

Psychospiritual Psychology and Psychotherapy

Joan Evans

In response to the question as to how psychospiritual psychotherapy differs from its closest relatives, especially from transpersonal psychotherapy, I would say that with transpersonal psychology the distinction is not, in my view, a polarised one, but an attempt to add to the debate and move it on. The term has risen from within the transpersonal perspective and proposes levels which are not as yet clearly defined or 'mapped' — namely Spirit and Will. As David Jones quotes from Anthony Sutich, 'transpersonal psychology is yet in its infancy'; even more so is psychospiritual psychology. At the same time, the term is not new to us. Assagioli himself in a series of lectures in Italy in 1966 used it in a comparative study of some of the fields, particularly Jungian, akin to psychosynthesis. There he talked about dimensions of consciousness and the dynamics of the psychophysical, the psychological and the psychospiritual.

In transpersonal psychology there is a well defined personal and collective unconscious, and psychospiritual psychology adds the distinction of a 'spiritual consciousness' — that of the Self. A psychospiritual psychology regards the Self as a reality, a living entity, direct and certain knowledge or awareness of which can be had. It recognises that the Self is a

spiritual being imbued with love which can be present to us in both its immanent and its transcendent state. It mediates the interface between psyche and spirit and attempts to reconcile two fundamental experiences: the way in which we experience ourselves in our 'wholeness' — the way of spirit; and the way in which we experience our separateness — the way of psyche or soul, that aspect of Self which suffers separation.

Unlike theories which consider the Self as a totality of the psyche, psychosynthesis, as a psychospiritual psychology, points to a Self which is distinct, but not separate, from any contents of the psyche. In an article on Jung and psychosynthesis Assagioli says, 'For Jung the Self is an intermediate point in which the conscious and the unconscious meet'. He considers the Self an 'archetypal figure' and states: 'From the intellectual point of view, the Self is none other than a psychological concept, a construction aimed at expressing essence, imperceptible and inconceivable as such, because it surpasses our comprehension.' And later he says: 'The idea of the Self is in itself a transcendent postulate justifiable solely from the psychological point of view and without possibility of scientific proof.'

It is important to add that a psychos-

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piritual psychology is neutral in relation to an individual's spiritual journey. It recognises and has as a context that the individual as a spiritual being is on a spiritual journey, and has no 'religious' biases or leanings in relation to that path. Psychologically, the individual engages in the resistances to that path. A psychospiritual psychology sees that spirit manifesting has a psychological life and that Self identification is a manifestation of spirit. We work to facilitate the discovery and development of the will which is the Self in action.

Central to the thesis on a psychospiritual perspective is the relationship between the I and the Self. There is a marked distinction between consciousness, however transcendent, and the freedom to act in relation to just such a consciousness. The purpose of the process of individuation then has meaning beyond simply the realisation of Self. 'I am that I am' shifts the level of causality and brings with it an imperative to act in relation to that which one knows, making the 'I' an effective servant of the Self as it, at its own level, realises an ethical consciousness. A quest for healing or 'wholeness' therefore can be seen as a sacred quest towards becoming a moral being.

We contribute as well, I believe, to the debate around 'psychological health'. Traditionally, a breakdown in health and well-being is defined from a societal point of view as psychopathology. We are interested in defining a psychospiritual pathology which provides a context for looking at three different levels of health; that of the ego, the 'I' and the Self. Loss,

alienation and repression are seen from the perspective of deviation from the numinous, and therapy engages with resacralising the psychological ground. We would relate to the theoretical perspectives and methodologies of psychoanalysis in looking at the 'health' of the ego; to those of the humanistic and existential psychologists in relation to the 'I'; and those of the transpersonal psychologists, Jung and psychosynthesis in relation to the Self.

To be enabled to act in relation to the Self requires the freeing of the will at every level. To be empowered to act means recognising the distinctions between conscience and superego, healthy and unhealthy narcissism, and between neurotic and existential guilt and shame. This will ultimately lead to the emergence of a 'moral being' free to act in relation to the wider environment, thus promoting guided change in service of the psychospiritual.

Knowing is the knowledge of the heart rather than of the mind, and a psychospiritual psychotherapy examines therapeutic interventions as a means of speaking to the client's unconscious, rather than of giving them insight, analysis or explanation. It looks at the deeper meaning for therapy within a psychospiritual context, where there is an imperative towards a morality beyond repair and individuation. I firmly believe that unless psychotherapy takes on such issues as morality and responsibility for the 'more than the individual', I mean beyond narcissism, then it fails in its promise to society.