

Motivation for a Charismatic Training



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1) Introduction to Relational Spirituality

Charismatic training is the radical enactment of *relational spirituality* in a group context. In this brief introduction to this work I will suggest that a *Charismatic Collaborative Inquiry in Concert* is an important step to take in today's spiritual environment. The following pages

outline the motivation behind our charismatic inquiry. For social actors (and I believe we are all social actors) like film and theatre actors' *motivation* is vitally import ... here I plan to outline the motivation for a more 'relationally based spirituality' (this paper should probably be read along with Paradise Unbound: Relational Spirituality and other Heresies in New Age Transpersonalism (Lahood 2010). Relational inquiry is designed to intervene in some of the maladies that continue to plague contemporary spiritual life...in particular the chimera of spiritual authoritarianism, spiritual projection, and spiritual narcissism (more about this below). The term 'inquiry' is something of a buzzword these days (related perhaps to Ramana Maharishi's self-inquiry) and while many have done various forms of 'spiritual-inquiry' I can assure you that only a handful of persons have had the opportunity to practice what I am talking about here.

There are three foundational pillars in this work: the first requires a deep commitment to the cessation of spiritual projection (a process) in a supportive trans/personal atmosphere - as people undo and re-own their charismatic projections their own spiritual authority and discernment begins to flower and flourish - as Spontaneity, Creativity, and Presence. A second pillar of the process is what could be called 'spiritual decolonization' the liberation from three thousand years (maybe more) of deeply held and unconsciously internalized spiritual authoritarianism. The uprooting of 'colonized spiritual consciousness' is a profoundly liberating process of great subtlety and one that removes the spiritual 'glass ceilings' from our ability to thrive and flourish in our worlds. The third pillar is what we call 'attention to the between' - charismatic persons learn to pay radical heed to the quality of spiritual life emerging with and *between* one another....the root practice of relational spirituality. We believe that all spiritual life unfolds and reveals itself in relationship. We attend to, and nurture, the maturing charismatic relationships between us. Abiding in relationship can become a skilful means to self discovery – since potentially at least the transpersonal abides within the interpersonal. This part of the process, which can be messy and chaotic, is also reasonably sequential and somewhat predictable:

- 1) First: choose to, and agree to engage in the uprooting of spiritual defences e.g. projection, authoritarianism, competition, narcissism etc (they are often used unawarely and offensively) they are subtle and sometimes pervasive assumptions, but usually can be gently flushed out with some gentle but firm confrontation.

- 2) This process (of owning projections) enables the person in the here and now to recover their indigenous relationship with their original source (*fons et origio*) and with all-there-is.
- 3) With the spiritual defences disrupted unresolved distress (hidden by these defences) can emerge into awareness and into the relationship with others...where (in time) it can be healed.
- 4) Unresolved distress is re-cognized (discharged through intentional breathwork or transmuted in ritual) allowing us an opportunity to liberate relationships within the world.
- 5) The more distress is released and resolved the greater is my capacity for emotional competence, trust, awareness, charismatic presence, participatory feeling, transfiguration, unitive states of being and healthy relating to other people and the worlds at large.
- 6) Unitive states and transpersonal encounters with divinity (human and non-human) have a refining effect of personhood.
- 7) The more grounded in refined charismatic presence and healthy relating I am the more I liberate myself, others and my relationships etc.

The strength of this work lies in getting out ‘beyond the breakers’ of personal and group distress, economic and sexual competition, power struggles, fears, unfinished business, unaware authoritarianism and projection, however, before discussing ‘spiritual projection’ further, its pros and cons, I would like to outline my use of the word *charisma*. For me (and for you if you engage in charismatic training with me) charisma suggests the emergence of a *relatively* distress-free, distortion-free, embodied spiritual presence - a spontaneous, creative, and self-transfiguring en-action of the life divine in a sacred world. On our training you will learn a few essential skills that allow your *own* unique ‘indigenous’ and ‘charismatic’ spiritual life to emerge and then embark on an adventure of self-discovery, that continues well after the meetings have finished.

The term ‘charisma’ comes from ancient Greece *kharizesthai* meaning ‘to favour’. A person with charismas (plural) was a person on whom the Gods had bestowed special gifts. In early Christian theology: ‘a favour specially given by God's grace’ in another sense it can mean the experiential encounter with spiritual realities. The meaning of ‘charisma’, when used in the academic study of religious ecstasy implies special trans/personal knowledge but it can also mean something like the Polynesian term *mana*, suggestive of the spiritual power

and status accrued by participating in sacred rituals (note: by ‘charismatic’ we do not mean anything like the modern day fundamental Christian movement). What we call a ‘charismatic’ event suggests the following: sacred, blessed, holy, generative, nourishing, heart-opening, wholeness, spontaneous, intimate, inclusive, numinous, awesome, and mysterious—in some combination.

Anthropological studies of tribal ceremonial curing, shamanism, divinisation, healing systems, ritual rejuvenation, and religious performance the world over, have shown us that charisma is a powerful element when used for healing – perhaps *the* most vital element. Almost all healing rituals, rites and practices, therapies, (ancient or modern) rely on some sort of charisma somewhere in the mix—most often residing in a particular person. This person, because of his/her potent gifts, magical powers, and connection to some form of spirit-world, or direct line to a spiritual being, often wields these mysterious powers on behalf of others and promotes group cohesion. For many, such a charismatic person provides a sense of safety, mission, and strengthens the aspirants’ beliefs that he or she is on the right path. The power of these beliefs becomes a compelling agent in such spiritual endeavours – because they engage (some) of the creative power of the human participatory mind.

For many this level of healing is really ‘all there is’ (and to be sure it is a level or stage that can be powerfully emancipatory and liberating). However, I would suggest that there is a subtle restriction (with serious consequences) in this kind of liberation and that this stage of healing relies heavily on the promotion and controlled maintenance of a subtle unaware (unconscious) ‘spiritual-projection’. To over-simplify the situation: spiritual aspirants can become caught in a subtle trans/personal defence in which their own spiritual authorship, knowing, and presence is disowned and siphoned off by the guru, teacher, book, method, ritual object, or even group structure. The final step is to move beyond external authority and retract our charismatic projections and spiritual power from the person, place or thing. In affect (and somewhat paradoxically) this means a profoundly deep surrender to and trust of one’s deepest inner knowing—tempered with radical reflexivity "*reflexive in the sense of showing ourselves ourselves ...*" critical subjectivity (why we think what we think) and by the feedback of companions engaged in a community of radical inquiry (without such feedback the person is isolated and at risk of inflation). Such a process calls forth new practices, new yoga’s, and new ethics among peer charismatics, perhaps the most important of these is the concept of ‘relational spirituality’.

Relational Spirituality

For me, spirituality is all about relationship with all that is and how we treat other persons and non-humans – how we approach reality – do we objectify it and try to control it or imagine we are somehow greater than it – or do we approach it as we might a beloved friend. Do we speak at it or listen to it?

Most, if not all of our human development, including motor skills, gender, psychosexuality, emotional and interpersonal skills, communicative competence, morality and spirituality, unfold through engagement with other people. The spirituality that is the fullest development of these modes can only be revealed through *relational* forms of practice. In my experience really comprehensive and complete encounters with transcendental spirit put us back into the world, transfigured, as we come fully into being, into our bodies and into a redeemed and sacred world, relationship becomes the court of charismatic practice.

To put it simply, the spirituality of persons is developed and revealed primarily in their relations with other persons. Religious traditions have promoted a non-relational mode of spirituality, with the lone mystic or meditator as a model. If you regard spirituality as primarily the fruit of individual practices, such as meditative attainment or arriving at some ‘higher plane’ then the paradox here is the gross anomaly of the ‘spiritual’ person who is also an interpersonal oppressor...a spiritual bully. But, if you regard spirituality as primarily about liberating relations *between* people, then a new era of participatory religion opens up, one that calls for a radical restructuring and reappraisal of traditional spirituality and relationships.

It also calls us to attend in a fulsome and wholesome manner to our interpersonal relations (with special attention to power dynamics and distressed interactions) and what we have learned from psychotherapy e.g. what we transfer and displace onto other persons. In this vein all inquirers must keep an eye on several relationships that may become figural in an collaborative inquiry group which are similar to Petruska Clarkson’s five relationships. These are (a) the working alliance or collaborative relationship, (b) the inquiry transference relationship, (c) the developmentally needed or reparative relationship, (d) the I-Thou or dialogical relationship, and (e) the transpersonal and charismatic relationship.

Participation in charismatic training and the enactment of relational spirituality can deepen interpersonal skills but can also unveil the living divinity between *I* and *thou* (after Buber)—what is called throughout the Middle East *sheikina*, *the* feminine spirit, the grace, the presence that dwells between us. To create a feeling of reverence for the sacred presence

‘between’ is, in itself, a radical intervention in hyper-masculine ‘up and out religion’. An extreme ‘up and out’ account of human spirituality was provided by Ken Wilber (1980, 1983). In this model all individual persons and the cultures they generate were seen as substitutes and denial of absolute spirit. All culture and human aspirations are seen in this model as deluded projections and misbegotten versions of absolute spirit. The only way out is to lift oneself ‘up and out’ of the so-called illusion of personhood and culture by entering ‘non-dual awareness’ wherein only a metaphysical ‘oneness’ exists instead of the sacred many. While non-dual awareness is all well and good it also has a shadow side to it, which we will begin to explore below. Attuning to sheikina, on the other hand nuances our embodied spiritual world with a new kind of freedom...we no longer have to do away with ourselves and our attachments in the world rather we look at how to liberate our relationships by freeing our healthy indigenous charismatic hearts....and engaging in the world by reaching out to others.

Relational Spirituality and Attachment

Another important dimension to relational spirituality then is, obviously, in our relationships with friends, family, and lovers and it has to do with the art of attachment. Most people that I meet want their relationships to work and they want love and companionship as one of life’s great gifts, and, as social beings, love, belonging and companionship are necessities and needs. Alongside the creation of loving relationships goes the warmth of a happy home and good times. Many people these days have looked to spirituality to help them in relationships and they choose to develop themselves ‘spiritually’ in the hope of creating more fulfilling interpersonal relationships. Others hope that their spiritual aspirations will give them all the necessary skills for their loving relationships. The great paradox here is that most, if not all, of the spiritual paths, frameworks, and traditions that people turn to are based in non-relational forms of spirituality and non-attachment. Silent meditation, satsang, inwardly focused yoga, lone prayer, detachment from the world, seeing the world and the persons in it as illusions—were aimed at release from the world and its desires. Indeed most of the so-called Wisdom Traditions (e.g. Buddhism, Vedanta, Christianity) are rooted in the denial of ‘world, women and womb’ a form of spiritual-psychopathology—most likely rooted in unresolved perinatal/personal distress. Ancient religion is almost completely devoid of any real sense spirituality *between* persons.

Thus almost all the models of spirituality available to us generally have little to do with interpersonal intimacy and relating. In fact the cultivation of ‘morality’ was really the only interpersonal work of traditional religion (a morality that was often punitive toward human sexuality, intimacy and women). To be sure, there are obvious gains to be made in the cultivation of such attributes as acceptance, compassion and forgiveness – but these are one sided monistic practices based on masculine transcendence, of getting ‘up and out’ of the world...whereas relationship demands the ability to be in the world...to relate, to empathize, to communicate with competence, to own our needs, fears, desires, and distress, defence mechanisms; a morality based more on being relatively free from past wounds (and their power to distort our perception of the present and recreate symbolic replays of the past) and to manage the pressures stirred up by the day. Relational spirituality has an emphasis, not only on healing past-wounds and opening to transpersonal realities, but also learning how our past issues can emerge in our relationships and with this awareness liberating the ‘between’ from its distorting power. To my way of thinking it is way too simple to foreclose on life and say “well we don’t exist anyway ... so who cares” or “what you thought never happened” is to fly to quickly across the nuances of co-creation. Collaborative inquiry simply is relational spirituality and relational spirituality simply is an intervention on Spiritual Narcissism – the great disease of Western spiritual seekers. Narcissism in my book is a self separating feeling of superiority that places a cold skin between me and the other. Spiritual narcissism cancels out my true participation in life/love energies which have both a cosmic and erotic sensitivity - for a full treatment of spiritual narcissism in the New Age, spiritual feminism, and contemporary spiritual practices see *Paradise Unbound* (Lahood 2010).

2) The Hidden Spiritual Malady of Our Times

I greatly value the storehouse of wisdom pointed to by the mystical branches of world religion and have learned much from studying them (and will borrow from their languages when appropriate). Awareness, for example, which I would hold as crucial to both healing and charismatic practice is central to Buddhism and Sufism. However, I am also critical. To ‘greatly value’ mysticism is not to over-value, idealize, or deny the shortcomings associated with religious traditions old and new, Eastern and Western. For example, most of these systems have traditionally devalued women—it is held in Buddhism that women cannot get enlightened unless born as men (as far as I am concerned

this suggests an incomplete spiritual worldview and cosmological system and I have no interest whatsoever in enacting its so-called 'enlightenment'. Let me speak plainly: I wouldn't cross the street to enact its restricted and restricting gendered 'liberation'...it holds no value for me. Likewise within Sufi lore (as with Tibetan Buddhism) it was held that women were closely related to the categories of the demonic - thus womb, woman and world were seen as 'dark' to be disparaged in favour of masculine unity and 'light'. I believe these subtle categories are still operating in Buddhism and American transpersonalism today.

Since William James published his influential work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) it has become increasingly recognized that psycho-spiritual experiences or, transpersonal events, can occur in a variety of circumstance and may vary in content, intent and purpose. It has been argued, for example, that 'Buddhism and shamanism aspire to different states of consciousness' (Winkelman, 1993, p. 5). This is because divergent cultural styles embed transpersonalisms that fulfil divergent cultural needs. The *satori* of Japanese Zen Buddhism or the *samadhi* of yoga is not much use for a hunting people who have honed their precognition skills in hunting dreams (e.g. Brody, 1981), or the healing flight of spirit-possessed shaman/midwives into the cosmic uteri of women in an effort to conceive of her client's generative potential (see Potter, 1974; Lahood, 2006a). In many ways the best kind of contemporary spirituality is that which intervenes in the excess and failures of past spiritual epochs – particularly those dealing in sexism, disembodiment, power and spiritual narcissism.

For example, it is no great secret that Western traditions have robbed spirituality of its eroticism by equating human sexuality with sin - an attack that also laid the blame on women, with the pain of labour seen, for instance, as a punishment for Eve's sexuality. Christian intolerance of same-sex eroticism seems to me another failure but equally pernicious was the banning of personal imagination and individual mystical experience as a route to salvation and the enforced prescription that divinity could only be reached through the church clergy. Eastern and Western traditions have historically devalued the world and have used their practices as escalators for escape (through aggrandised dissociation and valuing the transcendent over the immanent) rather than working through the wounds that create the need for such flight—these traditions turn the world into illusion. Ptolemaic Christians believed that our magnificent world with its lush exquisite and breathtaking unity was that thing most far and fallen from grace and luridly imagined the world as 'Satan's Anus' - a cesspool of sin and perdition. Between the East and the West much damage has been inflicted on our ability to embody our divine personhood in a sacred world creating all kinds of distorted ideas about the relationship between divinity and the human body.

Eastern and Western religious authority have combined in a way that has created a hidden spiritual malady in many Western people, especially those with spiritual aspirations. It is a malady that arrests our development and causes havoc in our participatory relationship with the world and other people. I think of this malady as spiritual self-centeredness (narcissism), which, along with its hand-maidens spiritual imperialism, spiritual authoritarianism, and spiritual projection, is the foundation of a subtly distressed spiritual ego—I will spend some time describing the aetiology of this wide-spread malady and then in the second half of this note clear a path to its healing.

Spiritual Pathology

It is only very recently that a working distinction has been made between a truly transformative spirituality and a false, psychologically unhealthy, spirituality, of which at least two kinds can be distinguished. There is repressive or defensive spirituality, in which spiritual beliefs and practices are used to reinforce the denial of whole parts of oneself (e.g. anger, fear, desire, laughter, knowledge). There is also oppressive or offensive spirituality, in which inflated spiritual claims are made in order to manipulate, regulate, constrain and dominate others to support and follow the claimant. And the oppressive kind is itself rooted in the underlying repressive kind. Because the self has been twisted out of shape and uses spirituality to hide its authentic rezones and inauthentic self is erected often as a grandiose and inflated shell around the authentic person - which splits the real person off. It is a major issue as to the extent to which all past spirituality is riddled with these pathologies, which breed compulsive authoritarianism. The dogmatic New Age claim that there is no sin or guilt, for example, is to be viewed with extreme caution because it suggests a defensive position which suppresses our healthy feelings of guilt (we can then hide and deny our interpersonal and spiritual abuse of others). The feeling of guilt, while no doubt uncomfortable to feel, can be a pathway to greater loving, greater self-directed morality and greater humanity. This is of course different from socialized guilt associated for instance with Catholicism and original sin. I believe human beings are originally divine in body and mind and forgetting this estate is the only original wound. I do not believe that human beings are inherently filled with darkness and evil but that coming into being and subsequent wounding in childhood and socialization separates us from our participatory feelings which go underground in pain and flight and in its place we erect a false self. As the false self individuates we get further away from our healthy indigenous charismatic heart. Evil occurs when we choose to comply with

our false-self rather than open to the life/love energies of a healthy authentic self...which we can do at any moment.

Eastern traditions have virtually no understanding of psychological defence mechanisms and over-value dissociation from the world as its only answer to social and emotional strife or pain (It is now understood that people with trauma who have already dissociated from their bodies because of assault, loss or sexual abuse are attracted to dissociating religions and practices partly because they aggrandise their defences—they might become so extremely dissociated they may even deny they were ever born or will ever die). A similar death denying fantasy is central to Advaita Vedanta (and *A Course in Miracles*) and this dubious set of ideas (given as final authority) has been swallowed and mimed by second generation of American gurus and charismatic teachers.

I do not fantasize any Eastern/American guru as a reflection of my unattained ‘true’ self and would not cross the street for a teaching or a transmission. I would not sit with or participate in the projective process of Satsang and do not encourage anyone else to. The set and setting is designed for persons thus engaged to relinquish their authority their knowing and their beautiful embodied selves. Here is a topic for charismatic inquiry: The degree to which I (the advanced practitioner) idolize a teacher; the more charisma I project externally; is the degree to which I refuse to become an authentic human being and treat others as equals and peers. Furthermore my final narcissistic defence against my own connection to source and its ego burning life/love energies is to project it onto others - which works as a subtle inoculation against the real thing. Indeed projected authority creates a pool of unconscious and unprocessed anger in the aspirant (her own strangled autonomy and her own spiritual feelings displaced onto the teacher etc) for the teacher, and, because the projection is locked in—the aspirant feels she must maintain her idealization of the teacher to remain spiritually supplied – thus it could be re-cognized as a form narcissistic addiction.

Spiritual Narcissismⁱ

There are many ways to understand spirituality. Different approaches emphasize diverse aspects of the spiritual life, the spiritual path, or one or another spiritual tradition. For our present purposes, I will adopt the definition offered by Evans (1993) in his superb *Spirituality and Human Nature*. According to Evans, “spirituality consists primarily of a basic transformative process in which we uncover and let go of our narcissism so as to surrender

into the Mystery out of which everything continually arises”. Even though the means and goals of mystical paths are diverse, Evans explains, mystics tend to agree that any authentic spiritual transformation “involves a shedding of narcissism, self-centeredness, self-separation, self-preoccupation, and so on”.

The logic of competitive individualism, consumer capitalism, and hopelessness in the teeth of the global disasters of our modern times has culminated in the dead end of an extreme narcissistic self-preoccupation. Critical thinkers have warned more than twenty years ago, the immersion in self-growth and spiritual work can easily become strategies of narcissistic survival. Spirituality, rather than transforming the self through a decrease or eradication of narcissism, can become one more egoic scheme at the service of self-centred ways of being.

By spiritual narcissism I understand a set of related distortions of the spiritual path, such as ego-inflation (the aggrandizement of the ego fuelled by spiritual energies), self-absorption (the over-preoccupation with one's spiritual status and achievements), and spiritual materialism (the appropriation of spirituality to strengthen egoic ways of life). As I see it, the thread common to all these pitfalls is what I call spiritual narcissism (i.e., the misuse of spiritual practices, energies, or experiences to bolster self-centred ways of being). The main symptoms of spiritual narcissism are, among others, a fragile sense of empowerment and self-importance; a preoccupation with one's comparative spiritual status; a constant and repetitious chattering about one's spiritual experiences and achievements; a strong need for being positively reinforced and praised; a preoccupation with the sense of being special, chosen for some distinguished spiritual purpose, [chosen by spirit to be a channel] or preferred by spiritual teachers, and an extreme idealization or demonization of spiritual teachers.

‘Spiritual materialism’ refers to an “ego-centred version of spirituality [in which] we can deceive ourselves into thinking we are developing spiritually when instead we are strengthening our egocentricity through spiritual techniques”. Once we have learned the new language and rules of the spiritual “game,” Trungpa (1987) points out, we can become attached to these ideals and use them in ways that bolster our ego and new self-image, rather than as a skilful means towards liberation. Several modern authors have also eloquently discussed the narcissistic tribulations of the ego in search of spiritual realization. In short, narcissism can be seen as diametrically opposed to spirituality. Both traditional and modern spiritual thinkers coincide in that the more we participate in Spirit, the more we move

naturally away from self-centred ways of being. And conversely, the more we preoccupy ourselves with self-gratification and self-grandiosity, the more we alienate ourselves from Spirit.

The Cartesian worldview we have inherited with its segregation of subject and object has serious consequences. Ferrer writes: First, its intrasubjective reductionism paves the way for the egoic appropriation of spiritual phenomena because it confines spirituality to the very domain where the ego believes itself sovereign and continuously struggles to dominate: the realm of inner experience. For Evans “both subjectivism and objectivism are complementary epistemological stances of narcissistic modes of consciousness that preclude a genuine availability to others, and a real participation in the world and spiritual energies. While in subjectivism the world becomes my experience of the world, in objectivism, by contrast, I retreat to a position of a detached observer and the world appears as entirely outside me. However, Evans points out, “whether I include everything [subjectivism] or exclude everything [objectivism] I am like a god in my aloneness, my self-sufficiency, and my domination of the universe. In the one case I dominate by devouring and assimilating into my experience. In the other case I dominate by subjecting to my intellect and will” (p. 44).

New Age Spiritual Imperialism

The New Age’s mystical occultism is recognized by many scholars as the religion of globalization—in one sense, the standardization or universalism of the world’s religious traditions into ‘One Truth’[one American/Christian/Hindu truth that is] is a form of neo-colonialism at the level of spirituality (or psychic colonization) and ultimately a replay of early European colonization - when Christian missionaries wiped out a good many of the world’s peoples, groups and religions in the name of the ‘One Truth’ and evolution. The New Age’s vision of planetary wholeness is to “bring the cultures and religions of the world together by overcoming dogmatic boundaries and emphasizing the universal wisdom traditions common to them all” in the name of wholeness and healing.ⁱⁱ But this ‘no boundary’ paradise, to which the New Age is bound can also mask a strong assimilationist arrogance; “crypto-ethnocentrism” and greedy authoritarianism in its project of conversion.ⁱⁱⁱ In the hands of the right ego-structure this can turn a person into a spiritual imperialist—to innocently claim that ‘we all come from the one light’ is, at the very least, unconsciously ethnocentric...and we can’t really afford such unconsciousness.

It is this same spiritual imperialism that caused the Lakota Indians of North America to issue a statement declaring war on the New Age in the 1990's. New Age traditions growing out of Christianity blended with Hinduism, like *A Course in Miracles*, can reproduce this arrogance and ego inflation in its adherents (as a conversation with any hardened New Ager will teach you). Many of the followers of 'the course' and its off-shots (especially in its cult formations) that I have met suggest that 'the course' and its self appointed Master Teachers simply do not do the business at the level of spiritual ego and (while all well meaning people to be sure) many of them (not all) remain trapped and unawarely inflated with neo-colonial New Age egotism—spiritual narcissism.

My own experience over twenty years working in transpersonal groups and cultures tells me that no amount of working with the wounds of childhood and the blocks to our loving etc, can burn away the 'spiritual ego' when it is founded upon a subtle unaware projection onto an external spiritual authority (or group of authorities). Spiritual projection is the process (as we will see) that needs to be broken at depth and uprooted—it is not possible to intellectualize this process; knowing and partial awareness of the condition is only useful to point—but it does not stop the cancer. I write the following in the hope of 'preparing the way' for the coming into being of our own 'indigenous spirituality'. To do this I will engage in a bit creative blasphemy to breakdown the idolization and idealization that is part of our current spiritual world. Such idealizations also enable spiritual projections.

Simply put, the deeper our re-collection of our spiritual projections the more presence centred, spontaneous and creative do we become. But there is a dilemma here (grasp the nettle) most of us are *completely unaware* of this crippling process, we are blind to its activity... we surround ourselves with people who will collude with us and not rock our ego-boat. To bring a cessation to our subtle narcissism I believe we must enter the world of intentional charismatic interpersonal relationship—a world of radical awareness, honesty, and feeling—we must allow ourselves to be exposed and this means we must also allow ourselves to die that little-death rather than killing off the group or our peers. Thus we work closely and intimately with each other to release our personal divinity from the cage of spiritual ego. We do this by exploring and deconstructing spiritual authoritarianism and its practice of ranking.

The Problem of Spiritual Ranking

As Eastern religions and their gurus arrived in the West they brought with them their fair share of spiritual authoritarianism and spiritual ranking. Let's look briefly at these problems: Spiritual narcissism (self-centeredness) is connected with subtly introjected (swallowed) beliefs around 'spiritual ranking'...if I imagine my path ranks above others e.g. then my isolation and inflation increases. Most religions, new age groups, and charismatic leaders, typically resort to the ranking of their tradition, path, or course, above others (e.g. anyone not doing our group's process is 'dead' 'asleep' 'has not lived' etc). One's 'path' or tradition becomes a kind of cosmological security blanket...(but also a source of narcissistic supply - those fine glowing feelings that subtly bolster a false self esteem at the expense of others) the rest are seen as less-than me.

Another source of spiritual ranking (in more traditional religious groups), I believe, is the fear of death. This is partly based on a deep existential fear, belief in tradition and its post-death vision of paradise (the Christian after-life or the Buddhist Para nirvana) are all-important to my sense of ongoing existence post-death/body and if my religious framework is not the be-all and end-all then my after-life and eternity is threatened, this is a deep and powerful existential fear—and this is partly what religious fundamentalism, religious war and terrorism is based on: my martyrdom in a ball of flame demonstrates my certitude, my fundamental surety and fealty to an off-word paradise that grantees my posthumous survival. In a grotesque displacement of divinity some choose suicide rather than the pain of ego-death—a sign as to just how powerful these psycho-spiritual-cultural processes are.

Let us look at some cross-cultural examples of spiritual ranking. As is well known, Christianity regarded pagan religions as incomplete steps towards the final Christian revelation. Likewise, in Islam, the teachings of Jesus and the ancient prophets of Israel are recognized as relatively valid but imperfect versions of the final Truth revealed in the Koran.^{iv} Bahauallah founder of the Bahia Faith ranks his revelation over and above that of mystical Islamic Sufi groups of the likes of Ibn Arabi, or Jelaluddin Rumi. Mohamed's *miraj* or 'night journey', celebrated each year in the seventh lunar month, was of particular significance to the Sufi's. They felt that his apotheosis or "supreme vision" where he was guided, by the archangel Gabriel, through heaven and hell, marked the very limit of human knowledge. This transpersonal experience, held to be a defining one for Islam, entered the Western literary and religious history through Dante's work *The Divine Comedy*. However in an act "typical of Western schizophrenia" Dante places "the Prophet himself in the lowest circles of hell"! ^v

Mani (the founder of Manichaeism) claimed a monopoly on spiritual knowing and that his vision was more perfected than the previous: “This revelation of mine of the two principles and my living books, my wisdom and knowledge are above and better than those of the previous religions”.^{vi} The ‘apostle of light’ (Mani) extended his authority and religious monopoly through eschatological threats of not ‘passing go’ when it came time for entering Heaven’s Gate “To join the Manichaean religion is the best one can do, because Manichaeism is the only door of redemption and XradēSahr [god] will summon all people at the end of time for the last judgement”^{vii}

I find this kind of veiled threat (that paradise will not be attained unless you subscribe to the ‘right way’) is a threat that seems to propel the psychological process of spiritual ranking. Buddhism ranks itself over Hindu schools and Vedanta claims non-dualism as the final and highest order of consciousness. The Dalai Lama (idealized by many contemporary Westerners) claims that only his school knows what emptiness is (the other schools therefore don’t understand nirvana or salvation). Furthermore the Dalai Lama claims that all other schools of Buddhism and all other religions will accept that his school has the handle on religion – and this says Jorge Ferrer is spiritual narcissism in action. Ken Wilber’s quasi-Buddhist writings, which place non-dualism at the highest level of his hierarchy, have also been faulted for their spiritual ranking by key thinkers in the transpersonal movement, yet such writings (because they are a locus for massive spiritual projection on to Wilber’s hierarchical cosmic schemata) are a cornerstone of such groups as Psycho-synthesis Training and the Fischer-Hoffman process. In my opinion this means that thousands of people are being pushed into a subtle narcissistic spiritual straightjacket, bound as it is to Americanized ‘one truthism’.

The Disease of Spiritual authoritarianism

Mystic innovators usually become authoritarian when they start a teaching career to pass on their realizations; and their followers will in any case rapidly turn them into authority figures. This is because the only model of spiritual education and training the world has ever known is authoritarian and (its natural consequence) spiritual projection. Thus a sect or cult is formed, and what is taught within it is given a warrant of authority via an appeal to a combination of some of the following:

The teacher’s intuitive and experiential certitude or faith

Divine revelation

Instruction from angels, ascended masters, off-world teachers etc

Sacred scriptures

Established doctrine and practice and ideas of purity

A lineage of gurus, teachers or priests within the sect

An ancient or modern innovative sage of religious founder

Religious training everywhere, from the remote past to the immediate present, means believing-and-doing what an authority prescribes. A warrant of authority means that when an inquirer asks why they should believe-and-do what is taught, the teacher's reply is, "Because the tradition of which I am a representative says so. And if you follow its teaching, as I and my predecessors have, you will find that it is correct". Thus training in say, Zen Buddhism is en-training the pupil's mind to its principles – it is not free inquiry. This appeal to the weight of established thought and practice proves that it is durable. It does not show that it is valid. Equally, of course, it does not show that it is invalid. It just doesn't answer the inquirer's question. It is beside the point, for the question is an early sign of the inquirer's spiritual autonomy stirring from its life-long slumber. The question cannot be answered from without, but only from the full awakening and alertness of divine autonomy within.

The universal authoritarian tendency within the diverse religious schools, ancient and modern, of our planet, is presumably to do with the remarkable call of the religious quest, which initially throws up a great deal of insecurity (to see how shaky it can all get I refer you to the concept of 'spiritual emergency'). As Freud said, success in 'love and work' are what our ego's mostly require, but as we all know, eventually these strivings fail us and we experience the devastations of lost love, death, illness, accident and chaos—the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'. And here, as Jung pointed out, the drive will then become a search for the transpersonal, to the spiritual, and cosmic belonging as the aspirant seeks healing and a wider understanding of her place in the cosmos. This stormy and sometimes frightening search often brings us in contact with a group, charismatic leader, technique, or therapy. No better way to put a stop to the upsurge of such shakiness, fear and chaos—and the underlying challenge of finding an inner source of certitude. This is the process of spiritual projection.

3) Spiritual projection and the interior monitor

If you claim that spiritual authority resides in some person, being, doctrine, book, school or path etc, you are the legitimating author of this claim. You choose to regard it as

valid. No authority resides in anything external unless you first decide to confer that authority on it. Nothing out there is accredited and definitive until you first elect it to be so. All explicit judgements that illumination resides without, rest upon a prior and much more basic tacit light within. When it is made explicit, this is the internal authority of which your own discriminating judgement is the expression. Individual human judgement, with its inner spiritual ground, is the legitimating source of all external spiritual authority. The religious history of the human race appears to involve the slow and painful realization that this is indeed the case.

We have to realize that every revelation must finally be appropriated by the individual soul. The very term 'revelation' implies the existence of the minds by which it is received. And it is on the attitude of such minds that everything in the end depends. The last word is with the interior monitor. The process is not completed until the divine which appears without is acknowledged by the divine which is enthroned deep within. And no amount of ingenious sophistry can do away with this ultimate fact. In other words the individual must take his stand upon the witness of the inner light, the authority within his own soul.^{viii}

When you are aware that the final court of spiritual authority resides within, and that any authority you have vested in anyone or anything external has derived from the imprimatur of that inner court, then you are spiritually centred and will not in the future become improperly subservient to any religious school or teacher. But when you are not aware of this, then you are busy with spiritual projection, and are spiritually off-centre. The spiritual authority that resides within is not known for what it is, is in some sense suppressed and denied, and is then unawares projected on, invested in, and inevitably misrepresented and distorted by, what is without.

Projection: perceptual and spiritual

On the view that all realities are subjective-objective, any view that reality is independently objective has a suppressed and unacknowledged subjective component which is prior, and which is inevitably misrepresented by the purely objective account. So in perceiving a world, if the subjective process of visual imaging is displaced and projected out as an objective image, then the subject is misrepresented as a dissociated Cartesian ego peering out at an independent world, instead of being known as presence in mutual

participative engagement with other presences in a shared world. In the same way, if my internal authorizing of a spiritual teacher is displaced and projected out as an external authority residing in that teacher, then my inner authority is misrepresented as an ignorance or a naiveté seeking illumination from another, instead of being affirmed as my inner knowing seeking dialogue with the inner knowing of another.

Now both sorts of projection, the perceptual and the spiritual, yield benefits up to a point, but sooner or later break down because they try to make half-truth represent a whole-truth. The critical turning point is when the process of projection becomes conscious and the subject reclaims the personal power within. This doesn't put a stop to the projective process, but it thoroughly reduces it and brings it within the aegis of critical subjectivity. It can now be monitored and modified.

Another kind of projection has to do with Creation: if I believe I am created and have no part in creation, and no relationship to something like a cosmic source, other than my being its creation, then I have not yet allowed myself to reach that moment in trans/personal self discovery of my intimate participation in and as the source of divine creation; the *fons et origio* (font of origin or fountain of youth). This means that I will remain projecting my participation in creation on to an external creator rather than experiencing co-creation in the deepest wellsprings of mystical knowledge and our aboriginal (meaning from the very beginning, from source and origin) participation in the coming into being of all-that-is. This does not suggest a claim to being 'god' rather it is a claim to inherent, inseparable, cosmic participation. Furthermore when someone like a guru or teacher claims to have identified experientially with the source-of-all-there-is with charismatic certitude we are prone to then project our own ability to plumb the depths of the wellspring of our ancestral heritage onto the spiritual expert robbing the aspirant of his or her own encounter with source. Hanging around a person who has been to their source is not the same as going to your own.

Projection and the guru

There is no doubt that the process of spiritual projection has been virtually the sole means of spiritual development both for the great mass of mankind and for many of the small minority with serious mystical intent. Indeed, eastern mysticism makes an explicit virtue of it. The guru without represents the guru within, and the guru within is only developed by full allegiance to, and identification with, the guru without. Today, however, in a world of mass

communication and planetary information exchange, the competing claims of innumerable spiritual authorities have created serious doubt as to the validity of any one-way. In fact all the noise coming from various gurus etc serves only to create confusion. Spiritual authorities, who are themselves off-centre, have no authentic spiritual autonomy as a basis for real religious co-operation with each other. Their continued spiritual projection - their allegiance to the authority of traditional belief and practice - keeps them apart. There is little or no cooperation among those who believe, by virtue of traditional indoctrination, that they are one of the god-realized of their respective traditions.

Spiritual Hypocrisy

Little attention is paid to the disturbed behaviours of current authority figures within the sect, to the impact of unprocessed emotional distress on their motivations, their practices, their teachings and their relations with their followers. To take but one example, sexual hypocrisy and perversion is regular scandal among religious authority figures, from Roman Catholic cardinals, bishops and priests, through Muslim mullahs and imams, to oriental gurus such as Swami Muktananda and Sai Baba and various Tibetan rinpoche's. The idea here is that enlightenment occurs as desire ceases—when desire has been completely disrupted enlightenment occurs. Then why, if their enlightenment has occurred, do they continue to crave sexual contact, if desire has ceased (as the story runs) why the need for sexual intimacy? It is because, I would argue, their frameworks of so called enlightenment are faulty, wrong and that their authoritarian role has corrupted their judgment which when coupled with creed of 'no boundary' becomes cock-tail for spiritual abuse. Ardent followers (eager beavers) (because they have already given their power away to the guru) will simply justify and deny any wrong behaviour or worse claim that his or her trauma spreading behaviour is a 'higher secret teaching' that will lead the unenlightened to greater experience of forgiveness – thus manipulating spiritual ideas for their own sexual ends.

The Exploitation of Spiritual Projection in 'Channelling'

The channel phenomenon has not escaped the scrutiny of transpersonal psychologists or clinical theologians or philosophical anthropologists in relation to 'spiritual emergency' that extremely shaky and psychologically challenging time in a person's development when the spiritual call ruptures the membrane of our Western worldview. Some so-called 'channelers', through a process of unaware spiritual projection cast their disowned and disembodied spiritual wisdom onto off-world 'beings' or 'entities' which in turn can become

a source of spiritual inspiration—however this is also problematic. According to a well known (non-reductionist) researcher sympathetic to the channelling phenomena up to 85 percent of so-called channelled material actually comes from personal unconscious of the individual effected.^{ix} This can suggest a mishandled attempt to cope with a spiritual emergency in which the individual effected by the ‘channel’ emergency engages in a kind of subtle splitting from their own wisdom and their own embodiment (which can have serious consequences). According to Stanislav Grof, a preeminent researcher into the realms of the human unconscious;

Spirit guides are usually *perceived* as advanced spiritual beings on a high level of consciousness evolution, who are endowed with superior intelligence and extraordinary moral integrity. This can lead to highly problematic ego inflation in the channeler, who might feel chosen for a special mission and see it as a proof of his or her own superiority.^x

Where a cult is based on channelling from some discarnate entity, (e.g. Seth, Lazaris, Ramtha, Abraham, St Germaine etc, etc) the status of the entity (and by association the channel or their works e.g. A Course in Miracles, Conversations with God, The Disappearance of the Universe) will become the screen for unaware projections, rather than a focus of critical scrutiny. The isolated spirit ego (the spiritual malady of our times) is often inflated with a kind of fundamentalist certitude claiming, for example, that the ‘course’; has come from ‘beyond’ a claim which gives its followers their authoritative warrant. However, this claim of beyond-ism requires critical scrutiny.

...

Little attention has been paid to the way current authority figures elicit and subtly or brazenly exploit the internal spiritual authority that is unwittingly projected on to them by their followers. Authoritarian abuse of power by leaders and teachers is an invariable consequence of such projection, and there is widespread evidence of ideological, organizational, sexual, and financial bullying and abuse in current spiritual movements, whether of ancient or recent origin, whether eastern or western or channelled.

I have heard of an American channeler/guru, who claims to be channelling Jesus Christ and on occasion Jesus will ‘come through’ with a message that the channeler and self-anointed guru should have sex with such and such a follower (often times a woman who is married or in relationship—suggesting an unacknowledged competitive streak in the channel and a need to disempower other males in the group). Quoth discarnate Jesus, “I put before you this man [the channeler] to be with this woman” [the eager beaver]. Trans/personal

development is undoubtedly an erotic process with the energies aroused very similar to sexual energies—unitive experiences, as I understand them from my own catalogue of peak events, and tend to be brimming with mystical Eros—a desire for union. Furthermore in transpersonal development the de-restriction of the sexual energies usually bound to genitally oriented sex allows our sexuality to become more polymorphous and flows into our erotic communion with the world and all that is.^{xi} Genuine charismatic presence has an erotic component, as the boundary between subject and object is overcome, we can feel a kind of mystical union as we participate in and with the local divinity in the place we inhabit thus leading to a sensuous beholding of the world and its particulars. Discrimination and prudence are needed after heightened transpersonal events because a consequence (in my own experience) is that of a naturally occurring inflation.

However, the sort of ‘channelling’ mentioned above is a blatant misuse of power for the ‘guru’s own end. If the channeler, or teacher, master etc claims to be the outer more evolved evolved or advanced reflection of the follower (eager aspirant) or worse the aspirant’s ‘Beloved’ then sexual union is often used as lure with the promise of spiritual fulfilment tied to the hook and (with de-traditionalized tantric practices coming to the West) there are plenty of eager aspirants ready to jump into the game as the sexual consort of Jesus, perhaps in the vain and inflated imaging that she was Mary Magdalene (championed as Jesus’ sexual consort in the New Age). For the eager aspirant the ‘special favouring’ offered by the leader/guru/father-figure can be nothing but a source of narcissistic supply. But this is really a simple and painful case of the ‘emperor’s new clothes’: we become enchanted in a group collusion—a powerful group projection of our own Sacred Marriage, our own inner wedding or coniunctio (after C.G. Jung) onto the guru and his new spouse. We are also told that ‘judgement’ is a crime in New Ageism and to ignore our internal authority and discernment as to what is elegant, beautiful, and truly trans/personal—and what is a deluded, grandiose, self-serving pseudomystic pantomime.

Suppression of spiritual autonomy

Most fundamentally, no serious attention is being paid to the ground of discriminating spiritual authority within each student, disciple, or follower. Any school or tradition that claims any kind of established authority for its teachings and practices will not encourage a full flowering of the autonomous spiritual judgment of each of its followers. Critical subjectivity, individual discrimination practice, independent judgment, inner-directed unfoldment, personal freedom of spirit in defining spiritual reality and in choosing and

shaping the spiritual path – all this is discreetly side-stepped or blatantly suppressed or seductively hijacked or, at the very best, affirmed only to be contained within carefully prescribed limits—the displacement of internal authority on to an external source. Thus several popular courses’ claim ‘carefully structured’ processes with which to attain ‘One Truth’ transpersonal consciousness (as if there is only one truth available). As useful as these workshops are, it does not allow you to have a hand in co-creating the structure etc.

Dissociation and hierarchical authority

There is clearly a close connection between dissociated, disembodied spirituality and spiritual authoritarianism. Moreover, the fact that there is so much spiritual authoritarianism in the world, in creeds and cults both old and new, creates a deep attitudinal warp in people which makes them susceptible to oppression by many other kinds of external authority. Claims made by masters or teachers of consciousness evolution (often leaning on the dubious authority of Ken Wilber) need to be chewed over very carefully and not swallowed whole. The problems with the classic Oriental non-dual state are its transcendental fixation, its dissociation from active charismatic participation in the social process of divine life and divine becoming, the deluded end-state claims made for it, its gender bias, and its internal association with spiritual authoritarianism.

Spiritual Idealization

Spiritual projection begins in childhood. We need and want from our powerful parents love, delight, understanding, esteem, discrimination, holding and helping; we have deep longings for complete and utter satisfaction, total safety, proper mirroring, and deep sense of connection. We want to be understood and to understand. We want to be chosen over all others, specially loved, and at some level we know our lives are in our parents hands (they have the power of death). We begin early to mime these authority figures—to try to incorporate their power into ourselves by becoming like them. No parent, of course can meet such needs, and these now unmet needs, these longings for love understanding and favouring can be directed in later life toward spiritual figures (Jesus, the guru, the master-teacher, etc). These longings and yearnings become restimulated at different times in our lives; (particularly around crises or spiritual awakening which is where people often get involved with groups or enter a spiritual relationship with a teacher) and become projected onto a spiritual authority. Here the spiritual projection is so strong that student completely gives up her own internal judgement and authority. Her own deep charisma and genius is projected

onto the teacher in her hope that someone in the world is fulfilling her fantasy of the enlightened one. This idealization is often powered-up by her defences, thus, if we are using spirituality to avoid some damaged, disrespected or distorted aspect of our personhood then we will often cleave all the more fervently to a false dis-embodied image of ourselves. Adoration of the so-called spiritual being or awakened one is used simply to avoid the deepest pain of personhood

Thus in contrast to authoritarian traditions relational spirituality, which can involve a group of charismatic peers engaged in their embodied spiritual life, 'decolonizing' their 'indigenous' selves and busy retracting their spiritual projections, and discharging the pain and grief (when they deem appropriate) associated with spiritual oppression, reduces the potential for psychic splitting. And enables peer collaborators to freely inquire into the charismatic power relations 'between' any two or more people (without defaulting to internalized external authority) in the spirit of personal flourishing spiritual flowering.

4) Charismatic training and education: Coming into being

While the work is grounded in humanistic and transpersonal psychology, it is more properly located in what is now called the 'participatory turn' in spirituality (e.g. Bateson, Skolimowski, Heron, Ferrer, Tarnas, Spretnak, Lahood) io it also artistic, healing, theatrical, and dramaturgical (in ancient Greece people would travel for days to participate in the ritual-drama of the amphitheatre undergoing a deep rejuvenating ritual catharsis from the Greek *katharsis* 'purging, cleansing,' from *kathairein* 'to purify, purge'). Re-evaluated and re-visioned transpersonal theory places great store on participatory theology, appreciation of local, embodied forms of spirit and the atunement to our aboriginal, indigenous relationship with all-that-is. This approach values our own inner wisdom and to this end we do not promote the 'one truthism' as the end state that all spiritual practice and culture should aspire to—since these theories risk being ethnocentric, patriarchal, disembodied, and ultimately bound and restrictive. Rather, we promote a relaxed pluralism (after Ferrer 20002 and we hold our selves open to the possibility of a Paradise Unbound: spirituality unhooked from traditional prescriptions, out-moded beliefs and dogma, spirituality as manifested between persons as embodied divinities in a sacred word. In this radical form of inquiry persons can liberate other persons with their charismatic presence.

It is a basic premise when working with the total person in a charismatic environment that healing is the cornerstone of the work. This healing, however, can occur on many different levels and its performance is essential for us as social actors. Transpersonal work is based on the premise that as we explore the contours of our being and becoming we encounter our deepest wounds, limitations and internalized oppressions. The restoration of a skilfully spontaneous, creative and charismatic person (not a dissociated psyche) is the aim and *raison d'être* of our training.

The Participatory Worldview: Coming into being

A 'participatory worldview' is just beginning to emerge in our spiritual world and will likely, over the next 100 years or so, have a huge impact on the spiritual landscape of our times – its basic principle follows: The human body and environment are the locus of being and the site of spiritual transfiguration. The human body and its environment IS a spiritual reality—only distress, culture, language and socialized habit stand in the way of our feeling of this reality. The human body will be construed here not as an '*it*' to be objectified and yoked to a project concerned with transcendent spiritual goals (as in yoga), but as a '*thou*', a partner in a sacred marriage and the pursuit of ever increasing and novel liberating wisdoms.^{xii}

The spirit of nature brings forth its *own* order through the human mind when that mind is employing its full complement of faculties – intellectual, volitional, emotional, sensory, *imaginative*. In such knowledge the human mind lives into the creative activity of nature. Then the world speaks its meaning through human consciousness. Then human language itself can be recognized as rooted in a deeper reality, as reflecting the universe's unfolding meaning^{xiii}

Historically (about 300 years ago) our Western world separated spirit from matter (this has been called 'scientific objectivity' or Cartesian dualism), in our times, as we heal this split, and return to a more sacred unity...we *and* our world are transfigured. As this self-transfiguring process develops (through an ever deepening restructuring [not dissociation] process) we begin to see that spirituality emerges from human co-creative participation with an un-chartable and un-bound mystery. This participatory understanding also re-establishes our direct connection with the source and ground of our being and expands our contact with it (it also does away with spiritual hierarchy, guru and priest-craft, and their commodification of liberation).^{xiv}

Divinity... Whither Do You Wander?

A trans/personal participatory inquiry must also wrestle with the question: 'where does divinity lie'? Is it over the hills and far away, or nearer and dearer than we had imagined? What we do know is there is such a thing as 'divinity' in human culture and therefore in human minds. Some religions place divinity on one being, e.g. Christianity tends to see divinity only in Jesus Christ. Whereas the Buddha never claimed to be divine at all, indeed, in early Buddhism divinity, as such does not really exist. Thus Buddhism in practice does not aspire to the Godheads found in Hinduism and Jainism. For Judaism, like Islam divinity is wholly other to the so-called human world. We have already explored some of the contours of New Age thinking which can see everything as pervaded by a single divine essence with the human being attempting to evolve in consciousness to 'realize' this socially constructed 'one truth'. However, one of the great forebears of the transpersonal psychology movement, But again we must inquire into the nature of our projections. Or is the question, more sharply framed, on to what cosmological construct do we project our own divinity? It seems to me a question of some importance as to where do we place divinity in relation to ourselves and our world. And it goes along with the question what is a person? Technically speaking, outside of human frames of reference, we don't really know what a person is. Thus the human body and person may or may not be divine – the point is we just don't know. On the other hand the human body and person may well be an extension of divinity in the field of time and space and we, because of cosmic amnesia and socialization, have forgotten our true estate as walking, talking, and dying divinities. William James claimed that 'Divinity lies all around us, but society remains too hidebound to accept that fact' (William James, 1902/1961) but divinity may well reside *as* us and not just 'all around us.

In the end, it may depend on one's 'intention' and which is the best story – is it a better story to be a divine person in a divine world or is it better to be a person pretending not to be here - a lump of skin in land devoid of spirit.

The notion of human divinity certainly has a lot of historical moss on it...in ancient Egypt the Pharaohs were worshiped as God beings. In the ancient Greek world a pantheon of Gods, with very human attributes such as jealousy, wrath, anger, pride, and lust, continually tinkered with human affairs and fought among themselves. In Zoroastrianism two divine

beings were locked in an eternal battle with each other representing the forces of light and darkness. The so-called human realm was conceived as a battle ground with angels and demons possessing humans as the celestial war was played out on the human 'level'. These ideas are loosely reproduced among some adherents of the New Age who see themselves busy 'downloading, decoding and light-working'. Such ideas seem to suggest a subtle dichotomy with divinity 'out there'

If we apportion divinity to a person, place, or thing, we must once again take charge of the act of authorizing this divinity and ask ourselves could this be another layer of projection? Generally speaking the notion of 'divinity' relates to ideas of the wholly transcendental or what used to be called the 'supernatural' usually off-world deities and 'superior' beings—so thoroughly woven into Western notions of divinity are the ideas that divinity is superhuman, superior, and immortal. But it does not necessarily follow that because a human being is mortal and that she ages and dies means she is any less divine than anything else. It simply means that built into this individual finite divinity is a unique process of impermanence.

A New Kind of Freedom

Once we overcome the dualism between matter and spirit, the human body can no longer be seen as a 'prison of the soul' or even a 'temple of the 'spirit'. For, example the Christian mystery of incarnation never alluded to entrance of the spirit into the body but spirit becoming flesh [John 1:1, 14]; therefore it may be more accurate to imagine that people come into being by *participation* in a transmutation of spirit into fleshy forms.^{xv} However, our fleshy form, as we well understand, is heir to a web of wounds and socialization processes that can stand in the way of our taking our place in the Garden. To fully incarnate, to come-into-being, means that we must restore our body's own revelation of its participation in a subtle, spiritual realm—this world.

However, there is another deep split in the Western psyche which has historically taught us to find solace elsewhere—the magician Pythagoras laid his faith in a higher world beyond the so-called 'taint of mortal life' and his ideas would profoundly affect the great Western philosopher Plato. In his stead Plato would perceive the source of truth and beauty in idealized *forms* beyond the sensuous world existing in a state thought not only to be pure, eternal and transcendent but 'outside all bodily apprehension'. For Plato's Academy true, genuine, reality is projected elsewhere – certainly a kingdom not of this world. As these ancient Greek ideas mixed with other cultures of the Mediterranean, including the monotheistic culture of Israel, a new model of eternity was wrought: the Christian afterlife.

For many these transcendent realms and dwelling places beyond the stars hold primacy over the earthly realm.^{xvi}

Yet there is a forgotten world of breath-taking unity at our feet, at our finger tips, and on the tip of our tongues – an Eden, a Secret Garden, a Paradise, (the word *Paradise* coming from the Persian term for an enclosed Garden) which has the fabulous and magical quality of being the ground of all otherworldly endeavours and which is none other than the world in which we live and breathe. The sensuous world is a realm that resides at the heart of all others, the world of the body, sound, speech and contact. This fleshy zone long derided by religious traditions as inconsequential is, rather, an inexhaustible field of unmediated experience.^{xvii}

This also means that we do not trade-off our individual personhood for the grandiose fantasy that our selves have evaporated into the spokesman or woman of the ‘one truth’ To be a self authoring and distinct human presence is not at all the same as being separate, alienated, and selfish being trapped in ego-centricity. To become self-transcending, to enter a heritage of consciousness, in which the sense of ego-centeredness falls away, is also at the same time to experience autonomy and distinctness of personal being at its most subtle and potent. To enter unitive states of consciousness (through charismatic training) is the sacred marriage of personhood with indefinable spirit. Encounter with god does not dissolve or erase the sense of being a person rather it transfigures the person. The self transfiguring charismatic person is that which emerges in abundance after ego-death because the erotic communion with the presences, powers, and archetypes (both transcendent and immanent) we encounter in the ground of one’s being have a opening and refining affect on personhood. This grace, this charismatic influence, has a regenerating, redeeming, and cleansing potency available to anyone with an open heart and mind anywhere at any time.

Thus as we reduce this splitting in our hearts we begin to celebrate and affirm the ‘festival of the flesh’ rather than a flight to the One—we explore through relational spirituality the presence of the Many. As we come into being and realize our inherent individual divinity an interesting question arises: how do we as divine presences treat the other divine presences - human and non-human? And herein lies to core of our work with ‘relational spirituality’ if we accept that our wounds have a way of coming around and hurting others through displacement, dumping, denial, envy, greed and competition then what is a healthy approach to our wounds’? We realize we have the power in our use of language,

gesture, and presence to allow others to realize their divinity, or what I call our *Perfect Nature*—or we use language, gesture and behaviour issuing from our still distressed and wounded personhood to shut down and disable each other. Here now in this place can we co-create with each other a distress-free diamond-clear relationship—freeing ourselves from spiritual projection, competitiveness, bullying, envy, manipulation, and one-upmanship? That is the quest.

The Charismatic Small Group Process

The small group process, is an intentionally intimate ‘holding’ environment for the radical but necessarily fledgling exploration of relational spirituality; it is a charismatic inquiry in concert, a dialogue, an enactment. It is a creative environment where we can gently and with humour flush the hidden malady out into the open and with love and compassion bid it fare-thee-well. It is an environment in which we-here-now, the co-producers of spiritual knowledge relax. As the person begins to relax two things tend to happen: The first is that they will either manifest deeply held blocks in the heart, mind, body and spirit that, like a cancer, disease our ability to ‘live the healthy life divine’. This unfinished business gives the person an extraordinary opportunity to let go, transmute or burn away this system of ancient defences.

The intimacy of the small group will gently (but sometimes dramatically) flush-out what I think of as ‘internalized self rejection’ which will begin to show itself to the group – because it is *only* through relationship do these hidden dynamics begin to surface. There is no reason for despair at this important junction—it can be a time huge learning, and a grateful, humorous, even joyful owning of our ‘stuff’. However, it is often not so easy at first and here we can use all manner of experiential psychotherapies (the best of which combine body and breathwork see ‘charismatic breathwork’) to work on our past distress and the deeper levels of pain and fear locked into the psyche in birth and childhood. Beyond the wall of internalized self rejection a non-rational and miraculous process begins to emerge through the charisma of the enlivened persons gathered.

The second possibility is the person will relax into their own spaciousness. Their presence will both deepen and open into an unrestricted, spontaneous, grace-filled creative charismatic person in deep-play with the other presences—deep-play here means we have become self-directed in opening to the ground bringing fourth our charismatic presence—as a cosmic birth-right. Each person begins to realize that they have the power in their presence, gesture and language to allow the flow in themselves and others or to shut it down out of fear,

competition, envy or jealousy. Charisma can be contagious, yet one of the most interesting phenomena is the subtle process of the transpersonal or ‘charismatic defence’ whereby a person attempts to regulate or restrict the charismatic self of the other in order to preserve her egoic-status quo. If her own primal repression is largely still in place then she will push against the regenerative flow out of fear. She or he simply cannot bear the flow of participatory feelings that were wounded in childhood and which were consigned to the unconscious and thus she recreates her agonized splitting in her relationships. This is done, in my observation, by attempting to kill-off the animating flow from the ground - usually by attempts to belittling, shaming, rejecting and devaluing of the group or its members - or simply through distraction. Of course to catch oneself out doing this is hugely liberating because it means that one can switch from constricting the other (and one’s own self) to liberating the other (and one’s own self lost in the process of incarnation). Because of the highly intimate and interactive nature of this work the group is pretty much full at 12 persons.

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