

The Spiritual within Psychotherapy

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I have never questioned whether it was appropriate for me to deal with spiritual matters. I was trained at the Karuna Institute as a core process psychotherapist and I am beginning my third year of practice. I think that because of this training, and because I have always held the spiritual as vital, I am certain that the psychological and the spiritual are intertwined.

I have seen that where the therapist has no spiritual perspective the client can be seen as an object and a problem which needs fixing. I have experienced this as both harmful and belittling. The 'psychospiritual' provides a way in which both therapist and client can meet, with an honouring of each other rather than a power struggle. I believe that because a lot of therapy is about healing the pain we have from birth and childhood, and that pain was often about not having our rights respected, power needs to be repeatedly given to the client. It is a bit like child-rearing itself; if we decide that we as parents know best what our children need, we will without a doubt harm them most of the time.

I think that the psychospiritual is dif-



ficult for western people, who focus on the production of tears, anger, catharsis rather than a gentle awareness of the client's reality. The rational bias of the west also means it can be difficult to make room for the spiritual within therapy. I think the unity of the psychological and the spiritual require the therapist to have two intentions: that of being with the client's pain or vulnerability or joy as much as possible, encouraging the client's tolerance, and that of being tolerant of their own experience also. This is not a rational process.

I enjoy the learning I do as a result of participating in this 'joint awareness' practice. My vulnerability teaches me

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what is happening for me and, due to my awareness of this vulnerability, sometimes it changes in seconds to strength. Or, if I am aware of fear or anger, and remain aware of it, I can watch it flower into a feeling of my heart opening. Sometimes these things are useful to share with clients; always they tell me what is going on for me, which I must know in order to be available for clients. For me, therapy is very humbling: a place where I am honoured to observe the power and vulnerability of another.

When I work, I often begin with five minutes meditation shared with the client — if they find it useful. This is usually guided by me: I just encourage their awareness of their breath and of what is happening within themselves. Clients say that they find this very relaxing and that they feel easier being in the room afterwards. I see this kind of time with oneself as essential to mental health and happiness, and I think it opens a door to the spiritual realm for people who sometimes have had no awareness of it.

I encourage many of my clients to meditate or sustain some kind of awareness practice. If they can do this, their progress is much faster. I also run a meditation group which a few of my clients attend. This is basically a Vipassana meditation practice, noting the rise and fall of the breath or any other mind-body phenomena which come into awareness. It has the effect on a person that, while processes occur in one's mind or body, one has awareness of these processes. This lessens one's identification with mind and body. Perspective is then gained on the impermanent nature of thoughts,

emotions, or physical pain and the whole of the personality is no longer identified with them and reactive to them.

I would not presume to say that meditation and therapy are the same, but for me they are both awareness practices. One is practised alone and one in relationship. I want psychotherapy to encourage me to explore the world I have within myself. To do that I need to close my eyes — to sustain contact with whatever is happening within me. I cannot have such contact with myself with my eyes open. I notice that my clients cannot either. Generally, without my encouragement, they would just not have this kind of contact with themselves. Without it, it takes much longer to heal.

Core process psychotherapy does not focus so much on the relationship unless that is particularly important at certain points in therapy. I find this important because another person's patterns are not confused with mine — I do not like the clinical distance of the analyst either. I think this can be quite harmful. It seems an extension of leaving the baby in the cot to scream. The baby does learn to accept her isolation, but she may also live her life knowing within herself that people are not there for her.

Awareness of the psychospiritual is important for the therapist so that therapy brings not disintegration, but a sense of reality and a new perspective. The psychospiritual provides a way to become aware of oneself as more than just a personality. It is a place where gentle awareness makes room for freedom. For if one is not trapped in history, much more is possible.