

# THErapy AND SPIRITUALITY

## *Transpersonal; Spiritual; Sacred*

*Caroline Born*

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I've been wondering whether 'transpersonal' isn't just a more acceptable word for 'spiritual', in the same way that 'my inner child' is more acceptable than 'my little girl'. 'Trans' means 'beyond, across or through', yet we don't, when we say 'transpersonal', say where or what it is that we want to go to beyond the personal. Is this, I wonder, a reflection of an embarrassment about naming that thing or place? We live in a climate of attitude that reckons any dealings with the spiritual runs a high risk of being, or being seen as, mere New Age fakery.

I think it may be very simple to be sacred, and that's hard to accept: just to be able 'to kneel down in awe' as Rilke puts it. If we do this, or name things directly and precisely, it reveals us and so make us vulnerable. 'Spiritual' is specific. Chambers and Oxford say it means 'holy, divine, inspired, and relating to the soul'. 'Spiritual' doesn't sound as clever as 'transpersonal'; being clever is being in the know, and so more grown up. But what is growing up?

I grew up — out of my heart and into



my head, so that my cleverness and my feelings got separated, and at times I even sold my cleverness to buy some love. My heart could no longer be my guide, and I cut it up and put it under my books because it was the only way I knew to get through. If we use our heads alone to try to reach that place that is called holy and divine, we won't. Our intellect is perilous to us when we use it as a defence.

Maybe the embarrassment around transpersonal is simply a habit that we haven't reflected on, have perhaps borrowed from someone else or from the cultural mood. Embarrassment, and then

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repression. I always thought it was my shadow I repressed the most, until my partner suggested I might be repressing the sublime (funny, I almost wrote 'suppressing'. I wonder if I ever suppress the sublime like I suppress giggles?) My answer was 'yes', and what a strangely enjoyable discovery it was, though then I felt the poignant sadness of having denied something so essential. So essential. I want to make an assumption: I think everybody has some relationship with the divine, whether little or large, embodied or not, (I mean being in contact; friendship with your body).

Now God . . . Oh god! She said that word, and its male, and patriarchal too. Of course, there is 'Goddess'. The Goddess, especially for women, whether seen as metaphor, or the earth, or something else again, can often offer the deepest meaning of divinity and provides a way to give power and healing to the feminine. A greatly needed divine female role model. Actually I think we have bigger taboos about God than about Her, because he's seen as christian. But does He have to be? I want to have the freedom to call it/her/him 'God' sometimes without him having to be Christ's dad.

Getting angry with God brings the shadow into the picture and makes a more real relationship. When I was only on my best behaviour with Her/Him, I was following pre-set rules of relationship, and made no discoveries. Recently the divine has felt easier for me. When I repress the sublime, enthusiasm goes under too. I mean that particular kind of heartfelt enthusiasm that is somehow both celebratory and tender. I've always been touched by the story of an Indian

saint called Lalleshwari who chucked it all in and roamed the country in rags chanting God's name in a state of bliss and not caring a toss what people thought. She seemed to have sorted both repressions out, of enthusiasm and of the sublime.

So I've been growing down as fast as I can, into my body — which after all, is all I am. Yes there are some energy fields about us, but if we fly off into the etheric before we arrive in good contact with our bodies, we miss out on a lot. It is often uninspiring arriving in our bodies, especially to the addicted seekers of peace. It can be terrifying, painful, or even boring, which is why it doesn't look at all spiritual. Although we have to release something in order to make contact with the body, we often make a U-turn back to the security of a mentally conceived God. Analytical psychotherapists in particular tend to view work with the body as only belonging to the pre-personal, primitive state. This de-sacralises the body, just as christianity has done, and removes it from the possibility of being a holy channel, expression, and means of transformation, to a naive or sinful part of ourselves.

For me, the body is essential to the transpersonal journey to God. I met mine one day some twenty years after my birth, soon after I started dancing as a way of life, and I wrote this to it: 'We met recently on more equal terms. We always hung around together, but I made all the decisions and never thought of asking you. I never had much confidence in you when we went out; I always wanted us to make an impression, and you always let me down in some way. I got impatient

with your childish demands, and tried to educate you. You would get irritable and sulk, and throw me completely with your unpredictability. Finally I've begun to listen to you. I realize how much there is to learn from you. As you get stronger I can appreciate your wisdom, your imagination and your memories. There is some communication going on at last.'

Since then I've worked as a movement teacher and movement therapist, because I discovered movement could express my being in a way nothing else can, and I love working with this potential in others. Movement is a door through which you can contact your ex-

perience. Trying to communicate this in words is hard: the door is only discovered when you move. This involves a surrender, a kind of leap, as you cannot predict with your mind when you really allow the energy in your body to move. But if you express your need and your energy through movement you can heal and transform yourself. You feel pleasure and joy in the relief of moving freely again — just walking, stopping or breathing, allowing the body to move like a child, to take space, to speak with a gesture. This can take you beyond the everyday — or more deeply into the everyday, the present moment — and this is sacred.

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## ***Ritual and Transformation***

*Alex Wildwood*

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*The soul might be cared for better through our developing a deep life of ritual rather than through many years of counselling for personal behaviour and relationships. We might even have a better time of it in such soul matters as love and emotion if we had more ritual in our lives and less psychological adjustment.*

Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*

Ritual is arguably one of the most distinctive features of human-being, from early human funeral arrangements of bone and pigment to the rituals of present-day hospital obstetricians. Yet today most of us suffer from ritual boredom, mainly because current religious rituals fail to engage the social, political and ecological reality of our times.

I work with ritual as a means of personal and collective transformation; I've used it as an extension of the Reichian work I do with individual clients. Through body-based therapy and ritual a person works outwards from an embodied sense of themselves to an increasing awareness of their spirituality. Ritual is inherently practical: it is an activity

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