INNER VOICES: DISTINGUISHING TRANSCENDENT AND PATHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

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HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Inner voices have been described for thousands of years. One of the earliest known accounts comes from the Athenian philosopher, Socrates, who heard such a voice throughout his life. This voice advised him against certain actions that were not in his best interest, but never told him what to do. Socrates referred to this voice as *daimon*, or "the divine" (Waterfield, 1990, p. 35).

Similar descriptions can be found throughout history. The ancient Egyptians, Romans, Babylonians, Tibetans, and Greeks consulted oracles for guidance (Hastings, 1991). These entranced channelers heard inner voices that were believed to originate from the gods (Guiley, 1991; Jaynes, 1976). The early Hebrews also believed that the inner messages they heard and trusted were divinely inspired. Numerous passages from the Torah described God talking through his followers. One such passage is 2 Kings 21:10 which reads: "Now the Lord spoketh through His servants the prophets." In China during the first century A.D., individuals called the *wu* received guidance from inner voices. In eighth-century Japan, the imperial court turned to the *kan-nagi* for advice, and local Japanese villagers used the *kuchiyo* for this same purpose. These trusted advisors relied upon inner voices for guidance (Klimo, 1987). Medieval Jewish rabbis conversed with disincarnate teachers known as *maggidim* who spoke via inner voices (Gordon, 1949). Christian mystics heard inner voices which they attributed to divine sources such as angels, the Holy Ghost, and deceased saints (Warren, 1975; Flanagan, 1989; Sackville-West, 1991; Brenan, 1973; Tsanoff, 1968). The Incas spoke directly to the gods via inner voices (Perkins, 1990). Shamans throughout the world also conversed with inner voices (Achterberg, 1985; Harner, 1980; Niehardt, 1972).

Many revered contemporaries have heard inner voices. Sigmund Freud, for example, related:
During the days when I was living alone in a foreign city—1 was a young man at the time—I quite often heard my name suddenly called by an unmistakable and beloved voice (Freud, 1960, p. 261).

Respected leaders who have listened to and benefited from inner voices include Mohandas Gandhi, Emanuel Swedenborg, Carl Jung, Martin Luther King, Jr., Paramahansa Yogananda, Black Elk, George Washington Carver, Winston Churchill, M. Scott Peck, General George Patton, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Rudyard Kipling, and Krishnamurti.

INTERPRETATIONS OF INNER VOICES

For at least two thousand years, inner voices have been valued as a source of creative inspiration, divine guidance, and intuitive knowledge. Dating back to the time of the ancient Greeks, through the Middle Ages, and continuing into the modern era, these voices were believed to originate from divine sources. During the days of the Old Testament, the act of receiving God's words was known as revelation, and the speaking of such words was called prophecy (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1985, pp. 190, 532). Those who spoke for God were known as prophets or seers, and descriptions from the Bible indicate that Moses, Elijah, Samuel, Ezekiel, and other Old Testament prophets transmitted help which originated from the "still small voice" of God, as well as a multitude of disincarnate spirits. Our Western culture's world view, with its rational/logical underpinnings, leaves little room for beliefs in such spirits. The Bible, however, which is based upon a spiritual world with spirit beings, contains two hundred and ninety-four references to angels alone, and this does not include the additional references to their incorporeal kin (Strong, 1986). Belief in the divine origins of helpful inner voices is not limited to the Judaic traditions, however, as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism contain similar beliefs (Hastings, 1991).

During the last five to six hundred years, the predominant view of the Western medical model as well as most Western psychology models has been that inner voices are not derived from divine sources. Furthermore, the information provided by inner voices is often discounted as irrelevant or untrustworthy. This view likely originated with the fifteenth-century book Malleus Maleficarum [The Witches' Hammer], published by two Catholic theologians, Malleus Maleficarum associated inner voices with witchcraft. Following the release of this book, individuals who heard voices were believed to have made a pact with the devil, and thus forsaken Christianity. Henceforth, instead of being viewed as divinely inspired messages, inner voices became associated with satanic influences (McNichol, 1977).

In the sixteenth century, the scientific revolution triggered a shift in the prevailing definition of reality. Unshared sensory experiences were no longer viewed as either divine or satanic in nature, but instead they were attributed to brain pathology. The medical model of schizophrenia, which emerged in the nineteenth century, supported this belief. Kraeplin, who first coined the term "schizophrenia," listed hallucinations among the symptoms of this disorder (Peters, 1991), and later both Bleuler and
Schneider associated hallucinations with schizophrenia as well (Bleuler, 1950; Schneider, 1959).

The view that inner voices are a symptom of mental illness persists to this day, with many contemporaries continuing to associate inner voices with psychopathology. One line of evidence for this psychopathological view comes from our state psychiatric hospitals, where scores of unfortunate individuals are housed because they cannot distinguish the voices of their misfiring brains from the voices of others around them. The fact that deranged killers such as David Berkowitz [aka "Son of Sam"] carried out their heinous acts under the guidance of voices only they could hear (Klausner, 1981) lends further support to the view that inner voices are diagnostic of mental illness.

But despite such evidence linking inner voices with pathology, equally compelling evidence demonstrates their occurrence in the absence of pathology (Posey & Losch, 1983). For example, Sidgwick examined over 15,000 individuals who were free of physical and mental pathology and found that 7.8 percent of men and 12 percent of women reported the occurrence of at least one unshared sensory experience (Sidgwick, 1884, quoted in Slade & Bentall, 1988, p. 69). Furthermore, inner voices have been reported to occur during hypnotic trances (Alexander, 1970; Erickson, 1980), the hypnagogic state (Noyes & Kolb, 1963), as a component of uncomplicated grief reactions (Parkes, 1970; Rees, 1971; Malinak, Hoyt & Patterson, 1979), and in young children who converse with hallucinated playmates via inner voices (Bender, 1970).

In many cultures, inner voices continue to be valued as a source of trans-rational assistance. Bourguignon (1970) found that unshared sensory experiences played an important role in 63 percent of the 488 cultures she surveyed around the world. Furthermore, she found that these experiences have the potential to catalyze transformations on individual and cultural levels.

The belief that such transformations are the products of psychotic symptoms belies an ethnocentric world view. A more plausible explanation is that these helpful inner voices belong to a separate category of experiences, those which have the potential to facilitate growth on individual, interpersonal, and societal levels.

TERMINOLOGY

One of the reasons inner voices have been so widely misunderstood is that the terminology used to describe these experiences is ambiguous. During the last several millennia, a variety of terms have been employed to describe inner voice experiences. For example, the ancient Greeks used the word phantasia when discussing experiences which today we would label hallucinations (McNichol, 1977, p. 311). The sixteenth-century saint, Teresa of Avila, used the term locutions to describe various types of inner voices (Teresa of Avila, 1989, p. 139).

The word hallucination first appeared during the sixteenth century in the book De Humani Corporis Fabrica, written by Vesalius. This book contained the phrase:
"but the Arabs are hallucinated" (Johnson, 1978, p. 41). The first English appearance of the word hallucination was in a 1572 translation of a work by Lavater, who used the word to refer to strange noises, omens, and apparitions (Slade & Bentall, 1988).

Initially the term hallucination was applied to abnormal phenomena only. With time, however, the word came to be associated with any unshared sensory experience. This expanded definition of the word persists today, as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders demonstrates. The DSM-IV defines a hallucination as: "A sensory perception that has the compelling sense of reality of a true perception but that occurs without external stimulation of the sensory organ" (DSM-IV, 1994, p. 767). This definition is so broad that it subsumes all inner voices with "the compelling sense of reality" under the umbrella of hallucinations.

Although the DSM-IV definition goes on to clarify that hallucinations are not necessarily pathological, many individuals continue to associate hallucinations with psychopathology. Some contemporary authors have attempted to correct this misperception by creating new terms to describe inner voices. Fish, for example, recommended the term "phoneme" to describe a hallucinatory voice (Fish, 1962, p. 37). Zuckerman offered the expression "reported auditory sensation" or RAS (Zuckerman, 1970, p. 133). Stevenson suggested we continue to use the word hallucination but reserve it for the unshared sensory experiences of the mentally ill. He then offered a new word, idiophany, to describe all unshared sensory experiences (Stevenson, 1983, p. 1611).

Other authors have taken a slightly different approach. While suggesting that the word hallucination remain in our vocabulary, they have modified it to discriminate between the unshared sensory experiences that occur in association with pathology from those that do not. Forrer suggested the term "benign hallucination" to describe unshared sensory experiences that occur in the absence of pathology (Forrer, 1960, p. 119). Gurney and Myers distinguished "veridical" from "morbid" hallucinations, depending upon whether or not the experience was linked to a real event (Williams, 1985, p. 244). Others have used the term "pseudohallucination" to describe the hallucinations of the sane (Medlicott, 1958, p. 669).

Despite suggestions such as these, which were intended to clarify the terminology related to inner voices, a blurred definition persists. Much of this confusion can be traced to a failure to discriminate between the various types of inner voices, an error which results in labels being misapplied. Terms such as "inner voice" and "hallucination" continue to be used interchangeably, as if they referred to the same phenomenon. But inner voices are a heterogeneous group of experiences. The auditory hallucinations of schizophrenics, the inner voice of the conscience or superego, the inspirational messages received by artists such as Rudyard Kipling and William Blake, and the revelations heard by Moses, Muhammad, Jesus, as well as other religious leaders are all inner voices.

Before appropriate terms can be applied to such experiences, we must first clearly understand that several different types of inner voices exist. A thorough examination of inner voices demonstrates that these experiences exist on a continuum, which...
extends from the pathological hallucinations of the mentally ill at one end, to the inspired revelations of the mystics at the other end.

**HALLUCINATION - REVELATION CONTINUUM**

Sensory experiences exist on a continuum (see Figure 1). In the center of this continuum are experiences associated with the ego (i.e., perceptions). On the left side are experiences connected with increasing degrees of ego disintegration, while the right side of the continuum contains experiences related to increasing degrees of ego transcendence.

**FIGURE 1**

**SENSORY EXPERIENCES**

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<th>Hallucinations</th>
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Perceptions are at the center of the continuum. Perception is "the process of organizing and interpreting sensory data by combining them with the result of previous experience" (Kaplan & Sadock, 1985, p. 31). Perception begins when a stimulus is received by a sensory organ. The organ then translates this stimulus into an electrochemical signal which is transmitted through the nervous system to the brain. This message is then decoded and a specific sensory impression arises within consciousness.

An example of a sensory stimulus which provokes a perceptual response is the sound of a person's voice. When an individual speaks, sound waves are created which strike the tympanic membrane of the ear. This sets in motion a chain reaction whereby an electrochemical signal is sent to the brain. The brain then deciphers this signal and a voice is perceived.

Disruption anywhere along this chain of events leads to perceptual abnormalities. For example, sensory messages may be deciphered incorrectly by the brain. This results in what is known as an illusion. An illusion is defined as a "perceptual misinterpretation of a real external sensory experience" (Kaplan & Sadock, 1985, p. 163). German physician Hannes Lindemann experienced illusions during his solo crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in a sailboat. As he ate his food supply, Lindemann stored the empty bottles, cans, and jars in his boat:

> The constant and terrible roll of the dugout made the empty containers gurggle and gurgle as the water in them rose and fell. To me they sounded like the voices of men and women; they shouted and whispered, laughed and giggled, tittered, coughed and mumbled. Their voices became so clear that I finally joined in the discussions (Lindemann, 1958, p. 74).

Another type of perceptual abnormality occurs when a sensory signal arises from within the nervous system rather than from within the sensory organs. This can result...
in what are known as pseudohallucinations. A pseudohallucination is a vivid sensory image which is recognized to originate from within one's self, rather than from the outside world (Medlicott, 1958). This awareness of the subjective nature of these perceptual aberrations distinguishes them from true hallucinations.

A hallucination is defined as "a sensory perception in the absence of an actual external stimulus" (Stone, 1988, p. 75). Hallucinations occur when the individual perceives sensory messages which arise from within but which are mistakenly attributed to an external source. Lori Schiller provides an example in her book, The Quiet Room. Describing her struggle with schizophrenia, Schiller wrote:

The Voices were coming louder and faster, startling me with their surprise visits to my brain. Only I didn't know they were in my brain. I heard them coming at me from the outside, as real as the sound of the telephone ringing (Schiller, 1994, p. 21).

The above types of perceptual abnormalities are found on the left side of the hallucination-revelation continuum. They demonstrate increasing degrees of pathology, ego disintegration, or regression. On the opposite side of the continuum, we encounter experiences which demonstrate increasing degrees of health. The word "health" is used here to indicate not just the absence of pathology, but the exceptional degrees of functioning described by Maslow in his discussion of B-values (Maslow, 1968). This right side of the continuum also demonstrates increasing degrees of ego transcendence. Another way of describing this is to view the left side of the continuum as containing prepersonal experiences, whereas the right side contains transpersonal experiences (Wilber, 1993c).

Moving from perception toward ego transcendence, we first encounter imagination. Imagination is "the action of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the sense" (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 1989, p. 711). Imagination thus involves sensory imagery which is known to originate from within.

Moving further in the direction of ego transcendence, we arrive at intuition. Intuition consists of direct impressions upon the mind. These impressions may be experienced as sensory messages, however they do not originate from the sensory organs.

At the far right end of the continuum are revelations. These trans-sensory messages are experienced as originating from outside of one's self, similar to hallucinations. They may be experienced as a distinct voice, just as hallucinations can be. But rather than pointing to a mental or physical disorder, revelations indicate a state of transcendent awareness.

Confusing experiences on one side of the continuum for experiences on the other side results in serious errors. Wilber has previously described these errors in his discussion of the pre-trans fallacy (Wilber, 1993c). For example, misidentifying experiences from the right side of the continuum for left-sided experiences results in transcendent inner voices being pathologized. An example of this type of error can be found in the preface to The Maggid of Caro. Joseph Caro, a sixteenth-century rabbi who has been described as "the most outstanding scholar of his generation" (Gordon,
1949, p. 45), heard an inner voice which served as his inner teacher. But when a number of preeminent twentieth-century psychiatrists were asked to comment on Caro's inner voice, they interpreted it to be: a hysterical manifestation, a projection of the mother, a schizoid mechanism, a hysterical dissociation, and a "hallucinatory projection ... [of] inner craving for supernatural knowledge and power" (Gordon, 1949, pp. 9-17).

Another example of inner voices being pathologized can be found in The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind by Julian Jaynes. In this book, Jaynes equated the benevolent voices of Socrates and other historical figures with the hallucinations of today's schizophrenics (Jaynes, 1976). Furthermore, Jaynes made the claim that our ancestors heard inner voices because they were incapable of consciousness as we know it today.

Equally problematic is the confusion of the continuum's left-sided inner voices for transcendent experiences. This results in the elevation of prepersonal voices to the transpersonal level. As David Cooper cautions: "Only a fine line may separate authentic revelation from complete self-delusion" (Cooper, 1992a, p. 53). Over four hundred years ago, St. John of the Cross recognized this trap when he wrote:

And I am appalled at what happens in these days-namely, when some soul with a penny's worth of meditation experience, if it be conscious of certain locutions [i.e., voices] of this kind in some states of recollection, at once christens them all as coming from God.... This happens very commonly, and many persons are greatly deceived by it, thinking that they have attained to a high degree of prayer and are receiving communications from God. Wherefore, they either write this down or cause it to be written, and it turns out to be nothing, and to have the substance of no virtue, and it serves only to encourage them in vanity (quoted in McCarrol, 1987, p. 9).

Saint John of the Cross was so concerned with this trap that he recommended resisting inner voices altogether (Keating, 1992b, p. 118).

If we are to avoid the error of confusing transcendent inner voices and regressive inner voices, we must first understand more about each type of experience.

TRANSCENDENT INNER VOICES

The contemporary psychological literature contains very few studies examining inner voices which occur in the absence of pathology. Despite this dearth of published studies, the scientific investigation of transcendent inner voices is not as difficult as the current paucity of literature suggests. Heery examined thirty subjects who reported hearing voices, and she divided their experiences into three categories: (1) inner voices as fragmented parts of the self, (2) inner voices characterized by dialogue providing guidance for individual growth, and (3) inner voices where channels opened toward and beyond a higher self (Heery, 1989). Beery's study illustrated a fact that anecdotal reports had previously demonstrated. Some inner voices exhibit characteristic features which have already been described by Maslow, Vaughan, Walsh, and Wilber in their writings about peak and transpersonal experiences.
In his discussion of the "spectrum of consciousness," Wilber defines the transpersonal bands of consciousness as: "the area of the Spectrum that is supra-individual, where one is not conscious of one's identity with the All and yet neither is identity confined to the boundaries of the individual organism" (Wilber, 1993a, p. 23). Wilber explained that these bands exist "where the boundary between self and other has not been completely crystallized" (Wilber, 1993b, p. 108). Stated differently, the transpersonal level of consciousness is that level in which there is neither exclusive identification with the ego, nor complete disidentification from it.

Building upon Wilber's cartography, Walsh and Vaughan defined transpersonal experiences as: "experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos" (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993, p. 203). Transpersonal experiences occur as attachment to the ego diminish.

Although Maslow used different terminology, he identified several typical features of transpersonal experiences in his discussion of "peak experiences" (Maslow, 1964). These features can be condensed into three categories: (1) a state of "unitive consciousness" in which the dualities of the ego are transcended, (2) altered perception of time and space, and (3) positive sequelae (adapted from Maslow, 1964, pp. 59-68). A fourth category, intuition, may be added to Maslow's list (Vaughan, 1979). These four traits are typical of transpersonal experiences, and they are also characteristic of transcendent inner voices.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSCENDENT INNER VOICES

Trans-ego

The fundamental defining characteristic of transpersonal experiences is ego-transcendence. Transcendent inner voices illustrate this characteristic in a number of ways. First, these voices are experienced as originating from an external source (i.e., not one's conscious mind). Second, these voices speak of themselves in the first person, while addressing the individual who hears them in the second person. Mystic Joel Goldsmith explains:

"It may take a month, a year, or ten years before you can break the crust of personal sense and finally hear that still small voice within yourself but when you do, it says to you, "Be still, and know that I am God." It does not say that Joel or Mary is God. No, no! It does not say that William or Robert is God, or Mildred always says!" (Goldsmith, 1971, p. 20).

A third manifestation of ego-transcendence is the transcendence of dualities. While the ego views the world as an unending series of polarities, these dualities are transcended in the transpersonal realm (Wilber, 1979). For this reason, inner voices appear self-contradictory from the perspective of the ego, but in fact, they express underlying truths. Consider the following example,

As an adolescent, noted author and psychiatrist M. Scott Peck was struggling to decide whether to return to a school he had previously attended, or transfer to a new

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school. Despite pressure from his parents, Peck resisted going back because he had been miserably unhappy at his former school. But then, while wrestling with his decision, he experienced the following:

At the moment of my greatest despair, from my unconscious there came a sequence of words, like a strange disembodied oracle from a voice that was not mine: “The only real security in life lies in relishing life’s insecurity” (Peck, 1978, p. 136-137).

The seeming contradiction in the statement, "The only real security in life lies in relishing life's insecurity," can be resolved once its paradoxical nature is understood. While our rational minds view life in "either-or" terms, transpersonal experiences are of the "both-and" genre. They view parts as components of a larger whole. Opposing aspects are seen as inextricably linked aspects of a common unity. Transpersonal experiences thus provide solutions to problems via a glimpse of "the bigger picture." Security and insecurity are viewed not as contradictory, but as inseparable.

The ego's seemingly endless capacity to create dualities leads us to view these polarities as immutable aspects of our lives. Fear/desire, aversion/addiction, and countless other dualities are viewed as unavoidable aspects of the human condition, rather than characteristics of identification with the ego. In the transpersonal realm, however, these polarities are transcended. The following examples are illustrative.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Martin Luther King, Jr. faced many challenges in his role as leader of the Civil Rights Movement. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, for example, King received numerous death threats. Yet, King overcame his fears with the support of a benevolent inner voice he identified as God.

God has been profoundly real to me in recent years. In the midst of outer dangers I have felt an inner calm. In the midst of lonely days and dreary nights I have heard an inner voice saying, "Lo, I will be with you" (Ayres, 1993, p. 95).

Pediatrician Melvin Morse offers additional accounts of inner voices leading to reduced fear, particularly the fear of death (Morse, 1994). One such account involved two young girls, Sandra and Chrissy, who met in a hospital while undergoing treatment for cancer. Sandra went into a coma after she was discharged home, but later regained consciousness and said: "Mommy, I went to heaven and Chrissy came to help me. She told me I shouldn't be afraid because she was there to help me in heaven." After this experience, Sandra's fear of death was nonexistent. It was only later that Sandra's parents learned that Chrissy had already died (Morse, 1994, p. 25). Experiences such as this have led Morse to write: "the near-death experience tells us that we all have an inner voice that, if we would listen to it, would tell us that death is not to be feared, and that life is to be lived to the fullest" (Morse, 1992, p. 83).

Transcendent inner voices also have the capacity to help overcome addictions. When Bill was admitted to a New York hospital, his drinking problem was so severe that his physician gave him little chance of recovery. Even Bill himself had little hope that his life could be saved. But then, the following occurred:

Lying there in conflict, I dropped into black depression. Momentarily my prideful obstinacy was crushed. I cried out, "Now I'm ready to do anything." … Expecting naught, I made this
frantic appeal: "If there be a God, will he show himself!" The result was instant, electric, beyond description. The place lit up, blinding white. I knew only ecstasy and seemed on a mountain. A great wind blew, enveloping and permeating me. It was not of air, but of Spirit. Blazing, came the tremendous thought, "You are a freeman!" Then, ecstasies subsided. Still on the bed, I was now in another world of consciousness which was suffused by a Presence. One with the Universe a great peace stole over me and I thought, "So this is the God of the preachers; this is the Great Reality. "But reason returned, my modern education took over. Obviously I had gone crazy. I became terribly frightened (William W., 1994, p. 260).

Today this chronic alcoholic, who never took another drink, is known as Bill W., one of the cofounders of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Trans-time

Another characteristic of transcendent inner voices is that they are eternal (i.e., they transcend time). The concept of eternity is difficult for those of us raised with a Western perspective of time to comprehend. We tend to think of time as something akin to a very long measuring stick, made up of increasingly smaller segments which we label millennia, centuries, years, months, days, hours, minutes, etc. We associate events with a particular time segment, thus assigning them a relative position on this time line. These relative positions are then categorized as past, present, and future.

This conceptualization leads us to believe that the transcendence of time should allow us to jump from one period in time to another. But this is not what occurs. Instead, the perceived divisions or partitions in time are transcended, resulting in the collapse of past, present, and future into the "eternal now" described by the mystics. Rather than jumping from one segment in time to another, we discover that events exist outside of time. Thus, eternity is experienced not as a very, very long time, but as the dissolution of time (Wilber, 1993b).

So how is this trans-time nature of transcendent inner voices experienced? British poet and mystic William Blake said his poem, Jerusalem, which was written entirely by an inner voice, came to him:

12 or sometimes 20 or 30 lines at a time, without Premeditation and even against my Will; the time it hastaken in writing was thusrendered NonExistent [my italics], and an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a long life, all produce'd without Labour or Study (quoted in Wilson, 1971, p. 78).

During the writing of this poem, time ceased to exist for Blake.

Another description of the timeless quality of transcendent inner voices comes from Helen Schucman. While working as a psychologist at Columbia University, Schucman began hearing an inner voice (Skutch, 1984). Worried that she might be developing a mental illness, Schucman consulted her department chairman. He recommended that she write down what the voice was saying, and more than seven years later, the manuscript for A Course in Miracles was completed.
While transcribing from her inner voice, Schucman could stop writing at any point, even in the middle of a sentence, and the voice would resume wherever it had left off (Skutch, 1984). The process of transcribing was unaffected by the passage of time. It was as if time had stopped, or, more accurately, past and present were inseparable.

**Trans-space**

Because transpersonal experiences are not limited by physical barriers, they provide assistance which is not available through the sense organs. The Oglala Sioux holy man, Black Elk, received such assistance while hunting bison with his father:

> While I was lying there in a bison robe, a coyote began to howl not far off, and suddenly I knew it was saying something. It was not making words, but it said something plainer than words, and this was it: "Two-legged one, on the big ridge west of you there are bison; but first you shall see two more two-leggeds over there" (Neihardt, 1972, p. 15).

The next morning Black Elk and his father met two fellow Lakota, and after walking to the ridge they found eight bison, just as the voice had described.

**THE EXPERIENCE OF HEARING TRANSCENDENT INNER VOICES**

The previously widely varying descriptions of transcendent inner voices illustrate the difficulties encountered when attempting to describe these experiences to others. They also reflect the diverse interpretations placed upon these experiences by the egos of those who heard them.

At times transcendent inner voices are described as a thought which is different from one's usual thoughts. Willis Harman, for example, reported his encounter with an inner voice as: "a thought that came like a voice that was my own but also strangely different from my usual 'rational' self" (Harman & Rheingold, 1984, p. xiv). Ex-advertising executive, Lee Coit, gave a similar description: "The guidance was usually a thought, but a thought unlike my normal thoughts. It came in the form of a unique concept, a clear insight, a reminder of a remembrance. When it came to me, I had the feeling of 'yes, of course'" (Coit, 1991, p. 22).

At other times, transcendent inner voices may be experienced as a thought which seems to originate from someone else's mind. Explaining how his description of Apollo in the poem, *Hyperion*, came to him, English poet John Keats said it was "by chance or magic---to be, as it were, something given to me." When finished, Keats was amazed by his writings as they seemed to be "rather the production of another person" (quoted in Harman & Rheingold, 1984, p. 45).

Rebecca Cox Jackson offers a similar account. A free black woman who lived in a Shaker community in New York during the mid-1800s, Jackson said of her inner voice: "These words are spoken in my heart as though a tender father spoke them" (quoted in Noll, 1991, p. 48). Furthermore, she said, "This communication to me has
been in words as clear and distinct as though a person was conversing with me” (quoted in Noll, 1991, p. 48).

Emanuel Swedenborg labeled his inner communications “thought-speech” or “vocal thought” (Swedenborg, 1979, p. 28). Betty Eadie’s near-death experience, described in Embraced by the Light, offers a similar description. Early in her near-death experience, Eadie was met by three men. As she described:

[Their]thoughts were communicated from spirit to spirit—from intelligence to intelligence. At first I thought they were using their mouths, but this was because I was used to people “speaking.” They communicated much more rapidly and completely, in a manner they referred to as “pure knowledge.” The closest word in English we would have to define it is telepathy, but even that doesn’t describe the full process (Eadie, 1992, p. 32).

A transcendent inner voice may also be experienced as a voice which seems to originate outside of one’s head, as accounts by Lee Coit, Julian Jaynes, and Black Elk illustrate. While standing on a pier overlooking San Francisco Bay, Coit had the following experience:

A voice behind me said, “You’ve Come This Far, What Are You Afraid Of?” Since the question seemed to be addressed to me, I turned around. Imagine my surprise to find no one there. There was no one on the pier. I was completely alone (Coit, 1991, p. 27).

Professor Julian Jaynes described a similar encounter:

One afternoon I lay down in intellectual despair on a couch. Suddenly, out of an absolute quiet, there came a firm, distinct loud voice from my upper right which said, “Include the knower in the known!” It lugged me to my feet absurdly exclaiming, “Hello?” looking for whoever was in the room. The voice had had an exact location. No one was there! Not even behind the wall where I sheepishly looked (Jaynes, 1976, p. 86).

Black Elk offers still another account:

I heard a voice that said, “Be careful and watch! Something you shall see.” The voice was so clear that I looked around to see who was there, and nobody was there (Niehardt, 1972, p. 156).

Others hear words which are unlike either a thought or a voice. Poet Amy Lowell said:

Some poets speak of hearing a voice speaking to them, and say that they write almost to dictation... I do not hear a voice, but I do hear words pronounced, only the pronouncing is toneless. The words seem to be pronounced in my head, but with nobody speaking them (quoted in Nelson, 1990, p. 291).

Hildegard of Bingen, who began having religious visions during childhood, reported similar experiences. In her early forties, Hildegard’s visions intensified and inner voices instructed her to write, which she did. Hildegard said all of her writings were dictated by the Holy Ghost: “I hear these things not with the bodily ears, nor the thoughts of my mind, nor perceive them through any combination of the five senses, but entirely within my soul” (Flanagan, 1989, p. 196). Helen Schucman provided a...
similar description: "It's all internal. There is no actual sound, and the words come mentally but very clearly. It's kind of inner dictation you might say" (Skutch, 1984, p. 56).

ASSOCIATED FEATURES

A variety of non-auditory perceptions may occur in association with transcendent inner voices. Jonathan Livingston Seagull author, Richard Bach, not only heard much of the book's dialogue via an inner voice, but also saw the book internally "like a wide-screen technicolor" (Hastings, 1991, p. 131). Joan of Arc heard, saw, touched, and smelled the images of Saint Michael, Saint Catherine, and Saint Margaret (Sackville-West, 1991). Jung experienced inner voices during visions, such as the following one which occurred in 1913:

I was suddenly seized by an overpowering vision: I saw a monstrous flood covering all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the Alps. When it came to Switzerland I saw that the mountains grew higher and higher to protect our country. I realized that a frightful catastrophe was in progress... Then the whole sea turned to blood. This vision lasted about an hour. I was perplexed and nauseated, and ashamed of my weakness... Two weeks passed, then the vision recurred... An inner voice spoke. "Look at it well; it is wholly real and it will be so. You cannot doubt it" (Jung, 1963, p. 175).

On August 1, 1914, less than a year after Jung's initial vision, World War I began.

Inner voices which occur during visions may be accompanied by an unearthly light. Bill W. experienced such a light during the vision which prompted his sobriety. Joan of Arc frequently saw a light in association with her voices. St. John of the Cross experienced a "heavenly light" from which God spoke to him while he was imprisoned (Bucke, 1923, p. 144). Saul had a similar encounter while walking to Damascus: "And suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven [my italics]: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Bible, Acts 9:3-4).

POSITIVE SEQUELAE

The effects of transcendent inner voices are generally positive. Both Adolph Hitler and Winston Churchill were keenly aware of their benefits, as the life of each was saved by an inner voice. While eating dinner with his comrades in a trench during World War I, Hitler experienced the following:

Suddenly a voice seemed to be saying to me, "Get up and go over there." It was so clear and so insistently that I obeyed automatically as if it had been a military order. I arose at once to my feet and walked 20 yards along the trench carrying my dinner in its tin can with me. Then I sat down to go on eating, my mind being once more at rest. Hardly had I done so when a flash and deafening report came from the part of the trench I had just left. A stray shell had burst over the group in which I had been sitting, and every member of it was killed (Langer, 1972, pp. 36-37).

Inner Voices: Distinguishing Transcendent and Pathological Characteristics 13
During World War II, Churchill escaped a similar near brush with death. Churchill routinely visited British antiaircraft guns during German air raids, but one night, something unusual happened. Instead of entering the door held open for him and sitting on the near-side of the car where he always sat, Churchill walked around and opened the door on the opposite side of the car and sat there instead. He had never done this before. As the vehicle accelerated, a bomb exploded nearby, nearly causing the car to roll over. If Churchill had been sitting where he usually sat, his weight likely would have caused the car to turnover. Later, his wife found out about this near miss and asked him why he had changed seats that particular night. He responded:

Something said to me "Stop!" before I reached the car door held open for me. It then appeared to me that I was told I was meant to open the door on the other side and get in and sit there-and that's what I did (Fishman, 1963, p. 125).

These two examples illustrate another characteristic of transcendent inner voices—they seem to have no internal sense of morality. They did not appear to value Churchill's life more than Hitler's.

Sometimes the guidance offered by transcendent inner voices benefits the lives of individuals who did not actually hear the voices themselves. Harriet Tubman, who led slaves to freedom in the North in the 1800s, said: "Twasn't me, t'was the Lord!" (Noll, 1991, p. 71-73). Everyday Tubman held discussions with, and was guided by, an inner voice which she knew as God. Relying upon this guidance, Tubman freed more than three hundred slaves and none was ever recaptured while under her supervision.

At other times, the positive effects are less dramatic, but equally portentous. Mary McLeod Bethune, who was born the fifteenth child of former slaves, founded the Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona, Florida, organized the National Council of Negro Women, and served as an advisor to four U.S. presidents. Bethune's achievements are remarkable in and of themselves, but they are even more astounding when one realizes that they were accomplished through the guidance of an inner voice. Bethune explained:

Herein dwells the still small voice to which my spiritual self is attuned.... These inspirational vibrations are known to me as my inner voice. Therefore, as I come face to face with tremendous problems and issues, I am geared immediately to these spiritual vibrations and they never fail me (Noll, 1991, p. 93).

Inner voices have positively affected the development of other organizations as well. The impact that Bill W.'s encounter with an inner voice had upon the treatment of alcoholism provides another example. As of January 1, 1995, more than one million Alcoholics Anonymous members attended over 50,000 groups in the United States alone, and worldwide AA's membership totaled more than two million (General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, personal communication, 1995).

The far reaching benefits of inner voices are further evident in the influences they have had upon the arts, sciences, social/political movements, and religious traditions.
**Arts**

The creative arts owe a large debt to inner voices. Dating back to the muses of the ancient Greeks (Dodd, 1957), celebrated artists, award-winning authors, and renowned musicians have benefited from epiphanic messages. Pulitzer Prize recipient Alice Walker received assistance, as well as a few good chuckles, from the inner voices she heard while writing *The Color Purple*. Walker explained:

> Just as summer was ending, one or more of my characters—Celie, Shug, Albert, Sofia, or Harpo—would come for a visit. We would sit wherever I was, and talk. They were, of course, at the end of their story but were telling it to me from the beginning. Things that made me sad, often made them laugh. Oh, we got through that; don't pull such a long face, they'd say. Or, You think Reagan's bad, you ought've seen some of the rednecks us come up under (Walker, 1983, p. 359).

Accounts such as Walker's are not unusual. Rudyard Kipling (Kipling, 1937), Richard Bach (Hastings, 1991), William Blake (Wilson, 1971), Robert Louis Stevenson, John Keats (Harman & Rheingold, 1984), and countless other authors have reported similar encounters with inner voices.

Another example of the artistic inspiration which can result from transcendent inner voices comes from the life of William Edmondson. The first African-American ever to be awarded a one-man show at the New York Museum of Modern Art, Edmondson attributed much of his inspiration to revelations from God. He described one such experience which catalyzed his sculpting career:

> I was out in the driveway with some old pieces of stone when I heard a voice telling me to pick up my tools and start to work on a tombstone. I looked up in the sky and right there in the noon daylight He hung a tombstone out for me to make (Fuller, 1973, p. 8).

**Sciences**

Western culture holds the sciences in a lofty position of esteem, in part due to our affinity for their rational foundation. However, few are aware of the role transcendent inner voices have played in their development. The field of psychology provides an illustrative example.

Psychology, which is so often guilty of pathologizing inner voices, has nonetheless been deeply affected by them. Several of the field's most influential figures heard, and were influenced by, inner voices. Carl Jung, who held conversations with an inner voice throughout his life, even had a name for his inner discussant, referring to him as "Philemon":

> Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represented a force which was not myself. In my fantasies I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I (Jung, 1963, p. 110).
Noted thanatologist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross provides another example. During a time of personal crisis, Kubler-Ross decided to leave the University of Chicago where she was teaching a seminar on death and dying. But soon after making this decision, she was greeted by an apparition of a former patient, a woman who had died almost a year earlier, and who now addressed Kubler-Ross:

Dr. Ross, I had to comeback for two reasons. One, to thank you... But the other reason I had to comeback is that you cannot stop this work on death and dying, not yet (Kubler-Ross, 1991, p. 34).

Social and Political Movements

Around the world, social and political movements have been deeply affected by inner voices. The previous incidents described by Adolph Hitler, Winston Churchill, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are representative. Mohandas Gandhi also listened to inner guidance from a "still small voice" while guiding India's nonviolent bid for freedom from British rule (Gandhi, 1992, p. 62). During World War I, George Patton heard inner voices urging him to action. He followed their instructions and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross as a result (Ayer, 1964).

Religious and Philosophical Traditions

Inner voices have profoundly influenced the major spiritual/philosophical traditions of the world. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, and Christianity have all been affected by inner voices. For example, Muhammad, the holy prophet of Islam, heard an inner voice attributed to the archangel Gabriel (Lippman, 1982). This voice served as the source of Muhammad's revelations which were later written down by his followers. Today these revelations comprise the Koran, the holy book of Islam. Other spiritual texts reported to have been similarly inspired include The Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Vedas (Hastings, 1991). Many Taoist scriptures were said to have originated from channeled deities who wrote through the priest (Hastings, 1991).

The history of Judaism is replete with descriptions of inner voices. Often these voices were attributed to God. It was God who called Abraham to go to Canaan, spoke to Jacob in a dream, and communicated to Moses from a burning bush. In the prophetic books, Elijah and other prophets spoke God's words which they received through direction communications, visions, and dreams (Cohn-Sherbok & Cohn-Sherbok, 1994). Post-medieval Jewish rabbis such as Joseph Caro and Moses Hayyim Luzzatto relied upon spiritual guides, known as a maggidim, who spoke to them via inner voices (Gordon, 1949; Cohn-Sherbok & Cohn-Sherbok, 1994). In the eighteenth century, Israel ben Eleazer, also known as the Baal Shem Tov, founded Hasidism. During visions, the Baal Shem Tov was guided by inner voices in spiritual matters (Cohn-Sherbok & Cohn-Sherbok, 1994).

Christianity has been similarly influenced by inner voices. Zacharias (Luke 1:13), Joseph (Matthew 1:20), Mary (Luke 1:28), Mary Magdalene (John 20:13), the
apostles (John 20:19), and Jesus (John 12:28), are just a few of the New Testament figures who encountered guiding inner voices. In the years following Jesus's death, Christians were under the continuing influence of inner voices. During the fourth century A.D., for example, the Desert Fathers of Egypt followed ascetic practices in their spiritual quest. Several of these Desert Fathers, including Saint Anthony who has been called the "father of Christian monasticism," heard inner voices (Keating, 1992b, p. 80). Another was Saint Augustine who heard a voice say: "Take up and read. Take up and read" (quoted in Tsanoff, 1968, p. 14). Augustine interpreted this to be a command from God.

During the Middle Ages and the European Renaissance, a number of important Christians heard inner voices. Saint Francis (Hall, 1980), Catherine of Genoa, Ignatius of Loyola (Cohn-Sherbok & Cohn-Sherbok, 1994), and Hildegard of Bingen (Flanagan, 1989) were a few. Another was a fifteenth-century French peasant girl named Jeanne. She recounted her first experience with an inner voice, with this description:

I was in my thirteenth year when God sent a voice to guide me. At first, I was very much frightened. The voice came toward the hour of noon, in summer, in my father's garden. I had fasted the preceding day. I heard the voice on my right hand, in the direction of the church. I seldom hear it without [seeing] a light. That light always appears on the side from which I hear the voice (Saekville-West, 1936, p. 51).

With time, Jeanne came to trust the guidance offered by her voices. In fact, at the tender age of seventeen, she left home and joined the army upon the advice of one of her voices. After enlisting, Jeanne was placed in command of the French forces—a testimony to the faith her contemporaries placed in inner forms of guidance. Under Jeanne's leadership, and with the assistance of her voices, the French army successfully liberated their country from the invading British forces. Today Jeanne is better known as Joan of Arc.

Christians from the modern era, such as Saint John of the Cross (Brenan, 1973), Francis de Sales, Marie of the Incarnation (Cohn-Sherbok & Cohn-Sherbok, 1994), Emanuel Swedenborg (Synnestvedt, 1977), Joseph Smith, Jr. (Hastings, 1991), and George Fox were also heavily influenced by inner voices. As a teenager, Fox left home to travel and seek spiritual guidance. But, after listening to various ministers, he found none who satisfied his thirst for answers. Fox then fell into a state of depression. While in this dejected state, he had an experience which changed his life forever:

I fasted much, walked abroad in solitary places many days, and oftentook my Bible, and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places til night came on; and frequently in the night walked mournfully about by myself; for I was a man of sorrows in the time of the Lord in me ... when I had lost all hopes ... then, oh, then I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Jesus Christ that can speak to thy condition"; and when I heard it, my heart leaped for joy (quoted in Tsanoff, 1968, p. 61).

Fox went on to found the Society of Friends, or Quakers, as the Friends are better known today. Traditional Quaker worship services are silent so that members can listen for the "still, small voice" within.
Intuition

When it comes to a conventional understanding of the world, the modus operandi of the ego is reason. However, at the transpersonal level, rational thought is transcended. This allows us to experience and understand the world intuitively.

Often misunderstood to be a lucky hunch, intuition involves neither happenstance nor guesswork. A dictionary definition of intuition is the "direct perception of truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process" (Webster's, 1989, p. 747). Yogananda understood this when he called intuition "the direct grasp of the truth" (Yogananda, 1953, p. 40). Jung also understood the true nature of intuition. He said "Intuition does not denote something contrary to reason, but something outside the province of reason" (quoted in Vaughan, 1979, p. 57). Thus, intuition is not irrational but transrational.

Mahatma Gandhi said of this type of knowledge:

There are undoubtedly things in the world which transcend reason. We do not refuse to bring them on the anvil of reason but they will not come themselves. By their very nature they defy reason... . It is not inconsistent with reason, it is beyond it (Gandhi, 1992, p. 64).

Transcendent inner voices are a rich source of intuitive knowledge, as the following examples illustrate. While performing research at Tuskegee Institute, botanist and chemist George Washington Carver relied upon intuitive knowledge which he received from inner voices. Carver illustrated this process in a story he once told about how he had located a particular clay with a color known as "the lost purple of Egypt":

I talked with God one morning and He led me to it. And when I had brought my friends and we had dug it up, they wanted to dig farther, but I said, "No need to dig farther. This is all there is, God told me." And sure enough there was no more (Clark, 1939, p. 18).

Another example of an inner voice communicating intuitive information is found in Transformed by the Light (Morse, 1992). Morse related a story told by a woman named Janice:

My father had to have a total hip replacement when he was very old. It was a difficult surgery and one that he didn't recover from. After about a week in the hospital, he died of a blood clot that moved into his heart and killed him.

Several weeks after his funeral I woke up early in the morning to see my father standing next to the bed. I got up and walked with him to the living room. He was walking fine, without a limp. All he said was that he had tuberculosis of the bone and he wanted us to know.

I don't know why it was important that we know, but when I checked with his doctor he confirmed that the bone was filled with TB (Morse, 1992, p. 167).

In its purest form, intuition provides opportunities for direct contact with the divine. Ralph Waldo Trine said intuition is "an inner spiritual sense through which man is opened to the direct revelation and knowledge of God... and through which he is brought into conscious unity and fellowship with God" (Trine, 1910, p. 39). Yogananda agreed:
It is through intuition that humanity reaches Divinity... The influence of senses vanishes; intruding thoughts disappear; Bliss-God is realized; the consciousness of "all in One and One in all" dawns upon us. This intuition is what all great savants and prophets of the world possessed (Yogananda, 1953, p. 84).

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF TRANSCENDENT INNER VOICES

Despite the far-reaching positive effects of transcendent inner voices, the experience of hearing these voices is not universally pleasant. Confusion, anxiety, fear, or doubt may occur when individuals hear transcendent voices. Hildegard of Bingen became ill following her initial visionary encounters. Despite her voice's instructions to write down what she saw and heard, Hildegard refused "because of doubt and erroneous thinking and because of controversial advice from men" (Fox, 1985, p. 27). Unable to overcome her illness, she finally yielded and began to write. Only then was she able to get out of her sick bed.

The emergence of inner voices has led some individuals to doubt their own sanity (Landis, 1964). Helen Schucman feared she might be developing a mental illness when her inner voice began dictating *A Course in Miracles* (Skutch, 1984). Black Elk experienced similar fears:

I was afraid of the stillness when everyone was sleeping, there were many low voices talking... crows would see me and shout to each other as though they were making fun of me... sometimes the crying of coyotes out in the cold made me so afraid that I would run out of one tepee into another, and I would do this until I was worn out and fell asleep. I wondered if maybe I was only crazy (Neihardt, 1973, p. 160).

Discomfort may result from what transcendent inner voices tell us. Although it has been said that "the truth shall set you free," the road leading to that freedom can be a bumpy one. Transcendent inner voices don't always tell us what we want to hear and our responses may include resistance, denial, or outright rejection of what these voices offer.

Another problem which arises in association with transcendent inner voices is the condemnation that comes from others who deny the reality of these experiences. Emanuel Swedenborg was charged with heresy for writing books that originated from his inner voices (Synnestvedt, 1977), and Joan of Arc was burned at the stake after being convicted of charges related to her voices (Sackville-West, 1991).

Alternatively, individuals who receive knowledge from transcendent inner voices may be placed on a pedestal, leading to hero worship or other forms of self-devaluation. Some individuals will project their divine capabilities onto others, before they will acknowledge the existence of such qualities within themselves.

Being the recipient of knowledge from transcendent inner voices does not guarantee the use of good judgment. Information received from these voices has been used for destructive as well as beneficial purposes. For example, Adolph Hitler, whose
survival during World War I resulted from a guiding inner voice, continued to rely upon his inner voice when making military decisions during World War II:

I carry out the commands that Providence [his inner voice] has laid upon me.... Unless I have the incorruptible conviction—this is the solution—to do nothing. Not even if the whole [Nazi] Party try to drive me to action. I will not act. I will wait, no matter what happens. But if the voice speaks, then I know the time has come to act (quoted in Alschuler, 1987, p. 9).

PATHOLOGICAL INNER VOICES

Pathological inner voices have been well described elsewhere. Therefore, I will limit my discussion here to the most pathological of all inner voices—hallucinations. The word hallucination is derived from the Latin hallucinatio which means "a wandering of the mind" (Webster’s, 1989, p. 639). The origin of this term is thus consistent with the American Psychiatric Association’s definition, quoted previously.

Hallucinated voices have characteristic features. For example, they generally speak the native language of the hallucinist. This means that an English-speaking schizophrenic hears English voices, a German-speaking schizophrenic hears German voices, and a Japanese-speaking schizophrenic hears Japanese voices.

Also, hallucinated voices tend to speak in single words, brief phrases, or short sentences. Such brevity does not preclude them from unleashing a tirade of hostile attacks however (Noyes & Kolb, 1963; Bleuler, 1950). In fact, these voices often slander or berate the individual particularly in those areas where he or she feels most vulnerable.

Hallucinations are messages which originate from the inner, rather than the outer, world. Hallucinating individuals have a difficult time grasping this veridical reality. They find it hard to believe that the origin of the voices they hear is their own brains. Instead, they attribute their voices to a variety of external sources including family members, friends, aliens, plants, animals, or even rocks (Fish, 1962).

Hallucinations in the form of voices often occur in association with mental or physical illnesses. Representative mental disorders include: schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, major depression with psychotic features, and bipolar disorder (DSM-IV, 1994). Physical disorders may cause hallucinated voices as well. Examples include: infections (Kroll & Bachrach, 1982), endocrine abnormalities (Hall, 1983), nervous system diseases (Mott, Small & Anderson, 1965; Minski, 1933; Murata, Naitomi & Sawada, 1994; Lanska, Lanska & Mendez, 1987), diseases of the ear (Rainer, Abdullah & Altshuler, 1970), systemic diseases (Tishler, Woodward & O’Connor, 1985), medication reactions (Hall, Beresford, Stickney et al., 1985; Pope & Katz, 1988), drug intoxication states (Jarvik, 1970), drug withdrawal states (Sarayva & Pardes, 1970), vitamin deficiencies (Bakhai & Muqtadier, 1987), and respiratory disorders (Allen, 1970). Deprivation of food, sleep, or sensory input may have similar effects (Baldwin, 1970; Zuckerman, 1970).

The exact mechanism by which pathological conditions induce hallucinations has not yet been determined. However, recent investigations utilizing positron emission
tomography (PET) and magnetoencephalography (MEG) have discovered alterations in glucose metabolism, auditory evoked potentials, and auditory evoked magnetic fields in the brains of schizophrenic individuals while they are hallucinating (Cleghorn, Franco, Szechtman et al., 1992; Silbersweig, Stem, Frith et al., 1995; Tiihonen, Han, Naukkarinene et al., 1992). Electrochemical changes in the brain are thus believed to play an important role.

The effects of hallucinated voices are typically negative (Miller, O’Connor & Di’asquale, 1993). They cause trouble sleeping (Landis, 1964, p. 133), mental confusion (Landis, 1964, p. 132), poor judgment (Johnson, 1978, p. 66), emotional distress, loneliness, sexual dysfunction (Miller et al., 1993), thought blocking (Johnson, 1978, p. 60), paranoia, delusions (Landis, 1964, p. 175), occupational difficulties (Landis, 1964), and catatonia (Johnson, 1978, p. 90). Self-destructive acts, such as self-mutilation and suicide, may occur (Johnson, 1978, pp. 86-90). Interpersonal functioning is negatively impacted as well. Relationships are disrupted (Miller et al., 1993) and violent acts may be perpetrated (Johnson, 1978, p. 86).

Although the mentally ill are usually less dangerous than the general public, noteworthy exceptions exist. For example, the brutal murders committed by David Berkowitz were incited by inner voices which he heard when the dogs in his neighborhood barked (Klausner, 1981). Berkowitz believed these voices were demons and felt compelled to carry out their demands. He murdered six people and terrorized millions more before he was finally captured.

Hallucinations do not always lead to such destructive sequelae, however. Several studies have found them to be a potential source of assistance. For example, Miller evaluated fifty subjects on a psychiatric inpatient unit and found that fifty-two percent reported benefits from their hallucinations (Miller et al., 1993).

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRANSCENDENT AND PATHOLOGICAL INNER VOICES

Now that we have distinguished pathological inner voices from transcendent inner voices, we can compare and contrast these two types of experiences.

**Similarities**

Many similarities exist between pathological and transcendent inner voices. First, both are heard with the mind, not the ears. This makes it impossible for others, who cannot hear the voices, to corroborate their content, or even their existence. Only the individual hearing the voices is capable of describing what is heard, as well as what the experience of hearing the voices is like. Others must rely upon observations, extrapolations, or even guesswork when attempting to discern the nature of these experiences.

Second, both types of voices may *appear* to have an outside origin. This is particularly true for those inner voice experiences which are found at the ends of the
hallucination-revelation continuum (i.e., hallucinations and revelations). Just as schizophrenics attribute their voices to external sources, so too mystics often perceive their voices to originate from a source outside of themselves.

Third, both types of voices speak the native language of the individual who hears them, whether it is a hallucination or a transcendent inner voice. A schizophrenic person hears voices in their native tongue. The Spanish mystic John of the Cross heard God speaking to him in Spanish, and Muhammad received revelations in Arabic.

Fourth, both types of voices may be precipitated by disruptions in the normal functioning of the ego. Diseases, drugs, or other consciousness-altering processes may precipitate hallucinations, but they may precipitate transcendent inner voices also. Van Dusen demonstrated this in his study of psychiatric patients (Van Dusen, 1972). Van Dusen’s subjects described two distinct types of voices which he labeled "lower order" and "higher order hallucinations." Van Dusen noted that the former had "less talent" than the individual whereas the latter were "more gifted." "Higher order hallucinations" were also found to respect the patient’s will and were highly symbolic (Van Dusen, 1972, pp. 150-151).

Fifth, both types of experiences may lead to beneficial as well as detrimental sequelae. Hallucinations are not universally harmful, and transcendent inner voices sometimes create problems for those who hear them. Thus, there is overlap between the helpful and harmful effects of both types of experiences.

Differences

Despite these similarities, many distinguishing features highlight the differences between pathological and transcendent inner voices. First, hallucinations tend to be judgmental, critical, andcondemning. Transcendent inner voices, on the other hand, tend to be supportive. Second, hallucinations have a reality only in the mind of the individual who hears them. But, transcendent inner voices may offer truths with a validity which can extend beyond the limitations of the ego. Third, hallucinations generally interfere with personal, interpersonal, and societal functioning. Transcendent inner voices, in contrast, generally lead to benefits at each of these same levels. Fourth, transcendent inner voices usually speak in complete sentences or long discourses, which is not true of hallucinations. Finally, hallucinations appear to result from brain malfunctions whereas transcendent inner voices apparently do not.

CULTIVATING TRANSCENDENT INNER VOICES

Transcendent inner voices can occur spontaneously, they can be precipitated by life events, or they can be cultivated. Examples of events which can trigger transcendent inner voices include experiences with death. Pre-death visions (Barrett, 1986; Osis & Haraldsson, 1977), near-death experiences (e.g., Ring, 1980), and apparitions of the deceased (Klbler-Ross, 1991; Moody, 1993; Callanan & Kelly, 1992) have all been associated with transcendent inner voices. Less often, physical or emotional illnesses may trigger transcendent inner voices as well.
The cultivation of transcendent inner voices requires two conditions: (1) receptive awareness and (2) inner silence. The importance of the former was described by Nobel Prize winner Rudyard Kipling who referred to his inner voice as his "Daemon":

My Daemon was with me in the Jungle book, Kim, and both Puck books, and good care I took to walk delicately, lest he should withdraw. I know that he did not, because when those books were finished they said so themselves with almost the water-hammer click of a tap turned off.... When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously Drift, wait, and obey [my italics] (Kipling, 1937, p. 227).

The second condition, inner silence, is known by many different names including "conscious sleep" (Yogananda, 1953, p. 59), "mind-fasting," "disappearance of the 1-thought," and "[the] void that you don't see" (Wilber, 1993b, p. 324).

Inner silence is present always, but we only become aware of it when we refocus our attention away from the so-called "ordinary" objects of consciousness (e.g., the messages of the senses and the thoughts of the mind). Wilber has described this process as "the suspension of thought, of conceptualization, of objectification, of mental chatter. This ... is a suspension of space, time, form, and dualism, and in this condition an utter mental Silence prevails" (Wilber, 1993b, p. 302). Kelsey, in very down-to-earth fashion, likened this process to the eating of an artichoke:

It must be done a leaf at a time, down to the heart. If one tries to take it in a single bite, all he gets is a mouthful of thistles. One has to set aside time for [inner] silence and then turn toward it with composure, letting go of immediate things a little at a time in order to enter a world where dreams and also the energy for life are born (Kelsey, 1976, p. 104).

How does inner silence facilitate transcendent inner voices? By refocusing attention away from the distracting messages of the senses, the ebb and flow of emotions, and the rambling thoughts of the ego, we reawaken to the transcendent realm of consciousness which is the medium of mystical experiences and direct encounters with the divine. Mystic Joel Goldsmith says: "In quietness, we become a state of receptivity which opens the way for us to feel or become aware of the very presence of God" (Goldsmith, 1956, p. 53).

Although some may find it paradoxical that transcendent inner voices occur during inner silence, this is nonetheless the case. As Dwight Judy said: "[Inner] silence does not necessarily mean that we hear nothing, but rather that in [inner] silence we may begin to hear everything" (Judy, 1991, p. 9). By tuning out the mind's incessant chatter, we begin to notice the more subtle messages of the transpersonal realm. As Satchidananda says: "It's not that you reach God or get God, but you realize God. You know that He is already there" (Satchidananda, 1977, p. 147).
Eileen Caddy, one of the founders of the Findhorn community, offers a personal account:

It is in that inner peace and stillness that things begin to happen and it was in that peace and stillness that I began to hear God's voice... All can hear that still, small voice within. Try it. Be still and know that the I AM within you is God, the Beloved. Listen then live by it. It really does work (Caddy, 1971, p. 11).

More than three quarters of a century ago, Trine described the importance of inner silence when he wrote:

It maybe an aid at first to take yourself for a few moments each day into the quiet, into the silence, where you will not be agitated by the disturbances that enter through the avenues of the physical senses. There in the quiet alone with God, put yourself into the receptive attitude... Then in the degree that you open yourself... you will feel a quiet, peaceful, illuminating power that will harmonize body, soul, and mind, and that will then harmonize these with all the world. You are now on the mountaintop, and the voice of God is speaking to you (Trine, 1910, p. 213).

This refocusing of attention is often achieved through the use of contemplative practices, such as meditation or prayer. Walsh refers to meditation as "the royal road to the transpersonal" (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993, p. 52). Goldsmith calls it "the door to the realm of the Soul" (Goldsmith, 1956, p. 89). Kelsey describes meditation as "the laboratory of the soul" (Kelsey, 1976, p. 38).

The Asian contemplative traditions, with their rich and diverse methodologies, are sometimes viewed as the source of all meditation practices. But in fact, the Judaic and Christian traditions have developed their own techniques (Kaplan, 1985; Judy, 1991). In fact, it has been estimated that over one million Israelites participated in meditation practices at the time the Bible was written (Kaplan, 1985). Furthermore, the experience of prophesy, which is so important in the history of Judaism, is said to have been facilitated by the prophet entering a meditative state (Kaplan, 1985). Aryeh Kaplan says:

The spiritual power and enlightenment that is the most important element of the prophetic experience is not found in the whirlwind or earthquake, but in the "still small voice" of utter tranquility. This is a state that is attained through deep meditation (quoted in Cooper, 1992b, p. 184).

In the Christian tradition, the Desert Fathers utilized a phrase from the scriptures as their focus of meditation (Goleman, 1988). A related technique, lectio divina, dates back to the sixth century. This method also involves meditation on scriptures (Judy, 1991). A third practice, the Jesus Prayer, was revealed to the West in the nineteenth century through the book, The Way of the Pilgrim. Also known as the Prayer of the Heart, this prayer involves repetition of the phrase "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Judy, 1991, p. 88). Inner silence is said to be the goal of this practice (Judy, 1991).

Goldsmith says "meditation is prayer" (Goldsmith, 1956, p. 91), and this fact is apparent in the above descriptions. But many different forms of prayer exist (Castelli, 1994), and not all are meditative. One particular style of prayer, known as contemplative prayer, is a form of meditation, however.

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Father Basil Pennington says contemplative prayer is "beyond thought or feeling or emotion" (Pennington, 1980, p. 114). Keating describes contemplative prayer as:

the opening of mind and heart, body and emotions—our whole being—to God.... We do not deny or repress what is in our consciousness. We simply accept the fact of whatever is there and go beyond it, not by effort but by letting go of whatever is there (Keating, 1992a, p. 14).

A specific type of contemplative prayer, centering prayer, dates back to the early Christian church. This form of prayer was predominant in the Christian church for nearly one thousand years until the time of the Reformation (Pennington, 1980, pp. 29, 34). Similar to the mantra utilized by Eastern traditions, centering prayer employs the repetition of a word or phrase. Saint John Climacus, who was one of the early champions of this style of prayer, wrote: "The beginning of prayer consists in banishing the thoughts that come to us by the use of a single word the very moment they appear.... During prayer do not let the senses create any images, so as not to be subject to distractions" (quoted in Pennington, 1980, p. 42).

This method of cultivating inner silence was further expounded upon by Saint Gregory of Sinai who said in the fourteenth century: "Keep your mind free from colors, images and forms; beware of the imagination in prayer—otherwise you may find that you have become a fantasist [i.e., a person who fantasizes] instead of a hesychast [i.e., one who pursues inner silence]" (quoted in Pennington, 1980, p. 47). In the fifteenth century, the Russian saint Nil Sorskii offered similar advice: "So as not to fall into illusion while practicing inner prayer, do not permit yourself any concepts, images or visions" (quoted in Pennington, 1980, p. 47).

Another Christian monk, Julian of Vezelay, spoke of the relationship between this method of cultivating inner silence and the emergence of inner voices:

Let us silence the desires and importunings of the flesh and the vainglorious fantasies of our imagination, so that we can freely hear what the spirit is saying. Let our ears be attuned to the voice that is heard above the vault of heaven, for the Spirit of Life is always speaking to our souls (quoted in Pennington, 1980, p. 44).

CONCLUSIONS

We can understand the true nature of inner voices only if we recognize that these are a heterogeneous group of experiences. A continuum of inner voices exists which includes both hallucinations and revelations. Despite our culture's ego-retentive tendency to view intuitive and revelatory inner voices as "unreal," or even worse as symptoms of pathology, these voices are a powerful, influential force in our world. They can offer inspiration, guidance, and intuitive knowledge to those willing to listen.

Transcendent inner voices should not be labeled "hallucinations." In addition to being a blatant example of the pre/trans fallacy in which transpersonal experiences are reduced to prepersonal phenomena (Wilber, 1993c), this pathologizing generates several other negative sequelae as well. First, individuals who hear transcendent voices may experience confusion, fear, or doubt their own sanity. Second, if they tell...
others that they hear such voices, they risk criticism or even punishment. Third, the assistance offered by transcendent inner voices may be ignored or discounted. Fourth, a climate of fear and intimidation is generated in which individuals are reluctant to share their experiences with others.

Labeling transcendent inner voices "hallucinations" also discounts the methods which are used to cultivate them. The contemplative practices of prayer and meditation may be naively viewed as attempts at escapism rather than vehicles for experiencing trans-rational states of consciousness. Furthermore, the cultures which employ these methods may be ethnocentrically and cognitively viewed as inferior or less evolved. The religious or philosophical traditions of such cultures may be similarly pathologized or discounted.

We can no longer afford to ignore, discount, or pathologize transcendent inner voices. The future survival of our species and our planet hinges upon our ability to access and utilize creative new solutions to global problems. Transcendent inner voices can provide a link to the transpersonal realms of consciousness where, perhaps, solutions to these problems may be found.

In order to access such transcendent assistance, as our ancestors did, and employ it beneficially, three conditions should be present. First, we must be able to distinguish transcendent inner voices from hallucinations. This is sometimes a difficult task, despite the existence of discriminating factors such as those previously mentioned. Spiritual teachers often warn of the dangers encountered when exploring inner worlds, and they emphasize the importance of discernment (Kelsey, 1978) as well as the use of a teacher or guide on this journey (Cooper, 1992b). Second, we must be able to trust in the value of transcendent inner voices, for even if we hear these voices and recognize they are not pathological, they will remain useless to us if we do not trust in their value. Finally, we must be able to integrate the assistance offered by transcendent inner voices into our daily lives. Simply hearing and trusting these voices is not enough. To benefit from them we must learn to apply the help they offer to the individual and collective problems we face.

Regardless of whether we identify the source of transcendent inner voices as God, intuition, creative inspiration, unexplained spiritual phenomenon, messages from the collective unconscious, or our own higher Self’s wisdom, these voices have spoken to our predecessors throughout human history. They can speak to us today, if we will listen, and if we apply the discernment and understanding that is also available to us in this modern era.

REFERENCES


