Psychotherapy and spirituality: a narrative exploration of the therapeutic uses of theories, strategies, and techniques derived from the spiritual traditions: or, if you see the Buddha on the road, invite him into your session.

Dorothy Firman
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY:
A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE THERAPEUTIC USES OF THEORIES, STRATEGIES, AND TECHNIQUES DERIVED FROM THE SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

or

IF YOU SEE THE BUDDHA ON THE ROAD, INVITE HIM INTO YOUR SESSION

A Dissertation Presented
by
DOROTHY FIRMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts
Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
February 1994
School of Education
PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY:
A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE THERAPEUTIC USES OF
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School of Education
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all Buddhas of past and present, Buddhas of future time, I give thanks...

THE HEART OF PERFECT WISDOM

The Bodhisattva of Compassion
from the depths of prajna wisdom
saw the emptiness of all five
skandhas and sundered the bonds
that caused him suffering.

Know then:

Form here is only emptiness, emptiness only form.
Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form.

Feeling, thought, and choice, consciousness itself,
are the same as this.

Dharmas here are empty, all are the primal void.
None are born or die. Nor are they stained or pure,
or do they wax or wane.

So in emptiness no form, no feeling, thought, or choice
nor is there consciousness.

No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind;
no color, sound, smell, taste, touch, or what
the mind takes hold of, nor even act of sensing.

No ignorance or end of it nor all that comes of ignorance:
no withering, no death, no end of them.

Nor is there pain or cause of pain or cease in pain
or noble path to lead from pain,
not even wisdom to attain, attainment too is emptiness.

So know that the bodhisattva holding to nothing whatever
but dwelling in prajna wisdom is freed of delusive hindrance,
rid of the fear bred by it, and reaches clearest nirvana.
All buddhas of past and present, buddhas of future time through faith in prajna wisdom come to full enlightenment.

Know, then, the great dharani the radiant, peerless mantra, the supreme, unfailing mantra, the Prajna Paramita, whose words allay all pain. This is highest wisdom true beyond all doubt, know and proclaim its truth:

Gate, gate
para gate
para sam gate
bodhi, svaha!
The problem addressed by this study is the insufficient information in the professional literature which describes the personal experience of therapists as they endeavor to incorporate spirituality into their therapeutic work. Fourteen practitioners, in various counseling and psychotherapy modalities were interviewed about their work in the field, in an effort to fill that gap. In all cases subjects reported that they were working actively in their professions with an interface of spirituality and psychotherapy. Many common themes and experiences emerged and at the same time, each story was unique.

The research included a literature review of both psychological and spiritual texts as well as review of the researcher’s own experience of twenty years of work in the dual worlds of spirituality and psychotherapy.
Data gathered was coded for the emergent categories and themes. The categories included: the participants’ personal journey as it lead them to their current work and the interface in that work of spiritual and psychological perspectives, the spiritual views and beliefs of the participants, their general experience of work with people, their understanding of clients’ spiritual issues, the techniques and strategies of a spiritual nature that the subjects use in their work, and the problems that they experience as a result of the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy. Case illustrations were offered by subjects to illustrate their work. Profiles of each participant, organized through these categories, and presented in their own words, offered an expression of the lived, subjective experience that each shared with the researcher.

Thematic analysis of each category further refined the elements of subject experience and offered a data base for emerging implications. The implications include: the need for greater openness between the fields of spirituality and psychotherapy, the need for greater educational and clinical inclusion of spirituality as a valid topic for consideration, the need for clients to be able to actively pursue, with their helping professionals, the spiritual issues in their lives, the need for spiritual traditions to open themselves more fully to an inclusion of psychological components, the need for more literature from practitioners practicing at this interface, and the larger need in this culture for inclusion of spirituality in all aspects of life.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Spirituality in Psychotherapy

Enlightenment is the awakening to our primal harmony or, in another mystical language, to our rootedness in the divine... From enlightenment radiate the insight, compassion, and power needed to resolve individual and collective human problems as they continue to arise endlessly. Enlightenment is not a magical transcendence of the human condition but the full flowering of humanity, disclosing unity and equilibrium at the heart of the love and suffering we call life. (Hixon, 1989 p. xi)

Spiritual practices historically have been designed to achieve the goal that Hixon writes about: enlightenment. Many therapists, healers and human services professionals out on the front lines, working day to day with clients, might argue that psychotherapy fits that same description. From psychotherapy radiate the insight, compassion, and power needed to resolve individual and collective human problems as they continue to arise endlessly. Psychotherapy is not a magical transcendence of the human condition but the full flowering of humanity, disclosing unity and equilibrium at the heart of the love and suffering we call life.
Twenty-five years ago the Association for Transpersonal Psychology was formed. Still going strong, they celebrated their anniversary last month. The statement of purpose of their journal, aims psychological study towards:

Transpersonal process, values and states, unitive consciousness, meta-needs, peak experience, ecstasy, mystical experience, being, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, transcendence of self, spirit, sacralization of everyday life, oneness, cosmic awareness, cosmic play, individual and species wide synergy, the theories and practices of meditation, spiritual paths, compassion, transpersonal co-operation, transpersonal realization and actualization; and related concepts, experiences and activities. (Sutich, 1969)

The statement of purpose has changed wording over the years, but the intention of studying the transpersonal dimension of psychology—perhaps best described as “the full flowering of humanity,” has remained the same. Roberto Assagioli, an early pioneer of transpersonal psychology wrote in the introduction to his book *Psychosynthesis*:

I make a cordial appeal to all therapists, psychologists and educators to actively engage in the needed work of research, experimentation and application. Let us feel and obey the urge aroused by the great need of healing the serious ills which at present are affecting humanity; let us realize the contribution we can make to the creation of a new civilization characterized by an harmonious integration and cooperation, pervaded by the spirit of synthesis.” (1965, p.9)

The spirit of synthesis certainly invites us to explore and understand the important interface between spirituality and the helping arts, to know
more about how spiritual traditions can be used in clinical settings, and to allow psychotherapy and other human services modalities to blossoms towards their highest possibilities. It may be discovered that the highest possibilities of psychotherapy share much with the quest for enlightenment.

**Background of the Problem**

In the past thirty years, there has been a consistent shift away from the limitations of the traditional psychotherapeutic views that have largely been defined by Freud and his followers, and it is this shift that allows for the consideration of this topic. By this point in time, humanistic and even transpersonal approaches to psychotherapy have entered the marketplace. This movement reflects an expansion of the original psychotherapeutic purview, which has involved primarily the range of individual personal history and its negative effect on present functioning. Many new doors have opened in the field. The relevance of culture, race, gender, politics; the importance of present familial patterns; the role of communications; issues of social construction; the inclusion of many new techniques and strategies; even the very questioning of the concept of the unconscious on which the field was founded, has emerged in the last several decades. With the work of Maslow (1968) and others, healthy functioning began to be considered, not as the model for the remedial work of psychotherapy but as
the starting place for further work. Actualization became a valid goal and an arena for exploration in the field. As the humanistic movement flourished, the transpersonal perspective emerged as the next force.

Corresponding to the emergence of theory that allowed for an interface of traditionally religious concerns with the work of psychotherapy, psychotherapists of many stripes were themselves exploring spirituality in their own lives. For many this took the form of study and practice outside of their religion of origin and into the Eastern, esoteric, meditative, and native religions that are common today. For some it involved a new and reconsidered interest in the religions of childhood. As therapists personally explored these worlds of spirituality, they began inevitably and with greater or lesser consciousness to interweave the domains of their psychotherapy work and their spiritual practices. For many the personal benefits of their exploration of spirituality were so significant that they could not help but include what they were discovering in their work with clients.

Clients, likewise began coming to therapy engaged in a spiritual path and wanting psychotherapy that supported, agreed with, relied on, or at the least did not discredit that work. Theorists like Roberto Assagioli, Ken Wilbur, Frances Vaughan, John Welwood, and others put forth theories based initially on their own experience of this interface. The field of transpersonal psychology was in full bloom.
In these changing times, there is a backdrop of theory and voices to be heard that encourage, support, and even train therapists in the interface that exists between therapeutic work and the spiritual traditions. There is, however, little research on the specific application of the theories and strategies and techniques from spiritual fields into therapy work. There is, even more importantly perhaps, little in the way of story. The rich tapestry of the lived experience of this important interface is limited. To hear how those who are living this interface experience their work is something that we need to do.

**Statement of the Problem**

While general theory is now available in the dimension of transpersonal psychology, the theory lacks the experience based, narrative rich story of works in progress. Therapists need a peer based matrix of experience to support their own evolution. For the many practitioners operating on their own intuitions in creating this interface between spiritual practices and psychotherapy, there is a lack of collegial data, experience, modeling, and support. There is little “voice” given to unpublished, in-the-trenches, therapists. With the exception of certain books on healing from illness, there is very little case material on the use of transpersonal approaches in therapy and equally little on specific technology for the interface. There is alarmingly little support or
permission for therapists, especially from within the academic, accrediting, and clinical structures for this interface to exist, be talked about or be actively pursued. Transpersonal perspectives are still too often rejected in the mainstream.

Cournoyer in interviewing one small group of clinicians stated, “They recognized traditional psychology’s exclusion of spirituality and reinforced this in recounting their own graduate studies. This is continually reinforced by the lack of open discussion in clinical meetings and case studies.” (1992, p. 162)

The problem, then, which this study addresses is that there is insufficient information in the professional literature which describes the personal experience of therapists as they endeavor to incorporate the spiritual into their psychotherapeutic work.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to add to the professional literature a narrative rich exploration of some of these therapists who are in the field, working in this under-charted terrain. This study hopes to reveal something about who these people are, how they have moved in this direction, what their work looks like, when and how they operate from a spiritual base and when they do not, how they conceive of their client’s
responses, and more. The literature will be somewhat more complete as these stories are told.

**Method**

In-depth interviewing is the research method that best suited the purpose of this study. “At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth.” (Seidman, 3) In searching for the knowledge held by practitioners in the field about this interface of spirituality and psychotherapy, the words of these people are of great worth.

A semi-structured interview format allowed access to the phenomenological experience of the study’s participants in a way that no other research method could. The questions that were asked involved the subjects’ experience of working at the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy, the techniques and strategies they use, the beliefs they hold, and the problems they face. Included was the story of their own personal history as it unfolded in relationship to spirituality and psychology, their perception of clients’ spiritual issues, and case illustrations.

From the answers to these questions and the conversation entailed in this interview, themes emerged from which could be drawn useful conclusions and ideas for further research. Each interview was fully
transcribed in an effort to locate the emergent themes. Open coding was the method that was used for developing the categories.

Open coding in grounded theory method is the analytic process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic analytic procedures by which this is accomplished are: the asking of questions about data; and the making of comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident, event, and other instance of the phenomena. Similar events and incidents are labeled and grouped to form categories. (Strauss, 1990, p.74)

Profiles, largely in the actual words of the interviewee, were presented based on the categories that emerged from the data. Conclusions and implications were drawn.

**Significance of the Study**

It is the hope and intention of the author that this study will provide the professional literature with accounts that will enhance, encourage, and inform those who wish to incorporate spiritual processes in their clinical work. It is one of relatively few studies that address the issue of spirituality in psychotherapy. It may, as well, be useful to clients in viewing the possibilities of therapy. Finally, each study that adds to the literature on this interface will support the evolution of the field of psychology.
Limitations of the Study

Potentially this research adds an important piece of information to the field of psychology. At the same time, no definitive information will be made available as a result of this research. The group studied is largely self selected and therefore not representative of a wide sample. The sample is relatively small. The experiences will be personal, and while useful as an addition to the literature, will not necessarily be sufficient to draw generalizations from. Only one researcher will be working with the material. This is designed to be a preliminary study, from which ideas for further study will emerge.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION

Introduction

The literature reviews that follow will offer an introduction to the literature from both the spiritual and psychological fields. It is this interface that this study attempts to further explore, and so it is in this dual literature review that the background of the work will be elaborated.

In the review of the literature of the spiritual traditions the researcher will attempt to offer the review through three major elements. The first section will be the history of her own personal quest, which forms the background of her work and this study. The second section offers a view of the limited literature that is available that addresses the issue of psychotherapy through a spiritual perspective. The third section invites a consideration of the literary source for spirituality itself. From the vast literature available in this domain, the researcher will draw forth examples to help distill the teachings in this important area, as they may have implications for the field of psychology. The final section considers the researcher's current quest. Chapter three examines the literature of the psychotherapeutic tradition.
The Researcher's Quest: The Background

The two fields that form the foundation of this study are vast indeed. I am no master in either. I am, however, a devoted student of both. I discovered religion in my family of origin. I discovered God when I was a frightened, lonely ten year old in the Swiss Alps. I discovered spirit when I began to practice meditation. I discovered psychology as an undergraduate, studying brains and rats. I discovered transpersonal psychology through my own explorations into pain, dreams, and Self. (“Self,” with a capital “S” has been used in the literature of transpersonal psychology to describe the core transpersonal element within the individual. It might be equated to soul. Typically “self,” with a small “s” has more general and diverse meaning, ranging from the concept of “center” to the descriptive of “oneself.”) I discovered the interface between psychotherapy and spirituality the first time I sat with a client. Since that moment I have never once been able to separate the two, nor would I want to.

My job, as a trainer of human services professionals, is often one of inviting therapists to see through a different lens; one that includes the possibility, even likelihood, that clients will have concerns beyond the “normal” range as we have known it. In fact, I propose that all levels of client concern and development should be seen in relationship to the transpersonal dimension. Whether that level is addressed overtly or not,
human development should be considered in its light. People are, in all times and cultures, seekers. The perennial philosophy, beginning to show itself again in the Western world of psychotherapy, is just that-perennial. While psychotherapy has historically been steeped in a focus on the past, trauma, linear causality, primacy of parental impact, even a pathology model, cries have been heard to allow for more, to see more, to support a wider, deeper, higher vision. Few psychotherapy clients have ever been treated to a course of work that was not largely focused on their past. At its best this traditional model supports the client in recreating him/herself as an adult, free from the pain of childhood. At its worst, this tendency in the field to be wedded to the power of past and parents may alienate and discount true client concerns that are other than “past” based. Examples abound. (All case material is offered in protected form.)

Jane came to therapy reluctantly after having been told again and again by her first therapist that her anger at her husband was really unresolved issues with her father. Her marriage to a cold and critical man, lasted many extra years while Jane worked in therapy on what was wrong with her past. It took a change of therapist to allow her to focus on the present experience of her life and to validate her appropriate anger.

Allen was twenty-one and on anti-depressive medication when he came to me as his fifth therapist in so short a life. He was consumed with finding out what in his childhood had made him so unhappy. His life, he felt, had not been so bad. But at fifteen when his family moved to Boston,
he had become severely depressed. I sent him to an allergy specialist, and his years of being diagnosed as depressed were ended when he was treated for intense environmental allergies. Four therapists had been unable to see beyond the "past and trauma" model of psychology.

My sister's genuine despair and grief at the untimely death of a peer was treated by her therapist as infantile regression.

Psychotherapy needs to be larger. The exploration that I am undertaking is not about which clients need what, when, or how to diagnose, assess, and treat. This is not a complaint against traditionalists who have paved the way for each succeeding generation of psychotherapists, nor is it an endorsement of transpersonalism which may equally be inclined towards limiting biases. It is, after all, no better for the unsuspecting client to have their issues with dear old dad be transformed into issues about God, past lives or soul loss then to have their deep issues with God be demoted to concerns about dad and childhood trauma. Dad and God are both essential ingredients of a healthy life, so are mom and the Goddess, boyfriends, girlfriends, jobs, vacations, fear, pain, love, joy, and seeking. Can we, as therapists, and human service providers, include this wide range and give ourselves and our clients the gift of drawing from thousands of years of knowledge and experience that is contained in the enlightenment traditions? Can we allow ourselves and our clients to benefit from the widest, most inclusive vision that we can hold?
In theory, we can do this without having to become "new age" or "transpersonalists" and without limiting our clientele to those who hang out in those worlds. We can offer sound psychotherapy to all comers, including in our work this wonderful interface between the world of psychology as we have known it and the world of spiritual seeking. I think this is possible and the invitation is in the mail. These post modern times require a larger view.

We are seeing in our lifetimes the collapse of the objectivist world view that dominated the modern era, the world view that gave people faith in the absolute and permanent rightness of certain beliefs and values. The world view emerging in its place is constructivist. If we operate from this world view we see all information and all stories as human creations that fit, more or less well, with our experience and within a universe that remains always beyond us and always mysterious. (Anderson, 1990, p. 268)

Towards a Spiritual Perspective

My own quest is concerned with an exploration of how the spiritual traditions define themselves, and what this might mean for us in the mental health field. The concept of enlightenment is key in many spiritual traditions, and so it is a starting place for this undertaking. Lex Hixon sums it up nicely: "Enlightenment is the awakening to our primal harmony or, in another mystical language, to our rootedness in the divine."

(1989, p. xi) He goes on to say:
All existence is revealed to the enlightened human being as a seamless whole, as Divine Life. Some taste of this Enlightenment which consciously touches the ultimate is possible for each of us. It need not be deferred to any future existence in heaven or on earth. Enlightenment is the secret essence of our consciousness, and the gradual revelation of this essence is the process of spiritual growth in which everyone is involved. (1989, p. xi)

The goals of enlightenment include a realization of our true nature which gives us access to important human qualities: insight, compassion and power. This process is not about denying our human nature, and I want to underline this. Enlightenment is about the "full flowering of our humanity," not a transcendence or denial of that humanity. In healthy spiritual traditions being human is the process and the point. It is about being fully human. What must be added is that being fully human is a vast experience, not limited to our lesser being or our greater being, but inclusive of all.

As early as 1954, Abraham Maslow pointed us towards this same conclusion. He directs those in the field of psychology towards, “the integration of this twofold nature of man, his lower and his higher, his creatureliness and his God-likeness” (1968, p. 11) He goes on the say that, “On the whole, most philosophies and religions, Eastern as well as Western, have dichotomized them, teaching that the way to become ‘higher’ is to renounce and master ‘the lower’.” (p. 11)

Psychology, to this day, has tended to bias itself towards that “lower” dimension as if its sole raison d'etre is the consideration and cure of the
lower nature. In all these many years, with Maslow and others leading the way to an equal consideration of the "higher nature", the impact of that perspective is still small in the day-to-day workings of the entire mental health system. The disease based model is predominant. The results of this are a limited system of healing, a hierarchical relationship between client and therapist, an acceptance of symptom loss as cure, a fixation on trauma and identification with being traumatized, and a vision that aims only as high as mediocrity. At the most basic level of mental health- the state funded systems-clients are diagnosed and labeled in ways that mark them for life, in spite of reliable research indicating that diagnostic codes are not reliable or replicated from one therapist to another. In most private offices, clients are often seen solely through the eyes of their pain or dysfunction, often anchored into those limited identifications by the therapist. Not often enough are people seen with the bifocal vision that would allow every client to be both a personality and a soul, both their past and their future, both their pain and their possibility. This "twofold nature," our creatureliness and divinity are still badly skewed in the field of psychotherapy, with creatureliness and all that implies carrying the day.

Looking at a variety of spiritual traditions, many quite common today in Western culture, we will begin to find the threads that define these traditions and discover as we do, what the relevance can be for the field of psychotherapy.
In the Zen (Buddhist) tradition, "kensho" means literally to see into one's own nature. Kensho is enlightenment. Satori is another term referring to the same process. It is defined as "enlightenment, that is, Self-realization, opening the Mind's eye, awakening to one's True nature and hence the nature of all existence" (Kapleau, 1989, p. 377). Implicit in this discovery of who we truly are is the corresponding discovery of who we all are. Spiritual traditions offer a synthesis in the me/them conflict. For at our true nature, we are unique and common. We stand alone and we stand united. Understanding who we are not only connects us to other humans, but offers us the vision to see into "the nature of all existence."

We are full, these days, in the secular world of a concern with this very nature of existence that shows itself in human and ecological conflict and crisis. To notice for a moment just how predominant this concern for the nature of existence is, in this time and place, we have only to read a bit from our vice-president:

The twentieth century has not been kind to the constant human striving for a sense of purpose in life. Two world wars, the Holocaust, the invention of nuclear weapons, and now the global environmental crisis have led many of us to wonder if survival- much less enlightened, joyous, and hopeful living- is possible. (This) gives way to a sense that what is real and right in our lives is slipping away from us. . . . there is indeed a spiritual crisis in modern civilization that seems to be based on an emptiness at its center and the absence of a larger spiritual purpose. (Gore, 1992, pp. 366-368)
This concern with nature, humanity, and spirituality is the same concern that we address in the enlightenment traditions, when we attempt to understand the relation of all things to each other and of our place in the mystery. It is also the same concern that we see repeated time and again in our therapy offices, where clients prove to us that their issues are not just personal and individual. Of course, transpersonal therapists spend hours on personal histories, individual traumas, unique needs of this or that person. But with eyes open, they see as well, the individual concerns for the larger picture, the other people, the planet, the nature of existence. More than just personal concerns exist for most people whose basic life needs have been satisfied, even for many whose needs are not met. Throughout this world, if we look, we will see a deeply felt sense of concern for all people, for fairness, for healing at the largest levels.

If the enlightenment traditions offer us the answer to these mysteries of humanity and divinity, if Self-realization really opens the mind’s eye, awakening us to our true nature and hence the nature of all existence, how are we to get there? It is clearly not enough to hypothesize that we are all one, or to hear the “masters” espouse their own experience of having attained that state.

A stunning paradox is offered in Zen between our Buddha nature and our human nature. We are Buddha mind, it is said, over and over. There is an assumption that we are already enlightened. There is no place to go, nothing to gain. At the same time, our human nature has yet to
recognize our enlightenment, our Buddha nature, and so must struggle to attain it. “Dharma gates beyond measure I vow to penetrate, the great way of Buddha I vow to attain.” This paradox challenges the practitioner to be both human and accepting of that humanness and to be willful and inspired in moving towards a more enlightened experience. And Zen, like other traditions offers a specific path towards that end. We are offered a view of our essential nature and a task to support the gradual unfolding of our enlightenment. In Zen the primary task is meditation. Each tradition has its way.

Psychotherapy, surprisingly, tends to be much more vague and uncommitted to a way. In fact, while spiritual leaders can stand firm in their conviction that if you do this or that, you will achieve enlightenment (in this lifetime or another!) therapists are often quite mystified about how to get from here to there or, more importantly perhaps, where “there” should be.

What does it look like when the way is clear? Ram Dass, himself a journeyer through the twin paths of psychology and spirituality, learned through his own personal experiences about the touch of enlightenment.

In 1967 I met my guru. That meeting changed the course of my life, for through him I came to perceive my life in spiritual terms. I found in him new depths of compassion, love, wisdom, humor and power and his actions stretched my understanding of human possibility. I recognized in him an alliance of the human and the divine.” (1979, p. ix.)
The theme repeats: the interface of humanity and divinity. The human qualities of compassion, love, wisdom, humor, and power show themselves as both the outcome of enlightenment and the way to enlightenment. And who, as a psychotherapist, wouldn't feel just fine about holding those same qualities as desired outcomes for their clients? I would be pleased to think that the process of therapy could be so infused.

As we look towards the heart of the spiritual traditions, we will see the most profound, yet simple guidance that we, as psychotherapists, could ever ask for.

**The Masters Speak**

Listening to the voices of some of the “masters” may help anchor this guidance. The literature of spiritual tradition is certainly the most vast body of writing in this world. Every tradition, every culture, every generation, writes and continues to write about spirituality. Tapping into a small fraction of this body of wisdom, as an illustration of the larger body, points the way more deeply towards the potential benefit in the field of psychology that is available from the spiritual traditions.

A follower of Gurdjieff says of this great teacher, “He calls us to open our eyes. He asks us why we are here, what we wish for, what forces we obey. He asks us, above all if we understand what we are.” (Gurdjieff, 1963, p. ix.) Therapists ask their clients those same questions, and without the
linear cause and effect distortion or the bias towards past and pathology, these questions may invoke a very large answer indeed. For surely we will learn not only that the forces we obey are those unconscious urges and drives, those repressed memories and defense mechanisms that come from growing up, but that we also obey even deeper forces that present as conscience, morality, values, meaning, purpose. The answer to Gurdjieff's questions may be that what people wish for will be not only freedom from rage and fear, but freedom to love and to serve. Gurdjieff invites us to consider that people are both the conditioned self, molded like clay in childhood, and the true Self, which is much larger. Each person is unique and is larger than their conditioning. People are soul and spirit and God, side by side with all the rest.

Many traditions echo similar views. From a current Christian scholar comes a variation. "There is only one way. That is to become, in your totality, the answer. To be, instead of merely to exist, through the constant rhythms of thoughts and blank moments, days and blind nights, life and mysterious death. To be, through your own action." (Da Passano, 1987, p. 164) The being/doing paradox has always been played out in therapy. But therapists needn't get caught, as clients so often do, in what looks good, what fits, what doesn't rock the boat, what is expected. Good therapists, of any persuasion, support their clients in finding what is true for them, whether or not they travel to the beat of a different drum. This often leads to facing the past, "divorcing" one's parents as some might say. Of course,
to know oneself fully, one must separate from parents. Adults must free themselves of the limiting and unconscious conditioning of the past. This is so often the background for therapy, the foundation that must be built to do the rest of the work. The limitation, however, of a simple injunction to divorce your parents is that one is only half way there at that point. Every divorce needs a reconciliation at personal or intrapsychic levels. Healing is a much greater process than simple issues of autonomy or self-care. A much deeper reach into the subjective reality of each human being is required and no pat answers or simple guidelines address those depths.

To be truly oneself, through all the days (better and worse) and blind nights (the dark that continually emerges), life and death (the big one), through one’s own action. This is a healthy goal for all seekers.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen teacher and Nobel Prize winner, also teaches something about how to be that “true self”.

Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We don’t have to travel far away to enjoy the blue sky. We don’t have to leave our city or even our neighborhood to enjoy the eyes of a beautiful child. Even the air we breathe can be a source of joy. ” (1991, p. 5)

We are invited again to be human and in a simple a way: today and here, not tomorrow or in some other place. We begin to move to that needed depth when we notice those children’s eyes, enjoy that blue (or gray) sky, and take joy in our breath. Therapy can support these very things, when it is allowed to.
Fundamental religious perspectives, of course, operating from a positivist view do not share the ingredients of an enlightenment model. But the mystical and esoteric spiritual traditions do, albeit with the unique coloring of the exoteric religion that they derive from. In *Esoteric Christianity* Annie Besant writing in 1901 says:

Third, the revelation, highest, fullest, best is the Self-unveiling of Deity in the kosmos, the revealing of attribute after attribute, power after power, beauty after beauty, in all the various forms which in their totality compose the universe. He shows His splendour in the sun, His infinity in the star-flecked fields of space, His strength in the mountains, His purity in the snow-flecked peaks and translucent air, His energy in rolling ocean billows, His beauty in tumbling mountain torrent, in smooth clear lake, in cool, deep forest and in sunlit plain, His fearlessness in the hero, His patience in the saint, His tenderness in mother-love, His protecting care in father and king, His wisdom in the philosopher, His knowledge in the scientist, His healing power in the physician, His justice in the judge, His wealth in the merchant, His teaching power in the priest. (1977, p. 255)

The language tells the same story. Divinity is not out there, other than the individual, something else. Divinity is in the natural world and in its inhabitants. Even roles and life situations inherently offer the qualities of God: fearlessness, patience, tenderness, caring, wisdom, knowledge, healing, justice, wealth, power. It is not better to be one thing or another. It is not better to be a king than a father, a priest than a mother. Each is the Self-unveiling of deity in the cosmos.

The ancient teachings affirm similar ideas and offer a wisdom that is unparalleled in any other literature, education or training. While most
therapists have a background in some childhood religion or another, many have not stayed with that religion nor plumbed its depths, beyond its formal presentation. And most have not partaken of the ancient wisdom. Schools teach ancient civilizations, but not ancient wisdom. Students study poetry and prose, but not sacred poetry and prose. Human laws, but not natural laws are the focus. We study sociology and peek into the cultures of indigenous peoples, but do not breath in indigenous truths. Social studies, not spiritual studies. Math and science as numbers and facts, not as the paths of seeking. Both clients and therapists are often cut off from a source of wisdom and healing that could have profound effect. Spiritual teachings, across the board, invite us to a greater knowledge of the depth of human understanding and possibility.

All things flow.
The sun is new every day.
Opposition brings together,
and from discord comes perfect harmony.
It is in change that things find rest.
The way up and the way down are one and the same.
(Heraclitus, in Mitchell, 1991, p. 8)

What advice are we being given as we peer into the wisdom that is available to us? Heraclitus, writing in the fifth century, B. C., tells us that change works. It is not to be feared or avoided. Homeostasis and metamorphosis each have their place. All things flow and discord leads to harmony. This is good news for clients, who come to therapy, most often,
in discord. Often this discord is a core sense of being split, alienated, not whole.

We ought not to understand God and creation as two things distinct from each other, but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting himself, in a marvelous and ineffable manner creates himself in the creature, the invisible making himself visible, and the incomprehensible comprehensible, and the hidden revealed, and the unknown known, and what is without form and species formed and specific, and the superessential essential, and the supernatural natural, and the simple composite, and the accident-free subject to accident and the infinite finite, and the incircumscribed circumscribed, and the supertemporal temporal, and the creator of all things created in all things, and the maker of all things made in all things; and eternal he begins to be, and immobile he moves into all things and becomes all things in all things. (Eriçena, in Mitchell, 1991, p.78)

Eriçena, an Irish theologian in the ninth century, teaches quite simply that spirit and matter inform and create each other. Divinity and humanity, creatureliness and God-likeness are intertwined. The splits can be healed. Permission is granted to know oneself fully, for there is nothing to know which is not divine, nothing to reveal that is not appropriate. How much of the distress of the client in therapy, or the therapist in supervision, or the disciple at her master’s feet, is based on efforts to hide from self and others, to deny shadow, to fear for our very essential worth. When therapists support their clients in truly knowing that all that they are, think, feel, sense, and imagine is God creating herself in the creature, a burden is lifted.
More guidance is offered from classic Buddhist sources, whose influence has informed Eastern culture for centuries.

It is proper to doubt. Do not be led by holy scriptures, or by mere logic or inference, or by appearances, or by the authority of religious teachers. But when you realize that something is unwholesome and bad for you, give it up. And when you realize that something is wholesome and good for you, do it.

All truths should be used to cross over; they should not be held on to once you have arrived. You should let go of even the most profound insight or the most wholesome teaching; all the more so, unwholesome teachings.

Be a lamp to yourself. Be your own confidence. Hold to the truth within yourself, as to the only truth. (Buddha, in Mitchell, 1991 p.10)

Buddha offers more sound and simple advice, guidance for the seeker, guidelines for the therapist, goals for the clients. Go inside for answers. They aren’t outside (in parents, old messages, society or religion, mates or children, books or experts, psychotherapy or religion). Trust yourself, even your doubts. The inner work of healing that therapists do with clients would surely be facilitated if one could but believe these truths. A significant part of the role of therapists, in fact, is to hold just such a view as a model for clients. Most therapy aims towards having clients be able to internalize a message such as this, in contradiction and victory over the messages they internalized as children. The weight of early childhood messages is strong. The therapist’s voice is strong as well, but not as strong as those early voices. How strong is the voice of God? The voice of truth, when recognized by a client is often stronger than any
limiting message. Being able to draw on universal truths may serve as a powerful ally to the therapist.

It is not just from esoteric or Eastern religions that spiritual wisdom can be drawn. The core religious truths of the dominant culture can add to the therapist’s repertoire, as well.

Ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

The kingdom of God does not come if you watch for it. Nor will anyone be able to say, "It is here" or "It is there." For the kingdom of God is within you. (Holy Bible, King James, pp. 1130-1132)

Jesus directly addresses those hunting for answers to their questions. When clients enter therapy they are asking, seeking and knocking. Luckily it is not the therapists, who are required to have the answers. When therapists do feel that (and many therapists believe just that), they may become burdened. They may be prone to authoritarianism or seeing the client as resistant. They may fall into counter transference or experience the stress of over responsibility. If therapists doubt that there are answers to be had, they end up hopeless, overwhelmed, and afraid, perhaps mirroring the client’s feelings of despair. When a therapist believes that those who seek find, they have the freedom to be no more and no less than a guide who helps to find yet another door to knock on, yet another question to ask. And when they know that the kingdom of God is within,
then they have that kingdom within themselves and know that the client
has that kingdom as well.

Another teaching available from the spiritual traditions, offers the
guidance that having unanswered questions is just fine. Therapists and
clients alike are not required to answer each question that emerges.

I would like to beg you to have patience with everything
unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions
themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a
very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which
could not be given to you now, because you would not be able
to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the
questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you
will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the
answer. (Rilke, 1982, p.104)

Therapy has the potential to become a tool for learning to be
involved with life's mysteries, rather than a technology to try to eliminate
those mysteries. Clients, in working in this broader dimension, will be
learning tools for life and will have the potential to come, at last, into right
relationship with this all too painful world in which they find themselves.

The Researcher's Quest: The Present

It has been said that whoever knows him or herself knows God. I
cannot help but end with this invitation to know myself. I appreciate the
clarity and simplicity of a message, originally attributed to Muhammad,
that equates self-knowledge and knowledge of God. For here the duality
between heaven and earth, humanity and divinity, and psychology and spirituality is rectified.

I have heard that there are therapists for whom the quest to know oneself is not a motivating factor in their work, nor a source for their love of their work. It is not true for me. Certainly it is not true for our clients who come specifically to know themselves better. Being a therapist, as well as a student, a meditator, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a friend, are all paths to know myself. I am continually thankful to those that surround me for helping in this quest. In my life I have tried to know myself in many ways, from the brutal, steam shovel approach to uncovering the contents of my unconscious, to the disciplined, mind confronting approaches of meditation, to the softer every-moment-of-my-day approach I call surrender. A Zen aphorism reminds me, “Sitting quietly, spring comes and the grass grows.” When I surrender I am at peace. When I surrender to my client’s process, whatever that is, I no longer fight them, label them, or try to change them. I am simply with them. There is no resistance. There is no right way to do therapy or to be in the world. When they surrender to themselves, they fall gracefully into their deepest Self, whether it is through the pain of retrieved memories, the joy of love, the serenity of no thought. Could psychotherapy really be about surrender?

As I draw forth a small portion of the riches offered by these spiritual traditions, I am woefully aware of how small an arena I am drawing from. The impact of the Judeo-Christian lineage is of course most strongly felt in
this culture. Secondarily, perhaps, the Eastern religions have impacted on our thinking and consciousness, especially within the last twenty-five years. But the sacred traditions have come down through every culture, at every time and have taken the form of matriarchal religions, native religions, myths, stories and oral traditions, mystery religions, art, poetry and philosophy and personal, spiritual lived experience that offers us, could we draw it forth, a richness unsurpassed in human endeavor. My apologies and my personal regrets are offered as I accept the limitations of my ability, in this form, to draw forth more of this richness.

To all of us who practice in these healing arts, the invitation is open to taste these riches. We are especially called upon to delve into the cultural, ethnic, and personal traditions that come to our doors in the form of our clients own lived experiences and traditions. For I say again, the hurts of this life are big, the healing of the divine is bigger. When our clients come to us with their own connection to the divine, in any form, through any source, we would do well to invite that divinity into our work. It will aid us and strengthen our clients in their own healing.

What stands out and should be underlined as this aspect of the literature review comes to an end, is that spiritual traditions invite us to find and know our humanness and our divinity, to be accepting of what is, what we are, who we are, all our limitations and strengths, and to unfold as we can towards our divinity. These traditions invite us to experience the
incomparable qualities of divinity in our very humanness: love, joy, power, creativity, and more.

To understand the potential interface of these traditions with the field of psychology, it is important to explore that thread as well. Psychology has not always been separate from its kin, spirituality. In its earliest roots, in shamanism, faith healing, and early religions, the two were merged. But psychology, for good reason, allied itself with the sciences and created itself, separate from its ancestry in religion. Like long lost cousins, a reunion is inevitable. To anticipate that reunion, it is time to review the literature of psychotherapy in an effort to see its readiness for that next step.
CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW: SPIRITUALITY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Introduction

This chapter will be devoted to exploring, more specifically, the literature that addresses the actual use of material gleaned from spiritual traditions in clinical settings. The topics that most clearly present themselves in this field are the uses of meditation in psychotherapy and the uses of transpersonal perspectives in therapy related to healing from illness. More eclectic information on this interface, in an effort to come to know the clinicians' experience, will be noted as well. First however, a brief view of what the literature tells us about whether clinicians are, in fact, working at this interface.

Therapists' Relation to Spirituality

Authors in the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology were asking this question in 1984. In surveying more than 250 people involved in clinical work, they found that more than 50% were personally involved in a religious or spiritual orientation. Not only were they involved in a spiritual
orientation but by and large they found this orientation meaningful to their personal lives. They also found it relevant to their clinical work but indicated that “little or no training and dialogue concerning spirituality or religious issues occurs within the education of the psychologist.” (Shafranske & Gorsuch 1984, pp. 236-8)

In 1990, Winston takes the question one step further. Of her 320 subjects, all of whom were marriage and family therapists, more than 80% had a personal belief in God, or a transcendent aspect of human experience, or a transcendent or divine dimension in humans and/or in all nature. (p. 54) In looking into the professional aspects of clinicians’ attitudes towards religious/spiritual issues in counseling, she found 44% of 301 respondents acknowledged that their clients presented spiritual or religious issues as part of the therapy. And fully 87% felt that these issues should be addressed within the therapy process. At the same time, subjects indicated that these issues were little if any part of their training process. Winston also discovered that 77% of her 312 respondents “agreed that the use of religious language, metaphors and concepts in family therapy was appropriate.” (1991, p. 63)

This is echoed by Cournoyer, in a smaller sample, noting that not only training but clinical case sharing excluded conversation about the spiritual dimension. (1991)

Curiously, from 1983 through 1990, in a scan of Family Therapy Networker, the major family therapy journal, there is only one issue that
addresses this interface. In addition the Networker’s ten year compilation, *The Evolving Therapist*, includes sixty articles, of which only one is concerned with spirituality. (Simon et al., ed., 1992)

Shafranske & Malone followed Shafranske’s earlier work with research on 1000 clinical psychologists, of whom 52% reported that spirituality was relevant to their professional work. 60% stated that clients often presented issues in religious language. 85% reported that discussion of these topics during their training was rare or non existent. (1989, p.1190) There seems to be a gap between practitioners’ experience, beliefs, and practice and their training and clinical supervision. Spirituality in psychotherapy, it seems, especially outside of the transpersonal milieu, is a hidden factor, a secret at times, a private realm, not shared with other professionals. This may speak to why there are so few books elaborating clinical experience in this interface.

With the advent of a psychological and spiritual approach to healing from illness, the door has opened to a more overt conversation about this interface.

*Healing from Illness*

Certainly when a client presents with a life threatening illness, a therapist, whether trained in this particular arena or not, will start to stretch beyond her normal therapeutic boundaries. There is little left to
lose, when life or death are the outcomes. A number of books have emerged from this experience, written by the client about his/her experience in a therapeutic situation that supported the healing of their illness. In that regard there is a unique opportunity to peer inside the therapeutic process to see how this interface happens. Interestingly, the therapists of these same clients are not writing their own books about how they work. While we can easily access numbers of books by healed clients, the number by therapists on the healing process from illness are few and far between. There are some obvious reasons for this: confidentiality, lack of validating research for processes used, and unwillingness to be in a position to “take credit” for a cure. There may be subtler reasons, as well, noted in the research, that remind us that many therapists do believe in a spiritual reality and do work with those beliefs in therapy, but these therapists don’t talk about it, share about it, do case presentations about it, or write about it!

Epstein, diagnosed with lung cancer, found her therapist and began a process aimed initially at extending her life beyond the one month given by her oncologist. It was May. Alice said, “I wanted to live to see the first snow.” (1989, p.65) Years later, cured, Alice wrote her book, Mind, Fantasy and Healing. She reflected on the intense therapy process that she was involved with, along with medical procedures and a comprehensive support system of family and friends. Her view, in retrospect:
The process of therapy (synthesis) is more important than the content of therapy or the outcome. The client’s inner wisdom and sense of rightness dictate how that process is best facilitated or accessed by the guide. The power of the therapy is in the energy of the higher self of the client, not in the therapist. Unconditional love is the cornerstone of transpersonal therapy.” (1989, p.69)

Laura Chester, in searching for the cure to her lupus, also encountered a therapist who bridged the gap between psychology and spirituality. Chester’s therapy included work on childhood issues, catharsis, nightmares, issues with present life and a spiritual dimension that included dialogue with God, work on higher purpose, forgiveness and reconciliation with the parent, and the experience of “greater Love,” as Chester calls it.

What a gift! Perhaps totally undeserved, but nonetheless I was thankful, for I was Accepted and Loved[sic]. I might be sick and angry sometimes, hateful or hurt and bitter, sarcastic, grotesque and disgusting, but I was accepted and loved. I knew that at the core of my being, as I lay there peacefully wrung out, while Penelope (the therapist) rubbed my forehead and smoothed my hair. “ (1987, p. 165)

A twist on the theme of stories by those healed is the story by David Tate of his own healing from Hodgkin’s disease and his choice, after the cure, to give up being a lawyer to become a psychotherapist. His own quest for healing, in so many modalities, moved him to be part of that healing effort. His training, not surprisingly, took him to centers and practitioners
who held to that interface between spirituality and psychotherapy. Having faced death, the ultimate questions were too important to leave behind. His training and practice as a psychotherapist must include questions about these issues. And so it does. “How can one be fully engaged, fully committed, whether to a dream, career, or to another human being or even to life in general, and simultaneously remain detached from the outcome of that engagement?” (1989, 153-4)

I can answer that question, personally. It is hard to sit with people in pain in life threatening situations, and not be attached to the outcome. As I reread this last section, I notice that I refer to Alice as Epstein. I feel myself shrinking from the personal engagement in this work opting for the professional line. It is easier than talking about my experience. I am one of the therapists who has not written that book. Alice Epstein was my client and in every moment of our relationship I struggled with David’s question. I loved Alice. I turned my intentions towards her own highest Self, as she accurately understood. I prayed for and with her, as Winston discovered that many therapists did. What was my role in that healing? I can’t answer that. I cringe to even ask the question: so unscientific, this healing stuff, flirting so dangerously close to faith healing, laying on of hands and the like. But there it is. Clients are coming with spiritual concerns, sometimes with life and death issues. Therapists are enriched by their own spirituality and take it, overtly or covertly, into their professional worlds.
The other arena in which we see indication of this interface, is in the use of meditation in psychotherapy. More literature is available, and it appears that it is easier for practitioners to talk about.

**Meditation and Psychotherapy**

Meditation in psychotherapy is an important aspect of the developing dialogue about this interface. Meditation is a technique that can easily be freed from its spiritual underpinnings and put into a scientific context. In fact, the roots of meditation flowing from many sources, come from the esoteric religious traditions of both the East and the West. The outcome of meditation, increased relaxation among other things, makes it grist for the scientific mill. Many meditators have been hooked up to machines in labs to find out what happens to them physically when they meditate. Walsh points to the phenomena.

Transpersonal psychologists have been interested in meditation research because of their hope that they could forge a link between the practices of the Eastern consciousness disciplines and Western empirical research. However, the current research tools of science are primarily aimed at measuring objective physiological, chemical and behavioral variables. Especially initially, the meditation variables examined have tended to be relatively gross, e.g. heart and respiration rate, by comparison with the subtle experiential shifts that are the goal of meditation. There is thus some question of the relevance of much previous research, but recent trends are towards more sensitive and refined measures. (1980, p. 154)
This is good news, at one level, for the medical people have advanced the interface of these traditions through the study and implementation of meditation processes in many medical settings. Stress reduction is the prime avenue in which meditation has gained prominence. Herbert Benson (1975&1984) at Harvard and Jon Kabot-Zinn (1990) at Worcester Medical School, as well as many medical people working with cancer, have all embraced meditation in this regard.

It is not, however, my intention to look at the medical implications, nor is it my intention to look at any techniques, freed of spiritual connotation. It is the spiritual traditions and their impact on psychotherapy that is my interest. And meditation as a spiritual process, though with the slowness we have noted before, is emerging in the literature as a process that may enhance psychotherapy.

We will not go into here the split that has existed for years between spiritual traditions and psychotherapy, a split which found both sides dismissing the other as an inferior or illusory path towards well being. Thankfully that split has begun to heal and the great teachers of meditation, who come from the spiritual ranks, have infused the field of psychotherapy with this knowledge and practice. Jack Kornfield, a meditation teacher and psychotherapist wrote an article, “Meditation and Psychotherapy: A Plea for Integration.”

I used to subscribe to the school that meditation led to the higher, more universal truths, and that body, personality, psychology and our own “little dramas” were a lower, more separate vision. I wish it worked this way, but experience (and
many Zen masters) won’t bear this out. In order to end suffering and find freedom, these two levels of our lives can’t be separated. (1989, p.3)

His plea is not yet about using meditation techniques in therapy, but creating space in one’s life for both personal psychotherapy and a spiritual practice.

Looking to see how meditation is used in integrating these two further, we may look first to research psychologist Robert Ornstein. In his consideration of the psychology of consciousness, he treats meditation as an important aspect of the psychology of human development. He posits strongly the need for integration of spiritual and psychological traditions. Of meditation, he says:

But the exercises of meditation do not involve reason and they cannot be understood by means of ordinary logic alone. They are rather, techniques designed to cultivate a certain mode of operation of the nervous system, at a certain time, within a certain context. This is the use of “thinking of nothing.” (1972, p.105)

And that mode of operation, Ornstein makes sure to point out, is not just about relieving stress so that we can avoid illness or cope with life. It includes these functions:

But most importantly, it is the shift from an individual and analytic consciousness to the attainment of an over-all perspective of unity, of humanity as one organism, which is the purpose of these esoteric traditions and the aim of these meditation exercises. “ (1972, p. 140)
Remembering the clients' stories about their own psychotherapy, we may note, from the work of Frances Vaughan, the place that meditation holds in helping clients get to those experiences of "Higher Selves".

The transpersonal Self can sometimes be experienced directly in meditation. When the mind is quiet and the endless inner monologue ceases, the quiet, open mind may experience the Self as a source and context of all experience. (1986, p. 55)

As a technique towards the enhancement of this interface, meditation is a common and standard tool. The results may be miraculous by scientific standards, but more commonly are reliable changes in client experience of self and life. "Indeed more experienced meditators note that what tends to emerge as one continues to have more and deeper experiences, is an underlying calm and nonreactive equanimity ..." (Walsh, 1980, p. 155)

While meditation as a technique has entered the mainstream for psychotherapists, other, more subtle realms and experiences are still left in the periphery. Noting, as I have, that practitioners are perhaps shy about representing their work at this cutting, but not yet scientific edge, my quest, in both the research of this paper and in this literature review, is to find out more about what these people are actually doing day to day with clients.
The Practitioners Speak

I've been in the field of transpersonal therapy for twenty years. When I think about the pioneers who have taken spirituality into the offices, consulting rooms, groups, and personal encounters with clients, and who have written about it, the names are few. There are theoreticians whose work has been of great value to practitioners. There are also schools of psychology, based more or less in transpersonal contexts. Those that stand out as comprehensive and relatively well known include archetypal psychology (Jungian), psychosynthesis, Holotropic breath work, Morita therapy, and logotherapy. In addition many Eastern religious orientations have a corresponding psychology. Sufism, many forms of Buddhism, and esoteric Christianity, among others have a comprehensive, and clearly transpersonal psychology.

But my interest in this exploration is not with the theoreticians or the schools of thought, but with the practitioners, the front line. The final element of the review of literature, therefore will be to hear about their experience as it has been written in books and journals. From the well known few, to the noble unknown therapist who works hard to have her article published in a friendly journal, I will attempt to draw forth a sense of what therapists are saying about this interface between spiritual tradition and psychotherapy. I will focus on exploring the wide range of processes practitioners are involved in that bring them to the interface of
spirituality and psychotherapy. The breakdown of this last section will include the impact of personal spiritual experience on therapists, spiritual processes that therapists use for themselves, techniques they use with clients and, briefly, what client experiences might elicit a need for the transpersonal.

The Impact of Personal Experience

We bring our spiritual experience, our beliefs, our practices, and our ideas with us into therapy, whether we use them consciously or attempt to box them into the realm of our "personal life." Few of us have not been touched, in one way or another by spirituality, whether in our religion of origin, in new found spirituality, or in consciousness that embraces possibility. The effects of that can be seen in myriad ways as practitioners.

"You see, I just need to learn to depend on God, to quit worrying about my life and put it all in His hands. If I could just do that, everything would take care of itself. ' I felt my body tighten as Bill, a student client, expressed his desire to become more trusting of God's will for his life. I was touched and saddened for him, for I knew he was locked in a deep personal struggle, a struggle that could potentially shake him to the very core of his being. I tried to overcome the tightness I experienced; the feeling was inhibiting me from listening fully to Bill, and I strongly wanted to hear what he had to say. As I thought of his need to learn to depend on God, however, I was flooded by a sea of personal memories, some bitter, some sweet, that swept me away to a not so distant time when I experienced a similar religious struggle of my own. (Watkins, 1982, p. 213)
What we do with what we bring to the therapy encounter largely determines who we are in that role. From the therapists who have actively and consciously chosen to include the spiritual dimension, we have much to learn.

Jean Houston gave us the “possible human,” an invitation to an exceptional life. Her work sprang from her own awakenings in childhood. “Almost everyone wakes up at least once in a lifetime, and almost everyone goes promptly back to sleep again. But through the drowse of the rest of their days they still faintly remember that time of awakening.” (1982, p.182) Remembering her own, she stayed the course to learn more about how to wake others and to invite her clients and students to become more than they had imagined possible.

Frances Vaughan is a major contributor to the field of transpersonal therapy.

I have devoted much of my professional life to healing emotional, mental, and existential dis-ease. Personally, I have been on a continually unfolding spiritual path ever since I can remember. In this book I have attempted to offer a new vision of healing and wholeness for the purpose of enhancing well-being at any level on the the spectrum of consciousness and pointing the way to liberation. (1986, p. iii.)

Allan Weinstock, Ph.D. (Swami Ajaya) and Rudolph Ballentine, M.D. discovered their guru, Swami Rama in the Himalayas. Through him they brought the practice of yoga and the principles of Eastern spirituality to their work as psychologist and psychiatrist. This surprising (to them)
movement in their lives led to the publication of a seminal book in the field, *Yoga and Psychotherapy: The Evolution of Consciousness*. (1983)

Victor Frankl developed logotherapy as a result of his spiritual crises and realization in a concentration camp. In the face of that which is most horrible he discovered strength, love, spirituality. He could not return to his practice of psychiatry without radically altering his view of human potential, his belief that life was about meaning. (1963)

Roberto Assagioli (1965) spent his early life training in psychoanalysis and studying esoteric spiritual traditions. From this emerged psychosynthesis. It is a synthesis of both aspects of his life's work. It is interesting to note that the tendency towards denying the spiritual element of our work as therapists plagued Assagioli in his work as well. His understandable efforts to support psychology as a mainstream scientific endeavor, made him choose to keep his private spiritual life completely hidden, pushing him into two dimensions: work with psychology and work in the fields of meditation and esoteric spirituality. The taboo against spirituality in psychotherapy was felt to be so strong by Assagioli and his followers that a "veil of silence" was constructed to separate his two worlds!

For each therapist there is story of their own unfolding that permeates, in some way, hidden or revealed, the professional work they do. And each therapist makes meaning of their experiences, in some way, in
the office. What do these many practitioners actually do to support or sustain the spiritual reality that they are personally in touch with?

### Therapists’ Use of Spiritual Processes

Mark Epstein brings to the attention of his fellow therapists the notion of “evenly suspended attention,” a strategy for therapist stance that originates with the work of Freud but is buoyed and further defined by Eastern meditation traditions.

The development of this ability is the cornerstone of Buddhist psychology and is well detailed in its psychological texts. ...The Buddhist assertion that, with practice, a state of mind may be established within which changing objects may be viewed evenly over time lends credence to Freud’s argument that a similar state of mind may be established, with practice, in the analyst (1984, p.197)

Meditation is a strategy not just to be used for clients, but as a basis for the therapist’s own consciousness.

Mona Barbara applies what she calls “bifocal vision,” the choice to see a client in both her personality identification and in her higher Self or soul.

Since bifocal vision is seeing all the of the client’s experience, including the transcendent and the immanent, it is more accurate and more likely to draw the client onward. The counselor is seeing the pain as it is, and also reflecting the basic essence, the part of the persona that has infinite wisdom and is leading the persona to deeper levels of experience. (1980, p.11)
Swami Ajaya experiences his work with clients in the fullness of his belief that “there is an underlying unity in all existence.” (1983, p. 36)) The client’s experience of painful life issues can be resolved in this unity.

Monistic psychology asserts that one may release himself from this enchantment and awaken to the experience of unity. Then he will find that what seemed to be the seeker and the goal are one in the same, that all differences and distinctions emanate from and have their existence in the same ultimate source, and that he himself is not distinct from that source. (1983, p.36)

And Ajaya says, the therapist has a role to play in inviting this experience of unity.

In order to allow the client this sort of freedom and acceptance, the therapist must remain the neutral witness, free from attachments to either side of the polarity with which the client is struggling at the moment. He may attempt to clarify the struggle that the client is putting himself through, but he remains a model of one who had disengaged from identification with polarities and their ensuing drama. (1983, p.228)

James Bugental, forty years at the game of psychotherapy, posits finally in his latest work that intuition, therapist intuition, is a key component to the therapeutic process. Intuition, like other aspects of the spiritual or transpersonal dimension, defies scientific analysis and so is met in the field of psychology with a certain skepticism. As a rule, therapists, in training and in supervision or case presentation, perhaps even in inner dialogue tend to want to understand, cognitively, what is happening with
the client, why they (the therapist) made the intervention that they did, what basis they have for formulating an hypothesis. Common therapist language does not include, “Well I intuited that... ” Spiritual traditions have long been more friendly towards the concept of intuition. It is assumed that meditation and the corresponding awareness that emerges from that clear mental state are the ground from which intuition springs. In psychosynthesis, intuition is one of six psychological functions, along with more commonly accepted functions such as thinking, emoting, and sensing. Intuition, in this map, is anchored in the transpersonal dimension of the human psyche. For Bugental, the work that he must do as a therapist is to develop and ground himself in this intuitive mode. “A therapist must develop her intuitive capacities, continually seeking to become more sensitive and skillful in using them to sense where the patient is and what is possible and needful at any given point in the work.” (1987, p.11)

Intuition has been one of the non-issues in therapeutic conversation, while in practice it is perhaps as common a part of the therapist’s process as a friendly hello. A practice that is much more in conversation, but with overtones that embrace the spiritual-psychological conflict, is the idea of values. At times therapy has been approached as a value free endeavor and to this day the therapist must carefully attend to her influencing. For those practicing a spiritually based psychology, values are a strong and necessary part of their work. Russel Bishop contends that divergent values
on the part of the counselor and client may likely lead to difficulties in the therapeutic encounter. Can a Buddhist feminist work effectively with a fundamentalist Christian? For Bishop the task is two-fold. The therapist is obligated to learn about and be able to accept the client’s religious or value based belief system (and to refer if acceptance is not possible) and to know her own values clearly enough to be able to self-disclose without devaluing or attempting to alter client values. (1992, pp. 179-89)

Sampling practitioners’ attempts to articulate the influence of a spiritual perspective on their work has offered us some key ideas for therapist consideration. Therapists, inclined to support a spiritual perspective in their work, may find that the meditative aspects of presence, attention, and awareness and a neutral observer stance are crucial in their role. Likewise the therapist may need to consider, embrace, or hold to a world view that supports, for instance bifocal vision, a view of unity, and other concepts that anchor a spiritual reality. The therapists’ own intuition and sensitivity are factors in their work as well as the spiritually based value system that the therapist holds to.

Techniques

What these therapists actually do as interventions is another question. “Techniques” is perhaps a limiting construct for the efforts spiritually oriented therapists make to implement this mysterious realm
into their work. “Processes” and “strategies”, may be better terms. As we explore some of these, it will be clear that they defy easy description. Some will fall more easily into categorization than others.

Roberto Assagioli (1965) holds strongly to using the technique of disidentification early and often in his therapeutic work. Disidentification is a three-fold process which mirrors certain meditation processes, particularly Vipassana or mindfulness meditation. The process starts with identification, coming to know and experience fully all of who we are. This is especially useful as a counterweight to the tendencies towards denial and repression that are so common. By identifying all aspects of being and disidentifying from them, the client develops the observer space that also comes from meditation. The disidentification lets us step out of that identification in full awareness and move into Self-identification wherein we stand at the center of our being. Disidentification “serves as a technique for acquiring pure self-awareness, the pure sense of self-identity.” (1965, p. 65) Likewise therapists who teach their clients meditation or instruct them to use meditative processes are aiming towards this outcome through a specific technology.

More complicated are the experiences that therapists invite or look for in their clients that open the doors to a more unitive, expansive consciousness. Wilson Van Dusen keeps alert for what he calls “the fertile void.”

At the very center of psychotherapeutic experiences there is an awesome hole. With Western modes of thought the hole tends
to be seen as a deficiency which the therapist plugs by an interpretation of what it means. My point is quite simple. The hole is the very center and heart of therapeutic change. To my knowledge the only place its dynamics are adequately described is in ancient Oriental writings. “ (1975, p.89)

John Welwood refers to a similar phenomena as the “moment of world collapse. To Welwood this collapse invites consideration of “the underlying sense of utter vulnerability, of clients not knowing who they are, of not having anything ultimately to identify with. Yet I see this vulnerability as the essence of human nature and of consciousness.” (1982, pp.132-3) Not surprisingly these frames on the therapeutic encounter, lead like disidentification and meditation towards the more expansive experience of Self that is unbounded by roles and limiting beliefs.

Welwood (1984) pointing towards this expanded self, describes, metaphorically that end point that these therapists look towards.

The joining of heaven and earth, letting go and grounding, can open up a third principle of inner work--awakening the heart--which corresponds in Chinese thought to the man(human) principle. “Heart” in this sense refers to the way we are open and exposed to the world; it is that “part” of us where we can be most deeply touched. (1984, p.69)

Even a die hard spiritually oriented therapist like myself, quickly sees after even a short introduction to spiritual techniques the lopsidedness that is possible if one holds only the transpersonal dimension. This is not the time to consider when or why certain of these spiritually oriented
techniques might be used, but suffice it to say, that the theories involved in bridging the interface between spirituality and psychotherapy are not naive nor do they displace the solid grounded theory of Western psychology, but simply build a further stepping stone from that strong foundation. As one instance of how this interface is viewed, we may consider the developmental models of Engler, Wilbur and others. These models offer a psycho-spiritual developmental process that sees the human being in movement through developmental stages that were well charted by traditional therapy and onwards to as yet uncharted dimensions. It is these uncharted dimensions that call for the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy.

Wilbur, for instance, posits the following stages of development, which cover the range from early, symbiotic stages through adult, personal levels into the farthest regions of the transpersonal. They include in chronological order of development from birth through adulthood: sensoriphysical, phantasmic-emotional, rep-mind, rule/role mind, formal/reflexive, vision/logic, psychic, subtle, causal, and ultimate. (1986, pp. 65-105) These stages anchor the conception that transpersonal psychology must include the whole developmental spectrum and have appropriate technology for each level.

Interestingly, Wilbur notes that most psychology addresses itself to the lower levels only. He mentions Jung, Assagioli, Maslow and Progoff as those whose work addresses transpersonal levels. Unity consciousness, he
believes is addressed only by spiritual traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and esoteric Islam, Christianity and Judaism. (1981)

Engler sums up the importance of this interface.

As I have understood it as a psychologist in both traditions, both a sense of self and no-self, seem to be necessary-- in that order-- to realize the state of optimal psychological well-being which Freud once described as “ideal fiction” and the Buddha long before him had already described as “the end of suffering. (1984, p. 53)

Many more “techniques” and frames exist. More, no doubt, than we have ever seen written about. Surely many of us make them up as we go, never publishing or teaching, but drawing on that intuition that we so finely hone.

Johnson interviewed six transpersonal therapists and created a list of spiritually based techniques that these people used. Many are commonly understood references or techniques, others obscure. From six therapists alone came:

AA twelve steps, attitudinal healing, bibliotherapy, cards and saying, centering, chanting, CORE therapy, Course in Miracles, Dream work, Golden Light, Guided imagery, healing memories, higher self, journaling, meditation, metaphysical, multiple ego states, Native American, past-life therapy, pathwork, prayer, psychosynthesis, silence, spiritual healing, tapes, and teaching transcendent view. (1989, pp.257-258)

The list serves to tell us that a variety of spiritual techniques, however rarely elaborated, are being used in offices of practitioners across the
country. Practitioners, it seems, are rich with strategies for supporting this interface.

To what end is this inclusion of spirituality in the psychotherapeutic process, we might be inclined to ask. It is evident to many of us that clients are not satisfied (nor are we ourselves) with the highest reaches of traditional Western psychology.

Western psychology in general and psychoanalytic theory in particular do not address the other end of the developmental spectrum. Their definitions of maturity and health reach no further than psychosocial identity, object constancy, mutuality in object relations, and more adaptive, less conflicted rearrangements of impulse and defense. (Engler, 1983, p. 52)

That being so, the spiritually oriented therapist is reaching towards another possible goal, which Frances Vaughan terms “healthy spirituality”. The elements of healthy spirituality, she notes, include authenticity, letting go of the past, facing our fears, insight and forgiveness, love and compassion, community, awareness, peace, and liberation. (1993, p.117-8) A tall order, it seems, but a worthy ideal, a star to guide us.

As an innate capacity that exists in every human being, psychologically healthy spirituality is not limited to any one set of doctrines or practices. From a psychological perspective, spirituality is a universal experience, not a universal theology. Spirituality may be theistic as in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, non-theistic as in Buddhism or polytheistic as in Hinduism. It can also be humanistic, as expressed by Abraham Maslow in his research on peak experience and transcendence.
Spirituality can be found at the heart of the great religions and in no religion. Spirituality can be found everywhere, not only in temples, churches and synagogues, not only in the stars, not only in music and song and dance, not only in the beauty of nature or the intimacy of a love relationship, but in every moment of every day of ordinary life. Spirituality is often awakened in the presence of death, and whenever the heart opens fully to love without fear. Those who seek peace, truth and love and find it within themselves become the teachers who can share their experience. Gandhi said, "My life is my message." And so it is with everyone of us. (Vaughan, 1993, p. 116)

Client Experience

There are many ways to conceive of when clients would be helped by spiritual processes. The developmental model offers us a general view. Any client moving beyond the ego-bound stages of development will need a therapist holding this frame. Even as the DSMIV moves towards the possibility of diagnostic categories related to spiritual issues, the transpersonal therapy movement is exploring serious psychological crises in the context of a spiritual frame. Mystical experience with psychotic features (Lukoff,1985, pp.155-182); kundalini (Waldman, 1992. pp 115-149.); trance channeling versus multiple personality disorder (Hughes, 1992,pp 181-192); spiritual emergency (Grof, 1989) are all client issues based in the spiritual end of the developmental spectrum. Ken Wilbur reminds us of what he calls the Pre-Trans fallacy. A client whose issues are transpersonal may easily be sidetracked or damaged by a therapist who can only conceive of her issues in prepersonal, developmentally early concepts. A spiritual emergency reduced to a diagnosis of psychosis, is a breech of our directive
to do no harm. Likewise, a psychotic episode, interpreted “up” to a mystical experience creates equal harm. (Wilber, 1983) It is clear that special training is needed to accurately assess the variety of client experiences that might better be treated at the transpersonal dimension. These few practitioners publishing their experience offer us an important piece towards expanding the repertoire of therapy.

Yet, even if we never encounter a serious transpersonal crisis, such as those described above, there is a need to be ready to open the door to the transpersonal for many middle of the road clients. More than twenty years ago, Assagioli (1965) noted the increase in spiritual issues in clients. It seems, to me practicing these twenty years since he wrote this, that spiritual issues in clients continue to be vastly important.

The incidence of disturbances having a spiritual origin is rapidly increasing nowadays, in step with a growing number of people who, consciously or unconsciously are groping their way towards a fuller life. Moreover, the heightened development and complexity of the personality of modern man and his more critical mind have rendered spiritual development a more difficult and complex process. In the past, a moral conversion, a simple whole-hearted devotion to a teacher or savior, a loving surrender to God, were often sufficient to open the gates leading to a higher level of consciousness and a sense of inner union and fulfillment. Now, however, the more varied and conflicting aspects of modern man’s personality are involved and need to be transmuted and harmonized with each other: his fundamental drives, his emotions and feelings, his creative imagination, his inquiring mind, his assertive will, and also his interpersonal and social relationships. (Assagioli, 1965: 40)
Summary

The doors are opening towards an integration of spiritual theories, strategies, and techniques into the field of human services. Indications are that practitioners feel strongly about this and work with these concepts, but do not feel they have a place to talk about this interface. They believe in the interface, but are not trained in working there.

Client issues appear, perhaps more and more frequently, that are directly related to spiritual concerns. Certain techniques, particularly meditation are becoming more accepted in the mainstream, and life threatening crises tend to draw forth spiritual perspectives for the clients and therapists who work with these issues.

A review of the spiritual literature gives a glimpse into a rich treasure chest of wisdom, that could be applied to the work of therapy. And it seems that while these fields have followed their separate paths for many years, they may, in fact, share a common goal: the full flowering of humanity.

The literature needs to be enriched, in order for this interface to continue to blossom. The stories, beliefs, experiences, case illustrations of practitioners in the field need to be added. In order to ground and fill in the potential that the literature points to, the real, lived experience of this reality needs to be explored. Only those on the front lines, practicing with real clients and their real needs, can fill in this need. Their voices need to be heard and in hearing them our understanding of this interface will be
strengthened. As I leave the literature to move into the personal world of a few of these practitioners, I know that I am moving into rich, fertile ground.
CHAPTER 4
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Design of the Study

This study set out to be an exploration of the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy in clinical settings. The initial phase of research consisted of a broad exploration of the literature from the fields of psychology and spirituality. Both of these areas are vast and a wide ranging search allowed consideration of many dimensions that have relevance to this interface. The psychological literature review revealed that there was little information available about practitioner experience of this interface: though inferences, especially from within the field of transpersonal psychology and healing from illness gave indication that this interface is alive and well. The exploration of spiritual literature, the sacred traditions, would not be expected to address this interface and yet the importance of grounding oneself in the material of the spiritual traditions was crucial to understanding the interface.

The absence of concrete writing on the interface of spirituality in the helping arts, especially from the practitioner's point of view, suggested a need to explore further. An exploratory study to draw forth preliminary
theory about practitioners' experiences of spirituality in their professional lives became the next step. A qualitative, naturalistic, phenomenological research methodology was chosen as the optimum format for this type of exploration. Lincoln and Guba (1991), Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Ellis and Flaherty (1992) validate the use of naturalistic, or qualitative, or heuristic, or humanistic methods for the exploration of lived experience which is the purpose of this study. Seidman (1991) validates the use of in-depth interviewing as the mode compatible with naturalistic inquiry. Stories are a way of knowing, Seidman point out. Stories are especially good as a way of knowing real, lived experience. It is this knowing that is the key to this research; knowing how practitioners live in the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy, how they make meaning of these concepts in their work.

Participants in the study

Through a network of resources including personal contacts, professional contacts and secondary referrals, letters explaining the study (see Appendix B) were sent to eighteen people. Though the criteria for selection was not rigid, it was based upon the participant practicing presently or in the past in any of a variety of human services practices. These practices needed to include a psychological component to qualify. Of these eighteen, fifteen replied affirmatively to the request to be involved
in the study. A telephone contact ascertained their willingness to be interviewed and included in the study. With the difficulties in scheduling and time constraints, a final group of fourteen was chosen to be interviewed.

Pilot Study

A pilot interview with a colleague, as well as consultation with the dissertation committee offered the background for choosing the final interview questions (see Appendix A) and a tentative sense of the order in which these might be presented. The approximate time needed for the questions was also determined in this process.

Interview

A semi-structured interview format was devised as the best method for research. The questions were not asked in a chronological order in every case as the open ended nature of the interview left participants free to explore the areas of interest that were most relevant to them. Often the first question would evoke a long response that ended up answering many of the other questions. Participants were free not to answer all questions and several did this. Many took the interview into areas that were not specifically related to the research questions, and this freedom to create a
narrative was supported. In every case, however, at some point in the interview each question was raised. The interviews were approximately one hour in length.

Procedure

An initial phone contact set up the interview time and place and I met with each participant at the place of their choosing. For many, this was their office: for others, my office. At the outset, after introductions and appreciation on my part, an informed consent form (see Appendix C) was given to each participant to read and sign. Questions about the form were answered. An explanation of the process was offered, the tape recording commenced and the interview began. Closure involved repeated appreciation, small talk and often a show of appreciation by the participants for the experience, which they valued.

Analysis

All sessions were transcribed verbatim into a Macintosh computer qualitative research program called HyperQual. The verbatim, unedited transcript was sent to each participant with return postage and envelope and a request that they return it, if they had any corrections, deletions or additions that they wished to make. Five of the fourteen subjects returned
the original transcript with minor corrections. All knew that they would have another opportunity to correct after I had created profiles. All changes were entered into the original transcripts.

The HyperQual system (Padilla, 1991) is designed to give the researcher an opportunity and a means, free of hard copy, to sort, code, and tag chunks of information based on emerging themes. Through reading and rereading the original transcripts, certain categories emerged as those that were most commonly revealed in the interviews. While these categories were related to the questions asked, there was not a direct correlation. The interview consisted of fourteen question as follows:

1) What initially interested you in this study?
2) Will you share a case experience(s) that seems important to you in this light?
3) Do you have an identified religious or spiritual path or practice?
4) What is the context that you hold as a therapist? (human being)?
5) What is your psychotherapeutic training? current psychotherapeutic views?
6) How do your spiritual and psychotherapeutic world views overlap or differ?
7) What has your own development towards this interface been?
8) When spiritual issues (content) are involved in the therapy, who has initiated this? You or the client? If you, what prompts you to do so?
9) Under what circumstances would you be likely to initiate the use of spiritual processes?
10) What specific processes (strategies or techniques) do you use that reflect a spiritual perspective?
11) Is this interface important to you? Why? What is its impact?
12) How do you compare the work you do that has a spiritual content with work that you do (or have done) that does not?
13) What problems, limitations or needs do you experience in working at this interface?
14) What else would you like to share that is relevant to this study?
The six categories that emerged were:

1) The participant's personal journey as it lead them to their current work and the interface in that work of spiritual and psychological perspectives
2) The spiritual views and beliefs of the participants
3) The participants' general experience of working with people
4) The participants' understanding of clients' spiritual issues
5) The techniques and strategies of a spiritual nature that the participants use in their work
6) The problems that participants experience as a result of the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy

These six categories became the basis for each profile. In addition, case illustration, when it had been offered, was included in the profile as well as relevant closing remarks. The profile was constructed principally of the interviewee's words modified only for comprehension and clarity. When more than three or four words were involved that were not the participants' words, they were noted in parenthesis. More than 99% of each profile is the participants' language. The order of the wording does not reflect the chronology of the interview, but reflects the categorization.

Each profile, when completed was sent to the participant with return postage and a letter requesting corrections. While the first mailing elicited little response (and much of that was a mild embarrassment at the awkwardness of a verbatim transcript with all the 'ums' and 'uhs) the profile elicited a strong positive response in most cases and in several cases a thoughtful and considered response for additions or corrections to better express the participants experience. The majority of corrections were included.
It was not my original intention to include profiles on all fourteen participants, however the stories seemed so rich and each so unique in its contribution, that I chose to include all of them.

While the original creation of the profiles grew from the emergent categories within the transcripts, their completion and the comprehensive study of the entire data base suggested “themes within themes”. The profiles were divided into categories so that, separate from the individual’s story, each category was viewed and studied unto itself. Six documents were created, one for each category. From within this frame the analysis continued, looking for commonality within categories. This research led to the ideas that are the basis for chapter six. Each category revealed a number of themes, relevant to that category.

With all emergent themes, articulated, as perceived by this researcher the material yielded some preliminary theory and implication for further study. Certain possible implications for practitioners emerged as well.

Limitations

This study is a preliminary investigation. It is limited by the small number of participants, who are partially self-selected. This is only a small sampling of professionals, not only in their numbers but in the fields in which they practice. Not all types of human services work are represented. Ethnic, age, religious, geographical, sexual identity, and other key factors
have not been fully represented. Generalization is not appropriate from this sample. Conclusions reached are hypothetical and intended only as invitations to further explorations.
CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

In this section much of the story of the participants will be revealed in relationship to the major themes that emerged. These six categories indicate the emphasis and natural categorization of the material that emerged in the interviews. Offering the profiles through these six major categories begins to pave the way for the emerging themes that have implications for further study. The six categories are related to the original interview questions, but are not a duplication of them. As the participants' stories unfolded in an open-ended narrative, being prompted or mildly directed by questions, the six categories below better represented what was important to these subjects than the original fourteen questions did. The six major categories are:

1) The participant's personal journey as it lead them to their current work and the interface in that work of spiritual and psychological perspectives
2) The spiritual views and beliefs of the participants
3) The participants' general experience of working with people
4) The participants' understanding of clients' spiritual issues
5) The techniques and strategies of a spiritual nature that the participants use in their work
6) The problems that participants experience as a result of the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy.
In the profiles, the titles of each category have been shortened for ease in reading, but each section reflects the six categories stated above. It is the participants' words that fill in the categories. When offered by the participant, there is a case illustration designed to exemplify the practitioner's considerations of this interface. Each participant was instructed to protect the identity of their client. Closing thoughts that added an important piece to the profile were included as well.

To begin, I will introduce each of these kind people who shared a piece of their lives with me. I have given them names, drawn forth from my subjective experience of them and their stories. The introductions will be short, designed to offer just a handshake before the more intimate dialogue begins. In gleaning from the raw data of the transcripts, the categories that emerged from within the conversations, we find that we have stories within a story. Each profile has a star, a story line, some very important information, and a piece of personal truth.

The stories combined, as seen through the categories, tell us an even larger story of many people, varied and unique, struggling with and blossoming within the issues of integrating the transpersonal in psychotherapy. We come away with a certain clarity. Therapists are playing at this interface and loving it. Certain problems arise for them, at least in part as a result of this interface, in a professional world that does not overtly support it. Certain belief systems are held in common, and uniqueness emanates through their work. Welcome to the worlds of
fourteen fascinating people! Apart from the introductions, all words (unless in parentheses) are those of the interviewee, modified simply for smoothness and clarity. Parentheses indicate my words or my clarification of what the participant is communicating.

"Drums and Rattles"

"Drums and Rattles" is very lovely, soft, and powerful. We met in her small office, filled with wonderful images, musical instruments, turtle shells, drums and rattles and bones. There was a couch and chair as well as a place for two to sit on the floor. "Drums" is a psychotherapist in private practice, working with many alternative modes of therapy: sound and music, drumming, imagery, meditation, shamanism, and more. Her work is anchored in transpersonal training at the graduate and post graduate level. She offered me tea. She has been a musician and an educator. She is a woman finding herself and helping others to find themselves. She is a seeker, a mother, an explorer of wilderness, and a shining light. In her work she is finding her own words.

The Personal Journey

Right now if someone at the emergency room asked me for a religious denomination, I would have a hard time giving them an answer. I have been in the process for most of my life of trying to find out what's true
for me, what works for me, and letting go of a lot of unexamined junk. I was originally a midwestern Bible Belt Methodist.

Now I am deeply nourished by an earth centered spirituality that has been awakened by Native American traditions as well as the writings of women with courage and passion for the larger truth. I view my womanhood as a sacred force, co-equal and providing an essential balance with masculine spiritual energy.

What didn't work for me in mainstream Christianity was what no one would ever talk about in Church. I was very involved with mainstream Methodist, Episcopal, and Congregational churches up until about 4 years ago. I was trying to be creative, to be who I was in my fullness, yet I found that part of me wasn't welcome in church. When I shared my concerns with my women friends, I learned that I was not the only one who was feeling this way.

I believe that the whole Garden of Eden thing continues to exert a powerful spell on our culture's ability to find the deeper truths about feminine energy. Supposedly Adam ate the apple at Eve's suggestion. When God asked Adam why he did it, Adam blamed Eve. They were thrown out of paradise, became ashamed of their bodies, children were to be birthed in pain, and Eve was judged at fault and therefore inherently evil or bad. Fundamentally, in our mainstream culture, very little has changed.
Backing up slightly in my story, in my late teens and twenties I began to feel that Christianity just didn't have all the answers, so I decided to go back into history and explore Judaism. At this point the search wasn't conscious, although in retrospect I know it has been a constant undercurrent in my life. I fell in love with a Jewish man, got married just before my 22nd birthday and had my first baby at 23. I learned that women don't fare too well in Judaism either. Eve is readily scapegoated in both Judaism and Christianity.

It seems that what I was searching for, as I review my past, was a sense of gratitude for being who I actually was. Ever since I was a little girl I had wonderful moments of being aware that there was something very sacred about being a woman, something in my experience that was magical, very wonderful and very whole. Earthiness, bitchiness, and the sacred feminine have no place in the church, yet they are part of every woman. There is this really narrow place where a woman is judged okay. If she steps outside this, she becomes the serpent, as though the serpent is something bad. Actually the serpent is a very sacred earth energy. For thousands of years, in many diverse cultures, the serpent has been a symbol of life and sexuality.

My introduction to the spirituality of indigenous peoples came when I was in therapy with a Jungian analyst about six years ago. The big turning point for me was a three-day workshop that she offered at a rustic setting in the wilderness. We explored the Navajo deity of Changing Woman, through a wonderful process of storytelling, drumming, chanting,
as well as sharing dreams and visions. We were reading from the Navajo Creation Story, words transcribed from their oral tradition, which deals with how do we all happen to be here, why do we have the energies we have, why do we have persistent problems, why is life too so weird and wonderful?

All of a sudden I became conscious that the earth and the feminine are the same. I realized that what is happening to our lives and our bodies in this very moment is the same thing that is happening to the Earth! This was a major revelation in my spiritual journey. I realized that I had been unconsciously, but relentlessly, on a search for a way to hold myself in beauty and wholeness ever since I can remember. I suddenly recalled sitting under a big, old elm tree in Kansas the summer before my 3rd birthday. My body reexperienced that same incredible sense of wonder. I felt surrounded by a warm peaceful sense of being a treasured and loved part of all life just as I was.

Spiritual Views

My belief is that we are all energetic clusters that come in human form and that we have an energetic imprint of who we are. We are definitely more than our egos or the pain we experience as a child, though that may be part of our individual imprint. Looking at it from a certain point of view, that may actually inform us with a great amount of wisdom
about life. But that is taking a bigger view about who we are in the universe.

Working with People

I believe our energetic entities are a spiritual manifestation. That defines spiritual as some sort of energy that you can't see, feel, touch, measure, and so to the extent that someone is unaware or not plugged into that "larger than" that is right in front of their nose, they are not fully living into who they are, and there is some pain in that and some aren't aware of that. But those coming to me are experiencing pain and it is usually creativity blocks, expressive things. I see that expressing oneself truly, deeply from the core of being of what one is is a spiritual thing.

I am very, very curious about people and how they manifest and if they come here, I want to be a catalyst for them in some way to help them move the way they want to be moved. My examples or stories or metaphors might be very much influenced by what has worked for me. But I would always phrase it, "This is how I see it, how would you phrase it, does this make sense to you?" For some of my clients it is a new thing. They haven't had their life framed in these kinds of terms. They take to it very readily. The beauty of the earth based spirituality, is that there is no shame, no guilt. What happens to you is a lesson. You learn from your mistakes. Life is there for the making. They love it.
Spiritual Issues in the Work

I probably see most issues as spiritual issues even though I may not overtly be using that terminology when working on the nuts and bolts of things. But there's usually something that is being thwarted in manifesting and that's where the work is, whether it was, that as a little kid mom never let me do whatever, or my work doesn't let me do whatever, or my life isn't manifesting. I see spirit very much as energy. We have to just break off a piece of it and focus on that deeply, otherwise you get lost.

The first few times that a person comes, there is creating a safe environment so they can talk about these things, because in the world at large, people think you're nuts if you talk this way. I take cues, body language cues as to whether we're going too fast, whether they're comfortable. If I err at all, I probably err allowing too much space for that feeling of comfort. I'd rather err on that side than having them feel like they have to perform spiritually for me somehow.

Techniques

Right away I do a disidentification exercise, within the first session or two, so I identify that center self, the place of sovereignty. And what I try to do is create that as a very safe place--that center place--so that even if we go into childhood trauma that brings tears and frustrations in the current moment, we can realize there's a safe place that's bigger than all of that. We
can go back and hang out in that place. I really try to carve that place, calling it whatever we need to call it.

I use the medicine wheel as the idea that we move in cycles. I may overtly do a meditation or a healing. I want time to experiment and play, and invoke whatever might come into the room, if just given an invitation. I might take the content of the session, whether they're feeling stuck or feeling like they're a worthless piece of shit because of something or other, and I can frame it in terms of the medicine wheel, in terms of movement and life and learning lessons, and learning from mistakes.

I can do a learning piece with sound. There are sounds for each portion of the wheel. It's all over the place. I might not even tell them that we're working in the East, and that I see them on the brink of birthing something in their life, or giving themselves permission to exist in the world, in a way their mother never gave them. Then I might take something like my little angel bells and I will bring this around at the end and talk about birthing things, and ask them, “Where does it go in your body? How do you feel awakened when you hear these bells? What is in you that you don't even know about most of the time, that you can draw on?”

I see things circularly. I'm always taking maps and trying to turn them into a circle. Sometimes I might put four rocks out and I would use this crystal as the center of the wheel, which again would be the spirit.
The drum is of the South and that's the heartbeat—that's where you find the heart of meaning for your life. The bones are the West. That's cutting old patterns, saying, "I want to let them go." That's also the place of being in the darkness.

I’ll sing to them sometimes. I’ll use prayer at the end. It really frees me up to say, “Look, my intentions are good. I’m not here just to mess with somebody.” I try to encourage them to have a spiritual practice on their own, but I have a sense that that's not working too well with everybody. I work with the chakras, too.

I get immediate feedback—such gratefulness at the end of these sessions—"I feel just wonderful."

Problems

I love it when I talk to someone who's been traditionally trained and in the field for quite a while, and is coming around to doing some of this stuff too, because there's a part of me, left over from that Bible Belt childhood, that can feel somewhat threatened by those who appear very straight. When someone gives the appearance that everything's working great for them, and they have plenty of money and they have all the clients they want, and they're really happy with their lives, a part of me will say, "Why do I always have to do everything the hard way?"
Case Illustration

There was a client who began therapy with a sense of relationships not working, of feeling more of a victim in life. Her work was kind of oppressive. Client is in early 30's, still very much bound into the parents' way of looking at things, feeling almost numb in certain parts of the body. Could bring breath down into maybe the heart, and then couldn't bring it down further and was in a lot of physical pain. We did some work with accessing the wise inner guide. I had the client bring in some dreams. There was a figure that came into a dream, that also cooperated with this wise inner guide figure--anchoring that inside of the client as wisdom that was there for the tapping into, for the taking. We did some shamanic journeying with the drumming to contact the power animal within the session, going into the vibrations of the drumming, going into an altered state, similar to a dream state. However, (in this state) you're aware that you're in the room. You know what day it is, but you're also somewhere else and you can come back. It's not scary. You feel safe all the time. We were accessing an energy that was right on target for what this client needed--to move some of this energy, dialoguing with these figures, being playful with them. Sometimes they would come in humorous kinds of ways. We spent time finding some of the places where energy's blocked in the body, in the hips and the belly and the thighs, and we're finding it's in the ankles now, and I suggested that maybe it was trying to come out the
bottom of the foot and be rid of. We've done exercises with the feet, to feel in contact with the earth. I'm just seeing progress. I assume I've done some fairly deep work with this client.

They've been trusting of me. They've been very willing to try the intuitive time at the end of the sessions, and they've given me feedback that their life is different. It's helped them move themselves in their lives to a place where they're functioning better.

Closing Thoughts

This stuff works.

"Miracles"

"Miracles" is a woman of the heart and soul. She is a healer, a teacher of the Course in Miracles, a soulful seeker. She is a psychotherapist and group leader. I had never met "Miracles" but she kindly agreed to meet with me and spent our time enriching me with stories of her quest, stories of miracles and healing. She gave me her presence. "Miracles" is well known in our community and deeply appreciated.
As always, it was circuitous. I was born into a simple family, had a twenty-year, somewhat traditional marriage, similar to my parents. Divorce and separation. It was very traumatic. I had to identify my part in it. So once that began with the therapy, it made the separation clear, and I began a series of journeys.

First, before the divorce, I went to England and Scotland with a friend and I had a series of experiences which I didn't understand at all at the time. We decided to go to Glastonbury, Holy Isle, and Iona. I loved Holy Isle. We were out on that little island which is surrounded by the tides. I was meditating there very quietly, and I came out of it to hear a voice saying over and over, "All is one, all is one." I really was not clear about what that meant at all. I knew I was shaken. I continued on with my friend and we went to Findhorn, and there we did some more meditation. I felt the energy rush up my spine, and it stopped right here at the Third Eye, and I became almost physically nauseous, and I bent over. Findhorn seemed like a wonderful place to have an abortive kundalini experience, but no one knew much about it.

The next year my divorce was complete. My former husband and I had really worked toward a peacefulness between us. He gave me a trip around the world, and I took it. It was an unusual journey, and it's interesting that he gave it to me. We were a host family, while I was married to my first husband, to a Japanese couple who were very unusual. We loved
each other a lot, and it's what I realize now was one of those karmic things. So I stayed with them (in Japan). At the end of the week they really surprised me because the husband said, "We've arranged for you to go to a Zen Buddhist monastery". We went and it was wonderful, an old monastery, and a young priest met us at the door. This priest said to me through Akiko, "You will not see a Zen teacher here today." That was OK with me, because I wasn't expecting to see one, so I wasn't upset. We went in and took off our shoes and did the wonderful Zen sitting. At the end they whack you with a stick, and it was interesting. Afterwards the priest came up to me and said, "The Zen master here will see you now." We were shown to his study, and it was wonderful. It was what I'd hoped Japan would be. It had one single scroll on the wall and a beautiful tea chest, and a couch and two chairs. And he said to me, "Why do you come?" I said, "To learn and to share what I learn." He said, "I'll see you for twenty minutes." And I was delighted.

Actually he talked for two hours. Interestingly enough, the gist of what he said was essentially what I'd learned in the Course, and that was that it didn't make one whit of difference if he was master or student, it was the amount of loving kindness with which he approached a task that mattered. I always laugh when I think of how we ended it, because he had really given me this enlightened information. And I, being the Westerner that I am, suddenly looked at my watch and said, "I have a plane to catch and I have to go," and backed out. I smiled as I went down the hall and said
to myself, "You silly creature." The young priest said, "You know, I don't know why Hoju-san saw you. He sees no one." It was clear that he didn't understand it and I didn't understand it. We were both mystified. Then the young nun came and said, "He saw you because of accumulated goodness." I didn't know what that meant at that time, but obviously he was sensing some past life experiences, which he knew about, but which I was not aware of.

My aim was to spend a month in India, but on my way there I stopped in Sri Lanka and the same thing happened. It was a Sunday and I took a taxi to see the famous temples in the area. It got to be five o'clock and I told the taxi driver to take me back to the hotel. But he said, "No, there's one more you should see." And I said, "I really appreciate you wanting me to go, but I'm just really tired. Eight hours of temples is plenty." He said, "No, you really have to go to this temple." So he's driving and we walked in, and it was a very small, quiet, downtown temple. A young novice came up and he said, "The master will see you now." I said to the taxi driver, "Is that what you do?" He said, "I don't know!" Essentially his message was exactly the same thing. He gave me a discourse for about an hour, with a written meditation on loving kindness. He said you need to study this and read it every day until it becomes a part of your being.

The point he did make and that Hoju-san made was that this was the time for the meeting of East and West. The West had technical skills and the East had meditation skills. It was time to blend them, and there
were people who would do that, in any number of ways. I hadn't thought of that at all, but it was a clear message, along with loving kindness.

I went on to India. It was very hot, the summer in southern India. Then it was the time of Sri Bhagwan Rajneesh so I went over to Rajneesh's ashram. Some of his lectures were very inspiring. He had tremendous charisma and an awful lot of power. He drummed up a lot of energy. I felt a lot of liberation. It was an interesting experience. I had darshan with him, but he wasn't a person I wanted to spend a lot of time with. I came back to northern India, to Amritsar, the Radha Soami which at that time was led by Charon Singh. I had read his works.

I was in the process of finishing my psychological investigating by working in analysis, and I'd been reading at the suggestion of the analyst, Maharaja-ji's book, which was about the blending of East and West. So I wrote him and asked if I could come see him. I went on his birthday. I went way up into the north of India on one of those buses with maybe a thousand of his followers. It was a real experience. I got there and we all swarmed into this big ashram. I went to the building and saw one of his secretaries, who wasn't happy to see me. I was a Western woman. He said, "You can't stay here and you can't see Master, and if you get sick we can't take care of you. We have so much trouble with American visitors. We don't have food preparation for you here. " He was really worried about me. And I could understand that. I said, "I'll just go back and forth by bus from Amritsar each day. " So I started to leave and he came back and said, "Master
said bring her over." So I had about 25 minutes with Mahariji'ji. He's very powerful and I said to him, "I would like to stay here for a while." He said, "I do think you should stay here, you should not go back and forth." It was wonderful. I like him. His message was the same. It was a time for blending.

Spiritual Views

The Course in Miracles says that this world of form is not the truth and that the truth of us is the spirit beyond the form. We cannot know the essence of that spirit, which we can loosely call love, because that is beyond what can be taught, but that we can work to remove the blocks to the awareness of that spirit. As I read that, I just became aware that this was the path for me with my intense interest in psychology. What the Course says is that all teachers work on self first. So when I'm with a client, when I find there is some lack of peace, some little glitch that occurs, that's the time that I turn it over. I have a very simple method of saying, "I don't feel peaceful," and I invoke a higher power. Your life and your therapeutic practice aren't that much different. Eventually the guidance is pretty strong.

There are incredible mysteries and intelligence in the universe and it's in all things. To put it in theistic terms that would be "God". God immanent not God transcendent. We are the body of God.
Working with People

The Course's theory of psychotherapy says that we're all therapists, and that if I am working with a client I have to almost hold a double vision. I work on a basic psychotherapeutic level, investigating early patterns and home, presenting problems. The other aim is to hold the perfectness of that being.

(Do you teach them about a higher being?)

Absolutely, that's a part of it. Of course that doesn't come until later. You can't use it too early. When the time is right, yes--that's the aim. That's the essence, to work with the client to help them gain that inner security. It takes awhile. It's very difficult because all of us are fighting or are fooled by the voice of ego a lot.

(How do you have a sense of difference between the voice of the ego and something that's bigger?)

I use two guides. The first guide is that the voice of the holy spirit which speaks of nothing but love. That can be tricky, because the ego can be pretty good--(as a masquerade). On the other hand, one thing I've learned through trial and error, through the spirit, there's a joinedness that comes between the client and myself that is palpable. You do know. The other thing I use as a rough guide is when I can say to that client, "You're doing exactly what you need to do no matter what: anger, fear, no matter, there's no judgment."
And eventually I say whatever comes. It took a while to become brave enough. Usually, when people really begin to integrate the material, there's a shift that occurs. I'd say it's a shift that is one where people are far less interested in the form of their lives.

Techniques

I don't use meditation because I'm not a meditator and don't feel I could do that. But if I find a Course student, it would be wonderful to say, "Look at this passage or that passage." But as you probably know, true Course students are few on the ground--it's not easy stuff. So very frequently what I'll do is take a quote, several of which I've had printed up. If a quote comes to me while I'm working with a client, I'll simply hand them a card and say, "Put this on your refrigerator for the next week, and every time you go to make a meal, read it." I also have tapes.

Problems

I think it does bring up lots of issues, for instance I have worked at colleges. There's far from universal happiness with what I do. People are not always happy with the Course. It's very radical. It isn't an issue for me. It's not easy when you're lecturing, because the thing you have to realize is that you're out there encountering resistance.
Case Illustration

One woman in her forties was a teacher. She came to work on Course workshops. She was part of a spiritualist church, so she needed a lot of grounding, and also needed a lot of good basic psychotherapy. It was clear we were going to work together, and we did for two years, and did a lot of good work. It doesn't always lead to this dramatic outcome. But she came to a predictable crisis as she began to realize her ties in the spiritualist church, what she had wanted, the manipulation she had felt and had perpetrated, and also all the family issues that came up. She went into a deep depression. But out of this, through Course work, there was a total change of her lifestyle.

Closing Thoughts

It's coming to me more and more. I have really understood that there are so many pitfalls along the path. I certainly fell into one when I didn't pay much attention to the body. I'd always eaten adequately and lots of vegetables. I really like rice and beans. So that's an easy way for me to feed myself. But it's become really clear to me that, in my opinion, we have to deal with body, mind, and spirit--perhaps in greater portion on body and mind because spirit will come of its own accord--but that body really has to be cared for. I find that people when they get into this work, that's
one of the first things that drops away. They're not their bodies. And I am more and more saying "You can't do body without spirit or spirit without body."

And you have to have some kind of a mental discipline, I mean Sufism, Buddhism, the Course, psychosynthesis. I'm easy with any of those, but you need something to keep bringing you back.

"Minds and Bodies"

"Minds and Bodies" is a soft spoken man radiating strength, sitting upright on the floor of his office, a spacious group room, used for the work of transformation that he is about. He was an artist, and is still (no doubt) an artist; a man who knows love, has raised his children, found his gifts, and given back to his world. He is a psychotherapist, working with groups and individuals. His work goes back 20 years. He is ageless, having left chronological accounting of his years behind him. "Minds and Bodies" has explored and studied in the alternative and the traditional. He has a Ph. D. in psychology and works with the subtlest energies. He is of the East and West, New England and New Mexico! He has much to teach.

The Personal Journey

Many years ago I lived out West close to some Indians. They don't keep track of their age and it was a very wonderful thing. Some of the old
Indians would have no idea how old they were. They had stepped out of that thing of being measured in that particular way, so I decided fifteen or twenty years ago to emulate them- to not keep track of my age.

I always resisted having a spiritual tradition because I felt it was so often abused. I was always very much involved in aesthetics and nature, so my awareness is of something out there, something beyond human beings. Whenever anybody started talking "spirituality," I got goose bumps.

I underwent a Reichean process and it changed my life completely. I was an artist, living in New York City in the ending days of a lousy marriage. By the time I finished therapy I was living in New Mexico, homesteading, and had met the women I am still with twenty years later. It was a total shift. I had done a leadership training after I had finished therapy. One of the people from that group was a good friend of mine who came up, then moved away and commuted to lead groups. He kept complaining and said why don't you lead the groups, but I didn't want to do it. He called in sick more and more and finally I took over his groups. I had no academic training. I eventually went on to get some. I was out in left field. I trained in something called aura balancing. I studied color therapy, and postural integration which is a lot like Rolfing. I was doing all kinds of stuff.

I've always been fascinated by energy. That got me into the aura balancing and the whole psychic thing: psychic healing. I went to England for a year and spent a certain amount of time meeting up with well known psychic healers, studying what they did. I worked with
pendulums. I went over to England, studying ancient monuments. I have studied native American spiritual traditions also (the vision quest).

Spiritual Views

I had one experience in a therapy group. I went through a tremendous release of anger, (physical, shouting and screaming). At the end of it, it was like some kind of reality change. The group was all standing there looking at me. Everything was extraordinarily vivid. I could look at any one person’s face and I could see their past and into their future, how it would be... unless things changed. I looked at the rug. The rug was a flecked green and brown and I understood why the therapist had brought it in. It was beautiful. It was like a peyote vision, and I suddenly realized there was a possible state of mind like psychedelics that just lifted the blocks. For a few minutes I was totally clear. It didn't stay that way. I didn't go back as far as I was before. I didn't collapse back all the way. But, for a little while I had a vision of what could be.

This gets into the whole Reichean concept. You have blocked energy. It becomes chronic tension, then you become a limited ecosystem. That's a theory of mine of hierarchy of ecosystems. An extremely limited ecosystem would be a catatonic schizophrenic, who is not interactive with his environment, whereas an extremely enlightened person is interactive and extremely open--high energy. So I feel that spiritual evolution involves moving up in the levels of ecosystems. You assume more responsibility,
become part of a larger system, and then greater energy comes in. In some religious circles they talk about the soul being the human entity moving through evolution and the spirit being the energy, the universal energy, which animates the soul. I tend to believe that. So a highly armored organism has blocked against the flow of spirit; it's not in ecological balance.

Working with People

As I see it, emotional tensions cause the formation of armoring. The Reichean concept of armoring is both physical and characterological. It is a limitation of the capacity of the organism to enjoy emotion, so it loses touch with emotion.

What I've done in the last few years, is develop my own model- a holistic model called “mind-body healing.” It started with my dissertation. This model looks like a clock, or a wheel, with the core or soul of a person represented in the middle. Six lines or axes radiate out from the center, representing body, emotions, rational mind, imagination, will, and behavior. (Brown, personal communication at his request, 1993)

I've developed a theory about how armoring develops. I see the whole thing as a web. If a person has a disturbance, there will inevitably be a component on each of the axes of the wheel I just described. You can do therapy on any one of the axes. Cognitive therapy, for example, works on the rational axis-talk, talk talk-which helps some. My theory is that
therapy will proceed more quickly if you can operate on several axes. You
can also choose the axis that a person works most successfully with. You
come in on the path that is the path of least resistance.

The idea in working with people is not just to get rid of armoring,
but to open yourself up. I guess you could say love is part of it. I think
forgiveness is a part. If you do an anger release-you know a physical,
shouting release-forgiveness is at the bottom. I think it helps for the
therapist to encourage forgiveness, each person forgiving him or herself to
start with.

Spiritual Issues in the Work

I'm sort of wary of people who are too into the spiritual. I had a
woman who was in an Zen ashram for seven years and totally devoted. She
finally dropped out and opened a business. She was very hard to work with
because she wasn't in touch with her feelings. She had so called
"transmuted" her negative feelings to higher consciousness. But in reality
what she did was suppress the negativity, building an enormous cover on
top of these feelings. It took me about a year to help her get to the rage she
had at a parent, and then it just boiled out like poison, sulfuric acid.
Cathartic therapy should, ideally, preceed more conventional spiritual
work.
Techniques

One other form of spirituality that I have studied quite a bit of is yoga. I work with the concept of chakras. I often do meditations with people about the chakras, picking up different levels of consciousness. Head may be saying, "I understand." The solar plexus is saying "I'm going to kill the bastard." I feel that it is a mistake to give the higher chakra precedence over lower chakras. They both need expression. In terms of sequence that fits in with the spiritual, release the lower chakras first, and then comes peace. I also work with energy. This is sort of incidental, hands on work.

One last thing has to do with frequency. I discovered long ago that an emotion-locked in, suppressed emotion-has a particular frequency. You can actually, in a therapy session, create that frequency and it resonates. There are various ways of doing this. One of the best ways is sound. I discovered (with the help of a therapist named Edward Eichel of New York City) that vocalizing the sound, really letting it be strong and loud for a prolonged period of time (five minutes), will very often cause a feeling to release. Fear is a high frequency scream. Anger is a certain lower sound. I combine sound with deep breath work. You can often determine what frequency is problematic for people. It can also be done with color. It can be done at two levels. But you can do it with visualization of color. You can do amazing things with color.
Problems

When I went back to academia I lost a lot. I used to have a lot of psychic phenomena. I could see colors around people, or words, and I started trusting that and using that. It was almost always accurate. It made my work about ten times faster. Then when I got into academia I kind of lost it. It was like shifting gears, perhaps a shift to left hemispheric dominance. Now I've been out of academia for about eight years and the psychic capacity is coming back.

One of the reasons I went to academia was to feel more legitimate, to have more clout. I think a lot of learning in courses is somewhat a waste of time. You cram your mind full of stuff and you have no time to digest it. It's like making pate de fois gras. They take a goose and force feed it so it can't process the food. The liver gets enlarged and that's what the pate is made of. I think that's what a lot of recently graduated doctoral brains are like—pate de fois gras. You haven't had a chance to turn knowledge into wisdom.

Case Illustration

I'll give you an example. Some years ago, I worked with a guy, a "closet musician", literally, and he joined this group. He was quite constrained. He'd been beaten quite severely by his father. Eventually it got
down to that and he simulated that situation. Using several techniques I won't go into, he opened to his rage at his father which welled up. He kicked and bashed and screamed, then afterwards there was this curious phenomena: he made a continuous burping sound that went on for two hours. It was a physiological change.

When he was done with this anger and the related withdrawal and defiance toward the world, it was a turning point. He started coming out. He began to get concerts, got more and more freed up, and began to work cutting records. Within two years he had set off on a world tour. He was really quite a genius.

He wrote in feedback about the therapy work, that it liberated his spirit, and then when his spirit was liberated, his special gift (I think everybody has some special gift) came forward. He joined a much bigger ecosystem. So it was like a birth. I call it second birth. The first birth is into your family, the second birth is out of it.

Closing Thoughts

I think of the capacity to love, to receive love and give love, compassion, justice.....
“Helper”

“Helper” works with a population of twenty-five teenagers in the inner city as part of a non profit service organization. She is the director and the lives of these students fill the bulk of her days. She has worked with them for six years, seeing them through the many life stages and crises that they continually face. Her overt goal is to keep them from dropping out of high school. Behind that is a deeper goal. She gives her life to helping everyone find a deeper meaning and connection to spirit.

Before her work in this program she was in social services, working with a variety of populations. We met in her busy office, between phone calls from teens, parents, teachers, and colleagues. Her commitment to these young people is unwavering. “Helper” is committed to their well-being. It permeates her life and work.

The Personal Journey

My father was introduced to a Protestant religion, and then he shared this with my mother. They were married in this church. Then my parents separated. After the separation is when I remember participating and being active in the church. At ten, two years later, I consciously accepted the doctrines, was baptized, and accepted a lot of the beliefs. I accepted Christ as my personal Savior. I can’t explain how at such a young age I was able to comprehend all that, but I did. I think it had a lot to do
with the fact that I was the oldest, that my father left and I had to take on a new role. I was no longer a child. I became my mother’s helper in raising her children. I had my mind opened to the fact that there is a God, that there is a purpose in life, that I had a reason for being here. I understood my purpose and I could incorporate that as part of my life and who I was, and also help others.

I remember being ten, eleven, twelve, and being the protector of the person in school who was being abused or made fun of, and I would come to their defense. It had a lot to do with the fact that God saw each of us as equal. God loves all of us how we are, so no one should be ridiculed or put down.

That continued, and I’ve just held these truths in my heart all these years. I felt I had to be the spiritual guardian for my siblings. One of my siblings still battles back and forth with it. Just recently he is returning to his spirituality, acknowledging that he is a spiritual being. He had been trying to deny it. My youngest sister has had her battles. I've had mine.

But always in my battle or depression or doubting or questioning, I still held onto my beliefs and had faith that there is a God who loves me. A God who will help me through it, that I can seek guidance and wisdom from God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. The comforter is here now, the holy spirit, to lead us and guide us. Jesus promised we would not be alone. He would send the Holy Spirit to be with us. I feel I’m not alone.
God has not abandoned me (as my earthly father did). That's helped me through all these years.

Spiritual Views

I feel we all serve the same God. We're all seeking the same peace and comfort. The message that each religion brings is that of love. I attempt to address those specifics, and I always feel that the people I work with and I have a commonality. I don't have to get into the heavy doctrine. I don't feel those specifics are pertinent to the needs of my population, when we are addressing what they are experiencing. They're experiencing loss, turmoil. Doctrine is not going to address that. But the love of God is. It's the love they're searching for, the peace they want, the comfort they're looking for. All religions address that emotional need. That's why people look for religions. That emotional turmoil is what they're looking for the peace in.

When I come to an impasse in my work, that's when I call on my Spiritual Helper to give me the guidance and wisdom that at that moment I don't feel I have. The skills stop here! I've done all the listening, all the body language, and the psychology stops here. I've taken it to its limit. And this person is now in spiritual need. Our techniques cannot go any further. Now I need to refer to my spiritual guidance.
In my case, psychological work and spirituality are always intertwined. My spiritual being is who I am. I don't overtly tell people my spiritual beliefs, but indirectly my spiritualism is helping to guide and direct them. That's where I get my strength to deal with their hurt, their need. I could not help them if I didn't have my spiritual strength to pass on to them. The client keeps coming back, and I could be beaten down. I would like to be able to say directly, "If only you were able to know there is a greater power or force that you could connect to and not feel that you're alone. Because you feel alone you come to me. But if you knew you had that spiritual power you could turn to, then you wouldn't feel so alone."

It's important for people to feel they have someone they can openly and comfortably speak to about spirituality. I feel good when I can reach the family and be a part of their lives, that the parents can speak to me about their religious convictions and their activities in the church, how they feel responsible for their child's spirituality, to share that with me. I could be the enemy, and many social services types are. They are experienced by the parents as interfering with their child. These parents take me in as an ally because we can share a spiritual plane together. The fact that the parents feel comfortable with the spirituality has helped me to help the home--to be allowed into the home, to be a liaison with the
parent—that they've accepted me as a partner with them in helping their child through an adolescent period.

The message I'm trying to convey to the young people, a lot of times, is that they're not alone, because a lot of them do feel that they're all alone, that nobody cares about them, nobody loves them. I'm trying to let them know that I am one person in this world who does care, but in addition, there is a God or a spiritual part of them that they can call on and can turn to and they're not alone.

Spiritual Issues in the Work

Within my role, I have the freedom to address some of the issues of spirituality with my students in my office, when we're riding in my car or in their home. When I drop them at home I will say "God bless you, be good, stay out of trouble." When I talk to students on the phone I'll end with "I'm so glad you called. God bless you." Many of the girls feel unloved. I'll end with "God bless you. I love you. You're not alone." This is also culturally acceptable within the population I work with. There are some students with whom I've gone into heavy theological parables, what Christ said and how he lived. Some of the young people are very spiritual, so when I speak with them, they're open enough to know where the conversation is going. The conversation can then be a two-way street, as opposed to a one-way street or me lecturing, this allows the student to be a participant in their own spiritual development, for we are all spiritual
beings. This is part of our development and I believe when we deny the part of our development that acknowledges our spirituality moral breakdown occurs. Our young people need exposure to spiritual mentors. If I don't open up, they feel inhibited. But when I open the conversation, they let down their guard and feel, "Oh, wow, this is something I can talk about." The student then explodes with questions and wonderments.

Techniques

The techniques are sometimes prayer, and evoking in this population the metaphor, by using biblical references and stories. I can give them some gospel tapes, or music they'll listen to and they'll say about me, "She's OK. She's on the same plane we are." So it gives them a piece of spirituality, but it's also a way you bond with them.

Now because I'm not part of the school system, I feel comfortable making the spiritual association. We were showing a video this week, a motivation lecture, and there were references which definitely, clearly came from the Bible. There were two students in the class, out of the five that were there, who I knew had biblical backgrounds. I responded by saying, "That sounds like it came from the Bible. Paul said that,'What I want to do, I don't do, and what I don't want to do, I do'.'"

I'm feeling freer about expressing spiritual or religious views, bringing the connection together. I'm trying to help them see all the
places spiritual ideas exist, to help them become the spiritual person they're trying to become.

You learn the counseling skills--listening, responding, eye contact, body language, sitting forward--all the basic counseling techniques. You listen, but don’t give advice. Yet if clients want it, you should be able to give “counsel,” not the advice. We are there to help them to be able to discover their own solutions, help them to learn the skills to do problem solving. Yes there are specific skills for counseling, and there is a spiritual work, but I still feel that I incorporate both of them. But I have to remember where I am, and I can separate them and I do as needed.

Problems

It disturbs me. When I took advanced level classes in psychology, I had to find the balance of maintaining the spirituality and psychology, as I do in my own practice. Yet I often felt I couldn’t bring up that unity. I had to maintain the separation. I don’t see that unity in the psychology world. I don’t know if they're ready for it. I don’t know if I’m ready to be a pioneer and introduce it. I was occasionally brave enough to present it with the professor and students. The more mature crowd, like myself who’s thirty, forty, fifty, are more comfortable with the spirituality, and I used to speak with them on the side to support my own development.
The spiritual world has gone on forever and ever, and we are spiritual beings, and yet many tend to deny it. Those who accept it and live it are often seen as fanatics. Sometimes they are, but not necessarily. The balance has not been found so that those with differing views can somehow communicate with each other. There's a wall that comes up between the two.

Case Illustration

When I was working in a clinic, I had a client who was hearing voices, and not able to focus on our plan, our treatment, because he was distracted by the voices. Psychology says these voices are in their own mind, their own distortion or imbalance. Religion says these voices are fallen angels that are in fact trying to make this human being part of their world, and take him with them so that he cannot know Christ and be saved. I knew the conflict between a psychological and religious view. I chose to pray, silently to myself, for the Holy Spirit to please come and remove these evil spirits. Then the client would calm down. I would always maintain eye contact so the client would know that I was there and listening.

I would say afterwards, “Are you still hearing the voices?” and he would say, “No, they're gone now.” I never told a supervisor. It was never put in my report.
Then I had another client who was spiritual, who did know God. The voices would distract him from our treatment plan. But in his case, because I knew he had a spiritual background, I was able to directly talk with him about the voices, and what he thought they were, and if they were spirits or how he felt about it. I could be more open with him.

In my spiritual world, my church life, I see much mental health that is in need within the church family. I am called on to help on a non-professional basis because it’s the church family. I may be asked to help with a young person who’s experiencing emotional distress, or the parents will call me for counsel on how to work with their adolescent. Again, because it’s a spiritual setting, I will counsel them using the psychology techniques, on how to work with the adolescent, but I will end the discussion with a prayer with the parent, so they will have the strength and receive wisdom and guidance from God. At that moment they are feeling overwhelmed with their child’s behavior and I will not be with them at their next confrontation, but God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will be, so the parent can take with them they are not alone in this.

Closing Thoughts

I think the therapist that’s the most effective is the one who’s able to intertwine the two, and integrate, and somehow have both of them-- live in both worlds. A therapist also needs a fellow therapist to be able to talk to,
to professionally deal with some of their own needs, because we burn out as well. It's difficult for me to speak with a therapist whom I feel does not have that spiritual understanding. I cannot get help from a therapist who does not have the same spiritual alliance or understanding that I need in order to address who I am, so that I can continue to go out there and serve my client.

“Voice”

“Voice” flows into the room where we meet. She is graceful, beautiful and gives the appearance of being a wise woman. She is in her fifties. Her voice is rich and full and her body moves as part of her expression. Even as we sit, her whole presence is alive, moving, sharing. Her eyes are intense and sparkly. She is a psychotherapist, trained in family therapy. She has been practicing for the last five years. For many years before that she was a healer, musician, performer. She has been working with people in one capacity or another since the seventies. Her work as a musician, preceded her therapeutic work. Her voice has taken her from “Sesame Street” performances to advertisements to international renown as a New Age singer and composer.
Early on, I grew up with a lot of solitude in earthy places. Also an identification as an artist that tied in—looking for mystical experiences, wanting to see things. It didn't come out of my family—my family doesn't get this at all. I used to go out at night in the dark when I was little so I could challenge myself with that titillating, at-the-edge fear. What is this bigger than myself, this Something Else? I have early memories of the sunlight coming through the stained glass picture of Jesus in the church we went to when I was small, and me wondering about that light.

We weren't Catholics, but there was a big Catholic church on the corner of our street and I used to go into that church when I was very little, five or six, with a lace curtain over my head and an old “dress-up” dress of my mother's that I remember really well. When no one was there I would play being Catholic -- go in and out of the confessionals, trying to figure out what it was they were doing in there, and light candles like people did who I watched. I just loved the feeling in that church. It was that particular echo of the stone floor and the arches and the way my voice sounded in it. It felt “holy”.

In the early New York years, when I was in a bad marriage and doing a lot of theater and superficial television commercials, a lot of stuff that had to do with a pretty face and being a role. I was terribly, terribly, terribly lonely for spiritual companionship, but I couldn't name it yet. I didn't have
it in my marriage and I had thought I would. I felt betrayed by that. I got involved with a Zen group and sat, and was also slightly involved in the Gurdjieff movement. I knew that what I wanted to do most of all in my life, at that time, was to leave all this superficiality and show and go to some quiet, beautiful place and meditate. That’s what I wanted to do.

The hunger just grew and grew and grew. When I had kids it even got more desperate--Help! What can I do to be alive in this part of me? I didn’t have anyone to share these feelings with, so they became inflamed by restriction, contraction, constriction.

Then came a time when a door opened and I walked through. I left my husband, took my children, and moved up to the country. And my spiritual practice became rooted in the land. The Shaker motto: “Hands to work, hearts to God,” community, spiritual community.

Some years later I went to India with a lover to see Nim Karoli Baba, Ram Dass’s “old man in a blanket,” who died by the time we got there. We had our tickets and heard he died and we went anyway. I had all kinds of experiences there. There was a time in Nanital, up in the mountains, which was one of those extraordinary state experiences. I had been very ill and was with this man who was ignoring me, and my two small children, and we had no money and it was cold. Ai-yai-yai! I was so foolish and so faithful.

I had this experience of climbing up a steep hill. My companion wanted to go see a Hanaman temple, and I'd heard there was some kind of
statue to a mother Goddess which I wanted to see. We were going to go together, though he was barely speaking to me. I had been ill with a cold and was very weak. He was surging ahead of me, which was his way, and I was lagging behind which was mine in that relationship. I thought, “I have to do something about this,” and I started to say a mantra and began to get connection with an energy source that apparently came through the evocation of the mantra, and I was filled with solidity, an energy that came in with the breath. It filled me with an inexhaustible potentiality. It was almost as if I were on a greased slide going uphill. I surged ahead of this guy, roaring up the hill on the waves of energy coming with the mantra. It was a very misty day high in the Himalayas, and all around me was an incredible view. As I was walking along a narrow path, my memory was that the sky “opened” and there was a light and a voice. And the voice said, “Why do you seek in form for that which is formless?” I knew then that I knew and I didn’t need the temples. I don’t remember whether I ever saw the temple I’d come to see. The experience in-lit me.

After that I still experimented with different types of practice, but I have been informed in my life by Buddhist thought as much as anything. It’s been a consistently fertile place for me to study and cogitate and try to live into. It’s a form to hold the formless.

I started working with workshop groups coming out of my experiences as a performer, as a singer. The sounds I made, the music I was singing, engendered deep emotional reactions in people and in myself.
Most frequently people would cry, and they'd come up to me after a concert and say "Your music touched me. I wept and wept." And at first I thought, "What am I doing wrong?" And then I realized there was something about the vibrational frequency fields—I didn't articulate it that way then—a quality in my voice that was carrying to people, and it was opening them. So I became very curious about that, and began to look at it. I found that in the climate or environment of certain kinds of sound, that high consciousness occurs—that altered states happen. In the workshop, with the climate of sounding, people got into extraordinarily deep and revelatory places, and changes seemed to be taking place without directed guidance or manipulation. Transformation was part of the vibrational environment. In looking into spiritual disciplines and systems, again and again, I've found that the sound current is a bridge between the worlds, an interface between one state of consciousness and another. Sound is a high-state language. It's consistent for human beings across disciplines, across practices.

Spiritual Views

What is not spiritual? When we talk about spirituality, we talk about it as though it were a discreet state in itself. Of course there's another point of view which is that everything is both in that realm and in "ordinary" reality.
Goethe says that whatever you pay attention to creates in you an organ of perception for its perception. He was talking about the natural world, about developing an appropriate capacity to be with a leaf or a bird. Of course, it happens also between people-- with clients. The degree that my attention is nourishing you as a client, you are also creating in me the ability to perceive you and vice versa.

There's another idea, which I have seen as a picture. It's a triangulated figure with a person here and a person here, and transpersonal here, God here. It's one of those line drawings with white bearded Daddy, God with a beard, sending down these lines of vapors into the two people. The idea is that no communication really happens on the horizontal level unless it has a transpersonal dimension.

Working with People

There is this very elegant meeting now of the genius of Western psychology and the genius of Eastern intuitional development. I see it in sessions sometimes where enlightenment is this simple, ordinary little state of being that becomes illuminated. The toothbrush that glows, the little action, the miracle of ordinariness. That's what can happen with a therapist who's tuned to those possibilities-- just knowing they exist in the transpersonal dimension. I don't think the therapist has to say a word about spiritual practice or enlightened states or consciousness or
disciplines. Spirit is implicit in the environment that's created by being there and opening one's attention.

I call my work Resonance Therapy, using a term from acoustical science. The image is of setting up a resonance field, one tuning fork and another tuning fork. You strike one and do not strike the other. The struck fork is centered and aligned and calls the other one into resonance so that it makes a sound. So when I, as a therapist, set up a field, it's like what Carl Rogers talked about--on good days, he said, he'd be a good therapist. When he was feeling good something seemed to happen. His conscious state called his client into a more tuned place. I try to tune into the place the client is, not inflict upon the client my point of view but work with their metaphors and experiences to come to an understanding--to make their world bigger rather than putting mine onto them. My tuning fork aligns to theirs. Resonance and an opening happens. It's a great joy with a client where that synchrony really zings and we experience that great consonance, that sense of rightness. At times like that, it feels like my spiritual background modulates the openness and is the most important thing I have to offer.

Spiritual Issues in the Work

I know clients may be open to spiritual issues because I am at my best, in a state of attention and awareness which is attuning. I know because I am linked into their frequency, and I can feel it. And when they're
not receptive, I read that through physical and subtle energy cues. I see it in things like eyes and breath and body posture, which are symptomatic of their condition of awareness and I can feel it.

Very frequently people come to me because they want to sing, not as regular therapy clients. When they come to sing, they know they want to do something extraordinary. They are already coming from an inchoate longing. They already know there's something they feel is theirs by right, that they can manifest, and they've been told they can't or shouldn't or mustn't. Somewhere they know that's wrong. They come to me to open a door to that capacity. I know that capacity to sing isn't just a physical capacity but is the ability to breathe, to sound the voice of spirit. Not everybody is ready to hear that, but around here most people who would come to me are. I don't teach singing any more, per se, but I use the voice as a pathway into the wholeness of the person.

Techniques

Sometimes I call people to simple Vipassana and mindfulness practice. And, of course, I'm also using sound, the sound of breath. I have people hum, and come into a deep meditative state in the hum. We often use this as a way to center ourselves at the beginning or end of sessions. I also must emphasize that the use of sound itself creates a spiritual state, a heightened consciousness state. Sound has been used across the world in
spiritual practice. Intentional tuning with vocal sound amplifies the frequency of that consciousness state we call spiritual.

Problems

It's an interesting dance. I did my training in family therapy and even though family therapy is probably the most open mode of therapy, next to transpersonal therapy, my work was in a clinic with reflecting teams, and there was always a group of people behind the mirror watching sessions. My perception of my own work is that often I can be most helpful by creating an environment, a climate which allows someone's healing to happen. That's not always easy in a clinical setting. It's both helpful and constraining to have the team watching. I could see, in the work sometimes, that we were addressing on a very mundane level what were really cries from another level. We either didn't hear it or chose not to go that deep.

I would sometimes talk privately with the other therapists involved, but "spiritual" or transpersonal issues were not part of our team perspective. Which is not to say there wasn't a great deal of compassion and love and caring and attention. We just didn't frame things in that way, which meant, in my view, that often our clients were not either seen, or encouraged to see themselves, from an expanded, transpersonal view.
I have a case example going on right now. The presenting desire was to sing. In the process I found an incredibly fertile field for resonance work. This person has been a student of spiritual practice most of her life. Singing a song that moves us, at the beginning of a session, sets us up for a rich way of working. We've found this very creative imagery that's coming up in her, and we do sounding and movement, following what those images feel like, sound like. There has been an evolution from a land-root creature, from a turtle, into a giraffe holding heaven and earth. There's a beautifully fertile thing here that has to do, in her imagery, with Christ consciousness.

My practice feeds into this work in a wonderful way. Here's a metaphor that works very well for me: What working with heightened consciousness states, which is really what sound is, creates in the therapist is a permeable boundary state, so the therapist can be like a cup or grail in which all the experiences that can't be spoken, can be held open-endedly. The grail is a good analogy because it's a bell upside down. When you take a cup and turn it upside down you ring the earth sound. What one does is to stretch the boundaries of affect and experience. So it isn't as if the therapist has to have had every experience in the world, but the development of that compassion --which spiritual practice trains and enhances one's ability to look with non judgmental awareness, to look with
metta (Buddhist term for loving kindness) at other people's experience and allow them to be who they are. It permits that alchemical transference to happen. And sound for me heightens that, amplifies it, and gives it form and formlessness in a very elegant way.

Closing Thoughts

I am not about spiritual striving or making it to enlightenment one day as a place to be attained in the future. It's imminence rather than transcendence. This idea templates onto a lot of anxieties people have in their lives about striving and getting and having. It's useful to know there are thousands of years of traditions behind this other point of view.

I think one very important place to note is that we are all increasingly going to be called to be with people who are dying, from AIDS, cancer, diseases of a wounded earth. I think this is evidenced in things like Sogyal Rimpoche's book, The Tibetan Way of Living and Dying. Perhaps this is the reason I've come back to Tibetan practice, to have a center, a wisdom system from which to relate to all this dying, as a therapist and a helper in the world. A lot of us are going to be dying...in droves. (All of us, in fact!)

There's another piece in here, which is the concept of right action: how appropriate action in the world and spirituality sit with each other in relation to psychotherapeutic practice. I'm on the couch with the engaged
Buddhists. You don't just sit around, but you move your meditation, your contemplation, into the world.

"Strider"

"Strider" gets his name from a self-description. "I've thought for a long time that therapists are very much like the character Strider, in Tolkein's Trilogy. When Strider appeared in Hobbit Town, the Hobbits were suspect of him, because they didn't see him that often. He wasn't one of them, and yet he was very helpful in guiding them when they had to leave Hobbit Town. And I think that the average person is very much like a Hobbit until the shit hits the fan. Therapists are like outlanders in a sense. They spend a lot of their time dealing with pain and anguish and transition. And so when it comes time for a Hobbit to leave the safety and security of Hobbiton, the therapist is the guide who takes them through the woods."

"Strider" has been a therapist for three years, but he is a maverick. He is trained as a therapist, but not employed as one. He makes a living loading trucks. He has offered his services for free, in restaurants or homes, to anyone who finds him. He has worked in clinics, but chooses the outlander approach. He is moved by his compassion.
The Personal Journey

I guess I became interested in things spiritual when I was about twenty-two years old. I got my first pet, and it got sick and it died on me and I was really sad. Before that I was an undergraduate up at school. I would go to mass every day, and I would go visit the chapel and stuff. I came across a course in Zen up at school, so I took that. I just had leanings to things spiritual. As a kid I was very drawn to ceremony. I was an altar boy. I lit the incense and the candles -- the props, in a sense. I guess they all combined to create a certain atmosphere that would heighten how you felt. After a number of years of reading, I became more drawn to Taoism than anything else. Taoism that's rooted in the idea of balance and harmony, and the idea that happiness is based in balance. And things change. And ideally, you try not to be predisposed to any particular direction, as much as possible, because then you're going to tend to be out of balance in that direction. So I really like the Taoist writings. They're my favorites.

Spiritual Views

I consider people to be inherently spiritual, whether they realize it or not and that life is a spiritual process whether you realize it or not.

I try to talk to who I think everybody is. It's some constant element that was there when they were a little kid, and will be pretty much there
unchanged, I think, when they're eighty years old. To use a strange analogy, it's like when in Biblical times, around the subject of exorcism, it was said that if you knew the demon's name that was inside the person, you could call it out, and you could draw him out. And I think in the same sense that through a tone of voice, and a certain bearing towards people, if they know that you're locked in on who they are, or you're only going to talk to who they are, and that person—that spirit—hasn't felt safe to talk to anybody in a long time, then I think that they'll often come out.

But I guess my approach is that I see myself as being down here alive for a certain amount of time. And my belief is that although we have careers, and families, and whatnot, and hobbies, and things, my real belief is that we're working on our spirits while we're down here. That's our main purpose.

Working with People

It just seems that many of the people that I come across, that I work with, have lives very different than my life has been. They don't have many resources to work with. They don't have much of a support system, if any. They haven't been allowed to be who they are. They don't know who they are and they're kind of in the darkness out there. They're not doing well. And so, while I'm down here in this life, it'd be nice if I could just kinda reach in, and help pull some people out. Because I think it's very easy to fall through the cracks, and never be seen again in this world. And I think
usually, what often determines whether we fall through the cracks or not, is whether somebody is holding on to us.

In my case, I had parents who were at least able to give me a strong enough sense of self that I feel Ok. But with a lot of people, they don't even have close to that, and so they need somebody who's going to stand with them for awhile, until they're steady on their feet.

I guess the main principle that I'm working on is that spirituality and psychotherapy are actually very simple affairs. They're subtle, but they're not complex. Nobody wants to be hurting, and nobody wants to hurt anyone else. Their behavior sometimes ends up with both those things happening, but they would like to find a way out, if they felt safe. I think that the spirit can only take so many blows, before it closes-before the wagon train closes up. And when you're working with somebody-who's probably a fair description of somebody with a personality disorder or whatever-it takes a lot of time, and if you can offer them a better way of being in the world, meaning not your way, not the therapist's way, but to experiment, loosen up on their own way, and expand it a little in one direction or another; then if you're non-judgmental, and you're supportive, then sometimes, maybe even oftentimes, they'll take it. People want to think well of themselves.

I really believe that psychotherapy is about to take two very separate and distinct paths. As a result of the swing to the right, I would call it- with the APA (American Psychological Association), and the licensing and the
certification, more rigidity and structure, more scientific bent-- I think as a result of that, people who are still drawn to being helpful in the realm of therapists, but aren't drawn to that path, are going to take the other path: where I'd put maybe psychosynthesis and eastern approaches to mental health. So I really think it's about to separate. And I feel that's good, because although the scientific path has things to offer, when it becomes too purely scientific, it kind of turns in on itself, and doesn't have much to offer.

When I was in high school, my mother read me a story about this doctor that worked in New York, in Harlem, or some place like that. And he had to pay malpractice, and all sorts of fees and forms, and he spent all this time doing everything but what he wanted to do. And finally he opened up a storefront, and he just took the medicines that the drug company gave him, and he didn't charge any money anymore. He was at the end of his career. And he just did what he wanted to do, and that was it. And I think with me, it's like the only part of therapy that I enjoy is the therapy.

What I get to experience is like pure therapy. I mean it's not diluted. I'll do it in a cheap restaurant or something like that, which I imagine will horrify some people, but there's no residual stuff around. It's simple. It takes place just in the heart, in the mind, I guess. And that's it. The person knows that I met them just as another person. In some ways it's more difficult, because I don't have an office, or a big desk, or a clinic name, or
something to give me a sense of power. Or something like a badge. But in other ways I think it's easier to reach the part that I want to reach, you know, as long as I address the spirit. And I feel that when I work with people, I always try to speak to their spirit.

I don’t see myself as heroic. I tell my friend who wants to be a therapist that Freud might seem glamorous, case studies might seem glamorous, but it's not glamorous work. For me, it's' like you're wrestling with the devil for souls. And most of the time he's gonna kick your ass. And there's no glamour to it at all. But there's a wonderful feeling of elation when you feel like you're stealing one back.

Techniques

I encourage people who have a history of being religious. Oftentimes you can see that where a problem began is right when they abandoned that. I encourage people to resume that, as part of their work. Whatever religion it is. And I don't often guide people towards meditation. For meditation to continue, it takes a certain bit of resolve. And oftentimes the people I'm seeing are somewhat in crisis. And there I think meditation might be a little too difficult for them.

So there's not a lot of overtly spiritual things. If you listen to a transcript, you might hear stories. I use a lot of stories that relate to the spirit, but not in a way that would fall in with Buddhism or Taoism, unless the person I 'm working with happens to have an interest in that, and then
I'll try and use whatever I have. I use any kind, from something I've read to a story I heard when I was a little kid, or something from the trucking place where I've worked, or anything. But I find that I use stories constantly. And people remember them and they mean a lot to them.

Closing Thoughts

I've told this one to people in therapy, but I also told it in class once, just because for me it was a very powerful thing that happened. But I told it in class and, well, the moral will be obvious. But I didn't expect much of a reaction. And years later, everybody remembers that story. And they talk about how much meaning it has for them, and how much they think about it. So here's the story.

I was driving home just before dawn. It was still dark. I came down off this hill, and in the headlights, I saw a possum lying on the road. I always hate to see road kill, but I always stop to make sure they're dead. Sometimes they're just knocked out. With possums, because they are marsupials and they carry their babies in a pouch, sometimes the baby might be there or whatever. Sometimes the baby's hanging around.

I get out of my car, and it's a beautiful morning. It hadn't rained but the dew was quite heavy. I hold my flashlight beam on the possum, and I can see what looks like an alien, a little tiny alien leaning up against the possum. And it's one of the babies. The babies are tiny. This one was dead, hairless. I don't know how old it was, maybe ten days or something. And it
looked like a human embryo. I see the little baby lying there, and I look at the mother possum. She had fleas all over, ticks all over, and she was kind of emaciated, mangy. She'd been through the mill. I opened up the pouch, and in there were probably about eleven or twelve squiggling little possum babies, still trying to nurse on their dead mother. And I'm saying to myself, "What am I going to do now?" And I'm not thinking, you know.

I reach into the possum and I start taking the babies out one at a time, real gentle. They don't want to leave the tit. And for every one I took out, it seemed like there were two more in there. And all of a sudden I hear something that sounded like seagulls flying down by the river and it sounded like something far far away. It was so tiny. As I'm reaching in, I realize the sound I'm hearing is the babies, a tiny, tiny little distant sound. At that point, I realized, for some reason that they were too little, that no matter what I did they couldn't survive. And I hate giving up.

My whole life in a sense has been a journey towards acceptance of certain things. And so for some reason, even though I've fought on stupidly in many cases, this time I got it. And I took the babies out of the bucket, and I opened the mother's pouch, and I put them back in. They reattached themselves. And I took the possum to the side of the road, and I stayed there a little while, and by then the babies were starting to get cold, and they were just falling into a sleep. And that's how they were gonna die. And so I told that to the class. They were human service students, and I said, "Even though you might not think a possum has much to do with
helping people, what I got from that was that there was nothing that I could do that would change what was going on there. I wasn't there to change it. I was there to witness it. What was going on there had been going on since the beginning of time, and everything changes, but things are born, and they die. Just watch it. ”

“Philosopher”

“Philosopher” thinks deeply about his work and his life and ponders the ultimate questions. He is a social worker in private practice. He runs groups, works with couples, and specializes in substance abuse work. He has a transpersonal orientation as well as social work training with a traditional emphasis. Much of his professional life has been his quest for synthesis; for an understanding and ability to apply the best of the traditional and the spiritual, the east and the west. He is himself a seeker. His philosophical considerations are equally applicable to his personal and professional unfoldment. It is a joy to talk to him as his eloquence unfolds a story of deep commitment to truth.

The Personal Journey

I was actually seeing a Freudian analyst when I was very young, and I was discussing my Oedipus complex at the age of fifteen, after I refused to acknowledge any reaction to my parents' divorce. But this guy was a weird
Freudian. He was seventy-five, and we had this really intense sort of mentor relationship. I'd been reading Siddhartha, about shape-shifting, and I would get into this mode with this guy, just this energy mode. I would watch him transform. Physically he would take on different things, and I could just perceive his "I" behind all that transformation, sort of smiling at me, saying, "This is ok, you know, go with this." I remember once he said something to me that grounded all this. And it's emotional when I think about it. He said to me, "You're going to learn a lot younger than I did that people are really the only things that matter in life." And what I got from that is experiencing people on this rich, interpersonal "more" level is what he finally came to value in life.

I remember once, when I was nineteen, I came with all this Freudian this and that, all this materialistic stuff about Freud and he just very gently said, "I think you're missing Freud's emphasis on emotions." That's all. For him it just came down to feeling. So that was a real foundation experience for me. I think that's what informed a lot of my mission. I felt like very much what helps me in this is that I feel guided. I feel like I'm on a mission. Although my life has been very varied in what I've done, it all feels like the patchwork of the same quilt, or the same tapestry. So there's a sense of being guided that I don't believe is illusory. And there's a sense of being on a path and having a mission or a purpose.
As far as my vision of the world, I hold the scenario in which there's this level in which we're all ultimately very, very alone, with ourselves and with our process. And what we want to do in our so called neurotic parts is to try to solve the aloneness by doing this or that. And that doesn't work, because that's entanglement.

I was in the woods one day. I was in nature, and I was looking at the blue sky, and I was experiencing love, not as an overwhelming experience, but as a quality in the universe, an objective quality in the universe. And I imagined it absent. I imagined the universe drained of this quality called love, and I thought, "God, what a horrible, horrible place!" This universe would be in love and it was conceivable that it could be just drained, and I thought, "God is love" and all this kind of stuff, and I thought a universe without love would be horrible. And then I thought, love has got to be a pretty tough thing, cause there are some pretty gnarly things in the universe, like evil, so love is like this very tough, powerful structure. And if you misbehave in love, love kicks you out, until you learn how to behave better. So my vision is that we learn that loving one another means respecting our aloneness, but that that doesn't have to mean not being with one another in that aloneness.

I think the idea of idolatry is important, and I think this might be a link between psychology and religion. Monistic religion has warned
against the dangers of idolatry. All religions warn against the dangers of worshiping false Gods. I think idolatry is when you imbue anything with too much divinity, too much importance. And I think that’s the transcendent and imminent God of Judaism. You can’t grab it. So that transcendent-imminent thing keeps you from idolatry. Because as soon as it’s imminent, and you’re going to hang it on your wall, and go “I got it!”, it transcends. I think that’s the experience of self. That’s the Tao. The Tao is transcendent-imminent, you know. The metaphor I use is that we’re given a mirror in life, to see ourselves and the world through, and for me the challenge of transpersonal psychology is to reach across the looking glass. Truly to reach across it. And maintaining the integrity of the world in the mirror in the process.

There’s this connective essence that is the basis of human nature, or nature/human nature in which we all participate, and that there’s something essential and universal about it. I think that this essence teaches love. There’s something tender and wonderful about being connected in this way.

If human beings could know God without the physical world, then life would never have been created. And I think that’s where it is. I think it’s as simple as that. I think on some level this is a process about moving toward God, and this is another tough word to use, toward spirit, toward that blissful whatever. I’m not even sure it’s all blissful, but it has to do with that essence that I’m talking about.
Working with People

Well for me, sort of the traditional Freudian notion of changing neurotic misery into common unhappiness as the goal of therapy has always been, like, if that's the goal, give me the gun now. My lifelong struggle, long before I'd decided to be a therapist, has been to reach beyond the looking glass, and find real experiences to validate my intuitions about the “more” that there is to human interaction. The “more” means more than what I've been enculturated to believe that “here” is to human interaction, both from my family and by my society. So that's why I pursue transpersonal psychology, as a way to reach for the more.

But I think that psychological wounding is the gateway to the “more”. I think by working with psychological healing you can start to experience the “more” and expand. And a person can reframe their whole way of experiencing themselves. It's happening for me and it has happened for me on many levels, and it's like the growing into self. So I seek models to help me be a better guide along that way.

What I am interested in is validating the independent existence of states, that we can enter. I feel very strongly that consciousness exists independently of matter, and that the things we participate in are things that we truly share. For instance in a session, if I allow myself to go with it, I can move into a state where I'm not seeing in the ordinary way. I allow that to be as real as my ordinary perception. I think in this culture we’re
conditioned to perceive things from a subject-object kind of thinking frame. That's what's "real" or ordinary. Everything else is kind of optional. It's not really real. So for me what's valuable about it is that it expands more my ability to perceive in ways that are non-ordinary but very real for me.

In my sessions, I go with feeling. I get out of the head stuff. I trust the movement. I don't abdicate thinking, but what I learn to do, what I'm learning to do, is to trust the movement. And for me it's usually a feeling movement, and that won't be true for everybody. Jung says the gateway to the spirit is through the inferior function, and I think that's true. For me it is true. Feeling is my inferior function in that model, and my spirit is available to me through that. For other people it might be different, but I trust the movement in the least dominant parts of myself when I'm in my work. Because I think that's where the spirit's going to show itself, or that something more is going to try to surface. In doing that I think I mirror to the client a similar kind of trusting.

Techniques

Well, I'd say definitely use spiritual techniques. See, the word spiritual tends to get very funny. So what I mean by spiritual techniques are techniques that evoke the mystery. And the mystery may lead to something very concrete. The mystery may lead to ... "my mother beat me"
and that's what this is all about. But the road that we take to it is one of spirit. It can lead to who knows what. It doesn't really matter. I mean it could lead to a past life memory which might or might not be real, but if it matters for the client, that's fine. Or it might lead to an expanded feeling of self, that will allow the client to begin to integrate more of their experience and personality in a richer way. And the techniques I use a lot are imagery and meditation, like a relaxation meditation. And what I ground that with is just awake body experience, really being in the body. I'll often ask clients, when they're looking at me, just to look at their legs for a minute. Suddenly they'll become very self-conscious, but then break through that. The resolution to the subject-object dichotomy, is to become aware of your body.

Problems

Because I have been training in both social work and transpersonal psychology, I come off as battered. I feel like when I come for transpersonal work, I have to throw a lot of traditional stuff around. When I draw up a DSM 3 category, I get crucified for it. And the same thing happens in reverse when I'm where I work. So on one of the looks I become a troublemaker. But really it's not. I'm honoring my mission. It's how I learn. It's like I have to introduce the conflict wherever I go, in an effort to try and work it out.
Case Illustration

I was working with a Puerto Rican kid, street kid. He had broken legs, you know, done everything shy of killing people, was only twenty-two, had been in jail for dealing. He was abandoned when he was fourteen. We worked together for about a year. He was in a very rough point, didn't know what to do. I did an image journey with him that came up and felt appropriate, and he did this journey and he was in this big castle. It was just unlikely for this kid to have these kinds of references. He was in this big castle, and he went into this room, and there was a wizard in this room, and he was afraid, but then when he finally confronted the wizard and talked to him, he started to get a lot of guidance, and this became sort of like an internalized mentor. And it was very shortly after that that he left therapy. We'd been working together for a year but I felt that that image had helped him to internalize an inner sense of guiding. And I think that's real.

Closing Thoughts

I think Christ was a great psychologist. I think he really understood what it meant to honor subjective psychological experience, as we are. I could say that a good psychologist might speak in a way that would evoke the teachings of Christ. Or teaching it might evoke the spirit of Christ.
Christ did say, "When two or more are gathered, I am there." And therapy is always two or more. And if we tap that spirit that we've been talking about, we are evoking the humanity that I think Christ was getting at. So I think there really is a lot of link between religion and psychology.

"Business Man"

"Business man" is a retired executive who spends much of his current life in volunteer work, offering to others his wisdom and concern for human beings. He works from the "golden rule" and even in the afternoon of his life, he offers himself to those in need. In his work life he began, after many years in business to offer a psychological perspective to his work. He was trained in Transactional Analysis, a humanistic psychology, and brought that work to bear in seminars and trainings for managers and employees. As he left full-time corporate employment, he went on to be a business consultant in the states and abroad. He is a thoughtful and considerate person, answering my questions with great care.

The Personal Journey

It was and it is now that I believe in God, I'm a practicing Episcopalian. I believe in the hereafter.
Spiritual Views

I've always felt that there was the supportive and nourishing deity/being, and I look at the benefits that have been lavished on me and my family and so many other people. But I do think that certain factions/faiths really do have that critical parent/adapted child relationship. To a large degree I see it in Catholicism. In some of the Baptist faith where they are run strictly by do's and dont's—not permissiveness to think and grow and choose your own method of worship—but, "Here's what you must do, and here's what you cannot do, and here's what you've got to believe and if you don't you're going to hell."

We are all cast in God's image. We are on earth for some purpose hard for us to know, but that anything we can do to help others is part of our purpose in being. Love thy neighbor as thyself, be true to oneself, lead a "good" life, but share it with others.

Working with People

I did not ever consciously think of fate, a God, a divine spirit or any such thing in my work. But I did of course do this work with the hopes that I would make the managers and supervisors participating more aware of themselves, their interaction. Not that the net effect was perhaps spiritual in that I was giving them better command of their own interacting, communications, methods of leading.
This feeling that part of our reason for being is to help others I was trying to transmit to the managers without bringing in overtly any theological implications. I didn't dwell on such things as the Golden Rule, etc. But basically my very strong feeling was that the good managers were ones who practiced consciously or unconsciously the Golden Rule. I felt that what I was doing would enable them to become more effective by becoming more aware of the problems people working for them and with them had, and helping them with those problems, being less critical. It seemed to be justified by what happened to me over the several years I did this. (They seemed to become) better people, more understanding, willing to help others with their problems, less judgmental.

Techniques

I used principally transactional analysis, showing the ego states and transactions that go on between them and others. The good transactions, the bad transactions, from critical parent, those from nurturing parent, those from the adult, those from free child--and let them see through example and practice how they obtained better results, had better morale, had reduced employee turnover when they were, in effect, doing to their employees as they would have their boss do to them. (Certain ego states support the 'Golden Rule.')

The nurturing parent ego state, “I want to love you unreservedly, I want to take care of you, I want to be good to and for you.” The adult, as
well. It makes good sense to me that people respond- and studies over time have shown this- much more to attention, to positive strokes than they do to negative strokes. In other words, the carrot rather than the stick. The free child. All my life I've had a large free child, and I find that humor and openness and playfulness and so forth evoke a similar response to people I work with. I tried to instill this in supervisors and management. That it was OK to let down your guard at times, to become close to people, to let them tease and joke.

The other two ego states were prejudicial to this philosophy that closely parallels the Golden Rule. The critical parent is necessary at times, at times of emergency, to steer people from destructive acts, possible danger to themselves, etc. But basically I see the critical parent as being judgmental. I've set myself to judge you, and you are totally aware of that. And this creates a hostile environment and nervousness in carrying out your work. And basically what I deal you is negative strokes and pretty well avoid the positive strokes.

The other, the adapted child, is really an outcome of critical parent in management (the workplace). A person who is constantly afraid of his or her supervisor tends to become adapted, tends to try to please, loses some of his or her initiative and creativeness and enjoyment of work.
Case Illustration

It was surprising the number of people, every time we get a company-wide attitude survey, who said in their anonymous questionnaires and in interviews (which were conducted by outside interviewers) that they are afraid of their supervisor, that they did not enjoy working for him or her. That the environment was hostile and they did not enjoy coming to work, but they needed the job. Then, following and during these training programs, we got a tremendous amount of positive response from employees who said ‘Mr. Jones’ or ‘Betty’ is so much easier to work for now, I really enjoy it. I've never seen such a change.”

One interesting comment came from the wife of a superintendent. At a company function she said, "___________ is a changed person. He's much more open, much more communicative, and much less critical". Here we were spreading these ideas out to families.

Closing Thoughts

My feeling is that spirituality and psychology are handmaidens of each other, and that really dealing with psychological problems - I'm not talking about taking the psychotic or neurotic and trying to make them well--I'm talking about people who are troubled or have problems relating to others; and giving them a new perspective on life, it is a spiritual thing. You're lifting them up, whether they're into religion at all--whether in fact
there is a single deity. But I think that the work of many psychotherapists
is a spiritual journey. I know some whose work I think is destructive or
nonproductive. It's long term. It seems based on economic security for the
psychotherapist. But again, the majority of people doing effective therapy
are doing something spiritual.

For people to live their life to the fullest, to do unto others; in effect
the therapist is freeing the client to do just this, to live a full, untrammeled
life which means that they will almost necessarily relate to others in that
vein. A person who feels good about him or herself often feels the same way
about people they work with, their families, their neighbors and friends.
They have an uplifting affect on everyone they come in contact with.

"Wise Old Woman"

"Wise Old Woman" is seventy-four years old. She was a school teacher,
head mistress and then a therapist and author. After retiring formally from
her therapist role, she has continued to serve in that capacity through her
church, the senior center, and to friends, near and far. She continues to
teach an occasional workshop on human relationships and is highly
regarded by all who come in contact with her. She crinkles her eyes when
she smiles, which she does frequently, with a gentle laugh that carries the
wisdom of her life's work. She is the archetype of grandmother, wise
woman, elder.
The Personal Journey

I was brought up in a traditional Episcopalian religious mode, but I would say that I was much more spiritually oriented than I am religiously oriented. I believe strongly in the fact that people can be in large part the way they want to be. I have a very strong sense of a divine presence in my life. I feel that there's an invisible thread that makes an instant warm rapport with people who have that same sense of themselves as a spiritual being.

Spiritual Views

I think the word “Grace” is the most difficult to define, but to me it is the essence of spirituality. We find grace when we look into ourselves with “searching eyes and longing hearts.” (A quote by Paul Tillich) Grace experienced once is always there to support and heal. It may disappear at times but the residual effects never leave. Grace is acceptance of the fact that each of us is part of a greater whole, the Ground of Being, and with acceptance of that fact, the tragic sense of separation that pervades most relationships, communities, races, sexes, falls away and we can see ourselves as one, and see life as a meaningful experience. I think that when you lose sight of the ground of being, you then become more unbalanced. It's one of Paul Tillich's words for God. He found many ways of expressing it, but
the ground of being is a sort of center of a person. It's the force that keeps you going.

Working with People

In my work, if I did not care for the person, if I could not be genuine with them, then I would be more medical than I would be humanistic. I think my strong point was that most of the people with whom I worked successfully, were people that I believed in very strongly, and therefore helped them believe in themselves. I think that people want to and are meant to be healthy in body, soul and mind, and when they believe that and see how to act on that belief, they will become healthy.

All I know is that I had some psychological skills, but I did not think the skills alone were enough. And so I felt it was much more of an I-Thou relationship, which I believe is part of the meaning of the ground of being.

If a therapist does not have any spirituality within, I don't think the client is going to get well. I came across a crossword puzzle that said, "God heals and the doctor collects the fee," and I think that unless you have a feeling that people were created in a whole healthy way, and have a love for people, and have a capacity to forgive things that people have done, I don't believe you're going to be beneficial to somebody. You may get them to have a momentary change of behavior, but I don't think in the long run you're going to change the way they respond to the world or to themselves. I think you really have to believe and I think that's why I am effective with
these senior citizens that I work with. It's because I have this feeling of being guided not by any motive except for caring for people, and they know it, and they come to me and they want hugs and kisses and I can give them to them freely. There's no sense of anybody having expectations that they behave or act differently than they do. I think that's important. And I just love 'em! I think they know that.

Spiritual Issues in the Work

Most of the older people that I have worked with have a very strong religious belief. And it's a very patterned religious belief. And what I try to work with is just experiencing love from an undemanding human being that can give them some support and help. Because a lot of them have had many hard blows in their life. When we talk about death sometimes, and when I say I don't know what happens, all I know is that I trust what's going to happen, and I liken it to the fact that I didn't know what was going to happen when I was born, but everything worked out fine, so I think that I can assume the same thing about dying. It's all a part of God's plan. Whatever happens is going to be OK!

Techniques

With these people, I may say, "Well if your child did something very very awful, would you condemn him to always be outside, and always be
punished? Or would you forgive him and let him come to you with love?"
And they always say they'd come to them with love. And I always say to
them, “Well then do you think, maybe, you know how to do it better than
God does, or do you think God will forgive you for anything you think
you've done wrong?” and they say. “Oh I never thought of it like that.” I also
use a lot of biblical references, depending on the person that I am dealing
with, but most often I can find a biblical reference that is pertinent.

Problems

I think it’s much easier for them when they have a faith. Whatever
went on in this world is not so important. The ones I feel sorry for are the
ones who have this harsh biblical interpretation that if I didn’t behave
myself during this life I’m going to go to hell, and those are the ones that I
try to work with.

Case Illustration

JJ was referred by the church. She was in her late forties when she
first called me. She was divorced, hurt, scared, almost penniless, and feeling
totally hopeless. When she first arrived I could scarcely hear her voice as she
spoke of her predicament. She was directionless, scared to change, too
tight to cry or be angry. I listened to her each week and held her hand and
offered her warmth, which was easy since I felt so moved by her anguish
and her genuinely difficult situation. She never made an appointment for
the next week but waited until the week had passed. I accepted this because I believed she sincerely hoped that she would be ready to go on without any support.

Gradually she gained confidence, found a reasonable job, reached out to women friends, and expanded on her knowledge of the public health profession. Her reputation grew and she was soon being asked to give lectures at the hospitals and civic centers. I saw her occasionally at church and we always spoke warmly but she was still without any men to even talk to. She is most attractive and I hoped she would let herself accept some attention. After almost three years, she called to say that she was dating a wonderful man and she added, “There have been several times over the last three years when I have felt this incredible love from you and that has carried me through.” To me that was another way of saying that she had experienced the Grace of knowing that no matter what happened, she was acceptable and one with others.

Closing Thoughts

One bible story that I always have in the back of my mind is the story of Job. Job was afflicted with increasing ailments that plagued him and tortured him. When his friends heard of his woes, they came and sat with him in silence for seven days, and Job was comforted and felt a sense of relief. Then his friends began to tell him that perhaps he should change his ways, that he should do this or that, and they offered him much advice.
Job became hurt and disillusioned and asked his friends to leave. That story helps me listen and make my presence felt without finding things to say about how one should change their behavior or thinking. When the sense of acceptance of self begins to register first by someone accepting you and then by accepting oneself, healing is almost assured.

“Doors”

“Doors” is a psychotherapist in private practice. Twelve years ago he made a career change, moving from sales and marketing and other corporate work into the helping professions. His primary mode of work is Transactional Analysis, a humanistic psychology. He works out of his home, in a lovely wooded setting. He is soft spoken and extraordinarily concerned with being a helper in a deep and effective way.

The Personal Journey

I actually got into therapy by mistake, by being invited to a weekend that sounded more like a social retreat, but was actually a therapy marathon. So at first I was scared to death that someone was going to find that I was in therapy, and I’d get fired, which is really truly where I was coming from. Then by the end of the weekend I really loved it. It was great and I made that work more a part of my life. As that process unfolded, I was delighted to be helping the untouched parts of me grow more and
more. As I went on I figured I wanted to do this! I want to spend the rest of my life at it, probably. I eventually got the courage to make the switch. There was no guarantee. There was no income. I was leaving something that I was really very good at, and starting something that I didn't know if I could do. The relational part always attracted me, and that's why I went on that first weekend. And I've just grown deeper and deeper with that as I've gone along.

Now, it's only in the last couple of years that I would even use the word God in the group that I'm in, and I'm a pretty active God basher. Not only did I have my own church dogma crap to get over but I also had all this stuff that goes on locally that drives me nuts to get over too. It's like I had no tolerance for the spiritual side of things at all. Except that I did, because I was doing sweat lodges, and the really alternative stuff, which I just wouldn't call God or spirit at that point. I'd just call it experience. So I guess I've been on a pretty steady path as I look on it. That's what attracted me and what I got into I stayed with, and I guess the big change for me is whether I'm willing to use the 'God' word.

Spiritual Views

When I think in terms of spirituality, I don't think in terms of crystals as much as I think more of the universality, the commonhood of humanity, and attachment to something that's bigger and greater than we are, perhaps.
I don't differentiate between the word God and nature, and oneness and other beings and all this stuff. My personal belief is we're always trying to define God, to make some enormous concept small enough to fit into our brain and that isn't going to work, so let's forget it.

Working with People

First thing is in terms of seeing the client. When I'm doing things right, which I hope is a larger part of the time, I really see them as a child of God, or a child of the universe, pretty much regardless of what the issue is, what's going on, or whatever. This is me. This is you. This is anybody. This is the seed that got damaged or hurt.

I have a bias not to bring up the spiritual. It's part of the process that comes much later and it is a long journey to get there. I guess the journey goes something like: no connection and a hopeful neediness on the client's part, then wanting to perceive me as their fixer and their parent, on into getting to know each other and developing respect, moving into a deeper rapport, on into mutual trust. That's a piece that I think is hugely important for me, that's not part of a lot of therapy. The mutuality piece is hugely important to me.

Instead of denying being affected by what's going on, I'm acknowledging that I am, and as a very imperfect being. And I really have a tremendous responsibility to be watching me, and to have somebody else
watching me. I keep things as clean as I can. And it's hard to be a therapist and be accused of doing something by a client, and saying, "Oh my gosh, I think you're right, I did that, and I'm sorry."

So then I guess after that mutual respect, there's a real tricky piece that I really don't (know how to describe). I've experienced it in my own therapy and with some of my clients, and it's where they come in looking up to me as the fixer, and that's deadly and we need to get rid of that. After the mutuality and the mutual trust, then there comes sometimes this invitation, I guess I need to say, to be the parent that they never had. But boy that does not mean stepping into that trap. It means that they trust enough that they're willing to allow a relationship that touches. I'm not the parent, and it's clear that I'm not the parent. From time to time, you can feel the child. I don't know how to say it except it may be that the relationship changes in a certain way. It's tricky. This is kind of new for me. This is really in there, and it's difficult. Talking about it from my own side (as a client), it's allowing my therapist to take a position with me that my mother couldn't, and as a result I never let anybody else. There's the wall there. It's really tricky to talk about, because when someone reads this stuff, they're going to think, "Oh it's reparenting. You're trying to be the kid's parent." It's not that, but it's allowing the connection to touch the part that never got touched.

That touching that happens there, it's when the client allows the therapist to touch the part of that child that hasn't been touched in that
way. Now what's the therapist's position? The therapist isn't doing it from a parental position. It's from an I-thou position, but it's impacting into the core of child, so to the child it feels nurturing like parent-child, but there's no transference. You're aware of what's happening. It becomes really nice because it's the connection between the child of the therapist and the child of the client at the same time there's the connection between the adult of the therapist and the adult of the client, so there's a monitoring of what's going on. And that's pretty special.

It's an authentic process. It's relational. I don't know how to describe this, but it's relational therapy. And it's also very clear to both of us that I am not the door (to themselves), and I'm not even an example of a person who's found the door. I'm just traveling with them, and we get to the door.

It's a shared experience, and it is their door. It feels like at that level, it's THE door. Nobody owns that. Their path to the door.

When people start to hook up with something beyond themselves, then it helps them to get through. I guess I think that when people are relating very openly, very genuinely, very deeply, that that in itself has the touch of universality and the spirit. When we're relating in that style, we're very, very close to the spiritual side. Buber's work is something that I really hold as a model, that's one of the most important things that I've picked up as I go along, and that's the whole way I see my clients, and hold them.
If you want to use God, then God enters actually through the child, so if you're going to have that connection, then you've got to have connection with your own child. And you've got to remove that big black line, and then things can start to flow with the spiritual energy. And I guess then, on the essential side of the spirituality, some awful things happen to people. And they make equally awful conclusions about their worth, and who they are, and their place in the world, and all that. And at some point it really does help if they can begin to see that perhaps they come from someplace that's greater than the abuse of family that they started in. That yeah, that's their origin in a certain kind of way, but they happen to fall into a place where they were treated badly. It's not where they started from and it's something they had to endure. And their beliefs about themselves could more easily be changed if they can see that perhaps they have a connection to something universal.

I guess to start with my bias, and bias to me comes from the electronic word. It means a gentle pressure in a direction. My bias is not to do it (elicit spiritual issues) because I think that the timing needs to be right. That's an important part of it. So when in doubt I don't do it. And when I believe and feel it's right, either they'll mention something first or give me some clues about some beliefs that they have, that I find would be really useful to hook onto. That's the nicest way.
Techniques

One of the things I do, I try not to use techniques at all. And I still do it. I still haven't found a way to replace them, but I don't like techniques. I certainly don't meditate with people. I don't pray with them. I would be revolted by that. I guess it's frightening to me to even think of. If you take that to an extreme, you end up with this: the wackos in Waco and that kind of stuff. Also I don't feel it's my business to be joining with people in my way. It's their way and their path and what's real for them.

When I feel that we're in a place where they really need a resource beyond what they've got, I'll start talking about plants and living things, and have they ever had a bird perch on their finger or whatever. What have they seen around? I help develop a connected feeling there and maybe then work from that. I wouldn't be this blunt about it, but, "Have you considered that you really are a part of all of that? You really belong with those things." I often use a plant metaphor. How do I do that? I don't know. It's basically relating us to a plant. You put a seed in the ground and it grows, and it becomes what it ought to be, and that's the way we are. But I'll say, "Sometimes bad things happen, and the plant gets planted in a shady place, and it has to go all the way out here before it can go up. Or maybe somebody drops a rock on it, but basically there's this inherent movement, this inherent life force that's moving towards growth."
I do one technique, and it won't work if anybody tries it, so don't write it down, with people that have been really pretty badly damaged. At some point I like to do a visualization with them, that takes them back to their own birth. Again, this is sensitive in timing. I'll do something first to just bring in nature and see if they've seen movies of things being born, and try to just elicit a respect for life and growth and all of that. Then as we do the visualization part about the child, I actually have them get into details. They can see the head, and I have them deliver themselves. At some point in there I do the visualization so that they can put the child in a way so that it's clear that they belong to the universe, and perhaps came from somewhere. There's a way in which I do certainly use the spirituality because I develop it in the natural thing, but I also talk about, "Well you began with a mother and father, but we're not interested in your mother and father. We're just interested in the child and where it came from." Oh I do use something symbolic too. I learned in Bali that for the first six months the child's feet are not allowed to touch the floor. And that is because a child is God. The parents are not parents, but are the caretakers of this God who's come to visit. So for the first six months this whole belief is that this is God, and it's much too holy to touch the floor. So I share that, as a way that another country, another belief system deals with this, and that helps facilitate this idea that perhaps we come from someplace beyond.
Problems

What really interested me is what I see as the pros and the cons of spirituality and psychotherapy. On the one hand I feel if we're really going to do significantly deep work with people, then it's almost essential that there be some spiritual quality to the work. On the other hand, I observe how spirituality is often used to avoid ever getting into any deep work in the first place. So there's that polarity there of how it's essential and how it's an avoidance.

In the Transactional Analysis model of the parent and the adult and the child, the wound happens to the child. Our way of dealing with that is to wall off the child, leaving the parent and the adult on top, leaving the child cut off and disconnected, because there's too much pain in there. With that I can feel, wanting to rise up, "Let's get up above the pain. Let's get out of here. Let's go on to 'higher things'." And so we become really good at thinking, and then go looking for a cult leader, or looking for an external parent, and we keep on rising up and we may decide we're connected to the spirits above and all this stuff. All rising up and out and away from child. And hopefully the quest would be like finding God, or finding something that's going to finally quench the pain for us. And that's the avoidance side of things that I see, whether it's crystals or real God, that's the avoidance side.
Case Illustration

Only once have I had a client who had a problem with God, and I just took that in their language and their belief system. He brought it up. He told a story about footprints in the sand. There are two sets of footprints in the sand, and all of a sudden this guy is looking down and sees when his life got tough, there was only one set of footprints, and he wanted to know why God left him. And God said, “I didn't. I carried you.” So he gave me that as a piece from him, and we used that several times throughout the therapy. When he got discouraged, and felt that God was unjust and all these things, and you could use it that way, in his way. So that way it becomes specific. It becomes specific when I start talking about a place in the universe, and things like that.

Closing Thoughts

What will work when they're ready and when I'm ready is my way of being with them. That works.

“Synergy”

“Synergy” invited me to her home looking over apple orchards. We had tea in her kitchen and later visited her office, a comfortable place where her work is done. “Synergy” does body-mind work, hands on body
work combined with a psychological component, and as you will see a spiritual one. She describes her work as being done on a massage table, fully clothed. It is, “body work with gestalt therapy.” Other elements of “Synergy’s” training create a variety of avenues for growth. She is relatively new to the field, having practiced for five years. “Synergy” is gracious and open. Her professional work is a mirror, I believe, of her own personal process of evolution to which she is deeply committed.

The Personal Journey

I was brought up as a protestant in a family that basically went to church pretty regularly. I had to go to Sunday school, which I didn't like very much. But I also felt quite a close connection with God at a young age. When I was in high school, I went to a prep school and my parents were going through a divorce. I happened to go to a school where we had to go to chapel a lot, and it was actually very comforting to me. And I felt like I spent time with God, but God was sort of more like the patriarchal grandfather in the sky, who would maybe give me what I wanted if I asked enough, or prayed enough. When I was in my early forties or late thirties, the whole paradigm or the whole idea I had about God just blew to pieces. I got very, very angry with God, and so my whole image changed. I didn't want anything to do with it, or him, or whoever it was. All of a sudden, I knew I had to be in nature. And God became nature. And much more of a mother, the earth mother, rather than the patriarchal God. I've done a fair
amount of spiritual work in different workshops, and I've done twelve step work which certainly talks a lot about a higher power, and basically gives you room for a higher power being anything that you need it to be. So now I feel that I'm working more with an inner guide, who happens to be a woman. And that is where I am as far as a belief, that I can attach myself to, but it's a mystery, obviously.

Spiritual Views

I guess my belief is that enlightenment is in the cell. I was brought up to believe that enlightenment and spiritualism or God was outside of me, and I think probably it's everywhere. It is outside of me, but I had never gotten in touch with what was inside of me. If I had to put it in a place, in my body, it would be in the cell. And so God is there, so to speak, but we don't necessarily know that. Or we did know it, but we forgot. And so this work that I do helps at the very deepest level to facilitate remembering, or getting in touch with that place.

Working with People

What I'm endeavoring to do in my practice, and believe is possible to do, is to bring greater awareness and consciousness to the client, in a holistic way. Their body as well as their mind and their spirit are all becoming involved in this opening up. A lot of that has to do with past
memories that have been blocked. As these come up, we work with them verbally.

I think that if I was going to look at it, I would imagine the person reaching to a core place within themselves. The core space, in my own sense, is almost reaching into a cellular level, whether it be cellular membrane or enlightenment. That would be a deeper place of going. I see it in my own imagery as a deep place within me.

It feels as though there's an in and out movement with transformation. There are times when you dive deeply in and look at whatever is coming up at the time, whether it's working with your relationship with your spouse or significant other, or your children, or your family of origin. It's sort of diving in and stirring up the muck, let's say, and then coming out. It's like an in and out breath, coming out of that place and then feeling the changes that have occurred. They don't always occur right away. I think the transformation lies in that out breath almost, in that place of surrender, of letting go of all those past judgments or beliefs that you've just worked on. And for me, transformation has felt like every time I go through that I become a little more centered, or a little more aware of where I want to be, or go.

It's a series of transformations, always. I think the two biggest transformations are when we're born and when we die. But in between those two points, there's a series of them. Other people might call them
phases of development, and they are that too. But in a more spiritual way, I would call them transformational episodes.

I believe that people come into this world bringing a lot of baggage as well, from what I would term as karma involvement, whether it's from past lives or other dimensions or I don't know what.

I feel that the people who I work with are somehow attracted to coming to work with me, and I learn a lot from them and they learn a lot from me. It's basically really important for me to keep up my own personal work, if I'm going to work with other people.

Spiritual Issues in the Work

I don't always work with someone on the table. Sometimes we just have verbal work, guided imagery, different things like that, or problem solving. But when the client is on the table, and I have done the body work and they are in a somewhat of an altered state, they're more in their body than in their head; they will get very much in touch with where God might be in their body. Or they may get in touch with a very young place, or they'll be in nature, or they'll find an animal guide, something like that, that definitely has to do with spiritual work.
Techniques

Often the client will say something that tips me off intuitively that going with an animal guide might be a good idea. So maybe I'll pose that to them, or do some guided imagery there. I'll say, "Well do you feel something in your hips?" or I might be able to tell that they're particularly tense in some area of their body, and they'll say, "Well you know I feel anger." My feeling about it is that any letting go, any expression, say, of anger, or sadness, or whatever it might be, and then getting in touch and becoming aware of where that's coming from, is a way to open up the passages, for more spirit to come in, rather than being so bound up in ego or in the head. It's very important to make the connections, and you need to do that with your head, but at first the body helps to facilitate the connections. I've watched a lot of clients get to that place of real serenity and peace.

I work with meditation and guided imagery, depending on where the client is at that time. The body work on the table is a real form of relaxation, just as meditation would be. I might use animal imagery. The animals are definitely spiritual guides. Usually though, what I try to do is not suggest to the client who their guide will be, but have them discover the guide. If we're working with the animal imagery, then you'd direct it to an animal, but sometimes they won't come up with an animal. They'll come up with an old wise being. I would go with what they want to go with, rather than try to control it.
Problems

Well, I feel that the world of psychology is extremely important, and that there needs to be a balance. They both are very important, I think. The problem could be that if you're just totally doing a spiritual kind of work, there could be a real feeling of being ungrounded by the client. The thing I like about the body work is that you can help facilitate groundedness, let's say, at the end of each session, which you can do working with the body. At the same time, it's important to process, verbally, and in the weeks between sessions, often a client will come back having made these different connections.

Case Illustration

There was one woman who came and she was just totally scattered and didn't know what direction to go in, and was very nervous, and just didn't have any focus. There were lots of things going on in her life, family of origin stuff that was pretty intense. We worked on those issues for awhile. And each time she would come, and we'd do the body work, I would notice she was becoming more and more centered and able to really begin to focus more on where her life was going, or where she wanted it to go. Over the course of a year and a half of working together, I'd say she really found herself. She really started to look at her life, rather than being an extension of a lot of other people. And she became very aware of the
natural world, and actually moved to a small cabin in the woods for awhile, really living a very esthetic kind of life. It was very interesting, because she hadn't been able to have children, and she changed partners, and she became pregnant. It was just this amazing, miraculous thing! I saw a series of transformations taking place.

Now that may have happened whether she was working with me or not, but I think that the body work and the timing of where she was in her life, really helped to facilitate this opening up and reaching the core place.

Closing Thoughts

It feels like it's very, very important to always keep searching for new and better ways to help facilitate people in their growth and their development, and their transformations. And you know, I'd like to see more clinical people, practitioners, learn more about this other way of working.

"Medicine Man"

"Medicine Man" is a psychiatrist, practicing in a clinic in the inner city, where his work is not therapy, but psychopharmacology. He works with between 500 and 800 patients a year, prescribing the meditations that are designed to keep them stable and mentally healthy. He has been in public psychiatry for his whole career, but his work has always been
informed by his Buddhist training and practice. His view of mental health carries the weight of both Eastern and Western psychology. We met in his office. I waited in his crowded waiting room, with the many, many clients who would be seen by this psychiatrist and others in his clinic. The environment was different than others I had experienced in this research, and the breath of fresh air, as "Medicine Man" wove an interface between Western medicine and Eastern spirituality was joyful.

The Personal Journey

I'm a longtime student of Trungpa Rinpoche. I consider myself a practicing Buddhist. The story is that I was in medical school. I knew I was going to go into psychiatry and I took my last year traveling around to different places, doing electives, and I did one elective in Israel. I happened to stumble in the library on Alan Watt's *Psychotherapy East and West*. Who knows what it was doing there? It spoke to me and then I just started reading all the Zen books I could find.

I read the small print where they all say somewhere, "This is all very well and good but, it's a bunch of bullshit if you don't practice." My wife and I stumbled on the Tibetan group, and read Rinpoche's books. The feeling was "Oh, so that's what those crazy Zen masters are trying to say." And so we went up to practice in Vermont, and then I went to my residency after that, very fortunately. Before they could get to me and freeze
my concepts, I was inoculated with the experience of intensive meditation, which tends to cut through concepts. You just don't take them seriously.

Spiritual Views

The idea, in Buddhism, is that you need to be born as a human being in order to be able to practice Buddhism and seek enlightenment. On the literal level, you've got to be born, have a human body. On the psychological level, you need to be existing in a human state before you're capable of going on and engaging in some sort of spiritual practice. If you are in animal realm, say the type would be Archie Bunker, or paranoid, or a manic dog-like realm, some jealous God realm, maybe an up and coming executive, devoting himself entirely to a rise in power; they are not accessible to spiritual practice. Only when you're in human realm, where things are basically stable and you're able to enjoy and use your intellect and your humor and so on, then there's that possibility. So from my point of view, that's why a very small number of people I see are accessible. Most people I see are in lower realms most of the time. I view my job as trying to get people into human realm as much as possible. In Western psychology, it'd be to self-actualize and that would be the ultimate goal. From the Buddhist point of view it's the beginning.
My Buddhist perspective makes a difference in how I understand what I'm seeing and perhaps my ability to hone in on what needs to be done, what can be done, and my ability to hear what people are saying, understand what they're saying. I think, as a practical matter, that's the biggest way that it affects what I do now.

The whole purpose of meditation, of spiritual practice, is to not suppress, not repress, but to feel everything, all the pain as well, and at the same time discover that you can tolerate it, that you don't have to shut it off. You start off dealing with your own internal stuff, but from the Mahayana point of view, that then expands to the rest of the world, and you don't have to protect yourself from it. You discover experientially it's true, and if you've done meditation you know that's so. I think without that kind of practice, you have to protect yourself from the pain. It's just too threatening. So you just shut off, and numb out. But to the extent that you're practicing properly, one way or another, you keep tending to dissolve the numbing.

To the extent that you're able to be there with the person (not numbing yourself), they respond to it. My experience is that most patients really connect with me, really like me, really feel that somehow I've understood them. So I think that comes out of the practice. When I was starting out, I was more self-conscious about it. At this point, whatever has
become part of me manifests. I'm not particularly self-conscious about doing what I do.

Ultimately, from a theoretical point of view, and from a practical point of view, I think meditation picks up where psychotherapy ends off. You know, if there was such a thing as taking psychotherapy to its limit, then you're really ready for meditation. But nothing's ever that clean. The way I would put it is that psychotherapy is trying to untangle the knot of ego, and you're still left with ego but you're trying to get it in some other configuration which is more adaptive, whereas meditation is chopping at the root of it. Another way of looking at it is that meditation makes the holding a little more transparent. To the extent that you actually connect with mediation, you may be just as crazy, but you're not taking it quite so seriously, which makes a very big difference.

The way I see it is that the medications are expedient means. I can make a very big difference in the lives of the vast majority of my patients by seeing them fifteen minutes once in three months. And because I have this expertise with this technology, I can help many, many, many people to some extent.

Psychotherapy is our Western, homegrown attempt at doing the same thing that Buddhism is trying to do. I'd say the closest we've come actually to duplicating it is probably pure psychoanalytic technique, not that I have any use for psychoanalytic technique. But to the point that you can really learn to free associate, you're already meditating, and if the
therapist, the psychoanalyst would just keep his mouth shut, and not lay
his conceptual framework on it, they would probably be much better off.
The problem is it's so easy to get trippy about things, and to lay your trip
on people. You know it's very tricky. On the other hand it's a very rich
situation. I think historically it's a very rich time, because the various
traditions are all coming together, and clashing and mixing, and who
knows what comes out of it.

Spiritual Issues in the Work

The people who are seriously into the charismatic Christian things
like Pentecostal and so on, I feel generally relieved when I hear that,
particularly when suicidality is an issue. I've seen religious practices sort of
transform people's personalities sometimes. There tends to be less suicides
among those people. My experience is that when somebody who's just
totally claustrophobic and overwhelmed by their life really gets into that
kind of practice in a real way, a lot of it lightens up. And again they are true
spiritual practices, even though I might have a very different
understanding of what it's all about. But the practice itself, the prayer
helps. Basically you're not taking yourself quite so seriously in some sense,
so it's there. And that helps people a lot.
Techniques

I very rarely recommend meditation to anybody. I don't have time myself to work in terms of teaching meditation or relaxation. There's an occasional patient that I've told, "I think you should go meditate." But it's also the kind of work I do now. I'm here in the clinic. We have a 70% Medicaid population, mostly Hispanic. It's just that that particular kind of work is not what the population is really open to. If I were to suggest meditation it would be to someone who is not so mentally disturbed that it inevitably falls into the biological mode of treatment. It has to be someone who either doesn't absolutely require medicine, or if they do, medicine helps whatever it helps but they're still struggling on some more existential level.

Problems

To the extent that I seem to be able to be very effective with people, I think that's as much or more to do with the (meditation)practice than to anything I've brought to it or any training I've had. The (psychiatric) training was more directed at putting people at a distance, and being very manipulative in some way.

Sometimes I see people for five or ten minutes, and then I stick strictly to the medicine. And yet, mostly what's important is that you're hearing what they're saying. And particularly doctors and psychiatrists,
people complain, come in and they talk and they feel that they didn't hear a word they said. The doctors aren't paying any attention to them. I think you could see two interviews where the identical words are exchanged, and, depending on this level we're talking about, the patient will walk out from one, feeling that they have actually communicated with somebody, or the patient will walk out mad, feeling they were completely ignored. So it's on a very subliminal level. Doctors particularly, because of the training, tend to be cut off, and they tend not to meet the person's eye, to just kind of not respond to what they've said or done. It's more like, "I'll tell you what to do." And simply not hearing anything.

Case Illustration

I do have a collection of very interesting experiences with people who develop psychotic episodes in the context of religious preoccupations. I've had some absolutely fascinating experiences, where I can actually communicate with a person because I'm not afraid to deal with the whole issue of religion and spiritual practice. I have seen people drive themselves into psychosis through misuse of spiritual practices. One was actually during my residency. A man walked into the emergency room and I was the psychiatrist on call. He was barefoot, ragged, bearded, looked like a chronic schizophrenic on the street. He walked in and we started talking and having this very interesting conversation when my supervisor walked
in and ruined it by being too doctorish, and the guy bolted. A month or so later, Trungpa Rinpoche was in town. The place was crowded with millions of people, and suddenly there's this guy and there's me, and he says, “You're here,” and I say, “You're here.” It turns out he had been a lawyer, and had gone to India and started practicing some sort of Tibetan Buddhism. He decided that the point of meditation was to focus your mind to a point. And he started developing all kinds of techniques on his own to do that, didn't go for instruction. And he drove himself crazy, was psychotic, but in a very unique kind of way. To start with he was an obsessive compulsive kind of person, and he just strengthened that. Instead of resolving ego, he strengthened ego. He wandered around on the street looking like a street person, had a nice apartment, that his brother paid to maintain, had money lying around all over the place 'cause he'd worked as a taxi driver, and he'd walk around and eat out of garbage cans, and people would walk up to him and give him food.

There was some real spiritual thing going on at the same time. I tried to get him engaged into coming to talk to me, but I think I got a little too aggressive. He wouldn't come into my office, but he'd meet me on the subway every day and walk with me to the hospital. I'd always stop in a coffee shop for my coffee before I went to work, and he'd follow me in. One day, I'm waiting in line to pay, and suddenly he starts doing full prostration. He'd seen a vision. The Greek proprietor goes rushing out yelling, “Get out of here!” I say, “No, that's all right,” you know I'm with my
white coat and my stethoscope, “He'll leave when I leave.” I made my reputation there. I ended up trying to get him to the hospital, trying to convince him to come in, I couldn't get him to take medicine. And he ended up riding the elevator up and down all day cause he couldn't make up his mind whether to stay. He moved to a Tibetan group. The Lamas tried to help him. Nobody could get him to do anything because if he didn't like it he'd just go back to the streets. I asked the Lamas, because I had some conflict about it, whether I should get him committed, force medicine on him. The Lama basically said, “He's done so much damage to himself already there's nothing you can do to hurt him. Anything you can do to interrupt this process is fine.” So from their point of view he was also driving himself crazy.

More recently I saw a lady from a pretty middle class family, but pretty wild. She'd become a junky and started with her husband sticking up convenience stores for money. Then she ended up getting into one of these charismatic Christian groups. This is a group where they teach various meditative techniques. You're supposed to be saying a prayer all day long whatever else you're doing, basically. And she started having all kinds of psychotic phenomena which she interpreted as being the spirit of Christ descending upon her. At some point it turned malignant and she became convinced that God had rejected her. She'd fallen from grace and was doomed to hell. And she stopped eating, ended up in the hospital, where I met her, and from my point of view it was a pretty classic psychotic
depression, but with this extra dimension from this whole intense religious thing she'd been into.

I treated her with anti-depressants and anti-psychotics, and she'd get a lot better, and as soon as she was better and felt she was in God's grace, she would reject medicine, because she doesn't need them anymore. And then she'd get worse again. I'm still struggling with it. It's been years now. And she's still around, and she went back to one phase of anti-social behavior again, and now is fairly stable. Lost her kids, lost her family along the way, fairly stable, but still convinced she's doomed to hell, even though she's not actively psychotic now. I could sit there and talk with her about it, and make her feel that I was not simply writing all this crazy stuff. And from my point of view, I am recognizing that she had actually engaged in some very powerful mediative practices, which if taken it too far, can produce psychotic symptoms.

“Cards”

“Cards” is the newest practitioner in this research. She has just completed training as a psychosynthesis counselor which she brings together with her tarot and astrology work. She is an artist, a creator of mandalas that carry the beauty of fine art and the significance of spiritual realities. Each draws on the qualitative aspects of the person for whom they are made. “Cards” is a little shy about her work, excited about its potential, hesitant about her role. The depth of her connection to Self and
spirit, though, are strong. Her perseverance and commitment to evolution are unwavering. In this interface of spirituality and psychology, she has found a fit for herself.

The Personal Journey

My grandparents were both ordained Christian ministers. Having my grandmother ordained gave me a definite role model for spirituality, as opposed to organized religion. My spiritual beliefs started forming then, when I would watch the Sunday school teacher be mean to his family and then come in and teach us about the Bible. It didn’t fit. When I was sixteen, I was picked to be Mary in a Christmas pageant. I had a bible verse to remember. It began with, “My soul doth magnify the glory of the Lord.” When it was time to get up and say my part, there was a spotlight on me. It was absolutely as if there was an angel up there, instead. My mouth was open, the voice was coming out, but it didn't seem like it was me. It felt like it was coming through me. It also seemed like I was having a conversation, on another level, with this angel about this being my path, being my purpose, to share the light, and to spread the “word”, and all of that.

The Timothys were young people in the church who were dedicating their lives to Christ. They said whatever I do with my life, whatever it is, I'll be teaching people, or sharing with people about my knowledge of God or Christ. I joined that summer. Then my parents divorced and all hell broke
loose, “What do I believe in, What do I really believe in? Not believe in?”

Some very good people didn’t believe in Christ.

When I was a kid I wanted to be a psychologist. I loved the psychological stories on TV, then mother would say, “Yes, but that takes eight years of college, and what about family?” So I got married. My first husband was very agnostic-no beliefs at all. He though spirituality was for weak people. He seemed smarter than me, so I just went along with what he said, till I turned twenty-six. I’d been doing a lot of reading of philosophy. He was a philosophy major, and would bring home his philosophy books, and I’d start reading them. One night I was laying there next to this stranger, and just calling out, “Why am I here? Who am I? What’s the purpose of my life?” A voice in the room, not in my head, said, “You are what you think you are.” It was very powerful. It was as if everything else again was just sort of melting away. I was being spoken to by a higher authority. I was what I thought I was.

So I started thinking about what I was and I wasn’t, what I did believe and what I didn’t believe. My marriage ended, and I went back to my faith, though not the dogma of it. I couldn’t call it God initially. I had to say this is about the Good. The greater Good. Couldn’t use the word Christ, because that brought up too many dogma issues. Someone had given me the Unity literature where they defined Christ as light. That was easier to accept. Then, I went for my first astrology reading, and tarot reading. I got back on track with, “There is something beyond us. There is something
more than us, whatever it is, however you name it. " Now since that time I've named it a lot of different things.

Spiritual Views

It's a great mystery. It's a great mystery. There's good in everyone, and that force for good is just yearning to come out. I believe, this is part of my belief system, that there is God's will, or a greater will, the mystery that we don't know about so much, and then there's our personal will, and the real trick for us humans is for us to learn how to use them together.

Working with People

I always try to hold positive unconditional regard for the other person, knowing that they really do have the answers within them, and that they have the ability to connect with that.

In context, right now, I think I'm really trying to stay out of preaching, or even sharing a lot of my own stuff right now, because it feels to me more important that the client be able to come up with their own knowledge. Working with groups is opening up new vistas and is very satisfying- a return to purpose
Spiritual Issues in the Work

They come more with the tarot reading than with the therapy, because the angels will come up, or a belief in something beyond will just automatically be part of the tarot discussion. My reading is designed to include many qualities and values, including the spiritual. I didn't start out to be a fortune teller in this. I use the card as a visual, but I start talking about a story! I'm telling these folks a story. They have free will, and I always start it out with, "I am not a fortune teller, you have free will." Some people get it and for some it's a new idea.

I find I'm more alert to transpersonal openings in therapy sessions. I just hold that spirit is there. And then, if I see that there's an opening with the client, then I'll ask them to connect to that source, or to connect to that light. Source, and light, divine, are words that I use more now.

Techniques

Lately I have been doing the meditation before seeing a client, or while we're tuning in, where I will ground my chakras, and then come up to the heart chakra, and imagine just a light going from my heart to their heart. Then I imagine that light goes up out of their crown, and then up out of my crown, and the lights sort of meet in the middle. For me that's an affirmation that this is going to be of the light.
I've done some teaching of meditation with my clients, and I'm thinking more of the therapy clients as opposed to the tarot clients right now. Every client pretty much, unless there's something immediate that needs to be addressed, I ask them to take just about five minutes to meditate with me. I call it tuning in, but it's quiet, and it's not directed too much at the beginning. Lately I've been doing even more "teaching" of meditation with good success.

I have done some work with artistic clients, with the mandala, drawing their mandala in the session. And workshops that I do offer many opportunities to introduce transpersonal concepts.

Problems

I was working at the shelter for battered women, and they put me right in to being a counselor. I seemed to be the one who was able to take care of everything, and so they wanted to make me director, even before I had finished my Bachelor's. I really didn't want any part of being the director. In relation to the psychology classes that I was in, and even the social service setting that I was in, I felt I knew more about how to help someone, or have empathy with someone, than I was learning in those settings. There was no support system available to me so I burned out after three years, and thought maybe I'm not cut out for this psychology field.
In college I don't remember any connection to transpersonal other than in my art classes. I don't think God was ever mentioned in any psychology classes and that was one of the things that kept me from going to a therapist for a long time, because I felt like I'm going to go and I'm going to say I'm interested in astrology, and they're gonna lock me up!

It's often unsettling, but it's very familiar. I have a real life experience of having an intense and painful custody battle because of my interest in an innocent program called Silva Mind Control, an unfortunate title for a course that teaches mediation, centering and responsibility. I haven't quite fit in with the rest of the world, their contexts, or their expectations: Sunday is church, the rest of the week is something else. Since I have found psychosynthesis I have been less reluctant about that, and more open about what I am believing in.

Case Illustration

Client was brought up in a Catholic home, and now she's going through a divorce. She wonders how can God love her if she's going to be divorced, and where does she fit into the church? She has sort of this bravado of "it doesn't matter", and yet underneath there is, I think there is, something that matters.

I've been doing some guided meditations with her. In her astrological chart one of the symbols is a quiet garden in a monastery. I've
taken her there, to that garden in the monastery, where she can connect to her higher Self and her place in the great mystery.

Closing Thoughts

This stuff fits like a glove to me! Tarot is more like a quick snapshot of what a life might look like, and maybe a glimpse into a probable future, but psychosynthesis really embraces it all.

"Spiritual-Practical"

"Spiritual-Practical" is a seasoned therapist. He works in a local clinic and is well respected in the area. He brings a unique and specific spiritual orientation to his work. He is deeply steeped in the anthroposophic tradition and endeavors to translate some of the principles of this spiritual science to the field of psychotherapy. His ideas are rich and deep, with great promise for further unfolding. He carries a wide repertoire of knowledge and experience and is clearly, himself, a life long learner. Above all, he is an ethical man, committed to his morality in all walks of his life. It is a pleasure to know him and to taste that high moral standard.
The Personal Journey

Well the path that I'm on spiritually is anthroposophy, which is a philosophy that comes from the teachings of Rudolph Steiner. The thrust of his work was finding a way to bring spirituality and science together, finding a way to make all these investigations into the spiritual, a scientific process. He gave another name to anthroposophy, and he called it spiritual science. I had earlier investigated many different spiritual paths, Eastern paths, starting when I was in college. I was very interested in Eastern philosophy at that time. And then I had looked at the Gurdjieff work for awhile, and then, Alice Bailey, who had a thing called the Arcane School. I got into that a bit, and that was actually where I learned how to meditate. But then I became very interested in anthroposophy because it was a path where I saw there were lots of practical results. They had figured out ways of taking these spiritual ideas and really bringing them into a reality by developing the Waldorf schools, and approaches to agriculture and medicine and the sciences, as well as the arts. And it was the practicality that I saw in anthroposophy that was very attractive to me. They didn't necessarily have an approach to psychology, but they had practical approaches in all these fields.

My father's from Poland, and so, you know it's a devout Roman Catholicism, the likes of which you don't quite see in this country. It has a different flavor to it. I can look back with a kind of fondness for what that
brought to my life. In my family of origin, the spirituality was very important to me. It was also that we celebrated our festivals in a very ethnic way, but the religious aspect is so closely tied to the ethnic within Poland. I can see how it develops early on, these feelings of reverence and awe in a child, to have that kind of a world view. The Catholicism unfortunately also mixes in shame and guilt. It's a package, you know? But within my family that wasn't such a big part of it. It was more like this devotion to Christianity. This devotion to Mary especially is very strong in Polish Catholicism. It was a wonderful thing, and it's a difficult kind of thing to bring across to children in our own post modern world. But because my father grew up in Poland before the war, he wasn't yet living in that world, so he brought me kind of the old stream of how it was.

Spiritual Views

There is already a link between medicine and psychology that you find in psychiatry, but I feel that there has to be a link between a spiritual psychology and a spiritual medicine as well, which involves looking at the human being as a spiritual being. Spirituality isn't just some big undifferentiated mass. It's got levels to it, or it has some kind of geography to it. It's connected with the workings of the physical body, which also has spiritual aspects to it. And I think that at some point these things are going to have to link.
One of the things I'm very interested in is the research, spiritually as well as scientifically, about the physical body and the “life” body as well, or Chi, or whatever you want to call it. How is that connected within an approach to healing, both emotional healing and physical healing? I feel that's very important. It's got to be addressed in psychology and in education. It's really through a spiritual approach that that's going to be possible. Through dissection you only discover the dead physical body, you don't explore the live physical body, and another level of technique's going to have to be developed for doing that kind of research.

I'm also concerned about the notion of needing to protect the child a bit, in many different ways, so that they can still stay open to the spirituality that they're still a little bit in touch with as children, and not having that taken away from them. Joseph Pierce talked a little about that aspect, the magical child and how it's all being stolen away. David Elkine talked about the youth growing up too early, and how they're losing something by becoming adults too soon. But part of what they're losing is this kind of closeness to the spirit when they're young. It's important to try to protect that experience for them so that when they grow up they can bring part of that into their adulthood. Certain qualities are built into a person when they're able to have those experiences of reverence and awe as children. Those qualities can later metamorphose in adulthood, and they can use them. While if they didn't have those experiences it makes for a
more kind of a dried out adulthood, an intellect that isn't warmed by the heart.

Working with People

A lot of what's being done in our field stems from Freud, and behaviorism, which in turn comes from Darwinism. We're being torn in our time to look at the individual two ways. One is to look at man as an animal, and the other is to look at man as a machine. And the idea that man is half an angel is not one that anybody looks at, or not many people look at. Honoring that aspect of the human being is something that a spiritual approach to psychology tries to do.

For example, this whole idea of looking at the person in terms of the negative symptoms that they express, you can get really locked into that. And that can be a problem, especially for someone who works in this field, and everyone they see has negative symptoms! And then you start to develop feelings about all of humanity, because after awhile most of the people you're meeting are your clients. And you need something to balance that too.

There's also this concept about human behavior. Well if you really think about it, behavior is something that animals have, and when you translate behavior to human beings, you're talking exactly about that aspect which isn't human. It's actually when we've sunk a little bit below the human that we have behavior, and yet entire departments, and
agencies, are called the Institute for Behavior. I feel that something is lost with that kind of a perspective, and the danger is probably the greatest in a place like America, because in Europe for instance, when you study psychology it is very much linked to philosophy. And then a little bit, you leak over into religious studies. In America that's not so at all. That whole spiritual, philosophical has been a little more missing in the United States.

(When you see people as half angels) I would hope that it brings another level of possibilities to the room. Another thing that comes to mind is that when you're not looking in terms of behavior, you're looking at what is the meaning in this person's life, and what does this mean. And for me it opens up to larger kinds of ideas like destiny for instance, or reincarnation, though I don't do reincarnation therapy. But I also keep those kinds of ideas open in myself, and it means that you can look at a person's life situation and help them to look at their own life situation in an entirely different way. When you get stuck on symptom relief, it becomes a very narrow kind of framework for looking at an individual's life.

So when I meet with other people on that kind of a level, I listen to what they have to say, and then I try to pick out things to help the perspective become wider. I actually try not to speak about spirituality too much because once you open up that word, people can shrug you off. And it's unfortunate.

The inner work of the psychotherapist is also important. That's very important for a person becoming a spiritual psychotherapist. It has to do a
bit with the role that the therapist is going to play with the client. Once again it depends on where the client is at, but when people come into psychotherapy, they're either going through or are going to go through a period of disintegration. That's not bad, but it means that the therapist has to have different kinds of roles in that person's life. On one level, with the therapist's own energies, they're in a way helping to hold that person together. To me that's kind of an unexplored area in our field. The therapist is actually doing something to the person without speaking. But on another level, when you're working with a person in psychotherapy, you're helping the person to transform their thinking, and it means that the therapist also has to have some kind of control over their own thinking.

And so these exercises that I sometimes prescribe or suggest for clients, it's very important that the therapist have worked on those and developed those. And hand in hand with that development of the thinking, is the development of an ethical moral sense within the therapist. One of the situations is hypnosis, though I don't object to hypnosis in all circumstances. In fact guided imagery is a kind of a hypnosis. However, if you're going to work with people on that level, it means that not only is the person absorbing what you're talking to them about, but I have a feeling that there's something about the moral stature of the psychotherapist that also has an effect on the client. So that's when it can get dangerous.
The other thing that this training and thinking in a meditative sense does, is it allows us to be open to inspiration. Sometimes you get inspired about which way to go with the client, and it's because you've developed a listening sense. And that listening sense allows you to take from the client what the client wants or what the client needs. I believe that the meditative work of the psychotherapist helps the psychotherapist to become more powerfully attuned to that.

Techniques

It depends on the client, how high or low functioning they are, how conscious some of these things can become. On a certain level, techniques are not the most important thing. But there are some techniques which you could say come directly out of it. The most direct kind of technique would be if I would talk to a client, and ask them if they would be willing to do meditation, or some spiritual exercises, or concentration exercises. Not so infrequently ask someone if they would like to do those (concentration exercises). People aren't always so eager to do these things.

If they express interest, we may go through it once in the session, but it's really something that they take home afterwards. For meditation you first have to be able to hold it in, otherwise a person kind of crosses that threshold into the spiritual world, and they don't have the mental strength. Then they'll either fall asleep or dissipate, and it won't be a very
valuable experience. So before they can really meditate they need to concentrate first, and develop that strength in their thinking, so they can hold themselves. I think some people describe it as building a little hut for yourself so that when you cross over into that other realm, you can still stay awake and take hold of it. We cross over into that realm every night, but then we don't get much out of it, except a few dreams.

It’s an exercise that I do almost every day of my life, and find it’s very practical. I just pick an everyday object, a man-made object, and closing my eyes, and picturing this object, and picturing exactly what it looks like, thinking about it. Say it’s a cup; you can think about the shape of the cup, you can think about what it’s made out of, think how there are big cups and small cups, and some cups have this kind of handle, and some have this kind of handle, and some are metal, and some plastic, and thinking a bit about how the inventor maybe thought about making this cup—what was his intent when he came up with this idea of a cup? Now when you get out of the exercise is when you think, “Well this cup reminds me of when I was drinking coffee in Paris. And you know Paris is really a nice place.” That’s when you get out of the exercise, but you have to always keep bringing yourself back. And picking a man-made object, the idea isn’t to lead into meditation yet, it’s to discipline yourself to stay with concentration. It’s always hard with things like a cup or a candle, because they already have a bit of a symbolic meaning, but you could pick a paper
clip, or a thumbtack. They have less symbolic value. And they keep you with it.

Meditation is something further along, and often I won't propose too much in the way of meditation with people, unless they're already inclined a bit in that direction, or have attempted something. And then I don't really teach people meditation, because that would take a long time, and it starts to pull you away from the work you're trying to do in the room. I might recommend a book, or suggest they investigate what classes are around. I'm not trying to lay any specific path onto them, but just telling them to look at what's around them.

Problems

There are dangers, and one is that there's nobody monitoring any longer who can use these techniques. Nobody's monitoring the ethics of it all either. The American Psychological Association or whatever has certain ethics and things, but those are really at a rather primitive level.

Especially when they give clients regular, allopathic, heavy duty drugs, which sometimes interfere with the process. If you're going to use that concept that the Grofs have been pushing around about a spiritual emergency, and spiritual emergence, and trying to honor that, anti-psychotic medication is not going to do that. It's going to push it away.

The danger of being amongst people who all believe in spiritual things is that spirituality can be taken too lightly, and talked about on a
level as if we all are having powerful spiritual experiences that we're conscious of all the time. It's hard to keep the reverence for the spirituality, on that level, so there's dangers in working in both kinds of areas.

Case Illustration

I'm not saying they have tremendous success yet in working with some of these things, but in Europe, if a person had a psychotic break, they might come to an anthroposophic clinic. There are big ones in Europe and they have psychiatric hospitals that are anthroposophic and there's an anthroposophic medical school in Germany. For instance you'd go to the clinic, and you'd see the doctor. The doctor would give you a very, very small dosage of an anti-psychotic medication, a dosage which any normal psychiatrist would say was below the effective range for that medication. They would give them some homeopathic medications along with that, and then they would surround the person with the support system to try to help them work their way through it. Now I'm not talking about a person who's bonafide schizophrenic and has had a number of breaks already. I'm talking about the person who's having a first break, and we don't know what direction that's going to go yet.

And then they slowly help the person work through that, with these adjunct therapies. When you work with color (art therapy), it works on the person on a very different level than when you speak to the person, and the person has to logically respond. I mean anybody that's psychotic can't do
regular psychotherapy. They're not in a place where they can do it, but that
doesn't mean that they can't do anything else. They wouldn't work with
painting with a psychotic person, because painting is too exciting. It'd
excite them too much. They'd work with clay, which brings them down,
and they have to work with matter a little bit, so they have to pull
themselves in in order to do it. Or they might work with black and white
drawing, but not color because once again that kind of brings them in.
Color would take them out too much. And then with maybe with curative
eurythmy (movement therapy).

Closing Thoughts

It's hard sometimes. It would probably be harder if I was working
with all Ph.D.'s who were convinced that they were experts, and that they
knew it all. Some of the people do have spiritual perspectives. To be
honest, I have some friends who are psychotherapists and who are
anthroposophists but they practice very straight psychotherapy. And I feel
like, "Well wait a minute!" They're just separating these two things side by
side, and they're not trying hard enough to make connections between the
two, and to find what the connection is. It really isn't enough, just the fact
that you might study a spiritual path.
CHAPTER 6
THEMES WITHIN THEMES

Introduction

The original interview transcripts offered a set of major themes that seemed to represent the most important elements of the subject’s presentation. These categories emerged from the open ended interview and the stories that were told in those interviews. In this section, each of the six categories will be considered unto itself and separate from the profile of each individual.

In looking for the common experiences or undercurrents that show up in participants' experience, many themes stood out as representing the issues and concerns within each major category. These major themes (categories within the profiles) and sub-themes (themes within the categories) are listed in the chart that follows.

Exploring both the categories and the themes within the categories, will offer a more specific and ordered sense of what the narratives tell us. This will be the grist for emerging theoretical implications. This thematic analysis is the researcher's distillation of ideas into a coherent base of data, grounded and exemplified with ongoing quotes from participant transcripts.
The case illustrations, offered as part of the profile, are not included in the search for themes, nor are the “closing thoughts.” Given the extraordinarily complex nature of psychotherapy, the case illustrations are too brief to draw further implications from. They add richness to the narratives by exemplifying the material presented by the participant. For this reason, the case illustrations stand in their own right. Likewise, the closing thoughts remain as summaries, last minute ideas or grounding of the narrative of each person. They do not lend themselves to deeper categorization.

Categories and Themes Chart

**Profile Category #1**

The participants’ personal journey as it lead them to their current work and the interface in that work of spiritual and psychological perspectives

Themes

Childhood experience of religion and spirituality

Unexpected phenomena

Teachers, travel, and study

Crises as part of the path

Path, guidance, and purpose

Psychological realms
Profile Category #2

The spiritual views and beliefs of the participants

Themes
- Struggling to define God (or like concepts)
- Who are we humans in the universe?
- The quality of spirit is love
- Implications of a spiritual world view for the therapist

Profile Category #3

The participants' general experience of working with people

Themes
- Clients' pain
- Growth goals
- The therapist

Profile Category #4

The participants' understanding of clients' spiritual issues

Themes
- Cues
- Opening the door, cautiously
- Life issues and the transpersonal
Profile Category # 5

The techniques and strategies of a spiritual nature that the participants use in their work

Themes

General strategies
Meditation or not?
Other techniques
Impact/effect

Profile Category #6

The problems that participants experience as a result of the interface of spirituality and psychotherapy.

Themes

Problems in the field of psychology
Problems with spirituality
Profile Category #1:
The Personal Journey

In every profile, this category appeared to be a very important one for the participant. It drew together aspects of the participants' spiritual history and professional history in a way that told the story of how they got to the point where the interface of spirituality and psychology was important to them. It was a surprise to this researcher to see how interested subjects were in sharing many aspects of their personal history. Many of the stories were long and specific, but each seemed to include the significant markers that moved that person from one point in their lives to the present moment. The stories are very different, but certain common threads emerged that give some insight into what elements go into a personal journey that leads someone to an interface of spirituality and psychotherapy. The themes that emerged within this category are: childhood experience of religion and spirituality; unexpected phenomena; teachers, travel, and study; crises as part of the path; path, guidance, and purpose; and psychological realms.

Childhood Experience of Religion and Spirituality

Religion of origin came up as a theme many times. For several participants, the religion of origin was a stumbling block or a negative
experience conceived as being problematic or opposing the spiritual unfolding that followed. For others that religion of origin was a key to later spirituality. Some made no mention of religion of origin.

When the religion of origin was seen as problematic, it related to a core sense of something important that was not being addressed or addressed inappropriately within that religion.

I believe that the whole Garden of Eden thing continues to exert a powerful spell on our culture’s ability to find the deeper truths about feminine energy. Supposedly Adam ate the apple at Eve’s suggestion. When God asked Adam why he did it, Adam blamed Eve. They were thrown out of paradise, became ashamed of their bodies, children were to be birthed in pain, and Eve was judged at fault and therefore inherently evil or bad. Fundamentally, in our mainstream culture, very little has changed.

Trying to find oneself in the religion of origin was sometimes difficult. As participants lived within their religion of origin hypocrisy was noticed, both when they were children and as adults. Also noted as conflictual was the use of shame, dogma, not liking Sunday school, anti-female bias, patriarchal god, and guilt. The religion was sometimes seen to have failed the person. “I felt like I spent time with God, but God was sort of more like the patriarchal grandfather in the sky, who would maybe give me what I wanted if I asked enough, or prayed enough.”

Coming back to a spiritual world view in later life after difficult experiences in the religion of origin led people to struggle with language and concepts. “Cards” commented, “I couldn’t refer to it as God anymore. I
called it good.” The experience of pain and disillusionment in early religious experiences led some to be wary of new found spiritual concepts. “I don’t know if I can use the God word.” “Doors” was even more opposed to the early religious conceptualization. “I was an active God-basher.”

Others, after early difficulties with religion, were led into deep immersion in a new spirituality, one that echoed the Self more truly. “Synergy” elaborates:

When I was in my early forties or late thirties, the whole paradigm or the whole idea I had about God just blew to pieces. I got very very angry with God, and so my whole image changed. I didn’t want anything to do with it, or him, or whoever it was. All of a sudden, I knew I had to be in nature. And God became nature. And much more of a mother, the earth mother, rather than the patriarchal God.

But for those that felt connected to the religion of origin in a positive way, the impact was experienced as long lasting. Core beliefs found or learned in those early positive religious experiences were carried directly into adult lives, both personal and professional. The tenets of the childhood religion that had meaning were kept and nurtured as an adult spirituality. “It was and it is now that I believe in God. I’m a practicing Episcopalian. I believe in the hereafter.” For “Business Man” this belief in God, nurtured since childhood, carried in tact into adult life where core beliefs of appreciation, service, kindness, and goodness permeated his personal and professional life. “Spiritual-Practical” too was deeply impacted by childhood religion.
My father’s from Poland, and so, you know it’s a devout Roman Catholicism, the likes of which you don’t quite see in this country. It has a different flavor to it. I can look back with a kind of fondness for what that brought to my life. In my family of origin, the spirituality was very important to me.

While the roots in childhood were often valued, for many, the form changed drastically as they became adults. Even when forms and basic beliefs changed over time, the belief that childhood religious experience was important did not change. In fact, concern for the absence in childhood of such spiritual impact was noted.

What they’re losing is this kind of closeness to the spirit when they’re young. It’s important to try to protect that experience for them so that when they grow up they can bring part of that into their adulthood. Certain qualities are built into a person when they’re able to have those experiences of reverence and awe as children. Those qualities can later metamorphose in adulthood, and they can use them. While if they didn’t have those experiences it makes for a more kind of a dried out adulthood, an intellect that isn’t warmed by the heart.

From within these childhood religious experiences many positive elements emerged. Some found role models, within the church or church family. “My grandparents were both ordained Christian ministers. Having a grandmother ordained gave me a definite role model for spirituality.”

Some went on to work with their church, carrying the same principles and form into adult life. Others drew from within the early religion, that which had continuing value while leaving behind the limitations.
Also of key importance to many were strong spiritual experiences in childhood. Some of these were related to organized religion, others were not. The description of these experiences was often rich and detailed, reaching back in some cases over fifty years. Those who spoke of these experiences did so with conviction as to their importance. These experiences bring to mind Jean Houston’s comment. “Almost everyone wakes up at least once in a lifetime, and almost everyone goes promptly back to sleep again. But through the drowse of the rest of their days they still faintly remember that time of awakening.” (1982, p.182) These experiences, for whatever reasons, seemed to leave this population awake and searching throughout their lives.

When I was sixteen, I was picked to be Mary in a Christmas pageant. I had a bible verse to remember. It began with, “My soul doth magnify the glory of the Lord.” When it was time to get up and say my part, there was a spotlight on me. It was absolutely as if there was an angel up there, instead. My mouth was open, the voice was coming out, but it didn’t seem like it was me. It felt like it was coming through me.

Many of these spiritual experiences happened in nature or in quiet or in relation to mystery; the mystery of the universe, of religion, of sounds and smells and light. We hear of the elm tree that one woman sat under when she was three, feeling the greatness of herself in life. There is nature in other forms; dark, mysterious nights, earth, water, animals, and plants. Ritual also played a part for children whether it was the formal ritual created in church or rituals made up over the burial of animals, or in play.
As a kid I was very drawn to ceremony. I was an altar boy. I lit the incense and the candles -- the props, in a sense. I guess they all combined to create a certain atmosphere that would heighten how you felt.

Little consideration has been given to children's spirituality in the past, though that is beginning to change, I am glad to say. The stories of these practitioners' powerful, deeply remembered experiences mirrors many that I have heard from clients. And yet, like therapists with spiritual perspectives, children are often not given a place to speak of these things. In some cases, powerful spiritual experiences can be disorienting and frightening. A Zen teacher that I studied with told of his childhood "awakening" and how it directed him towards his life work. The childhood experience was later paralleled by his enlightenment experiences in Zen. Something worked for him in this experience. A client, on the other hand, having a very similar experience, attempted to talk about it and was dismissed and diagnosed as "crazy," an epithet that followed her into adult life, with more impact than the original spiritual experience.

Everyone awakes at least once. Support and a paradigm that can include spiritual reality are needed to keep us from going back to sleep.
Unexpected Phenomena

Similar experiential phenomena, but in adulthood, were frequently referred to by participants. These descriptions too carried a vividness and, in every case, the quality of surprise. These individuals experienced an unexpected phenomena, often defying logic or reason. The phenomena validated, deepened or opened a door for the emerging spiritual views of the participant. The impact was great and often life-altering.

I was meditating there very quietly, and I came out of it to hear a voice saying over and over, "All is one, all is one."

As I was walking along this narrow path, my memory was that the sky "opened" and there was a light and a voice. And the voice said, "Why do you seek in form for that which is formless?"

Hearing voices often ends up with hospitalization! But the voices these people heard were described in no uncertain terms as the voice of truth or higher authority, of inner wisdom. Or the voice was inexplicable, but trusted. In every case these were life affirming and self-empowering messages and had the staying power to be felt as guidance many years later. No person questioned the validity or cause of the voices.

Other unexpected experiences were simply shifts in awareness or new awarenesses. When "Minds and Bodies" lived in the West and experienced Native American culture he discovered that many old Indians didn't know their ages, or refer to them in any way. Twenty years ago he
made that same choice, freeing himself from one of the constraints on his experience of boundless Self. For “Drums and Rattles” who felt slighted in her female nature by her religion of origin, the impact of powerful Native American female figures was significant.

Sometimes the unexpected phenomena was profound and mind-boggling. Sometimes it was mundane, but nonetheless impactful. “I came across a course in Zen up at school, so I took that.” “(In Israel) I happened to stumble in the library on Alan Watt’s *Psychotherapy East and West*. Who knows what it was doing there?” “All of a sudden, I knew I had to be in nature. And God became nature.”

To find an obscure American Zen book in a library in Israel while studying medicine may seem fateful or lucky or no big deal. But for “Medicine Man” this small occurrence altered his life and, in the trickle down effect, the lives of the thousands of patients he sees. This psychiatrist sees through eyes that were profoundly effected by spiritual tradition. Likewise, each practitioner who shared an unexpected phenomena was impacted by it and chose to let it influence their lives and work over many, many years. When something clicks, when there is a fit, when the tuning forks resonate, there is movement whose impact can be profound.

**Teachers, Travel, and Study**

Spiritual teachers are an obvious source of learning in spiritual traditions, and there were many experiences shared by these people about
teachers. For some the teachers have been long time, single pointed teachers. These teachers might be living or dead. For others, teachers came in and went out of a life. In the form of books, or actual encounters, this group of people was strongly influenced by spiritual masters. In every case mentioned, the influence of these teachers was experienced positively.

Afterwards the priest came up to me and said, "The Zen master here will see you now." We were shown to his study, and it was wonderful. It was what I’d hoped Japan would be. It had one single scroll on the wall and a beautiful tea chest, and a couch and two chairs. And he said to me, "Why do you come?" I said, "To learn and to share what I learn."

Some of the key teachers that were mentioned included a number of East Indian gurus, teachers from the esoteric Christian perspective, Gurdjieff, Rudolph Steiner, Buddhist teachers, a Native American wise woman, current Christian thinkers, and biblical figures. Traditions that are currently influential or actively embraced include: Buddhism (several types), Taoism, earth based traditions, Christianity of several kinds, and eclectic influence. Some of these practitioners clearly identify themselves on a specific path. “I am an Episcopalian.” “The path I am on is Anthroposhoy.” “Taoism has the greatest fit for me.” Others did not.

Right now if someone at the emergency room asked me for a religious denomination, I would have a hard time giving them an answer. I have been in the process for most of my life of trying to find out what’s true for me, what works for me and letting go of a lot of unexamined junk.
What often went hand in hand, and sometimes had a piece of the story all its own, was travel. Many people had traveled: to India, England, or Scotland, known spiritual havens, and to other parts of the world. The travel was often part of the search. Sacred sites, spiritual communities and the hunt for a “master” motivated these people in their journeys. These were not vacations.

I went to England for a year and spent a certain amount of time meeting up with well known psychic healers, studying what they did. I worked with pendulums. I went over to England studying ancient monuments.

The next year my divorce was complete. My former husband and I had really worked toward a peacefulness between us. He gave me a trip around the world, and I took it. It was an unusual journey, and it’s interesting that he gave it to me.

The journey has always been an active metaphor for spiritual questing. Whether the journey was an “accidental” trip to a therapy weekend that turned one person’s life around or a planned and directed trip around the world, movement from one place (psychological and physical) to another is an important description for these spiritual seekers.

Study, of one sort or another, was also an active part of the personal journey. Many books were read, trainings taken, explorations made into new ways of thinking. There is a considered spirituality that emerges from these people. Faith is strong, and often founded in early or unexpected experiences, emphasized or expanded in travel or with teachers, but
finally grounded in study. These people have worked hard to learn about their spirituality.

I had earlier investigated many different spiritual paths, Eastern paths, starting when I was in college. I was very interested in Eastern philosophy at that time, and then I had looked at the Gurdjieff work for awhile, and then, Alice Bailey, who had a thing called the Arcane School.

I've done a fair amount of spiritual work in different workshops, and I've done twelve step work.

After a number of years of reading, I became more drawn to Taoism than to anything else.

Crises as Part of the Path

While many aspects of the personal journey were benign, even joyful, it was a common thread to see conflict and crisis as a prelude to some spiritual consideration. Divorce of the parents, when the subject was a child, and divorce as an adult ranked as the most common crises. “Helper” found God directly as a result of her parents’ divorce.

Then my parents separated. After the separation is when I remember participating and being active in the church. At ten, two years later, I consciously accepted the doctrines, was baptized, and accepted a lot of the beliefs. I accepted Christ as my personal savior. I can’t explain how at such a young age I was able to comprehend all that, but I did. I think it had a lot to do with the fact that I was the oldest, that my father left and I had to take on a new role. I was no longer a child.
As an adult "Helper" is still engaged with her religion of childhood and still finds the presence of God to be a key element in her life.

Adult crises also moved people towards a spiritual orientation. For "Voice," the pain of an unhappy marriage increased longing and desire for spirituality.

In the early New York years, when I was in a bad marriage and doing a lot of theater and superficial television commercials, a lot of stuff that had to do with pretty face and being a role, I was terribly, terribly, terribly lonely for spiritual companionship, but I couldn't name it yet. I didn't have it in my marriage and I had thought I would. I felt betrayed by that.

For "Cards," the marriage that ended was a direct step towards a renewed spirituality. "And that marriage ended, and I went back to my faith."

For some, it was a simple, everyday moment that opened a door. "I got my first pet, and it got sick and it died on me and I was really sad." The entrance of pain or crisis can change life. Even the simple act of coming to terms with the death of a pet can lead to a pursuit for spirituality that defines that life.

The literature of transpersonal psychology validates the connection between crisis and spiritual awakening. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the work of Assagioli on Self-realization and psychological
disturbance (1965), the Grofs on spiritual emergence (1989), and Stephen Levine in much of his work (1982, 1984).

Path, Guidance, and Purpose

As one might expect when people attempt to describe the indescribable, words often felt inadequate to describe certain aspects of the personal journey, and yet frequently participants referred to a concept that sounded like path, or guidance, or purpose. There was a strong indication that people felt that their journey was not random or serendipitous, but that it was part of an unfolding purpose. For some this concept was clear and strong, for others a more vague sense.

I feel like I'm on a mission. Although my life has been very varied in what I've done, it all feels like the patchwork of the same quilt, or the same tapestry. So there's a sense of being guided that I don't believe is illusory.

When one has a sense of mission or purpose, the work and pain of a lifetime are put in a context that makes meaning for that person. Viktor Frankl (1963), one of the founding fathers of a transpersonal orientation discovered this in his concentration camp experiences. If one felt a purpose for life, the chances of survival were much greater.

In fact, one of the major tenets of a transpersonal approach to psychology is that meaning making is crucial. Some posit that there is inherent meaning to be discovered, others that meaning must be
constructed out of a life's experiences. In either case, battling the possible ennui or meaninglessness at the heart of the existential crisis is a key to work in the transpersonal. Not surprising then to note that people working in that realm have themselves found or constructed, in a deep way, a meaningful world.

In this consideration of spirituality, these folk found their guidance in many forms. For some the path is free of theistic connotation. For others guidance by a deity is the key. “I have a very strong sense of a divine presence in my life.” “The comforter is here, the holy spirit, to lead us, guide us. I’m not alone.”

Even when the conscious relationship to spirituality was conflictual, in retrospect, a sense of a path that led through that conflict was apparent. “Doors” tells of his experience with an emerging sense of meaning.

It's like I had no tolerance for the spiritual side of things at all. Except that I did, because I was doing sweat lodges, and the really alternative stuff, which I just wouldn't call “God” or “spirit” at that point. I'd just call it experience. So I guess I've been on a pretty steady path as I look on it.

In all cases, the felt impact of being on a path or having a purpose was a cornerstone to the development of a mature adult spirituality and its interface with psychology. Guidance for these people, in whatever form it appeared or however conceived, was and is important. “It also seemed like I was having a conversation, on another level, with this angel about this being my path, being my purpose, to share the light, and to spread the ‘word’, and all of that.”
And for each of these people who felt guided or on a path, psychology became a part of that path, one way or another.

Psychological Realms

While the research questions asked both about spiritual background and psychological background, as a prelude to the question, “What has your own development towards this interface been?” there was a significantly greater emphasis put by all but one participant on the spiritual aspects of that journey towards this interface. One might construe from the research (Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984, Winston, 1990, and Cornouyer, 1991) mentioned in chapter three, that opportunities to talk about this particular element are infrequent for many practitioners. This invitation may have been an opening for conversations long waiting to happen.

In spite of this imbalance in information, there were some indications of how and why these people got involved in the psychological aspects of their work. Sometimes that element was of little note. For others, the psychological realm in itself was an active part of the journey.

I actually got into therapy by mistake, by being invited to a weekend that sounded more like a social retreat, but was actually a therapy marathon.

When I was a kid I wanted to be a psychologist. I loved the psychological stories on TV.
Personal experiences of therapy also played a role in people's move into the field of psychology. "Philosopher" started out in the heart of psychology.

I was actually seeing a Freudian analyst when I was very young, and I was discussing my Oedipus complex at the age of fifteen, after I refused to acknowledge any reaction to my parents' divorce... And it's emotional when I think about it. He said to me "You're going to learn a lot younger than I did that people are really the only things that matter in life."

"Minds and Bodies" was moved towards the field of psychology in his adult experience of therapy.

I underwent a Reichean process and it changed my life completely. I was an artist, living in New York City in the ending days of a lousy marriage. By the time I finished therapy I was living in New Mexico, homesteading and had met the women I am still with twenty years later it was a total shift.

Integrating the work of spirituality into the psychological realms came in different ways. "Cards" almost left the field because her early experiences in a crisis center and in educational settings offered her so little of the larger world view that she needed. "Miracles," already involved in psychology knew instantly when she discovered her spiritual path that it would be a fit in her psychology work.

The personal journey is a key factor for these people. Few took for granted how they got where they are today. Their process, the movement over a lifetime, the singular events, the influences, their own questioning and seeking were included in their understanding of how they came to be
so closely in touch with a spiritual reality and therefore able to bring that reality into their professional lives.

Profile Category #2:

Spiritual Views

In many ways this theme cuts to the quick of this study. As I noted in the literature review, the sacred texts are the ground from which an interface with psychology must spring. Likewise, individual practitioners working with this interface have to know or struggle with knowing their own ground, their own sacred tradition. While their training, in whatever psychological tradition they work with, was simple and straightforward in many ways, the access to the spiritual side is not so clear. Many tapped into the spiritual experience as children, long before the thought of career entered their heads. Some went consciously into their psychological work with a spiritual orientation, even though the form to include that may not have been clear. Others worked hard to bring their spiritual orientation into their work later in their careers.

What, specifically, they bring to the psychological world at the edge of this interface was not always easy to label. Again the limitations of language were clear. It seemed especially difficult to clearly articulate spiritual views that were not dogmatic. The views themselves were fluid, by and large. They were multiple and holistic. Few practitioners had, it appeared, a set of rules or beliefs that could be simply listed. But the
presentation of spiritual views was rich with feeling and conviction. This was serious and important stuff for these people.

The common threads that emerged tapped into the deepest considerations these people had about life and its meaning. The themes are: struggling to define God (or like concepts); who are we humans in the universe?; the quality of spirit is love; and implications of a spiritual world view for the therapist.

I was privileged to share this with them.

Struggling to Define God (or Like Concepts)

Not too long ago the shared concept of the term God was fairly clear, especially within this culture. Now, as I write this dissertation I wonder at even so basic a question as to whether to capitalize the word “g/God” or when to do so. As practitioners attempted to express their spiritual world view, the word God, among others was used quite a bit. It was clear that people used that term in a fluid way, often within constructs that were decidedly non-theistic or polytheistic. God, it seems, has been taken out of his white beard and robes, and given more expansive attire. The meanings given to that term, God, were often quite different, though it seemed that all were pointing towards common themes. “I’ve always felt that there was the supportive and nourishing deity/being.” “I don’t differentiate between the word god, and nature, and oneness.” “God is love.” “We are
all cast in God’s image.” “Wise Old Woman,” who drew much of her reference from Paul Tillich, used his term for God: “the Ground of Being.”

In attempting to name this ultimate reality, more than the definition of “what” it is, was at stake. “Where” is also important. A classic attempt to understand or heal the split that may be perceived by God’s location, was addressed in several instances. Is God inside or out there? Immanence and transcendence, as concepts that hold importance in defining God came up a number of times.

There are incredible mysteries and intelligence in the universe and it’s in all things. To put it in theistic terms that would be God. God immanent, not God transcendent.

Because as soon as it’s imminent, and you hang it on your wall, and go “I got it!”, it transcends. I think that’s the experience of self. That’s the Tao. The Tao is transcendent-imminent, you know.

Some who had experienced God “out there” in their religion of childhood, had God “in here” in their new adult spirituality. That change from the God who is outside, hierarchically removed and bigger, took place in many ways. When God moved into immanence, it may have been through turning towards an inner wise being, a presence, an earth based deity, a female deity, a higher Self, and even the body as the source for “God in here.” “I believe that enlightenment is in the cells,” said “Synergy.” It doesn’t get more inside than that!
Suggestions throughout indicated that God was easily conceived in both its presence within; its human presence, and its presence without; its universal presence. Like Maslow’s human who is both a creature and a god, the spiritual views of this group reflected a need to allow both dimensions of human experience without excluding or belittling the “merely human.” True spirituality is conceived of as “Universality, the common hood of humanity, an attachment to something that’s bigger and greater than we are, perhaps.” God and like concepts are finally seen as “a great mystery. It’s a great mystery.”

God, being defined in some of these expansive ways, begins to come close to the concept of enlightenment. It might be hypothesized that enlightenment is a non-theistic version of God or vice versa. Both entail knowing oneself in both humanness and divinity.

Many participants felt perfectly comfortable in using references that were theistic, non-theistic, and polytheistic in a movement that attempts to describe something that is clearly more complex or unknown than words can hold. Even “Helper,” a woman grounded in a traditional Protestant religion, saw the many religions and forms, in all their differing colors and definitions come down to the same thing. “I believe we all serve the same God.” And “Doors” who himself struggled with language for this dimension, finally sums up what is perhaps implicit in this consideration. “My personal belief is we’re always trying to define God, to make some
enormous concept small enough to fit into our brain and that isn't going to work, so let's forget it.”

Who are We Humans in the Universe?

As soon as a consideration of God, in its many definitions begins, the consideration of our place in that universe kicks right in. In fact, it seems that the two are so intimately related that a description of God separate from people, or for these spiritually inclined folks, people without God, is impossible.

How do practitioners, who work daily with people, conceive of people in this largest scheme of things? “The truth of us is the spirit beyond the form.” “We are the body of god.” “We’re all seeking for the same peace and comfort.” “There’s good in everyone, and that force for good is just yearning to come out.”

Many, many years ago Carl Rogers (1961) gave us the concept of unconditional positive regard. It is likely that spiritual perspectives such as those hone in on that unconditional positive regard in a way little else can. People’s behavior is clearly not always likable, but when we see with bifocal vision, when we believe that people are souls in search of realization, that regard is deeply anchored.

“I consider people to be inherently spiritual, whether they realize it or not, and that life is a spiritual process whether you realize it or not.” If
people are spiritual, are in fact God, and life is a spiritual process, then therapy is perhaps a sacred act. For in this work, spiritual beings are pursuing spiritual matters, even when the content may look like the work of cleaning up a swamp! This, of course, leads us back to the idea that psychology is not simply a science. Pursuit of spiritual processes, which perhaps all of life is, makes every discipline potentially spiritual. Psychology, having tried hard to take on the mantle of pure science, never fully left its ancestry of religion and is now, thankfully, allowing itself to reclaim those roots, alongside its investment in its scientific nature.

Holding a view of therapy as spiritual (at least in part) allows the potential for interpersonal relationship that is intimate and profound. It opens a door for ways of being that transcend the limits of normal relationship. As “Voice” said, “Communication doesn’t happen without a transpersonal dimension.” And in therapy, one of whose goals is communication, the potential for deep relationship is quite real. Jesus said, “When two or more or gathered in My name, I will be there.” Participants echoed this sentiment in many ways.

There’s this connective essence that is the basis of human nature, or nature/human nature. In which we all participate, and that there’s something essential and universal about it. I think that this essence teaches love. There’s something tender and wonderful about being connected in this way.

To the degree that therapy is spiritual, there is an invitation for the transpersonal to be present, in connection and attitude, in presence, in
feeling, even when there is no use for transpersonal concepts or language or issues. This is important to differentiate. Spirituality is not defined by the content of any encounter or situation. As practitioners often noted, the language of spirituality may never arise, and content that is specifically spiritual may be rare. “Doors” noted that he had only had one client who had an overt issue with God.

Holding a spiritual view of people will undoubtedly have an impact on how the client is perceived and how the client feels perceived. This view can allow for intimacy in a way that is of great benefit to the client. The potential for this intimacy, this relationship in the presence of spirit, is not in contrast to any professional requirements, needs for boundaries, etc. Bugental, a key proponent of existential psychology, is convinced of the need for genuine intimacy in life changing psychotherapy. “When two people relate at the intimacy level, there is maximum accessibility and/or expressiveness between them.” (1987, p. 43)

And as we take the consideration of this relational aspect of spirituality one step further, it is clear that there are far reaching implications. “Wise Old Woman” who has spent three-quarters of a century in relationships, reminds us that, when we are in touch with God (in all its definitions), we have the potential for global well-being, political sanity, national and international compassion.

Grace is acceptance of the fact that each of us is part of a greater whole-the Ground of Being-and with acceptance of that fact, the tragic sense of separation that pervades most
relationships, communities, races, sexes, falls away and we can see ourselves as one and see life as a meaningful experience.

The Quality of Spirit is Love

It was often difficult, as I noted, for practitioners to define God or enlightenment or essence, and in spite of that, they did a good job. Equally difficult is the effort to describe the felt sense of spirit. Practitioners accessed both thinking words and feeling words to describe the spiritual aspect of reality. Quality words were used frequently to attempt to describe a belief, an experience, a way of thinking or feeling the world. In Zen they talk about a finger pointing to the moon. This metaphor implies that it is not possible to accurately explain the moon, and our best effort can be only to point to it. The descriptions of the quality of spirit were best efforts to point to the universe. And these descriptions most often relied on the idea of love. The words have a melodious ring, as poetic, romantic words tend to. “Philosopher” tried his hand at describing the indescribable.

I was in the woods one day. I was in nature, and I was looking at the blue sky, and I was experiencing love, not as an overwhelming experience, but as a quality in the universe, an objective quality in the universe.
As the word "love" was used, it never had a personal flavor. It was never soft or gooey. In fact, as a way to describe a universal quality and a way to point to the experience of spirit, love carried a lot of power.

"Philosopher" elaborated:

And then I thought, love has got to be a pretty tough thing, 'cause there are some pretty gnarly things in the universe, like evil, so love is like this very tough, powerful structure.

It was felt that love was a good descriptor of spirit. While we typically think of love as an interpersonal process, that which we look for in mates, hope to have with parents and children and friends, love was not a quality attributed to the interpersonal aspect of the therapy relationship, but was attributed to the inner spiritual reality. This love as described by these therapists is transpersonal or impersonal love. It is an objective fact of the universe. It comes in relationship to the divine or spiritual. It is in here, not out there.

Love seemed to be what people needed and what spirituality had to offer. It might come through nature, or religion or therapy. Love was the finger pointing to the moon, the description that seemed to fit in the difficult task of describing that which is beyond words.

The message that each religion brings is that of love. It's the love they're searching for, the peace they want, the comfort they're looking for. All religions address that emotional need.

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Scanning this section on spiritual view, it is clear that there is a qualitative component to the practitioners’ experience of their work at the spiritual interface that is full of the best in human quality. As they anchor into spirit, they describe this reality as love, grace, tenderness, connection, strength, peace, comfort, nourishment, oneness, mystery, intelligence, universality, common hood, the force of good in all people, and God immanent and transcendent.

Implications of a Spiritual World View for the Therapist

When someone holds the qualities we have heard articulated, what does it mean for their presence in life, for their effect on other people, for their profession? These practitioners are people whose views directly effect the many people who come to them for help. It appears so far, from all that has been said, that these spiritual world views offer clients a pretty good chance of being seen in a positive and affirming way.

People practicing consciously at the interface of spirituality and psychology allow their spiritual beliefs to have a strong influence on their work. These are not Sunday religions. These are life views which permeate, by choice, these people’s professional lives.

Later themes will address this issue as well, but it is interesting to note that as people spoke about spiritual views, about God, about people in the universe, about love, they also included directly or indirectly a great
deal of information about the potential impact of these views on
themselves in their work. How do such strong spiritual views play out in
the inner world of the therapist doing her/his work?

I don't have to get into the heavy doctrine. I don't feel those
specifics are pertinent to the needs of my population when we
are addressing what they are experiencing. They're
experiencing loss, turmoil. Doctrine is not going to address
that. But the love of God is.

Spiritual doctrine is irrelevant, but spiritual truths (the love of God)
are not. How does any practitioner access spiritual truth? “Helper” notices
that spirituality is the bottom line in her work.

When I come to an impasse in my work, that's when I fall back
on my spiritual need to get the guidance and wisdom that at
that moment I don't feel I have. The skills stop here!

Guidance is an important element. It is important to notice that, at
the minimum, a spiritual world view impacts on the inner experience of
the therapist. He or she feels guided, in some way, by this inner belief and
connection. “Your life and your therapeutic practice aren't that much
different. Eventually the guidance is pretty strong.”

With that strong guidance, these therapist sit with their client in a
different mode than “traditional” therapists might. They are accessing all
of their clinical skills and experience, case history, literature in the field.
Some are doing body work, others prescribing psychopharmacetical
drugs for serious mental illness, others doing talk therapy, others working
in business. Walking into fourteen different offices, we would see fourteen completely different scenes. But could we peer into the inner world of these fourteen different people, we would see that each, in her or his own unique way, would be connecting to a deep source of spirit within. The implications of this for their work with people is significant.

Profile Category #3:

Working with People

Spirituality is a context that allows the therapist to be in touch with Self. It is not necessarily overt in how one practices psychotherapy. Practitioners’ own tendencies towards a spiritual world view may, though, determine some of their motivation for being in a helping profession to begin with. As psychotherapists, their spiritual context defines their willingness and commitment to helping. It defines their openness to other people and their belief in human potential.

The spiritual belief system of the therapist allows the therapist to see the client in a positive and supportive way. These people do not operate from a medical model of pathology as much as from a spiritual model of evolution. The result of this is that working with people in a helping modality takes on a very different meaning than what would be true of a more traditional orientation.
While it is clear that no person here feels that they should involve spiritual content in the work unless there is a specific reason to do so, at the same time, they cannot help but see through a lens that includes the spiritual, because of their own deep beliefs and experiences.

The first themes that emerged from within the category of working with people were, not surprisingly, about the pain that clients feel and the goals that these practitioners hold as models of health and well being for clients. In considering their work with people, their own experience of being in the role of therapist also emerged as a theme. These three themes offer a piece of information on what it is like, in the offices of spiritually oriented therapists.

Clients’ Pain

Clients come to therapy typically because they are in some sort of pain. Psychological theory offers a range of opinion on why people experience psychological pain. In the field, trends rise and fall. Currently, “dysfunctional families” is the catch word for the cause of pain in most people. To this population, however, the pain that clients bring into therapy was widely considered to be related to spirituality in some sense. At the same time there was not, by and large, a direct causal relationship perceived. Rather, practitioners could see that pain came from many sources, and that without a spiritual anchor or reference, that pain was
more difficult. Again, it was not implied that healing that pain would best be done through spiritual means or at a spiritual level, but that the spiritual level, if included, strengthened that healing.

Pain may come in childhood development, when life is stressful and unsafe. Many people do come from dysfunctional or inadequate homes. Many enter adulthood with limited inner strength or self-confidence. The pain, as most therapists can easily see, often sprouts, takes root and thrives in childhood, leaving its wounds on the adult. The effects of painful childhood experiences is often what therapist see in their offices day after day.

To “Minds and Bodies” tension is the cause and armoring is the result. “As I see it, emotional tensions cause the formation of armoring.” Armoring is one conception of adult dysfunction or need, an indicator that someone is not fully free to be themselves. “Strider” sees the cause of pain as an ongoing lack of support:

It just seems that many of the people that I come across, that I work with, have lives very different than my life has been. They don’t have many resources to work with. They don’t have much of a support system, if any. They haven’t been allowed to be who they are. They don’t know who they are and they’re kind of in the darkness out there. They’re not doing well.

Since, by and large, it is the pain that brings clients into therapy, it is the pain that is the therapists first concern. Therapists must have both a frame of reference for understanding the pain and a strategy for working with the pain. For this group, the frame of reference is very large. It
includes a range of understanding of how individual, personal pain relates to larger spiritual issues. Because this group represents a wide variety of therapeutic traditions and styles, the strategies that this group use take many forms, but they share in common the tendency to see a connection between psychological pain and spiritual growth. As “Philosopher” expresses it:

But I think that psychological wounding is the gateway to the “more”. I think by working with psychological healing you can start to experience the ‘more.’ And expand And a person can reframe their whole way of experiencing themselves.

The wounding is seen as a path into healing, not only back to the norm, but into the “more.” Most of these practitioners shared a similar perspective. The connection between spirituality and childhood pain is seen as a movement from dysfunction into normal function and beyond into meta-functioning, if you will.

Some practitioners considered pain to be directly caused by a disconnection from spirituality. “Wise Old Woman” says, “I think that when you lose sight of the ground of being, you then become more unbalanced.” “Drums and Rattles” agrees, “To the extent that someone is unaware or not plugged into that ‘larger than’ that is right in front of their nose, they are not fully living into who they are and there is some pain in that.”

Wilbur (1984a) was one of the first to put forth a clear picture of the fact that pain may be caused or have as its origin experiences in very
different levels. Childhood pain may leave adults dysfunctional. It is true, as well, that personal or transpersonal pain can do the same thing. Assagioli (1965) also noted that problems arise from different dimensions, causing him to divide the work of psychosynthesis into two phases: personal psychosynthesis and transpersonal psychosynthesis. Determining the source of pain or dysfunction allows for a better chance to heal by directing the appropriate strategies for each dimension to the work in that dimension.

There may be another level of consideration still. Where the pain comes from is one consideration. It may be a problem with the past, with present relationships, or with spiritual matters. Why there is pain and what purpose it serves in a given life is another level to consider, as some of these people did.

For “Synergy” pain was directly part of the spiritual process.

I believe that people come into this world bringing a lot of baggage as well, from what I would term as karma involvement, whether it's from past lives or other dimensions.

“Spiritual-Practical” addresses the very way we see people as part of understanding clients and their pain.

We're being torn in our time to look at the individual two ways. One is to look at man as an animal, and the other is to look at man as a machine. And the idea that man is half an angel, is not one that anybody looks at, or not many people look at. Honoring that aspect of the human being is something that a spiritual approach to psychology tries to do.
How one conceives of clients' pain and its relation to the spiritual will, of course, have an impact on how that person views health and well-being. When a pathological overview is removed, a new way of seeing health has to be created.

Growth Goals

As therapists conceive of how or why their clients are in pain, and how to work with that pain, they are consciously or unconsciously making choices in relation to some version of health or well-being that they hold. We always make our interventions towards some ideal. For some in the field this ideal is very clear and articulated. For others it is a more general, inner sense of health that guides a therapist. In either case, the therapist’s ideal model exerts a strong influence.

Historically, in the tradition of psychology, the overt goal has often been to be normal or adaptive to society. This is the goal of a pathology model. “Philosopher” makes a strong statement that reflects this group’s decidedly different version of health. “Well for me, the traditional Freudian notion of changing neurotic misery into common unhappiness as the goal of therapy has always been, like, if that's the goal, give me the gun now.” This group does not aspire for their clients to achieve common unhappiness, normalcy, or adaptability. Maslow was one of the first to contend that being adjusted is not enough. “The danger that I see is the
resurgence, in new and more sophisticated forms, of the old identification of psychological health with adjustment, adjustment to reality, adjustment to society, adjustment to other people." (1968. p. 179)

Spiritually oriented therapists certainly want more for their clients. As they talk about working with people, they give some clear messages about what optimum human wellness might include. “That’s the essence....to work with the client to help them gain that inner security.” “To make their world bigger.” or “Express yourself deeply. Gain inner security. Open yourself up. Forgive. Find a bigger world.”

“Minds and Bodies” who saw the pain as armoring, saw that health is more than just the absence of that armor.

The idea in working with people is not just to get rid of armoring, but to open yourself up. I guess you could say. Love is part of it. I think forgiveness is a part. If you do an anger release, you know a physical, shouting release, forgiveness is at the bottom.

Powerful guidance, this. Goals to live by. Other similarly powerful ideals are revealed in the profiles. People are meant to be healthy. They can let go of limiting beliefs, learn to surrender, be less critical, more open, willing to help others. Aloness can be cured by connecting to an inner spiritual power. Transformation is possible. A core experience of Self can be reached. A wider, more expanded vision and experience of life is available.
Let me construct, from these fourteen practitioners, a picture of optimum well-being. This person is healthy. S/he is not critical and does not have a limited belief system. The vision of the world that s/he carries is wide. This person experiences Self and is connected to an inner spiritual power. S/he does not feel the pain of aloneness and in fact, is committed to helping others. S/he operates from a base of inner security, is open and expresses herself fully. S/he experiences love and forgiveness and is transformed.

Whatever strategies each practitioner actually puts in place to support these goals, the importance of the vision, separate from technique, must be noted. This vision of human potential is, in itself, transformative.

Further themes will reveal some of the methodology and strategy that these folks use to implement these ideals. Reference back to case illustration may serve to ground the ideas expressed above. But, also, this work towards higher ideals may be, after all, a simple thing. "Strider" thinks so.

I guess the main principle that I'm working on is that spirituality and psychotherapy are actually very simple affairs. They're subtle, but they're not complex. Nobody wants to be hurting, and nobody wants to hurt anyone else.... I think that the spirit can only take so many blows, before it closes-before the wagon train closes up. ..., and if you can offer them a better way of being in the world, meaning not your way, not the therapist's way, but to experiment, loosen up on their own way, and expand it a little in one direction or another, then if you're non judgmental, and you're supportive, then sometimes, maybe even oftentimes they'll take it. People want to think well of themselves.
People want to think well of themselves. The picture that emerges is one of the potential for self actualization. And what a powerful thing it is, to sit face to face with someone over many hours and have that person believe in this potential in you. The powerful affirmation that comes with having a therapist deeply believe in human potential can not be underestimated. And it is in contradistinction to a more traditional view that therapists take of their clients. The old psychiatrist joke sums it up. Three psychiatrists are sitting around talking about “problem” clients. One says, “I have this client who is always late: resistance!” Another says, “I have this client who is always early: anxiety!” The last says, “My client is worse than both of yours. My client is always on time: compulsive!” You can’t win for losing sometimes. “Spiritual-Practical” addresses one aspect of the problem with holding such a negative view. There are others as well.

For example, this whole idea of looking at the person in terms of the negative symptoms that they express, can get you really locked into that. And that can be a problem, especially for someone who works in this field, since everyone they see has negative symptoms! And then you start to develop feelings about all of humanity, because after awhile most of the people you’re meeting are your clients. And you need something to balance that too.

These practitioners do not hold that negative or labeling view. In fact, “Spiritual” himself likes to think of people as “half-angels,” and “Drums” sees that “expressing oneself truly, deeply from the core of being
of what one is, is a spiritual thing.” This idea applies to both the client and the therapist.

The Therapist

The therapists in this study bring to their work more than just a professional commitment, as we have already seen. Like many healers, the experience of their work is also about their path. In the best senses, the work of these practitioners points to the concept of right livelihood. Right livelihood implies several important things. The work is beneficial to the world, not detrimental. It serves others. It also has meaning, beyond the paycheck, to the one who performs the work. It has personal meaning, as part of a path or process that the therapist values for its intrinsic nature.

In their discussion of working with people, these therapists revealed a bit about their own personal meaning in this work and the particular elements of their work that are important to them. For “Strider” his life’s purpose and his work are one and the same.

And so, while I’m down here in this life, it’d be nice if I could just kinda reach in, and help pull some people out. Because I think it’s very easy to fall through the cracks, and never be seen again in this world. And I think what often determines whether we fall through the cracks or not, is whether somebody is holding on to us.

And how do therapists actually work with their belief systems, their sense of path in their sessions? We know that every therapist has a bag of
tricks and we will see what some of them are shortly, but every therapist also has an inner world and ways of working with themselves as they work with a client. Their spiritual views do affect their inner processes. They actively bring spiritual beliefs and practices to themselves in their work. This is different, it must be noted, than the use of spiritual techniques with clients. Here we are talking about the rich, inner world of a therapist whose work is both path and profession.

For instance in a session, if I allow myself to go with it, I can move into a state where I'm not seeing in the ordinary way.

When I'm doing things right, which I hope is a larger part of the time, I really see them as a child of God, or a child of the universe, pretty much regardless of what the issue is...."

I always try to hold positive unconditional regard for the other person, knowing that they really do have the answers within them, and that they have the ability to connect with that.

But there is more at stake than just holding a world view. In fact, though no question elicited this information, a number of practitioners, on their own, brought up the issue of the therapist's personal or spiritual work. As "Medicine Man" said, when he learned about meditation, "I read the small print where they all say somewhere, 'This is all very well and good but, it's a bunch of bullshit if you don't practice.'" I believe that this is a group of people who practice what they preach, in one form or another.

"It's basically really important for me to keep up my own personal work, if I'm going to work with other people." says one. And for many that
personal work is also spiritual work, the end point of which is to prepare the practitioner to carry the spiritual views firmly into the world. “Medicine Man” elaborates on how mediation training changes the way one is in therapy.

The whole purpose of meditation, of spiritual practice, is to not suppress, not repress, but to feel everything, all the pain as well and at the same time discover that you can tolerate it, that you don't have to shut it off. You start off dealing with your own internal stuff, but from the Mooney point of view, that then expands to the rest of the world, and you don't have to protect yourself from it. You discover experientially it's true, and if you've done meditation you know that's so. I think without that kind of practice, you have to protect yourself from the pain. It's just too threatening. So you just shut off, and numb out. But to the extent that you're practicing properly, one way or another, you keep tending to dissolve the numbing.

In his experience many practitioners do numb out, tuning out client's real needs, avoiding the intense and persistent pain that enters the office. Being firmly grounded in a personal practice of spirituality not only prevents numbing but puts the therapist in a strong role for his/her work with clients, a role which is crucial.

The inner work of the psychotherapist is also important. That's very important for a person becoming a spiritual psychotherapist. It has to do a bit with the role that the therapist is going to play with the client. Once again it depends on where the client is at, but when people come into psychotherapy, they're either going through or are going to go through a period of disintegration. That's not bad, but it means that the therapist has to have different kinds of roles in that person's life. On one level, with the therapist's own energies, they're in a way helping to hold that person together.
The therapist is trained both professionally and spiritually. The impact of the spiritual aspect of that training may never be overt, but it is certainly present.

I don't think the therapist has to say a word about spiritual practice or enlightened states or consciousness or disciplines. Spirit is implicit in the environment that's created by being there and opening one's attention.

Indirectly my spiritualism is helping to guide and direct them. That's where I get my strength to deal with their hurt, their need. I could not help them if I didn't have my spiritual strength to pass on to them.

There are many ways to conceive of this work that these practitioners do. It is a healing process, at the very most basic definition, that includes the skills of psychology and spirituality. "Wise Old Woman" refers in a lighthearted way to that juxtaposition between the two, and puts the emphasis where she thinks it belongs. "God heals and the doctor collects the fee." But she is not alone in that view. "Doors" describes the process.

It's an authentic process. It's relational. I don't know how to describe this, but it's relational therapy. When people start to hook up with something beyond themselves, then it helps them to get through. I guess I think that when people are relating very openly, very genuinely, very deeply, that that in itself has the touch of universality and the spirit.

And lest it begin to look as if this is a glamorous or romantic, or even an easy, comfortable process, this work at the edge of spirit and psyche, "Strider" sets us straight.
For me, it's' like you're wrestling with the devil for souls. And most of the time he's gonna kick your ass. And there's no glamour to it at all. But there's a wonderful feeling of elation when you feel like you're stealing one back.

Working with people, for this group of therapists is life work that carries meaning at many levels. It is service and it is personally meaningful. It is a place to "practice" not only psychology skills, but spiritual skills. Whether spiritual issues, per se, are involved in the work, the work is spiritual. And, as we shall see in the next section, sometimes the work itself is overtly spiritual.

Profile Category #4:
Spiritual Issues in the Work.

To many of us, the idea of religion mixed up with psychotherapy would be frightening. Pastoral counseling is designed to give members of a specific religion access to counseling within that religion. Someone from another denomination is not likely to wander in. Yet, this paper addresses the interface of spirituality and psychology and these fourteen practitioners each have their own belief about the nature of spirituality or God. Some use active spiritual techniques as we shall see shortly. Others rarely consider that. What ties these people together, though, is that dogma and even the form of spiritual process are are not viewed as
important. Each, however, believes that spiritual issues are real and valid concerns for clients.

As we saw in the last section these people easily see client need at a variety of levels. And one of those levels is clearly spiritual in nature. When a client announces that they have issues with God, we may have to assess the underlying message in this presenting issue. We would be naive to simply follow every lead the client gave. In fact, we would do well to keep in mind the pre-trans fallacy theory put forth by Ken Wilbur. Wilbur views clients' issues at different psychospiritual developmental levels. Issues concern material that is primarily prepersonal (pre-egoic or related to early childhood), personal (egoic and based in adult need), and transpersonal (concerned with issues that transcend egoic concern, such as spiritual issues). He notes, however, that certain schools of psychology tend to confuse prepersonal and transpersonal issues. Psychoanalysis, he says, tends to demean or reduce transpersonal issues to prepersonal ones. Certain transpersonalists tend to elevate prepersonal issues to transpersonal ones. These pre-trans fallacies (PTF), PTF 1 (transpersonal devalued) and PTF2 (prepersonal elevated), fail to meet the client at their true need, and thus are ineffective and possibly damaging. (Wilbur 1984a &b) Therapists clearly have the capability of reframing a client's true issues in line with their own (limited) belief system. Certainly a risk of spiritually oriented therapists is PTF 2, the possibility of imbuing prepersonal issues with a transpersonal meaning. This seems not to be the case with these
practitioners. In fact "Minds and Bodies" sums this up, from his perspective: "Cathartic therapy should, ideally, precede more conventional spiritual work."

Assessing and diagnostic skills are needed to view the whole of a client's life in making judgment calls on which dimension to work with. The field of transpersonal or spiritually oriented therapy will be no help if it simply carries the other side of a one-sided approach to psychology. It must be inclusive of all levels and the competent therapist must be able to address all levels. But how does one get a clear sense of whether the time is right, the issue is right, the client is ready to truly engage with issues of a spiritual nature? When is an issue with the Goddess an issue with the Goddess and not one with mom?

The research interview did not invite a specific analysis of these questions, but a more simple consideration of if and when clients presented with spiritual issues and how the practitioner knew that to be so. Several themes emerged in this exploration of client spiritual issues. The most obvious theme was in relationship to how practitioners knew that spiritual issues were present. What cues do these therapists use? Secondarily, how do they open the door to work on that level and with what cautions or safeguards? The last theme that emerged may be comforting to the concern about the potential for spiritual therapy to become flaky, New Age and ungrounded. Concerns with the relationship of spiritual issues to the life traumas and prepersonal issues of individuals
gave a picture of practitioners who grasped and worked with the entire developmental spectrum. There was no evidence of PTF 1 or 2.

Cues

I just hold that the spiritual is there, and then, if I see that there's an opening with the client, then I'll ask them to connect to that source, or to connect to that light. Source and light, divine, are words that I use more now.

There are a number of ways that therapists seem to know that the time is right to open to the transpersonal dimension. Therapists' intuition and felt sense as well as client's subtle cues were often indicators of that openness. In addition, clients often open to the spiritual level before the therapist has considered it. And quite often, there is a parallel awareness or opening to that dimension in both therapist and client. "And when I believe and feel it's right, either they'll mention something first or give me some clues about some beliefs that they have, that I find would be really useful to hook onto. That's the nicest way."

Altered states, referred to a number of times, seemed also to be both an outcome of some of this work and an opening or indication of transpersonal issues or readiness for work in the transpersonal. Heckler (1981) in a study on the therapist's experience of healing processes, included altered states as a prime factor in spiritual moments in therapy. He also noted therapist somatic cues as a key factor, as well as energy and
perceptual change, shared images and energy, leaps of awareness, deep emotional experiences, and resonance with client. (1981, p. 184)

While the cues may not be observable in a traditional scientific sense, there are certainly verifiable inner cues, shared not only by this group, but by others. Not surprisingly, many of the cues are subtle. This group listed a number of non-verbal indicators as evidence of a readiness for work in the transpersonal. Many of these matched Heckler’s earlier research. These include: body cues, felt-sense of deeper interpersonal connection (intimacy), therapist intuition, altered states, change in voice tone, heightened focus, perceptual changes, and clarity, among others. As “Drums” notes, “I see spirit very much as energy. We have to just break off a piece of it and focus on that deeply, otherwise you get lost.”

These subtle aspects, more than others, require of the therapist her own spiritual awareness and sensitivity to that domain, as well as the training that allows for psychospiritual developmental assessment.

Sometimes, the issues of a spiritual nature are not subtle at all, but brought to the consulting room with full consciousness. Practitioners in this study acknowledged this. From my years of experience and collegial case sharing, I see that some of the content in this dimension includes: issues of meaning, purpose and values, issues of relationship to the universe, God, desire for “more” in the sense of greater meaning, social, humanitarian, or global concerns, existential concerns, consideration of death, peak experiences, religious issues, longing, love, and search for
wisdom, among others.

In some instances the client's religious views and issues are on the table from the start. This facilitates the process of including that dimension. This was true for “Wise Old Woman” working with the elderly. Likewise, “Helper” often knew much about the religious orientation of her teenage population because she was involved with the family. When the religious context is overt, entry into the spiritual dimension happens in a fluid way. In the population that “Wise Old Woman” works with, it is particularly present and often the focus of work, as would be expected in a group that is facing the ultimate spiritual consideration of death. It is also clear that the spiritual dimension is the only one with very real impact at certain times. This may be one of those times.

Finally, the work itself may elicit or allow for an opening to the spiritual. Techniques may be specifically spiritual in nature, or general techniques may result in that openness. For “Synergy” body work often opens that door, in one of many ways.

But when the client is on the table, and I have done the body work and they are in somewhat of an altered state, they're more in their body than in their head, they will get very much in touch with where God might be in their body. Or they may get in touch with a very young place, or they'll be in nature, or they'll find an animal guide, something like that, that definitely has to do with spiritual work.
Opening the Door, Cautiously

When there is evidence that spiritual issues may be important to the client, there is still an appropriate caution in moving in that direction. I sensed a deep respect from this population for the territory they were entering and for caution in doing so. “Doors” notes this caution:

I guess to start with my bias, and bias to me comes from the electronic word. It means a gentle pressure in a direction. My bias is not to do it (elicit spiritual issues) because I think that the timing needs to be right. That's an important part of it. So when in doubt I don't do it.

“Drums and Rattles” affirms this caution and notes the prerequisites for opening that door:

The first few times that a person comes there is creating a safe environment so they can talk about these things, because in the world at a large, people think your nuts if you talk this way. I take cues, body language cues as to whether were going too fast, whether they're comfortable. If I err at all I probably err allowing too much space for that feeling of comfort. I'd rather err on that side than having them feel like they have to perform spiritually for me somehow.

The opening to spiritual issues, when it happens, is not about dogma. It seems to be much more about exploration, about opening new doors, about conversation. “The conversation can be a two-way street, as opposed to a one-way street. If I don't open up, they feel inhibited. But
when I open the conversation, they let down their guard and feel, 'Oh, wow, this is something I can talk about.'"

When the door to the transpersonal does open, therapists may share more of themselves at this point than they might at others. The reason for this, as noted in the research is the depth of the relationship that emerges in these transpersonal realms. The importance of the "I/Thou" relationship was emphasized many times. The sharing in these engagements draws on the depth of the therapist, as well as of the client. These are not lectures. These are relationships.

Most of the older people that I have worked with have a very strong religious belief. And it's a very patterned religious belief. And what I try to work with is just having them experience love from an undemanding human being that can give them some support and help. Because a lot of them have had many hard blows in their life. When we talk about death sometimes, I say "I don't know what happens, all I know is that I trust what's going to happen... It's all a part of God's plan. Whatever happens is going to be OK!"

It is likely, as some of these practitioners have noted that a client who has a spiritual or religious connection is in better shape as they face the issues of their lives. This was echoed over and over. Sometimes, the very issue of life preservation seemed to be strengthened by spiritual perspective. "Medicine Man" working with the most at risk population of this group felt strongly about that.

The people who are seriously into the charismatic Christian things like Pentecostal and so on, I feel generally relieved when I hear that, particularly when suicidality is an issue. I've seen
religious practices sort of transform people's personalities sometimes. There tends to be less suicide among those people.

With this strong sense of the importance of that dimension, these therapists, using available cues and appropriate caution, are willing and committed to opening those doors. As they do so, they seem to understand the transpersonal dimension in its relationship to other dimensions. There is a wide and comprehensive view. It is holistic. Practitioners see the relationship between life issues and the spiritual dimension. They seem to understand when to work in one dimension or the other, and how the dimensions relate.

Life Issues and the Transpersonal

Standard work of a prepersonal nature: regression, catharsis, inner child work, is part and parcel of the process of healing. Work is hard. Clients must face the shadow, the pain and darkness, the hurt, the past. Sometimes, as “Minds and Bodies” particularly noted, there is an impulse to denial of the wounding in favor of a “spiritual” reality. Clients, themselves, come in committing PTF2 quite frequently.

I'm sort of wary of people who are too into the spiritual. I had a woman who was in a Zen ashram for seven years and totally devoted. She finally dropped out and opened a business. She was very hard to work with because she wasn't in touch with her feelings. She had so called “transmuted” her negative feelings to higher consciousness. But in reality what she did was suppress the negativity, building an enormous cover on
top of these feelings. It took me about a year to help her get to
the rage she had at a parent, and then it just boiled out like
poison, sulfuric acid.

At the same time, there is a way to conceive of early wounding and
spirituality as deeply related. We heard “Philosopher” earlier tell us that
wounding is the doorway. Likewise, “Wise Old Woman” noted the pain in
her clients’ life and juxtaposed her own and God’s love as part of the
healing. In a most basic sense, as “Drums and Rattles” notes, any aspect of a
person that is thwarted is a spiritual issue, whatever the content or original
source.

I see most issues as spiritual issues even though I may not
overtly be using that terminology when working on the nuts
and bolts of things. But there’s usually something that is
being thwarted in manifesting and that’s where the work is,
whether it was that as a little kid mom never let me do
whatever or my work doesn’t let me do whatever...

Even more specifically, one way to consider the relationship of the
prepersonal to the transpersonal, or the inner child to God, is articulated
by “Doors”:

If you want to use God, then God enters actually through the
child, so if you’re going to have that connection, then you’ve
got to have connection with your own child.

When work at all levels is supported, it seems that clients have the
best possible chance of healing. Early childhood issues, issues of everyday
adult life and issues of the spirit are certainly all important aspects of health and well-being.

**Profile Category #5:**

**Techniques**

Given the dirth of information on the practice of psychology with a spiritual context, the information on techniques and strategies is even more scarce. As noted in the literature review, the bulk of information on techniques is about the use of meditation. This is perhaps the only “spiritual” technique that has entered the mainstream. Not surprisingly, this theme emerged in conversation about techniques in this group of practitioners, even though the question of meditation was not raised by the researcher.

Spiritual traditions have a long list of active and well-articulated practices or techniques to support the student in moving towards spiritual awareness. Likewise, each psychological tradition has a variety of techniques for helping the client reach whatever goal that therapy espouses. It is at the interface that techniques are not yet elaborated in great depth. And yet, it is obvious that when practitioners value spirituality as much as these do, they will have methods for implementing
those values. Discovering what those strategies and techniques are will add an important piece of information to the field.

In addition to scant information on technique, there is little if any sense of the impact or effect of such techniques on clients. This, too, emerged as a theme in the category of spiritual techniques.

With only a short portion of the interview devoted to the technical aspects of the issue of spirituality and psychology, a rich variety of information emerged to whet the appetite for further study. The themes that were revealed had to do with general strategies of a spiritual nature, the question of using meditation, the use of other spiritual techniques and the impact of such techniques.

General Strategies

Strategies have been differentiated from techniques as a larger set of guidelines. Strategies indicate general tendencies, directions, ideas for movement which define how the therapist is viewing a situation and in what direction they will attempt to move. Techniques, which will be considered shortly, are the tools to implement these strategies. Strategies, perhaps more than anything else predict the bias of the the therapist's work. Strategies seem to be the manifestation, in form, of the beliefs that a therapist carries.

Right away... I identify that center self, the place of sovereignty. And what I try to do is create that as a very safe
place--that center place--so that even if we go into childhood trauma... we can realize there’s a safe place that’s bigger than all of that. We can go back and hang out in that place. I really try to carve that place, calling it whatever we need to call it.

This core strategy anchors the spiritual belief in a center, soul, or higher Self in such a way that the client has access to that space. The implications for this kind of strategy are far reaching. Even deeply traumatic memory retrieval may emerge in a context that is safer, when a client has the reference to a place within that is not the inner child, not the content or the pain. This Self-identification aspect of the work allows greater access to the pain and trauma and less need for denial. One can look at that pain more readily if one is not that pain. This strategy also allows a reference point for whom to talk to in the client. Therapy can be very diffuse when a client represents through a number of subpersonalities (partial aspects of themselves). We might find ourselves in any moment talking to the inner child, or an introjected parental figure, or a wise being. When the therapist steadfastly refers to and addresses the client in her highest Self, that affirmation has great impact.

“Philosopher” refers to strategies that open to the mystery, regardless of the content.

What I mean by spiritual techniques are techniques that evoke the mystery. And the mystery may lead to something very concrete. The mystery may lead to "my mother beat me", and that’s what this is all about. But the road that we get there to it is one of spirit.
These strategies that evoke mystery, spirit, or Self, in relationship to varying content issues, support the integration of early needs with transpersonal possibilities. There is not confusion between the two, but integration. What could make more sense than invoking God (in all its definitions) to help heal the wounded child? The only thing bigger than the parent is, after all, God. "Strider" follows that strategy in a more specific way. "I encourage people who have a history of being religious... to resume that, as part of their work. Whatever religion it is."

Other strategies indicate the therapist's process for opening those doors. One wants "time to experiment and play, and invoke whatever might come into the room, if just given an invitation." Another sees the connection between emotions and spirit as important. "My feeling about it is that any letting go, any expression, say, of anger, or sadness, or whatever it might be, and then getting in touch and becoming aware of where that's coming from, is a way to open up the passages for more spirit to come in..." In addition, the importance of being in the body, being out of thinking mode, exploring oneself beyond ego identification, were noted as general strategies that supported the spiritual work.

Meditation or Not?

Because beliefs and the strategies that follow from them are the primary defining factors in how a therapist works, the question of
technique becomes less relevant to the larger picture, but very important in
terms of learning the tools of the trade. What is interesting to note as we
look at the most obvious spiritual technique, meditation, is that its use, in
the end, seems relatively unimportant. Some of these spiritually oriented
practitioners use it regularly, some occasionally, and some never, and yet,
each is aiming, in one way or another, towards a similar
spiritual/psychological interface. The question of meditation was never
specifically asked, but many respondents brought it up. It is clear that the
idea of meditation as the spiritual technique was most prevalent.

The group was pretty evenly split on the two sides of mediation as
technique. “I certainly don’t meditate with people. I don’t pray with
them.” “I don’t use meditation because I’m not a meditator and don’t feel I
could do that.” “I very rarely recommend meditation to anybody. I don’t
have time myself to work in terms of teaching meditation or relaxation.” “I
don’t often guide people towards meditation.”

On the other side: “Sometimes I call people to simple Vipassana and
mindfulness practice.” “I work with meditation and guided imagery,
depending on where the client is at that time.” “I’ve done some teaching of
meditation with my clients.”

Several of the interviewees elaborated on how and why they would or
wouldn’t use meditation and these comments give us a deeper look into
the issue of meditation as a technique. Again, as we have seen before, there
is not a simple or universal answer to the questions about spiritual work.
In fact, in the end, it is clear that those who use meditation and spiritual strategies and techniques do so situationally and within a set of guidelines that see the whole picture of human development and need. “Medicine Man” is a meditator himself, but sees the limited potential for meditation in his work.

If I were to suggest meditation, it would be to someone who is not so mentally disturbed that it inevitably falls into the biological mode of treatment. It has to be someone who either doesn’t absolutely require medicine, or if they do, medicine helps whatever it helps but they’re still struggling on some more existential level.

“Spiritual-Practical,” works in a setting with people who are not likely to be at risk or on medictation, a more “self-actualizing” population. He himself is a meditator and he knows how difficult a commitment it is.

For meditation to continue, it takes a certain bit of resolve. And oftentimes the people I’m seeing are somewhat in crisis. And there I think meditation might be a little too difficult for them.

“Spiritual-Practical”, who has most thoroughly considered the practical elements of spirituality, is quite clear about the steps that are needed, in his mind, for meditation to be effective. In his work as a therapist, he sees that these steps are not likely to happen.

For meditation you first have to be able to hold it in, otherwise a person kind of crosses that threshold into the spiritual world, and they don’t have the mental strength, then they’ll either fall asleep or dissipate and it won’t be a very valuable
experience. So before they can really meditate they need to concentrate first, and develop that strength in their thinking, so they can hold themselves. Meditation is something further along, and often I won't propose too much in the way of meditation with people, unless they're already inclined a bit in that direction, or have attempted something. And then I don't really teach people meditation, because that would take a long time, and it starts to pull you away from the work you're trying to do in the room.

With the consideration of meditation, it is relevant to add that meditation can mean very many things at the specific level of technique. This group mentioned several versions of meditation: relaxation meditation, Vippasana, body work on the table, guided imagery, and concentration. There are many, many more types of meditation for those who would further pursue this strategy.

**Other Techniques**

The story told in the listing of techniques that have a spiritual orientation, is the story of richly diverse people, practicing towards similar goals, using an immensely wide variety of techniques to support those goals. As we view the varied techniques, it also tells us that the possibilities for how to support a spiritual interface are endless. At the same time, as one mentioned, "On a certain level, techniques are not the most important thing." This is true. "Doors" confirms this and points to the reality of how techniques do exist within the work whether we want them or not. "I try
not to use techniques at all. And I still do it. I still haven’t found a way to replace them, but I don’t like techniques."

In psychosynthesis, one model of the human psyche involves the psychological functions of the human being. Jung and others have similar maps, each directing our attention to the myriad ways people take in information and express themselves in the world. “Minds and Bodies” had elaborated just such a map out of his own experience. In psychosynthesis the various functions include: intuition, thinking, feeling, impulse-desire, imagination, and sensation. Various techniques involve different psychological functions as their primary element. The value in having a wide selection of techniques is that clients will respond, partially based in their ease with a given psychological function, to different techniques better than to others. It is refreshing to see just how vast the array of techniques, in this small group, is and how they draw on many different psychological functions.

Techniques listed, include: disidentification, use of the medicine wheel, sound, singing, prayer, chakras, energy, hands on work, visualization of color, prayer, metaphor, biblical references, stories, breath, imagery, awake body experience, plant metaphor, visualization of birth, symbolism, animal guides, tuning in, art, drawing mandalas, recommending a book or classes, quotes, and stories from other cultures. A book could (and perhaps should) be written to elaborate the many common and unique techniques that these and other practitioners bring to the work. It was beyond the
scope of the interviews to elaborate on these techniques, but the simple beauty of some of them warrants a moment’s attention.

When I feel that we’re in a place where they really need a resource beyond what they’ve got, I’ll start talking about plants and living things, and have they ever had a bird perch on their finger or whatever. What have they seen around? I help develop a connected feeling there and maybe then work from that.

I learned in Bali that for the first 6 months the child’s feet are not allowed to touch the floor. And that is because a child is God. The parents are not parents, but are the caretakers of this God who’s come to visit. So for the first 6 months this whole belief is that this is God, and it’s much too holy to touch the floor. So I share that, as a way that another country, another belief system deals with this and that helps facilitate this idea that perhaps we come from someplace beyond.

The techniques are often unique and imbued with personal meaning at times. And sometimes they draw on the wisdom of others.

Very frequently what I’ll do is take a quote, several of which I’ve had printed up. If a quote comes to me while I’m working with a client, I’ll simply hand them a card and say, "Put this on your refrigerator for the next week, and every time you go to make a meal, read it."

Impact/Effect

Belief systems, strategies and techniques make up one end of the work, but clearly outcome is crucially important. Does the client get better by their own or the therapist’s standards? This research never even proposed that question and it would be an interesting one to pursue. How
do spiritual techniques impact on the growth and well-being of the client? Though this question was not asked, by way of answering other questions, a tiny bit of that answer was revealed and it is worth sharing here, to invite further consideration and to share the practitioners’ felt sense of the work they do and the impact it has. The practitioners readily see both the strengths and the weaknesses of their work. “I try to encourage them to have a spiritual practice on their own, but I have a sense that that’s not working too well with everybody.” “I get immediate feedback--such gratefulness at the end of these sessions-- I feel just wonderful.” Sometimes the magic works, sometimes it doesn’t! Sometimes the spiritual techniques help create bonding, which is one sign that the work is effective. “I can give them some gospel tapes, or music they’ll listen to and they’ll say about me ‘She’s OK. She’s on the same plane we are’.” When “Strider” tells his stories, it seems to him that they have great impact. “And people remember them. And they mean a lot to them.” And sometimes the overall impact is that clients move much closer to a place that sounds like enlightenment. “I’ve watched a lot of clients get to that place of real serenity and peace.”

There is not much more we can ask from this endeavor than that.
Profile Category #6:

Problems

From my own experience with the problems that practitioners have working at this interface, I had expected to hear much of what I did hear about problems within the field of psychology. What I also heard, and with equal emphasis, were the problems with spirituality. These became the two themes: problems within the field of psychology and problems of a spiritual nature. Clearly the balance between the two in a thoughtful, ordered way was important. Too much or too little of either was seen immediately as a pitfall. There is a line to walk, holding both and accessing the best of both traditions that is the ideal model. Several participants commented at different points that the interface of the genius of Western psychology and Eastern spirituality was a great and wonderful movement, a gift, a potential as yet unexperienced. I agree. At the end of this research, the warnings, cautions, and potential dangers that exist outside of the center, outside of balance, should be weighed heavily. On either side of the equation of spirituality and psychology one risks imbalance. These reporters carry with them hundreds of years of experience in total. Their combined wisdom is great.
Problems in the Field of Psychology

As might be expected these came in several specific arenas. The role of other professionals within the field was seen sometimes as problematic, both to these practitioners and by them in relation to clients. Academic and clinical settings carried a certain degree of difficulty as well because of their exclusion of spiritual issues.

The psychology world is still largely influenced by the medical model and implicit in that is a hierarchy of power that puts certain practitioners in a higher status than others. The history of the field includes ongoing fights for the rights of alternate practitioners to be validated. As such, it is often a battle to practice therapy in a nontraditional way. "Drums" noted her own inner issues with just this experience.

I sometimes feel threatened by someone who appears very straight. When someone gives the appearance that everything's working great for them, and they have plenty of money and they have all the clients they want, and they're really happy with their lives, a part of me will say, "Why do I always have to do everything the hard way?"

Even more to the point as a problem in the field is how clients experience their helping professionals. "Medicine Man," bound to the medical model by his training and profession, nonetheless sees the negative effects of that perspective on the client population.
Mostly what’s important is that you’re hearing what they’re saying. And particularly doctors and psychiatrists, people complain, come in and they talk and they feel that they didn’t hear a word they said. The doctors aren’t paying any attention to them. I think you could see two interviews where the identical words are exchanged, and, depending on this level we’re talking about, the patient will walk out from one, feeling that they have actually communicated with somebody, or the patient will walk out mad, feeling they were completely ignored. So it's on a very subliminal level. Doctors particularly, because of the training, tend to be cut off, and they tend not to meet the person’s eye, to just kind of not respond to what they’ve said or done. It's more like, “I’ll tell you what to do.” And simply not hearing anything.

“Medicine Man” mentioned the training as a reason that doctors are out of touch with their patients. It is not only in the medical field that professional training seems to be a problem. Many of the interviewees mentioned their academic experience as a limiting factor in their work.

When I went back to academia I lost a lot. I used to have a lot of psychic phenomena. I could see colors around people, or words, and I started trusting that and using that. It was almost always accurate. It made my work about ten times faster. Then when I got into academia I kind of lost it. It was like shifting gears, perhaps a shift to left hemispheric dominance. Now I’ve been out of academia for about eight years and the psychic capacity is coming back.

I think a lot of learning in courses is somewhat a waste of time. You cram your mind full of stuff and you have no time to digest it. It’s like making pate de fois gras. They take a goose and force feed it so it can’t process the food. The liver gets enlarged and that’s what the pate is made of. I think that’s what a lot of recently graduated doctoral brains are like- pate de fois gras. You haven’t had a chance to turn knowledge into wisdom.
“Philosopher” noted that the problems in training come from both the traditional and alternative sides of the field.

Because I have been training in both social work and transpersonal psychology, I come off as battered. I feel like when I come for transpersonal work, I have to throw a lot of traditional stuff around. When I draw up a DSM 3 category, I get crucified for it. And the same thing happens in reverse when I’m where I work.

And “Miracles” observed that even in the teaching role, this alternative message is not always well received.

I think it does bring up lots of issues, for instance I have worked at (colleges). There’s far from universal happiness with what I do. People are not always happy with the Course. It’s very radical.... It’s not easy when you’re lecturing, because the thing you have to realize is that you’re out there encountering resistance.

For “Helper” the psychological and spiritual worlds are still separate out there and her role in that is not easy for her. “I don’t see that unity in the psychology world. I don’t know if they’re ready for it. I don’t know if I’m ready to be a pioneer and introduce it.”

In work in the field the limits of not having a spiritual view were noted.

“Spiritual” or transpersonal issues were not part of our team perspective. I could see, in the work sometimes, that we were addressing on a very mundane level what were really cries from another level. We either didn’t hear it or chose not to go that deep. We just didn’t frame things in that way, which meant, in my view, that often our clients were not either seen, or
encouraged to see themselves, from an expanded, transpersonal view.

At the same time, spiritual training was acknowledged as a key to success in the work.

To the extent that I seem to be able to be very effective with people, I think that’s as much or more to do with the (meditation) practice than to anything I’ve brought to it or any training I’ve had. The (psychiatric) training was more directed at putting people at a distance and being very manipulative in some way.

While these people struggled at various times to deal with what may have felt like an inhospitable psychological environment, they also did not move lightly or without due consideration into the spiritual aspects of their work. In fact, they were quite willing to notice and comment on the equal limitations in the spiritual side of the interface.

Problems with Spirituality

While the exclusion of spirituality was clearly seen as an issue, too much spiritual emphasis, was seen as a problem at times, as well. Likewise certain types of relationships to spirituality were seen as problematic. Some of the concerns on the spiritual side included denial of spirituality and spirituality as denial, fanaticism in spirituality and non-acceptance of spiritual perspectives by those with differing views. Clearly a polarity was
noticed in which distortion and danger exist on either side and well-being exists in the synthesis of the polarity. Both sides of the polarity, too much and not enough spirituality, were carefully considered.

Too much spirituality as a bias could indeed be problematic “The problem could be that if you’re just totally doing a spiritual kind of work, there could be a real feeling of being ungrounded by the client.”

Spirituality was also seen as a problem when strict and limiting religious traditions were involved.

The ones I feel sorry for are the ones who have this harsh biblical interpretation that if I didn’t behave myself during this life I’m going to go to hell, and those are the ones that I try to work with.

At the same time spirituality was seen as a possible opportunity for denial, for cutting off from pain, rather than going into it towards true healing. “Doors” notices that some clients are interested in, “leaving the child cut off and disconnected, because there’s too much pain in there. With that I can feel, wanting to rise up, ‘Let’s get up above the pain. Let’s get out of here. Let’s go on to higher things.’” The implications for using spirituality as avoidance are grave.

And so we become really good at thinking, and then go looking for a cult leader, or looking for an external parent, and we keep on rising up and we may decide we’re connected to the spirits above and all this stuff. All rising up and out and away from child. And hopefully the quest would be like finding God, or finding something that’s going to finally
quench the pain for us. And that's the avoidance side of things that I see, whether it's crystals or real God, that's the avoidance side.

The interface is a delicate balance, that is clear. Too much, too little. Avoidance of pain, avoidance of spirit. These folks were not unaware of the need for balance and the pitfalls on either side.

What really interested me is what I see as the pros and the cons of spirituality and psychotherapy. On the one hand I feel if we're really going to do significantly deep work with people, then it's almost essential that there be some spiritual quality to the work. On the other hand, I observe how spirituality is often used to avoid ever getting into any deep work in the first place. So there's that polarity there of how it's essential and how it's an avoidance.

Spirituality must be taken seriously, as several people mentioned. Spiritual techniques can be powerful and should be monitored, as "Spiritual-Practical" noted. Spirituality can be used in avoidance or as a limiting construct. At the same time it is seen as essential, crucial to healing.

Problems exist, for these practitioners on both sides of the interface of psychology and spirituality, and yet their very awareness and consideration of the problems shows them to be working towards finding the appropriate and healing balance. It is with great appreciation for these pioneers that I close this exploration of the themes that emerged in our interviews.
The research work of this paper casts a warm glow on the field of psychology at its interface with spirituality. Fourteen practitioners have shared their insight and experience of working at this interface, and what has emerged is a picture of concerned, thoughtful, well trained professionals who integrate serious spiritual perspectives with equally serious psychological practice.

For each practitioner a personal journey was involved in getting to the present moment. The journey had spiritual impact and influenced their lives at many levels. Their spiritual views spanned a number of traditions, but shared in common a deep and abiding faith in human potential and in humanity's place in the universe. Their work with people is part and parcel of the path that these practitioners are on. It is hard to imagine any one of them working in a capacity that did not involve close connection with other people.

While their work with people is, in some essential way spiritual, they are not confused about the proper place of spirituality. Spirituality as a context is viewed differently than spirituality as a therapeutic process. There are times, it is clear, when spiritual issues as the specific focus of therapy are relevant. There are also times when spiritual issues are a
While their work with people is, in some essential way spiritual, they are not confused about the proper place of spirituality. Spirituality as a context is viewed differently than spirituality as a therapeutic process. There are times, it is clear, when spiritual issues as the specific focus of therapy are relevant. There are also times when spiritual issues are a defense against pain. Early childhood issues may require a very different type of work than spiritual issues and these practitioners are well aware of that. Techniques of a spiritual nature are included in the repertoire of these practitioners, as are traditional techniques. This group has a clear sense of when and why spiritual techniques would be used or avoided. And, while the group has encountered its share of problems in the psychological world and in the realm of spirituality, they are aware of the balance that must be held to honor the best of both traditions and to work effectively at the interface.

At the same time that many threads were commonly shared, each subject presented a unique view of this interface. The journey for each was unique. While some were heavily influenced by spiritual processes or teachers, others came from the psychological world into the interface. How these folks worked with people varied widely. Major professional identifications ranged from psychopharmacological psychiatry, to body work, counseling in the inner city, intuitive work, traditional, humanistic, transpersonal and eclectic approaches. Techniques used by these practitioners reflected both their different psychological orientation, and
their spiritual orientation. Some had specific spiritually oriented
techniques that they frequently used. Others never used spiritual
techniques. Belief systems were quite different as well, though sharing a
common theme of the acceptance of humanity and belief in a larger reality.

Their case studies indicated a depth of understanding and a great
hope in their relationship to those they work with. They are, above all, a
group of dedicated and passionate people, living their truth in a way that
can only be of benefit to the world. The authenticity of each person is
deeply grounded in psychological training and personal spiritual beliefs
and practice.

Our task as therapists is always to promote better health. It is always
to be harmless. Our task in this world must be the same and we can look at
these few people to see what it is like when people choose to live
harmlessly and towards the well being of others. No more can be asked of a
person than that.

The research, then revealed much of what was originally asked by the
researcher as a guiding question: what is it that practitioners are doing in
their offices as they work with the interface of psychology and spirituality.
At the same time, deeper questions immediately emerge, as yet
unanswered. What works and doesn't work in this interface? How do
clients perceive work at this interface and how are they impacted? What
are the distortions that may arise for those trying to work in two such
complex arenas?
The process itself was very rewarding for both interviewee and researcher. The experience of sharing about inner experiences, theories and practice in this important realm was validating and occasionally inspiring for the participants. Several have mentioned that the interview process gave them support for expressing more fully their own spiritual reality. Others noted that talking about the subject helped them to clarify their own thinking and beliefs, as well as raising new questions for further consideration. The researcher was both validated in her own ongoing quest and given a tremendous amount to think about in further consideration.

**Implications**

The implications of this study are many. For therapists and others in the healing arts, the implication is that opening to the spiritual element of the world can be of great benefit to the client. For these same practitioners, there is implied a permission to know and be in relationship to one’s own spiritual unfolding. A veil of silence is no longer needed. At the same time, it is clear that those who would choose to bring a spiritual dimension to their work should not do so lightly. The processes and experience of spirituality are powerful. They can be used inappropriately and have the potential to harm. Taking on a spiritual perspective should be viewed with the same seriousness that one would take on psychological training. Study
and personal practice are the backbone of a healthy spiritual interface with psychology.

For clients and those outside the psychological loop, the implications of this research are that spiritual experiences may be honored and trusted. We may assume that spirituality, in all its forms, is a valid and even essential element of human process. Clients who have an interest in this dimension will do well to make sure that the therapist they choose to work with is open to these views. Clients have the right to therapy that includes and honors that dimension. With that permission, a caveat is also in order. Clients who want to serve themselves most fully will need also to know and understand how the therapist views the psychological aspects of their work. As we have seen, the balance is key.

Implications for education can also to be drawn from this research. Practitioners mentioned the lack of interface in training and education and the difficulty that caused for them. Education, then, of the therapist should include this larger dimension. Perhaps it can be conceived that the way education happens and the content of the curriculum should both reflect a more spiritual and all inclusive viewpoint.

At the same time, a further implication is for education at all levels and for society at large. The spiritual dimension is at all times an important aspect of human development. It is always relevant. This culture and its institutions could do well to support, in many ways, more openness to this dimension.
Perhaps the key implication to be drawn from this study has to do with opening up a dialogue in this world about the interface of psychology and spirituality. Those who practice at this interface should consider sharing their work and ideas through writing and teaching. I certainly invite those in this research group to do so. We would be well served if you did.

In addition, spiritual traditions could enhance this interface by more actively supporting and including the psychological dimension in their understanding of human nature, and of course the field of psychology would do well to more firmly embrace this interface, allowing these considerations to permeate the education, training, and clinical practice of its members.

**Researcher’s Quest Revisited**

As the Brandenburg concertos comfort me in the closing minutes of a very long process, I am reminded that goodness is its own reward. I have seen that goodness in my research and I am thankful for it.

I am also reminded of a portion of a psalm, emerging unbidden from long forgotten corners of my religion of childhood.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me. Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all
the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Much of my work these days is with people who have cancer. As I sit facing death with them, I know, more surely than ever that spiritual realities are a deep and true part of this life. They take us where psychology cannot.

I am reminded of Buddhist wisdom, that tradition that informs my current spiritual life.

Thus shall we think of this fleeting world:
A star at dawn,
A bubble in a stream,
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp,
A phantom,
and a dream.

I am reminded of my commitment to the field of transpersonal psychology and I am reminded of Ken Wilber, whose words, long ago memorized, have always spoken, for me, a piece of great truth:

Nothing can stay long removed from God, nor long divorced from that ground of being outside of which nothing exists, and history, not as a chronicle of individual and national feats, but as a movement of human consciousness, is the story of men and women's love affair with the divine. On again, off again; loving and loathing; moving toward and recoiling from-history as the sport and play of Brahman.

I am deeply grateful to be working in the field of psychology at a time when we are again moving towards the divine, when my client and I
can sit in the light of the divine as part of the healing work that we do. For

as Wilber, in his profound way notes:

When a person rediscovers that his deepest nature is one with
the All, he is relieved of the burden of time, of anxiety, of
worry; he is released from the chain of alienation and separate
self existence. Seeing that the self and other are one, he is
released from the fear of life. Seeing that being and non-being
are one, he is released from the fear of death. (1986. p.99)

There can be no higher aspiration than this. And it is my aspiration.

I am reminded as well of my family and friends, of the love and
caring that exists in my life.
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name
Age
Occupation/ # of years
Work History

1. What initially interested you in this study?

2. Will you share a case experience(s) that seems important to you in this light?

2. Do you have an identified religious or spiritual path or practice?

3. What is the context that you hold as a therapist? (human being)?

4. What is your psychotherapeutic training? current psychotherapeutic views?

5. How do your spiritual and psychotherapeutic world views overlap or differ?

6. What has your own development towards this interface been?

7. When spiritual issues (content) are involved in the therapy, who has initiated this? You or the client? If you, what prompts you to do so?

8. Under what circumstances would you be likely to initiate the use of spiritual processes?

9. What specific processes (strategies or techniques) do you use that reflect a spiritual perspective?

10. Is this interface important to you? Why? What is its impact?

12. How do you compare the work you do that has a spiritual content with work that you do (or have done) that does not?

13. What problems, limitations or needs do you experience in working at this interface?

14. What else would you like to share that is relevant to this study?
Dear

I am looking for people who are interested in participating in a qualitative research study on the interface of spiritual traditions and psychotherapy. I am a doctoral student at U. Mass., a psychotherapist and an author.

I would like to interview mental health professionals, therapists, counselors, healers, who in some form or another bring to their psychological work some of the theories, strategies and/or techniques of the enlightenment or spiritual traditions. There is no desired form for those traditions. As a practitioner, past or present, if you feel that in any way you worked with the interface of those traditions and psychotherapy, I would like to talk to you.

My research will involve one or possibly two interviews and you will have at all times, the right to continue or withdraw and the right to review all material about you, before submission.

I believe that there is a rich tapestry to be revealed from the many practitioners, often alone and based only on their own resources, who are bridging this gap and in so doing, changing the face of both psychotherapy and the spiritual traditions. I myself am such a person.

I have gotten your name from . S/he believes that this study might interest you. If it does, please contact me at 413-256-8715 or 256-0772. I will also try to reach you after you have gotten this letter to see if you are interested.

Thank you for considering this. I look forward to contact with you.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Firman
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. I agree to participate in a study entitled: “Psychotherapy and the Quest for Enlightenment: An investigation of the clinical uses of theories, strategies and techniques derived from the spiritual traditions in the psychotherapeutic environment” conducted by Dorothy Firman. I understand that the purpose of this study is to generate more information on the uses of enlightenment based practices in the psychotherapeutic modality. I understand that my participation will involve between 1 and 2 hours of conversation/interview time with the researcher. I further understand that material in the form of personal artifacts or writing as well as texts or other data helping to describe this interface may be requested as part of the interview and research process.

2. I understand that information from this participation may be used in the written doctoral dissertation and in other as yet undetermined writing, published or unpublished. I understand that the researcher is available at any time for questions about the research and my participation.

3. I understand and agree with the following guidelines for gathering and safe guarding the material:
   A. There are no anticipated risks in being a participant.
   B. All information will be recorded anonymously and no overt revealing information will be released, so that confidentiality is supported.
   C. I will protect the confidentiality of my own clients in any conversation regarding them and the interviewer will also protect that confidentiality.
   D. My participation in the Study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time.
   E. Material involving me will be offered to me for review, if I so request, before inclusion in the final product.
   F. I will receive no compensation, monetary or otherwise for my participation now or in the future.

4. I understand the results of the research will be made available to me, if I so request.

__________________________________________
Signature of Participant

__________________________________________
Date

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


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