

DAVID HEY

*Travels in
Consciousness*



Travels in Consciousness

David Hey



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To Pia

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Introduction

As I started writing this book, I couldn't articulate what it was about. Yet I felt compelled to keep writing chapter after chapter, trying to come to terms with the driving force that propelled me to write. I knew that I had to finish the book, that I had something important to convey and that it was important to me to do so.

So I battled through the chapters without having any clarity of the overarching theme, of how the sections of the book fit together. The order of the chapters changed many times. Needless to say, not knowing what the book was actually about caused me considerable difficulty at times. But gradually I submitted to that shortcoming. I knew what I was trying to communicate in a particular chapter, and I was frequently reduced to tears when I couldn't get to the heart of what I wanted to say.

In particular, the chapters on the Beast, the shadow side of our personality, gave me trials. I wrote and rewrote the material, and still it wouldn't satisfy me. In the process of writing about the dark side, I was struggling with my own Beast, my own dark side. The enemy within was winning every round, it seemed to me, and sometimes I thought I would have to abandon the entire book.

One day, in the midst of these struggles, I remembered words of Osho, the spiritual master, saying that at some point in our path we need to stop struggling with the darkness, which cannot really be vanquished. We need to bring in the light. The only way to dispel the darkness *is* light. From that day on, writing the book got easier. That understanding brought me back to the light of my soul, to my heart, to the awareness of consciousness, which is the real subject of the book.

As human beings, we are in a unique situation. We are capable of experiencing different levels of consciousness. By becoming aware of consciousness itself we can begin to understand the different levels of consciousness, how they function and how they create our world.

At the most basic level of consciousness, we are identified primarily with our minds, our egos, with the content of our experience. Often we think that we *are* our minds. We live in a kind of one-dimensional consciousness that generates a one-dimensional world that I call Flatland. At that level we are focused solely on the content of consciousness, whether it is mental, emotional, psychological or phenomenal content. Usually we are struggling in that one-dimensional world to alter the content of our experience in some way. And of course we want to obtain better content—a better life, a better house or car, more fulfilling work, more satisfying relationships and so on.

At a second level of awareness, we start to become more aware of the vastness of our inner reality, the dimensions of our own subjectivity. We start to look inward, becoming more conscious of our inner experiences and how we experience reality, rather than just identifying with the content of our experience. This second level of consciousness has been given many different names by spiritual teachers. Eckhart Tolle calls it presence, J. Krishnamurti called it awareness, George Gurdjieff called it self-remembering. We start to become more aware of ourselves—aware of our own personhood and the quality of our presence in the moment. In short, we begin to develop an aware consciousness that is a function of the soul, which the Sufis sometimes called “the organism of experience.” This second level of consciousness generates a multidimensional world, the world of Essence.

And at the third level of consciousness, we become mindful of the fact that consciousness is flowing whether or not there is any content. The medium that is carrying the objects of consciousness is like pure water. This third level is called pure consciousness or universal consciousness. In touch with it, we start to become aware of Being. Pure consciousness is not identified with the mind, with thought or thinking. This state of Being puts us in touch with the whole field of existence, especially with what is beyond individual consciousness. In this experience of pure consciousness thoughts tend to slow down or disappear, and the heart and the breath become the focus of our experience. The heart has many times the electro-magnetic energy of the

brain, and for me this helps to account for the power of these experiences.

As the book took form, I realized it was more and more about consciousness. Our lives are a journey of self-discovery, whether we are searching for anything like that or not, and we will naturally experience different levels of consciousness on that journey. And the journey is largely a function of the soul.

My goal is to provide the reader with a clear understanding of what the spiritual search is about. Self-awareness is awareness of the soul, which is the seat of consciousness. My intention is to provide a better understanding of the soul, especially in its functions and capacities. In particular I am interested in giving practical, concrete expressions of how the transformation of the soul takes place.

I have located the different spiritual traditions (religions, wisdom traditions) in the nine personality types of the Enneagram to give a sense of the nature of the different spiritual paths and how they all aim at a similar goal, namely personal transformation. I felt this was also essential for understanding how the different spiritual practices and belief systems relate to each other.

Throughout the book I also have a serious global agenda, primarily because I don't think we have much of a future on this planet without some major shifts in consciousness. We are now mired in a global winner-take-all capitalism that pits all against all. This is a dog-eat-dog economic order that uses crises and catastrophes to attack the poor and enrich the super rich. The global political order now functions largely as the front line lobby for the super rich. And the angel of history is looking far away from us as we pile up disaster upon disaster.

It is a time of rapid change and growth in our technological mastery, coupled with our apparent helplessness in effectively addressing the social, economic, and environmental challenges we face. For the Chinese it was a curse to be born in such times ("May you be born in interesting times") but there are also big opportunities for transformation as the old world crumbles and the new one is born. Global transformation seems to me to be more and more dependent on us recognizing, exploring and really developing higher levels of consciousness, individually and collectively. This book is aimed at supporting that process of awakening.

1

No Man's Land

No ship exists to take you from yourself.

—Constantine Kavafis

I was living in Paris next to the Sorbonne, on the rue du Sommerard, in the Grand Hotel du Midi, which did not quite live up to the grandeur of its name. My room was on the sixth floor, up many creaking flights of stairs at the end of a grim linoleum covered hallway. With a *mansarde* roof that sloped down over my bed and hardly left any space in the place to stand up straight, this room had been my home since September (we were now in the month of May). There was a small *lavabo* and a small radiator next to it, which gave out precious little heat in the winter months. The toilet was down the hall and the shower door was locked—you had to pay extra to get the key to the shower. Books and newspapers in French and English were strewn around the tiny room, along with a few tattered blue packs of unfiltered *Gauloises* and *Gitanes* cigarettes. The low window opposite the door gave some light, but not much. The bed always remained in shadow, which suited me at the time. It was my garret, my hovel, my refuge.

Officially I was a student, but I spent little time in classes. Mostly I had spent the winter making long *Métro* trips out to the dreary outskirts of the city, where I gave English lessons to the cadres of different commercial and technical enterprises. The sky was usually a prison camp gray, the weather cold, damp and depressing. I walked the streets with my little collection of English texts and exercises, often thinking of Docteur Destouches (the author Louis Ferdinand

Céline) on his grim treks through the city, often on some terrible mission of medical futility, attempting to help one of his terminally ill patients. I'd look at the weary faces of the passersby and say to myself, "No, life hadn't turned out right for these folks—something had gone horribly wrong." Or sometimes it was Kavafis that was in my head, with his mesmerizing lines from *The City*:

You tell yourself: I'll be gone

To some other land, some other sea

To a city lovelier far than this

Could ever have been or hoped to be...

The city is a cage.

No other places, always this

Your earthly landfall, and no ship exists

To take you from yourself... [1]

Somehow I was not surprised by the level of pessimism I felt in those days in Paris, even though that mind set seemed more appropriate for old defeated men sitting on park benches. I was in my twenties and still wondering what the hell life was actually about, without having yet lived enough to really find out much about it. Still, all the reports (the books I was reading at the time) seemed to be in agreement that there was not a lot of hope in this human condition. Maybe I had taken a wrong turn somewhere and should have already been well on my way to building a colossal bank account.

Descending the stairs of the hotel, I heard the sound of chanting outside. The entrance of the hotel opened up to the street and a small park with towering chestnut trees. Beyond the park was the Sorbonne. To the right and down the street one met the somber black walls of the Musée du Cluny, and beyond that the Boulevard St Michel. I turned left toward the rue St Jacques and the noise I had heard upstairs—only to be met by a wall of students, locked arm-in-arm, slowly moving toward me up the street. "SS-CRS! SS-CRS!" was what they were chanting. It was spring and the weather was breezy and light. From the other direction, slowly moving down the rue St Jacques from the direction of the Panthéon, were the men in blue, the CRS (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité—the French riot police). They were in

full combat gear, with blue helmets and black boots, carrying black shields and clubs. And there were a lot of them.

Students and police faced each other across a space that could not have been much greater than the width of the rue du Sommerard itself. The students looked radiant in their defiance of authority. The CRS guys glanced at each other nervously, as though looking for orders. It was a tense moment. More demonstrators were pushing up from Boulevard St Germain and from the direction of the Seine. Something had to give.

Then without warning the whole line of police charged forward, wielding their clubs and bucklers like foot soldiers in a medieval battle. The crowd of demonstrators lurched backwards in a massive wave, amid screams of panic and surprise. People were scattering in every direction in order to avoid the blows of the truncheons. And the CRS were giving pursuit down the Boulevard St Germain in both directions. And suddenly the whole intersection was empty. All that was left were hundreds of shoes. Everywhere I looked, there were shoes strewn across cobblestones.

In the following days and weeks the Latin Quarter was transformed into a combat zone that pitted the police and the students against each other in pitched battles of tear gas, rock throwing, and bulldozers. It was one of the most exciting things I had ever experienced in my life. I suddenly woke up from a long winter sleep. The action usually started in the late afternoon around Place St Michel—and for several nights it went on all night long. I had to admit that building barricades and throwing rocks at the police was exhilarating. Half the paving stones of the Latin Quarter had been dug up to build the barricades. (The paving stones would be replaced by asphalt when the “uprising” was over.) There was a tremendous *camaraderie* on the streets at night. And the women were looking better and better, most of them without bras, sporting t-shirts, jeans and bandanas. I think most of us felt we were heroes fighting against a thoroughly destructive, rotten and corrupt society that was driven by greed, consumerism and war (the Vietnam war was at its apogee). Often there were fires burning along the barricades and the whole scene was incredibly cinematic and romantic to me. I loved it.

For about a week, the only time I could go back to my hotel room was during the day. In the nights it was usually unreachable because of police activity around the Sorbonne, which the police had occupied and cordoned off. My days were spent meeting friends in cafés and discussing “*la révolution*.” The student strikes gradually mushroomed

into strikes throughout France and eventually resulted in a general strike that brought down the government. My friends and I wouldn't even speak to people who were not solidly for the revolution and against everything written in the newspapers, which we considered rank capitalist horseshit. Mao's little red book was selling like hot cakes. It was exciting.

One day I met my friend Walter down by the Seine and he said, "Wow, I saw you running like a halfback through the streets last night." I was totally thrilled by this image of myself in the heat of battle. And at the same time, I wondered about this sudden appetite for destructive behavior. Mister Nice Guy had precipitously gone out the window and had been replaced by someone I had truly forgotten about, a part of myself I'd been hiding for a long time. Call it rage.

One of my friends had an assistant teaching position at the Sorbonne, and through him I met Madeleine. Her husband, a professor of history at the Sorbonne, was often out giving talks at factories, attempting to enlist the support of the workers in strikes that were beginning to take hold throughout France. I moved to a larger room with the help of Madeleine's largesse. With the luxury of a double bed, we began to spend our afternoons there together. There was an incredible feeling of liberation in the atmosphere of the Latin Quarter and my perception was that everyone seemed to be having a lot more sex than usual. Or at least I was. Although our lovemaking was often awkward and unsatisfying, Madeleine and I felt we were living the social and sexual freedom of the revolution. In any case, the revolution was working out for me. I felt alive for the first time in quite a while. And in any case, there was suddenly no time for sleep.

Then one day Madeleine came to my room with a very elevated sense of excitement. She conspiratorially pulled a small kerchief out of her jeans, while pushing her red hair to the side of her face. Dramatically she unwrapped the hanky to reveal four cartridges. "Now we've got guns," she intoned. She was proud of the bullets and the gravity and importance they lent to the political struggle.

I stood staring blankly at the cartridges, their bronze casings and death dealing tips. I was tightly wrapped in a stunned silence. I couldn't speak. I had never thought about real violence during the days we had been in the streets—never thought about a killing violence. This wasn't the Russian revolution, after all. Up to that point no one had been killed on the streets of Paris, and even when the demonstrations finally ended, one person had died, by accident it appeared, and only a handful had been seriously injured. It was my

kind of revolution, a lot of spectacle, a lot of rage, and very few casualties.

And the May Revolution did have an outcome. General strikes spread throughout France and the government did fall. Charles De Gaulle, the President of the Republic, did have to address the nation in his uniquely patronizing way and admit mistakes and changes. Worker demands were largely met. It was not exactly the Tahrir Square revolution in Egypt that brought down Mubarak, but it was something. And it represented a huge place in the psyche of our generation, giving energy to other mass protests that followed, like the ones at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago later that year.

At the time, I was not at all sure that I was willing to die for a social cause, any social cause, but I was very sure that I was unwilling to kill for such a cause. And I found myself unable to really communicate that honestly and clearly to Madeleine.

What troubled me most in that period were the main pathologies of the times, namely consumerism and war. I could not help feeling that there was something fundamentally very wrong with a society that worshipped acquisition and consumerism the way the West did. And the wars that America was pursuing in Southeast Asia only added a further, more horrible dimension to this sense of malaise in me. I could not escape the feeling that the wars and the “consumer society” were linked in some fundamental way that I could not grasp.

But more to the point was the fact that I felt wrong in my own Being, I was uncomfortable in my own skin. On one hand, I felt like I was living in a straightjacket of social convention and dishonest relationships, while on the other I was often reactive and belligerent in circumstances that demanded nothing of the kind. I felt I was living a lie, without real honesty or spontaneity, without love or joy. Sometimes I felt like I was in Hermann Hesse’s Magic Theater, from the novel *Steppenwolf*—eternally condemned for taking life too seriously.

Deep down inside of me there were two narratives running. One was this powerful foreboding that the train of history had gone off the rails, that collectively we were careening out of control in a wild ride to oblivion. The other story was that in my personal life I had lost my way, utterly and completely. I was in no man’s land—without a compass, a mentor or a friend. And the two narratives seemed to be two sides of the same reality. I could not avoid either.

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