

Person-Centered Therapy: Unlock Your Inner Growth Potential

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June 16, 2026

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2026). *Person-Centered Therapy: Unlock Your Inner Growth Potential*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=38684>

The Foundations of the Person-Centered Approach

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I wish to point to two related tendencies which have acquired more and more importance in my thinking as the years have gone by. One of these is an actualizing tendency, a characteristic of organic life. One is a formative tendency in the universe as a whole. Taken together they are, I believe, the foundation blocks of the person-centered approach.

Its Characteristics

But what do I mean by a person-centered approach? For me it expresses the primary theme of my whole professional life, as that theme has become clarified through experience, interaction with others, and research. I smile as I think of the various labels I have given to this theme during the course of my career - nondirective counseling, client-centered therapy, student-centered teaching, group-centered leadership. As the fields of application have grown in number and variety, the label "person-centered approach" seems the most descriptive.

The central hypothesis of this approach can be briefly stated. (See Rogers, 1959, for a complete statement.) It is that the individual has within him or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering the self-concept basic attitudes, and his or her self-directed behavior - and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided.

There are three conditions which constitute this growth - promoting climate, whether we are speaking of the relationship between therapist and client, parent and child, leader and group, teacher and student, or administrator and staff. The conditions apply, in fact, in any situation in which the development of the person is a goal. I have described these conditions in previous writings; I present here a brief summary from the point of view of psychotherapy, but the description applies to all of the foregoing relationships.

The first element has to do with genuineness, realness, or congruence. The more the therapist is him or herself in the relationship, putting up no professional front or personal facade, the greater is the likelihood that the client will change and grow in a constructive manner. It means that the therapist is openly being the feelings and attitudes that are flowing within at the moment. The term transparent catches the flavor of this condition - the therapist makes himself or herself transparent to the client; the client can see right through what the therapist is in the relationship; the client experiences no holding back on the part of the therapist. As for the therapist, what he or she is

experiencing is available to awareness, can be lived in the relationship, and can be communicated if appropriate. Thus there is a close matching, or congruence, between what is being experienced at the gut level, what is present in awareness, and what is expressed to the client.

The second attitude of importance in creating a climate for change is acceptance, or caring or prizing - unconditional positive regard. It means that when the therapist is experiencing a positive, acceptant attitude toward whatever the client is at that moment, therapeutic movement or change is more likely. It involves the therapist's willingness for the client to be whatever immediate feeling is going on - confusion, resentment, fear, anger, courage, love, or pride. It is a non-possessive caring. The therapist prizes the client in a total rather than a conditional way.

The third facilitative aspect of the relationship is empathic understanding. This means that the therapist senses accurately the feelings and personal meanings that are being experienced by the client and communicates this understanding to the client. When functioning best the therapist is so much inside the private world of the other that he or she can clarify not only the meanings of which the client is aware but even those just below the level of awareness. This kind of sensitive, active listening is exceedingly rare in our lives. We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know.

How does this climate which I have just described bring about change? Briefly, as the person is accepted and prized, he or she tends to develop a more caring attitude toward him or herself. As the person is empathically heard, it becomes possible for him or her to listen more accurately to the flow of inner experiencings. But as the person understands and prizes self, there is a development of a self more congruent with the experiencings. He or she is thus becoming more real, more genuine. These tendencies, the reciprocal of the therapist attitudes, mean that the person is a more effective growth-enhancer for him or herself. There is a greater freedom to be the whole person that he or she inwardly is. (Rogers, 1962)

The Evidence

There is a body of steadily mounting research evidence which by and large supports the view that when these facilitative conditions are present, changes in personality and behavior do indeed occur. Such research has been carried on from 1949 to the present. Studies have been made of psychotherapy with troubled persons; with schizophrenics; of the facilitation of learning in the schools; of other interpersonal relationships. Some excellent and little known recent research has been done by Aspy, Roebuck and others in education (1972, 1976), and by Tausch and colleagues in Germany in many different fields (summary, 1978).

A Directional Process

Practice, theory and research make it clear that the whole person-centered approach rests on a basic trust in the organism. There is evidence from many disciplines to support an even broader statement. We can say that there is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibilities. In man, too, there is a natural tendency toward a more complex and complete development. The term that has most often been used for this is the actualising tendency, and it is present in all living organisms.

Whether we are speaking of a flower or an oak tree, of an earthworm or a beautiful bird, of an ape or a man, we will do well, I believe, to recognize that life is an active process, not a passive one. Whether the stimulus arises from within or without, whether the environment is favorable or unfavorable, the behaviors of an organism can be counted on to be in the direction of maintaining, enhancing, and reproducing itself. This is the very nature of the process we call life. This tendency is operative at all times. Indeed it is only the presence or absence of this total directional process which enables us to tell whether a given organism is alive or dead.

The actualizing tendency can of course be thwarted or warped, but it cannot be destroyed without destroying the organism. Remember that in my boyhood the potato bin in which we stored our winter supply of potatoes was in the basement, several feet below a small basement window. The conditions were unfavorable, but the potatoes would begin to sprout - pale white sprouts, so unlike the healthy green shoots they sent up when planted in the soil in the spring. But these sad, spindly sprouts would grow two or three feet in length as they reached toward the distant light of the window. They were, in their bizarre, futile growth, a sort of desperate expression of the directional tendency I have been describing. They would never become a plant, never mature, never fulfill their real potentiality. But under the most adverse circumstances they were striving to become. Life would not give up, even if it could not flourish. In dealing with clients whose lives have been terribly warped, in working with men and women on the back wards of state hospitals, I often think of those potato sprouts. So unfavorable have been the conditions in which these people have developed that their lives often seem abnormal, twisted, scarcely human. Yet the directional tendency in them is to be trusted. The clue to understanding their behavior is that they are striving; in the only ways they perceive as available to them, to move toward growth, toward becoming. To

us the results may seem bizarre and futile, but they are life's desperate attempt to become itself. It is this potent constructive tendency' which is an underlying basis of the person-centered approach.

Some Confirming Examples

I am not alone in seeing such an actualizing tendency as the fundamental answer to the question of what makes an organism "tick." Goldstein (1947), Maslow (1954), Angyal (1941, 1965), Szent-Gyorgyi (1974), and others have held similar views and have influenced my own thinking. I have

pointed out that this tendency involves a development toward the differentiation of organs and functions; it involves enhancement through reproduction. Szent-Gyorgyi says that he cannot explain the mysteries of biological development "without supposing an innate 'drive' in living matter to perfect itself" (op.cit., p. 17).

The organism, in its normal state, moves toward its own fulfillment and toward self-regulation and an independence from external control.

But is this view confirmed by other evidence? Let me point to some of the work in biology which supports the concept of the actualizing tendency. One example, replicated with different species, is the work of Driesch with sea urchins many years ago. Driesch learned how to tease apart the two cells which are formed after the first division of the fertilized egg. Had they been left to develop normally it is clear that each of these two cells would have grown into a portion of a sea urchin larva, the contributions of both being needed to form a whole creature. So it seems equally obvious that when the two cells are skilfully separated, each, if it grows, will simply develop into some portion of a sea urchin. But this is overlooking the directional and actualizing tendency characteristic of all organic growth. It is found that each cell, if it can be kept alive, now develops into a whole sea urchin larva - a bit smaller than usual, but normal and complete.

I am sure that I choose this example because it seems so closely analogous to my experience in dealing with individuals in a therapeutic relationship, my experience in facilitating intensive groups, my experience of providing "freedom to learn" for students in classes. In these situations the most impressive fact about the individual human being seems to be his directional tendency toward wholeness, toward actualization of his potentialities. I have not found psychotherapy or group experience effective when I have tried to create in another individual something which is not there, but I have found that if I can provide the conditions which make for growth, then this positive directional tendency brings about constructive results. The scientist with the divided sea urchin egg is in the same situation. He cannot cause the cell to develop in one way or another, but if he focuses his skill on providing the conditions which permit the cell to survive and grow, then the tendency for growth and the direction of growth will be evident, and will come from within the organism. I cannot think of a better analogy for therapy or the group experience, where, if I can supply a psychological amniotic fluid, forward movement of a constructive sort will occur.

I would like to add one comment which may be clarifying. Sometimes this growth tendency is spoken of as if it involved the development of all the potentialities of the organism. This is clearly not true. The organism does not, as someone has pointed out, tend toward developing its capacity for nausea, nor does it actualize its potentiality for self-destruction, nor its ability to bear pain. Only under unusual or perverse circumstances do these potentialities become actualized. It is clear that the actualizing tendency is selective and directional, a constructive tendency if you will.

Support from Modern Theory and Experience

Pentony (unpublished paper, 1978) points out forcefully that those who favour this view of an actualizing tendency "do not need to be inhibited by the belief that it is in conflict with modern science or theories of knowledge" (p. 20). He describes the differing recent epistemologies, particularly that of Murayama (1977). It is now theorized that the "genetic code" does not contain all the information necessary to specify the mature organism. Instead, it contains a set of rules determining the interaction of the dividing cells. Much less information is needed to codify the rules, than to guide every aspect of maturing development. "Thus information can be generated within the organism system - information can grow" (p. 9, italics mine). Hence Driesch's sea urchin cells are doubtless following the coded rules, and consequently are able to develop in original, not previously or rigidly specified ways.

All this goes deeply against the current (and possibly outdated) epistemology of the social sciences, which holds that a "cause" is followed in a one-way direction by an "effect." Murayama and others see it quite differently - that there are mutual cause-effect interactions which amplify deviations and permit new information and new forms to develop. This "morphogenetic epistemology" appears to be basic to an understanding of all living systems, including all such growth processes as the growth of an organism. Murayama states that an understanding of biology "lies in the recognition that the biological processes are reciprocal causal processes, not random processes" (1977, p.130). On the other hand, as he points out elsewhere, an understanding of biology does not emerge from an epistemology based on one-way cause-effect systems. Thus there is great need to rethink the stimulus-response, cause-effect basis on which most social science rests.

The work in the field of sensory deprivation shows how strong is the organismic tendency to amplify diversities and create new information and new forms. Certainly tension reduction or the absence of stimulation is a far cry from being the desired state of the organism. Freud could not have been more wrong in his postulate that "The nervous system is... an apparatus which would even, if this were feasible, maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition" (1953, p. 63). On the contrary, when deprived of external stimuli, the human organism produces a flood of internal stimuli sometimes of the most bizarre sort. John Lilly (1972) was one of the first to tell of his experiences when suspended weightless in a soundproof tank of water. He speaks of the trance-like states, the mystical experiences, the sense of being tuned in on communication networks not available to ordinary consciousness, of experiences which can only be called hallucinatory. It is very clear that when he is receiving an absolute minimum of any external stimuli, the person opens himself to a flood of experiencing which goes far beyond that of everyday living. The individual most certainly does not lapse into homeostasis, into a passive equilibrium. This only occurs in diseased organisms.

A Trustworthy Base

Thus, to me it is meaningful to say that the substratum of all motivation is the organismic tendency toward fulfillment. This tendency may express itself in the widest range of behaviors, and in response to a very wide variety of needs. To be sure, certain wants of a basic sort must be at least partially met before other needs become urgent. Consequently the tendency of the organism to actualize itself may at one moment lead to the seeking of food or sexual satisfaction, and yet unless these needs are overpoweringly great, even these satisfactions will be sought in ways which enhance rather than diminish self-esteem. And other fulfillment will also be sought in the transactions with the environment - the need for exploration, for producing change in the environment, for play, for self-exploration when that is perceived as an avenue to enhancement - all of these and many other behaviors are basically an expression of the actualizing tendency.

We are, in short, dealing with an organism which is always seeking, always initiating, always "up to something." There is one central source of energy in the human organism. It is a trustworthy function of the whole system rather than of some portion of it. It is perhaps most simply conceptualized as a tendency toward fulfillment, toward actualization, involving not only the maintenance but also the enhancement of the organism.

A Broader View: The Formative Tendency

But there are many who are critical of this point of view. They regard it as too optimistic, not dealing adequately with the negative element, the evil in persons, the dark side in human beings.

Consequently I would like to put this directional tendency in a broader context. In doing so I shall draw heavily on the work and thinking of others, from disciplines other than my own. I have learned from many scientists, but I wish to mention a special indebtedness to the works of Albert Szent-Gyorgyi (1974), a Nobel Prize biologist, and Lancelot Whyte (1974), a historian of ideas.

My main thesis is this. There appears to be a formative tendency at work in the universe which can be observed at every level. This tendency has received much less attention than it deserves.

Physical scientists up to now have focused primarily on entropy, the tendency toward deterioration. They know a great deal about this tendency toward disorder. Studying closed systems they can give this tendency a clear mathematical description. They know that order or organization tends to deteriorate into randomness, each stage less organized than the last.

We are also very familiar with deterioration in organic life. The system - whether plant, animal, or human - eventually deteriorates into a lower degree of functioning organization, into a lesser and lesser degree of order, until decay reaches a stasis. In one sense this is what a part of medicine is all about - a concern with the malfunctioning or the deterioration of an organ, or the organism as a

whole. The complex process of the death of the physical organism is increasingly well understood.

So a great deal is known of the universal tendency of systems at all levels to deteriorate in the direction of less and less orderliness, more and more randomness. When it operates, it is a one-way street. The world seems to be a great machine, running down and wearing out.

But there is far less recognition of, or emphasis on, the even more important formative tendency which can be equally well observed at every level of the universe. After all, every form which we see or know emerged from a simpler, less complex form. This is a phenomenon which stands as being at least as significant as entropy. Examples could be given from every form of inorganic or organic life. Let me illustrate with just a few.

It appears that every galaxy, every star, every planet, including our own, was formed from a less organized whirling storm of particles. Many of these stellar objects are themselves formative. In the atmosphere of our sun hydrogen nuclei collide to form molecules of helium, more complex in nature. It is hypothesized that in other stars even heavier molecules are formed by such interactions.

I understand that when the simple materials of the earth's atmosphere which were present before life began - hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen, in the form of water and ammonia - are infused by electric charges or by radiation, heavier molecules first begin to form, then amino acids. We seem only a step away from the formation of viruses and more complex living organisms. It is a creative, not a disintegrative process at work.

Another fascinating example is the formation of crystals. In every case, from less ordered and less symmetrical fluid matter, there emerges the startlingly unique, ordered, symmetrical and often beautiful crystalline form. All of us have marveled at the perfection and complexity of the snowflake. Yet it emerged from formless vapor.

When we consider the single living cell, we discover that it often forms more complex colonies, as in the coral reef. Even more order enters the picture as the cell emerges into an organism of many cells with specialized functions.

I do not need to picture the whole gradual process of organic evolution. We are familiar with the steadily increasing complexity of organisms. They are not always successful in their ability to cope with the changing environment, but the trend toward complexity is always evident.

Perhaps for most of us the process of organic evolution is best recognized as we consider the development of the single fertilized human ovum through the simplest stages of cell division, then the aquatic gill stage, and on to the vastly complex, highly organized human infant. As Jonas Salk has said, there is a manifest and increasing order in evolution.

Thus, without ignoring the tendency toward deterioration, we need to recognize fully what Szent-Gyorgyi terms "syntropy" and what Whyte calls the "morphic tendency," the ever-operating trend toward increased order and interrelated complexity evident at both the inorganic and the organic level. The universe is always building and creating as well as deteriorating. This process is evident in the human being too.

The Function of Consciousness

What part does our awareness have in this formative function? I believe that consciousness has a small but very important part. The ability to focus conscious attention seems to be one of the latest evolutionary developments in our species. It is a tiny peak of awareness, of symbolizing capacity, topping a vast pyramid of nonconscious organismic functioning. Perhaps a better analogy, more indicative of the continual change going on, is to think of the individual's functioning as a large pyramidal fountain. The very tip of the fountain is intermittently illuminated with the flickering light of consciousness, but the constant flow of life goes on in the darkness as well, in nonconscious as well as conscious ways. It seems that the human organism has been moving toward the more complete development of awareness. It is at this level that new forms are invented, perhaps even new directions for the human species. It is here that the reciprocal relationship between cause and effect is most demonstrably evident. It is here that choices are made, spontaneous forms created. We see here perhaps the highest of the human functions.

Some of my colleagues have said that organismic choice - the nonverbal, subconscious choice of being - is guided by the evolutionary flow. I would agree and go one step further. I would point out that in psychotherapy we have learned something about the psychological conditions which are most conducive to increasing this highly important self-awareness. With greater self-awareness a more informed choice is possible, a choice more free from introjects, a conscious choice which is even more in tune with the evolutionary flow. Such a person is more potentially aware, not only of the stimuli from outside, but of ideas and dreams, and of the ongoing flow of feelings and emotions and physiological reactions which he senses in himself. The greater this awareness, the more surely he/she will float in a direction consonant with the directional evolutionary flow.

When a person is functioning in this way, it does not mean that there is a self-conscious awareness of all that is going on within, like the centipede whose movements were paralyzed by becoming aware of each of his legs. On the contrary such a person is free to live a feeling subjectively, as well as be aware of it. She/he might experience love, or pain, or fear, and live in these experiences subjectively. Or she/he might abstract self from this subjectivity and realize in awareness, "I am in pain;" "I am afraid;" "I do love." The crucial point is that there would be no barriers, no inhibitions, which would prevent the full experiencing of whatever was organismically present. This person would be moving in the direction of wholeness, integration, a unified life. Consciousness would be participating in this larger, creative, formative tendency.

Altered States

But some would take us further. Researchers like the Grofs (1977) and John Lilly (1973) would take us beyond the ordinary level of consciousness. Their studies appear to reveal that in altered states of consciousness persons feel they are in touch with, and grasp the meaning of, this evolutionary flow. They experience it as tending toward a transcending experience of unity. They picture the individual self as being dissolved in a whole area of higher values, especially beauty, harmony and love. The person feels at one with the cosmos. Hard-headed research seems to be confirming the mystic's experience of union with the universal.

For me this point of view is confirmed by my more recent experience in working with clients, and especially in working with groups. I described earlier those characteristics of a growth-promoting relationship which have been investigated and supported by research. But recently my view has broadened into a new area which cannot as yet be studied empirically.

When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or a therapist, I discover another characteristic. I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my presence is releasing and helpful. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviors turn out to be right, in some odd way. At those moments it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself, and has become a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present.

This kind of transcendent phenomenon is certainly experienced at times in groups in which I have worked, changing the lives of some of those involved. One participant in a workshop puts it eloquently. "I found it to be a profound spiritual experience. I felt the oneness of spirit in the community. We breathed together, felt together, even spoke for one another. I felt the power of the 'life force' that infuses each of us - whatever that is. I felt its presence without the usual barricades of 'me-ness' or 'you-ness' it was like a meditative experience when I feel myself as a center of consciousness, very much a part of the broader, universal consciousness. And yet with that extraordinary sense of oneness, the separateness of each person present has never been more clearly preserved."

Again, as in the description of altered states of consciousness, this account partakes of the mystical. Our experiences, it is clear, involve the transcendent, the indescribable, the spiritual. I am compelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension.

Science and the Mystical

Here many readers, I am sure, will part company with me. What, they will wish to know, has become of logic, of science, of hardheadedness? But before they leave me entirely, I would like to adduce some surprising support for such views, from the most unexpected quarters.

Fritjof Capra (1975), a well known theoretical physicist, has shown how present-day physics has almost completely abolished any solid concepts of our world except energy. In a summarizing statement he says:

"In modern physics the universe is thus experienced as a dynamic, inseparable whole which always includes the observer in an essential way. In this experience the traditional concepts of space and time, of isolated objects, and of cause and effect, lose their meaning. Such an experience, however, is very similar to that of the Eastern mystics" (op.cit., p. 81). He then goes on to point out the astonishing parallels with Zen, Taoism, Buddhism, and other Oriental views. His own conviction is that physics and Eastern mysticism are separate but complementary roads to the same knowledge, supplementing one another in providing a fuller understanding of our universe.

Recently the work of Ilya Prigogine (Ferguson, 1979), Nobel-prize-winning chemist, offers a different perspective which also throws new light on what has been presented.

In trying to answer the basic question of how order and complexity emerge from the process of entropy, he has originated a whole new theoretical system. He has developed mathematical formulas and proof which demonstrate that the world of living nature is probabilistic, rather than solely deterministic. His views apply to all open systems in which energy is exchanged with the environment. This obviously includes the human organism.

Briefly, the more complex the structure - whether a chemical or a human - the more energy it expends to maintain that complexity.

For example, the human brain, with only two percent of body weight, uses 20 percent of the available oxygen! Such a system is unstable, has fluctuations or "perturbations," as he calls them. As these fluctuations increase, they are amplified by the system's many connections, and thus drive it - whether chemical compound or human individual - into a new, altered state, more ordered and coherent than before. This new state has still greater complexity, and hence even more potential for creating change.

The transformation of one state to another is a sudden shift, a non-linear event, in which many factors act on each other at once. It is especially interesting to me that this has already been demonstrated in investigating Gendlin's concept of "experiencing" in psychotherapy (Gendlin, 1978). When a hitherto repressed feeling is fully and acceptantly experienced in awareness in the relationship, there is not only a definitely felt psychological shift, but a concomitant physiological

change, as a new state of insight is achieved (Don, 1977-78).

Prigogine's theory appears to shed light on meditation, relaxation techniques, and altered states of consciousness, in which fluctuations are augmented by various means. It gives support to the value of fully recognizing and expressing one's feelings - positive or negative - thus permitting the full perturbation of the system.

He recognizes the strong resemblance between his "science of complexity" and the views of Eastern sages and mystics, as well as the philosophies of Whitehead and Bergson. His view points, he says, toward "a deep collective vision." Rather amazingly, the title of his forthcoming book is "From Being to Becoming," a strange label for a volume by a chemist-philosopher (Prigogine, 1979, in press).

His conclusion can be stated very briefly. "The more complex a system, the greater its potential for self-transcendence: its parts cooperate to reorganize it" (Ferguson, 1979). Thus from theoretical physics and chemistry comes some confirmation of experiences which are transcendent, indescribable, unexpected, transformational - the sort of phenomena which we have observed and felt as concomitants of the person-centered approach.

A Hypothesis for the Future

As I try to take into account the scope of the various themes I have presented, and some of the available evidence which appears to support them, I am led to formulate a broad hypothesis. In my mind it is very tentative in nature, but for the sake of clarity I will state it in definite terms.

It is hypothesized that there is a formative directional tendency in the universe, which can be traced and observed in stellar space, in crystals, in microorganisms, in organic life, in human beings. This is an evolutionary tendency toward greater order, greater complexity, greater interrelatedness. In humankind it develops from a single cell origin to complex organic functioning, to knowing and sensing below the level of consciousness, to a conscious awareness of the organism and the external world, to a transcendent awareness of the harmony and unity of the cosmic system including humankind.

It seems to me just possible that this hypothesis could be a base upon which we could begin to build a theory for humanistic psychology. It definitely forms a base for the person-centered approach.

Concluding Summary

What I have been saying is that in our work we have discovered the attitudinal qualities which are demonstrably effective in releasing constructive and growthful changes in the personality and

behavior of individuals. Persons in an environment infused with these attitudes, develop more self-understanding, more self-confidence, more ability to choose their behaviors. They learn more significantly, they have more freedom to be and become.

The individual in this nurturing climate is free to choose any direction, but actually selects positive and constructive ways. The actualizing tendency is seen as operative in the human being.

It is still further confirming to find that this is not simply a tendency in living systems, but is part of a strong formative tendency in our universe, which is evident at all levels.

Thus when we provide a psychological climate which permits persons to be - whether clients, students, workers, or persons in a group - we are not involved in a chance event. We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all of organic life - a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable. And on an even larger scale, I believe we are tuning in to a potent creative tendency which has formed our universe, from the smallest snowflake to the largest galaxy, from the lowly amoeba to the most sensitive and gifted of persons. And perhaps we are touching the cutting edge of our ability to transcend ourselves, to create new and more spiritual directions in human evolution.

It is this kind of formulation which, for me, forms a philosophical base for a person-centered approach. It justifies me in engaging in a life-affirming way of being.

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