

Stanislav Grof interview

JI: What is your educational background?

SG: I was born and got my education in Prague, in what was called Czechoslovakia at the time. It is now the Czech Republic. I received a medical degree from Charles University in Prague and then later a Ph.D. from the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences.

JI: How did you get started in these areas of research?

SG: I went to study medicine and psychiatry specifically to become a psychoanalyst. I got very excited in my post-adolescent years by Freud's writings. A friend of mine lent me Freud's Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. I started reading it in the evening. I couldn't go to sleep and read through the night. Within two days, I decided to enroll in the medical school specifically to become a psychoanalyst. This happened at a time when I had completely different plans. I liked to draw and paint and I wanted to work in animated movies. I already had an introductory interview with a man who was a very famous Czech artist and had received many international awards for his animated movies. He accepted me, but after reading Freud I practically overnight changed my mind and went in a different direction.

JI: Do you think you made the right decision today?

SG: Yes, I do. There was a time when I didn't think so, when I was getting very discouraged with psychoanalysis. Initially it was not the theory of psychoanalysis, but its practice. I became aware how narrow its indication range was. People had to meet very specific criteria to be considered good candidates for psychoanalysis. It was also the amount of time that it required. My own psychoanalytic training was three times a week for seven years. It cost a lot of money and required a lot of time. I loved every minute of my psychoanalysis; I liked to play with my dreams and was very excited about the dream symbolism and finding that every slip of my tongue had some kind of profound meaning.

But if you ask me "Did it change you," I would say I changed, but in seven years you change anyway. I didn't have a sense that there was a convincing relationship between what I was doing with my dreams and any of the changes that happened during the seven years. So I got to the point where I was very disappointed with psychoanalysis as a clinical tool, but still excited about Freud's theories. And just at the time when I was experiencing this crisis, questioning whether it was the right decision for me to become a psychiatrist, we got a supply of LSD from Sandoz, the Swiss company that produced this substance. With it came a letter that said LSD was a very fascinating experimental new substance. Its powerful psychoactive effects were discovered by Dr. Albert Hofmann, who accidentally intoxicated himself when he was synthesizing it. The letter also said that Dr. Walter Stoll, a Zurich psychiatrist who was the son of Dr. Hoffman's boss, had conducted a pilot study which showed that this substance might be very interesting for psychiatrists and psychologists. They were basically asking us if we would like to work with LSD and give them some feedback as to what we thought about it and if the substance could be used in some way in psychology and psychiatry.

In their letter they gave us two basic tips. The first one was based on the fact that there seemed to be a deep relationship between what people experienced under the influence of LSD and naturally occurring episodes of non-ordinary states called "psychoses." So it would be possible to induce this experimental psychosis or model psychosis in otherwise "normal people", and conduct all kinds of tests – psychological tests, electrophysiological tests, biochemical tests and so on - before, during, and after the LSD experience. You would get insight as to what was happening biochemically and biologically in the organism at the time when the mental functioning was so profoundly changed This could bring new understanding of psychoses, particularly schizophrenia. If we could identify the substance that was responsible for these changes, we could also find an antidote, a substance that would neutralize its effects. And we would have a test-tube solution for schizophrenia, which, of course, would be the "Holy Grail" of psychiatry. So it was very exciting – in science it is an extremely useful to have a model.

But there was another tip the Sandoz people gave us in this letter and this tip became my destiny or karma - if you want to call it that way. They suggested that LSD might be used as an unconventional educational tool: psychiatrists, psychologists, students, and nurses could take it and spend several hours in a world that would be very similar to the

world of their patients. As a result of it, they would be able to understand their patients better, communicate with them more effectively, and hopefully be more successful in treating them.

I was at that time very disenchanted with psychoanalysis and this was a very exciting opportunity for me. I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world. I became one of the early Czech volunteers and I had a session that sent me - personally and professionally - in a completely different direction. I told you before that I have serious doubts that psychoanalysis changed me in any significant way; but I certainly can say it with certainty about my first LSD session. I know that I was one kind of person in the morning and somebody else in the evening. And there was no doubt in my mind that it was a result of my LSD experience. I had a very profound experience of cosmic consciousness, which involved a convincing sense of unity, oneness with other people, nature, the universe, and God. And the effect on me was so powerful that, in the last fifty years, everything I have done professionally was related in one way or another to non-ordinary states of consciousness. It became my vocation, my profession, my passion. So this, in a nutshell, was the beginning of my professional career.

Jl: You were recently awarded a high honor by the President of the Czech Republic. Would you discuss that? What was it for?

SG: Yes, it came as a very big surprise to me. The former Czech president Václav Havel and his wife started a foundation that gives annual awards, presented on Václav Havel's birthday. Every year they choose one person as a recipient of this prestigious award. It is given to people who are doing pioneering work that holds promise for the future, although current generation might not really understand it or appreciate it. The series of laureates started with Karl Pribram, the famous American brain researcher who developed the holographic model of the brain. Among other recipients were Robert Reich, former US Secretary of Labor, psychologist Phillip Zimbardo, MIT professor of computer science and pioneer in Artificial Intelligence, Joseph Weizenbaum, and Italian writer Umberto Eco.

So I was very surprised - because of the very controversial nature of psychedelic research - that president Havel had the courage to give me the award for something that

has such a problematic public image. I flew to Prague to receive this award and we had an extraordinary time – my wife Christina, myself, and Nathaniel and Deborah, our son and daughter-in-law who accompanied us. It was a very beautiful ceremony in a church that the Havels had renovated and turned into a spiritual center. And we had spent amazing personal time with the two of them. For me it was very special because I have admired Václav Havel for years. He is a philosopher and a playwright, who was a dissident during the Communist era, and was in and out of prison. He was one of the major figures in the “Velvet Revolution” that toppled the Communist regime. He became the first president of free Czechoslovakia at the request of people who admired him. He didn’t really want to be president; my Czech friends say that he was taken to the Prague castle “kicking and screaming.” He would have much rather continued doing what he loved to do, which was writing plays.

When he was president, he gave many lectures in the United States and all over the world and was very respected for his extraordinary vision. One of the first things he did as president was to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Prague and he spent three days with him. He was an extraordinary statesman, but not a good politician. Great visions do not always go hand in hand with practical politics. For example, he wanted to stop all production of weapons in Czechoslovakia without much concern about the economic consequences. To achieve something admirable like that, it would also have been necessary to have neighbors or partners who were on the same moral level. So he often got into trouble because of the practical consequences of some of his ideas, such as acknowledging the Dalai Lama as the head of Tibet without worrying what it was going to do to business with China. So spending some time with the Havels was an amazing experience and I feel very grateful for being honored by their award.

Jl: *You describe in your book *LSD Psychotherapy* that LSD is a tool, much like a knife. Would you discuss this analogy?*

SG: There has been a tremendous controversy about LSD. Some people think of it as a panacea, as a therapeutic tool of incredible value and power and usefulness, and on the other side there are people who see it as diabolical substance that causes unpredictable flashbacks, psychotic breaks, and permanent psychological damage. And it was also considered by the military of the whole world and by the secret police as a chemical

weapon, something that could be added to the water supply of cities and cause havoc, be used as aerosol to paralyze the army of the enemy, put it in the drinks of foreign diplomats to compromise them, and employed as a tool in brainwashing and interrogation of prisoners. In one of the conferences on LSD therapy, Humphrey Osmond pointed out that LSD is a tool, a very powerful tool, and it has no intrinsic positive or negative value. What it does depends on who is using it and for what kind of purposes. This is what we call "*set and setting*." And in this context, Humphrey used as an example a knife. He asked participants to imagine a similar discussion about a knife: is it a very dangerous murderous tool or is it an extremely useful tool? One of the participants in this discussion would be Surgeon General, who would claim that with proper training you could use it to perform operations that would save human lives. Another one would be the Chief of New York Police who would see the knife as an instrument that has killed many people and back it up with statistics. Another member of the group would be a housewife who would think about the knife primarily as a tool for cutting vegetables and salami. And there would also be an artist for whom the knife would be an indispensable tool for creating woodcarvings, and so on. If we witnessed this discussion, it would be clear to us that it's not the knife that is to blame or to extol. We are talking about different ways humans can use knives.

And you can say the same about LSD. If you have proper training and you use it responsibly, you can do quite extraordinary things with it. For example, we have seen some remarkable positive changes in chronic alcoholics and chronic drug addicts, groups of patients who are very difficult to treat. We had a unique program with people dying of cancer in which LSD sessions alleviated in many of them severe pain, sometimes even pain that could not be controlled by narcotics. This did not happen just for the time of the pharmacological effect of LSD; sometimes the pain would disappear or be significantly alleviated for several weeks. In many of these patients, LSD also took away the fear of death and transformed the experience of dying. This was without any doubt the most moving program that we had at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. So LSD can be an amazing therapeutic tool if it is properly used.

The results will be different if somebody brings a handful of sugar cubes laced with LSD into a party in Berkeley and throws it into a bowl of fruit punch; people are drinking it a powerful psychedelic cocktail thinking that it is an innocent fruit drink. Or if LSD is used

in the context of raves, where people take substances of questionable identity, quality, and quantity in public places, knowing that they are doing something illegal and that the police can arrive any moment. And then - as I have already mentioned - there are people who think about LSD primarily as something that could hurt other people, like the military or the secret police using it as chemical weapon, for brainwashing, or interrogation of prisoners. So LSD is a tool, an amazing tool. And I feel a lot of awe and respect for what it can do on both sides – used properly with some responsibility and some ethical values, or used in an ignorant way or particularly with hostile intentions.

I also made another comparison, which came from my appreciation for the positive potential of psychedelics. I compared LSD to a telescope or a microscope. LSD is basically a catalyst that activates and makes experientially available deep unconscious material that we are not aware of in our everyday state of consciousness. The contents of deep unconscious surface and become available for observation and analysis. We can learn how these hidden recesses of our unconscious influence the way we feel about ourselves, the way we perceive the world, and the way we behave. LSD provides access to realms that are normally not available to our conscious awareness, yet profoundly influence our life. Here is the parallel with the microscope, a tool that helps us to discover important dimensions of the world that we were not aware of - microworlds of unicellular organisms, including the bacteria, cellular structure of animal and botanical life, and so on. And the same with the telescope, where you can discover billions of galaxies, something that normally we are not aware of or cannot observe. So I really believe that psychedelics could be, if properly used, as useful for psychiatry or psychology as the microscope is for biology or for medicine, or the telescope is for astronomy.

Jl: **What are the dangers of LSD?**

SG: The dangers are related to fact that it opens up the psyche on a very deep level. This is, on one hand, a tremendous opportunity for healing or transformation but, on the other hand, with improper use, it can be very destructive. I have seen people who have taken LSD under very bad circumstances and had a “bad trip.” And in the middle of the session were given tranquilizers, which is the worst thing you can do. If that happens, the unconscious material that is causing the “bad trip” cannot be properly processed and

integrated. As a result, the psyche remains frozen in that difficult place. Ten or twenty years later these people were still in a psychiatric ward; when they tried to reduce the dosage of their medication, the unresolved unconscious material started to emerge and the unfinished experience was trying to complete itself. Their psychiatrists concluded that these patients were still sick and needed to continue receiving “maintenance dosages.”

On the positive side, over the years we have met people who got stuck in bad places in psychedelic sessions and we were able to help them. In Maryland, where we had a license to use LSD, we actually scheduled for these people supervised sessions, which made it possible for them to complete what was trying to happen in their “bad trips.” We have also helped some of these people in what we call Holotropic Breathwork, which is a powerful, non-drug approach, using accelerated breathing, evocative music, and a certain type of bodywork. It is a method that my wife Christina and I developed when we lived at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. It makes it possible to induce non-ordinary states of consciousness, quite similar to psychedelic experiences, in a non-pharmacological way. We have worked with people who were stuck in a difficult psychological state as a result of a psychedelic session they had had ten, fifteen, twenty years ago; they were able to complete the unfinished experience just by using breathing, music, and bodywork.

Unfortunately in current psychiatric practice, when somebody comes either during a “bad trip” or afterwards, because of some unfinished experience from a psychedelic session, he or she is treated by suppressive therapy, by tranquilizers, rather than by uncovering therapy, which means some form of experiential work so that they can finish what was trying to happen. As I have described in my book *Psychology of the Future*, effective work with non-ordinary states of consciousness would require a radical revision of the conceptual framework used by mainstream psychiatry and psychology. Currently, there seems to be a renaissance of interest in psychedelic research and there are some new young professionals, who are conducting psychedelic research and are aware of the conceptual challenges associated with it. However, I am afraid we have a long way to go before we will be able to use the healing potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness on a large scale.

Jl: Is LSD addictive?

SG: No. It is not physiologically addictive in the same way heroin, cocaine and other hard drugs are. What characterizes physiological addiction is that with continued use you have to increase the dosage to get the same effects. You also get to the point where you cannot stop using, because if you try, you will be experiencing very unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. After a long period of using, you experience a breakdown, a crisis colloquially called "hitting bottom." None of this is true for LSD and other psychedelics. There are people who take a lot of LSD, because they like the experiences and they are some who get "addicted" to them the same way that you can get addicted to watching television, working with the computer, or playing video games. But LSD not physiologically addictive and biologically it is very safe.

Jl: What is a flashback?

SG: I already touched upon it earlier in our discussion. A flashback happens when you have a psychedelic experience that remains poorly resolved. We always emphasize that when people do psychedelics, they should do it with their eyes closed, so that they really pay attention to what emerges from the unconscious. In a similar way, Holotropic Breathwork is always done with the eyes closed. It is less effective and more problematic to keep the eyes open during psychedelic experiences, as it is the case, for example, in raves or other forms of unsupervised use. As you know, people who take LSD often go to the movies, or even drive cars. In these situations, people pay attention to the external environment rather than to their inner world. They have to keep being focused on the outside while very deep unconscious material is emerging and flooding their consciousness. As a result, their experience is very poorly resolved.

If the experience does not find a closure at all, you get what we call prolonged reaction, where the session can last many hours or days. However, sometimes the experience seems to end, but the closure is incomplete. When that happens, at a later date something can weaken the psychological defense system and tip the scales of this precarious equilibrium - for example, a flu, physical exhaustion, lack of sleep, or smoking marijuana. The unconscious material that has not been properly processed in the session starts emerging into consciousness. Because people recognize that what is

emerging is similar to what they experienced in the session, they call it a “flashback;” but it is really continuation of the same experience, parts of it that remained unfinished. The way that we would work with flashbacks is to do more experiential work. We take people deeper into the experience to find natural resolution for what is emerging rather than trying to suppress it.

Jl: Are there any other benefits that you would like to mention?

SG: We have already talked about LSD as a therapeutic tool. Another thing that we have explored quite extensively over the years is the effect of LSD on creativity, primarily on painting, because for many people the psychedelic experiences are very visual. We had many artists in our programs, and you could see the tremendous change that happened in their style and content of what they were painting as a result of their psychedelic sessions. And people frequently report that - because of their psychedelic experience - they have a completely new, much deeper, understanding of modern art, for example, cubism, impressionism, expressionism, or Dadaism. They have discovered in their sessions that there exist states of consciousness in which you can see the world the way it was portrayed by artists of these different movements.

But the effect of LSD on creativity is not limited to art. This substance can also greatly facilitate scientific thinking or creativity of some other kind. Molecular biologist Francis Crick, the Nobel-Prize-winning father of modern genetics, was under the influence of LSD when he discovered the double-helix structure of DNA. He told a fellow scientist that he often used small doses of LSD to boost his power of thought. He said it was LSD that helped him to unravel the structure of DNA, the discovery that won him the Nobel Prize. Another molecular biologist and DNA chemist, Kary Mullis, received a Nobel Prize for his development of the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) that allows the amplification of specific DNA sequences; it is a central technique in biochemistry and molecular biology. During a symposium in Basel celebrating Albert Hofmann’s 100th anniversary, Albert Hofmann revealed that Kary Mullis had told him that LSD had helped him develop the Polymerase Chain reaction. It is also well known that psychedelics played a crucial role in the development of computer technology.

There is a wonderful book by Willis Harman, which is called *Higher Creativity*; it is full of examples of people who had major breakthroughs, artistic and scientific, while they were in one type or another of a non-ordinary state. They usually worked for a long time on a problem that they were not able to solve in the ordinary state of consciousness and then the solution suddenly came in a non-ordinary state. The most famous example is Friedrich August Kekule who discovered the chemical formula of benzene, the basis of organic chemistry. The molecule of this substance is a hexagonal ring, which has carbon and hydrogen on each of the angles. Kekule worked with the substance and he knew how many carbons and hydrogen atoms it contained, but could not figure out how they were arranged. Then when he was very tired and was in what we call a hypnagogic state, almost asleep, he was watching the fire and got hypnotized by it. Suddenly, an image came to him of a snake that was biting its tail and he realized that was the key to the formula for benzene - that you have to close the chain and create a ring.

Willis Harman gives a large number of similar instances. A man who grew up in an Indian village had visions of a village goddess who was teaching him mathematics. He then went to Oxford and solved problems that the Oxford mathematicians could not solve. Einstein had the idea for the theory of relativity in a non-ordinary state and his major insights came to him in the form of a kinesthetic experience. Harman also gives many examples of artists. For example, Giacomo Puccini said: "I didn't write *Madam Butterfly*, it was God who created it; I was just holding the pen." Mozart had entire symphonies appear in his head in a finished form and he just had to put them on paper. So psychedelics have an extraordinary potential to enhance creativity, as long as the sessions are conducted properly and responsibly.

Another important aspect of the effect of psychedelics are experiences that are mystical, numinous, spiritual. This "instant" or "chemical mysticism" opens fascinating possibilities for studying psychology and psychopathology of religion and a unique opportunity for people to have a mystical experience. In 1962, a close friend of mine, Walter Pahnke (who's not alive anymore; he drowned in the Atlantic while scuba diving) conducted his famous Good Friday experiment at the Harvard chapel. During the divine service, he administered psilocybin, the active alkaloid from the magic mushrooms with similar effects as LSD, to a group of theology students. Half of the

students received as placebo Niacin (vitamin B3). Walter was able to show that the students who had received psilocybin had mystical experiences that were indistinguishable from those that have been described in spiritual literatures of all ages.

We had a training program at the Maryland Scientific Research Center that made it possible for mental health professionals to have up to three high-dose LSD sessions for learning purposes. They were psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and also priests who were doing pastoral counseling. In this program, many of the members of clergy had mystical, spiritual experiences for the first time in their life and they suddenly understood what they had been reading and talking about in their sermons. We had some priests there who had ended up in the priesthood for all kinds of reasons and were not relay believers. I remember one of them who had immigrated to Canada from Russia and had been offered a scholarship in Canada. He accepted the offer for existential reasons, although he was not really interested in theology. As a result of his study of scientific literature, he had come to the conclusion that religion was a naive superstition that did not make any sense. But since he was already stuck in priesthood, he continued to give sermons, feeling like a fraud and hypocrite. He had a very powerful mystical experience in our program and felt extremely validated; he realized he had not really dedicated his life to something that is a complete delusion or illusion. So that is another very important area – opening of the way to understanding of mysticism and religion.

Jl: **Who, or what type of people use LSD?**

SG: There is a group of people who use or used it very seriously and responsibly. For example, philosophers, writers, and religious scholars, such as Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Gerald Heard, Lama Govinda, or Houston Smith. These are individuals, who took LSD and other psychedelics for philosophical and spiritual insights and they considered it to be part of their spiritual path. There were also psychologists and psychiatrists doing it, at least initially, for professional reasons. However, many of them – including myself - started doing it because of professional interest and ended up seeing it as philosophical and spiritual quest. People who do it seriously and responsibly pay much attention to the set and setting, they study literature on psychedelics and related subjects, and they see

it as a very serious spiritual path or journey of philosophical discovery. But then, of course, there are large numbers of individuals, who take it for kicks and do it in a very irresponsible way. Many young people also take it because they see it as an adventure; the fact that it is illegal can be an additional motivation for those who hate irrational authority. It is always exciting for young people to do something that is forbidden. These people usually are not very concerned about set and setting. They do it under circumstances that tremendously increase the risk and reduce the potential benefit. I have already mentioned the worst group of people who use psychedelics - the military and the secret service who see psychedelics primarily as a weapon or tool for other destructive and immoral purposes.

Jl: What percentage of people risk seizures or other trauma?

SG: The most interesting and comprehensive study in this regard was conducted by Dr. Sidney Cohen in the early years of LSD research, when we really did not know much about LSD, psilocybin, and other psychedelic substances. However, the experiments with them were mostly done in medical settings and it was understood that people who take it have to be supervised. There had to be at least one person that was with experimental subjects all the time. They usually stayed overnight and the experimenter saw them the next day to be sure that everything was okay. Sidney Cohen's study thus summarized experiences from experiments conducted without much knowledge about psychedelics, but with a sense of responsibility and with concern about safety. He sent out a questionnaire to a large number of people who were conducting early psychedelic research and collected data from about 25,000 sessions.

Cohen's study showed that under the described circumstances, the risk was really minimal, much lower than with other procedures that were routinely used in psychiatry, such as insulin therapy, electroshock therapy, let alone psychosurgery (lobotomy). Only a small fraction of experimental subjects made after the psychedelic session a suicidal attempt, or experienced a psychotic break. The risks were minimal and well worth the potential usefulness. But when people are taking it under uncontrolled circumstances, then of course the situation is different. The possibility of poorly resolved sessions, flashbacks, and psychotic breaks is much higher. And then there is also the fact that all kinds of things can happen during psychedelic sessions if people are not supervised –

for example, if they sit near open windows or drive cars. If somebody jumps out of the window during an LSD session, it does not say anything about LSD. It says something about the way LSD was taken and about the people who took it or were present during the session. These kinds of things simply would not happen if psychedelics were used in a responsible way.

Jl: Would you say that's related to how our society treats these things in general as compared to maybe a shamanic society?

SG: In ancient societies, pre-industrial, and native societies, non-ordinary states of consciousness were held in very high esteem. They were used for healing purposes and in sacred rituals. And the use of psychedelic plants, in particular, was taken very seriously. These plants were considered sacraments, "flesh of gods." The industrial civilization treats psychedelic compounds very differently. Psychedelics were initially used mainly for therapeutic purposes in psychiatric hospitals, research institutes, and offices of private therapists and some individuals used them privately and very responsibly. Once they started being used in public places and on a mass scale, things got out of control; before long, this engendered a mass hysteria. The majority of the culture was using psychedelics in a very ignorant and irresponsible way. But we have abused all the other major scientific discoveries; why should we expect that psychedelics would be an exception?

Jl: Like Ken Kesey and Timothy Leary's adventures, so to speak?

SG: The problem with Tim Leary was that he was a Pied Piper, a proselytizer; he was trying to sell psychedelics to the young generation. So he was talking about all the great things that people can expect when they take psychedelics. He was describing how "trillions of cells in your body will be singing the song of ecstasy and liberation." All those great things can certainly happen in psychedelic sessions, but Tim did not really give people a balanced picture. He did not adequately tell his followers that beside experiencing heaven they can also experience hell. So tens of thousands of people were taking psychedelics very poorly prepared, on the basis of his charismatic advice: "Turn on, tune in, drop out."

Jl: In your books you mention telepathy and other strange occurrences with LSD and other substances. Would you discuss this?

SG: One of the remarkable properties of psychedelics is that they greatly facilitate the occurrence of psychic phenomena. Of course, psychic experiences can happen in everyday life, but in non-ordinary states their incidence increases exponentially. And what happens transcends the types of phenomena which are traditionally studied by parapsychologists, such as telepathy, psychometry, and out-of-body experiences. For example, in psychedelic sessions, you can experience very convincing identification with animals. Your body image becomes that of those animals, you look at the world through the eyes of those animals, and have all the sensations characteristic of these animals. When this happens, you receive accurate information about these animals that you did not have before and that has not come through the ordinary sensory channels.

Much of this information could not really have been obtained the usual way - by direct observation, reading books, or by watching television or movies. A TV program like Nova could show you what an eagle looks like and what an eagle sounds like, but there's no way it can give you the information what the eagle *feels* like. In addition, when you become an eagle in these non-ordinary states, you suddenly understand how to fly. What you do with your wings to work the air currents, and so on. These are things people usually don't even think about - with the exception of individuals like Leonardo da Vinci. And you would see the world in a way that corresponds to the optical system of predatory birds, which is very different from ours. People who experience identification with dolphins - such as a late friend of mine, John Lilly, who studied dolphins, gave LSD to dolphins, and also took LSD with dolphins - experience the world that the dolphins live in. This world is very different from ours, because dolphins get most of their information acoustically using their sonars rather than visually. It is possible to experientially identify with a bat or a bee, each of whom perceives the world in a completely different way. And even if you have never studied biology and you have never have been interested in it, you can receive all this new information about various aspects of nature.

So in psychedelic sessions the range of psychic phenomena extends far beyond what traditional parapsychologists are interested in and study, because the capacity to receive information through extrasensory channels is associated with many different kinds of

experiences that we call transpersonal. I think the best and most convincing studies that have been done in this regard actually come from thanatology, the science studying death and dying. For example, we have now a large number of observations showing that it is possible for a person to be lying on an operation table with the eyes closed, in a coma - in a state of cardiac death or even brain death - and their consciousness can leave the body and accurately perceive what is happening in the environment. Sometimes their disembodied consciousness can actually move to other locations - pass through the walls and experience what is happening in other rooms of the same building, or travel through all the ceilings and above the hospital and see the environment from the bird's eye view. A very interesting study was done by Ken Ring and his coworkers on something that they call "mindsight." They discovered that in near-death situations, when consciousness leaves the body of people who are congenitally blind for organic reasons, these people can see the world for the first time. Not only can they see, but what they see can be consensually validated by people with the gift of sight. Ken Ring talks about "*veridical out-of-body experiences*," experiences that you can verify.

Jl: With your experiences and background, would you say these experiences are real?

SG: I know they are real. Obviously you cannot verify every single transpersonal experience, but this group of out-of-body experiences in near-death situations lends itself particularly well to objective verification. When a congenitally blind person describes accurately what the environment of a hospital looks like from bird's-eye view, what is the probability that something like this could be a fantasy? Or when people can describe accurately what happened at the time of their near-death experience not only in other rooms of the building but also several hundred miles away. We have ourselves observed similar instances when we could verify certain specific information that became available through near-death experiences of our patients. In my book *When the Impossible Happens*, I collected personal stories and observations of events that would be in principle impossible if the universe were the way it is understood by materialistic science. This is why the book is called *When the Impossible Happens*.

I have described in it a number of experiences in which people received information that they could not possibly have obtained the traditional way, including two past life memories of events from other centuries. One was from the seventeenth century in

Europe, from the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, and the second involved a historical event that had happened at the time of Walter Raleigh, during the war between England and Spain. Obviously, past life experiences from other centuries and countries are much more difficult to verify than the veridical out-of-body experiences in near-death situations, where it is easy to obtain objective information. But I have seen and verified enough transpersonal experiences to know that they can impart accurate new information. Although you cannot generalize and say that it is true for all transpersonal experiences, it would also be incorrect to assert that psychic phenomena cannot happen, that they don't exist, which is the position of most materialistically oriented scientists.

For me accepting the existence of transpersonal experiences was very difficult, because I had a very traditional medical and scientific training. In addition, I studied medicine at a time where we had a Marxist regime – Czechoslovakia was controlled by the Soviet Union. What we were getting through education was a particularly extreme form of the materialistic worldview. Everything that was considered idealistic was ridiculed or censored out. Since I started working with LSD, it has been a journey of major intellectual surprises that were coming practically on a daily basis. I had to change my worldview a number of times along the way.

Jl: **What is a full blown/transcendental/transpersonal/cosmic unity experience?**

SG: We are talking here about several things. There is a category of experiences which I call *transpersonal*. The usual understanding of the psyche that you find in academic circles is that the human psyche is limited to post-natal biography and Freud's individual unconscious. It contains only memories of what happened since the time we were born. Freud talked about the newborn as being *tabula rasa*, a clean slate. So the entire "software" of the brain determining who we become consists of memories of post-natal events from infancy, childhood, and later life. The individual unconscious, described by Freud is also, by and large, a derivative of post-natal biography – it contains material that we have forgotten or have found objectionable and repressed. For example, there is no recognition that birth is an important psychological event, a highly influential psychotrauma. And the academic circles certainly deny the psychological significance of anything that preceded birth, such as prenatal life, the life of our human or animal ancestors, or collective history of humanity that C. G. Jung wrote about.

As a result of my observations from psychedelic research, I had to greatly expand the traditional cartography of the psyche. The new map that I outlined bears great resemblance to the understanding of the psyche found in the great spiritual philosophies of the East – Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and others. The dimensions of the psyche are infinitely larger than Freud ever imagined and the realm of postnatal biography and the individual unconscious, seen by academic circles as the totality of the psyche, represent just its most superficial layer. Joseph Campbell, the greatest mythologist of the twentieth century and admirer of C. G. Jung, known for his caustic Irish humor, put it very succinctly and facetiously. He said that Freud was fishing while sitting on a whale.

To accommodate a vast array of new observations, I had to complement the image of the unconscious used in mainstream psychiatry and psychology by adding two large transbiographical domains. The first of these, which I call *perinatal*, contains the memories of the entire process of biological birth. And then beyond (or beneath) the perinatal realm, there is another vast region for which I have coined the term *transpersonal*. This is the source of such experiences as identification with consciousness of other people, of groups of people, of animals and other life forms. Another category of transpersonal experiences involves transcendence of time and space – adventures in other centuries and other countries of the world. Sometimes such experiences are associated with a sense of personal remembering (*déjà vu* or *déjà vecu*); people then talk about past life memories which seem to support the concept of reincarnation and karma: We do not have just one life, we have a whole chain of lives, and under certain circumstances we can get access to memories from our previous lifetimes.

Another large category of transpersonal experiences involves visits into mythological domains of the psyche. This is what C. G. Jung called the *archetypal realm of the collective unconscious*. The collective unconscious as described by Jung has two domains. The first one is the historical collective unconscious, which harbors the record of the entire history of humanity. This historical archive of humanity can become available to all of us in non-ordinary states of consciousness. The second domain of the collective unconscious - archetypal or mythological – contains the entire cultural history of humanity – images of various deities and demonic figures of different countries,

abodes of the Beyond, such as heavens, hells, and paradises, and a rich array of archetypal motifs. We can have these experiences whether or not we previously studied the corresponding mythologies, whether or not we have any intellectual knowledge about them. What you earlier asked about - the experience of cosmic unity - is just one important type of transpersonal experience. It involves the feeling that our individual boundaries have dissolved and we experience ourselves as being one with other people, with all creation, with nature, with the entire universe, and with God, with the creative principle itself.

Jl: **What can you say about your own experiences with these transpersonal and cosmic unity experiences?**

SG: Over the years, I have had many transpersonal and mystical experiences, including states of cosmic unity. I have been studying non-ordinary states of consciousness for over half a century and it has not been just observing what happened to other people. I have personally experienced all the psychedelic substances that I have worked with, some of them repeatedly, and was constantly comparing my own experiences with theirs. And I have also had spiritual experiences that did not involve any psychedelics, for example, in sessions of Holotropic Breathwork that Christina and I have developed and also during various forms of meditation. We both have had personal experiences with a number of well-known spiritual teachers.

One of our Esalen workshops, a six-week special program, entitled Buddhism and Western Psychology, had as guest faculty Tarthang Tulku, Chögyam Trungpa, Lama Govinda, Soen Sa Nim, Dhyana Yogi, Reb Anderson, and others. We have also co-led over thirty spiritual retreats with our dear friend Jack Kornfield, a wonderful psychologist and Buddhist monk and teacher. These retreats took place in different centers – at the Institute of Mental Physics in Yucca Valley, CA, at the Omega Center in Rhinebeck, NY, and in the Swiss Alps - and combined Buddhist Vipassana meditation with Holotropic Breathwork; both Christina and I have participated in meditation sessions of these retreats. We have also spent much time with Swami Muktananda, head of the Siddha Yoga lineage. We received from him what is called “*shaktipat*” (activation of Kundalini energy) and have done many weekend intensives and meditation retreats with him in United States and in India. I have personally experienced a rich array of transpersonal

experiences in these different contexts. Some of them are described in my most autobiographical book entitled *When the Impossible Happens*.

Jl: Do you think these experiences are real, or imaginary, drug-induced hallucinations?

SG: I am absolutely convinced that there are many aspects of these states that reveal the existence of normally invisible dimensions of reality which are ontogenetically real. They are available to all of us in non-ordinary states of consciousness and - as I mentioned before - many of them can be verified by methods that are recognized and used by mainstream scientists. It is also possible to perceive our everyday reality in a radically new way. There are two types of experiences that are spiritual in nature and reveal either some new perspective on everyday reality or some completely new normally invisible realities. The first of them is *the experience of the immanent divine*. This experience occurs when we watch the world with our eyes open and suddenly see it in a radically new way. We realize that what we believed was a material world made of "stuff" is actually a play of cosmic energy, a "virtual reality" (to use a modern term), created by Absolute Consciousness by infinitely complex orchestration of experiences. We perceive that objects are not solid and are not separate from each other. Underlying what seems to be the world of separate objects is a seamless unified field. The material world, the world of separation, is an illusion (the Hindu *maya*), teased out of this cosmic matrix. In this state, we also perceive the numinosity of what we used to consider to be ordinary material reality.

The second type of spiritual experience is *the experience of the transcendent divine*. It is not related in any way to the world as we know it in our everyday life; it reveals certain domains of reality that we previously had no idea existed. It is an experience of an entirely different dimension, which unfolds - to use David Bohm's terminology - into the field of our everyday consciousness. For example, we can encounter various archetypal beings - Jesus, Virgin Mary, Kali, or Shiva - or experience different archetypal sceneries. We can have the experience of being in heaven, hell, or paradise. We can experience accurately various motifs from the mythologies of cultures about which we have no intellectual knowledge.

It is interesting that how we perceive the world during the experience of the immanent divine is much closer to the way the world is portrayed by the most advanced science than our everyday naïve “pedestrian” perception of it. For example, for quantum-relativistic physicists, there are no separate objects in the universe. As they penetrated deep into the structure of matter, they discovered that on the subatomic level there are no separate objects, no “stuff, only a continuous unified field. Subatomic matter does not really exist, it just has certain statistical probabilities to exist, matter is essentially empty. The entire universe is a vibratory system that is in constant movement; nothing in it is static. David Bohm argued that to describe the universe accurately, we should not really use nouns, only verbs. We should not talk about tables and chairs, but “*tabling*” and “*chairing*,” “*newyorking*,” “*stangrofin*,” “*janirwining*,” because to see the world as full of static solid objects is a peculiar illusion, something the Hindus call *maya*. The capacity of cosmic consciousness to create this illusionary spell makes us believe that we are material beings living in a material universe. And those of us who have experienced psychedelic states know that consciousness can create very believable realities.

Of course, the mystics - particularly the Eastern mystics - have been saying these things for centuries or millenia, but in the third decade of the twentieth century, they were joined by quantum-relativistic physicists. In addition, as I mentioned before, consciousness researchers have proved that some of the normally invisible realities that the mystics are talking about are not just hallucinations or fantasies, but are objectively there. Jungians refer to the world of the archetypal figures and realms as “*imaginal*” to distinguish it from imaginary products of the individual human mind. Although it can be accessed through intrapsychic self-exploration, the *imaginal* world has objective existence, and those who experience it can reach consensual agreement on its various aspects.

When I talk about the immanent divine, I usually refer to television. It would be like watching black and white television and suddenly colors come in. If we have the experience of the immanent divine, we still see some of the old familiar elements of the world; we see trees, people, houses, fields, and rivers, and so on, but we see them in a fundamentally different way. A new dimension was added to our experience – the sense of sacredness or numinosity, as C. G. Jung called it. By comparison, the experience of the transcendental divine would be more like watching all the time just one television

channel and suddenly discovering that by pushing a button you can get access to some additional channels that you previously were not aware of.

It is very interesting to me that for people in the industrial civilization the idea of the collective unconscious is such an alien concept, when we have actually created something similar through electronic technology. As we are sitting in this room, we are immersed in an immense ocean of information that could create a rich array of experiences if we could access it. For example, there is all the information from the short-wave radio stations of the entire world. We could listen to news from London, hear a concert from Johannesburg or Tokyo, or enjoy a political commentary from Canada. Thanks to the satellite technology, the programs of countless television channels are being beamed down on us at this very moment. If we could tap this information, we could have an overwhelming plethora of visual and acoustic experiences. We could watch the Playboy channel, Home Box Office movies, Hollywood classics, Mickey Mouse cartoons, or Star Trek. We know intellectually that all this is available but we cannot transform this potential into actual experience, unless we have the right conditions – an antenna and television set. The corresponding instrument in relation to the information available in the collective unconscious would be technology that can induce a non-ordinary state of consciousness. If that happens, then all these other channels become available to us. You and I could independently have experiences of various archetypal domains and later reach consensus about them in the same way as people who have watched the same TV channel. If you have the experience of Shiva's heaven and I have the experience of Shiva's heaven, we can talk about it in the same way we would share our experiences from visiting London and refer to Westminster Abbey, Buckminster Palace, or Big Ben.

JJ: Are there levels in these experiences, say religious or spiritual, that you can only reach with certain practices, or that seem to be set apart from other, lower levels of the psychedelic experiences?

SG: Yes, there are many different levels of the psychedelic experience; they are basically identical with the levels of the unconscious psyche – biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal. And within the transpersonal domain, we can also establish a vertical stratification; Ken Wilber talks about the lower and higher subtle level, lower and higher

causal level, and level of the Absolute. There is also a superficial level of the psychedelic experience that I have not mentioned yet. People typically encounter it in the initial stages of their LSD self-exploration with the use of lower dosages – around 100mcg. This level is characterized primarily by very dynamic abstract images in rich colors. They are very similar to fractals, computer-generated graphic representations of non-linear equations. People compare them to kaleidoscopic displays, stained glass windows in Gothic cathedrals, or arabesques from Muslim mosques. They seem to represent a kind of sensory barrier that one passes through on the way to the level of post-natal biography.

People taking moderate dosages of LSD can spend a series of sessions exploring their individual unconscious. They relive various previously repressed or forgotten memories from their infancy, childhood and later life, obtain emotional and intellectual insights and process the emotions associated with this material. This process can be seen as greatly accelerated and enlivened psychoanalysis. Deeper than the biographical level is the domain of the unconscious that I call perinatal, related to biological birth, and a region that stores prenatal memories. These provide challenging material for many psychedelic sessions. And the deepest level of the psyche is the vast transpersonal domain that I have already discussed. Which level we reach in psychedelic sessions depends on many factors – the dosage, set and setting, number of sessions, attitude and personal courage of the subject, and others.

Jl: How do you know, when treating patients with psychedelics, that you have achieved the desired result or cure?

SG: I was trained as a clinical psychiatrist. Mainstream psychiatrists use the intensity of the symptoms as a measure of the clinical condition of the patients. Less anxiety, less aggression means that the patient is improving. This, from the psychedelic perspective, is a very superficial and inadequate perspective. Actually what we have learned in the work with non-ordinary states of consciousness is something very different. If we are not dealing with an organic, biological problem, but a psychogenic problem, the symptoms - like in homeopathy - are actually an expression of a healing impulse. For example, the person we are working with might have had a very difficult, challenging personal history – serious psychotraumas in childhood or infancy, complicated birth, or problems in pre-

natal life. So he or she carries around a lot of undigested, psychological material. When symptoms appear, their organism, their psyche is trying to get rid of this ballast and simplify its functioning. And the only way it can get rid of it is to make it conscious, bring it to the surface for processing.

Much of routine psychiatry focuses just on the symptoms; when we can do something with the symptoms, we consider the patient to be improved. We look also at some other parameters, such as how the person is functioning in life, their interpersonal relationships, their professional capacity, and so on. But the primary focus is usually on the symptoms. If a patient has asthma and the attacks are alleviated, it would be considered a therapeutic success. But what actually happens with psychedelics or with Holotropic Breathwork is that the symptoms are usually temporarily intensified, and then you go deeper into the symptoms and process the underlying unconscious material. As a result, not only do the symptom disappear, but you experience personal growth or transformation. This “uncovering” method of therapy positively affects your personality.

By contrast, the “covering” approach, psychopharmacological suppression of symptoms very frequently leads to impoverishment of personality rather than to expansion and growth. People who take tranquilizers for extended periods of time, particularly large doses, experience general inhibition. They feel better in the sense that they don’t have the symptoms, but there is a price pay for it as well, besides the obvious side effects that the medications often have. We see something similar with Holotropic Breathwork; it also causes transient intensification of symptoms, but takes people to the roots of their problems, and leads to positive changes in personality.

For example, we see improvement of self-image and self-acceptance and increase of tolerance and empathy towards other people. Many individuals doing breathwork develop spontaneously great ecological awareness as a result of having experiences of identification with members of other species, such as becoming fish in polluted rivers, or by experiencing their fundamental oneness with nature. They develop a very strong sense that we have to take care of our environment – since we are biological beings, our priority has to be having clean water, clean air, and clean soil to grow our food. Reasons, such as economic profit, ideology, politics, or military strategies are not good enough to override some of these fundamental biological imperatives. Many people also

develop a deep sense that violence is not an acceptable way of solving problems. Another consequence of systematic uncovering work is opening to spirituality of a universal, all-encompassing nature. None of those things would happen with tranquilizers or antidepressants.

Jl: Earlier you talked about transpersonal experiences and you mentioned transpersonal psychology. What is transpersonal psychology?

SG: I will start with a few words about the history of psychology and psychotherapy. In the first half of the 20th century, psychology was basically dominated by two schools. One of them was Freudian psychoanalysis and the other behaviorism. But in the 1950s, there was a growing dissatisfaction with these two schools. Behaviorism emphasized the study of behavior and rejected all introspective data. It focused on the work with animals, mostly rats and pigeons, and tried to draw from these experiments data for understanding human psychology. Psychoanalysis drew conclusions about the human psyche primarily from the study of psychopathology. The main spokesman for the dissatisfaction with these two approaches was Abraham Maslow. He published a very strong criticism of behaviorism and psychoanalysis that, at the time, were dominating academic psychiatry. He gave various reasons why these were inadequate approaches to the psyche and he and Tony Sutich initiated a new movement, humanistic psychology.

Humanistic psychology put great emphasis on personality growth and self-realization, focusing on what Maslow called the “growing tip of the population,” rather than just then psychiatric patients. It also embraced the use of introspective data which behaviorism refused; behaviorists wanted to draw all the experimental data from observing behavior. Humanistic psychology became an umbrella under which originated a number of new therapies (“experiential therapies”), emphasizing direct expression of emotions and work with the body. Examples of these new approaches replacing exclusively verbal therapies are Gestalt practice, various neo-Reichian practices, primal therapy, and bioenergetics.

Humanistic psychology became very popular, both in professional and lay circles. Many people attended workshops featuring these different forms of humanistic psychotherapy. But in the late 1960s, the creators of this new movement, Maslow and Sutich, became

dissatisfied with the school they themselves created, realizing that they left out some extremely important aspects of the human psyche – spirituality, meditation practices, mystical experiences, cosmic consciousness, artistic inspiration, and related phenomena. They started working on yet another version of psychology which would correct these omissions. They wanted to call transhumanistic, going beyond humanistic psychology.

At this time, I connected with Abe Maslow. At the recommendation of Esalen chronicler Paul Herbert, I sent Abe a large manuscript summarizing the observations from my psychedelic research in Prague. Abe had a very enthusiastic response to it and he invited me to visit him in his Boston home. We had a wonderful discussion about the parallels between our respective research projects. It became clear that my observations of mystical experiences in psychedelic sessions bore a close similarity with his study of what he called “peak experiences” - mystical experiences occurring spontaneously in the middle of everyday life. Abe had studied a large group of people who had these spontaneous mystical experiences and realized these were not pathological states as mainstream psychiatrists interpreted them. Clinical psychiatry does not have a category for spiritual or mystical experience. People who have mystical experiences are seen as mentally ill and receive stigmatizing diagnoses – schizophrenia or some other type of psychosis.

Abe Maslow realized that it was incorrect to see “peak experiences” as pathological and abnormal; if anything – when they were properly understood and supported - they were potentially supernormal. People who were allowed to experience them fully and integrated them well moved in the direction of “*self realization*” or “*self actualization*.” This was really very similar to what we had seen in responsibly run psychedelic sessions. So Abe and I hit it off and we became friends. He invited me to join a small group of people who were working on this new school of psychology. I brought to this group the psychedelic observations and Abe and Tony actually liked the name that I coined for a category of psychedelic experience – “*transpersonal*” – and decided to change their original name for the new psychology from “*transhumanistic*” to “*transpersonal*.”

Transpersonal psychology is a branch of psychology that studies the entire spectrum of human experience, including non-ordinary states of consciousness, and aims for a synthesis of spirituality and science within a new scientific worldview (new paradigm). Its basic tenet is that – correctly understood and practiced - spirituality based on direct personal experience is not incompatible with science but complementary to it. Ken Wilber said something very interesting in his book *A Sociable God*: “If there seems to be conflict between science and religion, it is very likely bogus science and bogus religion,” pseudo-science and pseudo-religion. People in these two camps do not understand what the other group is talking about and they are very likely not the best example of their own discipline. Correctly understood, science studies a different dimension of reality than spiritual disciplines; they do not compete for the same territory, they are complementary.

For example, if people from religious circles talk about heaven, do they talk about the same heaven that astronomers are speaking of? Astronomers have very sophisticated devices, such as the Hubble telescope, and they have systematically explored the entire vault of heaven. And none of them has reported seeing God or harp-playing angels. Does it mean that science disproved religion? Or we know that the center of the earth consists of liquid nickel and iron and its temperature is higher than the surface of the sun. This certainly seems to be an unlikely place for the caves of Satan, for hell. The early explorers tried hard to find paradise in some earthly location. We have now explored the entire surface of the globe and discovered many very beautiful places. But none of them fits the description of the Garden of Eden, paradise, as it is described in the Bible, or paradises from any other religious and spiritual traditions.

However, nothing that hard sciences have discovered has any relevance for correctly understood spirituality. The only people who can speak with any authority about religion, spirituality, and mysticism are people who study non-ordinary states of consciousness. As Aldous Huxley showed very clearly in his book *Heaven and Hell*, heaven, hell, and paradise are not related to any realities that are part of the material world. They are ontologically real, but are parts of the *imaginal world*, that we talked about earlier. They can be experienced in a very authentic and convincing way in non-ordinary states of consciousness. To understand the origin of religions, we have to study transpersonal experiences - visionary experiences that inspired them. Physicists, or representatives of

other disciplines of hard science who study the material world, have really nothing relevant to say about the spiritual dimension because they simply do not have access to it and do not know anything about it.

Naturally, what I just said does not apply to scientists who had personal experiences of the mystical domain. Another possible exception would be scientists who reached the pinnacle and frontiers of human knowledge. They studied nature to such depths that they realized the material world could not have created itself. They became convinced that the universe has a master blueprint created by superior cosmic intelligence whose dimensions are beyond human imagination and comprehension. Examples would be people like Einstein or some of his colleagues who created quantum-relativistic physics. These people “pushed the envelope” of their discipline to the very edge, to such an extent that they were actually practicing *Jnana Yoga* – taking the intellect to its very limits until it has to surrender. Einstein called this type of spirituality *cosmic religion*; he described it as “seeing God in the wonderful order and lawfulness of all that exists and in its soul as it reveals itself in man and animals.” After we have learned how intricate, how complex, reality is and see the unbelievable intelligence in the animal and botanical world, or even in the inorganic world, we see the numinosity in the world that we previously considered to be an ordinary material reality.

Jl: You talked about a technique that you and your wife developed - Holotropic Breathwork. Would you talk about this method as well as what spawned your development of it?

SG: We developed Holotropic Breathwork when we lived at Esalen, where we did not have the permission to use psychedelics any more. We were doing workshops where I talked about experiences and observations from psychedelic research and all the implications for psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, religion, art, and so on. And participants often became dissatisfied and they would say: “You are talking about all these wonderful experiences, but can’t we do something that will give us a taste of what those experiences are? We don’t want to just hear about it.” And I would have to say: “Sorry, I don’t have the license to give LSD at Esalen.” Our license to use psychedelics was bound to a particular place, the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. So at a certain point we started experimenting with breathing, music, and a certain kind of

bodywork. The inspiration for it came from observations from my psychedelic work. In several instances, my clients started spontaneously hyperventilating at the end of their sessions, when the effect of LSD was already subsiding, and they reported that faster breathing took them back into the session. This showed me that faster breathing can activate the unconscious. In our experiments at Esalen, we discovered that people can have very powerful experiences without psychedelic substances, with a combination of simple means – faster breathing, evocative music, and bodywork. And we started using this combination in our workshops at Esalen and in many other places around the world. Since 1987, we also have training for Holotropic Breathwork facilitators.

The shortest time for a Holotropic Breathwork workshop is a weekend. It would start on Friday by an evening lecture giving participants basic information about non-ordinary states and also practical instructions for the breathwork itself. We then ask people to pair up, divide them into smaller groups of about 16 participants each, and assign to each of the groups two trained facilitators who assist in the workshop. We work with half of the group at a time and people alternate in the roles of breathers and “sitters.” The breathwork sessions take place on Saturday, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. We begin the session by a relaxation exercise to bring participants into the present moment, in touch with their bodies. Then we ask the breathers to breathe a little faster, a little deeper than usual, tying the inhalation and the exhalation into a circle of breath, shifting the attention from the head to the body and to the breath. Then we start playing powerful, evocative music from various native traditions or spiritual traditions, which was developed specifically to induce non-ordinary states. And then we just walk around and unless some special situations develop, people can really do it themselves. It is very much like profound meditation, enhanced by the music and by faster breathing.

Physical sensations emerge, emotions emerge, memories emerge, and the basic idea is to just focus your attention to what you are experiencing and continue to breathe. We recommend that people approach the session with what the Buddhists call “the beginner’s mind,” as if they did not know anything about the process, letting themselves be surprised by what happen from moment to moment. Whatever emerges, you experience it fully, you find ways of expressing it, and let it go, so that you are always ready for the next experience. In many instances the breathers are able to process the material that emerges without any external help; others need assistance from the

facilitators for a short time, exceptionally for extended periods of time. During the culmination of the session, we play powerful orchestral music (“breakthrough music”) and later shift to music that is emotional, soothing, and reassuring (“heart music”). Toward the end we play timeless, floating, meditative music. When people return to everyday consciousness, they draw or paint a mandala reflecting their experience.

Saturday evening, we have a processing group where people talk about their experiences with the help of the mandalas. Sunday morning, we usually have what we call Open Forum, where people can ask questions about their own process, about issues that transpired in the small groups, about the technique of the breathwork or its theory, and so on; we take the discussion in any direction that people are interested in going. We have two websites where people who would like to experience Holotropic Breathwork can find information about the workshops and the training: holotropic.com and stanislavgrof.com.

Jl: **That's fantastic. How do you compare the experiences in Holotropic Breathwork with psychedelic experiences, say, LSD or psilocybin? How are they the same, how are they different?**

SG: What they have in common is that they involve the same categories of experiences. In my first book, called *Realms of the Human Unconscious*, I described a new cartography of the psyche based on the observations from psychedelic research. This map had two domains in addition to the traditional model of the psyche that is limited to postnatal biography; I called them *perinatal* and *transpersonal*. I originally thought about this map as a description of all the different experiences that we can have when we take psychedelics, such as LSD, psilocybin, or mescaline. However, when we started doing the breathwork, we discovered that the same map could be used for breathwork sessions. And then as we worked with people who had spontaneous non-ordinary states, or “spiritual emergencies,” as we call them, we found out that the same cartography was applicable to these conditions. I should explain the term “spiritual emergency.” Christina and I believe that a certain significant subgroup of people who have so-called psychotic experiences is actually experiencing a crisis of spiritual opening. We wrote a book about it called *The Stormy Search for the Self*, and edited

another one called *Spiritual Emergency*. We found that the general cartography of the psyche can be used in all three of those situations: psychedelic sessions, sessions of Holotropic Breathwork, and also spontaneous episodes of non-ordinary states. And we can also apply it to shamanic work, to systematic spiritual practice, and other situations involving non-ordinary states.

So far I have talked about the similarities. The way we experience these categories of experiences is different in psychedelic sessions and in the breathwork. For example, the experiences induced by LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin are generally more visual, more colorful. In the breathwork sessions, the focus is more on the emotions and physical sensations. Another difference is that the efficacy of the breathwork is more restricted – you are limited as to how fast you can breathe, whereas with LSD you can take 100 micrograms, 200, 500 micrograms. Many people have taken 1,000 micrograms and more. Some LSD therapists raised the dose to 1500 and 2,000 micrograms. In the breathwork you cannot achieve a comparable intensification of the experience.

On the other hand, with breathwork you are much more in control; you have to work to get deeper into the experience. And if the experience is too difficult and unpleasant, you can decide to slow down the breathing. This is not something that is recommended, but you have the option to do it and some people appreciate this aspect of the breathwork. If you take a psychedelic substance, particularly a large dose, there is no good way of interrupting it. To administer tranquilizers in the middle of a “bad trip” is not really a good way of terminating the experience. It is actually a very bad practice. It freezes the experience in a difficult place, prevents its resolution, and can lead to years of psychiatric hospitalization.

There also certain differences between the effects of various psychedelics. For example, the whole group of psychedelics that are related to amphetamine (which some researchers prefer to call “entheogens,” literally awakeners of God within) - substances like STP, MDA, MDMA, MDMA (also called Ecstasy, or Adam) tend to be much less visual, more emotional, more philosophical. They are much less challenging psychologically than LSD; it is very rare to have a bad trip on something like Ecstasy. But, on the other hand, they are quite dangerous physiologically. They activate the sympathetic nervous system, accelerate the heart rate, and increase the blood pressure.

They can be physiologically dangerous, particularly, if people increase the dosage. By comparison, LSD is biologically extremely safe. People see more frequently parallels between the breathwork and Ecstasy rather than the breathwork and LSD, because of the less expressed visual aspect of the breathwork experience.

Jl: What about things that you see on something like DMT, where you go into another world, where it's almost like it has walls, it almost appears that there are solid shapes there. Is that something that is also found in breathwork?

If you take a large dose of DMT or 5-methoxy-DMT, you might have an experience in which all the levels that contain any forms disappear. You can lose contact with the reality around you, you might break through the biographical, perinatal, and archetypal domains and reach an experience which I believe is identical or similar to what the Tibetan Book of the Dead describes as Dharmakaya -the Primary Clear Light that seems to contain all of existence in an undifferentiated form. I described my experience with 5-methoxy-DMT in my book *When the Impossible Happens*. You really don't do it justice and don't even come close to describing it if you say it was a gigantic radiant source of light, transcending all polarities, such as demonic and divine, destructive and creative, and possessing immense intelligence and boundless creative power. And that entire experience happened within about half an hour.

Jl: Going back to Esalen, what were some of the more profound things that happened there? Who did you work with there? You mentioned Joseph Campbell earlier. Weren't you a friend of his?

SG: Esalen Institute is a very fascinating place. It is a real Mecca of the human potential movement. It is located in an incredibly beautiful natural setting, on the scenic Highway 1 between Carmel and San Luis Obispo, on a narrow strip of land between the Pacific Ocean and Santa Lucia mountains. It used to be a sacred territory of the Esalen Indians and Esalen's famous hot springs were their healing place. The name Esalen was the name of this Indian tribe, like the Sioux, or the Apache. In 1930s, when Highway 1 opened, Dr. Murphy from Salinas bought this property and built a motel there for people traveling up and down the coast. And the hot springs represented a special fringe benefit

for the guests. And then when Dr. Murphy died, his sons Michael and Denis inherited the property.

Michael was at the time deeply interested in Indian philosophy and in psychology; he had spent many months meditating in Sri Aurobindo's ashram in Auroville. He had no interest in running a motel. So he and Dick Price co-founded the Esalen Institute, the first human potential center, offering seminars and workshops led by pioneers who had developed new methods of psychological and spiritual work and bodywork. Many of these workshop leaders were people whose work was so new and avant-garde that it would not have had much chance in more traditional settings: universities, research institutes, and psychiatric hospitals. During the 47-some years of its existence, Esalen hosted some amazing people. In the early years it was Abraham Maslow and Aldous Huxley; later Fritz Perls came and developed there Gestalt Therapy, Ida Rolf lived there and practiced Rolfing, Moshé Feldenkrais was visiting frequently; Will Schultz, a pioneer of group therapy lived and practiced at Esalen for many years, Virginia Satir, the originator of family therapy, was a frequent guest, and the list goes on and on.

The 14 years I spent at Esalen represented a real intellectual feast. I would find it difficult to say who of the people I met there left the deepest impression on me. I had the great fortune fortunate to spend at Esalen two-and-half years with Gregory Bateson. Gregory was an extraordinary scientist and seminal thinker, who called himself a "generalist." He had made original contribution to a variety of disciplines – anthropology, psychology, cybernetics, systems theory, evolutionary theory, and many others. He was diagnosed with inoperable cancer of the size of a grapefruit sitting on his vena cava and was given four weeks to live. Michael Murphy heard about it and told him: "Why don't you come to die at Esalen? Esalen is a beautiful place, a perfect place to die." Gregory accepted the invitation and everyone, who had any healing ambitions, descended on him; whatever was responsible for that, he lived two and a half years instead of four weeks. And we both lived there at the same time and we were called Scholars-in-Residence. This gave me the unique opportunity to spend hundreds of hours in fascinating discussions with Gregory.

Another person who had a profound influence on me was Joseph Campbell, undoubtedly the greatest mythologist of the twentieth century or of all time, a brilliant

mind and a walking lexicon of world mythology. He came quite regularly to Esalen and he became another close friend of both Christina and myself. I learned from him a lot about the relevance of mythology for psychology. Christina and I had the great privilege to invite to the monthlong seminars that we organized at Esalen a number of other extraordinary people. My list would certainly include Fritjof Capra, Carl Pribram, Rupert Sheldrake, Lama Govinda, Al Huang, Huichol shaman don Jose Matsuwa, and many others.

Living at Esalen was also an amazing esthetic experience – living for fourteen years between and the Santa Lucia Mountains the Pacific Ocean, watching whales passing by, sea lions and otters playing in the water, and on the land Monarch butterflies traveling along the coast and resting at Esalen on the eucalyptus trees and in the organic garden.

Jl: In your books you often discuss Freud and Jung, and I noticed that you also mentioned neo-Reichian concepts. Would you discuss how Wilhelm Reich's orgasm theory effects your research into Holotropic Breathwork and psychedelics?

SG: Reich had enormous influence of the development of experiential forms of psychotherapy in the 1960s, when humanistic psychology was very popular. Reich brought into psychotherapy the emphasis on the body and on breath. Freud was very shy in that respect and he avoided physical contact; he wanted psychoanalysis to be a purely psychological process and so did the orthodox Freudians. For example, my training analysis lasted seven years; I saw my analyst three times a week and, during all this time, he never shook hands with me, because he thought it would contaminate the transference/countertransference relationship. Reich was very different. He believed that if you have a traumatic experience, the emotions and physical energies associated with it remain stored in your body - in the muscles and in the inner organs. He called it the *character armor* and to release it, he introduced into psychotherapy bodywork and breathing exercises. So, in that sense, there is a definite similarity between Reichian therapy and Holotropic Breathwork, because we work with breath and with the body.

But there the similarity ends; our theoretical orientation is transpersonal and Reich was strongly antispiritual. He believed that if you are a mystic it is because you are not able to have a full sexual orgasm and that you escape into religious fantasies because you

are sexually frustrated. He believed that people who have good orgasms are not interested in mysticism and that mystics do not have satisfactory orgasms. That certainly has not been our experience. We have actually observed that when people have psychedelic or breathwork experiences and resolve some critical psychological issues – particularly those related to the birth trauma - their sexual experience becomes much deeper, much more powerful in the orgasmic phase, but at the same time more loving, sensual, and spiritual in the post-orgasmic phase. They love to continue close physical contact after the orgasm, rather than considering sex to be over when the orgasm happens. So we see actually sexuality as being very closely related with spirituality. And this is, of course, reflected in Tantra, which

actually uses sexual union to achieve a spiritual experience. So that is a big difference between the work with Holotropic Breathwork or with psychedelics and the Reichian approach. But Reich was certainly an important pioneer who brought the body and breathing into psychotherapy.

Jl: A few weeks ago I had an interesting moment of synchronicity that I would like to mention. And then have you discuss some of your own work concerning synchronicity. I was doing an interview with Dr. James DeMeo, the author of *Sahasra*, who's one of the leading researchers in Reichian theory. And while I was on the phone with him (whom I hadn't spoken to on the phone for about two years) a friend called me to discuss DeMeo's work that I hadn't spoken to in more than a year. It was a bizarre moment of synchronicity. Could you talk about some of your own research into synchronicity and some you have experienced?

SG: In the course of my research, I became very fascinated by the phenomenon of synchronicity and a good part - maybe one third - of my book *When the Impossible Happens* consists of stories about very unusual synchronicities from my own life. The concept of synchronicity was brought into psychology by Carl Gustav Jung, who observed many very unusual coincidences in his life. These were not just ordinary coincidences, but coincidences of a particular kind. Situations, in which one part of the coincidence was an intrapsychic event, such as a dream or a vision, and the other one was an event in the material world, in what we consider "*objective reality*." For example, having a dream, and the following day having the thing that you saw in the dream actually happen. Jung's famous example involves a patient who was resistant to his

interpretations. When they were analyzing a dream featuring a golden scarab, something suddenly hit the window; Jung got up, walked to the window, and came back with a beautiful specimen of the very rare gold chafer beetle, the closest insect to a scarab that you can find in Switzerland. And when he showed it on the palm of his hand to his patient, this coincidence had such a powerful impact on her that it became a turning point in her therapy.

I have in my book a fascinating experience of synchronicity that I heard Joseph Campbell tell in one of his seminars at Esalen; coincidentally, it also involves an insect. The Campbells lived on the fourteenth floor of a high-rise building in lower Manhattan and Joe's study had two sets of windows. The first had a beautiful view of the Hudson River and the second one faced Sixth Avenue. The view of Sixth Avenue was not particularly interesting and so the Campbells seldom opened those windows, except when they were cleaning them. At the time this synchronicity happened, Joe was working in his study on the first volume of his World Encyclopedia of Mythology, called *The Way of the Animal Powers*, discussing shamanic mythologies of the world.

The section of the book he was working on focused on the mythology of the !Kung Bushmen from the African Kalahari Desert. The central figure in this mythology is the praying mantis Tuk-tuk. So Joe was surrounded by papers and pictures featuring the praying mantis. Suddenly, he had a strong impulse to go and open one of the windows that they seldom opened. He looked out, automatically turned his head to the side, and there - on the fourteenth floor of this high-rise building in Manhattan - was a large specimen of praying mantis. Joe said it looked at him and continued climbing up. So that is another example of synchronicity. It is difficult to imagine how the praying mantis got there in the first place but, in and of itself, it is possible. However, the connection between its presence in that location and Joe's emotional immersion in the stories about it, as well as his completely irrational and unexplainable impulse to go and open the window for no good reason, is quite amazing.

The phenomenon of synchronicity is so extraordinary that Jung waited twenty years before he dared to publicize it, because he knew it represented a fundamental challenge to the academic community; thinking in terms of linear causality is the cornerstone of scientific thinking. Everything that happens has a cause and has an effect. Western

science describes the universe as chains of causes and effects, of course, with the exception of the beginning, the cause of causes, where this type of thinking breaks down. So Jung took twenty years before he had enough examples and he wrote a very interesting essay entitled "*Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle.*"

In my book, I have given many extraordinary examples of synchronicity from my own life and from our work with clients. We have repeatedly observed that in the same way in which non-ordinary states increase the incidence of psychic phenomena, they also seem to significantly increase the incidence of synchronicity in peoples' lives. Many psychiatric patients describe remarkable synchronicities that occur in their everyday life. Since the philosophy of psychiatry is materialistic and the world is seen as chains of causes and effect, when patients start talking about these astonishing meaningful coincidences, psychiatrists see them as delusional misperceptions. The technical term for them is "*delusions of reference.*" It is used when patients perceive meaningful coincidences between external events and themselves, which are beyond all reasonable statistical probability. But it is exactly this astronomical improbability that is the essential characteristic of Jung's synchronicity.

Jl: You have done a significant amount of research into death and dying, and death and rebirth. What is your interest in that area and why is it important?

SG: As I mentioned earlier, I studied medicine because I wanted to become a psychoanalyst. And the conceptual framework of psychoanalysis is limited to postnatal biography. It emphasizes the psychological importance of nursing, weaning, toilet training, various psychosexual traumas, Oedipal and Electra complex, and other aspects of infancy and childhood. And I started using LSD because I was very dissatisfied with the practical efficacy of psychoanalysis. I hoped that LSD would accelerate and deepen the psychoanalytic process, which it certainly did. But when I was administering LSD in serial sessions, sooner or later every single client I worked with transcended the biographical level. The nature of their sessions changed dramatically. They started having experiences of being hopelessly trapped in a hostile environment, crushed, and choked; they were afraid they were dying, going crazy, and would never come back. And many of them recognized that they were reliving the experience of their biological birth, becoming with the fetus passing through the birth canal. This replay of birth was very

realistic and often involved certain specific elements that could later be verified, such as umbilical cord around the neck, use of forceps, breech birth, type of anesthesia, etc.

And what was very interesting was that these different experiences related to various stages of birth functioned also as windows or gateways into specific areas of the collective unconscious that were thematically related to them. For example, being stuck in the stage of birth when the uterus contracts, but the cervix is not yet open - which is a very unpleasant claustrophobic state - would on the deepest archetypal level be associated with images of hell. On a more superficial level, it would involve identification with people trapped in a similar situation, such as a prison, concentration camp, torture chamber of the Inquisition, or locked ward of an insane asylum. Reliving of the stage of birth when the cervix opens and the fetus struggles to pass through the birth canal would be associated with images of revolutions from different periods of history: "Enough of the oppression, we will mobilize and overthrow the tyrant, and we will all breathe freely again!" In a similar way, the reliving of the moment of birth brought also images of victory in revolutions or of the end of wars. And when people completed this process it would not be just the experience of being born biologically. They did not emerge into the light of the day or of the operation room. They encountered light that had numinous quality and was often associated with archetypal images of various blissful deities, particularly Great Mother Goddesses from different cultures. It was an experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth.

As I became more familiar with this experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth – including my own experience of it – I realized that it was probably the single most important element in the religious and spiritual history of humanity. The career of many shamans begins with a spontaneous visionary experience of death and rebirth. They travel into the underworld, are subjected to some agonizing ordeals, killed, and dismembered. This is followed by an experience of rebirth and magic flight to the supernal world, the solar realm. In this process, the novice shamans experience a deep connection with animals and with the forces of nature and they learn how to heal. Similarly, the rites of passage, ceremonies that many cultures of the world perform at the time of important biological and social transitions, revolve around the experience of death and rebirth. The initiates are isolated from the rest of the tribe and subjected to some powerful mind-altering procedure that induces a death-rebirth experience. This is

then interpreted in rites of passage as dying in the old role and being born into a new one. For example, in the puberty rites, the adolescents die as boy and girls and are born into adulthood. This experience of dying and being born is very compelling and convincing. After completing the rite of passage, these individuals are treated as adults, with all the rights and duties that come with it.

Another area where this experience plays a crucial role are the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, such as the mysteries of Inanna and Dumuzi, of Isis and Osiris, the Dionysian rites, the mysteries of Eleusis, and the Mithraic mysteries. As a result of the experience in these mysteries, the neophytes lost fear of death and profoundly changed their way of life. And the experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth played also an important role in the great religions the world. The Hindus have a state to which they refer to as "*dvija*," which means being twice born: the first of these is biological birth, the second one is the spiritual birth. From a psychological point of view, it means conscious processing of the trauma of birth, but it is simultaneously also a powerful spiritual opening. The "*twice-born people*" perceive and experience the world differently and they act differently; they have a different hierarchy of values, and different life strategy.

In Christianity we also have a similar concept of second birth, of "*being born again*." In the New Testament there is a wonderful scene involving Jesus and Nicodemus; Jesus talks about the need to be born again and Nicodemus does not understand what he means and how something like that would be possible. He asks: "Jesus, how can an old man like me be born again? Look at me, I am a big man, and look at the small pelvis of my mother, how can I be born again?" (John 3:4) And Jesus answers: "I am not talking about being born from flesh, I am talking about being born from Spirit and water. Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) So the experience of being reborn is a very significant element in Christianity, whether it happens in the full form which the Bible talks about or takes the form of an incomplete, "half-baked" experience, as it is the case with many "born again" people these days. This truncated rebirth does not result in spiritual opening and liberation, but leaves people stuck in a rigid pseudo-spiritual fundamentalist place.

Jl: Rick Doblin sent me a few questions he wanted me to ask you. He asks: What promising research from the past do you think should be resumed?

SG: Some of it is already happening. In five large American universities – Harvard, UCLA, Johns Hopkins, UCSF, and State University of New York – new researchers are now repeating the research we did with cancer patients, which was the most rewarding, most moving research we have done. To see how people with terminal cancer facing the ultimate, the imminence of death, can move psychologically to a completely different place – feel great emotional relief and lose fear of death – is really remarkable. And many of them can experience long-term alleviation of pain, even pain that does not respond to narcotic medication. Most of these studies with cancer patients use psilocybin, which does not have the bad name that LSD has and, at the same time, has similar beneficial effects if used properly. So it is really great that this research is returning; it was a great shame that for so many years psychedelic therapy could not be used in actual clinical practice, considering how beneficial this treatment can be in otherwise hopeless situations.

Researchers at John Hopkins repeated recently with strict scientific methodology Walter Pahnke's study of the Good Friday experiment; showing that psilocybin, the active alkaloid from the magic mushrooms of the Mazatecs, can induce mystical experiences. New and potentially very influential has been the research of Michael and Annie Mithoefer, who use MDMA (Ecstasy) in individuals with post-traumatic stress disease. And researchers at Burghoelzli, the psychiatric department of Zurich University conduct a large study of several psychedelic substances using the new amazing brain imaging techniques. And there are several other interesting psychedelic research projects in other countries of the world. Psychedelic research is very important also from a heuristic point of view, because it shows the human psyche in a completely new way. The term heuristic is derived from the Greek "*eureka*," (*Εύρηκα*), which means "I found it." We could use psychedelics as a tool for obtaining new knowledge, as a microscope or as a telescope of the psyche. I believe that if we study what is happening in non-ordinary states of consciousness and in connection with them – such as the remarkable synchronicities - it would lead to a revolution in psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy that would be comparable to what happened to physicists in the first three decades of the twentieth century when they had to move from Newtonian physics, first to Einstein's theories of relativity and then to quantum physics. I believe that, in a

sense, it would be actually a logical completion of the revolution that has already happened in physics.

And I would certainly love to see continuation of the studies on creativity. To be able to do sessions with accomplished artists – painters and musicians – and scientists who have high qualification in quantum-relativistic physics, cosmology, and other fields.

Jl: What research has never been done before that you think should be undertaken?

SG: The research of the effects of psychedelics on creativity has not really been done in a sufficiently systematic way. In the 1960s, James Fadiman, Robert McKim, Willis Harman, Myron Stolaroff, and Robert Mogar conducted a pilot study of the effects of psychedelics on the creative process, using administration of mescaline to enhance inspiration and problem-solving in a group of highly talented individuals, who were trying to solve a problem but had difficulties in finding the solution. This line of research certainly deserves to be explored on a large scale. Oscar Janiger studied the effects of LSD in a large group of painters; he let them paint a Hopi Kachina doll before and during their sessions. There exist also many informal, anecdotal reports related to the effects of psychedelics on creativity – the story of Francis Crick, Kary Mullis, the role in psychedelics on the development of the computer industry, and so on - but we need well-designed studies. This is, according to my opinion, the most fascinating and promising dimension of the psychedelic experience. Another research that I would like to see is to conduct comparative studies of people who were born by elected Caesarean section and people who were vaginally born to see how different their sessions would be. And also, how different types of birth influence the course of people's lives and are conducive to different forms of emotional and psychosomatic disorders.

Jl: How do we avoid triggering another backlash of the psychedelic 60s as research moves forward today?

SG: I think the situation today is significantly different from the 1960s. The hysteria concerning psychedelics has now subsided and many people who are taking psychedelics today are doing it in a much more mature and responsible way. Another

important factor is that individuals who are today in decision-making positions were on the campuses in the 1960s and they have a very different image of psychedelics and attitude toward them than the old generation had during the psychedelic revolution. The academic circles have also experienced many conceptual cataclysms and blows to old paradigm thinking and they might be less self-assured and more open to the revolutionary findings of psychedelic research. I think the most important thing is to do research in a responsible way and make sure that some of the people who are conducting it officially with the government's blessing, don't go astray and do crazy things. This was, of course, the case of Tim Leary's and, to a much lesser extent, the case of Ram Dass (Richard Alpert). There is also the possibility that as the situation in the world is getting progressively worse, people would be open to try some more radical approaches that hold some promise to alleviate it. Certainly those who experience psychedelics repeatedly in a responsible way, undergo a transformation that would certainly make survival of humanity more plausible if it could happen on a sufficiently large scale.

Jl: **Are you optimistic or pessimistic about humanity's future?**

SG: I am moderately optimistic, but this optimism is not based on my observation of what is happening in the world; that looks pretty gloomy, especially in the recent decade or so. My hope is based on the feeling that very likely significant things are happening on some other level which we do not directly perceive. For example, being from Eastern Europe I have been following closely what has been happening there. Had you told me ten days or two weeks before the Berlin Wall went down that Gorbachev would say: "You Germans can put down the wall and unite Germany and, as far as the Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Yugoslavians, and Romanians are concerned, you can have your freedom; we are not interested in controlling you anymore," I would have thought that you were crazy, because there was nothing happening in the world that gave any indication that this might happen. So I attach my hope to mechanisms, such as "the hundredth monkey," "the butterfly effect," or the possibility that inner work that people have been doing is changing the archetypal fields that form and inform the material reality.

Jl: How have you changed your model of the psyche as described in *Realms of the Human Unconscious* since you published that book?

SG: The cartography of the psyche I outlined there has changed very little. If you look at my much later book, *Psychology of the Future*, where I have a chapter on this cartography, you will see that it is essentially the same. In the original formulations, I already had all the basic elements – the COEX systems, the biographical, the perinatal, and the transpersonal domains with all the different types of experiences. Also the idea that consciousness is not the product of the brain, but something much more fundamental, was already quite clear in the late 1960s. So not much has really changed in the map itself. However, these days my primary emphasis is on archetypal dynamics rather than on postnatal biography, where I started, or on perinatal dynamics, where it was in the 1960s and 1970s. I have also realized that this map is not just a cartography of psychedelic experiences, as I originally saw it, but that it is a general map of the psyche applicable to many other situations. I also became very interested in ways of inducing non-ordinary states without psychedelics. What you can do with simple and natural means which are less likely to be targeted by administrative and legal restrictions, such as faster breathing, music, and bodywork. This fascinated me, because when I was working with LSD I thought that it was an exotic, amazingly powerful psychoactive substance that was very unique and could not be matched by anything else. To some extent it is still true but not quite as much as it was then. Over the years, we have seen many breathwork sessions that were in every respect as powerful as high-dose LSD sessions.

Jl: What is the most important idea that you would like people to take away from this discussion?

SG: I think the message I would like to send them is the fact that my everyday research of non-ordinary states of consciousness extended over more than half a century has convinced me about their great potential. I believe that they could become a very important part of our life, individually and collectively, if we could use them responsibly and respectfully like all the pre-industrial cultures did. All of them held these states in very high esteem and they created special situations in which people had the opportunity to experience them and get deep insights into normally hidden dimensions of reality.

This would greatly minimize the risks and maximize the benefits associated with consciousness-expanding methods, whether these would involve psychedelics or various non-drug means. I believe that the reason for most of the problems that we have today in the industrial civilization is that we lost genuine spirituality based on profound personal experiences under good, responsible conditions.

We have religions, but organized religions are not really of much help. They actually significantly contribute to the problems in the world. The differences between them are enough to cause bloody warfare. We are Christians, you are pagans, we are Muslims, you are Infidels, we are Jews, we are Goyim, we are Hindus you are Muslims, and so on. And frequently even the differences between the factions within these religions are enough for people to kill each other. There have been centuries of bloodshed between the Shiites and the Sunnis and between the Catholics and the Protestants. Religion should unite people; '*religare*' means to bind together again what was fragmented and that certainly cannot be said about organized religions today. But it certainly could be said about mystical spirituality based on personal experience, which is universal, all-inclusive, and all-encompassing. Mystics of all times get along just fine, it is the organized religions that get into this kind of internecine conflict. What we need in today's world is more spirituality, not more organized religion.

JI: We have been speaking with Dr. Stanislav Grof, famed LSD researcher and pioneer. Stan, would you like to discuss your books or websites, studies, or anything else you would like to conclude with.

SG: We have two websites. The first one of them is holotropic.com; this has the information about our training for Holotropic Breathwork facilitators and about forthcoming workshops. The second one is my personal website, StanislavGrof.com; it has much information that people might be interested in and download – a number of articles, interviews, and a link to our photo archive with pictorial history of transpersonal conferences, Esalen workshops, and our travels. Regarding the most relevant books to read, it would certainly be *Psychology of the Future*, that summarizes all my experiences from fifty years of consciousness research, then *When the Impossible Happens*, which is a book of personal stories, and a very comprehensive book on death which is called *The*

Ultimate Journey: Consciousness and the Mystery Death. And then probably from my own books also *The Cosmic Game*, which describes the most far out spiritual and philosophical insights that have emerged from my research. And then there are books that are co-authored by my wife Christina. Two of them are *The Stormy Search for The Self* and a compendium of articles that we edited called *Spiritual Emergency*. They describe new understanding of spontaneous episodes of non-ordinary states of consciousness and how to work with them. Christina herself wrote her own very interesting book on the mystical quest, attachment, and addiction, which is called *The Thirst For Wholeness*. We have written more books but I think these would be probably the most relevant titles to read.

Jl: And I personally also recommend listeners to read your LSD Psychotherapy. I thought that was a phenomenal book. Stan, I must say this has been one of the most amazing and enlightening talks I have done. I really appreciate your time. And I can't thank you enough for doing this.

SG: Jan, thank you very much for having me. When you have the website, let me know and we will make a link. And I would also appreciate to have a DVD copy of this interview, so that we can use it our training when I cannot come personally. I feel that this has been one of the most comprehensive interviews I have ever done.