

# Thresholds

Counselling with spirit

April 2021

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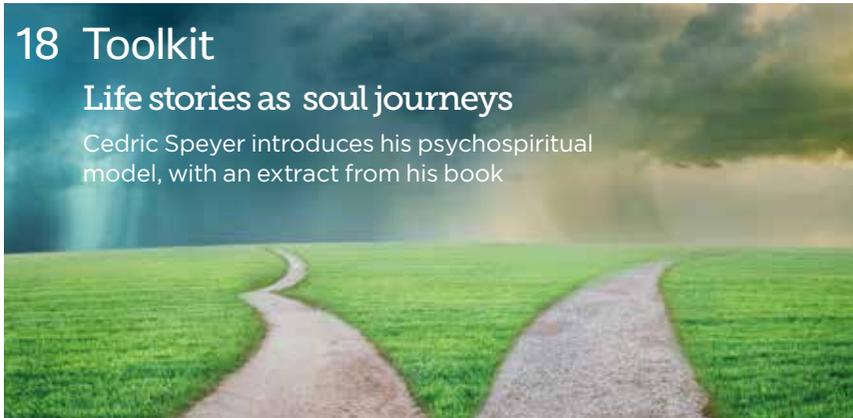
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*‘There is one particular dexterity that I think a creative practice can help us develop, in a way that we may then transfer into our therapeutic work. I am referring to wise risk-taking. I am giving this skill singular attention because I am not convinced that we talk sufficiently about the importance of risk taking\* in therapy.’*

– Steve Page  
Read the full article on p28



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*Thresholds* is the quarterly journal for members of BACP Spirituality. It provides insight into and discussion of key issues facing those involved or interested in spirituality, belief and pastoral care in counselling and psychotherapy.

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BACP Spirituality enquiries

For divisional enquiries, email spirituality@bacp.co.uk

# Does spirituality have a PR problem?

Over the winter, I started taking a picture of a favourite tree at dawn every day. This was partly inspired by a character who does this (albeit monthly) in the gorgeously tree-centric novel, *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers.<sup>1</sup>

This exercise accentuated the elegant, bare bones of the ash tree and brought an awareness that however stoically its silhouette stands against the sky, the tree, and everything around it, is always evolving.

I'd like to claim that the meditative art project was the inspiration behind the restructure that you'll start to notice in this issue and, who knows, perhaps it was. I certainly intended to create more of a sense that each new issue has a familiar backdrop.

Our regulars will still be here: the Chair's message, Alistair Ross's *Real-world spirituality* and a themed focus each issue. You'll also find some new writers. José Luis Leal, who wrote about endings in the last issue, is going to explore the shadow side of spirituality in a new column called *Spiritually ambivalent therapist*. We are also developing a regular space for students to reflect upon spirituality in training. This will be an interactive page, and it would be great to build a panel of lecturers and supervisors who would like to offer reflections. Please do get in touch if you'd like to be involved.

There is also a new section called *Toolkit*, which I hope will have a CPD feel. I'd like to offer as many practice-based

resources as possible to take into the counselling room. Generally, I'm looking to bring people to the fore, so that we can get to know, learn from, and connect with, each other. I'll leave some surprises for you to discover as you unwrap.

Also look out for the other new *Thresholds* online features that are publicised throughout the journal, including our first *Ten minutes* with the author blog, in which Mike Moss answers questions about his work.

I am often wide eyed at the parallels that run through separate articles as I start to collate them. This time, upon looking at the whole issue, I realised that in one article, spirituality is referred to as the 'S-word'; and in another, faith is referred to as the 'F-word'. It got me wondering, and I have to say, sadly, not for the first time, whether spirituality might have a bit of a PR problem.

If it does, what can we do about it? It's a big question and it would be great to hear your thoughts about this.

As always, I also welcome your views about the journal and your article ideas.



Reference

<sup>1</sup>Powers R. *The overstory*. London: William Heinemann; 2018.

# Whispers of hope

**Maureen Slattery-Marsh** is Chair of BACP Spirituality.  
To contact Maureen, please email [sonas@slatterymarsh.com](mailto:sonas@slatterymarsh.com)



Perhaps it was facing a new decade that sparked a desire to revisit the place of hope in my life and work? Or maybe it was a feeling of being under-resourced in hope, having journeyed through daunting personal and societal challenges over the last 12 months? Or a spiritual prompting, having woken from a dream with the melody of the gospel song, *Whispering hope*,<sup>1</sup> echoing in my soul? Whatever the impetus, the pursuit began.

My perspective on hope has been influenced by Gabriel Marcel's tenet that 'Hope is nothing but the active struggle against despair'.<sup>2</sup> I would like to suggest to Marcel that he could also include another perspective: hope is an active struggle *with* despair. My life and experiences with clients have often borne witness to the experience of hope in hibernation and hopelessness holding sway. At such times, we risk entering the cave of despair to kiss the dark and await the whisper of hope and promise of a better day.

**Hope sits between faith and love. It is both a verb and a noun – growing, rising, energising – and is most often recognised in how it moves and uplifts us**

In researching the theme of hope, I recalled a talk given by Dr John Prysor-Jones at BACP Spirituality's Working with Soul conference in Cardiff in 2017.<sup>3</sup> His exploration of the nature and characteristics of hope proved helpful at the time, and revisiting them led to further insights. Hope seems to be a universal phenomenon, an expression of a spiritual need, which Marcel describes

as being '...for the soul what breathing is for the living organism'.<sup>4</sup> Hope sits between faith and love. It is both a verb and a noun – growing, rising, energising – and is most often recognised in how it moves and uplifts us. In a recent article, Dr Rachel Clarke, author of *Breathtaking: inside the NHS in a time of pandemic*,<sup>5</sup> describes movingly how hope emerges in her active struggle with despair in the hospital where she works:

'My heart lifts. I feel hope flicker. For however bleak the times, however grim our prospects seem, human kindness finds a shape and form: it will not be locked down. All across the hospital, you see it. In the tiny crocheted crimson hearts, made by locals for patients and delivered in their scores so that no one feels alone. In the piles of donated pizzas, devoured at night by ravenous staff. In the homemade scrubs, whipped up by an unstoppable army of self-isolating grandmothers whose choice in fabrics is fearlessly floral. In the nurses and carers and porters and cleaners who keep on, despite everything, smiling. I may be tired and angry and sometimes mad with grief, but every single day at work, I see more kindness, more sweetness, more compassion, more courage, more resilience, more steel, more diamond-plated love than you could ever, ever imagine. And this means more and lasts more than anything else, and it cannot be stolen by Covid.'<sup>6</sup>

By doing the little things well, we cultivate habits of hope and connect to the wider community of copers and hoppers who show solidarity with the shaken and face down despair. Heroes and heroines of hope can turn up in unexpected ways and places and impart a gift. I had this experience during a recent creative, quiet day when I encountered a new hero of hope in the artist Henri Matisse. In his 84 years, he endured long periods of illness, personal setbacks and family tragedy. Out of these times of confinement,

disappointment and despair, the virtues of patience, perseverance and courage were forged, along with new life directions and spurts of great creativity. The crowning achievement of his artistic life was the Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence, France, which he completed in the final years of his life. Even entering this sacred space virtually, I found myself enveloped by the light play of hope. It dazzled forth from the tree of life window onto the stick-like figures of suffering. Each colour whispered gently and powerfully that hope can triumph over despair.<sup>7</sup> A visit to Vence has now been added to my bucket list.

Hope is whispering too through the BACP Spirituality division, with the launch of our student spirituality network group in February and new Executive members joining the team in April. Our network groups continue to meet regularly on Zoom and are well attended. Members report that they are both supportive and inspiring. If you haven't been to one yet, or for a while, then why not consider coming along? See: [www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-divisions/bacp-spirituality/events/for-further-information](http://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-divisions/bacp-spirituality/events/for-further-information).

What whispers of hope have you been hearing and responding to in your life or in your work with clients? We'd love to hear about them. Please do get in touch with me, or with Amy McCormack, our editor, if you'd like to share.

*Maureen*

#### References

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FcFicpeyZA> (accessed 11 February 2021).
- <sup>2</sup> Marcel G. *The Philosophy of existentialism*. New Jersey: Citadel Press; 1956.
- <sup>3</sup> Prysor-Jones J. Exploring hope: an experience of soul in counselling. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/cpd/cpd-hub/spirituality/hope-an-experience-of-soul/> (accessed 11 February 2020).
- <sup>4</sup> Marcel G. *Homo viator: introduction to the metaphysics of hope*. Indiana: St Augustines Press; 2010.
- <sup>5</sup> Clarke R. *Breathtaking: inside the NHS in a time of pandemic*. London: Little, Brown; 2021.
- <sup>6</sup> Clarke R. 'I've been called Satan': Dr Rachel Clarke on facing abuse in the Covid crisis. *The Guardian* 2021; 6 February. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/feb/06/ive-been-called-satan-dr-rachel-clarke-on-facing-abuse-in-the-covid-crisis> (accessed 11 February 2020).
- <sup>7</sup> Matisse Chapelle du Rosaire. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsDh5WdZLEo> (accessed 8 February 2021).



# Inside view

with **Jeremy Bacon, BACP's third-sector lead**



**In each issue, we meet a BACP staff member and find out more about their role**

## Could you tell us a little more about what you do

BACP's current strategy is built on listening to members, and we know from surveys that one-third of members deliver all or part of their counselling and coaching in third-sector organisations.

BACP's Policy team works to influence decision-makers across the UK, letting them know how important talking therapies are and the impact we make. To do this, we rely on published reports, research evidence and case studies. We can further strengthen our messages by including examples and evidence from counselling services in local communities which are finding innovative ways of meeting need. It's also important that we understand the pressures and challenges that organisations face, and work with them to help them to continue and to grow.

## What does a typical day look like?

One of the great things about this role and the team is that we very rarely have two days which are the same. This week, I've completed and submitted a response to the Welsh Government's National Carers Strategy consultation. This included insights and experiences from The Swansea Carers Centre counselling service. I provided feedback to a BACP member on her presentation about an Age UK counselling service to a Westminster All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting.

I've also been working with colleagues in BACP's Research and Comms teams to identify priority areas for future research and public opinion polling.

How are you building connections with the voluntary and community sector?

There are over 800 organisational members of BACP, of which 736 are local, not-for-profit counselling services. In my previous role in the Policy team, I met with organisations across the UK who worked with older clients, often establishing contact at conferences and Making Connections

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**BACP's Policy team works to influence decision-makers across the UK, letting them know how important talking therapies are and the impact we make**

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events. We'll be making use of our communications with member organisations and building opportunities into the online events. I'm looking forward to being able to meet with services face to face again and bringing people together to share experience, knowledge and learning from the sector.

## How will the work you do with third-sector groups benefit BACP members?

At the most immediate, this work will enable us to share the work being done by BACP members and the organisations that they work for and to recognise its impact and value. In the longer term, we intend to use our collective voice to achieve greater

investment in third-sector counselling provision and increase opportunities for members.

## What do you enjoy most about your role?

Towards the end of 2019, I was fortunate to be invited to the Working with Spirituality event, which was held in Leicester. Spending time with BACP members and listening to individual and collective experience and reflection is a very rich source of inspiration and motivation for our policy work. It's important that, as staff, we keep a sharp sense of the Association's mission and our responsibility to the profession. We understand the potential for members' work to change the lives of individuals and society at large. Conversations and networking with members are vital to our work and without doubt the most enjoyable aspect of working at BACP.

## Will you be working with faith groups in this role? And, if so, what might this involve?

I'm very keen to include as diverse a range of third-sector organisations into my work as possible. Case studies, impact measures, feedback from clients, and organisational stories are all useful in bringing our policy work to life.

If you would like to get in touch with Jeremy to share your organisation's work, you can contact him at:  
[jeremy.bacon@bacp.co.uk](mailto:jeremy.bacon@bacp.co.uk)

# The network

On these pages, we share the key learnings from the monthly network division meetings. They are a great place to meet like-minded practitioners and find out about tools and resources to help you in your work



## Exploring race, religion and belief

### Case studies

BACP has updated Good Practice in Action 101 CRP: *Race, religion and belief within the counselling professions*.

This resource contains six case studies, which are designed to encourage practitioners to reflect upon the assumptions, prejudices and unconscious biases that they may hold.

At the February meeting of the East Midlands Spirituality Network, group co-facilitator Myira Khan introduced the topic of pre-transference and explained that this is something which all therapists are likely to automatically experience before they meet their clients, perhaps based on identifying details or assessment notes.

Myira said: 'It's essential that we challenge our own conscious and unconscious biases, and that we are aware of what we are linking and associating with identity factors of a client, such as their race, ethnicity or faith. Are we unconsciously projecting or assuming someone's faith or ethnicity because of their visible racial identity or perhaps because of the client's name?'

Participants considered how they could become more consciously aware of and acknowledge these assumptions within themselves so that they could then go on to create a therapeutic relationship in which they do not act upon prejudice.

## Students

### Students talk about soul



#### How do we talk about a client's soul in training, CPD and in our practice?

This question was at the heart of discussions that took place between participants at the first student-focused spirituality network meeting in February.

East Midlands Spirituality Network group co-facilitator, Sukhi Sian, who led the discussion, said: 'We asked students to reflect upon how they define spirituality and what space they feel it has within their counselling training.'

The group discussed how separate spirituality can feel from the rest of the learning experience, although it is an integral part of what it means to be human. The group also discussed how to reconcile the spiritual and therapeutic selves in a way that enables authentic practice.

Members of the group offered some suggestions, which included having personal therapy with someone who models working at a soul level, and seeking out like-minded peer groups for support.

### New student group and column

The Spirituality division is now looking to set up an ongoing student network. If you would like to find out more about attending or would be interested in running the group, please contact [thresholds@bacp.co.uk](mailto:thresholds@bacp.co.uk).

*Thresholds* will also launch a new column designed for students and newly qualified practitioners. Students will be invited to consider areas of their learning or practice that have raised questions of a spiritual nature. A panel of practitioners who have been integrating spirituality into their work for some time will offer their own reflections. If you would like to get involved as a student or someone who would like to join the panel, please get in touch at: [thresholds.editorial@bacp.co.uk](mailto:thresholds.editorial@bacp.co.uk)

If you have any further ideas about how BACP Spirituality division can support practitioners in training who are seeking to explore and integrate spirituality into their counselling work, please get in touch.



### BACP Spirituality division will be planning CPD events for the coming year at our next meeting.

Are there any themes that you would particularly like us to explore? Please get in touch and let us know at: [thresholds.editorial@bacp.co.uk](mailto:thresholds.editorial@bacp.co.uk)

### Further reading

Good Practice in Action 101 *Race, religion and belief within the counselling professions* is available at: [www.bacp.co.uk/gpia101](http://www.bacp.co.uk/gpia101)



# Being with grief with Alison Paris



Alison Paris, who is a counsellor working within a bereavement context, talked about 'being with grief' at the latest West Midlands Spirituality Network meeting.

Participants were asked to evoke words, thoughts and feelings about being with grief and to reflect on process models of grief in order to identify connections with the spiritual aspects of bereavement. She invited reflection on the synchronicities between transpersonal and theoretical approaches.

Alison then asked the group to consider how they imagined grief to be. She explained that there is a process of entry to grief before we can fully be with it. She explored Tonkin's model of bereavement reflecting upon how grief is actually experienced and how we can see a way through. She also explored intentionality and the use of presence to deepen interactions.

Alison will be talking about her work in a *Thresholds* online podcast, coming soon.

BACP recently held an online event about working with complex grief. You can watch it on demand here: [www.bacp.co.uk/events/wcg1102-working-with-complex-grief/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/events/wcg1102-working-with-complex-grief/)

## Questions for personal reflection on grief

- How can we look after ourselves when we work with so many people who are experiencing bereavement?
- What about our own grief?
- How do we hold space to look after ourselves when giving so much of ourselves to others?
- How can we ground ourselves compassionately?
- How can we allow extra time for this, given the increased pressures of COVID-19?

## Introducing... Alison Paris

**What made you join the spirituality division?** I see counselling as a spiritual process, and am particularly interested in the relationships between spiritual and therapeutic practice. I offer spiritual accompaniment separately, and while this is different from counselling, there are overlaps in offering a contemplative space in which to be fully present, and open to discernment.

**How do spirituality or faith come into your practice?** I feel the counselling space to be sacred and I do silently ask God, Holy Spirit in my faith tradition, to work through me. Being a person-centred counsellor, the fundamental conditions are a 'way of being' that is also somehow spiritual, as expressed by Carl Rogers and Brian Thorne.

**What does spirituality mean to you?** Spirituality means, for me, the expression of God as being within all. I love the Quaker saying that there is '...that of God in everyone'. I'm a practising Christian and I try to meditate daily - to be still in God's presence, anchored by a sacred word or image.

**What's the best thing about being a counsellor?** I trained on retirement from full-time work in social work

## Using symbols to work with grief

**Research suggests that the most effective starting point is when the client offers a metaphor.** These are very personal and sensitive. Some images that are familiar and often associated with grief, which we might sensitively introduce as part of the therapeutic/pastoral process, are:

- **A waterfall**
- **A ship marooned**
- **A soul boat**
- **A bird** (*The Soul Bird* is a book by Michal Snunit that explores this image)

## Alison's top five books



- 1 *Grief works*, by Julia Samuel
- 2 *Working with grief and loss*, by L Machin
- 3 *This too shall pass: stories of change, crisis and hopeful beginnings*, by Julia Samuel
- 4 *Coping with the impossible: In our own words - parents talk about life after their child has died of cancer*, by L Tonkin
- 5 *The body keeps the score*, by Bessel van der Kolk

education. I had wanted to do this for a long time, and it's a gift and privilege to be able offer counselling in older age. To anyone who feels it's too late, I'd say, it isn't!

**Could you share something that you have learned about life since becoming a therapist.** I've learned the significance of compassion - in everyday life, in counselling and spiritual accompaniment practice.

**Is there a book that has particularly inspired you?** A book I hold dear is *Living with an Open Heart*, by Russell Kolts and Thubten Chodron. This book helped me through a difficult and strange emotional period, on retirement, and also helped me to be open to new ways of doing things.

**Have you got a favourite wellbeing practice?** Chatting to my grandchildren always makes me happy. I'm enlivened by poetry, singing, yoga - oh, and dancing, plus cooking in the kitchen; I'm also fascinated by science fiction.

**Could you describe a place that you really love.** I love Monte Oliveto Monastery in Tuscany. The combination of russet stonework, ancient frescos, sunshine, forests, blue hills in the distance, and supper outside, with wine and conversation - heaven on earth.

# BACP confidential advice line relaunches



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BACP's unique, confidential phone and email service for clients and members of the public has a new name and a new online look. 'Get help with counselling concerns', formerly known as 'Ask Kathleen', offers support for anyone with concerns about therapy. The administrators of the service, **Kathleen Daymond** and **Sarah Millward**, describe how the new-look service works

## What is BACP's 'Get help with counselling concerns' service?

The service falls under the remit of BACP's Register department. It was introduced in 2012 as the Ask Kathleen service and is seen as a vital element of the Register's public protection remit. The service is part of the requirement of the Professional Standards Authority's (PSA) accreditation of the Register and has an important preventative and educational role.

It responds to ethical queries and offers help and reassurance where enquirers have concerns or questions about their experience of therapy, about how therapy works and what good practice looks like. It also provides signposting to printed information through public information sheets and articles on BACP's website, as well as the current *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. We receive around 100 to 150 enquiries each month.

## Who is the service aimed at?

Clients receiving therapy from either BACP members or non-members. Clients can include supervisees, trainees and counsellors themselves, if they are in therapy. Sometimes, therapists can struggle to think of themselves as a client, but in relation

to their enquiry to us, they are a client and a vulnerable person.

## What sort of queries do you receive?

Boundaries are one of the main areas of concern, and could involve any of the following, or others:

- Too much self-disclosure by the therapist
- Inappropriate touching
- Sexual relationships
- Inappropriate information about other clients (which also breaks confidentiality of the other clients)
- Inability to see the problems of loose boundaries when counselling couples
- Timekeeping, including inconsistent length of sessions.

We also receive enquiries around endings, fees, contracts, confidentiality, and access to records, among others. Often, the most distressed enquiries are the ones where an ending has been sudden and unexpected.

## How do you work with clients?

We talk to the client to try to help them express what they feel has gone wrong, and what they want to do about it. Our role is to try to help them resolve whatever issue is concerning them, and sometimes this results in them being able to continue therapy. Just being

able to say what the problem is can help, and we often suggest writing things down to help clarify it in their mind; for example, identifying when they don't understand why their counsellor is doing something. Sometimes, that allows them to feel able to speak to their therapist. We try to give ideas to help the client sort things out for themselves, and we often suggest the support of another therapist, particularly if the client has ended with a therapist prematurely for some reason. We send relevant information and guidance by email, where required, and refer to BACP's *Ethical Framework*.

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**We are hoping that BACP members reading this article will be encouraged to inform their clients about the service**

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It can be difficult when callers want to hear confirmation that something is unethical; but that isn't within our remit. Sometimes, it's clear that they need to make a complaint; however, we can't influence their decision. The purpose of the service isn't to persuade people to complain. If a client doesn't want to take it further, we are not here to 'encourage' them to do so - that isn't our role. If they feel they want to submit a complaint, we can send them the information to do

so, or signpost them to BACP's website, where the information is also available.

## What about confidentiality?

Often, clients do not want to give their name, as they may be fearful that even their talking to us will get back to their therapist or we'll take further action. We reassure clients constantly about confidentiality. We can't 'report' a therapist just from a phone call, and the onus is very much on the user of the service. We do log calls, with minimum detail, according to data protection law; however, no linked details about therapists are recorded.

## In your experience, what perceptions do the public have of BACP?

Our experience is that, often, BACP is seen as a regulatory body governing therapists, and those who contact the service are often surprised when we inform them that counsellors and psychotherapists are not statutorily regulated. Many clients view a therapist in the same way they do a doctor – as a professional who must be 'governed' and licensed to practise; and, therefore, the therapist knows best. They can sometimes be frightened to challenge their therapist in case that ends the

relationship, and they're often unaware that it should be a two-way street, for their benefit.

Our role is to inform them of best practice and what we can do for them, and to let them know we're also here for them, the client and public. Clients in therapy often don't know where to go for guidance and information about therapy in general.

## Do other UK counselling organisations operate a similar service?

As far as we are aware, it is still a unique service.

## What are the future plans for the service?

It is beneficial for the public to be as informed as possible, and we believe the service is about providing information, education and support, being transparent about BACP members' ethical responsibilities, and thereby rebalancing the relationship between the professional and the client. It's important to remember that, for many people, accessing therapy for the first time is often shrouded in mystique. Clients need to be informed of their rights from the start in a straightforward, informative way,

and, where possible, within a written contract.

We would like to raise awareness regarding BACP's 'Get help with counselling concerns' service among our members and to stress that it is being provided as a service for clients, which then indirectly benefits our members. We are hoping that BACP members reading this article will be encouraged to inform their clients about the service. This will ensure we help more people, and the statistics we gain from the service will help with upstream prevention, by improving the guidance and training available to members.

To contact the service, call 01455 883300 and choose option 2, or email [gethelp@bacp.co.uk](mailto:gethelp@bacp.co.uk). Opening hours are Monday to Thursday, 9.30am to 4pm.

Printed information on therapy can be downloaded free of charge from BACP's website: [www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/we-can-help](http://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/we-can-help)

## New COVID-related resources online

Look out for new COVID-19 resources on BACP's website (in the COVID-19 hub), including information on:

- **Managing client disclosures on breaking COVID-19 regulations:** this is a legally informed resource with a framework, checklist and case studies to help members consider how they would respond.
- **Switching between face-to-face and remote working:** this considers the impact on clients and therapists.
- **Risk-assessment template:** this provides a structured approach to ensure your premises are COVID secure.



## Listening workshops

### BACP has launched a series of listening workshops to invite members' questions and feedback.

The workshops will take place once a month throughout 2021 and each will have a set theme. The next one is scheduled for 23 April and will be about making research work for members. To book, please visit: [www.bacp.co.uk/membership/listening-workshops](http://www.bacp.co.uk/membership/listening-workshops)

There is also a dedicated email address, [listening@bacp.co.uk](mailto:listening@bacp.co.uk), that you can use to send us any comments and suggestions you might have about any aspect of your membership.

## Keep up to date with research

The latest issue of BACP's research digest is out now and includes a recent paper by BACP member, Terry Hanley, that reflects upon the history of online counselling research and argues that the pandemic has been a catalyst for developments in online therapy. Read the digest and Terry's paper here: [www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/advancing-the-profession/research/research-digest-issue-3](http://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/advancing-the-profession/research/research-digest-issue-3)



## In depth

Studying Carl Rogers, as many *Thresholds* readers will have done, we cannot fail to notice that his approach is a way of *being* – indeed, it is the title of his last major work.<sup>1</sup> Celtic spirituality has been described as a way of *seeing*.<sup>2</sup> Is this just a trite similarity, a coincidence of rhyme? Or is there some deeper connection between person-centred theory and Celtic spirituality?

Researching the psychotherapeutic role of Celtic spirituality through the lens of person-centred theory, I have had the privilege of immersing myself in the experiences of people who have for some time engaged meaningfully with Celtic spirituality. I have attempted to understand its impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

This Celtic spirituality is the Christian spirituality of the Celtic peoples of Britain and Ireland, which emerged in the middle of the first millennium CE and today inspires dispersed, modern, monastic communities such as Iona, Corrymeela, Northumbria, Aidan and Hilda, and St Chad. My study does not focus on Druidry, shamanic or other pagan Celtic spirituality, though the pre-Christian spirituality of the Celtic peoples in these islands, which lives on in such beliefs and practices, has influenced Celtic Christianity. Other precursors include early Christian mystics, notably the desert fathers and mothers and St John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, often depicted in paintings of the Last Supper, resting on Jesus' chest, listening to the heartbeat of God.

John's writings, from the beginning of his gospel, are suffused with an openness to seeing God in all things and hence all people – in his opening explanation of the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus, he wrote that '...the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world'.<sup>3</sup>

### Celtic literature

Panentheism, the idea that God is *in* all things, is not the same as pantheism, the idea that God *is* all things. But as expounded in the works of ninth century Irish theologian, John Scotus Eriugena, it was condemned as heresy by one Pope in 1225 and banned by another in 1685, while persisting in Celtic thought on the edge of Europe.

From this idea that God is in all things, I derive three further propositions: that God is:

- in everything around us;
- within each of us;
- within everyone else.

Leading Celtic scholars have analysed key aspects of Celtic spirituality in various ways, but I have found those three propositions helpful in summarising Celtic attitudes and behaviours within the literature.

Seeing God in everything around us fosters rootedness, connection with a sacred earth and a passion for environmental justice. Life is a journey, a pilgrimage. God's presence is seen in the ordinary or everyday ('...turn but a stone and an angel moves', to quote Iona Community founder George MacLeod<sup>4</sup>). Celtic Christians value liminality: feeling particularly close to God at edge times and spaces (shorelines, dawn and dusk, remote from the centre of human power structures).

The idea of recognising God within oneself promotes an overwhelmingly positive, optimistic view of human nature, a countercultural view shared with person-centred theory's actualising tendency, which stands in contrast to the flow of Western thought, from Plato's cave through

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### Celtic Christians value liminality: feeling particularly close to God at edge times and spaces (shorelines, dawn and dusk, remote from the centre of human power structures)

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Augustinian original sin to contemporary Catholic and evangelical Protestant doctrine, and indeed much psychological theory, beginning with Freud. Seeing our essential goodness promotes acceptance of ourselves and our bodies, as well as the value of listening within ourselves through contemplative practice. And, seeing a creator God within us empowers our innate creativity, which is a strong feature in Celtic culture.

Celtic spirituality balances this view of the self by seeing God in everyone else too, which promotes love and affirmation of others (however different their background or views), rather than fear, as well as a spirit of reconciliation and humility, honouring the needs of others. Modern Celtic communities are active in social justice and, though far from beyond criticism, seek deep inclusivity. Taking the long view, there is a sense of connection with people who have died: past generations over many centuries, including those we have loved and lost. Relationally, there is a deep appreciation of community (evident in today's dispersed monastic communities) and of the one-to-one connection found through the ancient Irish concept of *anamchara*, or soul friendship, which anticipates counselling principles and resonates with contemporary spiritual accompaniment.



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# A way of seeing

**Andrew Smith** considers connections between person-centred counselling and Celtic spirituality

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## Holistic qualitative inquiry

We can engage with Celtic spirituality today through books and online written resources, but that feels rather narrow for a worldview which explicitly sees God in *all* things. Seeking to understand the experience of people whose engagement may be drawn from any combination of literature, worship, prayer, pilgrimage, retreat or immersion in the natural world, demands a multifaceted approach.

In my research, I adopted what I term 'holistic qualitative inquiry' as a method. This aimed to capture sensory and intuitive data, heart and head, ways of seeing and ways of hearing, creative knowledge and detailed textual analysis.

To do this, I used a four-stage method that started with collage inquiry, followed by immersive listening, poetic inquiry and finally, analysis of interview transcripts.

In the July 2020 issue of *Thresholds*, I noted collage's usefulness for capturing tacit knowledge, letting the client/interviewee take the lead as they work from heart to head, synthesising and intuiting from juxtapositions of images. Moving from images into words, it helps us to express deep feelings, hitherto taboo, unvoiced or otherwise hard to put into words.

I listened deeply to interview recordings (aided by background wave sounds) and captured brief counselling notes, both of the content and what lies at the edge of interviewees' awareness. This helped to capture resonant and symbolic feelings. I generated word clouds, based on the immersive listening notes, to portray participants' collective experience. The more often words were noted, the larger and more prominent they appeared in the word clouds. This yielded an impressionistic portrayal of key themes.

I used a form of found poetry, which involves reading the interview transcript, picking out words and phrases which capture or represent key elements of the interviewee experience and then forming these into a poem. This retains the chronology of the transcript and produces a narrative with concision, sensory impact and intuitive analysis.

I then used a process called interpretative phenomenological analysis to study each interview transcript, line by line, in order to find themes from the participants' individual and combined experiences.

## The experience of Celtic spirituality today

The overarching experience of my research participants through their engagement with Celtic spirituality has been one of integrating knowledge and experience on a journey towards wholeness. I was struck that my holistic method aligned with participants' holistic spiritual worldview.

Within this overarching experience, another theme emerged: being oneself, both in the moment and through life. This invokes Rogers' most important

core condition: congruence. Participants experienced this in the moment when taking part in contemplative practices. It was also present in the affirmation of creative or alternative ways of knowing or understanding. Elsewhere, this may have been considered unacceptable or taboo. Their sense of being themselves through life promoted their personal growth (self-actualisation). This was present in both their outer and inner journeys and approaches to coping with loss and suffering. Indeed, some of the most moving and tender moments in the interviews came as I listened and held participants through accounts of how their deep felt-sense of God around and within them sustained them through illness and bereavement, relationship breakdown and loneliness, depression and discrimination.

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**This seemed connected at all levels, starting with the everyday, small-scale wonder of a single flower, leaf or insect, through the vivid and beautiful experience of the earth as a sacred, living thing in its own right, and beyond, to the cosmos**

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This felt-sense was particularly evident in their oneness with creation. This seemed connected at all levels, starting with the everyday, small-scale wonder of a single flower, leaf or insect, through the vivid and beautiful experience of the earth as a sacred, living thing in its own right, and beyond, to the cosmos. Rogers' theory of the person is of course part of a universal organismic actualising tendency, which he later extrapolated to a cosmic level through his formative tendency.<sup>6</sup> The two other superordinate themes manifested empathy and unconditional positive regard in interpersonal relationships.

Connection through community encompasses modern monasticism through the dispersed communities I have mentioned. All participants engaged at some level with one or more of these, whether through occasional retreat, active membership or simply using some prayer or worship resources. It also encompasses soul friendship, which I have already linked tenuously to counselling relationships, and the Trinity. This Christian concept of God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit or (more gender-inclusively) Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, is particularly strong in Celtic thought, prayer and imagery, and portrays God as community.

Loving others manifests itself in present-day Celtic spirituality through social justice, valuing everyone and meeting people where they are. Most participants debated whether early or contemporary Celtic spirituality is romanticised, but cleaved to the gritty

reality of its love, acceptance and understanding of other people. Any visitor to Iona, Lindisfarne or the north Antrim coast of Corrymeela may be struck by their beauty, but also by the frequent harshness of the weather. Iona has always worked in Glasgow's East End; Corrymeela's founding mission is reconciling Belfast's sectarian divisions. This is life at raw edges.

### The Celtic and the person-centred

I have already highlighted some connections between Celtic spirituality and person-centred concepts such as the core conditions, actualising and formative tendencies. As with the criticism each receives for their countercultural, optimistic view of humanity, there is also common ground in their perceived lack of scientific<sup>7</sup> or theological<sup>8</sup> rigour. Neither seeks to be judged on those terms. Yet there is both quantitative and experiential evidence that person-centred practice is effective.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Celtic writers evidence deep biblical scholarship (they simply focus more on the Jesus of the gospels<sup>10</sup> and the emotional depth of the Psalms than Old Testament law and St Paul's instruction for Christian living) as well as deep communion with God through creation and personal encounter.

Celtic and person-centred adherents share a relationship of mutual suspicion of institutional authority. Iona's George MacLeod and John Bell are perhaps the best-known modern Celtic Christians. Like early saints, any natural authority today's Celtic leaders carry emanates from their manifest humility and integrity - in person-centred terms, their *congruence*. Leading Celtic scholar Ian Bradley contrasts this, talking of a '...modern church [which] has opted to be run by management structures rather than led by saints'.<sup>11</sup>

Newell asks of past repression: 'What was it that the establishment feared in this stream of spirituality that ran so deep within the people of the Celtic world? Was it in part that people of such a spirituality could not be neatly controlled or confined? ... Are people who believe that the life of God is deep within them easily cowed or brought into line?'<sup>12</sup> Like person-centred theory, Celtic spirituality nurtures the self-worth of the individual while honouring the worth of everyone else. Any power which seeks to control by divide and rule may feel threatened by the quiet, gentle approach of the Celtic or the person-centred, which works at the edges to give individuals the confidence to feel loved, understood and worthy of dignity and respect as they are, for who they are.

### Biography



**Andrew Smith** is a person-centred counsellor engaged in private practice, hospice, youth and diocesan work, while completing research for a PhD on the psychotherapeutic role of Celtic spirituality.

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- <sup>2</sup>Newell JP. *Listening for the heartbeat of God: a Celtic spirituality*. London: SPCK; 1997.
- <sup>3</sup>John 1:9
- <sup>4</sup>MacLeod GF. *The whole earth shall cry glory*. Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications; 1985.
- <sup>5</sup>Smith AJ. *Beyond words*. *Thresholds*, 2020; July: 24–26.
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## Conversations

**Shuranjeet Singh and Ishan Nandra** talk to Amy McCormack about the therapeutic role that faith plays in Punjabi communities



Shuranjeet Singh (left) and Ishan Nandra (right)

### Connecting faith and mental health

When Shuranjeet Singh left home to go to university, he suddenly found it difficult to engage with people and make friends in this new environment. He began to isolate himself more and to realise that something was wrong.

He did not share his concerns with family and friends back home as he wanted to be seen as living independently. Instead, he turned to his housemates, who in turn shared their own concerns: 'We were able to create a space of openness, a space where we could speak honestly without fear of being harmed or fear of being judged,' he said.

#### A safe space

As Shuranjeet looked back, he appreciated this safe space to talk about his feelings: 'I noticed that there were people in the communities that I grew up in who were going through similar experiences but weren't able to talk about these things openly or access the support that they wanted to access.'

Six months after leaving university, in 2017, Shuranjeet set about recreating that emotional support network on a wider scale. To do this, he set up Taraki, an organisation that works with Punjabi communities to reshape approaches to

mental health. *Taraki*, a word found in Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi, means to progress. The organisation focuses on mental health awareness, mental health education, social support and research.

Shuranjeet said the organisation has always recognised that faith plays a key part in its work: 'It's something that has been very intentional because we know and acknowledge the importance of faith-based knowledge and faith-based ways of living within Punjabi communities, and there are so many of those ways of living,' he said.

Shuranjeet is an Amrit Sanskar Sikh and grew up in an Amritdhari household where he and his family received *Khande ki Pahul*. This translates as 'the initiation of the sword,' to become part of the *Khalsa Panth*. This is an allegiance to a way of being in the world known as *Khalsa*. Shuranjeet explained the importance of faith in his own life: 'At times, it has been me pushing away and questioning; and at times, me finding support through faith. There has been this kind of complex relationship, at a personal level, which has really strengthened my relationship with my faith ultimately.'

#### Therapeutic role of religious community

He met mental health support worker and researcher, Ishan Nandra, at a faith-based event, and their discussions led to Ishan carrying out a piece of research into how different faith groups within the Punjabi communities

experience religion, and its impact on their mental health.

Ishan explained that although he does not usually practise regularly, he had been drawn to attend *Gurdwara*, which is the socio-political-spiritual centre of Sikh communities, and *Sangat*, which is a reflective and uplifting Guru-oriented community, at times of difficulty in his own life and that a key finding in the research was that people would turn towards religion for emotional support.

'From a psychological perspective, some of these things have been embedded in our psyches for quite a while, so for some people, it might be really beneficial to return to these things as coping mechanisms.'

'Equally, for someone who has not had the greatest experience with religion, some of these things can be quite traumatic and have the opposite effect, so I think it is subjective for the individual.'

'One of the most interesting cases in the research was an atheist who was born and raised in a very strict, orthodox Sikh family. She now chooses not to believe in God, but even she mentions that at her lowest times she will still recite the *Mool Mantar*, which is one of the first prayers in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is the scriptural guru for Sikhs.'

The research also indicated that the congregation itself was therapeutic for many of the participants. Ishan identified with this aspect too: 'When I was in that Sikh congregation, I had that numinous feeling. I felt that we are all here together and I felt that that was the most therapeutic thing that I have engaged with.'

#### Faith as self-exploration

When contemplating the role that faith has in a person's mental health, both Shuranjeet and Ishan stressed that it can be a rich form of self-exploration and therefore a person must be able to bring their whole spiritual self to a therapeutic encounter.

'There is such a presumption that the therapeutic or traditional counselling space is one that does not talk about faith or that it is not open to faith-based discussions.'

'It is almost not brought up, out of fear that it might not actually be appropriate. A lot of trust needs to be rebuilt for people to understand that counselling-related spaces are there for them, no matter who they are, so that I don't need to go into a counselling space as someone else. We should be comfortable to go into these spaces as ourselves and everything that we bring with us as a person,' Shuranjeet said.

Bringing therapy and mental health support to faith-based communities is important. Shuranjeet stressed the importance of the way outreach work is delivered: 'I have seen professionals not really adapt to the audience's way of speaking, which can lead to further misunderstanding and confusion. People think, "These people might not potentially understand me. They might not potentially understand where I come from". So, we ask, who are the counsellors who are engaging with faith-based organisations and do we have counsellors who can speak to particular faith-based experiences? Are we working closely with faith-based organisations?'

### Community-based support

Taraki also advocates for building skillsets to support mental health within the community: 'We'd like to see how professional organisations can work with faith-based institutions to build both trust and capacity, because only with those two things happening concurrently, are we able to ensure that communities are equipped with the necessary tools.'

Ishan pointed out that a community-centred approach is also helpful in breaking down different types of stigma that might be associated with counselling: 'By holding workshops within Punjabi communities, we break down that barrier within a place of worship. I think that this is a small but impactful step that could bridge the gap and integrate people,' he said. 'By doing that, you meet people halfway.'

Shuranjeet added that stigma can be multifaceted and can also come as a result of harm, trauma or violence that people may have experienced when seeking mental health support in the past: 'Healthcare systems are not neutral spaces. There are people who

can exert harm within them. If I have had a bad experience of a particular service or professional, it might stop me from engaging again in the future. We are not starting from the same point of mutual trust.'

### The power of testimonial

Taraki has found that using testimonial has been an effective way to communicate positive experiences of talking therapies: 'It's about sharing "This is how it helped me. This is what I was scared about. This is how my fears were overcome".'

## A lot of trust needs to be rebuilt for people to understand that counselling-related spaces are there for them, no matter who they are

'I think it is so important to outline the experiences of people from different communities who are themselves counsellors so people can look and say, "Here is a person who looks like me, who provides counselling in this area and might understand my background and my faith upbringing". Because I think one of the fears that comes through is that this person isn't going to understand me and that they might not take me seriously. They might not see my issues or concerns as legitimate.'

Taraki's first campaign was a male mental health project to share Punjabi men's testimonials about mental health experiences, after realising people from diverse backgrounds weren't represented in these conversations. 'I was having discussions about mental health with male relatives and they would say mental health was *'gore di cheez'*, which means a white person thing.

'I wanted to really show that these conversations can take place, and if men want to have conversations about mental health, they can freely do so because it's acceptable and something that we value, and a sign of strength rather than a weakness as it had potentially been painted in some contexts.'

During this campaign, the organisation realised the importance of pitching events to people without necessarily labelling them as 'mental health' events. And, since these beginnings, providing culturally sensitive ways of communicating has been at the heart of the work.

'Not all communities, not all groups, will take in information in the same way or relate to information in the same way because we all bring different systems of reference and different life experiences, so that is going to change how we approach the topics.'

'We have been able to create spaces that are social support, or spaces that are therapeutic, without saying "Hey,

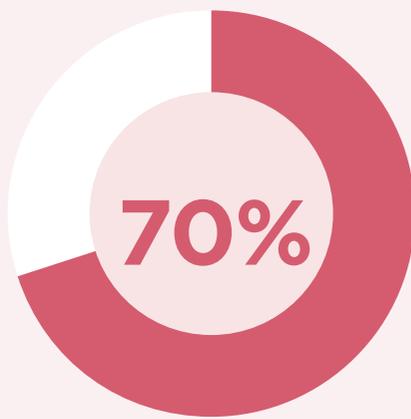


Picture, courtesy of Taraki

## In numbers

**In August 2020, Taraki Wellbeing released a report which explored the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on the mental health of Punjabi communities.<sup>2</sup>**

The majority of respondents identified as Sikh (**87.9%**), but people from Hindu, Muslim and other faith backgrounds also contributed.



**experienced mental health challenges during COVID-19 and lockdown.**

The report outlined that:

- **60%** of all respondents reported a decline in their self-rated mental wellbeing from before to during COVID-19, with the average change across the period being 18%.
- The largest decreases in self-rated mental wellbeing were reported by those with previous mental health challenges who identified as LGBTQIA+ (**-30%**), first generation migrant (**-29%**) or living with co-morbidities (**-25%**).
- **41%** of respondents reported that they used faith as a support during the pandemic, ranging from meditation to contemplation and reflection.
- Across all respondents, only **7%** and **5%** found support through state and private healthcare services respectively.

This report prompted Taraki to collaborate with several organisations to create spaces for learning, reflection and support founded in faith-based practices. With a focus on the Sikh faith and mental health, Taraki worked with Sikh faith organisations SikhNet and

Basics of Sikhi, as well as Sikh mental health advocates Sikh Your Mind and Bhai Baljit Singh, to facilitate seminars on the relationship between mental health and the Sikh faith.

In five workshops over four months, more than 500 people were able to learn about topics such as guilt and forgiveness, anxiety and stress, and compassion, and explore what the mind is, all through a Sikhi-informed lens. One hundred and forty-eight participants completed feedback from these events, which showed that:

- **70%** experienced mental health challenges during COVID-19 and lockdown.
- The three most cited challenges were 'occasional low mood', 'occasional anxiety' and 'challenges with the Sikh faith'.

Attendees said the sessions helped them to see things differently. They reported changes such as thinking more consciously, using their breath and being able to better support themselves.

Read the full report at:

[www.taraki.co.uk/covid19-research](http://www.taraki.co.uk/covid19-research)

this is therapy" or "Hey, this is a chance for you to talk about..." It's an open and non-judgmental space. You can come and talk, come and listen and choose how to use the space as you wish,' Shuranjeet said.

He called on the counselling profession, at both an individual and organisational level, to support the open, community-based approach that Taraki is advocating by starting conversations with groups and asking how counsellors' skills could best be used in the community, for example in the form of facilitating events or providing feedback on aspects of therapeutic practice.

### Continuing conversations

Shuranjeet also reflects on the fact that questions about how to integrate faith and mental health have both a personal and professional dimension and that they have to be processed in both capacities: 'How do you create that space for those conversations? There's not going to be an immediate answer, but how do you create the space where we can reflect on that in the long term?'

Looking ahead, he also wonders about how to make sure these conversations continue and reach the right people: 'There is something really stopping these conversations from moving forward and stopping them from reaching the people who are often marginalised from these conversations in the first place.

'I feel like faith is like the F word in mental health,<sup>1</sup> and maybe that's just from my experiences of the mental health landscape. What I have seen is that faith is almost relegated to a particular area and a particular way of being that sometimes isn't projected as equal to non-faith-based ways of being. How do we show that faith is a part of the conversation within counselling and mental health?'

To find out more about Taraki and to read Ishan's report on mental health and faith, as well as other research, please see: [www.taraki.co.uk](http://www.taraki.co.uk) or you can contact him directly at: [info@taraki.co.uk](mailto:info@taraki.co.uk)

### Biographies

**Ishan Nandra** is a mental health support worker from London; currently studying MSc Psychology and the Neuroscience of Mental Health at Kings College London. After completing his master's, Ishan intends to specialise in cognitive behavioural therapy where he can offer talking therapies to those in need.

**Shuranjeet Singh** is the founder and director of Taraki, a movement working with Punjabi communities to reshape approaches to mental health which Shuranjeet founded in October 2017 after his lived experiences of mental health challenges. Alongside Taraki, Shuranjeet is a graduate student at the University of Toronto, where he is studying for a master's in Health Policy, Management and Evaluation through an Oxford-Canada Scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> The Guru Granth Sahib is the centre of Sikh being, a divine manifestation of Sikh worldview and epistemology in the material realm. Guru Granth Sahib grants the Khalsa Panth the status of Guru-Panth as a sovereign entity.<sup>1</sup>

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## Spirituality through a critical lens

José Luis Leal



**In this new column, José Luis Leal shares his intention to reflect upon spirituality's dangers, depths and capacity for transformation**

'Spirituality' is one of those complicated words that will always evoke a reaction. The 'S' word, as Professor Andrew Samuels calls it,<sup>1</sup> creeps in, activating numerous and contradicting points of view. Some idealise it, others make a caricature of it, many instantly reject it, and some feel a genuine curiosity towards it. I do not mean to categorise attitudes towards spirituality; rather, I'm attempting to frame it as a contentious, fascinating and polarising subject. What I do want to emphasise however, is that there are responsible and grounded approaches to working with spirituality, and very dangerous ways of engaging with it.

To launch this column, I would like to share my background. I am a psychotherapist in Monterrey, Mexico, working in private practice with adults, teenagers and couples. I worked as a high school counsellor for four years. I did an MA in Jungian Psychology at the University of Essex, and my dissertation was a qualitative study on the clinical implications for clients who had psychotherapy while participating in different spiritual practices. Andrew Samuels was my academic supervisor. I then obtained an MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy at the Milton Erickson Institute in Monterrey. Since 2013, I have trained with Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés on archetypal psychology, including active imagination. I have been practising meditation for 21 years and teaching it for 15 years.

The driving forces behind my relationship with spirituality are curiosity and wonder: the humbling effect that connecting with something larger has, and the intense indignation and anger activated in me by irresponsible and harmful practices.

One of the reasons spirituality can be used in harmful ways is that it is almost impossible to define. Anything or anyone can pass as *spiritual*. It can become an umbrella term that loses all meaning and can be used to justify reckless behaviour. Spirituality needs a specific context within which to define it, otherwise it risks becoming confused and overlapping with religion, mysticism, the New Age movement, the wellness industry, and other misnomers.<sup>2</sup> However, an all-encompassing definition would be a disservice to the diversity of ways that cultures and individuals engage with their spiritual dimension.

**Everything casts a shadow, and spirituality's shadow is directly proportional to its light. If spirituality activates our curiosity, it can hyper-fascinate us and trap us in a never-ending, shallow spell of novelty and excitement**

In this column, spirituality will be approached as a perspective describing a subjective relationship with sacred and non-material realities,<sup>3</sup> including the use of intuition and feelings as a source of knowledge. It will focus on mystery instead of attempting to make everything measurable.<sup>4,5</sup> Therapy and spirituality share characteristics that open doors for collaboration.

I wanted to call this column, *Spiritually ambivalent therapist*, because my aim is to discuss the full spectrum of experiences one can have with the subject. Jung understands ambivalence as:

- the fusion of positive and negative feelings around the same phenomenon
- more than two contradictory feelings
- the negation inherent in every concept,
- a twofold vision for every force of nature.<sup>6</sup>

So, as a *spiritually ambivalent therapist*, I want to be critical in order to go deeper. I want to write about how spirituality can take us right to the heart of an issue.

Everything casts a shadow, and spirituality's shadow is directly proportional to its light. If spirituality activates our curiosity, it can hyper-fascinate us and trap us in never-ending novelty and excitement. If it connects us to a larger, non-material reality, it can cause disdain to consensual and ordinary reality. If it seeks a relationship with the spirit, it can also disconnect us from our humanity. If it helps us find subjective meaning and purpose, it can also drive us to an aggrandised and selfish attitude. If it privileges intuition over intellect, it can flood us with magical thinking, with real and damaging consequences to ourselves and others. In this column, I will strive to keep a compassionate and critical space for counsellors, therapists and clients, where spirituality and therapy can hold many-layered conversations in which we consider whether we are spiritual beings having a material existence, or *homo sapiens*, so inescapably aware of our existence, that we need to create another world just to endure it.

### Biography

**José Luis Leal** has an MA in Jungian and Post-Jungian Studies from the University of Essex and an MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy from the Milton Erickson Institute in Monterrey, Mexico. He works as a psychotherapist in private practice with adults, teenagers, and couples and has taught meditation workshops since 2005. He has been training with Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés since 2013. Email: [j.lealgomez@gmail.com](mailto:j.lealgomez@gmail.com)

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# Life stories as soul journeys

**Cedric Speyer** introduces his psychospiritual model, with an extract from his book

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**Extra toolkit practices online**

Cedric will be discussing a soul-growth approach to the assessment process in a podcast on the ***Thresholds* website**



**All good therapy allows clients to tell themselves a different story about their life situation than the one limiting their possible choices.** When we also consider what the soul wants, new heights and depths and breadths of personhood can be revealed. It is like looking at a person through a telescope rather than a microscope. We can see a vast interior landscape with previously unconsidered horizons. Psychotherapy is not just about deconstructing and reconstructing the plotlines of personality, giving a future to the past that it heretofore never had. There is value in that. Yet there is a whole realm of human development that cannot be defined by psychodynamic theory. It incorporates an integrative approach to therapy, drawing upon literature, art and spirituality. That is all part of the bigger story. It is the story of soul growth, which has developmental stages of its own and an evolutionary purpose. Our sense of self expands to the extent it is informed by what the literary arts have always offered: metaphors, analogies, allegories, chronicles, archetypes, mythologies and all the imaginative tapestries out of which positive life patterns are woven. What is therapy for and soul growth about, if not to bring a more expansive sense of self to the immediacy of life's built-in limitations. That is the challenge.

The following is an excerpt from chapter three (*Living in a bigger story*) from *Applications of a psychospiritual model in the helping professions: principles of InnerView Guidance*,<sup>1</sup> a book that I have co-written with Dr John Yaphe. It offers an introduction to the psychospiritual model called InnerView that we have developed for training coaches, counsellors and psychotherapists.

**T**he InnerView vision positions the helping professional as a 'guide at the crossroads' where different dimensions of life intersect. The crossroads is where the crux of life's contradictions and paradoxes is acutely felt.<sup>2,3</sup> The bigger story is also where the foreground and background of life's challenges are equally present. It is the perspective from which any problem takes place in the larger context of a soul's sacred story.<sup>4</sup> The person can then discern what ongoing soul formation could emerge from present challenges.<sup>5</sup> We explore what the client's experience and wisdom have to say about what is ultimately soul-restoring for them. We want to affirm that the client is worthy of love and belonging and help them envision their rightful place in the human community. We look for evidence of courage to face challenges, practise compassion, and become congruent with what one loves.

What would characterise the awareness of a person informed by larger infinite meanings, not limited to the immediate contingencies of day-to-day existence? That person would have a bird's eye view of reality and not be mired in the worm's eye view that lacks the capacity to step back from the immediate circumstances of their lives. They would intentionally engage the heights and depths of their humanity through the wide-angle lens of consciousness. It is the difference between a divergent form of attention, at risk of becoming scattered and ineffectual, and a convergent awareness that aligns physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels of being.

In the physical realm, we tend to deny mortality and defend against death with self-serving strategies for happiness. The bigger story involves giving oneself to projects and causes which benefit the next generations. In the emotional realm,

# Toolkit

we tend to be absorbed in the drama of attachments, often bound up with projections of the shadow self. Yet we might also claim the freedom to navigate the complex dynamics of close relationships while anchored in unconditional love.<sup>6</sup> Mentally, in the egoic state, we are prone to thinking in either-or categories. The broader view of the soul's truth is inclusive and rooted in underlying values such as honesty, courage, kindness, and compassion. In the spiritual realm, we may identify with an idealised self.

When that self-concept is split off from human limitations, it may lead to illusions of invulnerability and superiority. In the bigger story, we tap into archetypal sources of personhood that we all have in common yet express in unique ways.

## Going to the crossroads

As we grow in consciousness, each of us goes to the crossroads, willingly or not, to find our way forward (see figure, below). The crossroads is where the horizontal dimension of life (the interpersonal, social, and political) intersects with the vertical dimension (the transpersonal, ethical, and spiritual). It is where day-to-day decisions influence the integration of individuals, families, communities, as well as the evolution of the world at large. From this perspective, there are no insignificant gestures or moments. This is where overarching wisdom is needed to embrace life's contradictions instead of polarising them. This approach helps expand the client's sense of identity by exploring where the linear progress of life meets the eternal dimension. When a client connects interiorly with the essential qualities of truth, beauty, and love, it can help make even their seemingly intolerable experiences meaningful and potentially transformative.<sup>7</sup>

The InnerView practitioner helps persons understand they are being summoned to explore the interior landscape where the demands of a life situation take place. That is what we call soul work. We look for the soul strengths being called forth, and the essential qualities struggling to emerge in a person's unique way of grappling with circumstances. The InnerView practitioner is always asking the same question, customised to the feelings, needs, values, and purposes of the client: what capacities are needed to stay on the growing edge of this life situation? InnerView guidance is the process of eliciting those innate strengths and bringing the essential traits informing them to the fore. This is how a client's inner and outer worlds can become more congruent. It is the landscape of what the soul wants when informed by the nuanced voice of wisdom. No matter how brief or long term, it is a therapeutic journey from present predicaments to preferred states and from conditioned patterns to empowered choices.

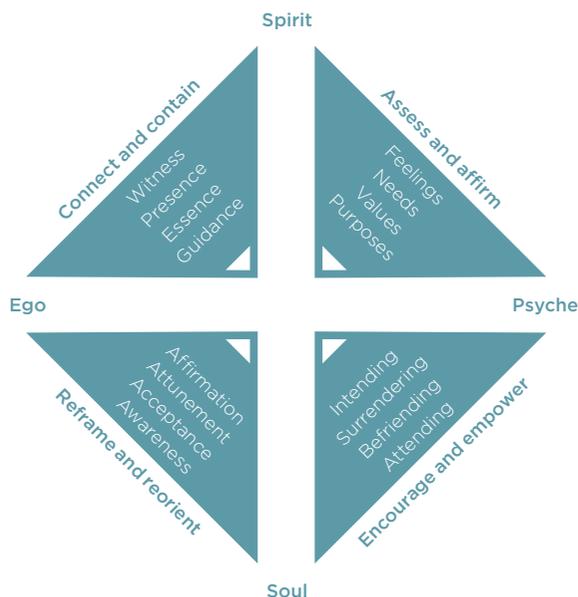
## Freedom for growth

There is a shift in the balance of power between ego and spirit when we achieve freedom from depression, anxiety, addictions, codependence, and other presenting issues. Yet there is a further step for soul growth beyond symptom relief; it is freedom for the contribution we can make to the world in our local sphere of influence. In the InnerView approach to healing, we seek congruence between the interior landscape of what the soul wants and the life purpose we are meant to manifest in the world. The paradox is that we need to look within to see beyond ourselves. Inner transformation is reflected in outer manifestation. We look beneath the surface of life circumstances and put mental health in the context of the overarching perspective of soul work. Ira Progoff recommended a first step in this direction when he said: 'As the work proceeded, it became apparent that the empirical data for holistic depth psychology are to be found not in case histories but in life histories'.<sup>8</sup>

Depending on the client's spiritual orientation, the interior journey could be framed in terms of a quest for deeper meaning, the result of a personal awakening, or a desire to grow closer to that which they call God. Given client readiness from any of these perspectives, InnerView guidance connects persons with their inner voice of wisdom, maps out the terrain of their psychospiritual life, and brings more clarity to their life purpose. Along the way, clients learn to claim their strengths and self-worth and engage with others authentically. They situate where they have been, where they are, and where they are going on their psychospiritual path. They embrace their imperfect human nature and view their life situation through the viewfinder of wellbeing, using a wide-angle lens. They practise expanding rather than contracting their emotional capacity when facing challenging life circumstances. They explore inner and outer resources to overcome obstacles on their own path. They feel they are an integral part of an evolving human community. Through mindfulness practices, they learn to access the inner calm and confidence that helps them connect with their values.

## The 4Fold Path Map

[www.innerviewguidance.com/4foldpath](http://www.innerviewguidance.com/4foldpath)



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The genuinely religious imagination (from the Latin word *religare*, meaning to tie, bind together) seeks to embrace the contradictions of life, with its order and chaos, comedy and tragedy, reality and revelation. The ego's tendency is to polarise these apparent opposites. From the soul's point of view, the dichotomies are contained within a unified field. Our personal perspective takes place in a landscape of transpersonal and archetypal realms. With that shift in consciousness, we then survey the inner terrain for the soul growth we want to nurture.

## Risk of spiritual bypassing

Spirituality without the kind of psychological integration InnerView represents is plagued by the prevalence of 'spiritual bypassing' when genuine soul work is disregarded.<sup>6</sup> It is what happens when developmental processes are overlooked, often under the sway of spiritual leaders with vested interest in the immaturity of their followers.<sup>9</sup> There are various ways in which ordinary, developmental stages of maturity can be displaced by high-minded denial of shadow elements in the psyche.

John Welwood was one of the first to draw attention to developmental process skipping. 'The attempt to use spiritual ideas and practices to avoid dealing with emotional unfinished business – notably our woundedness around love,' he writes, '...usually has disastrous consequences, especially in the West, frequently leading to psychological imbalance and destructive behaviour. My term for this kind of dissociation and denial is spiritual bypassing.'<sup>6</sup> The balanced alternative is to embrace the contradictions of life while holding a creative tension between our limits and potentials.<sup>10</sup> Archetypal psychology has emphasised that we cannot explore the heights of life without delving honestly into its subconscious depths.<sup>11</sup> All genuine religious experience points towards becoming fully human in this way.

## Containing the dichotomies

Whether in social, political, or religious spheres, we see the fallout from dichotomous thinking in the polarised worldview of win or lose, good guys and bad guys, and us against them. Such duality has its roots in the ancient conflicts that pit faith against science, and ego against soul, for example. Lost is the integration of opposites we find whenever co-existent qualities such as compassion and detachment are held in creative tension. When opposing ideas or clashing energies of all kinds collide within us or in society, we are naturally aggrieved. We tend to keep a tight grip on our emotional position and mentally or literally expel that which threatens us. Most of human history charts the violent power struggles that result from opposing and entrenched stances. Sacred history, both individual and collective, shows a third way of integration and synthesis, which is the antidote to the escalation of polarised grievances. It takes creative courage to maintain rather than escape the contradictions inherent in human reality. The intention of living in a bigger story is to resolve splits in the psyche. It is the way of, Buddha, Jesus, Maimonides, Jalaluddin Rumi, Mahatma Gandhi, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Etty Hillesum, among other spiritual heroes from all traditions.

Applying this dialectic to contemporary psychology brings us back to our therapeutic role as guides at the crossroads of developmental crises in the lives of our clients. It returns us to the study of redemptive values tempering the due diligence of clinical diagnosis. In practice, we apply the full scope of clinical expertise to the negative core issue. This is the glare of the assessment phase. Yet it is offset by a positive gaze on client strengths. While the glare provides valuable insight into self-defeating attitudes and problematic patterns, the gaze is focused squarely on the intrinsic capacity of persons to overcome, transform, or transcend painful life circumstances. It is a matter of remaining ever-alert to the intersection of the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of life. That is where the psychologically synergistic and synchronistic events take place. That is where we can show our clients, through the circumstances of their lives, that every problem exists as a means to call forth qualities from the gifts within. It suggests to clients that their perceived misery may have meaning, that healing may be hidden within the disease, and that every problem contains the seeds for potentialities of the soul.

*This is an excerpt from Applications of a Psychospiritual Model in the Helping Professions, by Cedric Speyer and John Yaphe.*

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## Biography



**Cedric Speyer** is a writer, registered psychotherapist and mentor. He pioneered e-counselling in Canada, overseeing 100,000 online cases before establishing InnerView Guidance International (IGI). The vision of IGI brings together the historically separate domains of mental health and spiritual awareness in a new synthesis for the helping professions. [www.innerviewguidance.com](http://www.innerviewguidance.com)

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# The stranger behind the mask

**Mike Moss** asks how we remain authentic while keeping each other safe

I wonder what some of the early writers on psychology and psychotherapy might think of us all wearing masks due to the pandemic, and how this might impact therapy? I know the familiar notion of a client wearing a mask in psychological terms is different from the masks we have to wear today, but maybe there are some similarities.

Carl Jung (1875–1961), the founder of analytical psychology, described the *mask* or *persona* as an attempt to project a favourable image of our personality to others, which may not accurately represent who we are. He also believed there was a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, which he described as ‘...a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual’.<sup>1</sup>

Wearing masks for our safety and protection in the context of therapy has thrown up some questions that seem to get right to the heart of the work. I have continued to work face to face in a high school. We always arrive with our masks on and then, observing social distancing and safety guidelines, agree to take them off for the duration of the session. This seems to have worked so far. After the session, we both slip our masks back on again and go out into the world.

When thinking about this, I cannot separate my concerns about the pandemic from the client’s concerns. We are both likely to be experiencing our vulnerability about being human.

### **The human instinct to connect**

Choosing not to talk about our experience of the pandemic – having to wear a mask, for example – and what it represents for us, does not feel congruent in the therapeutic relationship, and may make us both feel even more separate. Jung’s comments

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**Our own yearning to conceal our true nature becomes a physical reality when we are trying to communicate wearing actual masks and cannot see each other’s face fully**

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about individual consciousness and ‘mask wearing’ in society may offer something helpful in understanding this situation. Our own yearning to conceal our true nature becomes a physical reality when we are trying to communicate wearing actual masks and cannot see each other’s face fully.

Even though we appear as strangers while wearing our masks, I believe we instinctively want to know who the other

person is and how they appear in connection to what they are saying. Recently, I met someone I knew in the street and we were both wearing masks. They asked how I was doing and they wondered what my real expression was beneath the mask, even though I said I was doing OK. I think we need to be able to recognise something of the person which seems familiar or trustworthy. The perception of something being hidden may create a level of mistrust.

I haven’t experienced someone wanting to keep their mask on during a counselling session. How might it be if we can’t hear each other properly? What will it be like not being able to see the other person’s face? It might not feel like a genuine encounter if they don’t talk about what it’s like wearing a mask. Also, what if one of them became so anxious they had to rip the mask off, just to breathe some fresh air?

I believe we can learn how to process our joint distress and find shared meaning. The pandemic cannot be ignored when it comes to the actual risk facing us in the present moment, right there in the room, between client and counsellor. There is no escape. I also think the mask, whether on or off, is a symbol of both the immediacy and impermanence of our anxieties, tied in with the fragility of being human. Having a dialogue with our clients about this risk may reveal our strengths: being real,

showing we are human and that we share similar concerns as well similar hopes, fears and potentialities.

## Masks and authenticity

Carl Rogers (1902–1987), one of the founders of the humanistic approach to psychology, discovered people don't easily show themselves fully in the therapeutic encounter, and, like Jung, he believed people wear masks as part of their defences to conceal what he called a more authentic self. He also believed when a person's defences are reduced in therapy, as a result of being offered the core conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard, they can drop their masks. They are much more able to experience the hidden aspects of who they are and to become more authentically themselves. Interestingly, Rogers also believed that once we have dropped our masks, we eventually discover that the stranger who has been living behind our mask is indeed ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

I am not suggesting we go around dropping our actual masks, as it is clear they are our defence or protection; however, I am interested in what we can learn about ourselves and each other while having to wear one. What a client may be able to learn from me will be demonstrated, not by my appearing as an expert or distant, but as a human being. And what we may discover together in the therapeutic relationship becomes even more profound. Who I am as a person is available to the client as well as who I am as a professional helper. I intend for my clients to learn about the part of me who is fragile at times, who also yearns for protection and holds out hope for a vaccine. I also want them to know me as someone who cares deeply for them and who understands we all have a need to belong and find meaning in our lives. As people, we are all connected. The special qualities of relationship, connection and being human should not be hidden from each other, with or without a mask.

## Survival and care for others

To me, the most interesting development is that we are not only protecting ourselves as a way to survive, but we are also protecting others so that

we *all* might survive. This awareness of our connection with everyone else feels like a vital message for our survival as a species. The practice of wearing a mask is mirrored by friends and family all over the world. We appreciate each other's importance. We want our loved ones to be safe. We are being offered an opportunity to understand and appreciate that we really do all belong and are connected to a similar destiny; where we share a communal lived experience on this planet. More than ever, for us all to survive, our feelings of love have to extend from those we hold most dear, towards the stranger we come across in the street or in the supermarket. Keeping me safe will also keep you safe, which in turn will keep everyone safe.

## New ways of the heart

The once seemingly simple expressions of love we shared – a kiss, a hug, shaking hands, welcoming someone into our home for a cup of tea or welcoming a client into our room – have now become the way we used to do things. This calls for a new way of being. A new love in action is emerging, which has to include our health and safety practices: caution, distance, restraint and even withholding our touch. These new practices help us return to a consciousness which acknowledges our connectedness. We have to learn new ways of the heart.

Whatever we may understand about the life journey, I believe the coronavirus pandemic has brought us all into contact with the potential for a new awareness of life and death on our doorstep as well as in the therapeutic relationship.

Most importantly, if we can trust our humanness and our desire to create meaning and belonging with each other in an authentic way, as Jung and Rogers have shown, then even though it may at times seem we are hidden from each other, none of us need be a stranger behind the mask.

## Get to know the author

Find out more about the author in our new *Ten minutes with the author* feature in *Thresholds* online

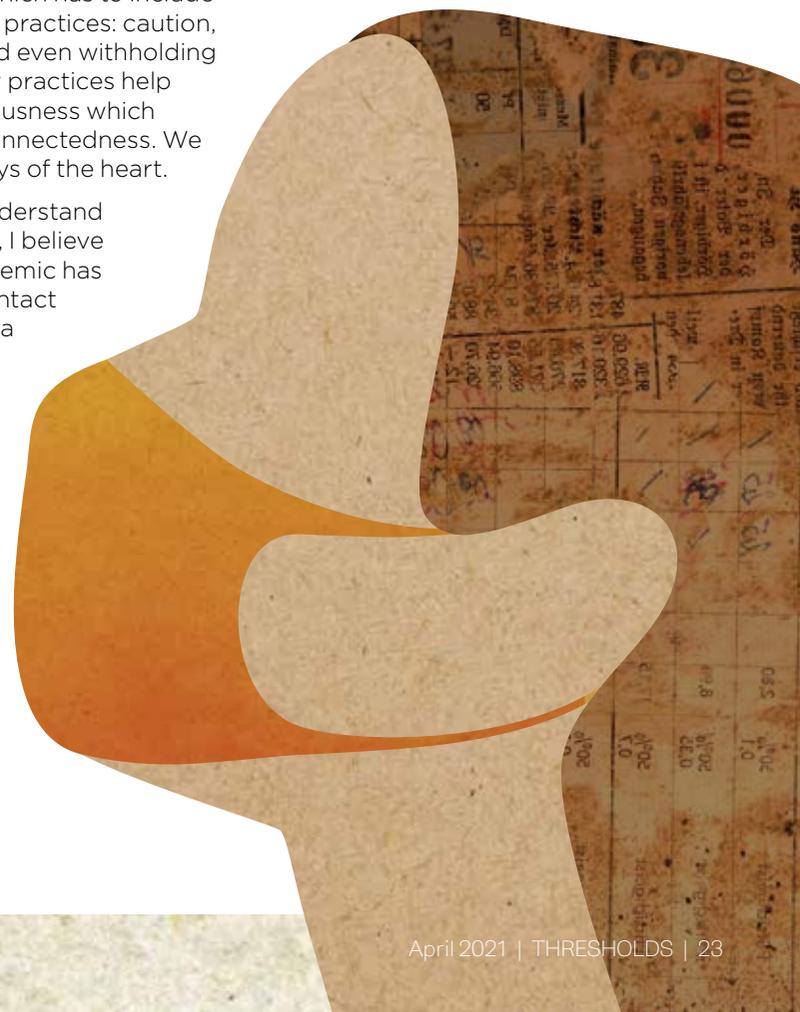
## Biography



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# Should you refer a client struggling with addiction to a 12-Steps programme?

**Samantha Duggan** writes about the power of the 12 Steps to transform lives

**O**n 25 October 2007, I woke with a hangover. There was nothing unusual in that. What was unusual that day was that I turned to my husband and said, 'The data are in. I can't do this on my own. I need help.' I had been trying to cut down on my drinking for years. I couldn't seem to manage it. I could easily skip a day or two, especially when I felt terrible on account of my hangover. But once the nausea and headache wore off and I'd had a good night's rest, I'd have my usual glass of wine with dinner and the whole cycle would repeat itself. Sometimes, I would manage to go without in the working week and only drink at the weekend. Once, I managed nine days without alcohol, but my goal had been a sober month. After nine days on the wagon, I had forgotten why I

didn't want to drink, and besides, no alcohol for a month seemed excessive, so I abandoned my goal. With hindsight, I could see that the consequences of taking a drink were predictable: unhappiness, anxiety, indignity, shame. And this even though I have a PhD in clinical psychology and have never missed a day's work on account of drinking, have never driven while drunk, and have never been arrested. I didn't drink every day and certainly never drank in the morning, but in my mid 30s, married with two young children, I finally came to understand that I was an alcoholic and when I drank my life was unmanageable.

### **A path to spiritual awakening**

What happened when I stopped drinking was nothing short of miraculous. My life transformed completely. How did this happen? I encountered something called the

12 Steps and had what can reasonably be described as a spiritual awakening. The Steps – as they are referred to by people in the fellowships – were developed in the 1930s to help alcoholics stop drinking. Since the formation of the first 12-Step fellowship – Alcoholics Anonymous – in America in the 1930s, the 12 Steps have helped countless millions to turn their lives around. They offer a solution to all sorts of addictions, from gambling to sex and even behavioural patterns that most people would never consider addictions, like shopping and helping other people. While there are considerably more than 100 12-Step fellowships worldwide, there are 30 known to be operating in the UK. Many thousands of weekly meetings, now mostly on Zoom, are available to support many more thousands of people who consider themselves grateful members of these amazing fellowships.

In my case, I first worked the Steps specifically in relation to alcohol. But I came to understand that they could be used to radically overhaul my life and make changes I had wanted to make for years, but somehow never managed. What sort of changes? There are too many to mention them all, but, in no particular order, here is a sort of top 10.

### **Transformation**

I became less dependent on my parents' approval in a way that meant I could have an enjoyable relationship with them. My own parenting changed dramatically and my relationship with my children improved enormously. I became significantly less anxious about everything. My litany of sub-syndromal mental health conditions subsided: my mild OCD, my PTSD symptoms, my disordered eating, my paralysing shame attacks, my imposter syndrome. My anger and rage gradually evaporated. My husband and I ceased being adversaries and became allies. Opening an official-looking envelope no longer made my heart skip a beat. My life expanded and became more fulfilling, more successful, more enjoyable. I gained a deep-seated but, I hope, quiet, confidence that isn't rooted in achievement or possessions or anything else ephemeral. The first Step involved cutting out alcohol. But as 12 Steppers are fond of saying, the next 11 steps don't

even mention alcohol (or your addiction of choice) at all.

People who are familiar with the fellowships can easily accept the peer-to-peer support aspect of membership in a 12-Step fellowship. Within drug and alcohol service provision here in the UK, 12-Step fellowships are understood to be a form of mutual aid (MA) where support is provided to people with a particular addiction by other people with the same addiction. When you join a 12-Step fellowship, you get plugged in to an amazing support system that can alleviate the loneliness that besets so many people today, and which is so detrimental to our emotional and physical wellbeing. It is also deeply

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## As I became more compassionate towards other people by learning to use the Steps to process and let go of hurts and resentments, I became more compassionate towards myself as well

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encouraging to discover that you are not the only person in the world dealing with a particular problem. It doesn't take many fellowship meetings to discover that whatever you are going through, someone else has been there before you.

### The Steps as a form of CBT

I also like to point out that the Steps and fellowships are a powerful yet casual form of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT),<sup>1</sup> where each member is encouraged to radically overhaul the way they think. Fellowship members learn to use a plethora of slogans and catchphrases that are designed to help address 'stinking thinking' and encourage a one-day-at-a-time approach to life. Step 11, considered one of the three spiritual Steps, along with Steps 3 and 7, is an inducement to incorporate prayer and meditation into your life. We have evidence that both prayer and meditation are greatly beneficial for health and mental wellbeing. So, while I regularly hear there is no evidence of or insufficient evidence to support the 12

Steps, I believe this is a disingenuous claim. We have plenty of positive evidence about the beneficial effects of the various components of the 12-Step programme, such as social connection, CBT, prayer<sup>2</sup> and meditation.<sup>3</sup>

### Healing relationships

One of the greatest gifts I have received from incorporating 12-Step spirituality into my life has been my transformation as a mother. Working the Steps has allowed me to go beyond my previous limitations and break chains of dysfunction from my family of origin. As an example, my previous reaction to physical pain in my children was anger and blame, rooted in fear. Through the 12 Steps, I have been able to transform this reaction into the more helpful response of compassion. I now have an automatic approach response, rather than an unhelpful but similarly automatic, avoid reaction. This change was hard won. I remember one evening when my exuberant four- and six-year-old children were bouncing on my bed, I had to literally sit on my hands and bite my tongue to stop myself going into critical parent mode and crushing their joyful fun. In a previous phase of my growth, I would have been grateful for this critical parent, which I later came to understand as an ineffective attempt to stave off accidents. Because, if an accident occurred, I might fly into anger, which was even more unhelpful and hurtful. Both reactions, the angry and the critical, were part of the hangover from my childhood interacting with my innate temperament. My own parents had been similarly unable to deal compassionately with the minor physical accidents that are a hallmark of a normal childhood.

### Lessons in self-control and accountability

The 12 Steps have also been of benefit to me in my role as a behavioural psychologist working with parents and children. The lesson that the only person you can control is yourself is helpful to anyone, not just people wrestling with addiction. I'm aware this wisdom isn't new to therapists and counsellors, but the 12 Steps give you a unique perspective because you commit to living this knowledge and you get daily, free support to do so. As you can only pass on what you've truly got for

yourself, I find that I'm more effective in my role as a helping professional as a result of the Steps.

The 12-Step practice of taking a daily inventory and discussing one's shortcomings with a sponsor or trusted recovery friend is a vital part of the accountability we know is beneficial to transformation. Twelve-Step spirituality is a philosophy of radical personal responsibility, coupled with immense compassion. Some people refer to this aspect of the 12-Step programme as accountability and forgiveness. My sponsor held me accountable until I learned to hold myself accountable. As I became more compassionate towards other people by learning to use the Steps to process and let go of hurts and resentments, I became more compassionate towards myself as well.

### Breaking down biases about spirituality

The 12th Step is about carrying the message of recovery to other people. In February 2020, Lord Clive Brooke, a Labour life peer, set up the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for 12-Step Recovery from Addiction, and I accepted the role of Secretary for the group. Dr Lisa Cameron (SNP MP), who worked as a clinical psychologist before entering politics, is our Co-Chair. The APPG for 12-Step Recovery is conceived of as part of how we hope to create a nationwide attitude of understanding, tolerance and openness towards 12-Step recovery and the people who pursue this route out of addiction. We are calling our initiative the National Welcome because we hope that one day people who work at the front lines of addiction and dysfunction throughout the UK – counsellors and therapists included – will come to see the power of the 12 Steps to effect change and thus be open to incorporating the Steps into their work. We are hoping to break down bias which still exists against recovery approaches that speak of spirituality.

It is interesting this bias exists when so many people are longing for greater spirituality in their lives. We see this in the popularity of spiritual practices like yoga and mindfulness, even if some people insist these are not actually spiritual practices. We can also look to

# Debate

the perennial popularity of spiritual books like *Eat Pray Love*, *The Happiness Project* and *The Secret*, in support of the idea that many people are incredibly open to spirituality. The 12 Steps use the word 'God', which some people have a negative reaction to. We know this is part of why some people working in the field of addiction have a negative bias against 12-Step fellowships, despite the evidence being in favour of them.

## A tool in tackling lockdown isolation

Since the first lockdown last March, we have been sitting on a ticking time bomb of increased drinking and mental health problems. The sense of isolation and disconnection that people are feeling can barely be overstated. The 12 Steps create connection where there has been disconnection – from the self, from others and from the spiritual aspect of

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Since the first lockdown last March, we have been sitting on a ticking time bomb of increased drinking and mental health problems. The sense of isolation and disconnection that people are feeling can barely be overstated

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life. They help recreate this vital sense of connection by encouraging the person to reach out to other people and thus, ultimately, connect with both the self and a Higher Power of the person's own choosing. The phrase 'Higher Power' is used in the 12-Step fellowships to refer to some source of support or 'power' that can help the person maintain sobriety. For some, this is not a recreation of connection, but rather the first time in life that such connections have been made. I am convinced that the 12-Step fellowships can and should play a vital role in our recovery from the pandemic and the lockdown response.

## Making spirituality accessible

One of the best things about using the 12-Step approach to overcoming addiction is that through the fellowships the addict is introduced to 12-Step spirituality, which is completely

non-didactic and presents spiritual ideas in ordinary, accessible language. Therefore, the steps and the principles they embody can fit with all kinds of spiritual and religious beliefs, as well as atheist and agnostic positions. The 12-Step practitioner is encouraged to find a God of their own understanding. Although the Steps use the word 'God' (of your own understanding), you will more frequently hear people in fellowship meetings speak of their Higher Power. In 12-Step recovery, you discover lots of acronyms for G-O-D, which can be used to get you started on a spiritual journey that might lead to a different conception of God, or which can serve as a long-term functioning conception of Higher Power. These acronyms include Good Orderly Direction, Group Of Drunks, Great Out Doors and Gift Of Desperation. 12-Step practitioners vary enormously in the degree to which they incorporate the spiritual principles of the programme into their lives. Some enjoy the fellowship and mutual support on offer. Others value having their lives placed on a spiritual footing and go to great lengths to incorporate spirituality – as they understand it – into their lives.

## A source of support for clients

I was recently interviewed by Dr Nat Wright, a GP and addiction specialist, who has developed much of the Royal College of GPs' training on addiction over the past 20 years.<sup>5</sup> He asked me what I thought GPs could do to help people with addiction and alcohol issues. My answer was to make more use of the free and constantly available resource that is the 12-Step recovery movement in the UK. I say the same to counsellors, chaplains, nurses, ambulance drivers, paramedics and care workers. Find out more about 12-Step recovery. Read the website of a fellowship like AA, Al-Anon (the fellowship for the friends and family members of alcoholics), Gamblers Anonymous or Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous or Codependents Anonymous (CoDA). Read some fellowship literature or attend a 12-Step meeting. It is probably worthwhile noting that the fellowships are not a substitute for counselling, and many 12-Steppers pursue personal counselling in addition to their

fellowship meetings. In fact, a disproportionate number of 12-Steppers are counsellors themselves, often retraining after their encounter with the 12-Step movement.

The need for recovery from addiction is great. I believe we owe it to people who struggle with alcohol, gambling or other problem behaviours, to offer them the solution of 12-Steps. Whether they take it or not is up to them. It doesn't work for all of the people, all of the time. But for those for whom it works, the transformation is profound and lasting. I consider myself lucky to be among that number.

Professor Keith Humphreys of Stanford University was co-author of a Cochrane review (a meta-analysis) last year, which found clear evidence for the efficacy of the 12-Step programme for treating alcohol use disorder.<sup>4</sup>

He will be addressing the 12-Step All-Party Parliamentary Group on this topic on 30 June this year, via Zoom. If you would like to attend, please contact me at:

**samanthamarieduggan@gmail.com**

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## Biography



**Dr Samantha Duggan** is a behavioural psychologist working in private practice with parents on family and parenting issues. Her website is [www.beyondsupernanny.com](http://www.beyondsupernanny.com). She is also

Secretary of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for 12-Step Recovery from Addiction, a cross-party group of MPs and Lords working to make 12-Step recovery more available to those who need it. **samanthamarieduggan@gmail.com**

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# Dreaming of holidays



**Alistair Ross**

## Alistair Ross meditates on the importance of transitions

My recent dreams have been about death (threatened and actual) and holidays. I generally prefer the holiday part, although they are difficult to distinguish as they often morph into each other. Perhaps it is the time of year when we are subliminally influenced by enticing adverts offering images of beaches, rugged coastlines, azure skies, and sun-filled days. Such adverts conjure up thoughts and feelings of relaxation and escape. They speak of freedom from the ordinariness of our daily lives: dark mornings and early evenings. Yet, holidays aside, my dreams tell me my psyche is troubled and my soul is unsettled in some difficult-to-reach way. This reflects the times we live in, where we go about our days, often limited to home, in a period of existential flux. CS Lewis talked about transitions from one life to another; one place of being transformed into another place of being; a transition most often marked by death. He writes at the end of one of his Narnia books, *The Last Battle*: 'Term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning'.<sup>1</sup>

My dreams left me with a thought about how vital transitions are for ourselves, and even more so, our clients. Such transitions are always a unique and uneven synthesis of the spiritual, the psychological, the therapeutic, the intellectual and the embodied. Such transformations are easier to identify than a gradual metamorphosis. Both are important. This could be a helpful occasion to take account of who and what we are at this moment in time, not dwelling on the past or escaping into the future.

### REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMATIONS

#### Spiritual being

Developing spirituality is a life-long quest, with detours and barren desert times. There are magical, if not all-too-transitory, mystical moments, helped by

rituals that are often held as part of religious traditions.

*What do I like about my spirituality? How does it sustain me? How does it define me?*

*Does it need some attention? What new aspects of spirituality might we explore? Who do we need to connect with, inside and outside our self?*

#### Psychological being

What are our 'normal' patterns, moods, or emotions? Have these changed during the COVID-19 crisis? I have discovered, much to my surprise, that I have become more anxious about things. I have less resilience to see things through. The extrovert part of me misses those relational conversations that energise me. It is often in talking with others that I discover more about what I think and feel.

*Make a list of the things that drain you and the things that energise you. See what you can do to rebalance.*

I think clients have a 'sixth sense' as to whether they are with someone who offers them a level integrity, emerging out of their being, rather than using a therapeutic technique

#### Therapeutic being

I make a distinction from our general psychological being, although they are closely intertwined. Therapists come in many forms and traditions. What is important is not what therapeutic tradition you have been trained in, or have evolved into, but how you inhabit your beliefs, traditions, and practices. I think clients have a 'sixth sense' as to whether they are with someone who offers them a level integrity, emerging out of their being, rather than using a therapeutic technique.

*Reflect on the kind of practitioner that you have become. What beliefs, traditions and practices have informed this? Is there anything you would like to change?*

#### Intellectual being

Painful as it is for me as an academic to acknowledge, intellectual fitness is hard to find, because it requires continual hard work and application. We find so many better things to do than read a book, especially one that stretches our thinking or challenges our precious assumptions. It might be controversial, but I believe that to avoid the intellectual tasks of reading and thinking is to fail our clients. A creative mind, alert to new ideas, or old ideas applied in new ways (drawing upon the immense wisdom of the past), brings an aliveness into the therapeutic space.

*What is energising your creative thinking at the moment?*

#### Embodied being

DW Winnicott made popular the idea that we experience the psyche (mind) in the soma (body).<sup>2</sup> Sally Mann,<sup>3</sup> a renowned American photographer and writer, has encountered controversy around some of her work photographing the human body, but has not when displaying photographs of her husband's muscular dystrophy. We exist in a culture with a deep ambivalence about the body in its exposure and ageing. Grown-up bodies are broken, mended and scarred. It is in this very corporeality that we live and move and have our being. It is through our corporeality that we express and experience our spirituality.

*Try mindful walking. As you exercise the body, allow thinking and feeling to come together. Take 10 steps for each year of your life, focusing on that age. Let memories float to the surface.*

#### Biography

**Alistair Ross** is Associate Professor of Psychotherapy at Oxford University, Director of Psychodynamic Studies and Dean of Kellogg College. His most recent book is *Introducing Psychodynamic Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Open University 2019). He is currently writing an encyclopaedia on Freud. Alistair's research focus is on spirituality and psychoanalysis. Email: [alistair.ross@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alistair.ross@conted.ox.ac.uk)

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<sup>3</sup>[www.sallymann.com](http://www.sallymann.com)

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# The therapist and the sculptor

**Steve Page** considers how being present in creative practice enriches client work

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Steve has completed a sculpture as part of his reflective process while writing this article. If you would like to see his finished work, as well as some short videos and additional information, visit: [www.sculptingrocks.co.uk](http://www.sculptingrocks.co.uk)

**S**ince graduating from university in the balmy summer of 1976, I have been directly involved in offering therapy, except for a period of a little over a decade from my mid 40s to mid 50s, when I worked in the wider field of university student support. I was given my first set of six woodcarving chisels as a teenager and I have been slowly adding to it ever since. I think it was some time in my early 40s that I started to think of this creative practice of mine as sculpting rather than woodcarving, and I was 50 when I tackled my first stone carving. To date, I estimate that I have spent roughly 10 times as many hours in the therapist's chair as I have spent sculpting. This balance is shifting significantly; having reduced my therapy practice over the

past year to fit into two days per week, I am now spending a similar amount of time on sculpting and therapy.

### My approach to sculpting

I encourage you to identify your own creative activity or activities, so that as I go on to focus on sculpting, you will be able to apply what I am saying to what you do. Mostly, I carve, which means that I start with a piece of material, generally wood or stone, and remove material with a variety of tools until I decide that I have finished. For some sculptures, I work from a drawing or a maquette, which is a three-dimensional 'sketch' in clay or plasticine (and occasionally Blu-Tack). Quite often, I take what American sculptor Milt Liebson describes as the 'direct sculpting' approach.<sup>1</sup> This involves taking a piece of material, noticing what I am drawn to do first, do that, review, decide what I want to do next and repeat this process, until an overall shape becomes clear to me and I move towards completion. To illuminate this process, in parallel with writing this article, I am currently sculpting a piece of wood that I had in my workshop, applying this direct sculpting approach.<sup>2</sup>



## Finding balance

Many therapists and counsellors who I have met, have mentioned their personal creative practice: dance, music-making, theatre, writing poetry or prose, painting, drawing, cooking, gardening or one of the many other activities through which people express themselves. I am not suggesting that as therapists we are unusually creative, but it is easy to understand why these creative activities can be particularly important to us. We spend a lot of time setting ourselves and our needs aside in service of our clients, so expressing ourselves creatively offers a natural balance to the effect that has on us. Zecevic-Gonzalez<sup>3</sup> described this in terms of '...finding something that replenishes our "inner reservoir" and that generates inspiration and brings balance to our lives'. Nina Coltart<sup>4</sup> delightfully describes how, as therapists, we learn to '...sit peculiarly still'. She goes on to suggest that physical activities such as gardening, playing squash and swimming are a physical antidote to the sedentary nature of our work. It was vital to my wellbeing to ensure I had time for such physical activities when I worked full time in a therapeutic role. Now my lifestyle has this balance built in. Our need for balance runs deeper than simply keeping our muscles supple. Coltart proposes that, perhaps more than our bodies, our spirits need, '...stimulation, change, refreshment, expansion'.<sup>4</sup> For me, the combination of sculpting, walking and meditation are the core elements of my balancing self-care.

## Embodiment

When sculpting, I need to be aware of how I am using my body. If I want to spend four or five hours a day, for two or three consecutive days, undertaking the rhythmic movements involved in cutting away stone or wood with a mallet and chisel, I need to ensure my body can absorb and dissipate the physical impacts this generates. To do so, I must pay frequent attention to maintaining good physical posture, fluid movement and balance, or I risk leaving myself in significant pain. Similarly, I regularly draw on my emotional and intuitive responses as I make decisions about the next steps to take when I am roughing out a form. Much as in therapy, there are seldom simple formulae to apply; rather,



we rely on our embodied, feeling and thought responses to what is emerging in our dialogue with our client to help us decide what intervention to make next. We judge when to be tentative, cautious and when to be confident and strong in our interventions – just as I may make some tentative small cuts in what I am sculpting to see if I like the direction that takes me, or may strike out boldly with deep confidence in what I am doing.

## Personal attunement and development

The capacity of our creative practice to assist us in maintaining a healthy balance may naturally evolve into deepening our attunement, both to ourselves and to the practice in which we are engaged. I think of this as increasing our capacity to be present; to place our attention in the moment, to engage as fully as possible in what is taking place. It is different from the way I do that in my morning meditations. When I meditate, my attention is primarily focused within myself, and once again (as in therapy), my posture is still, steady. When I sculpt, I am in relationship with the material and my tools, I am physically moving most of the time and only a portion of my attention can be internal, if I want to avoid hitting my hand with my mallet!

Through this concept of attunement, I think I am describing two distinct yet overlapping functions. First, we are practising skills that we then utilise in a

different arena. I can practise tuning in to my body, my feelings and intuition as I am sculpting, and these skills are warmed up ready for using in therapy, just as a runner might stretch muscles before going for a run. If I go on to spend significant periods of time using these skills when sculpting (just as our imaginary runner might when they go to the gym three times a week for an hour-long workout), it is reasonable to anticipate that I will gradually improve my ability in these areas of skill. In general, when this happens, we can describe the creative activity as developmental – the practitioner improves their transferable skills through that activity. Then, attunement becomes a developmental process.

## Risk-taking

There is one particular dexterity that I think a creative practice can help us develop, in a way that we may then transfer into our therapeutic work. I am referring to wise risk-taking. I am giving this skill singular attention because I am not convinced that we talk sufficiently about the importance of risk-taking<sup>5</sup> in therapy. In conjunction with a generalised anxiety about complaints that many within the profession appear to have, this can foster a tendency towards being risk averse. Yet, in the three decades of my practice, the key turning point in my work with a client has quite frequently occurred when I have been willing to take

# Creative self

a risk; to put myself on the line for them and with them. Sometimes, there is a degree of calculation on my part; I can assess whether I feel our relationship is robust enough to recover if my risk fails. Other times, it is more of an instinct; it occurs to me in the moment and I simply take the leap.

At the scale of sculpting I currently undertake, it is relatively simple to be courageous, because the price of failure is affordable. A modestly priced piece of material, my time and perhaps a short-lived bruise to my ego. As a therapist, the price is potentially much greater because I am working with another person; yet, surely, I must still be willing to fail? I agree with Seth Godin<sup>5</sup> when he suggests that the essential ingredients

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**We spend a lot of time setting ourselves and our needs aside in service of our clients, so expressing ourselves creatively offers a natural balance to the effect that has on us**

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of creativity are that we do the work, trust the process and are willing to fail. I consider my work as a therapist to be creative. It is fundamental to me as a therapist that the relationship I have with each client and the work we do together is unique, co-created.

When I started to clean up the wood for the sculpture I am carving alongside writing this article, I had an immediate inclination to make the piece of wood into a disc. This would be the first time that I have made a sculpture from a disc and I was initially reluctant, resistant. But then I realised that I was challenging myself to take a risk, do something completely new and unknown. That was an exciting thought because I know that I learn when I take risks, precisely because I put myself onto a path I have never walked before. This seems to me a clear example of the way in which having a creative practice provides an arena in which we can experiment with the nature of risk-taking in a way that is not appropriate in therapy. I hope that I will learn something useful from this

experiment, although at this point I have no idea whether that will happen!

## Expression of unconscious motifs

In 1959, the analytical psychologist Erich Neumann published a book titled, *The Archetypal World of Henry Moore*.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly, Moore was aware of this project as he is acknowledged by Neumann as having provided a significant number of the many illustrations used in the book. A year later, Moore was interviewed by Huw Weldon for an episode of the BBC arts programme, *Monitor*.<sup>7</sup> In the interview, Moore talked of receiving a copy of the book from Neumann, but he said that he decided to stop reading after one chapter, because he feared that he would learn more than he wanted to about his personal motivation and (possibly, tongue in cheek) that might result in him no longer wanting to sculpt.

Moore was clearly aware that the two dominant themes throughout his work are 'reclining figure' and 'mother and child', which Neumann pointed out (in chapter two) are strongly feminine subjects. Moore also suggested that this was not particularly intentional, so much as it was what occurred, which I interpret as Moore acknowledging that he recognises a degree of unconscious expression taking place as he sculpts. While few are engaged in their creative practice to the extent of spending their whole career exploring and expressing a small number of profound archetypal motifs as Neumann proposes Moore did, many of us do enable something of our unconscious selves to emerge through our creative work. In my view, this is to be welcomed, but it is probably sensible to follow the example of Moore and simply let it happen rather than try and make sense of it with our conscious selves.

## Final thoughts

As I was writing this article, I had an image of myself sitting in the corner of a café, trying to eavesdrop on two characters enjoying a coffee together at another table. They represent the therapist and sculptor within me. In this dialogue, it seems to my observing self that they gently and respectfully teach and learn from one another. I have tended to focus on what the sculptor can teach the therapist, because this article is being published in a journal for



therapists, but I believe the learning and teaching flows in both directions.

I can only describe this in an 'as if' manner because my conscious mind is a bystander, witnessing their conversation from my table in the corner, with only an occasional audible phrase drifting across. That feels wholesome; I think I might disrupt their conversation if I were to intervene, and they seem to be getting on very well without me.

\* I am using the term 'risk' in quite a different way to when it refers to the possibility of a client being a risk to themselves or others, when safeguarding considerations and policies need to be considered.

## Biography



**Steve Page** MBACP Accred has a coaching and counselling practice based in Sheriff Hutton, North Yorkshire. He is also a sculptor, working in stone, wood and currently experimenting with plaster. Steve is co-author (with Val Wosket) of *Supervising the Counsellor and Psychotherapist* and author of *The Shadow and the Counsellor*.

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# Claiming my anchor

**Yonca Ozkaya**



Photo: Christopher Emms

In this new column, writers talk about how spiritual experiences shape their understanding of the world

## Yonca Ozkaya offers a spiritual response to her experience of bereavement during lockdown

Just before I saw in 2020 with my terminally ill partner, I got in touch with a strong sense that I needed to connect with the church in our town. At that point, coronavirus was something that affected a far corner of our planet.

The virus was given a name, COVID-19, and quickly changed our way of living and being. It interrupted my routine, which involved moving between different corners of England, 24/7. In hindsight, it meant that I could spend time with my partner before he died. COVID-19 impacted on the setting, but I will remain forever grateful for this blessing.

My experience of multiple lockdowns has been that of being in my own company. I have needed to make sense of my emotional journey, and this exploration has led to a door being opened onto my past. I revisited memories of a time in my life, many decades ago, during which I was nurtured by Austrian nuns, known as the *Barmherzige Schwestern*, at a missionary high school in my native city. This triggered a deep sense of longing for their way of caring.

One of the sisters there felt like a God-sent grandmother to us all. She always smiled and enquired as to how we were. When one of us was upset, she remained present and offered comfort just by being her usual self. I remember another sister's loving gazes whenever we met in the corridors. These nuns provided a loving

home which has turned into a 'good object' in my emotional world.

Alongside this reconnection with the past, I developed an email correspondence with our vicar, which has helped to sustain me as I navigate the storms of bereavement. I also felt drawn to the Sacred Space of the Jesuit Society in Ireland. I access their website daily, and, in particular, the Living Space section, where I gain a better understanding of the Gospel. To me, this process has been similar to deepening my insight about emotional experiences using psychoanalytic thinking.

## My experience of multiple lockdowns has been that of being in my own company. I have needed to make sense of my emotional journey, and this exploration has led to a door being opened onto my past

Via the Living Space Chapel of Intentions, mentioned earlier, I have been able to place prayers with the Carmelite nuns. Knowing that the prayers I place reach them, provides me with the serene comfort I experienced during my teenage years in the presence of the Austrian nuns.

The initial worldwide COVID-19 lockdown meant I could access the online services of Pope Francis, the Church of England and our All Saints Church. I have found containment in their communication and continue to do so. My lockdown online shopping has primarily involved ordering books

from the Messenger Publications and Church House Publishing.

As I am spending a lot of time physically in my own company, prayer has become an important part of my daily routine. I still have many questions for which I seek answers, but I now have a firm anchor in my life. I feel peaceful and calm, while remaining connected to all that is happening on our planet. I continue my journey, on all levels, with a deep sense of gratitude.

### Biography

**Yonca Ozkaya** is an accredited BACP counsellor and Balint Society member. She is a therapist at Ealing Alternative Provision, London and a parent-child therapist and assessor at Renew Counselling Sycamore Centre, Chelmsford. Her core focus is on loss and trauma within a multidisciplinary team framework.

If you would like to write about a spiritual experience that has inspired or informed your work as a therapist for *Journey*, please get in touch at: [thresholdseditorial@bacp.co.uk](mailto:thresholdseditorial@bacp.co.uk)

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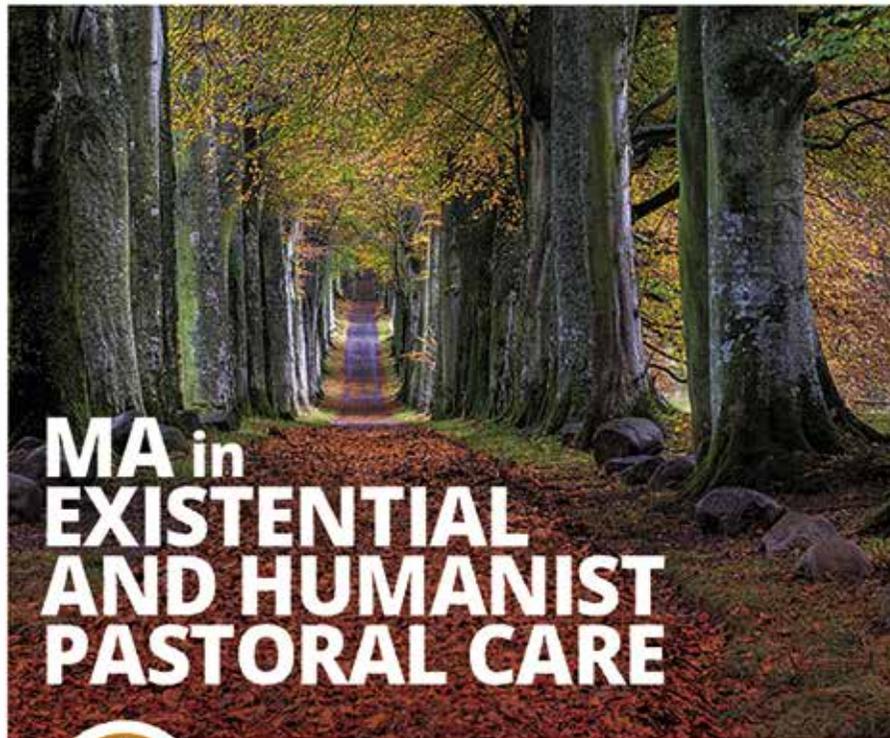
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