

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

