Monica ANTHONY

# *Modri sočutni opazovalec*

# *The Wise Compassionate Observer*

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Transpersonal Psychotherapy explores human experience and the human psyche from the perspective of a spiritual centre or Self within each individual. This Centre - Self, Soul, Atman - is the chief motivating and co-ordinating energy within us. The task of the transpersonal psychotherapist is to facilitate the release of this energy in individuals and in groups.

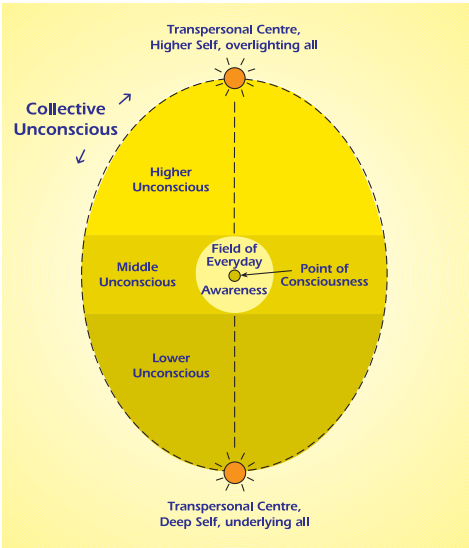
Transpersonal Psychotherapy is a perspective, a way of looking at the world. I like the image of a kaleidoscope containing many small pieces of glass. Look through it and you see one pattern. Turn it round and look through it again and you see a different pattern formed from the same pieces. With the transpersonal perspective, we seek to stand in a different place, to start from a different viewpoint, and to perceive our situation and/or that of our clients as maybe requiring another 'rotation' to find the optimum patterning - that of the inherent health in the system (rather than pathology).

I believe we are looking here at a question of perception and that a subtle shift on that level can open up a whole new world to explore and in which to be more truly ourselves. Sometimes insights can be illustrated by apparently random events in our lives, which somehow make a deep impression. When I think of subtle shifts in perception I am reminded of sitting in a theatre as a child of five or six years old and looking at the stage on which I could see a backdrop of forest. Then the stage lighting changed and the forest, which had been painted on gauze, became transparent, revealing a castle through and beyond it. We change the 'lighting', so to speak, and therefore our understanding and we see beyond the veils of everyday awareness.

If, as therapists, we consider our work as fundamentally, primarily, enabling a growth in consciousness, a sensing beyond, then we seek to orient ourselves toward the highest we may become, as well as encompassing the horizontal one-to-one relationship already in place. So, when we bring in the vertical axis alongside the existing therapeutic alliance with our client, we allow that there is a wise part of both of us who knows the answers and that third position created in the room gives both height and depth to the work. Hence, Transpersonal Psychotherapy adds to Roberto Assagioli's Egg Diagram, placing the Transpersonal Centre not only at the top of the Higher Unconscious, as the Higher Self, overlighting all, but also at the bottom of the Lower Unconscious, as the

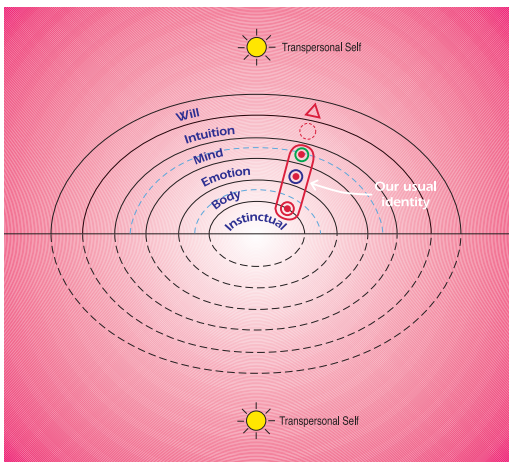
THERAPY@MONICAANTHONY.COM

Deep Self, underlying all.




Somers, Barbara and Ian Gordon-Brown., "Chart 1:05 – Assagioli's Egg 1"
*The Raincloud of Knowable Things: A Practical Guide to Transpersonal Psycholpgy*
Dorset, United Kingdom: Archive Publishing 2008

This next diagram is of the Stages of Consciousness from the work of Ian Gordon-Brown and Barbara Somers. It maps first the Instinctual nature, then Body, Emotion, Mind, Intuition, Will and the Transpersonal Self, again, both above and below. So there are levels of awareness, consciousness and experience: here we have body, feelings and mind, which comprise our everyday consciousness; then we move to Intuition and Will. At these two levels, we access the aspect of the transpersonal perspective in psychotherapy, which we call the Wise Compassionate Observer.



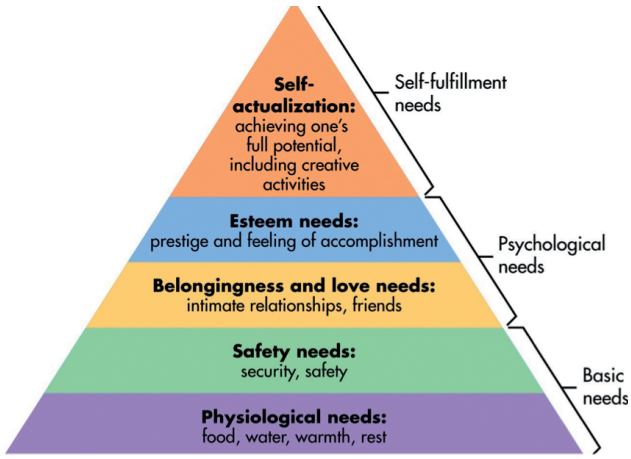

Somers, Barbara and Ian Gordon-Brown., "Chart 2:12 – Levels of Consciousness 3",
*The Raincloud of Knowable Things: A Practical Guide to Transpersonal Psychology,*
Dorset, United Kingdom: Archive Publishing 2008

We all have some experience of an inner critical observer and there is a role for a well-contained aspect of that critical faculty which enables us to assess and improve whatever we are doing. However, it is easy to be ruled by that voice. Bread baked without a pinch of salt is inedible but it is also unwholesome with too much. So it is with criticism - a pinch is fine, use too much and we poison our system. If we consider the possibility of a wise and compassionate aspect of our nature, we engage the wisdom of the Heart alongside the Head and our lives acquire a whole new range of colour and meaning.

So the Wise Compassionate Observer acts as a kind of bridge or point of connection to the spiritual core of our being. It is non-judgmental, compassionate, and, importantly, not sentimental. The Wise Observer gives a view of your life in the round; it is not a judgment seat. It is not the Self, yet it is in touch with the Self, the archetypal image of man's fullest potential. It allows a connection, not with the critical or punitive internal voice, which can so often dominate our consciousness, but with the wise part of ourselves, which knows the 'answers'.

It is said that no problem can be solved with the same thinking with which it was created. The concept of this other perspective, view or level in a therapeutic session, already changes the field of consciousness in the room, even if it is not expressly named and is, to begin with, held by the therapist alone. This awareness has been observed by many clinicians, in psychotherapy or otherwise, for whom the concept of the Inner Physician - that we hold a source of healing within us - is central to their work. I want to touch on and illustrate different aspects of transpersonal experience all of which can lead us to this concept and therefore to this way of being and working.

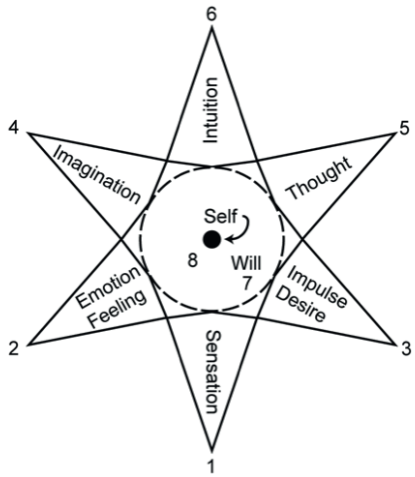
It is important to mention that the transpersonal approach still takes into account Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which illustrates that we need to take care of our physiological needs, as well as safety and security, love and belonging, and self-esteem before we focus on self-actualisation. So, if my vision is blurred, my inner vision may well need to be considered - what am I not seeing? - *and* I may also need an eye test and new glasses. 'And/and' rather than 'either/or' is a useful way of approaching this territory. Spiritual insights, like psychological insights, need a relatively secure structure to support them so they can be tools for freedom rather than agents of disintegration.



If a stream is blocked, we don't try to push the water, rather we take out the sticks and stones and debris, which are preventing it from flowing. This is also true of ourselves and our clients on all levels: physical, emotional and mental. So, in our work as transpersonal psychotherapists, we think of having a blueprint of something which is perfectly 'right' rather than something 'wrong' that has to be fixed entirely from the outside. As soon as we consider that 'the wise part of us that knows' is also a source of healing, we have a new focus and intention which place us in the centre of our life, linking us to our higher Self in a completely different way.

A seemingly trivial, everyday life moment, which has stayed with me as an illustration of the importance of choosing where and how to focus our intention, goes back to when I once went to a juggling workshop with my son who was 10 years old at the time. He learnt to juggle while I worked on my waistline - bending down to pick up the balls. What I did take away from the day, however, was the thinking behind the method we were being taught and I find that it has a direct application to this transpersonal field. If you merely throw balls in the air, aiming from one hand to the other, relatively horizontally, you are likely to end up chasing them across the room. If, however, you visualise an elongated triangle in front of and above your head and aim for the apex of that triangle, the ball will always land in the other hand. In transpersonal terms, if we work only on the horizontal plane, we may or may not connect, if we include the other dimension of awareness on the vertical plane, then connections 'land' in a different way.

So, symbolically, we aim for a high point, which is also a focus of integration and synthesis. We, as Wise Compassionate Observer, then stand 'in the Centre', here illustrated in Assagioli's Star map. The points of the Star: Sensation, Emotion, Impulse, Imagination, Thought and Intuition all lead through the Will to the Self. The Will in this context is not forceful or an imposition of some kind, but rather, it is enabling - serving, quite simply, as the directing, dynamic energy for all other psychological functions.




In the course of our lives, we can find ourselves caught between pairs of opposites within our nature, often dramatically played out in our outer world. We may step back from that on-going tension and gain respite but no real solution. However Transpersonal psychotherapy offers a clear third position as Wise Observer - a creative still point. This

opens a whole new range of possibilities as, arising from it, we may find the fourth position - the transcendent function and spiritual experience. In our work it is essential that we discover the presence of this higher centre, this *Other*, in ways that are meaningful to us individually at whatever stage in the journey of consciousness we find ourselves.

Piero Ferrucci, who studied with Assagioli, tells the following story: there is a Seeker after Truth who, while on his travels, consults a source of wisdom situated in a well in a cave. He is sent to a crossroads where there are only some shops selling pieces of metal, wood and wire. Frustrated at having been misled - or so he thinks - he has to continue on his way empty handed. After some years have passed, he arrives at a place where he hears and is deeply moved by the most beautiful music wafting in the air. On tracing the source of this inspiring sound, he sees with a flash of recognition that the instrument being played is, in fact, made up of the wires, metal and wood he had once found all those years ago, but had thought to be of no particular significance.

Ferrucci concludes: 'Nothing is meaningful as long as we perceive only separate fragments. But as soon as the fragments come together into a synthesis, a new entity emerges, whose nature we could not have foreseen by considering the fragments alone.'

Peak experiences can lead us to the Wise Compassionate Observer in some form, such as meditation and contemplation, vivid, even lucid dreams, strong intuitions and premonitions, and oneness with nature: the Self at the top of the diagram.

Even if we as therapists may not wish to work with altered states of consciousness or peak experience ourselves, we may very well have clients who bring these issues and we need to be able to hear them and meet them in that language rather than just reinterpret their descriptions in ours.

Meditation retreats and opportunities for contemplation are widespread, especially tuition in Mindfulness, which is very popular now and effective for many people. Psychotherapy, which includes spirituality, often draws on a Buddhist practice and this is not congruent for everyone. Many people find they develop a sense of presence and may use the term guardian angel even though they may not be religious in a particular way.

A profound connection can be found by simply visualising your own personal Sun above your head and sitting absorbing, through your imagination, the light, warmth and nourishment. Many people report being surprised when they open their eyes and find that it is a dull day, when they have just been 'seeing' bright sunshine. They have moved, essentially, into the position of the Wise Observer.

So holding in mind a sense of light or illumination can be part of this approach as well as also inviting the qualities of stillness and space to be present. Leaving room for the unknown, the unexpected, the nonverbal, and/or the intangible invites another level of awareness to emerge. And as soon as you make room for the unexpected, then something else can happen, greater than you might have previously imagined.

Other significant peak experiences can touch us through dreams. Clear dreams are the ones, which I find you do not need to write down as they remain in your awareness indefinitely. I had a dream when I was still an orchestral musician, which has stayed viv-

idly and accurately with me and which I didn't fully understand for over 20 years. In my dream I am going to the Academy of Music where I was teaching, but do not have my oboe with me and am interviewed by the Female Principal, although even in the dream I know there has never been a Female Principal at that institution. I see that my name is not on the orchestral lists, and, instead, walk through several rather etheric rooms speaking different languages. 20 years later I had left professional orchestral playing and retrained as a therapist. I was invited to interview for a prestigious clinic in Central London and had decided not to go, but then realised that the journey would take me to the same stop on the underground, and I would not be carrying my oboe. I would be walking to a building just past the Academy, and would be working with the Feminine Principle and with subtle perception. I joined the clinic.

Again, in this dream I was totally connected with what was happening, but also observing the unfolding events.

For others, peak experience leading to altered perception can come through a deep love of and affinity with the natural world. One such tells us: ' The beauty of the forest is extraordinary — but »beauty« is too simple a word, for being here is not just an aesthetic experience, but one steeped with mystery, with awe... Standing here I feel part of a larger, calmer identity; I feel a profound sense of being at home, a sort of companionship with the earth.'

We can find the Self at the bottom of the diagram through crisis or trauma, which can also be part of the transpersonal journey towards synthesis and beyond. The breakdown of old patterns can become a 'breakthrough' to the reality of a developing consciousness. There is an English nursery rhyme about an egg called Humpty Dumpty who falls and breaks into pieces, which no one can stick back together again. As psychotherapists we often work with clients in that position and are likely to have had some form of that experience ourselves. The transpersonal perspective would be to recognise that, if we break down, instead of repeated attempts to recreate the old self and trying to go back to how things were previously - exactly as they were in which was clearly an untenable situation - we should rather encourage a new phase of being to emerge and grow from the breakdown. Gordon-Brown and Somers talked about 'breakdown to break through': Humpty Dumpty can hatch, instead of enduring repeated attempts at being stuck together again. Something 'other' and 'more than' emerges, whose characteristic is a wise acceptance, which cannot be manufactured.

In fact it may be that we actually have to break down in order to be free to take on a new shape or form. This is reflected in our myths and fairy tales, which are the passing down through the centuries and cultures of essential information about human nature at all levels and there is nearly always a guiding figure in the narrative who can take a different stance and comprehend the unfolding events through embracing an overview. The Wise Observer acts as a constant and essential reference point throughout transformative change. On a profound level we seek something more than our everyday awareness.

An important prerequisite is that we have to be prepared to make room for that something more. As we have seen, part of our receptivity to these experiences relies on our capacity for leaving room for the unknown. I think of a 'crack in the universe', the

moment of clarity of perception, appearing apparently from out of nowhere and holding a charge of energy, which remains long afterwards - shifting our perspective and letting something numinous into our lives, leaving us changed in some way.

Working transpersonally, we can consider the power and effectiveness of using the creative imagination, which is quite different to indulging fantasy and even retreating into it. The capacity to image, which may involve sensing rather than necessarily literally seeing, is the precursor to all manifestation. Using the creative imagination, guided imagery in transpersonal psychotherapy can take us into a nourishing and helpful inner world with the potential for eventually supporting significant changes in our outer one. We might suggest taking a talisman into the inner space, which symbolises the Higher Self and, acting as the Wise Compassionate Observer, can be referred to whilst in that inner state.

Following on from this, I, and many others, consider that a subtle energy field connects us all. Interestingly, this subtle energy field is now being recognised by some physicists. In addition, a few scientists have done some influential work examining the possible links between existing scientific research and the out of the ordinary peak experiences of many people - from sports men and women through to practitioners and healers.

For me, an illustration of this 'field' of connectedness occurred while working with one of my clients who, at nineteen years old, had estranged himself from his parents who belonged to a strict religious sect. Working together therapeutically 10 years later, with my holding the possibility of a source of wisdom being available, he opened his heart and felt he could be in touch with them again and not lose himself. He went home at the end of the session and, before he had had the chance to decide how to act on his insight, received a letter from his mother who hadn't been in touch for all that time.

When holding the Wise Observer position myself, I wait without expectations for the story to unfold. The story is relevant in whatever form it appears and a resolute stance of not-knowing on the part of the therapist and yet also keeping open the possibility of illumination from another level of the psyche enables the client to access their own inner guidance, clarifying the underlying issues and the way forward for that individual. Listening from that place of consciousness enables work when much is hidden and not voiced for many reasons: fear, shame or even due to outer circumstances. I have worked with someone over many years, who is in a very high-powered job much of which is covered by confidentiality as to its nature. So, there are times when I do not have the whole picture of what he is talking about when he brings his part in work issues into therapy and I also cannot ask for clarification of many of the points. So I listen with total attention, from that still place accessing the Wise Compassionate Observer in myself, and I find that any observations such as a change in his body language, or tone of voice open doors to his gaining insights far beyond the level to which such observations would usually lead. He pauses in reflection and speaks in quite a different, deeply reflective voice, often surprised and even moved by his own observations.

Carl Jung wrote: 'Learn theory as well as you can, but then put it aside when you come into contact with the marvels of the living soul.' and I believe that is the territory we inhabit at that point.

Often a client can be invited to embrace that position directly. I once worked with a young woman who came from a family of three sisters all of whom had developed severe mental or physical problems in adulthood, my client having MS-like symptoms. I noticed after a while, that I was starting to feel very sleepy when sitting with her. First I checked that I hadn't just had a late night, but then I found that I would be alert for the previous session and again fine with the next client after her. Eventually I decided to name what was happening for me and, as I spoke, she began to identify a feeling herself, which she called a fog. Seeing a stool near to her chair, I suggested that she place the fog on that stool and, as soon as she did so, we both felt quite alert. Dialoguing with the fog, she began to describe the stifling and controlling atmosphere in her family home, which had affected all three of the children; this led to a breakthrough in her own process, health and understanding. An important part of the breakthrough was her own recognition that, when the fog was allocated a place apart from her, the chair where she was sitting became a still point and she became, in effect, the Wise Compassionate Observer. She could then internalise that stance and take it with her out into the world.

So in this exploration of the Wise Compassionate Observer, two qualities in particular come forward: firstly, that of *just being*, secondly, a kind of heart stillness which can lead to a profound level of listening and enable far-reaching change. Many people, after working in a transpersonal way, report feeling that they have come home to something they may not hitherto have realised that they had lost.

We need poets and seers to render to us the Transcendent in the world in which we are living. David Whyte, speaks of the transpersonal observer in his poem, 'Born Again':

'I want to be born again, in exactly the selfsame life,
aware this time from the inside out, and to stand this time
as a beautiful un-worrying witness, living beyond
the need for this or that…'

This 'unworrying witness' is reflected in the archetypal story of the Rainmaker who was invited to come to a distant place where there had been a terrible drought for so long that the people were suffering and no longer knew what to do. They had tried everything in their power to bring rain, but there was none. When he arrived they were rather disappointed because he did not look at all impressive and did not seem to have anything much with him. But they greeted him and asked him what he needed. He looked around and said, 'Nothing, thank you, just a small hut. Come back in three days.' So they put him in a small hut and waited doubtfully for the three days. And the rains came. It rained and rained and there was great rejoicing. Then they went to the Rainmaker and said, 'What did you do, what was this great magic?' The Rainmaker said, ' I didn't do anything. I did not like what I found when I got here. So I went into the hut and came quietly to myself. I got myself centred and in line, and of course it rained.'




Somers, Barbara "Figure 8 – Stage Three,
Separation of the Spirit-Body for Independent Existence",
*The Fires of Alchemy: A Transpersonal Viewpoint*,
Dorset, United Kingdom: Archive Publishing 2004

Individually and collectively we recognise increasingly the need for soul and the spiritual in our lives; otherwise we are bereft of a deep sense of connection with the world in which we live. It is important to find what is a spiritual, soulful language for each individual. I believe the Wise Compassionate Observer in us offers that freedom and a very real access to this *Other* Way - we can be human beings having a spiritual experience and maybe are also spiritual beings having a human experience.