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## **TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY FACILITATING THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION IN OUTDOOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION**

Journal of Experiential Education, 12 (3), Fall, 1989



This paper presents findings by the author from 19 years experience as the leader of an outdoor retreat program called Wilderness Vision Quest. It discusses explicit ways in which outdoor experiences can be enhanced to provide significant moments of personal growth, spiritual renewal, and psychological transformation for participants. Research on the different functions of the left and right sides of the brain is presented as it relates to the need for balance between adventure related activities and introspective processes to gain the greatest value from treks into nature. The field of Transpersonal Psychology is introduced; rituals and spiritual disciplines are mentioned which have been used throughout time to provoke transformative experiences in nature; and "Fascinations" is detailed, a process which employs specific methods to facilitate deep and creative contact with one's self, with others, and with the natural world during such adventures.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. Thoreau

As experiential educators, we are challenged to teach people how to live deliberately, to confront the central facts in their lives, and to learn what they can about themselves, each other, and the natural world. Many of us do this through outdoor adventure programs. We guide people on journeys which often lead to personal growth, positive change, and new, more effective ways of thinking and behaving. From the highest point of view, it could be said we are called to facilitate a process of transformation for those in our charge.

This article examines our role as agents of transformation. We will consider the need to strike a balance between adventure based activities and inner directed processes to help our clients gain the most from their experiences outdoors. The field of Transpersonal Psychology is introduced, along with research on consciousness and how the brain operates, in an attempt to understand the process of transformation. Rituals and spiritual disciplines are mentioned which have been used throughout time to provoke transformation in nature; specific methods and techniques for developing latent human resources are outlined; and an 11 step process for facilitating transformation, called "Fascinations", is discussed in some detail.

## TRANSFORMATION

Many needs can impel us toward contact with the natural world. We may need a change of pace from the routines of our daily lives. We may need to relax and release our stress and tension. We may need the stimulation of beauty, adventure, or wonder. We may need to get back in touch with who we really are inside. We may need to be renewed. These are spiritual needs. When we meet them, we empower and enhance our sense of meaning, enthusiasm, energy, and spirit for living. Nature can have a profound impact on the human spirit even if we are uneasy or unable to identify spiritual growth as a motivating reason for our trips into wild country.

Our experiences in nature can be powerful, educational, exciting, significant, and touch us in many ways, but in what way are we transformed by them? The concept of transformation is complex, and can convey a wide spectrum of meanings. At the low end, it can imply a simple change in form or energetic state. Water is transformed into steam. It can be transforming to breathe clean air, to rigorously exercise, to experience a state of balance, wholeness, and well-being. At the mid range, transformation can imply new growth, as when birds molt and grow new feathers, or when we get new insights and understanding about our attitudes and behavior. At the high end, however, it can imply metamorphosis--a permanent shift to a higher level of operating. A seed transforms into a living, growing plant. A caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. We are transformed by love. In this paper, we will wonder about transformation in its highest sense.

Adventures in nature may change us for awhile, but all too often, when we return to our normal lives, our roles, masks, and personality patterns assert themselves again, reform and reknit. Steam easily condenses back to its watery origins. Much of the positive energy generated on outdoor adventures

dissipates in time, leaving only memories behind of the fun, difficult, or exciting adventures we may have had outdoors.

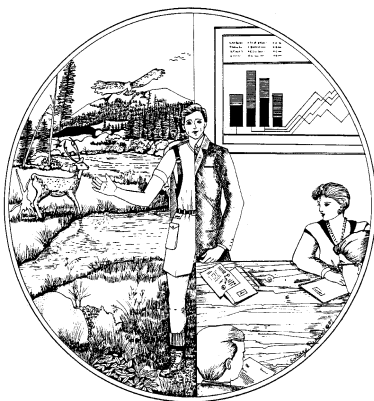
Transformation is a delicate and fragile process not easy to achieve, and there are some principles which underlie it. The metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly must happen at just the right time, must take place within the safety of a chrysalis, must be directed by an internal guiding principle, and involves a fundamental restructuring of its basic form. Right timing, safety, and an inner guiding principle must also be involved if a comprehensive restructuring of basic patterns within the human psyche are to occur.

Our clients must be ready and willing to experience transformation. Wilderness and back country settings--free from many of the cultural and social influences of the regular world--can offer an ideal context or chrysalis for transformation to take place, although a host of intervening factors--i.e. unusual environmental conditions, contact with unknown individuals or groups, fear, injury, illness--can interrupt or short circuit the process.

And transformation, to a very significant degree, must be guided by an internal principle unique to each person, not simply forced from the outside. We may not have the time, the knowledge, or the expertise to help our clients connect with or follow their inner guidance. Where can we go to study these issues and questions? How can we learn to facilitate a process of transformation in outdoor experiential education?

## TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In reaction to a culture which had become too rational and outer directed, a "counter culture" began to emerge in this country in the 1960's. This movement was characterized by an increased interest in the dimension of depth and in altered states of consciousness. A large number of people were attracted to this movement in the hope to find the "true," to discover the "self," to experience an ecstatic "mystical union," to feel the "other dimension," to achieve psychological peace beyond time-and-space transcendence, and to attain "real knowledge" (Jain, 1973).



Important insights into the process of transformation are emerging from a field called Transpersonal Psychology (Tart, 1975; Walsh, 1980). There is a drive toward self-actualization implicit within all life forms (Maslow, 1968). Abraham Maslow, the man who brought us the concept of self-actualization, also coined the term 'transpersonal' in a letter to Sutich in 1968.

The main reason I'm writing is that, in the course of our conversations, we thought of using the word "transpersonal" instead of the clumsier word "transhumanistic" or "transhuman." The more I think of it, the more this word says what we are all trying to say, that is, beyond individuality, beyond development of the individual person into something that is more inclusive than the individual person or which is bigger than he is...(Sutich, 1976)

In Latin, trans means "on the other side of", as implied in the words 'trans-Atlantic' or 'trans-continental'; or "above and beyond" as implied in the word 'transcend.' In Latin, persona means "mask". At the broadest level, then, Transpersonal Psychology attempts to help us:

1. Understand how to get above our personalities so we can see them clearly, understand their origins and dynamics, integrate their functions, and transform them when possible;
2. Look on the other side of our masks, roles, and patterns to discover what is hidden, blocked, or defended within us;
3. Develop our latent human resources;
4. Consciously play roles in life that manifest our deepest values, bring into the world our best talents and abilities, and thereby live more meaningful, productive, wise and loving lives (Brown, 1986 «1»).

To understand the dynamics of transformation, Transpersonal Psychology investigates those situations, methodologies, and events which have the greatest impact on the human psyche. It studies the effects of meditation and yoga, trance and mystical states, rituals, rites-of-passage, altered states of consciousness, profound grief, the near-death experience, the out-of-body state, the use of psychedelic substances, psychic phenomena, and other deviations from normal levels of awareness. Transpersonal Psychology attempts to distill from these studies an understanding of the principles which underlie transformations of consciousness, and promotes the wise, careful, and appropriate use of methods which can facilitate the process of transformation. (Tart, 1986; Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1987; Grof, 1988).

Campbell (1968) says it is a "call to adventure" which alerts us to the fact that transformation is necessary, possible, or imminent. Our response to this call can initiate us into an ever larger world view. He calls radical psychological transformation the Death/Rebirth process, and defines three important steps that must be honored to ensure the process has a positive and lasting effect: separation, initiation, and return.

In psychotherapeutic terms, these steps might be called preparation, exploration, and integration. Transformation requires us to be willing and prepared to set aside our roles, take off our masks, and explore our inner depths. It requires us to be willing to explore these depths in new ways through the use of explicit methods and techniques (to face our fears, for instance, to release our emotions, to awaken new modes of perception, to have the primal forces of nature move powerfully through us). And transformation requires us to take responsibility for the new things we learn about ourselves and integrate our new insights and energy in daily life.

Transpersonal Psychology is being increasingly applied in many fields of human endeavor--education, therapy, spiritual direction, art, and organizational development (Brown, 1986 «2»). Practitioners employ explicit methods and techniques to awaken, develop, and bring on-line specific human resources such as imagination, intuition, creativity, inspiration, and insight (Ferrucci, 1982; Vaughan, 1989). Some of these methods and techniques will be discussed later in this article.

## TRANSFORMATION IN OUTDOOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

As experiential educators, we are concerned about the education of the whole person--body, mind, and spirit--and attempt to help develop new resources within individuals, organizations, and groups. Many

outdoor oriented programs employ challenge-adventure activities as a primary way to achieve these goals, and this work represents a truly important evolution beyond the primary focus of contemporary education--the development of the intellect.

More than 400 colleges and universities in the United States offer courses in adventure education, and training in the development of outdoor leadership skills. Thousands of organizations conduct programs in natural environments, and the use of wilderness for personal growth, therapy and education is growing at a phenomenal rate. While the scientific evidence is slim, findings from some studies of these programs document small, but statistically significant increases in self-esteem, improved self-concept and self-awareness in many participants, and a reduced control orientation toward situations and the environment (Hendee & Brown, 1988).

There are a multitude of reasons which may explain why such increases are not larger, including methodological research factors, difficulties in program implementation, organizational constraints, etc. Factors which are receiving greater emphasis, and which tend to increase the power and effectiveness of adventure-challenge activities, include the value of debriefing after program activities, journal writing, and an increase in the use of metaphor and play (Bacon, 1983).

This article suggests that outdoor programs might provoke an even greater increase in self-esteem, improved self-concept and self-awareness, and facilitate even greater transformations, if they were to more frequently use methods and techniques for awakening deep levels of awareness and exploring higher states of consciousness.

## CONSCIOUSNESS

What is consciousness? Webster defines consciousness as the awareness of one's thoughts, feelings and impressions. But who, or what is conscious? It is the 'Self' within us that is conscious (Perry, 1953; Assagioli, 1965; Eastcott, 1973). The brain, which is the organ of awareness, is divided into two hemispheres, left and right.

Neuro-physiological research indicates that brain functions are, to a significant extent, localized in particular regions, although there are also strong communication links and integrative functions across regions. An important on-going issue and debate in neurological and cognitive psychology is the extent to which different brain functions are lateralized between these two hemispheres. Although there are divergent views among researchers, there is an extensive body of research and theory which indicates that each side of the brain has different functions (Ornstein, 1986).

The lateralization approach suggests that the left side of the brain perceives information one discreet piece at a time, and seems to control the rational, logical, analytical, and linguistic functions of the Self. These levels of awareness help us collect and understand information, communicate what we have experienced with one another, and get around in the world. The right side of the brain perceives patterns, intuitively how things connect together, and seems to control the receptive, musical, symbolic and imaginative functions of the Self. These levels of awareness help us experience the rich subjective inner world of feelings, meaning and values.

## BRAIN RESEARCH

An interesting range of research supports the lateralization hypothesis. For example, a number of psychoanalytic studies were made on 12 patients who had undergone operations involving the removal of the corpus callosum--a mass of white nerve fibers that connects the left and right cerebral hemispheres. All patients showed the same striking poverty of dreams and flatness of description seen in many psychosomatic patients (Hoppe, 1977, 1978). Cut off from fantasy, gestalt perception, dream material and intuition (by surgery, repression, education...) the left brain may be unable to express feelings or describe imagery.

Watzlawick (1978) carefully analyzed the "Elements of Therapeutic Communication", and concluded that the right cortical hemisphere, which synthesizes and perceives pattern, is the home of the individual's 'world image'--the subjective way he constructs, and then responds to, reality. Yet psychotherapy inappropriately tries to help people deal with or change this holistic image in the "the digital language of explanation, argument, analysis, confrontation, interpretation and so forth". Working with what he terms "right hemisphere language"--image, symbol, metaphor and myth--seems to be the best path to therapeutic change because it accesses most directly the individual's implicit world image.

Corey (1913) anticipated several of the findings of modern brain research. Noting that the physiologists of his day were unable to account for the purpose of the right hemisphere, Corey said that man has, in effect, two brains--not just two hemispheres. Each is capable of independent thought, and the right brain is "the organ of higher faculties." Corey deplored the education of his day for its neglect of right-brain faculties. "What is now known as mysticism will no longer appear mysterious when these faculties are developed. Man contains a being superior to the one he knows."

## IMPLICATIONS OF BRAIN RESEARCH FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

The split brain research hypothesis can be used to argue that many wilderness and back country programs place too great an emphasis on the functions of the left brain, the "hard skills" and technical abilities needed to travel in back country, for orienteering, plotting and executing technical climbs, paddling, working safely with equipment, keeping a group together, etc. These activities require a high degree of logic, reason, analysis, attention to the external world, and linguistic ability.

"Soft skills," introspective methods, and eyes closed processes-- deep relaxation, meditation, receptive thinking, visualization, imagery, symbolic art, drumming, chanting, singing, dance, and mime--may help us experience right hemispheric functions. In any case, these activities can help us more deeply enjoy, find the meaning of, and integrate our activities and experiences outdoors.

Even if one questions the split brain hypothesis, given the early stage of brain research, there is no doubt there are different types of brain functions, and many psychological faculties, available to us regardless of the degree of lateralization. So it seems fair to say we need to provide many different kinds of experiences, and stimulate a full range of brain functions and psychological faculties, if we wish to increase the depth and richness of outdoor programs. We need to help participants awaken, utilize, and develop more of their human potential, develop their latent human resources, awaken new mental states and psychological functions, to move toward an experience of transformation in outdoor experiential education.

## RITUALS AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

The search for transformation is not new. It is not just a current fad which results from lopsided education. Special rituals, spiritual disciplines, and powerful procedures have been used since time immemorial to provoke the regenerative effects of the transformative process (Grof, 1976).

For centuries, in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, people have gone to caves, mountain tops and other remote places to practice yoga, meditation and other spiritual disciplines directed toward the realization of the Self (Yogananda, 1981). The history of Christianity is full of stories about hermits, mystics and monks who, through prayer, fasting, austere self-discipline and self-denial in nature, have striven to develop their spiritual potential (Armstrong, 1982).

The Huichol Indians in Mexico use the hallucinogenic peyote cactus in night long drumming and chanting ceremonies, then externalize their visions in beautiful yarn paintings (Berrin, 1978). Many native Americans purify themselves in the heat of the sweat lodge. Some undergo rituals of severe physical stress and pain, such as the Sun Dance, to provoke altered states of consciousness. In order to make contact with the spirit world, find power animals or totems that could provide direction and meaning to life, plains Indians went on a vision quest. Activities on a quest often included solitude, staying in one spot for as three or four days, fasting from food, water, or sleep, drumming and chanting (Mann, 1972).

These rituals and disciplines have always been rigorous and demanding on every level. They have always been approached with reverence and have been conducted or supervised by wise elders of the community with long experience in using the methodologies. They have always been carried out in a sacred way and carefully interpreted.

In contrast, the exploration of consciousness is not widely validated in our culture. Few of us are willing to participate in such unusual or powerful experiences today. They seem irrelevant at best; dangerous or threatening at worst. We scoff at native and primitive practices while, at the same time, many of us are bored with our lives, lack enthusiasm and passion, only superficially interact with others, and lack a sense of meaning, vision, or purpose in our lives. Few of us really know how to renew ourselves at the deepest levels.

We would all profit from a better understanding and experience of the process of transformation. We need to seek a balance between adventure related activities and inner directed processes on wilderness and back country trips, whether we are alone; with our families, friends, or colleagues; or work for organizations commissioned to guide people on outdoor treks.

## TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING HUMAN RESOURCES

There are many methods and techniques for accessing, exploring, and developing latent human resources which can move us toward an experience of transformation. When used on outdoor programs, they can greatly complement adventure-challenge activities, and help clients tap and explore deeper levels of awareness.

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TECHNIQUES	PURPOSE OF TECHNIQUES	AREA FOR GROWTH
relaxation methods	reduce anxiety and fear	capacity to be
stretching exercises	release stress and tension	calm, centered
deep breathing	attention in the here-and-now	and present

meditation reflective thinking journal writing	reduce distracted thinking focus the mind, document important ideas and experience	concentration mental clarity
active listening receptive thinking synoptic statements	increase understanding improve judgement enhance communication skills	insight empathy bonding
visualization guided imagery metaphors	new perspective and awareness awaken creativity and wonder reframe fixed beliefs and attitudes	imagination inspiration revelation
symbolic art mandala drawing	to see, fully appreciate, and absorb the beauty of the environment; to externalize and document important images	creative self- expression
role playing, mime, psychodrama,	decrease intellectualization increase physical expression	playfulness non-verbal communication
identification	move past defenses and resistance & expand boundaries	
action plans	clarify values, priorities and goals in preparation for returning home	commitment motivation

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While space prevents us from examining all of these techniques in great detail, a couple of examples might be helpful. All of these techniques can help move people toward an experience of personal growth and well-being, spiritual renewal, and transformation.

Many people have anxiety and fear when traveling through wilderness and back country areas, or when confronting adventure-challenge activities (Ewert, 1989). Relaxation methods help reduce anxiety and fear by shifting our narrow attention from fearful thoughts and fantasies to a more expansive awareness of what's going on around us: the wind blowing, the birds singing, the warmth of the sun, the strength in our bodies, our inner self (Benson, 1975; Selye, 1978). Deep breathing can help us get calm and centered before we approach stressful events, increase the oxygen in the blood and help metabolize the by-products of stressed provoked adrenaline. Stretching exercises like Hatha Yoga can help us release our physical tension, increase our circulation and blood flow, and return us to a natural state of balance in body, mind, and spirit (Vishnudevananda, 1960).

Imagery, visualization and the use of symbols can help us switch our focus of attention from the external world to our internal reality, to understand the dynamic forces operating in us: needs, drives, desires, instincts, hopes, fears, love, will. When enacted, sung, drawn, or otherwise externalized, they can



also provide us with a mechanism for expressing ourselves to others in creative ways and drawing people closer to us.

The psychodynamic efficiency of the imagination is that it attracts psychological energies from many levels of the unconscious, stores them, pulls them together and transforms them, and then presents them to the conscious mind in a compelling way. (Progoff, 1963). An example of the powerful use of imagery can be found in the section of this article below about a person's experience with Rhododendron flowers on an outdoor retreat.



### FASCINATIONS

As we learn to tune into deeper levels of awareness with openness and receptivity, we become far more able to feel, appreciate, and experience our internal experiences and the primal forces in nature. We are fascinated by certain aspects of nature because something in us resonates with them.

There are deeper qualities, potentials, and talents within each one of us waiting to be explored and actualized. They draw our attention to specific facets of nature which, when considered deeply and fully explored, can reveal to the conscious mind that which lies beneath it.

One way to move toward an experience of transformation in nature is the use of a combination of exercises, called "Fascinations", developed by the author and employed on programs throughout the United States and Canada since 1976 called Wilderness Vision Quests. This process was developed with the split brain research in mind, in an attempt to stimulate, balance and use many of our brain functions and develop new psychological resources.

Outlined below is the "Fascinations" process. It can be employed as described here, or the methods can be used separately, at appropriate times during outdoor experiences, whenever an individual or group is willing to explore inner states of awareness. This work has been documented elsewhere (Brown, 1984, 1988).

Step 1: PREPARATION. Going out into nature is by itself a good preparation for transformation, since it disconnects us from our normal worries, anxieties and concerns, and the myriad influences of the culture, and can give us the time and space for inner exploration. Eating less can help, too. In our culture, we eat when we are happy or nervous, to celebrate, to repress fear, when we are depressed, lonely, angry, sexually aroused, etc.

Take a pound of food or less to eat per day--nuts, fruit, cheese, bread, granola--to change what are often unconscious and over abundant feeding habits. Not only will this liberate time from the tyranny of food preparation and cleanup, it can help us get closer to our true emotions. Fasting is one of the oldest and most frequently suggested practices for breaking mental patterns and moving toward spiritual levels of awareness.

Begin the day with a period of gentle stretching exercises and body movement. Hatha Yoga is a wonderful discipline for releasing stress and tension, and can set a receptive tone and way of being with

which to greet and enjoy the day. These activities can help us gain distance from our normal modes of thinking and behaving, can help us begin to observe how powerful our normal patterns really are, and heighten the experiences we can have in nature.

Step 2: DEEP RELAXATION. We begin the "Fascinations" process with about ten minutes of deep relaxation. We simply close our eyes, and breathe a little more deeply and regularly than normal for about ten minutes. This can help us detach from the external world and tune into our body, feelings, mind, and senses. Deep relaxation can help us become calm, centered, and energized in the present moment.

Step 3: REFLECTIVE THINKING. We take ten minutes to record special experiences, or outline and document the aspects of the land which are exciting, stimulating or inspiring. Then we choose the one fascination which has been most significant. We write about this fascination in great detail: what it is, in what niche it finds its expression, size, shape, color, and the feelings it evokes. We consciously reflect on these dimensions and document our thoughts in writing. Reflective thinking can help us focus, concentrate, and clarify our mind.

Step 4: RECEPTIVE THINKING. Now we sit with eyes closed, quietly in a receptive mode, allowing deeper thoughts and feelings to surface and enter our conscious mind. The more subtle aspects and meaning of our fascination rise into our field of awareness and, when they do, we record them in our journal. We take about 10 minutes for this. Receptive thinking can help us develop empathy and insight.

Step 5: VISUALIZATION. We close our eyes and take a few deep breaths, then allow an image, symbol, or mental picture to form in our mind's eye as we think about our fascination. The image that comes to mind can be quite illuminating. Seldom is it an exact representation of the object under consideration. Rather, the image which appears often is a composite picture of what we have seen on the land, what we think and feel about it, and what it means to us. It usually only takes a few seconds for this image to appear in visualization. Visualization can help us develop imagination, connect with the energies of inspiration, and get a broader perspective on the interrelatedness of external and internal reality.

Step 6: SYMBOLIC AND MANDALA DRAWING. Now we open our journal and draw a large circle on a blank page. This circle, or mandala, becomes a frame in or around which we make a drawing of our inner image. We use oil pastels, colored pencils or felt-tip pens, magic markers or other material with which to make the drawing, and take as much time as we need to draw the picture. Some people are finished in ten minutes. Others take a half hour.

It is important not to be concerned with the artistic value of the mandala. Intellectual judgments or perfectionistic criticisms will prevent the drawing from occurring in a fluid, fun, and authentic manner. Mandala drawing can help us develop the capacity to recognize the patterns operating in our life, and enhance our ability for creative self-expression. (Brodrick, 1970; Arguelles, 1972; Hull, 1972).

Step 7: COGNITIVE ANALYSIS. Now we analyze our drawing, describing in detail what we see in it and how we feel about it. What are the differences between the image we have in our head and the picture we were able to draw? What do the colors and shapes mean? Now that the inner image has been externalized, what further thoughts or reflections come to mind? What is the overall meaning of the drawing? Cognitive analysis can help us develop understanding and reason.

Step 8: INNER DIALOGUE. We close our eyes again, take a few deep breaths, and bring the image back into our mind's eye. When we visualize the image clearly, we ask this question directly to the image, in precisely this way: WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO TEACH ME AT THIS MOMENT IN MY LIFE? As these messages enter our conscious mind, we write them down beneath our drawing, in quotation marks. This inner dialogue can be repeated a couple of times in the course of about 5 minutes, to extract the maximum learning. Focusing on the inner image, and asking it this question, can help us access intuition and powerfully relevant inner guidance.

Step 9: IDENTIFICATION. Now we stand up with our eyes closed, breathe deeply a few times, and recall the inner image. Visualizing the image clearly once again, we let our awareness slip into the reality of the image. We become the image in our body, dancing, moving, gesturing, assuming various body postures appropriate to this facet of the natural world. We make whatever sounds, noises, or spontaneous music which seem to want to occur. The longer we experience and explore this identification in a kinesthetic way, the deeper we can be moved by it.

When we physically interact with imagery, new levels of insight, energy, and wisdom can become available to us. We can deeply feel and experience a most unique contact with nature, and discover how nature can directly touch and guide our life. Blocked channels of energy can open up, new circuits can be established, and we can have a most moving adventure. When we are finished, we return to our journal and document our experience in writing.

Step 10: HOMEWORK. As we begin to wind down from this process, we reflect on everything that has happened. We wonder what application can be made of the insights, energies and wisdom we have received back in our everyday life. We decide upon several practical ways we can use our insights and inspiration--small, realistic, do-able steps--and commit to doing them upon our return to our normal life. We document these ideas in detail. Defining our homework can help us develop commitment and motivation.

Step 11: CLOSURE. The last step in the "Fascinations" process helps us further integrate our experience. We take the time to share our experiences with one another, or with a few other people in a small group. We talk about our experiences in detail, and listen carefully and with respect to the experiences of others. A very powerful bonding can occur through this--with our own inner self, with others, and with nature. Seeking closure and sharing our experiences with other people can help us develop a support network which can reinforce and support our transformations long after we have returned home.

## RHODODENDRON FLOWERS

Fascinations is a unique process, the fruit of many years of training and experience with the tools of Transpersonal Psychology and concepts and methods from a discipline called Psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965). Because it may be difficult to fully understand or appreciate the potential impact of the "Fascinations" process by simply reading an outline of it, it may be illuminating to read a summary of one taken from the journal of a participant on a week-long Wilderness Vision Quest at Crabtree Falls, along the Appalachian Trail in southern Virginia one spring.

Jeff was an independent organizational consultant who had been experiencing a lack of work for several months preceding the trip, and he came on the program to seek new guidance and inspiration about his life and career. Here is how he summarized one "Fascinations" experience.

I was struck by the beauty of large purple blossoms on the Rhododendron trees which covered the mountainside along Crabtree Falls. I found a cluster of them lying beside the trail, picked them up and held them against my walking stick as I climbed the trail. I was hiking mindlessly, empty of everything except the will to get to the top, and the command to my body to hike. But the flowers I held were compelling, and I found myself studying them, wondering, touched.

I kept getting an intuition from the flowers about being alive, that I should open up, feel and accept the fact that I was alive! As I looked into the middle of the flowers, I was in great awe of the wisdom that made these flowers grow on the tip of the tree branch. I was impressed by their delicate stamen and pistil: how did they know to stick out so far? Pollen: inter-tree communication, carried by the insects and the wind. What precious and important information traveled down these fragile parts to the branch, limb, trunk, to the roots, to the spirit of the tree which guides its growth.

I got deeply into the flowers while I hiked and when I rested. Then I realized that I wasn't allowing myself to be with or experience this group of people with the same caring attention. I would look at someone and glance away; observe their personality traits and react, respond or be indifferent. I realized that I didn't really know these people, and began to watch them more closely, feel them more deeply. I began to allow myself to know them. I had moved from a state of separateness and detachment, through the light trance of hiking, to contemplation about the flowers of this tree, to a state of active awareness and receptivity to the people in my group.

After I had written up the experience and drawn a mandala of the flowers in my journal, I visualized them with my mind's eye. I asked the inner image of the flowers what it had to teach me, and this is what occurred to my conscious mind:

"You are fragile and vulnerable now. You have been through a deepening process which leaves you open and receptive, sensitive to life. You, too, are a mystery of nature. You, yourself! Go into the heart of your own mystery and touch the Life in you. You are a unique creation which, like we flowers, will bloom but for a time and then perish. But celebrate your existence now. You are alive!

"You will have more work ahead of you. It will be the flowering of your past growth and professional efforts. Acknowledge this and let this awareness into you. Rejoice. Be open. Reveal your own true colors, gifts, and special fragrance to the world. Let others take your gifts--your own special pollen--and carry it away. You, too, are fragile. You were meant to be. It is part of your nature. Celebrate this, too. You are an expression of the earth. It surrounds your spirit and gives it form. You are an expression of her flowering!"

I am a flowering of the Tree of Live. I am a peak experience in my very existence: for the planet, for the mother earth, for the race of man. I will be fully what I am, until I am no longer!



When I stood up and became the flowers in identification and spontaneous movement, there was an explosion of awareness--almost an orgasmic sensation. As the flowers, I could feel my interdependence with the insects, with the wind, with other trees. I felt joy and excitement to be fully open. Time took on a much different meaning, and the sun felt ecstatically warm and supportive.

When I sat to write about this experience, I felt much closer to the people in my group than at any other time, and the feeling increased considerably when I shared my experience with them. The feelings of closeness lasted for the duration of the trip. I resolved to spend more time

examining and enjoying the beauty of the flowers whenever I felt scared or depressed, and have often brought them into my home for this purpose since then.

Our fascinations on the land can continue to be important teachers for us long after our outdoor experience is over. Gradually we can learn how to pay special and close attention to what fascinates us, realizing that any part of nature can teach us wonderful things about living, and can become the gateway to profound states of awareness, insight, inspiration, energy, and transformation.

## DISCUSSION

The techniques in the "Fascinations" process have been used countless times--both as separate events which have stood by themselves, and as an integrated exercise--with different populations over many years: with young children above the fourth grade, youth at risk, the general public, and professionals in the context of organizational training programs. However, as mentioned above, there are a number of factors which must conspire to bring the greatest success to the use of these methods.

1) Participants must be ready and willing to experience and explore themselves in depth. Many outdoor experiential educators find it difficult to get a group to become quiet, reflective and introspective and, in truth, many groups--particularly youth at risk--are inherently restless and difficult to control. Nevertheless, this can be done. Success is almost always a function of how convincing, straight forward, and charismatic the leader is in guiding the process. Participants need to know ahead of time that these kinds of activities will take place and understand something about how they might help them grow. Doubt and skepticism must be addressed, and a positive attitude must be engendered.

2) The context must be undisturbed. These methods and techniques must happen in a place that will remain safe or undisturbed--a chrysalis--for a period of time. The "Fascinations" process takes about two

hours. It is always difficult to focus internally and engage introspective levels of awareness. Distractions pull attention away from the process, and can become easy excuses for not completing it.

3) The process must not be interrupted. Participants must make an agreement to sit through the exercise--whether it is just one technique or the whole "Fascinations" process--until it is complete. If an individual cannot or will not take part, for whatever reason, then they must be encouraged ahead of time to simply relax, enjoy the space or place, and wait for it to be over. Participants must be invited to honor the work of others who may be deeply involved in the activities at hand.

4) The guide must have the time, the knowledge, and the expertise to use the methods in an excellent way. This is the most important point of all. If the guide is thoroughly familiar with the methods and techniques, and has used them in the past for his or her own personal growth and transformation, then he or she will understand how long each step may take, when to move to the next level, what resistance may be all about and how to deal with it effectively, how to interpret the experiences and integrate them when they are complete. Training in the use of such methods and techniques is critical.

There is tremendous skepticism and resistance to this kind of inner work, just as there is to adventure-challenge activities, and for many of the same reasons: because we are unfamiliar with it, because we are afraid to be vulnerable and exposed, because we do not want to seem foolish or to fail, because we cannot possibly know before hand what the outcomes will be. But with experience, we can use these techniques over and over again to deepen awareness and increase the transformative power of outdoor programs.

## SUMMARY

There is great potential for spiritual growth and transformation in outdoor experiential education, but transformation is a complex and powerful process which must be approached with reverence and with care. Transpersonal Psychology, rituals, and spiritual disciplines show us that it is possible to rise above our normal ways of thinking and behaving, and develop new human resources. They also caution us to honor the ancient formula of preparation, exploration, and integration.

Consciousness research suggests that the two sides of the brain may control different states of awareness and modes of perception. We need to pay much more attention to the functions of imagination, intuition, inspiration, empathy, revelation, and the reality of inner guidance. There is a wide array of methods to focus on and help develop new human resources, and "Fascinations" provides one process for doing so.

As outdoor experiential educators, we must become more familiar with such methods and techniques, for our own self-exploration, integration, and spiritual growth, and so that we may be ever more wise, effective, and loving agents of transformation in the lives of those with whom we work.

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