

General Background

As a force, Transpersonal psychology emerged through a group of men and women interested in inner states of consciousness and their empirical, scientific study. Its pioneers include Richard Bucke, William James, Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Abraham Maslow and Viktor Frankl. The birth of the transpersonal as a distinct and fourth force in psychology was marked by the first issue of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology (1969) and the establishment of the American Association for Transpersonal Psychology (1971). Among the original board members and editorial staff of the brand new Journal of Transpersonal Psychology were some other familiar names: James Fadiman, Stanislav Grof, Arthur Koestler, Michael Murphy, Ira Progoff, Anthony Sutich (editor), Miles Vich, Alan Watts.

The Centre for Transpersonal Psychology

In 1973 Ian Gordon-Brown and Barbara Somers together founded the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology (originally conceived as a group for Consciousness Training and Research).

Ian Gordon-Brown (1925-1996) was born in Quetta (now in Pakistan) and educated at Cambridge, he worked for the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, became director of the Lucis Trust and later director of the Industrial Participation Association. Ian was a consultant psychologist and psychotherapist in private practice. He became president of EUROTAS and initiated and ran an International Transpersonal Conference in London in 1994. He wrote and lectured widely throughout, on questions of individual and social development and the spiritual challenge and responsibility of the time.

Barbara Somers (born 1929 in London) was literary editor for Amalgamated Press; later she originated the Freelance Group of the Society of Authors, ran it for ten years and co-edited their journal, dealing daily with the creative and emotional problems of authors, poets and artists. Working full time as psychological counsellor, therapist and workshop leader, she was also much involved in the supervision of therapists from all backgrounds who turned to her.

Before founding the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology, both Ian and Barbara had been particularly interested in the many ways of expanding human consciousness; and also in the synthesis of Eastern and Western thought. Barbara loved Zen, and the work of Jung, Maslow and Assagioli. She was developing work with dreams, meditation and imagery. Ian was keenly

aware that from time immemorial there have been mystery schools and centres of spiritual training (ashrams, religious orders, fraternities) offering seekers a progressive initiation into new, expanded states of consciousness. He saw his Transpersonal work as being in preparation for the mystery schools of the twenty-first century.

From the perspective of Transpersonal psychology, the path of initiation, both inner and outer, is the journey between the individual's first conscious response to the transpersonal Self and full Self-realisation. Our whole nature is involved, our substance transmuted; the quality of our consciousness is transformed and the locus of self-identity shifts. Ian emphasised that each phase of the individual journey is paralleled by similar processes in the collective psyche.

They adopted the name 'Transpersonal', with its sense of looking 'beyond the merely personal'. Together they held that there is a spark within each one of us, the Centre, or true Transpersonal Self; that our awareness of this Centre, itself pure, free, happy and eternal, needs renewal; that birth and death are neither the beginning nor the end; that there is a purpose to our lives.

For over two decades Ian and Barbara ran a highly successful programme of workshops and seminars in London and elsewhere in Britain. In 1977 Barbara established the Centre's training for counsellors and psychotherapists in the perspectives and techniques of Transpersonal Psychology. This included the training and supervision of therapists already trained in other approaches. Ian helped with this; together with Barbara, he was chiefly engaged in developing the workshops and in lecturing widely in Transpersonal Psychology and related subjects.

The model of the human psyche at the heart of the Ian and Barbara's workshops and training was that transpersonal psychology is a perspective based on the reality of a spiritual Centre or Self within every individual, a higher or deeper or inner Self that is the director, controller and monitor of our lives. This Centre, to which we can each make reference – this Self, Soul, Atman, this wise core of us – is the chief motivating and co-coordinating energy within us. It tends towards the finding of new meaning in life. The task of the Transpersonal psychologist is to facilitate the release of this energy in individuals and in groups.