

## Transpersonal Inspiration and Psychological Mountain Climbing

### Transpersonal Inspiration

If we were to look about us at the 'signs of the times', the present state of humanity, the direction of its interests and the nature of its behaviour, we should doubtless be struck by a growing polarisation between two opposing tendencies. On the one hand there is an immoderate desire for and frantic pursuit of material possessions, sensuous enjoyment, mastery of nature and authority over other human beings, coupled with the inevitable accompaniments in every field of license and self-assertiveness, individual and collective aggressiveness, and violence. On the other hand we find, displayed in a more or less overt form, a degree of dissatisfaction with that materialism, aggression and self-centeredness which, among many of the young, becomes open rebellion. This opposition is characterised by a conscious or unconscious search for different and higher values and gratifications, a longing for what is by and large termed spiritual or religious.

But the path of this search is strewn with uncertainty, confusion and misunderstanding. One notices a strange paradox in the fact that, while there is an abundance of evidence pointing to the existence of this higher sphere obtained by men and women of every age and place, it has been the object of little and largely unsatisfactory scientific research. A number of reasons account for this situation. In the first place, an erroneous conception of the scientific method is widely held, which would limit its use to the quantitative and statistical techniques suited to the natural sciences. Furthermore, the mind is reluctant to admit the existence of non-rational reality and values; it confuses the super-rational with the irrational or even anti-rational. There is also the fact that the descriptions of experiences in this higher sphere are generally couched in terms associated with religious doctrines, and employ pictures, symbols and forms no longer accepted or recognised as valid by the modern mentality. As Keyserling has said in his irreverent way, "they have been exhibited in the frames constructed out of their own prejudices."

Another difficulty stems from the inadequacies inherent in language, the incapacity of verbal expression to communicate the true nature of transpersonal experience. All who have attempted description of such experiences have affirmed that they are ineffable. This is one of the characteristics attributed to mystical experience by William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

Finally, the fear of adventuring into a different world from the common, everyday one must be reckoned with, a world that is unknown and apt to be baffling. This fear is strengthened by the frequent presentation of this 'adventuring' in a negative way, usually calling for the denunciation of all that man is generally attached to, while insufficient stress is laid on its positive and joyous aspects. All this builds strong resistance and reluctance as well as what has been called the 'refusal of the sublime'. And yet, despite all, the dissatisfaction and search for 'something other', the fascination in exploring and conquering the inner worlds, whose vivid light many have glimpsed, have had the effect of drawing large numbers to those who present themselves as 'messengers' and coaches in this sphere, and who collect around themselves enthusiastic and often fanatical adherents and disciples.

But wide variation in value distinguishes the messages and the competence of these coaches, or 'masters'. Side by side with lofty and genuine teaching is proffered what is either totally spurious or contains an admixture of truth and illusion in varying proportions. Flanking the truly wise coaches are to be found the false prophets who employ and teach methods that are not only worthless, but sometimes dangerous as well. Herein lie the necessity and urgency of scientific study and experimental investigation in this field: scientific in the sense of being independent of every doctrine, system and personal authority.

Studies and investigation along these lines have been initiated and are undergoing rapid development. They constitute a new branch of psychology, which has been given the name 'transpersonal' and which could be termed 'Height Psychology'; but this is only a beginning: a great deal remains to be done. Speaking for myself, this field has occupied my attention for many years, and I am now (June 1974) engaged on the task of co-ordinating and systematising my personal contribution to the field in a book to be called *Height Psychology and the Self*. (Unfortunately, Dr. Assagioli

died in August 1974 before he completed his proposed book.) Its proposed index will convey an idea of the vastness and complexity of this field:

Introduction – The Dimensions of Psychology:

- 1 Two-dimensional (superficial) psychology
- 2 Depth psychology
- 3 Height (transpersonal) psychology
- 4 Towards a three-dimensional, synthetic psychology

Contents:

- 1 Levels of the inner world
- 2 The superconscious level
- 3 Experience and realisation
- 4 Distinctive features of the ‘heights’
- 5 The Self (summary – existential experiences and transcendental realities)
- 6 The seven different paths:
  - The religious, devotional, mystic
  - The ethical, regenerative
  - The aesthetic
  - The path of social-humanitarian service and the heroic
  - The scientific-philosophical
  - The ritualistic or ceremonial
  - The path of the Will
- 7 Means and techniques for transpersonal realisation: Descent and Ascent One of the principal subjects covered by this Height Psychology is the relationship between superconscious, transpersonal activities and the conscious life, or, to put it more precisely, the various modalities employed in the passage of superconscious contents and energies into the field of the ordinary waking consciousness. There are several of these modalities and they can be indicated thus:
  - Intuition
  - Imagination
  - Illumination
  - Revelation
  - Inspiration
  - Creation
  - Understanding and interpretation

They do not operate separately, but tend to act more or less contemporaneously and in combinations of varying proportions. This makes it easy to confuse one with another; which is why their scientific study requires that the distinctions and differences existing between each of them be clearly established. Differentiation of this nature is essential if their relationships and interactions are to be recognised and properly understood. This study has in its turn its various aspects and stages, which also must be kept distinct:

- The phenomenology, i.e. the assemblage of spontaneously acquired experiences and observed facts, such as have been described and presented by a large number of witnesses of every time and place
- The modality of the processes by which the passage from the superconscious to the conscious is effected
- The techniques which have served, and still serve, to create and promote that passage. These include the various external and inner practices associated with the different religions, as well as those exercises which, though known by a variety of names, may be grouped under the generic title of Yoga
- The immediate results and the subsequent effects proceeding from them

- The methods of averting dangers and redressing potential damage caused by the ‘descent’ or by the irruption of transpersonal energies
- The ways of making better and more fruitful use of these realisations and energies

Let us first of all consider the various modalities referred to above, by which the superconscious elements and activities effect passage into the field of consciousness.

### Intuition

Here a distinction must be made between the intuition as a psychic function and the results of its action, that is, the intuitions which have different characteristics. The commonly given definition of the word is etymologically derived from ‘in-tueri’, meaning ‘to see into’. It is the sight, the immediate perception of an object apprehended in its individual reality. As a specific, autonomous, cognitive function, the intuition is widely known and has been recognised in both the East and the West.

Self-styled scientific psychology, on the contrary, has not acknowledged its validity as a medium of consciousness, owing to its restricted and unilateral conception of the field and methods of science, or has identified it with direct sensuous perception of external stimuli. But a reaction against this unjustified exclusivism has materialised and is continuing. The two major champions of the validity and value of intuition have been Bergson and Keyserling. Though regarded and classed as philosophers, they both possessed an exceptionally discriminating psychic sense based on the intuition, and in Keyserling’s case, on a profound capacity for empathy and self-identification with others. They thus made invaluable contributions to the knowledge of the human mind, contributions which the new scientific psychology will have to take duly into account.

In the strictly psychological field, credit is due to Jung for affirming the existence and validity of the intuition as a specific and autonomous psychic function. He says this about it: “I regard intuition as a basic psychological function. It is the function that mediates perceptions in an unconscious way. Everything, whether outer or inner objects or their relationships, can be the focus of this perception. The peculiarity of intuition is that it is neither sense perception, nor feeling, nor intellectual inference, although it may also appear in these forms. In intuition a content presents itself whole and complete, without our being able to explain or discover how this content came into existence. Intuition is a kind of instinctive apprehension, no matter of what contents. Like sensation, it is an irrational function of perception. As with sensation, its contents have the character of being ‘given’, in contrast to the ‘derived’ and ‘produced’ character of thinking and feeling contents. Intuitive knowledge possesses an intrinsic certainty and conviction, which enabled Spinoza (and Bergson) to uphold the *scientia intuitiva* as the highest form of knowledge. Intuition shares this quality with sensation, whose certainty rests on its physical foundation. The certainty of intuition rests equally on a definite state of psychic ‘alertness’ of whose original the subject is conscious.” (CG Jung, *Psychological Types*, Bollinger Series XX, Princeton University Press, 1971, p 453).

He terms it irrational, a designation that lends itself to misunderstanding, since it could be interpreted as contrary to reason, whereas in reality it is simply different, but not in opposition. It might well be called para-rational, or, better, trans-rational.

The types of intuition are three in number. There are first of all the sensory intuitions associated with the conscious perception of visual, auditory, tactile, etc., impressions produced by stimuli originating in the environment. This class need not detain us, as it is limited to personal psychic levels and does not concern the superconscious.

Then we have intuitions of ideas, in the Platonic sense, and since these come from a higher region than that in which the ordinary mind functions, they may be considered to be transpersonal. The same can be said of the third kind of higher intuition, that is to say, the aesthetic, the religious, the mystical and even the scientific (for instance, those of higher mathematics). This denotes the difference between the personal psychological and the transpersonal life.

Intuitions present themselves to the consciousness, or are perceived by it, in two ways. The first, which adheres more closely to the etymological meaning, can be described as the opening of an 'inner eye', thus permitting the 'sight' or perception of some reality inaccessible to normal mental vision. The other way is characterised by a brilliant, lightning-like flash of light, which, 'descending' into the field of consciousness, is perceived by the 'I', the centre of consciousness at its normal level or 'seat'. A common and specific characteristic of intuitions is their 'authenticity'. They convey the perception of their object in its totality, like an organic whole, and thereby differ from the mental consciousness, which is analytical. Keyserling points this out clearly in the following passage from *De La Pensée aux Sources*: "Man, like all animals, is intimately linked to the total mass of beings and things, and if instinct is lacking in him or is so atrophied that he cannot depend upon his elementary impulses, then the human equivalent of instinct must intervene in order that man may freely orient himself in the cosmos. In this sense only the intuitives are free: and that is why they alone provide all the great revealers, the leaders and the innovators."

As Keyserling says, the intuition displays another specific characteristic, its orientation towards becoming, towards the future: "The intuition penetrates the veils of the future and, therefore, of the possible. But reality is in perpetual transformation, and therefore only he is able to see it who grasps directly what from time to time is possible, and this in a double sense. Firstly, because above all the facts some 'possibilities' exist; and in the second place, because he perceives directly, among the possibilities, those which at times and in determined conditions, can be realised. Both can be derived only from a primordial interior experience of the all (totality)."

This points to the intuition's capacity to pass beyond the acquisition of knowledge about an object's every quality to capture its very essence, i.e. what it is. Thus the intuition qualifies as one of the fields of investigation of the new psychology of Being, in which Maslow was the pioneer.

### Imagination

That the imagination has a close relationship with the intuition is evidenced by the fact that intuitions often do not present themselves to the consciousness in an abstract, simple and 'pure' way, but rather in the guise of images. This entails a primary task of distinguishing the content, the essence, the idea inherent in an intuition from the form, the vestments, so to speak, which it assumes. The character of the form being symbolic, the complex and important question of symbolism arises. As I have dealt with this elsewhere (see 'Symbols of Transpersonal Experiences', *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Spring, 1969, also reprinted in *Fundamentals of Psychosynthesis*, Institute of Psychosynthesis, 2003) I shall limit myself here to emphasising the twofold and, in a certain sense, contrasting nature and function of the symbol. It can both veil and reveal. When mistaken for the reality that it expresses, it veils it and is thus a source of illusion. When recognised for what it is, a means of expression, it constitutes a useful and at times indispensable aid to 'catching' and then illuminating a transcendental reality.

Independently of its cognitive function as a means and vehicle of the intuition, the imagination displays several other and different aspects. There is first of all simple reproductive imagination, that is, the vehicle of memory-pictures of sensations and impressions already experienced (mnemonic images). While the visual is the most frequent of these, memory-images of other sense-mediated impressions abound, the most important being the aural. Latent and stored in what may be termed the 'records of the unconscious', they can surface spontaneously into consciousness, or be re-evoked by the will. The capacity to store and recall images is immense, one might say practically unlimited. Under certain conditions (hypnotic and feverish states) detailed memories of events occurring in early childhood can rise to the surface of consciousness. There are, again, the prodigies of memory exhibited by some great orchestral conductors (notably Toscanini) whose ability to remember entire symphonies and operas enabled them to conduct a work without reference to the score. Equally surprising is the way some advanced chess players can visualise the positions and moves of the pieces and play a number of simultaneous games without seeing the boards.

Then there is creative imagination: its great importance is insufficiently recognised and its power little utilised, especially in education. As I shall be enlarging on this later when dealing with creativity, I wish at this point simply to

make a passing reference to dreams, which are a mixed product of the two types of imagination: reproductive and creative.

### Illumination

One of the ways in which the superconscious manifests most frequently in the consciousness is illumination, which follows the opening of the 'inner eye'. Although intuition and illumination have a close affinity, each presents points of difference. In a general way an intuition can be said to be an illuminative flash concerning some particular aspect or manifestation of Reality. But illumination is something more expansive and enduring; it is a vision that reveals the essential nature and synthetic unity of the whole of Reality, or of some of its major aspects. It is the perception of a 'light' which, emanating from Reality itself, is different from physical light. Much evidential testimony relating to this experience is contained in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Winslow Hall's *Observed Illuminates*. This type of illumination may be regarded as the revelation of divine immanence, of the unity of the Universal Life as it manifests through myriads of forms. Its most pertinent description is that contained in Book X of the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which it is termed the 'Revelation of the Universal Form'.

A number of poets have had and tried to express this experience of illumination, the greatest of them being Dante, who fills the 'Paradise' of his *Divine Comedy* with expressions of light. At the beginning of the Canto he clearly claims to have undergone the ineffable experience of the loftiest Light, the light that pervades the highest level, the 'heaven' closest to the Supreme Reality which is God.

In the consciousness of its percipients, manifestation of the light assumes different aspects; or rather, different aspects of light dominate according to the individual, since they are not separate but interpenetrate and fuse in varying proportions. Sometimes, as in the case of Tagore, the cognitive aspect is overriding. In the Christian as well as the Eastern mystics it is associated with feelings of love and adoration. In others it arouses a sense of joy, which may reach ecstatic bliss. But, I repeat, it is a matter of the prevalence of one or other of these aspects. In general all are present to a certain extent.

### Revelation

A type of illuminative experience different from those mentioned so far is the 'flash' of consciousness, often a sudden perception, of what a human being is, in which an individual experiences a revelation of himself. This revelation can have various, sometimes opposite, features and effects. The first, of a strongly positive nature, is the vision of the wonderful potentialities latent or active on the superconscious levels. They can yield a dazzling revelatory flash of the spiritual Self. This is accompanied by a new understanding, a true comprehension, of the self and of others. The consciousness, while experiencing a sense of enlargement and expansion, is suffused by feelings of joy, goodness, love and gratitude. Even this revelation, however, if unexpected, sudden and overintense, can produce undesirable and even unhealthy reactions. It can generate a sensation of excitation and exaltation. In cases where awareness of the difference between the spiritual Self and the personal 'I' is lacking, the latter may attribute to itself the qualities and power of the former, with megalomania as the possible end product.

The other, reverse, aspect of inner illumination is the revelation of the inferior, dark features of the personality, hitherto ignored or unrecognised, or more or less negated and repressed in the subconscious. They constitute what Jung calls the 'shadow'. When experienced without warning, this revelation can prove emotionally unbalancing, being often exacerbated by depressive states, fear and even despair. The prevention, or at least abatement, of such effects is responsive to a prior psychological preparation. The key to this preparation is a knowledge of depth psychology, which cushions the shock of surprise and assists the acceptance of the revelation by exposing the truth that the dark features of the personality form part of the general human condition.

Other reactions, less extreme but still damaging, can be experienced at the emotional as well as the physical level, should the nervous system not tolerate the intensity, or 'voltage', of the irruptive psychospiritual energies. I have

written of this in my monograph, 'Self-Realisation and Psychological Disturbances', incorporated in *Psychosynthesis: a Manual of Principles and Techniques* (Hobbs, Dorman & Co., 1965). Here I shall confine myself to saying that in this case also, a preventative awareness of the different levels of human nature, as afforded by 'three-dimensional psychology', can lessen and help tolerate the reactions in question, as well as indicate the methods of eliminating them.

## Inspiration

### Creation

Inspiration and psychospiritual creation represent other types of relationship and interaction between the superconscious and consciousness. It is of importance to reach a realisation of the differences existing between illumination, inspiration, and creation, and keep them clearly defined, as they are often confused. Illumination can confer inspirations and often does so, but not always. With some mystics illumination remains subjective and may create a contemplative state. It often unleashes a rush of love and aspiration to become united with God, to fuse oneself with the Supreme Reality; but it does not necessarily inspire external expression or instigate action.

On the other hand there is the type of inspiration which takes place without illumination, elevations and expansion of consciousness. Most composers experience it at one time or another, but Mozart testified to the frequency with which it virtually 'dictated' his works from early childhood on. A distinct difference is to be noted between inspiration and creation. In its deeper sense inspiration denotes the process whereby more or less elaborated contents pass or descend from transpersonal levels, from the superconscious, into the field of consciousness. Creation is, rather, a process whereby these contents are elaborated prior to their descent or appearance in consciousness. Creation is thus analogous to the conception and gestation of a new organism in the maternal uterus, inspiration being analogous to the birth or emergence of the creature.

The 'birth' can occur at various stages of the elaboration. In some cases the product enters the consciousness clearly formulated and complete, equipped to pursue an autonomous existence, as occurs biologically in the case of many animals. In others, it 'surfaces' in a crude, unfinished state needing to be worked on, sometimes extensively, by the conscious 'I' until it acquires an adequate form. Analogously to physical parturition, the birth is sometimes spontaneous, rapid and easy, and accompanied by a feeling of joy. Yet it can be difficult, protracted and painful.

## Understanding and Interpretation

In a certain sense this is the most important stage, for it gives significance to all that precedes it. Intuitions, illuminations and the revelations they produce must be properly understood if erroneous interpretations, faulty applications, and inappropriate and even harmful actions are to be avoided. These types of error are so frequently encountered that quotable examples of them abound. I shall, however, refer only to two extremely common classes, one consisting of misinterpretations of impulses or inner 'commands' to act; the other of mental failure to grasp truths which appear in the field of consciousness. An outstanding example of the first type is a well-known episode in the life of St. Francis. Shortly after his conversion, while engaged in prayer, he heard an inner voice telling him to 'go and restore my Church'. Aware that there was nearby a small abandoned church, he interpreted the message as a divine command to repair it, which he proceeded to do. Only later did he understand that the words carried another and far wider meaning: the revelation concerned a mission to restore the Catholic Church, then passing through a phase of conspicuous decadence. How admirably he fulfilled this mission is common knowledge.

An example of the second type, totally dissimilar in character, has to do with a very different sort of man. It concerns the flashing revelation that Friedrich Nietzsche had of the great cycles which unfold in the eternity of the cosmic becoming. He interpreted and expressed this revelation in his theory of the 'eternal return'. He argued that, time being without limit, while the number of existing material atoms, however vast, is finite, and their possible combinations are necessarily finite, it follows that sooner or later these combinations must recur and reappear as they were before,

repeating the process ad infinitum. This discouraging doctrine was the natural outcome of an erroneous premise which held that the number of atoms was finite and invariable. Leaving aside the inherent absurdity of this hypothesis, it has been confuted by the demonstration by modern physics that the atoms of matter are continually disintegrating, to form new ones with different properties. What Nietzsche had intuited was the cyclic nature of cosmic manifestation, of the evolutionary process. This corresponds to the Eastern conception of the great cycles governing the appearance and disappearance of the worlds – in other words, of the periodic emergence of matter, its evolution in innumerable forms (Manvantara), and finally its re-absorption into the spirit, the unmanifest (Pralaya). Recent discoveries in astronomy of the formation and dissolution of stars and galaxies fully confirm this conception. Applying it to the human scale, Eastern beliefs interpret it in terms of the cyclic manifestation of the soul in a series of bodies (reincarnation). But none of that implies an identical return, but rather points to a reappearance in progressively finer forms, an evolution following an ascending spiral. This misconception on the part of Nietzsche affords a striking example of how an originally correct intuition can be misinterpreted.

The psychological field is the scene of a never-ending series of problems associated with symbol interpretation, and one in which confusion and error are continually cropping up. A particularly fertile ground for misunderstanding is the symbolism employed in dreams and myths, as well as that appearing in artistic and literary works. While these errors often derive from the preconceptions and private theories of those who interpret, a further difficulty stems from the proneness of symbols to carry different meanings at different levels of reality, without their coming into conflict or being mutually exclusive. This should always be borne in mind.

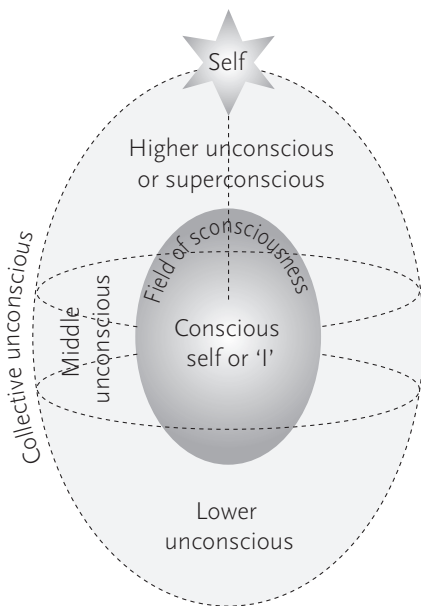
### Psychological Mountain Climbing

Our subject, Psychological Mountain-Climbing – that is, the exploration and conquest of the superconscious – offers a vast field for research. Two different, and in a certain sense opposite, ways of exploring the superconscious offer themselves. The more usual is the one that may be described as descending. It consists in the inflow, the irruption of higher elements into the field of consciousness. It might be considered a form of vertical telepathy; telepathy, since a considerable ‘distance’ separates the conscious ‘I’ from the Self. These inflows manifest themselves in the form of intuitions, inspirations, creations of genius, and impulses to humanitarian and heroic action. In addition, specifically para-psychological phenomena appear, some of which oblige one to admit that influences and impulses of extra-individual origin arrive through the medium of all three levels of the unconscious. This subject was dealt with in my preceding paper, ‘Transpersonal Inspiration’.

The other type of relationship and contact which we can establish with the superconscious is the ascendant. It consists in raising the conscious ‘I’ to higher levels, and with it the area of consciousness, to the point where a zone is penetrated whose location above the ordinary level of our consciousness normally prevents our knowledge of its existence. The diagram below indicates this clearly.

The zone in the centre represents the level and normal area of awareness with the conscious ‘I’ in the middle. In the process of the inner ascent this shifts its position by rising to the level of the superconscious. Thus the area of consciousness comes to include the content of the superconscious and to approach more and more closely to the spiritual Self.

To this ascent I have given the name ‘psychological mountain-climbing’, a designation which is not merely a more or less suggestive comparison; it also indicates a substantial analogy and a close symbolic relationship. In illustrating it, I shall avail myself, among other things, of some notes of Prof. Carruccio, as proficient a mountain climber as he is a mathematician.



The first analogy concerns the different motives which can stimulate and prompt us to undertake ascents, be they physical or inner. ‘Sometimes’, as Prof. Carruccio rightly says, ‘the passion for climbing assumes a form which, in its fierce affirmation of individual power in overcoming extreme difficulties in the face of grave danger, is associated with the conception of the Superman, in Nietzsche’s sense.’ Analogically, the urge to leave the habitual levels of the psychic life stems from the quest for, or assertion of superiority – from a desire to develop faculties by means of which to dominate others. The Nietzschean ‘will to power’, and the hankering after supernormal, magical powers are essentially egotistical motives, even if at times they are masked by pseudo-spiritual expressions.

Another motive common to both types of climbing is escape from routine life, i.e. from humdrum reality felt to be wretched, boring and burdensome, or in varying ways unsatisfying. It is a frequently encountered reaction to the limitations and prosaic nature of modern life, particularly as lived in the big cities.

A third motive is associated with the fascination exercised by the unknown, the extraordinary and the mysterious, and which has always spurred man towards the conquest, exploration and knowledge of the new, or what lies ‘beyond’, and lured him on to undergo experiences different from the commonplace. This motive, or impulse, so imperious sometimes as to be irresistible, has been personified by Homer in the figure of Ulysses. The whole of the *Odyssey* is an elaboration of this theme, whose modern manifestation takes the form of a search for out-of-the-way experiences, which is prepared to employ any and all means for the purpose, including drugs. Many of today’s happenings become comprehensible if this motive is taken into account.

A fourth motive is the attraction and fascination of adventure, of overcoming difficulties and risks for their own sake and independently of the results and compensations inherent in an undertaking. Good examples of this motive in action are provided by the number of sailors who in recent years have embarked on long sea-voyages single-handed. It is this same spirit that pervades ‘academic’ mountain-climbing, in which the search for and attempts to follow new and more difficult routes to the summit, engage the climber’s interest and skill to the exclusion of the known and less dangerous ones.

The association of this motive with the preceding one serves to explain why many young people disregard warnings and the demonstrations of the risks they expose themselves to, still more the prohibitory efforts of others and attempts to impose external restraints. This fact is important because it shows that in the prevention of drug addiction and treatment it is necessary to turn to other methods and appeal to other psychological incentives. We need delude



ourselves no further that pointing out the risks they are running suffices to dissuade drug-oriented young people from what they are doing. But this issue, though urgent, is incidental to our subject and cannot be enlarged upon here.

There is a fifth, often powerful, motive which must not be confused with those preceding, even if it is frequently to be found associated with them in varying proportions. This is the attraction, or fascination, exerted by what is truly higher, in that it possesses a value of a genuinely spiritual character. From this point of view, mountain climbing, writes Prof. Carruccio, "is understood as a branch of asceticism...of religious feeling in its various forms, from antiquity to the present day." In poetic vein, Guido Rey is thinking of a monastery of climbers when he writes in *Acrobatic Mountaineering*, "The peaks roundabout are altars where they go to perform mysterious rites far from the sight of other men...sometimes terrible." This statement is very significant. It points to the reason for the pronounced attraction and fascination that mountains hold for so many people, and for the sacred character attributed to them by all peoples, as well as for the states of enthusiasm and inner uplift experienced by climbers.

There is an eloquent expression quoted in a fine study by Edoard Monot-Herzen on this subject, entitled 'Ad Summum Per Quadratum', published in the review, *Action et Pensée*, December 1956, "The coach, Joseph Pession, said to me as we came to the upper refuge on the Cervino, 'All earthly troubles are left behind when one enters here: we shall find ourselves in an entirely new world.' And on reaching the summit, one of the porters said that 'he heard angels' voices and now could die happy.'"

For seventy years the painter Alberto Gros – his son, Carlo, reports – cherished a passionate love for the Cervino, a love transfigured by a kind of mystic feeling. "This," writes Monot-Herzen, "applies to Carlo Gros himself and to Guido Rey, who together wrote a book about the Cervino, and to me, myself, who during a span of fifty years made nineteen ascents of this mountain, each time bringing back some new revelation of its enchantment."

As is well known, the Indians believed the peaks of the Himalayas to be the home of the gods, while the Greeks regarded Mount Olympus as the habitation of their divine beings. The eminent Japanese painter, Hokusai, painted more than one hundred times the sacred Fujiyama – the mountain recognised as the temple of the divinity called 'The Princess of the Blossoming Flower', an allusion to the rose in bloom. In one of his works Hokusai depicts the summit of Fujiyama sparkling in the sun, while halfway down a storm is breaking. As further evidence of the spiritual milieu associated with high places, we find shrines erected near the summits of mountains; we have also the revelation to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the transfiguration of the Christ on the Mount of Tabor, and His Sermon on the Mount.

Let us take a closer look at the more exact analogies that exist between the various stages of the external and inner ascents. In both cases the ascent must be preceded by adequate preparation. For the climber, the preparation entails physical training on the flat, in order to strengthen the muscles. It would be folly to attempt an arduous climb as long as walking and physical exertions on level ground are still fatiguing. Before commencing an ascent one must have built up one's muscular stamina.

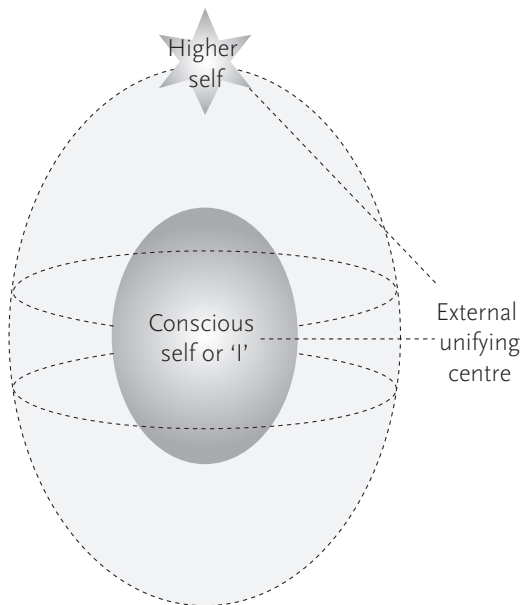
However obvious it may be in its particular field, this need for preparation is neither recognised nor catered for in psycho-spiritual climbing, an enterprise usually attempted without any previous selftraining. In psychosynthesis we always insist upon an adequate personal psychosynthesis – i.e. the control and utilisation of man's normal energies and functions, before the development of higher energies is undertaken, or the attempt made to ascend and explore the superconscious. Where this is neglected, psychic imbalance, often of a serious nature, may result.

But such physical preparation in the one case and harnessing of the psychic energies in the other are not sufficient. A further pre-requisite is a knowledge, theoretical at least, of the region into which it is proposed to venture. Except in the case of peaks yet unscaled, mountains have been mapped and relevant knowledge and information assembled from the descriptions of those who have climbed them. In the psychological field, the analogous knowledge is that about the superconscious made available by the writings of those who have had experience of these higher levels. Even more valuable are personal relations with someone who has himself explored those heights. In this category are the

genuine spiritual teachers: the false claims of many to be spiritual teachers necessitate the emphasis on the word genuine.

Thus doubly prepared, we can now tackle the ascent itself. Being an ascent and not a flight, it has a number of stages and halting-places. There exist two very instructive and illuminating descriptions of this gradual ascent; one is that of Dante's ascent of the Mount of Purgatory, the subject of the second part of *The Divine Comedy*. Studied from a psychosynthetic and anagogic point of view, it is even today a source of much relevant instruction, since the obstacles and difficulties to be overcome are largely the same in both cases. The other is the Ascent of Mount Carmel, described by St. John of the Cross. Despite its specifically ascetic and mystical character, it contains real treasures of psychological knowledge and some direction which expressed in modern language and abstracted from its period frame, could prove very instructive. For example: St. John gives a detailed account of the states of aridity and frigidity, including that of 'the dark night of the soul', which follows the first joyous experiences, with their warmth and riches of feeling. These periods of suffering have their correspondence in the icy conditions and thick mist encountered by the climber at a certain stage of the ascent before he reaches the sunlit summit.

Various psychotherapeutic methods have made use of the symbolism of mountain and ascent. Carl Happich, a professor of clinical medicine at Darnstadt active in the use of psychotherapy, introduced three symbolic situations which he called Meditation on the Meadow, Meditation on the Mountain and Meditation on the Chapel. This method of inner ascent by means of the imagined ascent of a mountain has been adopted by Desoille, among others, in formulating his technique of the *R\_ve Éveillé* (Waking Dream). It has since been developed and modified under such titles as 'mental imagery' and 'Oneiro Therapy' by Dr. Virel, who is active in psychosynthesis in Paris. The spontaneous drawing method often brings to light pictures of mountains to be climbed or those already scaled. The



importance of symbols as a mirror of spiritual realities is indicated in the diagram below.

The diagram shows an external centre which can act as a mirror of the spiritual Self. Sometimes, indeed, it is easier to catch a reflection of the spiritual Self when mirrored in an external centre than by direct ascent thereto. The latter may be constituted by the therapist himself, in the role of ideal model; also by a symbol such as that of a mountain. There are various categories of symbols and a number of anagogic symbols of ascent available for use.

Psychosynthesis makes use of some exercises of this kind, one of them being that of the Mount of Purgatory already mentioned. The *Divine Comedy* can be regarded as the poem of psychosynthesis, whose three principal stages it describes: first, the descent into the Inferno, which represents the psychoanalytic phase of the descent into the abyss of the lower unconscious; then the ascent to Purgatory, picturing the inner ascent; and finally, the ascension to Paradise, which stands for the increasingly lofty stages of spiritual realisation.

Another group of symbols is employed in the exercise of the Legend of the Grail. This is described in my book, *Psychosynthesis: a Manual of Principles and Techniques*. These symbols are not only therapeutically effective; they are no less competent, if not more so, in conquering the luminous heights of the superconscious and there discovering its marvels and utilising its treasures. Just as there are various routes up a mountain, so there are various 'inner routes' suited to different temperaments, to different psychological types, leading to the peaks of the superconscious and coming into contact with the spiritual Self. There is a mystical way, the way of love, the aesthetic way as expressed by

Plato in his famous scale of beauty, the meditative way, etc. It is the last, meditative way, that is more directly associated with the field of psychosynthesis, and for this reason, the remainder of this discussion will be limited to it.

The first phase, which in a sense corresponds to the preparation mentioned above, is one of recollection, of concentration from the periphery to the centre; that is to say, the liberation of the field of consciousness from its ordinary contents by means of disidentification. Our consciousness is generally dispersed at various points in the field of consciousness, meanwhile continually receiving messages, or 'information' as the language of cybernetics customarily has it, from different levels of the unconscious and from the external world. Thus the first thing to be done is to 're-enter into oneself', i.e. to withdraw the consciousness into the conscious 'I' in the centre of the field of consciousness (see the first diagram).

Silence must be observed; not only external, but also inner silence. In this connection, here is a penetrating reply given by a Teacher to one of his disciples who said: "I close my eyes and am blind to the external world, I close my ears to every word and noise, and yet I achieve no realisation." Said the Teacher, "Try also to keep your mouth closed and maintain silence, inner as well as external." In fact, if we are observant, we become aware that something within us is constantly speaking: our subpersonalities with their incessant chatter, or our unconscious with its ceaseless inner clamour. Thus external silence is not sufficient in itself, whereas recollection can be acquired even in the midst of external noise.

The second phase is that of true meditation – meditation, that is, upon an idea formulated from a phrase or elaborated from a single word. Its first stage is intellectual reflection, but this is followed by something deeper and more vital, which is a state of perceiving, of consciously realising, the quality, the meaning, the function, the value of what is being meditated upon, so that it is felt to be almost living and acting within. In place of words one can use images and symbols, adopted from the external world or inwardly visualised.

Higher still is the stage of contemplation, the nature of which it is well nigh impossible to describe in words. One can but hint at so intimate a state of identification with what is contemplated that all sense of duality disappears. It is a state wherein subject and object become fused in a living unity. In the absence of any formulated idea, therefore, contemplation ensues as a state of perfect calm and inner silence, a 'subsisting' in the pure consciousness of being.

It is then that the normally superconscious region, or sphere, is reached in full consciousness. At this stage one may experience the various psychospiritual qualities and activities which have play in the superconscious. They are not something abstract, vague and evanescent, as those unfamiliar with them might claim. They are rather something living, intense, varied and dynamic, which are perceived as more real than ordinary experiences, both inner and external. The principal characteristics of this stage are as follows:

- A perception of light, an illumination, both in a general sense and as light on problems and situations which are thereby rendered comprehensible and whose significance is revealed
- A feeling of peace, a peace independent of any external circumstance or inner state
- A feeling of joy, of happiness, the state of happiness so well expressed by Dante in the words: "O Joy, ineffable gladness, O Inner life of love and peace, Full of richness untainted by avidity."
- A feeling of harmony and beauty
- A feeling of power, of the power of the spirit
- A sense of magnitude, of boundlessness, of universality, of the eternal

All these qualities interpenetrate one another. Their inseparability Dante also pictures in his admirable tercet: "Intellectual light full of love, Love of truth overflowing with joy, Joy which transcends every sweetness."

Naturally, there can be no permanence in such a lofty contemplative experience; but even in departure it leaves behind effects and changes, often profound, in the ordinary personality. Among other things, it fosters a gradual stabilisation of the centre of personal consciousness and little by little raises the area of normal consciousness to higher levels. It can succeed in almost reaching the line of demarcation (not of division but of distinction) between the middle

unconscious and the superconscious in such a way that the waking consciousness stays always illuminated in some degree.

This, then, facilitates the other method, i.e. the descent of intuitions and inspirations, and makes their occurrence more frequent. The culmination, the symbolic arrival at the summit of the mountain, is the union of the centre of personal consciousness with the spiritual Self. It is to be noted that the 'star' in Diagram I representing the spiritual Self is traced partly within and partly outside the oval. This indicates that the Self, partaking of both individuality and universality, is in contact with the transcendent Reality.

Another result of this experience takes the form of inspired action. A powerful impulse is felt to give liberal expression to the treasures discovered and won, to radiate them and make others participants in them; then to collaborate with all men of goodwill, with all who have enjoyed similar experiences, in dispersing the darkness of ignorance which envelops humanity, in eliminating the conflicts which harass it, in preparing the advent of a new civilisation in which men, happy and like-minded, actualise the wonderful latent potentialities with which they are gifted.

*Roberto Assagioli (reprinted from the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, 1976)*