

## A "HOW TO" ON CONSCIOUSNESS Karen E. Herrick, PhD

### **An opening of consciousness means getting lost in the present and a detachment from time and space -**

When Wm. James, sometimes called the Father of American psychology, wrote *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), it was believed that a person's thoughts have a clear beginning and end and that the thinker is in control of his or her thoughts. But James described consciousness or thoughts as flowing. He influenced writers and novelists from James Joyce to William Faulkner who began to write about streams of consciousness in their work. Consciousness, then, became important during that time.

The word psyche stands for the totality of your mind and your unconscious. Mind can be described as the capacity for thought. When people speak of the non-locality of consciousness, it means that the psyche is not confined to time or space. You can travel in your consciousness! The more conscious one is the more that person sees, hears and is open to experiencing.

### ***Mind-Stuff* connects us to each other.**

In the Journal of Scientific Exploration, 1994, Vol. 8, No. 4, it was stated "It looks as if a fragment of mind-stuff becomes attached to an individual organism, at or near birth, and thereafter persists with this symbiotic relationship until that organism perishes" (as quoted in Venture Inward Newsletter, Winter 2011, p. 2). So, it seems, this *mind-stuff* connects us all to each other and to our spiritual source, higher power or God. Carl Jung stated "Consciousness is renewed by its descent into the unconscious ... (Jung, CW, Vol. 14, Para. 520). This consciousness is sometimes eventually perceived by your ego. But when?

Your ego is the *you* that you are aware of. A good ego exercise is to write an "I am" list. Write anything and everything that you think you are and this list will show you your ego's opinion of yourself. (Then check it out with your friends and see if they agree!). One problem with your ego in this American culture is that it hasn't been taught that some things are OK to experience. More on that later.

### **Limited Consciousness**

When we are born and as children we are aware of our family environment, which we want to be safe and secure. We have an unquestioning acceptance of this environment and a belief that the world as it is being experienced is all there is. We are dependent on our parents and family. This is limited consciousness.

Through them we learn about values, priorities and, supposedly, who we are. The money and material resources in our home gives us stable or unstable security needs. Your mother and father teach you about domestic arrangements and how conflict is handled or stifled. All of this determines whether you are codependent, oppositional, passive aggressive, avoidant or assertive in your dealings with people.

In “The Creative Attitude”, from *The Structurist*, (1963, No. 3, pp. 4-10), Abraham Maslow states, “The greatest cause of our alienation from our real selves is our neurotic involvements with other people, the historical hangovers from childhood, the irrational transferences, in which past and present are confused, and in which the adult acts like a child” (p. 7). This type of neurotic involvement causes a narrowing of consciousness, which, in my job as a therapist, I help people broaden. Freud was known to have stated that most people just live out their unconscious issues in life never broadening their consciousness. (Sometimes one may have had a spiritual experience as a child and no one in their family can help them. They may go for many years before they find their answer.)

Those people who broaden their consciousness usually learn to go beyond the values and beliefs of their families of origin to handle partnerships and their personal and professional lives in more meaningful ways. They heal their wounds and claim their own power with the support of others who share their new beliefs. They are, therefore, expanding their consciousness.

Through this and philosophy, organized religion, travel, etc. they eventually learn they have a Soul and a purpose in their life. They search for their “truths.” Wm. James was known to say that a person’s beliefs were true if they were useful to that person. Therefore, a rise in consciousness seems to eventually reach a spiritual dimension.

### **Increasing Your Consciousness Immediately**

James discussed two different forms of religious or spiritual experiences a person could have. One was a gradual type and the other was immediate. Many times, James observed, an experience started with an “absolute need of a higher helper and ends with the sense that he has helped us (James, 1985/1902, p. 203).” In other words, the person was in crises and pleading for help from some higher source whether they believed in that source or not.

In this book *Varieties of Religious Experiences* he stated “It is natural that those who personally have traversed such an experience should carry away a feeling of its being a miracle rather than a natural process” (p. 228). Some of the characteristics that were experienced are:

- Voices are often heard

- Lights seen
- Visions witnessed
- After the surrender of the personal will, it's as if an extraneous higher power had flooded in and taken possession.
- Sense of renovation, safety, cleanness, rightness, can be so marvelous and jubilant as well to warrant one's belief in a radically new substantial nature.
- words can describe the experience (p. 228).
- Bodily accompaniments, loss of sleep and appetite (p. 200)
- Ecstasy of happiness (p. 254).
- What is attained from a religious conversion: a "new level of spiritual vitality, a relatively heroic level in which impossible things have become possible and new energies and endurances emerge" (p. 241).
- The central one is the loss of all the worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the *willingness to be*, even though the outer conditions should remain the same" (P. 248).
- The second feature is the sense of perceiving truths not known before" (p. 248).
- A third peculiarity of the assurance state is the objective change, which the world often appears to undergo. 'An appearance of newness beautifies every object...This sense of clean and beautiful newness within and without is one of the commonest entries in conversion records" (p. 248).

These characteristics describe the immediate type of spiritual experience, which in his culture he defined as belonging to those who were religious. James stated that even when people became less religious in their continuing lives, they still felt and remembered the characteristics that happened during their conversion experience. This, then, has come to be known as being "born again."

### **Increasing Your Consciousness - Gradually**

Now would be a good time to return to your ego. Your ego is going to have a problem with some of these characteristics that may cause you to have a painful period of readjustment. Your ego may tell you things like "This is crazy what happened to you. You can't tell anyone about this because you'll be put away!"

So, one of the necessary things is for you is to find a place where these types of experiences will be validated. You need to search for other people like you to learn and to know that these things have happened before. You need to go *Beyond Ego* as Roger Walsh, who wrote such a book with Frances Vaughan (1993), would have you do! And, please tell your ego NOW that it is OK to experience any and all of the above characteristics! (One thing about a spiritual experience is that it cannot be transferred to others. It must be directly experienced so those experiencers are the ones you want to find.)

A gradual type of spiritual experience can be as different as the people experiencing them. Perhaps, one would start with showing up in the world open

to learn about what other people and cultures believe. You will read, read and then more reading will aid always in your education. Then, things will start to happen.

## **Awakening of Consciousness**

I am reminded at this time of the “Umwelt” story. I don’t know where I heard this but it’s about a little wood tick that lived in the woods for years and years. He’s very happy there in the forest until one day a big dog walks over the space where he lives. He feels the warmth from the dog’s body and jumps onto the dog. He then, thanks to the dog, is awakened to a new life.

So, another part of a gradual awakening is that people show up in your life – people you may only see once over a cup of tea in a cafeteria. And they say something like, “You may want to look into this organization called ASCSI. I think you’d be interested in what they do.” People really are angels who are sent to give us direction. It is then up to us to follow up with their suggestion/s.

When I became interested in Jungian psychology, I learned about synchronicities – a random meeting of two separate events that teach me something. Mostly, these synchronicities, I have found, come particularly when I am in transition. They teach me that I am on the right track and to keep going.

What symbols attract you? Draw them, cut them out of magazines, post in your home and in your car. Your unconscious loves symbols. Sometimes it is the unconscious that makes you aware of certain symbols. You will obtain more information as you work with your symbols.

What will it be for you that will aid in your gradual awakening of consciousness - a book, a person, an organization? One such organization is Alcohol Anonymous. In Appendix II of the “Big Book,” entitled *Alcoholics Anonymous* (AA World Services Inc.), p. 567, spiritual experience is explained. This is because their founder, Bill Wilson, had such an experience in the 1930s when he asked “If there is a God please take away my desire to drink.”

Herbert Spencer is responsible for the quote on p. 568, “There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance – that principle is contempt prior to investigation.” What else can stop a broadening of consciousness?

## **What Limits Consciousness?**

One way to think about consciousness is that you have a conscious and unconscious consciousness. One you are aware of and the other you are not. If you are hungry, angry, lonely or tired your conscious consciousness is lowered.

Thinking and judging many times stops the flow of this conscious consciousness. Obsessive thinking is usually trying to control things and people. Neurotic involvements also cause a lowering. Therefore, one opening of conscious consciousness can be eliminating negative people from your life. This could be lonely for you. So, please, find new people who want to be positive.

When you are hungry, angry, lonely or tired and your conscious consciousness is lowered, your ego is not as active. This may be a positive place to be for your unconscious consciousness to take over because apparently this *mind-stuff* that connects us all to each other can come up in an unconscious process when your ego is taking a nap. Therefore, it may be true that when your conscious consciousness is lowered, this is not the time to be making the best rational decisions because you're not fully conscious; BUT, when you are not thinking, that may be the best time for a spiritual experience to happen.

### **Finding Your Consciousness**

Perhaps your spiritual experience already has happened? As a person who wrote to me this week stated, "But, why Karen, why did this happen to me and what am I supposed to do now?" And yes, that's the big question isn't it? That's what we are here to discover. What are you supposed to do with your awakening and the *mind-stuff* you were given?

Probably, one of the big reasons to have one is to improve your life, your health (Yes, people who have higher consciousness are healthier!) and eventually to help others – maybe to make your relationships better. This is one thing that people who have experienced a near-death experience usually say. "I know I'm supposed to work on relationships" but what does that mean? The meaning will come to you, probably by *chance*, as you continue to learn, grow and increase your consciousness in life.

(Please go onto the beginning part of our website to learn the different names of spiritual experiences you could have had.) A definition of a raised consciousness is "We consciously use the knowledge that everything is connected to everything else. We develop mastery of the art of changing physical realities by first changing mental, emotional and spiritual ones" (Pearson, C. (1991).

The wonderful part about increasing your consciousness is that you get to decide how to do it! You get to use the *mind-stuff* you were given at birth to fulfill yourself! All of us here at ASCSI wish you the very best in doing just that!

**"Believe there is a great power silently working all things for good, behave yourself and never mind the rest." (Beatrix Potter)**