

Awareness of inspiration

a transpersonal thesis



Paula van Rein – 2006

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Foreword.

This thesis is about becoming aware of the transpersonal in day-to-day life.

Sometimes we become aware of something because we feel we are lacking or missing it. It is as if our intuition tells us of a dimension beyond what we can see or touch. Although we live our lives without this mysterious “it”, we feel slightly restless, not complete. Some of us start searching, looking for answers, attracted to others who seem to be on the same journey.

I wrote this story long ago during one of my hypnosis classes:

Once upon a time there was a candle.

She lived with all her fellow candles in a beautiful but forgotten candle shop. It was one of those delightful old-fashioned shops, with dark wooden shelves – filled with all kinds of candles in different sizes and colors.

Our candle lived on one of the top shelves. Here the nicest and most exquisite candles were stored. She had lived there all her life, and there was really no reason for her to be unhappy... but she was. “I am a candle”, she mused, and “there must be more to life than being on this dark shelf”. She felt a longing she couldn’t explain.

One day she heard whispers coming from other shelves, whispers of something very wise candles revered to as “light. Nobody on her shelf seemed to care – they were only interested in their beauty and style. But our candle knew that this “light” had something to do with her purpose in life. So she decided to go on a quest.

First she moved to the shelves next to hers in search for information about this mysterious thing called “light”. Some candles had actually seen some of it, and their stories intrigued our candle.

Then she came to shelves where candles had experimented with flames. These candles looked so beautiful to our candle; she admired their wondrous shapes and questioned them about their experiences. But although they could teach her how to light her wick – they did not know how to sustain the flame. Our candle thanked these inspiring candles for their lessons, but she knew she had to move on.

She met all kinds of candles along her journey – and she could learn lots of techniques of lighting her wick, but no candle had found a way to keep a flame alive. Finally she reached the shelf nearest to the window. Here she found the most beautiful candles she had ever seen – their shapes and colors were so graceful and unique, they brought tears to her eyes. She knew she was getting close – here the ultimate secret of light was to be found. So she decided to stay and exercise her flame with the other candles in front of the window.

And then, one day, it came to her, such a simple idea... She opened the window, and as the fresh air streamed in, her flame burst into a beautiful light. As she felt her light shining from her, she turned around to witness a path of light coming to life all the way to the darkest corners of the room. As more and more candles lit their wicks the whole shop transformed into a sea of light.

In this thesis, I will describe what I found on my journey. I have no illusion to have opened a window, maybe we all have to do that for ourselves anyway, but somebody might hear my whispers....

Paula, April 2006

Introduction.

The theme of this thesis is the transpersonal.

My personal quest for “more” in my life evolved in an extensive exploration of many aspects of the transpersonal dimensions. In my training as a Gestalttherapist I learned about awareness. During Hypnotherapy classes I was inspired by the power of true connecting. The courses at Atlantic University gave me ample opportunity to study the transpersonal in its various dimensions. It provided me with a context to experience and explore. Life challenged me to grow with what I assimilated.

At the end of my studies at Atlantic University I can see that my journey of learning was important to further awaken my awareness of my own transpersonal nature. The “more” I was looking for was already there; I simply needed to become conscious of it. I became aware that I was already aware of the transpersonal. I just did not know I was.

In this thesis I present this “*Awareness of Inspiration*”.

I will begin in the first chapter with a description of the original Gestalt philosophy as described in Perls, Hefferline and Goodman’s book: *Gestalt Therapy*^a. Although I realize psychotherapy is not the theme of this thesis, I thought it important to explain the origin of my concepts. Awareness is a major theme in Gestalt. The underlying idea is that *conscious* awareness gives us the possibility of a choice, a response-ability in our relation with the world around us. Some aspects of Gestalt seem to imply a transpersonal vision. One purpose of my thesis is to

^a Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy*, 1951

further explore and articulate these aspects and present them as an explicit quality Gestalt has to offer.

We will discuss the awareness of body and the awareness of mind in the second chapter. We will observe that awareness is always there, but that it needs our focus in the here and now to become *conscious* awareness. We meet the observer, our inner witness. We will see how we can look at our environment from different perspectives and thus create our own subjective version of reality. The awareness of our awareness – the Meta-awareness - enables us to focus on here and now, to look at life from a wider perspective and detach from the content of our thoughts.

In chapter three we arrive at our destination: the Awareness of Inspiration. I will illustrate what I mean with the help of metaphors and experiences many readers will recognize. We will see that the ability to be consciously aware of our transpersonal awareness comes to us naturally. We are aware; we just do not always know we are. We will discuss higher qualities, higher perspectives and God in this context. Only humans came up with myths telling stories of how a hero should act, what a wise woman should know and what a God should be like. This suggests that humans have an innate knowing of transpersonal potential or archetypal qualities.

In chapter four a further elaboration of the awareness of inspiration in day-to-day life is presented. How do we become aware of the transpersonal and how does it help us to know where we want to go? The metaphor of the little boat on stormy waters illustrates that to know the ways of the winds and the nature of the water enables us to handle our boats better. How wonderful would it be to be able to choose our destinations and reach our shores? In this chapter we will speak about self-realization and our sense of direction when we are choosing our foregrounds.

Chapter five is the most “scientific” chapter of this thesis. It presents a model that conceptualizes my transpersonal vision in a schematic way. I use it to explain the hierarchy of transpersonal perspectives we can experience as human beings. On the lower levels we are aware but not very conscious of it: this is the level of ego-consciousness or little self. The higher personal perspective is represented by the dimension of higher Self. Here we are consciously aware. The level of higher Self enables a transpersonal perspective in the sense that this level transcends ego-self. The axis between self and Self is called the transpersonal axis in this model. Beyond Self is the domain of the Divine or Being.

It is my intention to illustrate how in a therapeutic context, as an example of an I – Thou relationship, an awareness of inspiration is generated. Both, therapist and client strengthen their transpersonal axis by connecting on this level. This chapter shows a visual representation of what I consider to be a transpersonal experience.

In chapter six I go back to the Gestalt philosophy and present several of its most important aspects in a transpersonal perspective. This is an important part of this thesis for me. Although I realize this chapter asks much of most readers not familiar with Gestalt, for me it illustrates how our perspective transforms the way in which we perceive reality. It shows that conscious awareness of unconscious (implicit) qualities transforms those qualities into treasures. The philosophy Perls, Goodman and Hefferline present implicitly carries those transpersonal “treasures”. Once brought to the surface, as an explicitly essential part of Gestalt, they expand Gestalttherapy to its full potential.

In the next chapters in this thesis I will take a better look at this awareness of inspiration. I will explore the applications of consciously expanding our reality to contain the transpersonal.

What happens when we look at our lives with a conscious awareness of our ground in Being beyond? What transformations can we expect when we perceive our lives from the perspective of Being, from a transpersonal perspective?

Chapter seven is dedicated to relaxing in Being. It explores this quality from different angles and elaborates on ego-transcendence and being without a story.

This chapter is about acceptance as well. This is an important perspective when you realize that it is only with an inner acceptance of *what is* that we can make a choice how to handle this reality.

We will look at the acceptance of our own concept-making, at the acceptance of our responsibility and finally at the acceptance of Being itself.

In chapter eight the transpersonal sense of responsibility and the transpersonal sense of meaning are discussed. Edgar Cayce for instance, was quite clear on responsibility. His focus in many readings is on setting ideals and living according to them. We have free will and thus the choice, and thus the responsibility, to experience our lives as something we create ourselves. Once we discover that we are *more* than the image we project into the world, once we have sensed our potential beyond the ego-self, nothing is quite the same. We cannot turn our backs and go on with our lives as if nothing has happened. We want to discover this more. We feel an urge to be more like this more.

Chapter nine is close to my heart. It introduces the vision that enlightenment is a natural process. Many people seem to mature towards higher levels of consciousness. In this chapter I endeavor to explore the qualities that accompany this evolutionary process.

I envision that we can actively mature toward enlightenment when we become more consciously aware. We can actively and positively participate in the human evolution when we are willing to

face our world with more openness, with a keener knowledge of how our minds work and with a willingness to live in a world not fully explained. We will discuss various new and more enlightened ways to express ourselves. We will look at compassion, commitment and communion among other qualities that are in my view the most important keys to inspired living.

I present the Awareness of Inspiration throughout this thesis as an important ingredient in human growth. I am in the good company of visionaries like Carl Gustav Jung and Joseph Campbell and newer thinkers like Walter Truett Anderson and Ken Wilber, when I believe that the transpersonal dimension is an essential part of the human experience. It is time for us to explicitly acknowledge its implicit presence in our lives.

Chapter One: The Gestalt philosophy.

“Dealing with behavior out of the here-and-now is a waste of time.”

(Frederick Perls¹)

1.1 Introduction to Gestalttherapy: basic concepts

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, introduce a profoundly new approach to psychotherapy with their Gestalt Therapy². The focus is the client’s present experience, in the moment of contact and in the field that emerges when therapist and client meet.

Paul Goodman explains that “experience occurs at the boundary between the organism and its environment” and that “it is the contact that is the simplest and first reality”. The organism is the person; “self”, we say. The contact, the “place” where I (my self) and the environment (the not-self thus other) meet and become involved, is the primary site of psychological experience. Gestalt therapy names this the “contact boundary”: the fluctuating edge where self and other meet and something happens. This contact boundary is the process where awareness arises. This is where I become aware of my-self and the reality that surrounds me.

In therapy, where therapist and client^b meet, the therapist can intimately examine how the client meets her and responds to this contact. In Gestalt terms: how he forms “gestalts”. A

^b In this thesis I use the word client. Perls, Hefferline and Goodman talk about the patient, coming from psychiatry. In psychotherapy however, we use the term client. To avoid using he/she or his/her, allow me to use the male form for the client and the female form for the therapist.

gestalt is a whole, a complete figure formed against the background of the person/environment field.

To experience the forming of a Gestalt, look at the familiar drawing in picture 1. One moment the observer forms the gestalt of a crone, the next the gestalt of a young women. Two different experiences of contact, two different gestalts formed out of the same background.



Picture 1.

The purpose of therapy is to witness how the client goes about forming gestalts. The therapist reflects this *how* back to the client, not only by giving her client the phenomenological description of what she witnesses, but also by sharing her awareness of it.

In this way she heightens the self-awareness of the client and gives him feedback on his behavior.

In other words: she teaches him to become aware of himself, but also to become aware of his relationship with his environment; the interaction between himself and the other.

With awareness the client obtains the ability to shape his own experience: once he is aware that he is doing something in a certain way, he will be able to respond differently to a similar situation. He can choose to re-act in another way.

The contact boundary, where self meets other, is where growth occurs. Growth is seen as a process of assimilation.

In a healthy person the process of figure/background formation is the dynamic way in which the organism adjusts to its environment. The lived experience is creatively integrated, much like we integrate the food we eat and digest. The unknown (the novelty) is metabolized from the environment and made known. An aspect of the environment, of other, is transformed into an aspect of the organism, of self.

Imagine learning a language. At first you hear the sounds and intonations, but you do not understand what they mean, you do not know how to respond. After a while the language becomes familiar, the vocabulary you learned is yours to use and to express yourself.

Later in this thesis I will elaborate on these Gestalt notions where necessary.

In therapy the patient realizes that the reality he perceives is always and per definition a subjective reality, his “what I make of it” picture of reality. No two people experience exactly the same reality. A person “picks” his own gestalts; he translates what he perceives into something that makes sense to him. He transforms Reality into his reality, into something that has meaning to him.

In therapy the client learns to become consciously aware that he is forming his own gestalts, and in that sense he is the creator of his “own(ed)” reality.

1.2 Gestalt and awareness

Gestalt psychology provides an adequate theory of awareness, according to Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. Gestalt studies the phenomenology of awareness.

The self is “the contact-boundary at work” and is perceived as the integrator or the synthetic unity. The contact-boundary is the specific organ of awareness; here awareness arises. In the moment of contact the organism makes a creative choice out of all its possibilities; it gives reality its form in a gestalt. The contact itself is thus the first moment of creation.

As we saw, conscious awareness of this process, conscious awareness of “how” we choose, or in other words, of “how” we create gestalts, give us the possibility of a conscious choice. Conscious awareness allows us an active role in the creation of our reality. It gives us the possibility of a choice, a *response ability* in our relation with the world around us.

Gestalt therapy aims to give a client the instrument of awareness, or better of meta^c-awareness, as we will see in the next chapter. The client learns to become aware of his awareness. In other words: the client learns to become *consciously* aware.

A point of great value in the Gestalt approach lies in the insight that the interplay of organism (person) and environment; the organism/environment *field* constitutes the psychological situation. Neither the person nor the environment is taken separately. This unitary approach expands the focus in therapy to the dynamic relation of the client and his environment, of figure and ground, of foreground and context. The client learns how he connects and relates to his environment and realizes that the relationship itself has certain dynamics he was not aware of before. Furthermore he obtains a wider perspective from which to perceive his reality. He becomes aware of his experience as part of a larger “whole”. This is a self-in-relation approach as we will discuss later.

1.3 Gestalt and the transpersonal?

The presented aspects of Gestalt psychology already hint at the potential this approach has for an application in transpersonal psychotherapy. The way Gestalt perceives contact as a process, as dynamic and as played out in a larger “field”, signifies its readiness to expand its perspective.

In my view, there are some aspects in Perls, Hefferline and Goodman’s Gestalt Therapy that imply a transpersonal vision. Perls for instance, defines healthy growth as a process of creative adjustment towards wholeness and self-actualization. This natural process is in his view

^c the prefix meta is mostly used as concerning the subject itself: meta awareness = awareness of awareness.

ultimately directed by a self-regulating system. Although he calls this “system” the psychological form of organismic self-regulation, the self is apparently seen as regulated by a system that is of a larger order than self. In my view the concept of a self-regulating system seems rather unbalanced without a direction; without an understanding of meaning, or without a vision of an underlying unity.

The terms wholeness and self-actualization again carry the potential of a transpersonal perspective. When this process is supposed to be directed by a self-regulating system, doesn't this also suppose a “beyond” self, a transpersonal Self or Being?

As Perls, Hefferline and Goodman “only” mentions awareness on the levels of body (sensations) and mind (thoughts and emotions), the logical next transpersonal step would be to speak of the awareness on the level of soul, the awareness of a transpersonal Self, the awareness of spirit. This thesis is about this “awareness of inspiration”.

It puzzled me why the metaphysical is not explicitly mentioned in the Gestalt philosophy as presented by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. Maybe the main reason is that Gestalt therapy is primarily applied phenomenology. When we focus on what we can observe, the transpersonal is obviously not the subject. We see the same phenomenon in the original Buddhist tradition; it approaches human problems as they present themselves, but stays away from any metaphysical discussion.

I found several Gestalt-writers who do elaborate on spiritual issues. It is interesting to see where the Gestalt-philosophy presents itself to be creatively self-regulating towards greater wholeness. We will discuss this further in chapter six.

Chapter Two: Awareness.

“The limits of the possibility of dialogue are the limits of awareness.”

(Martin Buber³)

2.1 Awareness is there

In my experience awareness is *there*, as I will try to show, on all levels. To become aware however, to become “aware” of our awareness we need to shine the light of consciousness on it. In the Gestalt-view we become aware by contact: the creative and dynamic interaction between the organism and its environment. When we become aware a figure forms out of the ground, a Gestalt. This is the way we create what we experience, our reality.

Most of the time our consciousness is crowded with all kinds of input. We need to focus on the things at hand to function properly in our day-to-day lives.

If we want to become conscious of something we have to find a way to direct our consciousness to these areas of interest to "*become aware*" - this is how we use these words - of something. I am already aware, but "to become aware" in this sense is "to become *consciously* aware".

2.2 The awareness of body and mind

The awareness of body. I experimented with this with my son. I put my hand on his arm: “are you aware of my hand on your arm?” Yes, of course. Now we talk about other things. The awareness is still there, but he needs to *focus* his consciousness on his arm again to "become consciously aware" of the sensation of my hand on his arm. In the “now” moment my son can

consciously shift his attention to his arm and tune into his senses in order to experience my hand there.

The awareness of body is an important instrument. Our physical body is like an antenna; we obtain information from our environment through this instrument. Research shows that we humans have the ability to “tune into” more frequencies than we actually do and that we receive more information than we are consciously aware of. Through ages of civilization we were probably conditioned to ignore or overrule most of our inner signals, or we simply lost our sensitivity by lack of use of our senses.

The awareness of body is much more than being aware that you have a body. Awareness of our body is also more than being aware of how your body reacts to your environment, to what it experiences, to life. When you truly observe your body, you will notice that you can often “catch” what is going on outside, before you consciously figure it out with your mind. Maybe you recognize sensing a tightening of the muscles in your neck or your heart skipping a beat moments before you realize what causes this reaction. Or maybe you sometimes felt restless, or as if somebody pulled your plug, only in retrospect realizing what was going on?

Did you know that in our spoken communications, the words spoken account for only 7% of the meaning inferred^d? Amazing, reckon how we could communicate when we would become *consciously* aware of more of our non-verbal signs and signals!

Now a working example of the awareness of mind. I sit with a friend, talking. I hear what she says, listen, feel empathy, respond... then the phone rings. She talks and this conversation sets in motion a whole train of thoughts in my mind (emotionally charged). My

^d Professor Albert Mehrabian's communications model, 1967

friend hangs in and continues her story to me. I hardly hear her - I am totally immersed in my own thoughts. The sounds are there - my ears get them - my mind is getting the info, probably processing it (I know from hypnosis-training that indeed we process almost everything, a lot more than we are conscious of).

Somehow I step out of this process, into another position outside the stream of my thoughts where I realize I am not listening to my friend. I become *conscious* of what my mind is doing. As soon as I become consciously aware of my thinking process, I can choose to focus on my friend and on what she is saying again.

In this example I have to *wake up* from my own thinking, where my consciousness is crowded with thoughts and emotions, to re-focus. I need conscious awareness of my mind to do this, otherwise I would drift unconsciously further on the stream of my thoughts and feelings. To wake up - to realize that I am not listening to my friend but immersed in thinking - I need to detach: to step out of the puddle of thoughts into a position *beyond* these thoughts. Only in this observer - or “meta-position” I realize, or in other words *I am aware* - that I am interacting with/contacting my environment in a certain way.

In Gestalttherapy we offer the client the opportunity

- a. to learn to observe himself, his meta awareness
- b. to become aware of his way of contacting his environment and invite him
- c. to become aware of how his environment reacts to him

As we saw earlier, the underlying idea is that once we start to be consciously aware of how we interact with our environment, we can make *conscious choices* and *take responsibility* for

our actions. When I observe myself and become aware of how I drift off in my own thoughts, I realize that I can do something else: I have a choice.

An example. In therapy I often invite a client to pay attention to his breathing. When this person realizes he is for instance holding his breath, he can - "staying with it" (focusing on here and now) – listen to what this, up to this moment *unconscious* physical response, is telling him. He can for example become consciously aware of the fact that he is holding onto something; an emotional content or whatever this holding his breath is at that moment associated with, and use that information to make a more conscious choice; how to act/behave/think etc. He can for instance choose to share what is on his mind, and realize that, although he needed some courage to actually confront his partner (or the therapist) with this thought, he actually feels better and breathes more relaxed now he has done so. To become aware of holding his breath this client needs *conscious* awareness of his body. To become aware his thoughts, he needs *conscious* awareness of his mind.

A Gestalttherapist teaches her client to pay attention to the perceptions he gets *here and now* from his body and his mind. The focus is always in the now, even when experiences from the past or future are discussed. We can only become aware in the present; all consciousness knows is this moment. Experience, *contact* in Gestalt terms, appears in consciousness now. Past and future can only be conceptualized, thought or in other words "imagined" in the present.

2.3 The meta-awareness and the observer

A therapist's priority is to teach her client awareness. The only way to do that is to give the client the experience that he can observe himself. He can observe what is going on in his body

and what his mind is doing. The primary focus is on awareness and not on the *content* of feelings, emotions or thoughts.

Once the client realizes he can simultaneously experience something, and witness himself experiencing it, he has gained the instrument he needs to steer his own boat.

A therapist gives her client the *tool* of his meta-position.

Gurdjieff used to tell his disciples, “When the arrow of your consciousness becomes double-pointed, when your consciousness begins to flower at both ends, you will become an enlightened being⁴.” When you look at something, look at it, but also keep looking at your own self. You are both, the knower and the known.

We are already entering the domain of the transpersonal here. When I observe myself sensing and feeling things, and when I observe myself thinking, I - the observer - am obviously “someone” beyond the one who senses, feels and thinks.

Most of us feel, at least during the times we *consciously* observe, that we are the observers. We look at life through the eyes of the observer; we seem to identify with this observer. Allow me to assume in this thesis that the I, I perceive myself to be, the I that is consciously aware (in the measure that I am aware) is the I in the position of the observer. I will use “**I**” to indicate this position.

In my experience meta-awareness is not transpersonal *persé*. I see meta-awareness as the window **I** open to look at certain foregrounds that attract my attention. The observer seems to “look in” from positions along a “hierarchy” of levels or dimensions (a holoarchy of holons in

Arthur Koestler's⁵ terms) that we could envision between unconscious awareness, conscious awareness and full consciousness.

Many visionaries have written about similar hierarchic concepts; Jung describes the ego-Self axis on his path to individuation, Cayce speaks about personality and individuality, Roberto Assagioli and many others talk about personal self and transpersonal or higher Self, Aldous Huxley calls his hierarchy the Great chain of Being.

I seem to perceive my reality from different positions on this conceptual hierarchy, from different perspectives. In a moment of contact when I am not consciously aware, I perceive the world from a perspective of ego, or self. When I am more aware, I can look at reality from a wider perspective, from a position of a higher dimension of self, or from a position of *the* higher Self in Assagioli's terms. (This higher Self includes *and* transcends ego-self, this hierarchy is not a linear concept, but rather a symbolic representation that could be envisioned as stage-by-stage more-encompassing dimensions or holons). In a moment of enlightenment I might look from the ultimate, divine point of view, from the perspective of Being (or Jung's Self). In this vision, by becoming consciously aware self matures towards higher Self, and self, Self and Being ultimately fall together, unite we might say, in I.

2.4 Important aspects of Meta awareness

Awareness is there. So is full Consciousness.

I am not fully conscious, so I perceive a reality from the perspective of my level or dimension of consciousness in the moment of contact, the now.

In this view, my direction of growth is towards more consciousness.

When I develop the ability to perceive reality from a higher point on the hierarchy **I**, the observer, expands in the direction of higher Self, Individuality and ultimately towards a dimension that contains all of Being.

As we saw, conscious awareness of body and mind is a way to make conscious choices, to live our lives in an *aware* and thus response-able way.

I dare say most of us are not very aware. To become conscious of our own un-awareness is probably the first step we can take on our way to consciousness.

My clients are often shocked when they experience how unaware they are of their bodies. Normally we hardly give any attention to our bodies unless we actually feel physical pain; a sure sign that we *should* pay attention. Massage or massage therapy is a way to become more consciously aware of our body. Yoga and other physical exercises that focus on the coordination of body and mind as well. I started a few months ago with lessons in Pilates “controlled movements engaging your body and mind” and I am amazed how unaware I am of some imbalances in my body. Gestalttherapy obviously helped me to pay attention to my physical reactions to others or my environment. I never focused however on a healthy posture or on exercises to become aware of strain. Here too, awareness gives me an opportunity to do better.

There are several aspects of conscious awareness of mind we can to look at:

- a. the focus on the here and now
- b. the wider perspective
- c. detachment, the neutral stance

a. the focus on the here and now

Many of us seem to spend a considerable amount of time thinking about past or future. In other words, we live a great part of our lives in our imagination. Conscious awareness however, forces us to focus on the now. Only in the here and now can we become aware of our sensations, our thoughts and our emotions. The flashlight of meta-awareness can only shine on now; I can only observe myself now, *I am* only now.

Thoughts are like clouds, drifting past. Meditation practices for instance can teach a person to witness his thoughts as passing clouds. The exercise is meant to train the student to focus on the now by becoming aware of his thoughts and then detaching from them before they “invade” him. We could also describe thoughts and emotions as visitors, coming to our house as guests. We entertain them, *we* are the host, and then they leave again. Good guests and “bad” guests alike. We need to remember we are the host, before our guests start acting as hosts. Meditative (awareness) exercises or practice are a way to train oneself to stay in the here-now. Awareness wakes us up; it makes us realize that we were drifting off, daydreaming, forgot we are the host. With awareness we can choose to spend more time in the now, to be truly present, to become a *witnessing presence* as many describe it. There are several good books on this subject – Eckhart Tolle wrote “The Power of Now”⁶, Michael Brown developed the “Presence Process”⁷.

b. the wider perspective

Here we need to look at how we identify with our body and our mind. How many times do we catch ourselves in thoughts and moods we totally identify with? It is as if the actor forgot he was playing a role and starts to take the act, and his role in it, very personally. With meta awareness we actually step out of our identification with the roles we are playing. We realize that

we, and the others around us, play our roles. We observe ourselves, fully knowing that we are all actors in the play. We can play angry, we can act sad, but we know we are not our roles. We distance ourselves from what we experience by *witnessing* it.

Therapy is a good way to become aware by witnessing ourselves *in contact* with others. In a non-therapeutic context everybody around us is probably just as “lost” as we are, and it is much harder to step out of our identifications. One of my teachers used to say: “there should be at least one adult in the room”^e. In therapy the therapist is (supposed to be) the adult – the one who is aware.

We could compare the stepping out of our identifications with waking up from a dream or nightmare. Once we realize we were dreaming, the lion we were fighting in our dream turns out to be - from a waking perspective - quite harmless. How often we experience, in retrospect that is, that our response to our environment “erupted” from us because we were identified with our fear or anger? Often the time elapsed gives us the “distance” we need to realize our “over-reaction”. Meta awareness does the same for us; it gives us the wider perspective we need to distance ourselves from our identifications with emotions and thoughts.

There is another aspect we need to discuss concerning distance. When I observe myself I put a certain “space” between myself and what I experience. The experience becomes less frightening when I experience myself in it, but also beyond it. From a position beyond it, I can observe the situation in a larger frame, I see the bigger picture and it automatically becomes more “survivable”. We all have this experience. Fear tends to narrow our sight, we only see what we

^e Marleen Mulder – Hypnotherapy Training Institute.

fear and have trouble looking around it; we focus on the frightful object. Meta-awareness gives us per definition a look from a wider perspective – we see how this object or situation relates to other things, we see its context, we have much more information which generally lessens our fear.

c. detachment, the neutral stance

The art of witnessing is actually a spiritual method, a form of meditation devised by the ancient sages to help create awareness of the soul. From the point of view of the observer we can detach ourselves from the content of our thoughts and emotions, we can witness from a neutral, non personal stance. The idea is to “just witness” without judgment, to eliminate the usual bias, not to make assumptions and to observe without emotional involvement. This way of witnessing is often called meditative awareness, or meditative consciousness.

It reminds me of the phenomenological way of observing a Gestalt therapist uses when sharing awareness.

In my experience this *mode* of awareness is of great help in day-to-day life. Although I admit to learning detachment often only in retrospect (from realizing I could have handled something better), perseverance pays off. It is not easy to consciously witness oneself in action on a moment-to-moment basis; to *then* consciously choose one’s actions from a higher Self perspective is something one can hope to learn with practice.

Daily life gives us plenty opportunity to practice awareness. We will discuss these opportunities further in later chapters.

It is time for the next step.

Chapter Three: Awareness of Inspiration

On the personal level the world is perceived as a multiplicity of objects and events, existing separately in time and space.

In transpersonal consciousness the underlying oneness of the universe comes into awareness and the ordinary confines of time and space are transcended.

(Francis Vaughan⁸)

3.1 Awareness on the level of spirit

What about the awareness of inspiration - the awareness on the level of Spirit?

A metaphor is helpful here: imagine two icebergs floating in the sea. Only the tips of the icebergs are visible above the water level quite a distance apart, while their masses hidden beneath the surface almost touch. Seen from the tip of an iceberg each iceberg seems unique and floats as a separate unit in the sea.

Seen from the perspective of the sea however, these icebergs are just part of her whole.

Each iceberg originates from the seawater and will eventually dissolve into it again.

The sea perceives that all individual icebergs are part of the ongoing process of freezing and melting. The ice sea connects all icebergs; they are all equal; all made from the same stuff.

The sea knows, from her perspective, that she and the ice-bergs are ultimately one.

The ice-sea in which the icebergs drift is the underlying oneness of their existence, their "ground in being".

In my view, we humans are aware of our ground in Being. We know deep down that we are all part of the Being, the Spirit we emerged from.

In my view, we can become *consciously* aware of the underlying oneness of the universe, of Consciousness with a capital C, and indeed transcend our ordinary confines in doing so. With this I don't mean the confines of time and space per se, but rather the confines of our ego, our personal or cultural limitations and in general our narrow perspective.

The theme of this thesis is this awareness of transpersonal consciousness. I called it the awareness of *inspiration*. The word "inspiration" refers to the level of spirit. It implies that we can sense to be "in Spirit", a part of a larger transpersonal whole. But the term also indicates that we are "in-spirited" by the transpersonal. I use the word inspiration to point to something that stimulates us to vitality and moves us to greater things.

I see inspiration as a source of creativity and an impulse to positive action.

3.2 The awareness of inspiration is there

It is important to realize that our ground in being is *there*, as is our awareness of it. This third level of awareness, this *transpersonal* level of awareness, is also part of the human experience. It is this awareness of something bigger than us, which distinguished man from the animal, which made him truly human. For over 50,000 years^f, and probably much longer, humans created rituals to pay respect to forces that they felt transcended their own. Only humans make the difference between good and evil, search for meaning, make myths and use symbols. In my view these are signs of transpersonal awareness. It seems to me that man's ability to transcend time and space in his mind made him wonder about the reality beyond the one he could see. His

^f In the Shanidar Cave in Iraq, 50,000-year-old Neanderthal skeletons were unearthed in 1957. Ancient pollen buried with them has been interpreted as evidence that these cave dwellers had developed funeral rituals.

capacity to conceive of a dimension beyond his here and now caused him to feel the need to know his place in the larger order of his universe. Because he intuited this dimension and imagined it to be somehow regulating his life, he looked for ways to express his respect and honor its rules so he would guarantee the benevolence of this power. Of course man has always used the “spirituality” of his moment in history and his location on our planet. He time and again translated his awareness of a Spirit beyond into rituals that communicated in concepts he lived by. We probably would not think of burying our dead with food for the journey, or coins to pay the boatman. We seem to have a tendency to think in terms of the ones who stay behind; interesting!

We *are* aware of our transpersonal nature, but rarely conscious of it.

William James⁹ talks about a universal feeling of uneasiness, a sense that there is something “wrong” about us as we naturally stand. Houston Smith¹⁰ writes about our “forgotten truth”.

We *are* aware of our transpersonal consciousness, we get glimpses of it and in those moments a new dimension opens for us.

For most of us the awareness of Spirit resides beneath the surface of our conscious awareness most of the time. Although we never truly forget our glimpses of this dimension beyond, their impression normally fades. Many of us recognize the feeling that something essential is overlooked, missing even, when we live our lives without it.

Hence our candle stories, our journeys, our searches, our quests for the Holy Grail.

3.3 The awareness of our ground in being

This concept of an awareness of our ground in being is not as far fetched as it seems. In a therapeutic context we talk about the "field" when we describe the interaction between therapist and client for example. Field is not used in a spatial sense here, but encompasses both client and therapist and what is happening between them, process-wise. The therapist shares her awareness of this field with her client. In this way she invites him to become aware of the relationship they create together and he can observe how he reacts in/to that field. In this view it is the field that enables the therapist to "experience" what the client is experiencing.

We can talk about a *resonance* between people within the field of their relation. *Empathy* is a word we use; we can perceive and become aware of it because of the field that connects us. Stone Center articles¹¹⁺¹² describe empathy as *relational awareness* in the larger context of their self-in-relation (also a field concept) theory. Empathy is introduced as a concept of mutual relating much larger than a one-sided, separate-self quality of knowing and listening. I will come back to this in the next chapters.

We all have the experience of relational awareness. We can sense that we are part of a field that exists when we are relating to other people. We are sensitive to each others emotions, for instance we sense the mood of our children or the atmosphere in a room. We often surprise ourselves when we discover that we know more than we thought we knew about things going on between people. As we saw before, only an insignificant part of our communication is transmitted in words. We see, hear and scent each others other "emissions" too. We definitely have sensitivity to vibrations or energy, or however you want to call the "extra" that exists in a field.

Do you sense time? Can you sense space? Well, most people wake up just before their alarms go off and know when a certain amount of time has elapsed. When you step into your car, you know its dimensions just like a good captain knows the outline of his ship and can maneuver it relying on his sense of it.

Now to the next "level": the level of Spirit, of Being, of existence itself.

Paul Goodman articulates the Gestalt philosophy when he talks about self in relation/contact with its environment: an organism (person) is part of its environment and cannot be understood apart from it. For me this means that Goodman envisions a "field" in which organism and its environment relate, are in contact. Is it not a next and plausible step to stretch and expand this concept to a dimension that includes much more? An organism's environment is not limited to the dimension of the immediate physical world it lives in. We could define a person's environment to include the transpersonal dimension we sense to be there. We are all part of the "field of being"; the underlying unity from which we originate, in which we are connected. Like the sea from which all icebergs originate and in which they are all connected. We cannot be understood apart from that field of being.

Just like we look from a meta position at the "field" uniting therapist and client to become aware of the process that enfolds between them, we should consider the *field* that unites person and environment in Being to become aware of the process that enfolds in us.

3.4 Awareness of inspiration and our higher qualities

When we consider William James's "uneasiness" (the sense that we have that there is something wrong with us) we could also detect an experience in human consciousness of being

less than whole, less than what we are meant to be. Like the candle in my story who feels there is “more to life” than what she is living. It seems to me that the urge to search or grasp the *more-to-me* suggests an awareness of being *more*, an awareness of our transpersonal Self and its “higher” qualities.

As I mentioned before, through evolution as we know it, only humans came up with ideas of good and evil. Only humans came up with myths telling stories of how a hero should act, what a wise woman should know and what a god should be like. Archetypes and symbols live in our consciousness. I think they suggest a *transpersonal knowing* of (or the transpersonal potential for) universal qualities like harmony, love, wholeness or for instance beauty. We somehow have an innate sense of these virtues and higher qualities that runs deeper than what we have been taught by our society or culture.

Many spiritual traditions have spoken of these qualities; this is probably why they often speak of a *higher* Self. When referring to the transpersonal dimensions of Self, *higher* means *of a higher order* in an intuitively felt hierarchy. Higher also because these transpersonal qualities transcend the limited perspective of ego-self.

It is interesting to see how we are, often without consciously knowing it, inspired by our awareness of “our” transpersonal Self. An account of human evolution in this context is the book “God and the evolving Universe”, by James Redfield and Michael Murphy¹³. When Edgar Cayce¹⁴ speaks of a spiritual ideal, I am convinced he is referring to a transpersonal, higher quality that manifests in a person’s consciousness and can become that person’s light to follow. Cayce advises us to become very clear about our spiritual ideal and focus on our personal

cluster of qualities that makes us into what we are; a unique person with a unique “purpose” to pursue in life.

This is a transpersonal vision. It reflects a clear understanding of an underlying order in which each of us has his or her name *written*. I think we can become clear about our transpersonal ideal when we consciously focus on higher qualities we discover in ourselves. What is it that truly inspires us? What makes our hearts sing, what resonates with our innermost being? What shines through all our layers of cultural conditioning as our unique set of qualities? To become consciously aware of these higher qualities we carry deep within us and to see them in others, is another important aspect of our awareness of inspiration

3.5 The awareness of inspiration and God

In our western religious traditions God has been experienced as something existing outside ourselves, an external power rather. God has in these traditions been presented as an omni potent Father-figure. The wide-spread interest in Eastern traditions probably stems from a need to explore other ways of experiencing Divinity.

An awareness of our transpersonal Self gives us the realization of divinity within our own experience. It gives us an awareness of our essence, our own divine nature. As I suggested before, this awareness is already *there*, we “just” need to become conscious of it. Maybe this is so hard because we made the experience of divinity into such a “holy” concept. “Enlightenment” is presented as such an elusive state that is rarely achieved by mere humans and quite unreachable for normal people. We will come back to this in chapter nine.

I think we all get glimpses of our transpersonal nature. We do experience the underlying vastness of our consciousness in moments of peace and stillness. We do experience our deeper connection with Being when suddenly touched by beauty in nature or for instance by compassion and love in our relationships. This is not beyond our experience, not something we are too “human” to perceive. On the contrary!

We might let go of our expectations and surrender to Being. We might intuit that enlightenment is not something to reach but merely something to realize; not mentally but by simply being. We could “try” or better “practice” being still and present and recognize our transpersonal dimension when it dawns on us. We should develop our *awareness*; our awareness of inspiration. We will discuss potential ways to experience this in this thesis.

We need some caution with the evaluation of our consciousness: what is ego and what is Divine? Probably the emergency of the question itself indicates ego, doesn't it?

To me it is however obvious that an awareness of a transpersonal Self, and glimpses of God consciousness, exist in the human experience.

Personally I find the word “Divinity” quite overwhelming, an overburdened concept that lacks the clarity and simplicity I look for in this context.

I prefer to talk about *essence* or *Being*. The term “Being” makes the experience of our transpersonal Self into something that comes natural to us, the experience itself part of who we essentially are.

In the moments when we truly connect with who we essentially are, between the contents of our minds, we become aware of our deeper layers of consciousness. *Between* manifestations we realize we *are* consciousness. We are conscious of being conscious (Self) and

ultimately of being Consciousness or Being. Then, in those moments, we experience ourselves being more encompassing than our ego-self – a higher Self rather. We observe our reality and ourselves from another order, from a higher dimension.

Can we agree that this kind of conscious awareness of a transpersonal Self gives a person a fundamentally different perspective on reality? The experience of our transpersonal dimension, the realization of our divine nature, transforms our relation to the God *beyond* who we address and answer to in our prays. The notion of a human ascent to God then correlates with an awareness of a Divine presence within (descend into) us.

Personally, I think this aspect (religious experience) fascinating but quite beyond the scope of this thesis. It is however essential to realize that the image we create within ourselves of God or of the Divine nature is influencing how we perceive reality. Later in this thesis we will discuss this further.

3.6 The awareness of the higher perspective

As we saw in our iceberg metaphor, the sea has a very different perspective of reality than the icebergs. She sees the bigger picture, not limited by concepts or theories made up for the parts that are not visible for the icebergs. She watches the ongoing, fluid processes beyond what the icebergs experience. She knows for instance that all is related and that separate-self is an illusion. And she probably witnesses all of it, all there is, with compassion and with a natural commitment to life and its creativity.

In my vision life is about becoming aware. We need to find ways to cultivate awareness, and not only of body and mind. With a more conscious awareness of our transpersonal Self, our outlook on life will transform dramatically. When we realize that we are neither our body nor our mind,

we can truly take our place, namely of the one looking into the world through us. Once we realize that, we cannot avoid perceiving our reality from higher perspectives.

A gradual shift in position from the personal to the more transpersonal point of view will have far reaching effects. Not only on how we stand in life and relate to death for instance, but also on how we experience day-to-day life situations. Our relationships to others and our environment changes when we are able to consciously look from “higher”, that is ego transcending perspectives. Many aspects of life as we know it are already changing rapidly and radically because more and more people are willing to live more consciously. Many of us do feel a responsibility towards our fellow humans. We do care about environmental issues and we know that we participate in the evolution of humanity and our planet. I consider *awareness of inspiration* essential and meaning-giving. It gives us a tool to *consciously* focus on our transpersonal ground in being and look at ourselves from a transpersonal perspective. Consequently this awareness shows us a way to Self (self-actualization), as I will elaborate in the next chapters.

Allow me to tell you the story of the twins in the womb: one day these two are happily floating around and discussing existence. They argue about the meaning of life. One twin is quite convinced that “this is it”. He thinks that the womb is their universe because that is what he can see. His purpose in life is to be good to his sister and enjoy his life. The other twin however senses a world beyond. She has vague intuitions about a Mother. She has visions of an omnipotent Being who somehow is their source and probably their destiny. She senses that the purpose of her life in this womb is to grow in such a manner that one day she will transcend the reality of the womb. Then she figures, she will see the light and unite with Her.

Chapter Four: Awareness of Inspiration in day-to-day life.

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

(Joseph Campbell¹⁵)

I think we feel, we are aware of *the rapture of being alive* when what we live resonates within our soul, within our Being. The awareness of what resonates within us is our sense of direction, our light to follow while maturing towards wholeness. Through a keener awareness of the rapture of being we will be able to respond to life and thus consciously *create* ourselves according to our own innermost being, according to what we in essence are.

By becoming more conscious, we become more who we - on a transpersonal level – are; literally more Consciousness.

This hypothesis encompasses a transpersonal concept, a holistic view of who we are in the larger order of things.

4.1 Awareness of inspiration and the issue of self-realization

Frederick Perls speaks of self-realization as a goal of every living being. Carl Rogers writes:

