

Beyond a Shared Reality: Experience of the Creator and of Cosmic Consciousness

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In the most dramatic and all-encompassing transpersonal experiences, boundaries seem to dissolve and distinctions between ourselves and other people, objects, or forces disappear. We experience oneness and encounter, or even fully identify with, the creative principle of the universe. Depending on the extent to which we still maintain the sense of our everyday identity, we can experience this encounter either as an awed witness or as the creative force itself. This creative principle may take a variety of forms. Sometimes it appears as a personified Demiurge, or creator.... More frequently, the creative force of the universe is perceived as something beyond any form - pure consciousness endowed with supreme intelligence and the capacity to create any and all experiential worlds, seen and unseen...

Experiences of cosmic consciousness have been described in many religious scriptures throughout history. The ultimate creative principle has been known by many names-Brahman in Hinduism, Dharmakaya in Mahayana Buddhism, the Tao in Taoism, Pneuma in Christian mysticism, Allah in Sufism, and Kether in the Kabbalah. The basic message in the mystical traditions has been that not only can we experientially connect with the creative principle but each of us, in a sense, is the creative principle. This is possible because all boundaries in the universe are ultimately illusory, arbitrary, and can therefore be transcended. The best known expression of this perennial wisdom is the famous statement *Tat tvam asi* (or "Thou art That," you are the Godhead) found in the ancient Indian Upanishads. Modern research in non-ordinary states of consciousness has brought strong support for this understanding of human nature, since it shows beyond any doubt that transcendent states of consciousness can be reached by a variety of consciousness-expanding methods.

When we experience identification with the cosmic consciousness, we have the feeling of enfolding the totality of existence within us, and of comprehending the Reality that underlies all realities. We have a profound sense that we are in connection with the supreme and ultimate principle of all Being. In this state, it is absolutely clear that this principle is the ultimate and the only mystery; once its existence is accepted, everything else can be understood from it and explained. The experience of cosmic consciousness is boundless, unfathomable, and beyond expression. Yet, even a short experiential exposure to it satisfies fully our craving for understanding. All questions about the mysteries of life seem to be answered and there is no need to go any further. Communicating this to those who have not had this experience is neither possible nor necessary. It becomes a self-validating and deeply personal experience.

The languages of cultures with ancient spiritual traditions that are based on experiential self-exploration (such as Chinese, Tibetan, or Sanskrit) have a rich and sophisticated vocabulary describing various mystical states of consciousness. However, even then the terms adequately convey the meaning only if we can relate them to a personal experience. In Indian spiritual and philosophical scriptures, there is the concept of Saccidananda, which describes the experience of cosmic consciousness. This composite word is made up of three roots: *sat*, meaning existence; *chit*, meaning awareness or intelligence; and *ananda*, meaning bliss. Thus, Saccidananda suggests "blissful intelligent awareness of existence." It is an experience devoid of any concrete content, yet the being it represents possesses the capacity for creating infinite experiential worlds.

If the experience of encountering the ultimate creative force cannot be described in everyday language, poetry perhaps comes closer to doing it justice, though even poetry flails far short. The spiritual poetry of Rumi, Omar Khayyam, Kabir, Kahlil Gibran, Sri Aurobindo, or Saint Hildegard von Bingen comes closest to expressing this experience.

In this type of experience we can get profound insights into the process of creation and even feel the forces and impulses involved. We can sense an impelling abundance of creative energy, immense love and compassion, an irresistible artistic impulse, boundless curiosity, and a passion for experimentation. This identification with the creative energy of the cosmos often inspires a new attitude toward life and becomes the foundation for a new understanding of existence. Most people feel exalted as they discover their real cosmic status and gain an entirely new perspective on their daily problems. Many leave behind all feelings of being victimized by their everyday trials and tribulations, or even by such global problems as economic strife and war, knowing that on another level they are active participants in the creation of a universal drama.

Occasionally, people can have negative reactions to cosmic insights of this kind. Some find it difficult to return to their everyday consciousnesses and assume roles that seem trivial in light of what they have just experienced. Others may feel disappointed because of a realization that as human beings they are just actors in a predetermined cosmic play and they resist awakening to that fact. Peoples' reactions and insights to this experience can range from feeling disappointed to feeling that they have an important role to play in the continuing evolution of consciousness. There do not seem to be simple answers to the questions that arise as a result of the experience of cosmic consciousness; ultimately the answer we get is that our own individualized search for answers is an integral part of the evolution of cosmic consciousness.

The experience of cosmic consciousness provides important insights for deepening our understanding of the highest forms of creativity. The literature on creativity is filled with examples of extraordinary artistic, scientific, philosophical, and religious inspiration that came from a transpersonal source and that occurred in non-ordinary states of consciousness. Even the shortest "flashes" of mystical insight often trigger extraordinary results. The degree to which people participate in these moments of insight and discovery vary greatly from one individual to another.