

Thresholds

Counselling with spirit

October 2024

‘So many aspects of an individual’s experience have been shaped by culture, cultural values, beliefs, challenges, traditions and taboos’

– Page 8

IN THIS ISSUE:

Challenging misrepresentation

A call for cultural awareness

Using our imaginations

Visualisation in empathy

Holy wisdom

Embodied presence



Contents

ISSUES

6 In depth

Challenging misrepresentation

Ruqaiyyah Najib on the need for culturally competent training within the therapy profession



12 Discussion

Reflecting on therapy

Michael Jacobs talks to Amy McCormack about the inspiration behind his latest book

For me, spirituality cannot be sought, but is something that breaks in on a person without any act of will on our part; and puts us in a situation where somehow we are, at the same time, both outside ourselves, but also deep within ourselves – although to put that into such words does not do the experience justice, and in fact tries to nail it down in a way that such happenings can never be

Page 14

PEOPLE

19 Journey

The spirit of psychotherapy

Jeremy Holmes on pausing to reflect on his life's work

RESOURCES

15 Reflections

The space between notes

Richard Tyler shares an extract from his memoir

20 Creative self

Holy wisdom

Helen Warwick on bridging the ordinary with the spiritual



24 Toolkit

Using our imaginations

Nic Hartshorne on how a capacity to visualise another's world builds empathy

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.

Publisher

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth LE17 4HB. Tel: 01455 883300

Membership and subscriptions

The journal is distributed free to BACP Spirituality members. Membership costs £20 a year for individuals, and £25 for organisations.

For membership or subscription enquiries, call 01455 883300

Editor

Amy McCormack
thresholds@bacp.co.uk

Contributions

Contributions are welcomed; please contact the editor. For author guidelines, see www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/thresholds

Advertising

For rates, call 0203 771 7214 or email cara.termine@thinkpublishing.co.uk

Publication of advertisements and inclusion of advertising materials in *Thresholds* do not constitute endorsement by BACP Spirituality or BACP.

Design

Steers McGillan Eves
Tel: 01225 465546

Disclaimer

Views expressed in *Thresholds*, and signed by a writer, are the views of the writer, not necessarily those of BACP Spirituality, or BACP. Publication in this journal does not imply endorsement of the writer's view. Reasonable care has been taken to avoid error in the publication, but no liability will be accepted for any errors that may occur.

Privacy

In our author guidelines, we set out how we will help protect the privacy and confidentiality of any personal information used. For more details, please visit our privacy notice on BACP's website: www.bacp.co.uk/privacy-notice

Case studies

All case studies in this journal, whether noted individually or not, are permissioned, disguised, adapted or composites, with all names and identifying features changed, in order to ensure confidentiality.

REGULARS

3 From the Editor

4 Inner me

Jeffrey Samuels

11 Real-world spirituality

Yearning

Alistair Ross

23 Student voices

Faith and therapeutic values

Shakila Shaikh

28 From the Chair

29 Divisional and BACP news

Copyright

Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Clearance Centre (CCC), the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA), and other organisations authorised by the publisher to administer reprographic reproduction rights. Individual and organisational members of BACP only may make photocopies for teaching purposes free of charge, provided such copies are not resold.

©BACP 2024

ISSN (print) 2045-516X
ISSN (online) 2398-3590

BACP Spirituality enquiries

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

The soul work

It could be argued that, much like what happens to us from birth to three years old affects our subsequent experience of life, our practitioner training goes on to affect who we become as therapists.

Training experiences stay with us for a long time. We are thrown together in a circle with a group of people, led by a handful of archetypal wiser figures, and asked to share who we are in a very intimate way. This circle is supposed to be the safety net that holds you, and the place to experiment with authenticity, congruence and vulnerability. What happens when aspects of who you are aren't honoured in that process or you feel that you have to hide them away? It's interesting to think about this in

This circle is supposed to be the safety net that holds you, and the place to experiment with authenticity, congruence and vulnerability

Winnicottian or Rogerian terms, and I think this is why I found Ruqaiyyah Najib's article on p6 so powerful. Our experiences in training do shape how we feel about ourselves, as people as well as counsellors.

Alongside reading this piece, I came across Lynn Underwood's Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES).¹ It contains a series of statements such as 'I feel deep inner peace or harmony' or 'I find comfort in my religion or spirituality'. It was a simple reminder of the extent to which our worldview (whether that is staunch atheist, firm believer, or something in between) shapes our experience. It is a lens and when that lens is disallowed, it is at best a missed opportunity and, at worst, probably damaging.

Another idea I came across in my reading this month is Carlo Leget's concept of 'inner space'.² This relationship with yourself is beautifully conveyed in both the extract from Richard Tyler's memoir *As a Kite Falls* on p15, and Helen Warwick's piece about experiential listening on p20.

Ruqaiyyah's article calls for more positive institutional representation and perhaps this kind of reverent listening, one that respects what Leget calls the 'polyphony of every human being', is something upon which to build. Offering a gentle, non-intrusive, non-judgmental space for a person to bring their whole experience, which may include faith and cultural traditions, should be standard, but it seems we have some way to go.

In an interview with Michael Jacobs on p12, he tells me that the profession has changed enormously in the past 50 years. His latest book calls for a special kind of reflecting on the communication that passes between client and therapist. Again, this speaks of space.

If you have any thoughts about the themes explored, or would like to add your own voice to the *Thresholds* polyphony, please email me. ●



Amy McCormack

Amy McCormack
thresholds@bacp.co.uk

References

- 1 Underwood L. The daily spiritual experience scale: overview and results. *Religions* 2011 (2): 29-50. <https://tinyurl.com/4mwuzzhm>
- 2 Leget C. *Art of living, art of dying: spiritual care for a good death*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 2017.

Inner me



We talk to counsellor, **Jeffrey Samuels**, about the things that inspire him

Tell us a little more about what you do

I only qualified in my mid-60s and I am now in my 70th year. As one of my stepdaughters likes to say, in reference to my neurodiversity, counselling is my 'special interest'. Building a private practice is challenging but I am satisfied by the number of clients I have. I also spend a morning each week at the organisation that gave me a placement while I was a student, as well as seeing a few clients for a neurodiverse charity at a concessionary rate. The need for affordable neurodiverse counselling is leading me to explore offering group sessions, which would benefit neurodiverse people and those close to them, as psychoeducation can be helpful.

Is there a spiritual aspect to your work?

Over 40 years ago, I read *A Guide to the Perplexed* by EF Schumacher. It describes the tasks of humanity as: 1) learn from society and tradition, 2) interiorise this knowledge, find out how to think for yourself and become self-directed, and 3) grow beyond the narrow concerns of the ego. If spirituality means to 'grow beyond the ego', or to use what Schumacher describes as the 'X' factor (or that which distinguishes man from animal), then I use it.

What moves you in life?

A process which evokes emotion that I do not claim to understand. I notice I am

most moved when I see inner meaning. Think of Russian dolls, and the excitement of opening each one and finding another. There is an inner depth to each new find. Another example is that of *Trompe-l'œil*: two separate stories being brought together that at first instance are not obviously connected. As a pattern seeker, I find this stimulating.

I am also moved by certain musical pieces, especially hearing the richness of the double bass. In my work, it is the secret goodness uncovered within a client.

Are there any wellbeing practices or rituals that sustain you?

I like to be on the edge and live with a sense of knowing what I do not know. It is like climbing a bifurcated staircase. The climb is hard, but when you reach a platform step, you feel a sense of joy in the achievement and anticipatory excitement.

The routine of daily prayer and observing the sabbath brings anxiety, but also grounds me, bringing a pattern to time. Whilst I rail against being restricted, I know that without these rhythms, I would have no grounding.

Tell us about a mystical or memorable moment in your life

There have been various times that I have had my ego subsumed by the impact of external intensity. My personal translation of Psalm 118 (21-24) from the

Hebrew would be: 'This is the day the Lord created – we will be intoxicated and enraptured, joyful and celebrate' (Psalm 118). I have micro moments when I sense this. Ironically, these occur in mundane circumstances, rather than when experiencing a rite of passage. In those circumstances, I often feel underwhelmed.

I am inspired by those who think outside the box but have the courage to act on those beliefs

To me, the mystical moments feel rather like how critic Vivian Mercier described experiencing *Waiting for Godot*: 'a theoretical impossibility – a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats.'¹

Who has inspired you?

Quintessential, cultured, older people who have befriended me. In my youth, I met a number of central European refugees who had settled in England, who interfaced their pre-war culture, with that of the latter half of the 20th century. They opened windows of possibility for me.

I am always inspired, for the same reason, by people I did not know



who altruistically answered the call of humanity. Relief workers and peace campaigners, to name but a few. Otto Schindler, and Miep Gies (who sustained Anne Frank's family in hiding), come to mind.

People of my generation were brought up to admire what was thought to be the genius of Winston Churchill, despite the fact that he had a chequered career.

I am inspired by those who think outside the box but have the courage to act on those beliefs.

Do you have a favourite spiritual book?

The obvious candidates – the Bible and the Talmud – are of course, chains in a link. For them to have meaning, I look to the exegetes who bring to life the contents.

There is no greater work than *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel.² Born in Poland, and arriving in America in midlife, he composed a book in an incredible lucid English. These words inspire me:

'Sanctifying the Sabbath is part of our imitation of God, but it also becomes a way to find God's presence. It is not in space but in time, that we find God's

likeness. ...Even if people fail to observe the Sabbath, it remains holy.'

And perhaps most relevant to therapeutic work is: 'The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments. In a religious experience, for example, it is not a thing that imposes itself on man but a spiritual presence. What is retained in the soul is the moment of insight rather than the place where the act came to pass. A moment of insight is a fortune, transporting us beyond the confines of measured time.'

Do you have a favourite quote?

נָא גְבוּר, דּוֹרְשֵׁי יְחוּדָךְ כָּבֶדְתָּ שְׁמִי This is a line from a liturgy composed in the second century. Its import is, '*mollycoddle those who strive to reconcile the disharmony we find in life as delicately as one would the lens of an eye*'. It speaks to me – I use the metaphor that we expect life to be a doughnut oozing with jam, but it is more like a bagel whose hole we are constantly trying to plug. This task is as open-ended as painting the Forth Road Bridge. The concept of an eye's lens or pupil, alludes to seeing the abstruse.

A favourite piece of music?

Zadok the Priest; Fidelio; works by

Bruckner; John Rutter; Elgar; and Sibelius, all speak to me. Leonard Cohen is a new discovery for me, and joins Simon and Garfunkel, and Bernstein, from my youth.

I feel saddened that the beautiful masses are inappropriate, in parts, for a practising Jew, but I would recommend Kol Nidre. Even if the words are unintelligible, the emotion displaced on a good recording is palpable.

What does the word 'divine' mean to you?

All the above. Divine means celestial and ethereal. I notice that all my answers bespeak a sense of this, and I appreciate this opportunity for self-reflection and discovery. ●

References

- 1 Mercier V. Beckett/Beckett. London: Souvenir Press; 1990.
- 2 Heschel AJ. The sabbath. FSG Classics. Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2015.

Be featured here

If you would like to be included in a future *Inner me*, please contact thresholds@bacp.co.uk

In depth

Challenging misrepresentation



An abstract painting of a crowd of people, rendered in a style that blends colors and forms. The figures are depicted in various shades of pink, red, green, and brown, creating a sense of movement and diversity. The background is a mix of soft, blended colors, suggesting a large gathering or a public space.

Trainee therapist, Ruqaiyyah Najib calls for the therapy profession to prioritise culturally competent training

I am a Muslim, South Asian trainee, born and brought up in London. My drive to be therapeutically trained stems from my passion to provide taboo-free, accessible and relatable therapeutic support to all. In addition to my training, I work as a young person's life coach. My background and beliefs have greatly shaped my perspective on the counselling and psychotherapy field. Coming from cultural traditions where concepts such as mental health and therapeutic support are alien ignites a drive in me to bridge the gap.

Creating a space where people of ethnic-minority or Muslim backgrounds can receive support from a person who shows curiosity about their experience before judgment is all important to me. I would like these clients to experience a therapist who can relate to them, who may look like them and who is informed about them. Even though the therapy world is progressing in a beautifully diverse manner, practitioners from an ethnic-minority, Middle-Eastern or Muslim background are still a minority. There is a huge proportion of people in need of mental health support who are receiving culturally incompetent levels of therapy, thus affecting their trust in the field and therapists overall. I believe much of this derives from a lack of culturally competent training and professional support, or encouragement. There is a misrepresentation of our communities in the media, with a lack of visibility and positive focus. In environments where these discussions do happen, I've found that those leading the conversation do not always prompt much needed expansion on these topics. The theme is generically approached, rather than explicitly facilitating cultural curiosity.

I am the only person of my background on my course. At times, this can feel liberating, and a reason to be proud, and other times, it can be isolating and makes me question the place I hold in the world of therapeutic training. There is pressure to excel, and prove, that I have a right to be here. That I can provide a high standard of therapeutic care to people I support. That despite my hijab, or visibly ethnic features, or the cloud of public judgment around people who look like me, I too can be trusted as a therapist.

A part of that stems from my own cultural insecurity which derived from discriminative experiences growing up. Neither diversity nor therapy were valued in the environment in which I grew up. As a young person, I had many South-Asian, Middle-Eastern and East-African friendship groups, and very rarely recall us having access to a therapist or supportive adult who we could relate to. Most of the time, if a referral for support was made, it was a therapist who evidently lacked cultural competence. Aspects of our experience were either misunderstood, judged, or completely ignored. Behaviours that were indicative of trauma, anxiety or depression were perceived by surrounding professionals as problematic, troublesome, or due to 'bad parenting'. This resulted in a pool of judgment towards our communities. So many aspects of an individual's experience have been shaped by culture, cultural values, beliefs, challenges, traditions and taboos. To minimise that reality is to prevent doing justice to that child, young person or adult's therapeutic experience. After all, how can you empathetically and non-judgmentally support an individual when you lack awareness about aspects of their background that, for a large part, shape them?

Finding the right therapist can be difficult but I have been able to find someone who, I feel, offers a true therapeutic experience. The level of cultural curiosity, validation, relatability, and non-judgment I have received is an experience beyond my ability to articulate. They are not from my own background, but have acknowledged how my culture, background and beliefs contribute to my experience of being. And this, without judgment.

To me, that is what marks cultural competence. It is the ability to demonstrate skills that lead to validating and empathetic communication with people of other cultures, resulting in an impactful therapeutic experience.

The impact of misrepresentation on child, adolescent and adult clients is beyond measure. It affects and warps the way you see yourself, and your confidence in your identity. For years, I felt that I needed to minimise my 'ethnic-self', my 'Muslim-self'. These are parts of me that I yearn to love, but don't quite fully because society has taught me that it is safer not to. I spent a long time trying to be less culturally and ethnically visible, conforming in order to make others feel comfortable. This can be the result of misrepresentation-induced fear that if you show your true identity, people will recognise your difference too much, and paint you with the same brush that the media has been using for an incredibly long time.

There is a misrepresentation of our communities in the media, with a lack of visibility and positive focus

For far too long, Muslims have been represented as having extreme views, black and white, or backward ways of thinking, too often associated with extreme behaviours of groups that do not represent the true essence or beauty of the religion. Islam, for the majority of Muslims, is seen and experienced as a religion of peace. That is at the core of our belief. What is difficult to comprehend is that many individuals have a warped and opposing view of what we are taught and what we believe. For clients with therapists who are not Muslim, it is important for them to know that they are safe and included in the therapeutic space, and that they will be free of the judgment that is commonly exhibited towards the community.

At a time when Middle-Eastern and Muslim people are being globally villainised, and the world is becoming desensitised to our experiences, I encourage all of those reading to ponder on what role you can play in generating non-judgmental, validating therapeutic experiences for your clients from these backgrounds.

I believe that a key reason why some professionals can be desensitised in how they provide support to people from these backgrounds could be due to an inability to target and challenge their pre-biases. As well as misrepresentation in the media, judgments towards our communities also derive from a lack of representation in larger spaces. Institutional representation could play a huge part in building acceptance of our communities, if organisations across all disciplines allowed it. Similar principles to those required in the therapeutic field apply across the board. If there are more accurate, positive and realistic representations of our communities, we are more likely to be seen as equal individuals, worthy of curiosity, support and compassion.

Therapists can counteract stereotypes and biases in their practice by untangling their own pre-judgments and biases first. They can start by challenging themselves to unpack the embedded judgments about our communities, that they may not even recognise are subconsciously active in the therapeutic space with clients of different backgrounds. They could exhibit curiosity: ask their clients of these backgrounds about their experiences and acknowledge how that shapes them. They could show empathy and validation of the sometimes inevitable experiences of discrimination and, without shame, accept that they may not have been in receipt of that themselves, and acknowledge that there is a privilege attached to that. To ignore difference, and the blatant reality that your client is of a different culture and background to you, is to shut down the possibility of them sharing any difficult experiences related to that with you as a practitioner. It also fails to recognise the power imbalance. This sends the signal that you haven't attempted to understand their worldview and experience.

How can a client feel safe to explore these aspects of their experience of 'difference' if their therapist hasn't acknowledged that it exists in the first place?

When someone trains as a therapist, they may be driven by an aim to support and better society's and individuals' relationships with their mental health, personal experiences and traumas. To fully meet this mission, for all of society, it is our duty to understand how we can effectively approach supporting clients of diverse backgrounds, and complex needs or experiences. Advocacy and empowerment are core components that contribute to the uplifting and support of marginalised communities.

For far too long, Muslims have been represented as having extreme views, black and white, or backward ways of thinking, too often associated with extreme behaviours of groups that do not represent the true essence or beauty of the religion

The question that I ask myself on a recurring basis is, How can I use my platform and my training to amplify the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalised? I start by having the necessary conversations, and retracting from the fear of judgment that tells me not to. This empowers the part of self that wants to explore strategies for advocating for systemic change within the therapeutic profession and beyond. Recognising the disparity is the first element that requires change. This principle is something I believe applies to all aspects of life. When we are trying to encourage our clients in therapy, or they come to us with a goal to improve their quality of life, we don't throw several solutions at them, and sell therapy as linear and short term. Instead, we facilitate, empower and encourage. We validate and inform them, so that they can find different routes towards a place of equilibrium. Similarly, in the world of representation in the therapeutic field, we need to start with first steps.

This translates, not just to the client experience, but to the practitioner's. The therapeutic community can take steps to ensure that all individuals, regardless of background, can understand what culturally responsive care looks like. A powerful approach to this would be to reconsider the level of prioritisation given to cultural competency training in counselling and therapy courses. Promoting diversity and inclusion in training programmes on a larger scale, or asking for contributions from trainees of different backgrounds, can greatly add to the value and impact of therapeutic training. Not only is this an inclusive way to support existing trainees of different communities, but it is also a way in which trainees lacking confidence in cultural competence can be encouraged to explore and prioritise that part of their training. These trainings should cover topics such as cultural humility, unconscious bias and effective communication across cultures.

For years, I felt that I needed to minimise my 'ethnic-self', my 'Muslim-self'

Collaboration and inclusivity play a pivotal part in redirecting how our communities and those of different backgrounds are perceived. It is similar to exhibiting cultural curiosity in the therapeutic space. Who better to receive information from than those who are a part of the communities themselves? This is one of the reasons why, when I was approached to write this article, I felt incredibly appreciated and recognised. For far too long, inclusive policies and practices have been written by those who are not even a part of these communities. Establishing partnerships and inclusivity between therapists from different backgrounds encourages the barriers to be bridged. It is a way of giving the voice and platform to these community members. That, in turn, contributes towards tailoring support to better meet the cultural needs of clients and therapists.

This recognition, as well as the intention to provide a regular platform within *Thresholds* for trainees to express our experiences, are invaluable. My hope for the future of therapy is to reach an ideal point where trainees feel included, seen, heard, and considered in the therapeutic training they are receiving. Similarly, for children, young people and adults of these communities to reach the point where they can invite therapeutic experiences wholeheartedly with no fear of judgment, and confidence that they will be supported in a way that validates their identity.

For the next generation of therapists, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, I envision a therapeutic field where we are no longer the minority, where our contributions don't need to be divided, and where we can equally contribute to the therapeutic space, and have our opinions and contributions seen as equally valuable. I'd like to recognise the efforts, support and encouragement from BACP, and in particular the editors of *Therapy Today* and the divisional journals who have helped me to share this message. I am truly thankful and appreciative to be training within a space that allows diverse and unique perspectives to be heard. To be able to write and share this has contributed massively to my experience and confidence as a trainee from a South-Asian, Muslim background, and in feeling like I belong in this field as a future therapist. To my peers, I hope that this read has been a source of encouragement for self-reflection. I hope to have planted the seed that this conversation remains one that needs to be active and encouraged, in all therapeutic environments, in order to see accurate and positive representation for clients and therapists. ●

Biography



Ruqaiyyah Najib is a trainee therapist, currently studying integrative counselling and psychotherapy for children, families and adolescents at the University of Roehampton.

Yearning

Alistair Ross



Alistair Ross considers the role that longing can play in therapy

When did you last hear the word 'yearning'? An uncommon word, it has a depth of meaning that rarely escapes the clutches of poets. So, what about yearning in therapy or within the soul?

To yearn is to feel a strong desire or longing for something, someone, or somewhere. It consumes our body, mind and soul. As a child, can you recall that feeling of wanting something so much, it consumed every aspect of your being? Waiting with excitement for something longed for to be revealed. As an adult, when looking back to adolescence, was there someone you so desired, wanted to be close to, that you could scarcely breathe in their presence? Has there been a longing for a place that forms a vitally important and emotionally rich part of your memory? Refugees have often fled their homeland to save themselves and their families. Yet, they yearn for that place even if they can never go back. It lives on inside them.

Our yearnings are a part of our psychological makeup that we often overlook. Somehow, life has taught us that we cannot have what we long for, and so we push such deep feelings away, despatched to the dungeons of our more troublesome emotions. Such yearnings become forgotten in some dark recess of the psyche. So, how do we change this, as part of our therapeutic and spiritual growth?

1. Recover your yearnings. In the story of Joseph and his brothers found in the Old Testament Book of Genesis, Joseph, the father's favourite son, is sold into slavery by his jealous, spiteful siblings. He ends up in Egypt, where he rises to become a key figure in the empire of an

all-powerful Pharaoh. Due to a severe famine, his brothers come to beg for food from the Pharaoh's representative, not recognising it is Joseph, their abandoned brother. Joseph, seeing his youngest brother, Benjamin, has to leave the room because he is so overcome with longing, yearning, affection and emotion (the Hebrew transliteration is *kamar*). This is a powerful universal story of betrayal and redemption, driven by the acknowledgment of a deep yearning. Like a fingerprint, each of us has a unique set of yearnings that reflect who and what we are. These are too valuable to be ignored. They may even form part of our redemption.

Like a fingerprint, each of us has a unique set of yearnings that reflect who and what we are

2. Befriend your yearnings. There may be good reasons why we lock some yearnings away in the first place. Often, it is because we came to yearn for something, or someone, we cannot have. Therein lies a paradox. Just because we yearn for something, doesn't automatically mean it becomes ours. Thinking about why, is the stuff of therapy and spiritual discernment. For therapists, there could be another set of dangers that we yearn for: theoretical perfection, a depth of congruence, or a moment of meeting that validates who we are in our very being. Yet, all too easily, such yearning can become a stick that our super-ego uses to beat us with, reminding us we are never good enough. I often wish my own super-ego were more silent. If you don't like the term 'super-ego', feel free to insert your own preferred therapeutic equivalent.

3. Express your yearnings. This requires a safe space and a safe person. Speaking out loud in the company of another brings our yearnings back to life, in ways we cannot always predict or contain. They rediscover a life force or energy that was denied in their half-life existence. Like Joseph, we may be faced with a painful choice – revenge or redemption. We may find ourselves stuck, unable to go back or forward, fearful of what the next steps might be. Then we discover we are not alone. ●

A Yearning

An ache in the heart
A bruise on the soul
A fog of the mind

A fire that never ends
A torrent that rages
A tornado of emotions

I listen to the silence
Stare into the dark
Longing once more

Biography

Alistair Ross is Associate Professor of Psychotherapy at Oxford University and Director of Psychodynamic Studies. His recent books include *Introducing Psychodynamic Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Open University, 2019) and *Sigmund Freud: a reference guide to his life and work* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022). Alistair's research focus is on spirituality and psychoanalysis.

Reflecting on therapy

Michael Jacobs talks with
Amy McCormack about
the inspiration behind his
latest writing

You have written many other books over the course of your career, including *Psychodynamic Counselling in Action*, soon to be published in its sixth edition.¹ Could you tell me a little about your new publication, *Reflecting on Therapy*?²

It's a book that started as jottings – ideas I had as I reflected back on my years as a therapist and supervisor, as well as on what I have read (fiction, as well as books and articles about therapy). I had no intention, to start with, of publishing these; I just wanted to play with my own thoughts. I drafted short pieces that I kept to about 450 words. It was a way, after I had retired, of keeping my mind in good shape, and enjoying the written word. As it turned out, I built up so many of these pieces that I then thought I might have something of value to practising therapists. The book

therefore has space for them to share their own reflections following mine. My hope is that some of that conversation between myself and the reader will enhance their own therapeutic practice, helping them to understand what their clients are trying to communicate, and how they might respond themselves.

How have things changed since you started out as a therapist over 50 years ago?

They have, of course, changed enormously – and in many ways, it seems to me, not always for the better. Counselling has become over-organised and over-professionalised with a plethora of courses on this issue and that technique. To my mind, as 'a free spirit', which the counselling pioneer, Brian Thorne once called me, we risk losing the essence of the work, which is a profound concentration on the therapeutic relationship. This includes seeking to understand, at different levels,

the communication taking place between therapist and client.

Profound concentration has a distinctly sacred feel to it. Could you say more about that?

I can understand why you chose 'sacred' to reflect on my words, since spirituality is at the heart of this journal. I think there is something sacred about the therapeutic relationship, but there are many relationships that are similarly sacred, in that they are of a higher order of mutuality than the everyday relationships we also engage in. Yet, we may miss the point by concentrating on the relationship as sacred. The communication between therapist and client has a special quality to it, which I would not put so high as being sacred, except that it deserves our respect and deepening attention. I suspect most therapists care about their clients, and try to understand their clients, not just by being empathic but also in their thinking about what the

client says and does. I want to encourage this as being at the heart of the therapeutic endeavour. My book takes some examples of what clients say, what therapists think, how therapists develop their craft, and how they reflect, and asks the reader to think even more deeply about these aspects. The book encourages reflection, and there is space for the reader to add their own thoughts, feelings and ideas to those I have penned. I encourage what might to some extent be called 'contemplation'. Whether that is also sacred, seems to me to be a judgment I am not qualified to make. But I am certain it is special.

Could you say a little about the challenges that may lie in how a therapist connects their personal contemplation with the client's own experience of themselves?

The essence of therapy is not just the relationship between therapist and client – anyone who genuinely cares can offer

that. It is about how we think about that relationship, how we feel in that relationship, and ultimately how we communicate that to each other. We do that in a variety of ways, some of which are not obvious. Our task is to understand one another and find ways of communicating. Learning how to do that is a never-ending task for the therapist, and the longer we engage in this work, the more we reflect upon our work in supervision (the internal supervisor as much, if not more, than supervision with or by another), the more we learn about

Counselling has become over-organised and over-professionalised with a plethora of courses on this issue and that technique

how we and others think and feel in different situations, then the more sensitive we become to what we are trying to communicate to each other.

What drew you to the counselling profession?

When I first practised as a counsellor, there was no counselling profession as such! There were two strands that attracted me to this work. The first was that I was intending to research an eccentric English mystic, and was advised that I should read some psychology first; and, specifically, Freud. This, I found so fascinating that I abandoned my research, because Freud was much more interesting and relevant to me. The second strand was that I was a chaplain at the University of Sussex, and in search of a role. I was encouraged to put my reading, which had by then extended beyond Freud, into practice. This seemed an important role, since at the

Discussion

time, there were very few counsellors in universities. I valued working in this way, and felt that I was doing some good, so when the time came to leave that job, I applied for a post as a counsellor in a student health service at the University of Leicester. To my surprise, I was appointed. You see, in those days, there were very few opportunities to train, especially as a counsellor. Those of us who made this move were pioneers, largely learning on the job, with the help of those who had trained as psychotherapists and analysts, who were able to guide and supervise our development. So, what drew me in was a combination of intellectual fascination, and wanting to find a more effective way of offering care to people than I ever found as a chaplain. I have written at greater length about this journey in my memoir *Fifty Years of Counselling*.³

I'm intrigued by the eccentric English mystic. Could you say a little more?

The eccentric mystic is Margery Kempe, active as a woman preacher in the first quarter of the 1400s. She had visions of conversations with Christ, boldly condemned corrupt religious practices, and was tried as a heretic several times but never found guilty; an interesting psychological study, since she verges on the psychotic. Others have studied her since my early intention to do so.

I did return to my study of mysticism when I wrote the book *Illusion*,⁴ where I trace how belief can change its form all the time. I conclude with one form of belief which is 'unknowing' – a mystical tradition far from Margery Kempe's. Like that which I have described above, I cannot manufacture 'unknowing', but from time to time, I understand it alongside the experience I have tried to describe.

Could you share a little about your own spirituality and how, or whether, that has informed your approach to therapeutic work?

You ask an interesting question about 'your own spirituality'. I should say that I think the term is pretty meaningless in that it means 101 things to 101 people. But you rightly ask about my own thoughts on it. I have come to the conclusion, after a lifetime wondering about these things, that there is only one type of experience that I can describe as truly 'spiritual', even though I would not want to use that term,

since, like the word 'God', it seems to me to limit the experience to conventional spirituality – by which I mean prayer, ritual, meditation, mindfulness, drugs, etc. These are all ways of trying to engage on a 'spiritual' level with whatever 'higher principle' a person believes in. For me, spirituality cannot be sought, but is something that breaks in on a person without any act of will on our part; and puts us in a situation where somehow we are, at the same time, both outside ourselves, but also deep within ourselves – although to put that into such words does not do the experience justice, and in fact tries to nail it down in a way that such happenings can never be. It may happen when I am listening to a piece of music, or catching sight of the view from my window, or reading a book where a passage suddenly enlightens me. But if I were to play that piece of music again, or look out of the window, or read that passage, the experience would not be there. It is fleeting, cannot be described, and is uncontrollable.

The essence of therapy is not just the relationship between therapist and client – anyone who genuinely cares can offer that

How might this apply to being a therapist?

I think my new book, *Reflecting on Therapy*,² contains a number of pieces where I suggest that what can happen to a therapist is that in the course of listening to the client, or listening to yourself, there are similarly times when something seems to come in from outside, or inside, or both, although I never think with the same intensity as the experiences I have just described. But it is not from me, and not from the client (and certainly not from any god speaking to me!). It is a potential insight, which then needs to be thought through, and used when and if it seems right. Not blurted out as Margery Kempe would do, but savoured, digested, and passed on – no longer an external/internal experience, but an attempt to understand a little more of what the client and I are engaged in, not just therapy, but life.

I like the image of an indescribable fleeting insight being transmuted into something that can be used therapeutically. There seems a lot of care and consideration in that. I'm also interested in that final sentence: 'Not just therapy, but life.' I wonder what and where the line between the two is.

Therapy is usually these days – and perhaps it ever was – about people wanting to feel better as a result of some fear, trauma, loss, depression, etc. My own school, which informs my thinking and has always informed my practice, is interested in all the other aspects of a person's life, not just the presenting issue. Ultimately, the psychoanalytic quest reaches towards a philosophical understanding of life itself – the big existential questions, perhaps, which are also the concern of existential therapists. I see therapy as moving from concern about a particular issue to becoming a place where we reflect upon life as a whole, and upon our own experiences of and responses to our place in the world. This is an ongoing process which explains why some people stay in therapy for years – not because they are still trying to overcome the difficulty that might have brought them to therapy in the first place, but because they realise that what therapy provides is the space to reflect upon much wider issues. Of course, this can also happen following therapy, but isn't it good to be able to do that with someone else – not necessarily a therapist, but someone who becomes a soul friend? ●

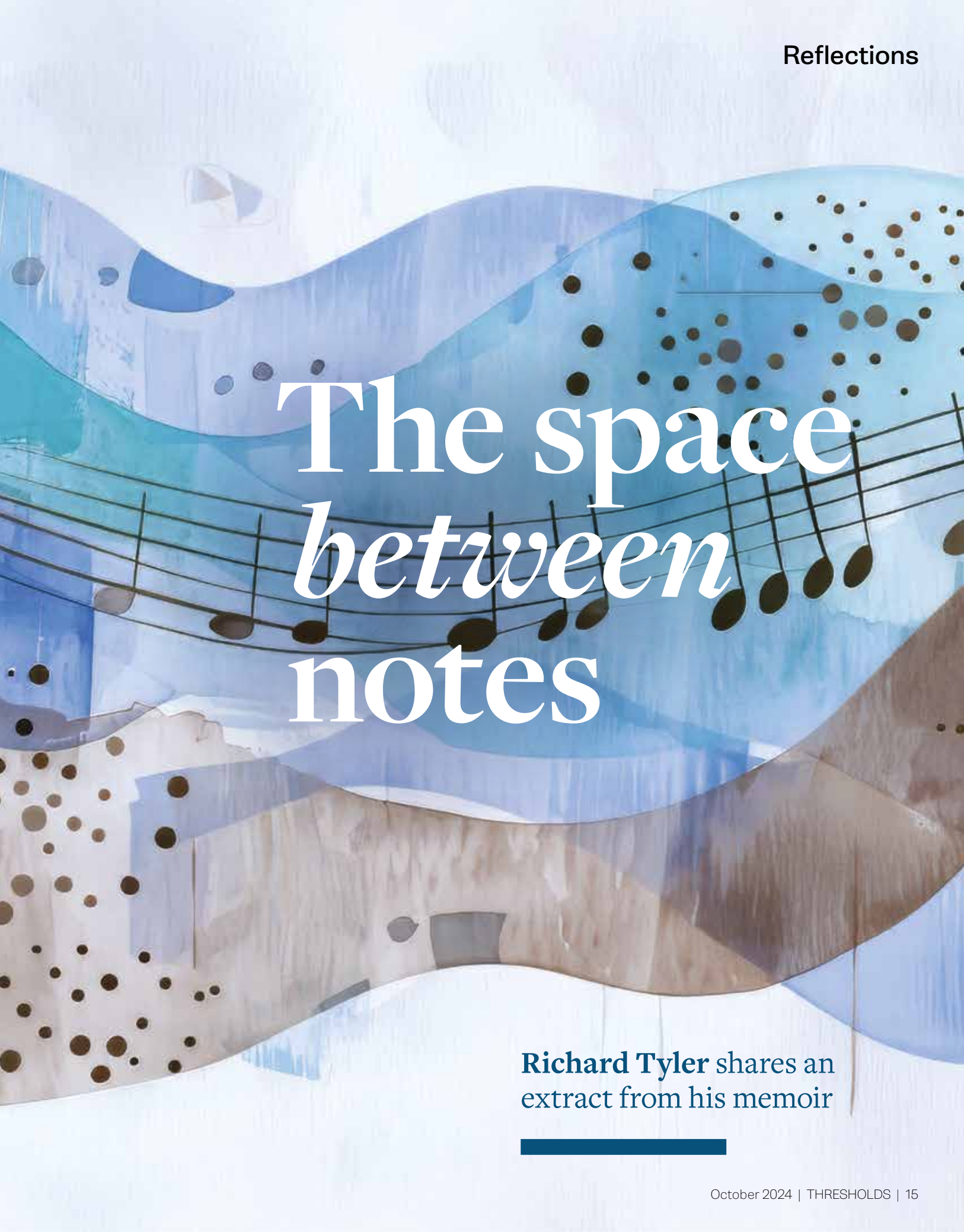
Biography



Michael Jacobs developed a counselling ministry when chaplain at the University of Sussex. In 1972, he moved to the University of Leicester where he was a student counsellor for 12 years. He then worked in adult education, developing a large training programme. He moved to Swanage in 2000 and retired from practice in 2021.

References

- 1 Jacobs M. Psychodynamic counselling in action. 6th edition. London: Sage; 2024.
- 2 Jacobs M. Reflecting on therapy. London: Karnac Books; 2024.
- 3 Jacobs M. Fifty years of counselling. Berkshire: Open University Press; 2018.
- 4 Jacobs M. Illusion: a psychodynamic interpretation of thinking and belief. London: John Wiley; 2000.

The background is an abstract watercolor-style illustration. It features several wavy, horizontal bands of color in shades of light blue, teal, and brown. Overlaid on these bands are numerous small, dark brown circles of varying sizes, resembling musical notes or dots. A single, larger, light blue circle is visible in the upper left quadrant. The overall composition is layered and textured, with the text 'The space between notes' centered over the middle section.

The space *between* notes

Richard Tyler shares an
extract from his memoir

Reflections

Actor turned psychotherapist Richard Tyler went from being a popular star of the West End, who appeared in iconic musicals such as Les Misérables and The Phantom of the Opera, to receiving a diagnosis of three months to live with a rare cancer.

In his memoir, As a Kite Falls, Richard invites the reader to accompany him as he navigates his own journey of loss, grief and heartache. The book 'illustrates what happens when you value, make space, and celebrate both the ups and the downs, and how descent can be the portal through which we find the meaning within our life.'

The author uses the flow of the seasons and haiku poetry, highlighting the significance of art in helping us to experience tragedy and descent. Here, he shares an extract from the book.

With my life's foundation firmly planted in singing, music and theatre, I am often asked what it is I think that makes the difference between those musicians who are perhaps more *ordinary* in their playing, and those who excel at being *extraordinary*. There are, of course, many individual qualities that could play into this distinction, too many to comment on or even comprehend. And yet, I continue to be drawn back to one quality in particular. The rest. The pause. The space.

Maybe we start by acknowledging what is common between them both: the number of notes they can play. Musical notes are musical notes. In many Eastern cultures, they use different scales to the ones familiar in the West. If you choose to listen with your whole body, you will hear a richer cacophony of sound. The Eastern musician is bestowed with an abundance of notes to play and sing, above and beyond our Western harmonics.

But, ultimately, a musical note is a musical note. The ordinary and the extraordinary, then, begin at the very same starting block. So, what does determine someone who is an extraordinary player over someone who is a more ordinary player? My view is that the spaces in between each note are what make the greatest difference.

The rest. The silence. That short, or extended, moment where the world comes to a halt, and the earth's all-hearing sense wonders what choice will be made next. It is these moments where some musicians step into a different league. It is in this space that they breathe in their audience, the mood, the ambience of the room, the story they are telling, their internal state, and the wealth of feelings that dance and swirl around. Discernment. Choice. Wisdom. All wonderfully entwined and dancing together. This isn't about following what the dots on the paper indicate should be played next. No, it is about absorbing what it means to be alive in this very beat of life. Whilst the dots offer up a map, they are not the territory. They are merely a suggestion as to what could come next. This space offers the musical storyteller a choice. And it is here that we come to discover that the music lives between the notes, and is not just the notes themselves. In stand-up comedy, we might call it *comedic timing*. For an actor, it's holding the tension of the *dramatic pause*. In graphic design, it is the *white space*. In music, it's a *rest*. Each one giving spaciousness. A pregnant *pause* where we wait for the birthing process to begin, knowing it can only happen when the gestation cycle is complete. In each medium, these spaces are designed to strengthen the energies at play between the artist and their audience.

If we track a path right back to indigenous tribes, they held great importance in the oral traditions and that of storytelling. Holding silence allowed reconnection and would deepen the interplay between the story, the orator and the listener. In Japanese, they have a word that we simply do not have in our English language: *Ma*, meaning the silence before the sound. The audience waits with curious anticipation as to what might come next.

This space, the silence, is not a void, but an entity filled with energy and purpose. Mystery surrounds this moment in the telling of the story. The story doesn't cease in the silence. In fact, quite the contrary. It is here that the story intensifies and deepens. As an actor, I would play a game with myself to see for just how long I could tenderly cup this journey between what passed and what was in sight. Always doing my best to sense when it felt too long, what effect it might have on the audience, and the narrative at play. The arts have certainly known this for millennia. Many of our spiritual traditions have embodied this sense of space and presence: Buddhism, Zen, Daoism and Sufism. Yet here we are, living in a world which drowns us in knowledge, noise, sound, words, colours, pictures and notes. So many notes. And without the spaces in between. A dissonance of opinions and views, and dictates that suffocate us. The rhythms are haphazard. Contrary motions of jangling melodies confront us. We seem to be living in a maze of minor keys and open-ended cadences. We move chromatically, step by step. The array of discord tests us. We are left searching for resolution. I often feel held hostage by the overwhelm of information, from mostly well-meaning people, who clearly seem to know what I should be doing next. I fight to catch my breath but as I come up for air, I am bombarded with more. We have become immune to the din. It's now normal for us. *Ma* is simply a beautiful word from Japan that remains a construct rather than a reality.

These past months have, for me, been a time of stripping back. A year of simplification. An expanse for me to marinate in less, rather than more. A reduction of my outer landscape which permitted me to be discerning about what I hold in my inner landscape. When too much stuff weighs the kite down, it will simply not fly. My kite was grounded. If you observed MLBC — My Life Before Cancer — you'd see how I was a slave to the notes. Endlessly drawn into a musical battle that I was never going to be triumphant in.

What would have been spaces had more notes squeezed in, making the most of time. Just in case. After all, you never know what life might throw at you, so best not to waste a beat.

After 50 years of filling my life up, I have now decided to empty out. I want less clutter. And more space. One of my deep hopes for the book (I have a few) is that it will offer you some moments of spaciousness and pause too. How rarely we do this — pause, breathe, reflect.

If we track a path right back to indigenous tribes, they held great importance in the oral traditions and that of storytelling. Holding silence allowed reconnection and would deepen the interplay between the story, the orator and the listener

For anything to ripen and mature, we must grant it time, space and the optimum conditions. Ripening is a highly complex process that involves thousands of micro adaptations and developments. If we rush through, we simply eat the inedible. Insights, intuitions, encounters and dreams, all require time to incubate and consolidate into something substantial. Therefore, I have resisted cramming the pages of the book with words and maxing out on chapter numbers. One of the characters I hold inside me is 'The King of Shoulds'. Nice bloke. Bit pushy. Keeps trying to barge in and tell me what I *should* think, *should* feel and *should* do next. He believes that every reader wants maximum value, word count and pages. I also have an inner rebel who tells him to go stuff himself, and tells me to write the story that my heart wants to speak. It is from his counsel that I have decided I am not going to follow the dots on the page just because it's expected. I am aiming for optimal value and, at the same time, will be culling words.

Reflections

The reality for me is that I don't actually know why you may read the book. Maybe you found a copy lying on a train. Or picked it up on eBay, cheap. Perhaps it leapt off the shelf in a bookshop or a friend bought it for you. I assume though that there was some slither of curiosity. It looks and feels different, and maybe it brushes gently across a nerve. I have no clue as to your personal reasoning for getting this far through. Maybe your life is also filled with an endless Spotify playlist of notes – yours and others. And perhaps you, like me, crave some spaces in between.

A thin veil exists between my hope and my despair. The book is one of the ways in which I stand shoulder to shoulder with myself

The magnitude of this year has left me sharply scarred. Not all the scar tissue has formed yet, so more will be revealed over the coming years. For now, I am only too well aware of the rupture my body feels. I'm shredded. Some days are easier than others and it's as if I glide through, hardly recalling the viciousness of the past months. Other days, I hover above myself and see the 1,000-piece jigsaw of my existence, scattered across the floor. I see the corners of my inner landscape where my anxiety and depressed state lay their weary heart. One of the benefits of my crazy strong painkillers is that they help elevate my mood and blot out the enormous sense of loss I feel.

Whilst I acknowledge the need for the strong drugs to start exiting stage left, I know that some days, it is only by allowing them to remain onstage that I can cope. A thin veil exists between my hope and my despair. The book is one of the ways in which I stand shoulder to shoulder with myself. *As a Kite Falls* is helping to prop me up by encouraging me to walk the inner terrain of my life. I've donned my boots and I am ready to get muddy. I come armed with a torch which might help me when the darkness overwhelms. And I have a hot water bottle as, since this illness began, the cold brutalises my skeleton. The fact that you are reading this is a bonus. I'm not used to doing much for me. The book, though, is just that. It's for me. It is my way of illuminating my own story so that I can heal, better understand and go some way towards *reparenting* myself. ●

This extract is taken from *As a Kite Falls: a voyage through descent* by Richard Tyler and is reproduced with the kind permission of Karnac Books Limited. www.karnacbooks.com

Biography



Richard Tyler is the founder of BTFL Ltd and bestselling author of *Jolt: shake up your thinking and upgrade your impact for extraordinary success*. He is an international speaker, coach and provocateur, trained in cognitive hypnotherapy, psychosynthesis, CBT, ACT, NLP, emotional intelligence, Barrett values, and constellation coaching. www.btfileadership.com



The spirit of psychotherapy

Jeremy Holmes

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

Jeremy Holmes writes about pausing to reflect on his life's work

There are certain distinct *pause points* in a person's life: a dark wood (ask Dante), the menopause (clearly), and the andropause (possibly). For therapists, let's postulate a 'philosopause' – a moment, as things draw to a close, where you ask yourself, 'What the hell have I been doing all these years?'.

This is what happened to me when, retired from the NHS, and, as the politicians put it, wanting to 'spend more time with my family', I decided to zoom out from everyday practice and think about what psychotherapy really is, why it matters, and how it fits into Western cultural life.

My starting point was the banal *aperçu* that psychotherapy has replaced a position in society previously occupied by religion. I began to think of the consulting room as a sacred space, where the normal rules and conventions are held in abeyance, much as was the case with churches and cathedrals. I wanted to move beyond my beloved focus on evidence-based practice, secure attachment, transference interpretations, etc, to what's really going on when we sit, listen and converse with our patients.

I homed in on what I call the 'hidden dimension', that is, *praxis*. Now, 'praxis' is a difficult word: it takes us beyond theory to what we actually do with our clients in the immediate here and now – the body we bring into the room and its persona, our history, our own struggles and traumas, our demographic profile and, above that, our inner world and its creativity. I wanted to explore this existential present moment of the therapeutic encounter, and its contribution to contemporary culture.

Pursuing the religious parallel, I began to conceptualise psychotherapy as a species of *secular spirituality* in a world of utilitarian disenchantment. I decided to interview a sample of religious people from a variety of faith backgrounds: Druidic, Buddhist, Muslim, Daoist, Judaic, Christian fundamentalist and Quaker. The most striking finding was, despite marked differences in 'beliefs', how similar were the experiences that interviewees described as positively religious or spiritual. These included a sense of awe, being part of a community, finding an overall framework in which they felt accepted and validated, and moving beyond self-preoccupation to a wider sense of connectedness.

The parallels with therapy were clear. But how could two such disparate cultural formations converge in this way? I still had no answer to the question, 'What is going on here?'. My conclusion was that what psychotherapy and spirituality have in common is that they are both strategies for dealing with *radical uncertainty*. In order to survive, thrive and reproduce, we need to be able to predict the future – but the future is, in its very essence, unknowable. Therapy and religion represent two attempts to resolve this paradox.

At this point, I needed a theoretical framework to help me unravel this conundrum. Attachment theory is my ever-present *vade mecum*, and reminded me that to face the future, we need a secure base: a parent, child, partner, pet, therapist. With their help, we learn to mentalise, to question our assumptions about the world, and modify them where needed. For believers, God is the ultimate secure base: ever present, always able to hear and respond to one's distress.

Beyond Bowlby, I drew on two more minor deities. The first was the neuroscientist and psychiatrist, Karl Friston, whose work I had explored and applied to psychotherapy in a previous book.¹

In his Bayesian free energy minimisation model, the mind/brain, in search of coherence and meaning, is always trying to reduce *free energy* by approximating its top-down models of the world, to the unbound energy associated with incoming bottom-up perceptions.

In psychological illness, the process of attending to sensation and revising models in the light of experience is compromised. From below, feelings are repressed. From above, simplistic and often self-defeating top-down concepts reign, e.g. 'I am inherently unlovable'; 'only if I am thin, will I be acceptable'; 'I am a complete failure'; 'the world is too dangerous to venture into'. Religion counteracts these with all-embracing comforting precepts such as 'God is love', or in the case of non-theistic Buddhism, the view that transience and change, and therefore suffering, are universal.

My third helper was Winnicott and the notion of *transitionality*. This is that play-space between the inner world of feelings and thoughts, and the outer world of brute reality. By co-creating a *transitional* zone, therapist and client can learn to play together, try out ideas, and allow the terrors and horrors of trauma to be felt without succumbing to them. By fostering free association, psychotherapy helps undo repression, and, with the help of mentalising or self-reflection, generates more complex and adaptive models of the self and their world. ●

Biography

Jeremy Holmes MD FRCPsych is Honorary Professor at the University of Exeter and set up the Exeter Psychoanalytic Studies programme in 1998. Author of over 250 papers and book chapters, his books include *Attachment in Therapeutic Practice* (2017), and *The Brain has a Mind of its Own* (2020). His latest, *The Spirit of Psychotherapy: a hidden dimension* (Karnac) was published in 2024. Gardening, Green politics and grandparenting now parallel his lifelong fascination with psychoanalytic psychotherapy and attachment theory.

Reference

- 1 Holmes J. *The brain has a mind of its own*. London: Confer; 2020.



Holy wisdom

Helen Warwick writes about bridging the ordinary with the spiritual

In the Western world, we have been taught to favour logic and reason over the experiential ways of Wisdom. This poetic movement, evolving through energy within our bodies, is a flow and breath, bringing health and a way forward through our difficult paths. Personified as female in ancient sacred writings, *Hokhmah* in the Hebrew scriptures, and Sophia in the Greek, she is steeped in everyday experience and ordinary life, emerging through connecting to our senses, our emotions and spirituality.

My research and articulation of wisdom, through the psychological and the sacred, have been energising and exciting. My exploration has come through living and working in the welcoming community of Holy Rood House, Centre for Health and Pastoral Care. This charity in North Yorkshire offers space for respite, healing, rest, and to breathe, in this chaotic world in which we live. Within the community's foundation, with its gentle Christian ethos, an earthy, creative and therapeutic space is created. As a chaplain, creative therapist and spiritual director, I work closely with guests on an individual and group basis. Hospitality is integral for all staff in the charity, as it is within hospitality that Wisdom can emerge.

Many guests coming to Holy Rood House are experiencing difficulties in their lives, with loss, trauma, change and anxieties. Many lose their true voice, and connection with themselves, perhaps, having given a lot over many years, they have lost their centre. Wisdom emerges in so many ways and I am a witness to her movement through the stories I hear, especially in one-to-one listening with the guests. I work with people in the art room and notice the creative process, and the transformations that occur. This highlights how we can open to a deeper way that gives us energy and healing.

Wisdom is elusive, wrapped in mystery. She can be humble, coming in the ordinary, in the now of the everyday

moment, and she can surprise us with an epiphanic screech that draws us to follow her voice. Her call resounds within us, connecting us to our deepest longings and desires. Shadow-like, Wisdom draws us from darkness showing a way of healing, love, and care for ourselves and the earth. Her relational ways connect us to our deepest selves. This becomes a transformative voice bringing unity and belonging. On the nature of wisdom, one of the apocryphal books states:

For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle,
mobile, clear, unpolluted,
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,
irresistible, beneficent, humane,
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,
all-powerful, overseeing all,
and penetrating through all spirits
that are intelligent and pure and
most subtle (Wisdom 7:22-30).

These are crucial times to hear the voice of Wisdom. Pandemics, wars and climate crisis are some of the instabilities reflected in the news, and there are always huge injustices that call for Wisdom's insight. In the early happenings of the COVID-19 pandemic, the online retreats I ran exploring Wisdom were among the most popular with our guests. There is a hunger for a way of being that is wise, that brings enlightenment and helps us discern the way through these difficult times.

Wisdom is an embodied presence — an innate aspect of our creation central to our existence, that I refer to in my writing as 'deep body-knowing'. The psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, explored a source of Wisdom that is deep in all our psyches. In listening to his clients and to himself, he noticed an 'inner voice' that he attributed to a spiritual dimension.¹ He noted Wisdom as an archetypal symbol, one grounded in our collective unconscious, inherited from our ancient ancestors. This Wisdom image may come to us through our dreams and insights, and is one we will recognise in myths and legends where there is an old crone, or wise old man who will give guidance in the journey.

Dr Marsha Linehan, the developer of dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT),

Creative Self

believes that all people have within themselves the ability to be wise. She uses the phrase 'wise mind' to describe this capacity for Wisdom.² As a psychological concept, Wisdom holds the balance between the extremes of knowledge and doubt, of reason and emotion. Her balancing ways connect us to our own exploring, especially as spiritual beings.

As we connect to our senses and emotions, coming into the present moment, we can open to a deeper sense of knowing. My work with guests include connecting to the breath and using other ways to enable the opening to our own 'deep body-knowing' and intuition. Wisdom emerges from a deeper place within, a sacred space under the clutter of everyday woes and chaos. Dr Linehan describes the wise mind as being like a deep well in the ground. The water at the bottom of the well links to the entire underground ocean of the wise mind.¹ This well, or underground spring, connects to a vastness, a freeing spaciousness. Many of our guests who feel restricted, smothered or shut down in some way, find the possibility of having space within to explore, dance and uncover our Wisdom – a revolutionary thought. We often run our lives based on everyday occurrences and what is going on in our heads. This spacious, deeper place is always there, reflecting the stability, peace and emergence of Wisdom that we can obtain.

Our 'I' has home in our spaciousness and is revealed through Holy Wisdom, the 'sacred sense'. Holy Wisdom, or Hōkhmah/Sophia, is named as the Breath of Life, or the wise breath of interiority, and it is only through our senses and sensations (not words or concepts) that we connect to it. Through Hōkhmah, we become aware of 'one who senses', a greater presence within that could be termed the 'knower' within us. Neil Douglas-Klotz writes: 'When we confront the "knower" within us, the one that experiences, we enter the presence of what these storytellers call Hōkhmah, Holy Wisdom or the "sacred sense." From the meaning of her name, she is "the breath of awareness from underneath and within."' ³

Hōkhmah/Sophia is the 'I-ness' at the core of all beings, of every living being on our planet, uniting all beings and

beingness into a greater unity. We become more aware of this 'I-ness' through coming into the present moment. Becoming a 'noticer' is one way of being present; we notice what is within and around ourselves, connecting our bodies to our environment. Placing ourselves as a noticer, we observe from a different perspective where we are connected to this 'I', a core centre from which there is co-ordination and connection of our diverse inner elements, giving us a sense of centredness and identity. This identity is our true identity, one that does not rely on our roles. Here is the core centre that is not worker, parent, child, lover, friend – perhaps a non-identity – where Wisdom brings forth our truth.

As a psychological concept, Wisdom holds the balance between the extremes of knowledge and doubt, of reason and emotion

Assisting a guest recently in her reflections, we explored her description of feeling like she is bricked in. She spent time fleshing out an image, and sighed as she supposed that she would have to try and dismantle this brick wall, brick by brick. I suggested she take the observer position with this image, so she became a noticer of herself within this structure. Very quickly, the brick wall she was seeing became a glass wall. Something shifted within her as she discovered a different perspective that offered more insight. We explored further her position as the observer and the connection of that perception to a wider field, a more unified stance. She was able to connect to a part of herself that was in a freer space, one that can be accessed through her observations. Wisdom is relational and here she encountered a relation between a part of herself that was restricted, and a freer part.

As we become a noticer, there can be a sense of expectation of an inner way of knowing that goes beyond our rational understanding, and will bring about transformation that encompasses our heart, mind, body and spirit. We are led

into an awareness of a process that takes us beyond the everyday life, the surface babble of problems and turmoil. It is exciting and brings energy and motivation. The noticing process initiates a way for us to connect our 'I-ness' to the 'I-ness' of others and of all creation.

Wisdom bridges the ordinary and the spiritual, and her way entices us across the bridge from our own body-knowing, to experience unique and varied aspects of her creative being, connected to love, belonging, healing and unity.

My questing with Wisdom has taught me how to be: with myself, with what is going on around me, and to feel at home within myself. I never feel alone, as I have a sense of accompaniment through Wisdom. She gives me a confidence that all will be well. Having solitary time is important for me so that I can keep in touch with listening and reflecting on her call. This calling is empowering, providing momentum and highlighting my vocation alongside my responsibilities. Her call is still leading me in my life, and will be an ongoing quest as I continue to follow through many found, and many still hidden, treasures. ●

This article includes edited extracts from Helen's latest book *Wisdom Calls: transformative ways for insightful living* published by Sacristy Press.

Biography

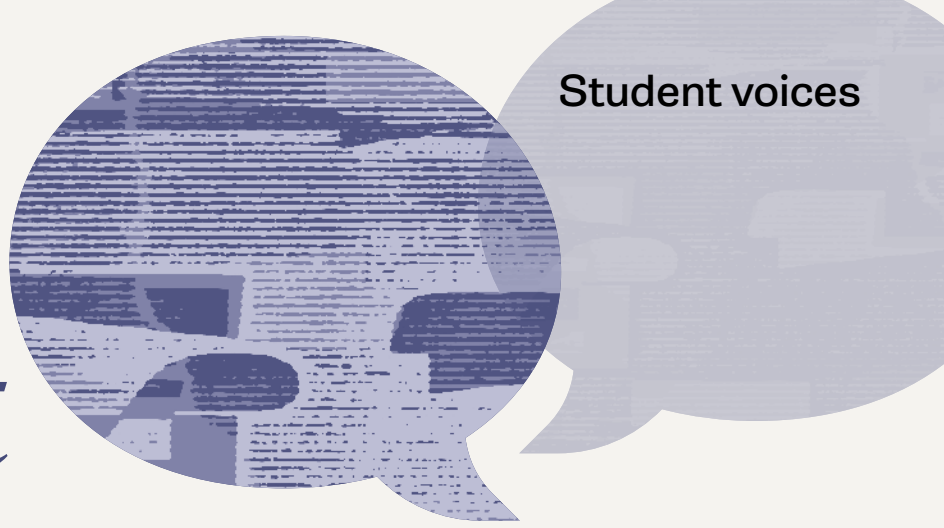


Helen Warwick is a chaplain, creative therapist and writer in the community of Holy Rood House. She is a trained occupational therapist and spiritual director with specialism in mental health, creativity, bereavement and trauma. www.holyroodhouse.org.uk

References

- 1 Glasson B, Johnson J. Writing the wisdom: creative writing as healing from childhood trauma. Durham: Sacristy Press; 2022.
- 2 DBT Self Help. Wise mind. [Online.] <https://tinyurl.com/4jmb43dh> (accessed 14 May 2024).
- 3 Douglas-Klotz N. Desert wisdom: a nomad's guide to life's big questions from the heart of the native Middle East. Worthington: ARC Books; 2011.

Student voices



We invite current counselling students to tell us about how their faith, spirituality or worldview is present in their learning

Shakila Shaikh, a counselling and psychotherapy student at Leeds Beckett University, writes about discovering that her faith aligns with person-centred therapeutic values

Before I began my training, I could never have envisaged learning so much about myself and experiencing the benefits of therapy. As I am from a South Asian background, therapy is still seen as taboo. Many families would feel shame if you discussed your issues with a stranger. There would be a sense of embarrassment at the idea that a relative had discussed these issues, and could not deal with them on their own. It may be seen as a weakness. Some might suggest that the difficulties have arisen because people haven't prayed, been religious or close enough to God. This can dishearten the individual and may prevent them from accessing support.

In hindsight, I could have benefitted from therapy when my dad passed away. It would have been helpful to be able to discuss my feelings and emotions with a therapist. I did, however, speak to those I was connected to who had experienced this loss. I felt we were part

of the same group, so group therapy may have also benefitted me at the time.

These days, I encourage others to take part in it and share the benefits. I hope that more people from the ethnic community are able to get counselling, focus on their emotions and work from their internal locus of evaluation, rather than societal norms and values.

I didn't realise how closely my faith, Islam, was aligned with Carl Rogers' core conditions, and maybe I took this for granted. Empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence do not apply to therapists alone. These values are instilled within Islam.¹ We are required to be kind as we may not be aware of what the other person is going through.

Making this connection made me appreciate both my faith and the course more deeply. It felt almost natural to speak about it, which helped with client work. I felt this was my way of being, so it came naturally to me, but now after learning about it, I have become more self-aware. The skills I use in my practice are the foundations of my relational framework, and I hope to build on these as I see more clients.

My own therapy has helped me to deeply reflect on my thoughts and feelings. I have grown as a person and have a renewed focus on my priorities. It has helped me to make decisions on things I have been struggling with and putting aside. It has allowed me to question why I think and act the way I do. I have been able to look at my attachment style and focus on how to change it.

When I started, I assumed that over the two years, I would learn extensively, absorbing everything I wanted to, and then be where I needed to be. I couldn't have been more wrong. It is an amazing journey, but it is a foundation for a lifelong process. As I start my next placement, I recognise that there will be more opportunities for me to develop. I must trust the process, as I've been told.

I notice the parallels with my faith here too. The month of Ramadan is commonly perceived as simply abstaining from food, but there is much more to it than that. It involves personal reflection and an opportunity to consider how you can better yourself to help others. It asks you to be more attentive to family, help those in need and sacrifice your time for others. It requires self-discipline and God consciousness, among other things. I now realise that every year, Muslims spend a month working to better themselves to please Allah (God), and this is why I have enjoyed personal development while training. I enjoy learning about myself, seeing how I can improve and looking at where I want to be. ●

Biography



Shakila Shaikh is a counselling and psychotherapy student at Leeds Beckett University.

Reference

- 1 Rehan Z, Rassool H. Is client-centred therapy congruent with Islamic beliefs and practices? *Journal of Integrated Sciences* 2021; 1(2): 70-73



Using our imagination

Nic Hartshorne explores how a capacity to visualise another's world builds empathy

My initial training to become an integrative therapist, back in the late 1990s, was based on Clarkson's five relational model.¹ It placed great importance on the therapeutic use of self and seemed to spend an age on empathy. I remember my frustration, wanting to move onto what I considered to be juicier topics, such as relational and maladaptive patterns. I was eager to learn more about concepts such as the unconscious process and shadow work. But here I am, nearly 30 years later, revisiting the topic of empathy: I find myself seeking more depth, wanting to understand how being more empathic could lead to better relational connection and compassion.

Emmy Van Deurzen postulates that the human environment is in trouble. In order to engage with building a better future, she suggests we need to learn new ways of being with each other. We are being called to collaborate and take a broader perspective.² Empathy is the ingredient that facilitates this. It's a familiar concept for many therapists, but how might it relate to spirituality? A paper by the transpersonal psychologist, Steve Taylor, states that spiritual values are the essence of any psychologically healthy society. He writes that '...the basis of the utopian or eupsychian society envisaged by Abraham Maslow is an individual state of empathic connection that gives rise to qualities such as compassion, responsibility, justice, fairness and equality'.³ He goes on to say that when we are psychologically disconnected and more individually focused, it can generate traits that indicate a lack of compassion, conscience and empathy. Such traits may culminate in social injustices, inequality and oppression.³

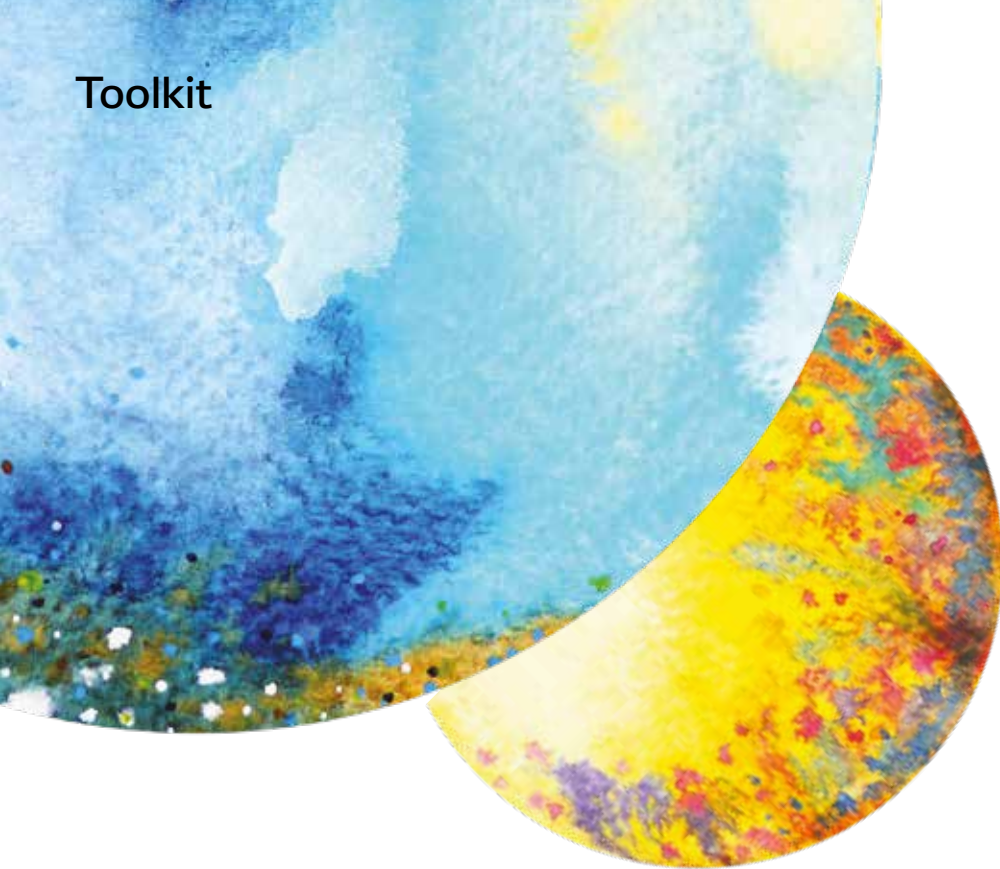
Similarities are found within the work of the philosopher, Ken Wilber, one of the original members of the transpersonal movement in the United States. He has written extensively on the subject of spirituality and has also picked up on the theme of excessive individual interests, versus more relational and global concerns.⁴

As practitioners, if we place what we do and say at the centre of our clients' healing, then we have exiled their suffering from the immensity of a deeper meaning and imprisoned it in the personal

The neuroscientist and philosopher, Iain McGilchrist, has put forward, as a central hypothesis, that a dominance of the left hemisphere of the brain has contributed to a cultural discourse that depreciates the qualities of the right hemisphere. Importantly, he emphasises that for optimal human functioning, we need to use both.^{5,6,7} According to his research, the right hemisphere may offer a more holistic, embodied relational stance, which is more tolerant of uncertainty and welcoming of novelty; qualities that he suggests could be aligned with a more spiritual appreciation, compared to a more detached, mechanistic competitive stance of the left.^{5,6} This hypothesis is based on his theory that the manner in which the brain pays attention to the world is dependent on which hemisphere is bringing about the reality, or mode of experience.^{5,6,7}

McGilchrist's argument is compounded by his research with patients who had experienced strokes. This included observations, as well as the neuroimaging of different aspects of brain functioning. He observed that different behaviour would arise depending on whether the stroke had affected predominately the left or right hemisphere of the brain.⁶ When we operate predominately from a left hemisphere perspective, we may have a fear of difference, or a competitive stance that disconnects us from awe, wonder, relationality and empathy.^{5,6,7} This may account for a lack of a wish for the kind of connectedness that arises from the desire or intention to understand another's unique world – such as Buber's conceptualisation of an I-thou perspective rather than an I-it, which may objectify a person as 'an other'.⁸

It is the quality of *imagining* another's world that is of importance here. I remember one of the first international events I attended via Zoom, when COVID-19 first hit. It was with the Science and Non-Duality Network (www.scienceandnonduality.com). This is a movement dedicated to the cultivation of spirituality. It focuses on how incorporating science with spirituality can support the understanding of spirituality, and act as an aid for spiritual development. The event was organised with the intention of providing an open space without a specific agenda, to bring together an international audience. The idea was to share stories about our experiences, as well as our feelings towards those experiences. I noticed I initially felt apprehensive to turn my camera on. Looking back, I think it was, in part, a fear of being seen and a fear of



difference. However, as people from all around the world shared their stories and the particulars of what was happening in their respective countries, my fear dissipated. Even though people shared a variety of experiences that were different from mine, by using my imagination I could empathise with the other's lived worlds. I wasn't just listening. Their words came alive, painting a picture that enabled me to really get in touch with their experiences at a deeper level. I was able to access an empathic connection that led to an overwhelming feeling of connectedness and love.

If empathy calls for the imagining of another's lived world, what do we mean by imagination and how does it differ from fantasy?

If empathy calls for the imagining of another's lived world, what do we mean by imagination and how does it differ from fantasy? Frater contrasts literalism, fantasy and imagination, suggesting that, within literal thinking, imagination has blended with physical reality.⁹ There is no bridge from the physical to the imaginal: the two are fused.

This leads to an overly objective imagining of a single, matter-of-fact world. Within fantasy, there is also a disconnection because we experience a disembodied imagining that does not connect back with reality. Again, this leads to an entrapment within a singular form of being, this time in the imaginary, rather than the concrete.⁹ McGilchrist distinguishes fantasy from imagination by describing fantasy as fixed, definite, known and dead, and imagination as vital and alive.⁷ I notice that when I connect with my own imagination, it brings the quality of aliveness to my being. There is an openness that lends itself to potentiality rather than stuckness. I also feel lighter in my body, like there is a space to connect to something other than myself.

Rogers¹⁰ cites empathy as part of the core conditions needed in the therapeutic relationship, but what is empathy? Clarkson suggests that it 'refers to the notion of *empfinden* – to feel into another person's subjective world of emotions, and images'.¹ She suggests that it is 'a deliberate attempt to enter into the other's frame of reference, not from a position of superior knowledge but from a position of open engagement'.¹ Coplan differentiates empathy from 'emotional contagion', which she describes as a kind of catching of the other's emotions,

often automatically and unintentionally.¹¹ She suggests, rather, that empathy is a perspective-taking process where, through the use of an imaginative process, one person can construct another's subjective experience by simulating the experience of being in the other person's situation. Coplan further clarifies that there are two positions within this, one being other-orientated and one being self-orientated. Self-orientated is imagining what you would feel like if you were the other person, versus imagining the other person's overall world. Other-oriented perspective-taking requires greater mental flexibility and emotional regulation, and often has different effects than self-oriented perspective-taking. A self-other perspective (imagining what we would feel like in that situation) is more subject to errors and misrepresentations, as humans have a tendency to come from an ego-centric bias.¹¹

An example from my own experience might be, if I were to listen to someone's story of attending a rock concert, and imagine the scene and what it might be like for me to attend, it would probably conjure up sensations of overwhelm, noise, crowds and generally feeling unpleasant. Without being able to enter the other's world, I would assume it was the same for them, when in fact it may have been stimulating and exhilarating – a wonderful, or even transcendent experience. So, in order to reach the other person through empathy, I would need to suspend my own judgment of the experience. Although we can never know with certainty what another is feeling, by exercising imagination we can attune to the other's experience.



I notice that when I connect with my own imagination, it brings the quality of aliveness to my being

Frater writes of imagination as images located in an elusive liminal space, located somewhere between the self and the world. These are known to us in the form of imagined thoughts, sensations, feelings and intuitions. This process of relational engagement calls for a suspension of the ego.⁹ To engage in this process, we are required to 'bracket' our own experience – a term borrowed from Husserl's transcendental philosophy of phenomenology.¹² To imagine the other's world, we deeply listen to the other, being with and witnessing their being in the world. There is an overlap between phenomenology and empathy, as phenomenologists understand how the use of empathy allows access to 'an other's' subjective experience (including emotions). Both empathy and emotions forming a fundamental part of therapy.^{13,14} Husserl's idea of phenomenology invites us to temporarily put aside what one thought they knew or understood, including any prejudices and beliefs, and to meet the phenomena, or person with fresh eyes.¹² This leaves us open to gaining an understanding of the other's lived world and to, perhaps, update our knowledge. By adopting such a position, we could be evaluating and perceiving something, or someone in a different way, trying to understand the layers of complexities that make up our humanness. Such a process could be transformative. ●

Working in the imaginative realm often activates right brain creativity. This enables the work to enter into a state of flow. Here are some ways of generating this:

- Deep listening and embodying mindful awareness. This allows what is needed to be expressed
- Working with metaphors
- Using art to capture what is trying to emerge when words don't come to mind
- Writing or drawing with our non-dominant hand
- Paying attention to what might need to be communicated through our clients' bodies
- Allowing stories to come forward, which might not make rational sense
- Using objects we are drawn to which can guide our storytelling. We could ask ourselves how we feel towards these objects, what they symbolise for us, or what they want to tell us.

Biography



Nic Hartshorne is a BACP accredited therapist and supervisor. Having spent most of her career working in the NHS, she now works full time in private practice. Her research interests are phenomenology and the integration of spirituality into mainstream counselling. www.baytreecounselling.co.uk.

References

- 1 Clarkson P. The therapeutic relationship (2nd ed.). London: Whurr; 2008.
- 2 Van Deurzen E. Befriending your anxiety: an existential perspective. [Presentation.] BACP Private Practice Conference; September 2023.
- 3 Taylor S. Toward a utopian society: from disconnection and disorder to empathy and harmony. The Journal of Humanistic Psychology 2023; 63(4): 537-560. <https://tinyurl.com/3vk6m6ar>.
- 4 Wilber K. The religion of tomorrow. Colorado: Shambhala; 2017.
- 5 McGilchrist I. The master and his emissary: the divided brain and the making of the western world. London: Yale University Press; 2010.
- 6 McGilchrist I. The matter with things: our brains, our delusions, and the unmaking of the world (Vol. 1). London: Perspectiva Press; 2021.
- 7 McGilchrist I. The matter with things: our brains, our delusions, and the unmaking of the world (Vol. 2). London: Perspectiva Press; 2021.
- 8 Buber M. I and thou. New York: Free Press; 2008.
- 9 Frater A. Waking dreams, imagination in psychotherapy and everyday life. Glasgow: Transpersonal Press; 2021.
- 10 Rogers CR. A way of being. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; 1980.
- 11 Coplan A. Understanding empathy: Its features and effects. In: Coplan A, Goldie P (eds) Empathy: philosophical and psychological perspectives. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2011 (pp2-18).
- 12 Finlay L. Phenomenology for therapists: researching the lived world. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell; 2011.
- 13 Husserl E. Erste Philosophie (1923/4). Zweiter Teil: Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion (Husserliana VIII). The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff. 1959.
- 14 Stein E. On the problem of empathy. Washington: ICS publications; 1989.

The network

BACP Spirituality division news and information, including updates from BACP's Spirituality division Chair and a network round up

From the Chair

A pilgrimage in Japan

This summer has seen me embark on a cultural exchange programme called *Taith*, which means 'journey' in Welsh. This is a Government programme based in Wales, which was developed to build and foster cultural exchanges at home and internationally.

What an experience it has been to immerse myself in another language and culture. As a child, I could never have imagined myself experiencing such richness and opportunity. My understanding of spirituality back then was praying that I could survive my home life, the neglect and poverty. Faith, in its most simplistic terms, meant believing in something greater than myself or wanting something greater for myself.

Learning Japanese has been a real challenge, but it has been softened by the warmth of my homestay family and teachers. It's been a pilgrimage, not that I realised it at the start of the journey. It's shown me life through a completely new lens and has invited me to be uncomfortable, unknowingly.

Japan has captivating beauty and a profound sense of tradition. It offers glimpses into its ancient history, spirituality and religious beliefs. These depths are deeply entwined and expressed in many forms, from Shinto rituals and festivals to Buddhism, but particularly Zen. Folk beliefs and superstitions all play a role in offering protection in everyday life. Very often, this is weaved together with a deep respect for nature.

Here, I am reminded of the importance of balance between the old and the new, and what is sacred in everyday life. It has certainly been a time to reconnect with myself and build resilience.

New energy

After five years in the Executive, now feels the right time for me to step down from my role as Chair. I'd just like to say a big thank you to everyone for your encouragement, engagement and support in what I still consider to be a very important area of counselling.

My intention in joining the division many years ago was based on the experience of feeling unable to be open about my own spirituality and lived experience. At the time, I felt judged, unheard and mistaken for holding views that were different to those of others. Having not had that space held for me, it took years to feel safe to be able to talk about it with someone. This meant the potential to be spiritually vulnerable was even greater.

Professional judgment from peers wasn't always easy, but it made me even more determined to generate a deeper understanding of the importance of spirituality within counselling. Dialogue is central to removing barriers and challenging stigma.

I've had the privilege of feeling a sense of belonging with the division, and I am grateful to everyone I have worked with throughout this role. The Committee continues to be driven by a dynamic and passionate team of people, and I hope that we will soon appoint a new Chair. My best hope is that BACP continues to recognise the importance of representation in our area.



Kath Lock-Giddy
BACP Spirituality Chair



Get involved

Become a Communities of Practice Champion

BACP's online Communities of Practice discussion forum provides members with a space to share best practice, knowledge, learning and experience, while participating in discussions with other members.

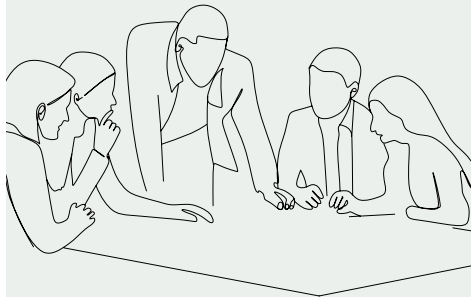
We're looking for people who would like to represent the Spirituality division in this online space. Your role would involve creating two online discussion topics per month to encourage conversations within the community, and encouraging others to share the experience, learning or challenges they've faced. This will help to build a knowledge base for others to use for best practice. You will also guide online discussions to ensure replies are focused around the purpose of the community.

i If you would like to find out more about this role or apply, see: <https://tinyurl.com/krvfezjk>

Run a BACP Spirituality network meeting

BACP's Spirituality division is looking to create a wider network of spirituality events, and is looking for facilitators who may like to run the groups in their area.

i For further information, contact: communities@bacp.co.uk



Life through death: exploring the relationship between post-traumatic growth and spirituality

BACP Spirituality division's annual 'Working with Spirituality' event is back. This year, we will be exploring how spirituality might be a force to support clients emerging out of traumatic experiences, or perhaps at times may be a way of bypassing them.

This event will help you to reflect upon the relationship between post-traumatic growth and spiritual awakenings, or increased spiritual or religious beliefs, or practices.

You will also develop confidence and competence in working with post-traumatic growth and spirituality within the context of therapy.

The event will take place on Friday 6 December between 9.30am and 1.30pm.

i To book, see: <https://tinyurl.com/26y6whbj>



Diary dates



Alister Hardy Trust autumn conference Saturday 26 October 2pm to 6pm

This online event will focus on the theme of spiritual experience and the environment. It will serve as a prelude to the forthcoming publication of a new book, *Environmental Spirituality and Wellbeing* (Equinox, June 2025), to which all the speakers have contributed.

The principal speaker will be the Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi, who is co-editor of the new book. The talk will be called 'Where three strands meet: spiritual experience, psychotherapy and the environment'.

There will be two other presentations. Prof Bettina Schmidt will give a talk called 'Wellbeing is the feeling of being "one with the world and my surroundings"' and the Revd Dr Robert Fruehwirth will speak about 'The gift of spiritual relationship: a person-centred approach to wholeness in Julian of Norwich'.

i admin@alisterhardytrust.org

International Network for the Study of Spirituality conference 10-12 June 2025

University of Northampton

This event will be on the theme of 'Spirituality, consciousness, technology and wellbeing: implications for research, education and practice'.

The call for abstracts is now open and contributions should address one or more elements of the conference theme.

i To find out more, see: <https://tinyurl.com/y4jyrh6s>

What's new

Research

French J, Brown RJ, Bell T. Breathing techniques in the treatment of depression: a scoping review and proposal for classification. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 2024; 24(3): 870–883.

This article looks to 'identify, categorise and synthesise breathing interventions that have been evaluated for depression, in order to inform further research and reviews.' It explores aspects such as attention and awareness, using the body and senses, and paced breathing, and discusses clinical implications and suggestions for further research.

Leonard J. Staying in my lane: an exploration of counsellors' and psychotherapists' understanding and use of nutrition in the therapy room. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 2024; 24(2): 545–557.

This paper states that its aim is to 'explore how therapists understand and view diet and nutrition in the context of mental health, and whether, and how, they use this knowledge with clients'.



Blogs

The dyslexic counsellor

Debbie Keenan explores embracing dyslexia: a journey as an integrative counsellor and doctoral student.

<https://tinyurl.com/uw7nk2hc>

What complaints tell us

Rebecca Grace, Assistant Registrar for BACP, addresses therapy complaints, confidentiality, competence, boundaries and power imbalances.

<https://tinyurl.com/4dy7bjwj>



Books

Soulful Aging

This collection, edited by Andrew Achenbaum, seeks to map out the parameters and boundaries of soulful aging, and explores philosophical and theological perspectives on the way we grow older. It features 10 authors versed in writing from multidisciplinary and inter-professional perspectives, and includes work on the religious/spiritual spheres of late-life human development.

<https://tinyurl.com/mpt8bkps>

Sex Therapy with Religious Patients: working with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities

This is a comprehensive guidebook for mental health professionals who work with those struggling with sexual issues within a religious context. The book, written by Caleb Jacobson, provides practical guidance on how to approach sensitive topics related to sex and religion, including addressing religious beliefs and values that may impact sexual behaviour, beliefs and attitudes.

It provides strategies for integrating spirituality into the therapeutic process, and features real-life case examples and exercises that can be used in therapy sessions.

<https://tinyurl.com/5x8f647p>

Black Grief and Healing: why we need to talk about health inequality, trauma and loss

The stories and poems in this anthology, edited by Yansie Rolston and Patrick Vernon, illuminate the unique ways that loss affects the Black community, and the effects of the widespread lack of understanding of traditional rituals and beliefs. They show us how experiences of collective loss during the pandemic, the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, and ongoing systemic health inequalities are experienced, not just as individuals, but also as part of a global community. Contributors from a range of backgrounds, professions and identities, discuss the challenges of grieving under the shadow of continuing adversity, including threats of deportation. Sources of strength and healing are also explored, from personal and spiritual responses to community initiatives and activism.

<https://tinyurl.com/57twxu3v>

The Alchemy of Addiction

In this book, Stephen J Costello draws on Eastern philosophy, Western psychology, and wisdom traditions, to offer an interpretation and answer to the multidimensional problem of addiction. The nature of pleasure, pain and attachment are discussed. Stress is also explored, as a key source of our suffering. Justifying and grounding the work is Jung's central insight that the solution to our disordered desires lies in cultivating a spiritual approach to life. This work features a detailed exploration of the 12 Steps of recovery, from the threefold perspective of the philosophy of Advaita, the Enneagram system, and the Christian contemplations of Richard Rohr, John Main, and Thomas Keating, as well as St Ignatius of Loyola. The work concludes with a brief look at Platonic ethics, especially the virtue of temperance, St Benedict's spirituality of humility, and the law of *dharma* as a blueprint for purposeful non-addicted living.

<https://tinyurl.com/3sa4r9hu>

Training opportunities

How to succeed in private practice

Take part in this Professional Development Day (PDD) to widen your knowledge of the practicalities required to grow and develop a private practice.

Martin Hogg will support you in building a solid foundation for your private practice, creating your own unique offer and discovering how to get clients.

This course is practical rather than theory-based. It aims to increase your confidence in working safely, and help you to identify key skills, legal and compliance issues. It uses practical examples to demonstrate how to operate a successful private practice and how to find clients.

Join us online on Wednesday 12 March 2025 from 9.30am until 1pm.

You can also catch up on the recording after the event as part of your booking.

<https://tinyurl.com/2cndb68u>



Integrating coaching into your counselling practice

This online Professional Development Day (PDD) gives participants the opportunity to consider how they might use coaching within a counselling setting in a coherent and informed way. It provides an overview of key integration models for participants to consider in the context of their own work, in order to help identify their own preferences for continued development. It also facilitates a discussion as to how we might practically approach integration within client sessions.

You will explore the benefits of integrating coaching into counselling and review options for integration, including an introduction to key theoretical models/types and an overview of how this can be done.

There will also be a discussion about the potential difficulties of integration and how to navigate them, including ethical considerations and how to better understand the value coaching can bring to your counselling work.

By the end of the day, you will be able to consider your own preferences regarding integration, with a view to identifying a plan for further personal development.

This workshop, taking place on Wednesday 29 January, is split into three 45-minute sessions, and each will be followed by a live Q&A session with Judith Plastow. The first session will begin at 9.30am and the event will finish at 1.00pm.

<https://tinyurl.com/bdcpmmyx>

Policy news

Third sector case study project

BACP has commissioned a policy report describing the positive impact of third sector counselling services, and the challenges that they face in meeting increasing demand and referral from the NHS without additional funding.

BACP organisational members were recruited to participate and the report is due this month.

Improving counselling for women in prison

We are developing a new policy workstream focused on improving access to counselling for women in the criminal justice system. Engagement to date has included establishing relationships with two BACP organisational members who deliver counselling in women's prisons in London and Durham, and meetings with the Ministry of Justice, and with an umbrella organisation that supports and promotes voluntary, community and social enterprise activity in prisons. Early planning is in place for a member event in February 2025.

Climate Minds coalition

BACP has been involved in a coalition of mental health bodies and practitioners. The aim is to campaign for an understanding of eco-anxiety, in order to inform policy and practice. We are working on a website launch, blog and social media presence for the coalition.

Next phase of third sector EDI grant scheme

Building on the knowledge and learning from our pilot grant scheme, BACP will be inviting organisational members to apply for grants of up to £50K to deliver projects that improve access to therapy for people from marginalised and racialised community backgrounds.

BACP divisional journals

BACP publishes specialist journals within six other sectors of counselling and psychotherapy practice.

Healthcare Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal

This quarterly journal from BACP Healthcare is relevant to counsellors and psychotherapists working within healthcare settings.



Coaching Today

The BACP Coaching journal is suitable for coaches from a range of backgrounds including counselling and psychotherapy, management or human resources.



BACP Children, Young People & Families

The journal of BACP Children, Young People & Families is a useful resource for therapists and other professionals interested in the mental health of young people.



Private Practice

This journal is dedicated to counsellors and psychotherapists working independently, in private practice, or for EAPs or agencies, in paid or voluntary positions.



University & College Counselling

This is the journal of BACP Universities & Colleges, and is ideal for all therapists working within higher and further education settings.



BACP Workplace

This journal is provided by BACP Workplace and is read widely by those concerned with the emotional and psychological health of people in organisations.



These journals are available as part of membership of BACP's divisions or by subscription.

To enquire about joining a BACP division, call 01455 883300. For a free of charge consultation on advertising within these journals, contact Cara Termine on 0203 771 7200, or email cara.termine@thinkpublishing.co.uk

bacp | counselling
changes lives

BACP and the BACP logo are registered trade marks of BACP

**British Association for
Counselling and Psychotherapy**

Company limited by guarantee 2175320
Registered in England & Wales.
Registered Charity 298361