

SHAMANIC EXPERIENCES: A DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS



ROGER WALSH, M.D., Ph.D. is professor of psychiatry, philosophy, and anthropology at the University of California at Irvine. His research interests include Asian psychologies and philosophies, the psychology of meditation and contemplative practices, and transpersonal psychology. His publications include *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision* and *Essential Spirituality: The Seven Central Practices*.

Summary

The nature of the experiences induced by shamans has long been a topic of considerable controversy. The experiences occurring during one of the major shamanic techniques, the shamanic journey, have been described in terms of various psychopathologies or as identical to the transcendent experiences of Buddhism and yoga. Despite such claims, careful analysis reveals that shamanic journey experiences are distinct on several phenomenological dimensions. This article uses developmental analyses to assess whether shamanic experiences represent experiences at similar or different developmental stages as yogic and Buddhist experiences, and concludes that although there is some overlap, there are also significant differences. The article then turns to current theories about the evolution of human consciousness. Different views of evolution are summarized, the possible evolution of transpersonal techniques and

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank J. P. Tarcher for permission to use portions of *The Spirit of Shamanism* as a basis for an updated discussion of shamanic experiences, and the many people who assisted in the preparation of this and related articles. These people include especially Angeles Arrien, Marlene Dobkin de Rios, Gordon Globus, Michael Harner, Arthur Hastings, Stan Krippner, John Levy, Larry Peters, Don Sandner, Huston Smith, Charles Tart, Frances Vaughan, Michael Winklemen, Tom Greening, the editor of *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, and several anonymous reviewers. Bonnie L'Allier provided her usual excellent administrative and secretarial assistance.

Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Vol. 41 No.3, Summer 2001 31-52
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experiences is outlined, and the possible place of shamanic practitioners in this scheme is suggested.

In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual everything depends on the development of consciousness.

—Jung (1969, p. 272)

Shamanism is one of humankind's most venerable traditions and includes medical, psychotherapeutic, and religious elements. It has endured for tens of thousands of years, spread around the world, and even today remains a vital practice in many cultures. Shamans were the first people known to devise a technology to systematically modify and explore consciousness and to use altered states of consciousness for healing. As such, shamans were the true pioneers of the field of research now known as consciousness studies. But all this begs a question: "What is a shaman?"

Definition

There are many definitions of shamanism ranging from broad to narrow (Peters & Price-Williams, 1980, 1983). In broad definitions, the "only defining attribute is that the specialist enter into a controlled ASC [altered state of consciousness] on behalf of his [or her] community" (1980, p. 408). In these broad definitions, the term *shaman* refers to any practitioners who enter controlled ASCs, no matter what type of altered state. Such definitions include, for example, mediums and yogis.

Narrow definitions are more precise and, I would argue, more useful. They specify such things as the type of altered state, prototypical experiences, and the practitioner's goals. One such definition (Walsh, 1990) states that

Shamanism can be defined as a family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves, or their spirit(s), traveling to other realms at will, and interacting with other entities in order to serve their community. (p. 11)

This definition will probably not satisfy everyone. Judging from the history of the field, probably no definition will. In particular, it does not encompass those practitioners who enter altered states and experience themselves as inviting "spirits" into them (incorpo-

rating them) but who do not experience themselves traveling to other realms. Many researchers consider these practitioners to be shamans. However, the narrower, more precise definition will serve us well for this article.

Controversy Over the Nature of Shamanic Experience

The nature of the experiences induced by shamans has been a topic of enduring conflict and confusion. Early Western researchers diagnosed shamanic experiences as clearly pathological and described them as, for example, epileptic, neurotic, hysteric, idiotic, psychotic, and schizophrenic (for reviews and assessments of these claims for pathology, see Feuerstein, 1991; Kakar, 1982; Noll, 1983; Walsh, 1989c, 1989d, 1990).

In recent years, an opposite but equally extreme view of shamanic states has appeared in the popular literature. Shamans are now being advanced as saints, sages, and even “masters of death.” Consider, for example, the claims that the shaman “experiences existential unity—the *samadhi* of the Hindus or what Western spiritualists and mystics call enlightenment, illumination, *unio mystica*” (Kalweit, 1988, p. 236), and that “shamans, yogis and Buddhists alike are accessing the same state of consciousness” (Doore, 1988, p. 223). In addition, Kalweit (1988, p. 11) claims that the shaman is “a master of death; he actually dies and is actually reborn” (whatever that means).

The Shamanic Journey

A central experience that has evoked many of these claims, both positive and negative, about shamanic health is the shamanic journey. The journey is a major defining technique and experience of shamanism (Eliade, 1964; Walsh, 1989b, 1994). In it, shamans enter an ASC, technically a trance state. They then enter controlled out-of-body experiences in which they experience themselves roaming at will through this or other worlds and meeting, battling, or befriending the spiritual inhabitants. Most important, all this is done (at least ideally) to learn or to acquire power, help, and healing for their people (Harner, 1982).

Several types of present day experiences bear some similarities. These include Jung’s active imagination, Watkins’, (1976) waking

dreams, lucid dreams, near death, and spontaneous out-of-body experiences (LaBerge, 1985, 1993; Ring, 1984, 1993).

Not surprisingly, therapists have become interested in incorporating shamanic journeys and other shamanic techniques into Western psychotherapy (e.g., Gagan, 1998; C. M. Smith, 1997). There have also been preliminary studies suggesting that shamanic journeying may have beneficial effects on subjective well-being and on the immune response (Harner & Tyron, 1996).

Of course the shamanic journey state is not the only altered state used by shamans—others include those states induced by fasting, solitude, and psychedelics (Harner, 1973; Walsh, 1990). However, in view of its importance and the misinterpretations it has suffered, the shamanic journey is a major and useful focus for discussion.

Phenomenological mapping of the shamanic journey state of consciousness shows, contrary to many claims, that it is clearly distinct from schizophrenic, Buddhist, and yogic states (Walsh, 1990). It differs from them on several experiential dimensions such as awareness of the environment, concentration, control, sense of identity, arousal, affect, and imagery. Consequently, these phenomenological analyses together with other data suggest that shamanism in general, and the shamanic journey in particular, cannot simply be dismissed as pathological or equated with other traditions. Shamanic journey experiences are very different indeed from, for example, the fragmented hallucinations of acute schizophrenia (Noll, 1983), the microscopic investigation of experience of Buddhist insight meditation (Goleman, 1988), or the unwavering attention of yogic samadhi (Feuerstein, 1998).

However, the phenomenological mapping and comparisons that have been done so far have not taken a crucial dimension into account. That dimension is development. Consequently, this article makes developmental comparisons of shamanic journey states with the states and stages of consciousness elicited in other traditions and then uses these comparisons to explore the evolution of consciousness.

WILBER'S MODEL OF TRANSPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Studies of child and adult development indicate that certain stages and capacities tend to develop later than others and to

emerge in a fixed sequence. For example, Piaget's formal-operational thinking and Kohlberg's postconventional morality appear later in life than preoperational thought and conventional morality.

It seems that similar sequences may occur with the development of states of consciousness. Invariant sequences of states are described in several traditions, such as the samadhis of yoga or the stages of insight and concentration meditation in Buddhism (Eliade, 1969; Feuerstein, 1989, 1998; Goleman, 1988). These and other traditions claim that their practices induce a constellation of states that emerge in a fixed order, and later states are usually regarded as more developed than earlier ones.

How then can we map states that emerge at different stages. Ken Wilber (1982) suggests three criteria. The first is the sequence of emergence; in general, states are more developed if they tend to emerge later than earlier. The second criterion is access to other states. A state can be said to be more developed than others if a person who can enter it can also access those other states but not vice versa. Third, later developmental states may have additional capacities not available in earlier ones.

So it seems that in addition to comparing states experientially or phenomenologically, we may also be able to compare them according to their developmental sequence. Metaphorically speaking, we can now add a vertical dimension of assessment (developmental) to the horizontal dimensions (experiential, phenomenological) that have been used up to now.

That we can map states occurring in a particular tradition or practice on a vertical developmental dimension seems clear. However, it is not clear whether we can hope to make developmental comparisons of states occurring in different traditions or practices because different practices induce very different types of experiences.

Yet, some underlying commonalities can be found. To give some obvious examples, the Christian contemplative and the journeying shaman who report seeing images of angels and spirits, respectively, are both seeing images of spiritual figures. The Buddhist and Vedantic meditators who attain nirvana and nirvikalpa samadhi, respectively, are both in states in which no thoughts, images, or sensations arise to awareness; there is only awareness. It is also clear that there are radical differences between the first pair and second pair of experiences. Consequently, we can see that it may be

possible to group experiences from different practices and traditions into clusters.

Along these lines, Wilber has suggested that we may be able to cluster states and stages of transpersonal development according to the underlying deep structures of the experiences (Wilber, 1980, 1983a, 1997; Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1986). The deep structure of a family of experiences is the common form that underlies and molds them. Thus, for example, human faces vary so dramatically that we can distinguish almost every person on the planet from almost everyone else. Yet, underlying these almost infinite differences in appearance lies what Wilber would call the same deep structure composed of two eyes, a nose, a mouth, and two ears. In other words, the deep structure of each face is the same. Yet, this single deep structure can produce literally billions of different appearances.

On the basis of a wide-ranging review of the world's contemplative traditions and experiences, Wilber has suggested that underlying the vast array of such experiences lies a finite number of recognizable deep structures. For example, Wilber (1980) suggests that the Buddhist nirvana, Vedantic nirvikalpa samadhi, and gnostic abyss all spring from the same deep structure: a condition of formless, objectless awareness.

Wilber's approach is obviously an intriguing one, for he is suggesting a way in which it may be possible to make sense of the extravagant profusion of experiences found in the world's contemplative traditions. Hidden beyond different experiences, names, and interpretations may be common characteristics and clusters. If further research supports this claim, it will be a major advance in our understanding of transpersonal states and stages of consciousness.

Wilber goes further to suggest that deep structures emerge in a set sequence during contemplative practice and that this same sequence is found across different traditions and practices: That is, it is culturally invariant (Wilber, 1980, 1997). There may be, he suggests, a widespread, perhaps universal, sequence of development or emergence of transpersonal states. In other words, no matter what the practice being used, certain deep structures and their corresponding types of experience may tend to emerge before others.

Of course Wilber's theory is not without its critics, including those who object to all hierarchical developmental and evolution-

ary models, though Wilber seems to have held his own in the debate (for reviews of these criticisms and Wilber's responses, see Rothberg, 1986; Rothberg & Kelly, 1998; Wilber, 1997, 1999).

Wilber's map and terms have varied somewhat from one publication to another (1977, 1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1995, 1997; Wilber et al., 1986). However, he consistently points to three major classes into which transpersonal states seem to fall. These he calls, in order of their emergence, subtle, causal, and nondual, which would correspond, for example, to the Buddhist *sambhogakaya*, *dharmakaya*, and *svabhavikakaya*.

Subtle experiences comprise those faint images and sensations that tend to emerge when the more raucous mental contents are stilled as, for example, in meditation (Goldstein, 1983). The experiences that arise may be with or without form. Formless experiences include pure light or sound. Experiences with form may comprise all manner of images including scenes of extraordinary richness and complexity. Archetypal figures symbolizing transpersonal and spiritual qualities may arise, such as images of sages, angels, Christ, or Buddha. Subtle experiences may be stably accessed in, for example, shabd yoga, Buddhism's jhanas, or Hinduism's savikalpa samadhi (Feuerstein, 1998).

Beyond the subtle lies the causal. This is the state in which there are no longer any objects or things in the field of awareness. Only awareness itself remains, but that awareness is not an awareness of any thing; it is simply awareness, pure and simple. This is the unmanifest realm or void in which no phenomena whatsoever appear. This realm is experienced in states such as Buddhism's nirvana or Hinduism's nirvikalpa samadhi (Feuerstein, 1998; Goldstein, 1983).

Rare as this causal experience is, it seems that it is still not the final one. According to some traditions, there lies beyond it a further state which Wilber (1995, 1996) and others call the nondual. Actually, this is not so much a state or stage but rather the ground of all previous states and phenomena. Here, phenomena are said once again to appear but now are recognized as creations and modifications of consciousness, Mind, or Spirit. Consciousness, Mind, or Spirit alone is now perceived as manifesting and expressing itself in and as all the levels and phenomena of the universe. This is the realization of Zen's "One Mind" or Hinduism's *Turya* or *Sahaj samadhi* (Feuerstein, 1998; Kapleau, 1980). Consciousness or Mind is said to have rediscovered its true nature, returned to its

Self as its Self, and to recognize itself in all things. Several traditions claim that this is the deepest contemplative realization (Free John, 1985, 1988; Wilber, 1995, 1997; Wilber et al., 1986).

If these experiences seem difficult to comprehend fully, it is hardly surprising. They and the states in which they occur are so unlike our usual waking experiences that we have little basis for comparison and understanding. Contemplative experts repeatedly warn that it is difficult to fully comprehend these states without direct experience of them (Kornfield, 1993). Indeed, a Buddhist precept forbids monks and nuns speaking about advanced meditative experiences to laypeople because the experiences would almost inevitably be misunderstood.

This difficulty of comprehending alternate states and stages of which we have limited personal experience may be understood in several ways. In terms of altered states, it may be seen as an example of the constraints imposed by what have been called state specific knowledge and state specific communication, for which there is experiential, experimental, and theoretical support (Globus, 1993; Tart, 1983; Walsh, 1989a). Epistemologically, this limited understanding can be seen as a failure to open what Wilber (1983b) calls the “eye of contemplation,” with the result that we lack *adequatio*: We are not adequate to or capable of recognizing the corresponding states and experiences (Schumacher, 1977). But although the upper scales of contemplative attainment may be only partly comprehensible to the many of us who have not done these practices, we can at least gain enough of a sense of them to begin to appreciate the differences between the subtle, causal, and nondual conditions.

DEVELOPMENTAL-STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF SHAMANIC STATES

The obvious question that arises now is, Where do shamanic states of consciousness fit into this scheme? One of their major states is that in which the shamanic journey occurs. From the many descriptions available to us, we know that the journey is often done at night because the images may be faint; that complex worlds, lights, sounds and other images occur; and that encounters with spirit figures are common (Eliade, 1964; Walsh, 1990). These are clearly consistent with subtle-level experiences, and Wilber

(1981) has proposed that the shamans were the first to access this level systematically.

Of course a skeptic might argue that these experiences are simple fantasies or even pathology-induced hallucinations. However, the shamanic journey is undertaken purposively on behalf of the community. Moreover, careful analyses of shamanic experiences, functions, lifestyles, and social roles reveal that these are incompatible with significant pathology and that shamans may even be exceptionally healthy (for a review, see Walsh, 1990).

However, critical interpretations of shamanic experiences do point to the primitive stage of our mapping skills with regard to states of consciousness. Many questions remain unanswered. For example, what exactly defines subtle experiences and how, if at all, are subtle-level images to be differentiated from ordinary fantasy? Are they to be differentiated by intensity or by the type or meaning or religious significance of the objects encountered?

At the present time these questions cannot be answered definitively. My own tentative estimation is that ordinary fantasy and subtle-level images are overlapping parts of a continuum, but that they differ in certain ways. Subtle-level experiences are usually deliberately induced for a religious purpose. They occur in altered states characterized by heightened sensitivity to inner experience. The objects of awareness can be very subtle or faint, though not invariably so, and hence may only be recognized in sensitive states and supportive environments, whereas ordinary fantasy is relatively intense and easily recognized. The apparent scale of subtle experiences may be much larger than ordinary fantasies. Whole worlds or even universes may seem to arise in which the Earth seems a mere speck. In subtle states, there also seems to be a greater likelihood of encountering spiritually significant images and themes and archetypal figures such as sages, spirits, or angels. By contrast, our usual waking fantasies tend to focus on more mundane topics. For an excellent discussion of imagery in religious experience see Joy (1987).

Of course, not one of these characteristics by itself would necessarily distinguish ordinary fantasy from subtle-level experiences. However, taken together, they point to differences that, at least to the person having them, may seem major in scope, subtlety, and significance.

Shamans, then, were perhaps the earliest masters of this subtle realm. Their specialty was journeying, "soul travel," "spirit travel,"

or “magic flight” in which they felt unshackled from the body (Harner, 1982). They experienced themselves as free “souls” journeying through other realms, mastering and placating their inhabitants and bringing their information and power back from these realms to their earthbound compatriots (Eliade, 1964). In any event, imagery is clearly an important topic and has played a major role in multiple religious and contemplative disciplines (Durand, 1987), especially in shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism (Powers, 1995), thus warranting further research.

The description of the subtle-level experiences given above is actually a simplified one, and there are also other possibilities at this level. Thus, for example, although shamans usually experience themselves as free souls, separate from other beings and worlds, they may also sometimes unite with spirits. In other contemplative traditions, the sense of being a separate individual may give way to an experience of union, not only with other individuals or spirits but with the entire universe or God. Thus, in the upper reaches of the subtle realms, there may occur certain forms of the *unio mystica* or mystical union so celebrated and sought after by the world’s mystics (Underhill, 1974). Other types of union characterize the causal and ultimate states.

Mystical Union in Shamanism

Do shamans ever experience mystical union? Many researchers think not. One authority categorically states that in shamanism, “We never find the mystical union with the divinity so typical for the ecstatic experiences in the ‘higher’ forms of religious mysticism” (Hultkrantz, 1978, p. 42). Consequently, Hultkrantz concludes that shamanism can be considered a form of mysticism only “if mysticism is not restricted to mean just the *Unio mystica*” (p. 28).

However, there are four lines of evidence that suggest that this conclusion might be incorrect. These are the facts that (a) some anthropologists have recently reported unitive experiences in shamans, (b) powerful psychedelics may be used, (c) some Westerners report unitive experiences, and (d) the fact that shamanism is an oral tradition means that such experiences may have occurred, at least occasionally, but have been lost to subsequent generations and of course to anthropologists. Without writing, there may be no

way to preserve adequately a record of the highest, and rarest, flowerings of a tradition.

The anthropologist Larry Peters (1990) did record one report by a Tamang shaman of possible unity with a deity figure that may be an example of one type of subtle state *Unio mystica*. Likewise Michael Harner (1990) states that in his experience, learning to merge with “nonordinary teachers” is common cross culturally in shamanism and is a goal of the advanced training he offers. However, his report does not provide sufficient details to categorize the type of union involved.

Although not an essential part of shamanism, the use of psychedelics is common in some areas (Harner, 1973). A significant number of those people who ingest peyote and ayahuasca report unitive experiences (Grof, 1998; McKenna, Callaway, & Grof, 1998), for example, in the Native American Church or the Brazilian ayahuasca ceremonies (Grof, 1998). Several researchers regard these unitive experiences as genuine mystical ones (Stace, 1987; Stafford, 1983). For an excellent review of this topic, see the classic article by Huston Smith (1964). Because shamans may use these substances, it seems probable that they could have drug-facilitated mystical unions.

Finally, Westerners trained in shamanic practices may report unitive experiences; I have personally heard two such accounts. These seem to be experiences of union with the universe rather than with a deity, and as such would be examples of a so-called nature mysticism rather than theistic mysticism (union with God) (Wilber, 1983a). Though unitive experiences may not be the primary aim of shamanic journeys, which focus on soul travel, they may occur. In light of this and the other lines of evidence considered above, shamanism may sometimes deserve to be considered a mystical tradition.

This then raises the question of whether shamans may have gone beyond subtle states altogether and accessed either causal or nondual states. Here we are on shakier ground, and it seems impossible to make definitive statements at this time. However, three lines of evidence suggest the possibility that shamans occasionally have done this. The first is the general observation that in any tradition, one may find a few practitioners who access realms of consciousness beyond those aimed for by the tradition (Wilber, 1981). The second is that psychedelics appear to occasionally elicit

causal or nondual experiences (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1986; Walsh, 1982), and shamans who use them might therefore sometimes have these experiences. The third line of evidence comes from the unusual psychological test pattern of an outstanding Apache shaman whose Rorschach tests showed marked similarities to that of an advanced Buddhist meditation master (Brown & Engler, 1986). Because this Buddhist practitioner had achieved causal level realization, the Rorschach similarities may indicate that the Apache shaman also accessed this state. On the other hand, it could simply be that mastery in any contemplative tradition results in overlapping personality changes and consequently similar Rorschach responses.

Taken together, then, these lines of evidence suggest that, though shamans traditionally aimed for the experience of soul travel in the subtle realms, a few of them also may have explored the causal and nondual. But no matter how many or how few investigated these higher states, it seems that shamans may have been the first to develop a systematic psychological technology (Walsh, 1989c) that allowed them to regularly access and explore subtle states.

SHAMANISM AND THEORIES OF THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The shaman's states and journeys may represent a developmental advance not only for the individual shaman but also in the evolution of consciousness. For if the capacity to access subtle states lies latent within all of us, then the question arises as to whether shamans were in some way evolutionary forerunners (Wilber, 1981). The answer to this question depends on one's view of evolution since paleolithic times. Therefore, before we can decide on the shaman's place in evolution, we need to consider various theories of the evolution of human consciousness.

Theories of the Evolution of Human Consciousness

In general, these take three main forms. The first is mainly a downhill view that things are getting worse, human consciousness is not evolving but devolving. The second is a no change view, namely, that consciousness, or at least religious consciousness, has

not evolved significantly since paleolithic times. The third is an upward view, the idea that human consciousness has evolved significantly since earlier times.

A more detailed evolutionary analysis would trace separately the evolution of two different modes of consciousness. The first would be the average mode of the population, and the second would be the mode of contemplative practitioners. However, because these are correlated (Wilber, 1981, 1995) and follow similar evolutionary trends, we can consider them together here because of space limitations.

The idea that the human condition and consciousness have degenerated is found most often in world mythology. The story of a prehistoric golden age or Garden of Eden is common in myths, as is the story of a subsequent fall from grace. In Christianity, it is the Garden of Eden and our subsequent eviction; in China, the age of virtue and subsequent decline. In Hinduism, it is the fall from the Satya-Yuga, the golden age of righteousness and wisdom, into our present Kali-Yuga, a time of viciousness and ignorance (for an extensive review, see Campbell, 1976).

The second idea holds that there has been no significant change for better or worse in human consciousness, or at least in religious consciousness. People holding this view argue that the earliest religious practitioners were on a par with the latest ones, prehistoric realizations were as deep as contemporary ones, and early shamans accessed the same experiences, states, and realms as recent mystics. Such ideas are at least implied, although not necessarily forcefully argued, by such notable scholars as Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, and Carl Jung. Eliade (1964) notes that

More than once we have discerned in the shamanic experience a "nostalgia for paradise" that suggests one of the oldest types of Christian mystical experience. As for the "inner light," which plays a part of the first importance in Indian mysticism and metaphysics as well as in Christian mystical theology, it is, as we have seen, already documented in Eskimo shamanism. (p. 508)

This theme is now being echoed more forcefully by some of the new popularizers of shamanism. To these people, shamanic experiences, states, and insights are on a par with, or even greater than, those of the mystics of later traditions. This represents an example of a currently popular but questionable view of "equifinality," the

idea that different paths lead to the same final endpoint; they are all just different roads up the same mountain.

Some of the more sophisticated popularizers of this idea use the language of states of consciousness to claim equivalence of shamanic and other states. These include claims that “shamans, yogis and Buddhists alike are accessing the same state of consciousness” (Doore, 1988, p. 223), and that the shaman “experiences existential unity—the *samadhi* of the Hindu’s or what Western spiritualists and mystics call enlightenment, illumination, *unio mystica*” (Kalweit, 1988, p. 236).

However, we have also seen that when the states of shamans, yogis, and Buddhists are carefully compared, they appear quite different. Of course these experiential differences do not necessarily prove that the states are not at the same developmental level. To compare the developmental level or stage of these states, we need to have a developmental scheme by which to assess the level, and such schemes are nowhere to be found among the people claiming the equivalence of these states. For that, we must turn elsewhere, and we will find it in the work of some of those holding the third view, namely, that consciousness has evolved, and may still be evolving, upwards.

For most of human history, time was regarded not so much as a march of progress but rather as cycles of day and night, winter and summer, birth and death. The idea that time is going somewhere, that there is an ongoing evolutionary process, is a surprisingly recent idea but one that is now firmly entrenched in the Western mind. Consequently, it is not surprising that consciousness itself is also seen as evolving, and this idea has been advanced by such luminaries as the 19th century German philosophers Hegel and Schelling, and more recently by Teilhard de Chardin, Jean Gebser, Ken Wilber, and Sri Aurobindo. Chardin’s view is inspiring but not without problems (H. Smith, 1976), and because Wilber (1981, 1995, 1996) draws on Hegel, Schelling, Aurobindo, and Gebser, we can focus on his work as representative of this evolutionary view.

It must be noted that parts of Wilber’s theory of evolution, especially as laid out in his book *Up From Eden* (1981) have received significant criticisms (Fox, 1990; Staniford, 1982; Winkelman, 1993) to which Wilber has replied (1995, 1997). However, as we have seen, Wilber does provide an intriguing scheme for locating transpersonal states of consciousness along a developmental continuum, and if we focus on these transpersonal states, setting aside

his discussion of earlier (prepersonal and personal) states and stages, we can use his ideas while sidestepping some of the controversies.

Wilber suggests that just as the subtle, causal, and nondual states emerge sequentially in today's contemplatives, so too did they emerge sequentially in human history. He therefore offers the idea that the subtle states were among the earliest transpersonal states that humankind realized. This realization was followed thousands of years later by the causal and hundreds of years later still by the discovery of the nondual (Wilber, 1981, 1995, 1996).

The subtle states, he suggests, emerged in the dawn of prehistory with the shaman. The causal he locates some 2,000 to 2,500 years ago with such sages as the authors of the Upanishads, the Buddha, the early Taoists, and Jesus. The nondual, he places in the early centuries of the common era and associates with names like Bodhidharma in China, Padmasambhava in Tibet, and Plotinus in the West.

Where then do shamans fit in this evolutionary view of consciousness? Wilber places them at the beginning of this process and regards them as the first humans to systematically access subtle states. Though they may occasionally have broken through into the causal void, their focus was clearly on certain subtle states and experiences, and both their mythology and technology were directed toward, and effective in, assisting people to attain these states (Walsh, 1989c). It was probably only centuries, millennia, or even tens of thousands of years after the first shamans that technologies were developed to systematically access the causal and absolute realms beyond the subtle through practices such as rigorous ethics, concentration, meditation, and yoga (Walsh, 1999).

The Technology of Transpersonal Development

The technologies of contemplative traditions that produce causal and nondual realization seem to contain several common elements of practice (Walsh & Vaughan, 1992). These include a rigorous system of ethics, training of attention and concentration, emotional transformation, and the cultivation of wisdom. Of course, different paths focus more on some of these elements than others, but all of them seem to occur in varying degrees among authentic causal and nondual traditions. Ancillary practices that refine perception, redirect motivation, and foster generosity and service are also valuable and widespread (Walsh, 1999).

Ethical training is widely regarded as an essential preliminary to any significant transpersonal development. However, this is not a fear or conventionally based morality (Kohlberg's moral stages 2 to 4). Rather, it is a precise discipline of mind training based on the understanding that unethical behavior both springs from and further reinforces such destructive mind states as greed, hatred, judgment and jealousy. Ethical behavior, on the other hand, tends to weaken their disruptive influence on the mind and life. It also reinforces more healthful and helpful states—generosity, calm, and compassion—that foster transcendence (Goldstein, 1983). Interestingly, ethical behavior seems to have significant psychological benefits in addition to contemplative benefits, a fact that was appreciated in classical times but is only now being rediscovered by contemporary therapists (Andrews, 1987).

Work on transforming emotions is part of and reinforces ethical training. Almost universally, the great contemplative traditions emphasize the importance of working to reduce disrupting emotions, such as fear and anger, while simultaneously cultivating more personally and socially beneficial states such as love, joy, and compassion (Walsh, 1999; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993).

As destructive emotions are relinquished, their disruptive influence on the mind diminishes. With the mind no longer caught between the pull of greed and the push of fear, it becomes easier to concentrate and hold attention on whatever the practitioner wishes. This allows further development because the mind can now be consciously directed toward, and thereby cultivate, desired states such as love and compassion.

This is an example of an ancient idea that virtues or positive mental qualities mutually support and strengthen one another. The idea is found, for example, in Buddhist psychology (the Abhidharma), in Plato, the Greek Stoics (who referred to it as *antakalouthia*), and more recently in Wilber's (1999) and Murphy's (1992) idea of "integral practice" to foster balanced development and make use of this "mutual entailment of the virtues" (Murphy, 1992, p. 559).

Contemplative traditions claim that attention can and must be trained. However, Western psychologists have largely agreed with William James (1899, p. 51), who said that voluntary attention cannot be continuously sustained. There is thus a dramatic contrast between the ideas of mainstream Western psychology (attention cannot be trained) and those of contemplative tradi-

tions (attention must be trained). This makes understandable Schumacher's (1977) claim about attention that "no subject occupies a more central place in all traditional teaching; no subject suffers more neglect, misunderstanding and distortion in the thinking of the modern world" (p. 67).

However, although James (1961) recognized the limits of our untrained attention, he also realized the importance of training it and stated that

the faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgement, character and will. No one is *compus sui* if he have it not. An education which would improve this faculty would be education par excellence. (p. 424)

Meditative traditions claim to provide this education par excellence.

The final strand of this four-part training program is the cultivation of wisdom. This is not ordinary knowledge or even worldly wisdom. Rather, it is in large part a transrational wisdom known, for example, as *gnosis* and *marifah* in the West or as *prajna* and *jnanain* in the East, and it is based primarily on direct experience and intuitive insight into one's own mind and nature (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993).

Although all authentic paths seem to use all these components and more (Walsh, 1999), different traditions have focused on some components more than others. For example, training attention to the point of unshakable stability has been a major focus of classical yoga (Shearer, 1989). Emotional transformation and the cultivation of love have been the emphasis of *bhakti* yoga, sufism, and Christian contemplatives, whereas Tibetan Buddhism has emphasized compassion. Wisdom has been the focus of *jnana* yoga and some schools of Buddhism (Walsh, 1999).

Though later traditions may have refined these ethical, emotional, attentional, and wisdom trainings, their precursors can be found in shamanism. The best of shamanism has long been based on an ethic of compassion and service (Harner, 1982). Some degree of emotional transformation, especially the reduction of fear, is an essential component of its training. For example, Australian aboriginal shamans were warned of the terrifying visions they would confront during their training and that they must not yield to fear.

You see your camp burning and bloodwaters rising, and thunder and rain, and earth rocking, the hills moving, the waters whirling, and the trees which stand swaying about. Do not be frightened. . . . If you hear and see these things without fear you will never be frightened of anything. (Elkin, 1985, pp. 70-71)

Shamans have often been described as having superior powers of concentration (Eliade, 1964). There seem to be no reports indicating that shamans practiced techniques to develop the extraordinary degrees of unshakable attention cultivated by later yogis. However, it is clear that arduous attentional training was sometimes part of their initiation. For example, the Eskimo shaman Igjugarjuk was left for 30 days in a tiny snow hut. He received only small amounts of food and water and “was exhorted to think of the Great Spirit and of the helping spirit that should presently appear—and so he was left to himself and his meditations” (Rasmussen, 1927, p. 83).

Thus, it seems that there has been a significant evolution of transformational techniques and of the technology of transcendence since some early human first discovered that if a stretched skin was hit, it emitted a resounding sound, and if it was hit repeatedly, curious and pleasurable experiences ensued. Shamans presumably remembered and recreated such chance discoveries and welded them into an effective collection of techniques and wisdom that could be transmitted across generations. Millennia later, early sages refined aspects of the shamanic technology thus enabling humankind to discover causal and nondual states. Of course, social, cultural and other factors doubtless also played crucial roles (Wilber, 1995), but the evolution of the technology of transcendence was surely central to the evolution of consciousness.

The Relative Difficulty of Accessing Different States

A crucial question is, What proportion of practitioners actually attain the realizations sought for by different traditions? We have some hints but very little firm data here. These hints suggest that it may be significantly easier to attain some degree of shamanic realization than to realize the goals of later traditions.

For example, Harner (1985) implies that in his experience, some 90% of people are able to undertake shamanic journeys. Although journeying is by no means synonymous with mastery—the latter may take years—this does suggest that a relatively large percent-

age of people may be able to develop some shamanic experiences rapidly. On the other hand, when we come to later traditions, the general sense is that among, for example, Christian contemplatives, Indian yogis, Buddhist meditators, or Taoists, relatively few actually experience significant realization and usually only after years of arduous training. For example, it is said that only 1 in approximately 1000,000 Buddhist meditators is likely to master advanced concentration practices (Buddhagosa, 1923/1975), and certainly very few meditators master the advanced degrees of stable enlightenment that is the goal of practice (Wilber, 1999).

This suggests that there is a relationship between the developmental order of emergence of a state in individuals and its timing, frequency, and ease of discovery throughout history. In general, the later a state emerges in individuals, the later it may emerge in history, and the smaller the percentage of practitioners who realize it. Consistent with this is the fact that shamanism was the earliest tradition to emerge and even today allows people relatively easy access to certain alternate states of consciousness and their attendant insights. This relative ease may be one of the major reasons for shamanism's current popularity in the West.

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Reprint requests: Roger Walsh, Psychiatry Department, University of California Medical School, Irvine, CA 92697-1675; e-mail: rwalsh@uci.edu.