

# SYMBOLIC APPERCEPTION AND INTEGRAL PSYCHOLOGY

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**Abstract.** Symbolic apperception is a way of perceiving a person, situation, or condition by means of images instead of words. Since most of these images are symbolic of feelings, attitudes, and potentialities, the process has been called symbolic apperception by the author. It is related to the primary process of dreams, and serves to translate unconscious and preconscious impressions into visible form. Symbolic apperception covers a wide range, such as the symbolic apperception of oneself, of a person, a situation, condition, symptom, relationship or abstract idea, as well as past, present, and future possibilities. It can be used by both patient and therapist, whether in individual or group settings. Symbolic apperception can enlarge the scope of psychotherapy, for it is not only a way of gaining therapeutic insight, but also a systematic method for the development of intuition, an important psychological function serving as an inner guide in human relationships and life situations.

## **A. Conceptual Orientation**

Symbolic apperception is one of the methods of symbolic visualization, which has been presented by the author (Gerard, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1967a, 1967b, 1969, 1971, 1972a, 1972a, 1973a, 1973b) within the frame of reference of psycho-synthesis (Assagioli, 1965; Gerard, 1961a), then from the point of view of the broad conceptual orientation of Integral Psychology (Gerard 1972a, 1972b, 1973a,

1973b). The aim of this paper is to discuss the rationale and practice of symbolic apperception in the context of Integral Psychology.

Integral Psychology includes but is not restricted to what the author calls Integral Therapy, namely the branch of Integral Psychology concerned with clinical research and practice. The goal of Integral Psychology is a holistic science of man which is concerned not only with practical applications in the field of counseling, psychotherapy and education, but also with basic advanced research on the inner constitution of man, and the measurement of subtle psychological energies.

The theoretical structure of Integral Psychology rests on Energy Field Theory (Gerard, 1954) which views man and the universe as an energy system comprised of a series of psycho-spiritual energy fields. Researchers in the United States and Russia are gathering evidence of such fields (Krippner and Rubin, 1973). In this connection, Integral Psychology is developing methods of psychological growth based on a direct approach to the alignment and transformation of psychological energy fields. It is already using an extensive series of techniques based on concentration, infusion, intensification, transmutation, circulation and radiation of psychological energies (Gerard, 1972a, 1972b, 1973a, 1973b). The purpose of Integral Psychology, however, is much broader than psychotherapy per se; it seeks a full understanding and a conscious cooperation with the integrative processes of

transformation involved in psycho-spiritual evolution. In the furtherance of this purpose, Integral Psychology is not limited to a Western view of man, but combines modern and spiritual disciplines of the East.

Integral Field Theory is a holistic approach to the human condition centered the principles of inclusion, integration and evolution. It is concerned with the total integration of the individual in terms of the full sum of energies available to man. Thus, it covers all dimensions of existence - physical, emotional, mental and spiritual - and all modalities of personal, interpersonal and transpersonal integration within the framework of the evolutionary theory of human consciousness.

The psychoanalysis of Freud (Freud, 1960; Wolman, 1967), the individual psychology of Adler (Adler, 1924; Ansbacher and Rowena, 1956), the analytical psychology of Jung (Dry, 1961; Jung, 1964), the psycho-synthesis of Assagioli (Assagioli, 1965), the Gestalt therapy of Perls (Perls, 1951, 1969), the rational emotive therapy of Ellis (Ellis and Harper, 1961; Ellis, 1962), the guided imagery of Desoille (Desoille, 1945, 1961, 1966), the systematic desensitization of Wolpe (1958) and other developments in behavior modification (Lazarus, 1961), each contribute valuable approaches to psychotherapy and psychological growth. Although Integral Psychology makes an extensive use of these methods in an integrated way, it is not content to rely exclusively on these essentially Western esoteric practices. Integral Psychology studies systematically and incorporates in its practice the esoteric psychologies of the East, particularly the meditative disciplines of Chinese Yoga (Lu Kuan Yu, 1964; Wilhelm, 1931), Hindu Yoga (Aurobindo, 1971; Bailey, 1927; Eliade, 1969), Tibetan Yoga (Blofeld, 1970; Evans-Wentz, 1958; Govinda, 1959), Sufism (Shah, 1964), Buddhism (Conze, 1956; Nyanaponika Thera, 1972) and its extension as Zen (Kapleau, 1967).

Of great value to Integral Psychology is the life work of Sri Aurobindo (1970, 1971), who undertook a synthesis of East and West in his

Integral Yoga, as summarized by Chaudhuri (1965), Satprem (1964) and Rishabhchand (1959). Aurobindo's genius enabled him to present the various paths of Yoga in a new light, for he was able to combine the transcendental meditative tendency of an Eastern sage with the practical action oriented approach of a Western-educated mind. His life-affirming integral philosophy provides a solid philosophical base for Integral Psychology.

Integral Psychology, however, does not limit itself to the synthesis of traditional approaches from Eastern and Western psychologies. Indeed, Integral Psychology dares to explore, test, practice and reveal methods of psycho-spiritual growth which until recently have remained for the most part esoteric. One of the basic tenets of Integral Psychology is that the New Renaissance will see the advent of two essential developments interacting for maximal evolutionary growth:

1. The expansion of the consciousness of many people all over the world toward an integral consciousness able to function effectively at all levels and modes of being: sensory-physical, emotional-feeling-affective, analytical-rational-intellectual, holistic-mystical-intuitive, for integral creative living.

2. The diffusion on a worldwide scale of heretofore esoteric knowledge, bringing new dimensions to our apperceptive world and conceptual outlook. Gradually, with the penetration of subtle realms of existence by our ever-widening consciousness, what now is labeled esoteric, hidden, occult or secret, will be a matter of ordinary common knowledge and experience.

At the present time, some esoteric knowledge has already been made available in print, for instance certain aspects of the secret doctrine (Blavatsky, 1947, 1967; De Purucker, 1932, 1940), several books from the Agni Yoga Society (1954, 1956) and particularly the extensive writings of the Tibetan Djwhal Khul, as presented by Bailey (1922, 1927, 1934, 1936, 1942, 1944, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1960). The spirit of Integral Psychology, a blend of modern energy approaches with the

ancient wisdom teachings and occult esoteric knowledge, is best exemplified by the monumental work of the Master Djwhal Khul.

His series of profound writings suggests promising areas of inquiry for the development of Integral Psychology. The author was introduced to these writings over 25 years ago, and has been amply rewarded by their study. The work of Djwhal Khul has provided a major source of inspiration to integrate Eastern disciplines and esoteric teachings with the mainstream of modern Western psychology. This is one of the main tasks of Integral Psychology. In the light of the foregoing, we can propose a tentative operational definition of Integral Psychology. It is the psychology that takes into account the attempts to integrate all dimensions of being (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) in all areas (personal, interpersonal, transpersonal and transcendental), and for this purpose studies and practices all modalities (Eastern, Western and esoteric) of biological, psychological and spiritual development. Any psychology that does not take all these aspects into account, whether in its theory, research or practice, is only a partial psychology, and therefore not integral. The task ahead for Integral Psychology is enormous, for vast uncharted fields of research and practice need to be explored in order to contact new ideas and develop new integral methods appropriate to our age and civilization.

## **B. Purpose and Rationale**

### **1. Symbolic visualization**

One of the major methods of Integral Psychology is symbolic visualization that utilizes visual imagery the pictorial aspect of imagination, for the purpose of psychological growth and integration. Since many of these images are symbolic of inner psychological states such as feelings, attitudes, conflicts and potentialities, the author has called this process symbolic visualization and has described its use for personal integration (Gerard, 1961a, 1961c), interpersonal (Gerard,

1967a) and transpersonal integration (Gerard, 1961a, 1972a, 1972b, 1973a, 1973b). A few psychotherapists, mostly from Western Europe, have developed some aspects of symbolic visualization, each under his own designation. It will suffice to mention Silberer (1901, 1951) "Auto-symbolic Phenomena", Jung (1960) "Active Imagination", Leuner (1969) "Guided Affective Imagery", the "meditative techniques" of German psychotherapists such as Frederking, Happich, Kretschmer, Mauz and Schultz (Kretschmer, 1951) and the "waking dream" or "guided day dream" of the French therapist Desoille (1945, 1961, 1966).

Symbolic visualization includes all the above-mentioned techniques but is broader in scope, for it explores the whole continuum of mental imagery from focused structured visualization of the specific symbols to spontaneous visualization, rather than being limited to one segment of the continuum or to one standard therapeutic stance, the induction of the visualization, the unfolding of the images and the therapist's interaction with the patient can cover the whole range from controlled to free, from passive to active, from directed to undirected, as the circumstances require.

Symbolic visualization has been used extensively by the author as a psychotherapeutic method for the deepening of insight, the resolution of conflicts and the integration of the personality. The author, however, has extended the process of symbolic visualization beyond the concept of psychotherapy in the usual sense, for symbolic visualization provides specific operational methods for contacting the transpersonal dimensions of existence (Green and Green, 1971; Sutich, 1969), the realm of ego transcendence, unitive consciousness, mystical experience, cosmic awareness, and related concepts and experiences. Instead of being limited to the spontaneous or drug-induced occurrences of transpersonal experiences, symbolic visualization facilitates their evocation as part of a natural process of expansion of consciousness.

## **2. Symbolic apperception.**

Symbolic visualization covers an extended range of imagery techniques and includes what the author has designated as the method of symbolic apperception (Gerard, 1972a, 1972b). It must be emphasized that symbolic apperception is not used as an exclusive therapeutic method, but as a part of a series of visualization techniques which are themselves part of an inclusive integral approach making use of a variety of methods for maximal effectiveness. Symbolic apperception can be used by both patient and therapist, whether in individual or group settings. It is a way of perceiving a person, situation or condition by means of images instead of words. These images are experienced internally and expressed externally via verbal reports, writings (including poetry), drawings, paintings, sculptures (including work with clay), poems, musical compositions, gestures, dancing and movements. They include visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, gustatory and olfactory images, but for the sake of simplicity this paper will focus on visual images since these provide for most individuals the easier approach to symbolic apperception.

The process is symbolic in the sense that it utilizes the symbol formation characteristics of the human psyche. It is apperceptive because it extends beyond the simple perception of the sensory world and integrates several layers of awareness as an apperceptive mass externalized in visual symbols or symbolic scenes. Symbolic apperception is related to the primary process of dreams and serves to translate unconscious impressions into visible form.

### **C. General Procedure**

Apperception has been defined as "1) The final stage of attentive perception in which something is clearly apprehended and thus is relatively prominent in awareness; 2) The process by which the apprehended qualities of an object are articulated with similar, or related, already existing knowledge and

attitude in such a way as to be understood. The already existing knowledge to which the present content is articulated is the apperceptive mass, or schema. (English and English, 1958, page 37). To apperceive is to perceive and to react to, with some awareness of the relations involved. Therefore, since symbolic apperception of imagery, it also involves two stages that may be more or less concurrent. The first stage is symbolic evocation, which is concerned with the production of images with attentive awareness. The second stage is symbolic understanding, which is concerned with the interpretation of these images.

### **1. Symbolic evocation.**

An example will clarify this stage in the process of symbolic apperception. In the case of the symbolic apperception of another person, the perceiver relaxes as deeply as possible and closes his eyes to receive visual images representative of the other person. For example, if this person were an animal, what kind of an animal would he or she be? If this person were an object, what kind of object would they be? If this person were a plant, or other part of nature, what kind of plant, what part of the nature? If this person were a famous figure in history or a character from a play, motion picture, or television program, what would he or she be? If this person were a figure from myths or fairy tales, what kind would he or she be? It is possible to be very specific, for instance, if this person were a flower, what kind of flower? If this person were a dog, what kind of a dog would they be? If this person were a food, what kind of a food would they be? It is also possible to evoke abstract symbols, such as qualities of colored light, geometrical forms and abstract designs.

Obviously, there are qualitative differences between a fox and a donkey, between a soft cushion and a steel rod, between a violet and an oak tree, between a raging torrent and a quiet pool of water, between Mussolini and Gandhi, between Othello and Hamlet, between the German God Wotan and Avalokiteshvara,

the Buddha of Compassion, between a German shepherd and a French poodle, between an intense red light and a soft blue haze, between a triangle and a circle, between a jagged design and a rounded design, to mention only a few instances, which can give the symbolic perceiver valuable clues to the personality of the other individual.

One can further assume that the first series of images would give an impression of the outer personality of the other person, what this individual shows to the world, his persona, and that further images would reveal what is behind this social mask, what lies deeper in the personality. Finally, the last series of images could bring the perceiver closer and closer to a symbolic representation of the inner core of the other person, his real Self, center of Being, his "soul", whatever terminology is used. For example, behind a tiger may be a soft fur, and behind the soft fur some steel pikes that eventually dissolve into a mighty river, with a diamond in its depth and a point of light at the center of the diamond.

## **2. Symbolic understanding.**

The author prefers to use the term "understanding" instead of "interpretation" in order to underline the integration of effective-intuitive with intellectual-cognitive processes for maximal understanding of the symbol. Integral Psychology acknowledges its debt to Freud (1960) and Jung (1964) for their understanding of symbolic language. The pictorial language is the basic level of the psyche, which relies on the primary process of images instead of the secondary elaboration of verbal language and abstract conceptualization. It is the "forgotten language" (Fromm, 1951) which modern man can learn to recover to his benefit, for it provides valuable guidance for the conscious life. In this connection, symbolic apperception can convey a vital message from unconscious or preconscious levels in symbolic terms pointing to something that was not fully conscious heretofore to the perceiver. According to Jung, a symbol is the expression

or formulation of an essentially unknown or even unknowable situation. It may be the best expression possible at the moment, but cannot reflect in its entirety all the depth and richness of the reality it seeks to represent. A symbol points towards an experience that cannot be fully put into words or intellectual concepts (Whitmont, 1968). Therefore, the integral approach to the reality expressed by the symbol does not limit itself to the techniques of verbal association and analytical interpretation. It attempts also to contact as many aspects of that reality as possible through what the symbol actually evokes in the individual who allows himself to be moved by the symbol. The integral approach seeks to derive the understanding of the first and foremost from a direct holistic non-verbal symbolic experience.

## **Methods of Symbolic Understanding**

We can briefly outline several methods of symbolic understanding:

**a) Resonance:** Throughout the process of symbolic evocation, an attitude of acceptance, openness and suspension of judgment is maintained, with an attempt to allow oneself to resonate to the images received in order to tune in on their specific qualities and understand their meaning from direct sensory and affective experience. After the symbolic apperception has been obtained, one can relive the symbolic experience as if it were happening now in order to contact subtle aspects of inner experience that may have remained unnoticed during the original apperception. Resonance includes (1) sensory awareness, for instance the slight feeling of expansion or constriction of the chest, tension or relaxation of various muscle groups, which provide valuable clues; and (2) affective awareness, for instance, awareness of fine gradations in feelings of elation or depression, in which the emotions associated with the visual image or series of images are perceived and spontaneously related to previous or potential experience.

**b) Free association:** The psychoanalytic

technique of free association attempts to reveal the latent content behind the manifest content of the imagery by means of associations to the various elements of the visual production. The method is useful to establish insightful connections with past events and experiences.

**c) Symbolic dialogue:** This is the technique describes by Jung (1960, 1964) as "active imagination". The person enters into an active interaction with the images, and engages in an inner dialogue in which even inanimate objects may be given a voice.

**d) Symbolic identification:** This is a method developed by the author (Gerard, 1961c, 1963, 1967). Perls (1969) has described a similar technique under the name of "dream work". It should be noted that while this method was developed by Gerard and Perls for psychotherapeutic purposes, it has been used for the spiritual purposes for over 1500 years in Tibetan Yoga (Blotfeld, 1970; Govinda, 1959; Tucci, 1970) to assimilate the qualities and energies of the figures visualized in the practice of mandala symbolism.

In symbolic identification, the subject is asked to assume that every single aspect of his inner imagery may represent not only situations and persons outside of himself, but also his inner state of being, such as feelings and attitudes. These need to be fully acknowledged and reintegrated by assimilating the projection via identification. Thus, the subject is asked to identify with each element of his imagery production. For instance, "the patient is asked to imagine that he is the person, animal, plant, object or natural setting (river, sea, mountain, etc.) that he has encountered in his fantasy, and to experience and spontaneously enact the scene from that point of view" (Gerard, 1961c, 1963, page 75). Thus, the understanding of the symbol emerges from a direct symbolic experience.

**e) Intuitive awareness:** The individual enters a meditative state of inner sensory, affective and cognitive quietude. His mind is poised and open to receive insights from the higher levels of consciousness. The author (Gerard, 1972a, 1973) has used a symbolic

alignment technique to facilitate this process. The subject is asked to visualize a point of white or golden light directed above the head. This radiant center represents the higher consciousness, the Self. The subject is then asked to imagine that a shaft of light radiates from this center down into the brain via the top of the head and fills the brain with this light, symbolizing inspiration and illumination. He remains quiet, relaxing as deeply as possible, and notes whatever impressions he is able to receive at this time. This technique tends to evoke philosophical insights about the conditions apprehended in the symbolic apperception, for instance what the particular existential situation represented in the symbolic apperception, for instance what the particular existential situation represented in the symbolic apperceptive images requires of the person to restore inner wholeness and harmony with the outer world. In this manner, the correctives for an overly one-sided attitude toward life (such as overly aggressive, overly dependent, etc.) are presented to the subject in accordance with the principle of the compensatory function of the unconscious (Dry, 1961; Jung, 1964).

**f) Symbolic amplification:** In a case of a symbolic apperception involving the evocation of mythological figures and cosmic structures (sun, star, moon), which tend to reflect the experience of a culture or mankind as a whole, it is useful to enlarge the personal meaning of the symbolism by a study of its cultural ramifications in mythological themes. This places the symbolic apperception derived by one individual at a given moment of time within the broader framework of cultural history. The author has found it rewarding for this purpose to consult Campbell's (1959) 9 volume survey of mythology, and the works of Eliade (1958, 1959a, 1959b, 1963, 1965) as well as several encyclopedias of comparative symbolism (Beigbeder, 1969; Champeaux and Sterk, 1966; Chevalier, 1969). The latter books unfortunately have not been translated into English, but are highly recommended to readers familiar with the French language.

**g) Interpersonal feedback:** In a symbolic apperception of another person or situation, it is important to differentiate between accurate apperception of reality and distorted projection based on the tendency to impute to others aspects of oneself. Clark (1973) has addressed herself to this problem and recommends an attitude of scientific detachment as well as the willingness to risk being wrong. In this connection, the author has found that an openness to elicit and accept feedback from others about the accuracy of one's symbolic apperceptions is essential for refining symbolic apperceptive skills via trial and error learning. The individual can also profit from feedback in the case of symbolic apperceptions of his own inner attitude and personality characteristics. A group setting lends itself readily to useful exchanges of symbolic apperception and can provide a valuable corrective to projective tendencies.

#### **D. Specific Techniques**

**Preparation.** Symbolic apperception, like other methods of symbolic visualization, can be practiced in any bodily position. The prone position tends to evoke deeper feelings, but the sitting and standing positions have the advantage of being able to be practiced under many life circumstances. In any case, the goal of the preparation, which after proper training may become almost instantaneous, is to become sufficiently relaxed to allow images to emerge into consciousness from the deeper levels of the psyche, and to quiet the mind to minimize rationalization and thinking about instead of directly experiencing. One of the most effective methods is breathing awareness with no attempt to control the breathing, but simply becoming aware of sensations in the chest and back as well as the flow of air in and out of the nose. Breathing awareness is supplemented by settling, namely surrendering the weight of the body to the floor, chair or sofa as the case may be, and feeling oneself supported, with full awareness of the pull of gravity. In the case of a symbolic

apperception in a prone position, the author has found the techniques of "autogenic training" (Schultz, 1966) useful to deepen relaxation. The subject remains receptive and attentive to whatever images may emerge. He allows himself to be surprised instead of controlling the flow of imagery on the basis of preconceived notion.

**Types of symbolic apperception.** This imaginary may take several forms: (1) static single images; (2) dynamic fluid images; (3) symbolic scenes including a sequence of images, and (4) symbolic stories, combining a series of symbolic scenes. In all these forms, symbols must be considered not only in terms of their appearance and content, but also in terms of their capacity to accumulate and transform psycho-spiritual energies.

We will not attempt to cover all aspects of symbolic apperception techniques, but will briefly mention some of the methods currently used by the author under the headings:

1. Symbolic apperception for individual integration, involving symbolic awareness of one's personal condition.
2. Symbolic apperception for interpersonal integration, involving symbolic awareness of other individuals and groups.
3. Symbolic apperception for transpersonal integration, involving symbolic awareness of the transpersonal realm of existence.

#### **1. Symbolic apperception for individual integration**

Symbolic apperception is applicable to the various levels and modalities of existence which are distinguished for the sake of exposition, but which tend to become combined and integrated in the course of symbolic experience:

**a) Sensory apperception:** This includes focusing on various bodily states and becoming aware of corresponding symbols, a method particularly useful in psychosomatic conditions. For example, a male patient suffering from recurrent migraine headaches was asked to symbolize his headache. He

experienced the image of a red devil armed with a trident poking his wife, a symbolic representation of his repressed anger as one of the contributing causes of his condition. Subsequent symbolic identification with this red devil enabled the patient to externalize his resentment and reduce the frequency and severity of his headaches. A metaphor to a sensation may also be elicited, with the metaphor forming the basis for a visual image. The sequence of sensations in a new metaphoric cycle, is very effective for energy transformation, with corresponding changes in the subjective psychological state of the patient.

**b) Affective apperception:** The symbolic apperception of effective states is an effective therapeutic technique for insight and subsequent transformation via symbolic identification. The emotional state can give rise to symbolic images in response to instructions such as "allow an image to emerge representing your anxiety (or hope, despair, love, hostility, etc.)", or "imagine a door which is the door of anxiety; describe this door, then open it and share what you can see". Similarly, the "door of sub-personalities" may reveal the emotional content of various aspects of the person. The therapeutic ways of dealing with the emerging symbolic material have been discussed in previous papers by the author (Gerard, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1967a, 1967b, 1971a). Since colors and artistic productions are intimately related to affective responses, additional useful ways of eliciting this material include using visualized colors ("what colors emerges to represent how you feel right now"), or imagined artistic productions (painting, statue, pottery, etc.) to symbolize the underlying emotions.

**c) Cognitive apperception:** In previous papers (Gerard, 1961a, 1961c, 1963) the author discussed the symbolic visualization of thoughts. Visual images are substituted for the words and concepts, which may include abstract ideas such as love, goodwill, altruism, integrity, etc. This technique has been elaborated by Crampton (1972) to develop

integrative qualities such as openness and inclusiveness in an educational setting. Beyond psychotherapy and education, symbolic apperception can foster creativity by means of symbolic analogy (Gordon, 1968).

**d) Cognitive apperception:** Cognitive symbolic scenes are related to the aspect of will, for example a symbolic apperception of one's inner will under different life conditions, or a symbolic apperception of inner guidance for an important decision.

**e) Intuitive apperception:** Since symbolic awareness is closely related to unconscious and preconscious processes, symbolic apperception is one of the major techniques for the development of intuition. Clark (1973) has discussed the author's use of symbolic apperception for intuitive awareness. Symbolic apperception themes such as "the key to the door of intuition" may help to put individuals into contact with the way in which their intuition could be more effectively developed and utilized. Accurate intuitive apperception is enhanced by the higher levels of personal and transpersonal integration in meditative states. Since intuitive awareness tends to be holistic, symbolic intuition is particularly useful to comprehend the personality as a whole. An interesting symbolic theme in this regard is to obtain images of the old personality versus the present personality as well as potentials for further growth. A symbolic apperception of decades of one's life, both in the past and in their intimations for the future, helps to integrate one's life as a developing process. A symbolic apperception of one's first name and family name can give clues to the personality as a whole, especially if the letters of each name are reversed to create a novel situation conducive to fresh symbolic perceptions.

**f) Integrative apperception:** Since any given psychological state tends to contain within itself the seed of its opposite, the subject can be asked to be receptive to the symbols representing the opposite state, for example anger and love, depression and joy, despair and hope, frustration and fulfillment.



By means of symbolic identification with each symbol the individual is able to assimilate both poles of opposites and enlarge the scope of his personality. The technique of the triangle is then used to evoke the integrative symbol in the following manner. Images representing the two opposite poles are visualized at the base corners of an equilateral triangle outlined in white or golden light. After a contemplation of the contrasting images at the two poles, the attention is raised to the apex of the triangle, where in most cases the symbol that eventually emerges represents the quality of being that would enable the individual to integrate and transcend the two poles of opposites. For more complex situations involving greater number of factors, other geometrical form such as a cross, pentagram, a six pointed star can serve as support for the contemplation of conflicting attitudes or conditions, with the symbol at the center emerging as the integrative factor. The combined experience at one and the same time of all the aspects with the integrative factor helps to develop the capacity for integral apperception.

This technique is related to the evocation of healing symbols to restore the integral wholeness of a person. For example, in the case of a patient in the throes of intense anxiety, after the latter has been finally experienced and symbolized the therapist may say, "suppose you now enlist the wisdom Of your unconscious to provide for you a healing symbol, in other words a power to transform your anxiety; this symbol can take any form and does not have to be logical". Afterwards, the individual identifies with the healing symbol, and thus can experience not only insight but also therapeutic transformation.

## **2. Symbolic apperception for interpersonal integration.**

Similar methods of sensory, affective, cognitive, conative, intuitive and integrative symbolic apperception, leading eventually to an integral symbolic experience embracing all

these aspects, find their application in the field of interpersonal relationships. In this case, the presence of another individual or group creates an opportunity for interpersonal sharing of mutual symbolic apperceptions; a means of enlarging human communication to include the symbolic dimension. As part of their training in symbolic apperception, group members may be asked at the offset of a workshop to sit in front of each other in pairs, choosing a person they have never known before the workshop period. After the usual preparation (relaxation, breathing awareness and settling usual conducive to a quiet receptive mind) the two individuals look at each other without staring, then close their eyes to better register visual impressions. Afterwards, they share their findings for immediate feedback and identify with the images in order to derive their meaning. Eventually, with proper training, it is possible to practice symbolic apperception with the eyes opened and under all kinds of conditions. The object of the apperception does not need to be present, thus enabling the perceiver to obtain apperceptive images at a distance in the calm and privacy of his home or office. Heretofore hidden personality traits of significant others may thus become revealed. For example, a young woman who had been subjected to the cutting sarcasm and aggressive criticism of a rejecting male experienced in succession a tiger, a lily, a metal spring, a knife, thick grass and leafy plants with flowers coming up, making clear to her the tender aspects of the man which later became more evident in their relationship.

Parental figures, siblings, relatives, friends, work associates, lovers, husbands and wives can all become the object of a symbolic apperception in two different ways: (1) the symbolic apperception can refer to the personality characteristics of the individual; or (2) the symbolic apperception can focused on the quality of the relationship between the perceiver and that individual, or between two other individuals. In each case, the symbolic apperception can be focused on the personality or relationship (1) as it was in the past; or (2)

as it really is in the present; or (3) as it potentially may develop in the future. The symbolic apperception of any relationship, for instance a marriage or partnership, can be revealing and even surprising to the perceiver. This method is useful to clarify the therapeutic relationship at the beginning of therapy or during a period of resistance. The patient's apperception of the therapist can be elicited in order to discriminate between apperception and projection, and to clarify the subtle preconscious ways in which the therapist is viewed by the patient. The therapist on his part can throughout the course of psychotherapy take a series of soundings of his patient via symbolic apperception. For instance, the author at the outset of the initial interview experienced a female patient as a volcano about to erupt, which she indeed proceeded to do half an hour later. After several months of therapy, he experienced the same woman as a tea kettle with water brewing for tea to be served in an atmosphere of conviviality, a confirmation of progressive transmutation of hostile energies toward more constructive social interaction. In another instance, when the author perceived symbolically the marital relationship of apparently congenial newlyweds, he was surprised to see the image of a crumbling wedding cake, which heralded their eventual divorce.

Another technique of symbolic apperception for integral awareness is based on Energy Field Theory (Gerard, 1954). It is a way of tuning into each of the energy fields of the other person in order to receive symbolic images representing the corresponding qualities of that particular field. For instance, what symbolic image do you obtain about the physical body, about the emotional nature, about the mind and about the "soul" of this person? A similar technique is to tune into the subtle energy centers described in yoga (Bailey, 1927, 1950; Eliade, 1969). What symbols are obtained to represent the present condition of each center in this particular person, for example, the sacral center, the

solar plexus center, the heart center, the head center. These symbolic images can provide valuable clues to the sexual, emotional, mental and spiritual life of the person as well as to the stage of evolutionary unfolding of each center.

### **3. Symbolic apperception for transpersonal integration.**

In the course of evolution, consciousness expands beyond the confines of the individual ego, and becomes unified with broader fields of energy. Transpersonal techniques of symbolic apperception facilitate this process of integration with wider dimensions of existence relating individuals and groups to the cosmic process.

**a) Symbolic apperception of the Self:** The first stage in transpersonal integration is to become more clearly aware of the higher center of consciousness in each human being, namely the Self (Assagioli, 1965; Gerard, 1961a, 1972a, 1973a, 1973b). It has been called the transpersonal Self because the phenomenological experience of the Self encompasses both the personal and collective, individuality and universality. It has also been designated as the transcendental Self because the consciousness of the Self transcends the limitations of ordinary ego consciousness. The answers in terms of symbolic imagery to the repeated question, "Who am I?" are understood in the light of the specific instructions that the images will tend to proceed from surface characteristics to uncover more central layers of the personality until finally the core of the Self may reveal itself in symbolic form (Crampton, 1969; Gerard, 1967b). Other methods for the apperception of the Self and its characteristics include the following:

- (1) Observing what symbol may emerge in one's consciousness as one gazes at the area above the head of a person.
- (2) Asking for a symbol of the Self to provide inner guidance. For example, what is the deeper meaning of this situation or relationship for the evolutionary growth of the Self?

- (3) Focusing on symbolic apperception of the specific qualities of altruistic love, spiritual intuition and dynamic will of the Self.
- (4) Asking for symbols or symbolic scenes to provide clues the evolutionary level of development of the Self (Jones, 1965).
- (5) Asking for symbols to contrast the characteristics of the ego and the qualities of the Self in a given individual.
- (6) Asking for symbols to reveal the essence of a person, situation, condition or experience.
- (7) Visualizing an equilateral triangle pointing upward with symbols at each corner representing Freud's concepts of Id, ego and superego, then observing the symbol emerging from the center of the triangle, presumably representing the Self. Similarly, at the center point of the triangle, the symbol of the Self may be found to integrate images representing the shadow, ego and anima (or animus) of Jung (1960) or the child, adult and parent of Berne (1961, 1964).

One of the most potent visualization methods developed by the author (Gerard, 1972b) combines symbolic apperception with the suggestion upward or downward movement utilized in the waking dream (Desoille, 1945, 1961, 1966; Gerard, 1961a, 1961b). It is the symbolic theme of the staircase of being via any kind of image, from the most concrete realistic objects to the most abstract symbols. The subject is asked to imagine that he enters a palace or castle or large mansion, and that he starts to ascend a monumental staircase. At each landing a magic mirror will reveal different aspects of his personality. Symbolically, as he ascends the staircase, consciousness is raised to higher levels of being until finally, when the top landing is reached, the subject may have the opportunity to come face to face with a symbolic representation of his higher Self. Similar instructions can be given for the symbolic journey to the depth of being until finally the deep core of Self may reveal itself.

**b. Symbolic apperception of cosmic realities:** In the technique of magic mirrors, symbolic representations of the Self may take

the form of a sphere or point of light, or a radiant sun, or other symbols of illumination. The natural human propensity to portray spiritual energies and realms of existence in terms of light of various hues, brightness and saturation, is enlisted for the symbolic portrayal of planetary and cosmic energies. Symbolic apperception gives form to these formless energies and impressions emerging from intuitional and higher planes of existence, bringing inspiration for harmonic living and creative expression. The request to symbolize universal cosmic essence can evoke experiences of supernal light and, beyond any manifestation, states of being where the individual transcends all imagery and finds his ultimate identity with the pure space, invisible and unconditioned, the void described in Buddhist literature (Conze, 1956; Evans-Wentz, 1958), the Essence beyond the point of Self. Thus, with symbolic apperception, one is able to contact and represent the whole range of human experience, from insightful apperception of sensory and affective states to the spiritual experience of mystical union.

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