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UNITY CONSCIOUSNESS AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: BEYOND KNOWLEDGE TO WISDOM

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The white man drew a small circle in the sand and told the red man, "This what the Indian knows," and drawing a big circle around the small one, "This is what the white man knows." The Indian took the stick and swept an immense ring around both circles: "This is where the white man and the red know nothing."

-Carl Sandberg

A lot of knowledge we accumulate is useless. But there can also be useful knowledge. In the Indian tradition they say, as the diamond is used to cut the diamond, knowledge may be used to transcend knowledge, and obtain insight and intuitive awareness of the true nature of life, its unity.

-Radha Burnier

Enquiry into transcendent or unity consciousness has been or is being made by researchers and others from many disciplines. Investigators in psychology include W. James, Jung, Assagioli, Maslow, Tart, Progoff, Grof and Wilber. In the sciences, some key persons are: de Chardin, Crookes, Capra, Birch, Bohm, Lovelock, Prigogine, Sperry and Sheldrake. If literature is an accepted area of enquiry, a host of writers ranging from Goethe, Nietzsche, Gibran, Tagore, Yeats, Wordsworth, Blake, Eliot, Emerson, Whitman, Berdyaev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz* can be added. Others deserving mention here are the artists-Kandinsky, Mondrian and Roerich; philosophers--Watts, Weber and Whyte; educators--Montessori, Steiner and Krishnamurti; political leaders--Gandhi and the Dalai Lama; and from the Social Sciences or a multi-disciplinary background--Campbell, Bateson, Harman, Houston, Eliade and Kubler-Ross. This paper purposely begins with a 'name dropping' exercise because

I wish to assure those who would glibly dismiss consciousness enquiry as New Age folderol that it is an area worthy of serious attention.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce and explore a line of enquiry which many educators would regard as radical. The paper has two main aims. First it will identify and briefly clarify a set of points drawn from the growing literature on transcendent or unity consciousness. Second it will propose some ways for linking these points with a multi-faceted view of educational change, particularly in the area of curriculum development. My reason for doing this is that such enquiry may hold the key for helping educators to move beyond knowledge to the getting of a more holistic, wisdom centred consciousness.

Consciousness and change are the main focal aspects of this paper. Consciousness, here is defined as a way of seeing, knowing and understanding one's self in relation to Reality. Two states of consciousness will be distinguished and considered - viz. ordinary and transcendent or unity consciousness. Ordinary consciousness refers to an everyday way of seeing ourselves as separate parts of an external objectively known reality where we are understood to be interdependent component parts of a macro system called the universe. Transcendent or unity consciousness refers to an extraordinary way of seeing ourselves as direct reflections of a deeper, inner experientially known Reality along with the realisation that we are one with that Reality. Granting this, change is not a process of changing reality, but one of deepening and clarifying consciousness in the sense that we become increasingly aware of ourselves as connected reflections of the one Reality, which just is. Moreover, when these notions are applied to education--already a process designed to change young people in certain ways rather than others--they call for the creation of educational programs geared to an intentional transformation of their consciousness in the direction of the one Reality based consciousness.

For those desiring a more detailed, research specific concept of consciousness, we present the following. Roberts (1984, p. 6) reveals the shortcomings of a batch of terms including Unconscious; Stream-of Consciousness; Subjective, Self, Women's, Higher, Proletarian, Left/Right Hemispheres, Ecological, Spiritual Levels Consciousness; Raising Consciousness; Conscientizacao; Consciousness; and Mind. Having done this he settles on 'state-of-consciousness' (SOC) (Tart, 1975) as the most specific and useful definition. Tart (1985, p. 4) proposes that a state of consciousness is a pattern of mental functioning --more precisely he notes a "discrete state of consciousness for a given individual is a unique configuration or system of psychological structures or subsystems." SOC's include waking consciousness, dreaming, hypnosis, being drunk, being drugged, strong emotional states, e.g. rage, panic, depression, elation, and meditation induced states. Parts or aspects of the mind include such things as memory, evaluation processes and sense of identity. One way of viewing a state of consciousness is as a dynamic process in which system or subsystem parts can change; they have stability

however, as they are anchored in set configurative patterns. States of consciousness can be altered and studied as an altered state is realised. This is done by asking the query:

How does *learning* vary from one SOC to another? (Roberts, 1989, p. 22). Other terms which can be scrutinised are identity, perception, memory, valuing, thinking, social interaction, movement, behaviour, etc. A key concern is to clarify the relationship among experience, behaviour and consciousness in any given state.

The study of consciousness has evolved over the last several decades. The traditional view is that ordinary consciousness is the only state worth investigating--all other states are interesting curiosities, but of little professional relevance (Roberts, 1984, p. 13). An emerging view holds that human beings have the ability to experience and function in a variety of states of consciousness, each of which makes a valuable contribution to their being, knowing and doing (Roberts, 1984, p. 13). Roberts (1984, p. 13-18) identifies below a number of beliefs fundamental to an emergent multistate view of consciousness.

All persons have the capacity to experience multiple SOCs and it is a natural, healthy, human trait to achieve, explore and develop many SOCs.

.....

The experience of reality and the sense of time, space and matter are functions of the SOC in which they are experienced. Knowledge can change as reason and perception also differ from one SOC to another. And finally self identity and social relationships also change with shifts to different SOCs.

.....

Many people learn best in different SOCs (such as focused awareness, guided imagery or relaxation/meditation). Intelligence is the optimal use of each SOC and the more general ability to select the appropriate SOC for the task at hand. As different states are realised, individuals attain higher levels of experientially grounded knowledge.

.....

Thoughts, values, beliefs and other conscious or mental phenomena exert emergent or downward influence on human behaviour and as

for creativity and problem solving the most insightful and valuable ideas often occur during non-ordinary SOC. Higher consciousness is a state periodically glimpsed rather than constantly realised.

.....

Personal existence extends beyond the usual limits of the body-based identity, time and space. The physical, biological, chemical and electrical state of the body and the brain can be voluntarily controlled to an unknown extent; thus a SOC is a controllable variable. It is possible to control the autonomic nervous system voluntarily by biofeedback, meditation, yogic postures, imagery and other noninvasive practices. Mental and physical healing are associated with access to certain SOC.

States of consciousness range from those that give a sense of a separate individual being (personal SOC) to those which give a sense of unified wholeness (transpersonal SOC). The individual ego-self and separateness are mainly associated with ordinary consciousness while the higher connected self, unity and wholeness are associated with transcendent SOC. A transcendent state can be accessed by meditation, guided imagery, dreams, hypnosis, yoga and other 'unconscious' accessing types of psycho-techniques. In the transcendent state the ego-self and separateness are seen to be a state-specific illusion. One may directly apprehend moral principles and universal or cosmic values and such an experience when properly integrated into the self can be one of the most therapeutic events in a person's life.

For those whose beliefs approximate those noted above a cardinal intellectual error of our times is the failure to acknowledge and support the significance of states of consciousness as a primary focus of research, development and educational application. This error is compounded by the fact that we also live in an age where 'self' centred development, specialisation and exclusivity and splintered experiences colour most of the inputs received by children and youth growing up in western culture. We are creating generations of self-satisfaction seeking persons and communities of intimate strangers who are lost in space rather than being connected parts of a cosmic life force animating everything and everyone in the universe. Moreover aspects such as the human spirit and soul are thoughtlessly rejected as relevant sources of personal/collective growth. These latter factors identify reasons for focussing on consciousness enquiry, particularly enquiry related to transcendent, unity consciousness.

Educational and curriculum change are mainly concerned with the application of innovative approaches to improve school and/or school program operations. Leaders and change agents have another way in which they can involve themselves with educational change. They can also be light bearers in the sense of shedding

light on new or alternative ways of revisioning education or school programs. It is in this sense that I invite you to PLEASE CONSIDER growth in areas such as unity consciousness, fullness of spirit, and the getting of wisdom. They are essential learnings--too vital to be left out in the cold--and they deserve to be major elements of any inclusive, multidimensional educational offerings created for children and youth of the 21st century.

Educational change of school programs will miss the mark until it is recognised that schools have a distinctive function aside from the social stability and social change foci which give them their reason for being. This is to help children and youth to learn (i.e., acquire knowledge) and to initiate them in a continuing process of knowledge growth. Moreover, this function can be approached from three interrelated levels of facilitation: (1) information accessing and processing; (2) knowledge production and conceptual mapping; and (3) wisdom-seeking in the sense of crossing boundaries and becoming aware of higher levels of integrative consciousness. Educators always have the option of choosing which of these they will emphasise. and whether they will do so from a fragmented or holistic perspective.

Knowledge production and conceptual mapping is the best known of the three levels as it has been the one traditionally associated with the education of children and youth. Unfortunately it has been plagued by problems, as schools have often given greater attention to knowledge consumption than to knowledge production. However, educators are now aware that learning how to learn is a crucial key to being educated, and they are focussing increasing attention and effort on this dimension.

The information explosion of the eighties and nineties, much like the knowledge explosion of the late fifties and sixties, is a gigantic revolution which is grabbing the attention of many educators. An outgrowth of this revolution is that educators are now expected to become technologically literate (i.e. be able to use computers to access and retrieve relevant batches of data) posthaste. The problem with this is the same as that found with earlier rational problem-solving advocates. It paints such a massive picture of technological revolution and impending social doom that it would allow schools little time for studying anything else once they opt to become technologically literate.

As noted earlier education can and also should be about the seeking of wisdom. Wisdom relates to helping children and youth to evolve towards human fulfillment in the sense of striving to realise a holistic and integrative consciousness which sees Self and Reality as one. Moreover, the seeking of wisdom can be associated with a synthetic mindset, an interdisciplinary system of knowledge (see paragraph one of this article) and a set of investigative pathways which can be clearly identified and incorporated into the varied levels of school programs.

Concerning the latter point of multiple investigative pathways Helminski (1992) proposes that there are seven levels (or pathways) for attaining knowledge certainty--viz "knowing something's name; knowing through the senses; knowing about something; knowing through deeper grasp and understanding; knowing through doing; knowing through subtle sub-conscious faculties; and knowing by Spirit alone" (p. 178). Educators and curriculum makers need to be sure then that students are challenged to explore and come to know in varying ways their connectedness to a universe where all aspects of Reality--physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual--are but different facets of the one Reality.

Unity consciousness is a state of enlightened awareness which has been described by persons experiencing Reality from many different perspectives. In education, Montessori stressed the oneness of Reality and the Many being interconnected parts of the One. She explored the education of 'idiot' and slum children and established a school built around a curriculum having four main parts: practical life, sensorial, language and mathematics. Strong emphasis was also placed on 'creative arts', music, science, geography, and cultural studies. Believing that the child's mind had a vast absorbent potential Montessori also developed and implemented a concept of "cosmic education":

Since it has been...necessary to give so much to the child, let us give him a vision of the whole universe. The universe is an imposing reality, and an answer to all questions... All things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity. The idea helps the mind of the child to become focused, to stop wandering in an aimless quest for Knowledge. He is satisfied having found the universal centre of himself with all things.

(Maria Montessori, To Educate the Human Potential,
quoted in Montessori In Australia, 1989, p. 8)

The Montessori Association of Australia sees Montessori's ideas about "cosmic education" being applied as follows:

Cosmic education begins with the story of the universe, through which we see the inter-relationship of all science and indeed of all things.... Different subjects are considered as interconnected, and are presented as such. For instance the history of Egypt is tied to the Nile, to geography, to art, to writing, to geometry--as in the 3-4-5 triangle used to survey following the floods--to flora and fauna and to papyrus the writing paper used to record the history which was the point where we entered the chain.

(Montessori in Australia, 1989, p. 8)

Cosmic consciousness (one expressive form of unity consciousness) or being conscious of the fullness of human spirit is an aspect which has been eclipsed in recent decades. The fading of this consciousness is linked in part to the association of thinking with rational or calculative thinking as the sole type of worthwhile thinking. As Martin Heidegger warns us, the reduction of thinking implies the reduction of our humanness.

...the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced as the only way of thinking.

What great danger then might move upon us? Then there might go hand in hand with the greatest ingenuity in calculative planning and inventing an indifference toward meditative thinking, total thoughtlessness. And then? Then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature-that he is a meditative being. Therefore the issue is saving man's essential nature. Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive.

(Quoted in Kelly, 1990, p. 62)

The path to wisdom begins with the realisation that a deeper level of Reality exists which can and must be known if we are to fully understand life and being human. In earlier times attention focussed on the experience of coming to know the inner spirit which defines the essence of what we are and at the same time identifies the ground of our connectedness both with all other creatures and things in the universe and its creative Cosmic Source. The key to being wise was to be conscious of and to respect Self and all other living beings as a reflection of this fullness of Spirit.

As centuries passed we became the objectifying, minimalised and mainly surface-centred selves we are today. We lost our way as an outgrowth of becoming more civilised, nationalised, rationally educated and specialised. We achieved increasingly greater measures of success as we learned how to control and make things work for us and became masters of our own destiny. 'External reality' became the only significant reality and the ego-self armed with selected and highly specialised knowledge structures possessed the tools needed to march forward and become Man--the Master of the Universe.

Wisdom is a heightened awareness that we are all parts of one Reality--a whole consisting of inner and external aspects--both of which are interrelated and dynamically unfolding aspects of an ongoing creative process. What we grow to see, be and do is either synchronised with this unfolding and contributes to producing harmony, peace and wellbeing or it is out of synch and results in division, disaster and destruction. Wisdom, then, is being in touch with the Spirit

Source which animates our being and connects us all as participants in the one Reality of the universe. It is a higher consciousness which goes beyond the knowledge of specialised conceptual maps just as this knowledge goes beyond information (data inputs) to integrate data and form cognitive maps. At the same time it identifies a deeper level in the process of becoming an enlightened being wherein one can penetrate the darkness beneath the veil and arrive at an illumined vision of one's true Self.

The getting of wisdom refers to opening ourselves to the possibility that the human spirit is just as important as human nature and that we have within ourselves the resources to uncover the essential nature of our being. We and others in the universe have the capacity to grow in awareness of the Spirit centre of our being and to realise ourselves more fully. To do this we must see ourselves not only as gatherers of information and knowledge (i.e. students) and/or as knowledge structure researchers/producers (i.e. scholars) but also as seekers of wisdom (i.e. sages) who through the seeking of a deeper understanding of Reality can attain glimpses of unity consciousness.

The getting of wisdom can be pursued in many ways. Two of these, discernment and synthetic inquiry, will be touched on here. Discernment is a process of searching for and sharing insights about approaches to the different problems which confront us. According to McKinney it is a three stage process involving (1) data collection; (2) meditative reflection on the data; and (3) sharing the wisdom emerging from reflection (1987, p. 43-47). McKinney proposes that discernment is part of a shared wisdom model characterised as being "synthesizing, holistic, collaborative, enabling" (p. 29). Shared wisdom could be explored, e.g. as part of a peer coaching, interdisciplinary group or school staff cooperative evaluation process.

A second pathway to wisdom is found in the search to clarify possible patterns of worthwhile connectedness in life or in the universe. Synthetic inquiry seeks to explore internal and external aspects of being by describing, clarifying and interpreting holistic patterns of intentional relations and meaningful, unified being (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 177-183) as it studies constructs such as education, community, creativity, change, etc. It is an inclusive process of exploring, clarifying and drawing out a sense of meaningful relatedness by combining knowledge attained through calculative, meditative, creative and other types of thinking.

Other pathways to insightful consciousness can be found in resource guides such as Hendlin's The Discriminating Mind (1989), Tart's Waking Up (1986), Houston's The Search for the Beloved (1987), Helminski's Living Presence (1992), Ferrucci's What We May Be: Vision and Techniques of Psychosynthesis (1983) and Starhawk's Truth or Dare (1990)--all fully referenced in the Bibliography.

All of this prompts the question of what can be done to encourage curriculum developers and other educators to investigate broader and more inclusive frames of reference. The shift to consciousness enquiry is a difficult move for several reasons. First, it means accepting the possibility that certain aspects of our interior subjective life can be trusted to provide us with valuable contributions to the enquiry process and the acquiring of worthwhile knowledge. Second, it requires that educators turn against the main expectations, pressures and rewards of what Tart (1986, p. 11) calls consensus consciousness or the conditioning inputs of the major traditions of western culture and the specialist education communities which 'care' for us. (Consensus consciousness leads us to develop an acquired nature which often blinds us to valuing our own essential nature. In this sense we learn to separate and do violence to a central dimension of our being. It is little wonder, then, that we can so easily become violent to other persons and things.)

Third, any massive shift from areas long held as central to our existence involves us in a death/transition/rebirth process which greatly unsettles us emotionally. The unsettlement derives from the fact that in separating from attachments central to our current sense of being we experience an intense threat of losing our self-identity, life-meaning and sense of ordered (i.e. controlled) reality. In this sense change is always like a two edged sword. It wounds and hurts us on the one hand and leads to healing and a new stage of wholeness on the other. In most cases where changes are managed much time is given to the cognitive and skill aspects of the new approach to be implemented, but little is given to the emotional confusion and hurt experienced by those changing, especially in the death and transition stages. More attention must be focussed on supporting those undergoing change as they work through the grieving process associated with letting go of former attachments and on helping them while in the transition stage to identify and clarify a vision of Self as a Spirit centred being.

The shift to consciousness investigation is also difficult because educators as yet have had few frameworks to help them understand what is involved in making the change from ordinary to transcendent consciousness. One example of such a transition framework is found in Figure I. Figure I represents some understandings I realised from contemplating consciousness and change while doing special studies for three and a half months at the Krotona Theosophy Centre in 1992. Over time I came to see the process of changing consciousness as being associated with certain observations contained in two short metaphorical statements. The diagram evolved as an outcome of trying to clarify the content of these related statements--both to myself and others.

The first statement--'As the eye is unveiled the I is transfigured'--identifies two key elements involved in the journey to transcendence. One, the unveiling of the eye has to do with the unfolding of consciousness. This is depicted in the horizontal sunglasses like set of polarities--the VEILED EYE and CLEAR

CONSCIOUSNESS. The one eye is veiled because its view of reality, which forms the foundation of consciousness, is mainly an outcome of perceptual inputs from the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell) which are processed by the rational intellect. In short, consciousness in this case is restricted to those things in the external world which our mind and ego chooses to focus on. Clear Consciousness is the eye of infinity. It turns inward in its search for a deeper and more meaningful grasp of life in the universe and relies on the unconscious faculty to help it come to know its being. If we can discipline ourselves to listen to the creative imagination of our unconscious we shall come to see our connectedness with the one Reality. Western thought gives priority to sensorial data and rational thought. Mature growth of consciousness relates to the balanced use of all our faculties and being chiefly centred in the unconscious, spiritually-orientated dimension of our being. Higher consciousness--called enlightened consciousness--is realized when we see and relate to self, others and the Spirit of the universe as interconnected aspects of the one Reality. The huge vertical 'I' depicts the Transfigured I. It is intended to show the transformation of the 'ordinary I' or ego (small) self to the "Transfigured I' or transcendent (higher) Self. In western culture the "I" is cultivated as the focal point of our consciousness. It is an outgrowth of all the conscious faculties called upon each day as we interact and cope with the varied aspects of the physical, material world. It gives rise to our personality, the evolving image of ourself which we construct and becomes the core of our self identity. The Self by contrast lives in our unconscious being. The ego plays an important role in that it directs what is done in our conscious life. It can do a far better job of this if it is in touch with the higher Self and relates with it in a balanced way. A mature person trusts Self to be the true centre and guide in both the conscious and unconscious areas of its life. Self then is that hidden part of our being which is the ordering and unifying point of the psyche (one's soul or spirit) and at the same time the integrative force of the totality of our unconscious inner being. It is the God Seed implanted at the centre of our inner being and the source of direction for our conscious and unconscious being. It is the Spirit of God within each one of us which gives us our individuality of soul (in contrast to our surface personality) and from which we receive the divine energies of grace. It is our key to being one with and partaking of the Reality of the Spiritual Universe (Michael and Norrisey (1984) pp. 182-184).

The second statement associated with the diagram is 'We are all meant to be mothers of God'. At the center of the horizontal and vertical dimensions is a large S in a broken circle. This S stands for the God Seed of the Divine Spirit which is implanted in us when we separate from the Spiritual Universe to take up individual life on this planet. The seed of the Spirit is ever present in us, but the extent that it grows and matures depends on the extent that we cooperate with nature and help/encourage it to flower. The Lord of light, life and love is the Father and we are the mothers, who once we accept the condition of being seeded, can co-create the higher Spirit Self we have the potential to be. This seed can grow to become

the central guiding force of our consciousness and self realisation or it can lie dormant and hidden at the centre of our being. It is our choice in most cases (the Spirit of the Universe sometimes directly acts to influence our choices).

WE ARE ALL MEANT TO BE MOTHERS OF GOD - MEISTER ECKHART

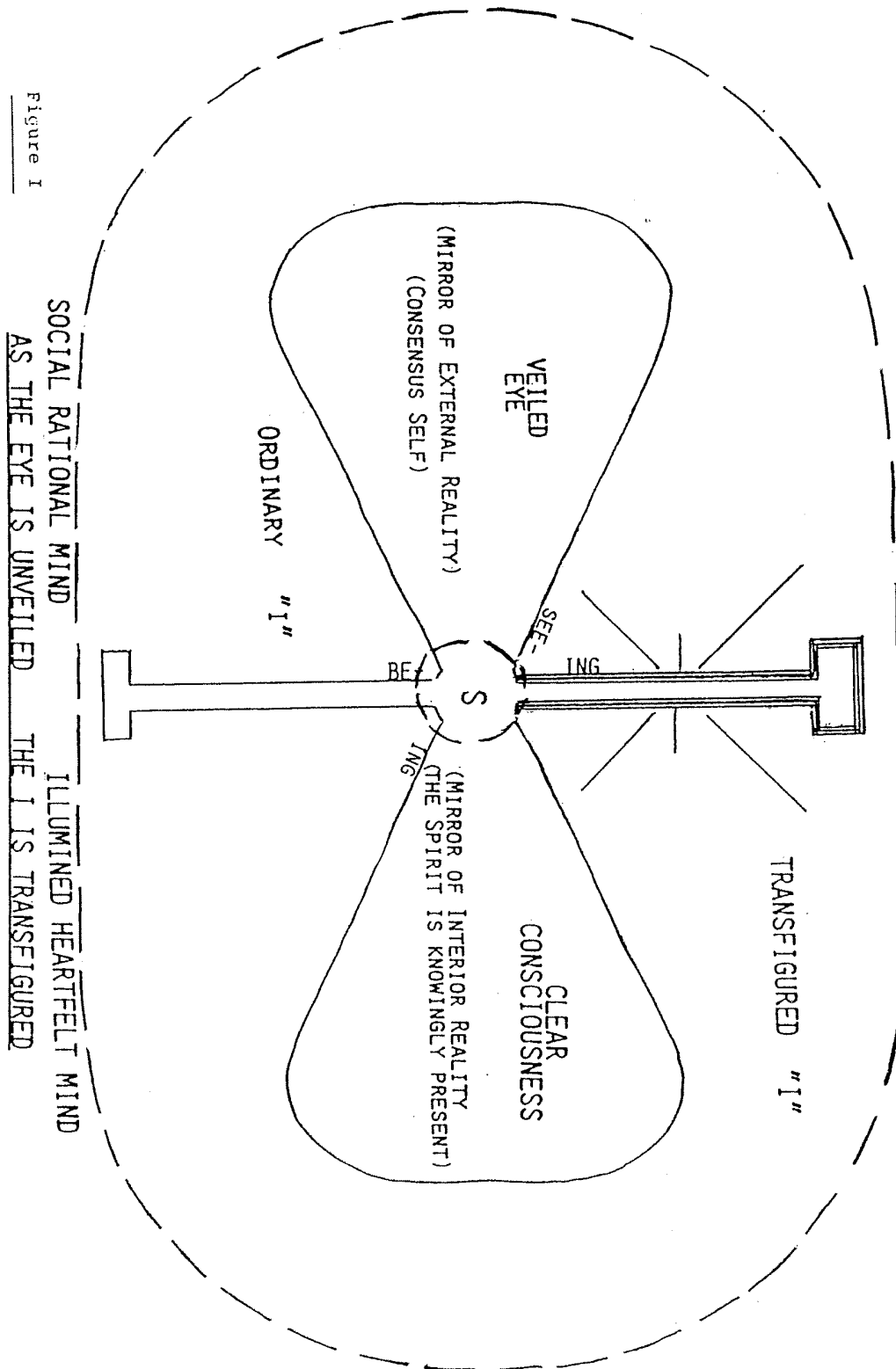


Figure I

SOCIAL RATIONAL MIND AS THE EYE IS UNVEILED
 ILLUMINED HEARTFELT MIND THE I IS TRANSFIGURED
 (RALPH METZNER, 1983, UNCOVERING THE VEILS OF ILLUSION")

The entire area of the diagram is surrounded by a flattened broken circle which is intended to reflect two points. One is that all differentiated dimensions, etc. are related parts of one totality and one Reality. The other suggests that once we yield to the parenting of our Spirit seed and to letting the unconscious guide us on our journey to transcendence, we enter a universe of greatly expanded and limitless (the breaks in the flattened circle) horizons. It is in this sense that we surrender freedom to become liberated. It is also as we make this decision that we begin to move beyond the world of often useless knowledge and discover the path to the perennial wisdom of the ages.

Wisdom then is being aware of and understanding that I/we and all other beings in the universe are related aspects of the one Spirit-Reality. It has to do with the re-visioning of self as Self (i.e. as the Transfigured I). Living wisdom is the active process each of us engages in as we strive to become whole by re-connecting ourselves with the one Reality. Educators can and should help those in their care to open themselves up to a fuller vision both of Self and right 'Spirit-centred' action.

An African proverb states that the village educates the child. This statement reminds us that the educating of children and youth is a community as well as a school undertaking. This brings up the question of who will educate the community so that its members can adequately share in the education of the young. Educational change then means much more than the changing of school programs. Educators must also attend to leading various groups of community members towards a re-visioning of education as an information, knowledge and wisdom seeking process at the very same time they are working to liberate the young from their defective and restrictive views of Self and Reality.

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