

# PHOENIX



**Journal of Transpersonal Anthropology**

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# PHOENIX Journal of Transpersonal Anthropology

Volume VIII, Nos. 1 & 2

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Transpersonal Anthropology considers the evolving (open-ended, cumulative) processes of human physical, conceptual and cooperative realms of reality. We consider species-wide cultural and individual levels of existence, including states of ordinary observed behavior, paranormal abilities and creative consciousness as they exist in fact and as a further potential of human development.

*Philip S. Staniford*

Transpersonal Anthropology is a science which investigates the relationship between consciousness and culture, altered states of mind research, and the integration of mind, culture and personality. As a science it incorporates, transcends, and contributes to the traditional discipline of Anthropology and its various sub-areas.

*Ronald L. Campbell*

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# RE-FRAMING

This is a rather special issue of the **Phoenix**, for several reasons. For one thing, it is the first one after a hiatus of many months; for another, it represents a great deal of thought and planning on the part of the Editor (Shirley Lee), the Co-Editor for this special issue (Tom Condon), and Associate Editors Richard Conviser (who did all the word processing and provided much input on the final decision-making) and Patricia Hunt-Perry, who has provided help and encouragement along the way. Finally, this is the last issue of **Phoenix** in its present format. (Next year, it will appear as an unbound quarterly journal.)

Especially, however, this is our offering of thanks for the intellectual and spiritual adventuring left to us as a legacy by our former Association President, Philip S. Staniford, pioneer transpersonal anthropologist whose untimely and unexpected death at our annual meeting, on March 25, 1983, left us shocked, grieving and confused. As we have struggled to regain balance once again, we have become increasingly aware of how much richness he has left those of us who have a deep interest in the transpersonal. But this issue of the journal is not a litany of grief for one who has left us, so much as a grateful acknowledgement for what he has left with us. For those who knew Philip, this issue will be particularly meaningful, especially Part I, **Death and Transformation**. For those who did not, it will be meaningful because of the issues it raises on the topics of re-framing, transformation, and Tibetan Buddhism, as well as one man's personal experiences in re-framing his life, and meeting death head-on.

In addition, this is the first **Phoenix** issue for which we have embarked on a more computerized route. The use of personal computer plus a new laser printing device, which translates Macintosh word processing into camera-ready book type, has made the production of this issue an adventure in a new direction. A few wrinkles have not been ironed out but in the main it has proved satisfactory.

Finally, as work has progressed we have been forced to the conclusion that what started out as a single issue has re-framed itself into a double one.

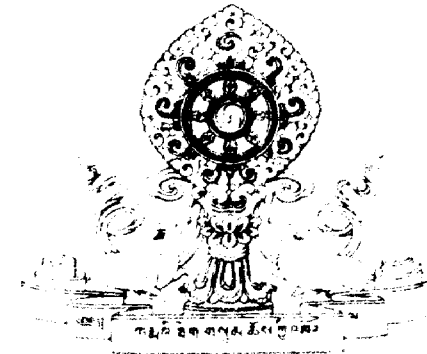
Thomas R. Condon  
Shirley W. Lee

## I. DEATH AND TRANSFORMATION

### Prologos:

#### The Karmapa

Our **Prologos** concerns the beginning of Philip Staniford's transpersonal search, in his own words and from the pages of an early issue of this journal. Those first efforts, struggling with the heat, noise and overcrowding of India, led to what he called *primary trauma*, but ultimately to an important spiritual experience in the presence of the Karmapa, then sixteenth head of the ancient Tibetan Buddhist Kagyu lineage. Then seven years later -- seven important years in Philip's transpersonal journey -- in 1981, the Karmapa died. The importance of the death of the Karmapa, and the Tibetan Buddhist view of death, is described by Laura Roth, who was present at an extraordinary ceremony at the Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, the cremation ceremony of the Karmapa.



(Traditional logo of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, the Seat of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa in America, in Woodstock, New York)

## Primary Trauma, and Meeting the Karmapa

(Excerpts from "Transpersonal Anthropology" by Ronald L. Campbell and Philip S. Staniford. *Phoenix II:1*, 1978)

During the spring of 1975, I became eligible for sabbatical leave and decided it was time to explore my new vocation as a specialist in cross-cultural religion, mythology, and cosmology. I settled on undertaking anthropological fieldwork in two south Indian groups in order to investigate religious community social structure and intra-group dynamics. As of 1975, no such studies had been reported. Most published literature was written by religious leaders such as Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Rajneesh, Sri Aurobindo, or their followers (p. 31).

\* \* \* \* \*

During the first week, we gradually recovered from the fatigue of traveling in India during the hot season. I term this condition *severe primal trauma*. It results from the rigors of Indian heat and humidity which leave one, even after a restful night, easily fatigued, physically run down, and prone to irritability. It also consists of exhausting overexposure to people noisily packed in tight population density and to the abrasiveness of Indian public social intercourse. Other significant factors include loss of patience, temper, and sense of humor. Everyday ordinary Indian reality is often very difficult for foreigners to accommodate to (p. 33).

\* \* \* \* \*

We resided at the Aurobindo Ashram for a month, spent a week in Madras with Sai Baba, and then journeyed south to Sri Lanka to make a pilgrimage to Adam's Peak, a sacred mountain.<sup>8</sup>

\* Throughout his stay in India, Philip was accompanied by his wife, Jenice.

We continued up the west coast of India to Cochin and attended a two-weeks course on Indian Spiritualism given by Sai Baba. We returned home four months after setting out. This completes the portion of the Indian fieldwork involving physical presence in India. What follows are the two stages of integrating this experience in on-going transpersonal consciousness, including first attempts and additional insights (p. 34).

\* \* \* \* \*

In short, this fieldwork fractured my normal, largely implicit assumptions regarding environment and my own and others' abilities, powers, ideals, and insights. Nothing may be categorically taken for granted. It seemed that every time I relaxed my guard, the unexpected occurred. It became clearly, cruelly evident that the most dependable and secure assumptions, even my deepest preconceptions, were very leaky vessels indeed. This was the hell I encountered during fieldwork.

As Sri Aurobindo reminds us, there is also heaven. In the first place, I went and returned safely. At one crucial juncture, while coming painfully down a mountain, I suddenly realized: "It's not the going that counts. It's the coming back!" Secondly, no matter how much I have resisted and suffered, I have been forced to acknowledge and confront my failure to live up to my own expectations and have experienced, bitterly, the high toll such demands exact. In retrospect, my ignorance of being able to anticipate what I encountered in India is a mixed blessing. I wonder if I would have gone if I had known what awaited? It would have been a cruel choice. Now that it is over and I am reaping further undeniable benefits in terms of anthropological awareness, I can no longer refute the experience. I still heartily disapprove of the stern method of instruction and initiation which accompanied my going to India. My personal positive/negative experience serves to illustrate that, as Alan Watts pointed out, "'Yes' has meaning only in relation to 'No'. To abolish all valleys is to get rid of all mountains" (47: iv). (p. 35)

\* \* \* \* \*

And so ended my first attempt to make sense of India. The Indian experience was a shadow upon the tapestry of personal capacities and short-comings. The experience with Sai Baba remained indescribable and lifeless to me (p. 35).

I went to India to find answers. When they were not immediately evident, I assumed I had failed. India painfully cracked my expectations of self. I went to have a positive experience, or at least to learn something. I did: my own ineptitude for rising above the physical discomfort and mental anguish of hiking, heavily laden, through southern India, on the move and exhausted. Experiencing India since returning home reveals different perspectives on what occurred.

I had intended to enjoy Indian music, eat good Indian food, and have high and illuminating experiences. In Calcutta, our first stop, the morning paper had a glowing account of Ravi Shankar playing all night by candlelight in a marble palace. We had just missed him. Some weeks later we missed him in Madras. Then we didn't hear him in Tiruvanmalai and Bangalore either, and left India without having even come close.

In Madras, we met a master musician and were invited to attend his devotional/meditational exercises. Just as I was briefly transported into melodious, rapturous spaces, an impatient old man arrived and the mood irreparably collapsed. Food expectations did not fare more palatably. Where were those succulent curries that cling expectantly to hope's desire? Watery rice, hot but tasteless gravy, and no saving spices was our lot.

After returning home, I volunteered to present a paper dealing with the Aurobindo Ashram in Flagstaff, Arizona in order to formulate some of the experiences in anthropological ways. After the symposium, we were invited to a performance by Ali Akbar Khan's sons. Unexpectedly we were spellbound by the soul-transforming, throbbing, melodic delights. We went to India to hear music, and had our senses satisfied in Flagstaff, Arizona!

And then there is the matter of the *looks*. I was first in Sai Baba's presence in Madras. Through good fortune I was seated in the front row of a large crowd gathered to receive Baba's blessings (*darshan*). After interminable waiting, we saw him appear, dressed as usual in flowing orange robes--brown skinned with a halo of black frizzy hair, and barefoot. As he passed in front of me, on sudden impulse, I reached over and touched his feet. He went to the end of the row, chatted for a moment with a group of Malaysian pilgrims, and turned. The late afternoon sun caught and glinted in his eyes. He was staring, head cocked, towards me. I was jolted. His eyes did not seem to be those of a human being. I have often pondered the effect of this event. Its significance continues to reverberate.

According to Hindu belief, touching the *avatar's* feet enables one to gain immediate liberation from one's own *karma* (fate).<sup>11</sup> We had just left the Aurobindo Ashram and were once again immersed in the strains of travelling. Removing karma and freeing consciousness from emotional constrictions would indeed have been appreciated under those circumstances. I directly experienced the possibility for an instant and was then immediately conscious that I had not worked past old habitual patterns of anger, impatience, and frustration. I was not even close! I could appreciate the possibility of release but was quite incapable and unwilling to "let go" in such a fashion. I had the sensation of being engulfed, once again, by who I was. Reflecting on this incident, I have been struck, once again, by the discrepancy between mental desire and the momentum of habit.

The closest I can now come to expressing my hidden expectations of that time, while overtly holding no desires, is to say that I wanted a personal audience, a cosmic map, a positive affirmative jolt. I wanted Sai Baba to somehow grab hold of consciousness and enlighten me. I wanted affirmation of validity of pursuing these goals--a peace, a security--right now! Under these circumstances, these expectations were not realized during three weeks with Sai Baba. When taking my final leave from him, just before returning home, I was able to touch his feet once again. I realized, once again, the formidable task of reorienting consciousness to permit such release from habitual patterns and self-imposed moorings. I had a brief glimpse of the alternative freedom, lightness, and inner illumination which could be mine.

The uncanny look Sai Baba first gave me was mirrored in an incident which occurred several months later while we were still in India. In the process of hurrying to find a bus one afternoon in Bangalore, we passed three Tibetan refugee monks. There was a relaxed, humorous air about them. One of them smiled, catching my eye in human recognition. Momentum carried me past the opportunity to experience these monks for a longer period. The possibilities of that look lingered, however.

A year after our return from India, the Karmapa, head of the powerful Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, came to San Diego from Nepal to perform a ceremony. Unexpectedly, I was granted a brief personal audience in the company of several other people. A translator invited us to ask any questions we desired. The Karmapa is the sixteenth in an unbroken line extending back to the twelfth century. Each time one passed away, a young boy who exhibited

certain qualities and skills was found, brought to the monasteries as the reincarnation<sup>12</sup> of this great personage, and trained to succeed to this high office (second only to the Dalai Lama in Tibetan religious hierarchy). Having been with Sai Baba, where I was unable to have an opportunity for such a close audience, I was especially aware of the uniqueness of this opportunity. The immediate problem at hand was to formulate on short notice a question worthy of such an occasion. Fortunately, someone in the group asked about Tibetan medicine, giving me a moment to reflect.

Finally, I asked: "What does one do to contact the teacher within while waiting for the Guru?" Tibetans and Hindus believe that a *guru*, a divinely inspired teacher, chooses his own students. So the question concerned how best to prepare and maximize life in the absence of such guidance. I was dismayed when the translator used the term *guru* in both cases. I already knew that within Karmapa's framework, ordinary beings do not possess the qualities of a guru within.

And sure enough! As the translator conveyed the question, the Karmapa's eyes smiled and he shook his head to the contrary, decisively. However, I was aware of a strange state. Normally, I am very defensive and such misunderstanding hurts. I did not have the usual ego suffering. He denied what I was saying with a smile which somehow did not make it a put-down. Chuckling, he said, "No, no! Don't think there is a guru inside *you*. A guru is one who shines with the light of a thousand Buddhas". I reflected on this image and the illumination from one Buddha was formidable. "Some amperage", I thought, As I was still wrapped up in this image, the most incredible thing happened.

Still laughing, eyes twinkling (not unlike Sai Baba's first look or that of the Tibetan monk in Bangalore), the Karmapa reached over and grabbed my right hand with his, covering both with his left hand and shaking my arm vigorously. The effect was immediately electrifying. Powerful energy coursed through the contact and flooded my being. All the while, he was staring directly into my eyes with a dancing sparkle of his. This response, given right after his first words, provided a second answer to my question. In effect, he was now saying, "Ah ha! You see, the guru really is inside you! It's just that you don't know yet. But we really do know better, right?" I was dazed by the experience.

Then, becoming serious, the Karmapa relinquished the grip and turned towards the others in the group saying "If the guru does not come, imagine his being and manner and mold your consciousness in that fashion. Create a place for him". Instantaneously, the Karmapa had provided three valid answers to the question. Each dealt with a different level of awareness regarding the query. This was the kind of experience I had sought with Sai Baba in India and now, a year afterwards, I was hearing it in San Diego from the Karmapa. And then, to further verify the event, I noticed the Karmapa's eyes. He would open his eyes very wide and smile as he faced people. I opened my mind and smiled back, making direct contact. It was the same look I got fleetingly from Sai Baba, that first *darshan*, and also that fleeting glance I detected from the Tibetan monk in Bangalore. This time I had plenty of opportunity to experience and respond to that look while the Karmapa held audience. What I had sought in India was granted in San Diego (pp. 35-36).

#### Footnotes

8. See Staniford (45).

11. *Karma* may be regarded as a basic interaction of cause and effect. "Good" actions and thoughts (such as charity and humility) result in merit to the individual who practices and thinks them. "Bad" actions and thoughts (such as hate and anger) likewise bring negative results in direct proportion to the strength exercised in activating them. According to Hindu tradition, liberation from results of actions and thoughts in this lifetime may be effected through special activities or by intervention of divinely empowered beings acting for a soul's benefit.

12. Reincarnation, within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, consists of the transmission of consciousness through a series of life forms in a lineal progression. At death, contributions and debits are weighed and the person is accorded a higher or lower position on the basis of such evidence. The backing of such a powerful tradition, the high priority established in finding the spirit of deceased high souls, and the treatment accorded him, all make each incarnation of the Karmapa of particular note and power, both spiritual and mundane.

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47. Watts, Alan. *The Meaning of Happiness*. Harper and Row: New York, 1970.

(Note: *Phoenix: New Directions in the Study of Man* was the original name of what is now *Phoenix: Journal of Transpersonal Anthropology*.)



*His Holiness XVI Gyalwa Karmapa  
taken by Maggie Hopp*

(from *Densal, Newsletter of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra*,  
Vol. 4, No. 2)

Laura M. Roth

## DEATH IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

The practitioner of Buddhism, particularly in the Tibetan tradition, is daily reminded of the inevitability of his own death and the need to prepare for this crucial time of transition. As one text says,

The whole external world and the beings contained within it are impermanent. Most especially so is the life force of beings which is as fragile as a bubble. It is uncertain when one will die and turn into a corpse, but since it is only the dharma that will help one at that time, one should practice now (Ngondro Liturgy N.D.; Kontrul 1977).

The death of a highly realized teacher such as His Holiness the XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa of Tibet is completely different from that of an ordinary person. This article is based on a visit I made several years ago to Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, northern India, to attend the cremation ceremony of the Karmapa. In describing this pilgrimage I shall also discuss the Buddhist tradition of the dying process, the in-between or Bardo state, and rebirth, both for ordinary people and meditators as well as for highly realized beings such as the Karmapa.

Rangjung Rigpe Dorje (the Karmapa) was the sixteenth in a line of incarnations going back to the first Karmapa, Dusum Khenpa, in the twelfth century. The Karmapas are the spiritual leaders of the Karma Kagyu, which translates roughly as "lineage of Buddha activity" and is one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The tradition of such teachers incarnating again and again reflects the Buddhist ideal of the Bodhisattva, who does not remain in Nirvana but returns to the world to benefit and liberate others. The Bodhisattva does not seek only his own enlightenment but vows to liberate all sentient beings.

Karmapa was born in 1924 in Derge, in Khamin Eastern Tibet. (The previous Karmapa, Khakhyab Dorje (1871-1922), had indicated in a letter the time and place of the rebirth.) He was enthroned at the age of 8 and studied and practiced at Tsurphu Monastery in central Tibet, which was his main center. The

accounts of the Karmapas always abound in miraculous occurrences wrought by them, such as overcoming droughts (Douglas and White 1976, Thinley 1980). During this life the Karmapa traveled throughout Tibet and visited China, Bhutan, and India, receiving and transmitting teachings and dispensing blessings. He had the ability and thus the responsibility to recognize the reincarnations, or *tulkus*, of various important teachers of the lineage.

My first connection with His Holiness came in 1980 when I visited Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, the Karmapa's monastery in Woodstock, New York, and there became a dharma student of the gentle and saintly abbot, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. I was told that our real guru was Karmapa, and when I met His Holiness in that year on the occasion of his visit to the United States my dominant impression was that when His Holiness was present, things happened. Monasteries were founded; people took refuge as Buddhists, or were ordained as monks or nuns or lay practitioners, or went on long meditation retreats. He was like the center of a hurricane, calm and collected while everyone around him was in a frenzy of activity. I also experienced the great devotion his followers had for him.

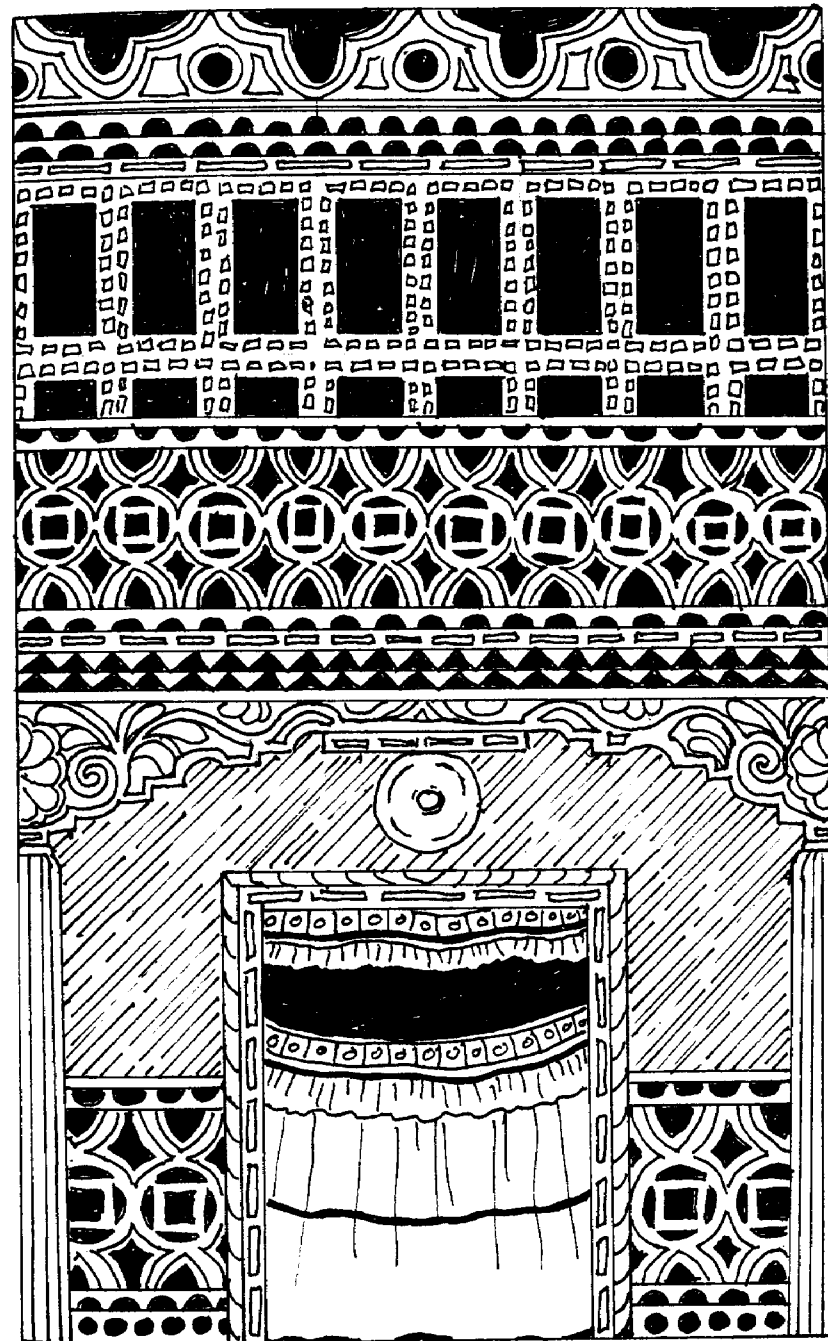
This visit to the West was to be the next to last in this life, because in the fall of 1981 he became ill and on November 5 died of cancer in a hospital near Chicago. The following month I traveled to Sikkim, high in the foothills of the Himalayas, for the cremation ceremony, together with a group of fifteen Americans and one Tibetan.

Rumtek Monastery, the main seat of His Holiness Karmapa, is on a mountain south of Gangtok and is reached by a narrow mountain road which winds through green terraced hills. It was built between 1962 and 1966 after His Holiness escaped from Tibet during the great exodus following the Chinese Communist destruction of Buddhism in Tibet. The Karmapa had early predicted that he would leave Tibet, writing

I will not stay but to the uncertainty of foreign lands  
Will go to fulfill the results of actions in previous  
lives.

The cuckoo comes to Tibet in the spring.  
When he sings his sad song,  
You will remember to think where the man Rigdol is.  
Also, how sad you who care for him will be.

("Refuge" 1977, p.32.)



Entrance to gompa, Rumtek Monastery.



