

Wall, K. & Louchakova, O. (2002). Evolution of consciousness in responses to terrorist attacks: towards a transpersonal theory of cultural transformation. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 30(3), 252-273.

Evolution of Consciousness in Responses to Terrorist Attacks:

Towards a Transpersonal Theory of Cultural Transformation

Kathleen Wall

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, California

San Jose State University, San Jose, California

Olga Louchakova

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, California

John F. Kennedy, University, Orinda, California

Abstract

Through the analyses of responses to attacks to September 11, the authors interpret trauma as a catalyst of transformation of cultural consciousness and American self, and articulate the foundations for a transpersonal theory of cultural evolution. Accounts feature positive values, humanistic and spiritual aspirations, direct intuition of the evolution of consciousness, and the instances of new type of integral consciousness identified with both oneness and multiplicity. Authors use the theory of emergent evolution of Sri Aurobindo and Gebser, and the spiritual psychology of Ibn-Arabi, as opposed to positivist and critical theory evolutionary perspectives. Imaginative responses to complexity and trauma, re-focusing attention on spiritual values, and transpersonal dialog are indicated as components of the new cultural strategies.

Focusing on transformative experiences that have emerged out of the trauma and conflict of September 11 (9/11), we find signs of a cultural transformation of consciousness and propose to articulate the foundations for a transpersonal theory of cultural evolution. In emphasizing instances of integral consciousness and the spiritual aspects of responses to 9/11, we are not devaluing mourning, fear, anger, or the national pain of loss. However, as researchers we cannot deny the evidence of another class of phenomena in the aftermath of 9/11, such as complex spiritual, imaginative and transformative. These experiences can also be described as transpersonal, sacred, altruistic, and positive.

We hypothesize that the spontaneous manifestation of transformative experiences indicates a shift in the cultural collective consciousness, possibly expressing the formation of a new structure of cultural consciousness. These experiences may provide evidence of a significant change in the dynamics in the structure of the American self: instead of independent, alienated, and empty consumers (Cushman, 1995; Stewart & Bennett, 1991) we may increasingly encounter more interdependent and fully alive selves.

By relinquishing the tactics of revenge and attuning our attention to this shift in cultural consciousness, we have opportunities to perpetuate and further the emergent evolution of consciousness (Aurobindo, 1914-1919/1996). Contrary to the view of cultural evolution based on the inevitability of opposition (Koenigsberg, 1989; Kriesberg, 1998) and the primacy of economic or intellectual factors (Cushman, 1995; Girard, 1996; Schellenberg, 1996), the theory of emergent evolution allows for the manifestation of completely new forms in cultural consciousness. It accommodates the possibility of integrated and undivided human beings. It also allows for the possibility of a world where cultures do not automatically develop oppositions,

social groups do not marginalize each other, and violence does not usurp the essential values of the world religions.

Review of the thesis

We will formulate the suppositions of a transpersonal theory of cultural shift through phenomenological and thematic analyses of first person accounts in the wake of 9/11. We also extrapolate from published survey and focus group data. By doing so, we are taking experiential data as a primary guide to our theorizing.

First, we will refer to approaches indicating the transformative influence of trauma, and show how the particular trauma of 9/11 is altering consciousness. Then we will further the argument by interpreting trauma, explaining conflicts as the loci of development, and bringing in principles of “emergenist” evolution. We will draw on the philosophy and practice of integral consciousness, as foreseen by Ibn-Arabi (1980), articulated by Gebser (1985), and lived and taught by Sri Aurobindo (1914-1919/1996). This is a freeing vision that allows us to relinquish jaded and inadequate mental structures and cultural programming, and be open to the actuality of emerging new cultural forms.

After establishing this perspective, we will report the results of our analyses of the post-9/11 accounts. We will provide a map of new elements of a developing spiritual consciousness, (e.g., a longing for spirituality, a sense of connectedness to the whole of the humankind, a sense of oneness, an experience of foundational love, a direct intuition of evolving consciousness, etc.) Through an analysis of structures of consciousness we will explain how the spontaneous emergence of these new elements of experience can evidence the evolution of consciousness. We will formulate the principles of this “emergenist” evolution in the context of 9/11. Then we will

look at new tendencies in behavior and attitudes appearing after September 11 as a result of the shift in consciousness.

These new types of behavior and attitude — such as re-focusing attention on positive values and spiritual insights, recognizing spiritual consciousness as a positive attractor, and using dialog as a means of cultural healing — are the components of imaginative new cultural strategies. We will indicate how these strategies serve as a means to cultural transformation and healing. Evidence of spontaneously rising imaginative responses to 9/11, in individuals and groups, will serve (a) as a component of a transpersonal theory of cultural shift, (b) as strategies furthering and sponsoring an evolution of consciousness.

In conclusion, we will suggest that psychology adopt an evolutionary perspective on the development of individual and cultural consciousness.

Culture and Cosmologies of Integral Consciousness

Cosmologies, developed by Ibn-Arabi (1980), Gebser (1985), and Sri Aurobindo (1914-1919/1996), provide the opportunity for a new orientation in which we can “make meaning” and revitalize culture, for life without purpose creates despair (Neimeyer & Levitt, 2000). Embracing the concept of the spiritual evolution of consciousness helps one to see tragedy as a means to awaken and develop a wider, deeper picture beyond merely mental constructs, to be imaginative in response, and to avoid the trap of revenge. These cosmologies carry the vision of a methodology for social healing, and provide an alternative to other more limited paradigms.

Gebser (1985) outlines how cultures are shifting from a mental to an integral consciousness, and Aurobindo (1914-1919/1996) shows how an emergent cosmic evolution is at work spiritualizing life. Ibn-Arabi (1980) describes a consciousness of integrated opposites and the cosmic meaning of humanness. In the following brief review of their complimentary

cosmologies, we can only gesture toward the horizons of their thought. Genius is theirs; mistakes, if any, are ours.

1. There is only one Consciousness. However, within consciousness there are levels of being and knowledge that are veiled to us. Though consciousness is One, and is experienced primarily as a personal intersubjectivity, in the human psyche there are both individual and transcendental realms. Emergent evolution is propelled by the transcendental experienced through individual and collective awareness.
2. The trajectory of the evolution of consciousness cannot be mapped at the level of consciousness in which humans are currently immersed. The present rational, mental mode is only capable of acknowledging consciousness on its own level or below. Humanity's vision is limited by its rationalist lenses. Aurobindo suggests that the widespread denial that these lenses are inadequate is as prejudicial to the extension of knowledge as was the religious obscurantism that opposed the extension of scientific discovery. The axiom according to which all truth must be referred to the judgment of rational analysis, and must be verifiable by a common, objective experience, is a restrictive, lopsided standard giving sovereignty to the normal, and excluding supernormal experiences. Spirit provides a radically different point of view.
3. Consciousness evolves in an emergent rather than continuous process. Creation is the projection of Spirit into matter, and evolution is the spirit coming home to Itself. Evolution is perceived by individuals as an ascent, while creation is the descent of Spirit into matter, life and mind. Evolution is positive — it is the unveiling of the Divine in humans resulting in the transformation of suffering. It transcends the endless perpetuation of oppositions, and is experienced as freedom and a peace that surpasses understanding.

4. Integration is a fresh new concept in evolutionary systems. Evolution is not just an ascent from a lower to a higher state; it is also an integration of those states. When new consciousness emerges, not only does a new state appear on the scene, but the extant forms of matter, life and mind also undergo a transformation, so they become different from what they were before (Maitra,1988).
5. Evolution means the opening of the Divine within which floods the whole surface life, mind and matter. This individualized opening is involved in the psychological aspects of self-development. The individual human soul is a particular “becoming” of the Universal Soul; therefore, upon transformation and self-transcendence, it can authentically govern, respond, and reject. Were this creative agency not present, humans would be at the mercy of slowly evolving Nature. Therefore it is imperative for the individual to actively participate in the cultivation of evolving consciousness.
6. The descent of higher consciousness is a condition of evolution. This descent is required for every transition from previous states of consciousness — for instance in the transition from matter to life and from life to mind. For Aurobindo, the world does not evolve on its own in a continuous self-contained process, but requires Divine intervention through the direct descent of Higher Consciousness at every crucial stage of its evolution. Emergenist evolution (Gebser's term)(Gebser, 1985) includes the possibility of a culture based on an integrated individual/cosmic self, without painful divisions or annihilating opposites. There is a motion towards development, not through conflict, but through consciously cultivated non-dual insight.
7. Nature, humans and the whole universe are spiritual in essence. The universe is a manifestation of spirit in substance in a series of planes. Ranging from the densest to the

subtlest substance, matter is seen as a form of veiled life, life is a form of veiled mind, and mind is veiled from higher states of consciousness. Consciousness is present throughout all planes, from the atom, to the plant, to man and beyond.

8. If spirit and nature are seen as a dichotomy between transcendent spirit and mechanical, unintelligent nature, the inevitable outcome is either a denial of nature as an illusion of the senses, or the denial of spirit as an illusion of imagination. People are dissatisfied with this dualism and see themselves as both spirit and nature. All human philosophies, religions, and sciences are attempts to get the right data and method to resolve this problem of our existence.
9. There is an emergent rather than continuous evolutionary process. In evolution, intuition and imaginative leaps are more important than dialectical unfoldment. A radical change takes place when a new integral structure of consciousness emerges.
10. The problem of evil is solved by a completely fresh method of transforming one's outlook. This outlook rejects both the western view (evil is permanently fixed) and the eastern view (evil equates with ignorance). The motion towards integral consciousness — where all are eventually self-realized — militates against the eternal existence of evil. Suffering is viewed as the pain of our innate aspiration for a higher state of intimacy with God. Intuiting a more fulfilling state of things, people suffer an acute sense of discontent (Divine discontent) with the world as it is at present. This discontent is a direct consequence of the spiritual character of evolution. It is a reminder that humans have a higher destiny. (Maitra, 1988). Rather than deadening one's sensibility, this cosmology can increase one's power to discern and support life-enhancing values.

The evolutionary crisis to which Sri Aurobindo calls our attention is a crisis of the current purely mental consciousness, which is incapable of properly coping with the developments of technology and science. According to Aurobindo, “a total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself”(Aurobindo,1919-1921/1995, p. 1059). This necessitates a transformation from our imperfect state into fullness of our real and spiritual personality.

In Aurobindo’s view, society goes through three stages of evolution before it arrives at the fulfillment of its possibilities. The first stage (natural consciousness) is a condition in which members of society are not intelligently self-conscious, and society does not consciously govern people's communal existence. In the second stage, the communal mind becomes more intellectually self-conscious. This stage (mental consciousness) produces scientific knowledge, and culminates in the armored efficiency of society. However, with its reliance on the supremacy of reason, the communal mind loses sight of the reality of society as a conscious organism, and treats itself mechanically. The simple principles of people’s vitality are lost. Collective human awareness cuts itself off from the secret roots of its life, resulting in a dependence on institutions, legislation and administration. Only in the third stage, that of integral consciousness, including non-duality, can humans discover their own rules, character, and means of actualization. Then human beings can live collectively in unity, sympathy, and spontaneous liberty (Aurobindo, 1918-1921/1995).

Trauma As Transformation and Conflict As Development

We know that trauma can be very destructive and lead to pain and pathology. Traditional mental health disciplines have already documented this aspect of 9/11 (Galea, 2002; Schuster et al., 2001). Our discussion considers the possibility that trauma can also be transformative, both for

individuals (Richards, 2002; Targ, 2002;) and for the culture (Pennebaker, 1997; Chamberlin, 2002). Transforming trauma into a helpful opening for kindling the evolution of consciousness is our interpretation of a transpersonal response to 9/11.

. Trauma shatters old structures of consciousness, both in the individual and collective psyches, and provides an opportunity for the development of either healing and imaginative new structures or pathological and rigidified reactions. Traumatized individuals report great dissonance between their current experience and their previously stable, secure, and predictable relationships with other individuals as well as with the supernatural and metaphysical (Sparr & Fergusson, 2002).

Harvey and Miller (2000) note that people grow stronger and gain hope in pursuing the meaning behind such loss. In research on serious physical illness, Targ (2002) reports that those patients who believe that their illness (breast cancer) is a lesson have a better quality of life than those who see illness as a punishment.

Recent research indicates those with spiritual beliefs have a better recovery from trauma than those who have none. (Pennebaker, 1997). In considering moral and spiritual issues following traumatization, (Sparr and Fergusson, 2002) review spiritual crises and the subsequent struggle to reconstitute values, beliefs, and a sense of meaning in life. The trauma survivors' quest for meaning and purpose (i.e., for a restoration of structures of consciousness) makes them face a profound set of questions. Can something larger than the self have the power to change reality? If so, what function might it have in the healing and restoration of wholeness in our collective trauma?

The sense of perplexity after 9/11 is the consequence of trauma, and is the "no-man's land" of conflict. Kriesberg (1998) and Schellenberg (1996) show that social conflicts develop

in stages. The escalation of tension and eruption of struggle are followed by confusion and chaos, finally to give rise to a new equilibrium. According to Critical Theory, conflict is the developmental locus in history where new socio-cultural structures evolve. Analysis of the period around 9/11, however, indicates different aspects of evolution in action.

Both tensions leading to the conflict, and new creative approaches to cultural change, were already present before 9/11. For instance, Ray and Anderson (2000), in an extensive survey of over 100,000 U.S. participants and focus groups, have posited a shifting consciousness in some 50 million people, whom they called “cultural creatives.” The values of this substantial portion of the population include authenticity, engaged action, whole-process learning, idealism, globalism, and ecological awareness. Supplementing intellectual ways of knowing with direct personal experience, they base their choices on intuiting authenticity. They like to be involved in what Margaret Mead called “whole process,” where they create something and carry it through to completion. They are more active and idealistic than the norm, and like to see the interconnections between things. They are good at synthesizing from very disparate, fragmented pieces of information and therefore are concerned about the global ecology and the well being of people around the planet. It seems likely that this large shift in consciousness in the U.S. prepared the soil for transformative responses to the trauma of the terrorists’ attacks.

According to spiritual psychologies, the emergence of new consciousness in the individual psyche — through conflict, coercion, confusion and a resolution into new meaning — is part of how we develop our individual histories. From Christianity with its unseen warfare (Spidlik, 1986; Scupoli, 1997), through Islam with its notion of internal *jihad* (Bakhtiar & Bakhtiar, 1995) to the tantrik teachings of Kshemaraja and Jnanadeva (Jnanadeva, 1985), the emergence of new meaning happens via perplexity. However, perplexity contains the possibility

of non-dual consciousness as well (Ibn Al-Arabi, 1911). In Shankara's Vedanta, experiences of non-dual consciousness are considered essential for psychological health and development (Bader, 1990). Gebser and Sri Aurobindo concur that consciousness in a new integral culture embraces all possibilities, from divisions and oppositions to consciousness of non-duality.

Signs Of New Integral Consciousness And Evolution In The Accounts After 9/11

Due to the complexity and immediacy of the data considered here, we have used both content analyses, and phenomenological analyses of these slice-of-life accounts. The principles of phenomenological methodology recommended by A. Giorgi (1985) were applied in our analyses of the poetry site (see below), and to the personal accounts furnished by spiritually oriented psychotherapists.

Quantitative data include the results of published surveys (Chamberlin, 2002; Daw, 2002; Krom, 2002; Reimer, 2002). Qualitative data come from a variety of sources. Frank White provided responses from spiritually oriented psychotherapists who were participants in his dissertation research at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP). Our students at ITP also provided reaction reports. Linda Smith, J.D., Ph.D. provided responses from her web site "Poems for Peace" (<http://poemsforpeace.utoledo.edu>), which she constructed for people to share their poetic reactions to 9/11. We also included her insights in integrating themes gleaned from the contributed poems (Smith, 2002). In addition, we included our personal experiences in communication with students at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology before, during, and after September 11. In the aftermath of September 11, Kathleen Wall taught a class on psychospiritual integration using the model of integral consciousness and cosmology from studies of Sri Aurobindo. Olga Louchakova had direct experiences of *Sohbet* in Turkey where

she was in a spiritual retreat with a group of students at the time of the attacks. *Sohbet* was used in teaching diversity research at ITP after September 11.

Findings from Quantitative Data

Quantitative evidence suggests a change happening in the structure of values, motivations, choices, and behavioral strategies in response to 9/11. This data indicated a reliance on, and aspiration for, sustaining virtues and strengths.

Peterson and Seligman's research from an online questionnaire studied the degree to which people see themselves as having 24 character strengths. In the 625 post-9/11 responses, significant increases were found in the virtues of love, gratitude, hope, kindness, spirituality and teamwork (Chamberlin, 2002).

Many people sought community and spirituality. 98% reported reaching out to family and friends, and 90% turned to religion (Schuster, 2001). Preliminary research from the National Opinion Research Council indicated that more people reached out to others after the 9/11 tragedy than after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. 74% felt like talking to others vs. 54% after Kennedy's death; 48% were contacted by someone after 9/11 vs. 38%; and 67% contacted others about the event vs. 37% (Reimer, 2002). Psychologist David Sattler (Krom, 2002 surveyed 1282 U.S. college students from New York, Washington, Colorado and South Carolina, and found them resilient amidst changing values after 9/11. Those subscribing to the following statements were as follow: "Have new priorities in life" ranged across states from 73% to 81%; "Appreciate each day" — 75%-82%; "Feel closer to family members" — 76%-80%; "Found I am stronger than I thought" — 65%-75%; "Know I can count on people" — 73%-75%; "Feel my life has purpose" — 35%-60% (highest in New York state on this last question).

The American Psychological Association (APA) focus group research conducted in Indianapolis, California, and Baltimore, also found people more resilient than expected and confident that most of the general public would “bounce back” from the initial emotional impact of the attacks. This led to the abandonment of a public education campaign focused on coping. The participants told the psychologists that messages cast in a negative light — such as coping with uncertainty or dealing with change — were seen as demoralizing. These results were echoed in research by Pann that included a literature review of previous studies of how disasters affect individuals and society and interviews with experts on terrorism. The focus group members responded positively to discussions about self-discovery and personal strengths. The participants clearly told psychologists to deal with positive, higher values and to refocus from an emphasis on pathology and coping (Daw, 2002).

Summarizing the quantitative data, there is significant evidence of a cultural shift from an economic definition of the “self” to an emphasis on higher values, belonging (interconnectedness), spirituality, and resilience, in response to the trauma of the events of 9/11. The amount of data that we can present in this article is severely limited in comparison to the overall complexity and breadth of the national response. But the very scale of that response, and its effects on all the facets of personality, allow us to suggest that something deeper and more integral is taking place than the transient shift of particular psychological modalities. We may confidently suggest that the very delicate and foundational definitions of selfhood, the actuality of being human in the current cultural context, and the overall consciousness as presented in our embodied lived experience, are all undergoing change. It seems a possibility that the economically determined definition of the self is suddenly being questioned, and that a transformational cultural shift into higher values and an emphasis on belonging

(interconnectedness), spirituality, and resilience, in response to the trauma of 9/11 has been initiated and continues to take place.

Findings from Qualitative Data, and Discussion

Findings from our qualitative data are here in reviewed, and a discussion follows. As we expected, qualitative analysis reinforced our tentative understanding of the deep structures in consciousness underlying the transition described above. Some of the structures, discovered in this analysis, do not easily lend themselves to psychological description. The absence of common language tools suited for descriptions of realms “in-between” manifestation and transcendence, or the emergence and dissolution of the structures of consciousness, is a serious limitation. Both the language of concrete definitions, and the language of negation (Sells, 1994) fail the task. Ancient phenomenologists of consciousness, such as Kundalini yogis or Taoist alchemists, solved the problem by using metaphors. Yet metaphors conceal as much as they reveal, and our focus is on revealing.

There are three groups of “non-normative” phenomena that characterize the accounts after September 11. We call them “non-normative,” because of their infrequency amidst the average cultural experience of living. However, in the responses to September 11, these phenomena appear with remarkable repetition. We may roughly categorize them as aspirations, values, and states. The special group of findings supporting the hypothesis of the evolution of consciousness is described in the following section.

Aspirations include:

- A desire to break the cycle of suffering and revenge. A heightened sense of urgency characterizes this aspiration. It also seems to be connected to the sense of freedom found in the aspiration for a non-violent world.

- The aspiration for an evolution of cultural consciousness. This is eloquently stated both in prose and poetry accounts. An awareness of the spiritual dimensions of life is heralded as a means toward further evolution.

- Another aspiration is the call for complex, imaginative responses. Some of our participants noted the desire to encounter such responses not only in themselves, but also in others. The sought after imaginative responses included: the nuances of belonging, a sense of the sacred, forgiveness, and an experience of the feminine.

- The next aspiration consisted of the urge to evolve — to evolve as a human species, and to escape the power obsessed “Neanderthal” consciousness. This included the longing for spiritual awareness, an inclination to take to spiritual practice in hopes of such an awareness, and an expressed need for spiritual sustenance and nourishment.

The sphere of values included a cultivation of connectedness and an intensification of purposeful, compassionate living, as well as the active desire to create a cultural transformation from this tragedy.

In addition to an enhanced appreciation of non-killing, fairness, forgiveness, and the like, we observed a new and striking element: a pervasive appreciation of discernment and differentiation. It is worth emphasizing discrimination in its role as a predecessor of spiritual consciousness. In the spiritual philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, the capacity to discriminate between various classes of phenomena (*Viveka* in Sanskrit) is the most important condition for Self-recognition.

The other significant change in the sphere of values was the recognition of the importance of an internal orientation towards integrity and peace. Many social activists, denied the possibility of immediate action in the “hot” spots of the planet, reported an understanding of

internal peace as a state to be pursued, and of spiritual consciousness as a state to be sustained. These were noted as forms of consciousness helping to heal the wounds of the world.

Under the “states” category we will mention some very interesting developments. First of all, accounts frequently showed remarkable shifts in self-identification. In these accounts there is a sense of a living cosmic soul, a Universal Godhead within, understood as the inner identity in many accounts. This is the realm of consciousness described by Gebser, Sri Aurobindo, and Ibn-Arabi. In Sufi cosmology, the illumined human being is described as one who has two eyes of awareness: one is the eye of the human, and the other is the eye of God. The accounts point to the presence of this “other” identity, with the levels of perception and insight pertaining to it.

The shift in self-identification to an expanded awareness inclusive of the experiences of all living beings is layered with confusion and perplexity. Many people reported, directly or indirectly, a sense of connection with the whole of humanity. Co-experiencing or direct knowing of how the other felt, seemed to be a repetitive feature of these accounts. This would seem to be a kind of reversed narcissism – one might well wonder what developmental phase might be assigned to this newly reported phenomenon. The most significant component of the accounts under consideration is the taste of oneness. One can track a “sandwich-like” structure of identity: as if that which is One transpires through multiplicity.

Non-dual consciousness, or the direct intuition of the One-Beingness of this universe seems to underlie the expressions of altruism, love, equanimity reported in these experiences, and may serve as efficient cause of these new “non-normative” phenomena in the psyche. In thinking about these spontaneous manifestations of non-duality within the containers of the individual psyche, we should acknowledge that the structure of the accounts after 9/11 doesn’t completely follow either of the models of personality or consciousness development that are currently

available. While a lengthy discussion of this issue is not the subject of the current article, we would like to underscore that the phenomena uncovered by this analysis do seem to fit into the maps of human consciousness provided by Sri Aurobindo, Gebser and Ibn-Arabi.

In qualitative analyses we used accounts of participants who appeared to be mainly spiritually inclined people. However, spiritual or religious experience is very common in the U.S. (Fenwick, 2001). In our study, we've been focusing not on spiritual aspects of experience per se, but on aspects that indicate the emergence of an integral consciousness. Integral consciousness, according to maps provided by Sri Aurobindo, Gebser and Ibn-Arabi, is characterized by the availability of awareness of both oneness and multiplicity. It is also a consciousness of both individual and cosmic levels of being, of immanence and transcendence.

It is probable that our participants had a predisposition for the emergence of this type of consciousness. Nevertheless, many people are reluctant to register their transcendent experiences (Palmer, 1999). Except for a few articles from positive psychologists, most psychological research, national surveys, and focus groups were focused on uncovering the prevalence of pathological response to trauma. However, there were large numbers of people and other studies that reported resilience and positive altruistic value shifts in reaction to 9/11. So, it is equally probable that the evidence of integral consciousness is far more prevalent in the culture than is recorded.

Besides the above evidence of a new consciousness, there are two groups of findings directly related to evolution. Participants spoke of an evolution of consciousness happening to the human species, of the possibilities of transforming the "lower" ego, and of integrating the spirit and "carnal nature." Poets expressed the willingness to look beyond anger, to develop new attitudes towards the challenges of life: unusual, non-typical ways of living. They demonstrated a

heightened awareness of all the elements of life experience that can be interpreted as change and evolution. Awareness and self-reflection on developmental changes have not been common in the population at large. Yet, amazingly, many people after September 11 noticed changes in themselves and others that they qualified as evolutionary.

The second, striking group of reports are those indicating a felt sense, or direct intuition, of the evolution of consciousness. The evolution of consciousness in these cases became a direct experience, not an intellectualized response or one shaped by media images. These accounts seemed to locate this insight within the very core of consciousness, where one's essence is encountered. We may speculate that these accounts give us evidence of an actualization of the essential (Mohanty, 1997) consciousness of change, the great archetype of evolution (Jung, 1996).

Cultural Transformation And Imaginative Responses

Perhaps it is the disturbing reality that 19 men used our own technology to kill 3000 people in the most "secure" and powerful nation that has commanded such attention. It certainly shook up widely held beliefs about the security of U.S. culture. Culture and self are two connected and mutually constructing realities (Cushman, 1995). Our analysis of the accounts indicates a change in the current configuration of the self, including emotions, values, perceptions, identity, and so on. Change affects, in fact, every aspect of the self. An essential feature of this transformation is what might be called a divinization of the collective. Ibn-Arabi spoke of this possibility as an upcoming actualization of the prophetic function in the individual psyche, i.e. the capacity to understand and practice the true ethics of communal behavior. This understanding re-focuses the mind on goodness, receptivity, and on seeing others

as divinized elements of the whole. Authentic self-definition comes through attention to true diversity (Aurobindo, 1914-1919/1996). The re-configured self manifests imaginative responses to the world, and new possibilities for functioning in it.

Consciousness, and not economic superstructures, is the efficient cause of such change. In the light of Ibn-Arabi and Sri Aurobindo's thought, the results of our analyses of 9/11 show that there is the possibility of integral consciousness not bound by dependence on power hierarchies, and free of divisions and oppositions. New behavior originates from this consciousness.

In resonance with Glover (2001) in his book *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, we see that technological developments and the breakdown of moral law complicate the clarity of choices in the face of violence and increase the possibility of war. The counterbalance to this can be found in complex imaginative responses, as exemplified in the Cuban missile crisis. In this situation, leaders found the solution which diffused the conflict (Glover, 2001).

Ibn-Arabi refers to the imaginal world — a non-local “realm” in which the human psyche shares in the creative imagination of Divinity bringing new possibilities into actualization (Corbin, 1995). Responses from the imaginal world are complex, unpredictable, and creative. They allow one to solve puzzles that resist merely intellectual solutions. The accounts we have analyzed provide evidence of inclusive consciousness: a tendency to expand one's empathic awareness to incorporate the psychological lives of other people. This serves as the foundation for opening the possibility of imaginative responses.

Some of these responses consist in re-focusing on the positive, soteriological aspects of lived experience. Such responses are spiritually expansive rather than individually contractive; cooperative rather than competitive; both interrelated and self-reflective. Refocusing on positive subtle states of awareness, on values, and on goodness allows negativity to be transmuted and transformed. Spiritual consciousness functions as a natural positive attractor within one's psychic

make-up. If one's vital impulses are cathected by spiritual consciousness — rather than by aggression or other lower drives — one's vitality supports positive transformation.

Imaginative responses call for unusual, unprecedented, non-normative, and unconditioned types of behavior, conflict resolution strategies, institutions, and approaches. Some examples include: the web site www.poemsforpeace.utoledo.edu; the work of organizations such as Global Initiatives for Peace, Capacitar, and Pace e Bene,— a Franciscan Service In Non Violence(M. Litell, personal communication, April 3, 2002). On the other hand, one could also argue that there has been an upsurge in war, violence, and hopelessness since 9/11. It is in these circumstances that the new consciousness is being born. Multiple meanings can be attributed to these events. It is similar to Frankl's "Man in search for meaning" (Frankl, 1992), where man's meaning in the concentration camp is not about the concentration camp per se. Responses to 9/11 are not merely about the tragedy of 9/11. The terrorist attacks are shifting people's focus.

One of the major responses has been the growth in popularity of various forms of dialog. Multicultural societies, that have historically had to deal with complex ethnic and social mixes, have developed forms of dialog where the emergence of spiritually heightened states or even experiences of oneness happen in and through conversation, with open eyes and a context of relatedness. *Satsang* (India), *Sohbet* (Turkey), and *Veche* (old Russia) are examples of this dialog, which have played a crucial role in traditional forms of cultural healing.

Such dialog requires both sincerity, and a spirit of egalitarianism. The dialog must come from a place of relative "egolessness". The general mood is one of mutual respect, caring, and a conscious emotion of love and friendship. This special form of dialog helps manifest a lived group experience of spiritual consciousness. It is also intended to assist implicit and latent meanings to emerge into explicit consciousness. Through the specific use of language

constellated around meaningful and essential issues, the group rises from moods of depression, angst, concern or confusion to a gradually increasing state of clarity, empathy, and joy; and eventually to a highly positive experience of the Self and of total connectedness.

Such a dialog in Turkey, right after September 11, with the founder of the Foundation for Anatolian Enlightenment, Dr. Metin Bobaroglu, led us from shock, anger, depression, and fear to a stable sense of self, in a state of aliveness and connectedness. Upon our return to the U.S., we discovered an increased resilience and resourcefulness in situations that would have otherwise been deeply disturbing.

Thus, spiritual dialog becomes a means of sustaining psychological health in a world afflicted by interfaith conflicts. For example, we used spiritual dialog at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in the aftermath of 9/11. We encouraged the following principles to be present in the dialogical process: sincerity; a deep attention equally inclusive of inter- and intrasubjectivity; patience and receptivity; the cultivation of a sense of empathy and friendship towards one another; an abstinence from therapeutic interactions and issues; existential enquiry; self-disclosure; and an engagement of the whole being. This type of dialog allowed us to reconcile differing reactions to September 11. We also found solutions to complex diversity issues, and healed personal wounds. As a group, we evolved into a new consciousness of integral understanding.

Spiritual Cultivation And Vision Of A Greater Psychology

We have a choice as to what lessons we may learn from the events of 9/11. Those events affected not only individuals but the entire country, indeed the whole world. Cultural shifts in consciousness following conflicted cultural turmoil and tribal strife have been well documented in history. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) cites many examples of how the focused efforts of leaders and small groups have literally changed conflicted societies. Several of his examples are related

to the development of spirituality. He sites Confucius as developing an ordered society through ritual dance and philosophical discussions with young students who became civic leaders. He also notes Muhammad's galvanization of the psychic energy of conflicted Arabs which bound people together in a common spiritual goal and established Islam.

September 11 brought a new type of consciousness to cultural attention. Perhaps a new psychology needs to develop that can accommodate and interpret these experiences. Such a psychology might look at the collective psyche drawing on the insights of great thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo or Ibn-Arabi. This would entail seeing human interiority as God, and seeing God's interiority as human — two poles of the same continuum. Such a new psychology would acknowledge realms larger than personality as having structure, and Oneness as having a spectrum of angles, states and meanings. It might incorporate such concepts as the imaginal world of Ibn-Arabi. It would posit a psyche that is cosmic, a supra-psyche which avails itself of ordinary human awareness and uses human beings as a locus of its manifestation. Can psychologists transcend the limits of determinism in psychology and break through to a psychology that can foster the possibility of a consciousness-based development of the world's social structures?

We propose the following ways in which psychology can be re-imagined to cultivate the emergent evolution at work in the culture. Psychology can acknowledge the evolution of consciousness, the possibility of integral consciousness and the possibility of transformation. The unpredictability of the psyche requires us to supercede the current symptom reduction and adaptation model and to encourage unbiased research and social action. There is a danger that psychology as presently formulated may remain captive to old concepts and become an obstacle rather than an aid to consciousness development. Surveys and focus group responses to 9/11

resulted in psychologists acknowledging the resilience of the U.S. populace. The need was not for coping strategies to avoid pathology but for self-exploration and the acknowledgement of trauma as transformative in the cultivation of positive values and altruistic actions (Daw, 2002).

Psychology can be more aware of the subtleties of phenomena as they present themselves within complex lived experience. At the same time, the broad, interdisciplinary, inclusive cosmologies will be complimentary for psychology to assess the patterns of development in cultures.

We call upon psychology to develop a further understanding of imaginative responses to conflicts and trauma, and to study and develop means of introducing and cultivating social practices that facilitate integral consciousness in world cultures.

Although it is not always acknowledged, psychology has a culture shaping function. A shift towards an emergent evolution oriented psychology able to accommodate spontaneity and acknowledge the reality of cosmic and non-dual realms might be a factor in the formation of non-violent cultures in the future.

References

- Aurobindo Ghose, S. (1995). *The foundations of Indian culture*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press. (First published serially, 1918-1921)
- Aurobindo Ghose, S. (1996). *The life divine*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press. (First published in the monthly review *Arya*, 1914-1919)
- Bader, J. (1990). *Meditation in Shankara's Vedanta*. New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.
- Bakhtiar, L., & Bakhtiar, S. (1995). *God's will be done: Vol. 3. Moral healing through the most beautiful names: The practice of spiritual chivalry*. Chicago: Kazi.
- Chamberlin, J. (2002). Research suggests Americans have changed for the better since terrorist attacks. *J. American Psychological Association Monitor on Psychology* 33(3), 14.
- Corbin, H. (1995). *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). *The evolving self: A psychology for the third millennium*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Cushman, P. (1995). *Constructing the self, constructing America*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Daw, J. (2002). 'Window to self-discovery' opened after Sept. 11. *American Psychological Association Monitor on Psychology*, 33(3), 15.
- Fenwick, P. (2001). The neurophysiology of religious experience. In I. Clarke (Ed.), *Psychosis and Spirituality* (pp. 15-26). London: Whurr.
- Frankl, V. (1992). *Man's search for meaning: an introduction to logotherapy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Galea, S., Ahern, J., Resnik, H., Kilpatrick, D., Bucuvalas, M., Gold, J., et al. (2002). Psychological sequelae of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York City. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 346(13), 982-987.
- Gebser, J. (1985). *The ever-present origin*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Giorgi, G. (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Girard, R. (1996). *The Girard reader*. New York: Crossroad.
- Glover, J. (2000). *Humanity; a moral history of the twentieth century*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

- Harvey, J. H., & Miller, E. D. (2000). *Loss and trauma: General and close relationship perspectives*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner-Routledge.
- Ibn al-Arabi, M. (1980). *The bezels of wisdom*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Ibn al-Arabi, M. (1975). *The wisdom of the prophets*. Gloucestershire, England: Beshara.
- Ibn al-Arabi, M. (1911). *The tarjuman al-ashwaq*. London: Theosophical.
- Jnanadeva, S. (1985). *Amritanubhava*. Pondicherry: All India Press.
- Jung, C. (1996). *The psychology of Kundalini Yoga*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Koenigsberg, R. (1989). *Symbiosis and separation: Towards a psychology of culture*. New York: Library of Art and Social Science.
- Kriesberg, L. (1998). *Constructive conflicts: From escalation to resolution*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Krom, C. N. (2002). Faculty-student research finds students coping well after Sept. 11 attacks. *Windows on Western* 8(2). Bellingham, WA: Western Washington University.
- Maitra, S. K. (1988). *The meeting of the east and the west in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.
- Mohanty, J. N. (1997). *Phenomenology: Between essentialism and transcendental philosophy*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Neimeyer, R. A., & Levitt, H. M. (2000). What's narrative got to do with it? Construction and coherence in accounts of loss. In J. H. Harvey & E. D. Miller (Eds.), *Loss and trauma: General and close relationship perspectives* (pp. 401-412). Philadelphia, PA: Brunner-Routledge.
- Palmer, G. T. (1999). *Disclosure and assimilation of exceptional human experiences: Meaningful, transformative, and spiritual aspects*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA.
- Penneybaker, J. W. (1997). *Opening up: The healing power of expressing emotions*. New York: Gilford Press.
- Ray, P. H., & Anderson, S. R. (2000). *The cultural creatives: How 50 million people are changing the world*. New York: Random House.
- Reimer, K. (2002). An invaluable journey. *Science & Spirit* (2002, March/April), 23-27.

- Richards, A. (2002). Prayer in the lives of people with HIV. *Focus: A Guide to AIDS Research and Counseling*, 17(2), 5-6. San Francisco: University of California AIDS Health Project.
- Schellenberg, J. (1996). *Conflict resolution: Theory, research and practice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Schuster, M. A., Stein, B. D., Jaycox, L. H., Collins, R. L., Marshal, G. N., Elliot, M. N., et al. (2001). A national survey of stress reactions after September 11, 2001 terrorists attacks. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 345(20), 1507-1512.
- Scupoli, L. (1997). *Unseen warfare: The spiritual combat and the path to paradise*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Sells, M. A. (1994). *Mystical languages of the Unsayings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, L. (2001). The day chicken little was right: Expression and sense making of 9/11 from around the world. *Organization Development Journal*, 19(4) 86-92.
- Sparr, L. F., & Fergusson, J. F. (2002). Moral and spiritual issues following traumatization. In J. K. Boehnlein (Ed.), *Psychiatry and religion* (pp. 109-123). Washington, D. C.: American Psychiatric Press.
- Spidlik, T. (1986). *The spirituality of the Christian East*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cisterian.
- Stewart, E., & Bennett, M. (1991). *American cultural patterns: A cross-cultural perspective*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Targ, E. (2002). Healing HIV: Mind, body, and spirit. *Focus: A Guide to AIDS Research and Counseling*, 17(2), 1-4. San Francisco: University of California AIDS Health Project.