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SPECIAL TOPIC: SYNCRETISM IN TRANSPERSONAL STUDIES

Syncretism in Transpersonal Studies: Introduction to this Issue's Special Topics Section

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Syncretism is a term referring to the reconciliation of divergent beliefs and practices, resulting in a newly constructed product based on, and sometimes perhaps going beyond, older traditions. Of course, orthodox traditions often disvalue syncretic efforts as devolutionary rather than evolutionary. Syncretism can be contrasted with eclecticism, which takes from different approaches, often based on pragmatic considerations, without attempting to reconcile them. One of the exiting aspects of contemporary transpersonal studies is that many different traditions related to the transpersonal, which were once hidden from each other through distance and time, can now be compared, contrasted, and even integrated for the first time. In this regard, syncretism can be used to describe the bridging (i.e., an alternative meaning for the prefix “trans,” as in the word “transpersonal” [which is usually seen as referring to “beyond”], is to “bridge”) of traditions through amalgamating them, as opposed to merely eclectically juxtaposing them. This Special Topics section focuses on three syncretic efforts. In “Gebser’s Integral Consciousness and Living in the Real World: Facilitating its Emergence Using *A Course In Miracles*,” Cornelius J. Holland and Douglas A. MacDonald examine parallels between Jean Gebser’s work in consciousness and a contemporary spiritual system, *A Course in Miracles*, forging common themes linking the conception of ego in both systems and illustrated with the application of a forgiveness exercise. In “Corporate Perspectives On The Vedic Meditative Practice, *Upasana*,” P. S. Rao and P. N. Murthy describe how a business corporation can be viewed as having a conscious quality, drawing a parallel between adaptive corporate learning and the processes of a Vedic meditation technique, *Upasana*. Finally, in “Manifest, Hidden, and Divine Self: Introduction to Sefirot Aikido,” Jack Susman explores creating a relationship between Aikido, a Japanese martial-spiritual tradition, and Kabbalah, a Jewish spiritual tradition, in which he argues that Kabbalah can provide

a framework for Western audiences to better grasp elusive deeper meaning within Aikido. Taken together, these three papers suggest how syncretic efforts can further transpersonal studies through providing a larger context in which to understand and apply disparate systems, showing how these efforts could augment each other in surprisingly productive ways. Syncretic efforts may be particularly useful over applying traditional transpersonal systems when the contexts of the traditional systems have changed considerably or when each system ignores important elements addressed by the others, such that the syncretic product might be more inclusive.

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