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SPIRITUAL HEART AND DIRECT KNOWING IN THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

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The self, and the cultural healing systems such as psychotherapy, are interdependent: as diachronic self changes, its pattern configures the healing systems (Cushman, 1995). The latter, in turn, mold the self. Sanatana dharma, the spiritual philosophy of India, suggests that there is a perennial form of healing, which consists in the realization of the true, immortal and limitless nature of the Self beyond the ego (Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, 1994). The processes leading to Self-realization are different in different cosmic cycles, as shown in the ancient legend. In the beginning of creation the mythological cow of dharma, a symbol of wholeness and clarity¹ of the psychological ego-self and harmony of all things, stands on all four legs. In this transparency of the psychological self, everybody gets Self-realized. In the second quarter of the creation cycle, the cow of dharma loses one leg, and the creation and the self are losing stability and wholeness. Then, rituals appear to balance the creation and the unstable mind, and make it suitable for Self-realization. In the third quarter, two legs are gone. To make the mind ready for Self-realization one needs stronger means such as yoga and meditation. In the fourth quarter, three legs are gone. Natural disasters, and man made calamities shatter the aging creation. Psychological self is eroded, and deconstructed, the whole picture being close to the postmodern zeitgeist. This kind of the mind can not be clear and whole, but can still attain Self-realization. Self-realization

¹ The “clear mind,” or, to be exact, “clear internal instrument” (*antahkarana shuddhi*, Sanskrit), has no direct correlates in the western vocabulary. It implies the wholeness and “transparency” of the psyche to its own internal process.

happens as if through the “cracks” in the eroded ego, in response to its longing, via the direct phenomenological intuition of the Self beyond the ego.

This aptitude towards spontaneity of ego-transcendence in the “fourth quarter of creation” manifests as changes in current religiosity. Jamesian “energies” are redirecting their flow: for example, more than 50% of Americans now see religiosity as a means of making meaning (Roof, 1999). What kind of meaning is being made? Different from the search for social belonging, typical for the prior generational cohorts, it is now a search for personal, experiential, perceptual and emotional communion. This is a request for the direct personal experience of the “living presence”, the *mysterium tremendum and fascinans* (Otto, 1924), the *feeling of absolute dependence* (Schleiermacher, 1821/1994), i.e. that taste which comes from the realms of the psyche beyond the ego. Grof & Grof, (1986) point out to the “spiritual emergencies”, and Palmer (1999) speaks of the spontaneous experiences of the non-ordinary consciousness that people are afraid to share. Does it mark a sudden turn to saintliness? I do not think so. I rather hypothesize that the religious function of the psyche (Corbett, 1996) in the post-post- modern Americans² goes through change, as the experience of ego-transcendence plays a major role in the reconstruction of the postmodern split self (Louchakova, 2005b). These experiences are both restorative and developmental. Because of the increasing frequency of these experiences it seems near urgent to research and legitimize them as a normal part of human life.

When the ego-transcendence brings to consciousness the deep faculties of the psyche, such as the direct intuition, or the foundational processes such as onto-poiesis (Louchakova, 2005), the emerging endogenous healing potential is unpredictable and unlimited. Even characterological transformation becomes a viable option. To shed some clarity on the internal

² There may be analogous data for countries other than United States. For the data on the meaning crises worldwide see McKenna (2005).

transformations of the self associated with ego-transcendence, I turn to the Prayer of the Heart (PH). Known primarily as an Eastern Christian contemplative practice, PH transcends the frames of Christianity. The forms of contemplative life similar to PH exist in Sufism, Judaism, and Hinduism, as well as in the esotericism of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Mayans. At the core of this spiritual practice is an experiential phenomenological introspection into the living topological construct of the self.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

Prayer of the Heart (PH) grew out of the spiritual exercises of the Pythagorean Greeks, Alexandrian Gnostics, and the ancient Jews. Corresponding spiritual exercises are in the Upanishads and commentaries, in Tibetan Tantra, and may also be reconstructed through Mayan artifacts (author's unpublished research). Hesychasm (from Greek *hesychia*, inner stillness), the mystical tradition of the Christian East, fully articulated PH as a formal spiritual discipline, which was later detailed in the Sufi practice of *dhikr* (remembrance) of Divine Names in the heart. Individual contemplatives still use the PH in England, the United States, France, Germany, Romania and Russia, and the various forms of *dhikr* are spread among different communities of Islam. In India and in the India-influenced West, one finds the *atma-vichara* (Sanskrit) or self-enquiry, which is the other contemplative form close to the PH. The history of Hesychasm contains many disputes concerning the safety and validity of this practice (Pelikan, 1974). As a rule, the seekers consider the PH to be esoteric, complex, and requiring caution. Over years, it turns into a journey of profound inner transformation, affecting all the levels of the self, from perception, to character structure, to the affective sphere and foundational identity (Louchakova and Warner, 2003; *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 1952; Ware, 1974).

I learned this method in the Russian spiritual underground during the years of Soviet Power (Kungurtsev & Luchakova, 1997). As a scientist researching the effects of various spiritual disciplines, I marveled at how fast this practice brings to conscious awareness the interior structure-contents of the self. Formally, PH consists of an uninterrupted repetition of the Name of the Deity paced with the breath, and accompanied by focusing attention on the sense of self in the chest. As practice matures over the years, there are shifts in the interior state such as a) progression from the verbal prayer to the internal silent prayer, b) movement of the focus of the internal prayer deeper into the chest, c) progression from the volitional repetition of the name to the state where the name spontaneously emerges from within, d) dissolution of the name into wordless prayer of sustained presence, and lastly, e) degrees of Union. Encompassed within these roughly defined steps is a structured phenomenological introspection into the human person. As the embodied sense of the self gets taken back to its phenomenological origins in pure subjectivity, a series of spontaneously rising reductions leads to an explication of the essential structures of the self.

The esoteric, interior part of the practice consists of these spontaneous reductions. Eventually, attention self-absorbs into the Spiritual Heart, a psychospiritual center of embodied consciousness in the interior space of the chest (Louchakova and Warner, 2003; Spidlik, 1986). The focus in the Spiritual Heart is associated with the mystical experience of I-Thou, and the transcendence of the sense of separate ego, which is followed by the state of Union. As this is happening, the hidden and latent content of the psyche becomes available to awareness, including the traces of past trauma, and early forms of the psychological self as well as any adaptive mechanisms. The transformational surfacing of this content challenges the seeker with

the need for posterior integration, and gives the PH a reputation of a complicated spiritual discipline (The Way of a Pilgrim, 1952; St. Simeon the New Theologian, 1995; Ware, 1974).

PH can serve the psychotherapy in two ways. On one side, it is a model where the ego-transcendence can be studied. The instances of the spontaneous ego-transcendent experience are so fleeting that for the researcher it is difficult to resurrect the experience to such a degree that it allows the deep presencing of its structures. Practice of the PH puts the experience on a slow burner, stretches it in time, so that one can “see” and articulate it. It is also a potential tool in psychotherapy. The use of spiritual practices in therapy is a new and exciting area of research that broadens the spectrum of clinical tools and deepens the understanding of the whole person (Louchakova, 2005a, c; Shafranske, 1996; Shafranske & Malony, 1990). Contemplative practices, especially those involving somatic focusing (Louchakova & Warner, 2003), differ in their effects on the person not less than the medications differ in their chemical effects. Very little is known regarding the specifics of these effects. Major studies focused on mindfulness, while the somatic focusing practices such as PH remain rather unknown (Louchakova & Warner, 2003). Among these practices, PH specifically advances direct intuition (Louchakova, 2005a, c; Tymieniecka, 2002). Direct intuition is the faculty which enables mystics to “see”³ God, mystical philosophers --- to understand the nature of the self (Yazdi, 1992), and phenomenologists --- to discern the inner workings of consciousness. If the increase in this exactly faculty provides for the possibility of introspection into the interior organization of the self, it seems to be of value in the clinical task of analyst. PH is also a great model for ego-transcendence because it never fails to lead to this experience. It is very effective due to the specific, secret method of focusing that is available only through the oral tradition. The

³As, according to the famous Biblical quote, changes happen from “seeing through the glass, darkly” to seeing “face to face” (Paul, 1 Corinthians, 13:12).

combination of these factors allows the insider's look into the dynamics of the psychological system generally called self, inspiring the host of interventions optimizing the essential elements of the self-structure.

RESEARCH METHOD

Phenomenological psychological method relies on direct intuition as the means of knowledge. Direct intuition grasps and the inner contents of consciousness, teases out the essences, and makes them available to the analytical mind. Rather than using the introspective self-analysis of the transcendental phenomenology, psychological phenomenology analyses the accounts of others. This is the so-called "second person" method in the phenomenological study. The method, therefore, is dead without the good description. In regard to the experience beyond the ego, including that of non-dual consciousness, the challenge is to overcome the commonly expected "unsaying" of the experience (Sells, 1994), and positively articulate the ineffable. In the ineffability of the experience, something always remains incomplete, as the phenomenological intentionality devoid of final fulfillment⁴. Generally, the ineffability of spiritual experience is taken for granted. Experiences may remain non-verbalized because there is no habit or skill of talking about them, as they do not contain information that is useful in daily communications. When the above is ruled out, the assumed ontological ineffability of spiritual experience is questionable.

One of the Indian spiritual leaders of the 20th century, Vedanta teacher H. W. L. Poonja, made a special emphasis on verbalizing the "ineffable", by insisting that his disciples speak from the states of deep absorption in consciousness. Similar to his method, participants in the

⁴ Intentionality in phenomenology, as different from the common use of word as synonymous to will or intention, refers to the "aboutness" of consciousness, i.e. to its feature to be the consciousness of something, rather than pure consciousness.

study were specifically asked to link their speech to the internal processes that usually remain non-verbalized. Thus, I obtained the accounts for the posterior phenomenological analysis. To control the goodness (correctness, adequacy, and precision) of the analysis, the uncovered essential structures were used for guided meditations (i.e. again verbalized) with other focus groups. This guidance led to the emergence of the experiences of ego-transcendence, which, in turn, ascertained the genuineness of discovered structures.

Those practicing spiritually oriented psychotherapy know that talking about the secreted spiritual experience by itself may be more transforming, and faster healing than weeks and months of spirituality-excluding therapy. The articulation of ineffable changes inner experience, but to what degree this factor influenced the research, remains not assessed.

In the study, more than 300 co-researchers, all participants in focus groups, described their subjective experience of the self in the process of practicing the Prayer of the Heart. Responses created the mind map of the self-experience of the group. Experiences of ego-transcendence that emerged in this practice were analyzed using the method of imaginative variations (Giorgi, 1985; 1992; 1997; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, 2004), applied to meaning structures, and to topological and perceptual structures of experience. In this approach, the researcher uses her own mind as a tool to perform reductions and imaginative variations upon the contents of descriptions. Since in this method the researcher analyses another person's account, for the sake of accuracy of the data, there is a need to control the interpretive, or hermeneutic part of the analysis. This is accomplished by the researcher through the extensive bracketing of her own presuppositions.

Even though the focus groups were central to the study, the challenge of articulating the ineffable warranted the additional use of other sources, such as classic textual accounts (St.

Hesychios the Priest, 1979; Theophanis the Monk, 1984; St. Simeon the New Theologian, 1995) and the accounts of expert practitioners. Second-person methods were also complimented by the first-person method of introspective self-analysis, and by interpretive cycles consisting of consultations with experts. Essential structures of experience, emerging in the process of analysis, were, in turn, used for the guided the Prayer of the Heart in the focus groups which served as reference panel. The emerging experience of ego-transcendence served as a criteria of the correctness of the identified structure.

Mastering the Prayer of the Heart traditionally takes many years. Communal practice in the focus groups considerably accelerated and enhanced the effects of the practice. Research design addressed both the long term aspects, and the short term effects. Short-term effects were registered in a specially developed dialogical procedure in focus groups, sometimes during, and sometimes following the process of introspection. Dialogical in-depth descriptions of the introspective experiences allowed to identify and self-identify the essential structures both the psychological (meaningful, content-related) and perceptual (cognitive, precognitive, structures of awareness related) elements of experience. As this understanding emerged, it sponsored new hermeneutic cycles of the practice, which in turn served the more precise explications that followed. Longitudinal observations were based upon the accounts of advanced practitioners collected over a 10 year period.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Phenomenological analysis of the accounts reveals the essential, invariable components of experience in the practice of the PH, such as the rise of direct intuition, ontopoiesis and unitive consciousness. These three components of experience appear in the inseparable, mutually defining connections. Direct intuition matures first, and leads to the ontopoiesis and Union;

ontopoiesis contains Union as one of its emergent structures; and Union in turn catalyzes and enhances the development of the direct intuition and deployment of the components of consciousness in the process of ontopoiesis. Results of the study are published in two articles: this article mainly focuses on the direct intuition, while the subsequent article will address the ontopoiesis and Union.

Philosophical stance of classical phenomenology suggests full bracketing of the ontological assumptions, and the assumptions of causality. Yet, in the analysis of the dynamic, emerging, life-long phenomena it seems quite counter-intuitive to abstain from these assumptions. especially in the analysis of developmental processes, which can be so closely connected with actual clinical practice. Ontogeny, unfolding of potentialities of Being here indeed is visible as individuation. To support this point, I will give provide a brief excursion into what is meant under direct intuition, ontopoiesis and Union.

Direct Intuition.

Direct intuition is an epistemological tool in systems of thought concerned with the maxim “know thyself” (*gnothi seauton*, Greek). The Islamic philosophy of illumination (al-Suhrawardi, 1999; Walbridge, 2000; Yazdi, 1992), Tantra (Louchakova & Warner, 2003), and Advaita Vedanta (Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, 1996; Rambachan, 1991) are all based on the direct intuition of the interior structure/meaning contents of the self. God, in early Christian mysticism (Kirk, 1931), in revelations of Jewish Merkabah (Scholem, 1946), or in Christian Philokalia (St. Hesychios the Priest, 1979; Theophanis the Monk, 1984), is known only by direct intuition. The Islamic spiritual philosopher al-Junayd qualifies direct intuition as the only valid means of self-knowledge (Abdel-Kader, 1967). Spiritual traditions and texts evidence that people

can arrive at this “seeing” of the interior workings of consciousness via a gradual training of the mind (Louchakova, 2005c).

Direct intuition can be described as the immediate consciousness of the fact of awareness/grasping/cognizing of phenomena presented to awareness. It is the in situ awareness of how awareness works within the act of this immediate awareness. Direct intuition, as a faculty of the psyche, needs to be differentiated from noesis, the innate sentiency by which consciousness “knows” the phenomena. “Every intensive mental process is precisely noetic... It is of its essence to include in itself something such as a “sense”, and possibly a manifold sense on the basis of the sense bestowal and, in unity with that, to effect further productions which become “senseful” precisely by this sense bestowal” (Husserl, 1999). Secondary to this ongoing life of consciousness, direct intuition is the conscious awareness of the noetic activity of consciousness, by which the latter becomes transparent to itself a) as an intentional consciousness, and b) as a conscious subjectivity. While the sentiency of consciousness is always present and synonymous with consciousness, people differ in regard to presence or absence of direct intuition, or in their awareness of noesis. Noesis always *is*, and direct intuition *can be* developed in a particular psyche as it comes to know itself. Direct intuition is not a given, and the initiation of its development is a conscious and volitional act. In its ability to directly perceive the essential structures and activities of consciousness, direct intuition, as it widens internal vistas and deepens internal landscapes, also causes the emergence of self-knowledge. While awareness, grasping its own phenomenal contents, serves as an ongoing background in the natural attitude, direct intuition, as the conscious perception of these activities, presupposes reduction of these phenomena and leads to the discovery of essences.

“Seeing” the interior operations and contents of consciousness is profoundly transformative (Louchakova, 2004). For example, it changes attitudes towards death. Theophanis the Monk, the Hesychast ascetic of the 8th century, indirectly points to the connection between the rise of direct intuition of the inner contents of the self through the Prayer of the Heart, and the resultant removal of the fear of death. More so, the fear of death alone serves as motivation to practice the Prayer of the Heart. The Indian Avadhuta Gita (Avadahūta Gītā, 1981) indicates that the rise of the direct intuition of Unitive consciousness leads to a cessation of “great fear”, or, in other words, existential angst.⁵

Ontopoiesis.

Ontopoiesis, as distinct from more customary term “autopoiesis”, is the principle category in the phenomenology of life of A.-T. Tymieniecka (2002). It points to the activity by which Logos of Life, the close analogue of consciousness-as-such⁶, explicates its own content, and deploys the phenomena of life in its ever-present self-creation. The central feature of ontopoiesis is the ordering in the unfolding of life. As shown by Louchakova (2005, 2006), ontopoiesis can be tracked as an intrapsychic process constituting the psyche, and the ontological hierarchies of the developing self. In this study ontopoiesis addresses the self-creative activity of consciousness as it manifests for practitioners of the PH. It will be shown in this article that such activity unfolds in a series of predictably organized experiences, leading practitioner from domains of the ego and individual will to the domains of Union, and manifesting as a layered gradient structure, organized as an ontological hierarchy. The actualization of every

⁵ This is the interpretation of sutras of Avadhuta Gita based on the oral teaching tradition of Advaita Vedanta (Dayananda Saraswati, 1993).

⁶ Tymieniecka’s Logos of Life also includes connotations of Unity-of-everything-there-is-(alive), the womb of life, the origin of reason, God, Being(ness), transcendent unity of existence, existence-consciousness-fullness etc.

ontologically structured and situated domain of experience may have specific influences in the process of individual psychological development.

Union.

PH leads to a complete restructuring of the intentional consciousness and towards a condition of the mind that the early Desert fathers call Union, or Theosis (Chirban, 1986; Theophanis the Monk, 1984). Union, a state of Oneness, lacks the denominator me-Other innate to all other states of perception. In early psychoanalytic works, Union was confused with the state of oceanic bliss. One of the contributions of transpersonal psychology to the knowledge of a person consists in identifying of the pre-trans fallacy (Epstein & Lieff, 1986), first defined by Wilber (1980) as absence of the differentiation between a state of Union and the early supposedly blissful experience of the merger.

RISE OF THE DIRECT INTUITION

Egological experience.

The key motion of attention in the PH brings focus *into* the embodied sense of self in the chest. Situated for the majority of people slightly to the right side of the chest, near the third rib, this sense serves as a gateway to the interior zones of the phenomenological self. Focus in the right side, as contrasted to the left side or the center of the chest, provides for faster development of direct intuition, as well as easier integration of the psychological contents of experience.

The PH begins with the repetition of the Divine Name (e.g. Jesus), which is associated with focusing in this somatic sense of self. In traditional forms of the PH, the connection between the invocation, self-sense, and focusing in the chest can arise spontaneously in the course of time, due to connotations such as “human subject,” “Son of God,” “God within,” etc.

In more contemporary forms of the PH in the Russian spiritual underground of 1980s, from the very beginning, attention was volitionally fixed in the chest. In this method, the phenomenological self, as well as the thoughts associated with it, are found in the inner space of the chest, and are not concentrated in the head. The phenomenological analysis of the PH uncovers the interior structures of consciousness within this “mind of the Heart”, and identifies them as different from the “mind of the head”. Head-thoughts are usually self-reflective or analytic/synthetic, and are thus one step removed from the immediacy of perceptions, thoughts and feelings as a lived experience in the phenomenological zone of the chest.⁷ The processes leading to the rise of direct intuition of the primal lived experience of intentional consciousness happen only in association with the focus of attention in the chest, and do not happen when the focus of attention is connected with the head.

Awareness of the felt sense of self in the chest corresponds to the rise of egological, self-referencing experience. As attention becomes more focused, this sense of self strengthens and becomes uninterrupted. De Monticelly (2002) follows Edith Stein in emphasizing the importance of “egological” experience as the entrance into the “inner being” in the pursuit of a serious epistemology of *personal knowledge*. In our study, egological experiences always involved the elements of a body schema, and a particular distribution of attention highlighting the areas of the latter. Some zones of the body sponsor the entrance into the “inner being” more than others. Both in the Prayer of the Heart, and in the self-enquiry of Sri Ramana Maharshi (Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, 1996), focusing on the right side of the chest aids practitioners in sorting the sense-thought of self out of the general flow of intentional consciousness. The internal structure

⁷ Interested readers may feel if for themselves through expanding introspective attention so that it includes the somatic self-sense and the body schema as well as the contents-structure of one’s thinking. This kind of introspection allows to differentiate between the bodily zones associated with the emergence of different types of thought processes.

of egological experience associated with the right side of the chest is different from the one associated with the head and other areas of the body. It is only in the chest that the sustained self-sense becomes the subject to spontaneously rising reductions. In that sense, one may speak about ontologically primary egological experience, as it is associated with a focus in the chest, and ontologically secondary experience, as it is associated with a focus in the head and possibly other body zones.

The chest-related egological experience includes affective, perceptual and cognitive elements, and may include volition. The common cognitive denominator is, of course, the “I am” – thought as it clusters with other elements in the process of formulating identity. “I am” can be inferential or abstracted, associated with the focus in the head, or immediate, lived, and associated with the focus in the chest, or the overall body schema, or rarely in the lower zones of the body. As I mention above, self-referencing may happen within the head or chest modes, which results in different ways of understanding the nature of a person. For example, “Cogito ergo sum” (i.e. existence equals thinking) is the result of head-based conceptual investigations, while Vedantic “Tat tvam asi” (Sanskrit, You are That), where the transcendental, indescribable Tat is defined as a Reality-Awareness/sentiency-Fullness beyond thought, is based, among other things, on the investigations of the consciousness in the heart (Tandavaraya, 1993, p.1). The experiences of ego-transcendence, or Union, and the direct intuition of ontopoiesis rise only via the chest-self, and do not rise via the head-self. The self-experience within the “self in the head” can not be reduced to pure subjectivity⁸ via hyletic reduction (see below), in ways it can be reduced in the chest. Transcendence of the individual identity necessary for the genesis of the

⁸ Some traditions, such as Kundalini Yoga, arrive at the realms beyond the ego via the focus of attention in the head. This process doesn't involve the reduction of the somatic sense of self to it's phenomenological origins. It will be a different type of ego-transcendence.

direct intuition of ontopoiesis happens only via reduction of the egological experience in the chest. It is not incidental that the 10th century Hesychast, St. Simeon the New Theologian instructs, “Search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart where all the powers of the soul reside .” (St. Simeon the New Theologian, 1995, p.73).

Thus, if one were to use ego-transcendent self-investigations in clinical practice, the starting point would be to find the egological experience that is associated with fixing attention in the sense of self on the right side of the chest. This experience contains a blend of meaning such as “I am,” “I am the person, the self,” or “I am this bodily being,” and actualizes the personal narrative. It also provides access to the contents of the early self, making psychoanalytic excursions readily possible, self-psychology style.

Hyletics.

Self-experience in the chest involves the specific tactility of “personhood.” Undifferentiated, it may be intermingled with affects, images and thoughts. Sorting this warm effulgence of personal sentiency out of its coupling with other cognitions is important insofar as this experience only leads one to finding the place in the heart (inner space of the chest) “where all the powers of the soul reside” (St. Simeon the New Theologian, 1995, p.73). The latter is pivotal in the practice of the Prayer of the Heart, and known in spiritual traditions as Spiritual Heart center. Somatic self-experience on the right side of the chest is the entry into the experience of Spiritual Heart. The Indian saint, Sri Ramana Maharshi (1996) calls the somatic self-sense in the chest *aham-sphurana* (Sanskrit), the radiance of the “I.” This tangibility of the sense of self is posited by hyletic intentionality, or the intentional consciousness of the materiality of the body (Louchakova, 2006).

The axis of reduction via hyletic intentionality organizes the sense of hierarchy and ordering within the egological condition. In “hyletic reduction” (author’s term, Louchakova, 2006) this sense becomes increasingly more “subtle”, that is, it “thins out” to reveal the interior contents of the self that are associated with it. The interior contents of the self can be systematically tracked only in association with this flow of hyletic reduction. This observation may be used as a clinical technique in analysis of the self. Experientially, hyletic reduction is a reduction by touch. If the egological self is grasped fully, without cutting off part of its modalities, all phenomena within their interiority are both within the interior space of the body, and are distributed along the gradient of hyletic reduction. The latter presents a continuum of gradual refinement of this materiality, which is perceived as a subtler and subtler touch, sometimes described in as “subtle energy”. Eventually, this reduction leads to “tangibility itself” merged with pure subjective awareness. Thus, the phenomena of the somatic self’s intra-subjectivity are seen not only as meaningful and spatial, but hyletic, or “tangible,” or consisting of “subtle energy.” In other words, the noemata of the self are pervaded by the noemata of the interior constitution of the body via the sense of touch. The internal phenomenal field of the egological sense, i.e. the internal phenomenal field of an embodied self-experience, has this hyletic gradient as one of its organizing principles. Informants in this study distinguished this vector of the internal organization of the self according to their proximity to the core of pure subjectivity.

To inwardly navigate the thought/sense experience of personhood to its phenomenological origins, practitioners’ attention must move inward and “ascend” from “gross” to “subtle,” from higher to lower density, and from lower to higher “vibrational frequency.” Core subjectivity, or pure awareness, is “tangibility itself” (Toni Varner, a.k.a. Gangaji, personal communication,

May 1994). Remarkably, the “subtler” is the hyletic reduction, the deeper and more existentially important are the meanings emerging with it. The closer to the innermost core of one’s interiority, the more intimate, alive, and meaningful is the experience. In the process of the PH, practitioner locates the Divine Name, paced with the breath, in the sense of self within the flow of this reversed intentionality, in the introspective space inside the chest, and goes back to the subtle center of the embodied awareness called the Spiritual Heart.

Spiritual Heart.

The Spiritual Heart is the innermost phenomenological soma-related core of both self-sense and of the cognitive self. Phenomenological origin of the thought is in the spiritual heart. Those willing to track the thought to its source will find it in Spiritual Heart. According to Hesychasm, the Spiritual Heart represents a junction of self-transcendence (Spidlík, 1986), where the individual I -Thou eternally dissolves into and emerges from the state of Union. The Spiritual Heart has a spatial locale within the internal landscape of the body-schema associated self. It is experienced as a core of the inner space of the chest, and is a junction of transcendence from the experience of body-schema related self, to the consciousness beyond the body-schema. Affectively in the Spiritual Heart the inward flow of intentional consciousness, attempting to grasp its own origin, is stabilized in the experience of internal intimacy.

The reverse flow of intentional consciousness backwards to its own origin is initially volitional and effortful. As the movement of attention inwards, and the corresponding reduction by hyletic intentionality deepens, one’s effort increases, and then abruptly ceases. It is as if a “pull” comes from within, with the impetus for the latter coming from the realm beyond the individual will. Further absorption and the self-transcendence of consciousness in the Spiritual Heart continues in the mode of surrendering to this rising attraction. These specific details of the

process of absorption into a felt sense of self are quite invariable across all accounts of deep absorption. Thus, they exist as a part of the essential phenomenological structure of the body-based introspection into the self.

Within this temporal-spatial structure, there are at least two radically different modes: relational, and non-relational. In the experience of non-devotional, emotionally dry self-enquiry, the reduction of the meaning of the individual I to transcendental ego, posited within the sole non-relational individual I, does not show the internal “pull” effect. The process of the Prayer of the Heart differs from this mode (namely, reduction of the self within the isolated individual I) not only by its bodily focus, but also by the overall relational setting that contains this introspective process. However, if reaching the depth of absorption corresponding to the Spiritual Heart happens, the formerly non-relational mode always spontaneously shifts to relational.

The worshipful repetition of the Divine Name in the spatial interiority of the hyletic self posits the polarity of I-Thou. The practitioner of the Prayer of the Heart intends upon, invites, and opens to the Other, the great prototype of all others. Reduction within the self is accompanied by a sense of the open unknown potentiality, described in earlier phenomenological studies of hope (Serrano Bonitto, 2005) and faith (Toussulis, 1995). In the case of this devotional introspection, such an opening also anticipates an encounter with the sacred, whereby one relinquishes ownership to consciousness as an attribute of the individual I, and awareness is recognized not as my awareness, but as awareness as such. Then, its given-ness is tracked beyond the individual reach. Having this as an operating assumption opens awareness to receive

disowned intentionality⁹. In contrast to the existential self-inquiry, which locks the person into an infinitely regressive monolog of self-transcending me - I, the Prayer of the Heart is implicitly a dialog. The epoché happens in the context of increasing intimacy, in between two affectively animated principles, ascending (known, owned, individual) and descending (transcendental, unknown, disowned, inferred, Divine). As one intends, invites, and opens to the Other, the Other intends, invites, and opens to the self in prayer. As De Monticelli (2002, p. 72) remarks, our loves get us closer to ourselves.

The Prayer of the Heart encourages practitioners to love beyond the name and form, and to conceive and cultivate an open-ended intention into the Unknown, with emotion directed at pure potentiality. The stepwise hyletic reduction of the embodied sense of self, the reduction by meaning of the self-referencing cognitions, and the reduction of awareness itself towards the essence of all perception, is paralleled by this worshipful receptivity to the Unknown. The inward motion of the mind continues in the direction of an increasing sense of intimacy. In that, gradual changes of perception are connected with awareness coming closer and closer to turning onto itself. The rise of direct intuition, associated with all of these processes, opens the inward fecundity of consciousness and transcendence into the greater Self, to which the egological experience is but a portal.

This internal life-world of somersaulting meaning of “who am I” in regard to the internal greater Other is embedded within the multidimensional of high complexity, which has field of different density, a passage from the right to the center where awareness can glide towards its origin, a junction (Spiritual Heart *per se*), where the transcendence of the individual I takes place. The right and the left sides of this continuum differ in the structure of associated

⁹ Awareness receiving disowned intentionality manifests within the psychological horizon as the unconscious coming to consciousness.

meanings, and at the core the notion of the body schema drops in the process of absorption.

Using Rosen's latest framework of topological phenomenology (Rosen, 2006), one may say that the life-world of the heart is topological. The detailed analysis of the topology of the heart exceeds the scale of this article, but I want to mention it here to point to the complexity of the inner structures of the self in the mode of ego-transcendence that I believe we are just beginning to explore.

Double agency of awareness.

As the interior presence deepens, and the inner space opens up, one "... will find there darkness and an impenetrable density. Later...you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as intellect attains the place of the heart, at once [notice the characteristic quality shift – the interior space is quantum structured] it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds it entirely luminous and full of discrimination. From then on, from whatever side a distractive thought may appear, before it has come to a completion and assumed a form, the intellect immediately drives it away and destroys it with the invocation of Jesus Christ....the rest you will learn for yourself" (St. Simeon, 1995, p.73).

The interior darkness and the sense of impenetrable density show in the beginning stages of introspection into the embodied self. The space is dark and unknown, because the vector of attention is turned where it has never looked before. This is the moment *prior* to the rise of direct intuition. There are no cognitive schemas readily available to know this internal reality. Also, in the act of turning onto itself, the inward intentional activity of awareness "clashes" with the outward vector of its own intentionality, which results in the temporary "arrest" of intentional processes. Furthermore, the internal flow of phenomena is not yet posited.

If the direction of attention is sustained, before long, a new type of intentionality comes to life. Awareness begins “seeing” inward and consciously grasping its own content inside the self. The set of processes described below exposes the double agency of awareness in the psyche. This notion of the double agency of awareness, clearly visible in the analysis of the accounts of the PH, is important, seems to me, for the understanding of how the increase of consciousness and the use of awareness as a healing agent in the therapeutic process can lead to the emergence of the new structures in the psyche.

On one side, awareness sponsors the deployment of phenomena, which looks like the proliferation of latencies from the informational repository of the unconscious. On the other, awareness acts as if it constructs, produces, or causes the production of the very material of consciousness of which it is aware. Gestalt, in which phenomena appear in the inner space upon awareness reflecting/touching upon its own phenomenological source, has both connotations: namely, awareness “teasing out” the latencies of the unconscious, and awareness “constructing” phenomena “upon contact” with itself.

In this gestalt, the initially dark space of introspection opens with meanings and images. Awareness of the interiority of the self catalyses the discharge of the interior contents of the self.¹⁰ Awareness applied to this interior dark space works akin to sunlight warming the dark and moist fertile ground: on contact with the “light” of awareness, the latter proliferates. This is into that darkness, proliferating with the phenomena of the inner life of the psyche, that the Divine Name is brought in the PH.

¹⁰ This double agency becomes available to explication in the PH due to the highly dynamic, temporal, developmental nature of the observed phenomenon. The analysis of the static “states” of consciousness does not show this double agency.

While in the simple process of reduction of the content of the self in self-enquiry, these freshly appearing images and meanings are woven into the tapestry of the self-construct, in the PH they are not invited to enter these horizontal concatenations of consciousness.

As opposed to mere process of self-reduction, which can be “haunted” by secondary interpretations, the repetition of the Name of the Divine in the Prayer of the Heart counteracts self-interpretations, keeping the focus on grasping the phenomena of the pre-interpretive level, and deconstructing secondary into primary, or seed meanings. The reduction is pure, freed from interpretation. The practitioner enters the “secret chamber of the heart”, where the living Logos, like a spider, posits out of itself the primordial phenomena, which are used for weaving both the temporal and spatial networks of the mind.

Direct Intuition.

Gradually, the interior space of consciousness opens as luminous, that is, fully available to awareness, and “full of discrimination” (St. Simeon The New Theologian, 1995, p.73). Temporal and spatial networks of the discursive mind are left behind, and the very emergence of meaning from pure subjectivity is witnessed. The phenomena of space and presence are deployed along with these newly emergent meanings. Initially, it is a display of impenetrable darkness deploying thoughts and images. Later, the darkness becomes “luminous,” and the resultant pure knowingness embraces the phenomena of absolute immediacy, rising from pure awareness itself on the divide between subject and object. Besides this emergence, awareness also perceives its own self-luminous nature. Metaphorically, it is as if the veil is removed, the overcast fades away, and pure, space-like sentiency dawns unto itself, revealing the threefold gestalt: “awareness is – awareness is aware of itself – awareness is aware of the meanings rising from awareness.” This opens the intuition of the origins of intentionality as such, beyond its

contents, as a sheer dynamic creative force, simultaneously the same and different from the unchanging substratum from which it deploys.

This grasping by awareness of the process of this phenomenological positing, or deployment of phenomena from pure consciousness, happens as what the ancients called the “direct knowing” (Yazdi, 1992). Husserl (1999) and Tymieniecka (2000) addressed it as “direct intuition.” In my observations, direct intuition leads to the intuition of one’s own developmental restructuring, for which I have previously suggested the term “ontopoietic intuition” (Louchakova, 2005a).

Direct intuition and the deployment of the latent meanings are mutually enhancing. In fact, this is one continuum of logicoic expression, described from two different vistas, interior and external, or those of releasing and receiving, taken together. This coming together of descending and ascending knowing unfolds in stages, gradually progressing from pure externality, to full logicoic expression. Theophanis the Monk (8th century/1994, p. 67) described it in the following verses:

“...The first step is that of purest prayer,
 From this there comes warmth of heart,
 And then a strange, a holy energy,
 Then tears wrung from the heart, God-given.
 Then peace from thoughts of every kind.
 From this arises purging of the intellect,
 And next the vision of heavenly mysteries.
 Unheard of light is born from this ineffably,
 And thence, beyond all telling, the hearts illumination.

Last comes – a step that has no limit
Though compassed in a single line –
Perfection that is endless...”

The stratified structure of the contents of self-awareness in the heart is known by direct apprehension, and seen immediately in its detail constituting one's self. The knowledge of this self-structure is the true self-knowledge, not by inference, deduction or through the senses, but the knowledge by directly “seeing” what is “there”. The rise of this faculty in one's interiority leads, insofar as the personal transformation is concerned, to the deconstruction of the adaptational false self, and the acceptance of one's own true psychological composition. Here is an illustration of how it works in one's transformational process.

This handsome man in mid 60s came to seek assistance in what he considered to be his spiritual awakening. His professional life was at its' peak: a successful attorney, he enjoyed authority, challenge and high compensations. He was divorced twice, had two healthy adult children, and was warmly welcome in their homes. He worked intensely with himself in various forms of therapy, specifically dealt the consequences of teenage sex abuse, and made the best out of the situation by being able to bring his abuser to court a couple of years before our meeting. By his own decision, he stopped addiction to drugs and alcohol. His life seemed to be under control, however, a couple of years ago he was diagnosed with diabetes, and then developed leukemia. During the leukemia treatment, taken by the fear of death and dissatisfaction with life, mixed with self-deprecation, he managed to stop his mind. He did it in the spiritual style of Eckhart Tolle (1999), and recognized that there is only eternal “Now”. He recovered from leukemia.

His relationship with his second ex-wife were tumultuous: they connected and separated, their sexuality either soared or failed completely. His ex, an eccentric New Age artist, got him “hooked up” on the ideas of spiritual awakening. During their number three break-up, he experienced what he thought was a full blown spiritual crisis, involving the tremendous energy opening in his body.

Soon after, he developed the prostate cancer (within 5 years after the diabetes diagnosis and 3 years after leukemia attack). He showed up in my office with the request to help him through the cancer, which, he thought, was somehow associated with him blocking his spirituality. At that time, he was in stable, boring, emotionally empty relationship with the woman, but his attraction to his second ex wife endured and even took over his survival concerns. In the several years of our weekly meetings using self-psychology oriented, somatically grounded, awareness based approach, he was able to remain healthy and get all the physical processes in his body into a much better shape. He continued his spiritual studies, and advanced in them as well. His very conventional partner was threatened by and disapproved of his spirituality, therefore he had to keep it very private. So, his secret life was that of spiritual awakening, and of longing for his ex wife. This was a life of deep existential hunger, unsettled sexuality and cravings for pornography and prostitution. That other, “dark” and secreted side, kept him locked in relationship with no joy, for he had no resources of accepting himself or being alone with it. In our work, it seemed that the analysis, breathwork, cognitive restructurings etc. will continue for years, helping him at best to get adapted to his situation, but not more than that.

He learned PH, and I started training him in direct presencing of the interior structures of the self in the heart. Results were unpredictable and immediate. In a few months, the self-

deprecation based dynamic in the session shifted. His mind opened, and he became aware of his own deepest composition. He accepted himself, the void within got more and more “filled”. He went through the crisis of the uncontrolled sex addiction, but this time there was nothing self-destructive in how he accepted it, worked through it, and got it under control. He came out recognizing his right to be treated well and to be loved, something he of course considered, but never really embodied. He saw the split, depleted parts of himself, and was able to animate them with the affect belonging to his adult, functional self. He stopped compromising in dry, empty relationship, voiced his concerns (which lead to termination of the relationship), and managed to stay healthy and reasonably happy through the split. He became aware of the transformations of his heart, and of the inner developmental flow of his consciousness, and that direct, “ontopoietic” intuition changed the ways of his mind. His cancer count is absent, and his diabetes is under control. I hope to share more on this “onotopoietic intuition” in the second article with the rest of the results of this study.

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