

The Consciousness Revolution:

(Opening talk of the XVIIth International Transpersonal Conference in Moscow)

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It seems to me that one of the most basic human experiences, one that is genuinely universal and unites — or, more precisely, could unite — all of humanity, is the experience of transcendence in the broadest sense of the word.

Václav Havel, President, Czech Republic

Dear Friends,

I would like to join Volodya Maykov and welcome all of you to this extraordinary meeting, the Seventeenth International Transpersonal Conference. I will give my talk in English, but - before I start - I would like to say a few sentences in Russian, in the native language of our hosts, to express my gratitude and appreciation.

Дамы и господа, дорогие друзья!

Прежде чем я начну свой доклад на английском языке, я хотел бы сказать несколько фраз по русски, на родном языке наших хозяев, и выразить свою признательность и благодарность. Во-первых, я хотел бы поблагодарить Володю Майкова и его сотрудники (или его «коммандо», как он их называет) за всю работу, время, энергию, и любовь, которых было надо для организации этой великолепной конференции. Моя жена Кристина, и я организовали ряд предыдущих международных трансперсональных конференций и можем себе представить масштабность этой задачи. Большое спасибо вам всем.

Я также хотел бы поблагодарить особенно Володю за все, что он сделал на протяжении многих лет для внедрения и распространения трансперсональной перспективы в России и в других странах Восточной Европы — относительно издания многих русских книг и превосходных переводов зарубежных книг,

сотрудничества в телепрограммах и фильмах, организации семинаров, и руководства тренинга холотропново дыхания.

И в последнем ряду я хотел бы поблагодарить Володю за его приглашение, которое мне дало возможность приехать в Россию и поделиться с вами опытом и замечаниями из более чем 50 лет исследования необыкновенных состояниях сознания. Это не мой первый визит в Россию. Я был здесь несколько раз в прошлом и у меня есть много теплых воспоминаний об этих поездках и ряд замечательных друзей. Это необычное удовольствие для меня вернуться. Еще раз, большое спасибо за все!

After thanking our Russian friends, I will now return to English. It is quite extraordinary for me to look at the program of this conference and to see the list of presenters. And I believe, I am talking also for my wife Christina, who was with me when the ITA was founded and had participated with me in organizing many international conferences in the past. About a year ago, Volodya Maykov asked me to use the close friendships Christina and I had made in our 30 monthlong workshops at the Esalen Institute and in the various international conferences that we had organized over the years in different parts of the world with pioneers of the transpersonal movement and to invite these people to Moscow in his name. It turned out to be a very sad task, since many of them had passed away and others were not able to come because of advanced age or health problems. It actually seemed for some time that the old ITA had ended and that the tradition of its conferences would not be continued.

It is therefore very exciting and encouraging to see so many representatives of the younger generation who will carry and advance the transpersonal vision in various countries of the world. Special thanks go to David Lukoff, Harris Friedman, and Glenn Hartelius, who were instrumental in the rebirth of the ITA; without them and Volodya Maykov, this conference would not have happened. For me personally, it is particularly moving to see that this conference includes the new generation of psychedelic researchers. Thanks to determination and persistence of Rick Doblin and the Multidisciplinary

Association for Psychedelic Research (MAPS) that he created, we are now experiencing a remarkable global renaissance of psychedelic research.

In the United States, several major universities have returned to psychedelic research – Harvard University, University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), Johns Hopkins University, State University of New York (SUNY), University of California in San Francisco (UCSF), and University of Arizona (UA). Dr. Michael Mithoeffer and his wife Annie have reported positive results with the use of MDMA in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder; their work could have important implications for solving the formidable problem of emotional disturbances in veterans who had experienced war. And important psychedelic research is currently being conducted in Switzerland, Germany, Spain, England, Holland, Israel, Brazil, Peru, and many other countries of the world.

The ITA conference we are attending is the seventeenth international transpersonal conference. As part of its opening, I would like to take you down memory lane to put into a historical context what we will be experiencing during the following days. The Association of Transpersonal Psychology (ATP) was founded in 1969 by Abraham Maslow and Tony Sutich and in the following years it held regular conferences in Asilomar, CA. These conferences occasionally had participants who had come from other countries. Two of them, Geir and Ingrid Vilhjamsson, offered to organize an international transpersonal conference in 1972 in Bifrost, Iceland.

This meeting had 72 participants, including Joseph Campbell and his wife Jean Erdman-Campbell, Huston Smith, Walter Houston Clark, physicist Nick Herebert, and Icelandic mythologist Einar Palsson. Geir and Ingrid organized also the second international transpersonal meeting in 1973, again in Iceland. The third meeting took place three years later in Inari, in the Finnish Lapland, close to the Soviet border. The lectures were held in the gymnasium of the school building that hosted the event; it was vacation time and the class rooms were transformed into residential units. Participants ranged from the Mexican psychedelic therapist Salvador Roquet to Prince Peter of Denmark, an old friend of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who had spent 20 years in Tibet and showed us

extraordinary footage he had personally taken of the four Tibetan oracles or *kutens*, important figures in Tibetan religion, politics, prophecy, and healing.

The first three conferences were held at the time of white nights in areas that lie beyond the polar circle. It is well-known that people who live in these far northern territories have a strikingly high incidence of psychic phenomena. We met many people who were precognitive, telepathic, and clairvoyant, and others who had reputation as healers, or were successful dowzers. The atmosphere and energy in these conferences were quite remarkable; many participants experienced spontaneous non-ordinary states of consciousness and had ESP experiences.

The fourth conference was organized by Pierre Weil, French psychologist living in Brazil, and Leo Matos, Brazilian psychologist living in Denmark; it took place in 1977 in Belo Horizonte in Brazil. This meeting introduced participants to the extraordinary spiritual life in Brazil, including the spiritist movement and the syncretistic rituals of Umbanda. In the final plenary meeting of the conference, it was suggested that the tradition of the international transpersonal meetings should be formalized and that we should create an international association of transpersonal psychology that would become a vehicle for future international meetings. The proposal to form such an organization was enthusiastically accepted by all present. When the question of the president of this organization came up, somebody mentioned my name and most of the hands went up. Against my better judgment - since I had always strongly disliked administration - I accepted the offer.

Founding an organization in California required three people. My friends Michael Murphy and Dick Price, the cofounders of Esalen, agreed to become the remaining two cosigners. By that time, it became obvious that the transpersonal movement had become not only international but also interdisciplinary. Calling the new organization International Association of Transpersonal Psychology would have also suggested hierarchical superiority over the Association of Transpersonal Psychology (ATP), which did not seem

appropriate. After a discussion with Arthur Hastings, I decided to use for the new organization the name International Transpersonal Association (ITA).

My first task as the founding president of the ITA was to organize in 1979, jointly with Christina and with the help of Elias and Isa Amador, the next international conference in Danvers, Massachusetts. We chose the topic **The Nature of Reality** and decided to make an attempt to bring together all major representatives of the field and make it a “coming out” of the transpersonal movement. Among the presenters were Gregory Bateson, Frances Vaughan, Roger Walsh, Michael and Sandra Harner, Jim Fadiman, Arthur Hastings, Ram Dass, Ralph Metzner, Ken Ring, Angeles Arrien, and many other pioneers in consciousness research.

At this conference, Christina and I had the great honor to introduce to the public for the first time the extraordinary creation of Alex Grey – his «Sacred Mirrors.» We also used this occasion to present for the first time our concept of «spiritual emergency.» A special and unexpected guest of this conference was Swami Muktananda, the head of the Siddha Yoga lineage. We opened this session to the public and it was attended by more than 2,000 people, including Jerry Brown, who was at the time US presidential candidate.

Alf and Muriel Foote, two Australians, who had attended our Esalen workshop, offered us help with the organization of the next ITA conference. Since transpersonal psychology was completely unknown in Australia, the conference desperately needed advertising. In 1979, we made a special trip to Australia to give a series of workshops, lectures, and TV and radio interviews. By the time the conference happened, we had over 400 participants. The meeting, held in 1980 in Phillip Island near Melbourne, brought together people from all over Australia, who had interest in transpersonal subjects without knowing the term. The ITA was also able to connect with the native tradition of the hosting country; one of the keynote presenters was chief and activist of the Australian Aborigines Burnam Burnam. Nature contributed greatly to the success of the conference; Phillip Island is a sanctuary of koala bears and has a giant penguin colony. Daily watching of

penguins returning at sunset to feed their young was a transpersonal experience par excellence. This meeting started the transpersonal movement in Australia.

At the suggestion of Swami Muktananda, the next ITA conference took place in 1982 in Bombay (Mumbai) in India. We received invaluable help from the Siddha Yoga Foundation and the Ganeshpuri ashram, which included Marilyn Hershenson who became the conference organizer and on-site coordinator. The theme was **Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science**; our intention was to bring together spiritual teachers and new paradigm scientists and show the convergence of their worldviews. This was a very special meeting, in spite of the fact that we lost two stellar presenters - His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who had promised to participate, but got very sick on his way from Dharamsala and had to stay in a hospital in New Delhi (Dilli), and the Karmapa who offered to close the conference by conducting the Black Crown ceremony, but died a few months before the conference began.

New paradigm science was represented by such pioneers as Karl Pribram, Fritjof Capra, Rupert Sheldrake, and Elmer and Alyce Green and the spiritual element by Swami Muktananda, Mother Teresa, Dr. Karan Singh, rabbi Zalman Schachter, the Parsee high priest Dastoor Minocher Homji, Tantric scholar Ajit Mookerjee, and others. The cultural program featured the rising star of Indian classical dance Alarmel Valli, musician Paul Horn, tai chi master Al Huang, an evening of Jewish mysticism with Shlomo Carlebach and Zalman Schachter, and a Sufi zikr by Sheikh Muzaffer and the Halveti Jerrahi dervishes. Over seven hundred people participated in this conference. After the meeting, Baba Muktananda invited all guests to visit his ashram in Ganeshpuri and enjoy a traditional Indian feast (*bandara*).

At the end of the Bombay conference, I passed the ITA presidency onto Cecil Burney, a Jungian psychologist, who organized in 1983 the next conference in Davos, Switzerland, with the administrative help of Rashna Imhasly. The meeting was very successful; this time, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was able to come and among other

special guests were Dr. Karan Singh, obstetrician Frederic Leboyer, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Gopi Krishna, and Marie-Louise von Franz.

After the success of the Davos conference, Cecil Burney became somewhat grandiose. Preparing the 1985 conference, entitled **Spirituality and Technological Society**, that took place in Kyoto, he managed to recruit to the organizing committee the founder and honorary chairman of SONY and the founder of Kyocera, the fastest growing company in Japan. Encouraged by this alliance, he decided to rent for the conference the Kyoto International Conference Center at the cost of \$ 11,000 a day. This was based on the fact that he expected to get 1,500 paying participants. He did not realize that he had to introduce to the Japanese public not only transpersonal psychology (unknown at the time in Japan), but also the concept of a conference where the Japanese need to take a week off from their work and attend a meeting unrelated to their job. Seven hundred people attended the conference, which was actually quite impressive and remarkable under the circumstances, but meant a financial disaster. The conference lost over US \$ 50,000 and sent the ITA into bankruptcy. Shortly afterwards, Cecil Burney unexpectedly died in Aspen, Colorado, of a heart attack.

Christina and I were receiving many letters and calls from people who had attended our transpersonal conferences in the past and were very unhappy about this situation. They sorely missed the opportunity to meet on an international scale and asked us to find a way to continue the tradition. Some fortuitous circumstances helped us to resurrect the ITA. Heldref Publications, the publisher of the Re-Vision Journal of which I was at the time editor, offered us a sizeable loan as seed money for the next conference. Thanks to their support, the ITA was reborn, this time with a home in Washington, D.C., and I resumed the presidency of the ITA. Trying to avoid the Kyoto fiasco, Christina and I decided to hold the meeting in Santa Rosa, close to the San Francisco Bay Area, the home of many pioneers of the transpersonal movement, who could thus participate without incurring any significant traveling expenses.

The theme of this 1988 conference was **The Transpersonal Vision: Past, Present, and Future**. The coordinator was John McKenzie, with the help of our new friends, Tav and Cary Sparks. Here we offered for the first time as pre-conference workshop the experience of Holotropic Breathwork; it had 360 participants, the largest group we had ever done. This conference was a great financial success. Among the special highlights of the conference was participation of Albert Hofmann, the discoverer of LSD, and an evening with Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead. We were also able to invite as guests of honor Vassily and Zhanna Nalimov. The ITA gave a special award to Dora Kalff, the mother of sandplay therapy, for her contributions to the transpersonal field.

Our interest in alcoholism and addiction for personal reasons inspired the next two ITA meetings – one in 1990 on the West Coast of the USA in Eugene, Oregon, and the second in 1991 on the East Coast in Atlanta, Georgia. They both carried the same title - **Mystical Quest, Attachment, and Addiction** and were inspired by Christina's idea – to bring together people involved in the addictions field, who recognize the vital role spirituality plays in the development and treatment of alcoholism and other addictions, and pioneers of transpersonal psychology developing a scientifically acceptable theoretical framework for spirituality.

After this meeting, I passed on the ITA presidency for the second time, this time to psychologist Patricia Demetrios-Ellerd. Patricia organized the twelfth transpersonal conference in 1994 in Santa Clara, California, on the theme **Spirit in Action: Awakening to the Sacred in Everyday Life**, bringing the transpersonal perspective to politics, business, economy, ecology, feminism, and medicine. Among the special guests with important bridging function were Jerry Brown, former US presidential candidate and California governor, Jim Garrison, who later became president of the Gorbachev Foundation, writer Isabel Allende, and feminist Gloria Steinam. The ITA Award was given to Ram Dass.

The thirteenth meeting held in 1995 in Killarney, Ireland, was to some extent a continuation of the Santa Clara meeting; its focus was application of transpersonal

psychology to urgent problems in the world. Theme of this conference was **Spirituality, Ecology, and Native Wisdom** and program coordinator of this conference was Ralph Metzner who has profound interest in ecology and in the peace movement. At this conference, the ITA Award was given to Arne Naes, Swedish environmentalist and founder of deep ecology.

After premature death of Patricia, I resumed at the request of our California friends the presidency of the ITA for the second time. Since one of the main goals of the ITA was improving relationships between nations and seeking peaceful resolution of conflicts, we were very unhappy that Eastern Europeans were not able to take part in our meetings. We made an attempt to organize a conference in Russia at the time of perestroika and glasnost, but did not succeed. When the «Velvet Revolution» radically changed the political situation in Czechoslovakia, Christina suggested that we hold the fifteenth transpersonal conference in Prague.

The 1992 meeting, entitled **Science, Spirituality, and the Global Crisis**, representing the first transpersonal meeting of East and West, was enormously successful. Since the purpose of the conference was to bring together equal numbers of participants from the East and West, we had to stop the registration for Westerners a month before the beginning of the conference. At the end, the Smetana Concert Hall with the capacity of 1600 people was full and we had no place for several hundred Czechs interested in attending. The participants were from 36 different countries of the world and the pre-conference breathwork had 350 participants.

This conference was held under the auspices of the Czech president Václav Havel, a statesman deeply interested in the transpersonal perspective. To our great disappointment, president Havel was not able to personally welcome the participants and give the opening speech, since he had to attend an emergency meeting of the Parliament focusing on the imminent break-up of Czechoslovakia into two separate countries. The highlight of the conference was an evening with Babatunde Olatunji, Nigerian musician,

accompanied by ten African dancers and drummers. After their performance, this group walked out into the streets of Prague and continued to sing, drum, and dance. They were joined by hundreds of pedestrians and citizens lured out of their houses by this amazing spectacle. This Dionysian feast continued in the Old Town Square until the wee hours. For the Czech people, only recently liberated from the clutches of the tyrannical Communist regime that did not allow free expression of any kind, this was an unbelievable event. For me, this meeting had a special significance, since it made it possible for me to bring transpersonal psychology to my native country where I started my professional career and did my early research.

The theme of the fifteenth transpersonal conference was **Technologies of the Sacred: Ancient, Aboriginal, and Modern**. It focused on the healing, transformative, and evolutionary potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness. Besides the representatives of the transpersonal movement, it featured shamans from Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, and Venezuela, the Santo Daime people, members of Union de Vegetal, spiritists, and others. The highlight of the conference was a concert in the famous European-style Manaus opera house built in the middle of the Amazon jungle, featuring among others Chungliang Al Huang, Jai Uttal, and Geoff Gordon. Over 900 people attended the conference in spite of inconvenience of travel and climate.

The theme of the sixteenth international transpersonal conference, the last one Christina and I organized, was **Mythic Imagination and Modern Society: The Re-Enchantment of the World**. The conference was inspired by the 100th anniversary of the birth of mythologist Joseph Campbell and explored the relevance of mythology and archetypal psychology for human society. The on-site coordinator was Robert Duchmann and among the special guests were the British-American actor John Cleese, pianist Lorin Hollander, and Indian classical dancers Vishnu Tattva Das and Barbara Framm. This conference was also an opportunity for Rick Tarnas to present his ground-breaking work linking archetypal psychology and astrology. At this time, the political crisis after 9/11 had hit hard and unfavorably influenced international travel. The number of participants shrank to about a half of what we were used to have at the international transpersonal conferences.

Here we are now attending the Seventeenth International Transpersonal Conference, in a context that allows bringing together East and West, North and South. We are meeting at a time of a global crisis of unprecedented proportions that threatens the survival of *homo sapiens* and many other species. Throughout centuries, unbridled violence and insatiable greed, two dangerous flaws of human nature, have engendered innumerable bloody wars and revolutions and created immense suffering. In the unfolding of human history, the roles of various nations and their relationships keep constantly changing in a rather capricious way. For example, during World War II, Germany, Japan, and Italy, the “Axis Powers,” were enemies of the USA, while the Soviet Union was an important ally. After the war, the political landscape changed dramatically. Japan and Italy became for Americans friendly countries and the Soviet Union an archenemy, referred to as the “Evil Empire.” The situation with Germany was more complicated; West Germany now was an ally of the United States and East Germany became a member of the hostile camp.

In the twentieth century, many European countries experienced the horrors of the Nazi and fascist rule and occupation and others the ruthless Stalinist regime imposed on them by the Soviet Union. In modern times, the main challenge for Great Britain and France was Germany and they maintained a decent relationship with each other. However, a few centuries earlier, they were sworn enemies. At one point of history, the major challenge for England was Spain and for Russia France, Spain was in war with Holland, Russia’s enemy was Sweden, and so on.

On the surface, alliances and hostilities come and go, but the memories of the deep wounds and the resulting prejudices survive in the collective consciousness of nations for centuries and color their present attitudes and relations. Unresolved and unforgiven harms and injuries keep breeding new violence. In the past, violence and greed had tragic consequences for the individuals involved in the wars and revolutions and for their immediate families. However, they did not threaten the evolution of the human species as a whole and certainly did not represent a danger for the eco system and for the biosphere of

the planet. Even after the most violent wars, nature was able to recycle all the aftermath and completely recover within a few decades. This situation changed very radically in the course of the twentieth century. Rapid technological progress, exponential growth of industrial production, massive population explosion, and particularly the weapons of mass destruction have forever changed the equations involved.

Diplomatic negotiations, administrative and legal measures, economic and social sanctions, military interventions, and other similar efforts have had very little success; as a matter of fact, they have often produced more problems than they solved. It is becoming increasingly clear why they had to fail. The strategies used to alleviate this crisis are rooted in the same ideology that created it in the first place. Albert Einstein put it very succinctly: “We cannot solve the problems in the world by using the same way of thinking we used when we created them (“Die Probleme die es in der Welt gibt, sind nicht mit der gleichen Denkweise zu lösen, die sie erzeugt hat”). In the last analysis, the current global crisis is a psychospiritual crisis; it reflects the level of consciousness evolution of the human species. It is, therefore, hard to imagine that it could be resolved without a radical inner transformation of humanity on a large scale and its rise to a higher level of emotional maturity and spiritual awareness.

The task of imbuing humanity with an entirely different set of values and goals might appear too unrealistic and utopian to offer any real hope. Considering the paramount role of violence and greed in human history, the possibility of transforming modern humanity into a species of individuals capable of peaceful coexistence with their fellow men and women regardless of race, color, and religious or political conviction, let alone with other species, certainly does not seem very plausible. We are facing the necessity to instill humanity with profound ethical values, sensitivity to the needs of others, acceptance of voluntary simplicity, and a sharp awareness of ecological imperatives. At first glance, such a task appears too fantastic even for a science-fiction movie.

However, although serious and critical, the situation might not be as hopeless as it appears. After more than fifty years of intensive study of nonordinary states of consciousness, I have come to the conclusion that the theoretical concepts and practical approaches developed by transpersonal psychology, a discipline that is trying to integrate spirituality with the new paradigm emerging in Western science, could help alleviate the crisis we are all facing. These observations suggest that radical psychospiritual transformation of humanity is not only possible, but is already underway. The question is only whether it can be sufficiently fast and extensive to reverse the current self-destructive trend of modern humanity.

Systematic spiritual practice and responsible inner work using nonordinary states of consciousness does more than alleviate emotional and psychosomatic disorders and make the life of people involved in it more comfortable and fulfilling. The resulting changes in the worldview, hierarchy of values, and life strategy that follow the processing of biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal material have important implications that reach beyond the personal benefit for persons who do intensive inner work. This transformation involves a significant reduction of aggression and development of racial, gender, cultural, and ideological tolerance and compassion, ecological sensitivity, and sense of planetary citizenship.

Many of the people with whom we have worked saw humanity at a critical crossroad facing either collective annihilation or an evolutionary jump in consciousness of unprecedented proportions. Terence McKenna put it very succinctly: "The history of the silly monkey is over, one way or another" – if we do not undergo a profound psychospiritual transformation, our species might not survive. It seems that we all are collectively involved in a process that parallels the psychological death and rebirth process that so many people have experienced internally in non-ordinary states of consciousness. If we continue to act out the problematic destructive and self-destructive tendencies originating in the depth of the unconscious, we will very likely destroy ourselves and possibly life on this planet. However, if we succeed in internalizing this process on a large enough scale, it might result in an evolutionary progress of unprecedented proportions that would take us to a level where

we would deserve the name we have so proudly given to our species – *homo sapiens sapiens*.

EPILOGUE.

I would like to conclude my opening talk by relating an experience of profound healing and transformation that occurred many years ago in a group of people with whom I shared a non-ordinary state of consciousness. This remarkable episode gave me some hope in a better future of us all in spite of the grim overall situation. Although it happened over forty years ago, I still feel very moved and tearful whenever I think and talk about it. This event showed me the depth of the problems we are facing in our world where for many centuries hatred has been passed from one generation to another. However, it also gave me hope and trust in the possibility of lifting this curse and dissolving the barriers that separate us from each other.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, I participated in a government - sponsored research program at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore, MD, exploring the potential of psychedelic therapy. One of our projects at the center was a training program for mental health professionals. It made it possible for psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and priests doing pastoral counseling to have up to three high - dose LSD sessions for educational purposes. One of the participants in this program was Kenneth Godfrey, a psychiatrist from the VA Hospital in Topeka, Kansas. Ken was one of the pioneers of psychedelic research himself, conducting sessions with his clients, but he did not have in his program provision for his own sessions. I was his guide in the three psychedelic sessions he had in our institute and, in the process, we became very close friends. Ken and his wife were both Native Americans and had a very deep connection with the spiritual tradition of their people and with the elders of their tribe.

When I was still in Czechoslovakia, I read about the Native American Church, a syncretistic religion combining Indian and Christian elements and using as a sacrament the Mexican psychedelic cactus peyote. I became very interested in having a personal

experience of a peyote ceremony that would make it possible for me to compare therapeutic use of psychedelics with their use in a ritual context. After my arrival in the USA, I was looking for such an opportunity, but without success. During our final discussion after Ken's third LSD session, it crossed my mind that he might have some contacts with the Native American Church and help me to find a group that would allow me to participate in their peyote ceremony. Ken promised to explore this issue with John Mitchell, a well-known Potawatomi "road chief," or leader of sacred ceremonies, who was his close friend. Several days later, Ken called me on the phone with some good news. John Mitchell not only invited me as a guest to his peyote ceremony, but offered that I could bring along several other people from our staff.

The following weekend five of us flew from Baltimore to Topeka, Kansas. The group consisted of our music therapist Helen Bonny, her sister, psychedelic therapist Bob Leihy, professor of religion Walter Houston Clark, and myself. We rented a car at the Topeka airport and drove from there deep into the Kansas prairie. There, in the middle of nowhere, stood several teepees, the site of the sacred ceremony. The sun was setting and the ritual was about to begin. But before we could join the ceremony, we had to be accepted by the other participants, all of whom were Native Americans. We had to go through a difficult process that resembled a dramatic encounter group.

With intense emotions, the native people brought up the painful history of the invasion and conquest of America by white intruders - the genocide of American Indians and rapes of their women, the expropriation of their land, the senseless slaughter of the buffalo, and many other atrocities. After a couple of hours of dramatic exchange, the emotions quieted down and, one after the other, the Indians accepted us into their ceremony. Finally, there was only one person who had remained violently opposed to our presence - a tall, dark, and sullen man. His hatred toward white people was enormous.

It took a long time and much persuading from his peers, who were unhappy about further delays of the ceremony, before he finally reluctantly agreed that we could join the group. Finally everything was settled, at least on the surface, and we all gathered in a large

teepee. The fire was started and the sacred ritual began. We ingested the peyote buttons and passed the staff and the drum. According to the Native American custom, whoever had the staff could sing a song or make a personal statement; there was also the option to pass.

The sullen man, who was so reluctant to accept us, sat directly across from me, leaning on a pole of the teepee. He radiated anger and hostility and it was obvious to everybody that he was sulking. While all other participants wholeheartedly participated in the ceremony, he remained detached and aloof. Every time the staff and the drum made the circle and came to him, he very angrily passed them on. My perception of the environment was extremely sensitized by the influence of peyote. This man became a sore point in my world and I found looking at him increasingly painful. His hatred seemed to radiate from his eyes like bright laser beams that were consuming me and filling the entire teepee. He managed to maintain this recalcitrant attitude throughout the ceremony.

The morning came and, shortly before sunrise, we were passing the staff and the drum for the last time. It was an opportunity for everybody to say a few final words about their experiences and impressions from the night. Walter Houston Clark's speech was exceptionally long and very emotional. He expressed his deep appreciation for the generosity of our Native American friends, who had shared with us their beautiful ceremony. Walter specifically stressed the fact that they accepted us in spite of everything we had done to them - invaded and stolen their land, killed their people, raped their women, and slaughtered the buffalo. At one point of his speech, he referred to me - I do not remember exactly in what context - as "Stan, who is so far from his homeland, his native Czechoslovakia."

As soon as Walter uttered the word Czechoslovakia, the man who had resented our presence all through the night suddenly became strangely disturbed. He got up, ran across the teepee, and threw himself on the ground in front of me. He hid his head in my lap, crying and sobbing loudly. After about twenty minutes, he quieted down, returned to his place, and was able to talk. He explained that the evening before the ceremony he had

seen us all as 'pale faces' and thus automatically enemies of Native Americans. After hearing Walter's remark, he realized that, being of Czechoslovakian origin, I had nothing to do with the tragedy of his people. The Czechs certainly were not notorious as raiders of the Wild West. He thus hated me through the sacred ceremony without justification.

The man seemed heart - broken and desolate. After his initial statement came a long silence, during which he was going through an intense inner struggle. It was clear that there was more to come. Finally, he was able to share with us the rest of his story. During World War II, he had been drafted into the American Air Force and, several days before the end of the war, he personally participated in a rather capricious and unnecessary American air-raid on the Czech city Pilsen, known for its world-famous beer and the Skoda automobile factory. Not only had his hatred toward me been unjustified, but our roles were actually reversed; he was the perpetrator and I was the victim. He invaded my country and killed my people. This was more than he could bear. He came back to me and kept embracing me, begging my forgiveness.

After I had reassured him that I did not harbor any hostile feelings toward him, something extraordinary happened. He went to my Baltimore friends, who all were Americans. apologized for his behavior before and during the ceremony, embraced them, and asked them for forgiveness. He said that this episode had taught him that there would be no hope for the world, if we all continued to carry in us hatred for the deeds committed by our ancestors. And he realized that it was wrong to make generalized judgments about racial, national, and cultural groups. We should judge people on the basis of who they are, not as members of the group to which they belong.

His speech was a worthy sequel to the famous letter attributed to chief Seattle, in which he addresses European colonizers. He closed it with these words: "You are not my enemies, you are my brothers and sisters. You did not do anything to me or my people. All that happened a long time ago in the lives of our ancestors. And, at that time, I might actually have been on the other side. We are all children of the Great Spirit, we all belong

to Mother Earth. Our planet is in great trouble and if we keep carrying old grudges and do not work together, we will all die."

By this time, most people in the group were in tears. We all felt a sense of deep connection and belonging to the human family. As the sun was slowly rising in the sky, we partook in a ceremonial breakfast. We ate the food that throughout the night had been placed in the center of the teepee and was consecrated by the ritual. Then we all shared long hugs, reluctantly parted, and headed back home. We carried with us the memory of this invaluable lesson in interracial and international conflict resolution that will undoubtedly remain vivid in our minds for the rest of our lives. For me, this extraordinary synchronicity experienced in a non-ordinary state of consciousness foments feelings of hope that, sometime in the future, a similar healing could happen in the world on a large scale.