

MUDr, Milos Vojtechovský's LAUDATIO on the occasion of awarding the Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation VIZE 97 Prize to Stanislav Grof Prague, at the Crossroads Spiritual Center, October 5, 2007

STANISLAV GROF (76) is a highly proficient and world-renowned psychiatrist and philosopher, whose first half of life was formed by Prague, the Faculty of Medicine of the Charles University, by the psychiatric practice at the treatment facilities in Kosmonosy and Bohnice, and significantly also by the creative environment of Prague's Research Institute of Psychiatry. His personality was deeply influenced by psychoanalytic training and a series of personal LSD experiences in 1956-1967. At the age of 29, Grof was awarded the specialist certification in psychiatry and, at the age of 34, he successfully defended his Ph.D. thesis with subject "Use of LSD in Clinical Practice".

Up until his leaving for a scholarship stay in the United States, in the spring of 1967, he had been highly engaged in psychotherapeutically-focused lectures and, together with Milan Hausner, presented his new views of the treatment of numerous psychological disorders resistant to therapy available at that time. In the 1960's, Czechoslovakia was one of the major centers of research of psychedelic substances. The easing of international relations thus opened the path to presenting substantial and often revolutionary discoveries in uncovered mechanisms of human unconscious at world expert meetings. So much, in brief, for Grof's professional career in our country.

Stanislav Grof's American epoch in the second half of his life is marked by nearly a lightning-fast growth in his career of scientific research on the new ways of discovering the realm of human unconscious. For more than five years, Grof led a research project on the therapeutic use of psychedelics at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, Baltimore. Later, he came to California's ESALEN Institute and became an important member of an interdisciplinary team of top U.S. intellectuals, forming the foundations of a new discipline – TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY. In 1974, he founded the INTERNATIONAL TRANSPERSONAL ASSOCIATION (ITA) and became its first President. Similarly to Czechoslovakia, the lawful conditions for use of psychedelic drugs in the U.S. became significantly tightened, and consequently Stanislav Grof and his wife Christina tried to find other, non-pharmacological approaches to researching unconscious.

They found them in the modification of ancient practices of the East – and formed a non-pharmacological method of self-exploration and therapy that they called "Holotropic Breathwork." Stan Grof summarized the expertise from his own experiences, and from the experiences of hundreds of clients – healthy volunteers, professionals, somatically ill patients and patients with mental disorders, with more than 4,000 psychedelic journeys

into the unconscious, in hundreds of magazine stories and published it in numerous monographs, eight of which have been translated into Czech. Since 1991, our professionals as well as the general public have had several opportunities to gain an insight into the theory and practice of Grof's transpersonal psychology at multiple events in Prague, of which the 1992 ITA conference was the official scientific and social return of his teaching to his native Prague.

The life of every individual is limited by two milestones: birth and death. We mostly remember nothing from the period of a few years after birth, while we do not even wish to think of the last phase of our lives. Using psychedelics, Grof could go as far as the very roots of the ontogenetic development of human lives as well as the complexities of perinatal psychology. When Sigmund Freud slightly uncovered the laws of the development of child sexuality more than 100 years ago, and pointed to their importance for the future mental health, the cultural world was shocked and most of that time's neuro-psychiatrists cast doubt on Freud's conclusions. Later, when two Vienna psychoanalysts (W. Reich and O. Rank) came up with a proposition that the future human mental life may be traumatized from as early as the experiences from the progress of the fetus through the birth canal, even Sigmund Freud himself was shocked, reprehended his colleagues, and even expelled one of them from the Psychoanalytic Association.

Several decades later, Grof not only confirmed the rules postulated by Freud, but also those by Reich and Rank. He integrated these rules with a traumatic experience of the birth phase of the foetus progress from mother's womb, with a symbolically experienced state of death and re-birth, used in the genesis of numerous psychical disorders of adults. These of Grof's postulates are even today impugned by not only orthodox psychoanalysts, but also by neurophysiologists, who assert that the fetal brain lacks the matrixes for the permanent storage of early perceptions in memory. However, Grof goes even further: during the continuing psychedelic therapy, he encountered other unusual experiences of his clients, which exceed the boundaries of understanding the human psyche and which have a significant therapeutic potential if they are lived.

Grof seeks support in the interpretation of these transcendental experiences in other fields: in Jung's teaching of archetypes and collective unconscious, in the mystic experiences of Eastern religions, in the concept of cosmic consciousness of current astrophysicists, in trances and ceremonials, in rituals of Afro-Asian nations and in the episodes of religious, art and scientific inspirations. He assumes that the spirituality included in the modern scientific paradigms will play an important role in the philosophies of

the 21st century. He formulates a new psychological hypothesis on “expanded consciousness”.

However, this Grof's concept of transpersonal psychology is confronted with criticism, with misunderstanding from current psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, as well as the other sciences, and also with a reticent approach or even rejection by skeptically oriented natural scientists and representatives of contemporary churches. Some postulates of Grof's studies are hard to believe if we have not experienced non-ordinary states of consciousness induced by psychedelic drugs ourselves. Bear in mind that psychedelics in Grof's concept are pharmacologic catalysts for releasing the mental processes that have been hidden so far and cannot be otherwise examined under normal state of consciousness. These substances are a similar aid for a psychiatrist as a telescope for an astronomer or a microscope for a scientist. The scientific conference on the occasion of the 100th birthday of Albert Hoffmann, the discoverer of LSD and psilocybin, which was held in January 2006 in Basel, let us know again that the era of more than 60 years of clinical use of psychedelics involves a significant treatment potential, which has not been utilized enough so far. This substance, if used by a responsible physician and researcher such as Stanislav Grof and his likes, brings new possibilities of experimental psychiatry, psychology and psychotherapy, and can reduce the risks of hazardous and uncontrollable misuse, we can see today across the globe.