

5. Returning Home to Paradise

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We human beings were conceived in Paradise, both as individuals and as a species. Phylogenetically, the myths in many cultures of a Golden Age during the early years of the emergence of humanity on Earth attest to the existence of “a place of peace and prosperity, governed by wise and compassionate rulers”, as Chögyam Trungpa described Shambhala in a book of that name. Ontogenetically, Stanislav Grof refers to our development in our mothers’ wombs as a time of ‘oceanic ecstasy’ in *The Holotropic Mind*.

Then we were ejected from Paradise, and all hell broke out on Earth. For instance, Adam and Eve, who were not ashamed of their nakedness in the Garden of Eden, were condemned when they ate an apple from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, an allegory for the birth of the analytical, egoic mind. Provided we do not suffer a prenatal disturbance in what Grof calls a ‘bad womb’, our births generally mark our ejection from Paradise as individuals. He describes four perinatal matrices—influences that shape human consciousness from prenatal life through birth.

These early experiences clearly have formed our collective and personal subconscious, which most are unaware of unless they have engaged in many years of self-inquiry. These subconscious, divisive energies have then obviously played a major role in our cultural development in religion, science, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, economics, politics, and every other branch of human learning. So as we have accumulated more and more knowledge, our minds have become deeply fragmented and split—the central problem facing humanity today—leading us to lose touch with our innate Wisdom.

So is it possible for us to return Home to Paradise before the deaths of our bodies and our species? Or will the Earth only return to Paradise after humanity has disappeared from the face of the Earth, as Jan Brueghel the Younger’s painting of *Paradise* seems to indicate.

Well, Grof’s neologism *holotropic* offers a valuable clue here. For him, *holotropic* means ‘turning towards the Whole’, like *heliotropic* ‘turning towards the Sun’, from Greek *holos* ‘whole’—as we see in holism, evolution’s convergent tendency to form wholes—and *tropē* ‘turning, change’. However, the Greek verb *trepo* had two meanings, as in English: ‘to change direction’ (as in ‘turn into a side-road’) and ‘to change form’ (as in ‘turn into a frog’). So *holotropic* can also mean ‘transformation of the Whole’, when frogs can turn into princes and princesses!



It is with this meaning of *holotropic* that we can heal our fragmented minds in Wholeness and thereby return Home to Paradise. However, this is not a task to be undertaken lightly. For first, we need to completely purge the mind of the past by demolishing the Tower of Babel that depicts the deluded world of learning today, painted by Jan Brueghel the Younger’s grandfather Pieter Bruegel the Elder. For it is only by starting afresh at the very beginning with a *tabula rasa*, at the Alpha point of evolution, that we can reach evolution’s glorious culmination at its Omega point.

But then there is another snag concerning the relationship of the individual, seeking to return Home to Paradise in this liberating manner, and the rest of society. Normally, in the evolution of the species or civilizations, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, as children mimic their parents in their social environment. However, when new species or civilizations emerge, individuals begin to develop in a manner quite different from their forebears. Then when a critical mass of such pioneering individuals becomes established, phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny, and a new species or civilization is born.

In *The Ghost in the Machine*, Arthur Koestler described two words that denote these two evolutionary paths: *gerontomorphosis*, the ‘shaping or forming of the old’, and *pædomorphosis*, ‘the shaping or forming of the young’. During gerontomorphosis, evolution progresses from immediately preceding forms and structures. However, as Koestler put it, “gerontomorphosis cannot lead to radical changes and new departures; it can only carry an already specialized evolutionary line one more step further in the same direction—as a rule into a dead end of the maze.” During pædomorphosis, on the other hand, evolution retraces its steps to an earlier point and makes a fresh start in a quite new direction. Pædomorphosis is thus a rejuvenating, reascent process; it leads to new vitality, new energies, and new possibilities.

However, there is yet another snag here. In *The Holotropic Mind*, Grof likened intrauterine oceanic ecstasy to what Abraham Maslow called a ‘peak experience’, a blissful feeling of Wholeness, effortlessly utilizing our capacities to the fullest. It might seem obvious that this is something that we all desire more than anything else. However, as Maslow showed in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, this is far from the case. We both hesitate from reaching out to our fullest potential as awakened human beings and also try to prevent others from doing so, in what he called the ‘Jonah Syndrome’.

It was not only the writers of the Old Testament who were aware of the Jonah Syndrome. Arjuna had a similar experience, recorded in the *Bhagavad Gita*. When Krishna showed him the Ultimate Cosmic Vision—“all the manifold forms of the universe united as one”—Arjuna said, “I rejoice in seeing you as you have never been seen before, yet I am filled with fear by this vision of you as the abode of the universe.”

Ken Wilber’s three-stage model of evolution illustrates the challenge here. The subconscious, prepersonal stage roughly corresponds to what is known as the Great Mother Goddess epoch, while the self-conscious, personal stage is the conflict-ridden patriarchal epoch of the past 5,000 years, since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. There is a prospective superconscious, transpersonal third stage. But as Wilber says, it is most important not to fall for what he calls the pre-trans fallacy just because the first and third stages are different from the second.

Although there is not an exact match here, we can say that moving from the personal to the pre- or transpersonal is like following spiritual paths leading to No-mind or Supermind, respectively. The former is the traditional mystical path, encapsulated by Ramana Maharshi, when he said, “The thought ‘Who am I?’ will destroy all other thoughts, and, like the stick used for stirring the burning pyre, it will in the end get destroyed.” However, while killing the mind in this manner might well lead practitioners Home to Paradise in Oneness, it is only when we are fully cured of schizophrenia, literally ‘split mind’, in Wholeness that we can intelligently adapt to the most momentous turning point in the fourteen billion years of evolutionary history, currently taking place.

But as such an integral, holistic perspective can only be seen from the summit of the Mountain of All Knowledge, when both the clouds of unknowing and forgetting are dispersed, it doesn’t look as if many will reach the summit before the global economy self-destructs in the next year or two. Then the primary focus of attention will be on meeting basic survival needs in self-sufficient, ecological communities. Evolution will then have gone into reverse, as Doris Lessing’s novel *Mara and Dann* well depicts. This is very sad. But we cannot argue with the basic law of the Universe: the Principle of Unity, expressed as $W = A \cup \sim A$.

