is a huge and important unfinished task. Another unfinished task surrounds the subject of clarifying the roles of helping and being helped on each of these paths. Much wisdom is needed to clarify ineptitude and genuineness in the exchanges between teacher and student, therapist and client, guru and disciple, adept and novice. In this conclusion, I will not even attempt to survey such vast subjects.

I do, however, want to clarify some of the relationships between the seven steps and say why a wholistic approach to human consciousness is crucially important. I will begin with three examples of lack of wholeness within the realm of spirit consciousness.

An emphasis upon tranquillity without an adequate emphasis upon oblivion and resurgence will result in what I call indulgent mysticism. The great bulk of popular religious movements fits this category. They are indulgent because they pursue happiness and fulfillment without adequate attention to the necessity of depth personal change. It is easy to understand the appeal of an offer for a quick and easy solution to human fulfillment, especially one that entails no alteration of my old familiar patterns of living. The tragedy of this attempt to skip over oblivion and resurgence to quick bliss is that it simply does not work. All the quick bliss turns out to be just as quickly gone.

Or again, an emphasis upon oblivion without adequate emphasis upon resurgence characterizes the many forms of ascetic quest for nirvana. Here, release from the past self is sought with great energy, and the lucidity and soberness about that process is sometimes commendable. But something very important is sacrificed--namely, the significance of daily life and the significance of participation in the great sweep of history.

Or again, an emphasis upon resurgence without adequate emphasis upon oblivion will result in what we might call an over-gentle do-goodism. Engaging others at the point of demanding radical change will be feared as harmful, or tactless, or impolite, or harsh. The virtue of severity is missing. True spirit wisdom never forgets that dreadful dying to our old selves is an essential part of wholesome living for each and every person at every stage of life.

Another kind of imbalance can result from neglecting the whole realm of spirit consciousness. Emphasizing imaginal consciousness, feeling consciousness, perception and intentionality to the neglect of spirit consciousness is a characteristic of most philosophies of life which are based solely on the secular disciplines of psychology and/or sociology. Frequently, we encounter strongly conscious therapists, social revolutionaries, or secular thinkers who rigidly reject the whole realm of spirit depth. Since this attitude blocks out the dynamics of change at the deepest levels of human life, such philosophies always lead to tyranny of one form or another. It may be the tyranny of the skilled mind over the mentally slow. It may be the tyranny of the emotional adept over the emotional novice. Eventually, the tyranny will emerge in some kind of social form in which the "more conscious" lord it over the "less conscious." "More conscious" usually becomes stabilized in some theory or ideology with which the "more conscious" resist becoming still further conscious. The learned cease to learn (at certain crucial points) and the learner is prevented from ever teaching certain "counter-revolutionary" insights. Everything becomes stuck in some rigid pattern like party and people, therapist and patient, trainers and trainees. As I said, this is inevitable whenever spirit consciousness is de-emphasized. Oblivion, resurgence and tranquillity are the great equalizers. On these three journeys everyone is at the same level--namely, a person of finite consciousness who is dying to that particular consciousness and building a new finite consciousness. The fellowship of spirit consciousness is a fellowship among equals.

On the other hand, emphasizing spirit consciousness to the neglect of imaginal consciousness, feeling consciousness, perception and intentionality leads to a tragedy similar to an emphasis upon tranquillity to the neglect of oblivion and resurgence. Like leaping over oblivion and resurgence to bliss, leaping over finite consciousness to spirit consciousness creates an illusory spirit consciousness. Authentic spirit consciousness exists only in the midst of our earthly biological wholeness. A flight into an "out-of-body" experience is actually a trip into some obscure corner of our own bloody brains. Actually there is no such thing as an "out-of-body" experience. All consciousness is no more and no less than some truly amazing function of the human body. There is no need to hypothesize a "spirit body" which descends into our "material body" and there struggles to return to its pure spirit realm. There is no pure spirit realm. There is no pure material realm, either. There is just one realm: the name for it is unimportant. All philosophies which posit a metaphysical dualism have: (1) created an illusory understanding of spirit experience and (2) depreciated the wholesomeness of some or all of the following: flesh, body, feeling, nature, brains, mental function, society, historical process, ego, perception, will, personality, sex, intimacy, community--the list is long.

Experiencing spirit is mixed inseparable with all aspects of our living. Furthermore, spirit consciousness is a positive energy that enriches imaginal consciousness, feeling consciousness, perceiving, and willing. The whole person is a spirit person, and the authentic spirit person is a whole person.

#### A Postscript on Spirit Consciousness, Reality and Religion

The full importance of spirit consciousness in the life and history of humankind can only be realized if the following two considerations are also kept in mind:  
(1) Spirit consciousness is encounter with and response to reality in its fullness, and (2) Spirit consciousness, when given social form, is called religion.

(1) Encounter with and Response to Reality. It is essential for a full understanding of spirit consciousness not only to see the subjective feelings, images and resolves of the personal experience of awe, but also to see the objective awe-producing reality.



Spirit consciousness is a relationship with reality, just as all consciousness is a relationship with reality. And the full meaning of the term "relationship" is two-fold: encounter--outward reality impacting me and creating affects in my interior being, and response--my interior being creating action in my own body and within the environment encountering me.

Awe happens when I am encountering reality with an intensity of awareness that vastly exceeds the awareness characterizing the usual flow of my life. In such an awe-moment, I am seeing reality in a deeper way. Reality has not itself become deeper; the depths of reality have been revealed to me. The human race has created many words for the depth of reality. The most recent effort has centered on terms like "Being," "The abyss of being," "The ground of being," "Being itself." The meaning of these terms is missed unless the overtone of "infiniteness" is heard in them. In other words, awe is occasioned in my life when the infinite depths of reality become apparent to me. Oblivion, resurgence and tranquillity are all descriptions of states of awe and hence of aspects of our encounter with Being. The infiniteness of reality is what each of us is encountering whenever awe is present.

An encounter with Being necessitates a response to Being. The response may be a flight from the encounter into some kind of unconsciousness of the encounter. Or the response may be a willingness to remain conscious of the encounter and thus undergo a process of radical change in some aspect of my life.

The response of flight may take the form of total refusal to be conscious of the encounter thus striving to make it seem like such an encounter never happened. Or the response may take the form of: a refusal to credit the encounter with being worthy of a response; a stoical dismissal of the encounter as a bad thing; or a bitter grudge against the encountered reality. Whatever form the flight takes, it is self-defeating; for escape is not actually possible. Therefore, the attempt to flee the un-flee-able creates a state of being that Soren Kierkegaard calls "despair".

The following is an outline of the components of the whole encounter and response dynamic when the response is one of remaining conscious and trusting the reality being encountered.

ENCOUNTER: An Impingement of BEING upon my life

1. An external situation impacting me
2. An interior upheaval in my life
3. My automatic flight from the experience
4. My unavoidable awareness of an urgent life question to which I must respond

RESPONSE: A fresh Recreation of my Relationship to BEING

1. A choice to be aware of my estrangement from the BEING I experience impinging on me
2. A choice to be aware of the "fact" that BEING is not estranged from me, but accepts me in spite of my estrangement
3. A choice to accept this "fact" rather than:
  - a) try to alter my estrangement from BEING
  - b) try to do something that would make up for my estrangement
  - c) blame BEING for my being estranged from BEING
  - d) deny the existence of BEING or of my estrangement from BEING, or both



4. A choice to shift my active behavior toward the practical issues involved in responding to the BEING that has impinged on me. This choice does not mean ending all my estrangement from BEING. It does mean adding to my life new and fresh activity which carries out my choice to accept the fact that BEING accepts me in spite of my estrangement. Such activity has the effect of overcoming my estrangement. Such activity has the effect of countering despair with trust in the goodness of reality and in my possibility to live realistically.

These eight aspects of Encounter and Response appear in every occasion of spirit consciousness. They describe a basic dynamic of each experience of spirit consciousness, whether of oblivion or resurgence or tranquillity.

(2) The Paradox of Religious Form. Spirit consciousness is like a wind that blows through individual lives, through the interchange between individuals, and through all the processes of social existing. This wind demands to be given form; and yet the spirit can never be contained in any of the forms we create for it.

What do I mean by "forms?" I mean any and all the rational creations of human beings. I mean patterns of thought, styles of behavior, structures of society, techniques, methodologies, art and language. All forms, all rational creations, are social in nature. One of the types of social form which human beings have given and must give to spirit consciousness is called "religion." Religion consists of these forms:

- 1) mythic stories
- 2) ritual practices
- 3) pictorial, plastic and architectural symbolisms
- 4) social organizations to support and spread the above

The "aliveness" of such religious forms depends upon the capacity of the persons using them to experience the awe which originally gave impetus to their creation. Any religious form can become "dead" when people no longer experience the awe that the form was pointing to in the lives of its original users. Any religious form, no matter how primitive, can spring to life again when its contemporary users focus their consciousness upon the appropriate spirit experiences.

Furthermore, all religious forms participate in the relativity which characterizes all human creations. The absolute nature of the reality to which religious forms point does not pass over into the nature of religious forms themselves. Religious forms pass away. They are superceded and augmented. They are used in new contexts. Religious forms, like all forms, are lifeless apart from the lives of contemporary spirit beings. Religious forms can be evaluated as better or worse depending upon how accurately and effectively they express our actual experiences of awe.

No religious form has to be "believed in" as some kind of literal truth. The current ideas in our society about literal truth arose with experimental science. It is hard for contemporary people to grasp that such literalism did not limit human thought a thousand years ago. All the originators and enrichers of the great religions were artists and poets playing with symbolic forms in a wildly creative effort to give form to their spirit experience. The very genius of religion is destroyed when literalism is brought into it. Scientific literalism is appropriate to the scientific enterprise. Science, as such, cannot destroy religion. The true destroyers of religion are the religious thinkers who take the methods of scientific literalism into the realm of religious metaphor. This is what has happened whenever we are asked to "believe in"



a literal heaven or hell or immortal soul or reincarnation of the monad or supernatural being or angels or devils. What is literally true is that all these things are metaphors, poems, myths--creations of the religious imagination for the purpose of giving expression to the human experiences of awe. If we have bound our minds with religious literalisms and authoritarian rigidity, we will not possess the suppleness necessary to fly on the wings of metaphor and poetry into a full participation in spirit consciousness.

The descriptions of steps 5,6, and 7 were but one fragmentary effort to obey the cry of the wind of spirit: "Give me form! Give me form!" And the form that was given, though very good, will never contain the wind of the spirit. This wind will break out of any form given to it. The reader will have to learn to feel the wind directly and participate in creating form for it. In this strange century, speaker and listener, author and reader, have to invent anew, each and every step of the way, the basic elements of religion.