

## Integrating Psychotherapy and Spirituality

(An Occasional Department)

A number of people were asked to give a brief and personal response to the following inquiry:

*Much psychotherapeutic theory stresses the importance of differentiation and individuation of the self as central in the pursuit of mental health and happiness, if not of liberation and enlightenment. Schools of thought having to do with the spiritual realm, on the other hand, almost universally suggest that the important thing is the transcendence of a separate sense of self. In these systems of understanding the nature of reality, it is held that the experience of the differentiated self is an illusion that perpetuates misery and which can be corrected through compassion, love, forgiveness, nonattachment, humility, surrender, and the like. It is frequently alleged in such systems that there is some sort of transcendent force or organizing energy in the universe (e.g., God, Tao, Ki, prana, Ground of Being) to which we can turn for assistance. One very interesting such system goes so far as to claim: "Psychotherapy is the only form of therapy there is. Since only the mind can be sick, only the mind can be healed." It would appear that the trick is to successfully integrate whatever wisdom or healing power one finds in such systems into one's practice of psychotherapy. Are you aware of attempting such an integration in your work? If so, how do you go about it? If not, why not?*

### Responses

My work is grounded in an understanding of the human spirit as having an enormous capacity for self-healing and growth—an act of faith in itself. Individuation, an essential component to a felt understanding of relationship with another human being, or with the whole, is part of the work. Regardless of the external psychotherapeutic/spiritual system we might choose to use, the internal spiritual/psychotherapeutic healing process is still one of traveling through the "I can't," "I won't," "I didn't," "I should," and so on to the relaxed, connected "I AM."

ANNE ANDERSON, B.A.

Yes, I believe that the differentiated self (as I understand it) is an illusion; and yes, I feel that this is likely the central core of my relationship with a client—which, in turn, is about all I have to offer a client. I periodically communicate with my Great Spirit which has no denominational status, and is, thus, not related to any religious denomination. The closer I get to my Great Spirit, the more skeptical I become about the efficacy of any techniques or systems or schools of psychotherapy. Most of these seem to be ways that the Doctor, the Wizard, the Guru, the Shaman can "cure" us, and the pages of *VOICES* have sometimes been filled with the ecstatic cries of some folk who feel they have been cured. Alas!

But if I must go beyond myself in order to find myself, how can I be "cured" by some other fellow human? I do not see myself, or my self, in the business of curing, but rather helping someone to take that step—somehow—beyond one's self. If one's self is transcended, then there is more than just the client and the therapist in the client-therapist relationship—and the "you are not alone" is not just a hackneyed cliché. Maybe it's the existential "becoming" or the reaching of Maslow's "peak," but whatever it is, there is more than just me relating with the client, and I believe that that comes across.

DUGALD S. ARBUCKLE, PH.D.

In my view, psychotherapy has to do with turning mirrors into windows, expanding consciousness, being realistic about limits, and owning our choices. The personal pilgrimage is more than a narcissistic self-indulgence; rather it invites to an exploration of the self as well as of its relationship to others, the ecosystem, societal structures, and the spiritual dimension. The Beyond is discovered Within and Between.

Thus, the material of therapy may be individual predicaments, both situational and characterological; but it may also focus on belief systems, values, ethics, justice, or the transformational meanings of the spiritual quest. It all depends on where the holes are, what has been hidden in the shadows, what perpetuates imbalance, and where the particular client is on his or her unique journey. Often we don't know where we need to go until we have set off down the therapeutic road together. Where the path takes us can surprise us both.

GROVER E. CRISWELL, M.Div.

The universal hero-heroine leaves the ordinary world, becomes enlightened, and returns to transform the familiar. This monomyth described by Joseph Campbell is similar to both a Marxian dialectic and a Christian resurrection. For some time now, it has served as an adequate template for most depth therapies, including both Jung's "conjunctio" and Winnicott's regression to the "True Self."

When I used to jog, I would frequently experience a passage through discrete stages. After bursting forth with readily available "nervous" energy I would soon feel a slow, mounting, massive resistance. There was discomfort heading into pain and strong messages from the physical plant that I should stop immediately. Next came the "second wind," when the self seemed to make a complete split of its previously troubled entanglement. Both the mind and body sailed through time and space free of each other, each having the added energy of a clear separation and freedom from each other. Finally, but with less certainty, there was an end stage of ecstasy when boundaries burst. My self was suddenly everywhere at once—in the trees, mountains, sky, my stomach, my breath. There was an exhilarating union of everything, no sense of separation.

The initial stage of this experiential template provides raw material for a variety of diagnostic observations on the human condition. Something's wrong with the being as he or she starts to run. Is it alienation from God or from True Self? Once this initial assessment is made, psychology seems more interested in the "second wind" stage where boundaries and individuation processes abound. Spiritual views become more absorbed with the final ecstasy state where connectedness with larger-than-self forces predominate. In the actual practice of psychotherapy, the dissolution of a muddled merged social self becomes sorted out into clearer compartments. After that, and again with less

certainly, opportunities begin to occur for more "informed" mergers that have a healthy, more deeply related quality to them. A healthy client seems to travel freely, not stuck in either self or other. Unbounded religious experience has this same flavor.

DARRELL DAWSON, PH.D.

If schizophrenia is the disease of the human condition, then polyphrenia, the orchestration and integration of our many selves, may be the health.

Western culture is one of the few cultures that demands a limited and singular self. The genius of the child is to become what he or she beholds—dog, kitten, tree, bug, cloud. The child seeks understanding by incarnating the world. So as a child you were permitted to enjoy many and manifold selves. At a certain point they were declared unreal or inappropriate, and your genius for identity was truncated. In some this loss of psychoecology, or being permitted to have leaky margins with reality at large, can result years later in pathology. Because the yearning of the manifold self to complexify is kept in a pressure cooker, it can eventually explode and fracture. How much better if we instead recognized and encouraged the healthy development and orchestration of our various selves. How much incipient neurosis or pathology might be avoided.

JEAN HOUSTON, PH.D.

*Sacred Psychology*

I am deeply identified with Old Testament themes and concepts of God. These themes and concepts permeate my feelings and ideation to a degree that they can be tapped or stimulated very readily.

The God that I relate to is an invisible God, a God of passion, a God of love, a God of power, a God capable of terrible wrath, a God capable of tender mercy, a God who wants human beings to BE, and to become; a God who needs us to atone, to be forgiven and to forgive, and to heal and to be healed. This God's name is "I have no Name," it is "I am that I am"—his name is One. This God instructs us that if we are to know him we must observe his work. This God is the God of history. This God is a Universal God and this God is a personal God with whom we (all of us) have covenant—We are his people, he is our God. This God is profoundly concerned with our relationships with our fellow human beings, our relationship with ourself and our relationship with God—the universe. This God provides us tales of dawning consciousness, and tales of individuation, tales of rebellion and tales of lust, tales of descent and tales of ascent, tales of exodus and tales of striving for full liberation.

I find this God present and relevant in my life and in my work. Oftentimes we lose each other—sometimes my clients lead me back to him, and sometimes I make the introductions or reintroductions for them.

Recently, he appeared at a session I was having with a man whose parents were concentration camp survivors. My client's story revealed that his parents revisited cruelty and dehumanization on him (their only child) in lieu of opening themselves to their own almost unbearable pain and rage connected to their brutalization by the Nazis. Instead, they determinedly suppressed their feelings and acted them out—frequently scapegoating their own son. My client was in utter turmoil about where to find the self-regard, humanity, and courage necessary for him to hold them responsible for what they did to him—given all that they had been through—and then to authentically forgive them. I was in a similar quandary as to where to find the spiritual wherewithal that I needed to hold him accountable for his inclinations to repeat these scapegoating pat-

terns at my expense—given what he had been through. I managed to reach back and find the spiritual strength just at the right time and just in the right way—with firmness and love, without judgment and harshness—to do the necessary work.

In a different vein, I was “visited” by a spiritual association during one of my groups. It passed by quickly and stirred a strong sense of the potential for holiness in the human community.

*Abraham to God during his pleading to save Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction: “If 20 righteous souls are discovered would You stay your harsh decree? 10?” Both times the answer was “Yes.” Ten were not found and the decree was not stayed. But had 10 humanly loving souls been found, the whole community would have been spared. . . .*

That morning my work was full of looking for and finding the communal connections, that is, the power of the group to move, sway, support, undercut, give energy, and to shape consciousness. I kept focusing on and inviting the group to focus on those forces that supported chaotic disintegration and those forces that supported healing, growth, and affirmation. The communal aspect of the work dominated my consciousness that morning and groundwork was laid for creating a more involved and interconnected community. A spiritual dimension was palpable.

I know very little about when a wave of this kind of consciousness will come or why. I almost never talk out loud like this. I become fearful that my grandiosity will run amuck and I suppress myself. I am glad not to do so this time.

FREDERICK L. KLEIN, PH.D.

As I have become more familiar with “spiritual” literature, 20 years into my career as a psychotherapist, I have initially felt some conflict between philosophies of “transcendence” and my therapeutic orientation toward the importance of accessing unconscious feelings and attachments. This sense of conflict has diminished as I have moved in my own growth to know deeply about balance and process.

Transcendence of self is meaningless if I have never developed a sense of self to transcend. Transcendence can so easily be substituted for owning one's least acceptable feelings or ways of being. Forgiveness can be rushed into before hurt is acknowledged. Without acknowledgment of what is experienced as negative, such transcendence feels empty, false, open to ridicule and disbelief. Getting stuck in negative feelings is obviously destructive! Getting stuck in forgiveness and other transcendental attitudes is equally destructive.

In my work as therapist I am occasionally delighted by experiences that feel like connections with some force “bigger” than I. At such times my intuitions, my choice of words, my imagery comes through me rather than from me. I don't pretend to know what allows me such experiences. Are *most* of my images, words, intuitions from other than me, but my ego claims them more often—or are there *special* times when I am differently opened up to some larger force? I don't label such experiences; I don't judge them. I remain curious, awed, and grateful for them when they occur.

CAROLE S. LIGHT, PH.D.

In the Christian contemplative tradition, the experience of a differentiated sense of self is not seen as delusion nor illusion, nor is it the source of suffering. It is the *idolatry* of this self-sense that is the culprit—when it assumes more importance than God. Ideally, the sense of the self is just expedient, a simple

tool for communicating, behaving, and relating; nothing to be served but rather to serve (along with all one's faculties) the purpose of God. Compassion, forgiveness, and so forth then are not simply healing acts for one's self but are expressions also of God's essential lovingness through persons and community. This is not to say that "one has to have an ego to give it up" or that one's sense of individual autonomy is inviolate. Instead, the sense of self becomes, I think, increasingly transparent, (less an interference and more an open window) toward the end of "not I, but Christ in me."

Although I am aware of having "attempted an integration" of this understanding with my practice of psychotherapy, I am woefully at a loss in explaining much about how I go about it. I do understand that true healing comes from God, more through me than by me if it happens, so I do pray for that for myself and for the people I see. I also try to intentionally turn to God on a moment-by-moment basis, and to pause a little before responding or intervening. In other words, I seek a sense of space and a sense of the Spirit's movement more than immediately jumping into my "own" impulses. But these "ways" do not really convey how it happens, because I do try to use common sense, and the sense of me-vs.-God conveyed in these methods is more arbitrary than I really feel it to be. I guess the best thing I could say is I try to be prayerful, I have a vision of what true transparency might be in therapy and in life in general, and have had tastes of it, but it remains quite beyond me most of the time.

GERALD G. MAY, M.D.

My spiritual journey is teaching me how to honor incarnation. Incarnation is not an error. One becomes free through form, not in spite of it. I am learning how to honor my uniqueness of manifestation without exclusively identifying with it. I am in form and I am also not in form. In my work with others, we may work on the forms, for example, personality variables, conceptual structure, emotional patterns; but the process of working with "other" is one of working on myself to remember the One behind the many. Then I can become an environment in which another can awaken out of the illusion of separateness if he or she so chooses.

RAM DASS

Like patriotism and automobile repair, spirituality is often an ideal den for thieves, con men, and liars. It has been said that the best salespeople are also the biggest suckers, so it is no surprise that psychotherapists are drawn like soldier ants to the sweet pile of religiosity. All claims of spiritual knowledge, I believe, should be approached with the skepticism appropriate to an encounter with UFOs.

Having said that much, it's also important to stress that the spiritual is indeed of the world and in the world, that the rare epiphany we experience with one another, or with nature, or with whatever we choose to call "God" is a dim glimmer and reminder of what we could be—and sometimes are. We therapists may be privileged to stumble upon this possibility more than others. That fact alone commands our gratitude and our generosity.

ALEX REDMOUNTAIN, PH.D.

Theodore Reik listened with his third ear. Carl Rogers listened as carefully as he could with two ears. I listen with as many different ears I can and, with my patient, re-create psychotherapy in our own image.

For me there is no dichotomy between *spiritual* and *material*. The ancient discovery, and recent re-discoveries of *Transcendent Forces* reflect the uni-

versal and timeless human search for *Meaning*—the hope that, surely, there must be more to existence than that which meets the senses and one's ordinary level of consciousness. "God," or Transcendence, is one of many *grounds* against which the human condition is the *figure*; "Human," or Worldliness, is another.

For those who ridicule Transcendence, like it or not, your *own* inner radiance glows without your rational cooperation.

For those who seek the Transcendent Path as a short-cut: there is no Way to become *Self* without awareness of phony (non-)self, and no way to attain *Non-Self* without developing a *Self* to give up.

My need for Self-Realization is not separate from my need for Self-Transcendence. They coexist within me and within all humans simultaneously and at all times; *there is no hierarchical arrangement between them.*

At a given moment on our journey our focus or level of attention is influenced by where we experience it is "right" for us to look *now*. This focus will *change* over the long course of psychotherapy, from day to day, from moment to moment. Kazantzakis wrote: "God is not the power that has found the eternal equilibrium, but the power that is forever breaking every equilibrium, forever searching for a higher one." *Neither Self nor Transcendence is the Higher Equilibrium.*

There is no technique or trick or miracle to integrating "(Transcendent) Wisdom or healing power" into one's practical psychotherapy. Mostly there is Letting-Be; respect for the potential power of those processes *inherent* in human nature; figure-ground/self-emptiness/human-god; *processes* which *continuously* exist, and which, with focus, experience, and grace, may be revealed in our psychotherapeutic endeavor.

(This paper has had the benefit of lengthy spiritual discussion with Ruth C. Cohn.)

VIN ROSENTHAL, PH.D.

I have been in the process of integrating the spiritual with the treatment process for many years. I believe there is no way that anyone can realize change unless their life force has been touched and they are free to have access to it.

VIRGINIA SATIR, M.A.

If during dilemma, during crisis, during confusion in my mind or even in meditation, if I can *literally* focus on the heart itself, the apparent problem I am faced with dissolves in a new framework and I have understood what has been left out. That can be pain or avoidance or psi or any other obscure intuition of myself and its expression in the inner landscape of the other person. When I overcome my stuck emotion and psychological space that *includes* both me and the other, and of which both I and the other are projective localizations of a shared whole, we are literally aspects of the only One who is! I touch the current of living energy in this way and the blocks are transcended in a radiant field of energy. If during anger or worry or convoluted emotional interaction I fully attend to the body-space where my fear arises, then often the sense of danger evaporates and humor bellows through like a stoned walrus laughing.

When I am lost in obsessive analysis, stuck in my inability to see through a client's resistance or my own wilderness of countertransference, then I advance to the source-point of my attention, which is invariably at the base of my spine, the pit of my stomach, or the right side of my heart. In each case, in each seemingly separate situation, my felt dilemma dissolves, the subject—

me, and the object—you, are reframed in a unity that is both intuitive, new, and refreshingly functional. This is not primal refusal or regression or some other face of psychoanalytic mythology, but rather a deeper integration, a post-rational intuition of my radiant identity with all living forms. "Separation" in this context becomes a useful apparition, the ego a lucid tool I employ but do not fully identify with. In this methodology I actually see and feel Intelligence and Compassion interconnected everywhere in the great poem and radical alchemy of  $E=MC^2$  and beyond.

E. BRUCE TAUB-BYNUM, PH.D.

My religion provides the bedrock of my spirituality. My religion provides me with a deep sense of history and connectedness within Western civilization; it provides me with ritual, symbols, images, parables, and metaphors. It furnishes me with vehicles through which I can celebrate, mourn, and milestone my journey. While intellectually I identify as an existentialist, my heart and attitude are deeply rooted in a stance of hope. I continue to marvel at how different my world view is from my colleagues', at how different our basic presumptions are. I attribute much of this to my religious and spiritual experiences, which are ultimately comforting and enlivening.

I do not attempt any integration because I don't dichotomize spirituality and psychotherapy, each reflecting the other, each flowering from and nourished by the same soil/soul. My formal training in medieval philosophy alerts me to the fact that concepts like immanence and transcendence wax and wane in intensity with cultural shifts. My study of Western mysticism illumines how both are one in a "coincidence of opposites."

The concern with transcendence is rooted in neo-Platonic philosophy. In the Great Awakening of the West, the nature of mystics like Francis of Assisi found their source of meaning by admiring the flowers and stars. The great Anselm advised that one could come to discover God by examining a grain of sand. Bernard of Clairvaux, in the 13th century, exhorted pilgrims to leave the travels of the road and to journey inward in their heart if they were to find what they were seeking; and this long before Freud and the couch.

What's to make of this whole issue? As Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and social critic kidded a '60s humanist who was advocating that people "be themselves," Merton said that he reserved the right to be whoever he wanted to be and, that there was little chance of being anyone else besides ourself, anyway!

JEROME A. TRAVERS, PH.D.

My son Jonathan will be 3 years old this coming May. If, prior to his conception, he existed in some other dimension, I was not at all able to make contact with him. In 1968 my father died. Since his death, I have not, as far as I know, had communion with him. I don't know from what realm my son came and to what state my father went. I can and do conceptualize those two entities that have been named birth and death and that sometimes marvelous space in between.

In simple—some might say simplistic—metaphorical terms, but in a way my feeble brain can accommodate, life may be thought of as a bus stop. We were, without our consent, brought to it, and in most instances shall, again without choice, be taken from it. We don't know where we came from, we don't know where we are going, and we don't know how long we're going to be here.

What we do know or think we know or at the very least, know better than the therebefore and the hereafter, is this funny thing called life.

I believe that what we do at the bus stop of life, while waiting to be transported to our next destination, is, within limits, up to us.

Certain individuals pass time at the bus stop praying to the big dispatcher in the sky to stay a premature departure; some flagellate themselves as a down payment for a better time to come at the next stop; while others bow down to graven images because everybody else does.

But as for me, I've decided to focus on this stop and have ceased speculating on matters far beyond my puny grasp. As a result I've given myself far fewer headaches and I've even been able to fix up the place a bit. You wouldn't believe how ignorant some people are in the way they treat it and the others here with us. You'd think they'd know better. After all, this may be the only stop there is, mayn't it?

DOV VINOGRAD, PH.D.

Psychotherapists for whom spiritual growth is the foundation for psychological growth have as their greatest challenge to integrate the two. Such integration occurs as we support and foster the removal of the blocks to the development of a self—unencumbered by unconscious imprisoning agents such as repression and projection; at the same time recognizing that such removal is the developmental preparation for transcending this self, remembering the Self that is our true identity as children of God. The psychotherapist's specific challenge is to differentiate between these two stages; for example, not to confuse true ego-transcendence with regression, psychotic withdrawal, and fear of living in the social world. One can commit both "Type I" and "Type II" errors: reinforcing decompensation by mistaking its fearful expression for spirituality; or retarding spiritual growth by a psychological labeling that automatically associates spiritual experience with illusion. *Our* wisdom is hardly adequate for such discernment, but the Wisdom of God is. We as therapists thus must be as free as possible from our own self-importance to let this Wisdom speak through us. The integration of Heaven's Wisdom with our therapeutic skills transforms our office into a temple, where psychotherapy becomes an altar where two have truly come together in the Name of God.

KEN WAPNICK, PH.D.

I'm very humble about accepting your offer to evaluate my own psychotherapy. I'm not sure that that's possible. I do think that one of the secrets of my own living professionally has been my never having been captured in loyalty to any school and never having spent enough time in the camp of any mentor to buy any theory. So I have really lived the first 30 years of my 45 in a largely unknowing state of chaos including the chaos of my own personal psychotherapy. I am sure that one of the early decisions, quite deliberate ones, to give up religion as such where I had been deeply indoctrinated by my family and my first 18 years of church-going has carried over so that somewhere in my insides the spirituality of my family scene and of my church community has always been an understructure resulting in the gradual evolution of a belief in the spirit of a human contact that could be called "we-ness" or "morale" or "empathy" or "interpersonal resonance" or "vibes," but which is in effect some kind of field of force or energy that I suspect understructures any effective healing process no matter the so-called theoretical understructure, because I think the mind of the psychotherapist probably is useless if his affect isn't in it—pure, not short-circuited or long-circuited through a theoretical structure or thinking that is not going to be much help.

CARL A. WHITAKER, M.D.



Your question about the integration of spirituality and psychotherapy intrigues me. An unreflecting "yes" or "no" would be easy but unchallenging.

Her son hanged himself on his graduation day. "Life is absurd and without meaning; I want to kill myself." "Yes, it sure can be," I say. "For many years I've been staring into a black emptiness. At first I thought I'd get through it and find the light. Then I thought my eyes would grow accustomed to the dark and I'd see. Now I know that the darkness is the light, that my task here is not one of knowing or seeing, but just being." Two years later, thanks to whomever, she's working with hospice patients, helping them not be afraid of the dark.

Some may question the therapy, others the spirituality. You may question the integration. I don't question the life I feel in myself and my patients.

ROBERT J. WILLIS, PH.D.