

CHAPTER FOUR:ANNE ARMSTRONGEMPIRICAL OPENINGS TO INTUITIVE REALMS: AN EXAMPLE¹

I met Ann and Jim Armstrong for the first time in 1985 in a memorable month-long workshop, led by Stanislav and Christina Grof, on "The Frontiers of New Consciousness Research: The Dawning of a New Paradigm" at the Esalen Institute, in Big Sur, California. ² They were guest speakers among various leading experts and teachers in the fields of consciousness research and what is now known as "new science". Anne was invited as a highly-regarded psychic and transpersonal counselor and was joined by her husband who, as an integral part and major support of her psychic development, shares in her spiritual work and appears with her in public events.

Anne Armstrong's personal history is representative of the sort of spiritual awakening that emerges in a series of rather bizarre symptoms and manifestations and in the absence of interpretive and supportive environment or circumstances. The birth of a new consciousness, Anne says, like any birth, can be very bizarre. It can be out of character. There can be a number of crises or emergencies that accompany that birth.

In the workshop Anne shared her engaging life story about the unfolding of what she refers to as her spiritual awakening, and told how this led to her become the psychic counselor that she is today. Some of her experiences illustrate, in her view, one way in which a spiritual opening can occur. She also offered us some amazingly simple exercises for the training of intuition which we tried individually, with partners, and as a group. The fascinating and entertaining sessions culminated in demonstrations in which a high number of participants were able, on several occasions, to locate and

identify hidden objects that were being held out of sight or were able to "tune into" another's life-circumstances, problems or issues--and with a degree of achievement well beyond the probability of merely guessing.

Even though Anne comes from a Catholic background, she attributes the beginning of what she identifies today as her spiritual unfolding to a series of bizarre experiences she had when she was 13 years old. These consisted of feelings of dissociation from her body--of seeing herself as if from the "outside" and were accompanied by vision problems and feelings of disorientation. These experiences occurred at a time when there appeared to be no one in the helping professions to turn to for help or understanding, and she was diagnosed as having had a nervous breakdown with symptoms bordering on psychopathology.

Her "high school sweetheart" and husband, Jim, had a long standing interest in metaphysics and esoteric experience and during high school he and Anne would frequently discuss esoteric subjects, meditation, parapsychology, and spiritual development. After they got married, Anne enrolled in spiritual development classes offered by the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Oceanside, California and began to immerse herself in esoteric studies and to meditate twice a day. And then:

Within a few months I began to have rather strange experiences, but since I'd had some unusual ones when I was younger I did not think much about it. The "nervous breakdown" I had at 13 was accompanied by vision problems and feelings of disorientation. But now I had a slightly different set of symptoms. I felt dizzy and disoriented when I walked around, but when I lay down I felt as if she-I were separating into two parts. I know now that I was having out-of-body experiences. There weren't any gurus or spiritual teachers in the small Utah village where we lived. There was no one to tell me that this was "normal" behavior. Every time I became still or concentrated on anything the separation would begin. I felt as if every cell in my body was speeding up. Suddenly all would become quiet and I would find one part of myself looking at some other part. It would happen at a lecture or a movie just as easily as when I was sitting home meditating. Once I got out of my body there was absolute stillness. It was a

beautiful feeling, but I could not enjoy it because I was so frightened. I did not know if I was dead, insane, having delusions, or what. If I was out of my body, could I get back in?

I did all the logical things, like go to medical doctors, take pills and shots. They told me that I was neurotic, which I already knew, but they did not tell me that I was having a spiritual emergency, or a spiritual emergence.

At some point, Anne linked these experiences with her meditation as, for the first time, she could not manage to successfully handle life's many tribulations and continue to function. There were more than a few of these episodes. Plagued by migraine headaches since she was seven years old and, in spite of having asthma, hay fever, and a nervous breakdown, Anne had nevertheless always managed to continue to function until then. She therefore discontinued her esoteric studies and meditation practice and took up gardening and cooking--"Anything to get grounded and centered." But the symptoms did not subside.

I still felt as if my feet were several inches off the ground; I was nauseous most of the time and the migraine headaches that I'd had for 15 or 16 years became more frequent and more intense until I literally lived with a headache. The only medication I could take was aspirin--and that didn't help much. They became so intense that I thought I was going out of my mind. I was checked for brain tumor and everything else that could cause such pain but the doctors could find no cause.

During the following fifteen years and after many moves, they ended up in Sacramento, California. A family moved in next door, and the wife and Anne soon found that they had a common ailment: migraine headaches. One day the neighbor came, elated--she had no more headaches! She had been working with a local doctor who, using hypnosis, had regressed her to a time when she'd had a traumatic confrontation with her mother. In only a few of these sessions, the neighbor's headaches were gone. Naturally, she wanted Anne to see her doctor and get rid of her own migraine headaches.

This sounded fine to me on the surface but I had read in some of the esoteric literature that one should not turn one's control over to anyone- especially a hypnotist. To help allay my misgivings, this neighbor loaned me a do-it-yourself book on hypnotism. One rainy Sunday afternoon I asked Jim if he would hypnotize me. He thought that the headaches had finally driven me out of my mind. But when finally he took me seriously, I explained what had happened to our neighbor, but that I did not want just anyone to hypnotize me. I trusted him and wanted him to do it. I then went on to say that I even had a little book that he could read to tell him how to do it.

After reading a couple of pages on "techniques" in the middle of the book, Jim proceeded to give Anne her first hypnosis session. It ended with a fit of hysteria when he asked Anne about some childhood events, but he managed to return her to sanity. Even when they tried it again, "after Jim read a couple more pages," they could not get past the hysterical crying. So they concluded that hypnosis would not work either. "Little did we know that this was the beginning, not the conclusion..." The following week, through a chain of interesting circumstances, they joined a local "hypnosis club" and spent all their spare time learning and practicing hypnotic skills in the succeeding weeks. Then one night,

... while I was in an altered state of consciousness Jim assured me that part of my being knew the cause of the headaches and that all we needed was the key. Then, with a small degree of skill and a lot of luck, Jim regressed me into what appeared to be a past life, which for therapeutic reasons we both treated as if it was real. It was as if I had awakened in the body of a 230-pound male, 2,000 years ago, on a torture rack in a Roman dungeon. But at the same time I was aware of Anne.

In addition to the practice therapy Jim and Anne were doing, Anne began to see a hypnotherapist, Irene, for a couple of private sessions each week. The two of them tried many times to take her backwards to the birth of that particular "life" and forward to

death in an attempt to get a hold on the traumatic events and to get Anne to identify the Roman soldier that was directing the torture.

I would describe the fancy Roman uniform from the sandals right up to the chin strap on the helmet and then jump over the face and describe the helmet with its brilliant plume, but never looked at the face of the Roman officer. For weeks I thus avoided identifying my torturer. Finally, after weeks of therapy, I identified the Roman officer, my torturer and killer, as Jim!

I do not know if this was my "past life" but it was a great therapeutic tool that allowed me to say "I'm being tortured". I have always allowed everyone to run my life, but would never speak up- just resent it. I felt that I had no power, that I was always a victim. Jim didn't know because I never hinted at my discomfort. But this gave me a vehicle to speak up, to be courageous, to be straightforward and honest for the first time in my life.

Both Jim and Irene continued with the therapy, digging into this apparent "past life", looking for answers. Almost immediately after identifying her torturer, and talking about it, the headaches began to become less frequent, until in about six months or less Anne was totally free of migraine headaches. Little by little she began to tap into other "past lives" or personalities and would perform feats under hypnosis that she could not do in her normal awakened state. Anne was accessing then three personalities and each one of them allowed her to reclaim different parts and traits of herself.

Unknowingly, almost inadvertently, Anne may have been activating certain psychic abilities. Irene, the hypnotherapist, started giving her material from Edgar Cayce, perhaps the world's best documented psychic.

The hypnotic induction was a way of returning me to the meditative state I had abandoned 15 years prior. Through hypnosis I had been tricked into entering a similar state, but by mechanical means. Within a couple of months, I found I no longer needed to be hypnotized to do my therapy. I would just lie or sit down, close my eyes, take a couple of deep breaths and I was ready to go to work. I continued to do intensive therapy with both Jim and Irene for about a year. At the end of that time we all realized that my health was significantly improved. The migraine headaches were gone, the goiter became dormant, I no longer needed a hysterectomy,

and Spring came and went with virtually no hay fever or asthma. So we knew we were on the right track.

Irene was well aware that for many months during the therapy Anne was pretty much "running the show", asking questions and getting her own answers, and also that Anne was starting to exhibit considerable psychic talent. So, one day, the hypnotherapist gave Anne the name of one of her clients' and asked her to get information to heal that client.

I took the folder, closed my eyes and in a few moments had the feeling that there were several compartments in my head. I "went into" each one of them and described what I felt. Within 45 minutes I described and acted out several personalities: a socialite with no children and a wealthy life style, a dowdy housewife, a real flirt, and a frustrated artist. Irene told me that I had just described the behavior of that client during therapy and in her daily life. More than that, I started to gain insights as to why the client needed to exhibit these several personalities.

Thus Anne started to work with Irene behind the scenes in difficult cases and after a year she gained enough courage to meet the clients face-to-face. This is how she began the transpersonal counseling that she has now been doing for over thirty years. Anne Armstrong specializes in the area of relationships, giving readings to people, training people who are experiencing psychic openings, and helping them tap into their intuitive resources--and she assists them in the process so that it proceeds in a stable manner, less disruptive than in the case of her own experience.

Another phase of her therapy, or training, started about a year or so after her first hypnotic session:

By that time, it was apparent that my awareness had moved beyond the familiar, so-called "real world". It had become very obvious that I had access to information not normally available to our familiar brain/mind system. I could sense presences beyond my normal range

of insight and I could ask a question and the answer would instantly become apparent. Then one day during my morning meditation I had the feeling of a strong presence and the definite telepathic communication that I was to set aside two to three hours a day for "instruction". The next day the instruction begun. I sensed the presence of some form of intelligence beyond my own, communicating to me telepathically by way of a sense of "knowing."

The instruction began with all kinds of breath training. Anne was also telepathically guided to move her body into strange positions which, only later, she identified as yogic asanas. She was also given instruction on food, sleep habits, thought and emotional behavior, and meditation techniques--instruction in what she refers to as "how to live a more productive life." Finding no conflict between those instructions and her own common sense and reason, and in recognition of her significant improvement in health over the previous year, Anne continued to follow this guidance and instruction. It was, to her, "like having my own private guru."

Within a month or so the breathing patterns and yoga asanas became very complicated. Jim bought and borrowed books on yoga and pranayama just to see what instructions were being given. In most cases we could identify the positions. I became aware of a presence, during the instruction, which appeared to me as an image of a beautiful Hindu face. Eventually I got a message, through a meditation, that I had the knowledge to continue without any body else's guidance. I never saw this presence again.

Their neighbors began to hear about her remarkable recovery and the interesting things they were doing. Soon a small informal group began to gather--the "Friday Night Group." They would have random discussion until everyone arrived and would then meditate for ten or fifteen minutes, asking to be given information that would be useful for their spiritual growth at that time in their lives.

When I was centered, and felt the impetus, I would begin to deliver a spontaneous lecture seemingly tailored to the needs of the group. Over the next several years the subjects covered

included esoteric teachings, food, psychology, and commentary on economic, political and social situations, but all slanted toward how to live a more useful, productive life. I do not recall any information being given in those lectures that was obviously untrue or misleading. The esoteric material, although going beyond most texts that I had seen, was in basic agreement with classic esoteric writings, whether Christian mysticism, the Cabbalah, Tantric Buddhism, the esoteric aspects of Mohammedanism and Hinduism, or the teachings of Don Juan. During the transmission I was totally present, but did little or no thinking...However, there seemed to be different levels of awareness and transmission...I found that the more I cleaned my own psychological material the better the quality of the lecture material became.

Anne recalls only one unpleasant experience in this area, 25 or 30 years earlier when, submitting to a deep trance a "hell-fire-and-damnation" preacher took over for thirty minutes and she voiced quite unkind things. Since then she learned about the choice she has when delivering information- of "bargaining" with it in the sense that she would transmit it if it fits with her total personality, values, logic, and common sense, while also serving the highest spiritual good.

I basically believe that humanity can obtain a lot of help from this more subtle realm if it will prepare itself to receive that help. But it takes discrimination. Material received from this psychic realm must be judged just as critically, or more so, than that from more ordinary sources.

The intensive training that began a year or so after her first experiment with altered states of consciousness continued for about 6 years. In addition to the spontaneous lecture work Anne did with the Friday Night Group, Jim and Anne made themselves available several times during the week for additional instructions. Most of this material has served as a guideline for their spiritual practice and way of life.

So we know beyond a shadow of doubt that it is possible to reach beyond the brain/mind system and obtain information useful for one's own development- physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. I want to say again that this is an area for discrimination, logical examination and

skepticism. Budding psychics are not messengers from God. They are just members of the human race that for one reason or another have glimpsed a realm beyond our physical reality. Since most people want someone else to solve their problems and tell them how to live their lives, the budding psychic has a fertile field to till. There are millions of people out there just waiting to feed their ego and give them all the power they will accept. So if someone starts to open up psychically, they should discretely use the information they receive (after it passes the tests of logic and harmlessness) to improve their own life. When they have become a significantly better person as a result of their psychic/intuitive abilities, they can consider sharing with others--if they are asked to share.

Today Anne and Jim have created their own network for esoteric and spiritual teachings (Azoth), and they give workshops on intuition training all over the country and overseas, sometimes jointly with other well known psychics. Besides Anne's practice of transpersonal counseling, she and Jim participate in many interdisciplinary meetings and conferences which include scientists, psychologists, spiritual teachers, healers of various sorts, and artists. Among the organizations where they lecture and train people on a regular basis are the Institute of Esalen, at Big Sur, and the *Spiritual Emergence Network* at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Menlo Park (which Stan and Christina Grof originally founded in 1980, at the Esalen Institute).

Commentary:

The discovery of intuition and experience of psi phenomena, as illustrated here by the space explorers, Dr. Harman, and Anne Armstrong, were typical of the experience (though in varying degrees of intensity or disruption) of countless people who were a part of this emerging new consciousness. All these events and experiences imply a changed view of human potential. They suggest that the dimensions of the mind are much wider than dominant behavioristic or psychoanalytical schools in psychology--and science in general--have believed.

Anne Armstrong's story highlights some common aspects of an awakening to intuitive modes of functioning, particularly when this occurs spontaneously and in the absence of interpretive systems to help make it intelligible and of support networks that help normalize rather than criticize, pathologize, or even penalize.

Recent studies of psychic phenomena and of the development of intuition suggest that hers is not a bizarre or singular case. Dr. Stan Grof, a central theoretician in the field of transpersonal psychology and a leading world authority on methodologies of expansion of consciousness (including LSD) was well aware of similar "bizarre" symptomatology that may characterize what he calls "crises of psycho-spiritual transformation", particularly when there is no support nor interpretive system for them. *The Spiritual Emergency* (later, *Emergence*) *Network* (SEN), that Dr. Grof and his wife, Christina, founded in 1980, was precisely intended to provide support, guidance and referrals to people who are going through transpersonal crises.

I did interview other people in the context of this work who report a similar sense of confusion about the boundaries of the self associated with a spontaneous intuitive awakening. They often report a host of mild to severe physical symptoms.³ Also, when people experience intuitive access to events and associated memories, or access to other people's thoughts or issues, crossing linear time and space and the parameters of Newtonian-Cartesian thought, they report a sense of disorientation. When these episodes are neither validated nor accepted in their usual world, they usually experience a great deal of fear as well.

People who have these experiences, as well as the contemporary research professionals who investigate them, identify many of these experiences as a normal aspect of spiritual transformation.⁴ But this, of course, was not the case during the 1940s and 1950s in our country, when they were more often than not diagnosed and treated as psychopathology. The support of Anne's husband, who had a long standing interest in and acquaintance with esoteric subjects, the eventual availability (during the

1960s) of hypnotherapy, and the availability of material on Yoga and Eastern disciplines were crucial in making her experiences meaningful, valid and contributive to the productive life that Anne now leads.

There is evidence to suggest that many people have intuitive or mystical experiences but, not knowing how to integrate them, tend to deny or repress them.⁵ It was only during the 1960s, when large numbers of people (particularly among the youth of the "counterculture") in the United States, and certainly in California, were claiming experiences of a deep personal sense of inner knowing--and thus effectively challenging the old authority--that reports of psychic, intuitive, and spiritual experiences dramatically increased. These were occurring in the context of diverse inducers, or triggers, that could range from the practice of yoga or meditation to the use of consciousness-expanding drugs, and to intense emotional or aesthetic experiences.⁶

The sudden popularity of such phenomena was accompanied by a gradually increasing interest in them on the part of professional investigators and practitioners. Evidence was found in ancient cosmologies, and particularly in the esoteric cores of most world religions, that intuitive phenomena were simply an additional aspect of a universal human potential and that, like all human capabilities and possibilities, they needed careful training and guidance.

Furthermore, both in ancient sources and in contemporary reports, there seemed to be a link between the discovery of intuitive states and the development of spiritual or transcendental states--as if when reaching for self-actualization a sort of spiritual consciousness develops.

In 1969, the *Association of Transpersonal Psychology* was formed in California, by many of the original founders of the Association of Humanistic Psychology.⁷ Here there was an attempt to incorporate "alternative" or "altered" states of consciousness into the range of healthy human experience and evolution and to learn about the difference between pathology and true intuition and psychic and spiritual "gifts"--areas

in which traditional psychiatry and psychoanalysis were notably unhelpful.⁸ The way that Transpersonal Psychology followed after Humanistic Psychology further suggests the spiritual potential latent in the development of our natural powers as humans.

Today there is a growing body of literature that documents how widespread psychic phenomena truly are. In fact, in the last decades they are becoming more legitimized, as the growth of this field of study, namely "paranormal functioning" (or, simply, "psi phenomena") attests.⁹ And this growing interest is evident not only among leading edge institutions for the study of consciousness (such as IONS and Azoth) but also among highly prestigious universities and more conventional institutions. The growing body of contemporary research in this area today is an indication that the existence of psi phenomena is not in question--only their mechanisms.

It is essential, however, to clarify that the development and use of psychic capacities and extra-ordinary powers in the physical, psychic or mental realms of human functioning cannot be ascribed to spirituality (Keys, 1985). These developments do not necessarily testify to high moral character, but only to the development of some latent natural and universal human capacity. Very ordinary and even very dangerous persons can develop most, if not all, of the psi capacities now under general investigation.¹⁰ Indeed, many articulators of planetary consciousness included in this work are very aware of the dangers inherent in the attraction of psychic powers and their development for personal benefit or for manipulation. Doug Boyd expresses a serious concern that most seemingly contemporary spiritual activity in our country is actually an expression of a search for psychic bounties--an interest in the gratification and enhancement of the individual self. He considers this glamorized approach a hindrance to the emergence of a true spirituality, the essence of which is a transcending of the selfish interests of the individual. Yet there is a general trust that eventually, as people truly establish connection with their inner selves, they will recognize and honor the interconnectedness of all beings and all of life.

Planetary activists included in this work suggest that when intuition, inner knowing and psychic abilities are put to the service of "that which is best for all of life" they are indeed a powerful contribution to the transition and the emerging society--a planetary society founded on the perception of inner nature and interconnectedness. They appear to agree that knowledge of and access to natural powers implies responsibility to others--to the community and to the world--and this appears to agree with the view and the practice of traditional shamans, medicine people, lamas, yogis, and healers all over the world.

¹ The present account is based on several of Anne Armstrong's talks and on an autobiographical narration that she provided to the Spiritual Emergency Network, at Palo Alto (California) --which was originally founded by Stan and Christina Grof, while they were residents scholars in the Esalen Institute, at Big Sur.

² This was a fascinating and memorable experience, where we met leading thinkers and articulators of the emerging New Paradigm (such biologist Rupert Sheldrake, neurosurgeon Karl Primbram, physicist Fritjof Capra), other leading cutting-edge figures (such as the Benedictine monk, Brother David Steindl-Rast) or people in cutting-edge fields (like Kenneth Ring, in Thanatology; Russel Targ and Anne Armstrong, in psychic exploration and research; Jack Korenfield, in Vipassana Buddhism and meditation). Stan Grof presented at length his own view of the human psyche throughout the whole workshop, and we also participated in the method of holotropic therapy that he and his wife designed in order to facilitate expansive states of consciousness.

³ Greg Schelkun, a very respected psychic healer from the San Rafael city of Marin County, California--trained in the Phillipines by an internationally recognized local "psychic surgeon"--also reported about 15 years of daily migraine headaches which disappeared as his psychic healing abilities became manifest and functional. His intuitive opening was also associated with visions. Personal communication.

⁴ In their extensive world travels and networking, Dr. Stan and Christina Grof met an increasing number of people who were, in their words, experiencing episodes of non-ordinary states of consciousness accompanied by various emotional, perceptual and psychosomatic manifestations. That is, these persons may have been undergoing altered states of consciousness, disorientation, strange bodily sensations and other symptoms traditionally associated with mental disorders. What was unique about these people, however, was that their process had a significant transpersonal or spiritual emphasis. Thus, they may have been experiencing near-death or dramatic death and (re)birth sequences, mythological and archetypal phenomena, out-of-body experiences, incidences of synchronicities or extrasensory perception, states of mystical union, identification with cosmic consciousness, and others. Many of these people were otherwise enjoying good physical and emotional health,

led functional and productive lives, and they tended "to see their condition as an inner psychological process and approach it in an internalized way." They thus tended to form an adequate working relationship with helpers, maintain cooperation and be actively involved in the identification of what aspects of their experiences may be projections of the psyche vis a vis direct intuitions of transpersonal realities: Their general behavior, besides the particular crisis they were undergoing, did not seem to fit the conventional psychiatric label of "pathology", even though this line was not always so clear. Dr. Stanislav Grof, personal communication.

⁵ See Andrew Greeley, 1988.

⁶ Christina Grof, for ex., started her whole psychic and spiritual path from an intense practice of yoga--specifically designed to still the mind, listen to the body and activate life energies. After being significantly involved in an intense daily yoga practice which resulted in Christina's becoming a yoga instructor--with no metaphysical expectations--she began experiencing strange visions and symptoms that seemed bizarre and scared her. Too afraid to expose herself, she flew to New York to confide in her former teacher, noted mythologist Joseph Campbell, who directed her to Stan Grof, at Esalen Institute. Not too long after that they were married and jointly exploring the area of consciousness and spiritual awakening in the West. Christina Grof, personal communication.

⁷ Maslow himself, who was actively involved in the formation of Humanistic Psychology and called it the "Third Force" in Psychology (after Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism) referred to Transpersonal psychology as the "Fourth Force."

⁸ This was done by the initiative of many of those who originally founded Humanistic Psychology (such as Maslow, Suttich, Grof and others). The synthesis between religion and science is part of scientific psychology. Many beginners of mainstream scientific psychology were religious people, such as Floyd and Gordon Allport, and so were William James and G. Stanley Hall. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, was explicitly atheist, and not to be religious was a requirement for certification as a psychoanalyst.

Transpersonal, and more among the humanistic, psychologists are gathering increasing evidence of psychospiritual development as a natural phase of human development, a step closer to self actualization--in Maslow's terms, in William James's spirit.

⁹ Formerly referred to as belonging to the realm of parapsychology, psychic phenomena or extra-sensory perception (ESP), these emerging areas of observation, experimentation and research include phenomena such as "out of body experiences", psychokinesis-- the capacity to move objects without touching them, telepathy-- the ability to receive and transmits thoughts without communicating them by any of the conventional channels (words, writings, etc), clairvoyance (now called "remote viewing"), precognition-- to know the results of an action beforehand, and related others.

¹⁰ Examples of such hazards are real-estate enterprises based on prophecies of doom and of "safe areas" from it; attempts to use psi-phenomena in warfare by both the U.S. and the former USSR and in a great part of the "mind control behavior modification" multimillion dollar business in the US: in subliminal content advertising, in factories and offices, and in the programs and leadership of some pseudo-spiritual groups. Donald Keys, *Earth at Omega: The Passage to Planetization*. (New York: Branden Publishing Co., Inc. 1985).