Integral Transpersonal Journal

of arts, sciences and technologies

Eurotas Official Journal

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INTEGRAL TRANSPERSONAL JOURNAL

VOLUME II, NUMER II, 2012

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Editorial

Supporting Transpersonal Psychology: a Call for Action

STEVEN SCHMITZ, Ph.D.

In this editorial I will share an example of Transpersonal Psychology's current progress and international collaboration, through my observations on the recent ATP-ITP Conference in Menlo Park, California, U.S.A. On February 17-19, I participated in the *ATP-ITP Conference on Spirituality and Psychology*. The theme was "Spirituality: Promises and Pitfalls." As an EUROTAS and ATP board member, I have seen this as a timely topic for the field in both Europe and the U.S.A. I have noticed a shift happening internationally in relation to Transpersonal Psychology looking deeply and critically at itself.

The Conference program states: "As we confront economic and ecological disasters, we are experiencing 'spiritual crisis', where previously held beliefs and practices are called into question. This...is an opportunity to apply transpersonal approaches to resolving these issues. Spirituality can be a powerful force to unite people in overcoming shared challenges, or...an obstacle fostering greater dysfunction. We are looking forward to...sharing...how to create movement toward an inclusive integrative spirituality and how to avoid the pitfalls of the paths."

The Conference commenced with Roger Walsh, M.D., Ph.D., D.H.L., presenting, "Towards A World Spirituality: Essential Practices and Potential Traps." Two main points that Walsh presented were (1) on being a gnostic intermediary, and (2) the recognition of two current forms of religion.

He introduced the concept of the "gnostic intermediary," which he defined as

"central to the whole transpersonal community." Gnostic Intermediaries are those who can transmit wisdom across cultures and require: (1) the ability to absorb the wisdom, (2) to know the language and concepts of the culture or community they attempt to communicate with, and (3) the ability to translate the wisdom in a way that creates an "aha" experience for those hearing it. What is unique today is that gnostic intermediaries are not only translating between cultures, they are also translating between eras of human history. He shared that to do this work we need to be aware of the two current forms of religions, i.e., conventional narrative-based religion and trans-conventional practice-based religion.

Walsh outlined several traps of the spiritual path: (1) devaluing previous stages of spiritual development, (2) egocentric use of one's new understanding, (3) settling for mere intellectual understanding, (4) overestimating one's stage of spiritual development, (5) failure to keep growing spiritually. He quoted from Suzuki Roshi, "You are perfect just the way you are, and you still have places for improvement." He challenged the conference attendees with this question: "What is the most strategic contribution I can make to the world?"

As EUROTAS Conferences include U.S. presenters, so too did the ATP-ITP Conference include European presenters. Pier Luigi Lattuada, M.D., Ph.D., Psychotherapist and Director of the Integral Transpersonal Institute in Milan, Italy, presented "Biotransenergetics: Trance, Elemental Forces, States of Consciousness". Dr. Lattuada has interwoven Brazilian shamanism, bioenergetics, and modern European clinical psychology into a transpersonal-oriented psychotherapy. He presented how the wisdom of an ancient tradition translates into modern psychotherapeutic processes that offer participatory vision, provide interconnected relationships between individuals and their environment, and encourage dialogue between personal-self and transpersonal-self.

Jan Mojsa, Ph.D., psychotherapist from the U.K., and teacher at the Bath Center for Psychotherapy and Counseling, presented on "Non Duality, Psychotherapy, Thehro, and Implications for Practice." Jan has researched the wisdom traditions of Pakistan's Sufis and the technologies of modern psychotherapy in the U.K. to develop an effective therapy practice for contemporary life.

Jim Fadiman, Ph.D., closed the conference with a powerful "call-to-action." He spoke with humor and passion about the state of transpersonal psychology in the U.S.A. He mentioned how universities here have not yet embraced transpersonal

psychology. Much of the knowledge from cutting-edge research and inquiry into spiritual and mystical experiences and their benefits has become mainstream without the recognition of the transpersonal field's contribution. Concurrently, in Europe, new transpersonal programs are being established, and EUROTAS continues to grow, adding new training institutes and individual members.

He encouraged the conference attendees to view transpersonal psychology as a life form. "We need to ask ourselves, is it expanding its reaches or going the way of extinction?" He called for a "transpersonal stance." Transpersonal psychologists need to stand up for the field and reframe its direction. Dr. Fadiman believes we are at a choice point. We can more fully impact the mainstream or remain a boutique psychology. He also challenged us, "Are we capable of seeing ourselves as a world psychology?"

The Conference presenters provided many examples of how "spirituality can be a powerful force to unite people in overcoming shared challenges...or it can become an obstacle fostering greater dysfunction. "As Transpersonal Psychologists, we can apply both the knowledge and wisdom of the field to help create a better world. One of the current goals of both EUROTAS and ATP is to bring the value of Transpersonal Psychology to the mainstream in a way that can be heard. We can actively support this international collaboration in the transpersonal field and the movement toward a cooperative global village.

Find an archive of videos through the following website:

<http://itp.givezooks.com/events/online-conferences>