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Developmental Influences of Spiritual Experience: A Closer Look

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Research on spirituality has focused mainly on the phenomenology of the experiences, on the stage theories of spiritual transformation, and on the changes resulting from meditation. The actual developmental shifts following spiritual experiences have not been identified and researched. This study focuses specifically on the developmental changes invoked by the spiritual experience in the mind of the participants. The results of the depth- phenomenological analysis are based on the accounts of more than 30 people who self-identified as having spontaneous spiritual experiences, specifically a group of practitioners of the devotional spiritual practice of the Prayer of the Heart and 11 practitioners of a very structured focusing tantric body-centered spiritual practice. For the purpose of this research, experiences containing the component of ego-transcendence, identified by Schleiermacher as the “feeling of absolute dependence”, or by Otto, - as the encounter with *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, were the focus of the experiences related to spirituality. The traditional method of second person psychological phenomenological analysis was adapted in order to capture the developmental changes in perception, meaning, body-construct and self-construct. Results show that the above experiences can be qualified as a normative developmental events, causing predictable changes in the mind. These changes consist of: 1) an increase of the capacity of direct knowing, i.e., presence to the interior contents of the psyche, a.k.a. self-knowledge; 2) the topological shifts of meaning leading to the restructuring of the inter- and intra-subjective spaces, i.e., owning of the shadow, the awareness of the interior changes that are perceived as developmental, i.e the ontopoietic intuition; and 3) the emergence of new qualities in the mind which can be seen as a characterological transformation. The term *ontopoiesis* is suggested by the author to capture the multitude of events happening in the mind after the ego-transcendent experience.