

We have not yet reached a complete model of transpersonal supervision, but some of these ideas may provide a few building blocks. I would be most interested

to hear from readers who have experienced transpersonal supervision, for example in psychosynthesis, or who practise it themselves.

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## Further Reading

Michael Carroll, 'Counselling Supervision: The British Context', in *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, Vol 1, No 4, 1988

Patrick Casement, *On Learning from the Patient*, Routledge, 1986

Petruska Clarkson, 'A Multiplicity of Therapeutic Relationships', in *On Psychotherapy*, ed Petruska Clarkson, Whurr Publishers, 1993

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, Rider, 1992

Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet, *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, Open University Press, 1989

Brigid Proctor, notes from workshop on *MSC Course in Counselling for Trainers and Supervisors*, Bristol University, 1993

Bonnie Rabin and Robert Walker, 'A Contemplative Approach to Clinical Supervision', in *Journal of Contemplative Psychotherapy* Vol IV, 1987, The Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado

Diane Shainberg, 'Teaching Therapists How to Be With Their Clients', in *Awakening the Heart*, Ed John Welwood, New Science Library, 1983

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# The Transpersonal and The Psychospiritual

Thomas Greaves

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## Trusting the Process

Transpersonal models provide us with frames of reference in which depth experiences, particularly those associated with spiritual growth, can be interpreted. They operate on the boundary where the empirical ground of experience and the unconscious mystery of spirit meet, help-

ing to demystify and give shape to the ebbs and flows between conscious and unconscious worlds. But all psychological theories are limited by their fixed literal forms and cannot reflect the ever changing flow of process; they are individual frames of a continuous film, islands in a sea of flux. This is like our relationships with clients that flow like a river, down which we are

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carried through unexplored terrain; every now and then we see something that looks familiar, a form, which helps us gather a sense of where we are and the kind of place it has taken us to. From these sightings we build pictures using the theories psychology supplies to us, but we have no way of knowing their accuracy and the danger is that by clinging to these images we sabotage the open-minded attitude needed to be fully present in the moment-to-moment flux of process. Therapeutic presence calls for enough trust and faith to let go of our fixed attitudes and keep a position of 'don't know'. Even in the midst of confusion when all attempts to understand and theorise fail we 'trust the process'. We cannot trust our theorising but we can trust our heart to be in relationship.

In this most important sense psychotherapy goes beyond personality forms and into the mystery of relationship as a process of unified contact. The depth of faith and trust needed to enter fully into unified contact is cultivated by practices which help us enter the mystery of relationship by releasing ourselves from all dependence upon conceptual positions, and giving ourselves to the moment. Theorising is of no use here; we are in territory more familiar to the spiritual traditions whose practices open us to faith in the moment, and linking these practices with psychological understanding offers an approach to therapy that is psychospiritual, integrating mind, body and spirit in a here-and-now practice.

### *Form is Void and Void is Form*

Psychology and spirituality share their ground of discovery — inner life. Both re-

quire a turning inwards for their illumination. However, the fundamental difference between psychology and spirituality is that the former strives to know, whilst the latter strives towards the faith to unknow. This is a crucial difference that could, if we are not careful, get lost in the mistaken notion that transpersonal therapies and spirituality are the same. Transpersonal therapies are informed by a psychology that reaches beyond the personal to understand and contain depth processes without placing them in a material location — what's yours and what's mine — referring them instead to transpersonal space. This approach is part of our struggle to integrate depth experiences by mapping them onto models that give them meaning. This search for psychological understanding informs the personality about experiences on the borderline where personal and collective consciousness meet in imagination, archetype and myth. Transpersonal work can inspire us to open to spirituality but is not of itself spiritual any more than are other theories dealing with links between conscious and unconscious.

The spiritual, on the other hand, is ungraspable and beyond epistemics, imagination or form, requiring the cultivation of faith for the discovery of emptiness beyond form. It is the discovery of the ultimate emptiness of form which marks spiritual consciousness, a consciousness described in the Zen tradition by the statement 'form is void and void is form'. It would be wrong to interpret emptiness, the void, as a vacuum; this consciousness is empty of self-sense and is the mystery at the heart of spirituality. If we try to capture mystery in forms we

miss the insight and message it offers. When we are faced with the unknown we get uncomfortable because it's beyond our personal control. We are faced with that which transcends our understanding and the personality doesn't like it one bit — it is petrified by it. The ego, particularly of westerners in our time, is built upon a fear of the unknown to such a degree that it greets mystery as an enemy to be conquered by the heroic sword of reason. If, in the world of psychology, an experience cannot be captured in the nets of theory it is beyond its field of reference. Psychology is empirical and ends at mystery, and yet the mystery in itself yields a crucial insight about the nature of psyche which is of the utmost importance to psychotherapy: the psyche in its entirety is relative, always changing, and its forms are empty.

### *The Emptiness of Self-Sense*

Emptiness is the psychic death of self-sense. Self-sense is maintained by a conditioned image of how things are which constantly reduces experiences to its own terms in order to control them, part of which is the struggle to tie experience into theoretical frames and 'understand' them. Letting go of self-sense is not something 'I' can do; the ego cannot commit what it sees as psychic suicide and will resist with all the defences it can muster. This brings about the suppression of psychic death by clinging to forms of any kind, and is especially visible in the frantic activities of the intellect which has to find theoretical order everywhere in case chaos squirts into consciousness and threatens its illusion of safety in order. But until the psyche opens up to psychic death it is filled with unconscious fear which keeps us trapped in old

egoic habits, like using subtle methods to deceive us into believing that we really have freed ourselves from the grip of the past. Letting go is an act of faith. It is surrender to the empty moment from which forms arise and into which they disappear. The cultivation of this faith is spiritual growth.

The forms of psycho-logic are a fundamental part of therapeutic work but ultimately there is nothing in them to hold onto. They are products of the moment, offering us passing perspectives of experiences which, if we try to preserve them, become blocks and blinkers to the next moment. Working in the moment requires letting go moment-to-moment, and the skills which enable us to do this have been developed by the spiritual traditions down the ages. Spirituality is practised rather than theorised about, helping the therapist trust the process and open to the boundless, unconditional space where unifying contact in relationship can happen. This brings about an attitude of the heart which says 'I don't know, but it's OK that I don't know'.

It's OK not to know what's going on in relationship so long as we remain unconditionally aware moment-to-moment. The difference between knowledge and unconditional awareness is that the former is epistemic and aggregates conditioning, whilst the latter is 'consciousness-of' that carries no implications beyond the report of experience in the moment. Unconditional awareness is cultivated by letting go as opposed to coming to know. This distinction picks up the fundamental difference between eastern and western approaches to suffering and well-being. The eastern spiritual traditions are

inspired to let go into the mystery knowing that it is the source of divine love and unity which heals and humanises the heart. The western psyche resists mystery and trusts analysis and 'understanding' to deliver liberation. The middle way between these positions is where psycho-spiritual therapies are working.

### *Beyond Separation and Individuality*

Psychotherapeutic work can open us to powerful experiences which dissolve all sense of separateness and bring us the gift of unity and belonging — in my experience the most valuable healing experience of all. When we analyse and separate these experiences of unity into parts there is a great danger of destroying their spiritual meaning which points beyond their form into formless unity. Only by letting go of these positions can we open to their spiritual message. Approaching experience solely from a dialectical standpoint blinds us to the whole. One of the more lamentable consequences of the west's preoccupation with separation and analysis is its consequent loss of the holistic vision which can serve to unite the cosmological, ethical and psychological in a spirituality that inspires the imagination and gives individuals a sense of unity with all creation.

This vision awakens us to our separate self-sense, personal identity, as an arising of a form that we identify with and cling to as 'me', this is what 'I' know, 'my' truth. But these forms are but reflections mirrored in experience as cycles of fragmentation returning to empty unity. Personal identity, when based upon illusions of permanent forms, generates

suffering because all forms are impermanent and are the passing contents of psychological processes. Permanence lies beyond the passing forms, and being aware of this helps us see the way out of suffering as unity in emptiness. Our self-sense is our felt experience of individuality and character which, though it appears to us temporally fixed, is transforming moment-to-moment. Working to open our awareness of this helps create space for these transformations to expand our conscious freedom to live in the moment. The therapeutic work we undertake using transpersonal models is personality work that integrates and clarifies our individuality and self-sense, but cannot bring unity beyond the inherent separation that individuality entails.

This has important implications for our work in relationship with clients and the suffering of separation which requires the elixir of unity. It is spiritual awareness of unity beyond form that helps us avoid identifying with our separate self-sense and getting stuck in its images, especially those that mushroom from early conditioning. Seeing ourselves as purely separate gives rise to fragmented relationships where two persons never meet; if they do there must be a third space into which they both link. This is the space that transpersonal theory postulates as a soul ground in which collective experience aggregates. It is thus an empirical ground of forms. Spiritual consciousness is beyond the empirical ground where relationship is the sacred vessel in which individuals dissolve into unity beyond form and separation. This unity is the absolute mystery in which individuals are not linked because there is no separation,

no separate experiences and so nothing to theorise about.

## *Relationship as the Universal Heart*

Spiritual consciousness opens into the mystery of relationship that is known only to the heart, where we come to the awareness that ultimately our personal experience is a facet of universal experience, and in particular that the suffering we experience personally is an expression of universal suffering. Although we cannot feel the suffering of others until we can feel our own, spiritual consciousness helps us recognise that suffering is never just personal but is the root and inspiration of the heart's development towards responsibility for ourselves and all creation. Herein lies the ground of compassion. When we see our suffering as just personal then *that* is a great part of the problem and the remedy is to open the heart. From this point of view psychotherapeutic healing is about establishing relationships that go beyond separateness, which can only happen when we are able to let go of the positions and forms by which we navigate the river of relationship and stay unconditionally open to the unified, empty moment. Letting go of the struggle to know where we are is an act of faith that brings open-hearted relationship where there are two persons but one heart.

We are faced with the paradoxical notion of 'separation in relationship' which cannot be grasped literally. Its reality becomes clear as we encounter the divine both as unity and individuated, with its empty centre everywhere and boundary nowhere. We are all at once both in rela-

tionship with the divine and identical with it, just as we are all both individual human beings and one with humankind simultaneously. These experiences point beyond themselves to the transcendent which cannot be interpreted literally, and although psychology has some invaluable insights about the transpersonal it has never been possible to talk of the transcendent — as Occam first made clear in the fourteenth century. The aspirations of transpersonal psychology, indeed any psychology, are neither transcendent nor spiritual but are efforts to inform the personality and bring depth and meaning to experience. This activity is always about personality reinforcement rather than the cultivation of spiritual consciousness. However, spiritual consciousness can be brought into the therapeutic setting not as experiences mapped onto transpersonal models, but as the empty void that relativises all experience and the entire psyche — transpersonal concepts included. Going beyond the personal means going beyond ego and personality stuff, therefore beyond all and every conceptual handhold and into emptiness. Silence is the way; words get in the way.

## *The Key to the Heart's Door*

Psychospiritual work proceeds from the vision that psyche arises from and folds back into the mystical emptiness of spirit in a birth-death cycle. This approach includes the clarification of depth processes, which is the essence of transpersonal work, and goes further in that it recognises that the psychic death of separate self-sense is an ever-present suffering which is intrinsic to the psyche itself. This means we must look beyond psyche to see

the significance of suffering and we can't do this with the mind; this is the heart-ground which is reached by letting go of mental forms. By cultivating practices which help let go of forms we work towards experiencing the rapture of divine love which of itself transforms suffering for its own sake. This releases us by merging in at-one-ment with the divine to bring illumination, healing and joyfulness. The road of spiritual growth can be helped by transpersonal work, joining integrative growth-work with a spiritual quest, so long as there is no confusion about their respective domains.

The psychospiritual approach addresses both the needs of the western ego and the spiritual heart simultaneously. Opening our heart requires clarity and space around our personal experiences,

and the process of 'coming to know' ourselves with the help of psychological models is the way forward here. At the same time we must avoid becoming stuck in theoretical positions in relation to both our own self-sense' and the islands of understanding we meet in relationship with clients, and live with 'don't know'. We are meeting another paradox here because developing a healthy self-sense with clear boundaries grounds individuality and helps cultivate the strength to let go into emptiness. There's no answer to this, nothing to say! We allow all experience an equal place in the process — equanimity; empty psyche into spirit beyond the fragmentation of experience — love; and recognise that we are both individuals and at one with each other in the heart — compassion. What a joy!

