

# **Psycho-spiritual Roots of Human Violence and Insatiable Greed**

**Stan Grof (USA)**

**Abstract.** Diplomatic negotiations, administrative and legal measures, economic and social sanctions, military interventions, and other similar efforts have had so far very little success in alleviating the rapidly escalating global crisis. Drawing on the observations from forty-five years of research of non-ordinary states of consciousness, the author explores the implications of this material for the understanding of the psychological and spiritual roots of the problems humanity is currently facing. The vastly expanded cartography of the human psyche that has emerged from this work offers a new understanding of insatiable greed and malignant aggression, two powerful forces that have played a critical role in human history and currently represent a serious threat for life on our planet. The author suggests that the problems in modern world are products and symptoms of a psychospiritual crisis and that any effective solution will require a deep inner transformation of humanity and a new scientific world view emphasising unity, co-evolution, and co-operation. He explores the possible role of ancient and modern methods facilitating spiritual opening and consciousness evolution in achieving these goals.

The research of holotropic states of consciousness has important implications not only for each of us individually, but also for the future of humanity and survival of life on this planet. In this chapter, I will explore how the experiences and observations from consciousness research can help us understand the nature and roots of the global crisis we are all facing. I will also discuss some new strategies for coping with this critical situation that have emerged from this work. We will pay special attention to the psychospiritual roots of two elemental forces that have driven human history since time immemorial, the proclivity to violence and insatiable greed. We will also take a look at the role that the monistic materialistic worldview of Western science has played in technological progress and in the loss of spiritual values.

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There is no doubt that “malignant aggression” is connected with traumas and frustrations in childhood and infancy. However, modern consciousness research

has revealed additional significant roots of violence in deep recesses of the psyche that lie beyond postnatal biography and are related to the trauma of biological birth. The vital emergency, pain, and suffocation experienced for many hours during biological delivery generate enormous amounts of anxiety and murderous aggression that remain stored in the organism. As we saw earlier, the reliving of birth in various forms of experiential psychotherapy involves not only concrete replay of the original emotions and sensations, but is typically associated with a variety of experiences from the collective unconscious portraying scenes of unimaginable violence. Among these are often powerful sequences depicting wars, revolutions, racial riots, concentration camps, totalitarianism, and genocide.

The spontaneous emergence of this imagery during the reliving of birth is often associated with convincing insights concerning perinatal origin of such extreme forms of human violence. Naturally, wars and revolutions are extremely complex phenomena that have historical, economic, political, religious, and other dimensions. The intention here is not to offer a reductionistic explanation replacing all the others, but to add some new insights concerning the psychological and spiritual dimensions of these forms of social psychopathology that have been neglected or received only superficial treatment in earlier theories.

The images of violent socio-political events accompanying the reliving of biological birth tend to appear in very specific connection with the consecutive stages of the birth process and the dynamics of the basic perinatal matrices (BPMs). While reliving episodes of undisturbed intrauterine existence (BPM I), we typically experience images from human societies with an ideal social structure, from cultures living in complete harmony with nature, or from future utopian societies where all major conflicts have been resolved. Disturbing intrauterine memories, such as those of a toxic womb, imminent miscarriage, or attempted abortion, are accompanied by images of human groups living in industrial areas where nature is polluted and spoiled, or in societies with insidious social order and all-pervading paranoia.

Regressive experiences related to the first clinical stage of birth (BPM II), during which the uterus periodically contracts but the cervix is not open, present a diametrically different picture. They portray oppressive and abusive totalitarian societies with closed borders, victimising their populations, and “choking” personal freedom, such as Czarist or Communist Russia, Hitler's Third Reich, South American dictatorships, and the African Apartheid), or bring

specific images of the inmates in Nazi concentration camps and Stalin's Gulag Archipelago. While experiencing these scenes of living hell, we identify exclusively with the victims and feel deep sympathy for the down-trodden and the underdog.

The experiences accompanying reliving of the second clinical stage of delivery (BPM III), when the cervix is dilated and continued contractions propel the fetus through the narrow passage of the birth canal, feature a rich panoply of violent scenes -- bloody wars and revolutions, human or animal slaughter, mutilation, sexual abuse, and murder. These scenes often contain demonic elements and repulsive scatological motifs. Additional frequent concomitants of BPM III are visions of burning cities, launching of rockets, and explosions of nuclear bombs. Here we are not limited to the role of victims, but can participate in three roles - that of the victim, of the aggressor, and of an emotionally involved observer.

The events characterizing the third clinical stage of delivery (BPM IV), the actual moment of birth and the separation from the mother, are typically associated with images of victory in wars and revolutions, liberation of prisoners, and success of collective efforts, such as patriotic or nationalistic movements. At this point, we can also experience visions of triumphant celebrations and parades or of exciting postwar reconstruction.

In 1975, I described these observations, linking socio-political upheavals to stages of biological birth, in *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (Grof, 1975). Shortly after its publication, I received a letter from Lloyd de Mause, a New York psychoanalyst and journalist. De Mause is one of the founders of psychohistory, a discipline that applies the findings of depth psychology to history and political science. Psychohistorians study such issues as the relationship between the childhood history of political leaders and their system of values and process of decision making, or the influence of child-rearing practices on the nature of revolutions of that particular historical period. Lloyd de Mause was very interested in my findings concerning the trauma of birth and its possible socio-political implications, because they provided independent support for his own research.

For some time, de Mause had been studying the psychological aspects of the periods preceding wars and revolutions. It interested him how military leaders succeed in mobilizing masses of peaceful civilians and transforming them practically overnight into killing machines. His approach to this problem was very original and creative. In addition to analysis of traditional historical sources, he drew data of great psychological importance from caricatures, jokes,

dreams, personal imagery, slips of the tongue, side comments of speakers, and even doodles and scribbles on the edge of the rough drafts of political documents. By the time he contacted me, he had analysed in this way seventeen situations preceding the outbreak of wars and revolutionary upheavals, spanning many centuries since antiquity to most recent times (de Mause 1975).

He was struck by the extraordinary abundance of figures of speech, metaphors, and images related to biological birth that he found in this material. Military leaders and politicians of all ages describing a critical situation or declaring war typically used terms that equally applied to perinatal distress. They accused the enemy of choking and strangling their people, squeezing the last breath out of their lungs, or constricting them and not giving them enough space to live (Hitler's "Lebensraum").

Equally frequent were allusions to dark caves, tunnels, and confusing labyrinths, dangerous abysses into which one might be pushed, and the threat of engulfment by treacherous quicksand or a terrifying whirlpool. Similarly, the offer of the resolution of the crisis comes in the form of perinatal images. The leader promises to rescue his nation from an ominous labyrinth, to lead it to the light on the other side of the tunnel, and to create a situation where the dangerous aggressor and oppressor will be overcome and everybody will again breathe freely.

Lloyd de Mause's historical examples at the time included such famous personages as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Samuel Adams, Kaiser Wilhelm II., Hitler, Khrushchev, and Kennedy. Samuel Adams talking about the American Revolution referred to "the child of Independence now struggling for birth." In 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm stated that "the Monarchy has been seized by the throat and forced to choose between letting itself be strangled and making a last ditch effort to defend itself against attack."

During the Cuban missile crisis Khrushchev wrote to Kennedy, pleading that the two nations not "come to a clash, like blind moles battling to death in a tunnel." Even more explicit was the coded message used by Japanese ambassador Kurusu when he phoned Tokyo to signal that negotiations with Roosevelt had broken down and that it was all right to go ahead with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He announced that the "birth of the child was imminent" and asked how things were in Japan: "Does it seem as if the child might be born?" The reply was: "Yes, the birth of the child seems imminent." Interestingly, the American intelligence listening in recognized the meaning of the "war-as-birth" code.

Particularly chilling was the use of perinatal language in connection with the explosion of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. The airplane was given the name of the pilot's mother, Enola Gay, the atomic bomb itself carried a painted nickname "The Little Boy," and the agreed-upon message sent to Washington as a signal of successful detonation was "The baby was born." It would not be too far-fetched to see the image of a newborn also behind the nickname of the Nagasaki bomb, Fat Man. Since the time of our correspondence, Lloyd de Mause collected many additional historical examples and refined his thesis that the memory of the birth trauma plays an important role as a source of motivation for violent social activity.

The issues related to nuclear warfare are of such relevance that I would like to elaborate on them using the material from a fascinating paper by Carol Cohn entitled "Sex and Death in the Rational World of the Defense Intellectuals" (Cohn 1987). The defence intellectuals (DIs) are civilians who move in and out of government, working sometimes as administrative officials or consultants, sometimes at universities and think tanks. They create the theory that informs and legitimates U.S. nuclear strategic practice - how to manage the arms race, how to deter the use of nuclear weapons, how to fight a nuclear war if the deterrence fails, and how to explain why it is not safe to live without nuclear weapons.

Carol Cohn had attended a two-week summer seminar on nuclear weapons, nuclear strategic doctrine, and arms control. She was so fascinated by what had transpired there that she spent the following year immersed in the almost entirely male world of defence intellectuals (except for secretaries). She collected some extremely interesting facts confirming the perinatal dimension in nuclear warfare. In her own terminology, this material confirms the importance of the motif of "male birth" and "male creation" as important psychological forces underlying the psychology of nuclear warfare. She uses the following historical examples to illustrate her point of view:

In 1942, Ernest Lawrence sent a telegram to a Chicago group of physicists developing the nuclear bomb that read: "Congratulations to the new parents. Can hardly wait to see the new arrival." At Los Alamos, the atom bomb was referred to as "Oppenheimer's baby." Richard Feynman wrote in his article "Los Alamos from Below" that when he was temporarily on leave after his wife's death, he received a telegram that read: "The baby is expected on such and such a day."

At Lawrence Livermore laboratories, the hydrogen bomb was referred to as "Teller's baby," although those who wanted to disparage Edward Teller's

contribution claimed he was not the bomb's father, but its mother. They claimed that Stanislaw Ulam was the real father, who had all the important ideas and "conceived it"; Teller only "carried it" after that. Terms related to motherhood were also used to the provision of "nurturance" -- the maintenance of the missiles.

General Groves sent a triumphant coded cable to Secretary of War Henry Stimson at the Potsdam conference reporting the success of the first atomic test: "Doctor has just returned most enthusiastic and confident that the little boy is as husky as his big brother. The light in his eyes discernible from here to Highhold and I could have heard his screams from here to my farm." Stimson, in turn, informed Churchill by writing him a note that read: "Babies satisfactorily born." William L. Laurence witnessed the test of the first atomic bomb and wrote: "The big boom came about a hundred seconds after the great flash -- the first cry of a new-born world." Edward Teller's exultant telegram to Los Alamos, announcing the successful test of the hydrogen bomb "Mike" at the Eniwetok atoll in Marshall Islands read "It's a boy." The Enola Gay, "Little Boy," and "The baby was born" symbolism of the Hiroshima bomb, and the "Fat Man" symbolism of the Nagasaki bomb were already mentioned earlier. According to Carol Cohn, "male scientists gave birth to a progeny with the ultimate power of domination over female Nature."

Carol Cohn also mentions in her paper abundance of overtly sexual symbolism in the language of defence intellectuals. The nature of this material, linking sex to aggression, domination, and scatology shows a deep similarity to the imagery occurring in the context of birth experiences (BPM III). Cohn used the following examples: American dependence on nuclear weapons was explained as irresistible, because "you get more bang for the buck." A professor's explanation, why the MX missiles should be placed in the silos of the newest Minuteman missiles, instead of replacing the older, less accurate ones: "You are not going to take the nicest missile you have and put it into a crummy hole." At one point, there was a serious concern that "we have to harden our missiles, because the Russians are a little harder than we are." One military adviser to the National Security Council referred to "releasing 70 to 80 percent of our megatonnage in one orgasmic whump."

Lectures were filled with terms like vertical erector launchers, thrust-to-weight ratios, soft lay-downs, deep penetration, and the comparative advantages of protracted versus spasm attacks. Another example was the popular and widespread custom of patting the missiles practised by the visitors to nuclear

submarines, which Carol Cohn saw as an expression of phallic supremacy and also homoerotic tendencies. In view of this material, it clearly is quite appropriate for feminist critics of nuclear policies to refer to “missile envy” and “phallic worship.”

Further support for the pivotal role of the perinatal domain of the unconscious in war psychology can be found in Sam Keen's excellent book *The Faces of the Enemy* (Keen 1988). Keen brought together an outstanding collection of distorted and biased war posters, propaganda cartoons, and caricatures from many historical periods and countries. He demonstrated that the way the enemy is described and portrayed during a war or revolution is a stereotype that shows only minimal variations and has very little to do with the actual characteristics of the country and culture involved.

He was able to divide these images into several archetypal categories according to the prevailing characteristics (e.g., Stranger, Aggressor, Worthy Opponent, Faceless, Enemy of God, Barbarian, Greedy, Criminal, Torturer, Rapist, Death). According to Keen, the alleged images of the enemy are essentially projections of the repressed and unacknowledged shadow aspects of our own unconscious. Although we would certainly find in human history instances of just wars, those who initiate war activities are typically substituting external targets for elements in their own psyches that should be properly faced in personal self-exploration.

Sam Keen's theoretical framework does not specifically include the perinatal domain of the unconscious. However, the analysis of his picture material reveals preponderance of symbolic images that are characteristic of BPM II and BPM III. The enemy is typically depicted as a dangerous octopus, a vicious dragon, a multiheaded hydra, a giant venomous tarantula, or an engulfing Leviathan. Other frequently used symbols include vicious predatory felines or birds, monstrous sharks, and ominous snakes, particularly vipers and boa constrictors. Scenes depicting strangulation or crushing, ominous whirlpools, and treacherous quicksands also abound in pictures from the time of wars, revolutions, and political crises. Juxtaposition of pictures from holotropic states of consciousness that depict perinatal experiences with the historical pictorial documentation collected by Lloyd de Mause and Sam Keen represents strong evidence for the perinatal roots of human violence.

According to the new insights, provided jointly by observations from consciousness research and the findings of psychohistory, we all carry in our deep unconscious powerful energies and emotions associated with the trauma of birth that we have not adequately mastered and assimilated. For some of us, this

aspect of our psyche can be completely unconscious, until and unless we embark on some in-depth self-exploration with the use of psychedelics or some powerful experiential techniques of psychotherapy, such as the holotropic breathwork or rebirthing. Others can have varying degrees of awareness of the emotions and physical sensations stored on the perinatal level of the unconscious.

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, activation of this material can lead to serious individual psychopathology, including unmotivated violence. It seems that, for unknown reasons, the awareness of the perinatal elements can increase simultaneously in a large number of people. This creates an atmosphere of general tension, anxiety, and anticipation. The leader is an individual who is under a stronger influence of the perinatal energies than the average person. He also has the ability to disown his unacceptable feelings (the Shadow in Jung's terminology) and to project them on an external situation. The collective discomfort is blamed on the enemy and a military intervention is offered as a solution.

The war provides an opportunity to overcome the psychological defences that ordinarily keep the dangerous perinatal tendencies in check. Freud's superego, a psychological force which demands restraint and civilised behaviour, is replaced by the "war superego." We receive praise and medals for murder, indiscriminate destruction, and pillaging, the same behaviours that in peacetime are unacceptable and would land us in prison. Similarly, sexual violence has been a common practice during wartime and has been generally tolerated. As a matter of fact, military leaders have often promised their soldiers unlimited access to women in the conquered territory to motivate them for battle.

Once the war erupts, the destructive and self-destructive perinatal impulses are freely acted out. The themes that we normally encounter in a certain stage of the process of inner exploration and transformation (BPM II and III) now become parts of our everyday life, either directly or in the form of TV news. Various no exit situations, sadomasochistic orgies, sexual violence, bestial and demonic behaviour, unleashing of enormous explosive energies, and scatology, which belong to standard perinatal imagery, are all enacted in wars and revolutions with extraordinary vividness and power.

Witnessing scenes of destruction and acting out of violent unconscious impulses, whether it occurs on the individual scale or collectively in wars and revolutions, does not result in healing and transformation as would an inner confrontation with these elements in a therapeutic context. The experience is not generated by our own unconscious, lacks the element of deep introspection, and



does not lead to insights. The situation is fully externalised and connection with the deep dynamics of the psyche is missing. And, naturally, there is no therapeutic intention and motivation for change and transformation. Thus the goal of the underlying birth fantasy, which represents the deepest driving force of such violent events, is not achieved, even if the war or revolution has been brought to a successful closure. The most triumphant external victory does not deliver what was expected and hoped for - an inner sense of emotional liberation and psycho-spiritual rebirth.

After the initial intoxicating feelings of triumph comes at first a sober awakening and later bitter disappointment. And it usually does not take a long time and a facsimile of the old oppressive system starts emerging from the ruins of the dead dream, since the same unconscious forces continue to operate in the deep unconscious of everybody involved. This seems to happen again and again in human history, whether the event involved is the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Communist revolution in China, or any of the other violent upheavals associated with great hopes and expectations.

Since I conducted for many years deep experiential work in Prague at the time when Czechoslovakia had a Marxist regime, I was able to collect some fascinating material concerning the psychological dynamics of Communism. The issues related to Communist ideology typically emerged in the treatment of my clients at the time when these were struggling with perinatal energies and emotions. It soon became obvious that the passion the revolutionaries feel toward the oppressors and their regimes receives a powerful reinforcement from their revolt against the inner prison of their perinatal memories. And, conversely, the need to coerce and dominate others is an external displacement of the need to overcome the fear of being overwhelmed by one's own unconscious. The murderous entanglement of the oppressor and the revolutionary is thus an externalised replica of the situation experienced in the birth canal.

The Communist vision contains an element of psychological truth that has made it appealing to large numbers of people. The basic notion that a violent experience of a revolutionary nature is necessary to terminate suffering and oppression and institute a situation of greater harmony is correct when understood as a process of inner transformation. However, it is dangerously false when it is projected on the external world as a political ideology of violent revolutions. The fallacy lies in the fact that what on a deeper level is essentially

an archetypal pattern of spiritual death and rebirth takes the form of an atheistic and anti-spiritual program.

Communist revolutions have been extremely successful in their destructive phase but, instead of the promised brotherhood and harmony, their victories have bred regimes where oppression, cruelty, and injustice ruled supreme. Today, when the economically ruined and politically corrupt Soviet Union has collapsed and the Communist world has fallen apart, it is obvious to all people with sane judgement that this gigantic historical experiment, conducted at the cost of millions of human lives and unimaginable human suffering, has been a colossal failure. If the above observations are correct, no external interventions have a chance to create a better world, unless they are associated with a profound transformation of human consciousness.

The observations from modern consciousness research also throw some important light on the psychology of concentration camps. Over a number of years, professor Bastians in Leyden, Holland, has been conducting LSD therapy for people suffering from the "concentration camp syndrome," a condition that develops in former inmates of these camps many years after the incarceration. Bastians has also worked with former kapos on their issues of profound guilt. An artistic description of this work can be found in the book *Shivitti* written by a former inmate, Ka-Tzetnik 135633, who underwent a series of therapeutic sessions with Bastians (Ka-Tzetnik 135633 1989).

Bastians himself wrote a paper describing his work, entitled "Man in the Concentration Camp and Concentration Camp in Man." There he pointed out, without specifying it, that the concentration camps are a projection of a certain domain which exists in the human unconscious: "Before there was a man in the concentration camp, there was a concentration camp in man" (Bastians 1955). Study of holotropic states of consciousness makes it possible to identify the realm of the psyche Bastians was talking about. Closer examination of the general and specific conditions in the Nazi concentration camps reveals that they are a diabolical and realistic enactment of the nightmarish atmosphere that characterises the reliving of biological birth.

The barbed-wire barriers, high-voltage fences, watch towers with submachine guns, minefields, and packs of trained dogs certainly created a hellish and almost archetypal image of an utterly hopeless and oppressive no exit situation that is so characteristic of the first clinical stage of birth (BPM II). At the same time, the elements of violence, bestiality, scatology, and sexual abuse of women and men, including rape and sadistic practices, all belong to the phenomenology

of the second stage of birth (BPM III), familiar to people who have relived their birth.

In the concentration camps, the sexual abuse existed on a random individual level, as well as in the context of the “houses of dolls,” institutions providing “entertainment” for the officers. The only escape out of this hell was death - by a bullet, by hunger, disease, or suffocation in the gas chambers. The books by Ka-Tzetnik 135633, *House of Dolls* and *Sunrise Over Hell* (Ka-Tzetnik, 1955 and 1977), offer a shattering description of the life in concentration camps.

The bestiality of the SS seemed to be focused particularly on pregnant women and little children, which brings further support for the perinatal hypothesis. The most powerful passage from Terence des Près’s book *The Survivor* is, without a doubt, the description of a truck full of babies dumped into fire, followed by a scene, in which pregnant women are beaten with clubs and whips, torn by dogs, dragged around by the hair, kicked into the stomach, and then thrown into the crematorium while still alive (des Près, 1976).

The perinatal nature of the irrational impulses manifesting in the camps is evident also in the scatological behaviour of the kapos. Throwing eating bowls into the latrines and asking the inmates for their retrieval and forcing the inmates to urinate into each other's mouth were practices that besides their bestiality brought the danger of epidemics. Had the concentration camps been simply institutions providing isolation of political enemies and cheap slave labor, maintenance of hygienic rules would have been a primary concern of the organisers, as it is the case in any facility accommodating large numbers of people. In Buchenwald alone, as a result of these perverted practices, twenty-seven inmates drowned in feces in the course of a single month.

The intensity, depth, and convincing nature of all the experiences of collective violence associated with the perinatal process suggests that they are not individually fabricated from such sources as adventure books, movies, and TV shows, but originate in the collective unconscious. When our experiential self-exploration reaches the memory of the birth trauma, we connect to an immense pool of painful memories of the human species and gain access to experiences of other people who once were in a similar predicament. It is not hard to imagine that the perinatal level of our unconscious that “knows” so intimately the history of human violence is actually partially responsible for wars, revolutions, and similar atrocities.

The intensity and quantity of the perinatal experiences portraying various brutalities of human history is truly astonishing. Christopher Bache, after having

carefully analysed various aspects of this phenomenon, made an interesting conclusion. He suggested that the memories of the violence perpetrated throughout ages in human history contaminated the collective unconscious in the same way in which the traumas from our infancy and childhood polluted our individual unconscious. According to Bache, it might then be possible that when we start experiencing these collective memories, our inner process transcends the framework of personal therapy and we participate in the healing of the field of species consciousness (Bache, 1999).

The role of the birth trauma as a source of violence and self-destructive tendencies has been confirmed by clinical studies. For example, there seems to be an important correlation between difficult birth and criminality. In a similar way, aggression directed inward, particularly suicide, seems to be psychogenetically linked to difficult birth. According to an article published in the British journal *Lancet*, resuscitation at birth is conducive to higher risk of committing suicide after puberty. The Scandinavian researcher Bertil Jacobson found a close correlation between the form of self-destructive behaviour and the nature of birth. Suicides involving asphyxiation were associated with suffocation at birth, violent suicides with mechanical birth trauma, and drug addiction leading to suicide with opiate and/or barbiturate administration during labor (Jacobson et al. 1987).

The circumstances of birth play an important role in creating a disposition to violence and self-destructive tendencies or, conversely, to loving behaviour and healthy interpersonal relationships. French obstetrician Michel Odent has shown how the hormones involved in the birth process and in nursing and maternal behaviour participate in this imprinting. The catecholamines (adrenaline and noradrenaline) played an important role in evolution as mediators of the aggressive/protective instinct of the mother at the time when birth was occurring in unprotected natural environments. Oxytocine, prolactine, and endorphins are known to induce maternal behaviour in animals and foster dependency and attachment. The busy, noisy, and chaotic milieu of many hospitals induces anxiety, engages unnecessarily the adrenaline system, and imprints the picture of a world that is potentially dangerous and requires aggressive responses. This interferes with the hormones that mediate positive interpersonal imprinting. It is, therefore, essential to provide for birthing a quiet, safe, and private environment (Odent 1995).

## Transpersonal Origins of Violence

The above material shows that a conceptual framework limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian unconscious does not adequately explain extreme forms of human aggression on the individual and collective scale. However, it seems that the roots of human violence reach even deeper than to the perinatal level of the psyche. Consciousness research has revealed significant additional sources of aggression in the transpersonal domain, such as archetypal figures of demons and wrathful deities, complex destructive mythological themes, and past-life memories of physical and emotional abuse.

C. G. Jung believed that the archetypes of the collective unconscious have a powerful influence not only on the behavior of individuals but also on the events of human history. From this point of view, entire nations and cultural groups might be enacting in their behavior important mythological themes. In the decade preceding the outbreak of World War II, Jung found in the dreams of his German patients many elements from the Nordic myth of Ragnarok, or the twilight of the gods. On the basis of these observations, he concluded that this archetype was emerging in the collective psyche of the German nation and that it would lead to a major catastrophe, which would ultimately turn out to be self-destructive.

In many instances, leaders of nations specifically use not only perinatal, but also archetypal images and spiritual symbolism to achieve their political goals. The medieval crusaders were asked to sacrifice their lives for Jesus in a war that would recover the Holy Land from the Mohammedans. Adolf Hitler exploited the mythological motifs of the supremacy of the Nordic race and of the millennial empire, as well as the ancient Vedic symbols of the swastika and the solar eagle. Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein ignited the imagination of their Moslem followers by references to jihad, the holy war against the infidels.

Carol Cohn discussed in her paper not only the perinatal but also the spiritual symbolism associated with the language of nuclear weaponry and doctrine. The authors of the strategic doctrine refer to members of their community as the "nuclear priesthood." The first atomic test was called Trinity -- the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the male forces of creation. From her feminist perspective, Cohn saw this as an effort of male scientists to appropriate and claim ultimate creative power (Cohn 1987). The scientists who worked on the atomic bomb and witnessed the test described it in the following way: "It was as though we stood at the first day of creation." And Robert Oppenheimer thought

of Krishna's words to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita: "I am become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds."

### **Biographical Determinants of Insatiable Greed**

This brings us to the third poison of Tibetan Buddhism, a powerful psycho-spiritual force that combines the qualities of lust, desire, and insatiable greed. Together with "malignant aggression," these qualities are certainly responsible for some of the darkest chapters in human history. Western psychologists link various aspects of this force to the libidinal drives described by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic interpretation of the insatiable human need to achieve, to possess, and to become more than one is, attributes this psychological force to sublimation of lower instincts.

According to Freud, "What appears as . . . an untiring impulse toward further perfection can easily be understood as a result of the instinctual repression upon which is based all that is most precious in human civilization. The repressed instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction, which would consist in the repetition of a primary experience of satisfaction. No substitutive or reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct's persisting tension" (Freud 1955).

More specifically, Freud saw greed as a phenomenon related to problems during the nursing period. According to him, frustration or overindulgence during the oral phase of libidinal development can reinforce the primitive infantile need to incorporate objects to such an extent that it is in adulthood transferred in a sublimated form to a variety of other objects and situations. When the acquisitive drive focuses on money, psychoanalysts attribute it to the fixation on the anal stage of libidinal development. Insatiable sexual appetite is then considered to be the result of phallic fixation. Many other unrelenting human pursuits are then interpreted in terms of sublimation of such phallic instinctual urges. Modern consciousness research has found these interpretations to be superficial and inadequate. It discovered significant additional sources of acquisitiveness and greed on the perinatal and transpersonal levels of the unconscious.

### **Perinatal Sources of Insatiable Greed**

In the course of biographically oriented psychotherapy, many people discover that their life has been inauthentic in certain specific sectors of interpersonal relations. For example, problems with parental authority can lead to specific patterns of difficulties with authority figures, repeated dysfunctional patterns in sexual relationships can be traced to parents as models for sexual behavior, sibling issues can color and distort future peer relationships, and so on.

When the process of experiential self-exploration reaches the perinatal level, we typically discover that our life up to that point has been largely inauthentic in its totality, not just in certain partial segments. We find out to our surprise and astonishment that our entire life strategy has been misdirected and therefore incapable of providing genuine satisfaction. The reason for this is the fact that it was primarily motivated by the fear of death and by unconscious forces associated with biological birth, which have not been adequately processed and integrated. In other words, during biological birth, we completed the process anatomically, but not emotionally.

When our field of consciousness is strongly influenced by the underlying memory of the struggle in the birth canal, it leads to a feeling of discomfort and dissatisfaction with the present situation. This discontent can focus on a large spectrum of issues - unsatisfactory physical appearance, inadequate resources and material possessions, low social position and influence, insufficient amount of power and fame, and many others. Like the child stuck in the birth canal, we feel a strong need to get to a better situation that lies somewhere in the future.

Whatever is the reality of the present circumstances, we do not find it satisfactory. Our fantasy keeps creating images of future situations that appear more fulfilling than the present one. It seems that, until we reach it, life will be only preparation for a better future, not yet "the real thing." This results in a life pattern that has been described as a "treadmill" or "rat-race" type of existence. The existentialists talk about "auto-projecting" into the future. This strategy is a basic fallacy of human life. It is essentially a loser strategy, since it does not deliver the satisfaction that is expected from it. From this perspective, it is irrelevant whether or not it brings fruit in the material world.

When the goal is not reached, the continuing dissatisfaction is attributed to the fact that we have failed to reach the corrective measures. When we succeed in reaching the goal of our aspirations, it typically does not have much influence on our basic feelings. The continuing dissatisfaction is then blamed either on the fact that the choice of the goal was not correct or that it was not ambitious

enough. The result is either substitution of the old goal with a different one or amplification of the same type of ambitions.

In any case, the failure is not correctly diagnosed as being an inevitable result of a fundamentally wrong strategy, which is in principle incapable of providing satisfaction. This fallacious pattern applied on a large scale is responsible for reckless irrational pursuit of various grandiose goals that results in much suffering and many problems in the world. It can be played out on any level of importance and affluence, since it never brings true satisfaction. The only strategy that can significantly reduce this irrational drive is full conscious reliving and integration of the trauma of birth in systematic inner self-exploration.

### **Transpersonal Causes of Insatiable Greed**

Modern consciousness research and experiential psychotherapy have discovered that the deepest source of our dissatisfaction and striving for perfection lies even beyond the perinatal domain. This insatiable craving that drives human life is ultimately transpersonal in nature. In Dante Alighieri's words, "The desire for perfection is that desire which always makes every pleasure appear incomplete, for there is no joy or pleasure so great in this life that it can quench the thirst in our soul" (Dante 1990).

In the most general sense, the deepest transpersonal roots of insatiable greed can best be understood in terms of Ken Wilber's concept of the Atman Project (Wilber 1980). Our true nature is divine - God, Cosmic Christ, Allah, Buddha, Brahma, the Tao - and although the process of creation separates and alienates us from our source, the awareness of this fact is never completely lost. The deepest motivating force in the psyche on all the levels of consciousness evolution is to return to the experience of our divinity. However, the constraining conditions of the consecutive stages of development prevent a full experience of full liberation in and as God.

Real transcendence requires death of the separate self, dying to the exclusive subject. Because of the fear of annihilation and because of grasping onto the ego, the individual has to settle for Atman substitutes or surrogates, which are specific for each particular stage. For the fetus and the newborn, this means the satisfaction experienced in the good womb or on the good breast. For an infant, this is satisfaction of age-specific physiological needs. For the adult the range of



possible Atman projects is large; it includes besides food and sex also money, fame, power, appearance, knowledge, and many others.

Because of our deep sense that our true identity is the totality of cosmic creation and the creative principle itself, substitutes of any degree and scope - the Atman Projects - will always remain unsatisfactory. Only the experience of one's divinity in a holotropic state of consciousness can ever fulfill our deepest needs. Thus the ultimate solution for the insatiable greed is in the inner world, not in secular pursuits of any kind and scope. The Persian mystic and poet Rumi made it very clear:

All the hopes, desires, loves, and affections that people have for different things - fathers, mothers, friends, heavens, the earth, palaces, sciences, works, food, drink - the saint knows that these are desires for God and all those things are veils. When men leave this world and see the King without these veils, then they will know that all were veils and coverings, that the object of their desire was in reality that One Thing (Hines 1996).

### **Technologies of the Sacred and Human Survival**

The finding that the roots of human violence and insatiable greed reach far deeper than academic psychiatry ever suspected and that their reservoirs in the psyche are truly enormous could in and of itself be very discouraging. However, it is balanced by the exciting discovery of new therapeutic mechanisms and transformative potentials that become available in holotropic states on the perinatal and transpersonal levels of the psyche.

I have seen over the years profound emotional and psychosomatic healing, as well as radical personality transformation, in many people who were involved in serious and systematic inner quest. Some of them were meditators and had regular spiritual practice, others had supervised psychedelic sessions or participated in various forms of experiential psychotherapy and self-exploration. I have also witnessed profound positive changes in many people who received adequate support during spontaneous episodes of psycho-spiritual crises.

As the content of the perinatal level of the unconscious emerged into consciousness and was integrated, these individuals underwent radical personality changes. The level of aggression typically decreased considerably and they became more peaceful, comfortable with themselves, and tolerant of others. The experience of psycho-spiritual death and rebirth and conscious connection with positive postnatal or prenatal memories reduced irrational

drives and ambitions. It caused a shift of focus from the past and future to the present moment and enhanced the ability to enjoy simple circumstances of life, such as everyday activities, food, love-making, nature, and music. Another important result of this process was emergence of spirituality of a universal and mystical nature that was very authentic and convincing, because it was based on deep personal experience.

The process of spiritual opening and transformation typically deepened further as a result of transpersonal experiences, such as identification with other people, entire human groups, animals, plants, and even inorganic materials and processes in nature. Other experiences provided conscious access to events occurring in other countries, cultures, and historical periods and even to the mythological realms and archetypal beings of the collective unconscious. Experiences of cosmic unity and one's own divinity lead to increasing identification with all of creation and brought the sense of wonder, love, compassion, and inner peace.

What had begun as psychological probing of the unconscious psyche automatically became a philosophical quest for the meaning of life and a journey of spiritual discovery. People who connected to the transpersonal domain of their psyche tended to develop a new appreciation for existence and reverence for all life. One of the most striking consequences of various forms of transpersonal experiences was spontaneous emergence and development of deep humanitarian and ecological concerns and need to get involved in service for some common purpose. This was based on an almost cellular awareness that the boundaries in the universe are arbitrary and that each of us is identical with the entire web of existence.

It was suddenly clear that we cannot do anything to nature without simultaneously doing it to ourselves. Differences among people appeared to be interesting and enriching rather than threatening, whether they were related to sex, race, color, language, political conviction, or religious belief. It is obvious that a transformation of this kind would increase our chances for survival if it could occur on a sufficiently large scale.

### **Lessons from Holotropic States for the Psychology of Survival**

Some of the insights of people experiencing holotropic states of consciousness are directly related to the current global crisis and its relationship with consciousness evolution. They show that we have exteriorized in the modern

world many of the essential themes of the perinatal process that a person involved in deep personal transformation has to face and come to terms with internally. The same elements that we would encounter in the process of psychological death and rebirth in our visionary experiences make our evening news today. This is particularly true in regard to the phenomena that characterize BPM III.

We certainly see the enormous unleashing of the aggressive impulse in the many wars and revolutionary upheavals in the world, in the rising criminality, terrorism, and racial riots. Equally dramatic and striking is the lifting of sexual repression and freeing of the sexual impulse in both healthy and problematic ways. Sexual experiences and behaviors are taking unprecedented forms, as manifested in the sexual freedom of youngsters, gay liberation, general promiscuity, open marriages, high divorce rate, overtly sexual books, plays and movies, sadomasochistic experimentation, and many others.

The demonic element is also becoming increasingly manifest in the modern world. Renaissance of satanic cults and witchcraft, popularity of books and horror movies with occult themes, and crimes with satanic motivations attest to that fact. The scatological dimension is evident in the progressive industrial pollution, accumulation of waste products on a global scale, and rapidly deteriorating hygienic conditions in large cities. A more abstract form of the same trend is the escalating corruption and degradation in political and economic circles.

Many of the people with whom we have worked saw humanity at a critical crossroad facing either collective annihilation or an evolutionary jump in consciousness of unprecedented proportions. Terence McKenna put it very succinctly: "The history of the silly monkey is over, one way or another" (McKenna 1992). It seems that we all are collectively involved in a process that parallels the psychological death and rebirth that so many people have experienced individually in holotropic states of consciousness. If we continue to act out the problematic destructive and self-destructive tendencies originating in the depth of the unconscious, we will undoubtedly destroy ourselves and life on this planet. However, if we succeed in internalizing this process on a large enough scale, it might result in an evolutionary progress that can take us as far beyond our present condition as we now are from primates. As utopian as the possibility of such a development might seem, it might be our only real chance.

Let us now look into the future and explore how the concepts that have emerged from consciousness research, from the transpersonal field, and from the new

paradigm in science could be put into action in the world. Although the past accomplishments are very impressive, the new ideas still form a disjointed mosaic rather than a complete and comprehensive worldview. Much work has to be done in terms of accumulating more data, formulating new theories, and achieving a creative synthesis. In addition, the existing information has to reach much larger audiences before a significant impact on the world situation can be expected.

But even a radical intellectual shift to a new paradigm on a large scale would not be sufficient to alleviate the global crisis and reverse the destructive course we are on. This would require a deep emotional and spiritual transformation of humanity. Using the existing evidence, it is possible to suggest certain strategies that might facilitate and support such a process. Efforts to change humanity would have to start with psychological prevention at an early age. The data from prenatal and perinatal psychology indicate that much could be achieved by changing the conditions of pregnancy, delivery, and postnatal care. This would include improving the emotional preparation of the mother during pregnancy, practicing natural childbirth, creating a psycho-spiritually informed birth environment, and cultivating emotionally nourishing contact between the mother and the child in the postpartum period.

Much has been written about the importance of child rearing, as well as disastrous emotional consequences of traumatic conditions in infancy and childhood. Certainly this is an area where continued education and guidance is necessary. However, to be able to apply the theoretically known principles, the parents have to reach sufficient emotional stability and maturity themselves. It is well known that emotional problems are passed like curse from generation to generation. We are facing here a very complex problem of the chicken and the egg.

Humanistic and transpersonal psychology have developed effective experiential methods of self-exploration, healing, and personality transformation. Some of these come from the therapeutic traditions, others represent modern adaptations of ancient spiritual practices. There exist approaches with a very favorable ratio between professional helpers and clients and others that can be practiced in the context of self-help groups. Systematic work with them can lead to a spiritual opening, a move in a direction that is sorely needed on a collective scale for our species survive. It is essential to spread the information about these possibilities and get enough people personally interested in pursuing them.

We seem to be involved in a dramatic race for time that has no precedent in the entire history of humanity. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of life on this planet. If we continue the old strategies which in their consequences are clearly extremely self-destructive, it is unlikely that the human species will survive. However, if a sufficient number of people undergo a process of deep inner transformation, we might reach a level of consciousness evolution when we deserve the proud name we have given to our species: **Homo sapiens**.