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Twenty-five or so years ago, a series of events were to take place in my life which would change forever my sense of life and death. I am going to describe them in detail, because I believe they are part of a potentially universal experience that can move us as a species toward higher levels of consciousness and a more spiritually uplifting life.

I'll start at the beginning.

When I finished my twelve years of training in arts, medicine and psychiatry, I was an emotional wreck. I had a beautiful office complete with a harpsichord in the most professionally acceptable section of Toronto. While I certainly felt a great sense of accomplishment, I was none the less, frightened and very depressed.

As part of my years of university training, I had been exposed to many of the major types of mainstream therapy. Additionally, I had been a client in three of them but at no point had my pain even been approached much less touched or healed.

Having little interest in general psychiatry, I had failed my certification and, tired of being a child in the system I decided at age thirty two, to leave it. I opened an office of my own and limited my practice to psychotherapy. Additionally, I decided to “throw out” everything I had ever learned.

I would start from the beginning, listen with great care to my clients and try to learn, without prejudice, from the experiences I would have with them as I went along.

Serendipity, a process that I now trust with all my heart, came repeatedly to my rescue.

A teenaged baby sitter tossed a book on my dining room table and said, “Dr. V., you might like this.” It was “Gestalt Therapy,” by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. The book contained a series of psychological exercises which the reader could do alone. I set aside two hours each day at lunch time, lay on my office chesterfield and very carefully worked my way through them. Six months or so later I knew something important had changed.

It would be four more years before I would finally discover Primal Therapy, but the ball had begun rolling.

Next, a woman friend handed me the first book I would ever read which would make perfect sense to me from start to finish. It was “Nature, Man and Woman,” by Alan Watts, a well known American writer in the area of consciousness raising.

In the bibliography I found “The Way of Zen,” by the same writer, and that led me to “The Supreme Doctrine,” by Hubert Benoit.

This I read to save my life, the same way that I read everything in those years. It was written in the European tradition of hyper intellectualism and was a very, very complicated book, but I had a strong feeling that what it said was absolutely central to the human dilemma. It is a study of those things within us which blind our minds to a full comprehension of ultimate reality.

I decided that I would not move from one para-
instant everything changed.

With the sound of the twig breaking, I was suddenly bathed in a golden light and found myself deep in outer space, gazing into the heart of the universe. In the infinite dark and cold I saw that everything was alive with energy. Absolutely everything was alive; from the most frozen rock to the warmest sun. From the deadest leaf, to the liveliest person, everything was filled with energy. More than this, everything was perfect, good and right.

I perceived these things through some set of senses that I had never accessed before. The vision seemed to flood in through my abdomen and spread out through my whole body while at exactly the same moment I was seeing it with my eyes. It was as though my body, not just my mind was being suddenly saturated with a completely new consciousness.

I saw that the universe was perfect, and that within that perfection my death was perfectly alright. I was instantly filled with a feeling of awe, and this was accompanied by a gratitude so huge that it felt like a state of worship. The feeling was that I had been given an ultimate gift because with it came a sense of peace that was so profound it reminded me of the Christian phrase, “The peace which passeth all understanding.” Tension drained from my body so completely that I realized that from the earliest years of my life I had never been free of it.

I was no longer fearful of anything, including my own death.

The feeling of joy and peacefulness lasted six weeks, then slowly began to fade. Although the memory of what had happened remained clear, daily life with its care and worries began to reclaim me. I would never again however be afraid in the same way.

When I had my first primal experience several years later I was immediately struck by the fact that the feeling of the primal event, along with its sudden expansion of consciousness, was almost exactly the same as the experience of Satori itself.

In my book “Help Me—I’m Tired of Feeling Bad,” I have detailed the levels of the expansion of consciousness that occur within the primal experience. I call this sudden and unique expansion of awareness “Holistic Insight” and in the following excerpt from chapter twenty two, I attempt to show how it is similar to and yet different from Sudden Illumination (Satori).

Holistic Insight has gradations of quality and extentiveness which can be seen to exist in six stages:

STAGE ONE HOLISTIC INSIGHT begins with the experience of inwardness which comes to us when we lie down to focus on the inner arena of our life.

We begin to sense the ground of our being, the place where we will study and merge with the previously warded-off parts of our deepest self.

Just as putting our hand in water gives us a direct sense of what water is, we start to gain a non-verbal, non-intellectual awareness of our inner environment through this process of merging. This is the beginning of the long, sweet relief of giving a harassed surface-self over to a study of our deeper processes.

This relief is increased as we allow our conscious self to fully feel the six ways in which our brain broadcasts its pain to us through specific body sensations and so on.

The relief is even further enhanced as we make our congruent expressions to fully merge with these deeper experiences. It is here where Holistic Insight truly begins, when we feel the deeper self and the surface self coming into alignment for the first time. Now a sweep of honesty begins to neutralize the displaced, disguised and fruitless struggles of our life.

Stage One Holistic Insight then, is the direct non-linear, non-symbolized experience of an inwardness and a re-alignment between the unconscious and conscious parts of our being that is facilitated through the use of the techniques of congruence and externalization.

At this level no specific insight is required; no words, no images and no re-experiencings are necessary. There is nonetheless, a deep and growing sense that something within us is easing and becoming whole.

Because all these Stage One processes have been without specific insight and yet deepen our non-specific awareness, we can refer to them as textural self-enhancement.

STAGE TWO HOLISTIC INSIGHT is marked by the emergence into consciousness of a specific issue along with some of the meaning attached to it.

We have focused inwardly on some discomfort, allowing it to fill our awareness. As we are merge with it we may or may not start
to make our congruences. Suddenly though we realize something new about ourselves, we become completely aware of a truth concerning our existence.

For example, an argument with someone might have left us feeling very discomforted, with a tightness in our chest. We lie down, focus on the tightness, merge with it, and suddenly find ourselves saying, “Please don’t hurt me.” We repeat this congruence five to ten times, matching the words to the feeling. Suddenly we have the insight that we have been overwhelmingly hurt far more deeply than we realized. We have a sense that, in some way, the whole axis of our bodymind has been rocked on its foundation.

While this realization has definite form and insight, it is limited to the present and the circumscribed event. This is the hallmark of a Stage Two Holistic Insight. It is non-linear; and comes suddenly as a small wavefront of awareness. It is this instantaneous, gut-level, non-verbal, non-linear knowing that classifies it as a Holistic Experience.

It is holistic in nature because our sense of knowing and being, a fundamental expression of our bodymind, instantly expands with the experience. It is felt within the mind as clarity and within the body as relaxation. The enhanced knowing and the physical relief are simultaneous and immediate. We have the intriguing deeper sense that because of what we have just realized, we are suddenly more than we were. The quality of our integration, our knowledge, the organic functionality of our bodymind, expands in many directions.

For instance, we realize that we do hurt, and that we are hurtable. There is a shift from a false sense of strength to a sense that we are always vulnerable. And yet, through our newly reformed integration, we sense that we are also repairable. We do not have to be rigid and self-protecting. We can live more openly without being destroyed. This is an example of the kind of awareness expansion that accompanies a typical Holistic Insight.

Stage Two Insight is marked by a sudden, non-linear expansion of present awareness confined to a single issue, and the insight is internal to the life of the one who experiences it. It is experienced mentally as insight and physically as relaxation.

Stage Three Holistic Insight manifests as a sudden, non-linear awareness that expands laterally in the present to include self and world. For example: after an argument with a boss, a feeling sequence on the mat can yield the realization, the Stage Two insight, that not only have we been deeply hurt but also that the boss is a deeply damaged and therefore hurtful man. We see how damage within him permeates the world around him, triggering everybody's pain. Sensing things that are intrinsic to negative authority, how it comes about and how it harms us all, we become aware that many people in authority are like this.

With our awareness still confined to the present, our work at Stage Three not only enhances our comprehension of matters internal to ourselves but our insight spreads outward to encompass the dynamics of the world around us.

Stage Four Holistic Insight

At this level, realization spans out not only laterally but backward in time as well. We suddenly see flashes of our existence down through the years as they pertain to our current discomfort. We realize that old pain within us has been activated. Once again, this is a sudden wave of comprehension that washes through us. We are not, however, actually re-living a past event, although we do feel eased in body and in mind at the moment of perception.

Holistic Insight, Stage Five

At this level a shift in temporal context is activated; a sort of magic, time-carpet if you will.

Awareness of our present moment fades into the re-living of a childhood experience with the completeness and intensity of an actual hallucination. Corridors of connectedness open within our bodymind that lead from the past event to multiple, significant experiences through the course of our lives. We are suddenly illuminated as to the multiple causes of our experience with regard to importantly formative events.

As barriers within the bodymind collapse, the sensations are strange and wondrous, yet, the experience seems to take just a few seconds. The aftermath is a most profound know-
ing on the plane of one’s psychobiology, one’s bodymind, that leaves the body deeply relaxed and forever changed, especially in the chemical and muscular structure of its defenses. The mind comes to trust openness and vulnerability as a natural part of deeply organic function.

Forgiveness, both of self and others, naturally spins out from within the incremental disentangling of the bodymind. A non-judgmental, profoundly ethical stance begins to replace a lifetime of externally imposed teachings and the incultation of guilt. The brain begins to experience true individuation, a sense of authentic internal power. A sense of the profound complexity and preciousness of life automatically fosters feelings compassion and morality.

Stage Five Holistic Insight is the last stage of Holistic Awareness before the great experience of Sudden Illumination or Satori itself, the goal of Zen. It shares many of the characteristics and qualities of Satori. It is both sudden and profound, it brings enormous comprehension while affording exquisite relief within one’s bodymind. It is not, however, actual Satori as it is still limited to the plane of psychobiology and confines itself to connections and processes of a worldly nature, it is not metaphysical.

Stage Six Holistic Insight (Sudden Illumination or Satori)

Because I believe that the mechanisms involved in Bodymind Holistic Insight and those in Zen-oriented Satori share similar processes, I will include a few brief comments about this ultimate experience.

Satori itself, as I have both studied and experienced it, is a sudden and profound awakening of an altogether different kind of consciousness.

Psychobiological awakening (Holistic Insight) concerns itself with remaking a functional, organic whole of the “discrete compartments” within the fractured realm of our embedded unto unconsciousness internal experience. It is achieved through careful and minute attention to inner body states and the creation of the congruences that we have already described. These are mechanisms of mind and body (inquiry within the psychobiological plane) and therefore work in this area issues forth in awareness at this level.

Satori itself is an attempt to dissolve the compartmentalization of the bodymind in a much more profound way. It is an attempt to render obsolete the absolute ground of symbolization as it pertains to the mind’s view of all things. The stage of inquiry is far more vast, infinite in fact, encompassing the structure of mind, the structure of matter and the relationship between the two. It also includes the Prime Movement of the universe.

Our perception of all things is challenged as, all in a blinding flash, the event-process of Satori dismantles the symbolic barriers between comprehension and matter itself.

It is for this reason that the Zen Koan, or mind puzzle, is so profoundly enigmatic. The solving of a Zen puzzle (“What is the sound of one hand clapping?” for example) brings the symbolizing functions of the brain crashing down around us until we and the universe are one. A Zen monk requires years, sometimes decades, of concentrated meditation to achieve final dissolution of such intrinsic brain function.

It is extraordinarily interesting to note that the cultivation of what we shall call Purity of Intent in approaching Holistic Insight is very similar to the cultivation of Purity of Intent in the approach to Satori itself. Both require the same paradoxical process of intensity versus letting go, of extraordinary humility, patience, lack of expectation and extreme focus.

The driving force at the bodymind level is pain. The method is the forging of a link, between present experience and past experience, through the use of congruent feelings. The ultra-high level of congruence between a present feeling and a past feeling activates the psychobiologically immaculate process of non-linear Holistic Insight. Holistic Insight is the sudden overwhelming expansion of consciousness within the psychobiological field of enquiry.

The driving force toward the Satori-level experience is profound existential dissatisfaction coupled with extraordinarily intense meditational techniques extending over time and employing puzzles that have no solution at the level of the mind’s symbolizing processes.

Both processes share a sudden, profound expansion of consciousness. Holistic Insight is still confined however, within its bodymind’s field of examination. Satori shatters
all confinement of awareness. It would seem to be the most profound and complete achievement of awareness possible for our biochemically-based consciousness.

Satori shatters the barriers between mind and universe. What then are these barriers? What is it that we all carry around and are so completely saturated with that we cannot see it?

The most important function of the human brain is dishonesty. It’s main job is to lie to us about almost everything until those lies finally coalesce into chronic overwhelming delusion. Living within this delusion we of course cannot see anything clearly, certainly not the nature of reality itself.

I cannot see the full extent of this dishonesty but I am beginning to understand some parts of it. What I understand, amazes me.

HUMAN DELUSION, LEVEL ONE: The Image

When something is represented in our mind, for instance with a word or an image, that symbol is not the thing it stands for. The symbol lifts us away from the real thing. Mental function at this point becomes displaced away from the Universe. We are cut off from it in the same moment we acquire the symbolic tool with which to represent and think about it. This may seem like a small matter but it gives the mind building blocks it can use for it’s own purposes without having to deal with Reality.

We can leap off a building in a dream with no consequences. We can believe what we like about anything without having to check it out. The building blocks of delusion have been set in place.

HUMAN DELUSION, LEVEL TWO: The Mental Mechanisms of Defense

Human needs and impulses are displaced away from their roots into all the varied forms of civilized behavior that we see on the surface. This is dealt with in depth in my book, *Help Me—I’m Tired of Feeling Bad,* in chapter twenty, “The Devices Forces and Trickery Used by the Unconscious to Keep Us Out of Our Own Brain.”

What we pursue on the surface is not what is happening deeper down. What we believe to be true is often not. Denial keeps us safe from knowing who we really are and for that matter, who anyone else is. It takes years in a therapy group to begin to really see others and ourselves.

HUMAN DELUSION, LEVEL THREE: The Belief That We Initiate Thought and Action

We do not create thoughts. They come to us, and the same is true of feelings and the behavior that flows from them. We initiate nothing. We receive it from deeper within and pass it on. Yet at the moment this happens we have the feeling that we are the authors of our actions. We feel as though we are consciously creating our life through our activities when in fact we are receiving it.

HUMAN DELUSION, LEVEL FOUR: The Belief That We Have Freedom of Choice

We can spend years in therapy examining the roots of any given moment of seeming choice. This says that in any given moment of “choice” there is so much unconscious process involved we cannot begin to know in the moment why we choose what we choose. And yet nothing is stronger in humans at any given moment than the feeling they are choosing what they think and do.

(Editor’s note: The author explains his position in the matter of whether we have “freedom of choice” in greater detail in his Interview with the Primal Psychotherapy Page)

These delusions seem to exist to allow us to function and survive on the planet as physical organisms. They give us the illusion of being consciously in control of our food acquisition and other self- and species-maintaining behavior. They let us feel as though we are manipulating our world, have power and can survive. In that sense they work.

Unfortunately, they are lies; lies maintained in spite of any real examination we might conduct.

We receive everything, from our life to our feelings and thought, to our actions and their results. I believe that our profound misunderstanding of this situation requires energy to maintain and creates tensions within us that can rise to very high levels.

These tensions have no effective way to dissipate, and beyond even these yet more profound levels of tension are continuously at work within us.

There is the tension of knowing that we are going to die. We spend a lifetime struggling to live as though this were not true. Denial of death is one of the great, founding and inexorable tensions of our being. As we find ourselves, there is no relief from it and the great majority of people will not achieve anywhere near the
growth that is necessary to neutralize this paradox.

I believe that whenever the mind creates a delusion, with the necessary level of denial to maintain it, this distortion of reality produces tension (existential tension). Since almost all our sense of what is, is in fact false, the central nervous system is always under serious tension and consequently far removed from Reality.

This nullification of Reality, the subsequent maintenance of our delusion and the massive denial that must, of necessity, accompany all this displaces us away from the ground of the Universe. At the level of our belief systems we are absolutely incongruent with It while at once within It; a paradox.

This completes our separation from Reality, a separation that began with the formation of the original images and symbols spoken of earlier.

Now we can begin to see what Satori might be about.

When the tensions of our falsely engineered belief systems regarding our own existence rise beyond a certain point, which they can do under a wide variety of circumstances such as an impossibly painful life event or a near death experience, they can precipitate a cascading failure of the symbolizing processes of the mind. When this happens and symbolizing collapses, we suddenly “see” the Universe without our false lens and as it is in Reality. In this moment there is no lie to separate us from it.

Now without our symbols, we and the ground of the Universe share identical structures. We are One. Delusion dissolves, the “Lie” ends and Satori occurs. Tension naturally drops to zero in a manner somewhat similar to that experienced on the psychobiological plane during Holistic Insight. With Satori however this reduction of tension far, far greater.

Interestingly, we will still struggle to symbolize even this experience. The Christian sees Christ, the life-long science fiction fan finds himself in outer space, the botanist might see the Wonder in a leaf. Some might experience just the Wonder of no thing at all. Just the Wonder and awe.

The key thing here is not our imposed modulations—all our symbolic representations—but the carrier wave itself, the integrated oneness that is the ground of all things.

An aspect of the natural order has created human beings as creatures of delusion, forever cut off from the ground of existence. We can not set ourselves free until we understand this.

Primal therapy’s Holistic Insight experiences liberate us from psychological delusion.

Satori liberates us from the delusions beyond psychology; the delusions both inside and seemingly outside of ourselves that separate us from the natural world.

We can now see that in fact, these two great phenomena of insight share similar brain mechanisms. Because of this, complete enlightenment, which was thought to be beyond comprehension, swim into view as something understandable and available for study, and even attainable through carefully understood kinds of personal work.

The door to a new level of integration between mind and matter begins to swing open . . .

Question: What do you think about rapidly attained Satori (Sudden Illuminations)?

Very interesting. If there were a simple way to get to a “Godhead” experience, it would certainly put a shortcut in the world’s growth work.

It would be a wonderful thing, but it gives me pause as I am sure it does you.

Sudden illumination after years of disciplined effort, tends to teach discipline and a healthy respect for gradual evolution toward expanded consciousness.

A shortcut solution tends to create religious zeal and cultism.

Now in all fairness, I must say that if the “Satori” experience is a real one—whatever that might mean, given the delusional capacities of the human mind—the speed of attainment would be irrelevant. Real awakening banishes delusion of any sort, creates genuine humility and instills profound wisdom and compassion. Not a bad combination for the human race to inject into itself. Quite species-saving I would say.

The terrible truth is however that I am not sure we can count on the mind’s objective integrity.

Touch certain parts of the brain with an electrode and you can stimulate centers that produce profound feelings, from rage to joy. Couple these with ideational content, and presto, certainty about things might emerge.

I do believe after my experiences that the Universe is “good,” that is to say: it makes complete sense. I do believe that if we could see it through infinitely expanded “eyes” we would see that all things are, in fact, perfect, and that there is absolutely nothing to fear in any final way. This expanded
view, of course, when experienced through the physical mechanisms of our heretofore vulnerable and frightened bodies, could not fail to produce ecstatic joy. After all, given the problems of human suffering and death, who wouldn’t be relieved to know that everything is really and finally OK.

I just think we have to be cautious about how we embrace these awarenesses. I think however that we should study them with all our heart and balanced good will.