

# SPEAKING FROM THE HEART: INTEGRAL T-GROUPS AS A TOOL FOR TRAINING TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

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*ABSTRACT:* This paper articulates the rationale for using integral T-groups, a modified version of the original T-group concept, in the training of transpersonal psychotherapists. Training in transpersonal psychotherapy involves a synthesis of psychology and spirituality. In the T-group experience, as we have modified it, students are encouraged to express their authentic truth in the context of compassion. Sharing authentic feelings leads to many positive outcomes, including diminishing defensiveness, eroding disavowal, and increasing interpersonal sensitivity, while deepening presence, expanding empathy, and opening the heart. Sharing interpersonal truth compassionately brings together the psychological and the spiritual in a concrete, personal way that makes it an important training tool for transpersonal therapists, as well as being a positive influence in both the students' growth and the culture of the training program.

Transpersonal psychology has for decades been immersed in researching and pioneering the importance of spirituality in understanding the whole human phenomenon. As clinical educators in a transpersonal graduate school, we have long been concerned with how best to train transpersonally-oriented psychotherapists. While this is a large and complex issue, in this paper we present one part of the answer that has emerged in our teaching over the past two decades: the development and use of integral T-groups, a modified version of the original T-group concept.

The three co-authors teach in the Integral Counseling Psychology (ICP) program at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), a free-standing graduate school in San Francisco. We have come to the conclusion that T-groups, particularly as they have been modified in our setting, provide rich training experiences for transpersonal psychotherapists.<sup>1</sup>

We situate this discussion specifically in the literature on transpersonal clinical education. Like many academic disciplines the clinical education of transpersonal psychotherapists warrants more attention. For example, Walsh and Vaughan (1993) suggest that training include conventional clinical training as well as training in spiritual systems, personal therapy, and spiritual practice. Scotton, Schinen, and Battista (1996) suggest training in various kinds of spiritual emergency as well as traditional psychiatric training for transpersonal residents, and Cortright (1997) suggests that education must include more focused training in behavioral, psychoanalytic, and humanistic-existential psychotherapies, in addition to personal therapy and spiritual practice. Boorstein's works (1996, 1997) emphasize the need for grounding in conventional therapy, especially psychoanalysis, as well as psychological and spiritual practices. Several articles in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* have touched on the issue (Murphy, 1969; Clark (Vaughan),

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1974; Hutton, 1994). Building upon this foundation, we offer an approach which can contribute to strengthening clinical education and training in the transpersonal arena.

### *Challenges of a Transpersonal Training Program*

One of the challenges in a transpersonal training program is to convey a transpersonal vision of the psyche, one that includes all of traditional psychology as well as the spiritual ground that supports our psychological existence. Another challenge is to do this in a way that is experientially powerful, i.e., working within a context of personal healing and growth. This means two things:

1. Psychological healing and development that lead to greater psychological integration and cohesion.
2. Increasing spiritual receptivity through practices that “open the door” to spiritual experience.

Traditional psychological models focus on our outer being only—our body-heart-mind organism—sometimes called our “lower nature” by religious traditions (Underhill, 1993). Spiritual traditions, on the other hand, tend to focus on the inner, spiritual ground or “higher nature,” which most people only rarely glimpse because of our insistent identification with our outer being (Aurobindo, 1971). Ending this identification with the surface self in order to contact the fundamental, spiritual ground of our being is the goal of many spiritual practices (Aurobindo, 1971; Underhill, 1993). Unfortunately, in their attempt to purify the outer ego or organism, spiritual practices often denigrate the psychological realm (Cortright, 2002; Welwood, 1984). Although there often seems to be a conflict between psychological and spiritual growth, for example through growing psychologically by fulfilling desire vs. growing spiritually by renouncing desire, a transpersonal perspective seeks to honor both.

One outcome of greater psychological integration that we hope to see in our students is increasing authenticity—more genuineness in their relationships, and expanded capacity for intimacy, vulnerability, and ability to enter into relationship with others in a deep and meaningful way. One outcome of spiritual practice we hope to see is a deepening of love and compassion. Transpersonal growth involves both—a deepening of authenticity and compassion. Where there are times in a T-group when authenticity and compassion coincide, very often there is a conflict between them, for example when someone feels put-down by another member. Rather than choosing to express one over the other, in our modified T-group setting we encourage students to hold both sides of this conflict in a dialectical tension. For reasons that will soon become clear, we have found that our groups are a way of exploring this dialectical tension and, at their best, achieving a higher order synthesis.

### *What a T-Group Is*

The T-group was developed by Kurt Lewin and his associates in the 1940's and flourished primarily in the eastern United States (Bradford, Gibb, & Benne, 1964).

Whereas the California encounter group (Schutz, 1973) emphasizes personal expressiveness, and the Tavistock group (Coleman & Bexton, 1975) emphasizes the learning of group dynamics within a psychoanalytic context, the T-group concentrates on interpersonal sensitivity, power dynamics, authority issues, and group development.

A T-group is a group that meets without a structured agenda. The leader's task is to help the group learn about itself and to help the members learn about their interpersonal styles. A T-group seeks to bring into the open the interpersonal underworld present in all groups. Attending to these emotional forces does not result in emotional chaos and conflict as most people fear but rather an increasing degree of closeness and loving unity, especially when conflict is brought into the open and explored sensitively and respectfully. As the group progresses and the trust level deepens, members become more self-revealing and willing to risk expressing themselves in vulnerable ways. Not every encounter has a happy ending, of course, but even unresolved conflict has much to teach when it is direct and above-board rather than ignored. Issues relating to authority and how the individual responds to group forces are also an important part of the learning.

Learning is facilitated when members can increasingly share their emotions and motivations in the here and now. The more transparent and honest members can be, the further the group goes. This means paying scrupulous attention to language so communication becomes more affectively revealing (Kahn & Kroeber, 1971).

### *A Modified T-Group*

There are three technical modifications in the traditional T-group that we have found make it more useful for our purposes in a transpersonal training program. The first, and most important, is we have an explicit value on truth in the context of compassion. The second is we do not make group dynamics a major focus. The third is we do not emphasize power or authority issues. Let us take each in turn.

In encouraging the students in our modified T-group to express their feelings toward each other, we ask that they speak the truth from their heart as fully as they can. This means *truth in the context of compassion*. Our experience is that with practice, each student can become more skilled at expressing her or his feelings directly, clearly, and compassionately.

The second modification involves de-emphasizing group dynamics. While traditional T-groups are not single-mindedly focused on group dynamics in the same way Tavistock groups are, learning about the stages of group development and group-level issues and interventions are an important part of standard T-groups. These group-level dimensions of group work are valuable and interesting, we believe, but from the perspective of training psychotherapists they are secondary. Naturally, we deal with these things when they arise in a group, but as part of our second modification we do not make them a focus of the group. One reason is time. We only have so much time together as a group, and we want to use this time as

efficiently as possible. Our observation is that the learning is more powerful when we keep the focus on the interpersonal exploration among the members. Additionally, by not focusing on group dynamics we de-emphasize the interpretive stance of the leader, which leads to the group becoming less leader-centered and more member-centered.

Third, traditional T-groups have an interest in exploring power and authority, particularly power differentials among the members and in relationship to the leader. This also can be interesting and valuable, but to make this a focus contributes to creating an overly leader-oriented group, rather than a member-centered group. In addition to not having this on the agenda of group learnings, we refrain from having the leader initiate encounters with group members. Although the leader responds fully when a member initiates an encounter with him or her, we find that fostering a member-centered group is best facilitated when the leader is responsive to encounters rather than actively initiates them.

### *Integral T-Groups*

We have come to call our groups integral T-groups for several reasons. We teach in the Integral Counseling Psychology (ICP) program at the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS), a program established by the school's founder, Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, along the lines of integral psychology. While the word integral has become fashionable, the phrase "integral psychology" was in fact coined in the 1940's by Indian psychologist Indra Sen (Sen, 1986; Cornelissen, 2002; Cortright, in press) to describe the psychology that emerges from Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga and integral philosophy. It was in this spirit that Dr. Chaudhuri used it in establishing the ICP program in 1973. Integral has come to be used in two main ways, general and specific. In its generic meaning it includes whole, holistic, psycho-spiritual, transpersonal, and even east-west. In its specific, brand-name meaning it embraces the lineage of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga philosophy with its more precise delineation of body-heart-mind-spirit.

Both of these usages emphasize the unity of spirit and matter, or psychology as a psycho-spiritual discipline. Integral yoga and integral psychology begin with *aspiration*, an aspiration for the Divine, an aspiration for the true consciousness, an aspiration for love and for a deeper, truer, more authentic level of being. This aspiration is the soul's call for the Divine, and it marks the beginning of the spiritual life. Our T-groups begin with this aspiration for love, for compassion, for a deeper ground of being from which to relate. Explicitly recognizing this aspiration to communicate compassionately as well as authentically makes these T-groups integral in this sense.

One of the thorniest problems in a transpersonal context is how to reconcile psychological and spiritual growth. Although a naïve transpersonal view sees all growth as contributing toward over-all psycho-spiritual development, when we look more closely we see that sometimes psychological and spiritual growth head in different, even opposite directions.

Nowhere is this more clear than in the interpersonal realm. Such spiritual concepts as “love thy neighbor,” “ahimsa” (non-harming) and “right speech” have on occasion been interpreted to mean that expressing anger is destructive or sinful. The division of our being into an earthly, “lower nature” and a spiritual, “higher nature” (Underhill, 1993) has had unfortunate psychological consequences when many religious teachings stress identifying with “higher,” “purer” feelings over “lower,” “impure” feelings. As many psychotherapists since Freud can attest, such judgments easily become a rationale for repression, resulting in intra-psychic conflict and psychological pain.

In our modified T-groups we hold a transpersonal view of the person that includes both “lower” and “higher,” psychological and spiritual, outer and inner, and an encouragement to transcend the dichotomies themselves. We encourage our students to speak from the heart. This statement, however, can mean many things, depending upon the context. In the early days of Esalen, for example, the California encounter group had a premier value on self-expression, with very little consideration for the person to whom one expressed oneself. Given the neurotic inhibition of those times, it can be argued that this was a healthy antidote. But the antidote came at a steep price: if a person got hurt or a relationship was fatally wounded, it was an unfortunate by-product. As Perls’ gestalt prayer put it: “If by chance we find each other, it’s beautiful. If not, it can’t be helped” (Perls, 1969, p. 4). Another way of looking at this kind of self-expression is that it expresses the lower or outer psychological self exclusively. It ignores the higher, inner, spiritual being we also are. (It is important to keep in mind that “lower” is not meant to be construed as “inferior.”)

Another way to understand the principal innovation of these modified T-groups is through the language of Hindu tantra, itself a philosophical foundation of integral yoga philosophy (Aurobindo, 1972; Chaudhuri, 1981). In the system of tantra the basis of the human body is a subtle body organized by energy centers called *chakras*. Each *chakra* represents a particular level or dimension of consciousness. The third *chakra* represents the function of power, the will to achieve, and one’s sense of personal power in the world. The fourth *chakra* represents the opening of the heart to love and spirituality. With their focus on the personal power that comes with being brutally honest and expressive, conventional T-groups can be thought of as third *chakra* T-groups. In contrast, the T-groups we have developed can be thought of as fourth *chakra* T-groups. These T-groups consciously aspire to manifest the loving energy of the fourth *chakra* while simultaneously taking up and including the personal truth and power of the lower *chakras*, so that authenticity is melded with loving self-expression.

This change can be conceptualized in the language of any of the traditional spiritual systems. In theistic traditions this is imaged as calling on the soul’s inherent love for the Divine and the creation (Tapasyananda, 1990). In Buddhist terms this involves finding the heart of compassion that lies at the center of consciousness (Hanh, 1996). In the language of integral yoga, this is the transforming process of psychicization, in which the energy of the evolving soul purifies and spiritualizes the surface self (Aurobindo & Mother, 1989). In the language of transpersonal psychology this can be understood as an integral synthesis of our surface psychological being and our spiritual ground.

## *What Students Can Learn in an Integral T-Group*

*How to Work with Defensiveness.* One of the most important abilities in learning and doing psychotherapy is non-defensiveness. Indeed, as clinical educators we have come to see defensiveness as one of the greatest obstacles to becoming a therapist that we find in our students. We define defensiveness as not fully letting in feedback that clashes with one's self-image. We define non-defensiveness as being open, truly open, to receiving and ingesting feedback. The ability to take in feedback is essential in this psychotherapy business, because being a therapist is an ongoing lesson in humility. As a seasoned therapist has joked, where else do you get to learn that you are wrong hundreds of times a day? If a student has to "be right," his or her learning gets sacrificed on the altar of ego. Learning and the need to "be right" travel in different directions.

Heinz Kohut (1977) saw defensiveness as the self protecting itself against the threat of fragmentation. The painful affects that accompany fragmentation, such as shame and anxiety, are defended against by attempting to ward off what seems to be causing it (not letting in feedback that conflicts with our self-image). When the self is protecting its very integrity, it has little capacity for learning or letting in something new. We can learn or we can defend, but we cannot do both at once. A key skill for any therapist is learning to get a handle on his or her defensiveness. Of course we all feel defensive at times. No one gets past this until reaching full enlightenment. But learning to tolerate the anxiety and shame that negative feedback stirs in us and open up in spite of it (rather than defensively acting to close down) is the key to learning.

We are on safe ground in assuming that defensiveness is what has characterized many, if not most, of the relationships the client has previously encountered, and that this is one of the reasons those previous relationships have not been healing ones. Thus, hard as it may be to come by, non-defensiveness is one of the main gifts we have to offer our client. In fact, it is possible to read some major theorists as implying that non-defensiveness is therapy's indispensable element (e.g. Gill, 1982; Kohut, 1984). This is especially apparent when a client is sharing his or her feelings about us. At such times defensiveness and empathy are mutually exclusive.

An integral T-group provides a fertile field for exploring and working with defensiveness. When students agree to participate in an integral T-group, they are implicitly assuring their group mates that they are open to feedback, and that they will try hard to receive it without arguing, explaining, refusing to listen, or counterattacking. They will not always succeed because the old habits are very strong, but an integral T-group becomes a good place to practice this valuable therapist's quality.

Suppose I am a therapist who believes that non-defensiveness is one of the best gifts I can give a client, and suppose a client expresses some negative feelings about me. His feelings might make me at least a little uncomfortable, frightened, hurt, or angry. (Hopefully, there is also another feeling: pleased excitement that we are getting somewhere, although I can not always count on that.) Suppose further, he goes on to relate an impression of me that does not fit with my self-image, or suppose he

criticizes me in a way which seems unfair or even off the wall. It would be tempting to straighten him out or at least protest. I could justify such a maneuver by telling myself it was important to keep him in touch with reality. But as a non-defensive therapist I hope I would do none of that. I hope I would solicit as many of his feelings and impressions as I could get. At the very least we would have moved the therapy along. But perhaps we would have done even more: Perhaps we would have generated some feedback for me, which, however painful, might turn out to be extremely valuable for my work and my personal growth.

Now none of this is easy to do. So how do we train ourselves to overcome our natural defensive tendencies?

Suppose, in a parallel manner, we are in an integral T-group and it is a fellow group member who expresses some negative feelings about me. His feelings might make me at least a little uncomfortable, frightened, hurt, or angry. Suppose further that he goes on to relate an impression of me that does not fit with my self-image, or suppose he criticizes me in a way which seems unfair or even off the wall. It would be very tempting to straighten him out or at least protest. (“That’s your problem, not mine!”) Here now is a chance to practice this new behavior I want to have in my repertoire as a therapist. Practicing this new behavior means I solicit as much of his feelings and impressions as I can. At the very least I will have practiced a difficult and important therapist’s skill.

At this point it is important to make clear the difference between being a member of a T-group and being with a client in the role of therapist. Being in a T-group means I am in a reciprocal relationship with my group-mates. There is a step open to me as a group member which many therapists would consider inadvisable in the consulting room: After having elicited as many of my group-mate’s feelings and impressions as possible, that is having received as much invaluable feedback as possible, then it would be generous of me to give him the same opportunity. I can do that by sharing my feelings (which might include discomfort, fear, hurt, or anger) and letting him practice non-defensive acceptance of feedback. Then, in a really good T-group, we both have an even further opportunity: We can practice our non-defensiveness as the group gives us both feedback. It should be stressed that working toward non-defensiveness is a lifelong psycho-spiritual practice, not something that we definitively achieve.

*The Eroding of Disavowal.* One of the greatest learnings of the T-group is the eroding of members’ *disavowal*. Disavowal is a defense mechanism that psychoanalytic self psychology considers primary in most neurotic disorders (Basch, 1988). In disavowal, we pretend that something or someone does not affect us as much as they really do. Its usefulness in most (dysfunctional) families is obvious. After decades of disavowal, most people are very out of touch with their feelings. Although many members enter the group believing that they can not possibly have feelings about the other group members until they know them much better, in fact there are powerful feelings operating from the first moments the group meets and which continue throughout the life of the group. As the group members’ awareness of their feelings for each other increases, their awareness of the very intense interpersonal underworld of daily life and psychotherapeutic life also expands.

*The Difference between Intent and Impact and the Implications for Relational Therapy.* One of the most interesting phenomena to be observed in an integral T-group is the relationship between *intent* and *impact*. Imagine for a moment that I have just said something which has hurt your feelings. You tell me I have hurt you. I am shocked; I was aware of no desire to hurt you. I just wanted to make sure you understood my position, so I said it forcefully. Now if we are not careful we could get into an argument about who is right. Perhaps we could even induce the group members to take sides. I could maintain that I am totally innocent and you are much too sensitive for your own good. You could maintain that you were not born yesterday and you know when someone is hurting you.

The intent/impact model says that there is nothing to argue about: we are both right. I am the world's leading expert on my intent. The only way you can know what my intent was is if I tell you. There is no way to argue against it. I am the authority. Similarly you are the world's leading expert on the impact my statement had on you. The only way I can know what impact I had is for you to tell me. There is nothing to argue about. You are the authority. We have each learned something about the other and about ourselves. So has the group.

Impact can be very different from our intent. I do not always appear to others the way I do to myself. Only I can know my intent, and you will never know it if I don't tell you. But only you can know the impact I have, and I will never know it if you don't tell me.

Our clients interpret our behaviors in ways that violate our expectations. It is tempting at such moments to suggest, however tactfully, that they are wrong, that they are distorting. An ever-increasing number of contemporary authors point out the dangers of yielding to this temptation (Gill, 1982; Kohut, 1977; Stolow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987). An integral T-group is an opportunity for us to learn that the other person's subjective response is every bit as correct as ours. Finally, it gives us an opportunity to become increasingly sophisticated about how we are perceived in the world. Since our clients are an important part of that world, this seems like worthwhile learning, and an integral T-group is a well-designed place to learn it.

As our field moves forward, an increasing number of therapists find it invaluable to have as part of their repertory the disclosure of their own feelings. This probably is not something to do very much of until a student therapist has had some flying time because it can be very tricky indeed. As we look at the trajectory of our field, however, especially recent developments in contemporary psychoanalysis that stress intersubjectivity and the relational nature of psychotherapy, we think eventually most therapists will want to have this in their repertory [for example, see Mitchell (1988) and Hoffman (1998)]. An integral T-group is designed to help learn how to do this, not just with compassion, but also with considerable sensitivity to the other person.

*Carl Rogers' Contribution.* One of the theoretical foundations of transpersonal psychology is humanistic psychology, and Carl Rogers represents one of humanistic psychology's most important teachers. Carl Rogers did not have a high opinion of most therapy training. He often said (for example, 1957) the only training he could



imagine that would really do a therapist any good was personal sensitivity training. That is probably a stronger statement than many therapists would agree with, but it served to convey Rogers' attitude. He believed that the success of a therapist depended on the degree to which he or she could embody *genuineness*, *empathy*, and *unconditional positive regard* for the client (Rogers, 1957). It did not matter to Rogers what brand of therapy was being practiced. Whatever technique the therapist was using, he thought those three attributes essential (Rogers, 1961). It is hard to know how to develop those three capacities in our students or in ourselves for that matter. One can teach theory and technique forever without necessarily increasing the student's human sensitivity. We have found that the T-group is a good training ground for psychotherapists since it is one way to develop the three qualities of *genuineness*, *empathy*, and *positive regard*. *Genuineness* means being in touch with our deepest feelings and attitudes, and somehow (whatever we may believe about explicit self-disclosure) letting them transparently show. *Empathy* means a sensitive tuning in to the experience of the other. *Positive regard* implies getting beyond the ego reactions which might be stirred by the superficial behaviors of the other (behaviors which are often irritating or frightening), and finding our way to a clear view of the person inside those behaviors. It might be thought of as a humanistic precursor to the spiritual and transpersonal emphasis on compassion and love. Rogers thought that therapists must be *genuine*, or, as he sometimes said, "congruent." That means they must have ongoing access to their own internal process, their own feelings, their own attitudes, and their own moods. Rogers believed that therapists who were not receptive to the awareness of their own flow of feeling and thought would be unlikely to help clients become aware of theirs. While we are aware that there may be therapists who focus on the client's internal process as a good way to avoid the pain and anxiety of looking at their own, Rogers taught that this is a recipe for disaster. He taught, and we agree, that becoming a therapist means taking on an immense responsibility for facing oneself.

In most of us there are significant obstacles to genuineness. We live in a world where genuineness is neither encouraged nor welcomed. Like our clients, we have learned to fear and to suppress our true selves. Like our clients, we often can not discover what we are feeling. Like them we have little opportunity in our everyday lives to find out if indeed self-awareness is as dangerous as we fear it is.

In an integral T-group we are encouraged to get in touch with our feelings and to share them. For most of us it is about the only activity in our week which asks this of us. All the rest of the time we have so much else with which to concern ourselves that we simply do not have the luxury of being able to devote ourselves to practicing this sort of self-awareness. Further, for most of us there is no other situation in which we can be relatively certain that honest self-expression is really welcome. In an integral T-group honest self-expression is actually *invited*, thus providing us with a place to practice. Then, hopefully, in the rest of our lives, and particularly with our clients, genuineness will be somewhat more available.

An integral T-group is designed to promote empathy. Empathy means tuning in to others, discovering the way the world looks to them, and learning to see it as they do. When successful, the integral T-group gives us an opportunity to learn the feelings and thoughts of the other—feelings and thoughts which under different

circumstances there might be no appropriate context to reveal. So the group can teach us a good deal about tuning in to other people.

The importance of empathy is hard to overestimate. Rogers was certainly not the only author to emphasize this attribute, and recent developments in psychotherapy, particularly Kohut's self psychology, place empathy at the very center of the therapeutic process.

*Sharing Truth in the Context of Compassion.* Because speaking involves the most external part of us, we can react quickly and thoughtlessly before we even realize what we have said. Most of the time our interactions with others are fairly automatic. Even when we are being clever or amusing, there is often a predictable and mechanical quality to our interactions.

In the T-group we begin by bringing as much presence as we can to our interpersonal world. We begin with an aspiration to communicate as fully as possible our experience in the group. In a transpersonal context, this means expressing not only the dark, shadow side of ourselves, our anger, fear, jealousy, lust, distrust, etc., but also our more fundamental desire to reach out, to connect, to love. When we include our deeper, ultimately spiritual, nature of love and compassion, it profoundly changes how we express ourselves.

When we express the truth of our anger in the context of compassion, not only are we in a different relationship with the person to whom we are speaking, we are in a different relationship to our feelings and inner experience. If we identify only with our anger, we become anger and this fills our experiential field. But when we are also able to include our deeper, more inward aspiration for love and compassion, when we can sense a deeper center of peace and affection, then our anger is only part of our experience rather than dominating the entire field. Our anger changes in this larger context, as do the expressive possibilities. We can then express our anger clearly and directly rather than acting it out in some way that hurts the other person.

The great danger, of course, is spiritual by-passing. Spiritual by-passing comes in two forms: a rationale for repression or a rationale for acting-out. Repressive spiritual by-passing tries to transcend a feeling but merely results in holding it down and in. Acting-out spiritual by-passing uses spiritual ideals to justify destructive behavior.<sup>2</sup>

What is essential here is wholeness, to identify not only with our "higher," more inward feelings but also our "lower," "negative" feelings. This leads us away from either repressing or acting out our negative feelings by hurting or putting down the other person to being more direct in expressing our feelings. Much of normal interpersonal communication consists of a constricted expression of our feeling life where a person defensively either represses unacceptable feelings or acts out feelings in a destructive way (for example, "You dumb bastard! Can't you think about anyone else but yourself?" which angrily puts down the other person). In an integral T-group we strive for an expanded, more psychologically healthy response: being able to both contain a feeling and express it directly and clearly (for example, "I'm really angry at you and want to say something to hurt you! When you do X, I feel enraged!"). This does not mean suppressing, repressing, or cathartically acting out

our feelings but being clear and peaceful inwardly, though we may be shaking with intensity on the outside. Even when we cannot do this perfectly, our simple aspiration to do so can make all the difference.

Rogers' notion is that it is very hard not to feel positive toward someone you know really well. "Really well" does not mean merely spending a lot of time with her or him. There are people who tempt us to say, "The more you know them, the more you learn to dislike them." We suggest Rogers would likely reply: "You don't really know them. You only know their pathetic defensive behaviors. Some of yours and mine do not look so lovely either when you can only see *them*. If you could look beneath those behaviors and see the lonely, frightened child, I think you might feel differently." A T-group can become the place where we are permitted to look beneath.

To transpersonalize Rogers' notion of positive regard, it is important for therapists to be able to hold clients in a superordinate loving compassion. Superordinate implies that though the ever-changing flow of feelings may well include irritation or worse, all of those feelings are surrounded and contained by loving compassion. Since we are not saints we can not always grasp this; repeatedly we lose it and recapture it. Just as in dealing with countertransference, the task is to shorten the time it takes us to recognize a countertransference issue, so here the task is ever to shorten the periods of time during which we misplace our compassion.

This certainly is one of the major *koans* of our craft. On the one hand we are to be in touch with each subtle feeling which flows through us; on the other hand we are to be in a condition of loving compassion. Our changing emotions are an indispensable source of data. So we are stuck with the *koan*. There is a dialectical tension between *authenticity*, the truth of our personal reactions, and *compassion*, our basic, loving relation to the world. Over and over in an integral T-group we are faced with this. Other members can frighten or anger or repel us. We are encouraged to allow ourselves to be in touch with each of these feelings as they pass through us. But the group also affords opportunity for these other members to reveal aspects of themselves that underlie the frightening or irritating behaviors, aspects which enable us to see their basic humanity and vulnerability. In this process, the walls around our hearts begin to melt, and we can connect more deeply with our loving center within.

Our integral T-group approach is based on the assumption that our deepest nature is love, compassion, and empathic connection to others. Bringing this awareness into our interactions causes a fundamental shift in our perception in which anger, for example, however intense it may be, is seen as a more superficial part of our experience. This shift in our relationship to anger gives it a different meaning. We then naturally take better care of our relationships, and anger more easily assumes its rightful function as an emotion that seeks for contact in order to overcome a frustrating obstacle. In psychoanalytic parlance this is the capacity for "neutralization," the ability of the ego to tame the primal energies of the id and make them acceptable to society. But while neutralization may appear this way from the superficial view of the self, from a transpersonal perspective neutralization is an incomplete concept, for it fails to recognize the deeper, spiritual foundation of both ego and id. It is this spiritual ground of loving compassion that gives us some purchase on our anger, a spaciousness that allows us to be less reactive to anger's seductive impulse to hurt.

The following vignette is emblematic of encounters in our integral T-groups and presents a concrete example.

*Marie and Elena entered graduate school at the same time and found themselves together in every first-semester class. Marie quickly developed a strong antipathy to Elena. She found her a conceited show-off. They had one or two mildly unpleasant encounters and then stayed away from each other. In the next semester, Marie was mildly dismayed to find herself in a Group Process class with Elena. She resolved to keep her distance, but mid-way through the semester Elena said to her, "I feel very uncomfortable around you, Marie. I'm afraid you really dislike me, and I don't know why." Marie was not altogether unprepared for this. As she had thought about her feelings for Elena all semester, she had been asking herself if there was not some irresolvable conflict between truth and compassion. She took a deep breath and said, "I appreciate your approaching me. You're right. All year I've been aware of disliking you and feeling judgmental of you. Sometimes when you take up a lot of space in class I get really angry at you. It has happened in this class. I'd resolved to keep away from you and keep my anger to myself. I would have if you hadn't talked to me." She paused. "I realize I don't really know you at all. I just see some surface behaviors that make me angry. I'm a little afraid to look at why you trigger me so. If you're willing to pursue this with me, I'd find it very helpful."*

*In the ensuing conversation they carefully explored their history with each other and their feelings for each other. It was relieving and illuminating for both of them, and a key moment in the development of the group.*

We work and rework this dialectical tension between authenticity and compassion to ever-higher levels of synthesis throughout our lives. Including the dark and the light in our interpersonal experience then becomes an important part of a contemporary psycho-spiritual practice, a quest for authenticity that is loving and empathic.

*The Language of Transformation.* Language reflects the consciousness using it. In working with ourselves and our clients to bring about a psycho-spiritual transformation, it is important to use language that reflects the shifts in our inner experience. This means being able to use language that is grounded in ever deepening subjectivity.

This is certainly in keeping with the postmodern trend that moves communication away from "objective facts" toward more personal, relational modes of discourse. Just as neurotic communication moves toward distancing and intellectualizing, language that reflects psychological and spiritual growth moves toward embracing our experience. It tends to be centered more in subjective and intersubjective experience, rooted in feelings, empathic, and relational. In this, discovering the difference between cognitive and affective ways of speaking is essential.

After all, therapists share with the general population considerable confusion about the difference between a thought and a feeling. All of us are prone to saying, "I feel that . . ." followed by an opinion or an attitude that reveals nothing about our emotional state. A central T-group goal is helping group members explore this distinction.

An important component of therapist's empathy is identifying and responding to the client's *affect*. Stolorow and his colleagues (1987) borrowed the term *affect attunement* from Daniel Stern (1985) and propose that essential to the healing process is the therapist's capacity to recognize, distinguish, and respond appropriately to the client's distinctive affect states. This requires, on the one hand, considerable sensitivity to the difference between thoughts and feelings, and, on the other hand, alertness to the affect which may underlie and inform the client's narrative.

An integral T-group is particularly suited to teaching this sensitivity and this alertness. We might think of alertness to underlying affect as a figure-ground problem. In everyday relating, the narrative content is figure and the underlying emotion is background, whereas in integral T-groups the primary medium of exchange is emotion. Thus, there occurs a figure-ground reversal where members are encouraged to treat the emotion as foreground and put the content into the background. By highlighting and encouraging emotional interchange, the integral T-group becomes a way of training therapists to search for and attend to the affective flow of their clients. This focus gradually expands students' language of emotional experience.

Integral T-groups teach us how subtle and complex feelings can be. When you speak harshly to me I am likely to assume you are angry and that is all there is to it. But in a safe group you may find it possible to let me know the fear or hurt (or whatever) that underlies your anger. Learning about the complexity and subtlety of feelings certainly ought to enhance one's capacity for affect attunement.

### *An Interpersonal Meditation*

Krishnamurti often remarked that the central spiritual issue facing every human being was finding "right relationship." Integral T-groups are a medium for exploring this. We have come to view the integral T-group's exploration of the interpersonal underworld as a kind of interpersonal meditation group. In this group we pay exquisite attention to the feelings and motives of interpersonal relating and share these with the other group members. Like a mirror in which we see ourselves, speaking out loud our experience helps other group members become progressively aware of new levels of feelings and motives within them. It becomes a practice that combines both psychological and spiritual methods and values.

There are many reasons both our faculty and students have come to believe the integral T-group experience is important in training transpersonal therapists. It helps create an *ethos* in our graduate program, a culture of honesty and authenticity, of relating in a loving yet real way. Such an atmosphere of openness and direct communication among students and faculty is highly conducive to learning. In addition, there is a good deal of personal growth in which students learn life-skills that are important in their personal lives. In this alienating society in which we live, where relationships are no longer stable or lifelong but are ephemeral and ever shifting, being able to establish meaningful relationships more directly and quickly is a very helpful ability. But the over-arching rationale is that integral T-groups bring together psychology and spirituality in a way that is concrete and personal. They are a fertile training ground for therapeutic skills, and in these integral T-groups our daily life and relationships form the soil from which psycho-spiritual transformation emerges.

## *Challenges and Future Directions*

We have found that integral T-groups are very powerful, transformative experiences for almost all of our students. There are a very few students, however, who are quite threatened by the intense interactions of the group and keep a low profile in the group. We hope to become more skilled at reaching these students. Another danger is when outside political movements come into the group and jeopardize the ground rules of communication. For example, diversity issues regularly arise in our groups. Here the challenge is to maintain a compassionate stance without denying the reality of conflict.

Our hope in writing this article is that clinical educators in transpersonal training programs who have been trained in running T-groups will consider offering T-groups modified along the lines we have here described. One direction for future research would be to systematically monitor how this kind of communication can be successfully taught, not just in integral T-groups training transpersonal therapists, but to the general public. Perhaps the earlier this training is begun, the better, but future research must explore at what grade level this is possible—middle school, elementary school, pre-school?

Finally, we see this work in the larger context of consciousness evolution. To return to the language of tantra, it is not just conventional groups or training that are mired in third *chakra* concerns but much of this world. The third *chakra* intoxication with power results in massive destructiveness, which is being played out in myriad ways across the planet. To take one glaring example from today's headlines, whether power is wielded by terrorists or the governments that fight them, no resolution can come until both sides begin listening to each other. Only when power is subordinated to and subsumed by the fourth *chakra* guidance of love will there be any chance for harmony in the world. Consciousness evolution occurs one consciousness at a time. In this way we hope such efforts contribute to making this world a better place.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> To briefly summarize the context for this article, all three co-authors trained at National Training Laboratories (NTL) and one was a NTL trainer. Teaching T-groups in the ICP program began twenty years ago by one co-author, and 15 years ago another co-author began using T-groups as part of a CIIS counseling center training with first year transpersonal therapists. While the explicit transpersonal focus in these T-groups emerged over time, in the past several years it has become increasingly explicit. The graduate students in our program range in age from mid-20's to 40's but tend to cluster around the early 30's. Some have extensive previous counseling and group experience and some have very little. Although a group course is required for all students, about half of the program's 150 students choose the integral T-groups and half choose a mixture of different approaches. One of the two program counseling centers uses integral T-groups as part of the year-long training; it trains about 20 students per year.

Approximately two hundred students have now been trained by us, and our conviction that integral T-groups are useful for training transpersonal therapists is supported by different data sources. These include formal class evaluations, class discussions, feedback in the clinic about training, feedback from supervisors and supervisees, and interviews with alumni of the clinic, many of whom have reported that the training in the modified integral T-group approach was the single most valuable part of their training.

<sup>2</sup> In an apparent analogue to what we are proposing, Masters, (2000) suggests "heart-anger." Our first impression was the hope that Masters shared our view. However, a more careful reading revealed major differences. Whereas Masters holds out his approach only for advanced meditators (p. 45), we find students at all levels are able to benefit from integral T-groups. More importantly, Masters does not make a distinction we see as crucial, namely the difference between acting-out feelings vs. directly and clearly expressing feelings. In describing the three possibilities of anger-in, anger-out,

and mindfully held anger (with “heart-anger” as a fourth incorporating the best of each), anger is either: a) held in, b) cathartically released, c) mindfully contained, or d) mindfully expressed, which does not involve “any lowering of the flames or any muting of the essential voice of the flames” (p. 49).

We are suggesting another possibility: modulating and at times significantly toning down anger so its destructive force is not *acted-out* but can be *expressed* clearly. The failure to distinguish between acting-out vs. expressing clearly leaves some form of cathartic release as the only alternative to holding in. As an exemplar of “heart-anger,” Masters offers a scene in which Gurdjieff angrily unloads on and humiliates one of his students. While there may be many interpretations of this, Gurdjieff excoriating his student does not appear to us to be an exemplary way of expressing anger. We have a different position and are suggesting an alternative—fully feeling an emotion (e.g. anger) and compassionately modulating its expression so it is *not* acted-out but *expressed* clearly, directly, and authentically.

Further, central to our approach is empathic awareness of the impact of our self-expression on the person we are speaking to. We want our communication to be an invitation to further engagement and for the person we are addressing not to feel diminished in any way. Humanely and respectfully expressing feelings in a way that keeps the channel of communication open occurs more through modulating the prosody of the exchange rather than the content, i.e., it is expressed more through the tone of voice, inflection, the energy of the exchange than the words.

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