

# SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Charles Tart and Anthony Blake

Transcript of Video-Conversation, December 1998

Blake: Usually, a distinction is made between psychotherapy and spirituality. But the usual distinction assumed years ago seems to me to be rapidly fading. Or is there something fundamentally distinct in their framework conditions?

Tart: Well, I think the distinction comes like this. In both cases we're talking about having a skill or profession to help you understand how you operate your own mind. In the case of psychotherapy, the framework you usually do this in is that you are not doing the things that normal people do to enjoy themselves, or at least you think you're not doing the things normal people do to enjoy themselves. And you want help to become normal—holding a job or having relationships or something like that. You're not trying to transcend society; you're trying to fit into society. That's the usual psychotherapy.

The spiritual growth context I would say is a broader context where you're not particularly interested in fitting better into society. You're interested in developing something higher than simply fitting into society. So I think that's a working distinction in society. But you're right. I think there are areas between where it would be hard to draw a distinction.

Blake: I think I can help you challenge your questioning. I raise this idea of normality, also defined as a social normality, which does imply some kind of right functioning – Gurdjieff's ordinary, basic, good householder. In my experience when I observe my friends, people I know, or myself, psychotherapy is what we turn to, not because these people are not functioning at all, but because they have some disturbance or questioning which they can't manage by themselves. To speak of it as a restoration of them toward normality is completely wrong.

Tart: Well, you're speaking of something that happened historically that I think was very interesting. Twenty-thirty years ago the distinction I've drawn would have covered almost all cases of psychotherapy.

Blake: Yes.

Tart: But then a very interesting thing happened starting in the '50s. A new kind of client started coming to psychotherapists who was successful by ordinary standards. They said I have a good job, my career is satisfying, I have a good marriage, I like my family, I have friends, I have respect, I have enough money and I'm *bored*. Isn't there anything more than just getting more of the ordinary?

And this was new for most psychotherapists. This was not the usual kind of client that they had and they began calling it 'existential neurosis'. It's people who in a sense had their ordinary needs satisfied enough that they had the luxury of starting to ask meaning questions. Not that you necessarily have to be rich and happy to ask meaning questions but this is what presented itself. People who were total successes by our ordinary social criteria were saying isn't there something more? This started the humanistic psychology movement—the whole idea that psychotherapy had to move beyond simply assisting people's normality and start answering this question—what is there to be born beyond the good householder as it were. Of course, historically, this was fascinating. This led to the whole human potential movement, the psychology movement as people began exploring ideas like what is authenticity? What is meaning in a larger context than just a particular social situation? And a lot of interesting things have come of that.

Blake: It does seem that the psychologists were, let's call them secular people. They were not what you might call sacred people or spiritual people.

Tart: Well at the time this first started happening there weren't any sacred people to speak of. At the time this new kind of client started coming into psychotherapists, there weren't any sacred people around to speak of. You hadn't had the influx of teachers from the

East. This was in the late '50s, early '60s. What you had were conventional western religions. You had Christianity and Judaism which were systems that told you to be good and that you were part of something higher but didn't really make it live; so that most people if they turned to the religion of their childhood or what was readily cultural and available, it was shallow. It did not satisfy them. And so they went to the psychologists and psychiatrists thinking that these people were supposed to know something about deeper meaning.

Blake: When you spoke about wanting something living, maybe it concerned where they were and who they were and not these general schemes. They thought these general schemes applied only to the collective community or something like this. It had nothing to address this individuality so it would be also correspond with the time of western individualism and seeking a way in which, right from the word go, would not be associated with religion at all

Tart: And religion really was bankrupt for a lot of people. Conventional religion was too easy to see all the flaws in, to see it was a social conditioning system and it didn't really address peoples' needs. For a few people it's always addressed their needs and those other people who had to watch what the psychotherapists termed initially existential neurosis, there's something wrong with them. Fortunately, they outgrew that classification. But these people were not finding answers in religions and conventional spirituality alone. Ten years later the situation was very different because then you had the psychedelic revolution which opened up a lot of experiences. You had eastern teachers coming in right and left and saying here's a spirituality which gives you something to do that will change you, not something that preaches at you about who you want to be. And that changed the situation.

But meanwhile humanistic psychology had been founded, so there were now relatively organized psychological techniques that opened people up to greater potentials beyond the normal and then, eventually, we had *transpersonal psychology* coming in also and here we were saying, let's take our psychology and our science and look at the spiritualities of the east and see what we can find out about them and how we get to them and so forth. So things changed quite rapidly in terms of cultural timespans.

Blake: It was just this particular time span when almost out of need something new started because people could cobble something together to find out what would happen.

Tart: And of course we're a very anti-authoritarian culture so most of us don't like some authority saying this is the truth, do it. We want to fool around. We want to find out for ourselves what works and what doesn't work. And of course I say that as a characteristic of all mature people everywhere and of course at least partially projecting because that's the way I am. I'm not very good at accepting things on authority. I want to test things out and see what actually works and doesn't work.

Blake: Okay, anything is up for grabs so to speak. Any possible realm of human experience should be accessible to almost everyone. There's not a class of experience which is peculiar to a certain class of people and governed by a certain class of methods.

Tart: A good example of that is the way Buddhism is spread in the west for instance. In the east most Buddhists do no particular spiritual practices themselves. They give alms to support monks who are the specialists to practice. Most western Buddhists are not like that at all. They want to learn to meditate. They want to learn to directly move along this path, not simply support specialists who do this kind of thing.

Blake: This was the case for Christianity too. They supported the monks because they prayed and the salvation out of prayer was transferred to them. Maybe it was a common thing.

Tart: It takes great faith to function that way. You really have to be convinced what monks and nuns are doing really is effective and so forth and you're occupying a valid place in their world but the whole world view that supported that kind of thinking began crumbling in the west. Christianity and Judaism did not work for a lot of people.

Blake: It seems to be like crumbling, failing and so on. For me it's exciting because it leads to new kinds of possibilities. Though many regard what is happening in terms of adolescence, sex, the wild, erratic, unknown, uncharted kind of thing. You often see when people talk about the crumbling of things in the west; this is part and parcel of some new spirit and vitality coming out which almost always is quite ugly.

Tart: Uh-huh, when you're starving, you'll eat anything. You don't worry about the nutritional value. If you're starving, if it's edible you'll eat it.

Now it's true there was a lot of crumbling of the old values in western civilization but historically another thing happened that we can't underestimate—that was the introduction of spirituality. When suddenly a lot of people who wanted something spiritual and who found contemporary religions completely lacking and just associated with guilt and failure and whatnot, had direct experience of what we would call traditional spiritual kinds of attainment. Maybe attainment is not quite the right word. Let's say spiritual experiences that were real to them—ideas about cosmic love for instance - suddenly was not an abstraction anymore. They experienced incredible quantities of love and life and this opened the door for the serious long-term practices we associate now mainly with the eastern religions. People have a taste as it were but there's something real here.

Now that was a mixed blessing in a way because for some people they mistook the taste for accomplishment. They didn't realize you just have a preview of what's possible. Now you have to re-create your life to make this part of your being instead of just an exotic experience that comes in and you feel very profound and the next day you're as neurotic as you ever were. But the combination of the lack and longing on the one hand and the pre-views 'blew people's minds'. That's the exact technical term that describes what happened for a lot of people. That made an enormous difference in what happened in our culture.

Blake: There was shamanism too and all those traditions which you described as part of a movement to help pave the way for the assimilation of this culture.

Tart: If I think about it, the shaman is intended to come in later—a decade later - the 'psychedelic shop' was associated with what people thought were profound mystical experiences from the more advanced traditions rather than the more direct shamanistic sides. It was probably at least 10 years later before Michael Harner really introduced shamanism as a technology that has gone on to make enormous strides in terms of satisfying a lot of people.

Blake: That's a '70 event.

Tart: Yes.

Blake: Another extraordinary thing—this is what's strange about it, empirically - the random use of the technology of mind-altering drugs at a time there weren't as many spiritual guides as there are now, or traditions.

Tart: I don't know how much I'd accept the word "randomly" in what you said.

Blake: You had the early example of William James and later Aldous Huxley but for most people surely they were just finding out as they go?

Tart: I supposed it was bound to happen. I really don't know whether it was something that was historically necessary or relatively random or if it was an action from some higher spiritual level based on an idea of - here's this very dumb bunch of people who need a major stimulus to get them to notice that their self-importance. I don't know that we'll ever know but I can see it all those ways.

Blake: Okay, so in that story psychotherapy changes around the 1950s from the Freudian sense of making people into functioning beings of society into something which is essentially transformative and then there was the impact of drugs soon happening about 10 years later which gave personal access to experiences which previously had existed only in books.

Tart: Right.

Blake: So this also in a way has democratized the whole process. You and I can look into this.

Tart: Right. Mystical experience was no longer the province of a few highly specialized people who were totally different from you and I. It seemed to be available on a large scale. But let's go back to psychotherapy now because I think there's another important thing here. A lot of people, once they discovered some kind of practical spiritual path that they could try to go along, gave up on psychotherapy or never got involved with psychotherapy in the first place.

And they said, okay, here's Buddhism or Yoga or what have you. I would just look at this and it's now clear to me that in a lot of cases spiritual work did not have very much success because people went to spirituality often as a way of trying to bypass ordinary psychological developmental tasks they need to accomplish.

So for instance if you have difficulty holding a job really because of your ineffective and neurotic habits, who wants to face that when you can say I'm destined for higher things. I don't need to be concerned with holding down a job and the attempt of bypassing ordinary developmental tasks really throws a scanner in the works of the spiritual path. People put their emphasis on some spiritual practice when they need to learn how to talk to people and be less shy, be less neurotic, hold a job, things like that.

Blake: This is going back in part to your previous model about associating psychotherapy with achieving some kind of normal of functioning and spiritualists being beyond that.

Tart: No, actually I'm putting the two together.

Blake: It's going to be very important to clarify this.

Tart: But let's put it this way. Here we are in life. We have a certain energy, a certain intelligence and life tasks ranging from the most mundane, sitting down and paying the bills to challenges in love and interpersonal relationships to spiritual tasks and so forth. So we have a certain amount of energy and a certain amount of intelligence in all these tasks.

Now you can shift the emphasis to ordinary life tasks and say how well do you do them and talk about psychotherapy in the kind of ordinary historical sense that I talked about or you can put the emphasis over on the things you can actual label spiritual but in point of fact there's a whole continuum here.

When you attempt to do any kind of spiritual practice, you don't just suddenly totally leave your life. That is there too. If you have ordinary habits as it were that interfere with ordinary accomplishments chances are those ordinary habits are going to interfere with your spiritual accomplishments.

Blake: A habit is a habit.

Tart: Right, a way of using energy or a way of distorting your perception is going to persist in a variety of tasks.

Blake: Then there is *transference*.

Tart: Yes, I think we've talked before about my concern that the problem of transference is just as important on the spiritual path as in the ordinary life. This whole I think quite amazing recognition that primarily as children we're affected by a god and goddess and we form these irrational attitudes toward this mom and dad that then later in life we think we've outgrown though in point of fact we frequently project it onto other people. In addition to whatever rational conscious relationship we have with another adult, in some cases this is the magic mom, this is the magic dad and there's this irrational element in there.

Now when this happens on the spiritual path what often happens is that the spiritual teacher becomes the magic mommy or daddy. This gives their words and actions immense power and it looks like this kind of student makes fantastic progress. I found my teacher here. She is wonderful. The things they do affect me so much.

It's like a person projects this magic mommy, magic daddy who understands me, who loves, who's all powerful, wonderful teacher and they seem to progress extremely rapidly. The instructions for exercises works so well. They have marvelous experiences in change and so forth and this is a transference in a psychoanalytic sense. It's power to the magic mommy or daddy has been transferred.

Now that works very well up to a point. But there are negative aspects of transference as well as positive aspects of transference. The teacher suddenly does something that breaks this transference. It goes from positive to negative and suddenly 'that charlatan has been exploiting me and ruining my entire life' and all the apparent learning and movement that happened before is gone. The person is back where they were or perhaps even worse off.

Now my experience has been that most people who are spiritual teachers don't understand transference. They put it down to, you know, students are so enthusiastic because I'm so wonderful. It seems like a sensible logical thing to do. Or the student has suddenly become disloyal and negative because it's their bad karma and their fault.

I think where psychotherapy can make marvelous contributions someday is to make teachers and students aware of the transference problem and how to work with it in a psychotherapeutic kind of sense so a teacher can be perceived for what they actually are and what they're actually teaching the student. And you get also counter transference from teachers on the students because you don't have to be perfect to be a worthwhile teacher but your transferences on your students can distort what you do. So if we can work on both sides of this relationship and have more realistic relationships between teachers and students I think we'd have a lot more really serious progress instead of in a sense getting lost in an ordinary developmental task of learning to have adult relationships with people without the transference projections.

Blake: In western culture there's this concern with problems of transference that have to do with the detail in a sense of what's going on. By detail I mean it has to do specifically with this teacher and those students in a specific situation. Whereas when you use such a word as spiritual practice or teaching or something like this it evokes all the sense of the standard issue. It doesn't concern itself with the detail. It seems to me that in the detail the western mind is beginning to find things which were not apparent, which were not recorded, which were not investigated, which were not researched in a lot of the things in eastern traditions or whatever. Maybe this is simply because we have the money and time to do so but it's also a mental attitude that the concrete particulars in this moment can be noticed, we have specific ingredients which do not occur in other cases.

Now in a normal, if I can use the vague term normal, kind of spiritual setting, it's irrelevant. It's water under the bridge. It doesn't really matter about what's essential because it has the ideology of what's essential, what's higher, what is the source, all of these which point to generalities and away from the in particular. I'm waving the flag again for western culture.

Tart: And your ordinary spiritual teaching situation is culture-specific. There's a tradition that exists in a particular culture and the students are from that culture and these transference relationships in other ordinary psychological systems maybe just as strong but they're totally invisible to people. They don't have any concept of them. That doesn't make them any less important.

Blake: I was trying to go along with you, trying to merge the two sides of the psychotherapy and what used to be called psychotherapy here and spirituality there. Because the way in which the spiritual teaching is being done should change and it's not just oh, we've got some limitations in the spiritual part that's dealt with from the psychotherapeutic part. What you're actually doing in the spiritual transmission or education, whatever it is, has to be in itself different.

Tart: Unless of course you set your criteria for students for your spiritual path so high in terms of ordinary psychological maturing they have no problem. Good luck.

Blake: Yes, because this is something I came across 20 years ago, and I accepted the theme which was just go and sort yourself out and then come do the work. And if you had a kind of emotional problem, a difficulty, this was something to be almost hidden, avoided or shelved.

Tart: There was a tendency to hide it.

Blake: Hide it because it made you not worthy. You didn't raise it to the teacher because it would put you in a bad light as you have suggested. And all of that had to be ignored because this spirituality, this work, whatever it is occupied some other level.

Tart: It's a great theory but in practice it often gets you into trouble. Now some teachers of course attempt to deal with every problem their students have. Someone might be say an excellent meditation teacher or an excellent fourth grade teacher but they may not be qualified to do psychotherapy kind of work which may be what is necessary for certain students at certain times.

I mean, I can envision a path where a really alert spiritual teacher would realize some times uh, this is a psychological developmental problem, refer this guy to therapist X who is good at this sort of thing and get that out of the way and then you can go on with it. But to encourage people into denying in order to make themselves think I'm worthy to work at this level, that's not it.

Something you said gave me a thought here. I want to go look at psychotherapy in the *fourth way*. To grossly oversimplify, the basic practice of the fourth way is about observing oneself. It's about creating a quality of consciousness that's not totally absorbed in what the machinery is doing but it gives an observer semi-detachment—I don't like any of these words particularly—so you're bigger than your particular manifestation and in general I think this is probably the most powerful growth trend in psychology. It does wonders for people.

But now from that perspective, what is psychotherapy? Psychotherapy is hiring an expert to be your observing self. It's hiring someone who is paying close attention to you and your mental processes as you display them but who is not as involved because she is somebody else and this that gives her a wider perspective so occasionally she can intervene and make you aware of things you're not able to self observe yourself.

My own experience at self observation is that, yes, in principle you do it all but in point of fact there are areas where your mind just automatically blurs out and you don't see. That's where your false personality is strong, where your habits are very strong. At that point an expert can say why are you clutching your fists when you're talking about being peaceful? A psychotherapist is acting like a specialized observer.

Blake: We were speaking about a spiritual teacher who supposedly has a higher consciousness or rapid consciousness or something like that so for example in the particular fourth way exercise 'the stop exercise' is able to make an intervention into the emotional psyche of the student, hopefully or supposedly from the more detached standpoint. But it's exactly the same form as your description of the psychotherapist—noticing something, drawing attention to it, in the student. Yes. I find it interesting that there are people, with very different conceptual and practical skills—values and orientation—are beginning to address more and more the same questions.

Tart: Although their values of orientation are very important. There's no such thing in a sense as a general purpose therapist or spiritual teacher. They all have particular systems they're working on - so a fourth way teacher is liable to try to stop you and make you observe for instance some things that are of theoretical value within a fourth way perspective. A Freudian is going to try to make you aware of things within a Freudian perspective.

Now that's all very valuable, especially if you eventually learn two things. One thing is that the particular perspective a teacher or therapist works on is helpful but it's not the final truth. It's a way of widening your perspective and the other thing of course is you

have to learn to do this yourself. Some people get dependent upon therapists to constantly tell them...

Blake: Absolutely, it's just the same as a spiritual...

Tart: But there's a limit to how much you can farm out developing your own observing self. You've got to develop it yourself. But that specialist's help is so valuable.

Blake: The question is what is being set up between your specialist and psychotherapist and the client, the student or whatever name it has—this has been some concern to me. I have been making the assumption that in psychotherapy there's a more conscious contracting of the relationship between two people than it tends to happen in a spiritual group and I would say this is because in a spiritual group you get such a load of ideological content which often far outweighs the particular concerns of that person or this person coming into a contract with each other. But in psychotherapy there is some opportunity of the people determining what are you going to do, what am I going to do, and so on.

Blake: As best that's true. Like a good therapist, for instance, will make it clear, I'm not going to tell you what your values should be. I will help you clarify your processes and in that processes you may come to understand what's your own deeper values are, but I'm not going to impose my values on you. And of course a spiritual teacher, in some extent, may be imposing particular values which may or may not suit the student.

At times it's helpful. At times we recognize I'm in a total mess. The best thing I can do at the moment is listen to somebody who is more adaptive, more spiritual than me. But you are right. The psychotherapy contract can often be much clearer than the spiritual teacher contract and that gives it a certain power and clarity which is very useful.

Blake: Then to me it's a very, very important point. I remember I tried to get a conversation with John Bennett about this. 'You are a higher consciousness than me; can you really see more of my realities than I can and if so, how can I interact with you about this?' I tried to raise these questions; we didn't get very far with it.

Tart: I hate to hear the question raised in such an absolute form.

Blake: Why, what other form, because it's a beginning form? This is the issue.

Tart: Let me rephrase it. Are you wiser than me in every single aspect of life? That's a very heavy question.

Blake: It is a heavy question.

Tart: I think it would be safer to put it in the form of - do you at least have moments of prior or clearer consciousness that you can help me find because when you put it in the absolute form, that's the kind of thing that fosters transference. The magical daddy will handle everything for me.

Blake: But not if it is actually vocalized in words.

Tart: Yes, if you make it clear, that helps.

Blake: The question, what is the deal here in terms of your supposed access to consciousness? What does it actually mean in terms of you and me?

Tart: I wouldn't ask it the way you describe it. I would feel like I'm putting the teacher on the spot and encouraging them to possibly identify with egotistical elements of their own psyche.

Blake: Of course one of the things in this context was that he was a rare person. I've often said he would accept questioning from students. I often look back and I think of questions like this which began probing towards what the hell is the deal? What is the contract? What is the relationship, can you address this? It was always very sensitive and never followed through, never. And because it's not followed through, what happens is that the ideology comes through in projection, fantasy, transference.

Tart: Which can evoke counter transference on the teacher's part which can ruin the

teacher.

Blake: Yes indeed, they have their problems, my God.

Tart: When I had the experience of starting—I hate to call it a fourth way—starting a psychological course, I eventually gave it up because I was aware that at a certain point, no matter how much I made it clear to the students that I am not an enlightened person - I'd been at it for a while and I know a few things and I might help - no matter how clear I made it, it came to a certain point where people would transfer. People would ask me a question and there was this look in their eyes and this body posture. And I would honestly say I don't know. And that look and posture that they'd think I'd given them a profound answer and it would be scary and I tried to explain to them, no, there's nothing profound about not knowing. I just don't know. And that look would increase--God, he's so humble. No! I just don't know.

So I deliberately ended the group I had when I saw that thing starting to get out of control because I wasn't trying to have people have ridiculous ideas about me. I'd done what I could to be useful and now it's time to draw it to a close.

Blake: That was an extraordinary step to make.

Tart: That's the scary part. I mean, a part of me thought it was wonderful if people were really paying attention to me. Gee, maybe I'm much more awake and enlightened than I thought. Whoa! Hold on.

Now I think—and I would say in an objective sense—I taught people a lot of useful things. Okay. There was that level of reality but how often does it happen that someone in the role of teacher and is indeed teaching useful things that are in some sense at a higher level than where people ordinarily come from, but then this transference thing started to come in, the teacher got inflated, the students got inflated and disaster happened further down the road. I think it happens too often and that's why I don't separate psychotherapy from spirituality. That's why I think it's important that we have to bring these two fields together in some sense to both make the spiritual path more effective and less likely to lead to disaster and to also make sure that psychotherapy does not settle back in too many instances, adjusting someone to be normal when normal is neurotic conformity.

Blake: There's a lot more things to say about that. The point about designing development. I have an overall question I want to address about group psychology which is a very, very important thing. You can see how this person and the students is often designed for disaster. But in psychotherapy if you have two or three facilitators they can check on each other because they are aware of the problem—it's designed in.

Tart: Psychotherapists have peers and they have ethics committees which spiritual teachers don't.

Blake: Though you don't expect the police to police the police.

Tart: It's an over-generalization when you say it that way. Some people work in a tradition like Buddhism for instance, they have peers. They have some people they regard as more advanced and that they can talk to. How well they actually use them is another question but in principle it's there. In the fourth way, where's the peer review? Where's the club for fourth grade teachers where they all have a beer and then say, you know, you treat your students like shit. Where's that?

Blake: They are all in separate quarters. I'll tell you in terms of my own experience, there's got to be some independent person, a third force if you like, who is able to say, uh-uh, or raise a difficult question or even insist on a review assessment.

Tart: It's a big deal to ask. I thought about starting a group. A teacher I was studying with encouraged me to start a group but I resisted for a long time but finally I thought, well, I am aware of transference problems. Not only that, this will only be one small part of my life and I will have a lot of other parts of my life where I have peers who are alert and who will notice if my head gets too swollen. Otherwise I'm not sure I want to take the chance. The power of being teacher is astronomical. I'm very happy being a teacher on the

university level, okay, where the students don't expect too much of me and I'm not responsible for the ultimate well being of their souls, no problem in there.

But in what you call the spiritual growth group, the psychological possibilities for disaster are great, you know that. Too many teachers don't know that. For example, I gave a talk a few years ago and my talk was very well received. In fact, they had about several thousand people in the audience and they were many bursts of applause during my talk. And I started getting high and a part of me was thinking, god, I'm being profound. I thought I was intelligent but I must really be *very* intelligent and touching people deeply and it took me awhile afterwards to calm down and realize maybe to some degree I was being manipulated by this. It is a technique being used to get people caught up in their feelings of cleverness and success and so forth and I'm not that profound. Slow down, sober up here. It was an emotional high. And this kind of emotional intellectual high can be so seductive. For instance, I think we can both probably think of teachers in fourth way traditions or other traditions who in terms of their ideas are absolutely wonderful. They know everything, they can connect everything but if you think about their level of being, it's not very much. I mean they're as neurotic as the rest of us when you get away from brilliant answers but they get intoxicated by this. Students can be intoxicating. Here's somebody who can answer your every question!

Blake: The ideas show. Cosmology brought to you.

Tart: This was really brought home to me when I tried to do Aikido. I got a teacher in and started. Let's face it, I had a black belt in talking by the time I was 10 years old! I could explain the principles I could point out the relationships between philosophies and spiritual traditions and psychological ideas much better than he could. He'd get me to explain to the class. But part of me kept noticing something. I couldn't actually *do* anything and he could toss me across the room with his little finger. And it took a long while for me to be reminded that Aikido is a knowledge that's manifested in your body, not in words. It's art talking art. It took me years to learn to not get intoxicated by the words that would come to my head and to learn to be present and pay attention in my body to what I was doing and learn that this kind of knowledge. It took me years to do that. But it was an excellent lesson for me that having the right words does not necessarily mean you're understanding at all.

I know a lot of people who are like I was - in the academic world as well as in the spiritual teaching world. They seem to know everything. They can't do a damn thing.

Blake: With all these people with their partialities like you and your Aikido master you really need both of you to make the whole and this should be the joy of it.

Tart: Let me flesh out that same example. For the founder of Aikido, Aikido was part of his spiritual path. It was a deep and genuine spiritual path. Now you have a second generation of Aikido teachers. Some of them are present and what they're teaching is a spiritual path, a complete spiritual path and yet there are some of them I have met who are still at the emotional level of adolescent children. I feel sorry for people who think they are getting a complete spiritual path. At the training level, it can be fantastic. But if they think they are getting their intellect or their emotional brains developed they are making a bad mistake.

: But of course, in a sense we shouldn't be too hard on this because if you're stuck in an ordinary neurosis, your life doesn't have any meaning, to some extent to find an even incomplete spiritual path is misrepresented may be a step forward. It may create new problems that you have to solve but it may at least let you move.

Blake: Does this operate as a disturbing force of the system—is it energy, we can make use of?

Tart: If we wait for a perfect spiritual teacher we'll probably die first.

Well, you know as I've gotten older and hopefully wiser—I'm not sure whether I'm wiser or just more relaxed—I've found that I'm really looking more at the bottom line of various

systems and saying, do people who go through them become more perceptive and more intelligent and more compassionate or do they become caught in their belief systems? If a person actually becomes kinder and wiser, I think it's a great spiritual system.

Sometimes I think about this in terms of judging a spiritual system by its graduates. When we think of a university on an ordinary level you can say well, they've got laboratories and libraries and marble buildings and all that but where you really decide what's a great university is what do the graduates do in life after they get out?

Well, you know, this is extrapolating from the ordinary but if you apply this to some groups and spiritual systems, the first thing you notice you simply don't have any graduates at all. I've begun to regard this as a very suspicious sign. If all the energy is always turned in totally, that's kind of incestuous you know.

Do people manifest in the ordinary world as kinder and wiser people as a result or not? If they don't, I'm suspicious of what goes on.

Blake: Are you meaning to apply some pragmatic measures?

Tart: To some degree. There may be hidden things to do, marvelous things for the world that are not at all manifested. I can't think of making any judgments about them.

Blake: There are many *stories* about that sort of thing . . .

Tart: They are great stories, inspiring. The criteria that I apply to myself is now when I meet people, do I actually pay more attention to them as to what they are actually saying? Do I at least use a little effort to be helpful at times instead of just tell me telling them what's good for them? If I get negative answers I decide I'm getting intoxicated by spiritual ideas and just getting a more fashionable neurosis instead of a less fashionable one. That's not the direction I want to go. I hope not too many people follow that direction.

Blake: What works for me is when some observation has become for me part of life. But maybe I get a real insight into what actually is going on just once or twice a year and that's it.

Tart: It's funny. I was talking to my class at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology yesterday. I just completed a quarter which I taught the basic self-observation and my final word was that you pay more attention to yourself. You create an observance - however you want to express it - and when you first do this you sometimes have marvelous experiences in clarity and presence and so forth and it's so easy to think that feeling a certain way is the point of it.

But that's not the practice. The practice is trying to be more conscious of your life in general and that means it's going to keep changing all the time and if you're not alert to that, you'll change the process of self-observation and self-remembering to what shall I do to make myself feel good and that's not it. That's going for a kind of happiness which can easily be psychologically distorted.

I think it would be wonderful if self-observation always made me feel like wow, I'm awake, I'm present, I'm so clear, I know the truth. Sometimes it makes me realize how screwed up I am and that's the point

Blake: Real observation gives you facts.

Tart: Here again I think there is a good connection with psychotherapy here because psychotherapy in a sense has a lot of its roots in science where the goal is truth. In an idealistic sense, forgetting the people, science is about trying to find out more and more of the truth regardless of what you want things to be, regardless of your preferences and developing systematic ways of observing the world and taking account of your biases so you don't distort.

The fourth way is compatible with this. I'm the experiment. I'm trying to understand my manifestations better. To see what lies behind the manifestations. When I get an idea about what lies behind the surface take that as a theory to test. Science and this kind of

spirituality go together very nicely although for most people they don't see it this way; but psychotherapy having its roots in a scientific condition does have this tendency to say let's be careful not to get an ideology going here. Let's see if we're actually doing something about this.

In psychotherapy we have a lot of studies that have been done to test the effectiveness of psychotherapy. Now if we jump over to the things we're calling spiritual, do you know of any studies that test them? They have simply said, well some people dropped out but they've got bad karma or there's something wrong with them.

Blake: Yes, the student always gets blamed for not being worthy and the teacher and the system protected in that way.

Tart: If you have a system of psychotherapy and a study shows that it's not very effective, the proper response to that is to look at your system of psychotherapy. I'll give you another example. A friend who is such a good meditation teacher has been often telling me that if you teach basic meditation to 100 people they all would say oh, this is good. I got something important here. I want to make this a part of my life. You come back a year later. If 5 percent of them are still doing any regular meditation you are doing well. Now this is the experience of almost all western meditation teachers.

Blake: Because of some kind of mismatch between the students and the method?

Tart: Yes. Now, in the east this has been observed from time immemorial and the attitude there is well, the student did not have good enough karma to stick with the meditation. Maybe he'll come around again in 10 lifetimes down the road. I can't help being the skeptic here. If I start a school and 95 percent of my students drop out within a year, I'm going to ask about my teaching methods. What is it that I'm not doing to have such an incredibly high drop-out rate?

Blake: But what the hell is the contract going on in a school which teaches meditation? The problem is that no negotiation is going on between the students and the authorities in this system about the goals. This man is sitting here and he is a master of meditation, right? He's truly a master; he transmits it effectively but...

Tart: But you couldn't understand his goals because you're so unenlightened!

Blake: It could be true. On the part of the students, maybe the master didn't understand what the students' goals are and what they are looking for because he can only offer what he can offer. There's a need for some kind of more conscious agreement between the mutual parties involved. I mean every now and then, once a week, think about meditation or what it means because it's transformed as you go on - you get older, you get more experiences. The whole nature of what you call in practice change in capacity to paying attention doesn't remain the same. So when people come together they may have to work on agreeing what it is all about.

Tart: We can reframe that very nicely. If you take on a teacher with a capital "T" you have high ideals, some of which you're not probably very clear to yourself. You have hidden psychological agendas which may not be clear to yourself and there's a lot of projection onto the teacher as hopefully he knows what's really right and what isn't. And that is a very big contract that allows for all sorts of misunderstandings and problems.

My friend is interested in reformulating the laws as part of his adaptation of some eastern techniques. An alternative model is to have a personal trainer. But of course if you hire a personal trainer you have a very clear understanding of what you expect the trainer to do so just by that kind of reformulation you automatically have a clearer understanding of what the relationship is about on both sides.

I'm going to be very interested to see if he teaches meditation more effectively. I suspect he's already doing that. When I look back on my attempts to learn meditation over 40 years, I sometimes billed myself as an expert on the problems of learning to meditate because I'd been lousy at it and experienced all the problems one after another and from one perspective well maybe that's my karma and I had to go through all the mistakes

before I was able to learn. But maybe I just didn't find a teacher who understood how to teach me and when I finally found somebody who could tailor it to fit me, I learned a lot faster.

Now again, this is this kind of western psychotherapeutic scientific sort of approach, how you tailor things to the individual student. You said earlier that a spiritual teacher comes from a cultural condition and teaches the way he was taught. And that may work very well for certain people but a lot of other people may drop out who could have learned valuable things.

Blake: There is something—which is very hard to define – maybe a challenge, I think there is something like a challenge in spirituality. Which is more than life - god or the absolute—the soul—but there's something more than just people living their lives with whatever powers they might learn and in that mainly ideological sense you get something, occasionally with people it does something for them—it challenges them—brings them to the transpersonal. That's very important because going back to the fourth way, there's an existential...

Tart: I said I was oversimplifying it.

Blake: All right. The existential part of it doesn't make sense unless people have an objective task to do together—and this creates its own set of problems but it's that which counterbalances personal development. And these seemingly absurd new expectations and possibilities are put in front of people which they would never address otherwise. I'm trying to explore. There's something introduced in spiritual which wouldn't be—you wouldn't expect to find it in the psychotherapeutic.

Tart: What you're going to try to put energy to strive into your life is controlled by two things. One is the reality of the way the world is and the other is your beliefs about what reality is. Now in the traditional spiritual model ... you tend to be preoccupied with your own physical, biological, social needs but in point of fact your real identity is included in something much bigger. Something that extends beyond your skin, beyond your social boundaries and so forth. It's transpersonal, it's spiritual, something like that and it's part of a universe that has a purpose. It's inherently right. That's sort of the generalized spiritual view and then gives the practical details of what's preventing you from understanding that in your life.

Psychotherapy grows more out of a western *scientific* view. I'm not saying scientific, I'm saying scientific. What happens when science becomes a dogmatic religion? It says, you ain't where your student is. Your mind is nothing but the electric chemical activity of your nervous system and that's all there is to it. Every thought, every feeling, every experience - it's just an objective material fact in a universe that's just a meaningless collection of facts. Big bang? There's no reason for it. It just happened. Things condensed into molecules and they bump into each other for a zillion years, some of them became self replicating and here we are and it doesn't mean anything, it's just physics. And when you die, your brain turns into mush and your consciousness is all gone.

Now that view, that scientific view is very powerful in western science. Most people don't realize just how powerful it is. But if you really believe that what are you going to put your energies into? I wouldn't sit around and meditate. I'd get some drug to make me feel good. If I'm anxious I'd get an antidepressant or something like that. I'll promote medical research to prolong life and health and I'd try to get all the pleasure I can and try not to get punished by society. If that's what I truly believe, then that's what I'd try to do.

This is what we are taught in numerous direct and indirect ways is the nature of reality. That limitation really controls your energy. Now a lot of psychotherapy is controlled by that. In a sort of existential way well we'll make the best of a bad situation. We'll try to adjust and at least we'll be happy and take our Prozac and then we die.

That doesn't encourage you to invest in spiritual orientation. From that point of view, which is very powerful and pervasive, the spiritual activities we engage in are an illusion

because we can't face reality. I can't face the fact that I'm going to die and my life doesn't really mean anything anyway, it's just all chemistry so I invent a soul and a god and a plan and evolution and purpose and all that. Too bad I'm not tough enough to face things.

To me, what's really important in what is being focused in my career world is to say wait a minute, if you genuinely use science as a search for truth—not just fitting in with fashion and all sorts of things but really look at the data—human beings do things, manifest things which don't fit this reductionistic point of view. Human beings manifest things like telepathic communication. There's no reasonable explanation. Human beings occasionally do things like know the future when it's inherently unpredictable. Now wait a minute. If a mind in some sense is not all that tightly localized then maybe when somebody has a mystical experience and knows that the universe is inherently intelligent, alive and loving, I'm not going to dismiss that as just an illusion. Maybe that's the way it really is.

So this scientific bridging that I've done in my research with parapsychology, altered states and so on, to me is extremely important providing fuel for the spiritual search. For people who have simple faith and it's not corroded by the scientific view which says it's all an illusion, more power to them. I'm even jealous of such people. But most of us in the modern world are exposed to this denial of our spiritual nature by scientism

The only way out that I see is to use the best methods of science to show as I've just talked about that we have excellent scientific evidence to prove there really is a basis, a factual basis for a spiritual life and then we have a lot more confidence in getting on with the spiritual growth that will make that more than just an idea, more than just a goal but something new in our life.

Blake: You are introducing some interesting kind of criteria here that have to be understood.

Tart: If my mind is not always limited to inside this skull box and yours is not always limited to that and someone says we should treat each other well because there's a deep spiritual level at which we are one, I've got evidence to show that maybe that's true. Whereas if all we want is a physical self, the idea that we're all one doesn't make sense. I'm locked up in here; you're locked up in there.

Blake: How to address this nonlocality of mind in terms of what you might do?

Tart: Suppose your own mind is trying to survive in some sense. Suppose there is some sort of survival of some aspect. That gives you a very different perspective on how you're going to use your energies than if that's not possible.

So let's say I have some bad habit now which gets me into a moderate amount of trouble but it's too much trouble doing psychotherapeutic work or to work to do anything about it. And besides you know, I'm dying in another 20, 30 years, why take the trouble.

Suppose you take the perspective, this bad habit may be with me for another 10,000 years causing me trouble. It's worth the effort to do something about it. And that way a spiritual perspective that sees meaning and continuity inspires you to work on yourself in a way that's quite different from the view that this is it and there's probably nothing afterwards.

Blake: I want to get at this, the arising and shaping of such explanations because traditionally we have people looking to the things that which were being offered in the marketplace. In the past you had just a few experts on religion or some kind of spiritual explanation. But what is very exciting for me is that now there is so much of that around, just like a whole medley or smorgasbord of offerings and the processing of all this stuff becomes quite important because maybe people can get clogged or blocked or confused but the sheer processing through them of what's bombarding them from different sources is very important. How is it going to be done because it can't be done just by following spiritual X because it probably doesn't work. So I am being more and more attracted to

this issue of people getting together with without authority or hierarchy and experiencing the processing of their beliefs in that moment.

Now this is I think the most exciting thing in group psychology. That people can be facilitated to do this with a very minimum of structure and begin to learn on the job. What usually was done by those people who then became the experts.

Tart: When I teach my mind transference class in the Institute of Transference Psychology I have students for a single quarter. Okay. They know they're learning something from me in the academic setting, even though it's much more experiential than what they usually do.

They don't look upon me as a spiritual teacher. They look upon me as somebody who knows something useful and undoubtedly has some limitations as they will find out that. I introduce them to basic self observations and then largely what the class is about is people coming together and being able to say that while trying to be more present and mindful than usual, I observed such and such in myself and sharing that.

And someone else trying to listen to that in a more mindful present kind of place, being able to say, oh, yeah, this happens to me too in this kind of way and so forth and it's very much like the sort of thing you just proposed in a sense that people had a tool for being more present and clear about their own on-going psychological processes and share it with each other to learn from each other rather than my saying, I'm an authority. Here's the way things are.

I constantly keep coming back. You've got a tool to finding things out. Not that you have instant access to THE truth or something like that. But you have a way of focusing the bridge or more into the present and let you see some things more clearly and by sharing that with open-minded, honest fashion with each other you're helping each other. The teaching function is spread out. It's not just a teacher passing on wisdom.

Blake: And even yet more in terms of the shaping of belief because in a way belief is anticipatory of experience. It can be a very intentional projection in to the world, into reality itself...

Tart: Which then distorts your perception to give you a pseudo-validation of your belief.

Blake: It can do. But you know, you're doing it all the time in some way or another. But I think it does go beyond in a sense, we don't have the language for it. It may go slightly beyond the experiential because it's cognitive, it's projective in the way I've just tried to describe and so the shaping is something which people I feel now are just beginning to address. Even if you took a practice like self observation the way it would be expressed and the context, the language it would, you would use for it would tend to be fall into a certain range or pattern or reference.

But in its turn the whole pattern would be questioned. We're speaking about how experience can all be questioned and there's a chance for people to do it. It's amazingly exciting because look at us now in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It's a chaotic age, it's almost like a great bean bag. All this stuff from all the ages thrown into it—all kinds of things—I see the future thrown into it.

Tart: We obviously see it as a great opportunity and some people see it as a horror because it distracts people from the true tradition. And both of us are right.

Blake: That's another part of it, you see. It's when you begin to question the higher being person, the person you choose and all this kind of thing, then you eventually have to take in a kind of reality in which different people involved in practically the same thing are seeing it quite differently. Not because any of them is mistaken but because they are people.

Tart: Yes, group psychotherapy can't process this projectory. When they work properly you get a greater spaciousness from having several minds working at different aspects of your experience than sharing with only one person.

Blake: And you only find out about this kind of thing by doing it. And it's so empirical and it's so on the job and nobody's an expert in it because next day they've got to do it and then you start all over again.

Tart: My experience is taking part in these processes is usually very different from the expectations. I have my biases ahead of time.

Blake: I have one final topic. Part of the reason of our getting together was our interest in this book by John Bennett *A Spiritual Psychology* which in itself raises these questions and probes into them. He included of course in his writing a third component—there's material, there's spiritual and he added a third—the supernatural. Now this is something you don't get spoken of these days very often because in our culture of course, Christianity would have been the depository for that but even the Church was ashamed of the supernatural and didn't want to have anything to do with it. For Bennett the central mystery was the will or active role. What can we do and why—and the next moment can do something more than I could a moment before. And some person would call this grace and start speaking about these mysterious things and so on.

In other words it's just to say that maybe rather like you get in Hinduism where you had three states of consciousness and somebody says oh yes, and there is a fourth state beyond – *turiya* - no, there's a fifth state which is beyond all this: whatever the system, it may be western or Indo European, whatever the system you have to break its rules, go beyond it. This is something to do with the relation between psychotherapy and spirituality because spiritualists go beyond psychology, beyond the psyche.

Tart: I'm glad you raised this because I think it brings us around to put a nice end to this. My bias is to think I'm an intelligent person, as practical and competent and am progressing in my life because of my insights and will and attention and accomplishments and so forth. And partly that's true which gives excellent basis for working it up into a very large delusion. It's only partly true. It's true for all of us. It's very sensible. You make the effort. You do what you can.

But I have to recognize there is another level of reality. Call it spiritualist, supernatural, call it whatever, where sometimes the universe—call it whatever you want to call it—does intervene and change my direction and sometimes with my kicking and screaming. Sometimes recognizing thank god for the input. So Gurdjieff said work as if everything depends on work and pray as if everything depends on prayer. It makes sense to me.

When I go in to teach a group or something like that, I'm going to use all my talents and as best as I can figure out the situation and do what I think is best but beforehand I'm going to say a little prayer in order of please God, don't let me screw up and hurt anybody and even mention the right direction if that will help because I do what I think is best to please. It sounds sort of non-sectarian and lawyerly when I put it that way . . .

Blake: I'm glad you introduced the notion of prayer because I think it's a definite act. One can ask and one can pray and this is an act you make. No matter how symbolic you make it you can say you're praying for somebody you know not who, you know not how or anything about that but still because you make that act it matters.

Tart: And it would be nice if you know your prayers are heard. At times I find myself very envious of people who think that God answers their prayers in very clear fashion. I don't know what happens 99.9 percent of the time. I have a faith in something bigger and I ask for guidance and then I do the best I can given what I understand because what else can I do. What else can I do?

Blake: The other thing you do a bit of checking with other people.

Tart: Now I would like to end our session with a kind of prayer by giving a dedication from the Tibetan traditions. That is what I use in my own practices and that is that by virtue of our aspirations and efforts to understand each other and come up with ideas or concepts that could be useful to people besides ourselves, that I would pray that all beings would find happiness and causes happiness, that they would be free from sorrow and the

causes of sorrow. That they would never be separated from the sacred happiness, the source of whatever divine reality is to keep that connection and in a practical Buddhist sense that they would learn to live without too much attachment and too much aggression.