

Expressing the Self:

Supporting Organicity in the Integration of Expanded States of Consciousness

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The path of integration experienced after expanded states of consciousness is a hero's journey, of which the ceremony or session is just the beginning. Through the expanded state, the participant has an opportunity to regenerate and transform the psyche, removing obstacles to accessing deep wells of energy, awakening higher functioning that has laid dormant or underdeveloped, and receiving periods of strong intuitive guidance from the higher Self (Naranjo, 1975). After an expanded state experience, the participant may feel filled with love, as if one's general insecurities and anxieties have completely disappeared, and one walks in complete harmony with the universe at large. Yet, as in nature's cyclical nature, one must come back down to the ground and integrate the experience into daily life. This paper defines the "integration" of expanded state experience as the conscious recognition of subconscious transformations, linkage of disconnected parts into a cohesive whole, and the implementation of new relationships and behaviors in the external world that reflects the new internal state.

Integration may include coming to terms with new understandings of self and other in the world or ongoing processing of material newly discovered. "Most spiritual experiences contain a combination in various proportion of permanent changes, temporary changes, the recognition of obstacles that need to be overcome, and the lived realization of what is is like to exist at this higher level of integration" (Assagioli, 1989, p. 39). Many methods may be employed to support a participant's natural process in the healthy and harmonious integration of expanded states. This process can follow the natural organicity of the participant's consciousness, bringing forth the intelligence of Self energy and then acting to stabilize new structures into the personality and relationships with others and the external world. "The client must express one's essential nature, in spite of opposition. This starts in the context of the relationship with the

psychotherapist, and then can be extended into art and imagination” (Naranjo, 1975, p. 13).

Giving expression to the experience is a journey of self-discovery and realization.

Assumptions

For the purposes of this paper, I draw from the transpersonal psychology frameworks of Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Claudio Naranjo, and Stanislav Grof to give language and context to make meaning of experiences that can sometimes be simply beyond words. This paper assumes Dan Siegel's (1999) description of the mind as an open, dynamic self-organizing system that regulates energy and information flow. Further, it assumes the mind, or “psyche,” as I will refer to it, is comprised of many interconnecting layers from the physical to emotional, psychological, and to spiritual (or transpersonal). Claudio Naranjo writes “In my view, ‘psychotherapy’ (rightly understood) and ‘mysticism’ or ‘esotericism’ (rightly understood) are but different stages in a single journey of the soul, different levels in a continuous process of expansion, integration, and self-realization” (Naranjo, 1975, p. 17).

Last, this paper assumes that the Self's natural drive towards increasing levels of wholeness and individuation is what animates the self-organizing process. Jung (1953) posits the Self will always attempt to realize itself. It acts as an unrelenting force that pulls on psyche to heal split off parts and unconscious part of the psyche and achieve individuation, becoming a unique expression of the personal self and connected to and with the collective. Jung (1953) called the Self “god within us” (p. 280). Expanded state experiences with entheogens, sound, meditation, or other means may open the consciousness to Self energy and catalyze the process of individuation. Given these assumptions, the integration process may seem simple and organic. Nonetheless, careful shepherding of the consciousness through the integration process the support of a knowledgeable therapist can maximize learnings and decrease the pitfalls and inevitable challenges.

Assagioli (1989) points out that the flow of light and exalted states rhythmically ebbs and flows in consciousness. When the Self energy subsides, “the transformation is seldom either permanent or complete” (Assagioli, 1989, p. 37). Elements of the personality revert to their earlier state. One can look at the process in terms of energy and levels of organization. Peak experiences can bring the personality into higher levels of organization, but depending on the personality structure at the time, these changes may not be stable. The changes may only be maintained as long as the Self energy is elevated. Proper integration can support stabilizing these changes. Many times I myself have thought that I need to return to ceremony to do another session, when actually I found that the deeper work was to be present with the personality constructs revealed when Self energy subsided and transform them with new awareness and dedication.

Preparing for the Journey

Preparation for the expanded state experience is a crucial process to support the participant's experience as well as the integration of transformations. A therapist may prepare a participant by discussing the possible effects of the experience and developing a trusting rapport with the participant. Especially in cases of trauma, therapeutic alliance can provide the client with a strong base for the experience. “There is something within our minds that requires acknowledgement of our interconnectedness with and dependence upon other people in everyday life, at least on some occasions, before the doors to eternal realms of awareness can fully open” (Richards, 2016, p. 108). Moreover, the therapist may prepare a client with counseling in areas of the participant's life that are out of balance, bringing attention to that which can be most practically worked with from a conscious state. Then, the therapist and client may develop an intention for the participant to inquire into or receive guidance on in an altered

state of consciousness. Finally, a therapist may offer the participant strategies for calming and centering through breath and meditation that may prove useful in the expanded state.

The Expanded State Experience

Expanded state experiences may be induced in a variety of ways, including with entheogens, sound, breath, or meditations. Generally, this paper generally speaks to strong experiences and peak experiences, such as those as with entheogens or holotropic breathwork, but the tools can be used for any range of experience. During the expanded state, the participant may experience somatic sensations, emotional catharsis, insights, memories, or visionary experiences which include figures or scenes that are familiar or unfamiliar. The participant may receive information about one's life or process early life memories. Further, he or she may experience intense openings including access values like beauty, love, and unity consciousness, or the agony of 'hell realms,' the discomfort of confronting one's own disintegrated aspects in a powerful way. The experiences may vary from session to session for the same client and are here assumed to be brought forth by the inner drive of the participant's own consciousness and catalyzed by external methods.

Integration Processes

Given our assumption that the organizing capacity of the Self drives integration, the process reflects a movement from inwards to outwards -- first, becoming aware of one's own internal changes to then stabilizing transformations in the personality and implementing new relationships and structures in the external world. Through expanded states of consciousness, internal changes may be drastic and not fully understood initially. Material may be uncovered that requires additional processing over time. An important key for participants and therapists is to hold compassion and patience with one's process through its ups and downs.

Observing Regulations

With some entheogens, dietary and behavioral regulations are suggested over time, such as avoiding meat, fermented foods, sexual activity, and medications after an ayahuasca session. These regulations are intended to support the physical body through the integration process by reducing the risk of chemical and energetic interactions. Psychically, observing regulations may maintain a ceremonial container for the participant, allowing the psyche more time to self-organize harmoniously as the participant returns to the physical world with less external disruption. Thus, the first step in integration is to observe the guidelines for safety and containment and for the therapist to clarify what these guidelines entail.

The Journey Over Time

The expanded state experience may give a client access to realms of the psyche never experienced before. Peak experiences can bring a participant into contact with intrinsic values, beauty, love, or the common ground of all things (Naranjo, 1975). Stan Grof describes the peak experience as such:

“It is an ecstatic state, characterized by the loss of boundaries between the subject and the objective world, with ensuing feelings of unity with other people, nature, the entire universe and God...in most instances this experience is accompanied by visions of brilliant white or golden light, rainbow spectra or elaborate designs resembling peacock feathers...They speak about cosmic unity, unio mystica, mysterium tremendum, cosmic consciousness, union with God, Atman-Brahman union, Samadhi, satori, moksha, or the harmony of the spheres.” (Harrison, 2009, p. 40)

Other experiences may enhance psychiatric conditions, anxiety, depression, and psychological or emotional conflict. Feelings of unprecedented elation and bliss may last for a

period of time after a session only to slide into depression and disappointment when the inevitable return to baseline occurs.

A therapist can describe the terrain for the participant to understand potential ups and downs common to the process of awakening and coming to terms with the limiting parts of the personality, thus normalizing the experience that may feel like a crisis for the participant and helping the participant to draw forth the lessons inherent in each.

According to Assagioli (1989),

“It is as though he had made a superb flight to the sunlit mountain top, realized its glory and the beauty of the panorama spread below, but had been brought back, reluctantly, with the rueful recognition that the steep path to the higher must be climbed step by step. The recognition that this descent or ‘fall’ is a natural happening affords emotional and mental relief, and encourages the individual to undertake the arduous task of confronting the path to self-realization” (p. 40).

To offer another useful metaphor, Assagioli (1989) describes the rise and fall of Self energy through expanded states like that of a river the floods. In one outcome, the river is strong enough to break down and transform the rocks below it, or the personality structures of the previous state. These experiences are relatively rare, according to Assagioli. In a second outcome, the river subsides leaving some stones moved and others still there but with new awareness of their existence. In this case, the personality may revert towards a previous state, but what remains is an ideal model and sense of direction for ongoing work. In a third outcome, the flooding is less intense, and the energy is absorbed by the hidden patterns and blockages that inhibit higher states, energizing these tendencies so that they are more observable and able to be transformed. By giving proper context and understanding, therapists can use the

variety of expanded state experiences and their stages for growth and learning and decrease disappointment and deflation of returning to the personality.

Maintaining Connection to the Numinous

Expanded state experiences can bring a profound connection to the *numinous*, a transcendent and mysterious force which Jung calls as aspect of the god image or the Self. “The opening of the channel between the conscious and the superconscious levels, between the “I; and the Self, and the flood of light, energy, and joy which follows often produce a wonderful release...” (Assagioli, 1989, p. 35). Yet, the brilliant connection to the infinite closes over time after the returning, like the aperture on a camera slowly shrinking the opening back to nothing, leaving the participant awe-struck and sometimes disappointed and depressed about the lost connection. However, this connection to the numinous can be maintained and recovered, for once the numinous has been experienced, some say it can never be truly forgotten. It is here that meditation or spiritual practice picks up where entheogens drop off, and a therapist can support participants to adopt new meditative practices for revisiting the numinous space and pave neural roads to the space of the mysterious. With dedication, the participant may learn to keep the aperture of the camera slightly open, allowing the connection to the mystery to become more stable over time.

Context for Archetypal Imagery

John Perry writes in *The Far Side of Madness*,

“As a mythical hero, the patient found himself performing wonders. As King Richard the Lion-Hearted, he killed a tiger and strangled a serpent just after he was born. As a Japanese hero he took on the form of a serpent and acquired a “vicious power to strike back;” he killed a tarantula who was a Japanese mother

dressed for battle, and he overcame several monsters” (as cited in Grof, 1989, p. 86).

Expanded state experiences can immerse participants in the imagery of the archetypal realm, sometimes very foreign to the Western mind. Cohen (2017) describes that indigenous cultures keep the archetypal realm alive in their cultural consciousness through passing myths and esoteric teachings as part of their traditions. Visionary experiences in traditional cultures were integrated and understood through their cosmological framework. In contrast, Western culture significantly lacks symbolic understanding. Huston Smith writes in “The Revolution of Western Thought,” “If modern physics showed us a world at odds with our senses, postmodern physics is showing us one which is at odds with our imagination...” (a cited in Richards, 2016, p. 69). For Westerners, becoming familiar with spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Gnostic Christianity can offer frameworks for understanding phenomena interpreted as past life experiences, karmic patterning, and ancestral inheritance. Additionally, transpersonal psychology offers modern maps for navigating realms beyond the ego and describing the many formations of personality that may be encountered in expanded states.

The line between “real” and fabricated material in the imaginal realm may be up to a participant’s subjective perspective on reality. Traditional shamanic cultures hold these images as figures of the spiritual realm. In *The Red Book*, Carl Jung (2012) posits the archetypes he had relationship with had their own will and autonomy. “This I learned in the Mysterium: to take seriously her unknown wanderer who personally inhabits the inner world, since they are real because they are effectual” (p. 217). Mazatec shaman, Maria Sabina said, “There is a world beyond ours, a world that is far away, nearby and invisible. And there it is where God lies, where the dead live, the spirits and the saints, a world where everything has already happened and everything is known. That world talks. It has a language of its own” (Wasson et al., 1974, p. 17)

According to Cohen (2017), the archetypal imagery that emerges can be seen as “coming from the Self, aiding in the healing process, and opening the experiencer to the spiritual and archetypal dimensions that are inherent” (p. 93, 94). Giving creative expression and emotional completion to the internal imagery and scenes that emerge can support processing and resolution of the material. Further, active imagination or shamanic journeywork can reconnect the participant with the archetypal images, where the participant can ask questions, ask for guidance, or find internal resources for the journey. As Naranjo said, the integration process intends to give expression to one’s essential nature, however one understands it.

Recognizing Oneself and Reality

Through expanded state experience, the participant may reach a new levels of psychological organization. As the new internal reality is formed, the participant may find a profound new sense of meaning and new relationship to his or her external reality. However, the period of transition into a new state of being can feel awkward, challenging, painful, or alternatively, quite delightful for the participant. Cohen (2017) writes that the liminal phase is in-between stage “where old inner dynamics and self-perceptions are being challenged by the activity of the unconscious as it brings up shadow material and images, accompanied by an emotional influx.” This phase requires dedicated attention to the inner state and is marked by new observations and realization, “as internal structures are called to change in order for new attitudes and life to come forth” (Cohen, 2017, p. 109). During this time, the participant may experience a profound sense of guidance from a will higher than themselves as the Self energy is raised and the conscious and unconscious minds intersect.

To give an example, upon returning home from Peru where I had been drinking ayahuasca and other Amazonian plants in a process call the *dieta* for 6 months, I remember everything felt completely new -- the very reality in front of me seemed to respond differently

than before and I suddenly understood more of it its patterns and flow. Buying coffee and sweeping the floor felt the first time I had ever bought coffee or swept the floor, completely unfamiliar and novel. Self-regulating my own body felt entirely new, as if I had suddenly learned many new skills for managing my own internal states. Interacting with others reflected back to me a person I barely knew. Seemingly impossible tasks became accessible and other tasks habitual to a former self became irritating or unfamiliar. The process of re-experiencing myself was akin to getting a new body and new reality right in front of me.

Since I had already struggled with the hardships of integration in years prior, I had the resources and support to explore and enjoy the process even with its confusion and hardships. At this point, a therapist can support a participant by continuing to validate positive experiences, process blockages, and follow the flow of the Self energy through ongoing counseling or support.

Ongoing Treatment for Trauma

Often, expanded state experiences bring up new material for a participant to address and transform in the personality, from discovery of challenging personality elements to continued emotional processing or resolution of cognitive dissonances. Assagioli (1989) describes, "Sometimes these new emerging tendencies revive or exacerbate old or latent conflicts between personality elements. Such conflicts, which by themselves would be regressive, are in fact progressive when they occur within this larger perspective. They are progressive because they facilitate the achievement of a new personal integration, a more inclusive one, at a higher level — one for which the crisis itself paved the way" (p.34).

Referring back to the Assagioli's river model, as Self energy rises and inevitably subsides, the participant may encounter new heights of positive feelings, which can persist from hours to weeks, and then return to baseline only to find uncomfortable facets of his or her

personality still exist. In the light of new awareness, the participant may experience these personality elements as even more confining and pervasive than ever before. A therapist can encourage the participant to remember the peak state and address personality limitations in stride, to be transformed one stone at a time. “Experience tells us that [the peak experience] is temporary, the end of the *via purgativa* being self-acceptance, but it is doubtful that such an end may be attained without starting at the beginning, exposing the wounds that are to be healed—conflicts to be reconciled, self-hatred to be reexamined, shame and guilt to be worked through, and so on.” (Naranjo, 1975, p. 10). By bringing more light, more shadow is exposed to be worked with and transformed.

Moreover, trauma may be uncovered during the expanded state experience. This is not to be misunderstood as a failure of the entheogen or therapist to support the client. Richards (2016) writes:

“Rather, especially when people uncover traumatic memories, often of physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, that have been sealed away within their minds, interaction with a skilled therapist may prove very helpful in assimilating those memories into the overall functioning of the mind, thereby decreasing chronic anxiety and depression and facilitating the establishment of a more mature, better-integrated identity. Such treatment or disciplined interpersonal interaction may prove to be hard work, but the rewards can be significantly meaningful” (p.125).

In the case of trauma and blockages that inhibit the participant’s natural resolution of emotional or somatic symptoms, Mithoefer (2013) advises the use of bodywork as a support. Bodywork may include the exaggeration of the tension in the body and subsequent release, movement, or

therapeutic touch to the client. Bodywork may further serve to release physical tension or pain and intense emotion with somatic components such as agitation (Mithoefer, 2013).

Ongoing counseling in integration helps the client integrate personality conflicts or limiting structures, move emotional energy that has surfaced in consciousness, continue the ongoing treatment of trauma. Further, therapists can use integration counseling as a starting point to enhance the participant's emotional and behavioral repertoire in response to emotional triggers, create new strategies for working with thoughts and emotions that arise after a session, and demonstrate practices for relaxation and centering after the expanded state experience.

Dropping Anchors

The integration process involves bringing internal transformations and insights into the conscious and manifest world. A therapist can support this process is by validating affirming experiences and helping the participant reconnect with them through “dropping anchors” in the manifest world as reminders of the sensations, feelings, images, and thoughts from the expanded state experience. Mithoefer (2013) provides an extensive list of practices that can help the client consecrate insights into conscious experience which includes the following: listening to music from the session, journaling, making art, singing, spending time in nature, and any form creative expression for reflecting on and recalling the expanded state experience. Additionally, creating an altar may support a participant to ‘drop anchors’ in daily life. An altar may become a physical reminder of insights and resources as well as new intentions and new ways of being. These techniques may also give the client new coping skills for processing emotions and continuing self-exploration.

Community Support

One of the strongest supports or challenges of integration can be the support, or lack thereof, from the participant's community. “The gradual process of integrating religious

experiences is often assisted by participation in supportive communities. It is here that one may value belonging to a church, temple, synagogue, mosque, or group of some kind where one can speak of one's insights, hear about those of others, and unite in practical applications that may effect social and cultural change" (Richard, 2016, p. 124). In indigenous cultures, the expanded state experience is held within a cultural container cosmology that supports the participant emotionally and psychologically in ways that our Western scientific and rationally dominated culture usually fall short. Woodman (1985) writes that holding these experiences alone can be intolerable.

In best cases, the community provides acceptance, encouragement, and understanding to the participant through the major transformations, emotional tenderness, and awkward growth phases of recognizing oneself and building new relationships. Ideally, the community can also provide an ideological and psychological context for holding the participants expanding perspectives. "Within community life, one may also learn a language with which to express the insights that have occurred and may find it easier to adjust to changing patterns of attitudes and behaviors" (Richards, 2016, p. 125). The community provides mirroring and reflection to the participant's new internal state in a more accurate way than the person can see himself or herself. When supportive, this mirroring may help the participant to see and feel deeper connections, new perceptions of self and other, and the falling away or triggers or presence of new ones.

However, when there is a lack of understanding and support from the community, the participant risks invalidating the experience or struggling to make the changes that bring him or her into higher states of integration. For some participants, coming home to the world requires renegotiating social and family agreements. Changing social agreements may bring uncertainty, risk, and even separation within relationships. In some cases, the instability in precious family or

social relationships may be enough for him or her to abandon the changes required for growth altogether. Yet, in this new and delicate internal state, the participant faces important opportunities for strengthening and growing, whether through committing to follow one's inner guidance or through reweaving social agreements that are integrous and rewarding. This practice of making new agreements can further be applied to work, habits, places, and parts of the self. This reweaving into a different relationship with the world is the juice of the integration journey.

Challenges to Integration

While the rewards are many, so are the challenges on any spiritual path. Today's culture boasts a psychedelic renaissance larger than any time before. What is the effect of so many young people having access to mystical states without having the foundation of life experience or spiritual training? Claudio Naranjo (1975) writes,

“Yet with entheogenic substances, the client can experience visionary experiences and ecstatic journeys before the personality is ready to understand it, when he is ‘unprepared.’ Preparation in this context does not mean knowledge as much as a personal development, without which the way of mysticism becomes that of magic: a quest of the supernatural in the service of the ego rather than one for a supernatural order to which the ego may become subservient, the living understanding of a greater whole in which the individual may find his true purpose” (p. 15).

On the other hand, these experiences plants seeds-- possibilities for one to grow into and glimpses of the mystery that one cannot forget.

Another challenge to integration involves rapid opening that is overwhelming to the participant, or “spiritual emergency.” In spiritual emergency, unusual states of mind and

perception of paranormal phenomena may be alarming to a participant and verge on crisis. Unfortunately, most modern psychiatrists treat these cases as psychosis, medicating participants and stopping the organic process. Groff and Groff (1989) have made tremendous contributions to understanding spiritual emergence, and inform us that when handled appropriately, spiritual emergencies bring powerful potentials for healing and benefit to the participant.

While the rise of therapeutic training for working with entheogens makes safe treatment more accessible, there is still much to learn in the realm of integration. Mithoefer (2013) assures therapists what while new challenges may arise during the integration period as a result of the healing process, “normalizing, exploring and processing these reactions is usually all that is needed for them to resolve and additional insights, healing, and growth typically arise as a result.” (p. 53). In many cases, following the natural flow of the Self will guide clients to beneficial resolution.

The Role of Patience

“What is most painful for me in my work is seeing people getting upset and frustrated because to their eyes “nothing happened” or their intentions weren’t addressed. Attachment to the fulfillment of our intentions and the resulting anger or disappointment is a sign the the mind is subtle at work and an element of unconscious expectation has crept in the experience” (Reguiero, 2014, p. 78). For those seeking healing, the promise of expanded state therapy offers new hope for relief where treatment was not effective before. Likewise, the process of unfolding is slow and ongoing. On the road of self-discovery, as therapists we can offer participants a gift of infinite patience and compassion.

Conclusion

One could say that integration starts with preparation, before the expanded state experience even begins, and then continues from first steps out of ceremony space into life on a journey of self-discovery and exploration. Expanded state experiences range in intensity, from subtle insights to death and rebirth. In every case, making meaning of the experience is a process of expanding into a world beyond what one knew before. New roads are paved to the internal mystery and the energies and allies that lie within it. Recognizing oneself and a fresh reality brings the opportunity to discover the world again through child-like eyes. Ongoing work and healing take one deeper into the journey of self-knowledge and moving towards wholeness, as challenging as it may prove. As the psychedelic psychotherapy movement grows, communities are transformed and hopefully more supportive communities of understanding and support will weave themselves together as time goes on. Our collective knowledge for working therapeutically with participants after expanded state experience is ever growing.

The result of integration is inner healing and wholeness that then impacts every area of the participant's world. Not only does the expanded state give the opportunity of recovering lost parts of the self but further it reweaves what has been disconnected through trauma in the collective back into the web of wholeness. Through this work and its integration, we reweave the social and ecological into the individual psyche and the greater whole.

The topic of integration is vast and there is still much to understand. Gratitude goes to the pioneers of this psychic territory, including Jung, the Grofs, and Assagioli, and the indigenous and spiritual practitioners who charted the way before them into the subtle realms. Jung reminds us to incessantly turn inwards to the wisdom of our own truth. "But my soul spoke to me saying, 'My path is light.'" (Jung, 2012, p. 157).

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