

50 Years of Transpersonal Psychology

History of its Current Members

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Transpersonal psychology is colloquially known as the school of psychology that integrates the spiritual dimension of the human being. Fifty years after its birth, there is a vast amount of research and information about the subject, but not much is known about the spirit of those who gave life to this discipline.

Some of these individuals have died, but many continue to contribute with their research, implement critical points of the practice, and provide growth to the evolution of transpersonal psychology.

With this interview, from the *Journal of Transpersonal Research* we want to delve into the soul of those individuals whose careers have nurtured transpersonal psychology worldwide in the last 50 years. We also want to learn the steps they took on their way and what made them decide to take those steps.

1.- Could you describe what occurred when you heard the term “transpersonal psychology” for the first time?

I first heard of Transpersonal Psychology when I read Ken Wilber’s book “No Boundary”. I was 18 years old, in a period of deep personal grief and existential questions after my father passed away unexpectedly. When I heard the term I felt that I found a deep well of wisdom that was fascinating intellectually and also emotionally healing. This fascination has been a source of joy and inspiration for me for the past 34 years.

2.- What circumstances led you to this type of psychology?

I grew up in a family of scholars and researchers of Psychology. My Father was one of the first Neuropsychologist in Israel and my Mother was (and still is to this day) one of the prominent figures in the field of Narrative Psychology. I was surrounded by an environment of intellectual rigor. After the family crisis, mentioned above, I started to study and practice Buddhism in Thai traditions and the idea of integration between the depth I found in the Eastern traditions with the Western psychological approaches to the psyche was ex-

tremely important to me- as a way to help people struggling with deep existential questions.

3.- What was the first thing that specifically attracted you to the discipline?

The first thing that specifically attracted me to the discipline was the idea that healthy human development is viewed as a journey that involves a broadening of identity beyond the “personal self”. I was also deeply appreciative of the concept of “Spiritual Emergency”- it was a fresh and powerful way of looking at development.

4.- Who were the people you met in this school that were most significant to you, and how did they influence you in the future of your professional career?

I feel very fortunate to have studied in CIIS- where I met many wonderful teachers and colleagues. I studied courses with Stan Grof and met Jorge Ferrer while he was developing his deep way of thinking of the field. I studied with the wonderful Chinese philosophy scholar Dr. Yi Wu. After graduating and returning to Israel, their courage and ideas were always a source of inspiration

for my work and effort to integrate experiential learning into the Academic world of psychology and education- both in my writing, and as a co-founder and academic director of the Mindfulness Based Therapy program supervised by The School of Social Work, Bar Ilan University and as a co-founder and of the NGO- the Center of Compassionate Mindful Education.

5.-How did you first become involved with the transpersonal school? Do you continue being involved?

I became involved with the Transpersonal school in my Graduate studies of East West Psychology in CIIS. It was an exciting and inspiring time, when scholars that were developing their ideas in the field were sharing their process. After returning to Israel, part of my vision was creating a Journal of East west and transpersonal Psychology in Hebrew- creating a platform to connect and inspire the many local psychologists that were interested in those ideas. I was happy for the Support of Jorge Ferrer in this venture, every time I needed to ask for advice. I was also reading articles for the Journal of transpersonal Psychology and am still greatly appreciative of this Journal and its vision.

6.- What were the main difficulties you encountered on your professional path within the discipline?

When I started my professional path, in the early nineties, there were no scholars or practitioners in Israel that knew about the field of Transpersonal Psychology. I had to face many obstacles in pursuing academic studies in the field, and eventually decided to go study abroad. When I returned to Israel, twenty years ago. I was still very much alone professionally. I started teaching Transpersonal psychology in a very small alternative College, wrote a first book in Hebrew introducing the discipline to the Israeli public, and was astonished to see the ideas slowly take root and flourish here. I created one of the first programs of Mindfulness based Psychotherapy in a University in Israel and was happy that some of the younger generation of Israeli graduates from CIIS had a much easier time with their entrance into mainstream Academia.

7.- How did you overcome or face the difficulties mentioned above?

I overcame the difficulties by reminding myself that the ideas in Transpersonal Psychology were not just an intellectual pursuit- they could actually change and enable a better society. To this day, I try and think of my professional path in terms of a spiritual journey- one that must have ups and downs. In this way, whenever I encounter challenges, I can have a balanced view of the situation in terms of the development of a wider view of self and other here in the Middle East. I found a small group of like minded people and we created an NGO that brings Mindfulness and Compassion interventions to the educational field. These actions bring me a sense of purpose and enable me to keep going even when I meet obstacles.

8.- How do you see your professional future, regarding transpersonal psychology?

I hope to see my professional future as one in which I keep learning and teaching- bringing more depth and understanding of the ideas of Transpersonal Psychology to the Psychotherapists and educators that I meet and to the grater society.

9.- How does being involved with this discipline connect with your spiritual development?

I feel that this discipline helped me understand some of my personal experiences and challenges. It has been greatly influential of my view of the Buddhist path, which is the main path in my life. The ideas of integrating our early experiences and attachment style with the path of meditation has influenced my perception of the importance of growth in connection with others.

10.- What dangers do you see in the discipline to reach its first centenary?

The main danger I see for the discipline is a possible blurring of ethics. With the current wide spread integration of ideas regarding psychoactive and meditative states into mainstream therapy- I feel we have to address new questions of boundaries. Another challenge is keeping up high standards of academic research and writing.

11.- Is there something you would like to express to transpersonal colleagues from your country or other countries?

I would like to invite transpersonal colleagues to be part of the movement to bring compassion and prosocial values into conflict areas around the world. We need your strong and stable presence to help with the immense challenges of these areas. We are currently working in Mindfulness and compassion based approaches with refugees, children in very low income and in inter-religion dialogue. We are always glad to connect with others.



12.- Any thoughts you would like to share with anyone outside the discipline?

I would like to express my understanding that the history of Transpersonal psychology is, in my view, an important link in the development of research based Mindfulness and Compassion interventions. Understanding some of the discipline's early ideas can bring much needed clarity to questions of integration of practice and ideas from Buddhism into western Psychology.

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