

WHAT IS TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY?

Transpersonal Psychology brings together what is impossible to bring together: science and the mystery of life, mind and no-mind, psychology and spirituality.

Even if its roots may be found much earlier in time, the 1960-80s can be seen the onset of Transpersonal Psychology. Abraham Maslow initially regarded it as an extension of Humanistic Psychology; in 1967 a small working group (Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof, Anthony Sutich, James Fadiman, Miles Vich, Sonya Margulies) came together to found a new psychology encompassing the whole spectrum of the human psyche. Particularly, the research on extended states of consciousness (“altered states”; “holotropic states”) brought into awareness that the human psyche is much more than a reflection of a “skin-encapsulated ego”; it is interconnected and part of the cosmic consciousness. This new psychology should become the fourth psychological approach in addition to psychoanalysis, behavioral and humanistic psychology.

Synchronistically, this was the time of the “Human Potential Movement” and the Hippie culture, which influenced the new Transpersonal Psychology to become not only an academic approach but moreso a subcultural movement which attracted world-renowned speakers, spiritual teachers and psychologists and filled huge congress halls in many parts of the world.

Michael Murphy, co-founder of the Esalen Institute in California, recognized three phases in the development of Transpersonal Psychology, of which the first one was a movement primarily based on consciousness-experiences. The second one, beginning in the 1980-90s, was more individual-centred: Some dived deeply into the exploration of the old spiritual traditions thereby finding out the genuine psychological potential of some of these traditions. The third phase can be described as a phase of integration of different approaches and a critical review; maybe the publication of the “Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology” can be seen as a first result and highlight.

How to integrate psychology and spirituality, how to integrate psychotherapeutic competence and spiritual depth, is still a vibrating question far away from its solution. The team of the International Institute

of Consciousness Exploration and Psychotherapy cannot offer an always simple and never contradictory answer, either. The older teachers of the Institute went through these described phases of TP and let come together in their lives psychological exploration and the spiritual discovery. We know that Transpersonal Psychology always has to integrate the personal and the transpersonal. The spiritual is always bound to the human body; as a human being, you can only experience the spiritual in your physical form. Yet, the spiritual is much more, it is what connects us to the formless, to the void, to the unborn eternity.