Autonomy with Integrity

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Abstract

Using Eric Berne's description of autonomy as a starting point, this article presents a reorientation that places transactional analysis and some other psychological models in a broader context. Integrity, in relation to wholeness and morals and ethics, is seen as central to autonomy and a freeing force in people's lives. Awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy, Berne's original capacities, continue to play profoundly necessary parts in understanding autonomy. The orientation proposed here does not replace transactional analysis and other personal change systems but encompasses them by placing them in a simultaneously transcendent and worldly context that honors their ongoing value. Specific techniques by which people may develop and expand their capacities for awareness, spontaneity, intimacy, and integrity are also elaborated.

In 1964 in *Games People Play,* Eric Berne wrote, "The attainment of autonomy is manifested by the release or recovery of three capacities: awareness, spontaneity and intimacy" (pp. 158-161). When I first read these words in 1969, I was filled with excitement, hope, and curiosity. I had a profound longing for the autonomy of which Berne wrote and for the freedom and sustained ease implied by his descriptions of it. I knew his little book had changed my life. It provided me with simple ways of understanding myself and what was happening between me and others—information I needed desperately. It seemed like a miracle, and it prompted me to explore the nature of autonomy from then on.

Autonomy

Back in 1969, Berne's autonomy seemed to be a profoundly useful benchmark for measuring progress in personal development and a beacon that could give direction to all that we did. I think this struck me so much because while it was not unusual for the times in which I grew up, I received little guidance on personal issues. We were expected to live for other people and to conform to the expectations of grown-ups to the exclusion of our own needs and wants. It was inconceivable that I should take an interest in, for example, my own development as a feeling person who had any intrinsic value.

What Berne offered was significantly different: people living with awareness of what is rather than in the haze of what remained after everything risky or unacceptable was filtered out; people with the inner freedom to act spontaneously rather than staying locked in the prisons into which restrictive upbringing had cast them; and people capable of experiencing intimacy with others—tender appreciation and sharing of what each was experiencing in relation to the other—instead of enduring the alienation of desiccated formality handed down from their "elders." All this was truly revolutionary.

Yet, I was also dissatisfied with Berne's discussion of the three capacities of autonomy, spontaneity, and intimacy. While his ideas were much more precise than anything I could have imagined, they were, nonetheless, still rather vague and unclear. I craved greater precision so I could easily apply the benchmark of autonomy to myself and with others. Also, I sensed there was more to each of the three capacities, and so my "research" began.

Results

To call what I did "research" requires an explanation, for it was not like most research conducted these days. My methodology involved using other people's and my own experiences and outcomes as the data (Etherington, 2004); my capacity to conceptualize these using transactional analysis and other therapeutic and non-therapeutic models that called on my background in mathematics, philosophy, and logic; and some of the guidelines that informed Berne's

own work, such as seeking simplicity of understanding and language, to name just two. I did not engage in double-blind trials with matched groups of people followed by statistical analysis.

Using Berne as my starting point, my destination was unexpected and my process a kind of meandering through the years, with a persistent interest in this subject coming to the fore from time to time (Macefield & Mellor, 2006; Mellor, 1980a, 1980b, 1982, 1988a, 1988b, 1992, 2002; Mellor & Schiff, 1975). So the nature and significance of my conclusions were only obvious in retrospect. Also, my integrated understanding had to wait for me to make a fundamental shift of orientation after I started to explore Eastern personal change technologies. This was in the early 1980s, when the Western technologies I was using proved ineffective in long-term work with people who were seeking personal completion.

My training in Eastern spiritual processes, which continues still today, has been with several highly accomplished spiritual masters. It was their orientations to life that led me to recast virtually everything: my basic conception of human processes; what awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy are; and how ego states and the full dynamically descriptive and powerful repertoire of transactional analysis and other models relate to the deeper being in each of us. More importantly, the way these masters lived, rather than anything they taught directly, alerted me to the fundamental part integrity needs to play in a life lived autonomously.

The overall results were as follows. First, I discovered the root of my initial dissatisfaction. What Berne wrote about his three capacities was more descriptive and indicative than definitive. His descriptions pointed toward awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy rather than defining them, and this lacked the precision he usually applied to his key concepts.

Second, I eventually realized that there is a shared essence in each of the three capacities. Each is a process rather than some sort of state, and a repeating process at that. They all require ongoing attention to maintain them as needed for living autonomously.

Third, I realized more was needed to complete the picture. The gap became obvious as I started to bring into my everyday life a sense of the complete union and wholeness that underlies everything. The missing piece, also a process, was integrity. Our integrity helps us to embrace all of our life experience, to stay on track as people, to affirm and celebrate others as well as ourselves, and to expand greatly our capacities for awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy. Integrity enables us to live richer, more self-sustaining forms of autonomy than we can without it and brings us into alignment with a natural ethic that seems to be available through all of existence. This process, when it informs what we do, aligns us with a primal power underlying our aliveness.

Last, in the process of the aforementioned work, I developed several straightforward ways of expanding our capacities for awareness, spontaneity, intimacy, and integrity.

A Different Model

To present my understanding of autonomy, it is necessary to outline a new model that I developed in order to integrate the many different dimensions involved. This outline must necessarily be brief given the confines of a journal article.

During the 1960s and 1970s, many of us participated in a reductionist revolution as we explored and grappled with human psychological and social processes. It was a time that saw a wonderful wave of creativity as we observed human beings with new eyes and ears and came up with all sorts of different models, techniques, and new possibilities for dealing with personal problems, growth, and development. Thinking about gestalt therapy, reality therapy, rational emotive therapy, primal therapy, bioenergetics, radix therapy, family therapy, communication theory, neurolinguistic programming (NLP), art therapy, and many other systems that were also emerging at that time, we can see that transactional analysis was one among many to break new ground.

Significantly, the exponents of many of these approaches were keen to communicate their understanding to everyday people. As a result, the complexity of our bodies, feelings, thinking, and psychological processes, as well as the dynamics of our exchanges with one another,

became much more understandable to everyone. We also discovered that everyone was capable of deep personal change. At the same time, to my delight, I found that all of these approaches could be integrated to create a richly diverse repertoire that therapists could use in their work. These were truly revolutionary developments.

What was missing from all of this, however, was any reference to what many people were dealing with on a daily basis—vast areas of experience involving either great beauty, great challenge, or both. Many individuals were dealing with phenomena beyond normal worldly awareness; views and processes with spiritual or religious origins; the daily importance of meaning and purpose in life; and experiences of transcendence, eternity, and, even, with direct exposure to life itself. In retrospect, these omissions seem understandable. We were so occupied with what we were discovering that these other issues did not even occur to many of us.

However, in time, increasing numbers of people involved in psychotherapy and related disciplines started to include spiritual and other dimensions in their approaches. The intensification of people's involvement in transpersonal psychology in the 1970s was clearly stimulated by such interests. I was particularly prompted to include them in my thinking from the time I became apprenticed to the spiritual masters already mentioned, although many experiences had been niggling at me for years before then (Mellor, 1980b).

Interestingly, what I have evolved is not a radical rewriting or reinterpretation of my learning from Western sources. It is an integration of those systems into a bigger, more encompassing understanding, an integration that honors the value of transactional analysis (and other systems) at the same time it enables people to understand and embrace many more perspectives in their lives than those included in the earlier systems.

My new approach continues to embrace some of the fundamentals of the early innovators. Like its predecessors, for example, the model is grounded in the observable—in direct experience. It did not arise primarily out of conjecture or conceptualization. The necessary observations also require awareness that some people do not have. In other words, the phenomena are readily accessible to many people, but not to everyone—at least not at first. It is a bit like trying to understand the significance of the squiggly lines on electroencephalogram or electrocardiogram printouts: The raw data is there, but the ability to distill their correct meaning requires special training. Some people also need to be trained so they can even see the squiggles. In relation to transactional analysis, think of the training necessary for some people to recognize ego states and different types of transactions as examples.

The Diagram

Many of the central themes in the paradigm I am proposing are shown in Figure 1.The figure has two concentric circles, ten arrows, and "I-Am" in the center. It is a map of a person, of aspects of awareness, and of experiences having to do with life energy and living processes. In presenting this, I am aware that this is more of a "comic strip" picture and not a real person, its main value being in the way it helps us to relate many different experiences and suggests

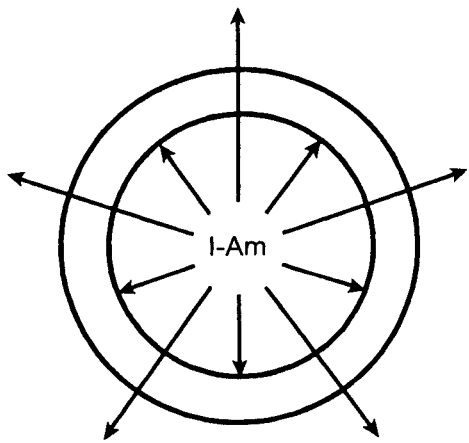

Figure 1
Basic Diagram

different techniques for maximizing aliveness. Also, the figure is in two dimensions only because it is easier to draw; it would be better shown as concentric spheres.

The outer circle shows the boundary or threshold between the inside and the outside of our bodies that is created by our skin. The inner circle shows another boundary or threshold between inner physical or physically based experiences and inner experiences that are not bound by space and time. I first encountered the concentric circles in a book by R. D. Laing (1964/1970) entitled *The Divided Self.*

The continuous lines of the circles represent split awareness, a phenomenon found in many people. The outer circle represents a split between people's physical awareness of what is inside and what is outside their bodies. (Dotted lines may be used to represent permeability, which is discussed later in this article.) Two examples of this outer split are the beliefs that (1) all our thoughts and feelings are private and (2) we must be in "sensory range" to be able to communicate with others. These beliefs are based on the assumption that the inside and outside are separate, and neither of these beliefs or positions is actually true, because, in reality, there is no clear separation. (See McTaggart [2001] and Law [2006, pp. 272-274] for multiple examples of the sharing of thoughts and of distant communication using thinking as the medium.)

The inner circle represents an internal split between awareness of inner, physically based processes (sensations, feelings, thinking, memory, etc.) and deeply buried experiences that come from non-four-dimensional, non-space-time awareness—that is, beyond consciousness. In Figure 1, physically based processes are inside the rim created by the two circles, while the experiences produced by "the beyond" are located inside the inner circle. An example of the inner split is the common experience that we are cut off from our deeper selves (the inner person, the soul, the higher self, our real purpose for living, etc.) and from transcendent experiences. Many people only discover what lies deeply hidden there if something powerful occurs that expands their awareness, such as an epiphany or witnessing a birth or death.

In fact, many of us have permeable boundaries, and even those of us with seemingly impenetrable boundaries have some porosity there. Thus, it is better to think of these lines in Figure 1 as thresholds or transition areas of experience and consciousness, not as impenetrable barriers. This permeability is important, too, because openness to all possible dimensions of experience is generally more life enhancing, more functional, and more likely to promote autonomy.

Between the two circles are located the body, feelings, language-based thinking, memories, personal history, patterns of living, culture, and so on—all the worldly, body-based stuff of life. Ego states, impasses, and the whole of TA's rendition of inner processes associated with transactions, rituals, pastimes, games, rackets, scripts, and so on are included here. However, it is important to realize that much more than ego states and other transactional analysis paraphernalia reside in this outer rim. Figure 2 is a simple way of diagramming ego states in relation to these other ideas.

In part, the long arrows in Figure 2 represent awareness of the world that comes through the

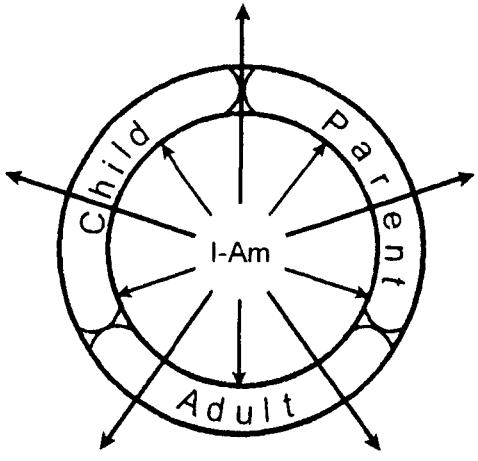

Figure 2
Diagram with Ego States

five external senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. It is our five senses that keep us physically plugged into the physical world around us. Remaining well earthed is fundamental to survival and to our ability to cope in the world. It is also fundamental to our inner equilibrium. In part, the small arrows represent the inner senses that enable us to know what our inner states are. The data from these senses produce the pictures, sounds, feelings/sensations, tastes, and smells that enable us to know our inner states—the output of our representational systems, in NLP terms.

This data is the physical bedrock of our awareness of inner states and processes. As with our awareness of the physical world, ongoing awareness of the physical bedrock of our inner lives is life sustaining. It is fundamental to our connection to the world, to our accessing and participating in the life energy available to us, and to our having a sense of self. I emphasize that the foundation of both our outer and inner awareness is physical, and when all is working well, the awareness is simultaneous.

I-Am is the infinite core or spark of life in each of us. As physical beings, this is the region of our first arising into consciousness out of the "universal ocean" of awareness. In spiritual circles, to realize this I-Am by experiencing it directly means we have become enlightened or fully realized, a mixed state-process that is variously referred to as Buddhahood, Christ consciousness, Krishna consciousness, paramatman, nirvana, or the inner guru (Chandran, 2007). Using Western idiom, I prefer the designation of "over-soul." It is our deepest being, our almost divine self, witness, or observer.

The Infinity from which I-Am arises is the background on which the figure is drawn, and you have to imagine this background as infinitely large. This infinite backdrop to everything is known by many names, including the zero point field in quantum physics (McTaggart, 2001), God in some religions, and the Void and the Infinite in various spiritual circles. In the scientific realm of quantum physics, the zero point field is postulated by some physicists as the ground from which everything arises, in which everything continues to have its root existence, and to which everything eventually returns. It is what is left when all particles that can be removed have been removed. Also postulated by some in physics to be an infinite field of awareness, memory, and knowing (McTaggart, 2001, 2006), this realm is something that spiritual masters have urged people for thousands of years to devote themselves to realizing.

Aliveness

Functionally, I-Am plugs us into the life energy of the Infinite, while our five inner and outer senses plug us into the physical, four-dimensional/space-time reality of our daily lives. When we are, thereby, connected to the source of power and grounded or earthed in the world, a circuit is completed, and life energy floods into our systems through I-Am. This then moves in the direction of the arrows shown in Figure 2, out through the various layers of our systems, nourishing and enlivening as it goes, until it reaches our bodies, from where it flows on out into the world around us.

It is this flow of life energy that keeps us alive. When its flow is strong, we are healthy, balanced, and vital. Being in this highly desirable state relies, however, on the outer rim between the two circles in Figure 2 performing its function well. For it is this aspect of our systems that keeps I-Am in the physical world, which is important, because I-Am is the source within us as physical beings of our very aliveness. Put another way, what we develop in physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social terms in our formative years needs to be up to the job of managing what is going on inside us, what is going on around us, and integrating the two fully enough for us to survive well. In more traditional terms, then, this area of Figure 2 is the ego, while the inner threshold would include the preconscious and the rest of the inner circle the unconscious. Interestingly, although by definition the unconscious never becomes conscious, for thousands of years, spiritual masters have developed technologies for bringing everything in us into awareness (Underhill, 1910/1999).

Centeredness

We have different experiences according to

where on "the map" (i.e., Figure 2) we are centered. The overall pattern is simple to understand. When centered in I-Am, we experience transcendent oneness, whereas when centered in our physicality and worldliness, we experience fragmentation and the divisions between many things. This is the difference between the Tao (or Way) and the "world of ten thousand things" to which the Taoists refer (Lao Tsu, 1972). States experienced as ultimate union, infinite love, and the like are available to us through epiphanies, in deep meditation, or from events that take us directly into those reaches beyond our worldly selves. By contrast, the trillions of objects in the physical world make worldly division and separation obvious, with ego states offering good examples of inner fragmentation, separation, or polarization.

More specifically, many, perhaps most, people live their lives with their sense of themselves—their center, observer, or witness—located within or anchored to the outer rim of Figure 2, between the two circles. These people experience their bodies as the primary reference of what they are. They have a strong physical sense of themselves, are physically aware of what is inside and outside them, and are time-bound. Diversity is paramount for these kinds of individuals and arises out of contraction, contention, and difficulty, even at those times when they experience comfort and ease. This kind of centering opens people up to everyday experience.

Others are more centered outside their bodies, beyond the outer circle in Figure 2. This often leads to the fusion of awareness with what is taking place in the external physical world. Some of these people "become" what they perceive (McTaggart, 2006, pp. 77-81; Mellor, 1980b; Radin, 2006). A very low-level example of this is when people agree with others while they are with them, only to realize when they are away from them that they do not agree at all. People centered like this may be confused about who, where, and when they are, partially experiencing themselves as having become other people, as being in other locations (possibly in other people's bodies), or as being in other times (seeming to live past or future events as if they are in a concurrent here and now). You may find it extraordinary that people can lose a sense of who, where, and when they actually are, yet it happens.

Those who are centered inside the inner circle of Figure 2 have a wide range of nonordinary or transcendent experiences. The differences between these and everyday experiences increases the farther in toward I-Am people are centered. Near the threshold represented by the inner circle, people still have some spatial sense of their bodies and themselves and of time passing, although it is somewhat diffuse; however, this sense quickly diminishes and dissolves completely as they move farther in. Much nearer I-Am, they no longer have any sense or memory of their bodies, their histories, their current lives and concerns. Their experiences include, for example, states of supreme oneness, of bliss, or of profoundly knowing the meaning and purpose of life. Union and wholeness are paramount. There is only being, no form or action. Also, the closer to I-Am they are centered, the less they have a sense of "I-ness," because their observer and all it perceives dissolves increasingly into a vastness that is more "a sense of presence," an "expanded, infinite awareness," or simply "being" more than anything specific or specifiable. Wilber (1991) has described this beautifully with his usual illuminating eloquence: "There is no separation between subject and object, there is just the ongoing stream of experience, perfectly clear and luminous and open. What I am now is what is arising" (pp. 102-103).

Attaining Autonomy

Using this model as a basis, the results of my research over almost 40 years potentially offer a greatly expanded understanding of autonomy. After starting out exploring the nuts and bolts of awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy, I finally concluded that the fourth factor, integrity, needs to become the foundation of everything, that it needs to be the beginning, middle, and end of autonomy. The presence of integrity in life is a primal state that manifests as a power that draws us all into increasing states of wholeness, including union with all that is. Integrity also offers natural guidance on how to live well and can give real meaning and purpose to our

efforts to become whole human beings. It can lead us naturally to honor each other and the planet in our shared aliveness and to living in harmony with everything so that we live our aliveness fully. It also offers potent strategies for dealing with conflict, strife, and trouble. Without integrity, what we think of as exercising our autonomy can easily result in the various personal, social, environmental, and other abuses with which we are beset these days.

At the same time, Berne's original capacities still remain central. Without realizing the capacities for functional awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy, I think autonomy would be a figment of our imaginations. The emphasis on "functional capacities" is important, too. Many people whom we would not describe as autonomous have some ability, even if only minimal, in each of the four capacities. However, they would need much more of each to live autonomously. Berne (1964) clearly had some notion of this, as shown in his descriptions of what he meant by his three capacities or indicators (pp. 158-161).

The attainment of autonomy is manifested by the realization of integrity through using three functional capacities—awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy—and by ongoing efforts to continue developing all four.

Awareness

Three of Berne's (1964) descriptions are helpful here: "Awareness [is] the capacity to see a coffeepot and hear the birds sing in one's own way, and not the way one was taught" (p. 158); "Awareness requires living in the here-and-now, and not in the elsewhere, the past or the future" (p. 158); and "The aware person is alive because he knows how he feels, where he is and when it is" (pp. 159-160).

Three elements in these statements are particularly useful in relation to awareness. When we are aware, we perceive things as they are, we are centered in the here and now, and we know what we are experiencing. In other words, we are grounded. This is a term I first encountered in gestalt therapy (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951), radix therapy (through personal communications with trainees of Charles Kelly), and bioenergetics (Lowen, 1975/1977). In what follows, material on representational systems from NLP (Bandler & Grinder, 1975; Grinder & Bandler, 1976) also helps me to understand and to elaborate the mechanisms by which people become grounded (Law, 2006, pp. 321-323, pp. 324-327; Mellor, 1982).

Grounding. People are grounded when they are physically aware via their five senses of the things, people, situations, and events around them and simultaneously aware of the physical sensations in their bodies through their proprioceptors. In Figure 2, simultaneous physical awareness involves using the long arrows (the senses) and the short arrows (the proprioceptors). You can do this now: Simply look around you, listen to the sounds around you, reach out and touch what is there, and notice any tastes or smells. At the same time, notice physically what is going on inside you (look at, listen to, feel, taste, or smell your physical sensations). If you find doing all of this is too much to begin with, go back and forth between the different aspects of your inner and outer awareness. Remember, though, that these perceptions occur instantly and automatically the moment we turn our attention to them, so avoid putting effort into it.

When we cultivate this dual physical awareness, many wonderful and extraordinary things happen beyond the pure awareness that grounding cultivates (Mellor, 1982). In relation to awareness alone, however, grounding quickly brings us into the here and now because our external awareness is "here" and the act of noticing our current sensations and outer perceptions is "now." Clearly, this is a very simple process. Nevertheless, sensations have to do with physical events like hot/cold, tight/loose, tingling/numb, light/dull, transparent/opaque, loud/soft, discordant/melodious, sweet/sour, or foul/fragrant. They are not feelings (happy/sad, love/anger, etc.), emotions (capable/inadequate, perfectionist/lackadaisical, etc.), or assessments ("I don't know what to do," "I like going/staying," etc.).

Well-grounded people are usually steady and balanced inside; they are available and responsive to what is going on both inside and around them (Mellor, 1982). Their experiences and knowing come together naturally, and they often have a poised sense of observing what is going on. As they persist with grounding, their

awareness of the physical continues to intensify and other dimensions of awareness also open up.

In fact, great awareness is possible. The extra dimensions have to do with paying attention to the aspect of us that knows or is aware—the observer. This is the aspect of awareness that Berne (1964) hinted at when he wrote that "the aware person . . . knows how he feels, where he is and when it is" (pp. 159-160). In other words, for functional awareness we need to be conscious that we are aware of what we are paying attention to. The important question to answer is how to do it. The answer is to become self-conscious (conscious of self), and we can do this through centering (Mellor, 2002).

Centering. People are centered when they are aligned or at one with the observer inside them (Law, 2006, p. 323; Mellor, 2002). This is the faculty in us that knows what we are perceiving. Note the two aspects in this process: aligning with the faculty in us that is aware and the contents of that awareness. Also note that, while the basic process of becoming centered is the same, our experiences of centering can vary enormously (see the earlier discussion on centeredness). In summary, we can be centered outside the body, which offers direct awareness of external things and events; centered in the physicality of the body, which offers direct physical awareness; centered in the "me" of who we are, which offers us childlike emotional and cognitive awareness; centered in the "I" of who we are for awareness of our personal styles and personalities; or centered in the "I-Am" of who we are, which give us transcendent awareness (see Figure 3 for the locations of these on "the map").

The first step in becoming centered is to become grounded. This helps to create balance and to heighten our sense of the observer.

The second step is to pay attention to the observer by using the physical awareness we have from the grounding. Then ask or notice: What is the observer like? Do we have one observer or more than one? Is it specific and confined? Or is it extensive? Is it dense or subtle? Is it stationary or moving? Is it hard to see or get hold of? Does it include all of me or only part? Is it stable or changing?

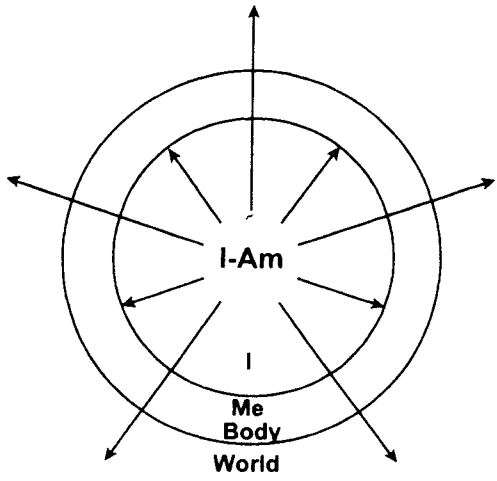

Figure 3
Observer Locations

The third step is to make ourselves one with whatever it is. We metamorphose ourselves into being it. You can do this in a variety of ways, so choose the easiest way for you. For example, think of the TV ads in which a vehicle turns into a person or animal. This is a transformation from something specific into something else specific, which is helpful if your observer is definite. However, it could be diffuse, expanded, or expansive, in which case you will need to allow yourself to become diffuse, expanded, or expansive, too. You may experience this as an "evaporation of self" as a field of awareness replaces definite shape, location, or substance. It may even seem as if you are becoming "nothing." Then there are those people who are already centered in I-Am. They do not find it easy to relate to the processes just described because they experience themselves as already dissolved. The main issue for them is to become grounded so they claim the substance of the denser parts of their experiences, parts that they have often neglected.

Centering is empowering. Well-centered people catch our attention because of their poise, presence, vitality, and grace. Their lives have an attractive ease and flow. Significantly, whatever

our observer at a particular time, it is our best access to the life energy already mentioned, which explains the personal qualities just listed. Centered people are also aware of inner realities that can make them both more self-possessed and more available to others. By contrast, many people are clearly lost in life, unenergetic, and weakened. Because they are not well centered —that is, aligned with their observers—they have little or no sense of either who they are or where to find themselves. The observer in its various locations—the world, body, me, I, or I-Am—is not directly available to them, even though it is there waiting for them to connect with it.

Our availability to and mastery of the different types of centering and associated consciousness is conditioned in great part by a developmental sequence that unfolds from birth through childhood and on into adulthood. Each stage begins with a birth, of which there are four (Mellor & Mellor, 2001, pp. 176-187; Mellor & Mellor, 2004, pp. 33-39). Physical birth—the delivery of the baby from fetus-hood in the womb—is the first. The mother-child bond provides the base for learning through the following 2 years, during which we acquire a primary experience of *body-here-and-now* centering and consciousness. Emotional birth—the delivery of a child from babyhood—is the second birth. Naturally occurring at age 2, it takes about a year of labor, with the "newborn" child arriving at age 3. The child-family bond it forms provides the base for learning for the next 11 years, during which we acquire primary experience of *me-here-and-now* centering and consciousness. Cognitive birth—the delivery of the adult from childhood—is the third birth. This naturally occurs at age 14, with its labor also taking about a year and the "newborn adult" arriving at age 15. The adult-community bond it forms is the base for learning about grown-up life as a person, acquiring in the process a primary experience of *I-here-and-now* centering and consciousness. Spiritual or soul birth—the delivery of the soul from personhood—is the fourth birth. In my experience, this occurs at no set time, depending as it does on a sufficient level of completion of the other births and on how much we have learned from our life's events. Once the delivery does occur, the "newborn soul" has arrived into spiritual realms that form the base of our subsequent learning about life as living souls. In the process we acquire a primary experience of *I-Am-here-and-now* centering and consciousness.

In relation to autonomy, centering adds range, depth, and beauty to the awareness available through grounding, qualities that are not available through grounding alone. The awareness, personal poise, and aliveness of people who are well grounded and well centered automatically keep expanding, too. At any time, the observer in which they live when centered depends on their progress through the aforementioned developmental sequence of unfolding and expanding consciousness. Regardless of this progress, however, grounding and centering enhance their experience of the (body, me, I, or I-Am)-here-and-now, which I will refer to from here on as "I-Am-here-and-now." Grounding and centering are the means by which we can become functionally aware of inner and outer realities, strongly connected to the life energy and earthed in the world.

Functional awareness is the capacity to live in the I-Am-here-and-now by staying grounded and centered, managing our awareness and continuing to expand it.

Spontaneity

Spontaneity is a wonderfully enlivening quality. It has a good deal to do with allowing ourselves to be carried away. When acting from our being—from I-Am—what we do arises in I-Am and is carried out into the physical world by the flow of life energy. Awareness is a natural part of this. Of course, most of us act from body, me, or I most of the time; however, the same flowing process operates. For example, I was in an elevator one day with a little girl standing nearby, facing another man. Her eyes were at crotch level, and after a few seconds she tugged on her mothers arm and said spontaneously, "Mummy. That man's got a big penis, hasn't he?" Several hidden smiles glimmered subtly into vacant space around her as her mother replied, "Has he, dear?" Perhaps their responses were not from the I-Am of anyone present, nevertheless, the contrast in

spontaneity and awareness among the people in the elevator was obvious.

Generally, spontaneous action is unpremeditated and propelled by inner impulse. Spontaneous people are usually open, natural, and uninhibited. Of course, some spontaneity is not charming, comfortable, or acceptable for others. It may involve the direct expression of unpleasantness, for example. So, for spontaneity to be functional, we need to develop the capacity to monitor what we are doing. This enables us to guide our actions so they prompt desirable consequences for ourselves and others. At the same time, acting spontaneously requires that we have the freedom to express ourselves, and not everyone does.

In order to act freely, many of us need to loosen up the overconstraining bonds of our past lives. These bonds arose because we inhibited the flow of life energy to such an extent that the outer rim on the diagram became clogged (see Figure 4). All the feelings, thoughts, impulses, desires, memories, physical sensations—any experience that we did not manage to digest or express—added to this clogging. These have been called repressed feelings, body armoring, unresolved issues, and the like, and when working therapeutically with people, it is routine to deal with these deposits in some way.

The way this clogging occurs is, in principle, simple. Four aspects of the process are important. First, we hold on physically in some way in order to repress, suppress, or distort experiences, and in order to hold on, we control or interrupt our spontaneity. This enables us to inhibit our responsiveness. Second, a significant part of how we do this is by blocking or reducing physical awareness of our bodily sensations or of the outside world by becoming ungrounded. Third, and at the same time, as a way of managing the intensity of our experiences, we become adept at diminishing the power or intensity in our systems. When the power is turned down, inner conflicts are easier to manage because they are less intense. We do this by splitting from the observer inside us, by loosening the plug in our life energy socket; in other words, by becoming uncentered.

So, in summary, what inhibits our spontaneity and creates this clogging in our systems is

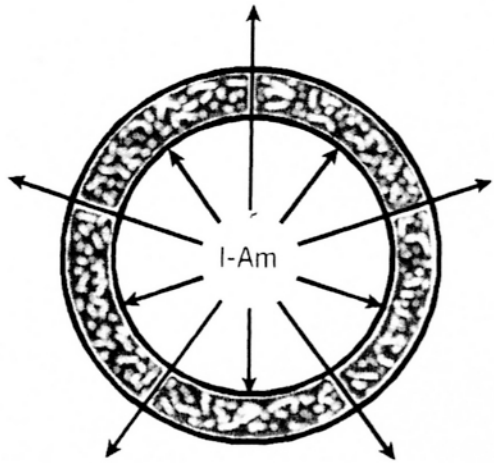

Figure 4
Collected History

our inactivity in the face of life's events, our lack of groundedness, and our lack of centeredness. And understanding this leads directly to what we can do to recover the capacity for spontaneity.

First, we need to cultivate expressiveness, to learn to go with the flow. Whatever we do along these lines helps to free us from what we were holding, the process that got us into trouble in the first place. To do this, we can put ourselves on various "expressive programs," such as telling people what we think, feel, want, or so on at least three times a day until it is routine for us to do so. Many therapies, including transactional analysis, also regularly use expressive techniques for their own sake, to actively release the build-up of inner feelings or tension associated with holding on. Doing this is a great relief. Such release also often helps us to resolve old conflicts in the here and now by fostering new understanding of our old views and conclusions and new opportunities to act differently.

Second, we need to deal with the unresolved history that is clogging our systems in the outer rim of the diagram. As part of doing this, we need to open up our portals to the world—our

inner and outer senses. Doing so releases life energy so it can flow more easily from inside us into the world. Using grounding is an optimal way to do this, because it simultaneously promotes physical awareness of our sensations and of the world around us, the opposite of what we did to make ourselves congested. Grounding also helps us to digest much of what we have collected, something that is explained later. (Figure 5 illustrates the way grounding releases our histories.) Many techniques help to bring salient issues and past incidents into awareness, and the resolution of these issues and incidents, in my experience, is greatly enhanced by combining them with grounding.

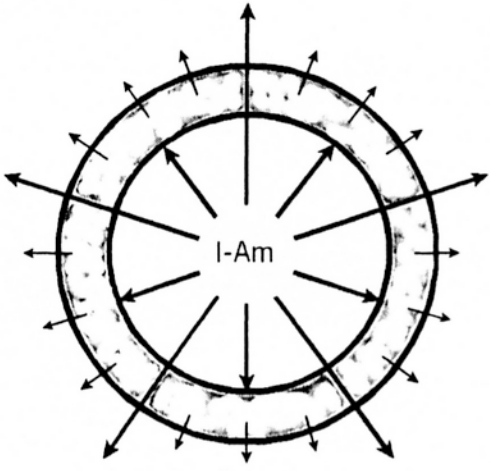

Figure 5
Release of History

Third, to intensify its flow through us, we need to reconnect to the life energy that enters our systems from the Infinite. The more of this wonderfully loosening, healing, and releasing energy we can get to flow into our systems the better. Remembering, too, that this energy is our aliveness, then clearly, reconnecting and opening ourselves to it is more than just important; in fact, our lives depend on it. Centering is a most efficient way of doing this, because body, me, I, and I-Am are our direct access to it.

Fourth, for functional spontaneity, we need to monitor what we do. Importantly, this monitoring is very different from inhibiting or constricting our behavior and our flow. Imagine holding a hose that is squirting water. The squirting represents our spontaneous flow, and the direction in which we point it represents our activities. When properly monitoring what we do, we would decide how much water to release by turning the tap/faucet further on or off and deciding the direction in which to point the hose. This is like deciding how much feeling or impulse to express and what to do to express it. Simply acting out whatever we feel would be the equivalent of turning the tap/faucet on full and letting the hose writhe and swing around at random. Effective monitoring also includes knowing that we have the capacity to express our impulses fully if, when, and how we decide to do so.

Generally, then, releasing or recovering the capacity for spontaneity involves learning to go with the flow. To develop this capacity, we need to release our inner blocks and strengthen our connection to life energy. Grounding is the great releaser and cleanser of our systems, and centering is the most direct way to reconnect to life energy. Grounding also helps us to ensure that what we do strikes a balance between inner and outer realities. As I explain later, integrity contributes greatly too.

Thus, functional spontaneity is the capacity simultaneously to act expressively and, using integrity as our guide, to monitor and manage what we do according to prevailing inner and outer realities. Concentrating on becoming well-grounded and centered, and on acting in the flow of our inner processes, enables us to keep expanding our capacity for spontaneity.

Intimacy

Intimacy is an experience most people seek and one with which many people have difficulty. It is available to us in every relationship. Three connected elements are important for it to occur: our openness to others, our availability to what is going on inside ourselves, and our willingness to merge with other people's experiences. The way to practice all three is explained in detail in the *Intimacy Meditation* (Mellor, 1988a).

Openness to Others. Intimacy has to do with the effect other people have on us. If someone has no effect, there is no intimacy; if someone has an intense effect, there is the possibility of intense intimacy. Interestingly, it is not primarily what is going on with the other person that determines the degree of intimacy we can experience with him or her. It is primarily our own openness to—our awareness of—that person. The more open we are to others, the greater the potential for becoming intimate.

Think of people you do not like and remember what you do to diminish their personal effect on you by filtering, blocking, or defending yourself from them (Macefield & Mellor, 2006; Mellor & Schiff, 1975). Think also of people you like and remember how you increase their personal effect on you by encouraging exposure and exchange and deliberately opening yourself up to them. Grounding—in which the other person is a key ingredient in our awareness of the outside world—is an obvious way to increase this capacity.

Availability to Our Own Processes. When seeking intimacy with others, many people believe that it involves having to know what is going on inside the other person. They may thus assume that they have to bridge a gap between them and the other. In my experience, however, this does not work well, and there is a much easier and more immediate way to go about things. To become intimate with others, instead of reaching out for them, we need to reach in, to get inside our own skins and discover what is there (Mellor, 1988a).

Think about it this way. Our primary source of data about other people is what is going on inside ourselves. So, it is our own experiences and perceptions, not the other person's, that determine the level of intimacy and satisfaction we achieve. Added to this, to be fully available to our own experiences, we need to be open and accepting of them (Macefield & Mellor, 2006; Mellor, 1988a). In other words, we need to know ourselves in order to know others. Any filtering, shielding, or defending of ourselves from what is going on in us in response to another, any discounting (Mellor & Schiff, 1975), reduces the intimacy we can experience. Clearly, centering is a direct way of cultivating this openness and acceptance of our own experiences.

One-sided Intimacy. The description just given is of one-sided intimacy, to use Berne's (1964, p. 160) term. Interestingly, anyone can do this, regardless of the other person's participation. This is because the process involves tuning into or scanning another person by using our own experiences to register what is going on with them. In fact, as an exercise in intuition, others do not need to be aware that we are doing it. Before we assume our impressions are accurate, however, most of us will need many opportunities to identify what in others produces the experiences we have. Until then, we can be wildly wrong!

Willingness to Merge. Two-sided intimacy involves much more than the one-sided type, because both people share aspects of themselves. Doing this requires that we drop our boundaries and release any inclination to separate from the other. The degree of our capacity to do this depends on our availability to merging consciousness with the other person and on how accepting we are of the loss of identity doing so may stimulate in us.

It is one thing to cultivate openness and acceptance of everything we experience as we open up to others in one-sided intimacy. For many people, it is quite another to go further and to seek oneness of consciousness, because this opens us without restraint to people's full influence on us and our full influence on them. It can be extremely stimulating at times, to put it mildly, and people may become alarmed at the level of intensity involved and the automatic self-revelation that accompanies the experience. Everything about us becomes potentially known or knowable, and for many people this level of sharing seems to involve a loss of their sense of self, that is, a loss of identity.

Put another way, in deep, two-sided intimacy, our I-entity becomes a we-entity that simultaneously encompasses and blends the consciousness of both people. Many of us experience this when we are in love or when nurturing babies or young children. It also happens, not infrequently, in therapeutic relationships.

Love is a wonderful unifier and boundary dissolver. In the context of a love relationship,

many people celebrate the merging and the weness of everything; they experience their floating in shared consciousness as pleasurable and fulfilling. In my experience, love (caring or tenderness) goes together with union of consciousness and union with love (caring or tenderness). However, intimacy is often built on much less pleasurable foundations. Think of blending consciousness with someone when the currency of the relationship is, for example, pain, rage, fear, or abuse. Many people are enmeshed in this kind of intimacy and want out, but because of their personal problems and histories they have great difficulty breaking free. Nevertheless, intimacy is involved, and it could be that the deep joining they experience because of it, and the resulting love, is what keeps some involved despite their intense desire for something better.

Identifying. As already mentioned, when centering ourselves, we need to align experientially with the observer in us and to become one with it. This process has already been described. The specific procedure I use for this, which is also powerfully effective for fostering intimacy, is called *I Am That* (Mellor, 1992). The way we do this is to open ourselves to another person, accept what we experience by making ourselves fully available to it, then imagine we have turned into the other person. To do this, we imagine we look, sound, feel, taste, and smell as the other person does, that we think and act the way he or she does, that the other person's memories, history, impulses, desires, values—everything—are ours too. It is important as part of doing this also to concentrate our attention on the beauty, light, ease, and sweetness in what we experience and, at the end, to do this strongly. Throughout the process we also need to ensure we are well grounded and centered so that we digest all that is stirred up as we proceed.

Functional intimacy is the capacity to open up to others completely while experiencing and accepting fully whatever is stimulated in us so that merged consciousness (one- or two-sided) with them occurs. The identifying, grounding, and *centering procedures help us to expand the necessary capacities for doing this.*

Integrity

Integrity has to do with personal wholeness, unity, completion, and alignment. In some uses, it also has to do with moral and ethical qualities, which are relevant to a natural ethic that arises out of our realizing true integrity.

In addition, integrity is a quality that everyone has to some extent, for no one can survive without it. This is because the flow of life energy through us relies on integrity, as its fundamental nature is quintessentially integrated. That is, life energy itself is whole, united, complete, and fully in alignment with everything. It has to be, because it arises in pure beingness, the is-ness of the "universal ocean" mentioned earlier. The more integrated we are, the more integrity we have and the more abundant the flow of life energy through us because our systems are more open.

Now, if this is true, then for maximum aliveness, we need maximum integrity. We need to become fully integrated in every dimension of who we are. Thinking of the diagram again, this would mean that every aspect of it, both inside and outside the outer circle, would have moved into a state of wholeness. There would be no fragmentation, division, polarization, or contention. All aspects of ourselves and the world would become a blended, cooperating, harmonious whole.

Realizing this is, of course, a huge undertaking and, realistically, it is perhaps impractical if not impossible for most people. However, experience shows there is much to be gained by applying ourselves to the task of creating this state as fully as we can, for every advance, no matter how trivial, seems to make life easier and to make us more autonomous.

Digesting Experience. The way we can increase our oneness with everything is, in fact, quite simple. It involves using the techniques already discussed for expanding our awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy: grounding, centering, expressing, opening, accepting, and identifying. These techniques help us to draw all elements of our lives into an increasingly integrated whole by digesting all our unfinished business, contraction, splits, and conflicts—everything that is inconsistent with wholeness.

Grounding is the master key that opens all locks blocking integrity. When we become well grounded, our systems come into a wonderful

natural alignment to whatever extent we allow this to occur. This is because ultimate integrity —the fundamental union, love, and aliveness of the Infinite—underlies everything. And so it, as a state of awareness, is in and through everything, compellingly attracting us and inexorably drawing us toward itself whenever we either let go enough to allow it or actively embrace it.

We can let go or embrace experience by the simple act of returning the worldly level of our consciousness to its natural focus on physicality, that is, by becoming grounded. Grounding releases our systems to return automatically to states of greater integrity (wholeness). The process works like this: To begin, when we become grounded, our concentration is on our sensations and on the physical things and events on the outside. This concentration releases natural, often unconscious processes to do their work, processes that seem to act similarly to our digestive system. We put food into our mouths, chew it, and swallow; then, unless some problem develops, we forget it. The body automatically takes over and digests the food, withdrawing the energy and nutrients the food contains and diverting those to exactly where they are needed to feed, maintain, repair, heal, and create new physical aliveness.

With grounding, a similar digestive process seems to work on all the energy in our systems —our feelings, thoughts, memories, impulses, desires, physical vitality, and the like. Interestingly, through this process we are able to digest only what is mobilized—our free energy (Berne, 1961)—because the "digestion" is unable to have much impact on what is still held inert by our physical contractedness. What is digested, however, makes "energetic nutrients" available to our systems. These nutrients nourish us with life energy, energy that comes from those historical deposits that were previously clogging our systems. The process often brings us understanding and wisdom as well as clarity about past incidents, what to do now, and confidence in going ahead. So this whole digestive process enriches us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. And grounding is something we can use in every situation, no matter what is going on.

A simple exercise illustrates the process well. Think of a recent experience, the remnants of which you are still carrying with you. As you remember the situation, relive it as fully as you can. Do this only briefly—say for 5 to 30 seconds. Then pay attention to your physical sensations: where they are and what they are. At the same time, pay attention using your five senses to what is around you. Keep doing this for a short time. If it helps, move your body to release what has been stimulated in it. Then repeat the whole process: relive your remembered event for a short time, then ground yourself again. For a third time, relive your remembered event briefly and again get yourself well grounded. At this point, review what you experienced during the different steps.

The following results are common. After the first, second, or third repetition:

- The incident stops having the same emotional charge, it seems to become less significant.
- The incident becomes a neutral memory and may be even quite difficult to recall.
- The incident can no longer be remembered.
- The upset or other feelings and thoughts become even more intense.
- Nothing seems to change (this usually occurs less frequently than the others).

The first three results are the most common. The fourth is relatively frequent and still indicates that the grounding has helped because we have become more aware of the experience. If we have discounted experiences for a long time, digesting them may require us to pay intense attention to them for a while. Persisting with grounding is the way to do this, and moving around at the same time helps. When our feelings are related to core issues, digesting them and their roots can take months or years. However, this should not be a surprise to therapists, because we expect this in relation to such issues. By the way, we know the digestive process is near or at its end when we are left with a neutral memory or have forgotten what we started with.

In overall terms, the more past or present experiences we digest, the more integrated we become. The process enables us to cultivate a

holistic appreciation of what is going on in our lives as well as balanced ways of handling ourselves. What we are left with is a state of inner balance in which we can experience our worlds, bodies, feelings, thinking, and deeper selves as one. This naturally prompts us to respond to what is going on inside ourselves and in the world at large with openness, appreciation, attempts to bring harmony and clarity, and the fostering of aliveness, mutual respect, cooperation, and union, for these are natural responses as we increasingly expand our integrity.

Thinking in transactional analysis terms, this means, for example, digesting all our ego states, impasses, scripting, and reflexive ways of structuring time. These, as vestiges of the past, are relics that are locked in our systems. Many different techniques are used by transactional analysis therapists to digest these, including, for example, two-chair work in redecision therapy. As we digest them, their energy and their up-to-date value are released, and we are freed to act in the I-Am-here-and-now more completely. We move from a robotic kind of living —programmed by the past, bouncing from one ego state to another, or perpetually having to manage the influence of past scripting—into truly free autonomous living.

From my point of view, the end result is an integrated person, not an "integrated Adult," as referred to by Berne (1961, p. 212)—if by this he meant an ego state. As integrated people, we can become thoroughly unified with the world, our bodies, our feelings, our personhood, and our inner beings (Figure 6 depicts this state). We can become capable of centering selectively in any part of ourselves as the need arises, of deciding freely how to act, and of acting from our wholeness in all that we do. These options are available because there is a far more powerful reality that underlies and surrounds systems like transactional analysis. These systems can be powerful at their own level, but they are not in the same league as the Infinite. This reality is available to us now.

I understand that my position is not consistent with the views of those who perceive ego states and so on as having enduring reality. However, I have always understood transactional analysis as a set of perceptions and tools

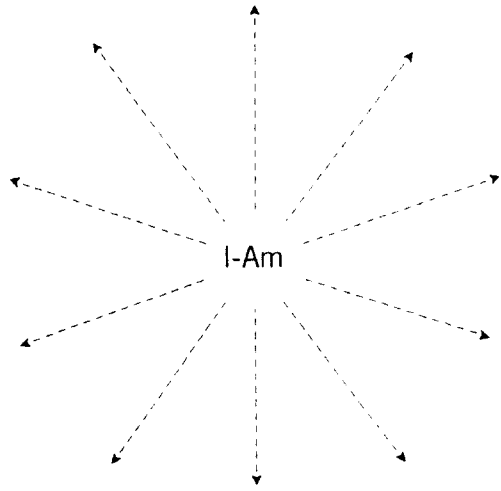

Figure 6
Autonomy

that can help us to transcend the influence of the past in order to live with the integrity that full awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy make available. Even small hints of this integrity, especially when imagined as cumulative with each "digestive act," make clear that we are capable of living freely. So, it was easy to conceive of the dismantling, dissolving, and digesting of old structures, processes, and behavior such as ego states, scripts, impasses, and games. In fact, I have had an abiding reluctance to strengthen them by assuming they will continue unchanged and so keep us all locked in the prisons they can create. I think, too, that this orientation releases us to discover, both from others and from our own efforts, powerful ways of securing real freedom.

Thus, in summary, transactional analysis and other therapeutic systems can help to reveal how we are caught, offer us ways of releasing ourselves, and identify alternative ways of living. At the same time, there is much more to us than transactional analysis or any other model can describe, and it is from that "more to us" that our freedom comes, provided we seek it. By continuing to confine ourselves to our models,

however, we simply keep ourselves "locked up." We need ways of getting ourselves outside the systems we use to explain how we are caught (including the one presented in this article) in order to free ourselves from them. Sandra Maitri (2000, pp. 1-3), in her book, and Geneen Roth (2000, pp. xi-xiii), in the foreword to that book, make the same point in relation to the enneagram. It is from outside our prison cells that we are released, not from inside, no matter how accomplished or accustomed we become to prison life. And while our worldly selves may be imprisoned, the being in each of us resides in spheres that transcend everything. By accessing the aspects of ourselves that abide there, we can embrace freedom.

For functional integrity, realizing oneness or wholeness is the goal. It is the capacity to keep integrating/digesting all aspects of experience that present themselves to us in our lives: from realms beyond space and time, from within our worldly day-to-day living, and from anything in the physical world. The basic skills used are grounding, centering, expressing, opening, accepting, and identifying.

Autonomy Revisited

To become fully autonomous, we need to have realized the full freedom and power that is inherently available to human beings in every moment of our lives. This comes to us through embracing integrity (wholeness) in all that we do and, guided by that, developing our capacities for awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy. These are the keys.

Awareness is the first key. We develop and expand our physical awareness through grounding and awareness of self through centering. Awareness releases the contractions that bind our histories to us. It releases us so life energy can flow through us with greater intensity, bringing all of its healing, releasing, and life-giving power with it as well as inner balance and freedom.

Spontaneity is the second key. We are living organisms who thrive on action, movement, and expressiveness. We need to act in accord with the life energy coursing or trickling through us if we are to experience our full potency and power. Expressiveness promotes our connection to the source of that life energy, which helps to make physis (Berne, 1972; Clarkson, 1992) a direct experience rather than an abstract idea (Thomas & Law, 2007). Also, the more expressive we are, the more our collected histories can come to the surface and be digested, which releases us into the fullness that empowered living offers us.

Intimacy, our capacity for oneness of consciousness with others, is the third key. Intimacy with people gives us practice at opening ourselves to others so we become more intuitive and learn more about ourselves by experiencing whatever in us is stimulated by them. By enabling us to become comfortable with a loss of I-entity through experiencing our we-entity with others, we discover the great freedom available in relationships through deep sharing. Intimacy also opens the well-springs of love, tenderness, and caring in our systems. All of these gains help to release us from the codependency that arises from our past unwillingness to experience another person in ourselves.

Integrity, the capacity for achieving oneness with everything, is the fourth key. Integrity is inherent in all the others, just as they are in it. Paradoxically, to develop this capacity we need to be willing seemingly to lose all, perhaps even to lose who we are, in order to find that in doing so we gain everything (Wilbur, 1991, pp. 102-103). We do this by embracing the beauty of life and learning to luxuriate in it. At the same time, by cultivating a willingness to face and experience everything, no matter how comfortable or uncomfortable doing so is, we encourage our systems to digest it all. We develop the capacity to submerge or even to drown in what may seem like overpoweringly beautiful or harrowing experiences, so we can emerge having digested every aspect of them. Our systems then expand in ways that enable us to become all of those benefits. An important accompaniment of these changes is the integrating and digesting of the divisions or thresholds that once prevailed in us (depicted in Figure 6).

People with a developed capacity for autonomy are integrated, aware, spontaneous, and intimate to a high degree. Their experience of their "selves" (body, me, I, and I-Am) in the here and now is expanded greatly, perhaps far

beyond the reaches of most people. Interestingly, associated with this, the more autonomous people become, the more the time-space-entity range in which they live extends. Directly knowing aspects of the past or future, aspects of what is going on in other locations, and sharing consciousness with other people become increasingly routine. For them, "now," "here," and "self" have expanded (see Figure 7.) Also, as seen in Figure 6, everything is progressively digested by I-Am through persistent unifying of what they experience.

Put another way, by becoming autonomous, we fully claim our own heritage. We become the integration of our past, present, and future. Instead of living with our heritage controlling or limiting us, we ingest and digest it. By digesting it, we are nourished by it and it becomes our fuel for living. This fuel is filled with knowledge, experience, understanding, wisdom, and skills and with physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual richness. And all of this is part of and keeps promoting real autonomy.

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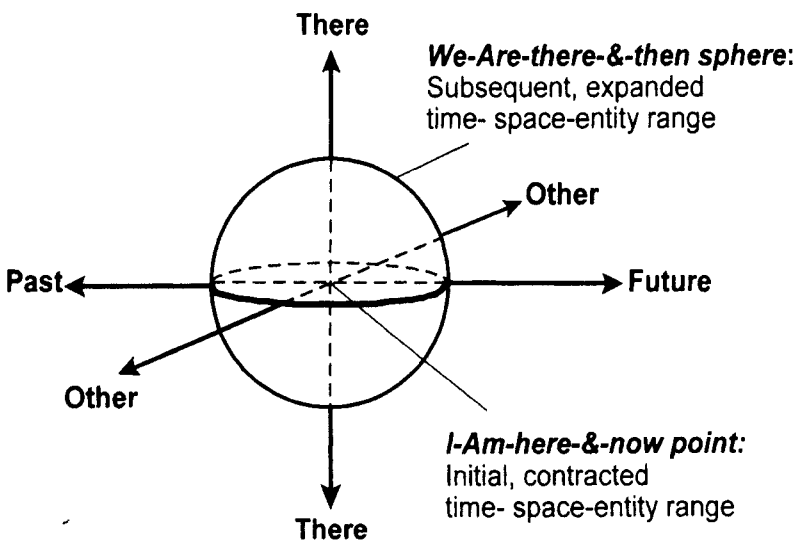

Figure 7
Time-Space-Entity Range

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