

UA Psych 357 Fall Semester 10/6/00
Grouped Excerpts from
Student Journal Summaries

Numbers: Student comments

Dots: • Instructor C.F. "Perk" Clark responses

Use of Drugs in Spiritual Practices

1. Regarding using psychedelics in a spiritual context: any enlightenment is easily dismissed as damage or alteration to the brain... hypnotism and meditation are biological pathways to the mental and spiritual... taking a chemical is riddled with potholes... "What is the acceptable amount of corruption and damage allowable before enlightenment is no longer worth it?" How useful can drugs really be to your spiritual growth when they are poisons and contaminants?
 - *it is indeed important to observe what forms of corruption exist which impede a person's progress in their developing a functional spiritual or religious life*
 - *sincere researchers do not dismiss chemically-induced altered states, especially those done as ritual and with respect, as "corruptions;" researchers rather see them as incomplete, insufficient in the long run, with unpredictable outcomes; thus they favor softer methods employed over time*
 - *their position is somewhat like the one taken toward the corrupting personal trait of being moralistic and judgmental, contrasted with being aware, discriminating -- the latter trait is more functional than the former*
2. Last summer at a music festival I put liquid LSD on my tongue and later inhaled nitrous oxide. I went into a land where I saw my entire life flash before my eyes. The experience was indescribable... but when I came back I could hear one word repeating over and over in my head: the word was **love**. Was this a near death experience (NDE)?
 - *the experience you describe sounds more like a classic psychedelic event, where a life review (i.e. family of origin, psychodynamic issues) and primary feelings of love for the world can accrue*
3. Can one say that a person is truly transpersonal when using an antidepressant?
 - *yes, this can happen especially in managed psychological care practices that aim to 'eliminate the symptom with the medication' and ignore psychotherapy*
 - *transpersonal capacity posits resolution of personal traumas, inhibitions, constrictions -- this is a gradual process implying gradations of both endarkenment and capacity*

- *saints of the past were likely depressed (St. John of the Cross: the Dark Night of the Soul; poets in their darker writings)*
- *you need not be 'perfected' to experience transpersonal events*
- *I hope that particular biology (as those in predisposed toward depression or alcoholism) never determines closeness to God...!*

Dis-identification & Habits

4. The application of dis-identification: I am friends with this group of people who don't like my boyfriend... the group rejected me and began to ignore me... I told them I wanted to work it out, they rejected the idea. I was incredibly hurt and sad.. then realized that I'd begun to identify myself with them... and now I could begin to identify as someone a little more independent, mature... makes me feel good... now I see the situation in a more positive light.
5. I find the one thing I do the most is identify with habit ... it's a pervasive and unrelenting force...
 - *great observation!*
 - *experiment: do habits differently; dis-identify and do the activity another way*
 - *habits can help and hinder us: discrimination regarding habits is important*

Transpersonal Psychology

6. Please explain how transpersonal psychology relates to psychology in the aspect of treatment.
 - *I'll devote more time in class to this topic -- think of it as applying a body of knowledge & actions (meditation; reading; awareness training) that is adjunctive to conventional psychotherapy*
7. Re: article, "Psychotherapy as Spiritual Inquiry" by Francis Vaughan, PhD, what is spiritual inquiry??
 - *Vaughan's article is the best I've ever seen as an example of that; it's 'a context' as much as anything else, a way that the therapist 'hears' what is being said, helping the client to elaborate on aspects that are spiritual but are usually ignored in conventional psychotherapy or psychoanalysis*
8. Now I understand what Jesus meant by 'if you come as a child you can enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' Through Jesus stories about his childhood you can see that it's a child's characteristics that lead us to I(Real Self) = God.

- *characteristics of a child that lead us include curiosity and love, energy and attention, sincerity and the capacity to merge with an other.*
9. I took a class in mind and behavioral medicine.. we talked a lot about the Self and dualistic/non-dualistic thinking... the main focus was how mind and body are one entity that works together to provide a better quality of life; when these become separated as in dualistic thinking, one is more susceptible to disease, infection, change in moods.
 10. The only concept that I had a problem with was the idea in mysticism that the self is an illusion.
 - *this is a conclusion of mystics across many centuries and cultures; don't take it on faith: test it out!*
 - *It doesn't mean 'non-existent'. It refers to the commonly held belief that your self is a unified "I,," one solid thing -- that's what's the illusion; the facts (seeing our tendency toward the impulsive, toward conflicting behaviors and thoughts) indicate otherwise.*
 11. What is transcendental magic?
 - *I don't know.*
 - *I do think it accurate that 'black magic is making things happen, white magic is seeing what is happening'.*
 12. Is 'MAGIC' considered a religion?
 - *does it meet the criteria in the definition of religion?*
 - *who is doing the deciding?*
 13. Do the five forms of yoga coincide with the stages of life? Is there a form of yoga that ties in all the five forms?
 - *I'd say that they do; I've not studied yoga -- good paper topic*
 14. Why do we feel the need to keep ourselves 'in the dark' when we could join those who came before us and share in the enlightenment?
 - *darkness, i.e. habit, constriction, is comfortable; enduring a spiritual/religious development is not comfortable*
 - *ordinary social-cultural rewards to not accrue to those who pursue self-development in spiritual or religious terms; the current god worshipped by culture is financial profit - - there is no financial profit in enlightenment*
 15. How does transpersonal psychology view sexuality?
 - *supportively*
 - *tantric sexual practices (see the Hindu tradition) are acknowledged*
 - *see articles/book by author Jenny Wade/PSYCLIT*

Established Religions

16. Does the word dogma mean 'basically staying the same?'
- *dogma: 1. 'a system of doctrines proclaimed true by a religious sect; 2. ideas formally considered to be absolute truth'*
 - *note that established spiritual/mystical/transpersonal paths can also be dogmatic*
 - *dogmatism is conceived of by researchers as a "closed cognitive style" favoring centralized (as opposed to decentralized) belief systems, where beliefs derived from an authority are held in an unquestioning way*
 - *researchers also postulate that authoritarianism stems from a social learning process established during adolescence*
17. I want to research what I see as hypocrisy in the Catholic church: clashing with the Old Testament and with (Gospels) that have been judged by the Church as heresy.
- *is this hypocrisy or is it religion being constantly recreated?*
 - *what about personal hypocrisy?*
18. My journal is mostly about my own religious views... I generally disagree with the articles we read and the topics we discuss in class... still I enjoy hearing about these things.
- *thanks for continuing to hold to your views and to listen in on other views; this takes tolerance and patience, which is the 'least' you might get from the exercise!*
19. Please present more information about established religions and the psychology involved in that, i.e. how is the ego transformed when it has had the experience of religion?
- *functional lens: what does it do? established religions structure the ego; sanction 'conversion' experiences as valid; offer a common language; inform re: 'higher values and ways of behaving'; help in the formation of auxiliary ego or a tutored superego which now lobbies for choices (a.k.a. 'what would Jesus do?); creates a safer social structure (ego feels safer and sees it's own values reflected in its peers); creates a body of values and morals that are now 'the right choice,' diminishes ambiguities and vagaries; reduces choices to right/wrong, thus diminishes a member's anxiety*
20. Do people then (as an effect of an established religion) often look at society and other people in a different light?
- *the religion's substantive tenants are now a window: you see other people through that window: the real question: what is the window colored with? compassion? condemnation? a sense of 'we are in, saved, believers, the faithful --*

and they are out, unsaved, unbelievers, infidels? does it question it's own functioning or accept uncritically all things within its boundaries? does it include the confused naming of 'emotional' states as 'spiritual' ones? etc.

21. What is it about religious beliefs that cause people to do strange things, like die for a belief (martyrs: place religious injunctions like dying for a belief above ordinary actions that direct one toward pleasure and away from pain.
 - *I don't know 'what it is' but I suggest this is how it occurs:*
 - *auxiliary ego is formed in religious/spiritual systems which promote specific beliefs/actions*
 - *social structure of religious/spiritual systems teaches and promotes 'strange behavior' and honors, sanctions, makes it 'unstrange' and even desirable*
 - *texts of religious doctrine support and justify 'strange behavior'*
 - *'strange' is in the eye of the beholder*

22. What is the draw of spirituality and the irrationality that seems to result in strange behaviors?
 - *cross-culture and cross-time yearning*
 - *inherent in humans?*
 - *confusion between pre- and trans- personal thinking may account for 'irrational' behaviors and thoughts*

23. I wish I could find a religion that makes sense to me...
 - *this is a reasonable desire*
 - *but it has somehow to transcend and yet embody common sense*
 - *what kind of sense it makes is evident in the results you see in the participants and the way they live their lives that accrue from their participation*

24. I'm a non-practicing Catholic: don't do church but pray a lot, try to live a decent life -- but devout Catholics would say I have to follow the rules. Who is right?
 - *traditional (i.e. devout) vs. non-traditional (non-devout) participants... the debate goes on and on... perhaps both are necessary (i.e. the devout need the rules and the non-devout need the freedom from the rules) at certain stages of development*
 - *often it appears that the devout could develop if they held to fewer rules and the non-devout to more rules!*
 - *what system is best for you??? test them out, trust your self and people you respect, be willing to admit failure in your practice, use common sense*

25. Since the creation of the world religion has (kept changing)... people keep making adjustments in it...
 - *it seems the defenders of the faith always hold to the original dogma from the prophet that presented it*

- *Idries Shah has proposed that dogma and practices do seem a product of a particular time, place, people, teaching, and teacher, and that since times/places/people etc. change, then dogma and practices change to accomplish traditional goals*

26. How do we know if all this is true?

- *the proof of the pudding is in the eating: try (participation in religious or spiritual practices) for yourself and find out for yourself*

27. How do we know for sure what God really wants?

- *listen to Pink Floyd's founder Roger Waters' song: "What God Wants"*
- *Remember the story of the man who appeals to a Sufi teacher: "I don't know what to do! What does God want me to do?" Teacher: "See that wilted plant over there? What do you want God to do, shout?!"*

Requests about Process of the Class

28. I'd appreciate some kind of mark on my journal indicating that I've been credited for doing the work

- *good point: Willoughby, please do*
- *you can email Willoughby (Willoughby B Britton: wbritton@U.Arizona.EDU) anytime re: 'did I get credit for X assignment?'*

29. Please use more slides and overheads.

30. I write in my journals about confusions I have with the material in class.

- *PLEASE SPEAK OUT YOUR CONFUSIONS IN CLASS!!! ASK!!!*

31. Test taking: I began as mindful, then saw it was a case of 'lockstep regurgitation.' Shifted into auto pilot: remembered more quickly and accurately, better than if I'd been very present.

- *right: various kinds of consciousness facilitate various activities; mindfulness is an exercise, not a way to be in every waking minute*

Belief Systems

32. How do I know what I believe?

- *pick a topic; make a declarative statement about it: "I believe that....." Then sit back and observe how this makes you feel... is that feeling coherent with the statement? Then this is one of your beliefs*
- *don't accept 'I don't know WHAT I believe' as an answer; push yourself forward; say, 'it sounds like I believe X' or by my behavior I can deduce that I believe X*

- *notice how you react when an author or speaker is presenting a belief -- this tells you also what you believe*

Apparitions & Temporal Lobe Epilepsy

33. Are people who see apparitions susceptible to that particular belief?
 - *ask Willoughby*
34. Are apparitions real?
 - *ask Willoughby; make that your research paper!*
35. Is temporal lobe epilepsy an inherited trait?
 - *ask Willoughby*
36. Which occur more: hauntings & poltergeists or apparitions?
 - *ask Willoughby*

Techniques to Induce Transpersonal States

37. Do you need to have an NDE, some trauma, some drug induced experience to experience a transpersonal state?
 - *no, they can be spontaneous; or a function of reading, or practicing meditation, prayer, etc.*
38. What about people who are deaf, blind, mute... do you need all of your senses to be able to experience transcendent states? Is it a different route in that situation?
 - *yes, a different route; read Helen Keller's autobiography*
39. Seems like you have to be really focused, dedicate a long time of your life, sacrifice a lot of your "normal" life to be able to experience these states without drug catalysts.
 - *yes re: focus & dedication*
 - *yes re: sacrifice, but more of integrating your efforts into ordinary life, not a monastic retreat kind of sacrifice*
 - *drug-catalyst induced states are not long-lasting in developing your self or your Self*
 - *experiencing a state is not so important as developing yourself in the long run: the altered states & psi phenomena are never seen as important in substantial religious/mystical systems*
40. I once dismissed my mom when she talked of a NDE she'd experienced but kept it hidden from our family (fearing we'd be dismissive of it, which we all were). Are there any ways in which I could go about demonstrating a better willingness to listen reflectively?
 - *intentionally practice it for specific periods of time by simply reproducing in your mind what the other person is*

saying and how they are feeling; ignore (dis-identify from) your mind's attempts to debate/fix/solve/reject/affirm their dilemma

How Do We Develop?

41. My journal is basically attempting to figure myself out, the dominant themes in my life.. sometimes in there I just 'tell my story' about why I believe the things I do and why I've come to those conclusions.. my personality... my motives... and relate my everyday life to class material... Question: "do we ever figure out our lives or come to a point where we say, 'Ah, I see it now!!'

- *good journal work!*
- *phenomenology, i.e. 'watching,' may help more than analysis*
- *data gathering leads to consistent observations that you 'do see now, right here!' over and over again*
- *seeing it now creates an aware moment where you can choose against your "natural" i.e. habitual behaviors so those themes cease to dominate you after a while*

42. For ordinary people does this 'just happen' or do I need to accomplish something?

- *there is a lot to accomplish (that's why it is called Work!)*
- *this refers to either strengthening ego or dis-identifying from it and your personality*

Applications of a Transpersonal Intervention

43. Hiking: I was tired, hot, sat down: I noticed my depth perception was askew... I initiated one of the exercises to establish a mindful state... after only two four-count breaths, I was no longer gasping for oxygen.. lungs were (suddenly restful)... felt body sensations more deeply, more fully... I was hyper-aware.

44. Changing poisons into honey: story about being attacked at work by bosses for a performance issue; crying in the rest room and remembering: "hold thy peace and let the Lord fight your battles and victory shall be yours." Began to recite that scripture and felt a calming (come) over me... then received a tape from a friend [synchronicity] entitled "Patience," realized God was trying to teach me to be patient (thus less judgmental and argumentative)... apologized to people I'd apparently wronged... felt after this a tremendous joy and sense of peace!

45. Doing work with my non-dominant hand: I realized all the little things that I take for granted every day

- *good thing to demonstrate to yourself on a daily basis*

Managing the Major Difficulties in Ordinary Life

46. I've had big losses (important people) in my life... I try to live more for the future now.
- *resolving past traumas happens in good psychotherapy*
 - *learning to live in the present (where you create the future) can help*
47. I can't stand living in Tucson! What would you all mighty guru suggest for me to do to end this depression for the duration of my stay?
- *you neglected to capitalize the phrase 'all mighty guru' :)*
 - *look more deeply into the aspects that are depressing*
 - *isolate the specific ones you are (rejecting, resisting, complaining about, feeling the victim of)*
 - *make a concerted effort to address those*
 - *grieve any losses about what is not here and was there*
 - *change what you can*
 - *accept what you cannot change: practice this over & over*

Mindfulness

48. Where or how are we supposed to transcend our 'self' through mindfulness? The explanations of 'transpersonal Self' (i.e. it does not avoid or pursue anything; it partakes of infinite wisdom & compassion & forgiving) seem contradictory: the definitions go on to cite that it DOES do things (like forgiving) or does involve striving (like for transcendence).
- *you may be confusing the little s self on the way to the big S Self*
 - *transcending ego does not mean losing the capacity to organize & do: it means learning to employ the ego intentionally rather than being run by the ego*
49. How can 'forgiveness' be part of the transpersonal Self if there is no (small self) around that would be wounded and would thus have to forgive???
- *the transpersonal Self is an ideal end state*
 - *most of us all will still have ego present, which is wounded and can learn to forgive*
 - *in the ideal end state one would just be 'walking forgiveness,' meaning that a condition of prior forgiveness was being manifested toward all those that were hurting us -- even Jesus uttered "forgive them Father for they know not what they do"*
50. A very interesting aspect of mindfulness is concentrating on what you are actually doing... if you really concentrate on any task you filter out all wandering thoughts and put your energy on that task... I find this increases the inherent pleasure in some [ordinary] things..

just about every small task is challenging and interesting in itself.

51. I've made a lot of progress... realized there is no me, that I'm not my accomplishments, my brain, just awareness... but why does my awareness maintain a perspective, MY body's perspective?
- *ego-centric awareness is always this way, and the body is one's first impression of 'what one is'*
 - *non-ego-centric awareness is 'above' whatever is seen through the veil of the body/mind*
 - *the part of your awareness that notices 'I am seeing this situation through my own veiled eyes,' that part is non-egoic awareness; "seeing" (a la Carlos Castaneda) vs. just seeing*
52. I tried yoga once but couldn't enjoy it because there was so much on my mind -- I'm a high stress person and it's impossible for me to relax... I'd love to reach a state where I was at peace with myself & my surroundings
- *the methodological addressing of having 'too much on my mind' is in meditation practice or stress reduction techniques*
 - *reaching a state of completion vs. working on oneself toward more moments of peace means interrupting 'too much mind' over & over again -- you agree to work without wondering ('when do I finish' or 'what do I get')*

Spiritual Emergence and Spiritual Emergency

53. I think I'm having a spiritual emergence (lots of spiritual themes, no anxiety, constant feeling of contentment). I was reflecting on the Biblical passage, 'the Holy Spirit is like living water or a stream welling up inside of our hearts' and it seems like this for me.
- *beautiful poetic metaphor describing your experience*
 - *what are some other meanings of "water"? consciousness?*
54. Are the outcomes for spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency the same or different?
- *I have no sense of that, more a sense that the conditions that exist in and for the person before either crisis push certain outcomes:*
 - *pre-existing personal pathology*
 - *social support or condemnation*
 - *religious/spiritual support or condemnation*
 - *available transpersonal consultation*
 - *less prior pathology + more support = better outcome*

#