Thresholds

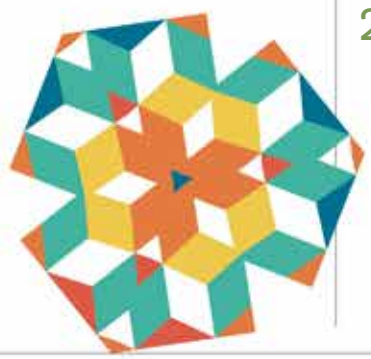
Counselling with Spirit

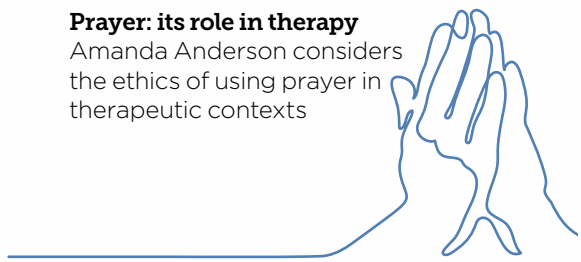
January 2020

IN THIS ISSUE:

Contents

FEATURES





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

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The importance of wonder

In this issue of *Thresholds*, we celebrate aspects of working with soul across the lifespan. Three of the speakers from the BACP Spirituality conference, held in Leicester in November 2019, have contributed articles on this topic. I would like to thank them for writing to very tight deadlines and being very generous with their time.

I was surprised by one episode in the new series of *The Crown*, which focuses on Prince Philip's reaction to the moon landings in 1969 (no spoilers there, I hope).[1] It made me reflect on how I often lose my sense of wonder during stressful times in my life. The episode features spacehoppers, and brings back funny memories of my siblings playing hockey while bouncing around on spacehoppers! Recently, I attended a one-day retreat on the topic of wonder at the Meditatio Centre in London, facilitated by Professor Mark Burrows. During the retreat, we were invited to watch a 10-minute video of birds in flight as a visual meditation; it was beautiful to spend time really observing and enjoying the patterns and rhythms in silence. As I get older, I need to find creative ways to rekindle the sense of wonder I had as a child growing up in Singapore.

In Japan, a person's 60th birthday is seen as a new beginning. Hokusai, the Japanese artist famous for *The Great Wave* woodblock print, wrote about his attitude towards age: *'...until the age of 70, nothing I drew was worthy of notice. At 73 years I was somewhat able to fathom the growth of plants and trees, and the structure of birds, animals, insects and fish. Thus when I reach 80 years, I hope to have made increasing progress, and at 90 to see further into the underlying principles of things, so that at 100 years I will have achieved a divine state in my art, and at 110, every dot and every stroke will be as though alive. Those of you who live long enough, bear witness that these words of mine are not false.'*[2]

Alas, Hokusai didn't live to be 110, but one of his final images is of a dragon ascending a mountain. It seems to be alive, to me.

I will be leaving the role of editor of *Thresholds* in early February 2020 to do some work with older people and I hope to set up in private practice. I would like to thank Maureen Slattery-Marsh for her support during my time as editor, along with the other members of the Executive Committee. Former Chair, Melody Cranbourne-Rosser, has also been a great support, and I remember my first meeting with Melody in 2014, when she was Chair of the Exec, at Pontyclun station, when we were both attending a meeting of the South Wales BACP Spirituality Network group. Jacqui Gray, Managing Editor of the divisional journals at BACP, has guided me skilfully through the editorial processes and I appreciate her patience and guidance. I have enjoyed meeting attendees at BACP events and would like to thank all the authors who have written for *Thresholds* during my time as editor. I wish everyone a Happy New Year and a wonderful 2020.

Amanda Anderson
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References

1. The crown [television programme]. Series 3, episode 7 (Moondust). Netflix 2019.

2. https://blog.britishmuseum.org/hokusai-old-master/ (accessed 2 December 2019).

Finally, spirituality has come out of the closet!

Maureen Slattery-Marsh is Chair of BACP Spirituality. To contact Maureen, please email **sonas@slatterymarsh.com**

In the year 2020

We will also be working with BACP to review and update our divisional strategy in response to BACP's newly launched 2020–2023 overall strategy, which you will hear more about as the year unfolds. In January, we will be recruiting a new Executive member as we bid Melody Cranbourne-Rosser farewell. We pay tribute to Melody and her immense contribution to the division over many years on page 5 of this issue. Amanda Anderson, editor of *Thresholds*, will also be moving on in February 2020. We will have the opportunity to say farewell and express appreciation to her in the next issue of *Thresholds*. You may have noted that there are two Making Connections events being held this spring in Bournemouth, on Wednesday 5 February, where Keith Hackwood will be representing the BACP Spirituality division, and in Belfast on Thursday 26 March, where Hilda McKinney will be our Executive presence. These events are free, providing an excellent opportunity for CPD and an occasion to meet with others who are interested in spirituality in counselling at the roundtable discussions which form part of the events. Hilda McKinney and Kath Lock have been liaising with Scottish and Welsh delegates who attended Making Connections events in July and September and expressed interest in setting up a regional spirituality network group/community of practice in these areas. If you are willing to volunteer as a regional co-ordinator in one of these areas, please get in touch.

Identity, personhood, and working with soul across the lifespan were among the themes addressed at our annual BACP Spirituality conference held in Leicester in late November 2019. We heard from five excellent presenters who discussed ways soul is understood within philosophy, different religions and therapeutic approaches. Three of the speakers have contributed articles to this issue of *Thresholds* and I hope you will find them relevant and helpful in your practice.

During the whole-group discussion on culture and soul at the conference, one of the delegates found her voice to express her relief that here, finally, 'Spirituality has come out of the closet!' To be in a room of 90-plus people, all open to validating spirituality as an integral part of counselling, was experienced by her as a liberation. This turned out to be the keenly felt sense of many of the practitioners who attended the conference, whose contexts and settings do not allow space or openness to the reality and importance of the spiritual dimension of human existence. They were thus very appreciative that BACP honours spirituality and seeks to resource practitioners whose own work and worldview, or whose clients' world view, is informed by a spiritual perspective.

Lifespan and soulspan

Since the conference, I've been pondering the relationship between lifespans and soulspans. The recent premature death of a close relative, attending to an ageing parent, and encountering a terminally ill child have all brought into perspective the transience of life, the inevitability of death and a question around what remains of the essence of personhood and presence when the body returns to dust. The word 'soulspan' is my attempt to describe the enduring melody of personhood that transcends *chronos* time, manifesting in cherished memories, in lasting influence, in valued inspiration, in bonds of love. Within my faith view, the promise of eternal life is real, and I hold hope of the affirmation of another dimension of soulspan. John Swinton captures this for me when he writes: 'To be remembered by God is to endure in the present and into eternity… Our Identity is safe in the memory of God'.[1]

My experience of working with clients across the lifespan in therapy is that issues of identity, mortality and death anxiety can emerge, unsolicited, at any time in the encounter. Engaging with clients' legacy of regrets, failures, loves, losses and hopes become the draft of their soulspan story. I seek to be receptive and hospitable to ways of responding therapeutically to their need with sensitivity and appreciation of their worldview, which may be vastly different from my own.

As the New Year begins, I offer you the poetic words from a Celtic blessing to nourish and inspire:

'May the light of your soul guide you; May the light of your soul bless the work you do with the secret love and warmth of your heart; May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul; May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those who work with you and to those who see and receive your work; May your work never weary you; May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement; May you be present in what you do. May you never become lost in the bland absences; May the day never burden; May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your new day with dreams, possibilities and promises; May evening find you gracious and fulfilled; May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected; May your soul calm, console and renew you.'[2]

Maureen

References

1. Swinton J. Dementia: living in the memories of God. London: SCM Press; 2017.
2. O Donohue J. To bless the space between us. London: Doubleday; 2008.

Data protection and Brexit – business as usual

Will data protection change in the event of Brexit? The short answer is 'not much – probably'. The long answer depends on conditions like a deal being agreed, the type of deal, any arrangements for a transition period, etc.

As a member of BACP, it is unlikely data protection will change for you in any significant way, whatever the outcome of Brexit. Perhaps the best way to look at it is in the (perhaps extreme) scenario that the UK leaves the EU without a deal; the UK Government has published some guidance on this, available here: bit.ly/data-and-brexit

The guidance suggests that there will be little change for most people. There are some scenarios in which Brexit may impact you; specifically, if you are processing the personal data of individuals outside the UK. Multinational organisations are also likely to be impacted. Find out more in the ICO guidance: bit.ly/ico-data-and-brexit

There are no guarantees, and it's well worth bearing this in mind; but, for the time being, it does appear to be business as usual.

Dan Gibson
Data Protection Lead, BACP

Farewell to Melody Cranbourne-Rosser

I know lots of melodies, but only one Melody! And what an immense joy it has been to get to know this wonderful and talented colleague over the past six years. Melody served as Chair of BACP Spirituality from 2013 to 2016. During this time, she navigated us through the process of rebranding the division in 2014 and envisioned different ways of championing the importance of spirituality within BACP and the health professions. Having served two terms on the Exec', Melody is now stepping down at the end of the year. Those of us who have served alongside her have valued her graceful presence and wise leadership. Elegant, eloquent and erudite, Melody's thoughts and words on the Chair's page and in other articles in *Thresholds* were always thought provoking and well researched.

This summer, Melody successfully completed her doctorate in psychology on the subject of 'The role of presence when working with children and young people demonstrating harmful sexual behaviour'. We are pleased that Melody will continue her involvement with the BACP Spirituality division, most especially by offering consultancy to us on spirituality and counselling of children and young people .

Maureen Slattery-Marsh
Chair of BACP Spirituality

And the final word from Melody:

'Since May 2013, when I first joined the Executive Committee of the division, it has always been an enormous pleasure to work alongside members to explore how we might appreciate the meaning and value placed upon spirituality in the broadest sense: to encourage dialogue, promote awareness, and celebrate spirituality in all its forms, but also acknowledge and consider ways of working with the more problematic aspects. Throughout this time, I have felt hugely privileged to work alongside so many insightful, knowledgeable and compassionate people, specifically Maureen Slattery-Marsh, the current and former members of the Executive, and Amanda Anderson, whose editorial skills have been invaluable. Their friendship as well as their professionalism will not be forgotten. Although my involvement with the Executive is changing, I am really pleased to remain connected through other avenues and I look forward to seeing how BACP Spirituality evolves and supports its members and the people they work with in the future.'

Melody Cranbourne-Rosser

Visit to Gloucestershire Counselling Service

BACP's Older People Lead Jeremy Bacon and BACP's Children, Young People and Families Lead Jo Holmes have visited BACP-accredited service GCS, sharing information about older people and CYPF priorities and how these can support and promote the work of the service.

Jeremy is following up with staff developing CPD training on work with older people, as well as including GCS data in analysis of older people's access to counselling. Jo has invited GCS to present at the BACP CYPF conference in February.

Emma Griffiths, CEO of GCS, explained the importance of BACP accreditation to the service, which strives to meet and maintain the highest standards, including only employing BACP-accredited therapists. Emma urged that more be done to ensure commissioners and funders understand accreditation as a mark of quality.

She said: '*It was a pleasure to have you both visit and it made me realise how important it is to have face-to-face contact with accrediting bodies, even if only occasionally. There is so much to cover and I am really excited that we have at least found a starting point here.*'

As part of a rich and varied series of CPD training and workshops, GCS is offering an experiential and interactive day exploring working therapeutically with older clients in March 2020 – details can be found at bit.ly/385F2YQ

Jeremy Bacon and Emma Griffiths

Counselling for people with age-related sight loss

From left: Sarah Oakley, Suzanne Roberts and Jeremy Bacon

We've produced a briefing exploring counselling for people living with age-related sight loss. In the UK, 80 per cent of sight loss happens to people aged 60 and older. The Macular Society's telephone counselling service provides therapy and signposting to people with age-related macular degeneration. Jeremy Bacon, our Older People Lead, met its CEO Sarah Oakley, and Suzanne Roberts, counselling service manager and BACP member, to discuss shared areas of interest, how our older people strategy relates to their work, and access to future case studies.

Thank you

to our 50,000 members!

At BACP we have had the privilege of serving our members for over four decades. Now we are marking the milestone of representing 50,000 members by sharing some of your stories. Among those sharing theirs is John Eatock, who was Lead Advisor for the BACP Spirituality division between 2004 and 2011, when it was known as the Association for Pastoral and Spiritual Care and Counselling (APSCC).

John is an Anglican priest, who, in the 1990s, also became a counsellor. Of joining the Association, he recalls: 'I considered my work within BAC/BACP as an extension of my vocation as a priest and always had an interest in highlighting the spiritual aspects in therapy. When I was Lead Advisor for the division, I recall my objectives were to give greater prominence and influence to the division across the whole of the Association, to increase membership in this area and to assist, and be a link and a resource for, those involved in pastoral care and those who used counselling skills. I endeavoured to begin the establishment of local groups across the UK, to be inclusive of those of many faiths and none and to focus on enhanced training for counsellors/psychotherapists in enabling them to not ignore all spiritual/faith issues. I was also keen to establish links with other parallel organisations, such as the Spirituality section of the Royal College

of Psychiatry. Last, but not least, was my desire to enhance what became *Thresholds*, and to provide working groups as resources for all therapists to help them address this vital area. It was, and is, pioneering and exciting work.

'Since extending my vocation as a priest into the world of counselling, a lot has happened within BACP in all the areas which provided the reason for my original membership. During my membership, and my involvement to a small extent in the ongoing work of BACP, I have been impressed by the fact that the Association consistently holds up a beacon that promotes professional standards and activity in a community of practitioners that is wide ranging and innovative.

'If I were to speak to myself now, as if I were a trainee counsellor, I would say that you will need tenacity and resilience, and BACP membership will help you in a multitude of ways. Thirty years on, I still value my membership.'

You can read more about the stories our members have shared with us, at bit.ly/50k-BACP

Conference News

The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) held its Annual International Conference in Manchester from 4–6 July, 2019. I was fortunate to be invited to present recent research at the conference, together with my colleague Dr Lisa Oakley. While there, I took the opportunity to talk again with my colleague – former BACP Spirituality Executive member, Dr Gillie Jenkinson, who was presenting her work. ICSA began in 1979 and in its early days focused mainly on cults and people who had experienced living in cults. Increasingly however, attention has been given more widely to include research and testimonies from Christian organisations; acknowledging that abusive practices in the name of the accepted spiritual leader and/or faith take place in many different places. The conference in 2019 was titled 'Coercive Control and the Psychology of Influence Across Comparative Contexts – Implications for Policy, Practice and the Criminal Justice Process'. The range of speakers included contributors from legal and criminal justice fields, academics, policy makers, counsellors and survivors. Indeed, the conference delegates were unusual in that many – if not most – were survivors of abuse in a spiritual or faith-based setting. It was humbling to talk with them in coffee and lunch breaks; to witness the trauma they have experienced but also their determination to change the future for others. A further major feature of this annual conference was the opportunity to speak to researchers from all over the world as they ponder the issues of coercion and control in religious organisations of all kinds. I hope that the very powerful messages of the survivors resonate sufficiently with the academics so that we can all work together to rid the world of faith-based abuse and all that this insidious abuse carries with it.

Dr Kathy Kinmond
BACP Spirituality
Executive member

BACP SPIRITUALITY DIVISION NETWORK MEETINGS

West Midlands

Fifteen of us met on 5 October to discuss the theme of 'Spirituality and Social Justice – Finding our Feet and Sounding our Voice in the service of our clients'.

We looked at four key areas:

1. What is social justice/injustice as we understand and experience it in the world?
2. What sources of inspiration (people, writings etc) nurture our vision of social justice?
3. What social justice challenges have we encountered in our engagement with clients?
4. How can our therapeutic work be informed by our vision of social justice and spirituality?

In reflecting on the multiple issues of social injustice we are aware of in our world, we connected with the powerful feeling states these evoke: rage, vulnerability, powerlessness, anxiety and despair. As we shared the sources of inspiration that nurture and sustain us in responding to the challenge of social justice, we recognised the cost and the courage of standing up and speaking truth to power. We recalled clients who had taught us much about perseverance and resilience in how they approached truth seeking in themselves and found their feet and voice to challenge discrimination.

This topic has opened up further questions, which we will explore at a future meeting; for example: What happens to us when health or caring provision becomes oppressive and does not serve the wellbeing of our clients? What changes can we bring about? Where can we speak up or take a stand? What might this cost us?

Our group continues to meet three times a year, usually in January, May or June and September. The next meeting will be on 11 January 2020, at Carr's Lane conference Centre, Birmingham.

Maureen Slattery-Marsh

Northern Ireland

We are small in numbers but our time together has been one of constructive engagement and discussion in the issues raised. We welcome folks from all walks of spirituality/belief/faith and seek to learn and grow in understanding from each other.

Our December 2019 meeting explored the issue of suicide, its impact on individuals, family and beyond and how that influences our belief/spirituality/faith and our work with clients.

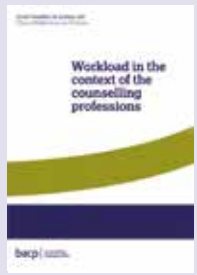
Creating a safe place to explore our thoughts regarding spirituality/faith/beliefs, and discuss challenging issues is essential to expand our perspective, and understand our thinking and how we work with our clients. Network groups create a safe place to meet together, explore relevant issues, challenge our thinking and discuss what influences us and our practice.

Hilda McKinney

REVIEW OF IAPT POSITIVE PRACTICE GUIDE

BACP is part of a working group, hosted by Age UK and commissioned by NHS England, reviewing the *IAPT Older People Positive Practice Guide*. Originally published in 2009, the guide provides information for practitioners, GPs and commissioners on shaping services to reduce barriers to older people accessing therapies. In the consultation, we've emphasised the importance of choice of therapy and the findings from analysis of National Audit of Psychological Therapies (NAPT) data, showing similar outcomes for counselling and CBT. Publication of the revised guide is planned for early in the New Year.

BACP resources



GPiA 109 Clinical Reflections for Practice: Workload in the context of the counselling professions

Published: 31 May 2019; last update: 27 August 2019

If our workload is excessive, we may not be able to meet our commitments under the *Ethical Framework*, such as putting clients first, keeping our skills and knowledge up to date or ensuring our own wellbeing. But underload can also be a problem: if our work fails to use our skills, knowledge, experience and abilities, it can lead to boredom, disengagement and mistakes. This BACP *Good Practice in Action* resource aims to stimulate ethical thinking in respect of a practitioner's workload.

Available at: www.bacp.co.uk/gpia109

BACP's *Good Practice in Action* resources provide supplementary information to help you implement the *Ethical Framework* within your practice. To view all GPiA resources, see www.bacp.co.uk/gpia

New BACP guide on safe lone working

In a recent survey of BACP members, 79 per cent said they work alone, while 15 per cent said they'd experienced violence or aggression while working with clients and or colleagues. This is significantly higher than the national average of 1.3 per cent (BACP and Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2019). BACP's Ethics Hub has released *A quick guide to Lone Working*, a new three-part guide on safe lone working, designed to support you as you consider your own safety and the implications of lone working. It addresses questions to ask yourself in relation to where you work, who you work with, steps to mitigate risk, safety planning, how to act on concerns and ethical considerations.

Available at: www.bacp.co.uk/loneworking

Special focus

Working with the soul in autumn and beyond

The arts, the spiritual and the therapeutic

Els van Ooijen focuses on the soul's process as it ages

The proportion of elders in our population is ever increasing, but until relatively recently, the older client has not had much attention within counselling and psychotherapy. In this article I therefore focus on the soul's process as it ages and discuss how we may help ourselves and our clients embrace the lived experience of ageing, in order to find peace and meaning.

Introduction

Recently, my five-year-old granddaughter said to me, as a simple matter of fact, 'Oma, you'll be going into a wheelchair soon.' I thought I had misheard, so asked, 'What did you say?' Her seven-year-old sister 'helpfully' repeated with glee, 'She said that you'll be going into a wheelchair soon!' 'What makes you say that?' I asked. 'Because you are very old', the five-year-old replied, and her sister agreed, 'Yes, you are!'. Right, I thought, that's telling me!

Trying not to sound too defensive, I responded, 'Well, not everyone who is old goes into a wheelchair; a lot of people never have to.' This did not compute at all; they told me firmly that, 'Mr so and so, and also Mrs so and so, were very old and were most definitely in a wheelchair, because they could no longer walk.' So, they thought it was clear that any time now, my legs were going to stop working and I would be in a wheelchair. The seven-year-old said, 'Well, that could happen Oma, you might hurt your legs.' Well, true, I am 75, and might have a fall or a stroke, or whatever, but I was not planning to have any of that happening just yet. It takes little children to face you with things, though.

The autumn and winter of nature are good metaphors for the later stages of human life. As I age, I appreciate that this second half of life can be a fascinating time of transition, offering significant personal growth. However, the latter is dependent on the love, support and understanding we receive to meet the inevitable challenges and losses involved.

'Thoroughly unprepared, we take the step into the afternoon of life. Worse still, we take this step with the false presupposition that our truths and our ideals will serve us as hitherto. But we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning, for what was great in the morning will be little at evening and what in the morning was true, at evening will have become a lie.'[1]

The above quote from Jung[1] makes clear that during the second half of our life, we need to change how we look at ourselves and the world. He clarifies that, although during the first half, we necessarily look outwards, focusing on important matters such as education, a career, a relationship and a family, that process needs to reverse later. As we enter the mid part of life, our psychological and spiritual development needs to focus less on the ego and more on the soul, our true inner identity. Engagement with this period's specific developmental tasks, invites us to accept the most important challenge of all: to become an elder.

The soul's autumn, these days ranging roughly from mid-to-late 40s to mid-to-late 60s, is a very important, and (as in nature) often turbulent time. But this very turbulence also provides the opportunity for us to mature further, to become 'seasoned', in preparation for 'elderhood', the winter stage of life. The challenges and difficulties during this time are an invitation for us to learn and grow. The saying 'life begins at 40' is all very well, but it does depend on how we respond to the realisation that we have already lived half of our life.

Autumn has two aspects: it may give us beautiful days, with the sun shimmering through the turning leaves, while a chill in the air in mornings and evening may actually be quite welcome after a long, hot summer. The colours of flowers and fruit are beautiful: burnt orange, deep red, burgundy, all shades of purple, a deep brownish gold. Mushrooms, chestnuts, acorns and hazelnuts appear, and harvest festivals abound. However, it can also be cold, wet and very windy. This year has seen some lovely days as well as fierce storms and flooding in some areas.

So, although in nature autumn can be a time of abundance and celebration, those colourful flowers must eventually die, and the leaves of the trees must drop. I love trees in winter, when the architecture of their trunks and branches is no longer hidden under luxurious green growth. There is an honesty about it – it is as if the trees are saying, 'This is me; take it or leave it.' Also during this time, it may look as if nothing much is happening, but the trees are working hard, pushing their roots deeper into the soil, in preparation for spring.

Traditionally, most psychotherapeutic approaches have mainly focused on the first half of life; but I believe it is time to change this. If we see life as a spiritual journey, we need

a psycho/spiritual model of ageing that will help us to walk the road that leads to elderhood. The set of tasks below, which is based on the psychologist Erik Erikson's work on developmental stages[2] and the Jungian analyst Allan B Chinen's analysis of fairy tales,[3] may be helpful in the construction of such a model.

Task one: Facing the truth

For many of us, getting older is not a smooth process: we may resist and go through a 'midlife crisis', denying the fact that we are ageing and trying to prove to ourselves and others that we are still young. The older man buying an expensive sports car, or changing his partner for someone much younger, and the woman who dresses like her daughter and tries to be her friend, rather than her mother, are well known clichés. It does not help that our Western culture is obsessed with youth: we have facelifts, Botox and expensive creams and potions to try to help us continue looking young. We say, 'You're showing your age…', if someone remembers a pop song or an expression from a few decades ago, as if this is shameful, and something to hide. However, sooner or later, we need to face the truth, and come to terms with the fact that we are no longer young. If we resist the tasks and challenges the second part of life brings, and respond to the losses and disappointments with depression, life may look very bleak.

Frank sold his business when he was aged 66, and decided to retire. Initially, he enjoyed the lack of stress associated with running a company. Gradually, however, he stopped his various activities because of a back injury, saying that now he was retired, he was 'taking it easy'. His children noticed that he seemed to drink a lot, and they became concerned. They suggested counselling, but Frank refused to listen. He had never been interested in his inner life and said, 'What's the point of talking? I'm old now and my life is over.'

Task two: Accepting losses and letting go

Facing the truth of our age is not unlike Worden's first three tasks of mourning:[4] to accept the reality of the loss; to feel and process the pain of grief; and to let go of our attachment to what we have lost. The loss of our youth goes together with many other losses. For women, the menopause signals the end of their childbearing years, the loss of their youthful looks and energy and the loss of how they are regarded by others. Both sexes may notice a loss of agility and strength, as well as the intellectual agility of youth (the students who compete on *University Challenge* are good examples of just how quick these young people are!). We may lose our job or get bypassed for promotion. Our role as parents may change as children leave home, and relationships may flounder when both parties realise that they do not have much in common anymore. And there are the existential losses, of parents, friends and sometimes of children.

It does not help that the older we get, the more we may be regarded as 'past it', no longer relevant, a bit of a joke really. Although these days there are more old people than ever before, Jenkinson[5] laments that very few are elders. This is a tragedy, as in traditional societies, the elders were revered as the wisdom keepers, the ones to go to for advice. In our society, with its focus on youth and speed, we are seen as a problem, a burden, a drain on resources. We live longer, yet our experience and wisdom are not valued. No wonder so many older people feel lost and depressed. As therapists, we need to reject the negative stereotypes of old age and help ourselves as well as our clients embrace our ageing as an exciting part of life's developmental journey.

At this stage we also let go of our addiction to certainty and develop the emotional maturity needed to be able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, as well as the anxiety that such insecurity may cause.

Amy, a widow in her early 70s, worries that eventually she may have to give up her independence as her Parkinsonism progresses. 'I don't seem to get sufficient time to come to terms with anything', she said, 'because as soon as I have accepted one limitation, there is something else I can no longer do.' Initially. Amy found her illness hard to accept. She was just so angry with herself for having it, with her body for letting her down, and with doctors for not having a cure. I noticed that she bullied herself by saying things like, 'Stupid woman, why can't you do that anymore?' etc. When I drew her attention to this, Amy realised that she was angry with herself; what she needed was healing, not of her body, as that was not on offer, but of her soul. Amy needed to accept what was happening and learn to love herself as she is, for who she is.

Task three: Developing wisdom

We develop wisdom in order to pass it on to others; practical wisdom, forged through learning from and reflection on experience. To engage with this task, we need to be willing to take an honest look at the darker parts of our soul, reflect on what we see and withdraw our projections. Such 'self-confrontation and self-reformation'[6] require us to face our shadow and our blind spots, as well as our inner demons and other negative parts of our personality. This can be a big ask, and often a traumatic event is required as a catalyst before we can be persuaded to do so. Reflection on and acceptance of our own darkness and of what has been hidden in our unconscious helps us recognise it in others; within therapy, people's dreams often reflect this process.

Richard's relationship floundered in his mid-50s, so he decided to take a good look at himself and learn whatever it was that had gone wrong, so that he would not repeat what had contributed to the loss of that relationship. In therapy,

with warmth, gentle challenge and compassion, he gradually got in touch with the murkier parts of his soul. This was a painful, but ultimately helpful process, which eventually enabled him to live more authentically.

Task four: Self transcendence

Erikson sees the tasks as developmental stages and regards generativity as coming before wisdom.[2] However, as self-transcendence seems to be at a different level of development than wisdom, I have, with Chinen, suggested it as a task following on from wisdom.[3] Self-transcendence may also be seen as a deepening of wisdom, as none of these tasks are ever fully completed, but continue throughout life.

Self-transcendence is being willing to sacrifice one's own happiness for the sake of others, particularly the next generation, such as grandchildren or even society as a whole. Erikson sees this task as part of 'generativity', a kind of altruism.[2] The elders in Extinction Rebellion are a good example of this, as they are not taking action for their own future, but for those who will live on after them. Erikson sees such altruism as a sign of good mental health, as well as crucial for further psychological growth to occur.[2] Without it, he says, the older person would be egocentric and stagnate, as for them, their own ambitions and desires would come first. Self-transcendence is also essential for the achievement of 'emancipated innocence' when we no longer worry about social convention and reclaim our childlike innocence, without being childish.[3]

John, a retired merchant banker, was happy rolling on the floor with his grandchildren, pretending to be different animals and making funny noises.

Betty was in her 70s, when a cancer she had previously been treated for, returned, and was now in its final stage. This was a shock; although she had always known that the illness might return, Betty had hoped that it would not. Her rapidly deteriorating condition forced her to realise that she had no choice but to accept it. She decided to make the best of the time she had left and visited a few places she'd always wanted to see. Betty's concern was mainly for her husband, children and grandchildren, so she talked with them all and helped them to see that she was at peace with what was happening. Above all, she was concerned about her family's welfare and wanted to make her leaving them as painless as possible for them. She put all her affairs in order, and with her family, decided not to go into hospital, but to spend her final days and hours at home. Her death was peaceful, with her family around her. She was regarded as a true elder, who to the end was more concerned about those she was leaving behind than about her own fate. It was clear that Betty had worked through Erikson's seventh and eighth stage and completed the developmental tasks. She was at peace with the fact that her life was at an end and that the people she left behind would be able to manage without her.

Towards the end of his life, Erikson added an extra stage to the two developmental stages he had postulated previously for the second half of life, as eventually the body will weaken and can no longer be relied upon.[2] Eventually, people may need help with even the simplest activities of daily living, which can be hard to accept and lead to depression and despair. 'Yet', he writes, 'elders rejoice to see the sun rise brightly every morning. While there is light, there is hope, and who knows what bright light and revelation any morning may bring?'[2]

To conclude, the second part of life offers the opportunity for our soul to grow, through accepting the challenge of the developmental tasks that present themselves, and to become an elder. As therapists, it is crucial that we also accept these challenges, as only then can we truly help those who come to see us. Ultimately, therapists could be instrumental in changing society's view of older people, which should be to everyone's benefit.

Life expectancy is longer than in the past; let us use this gift well.

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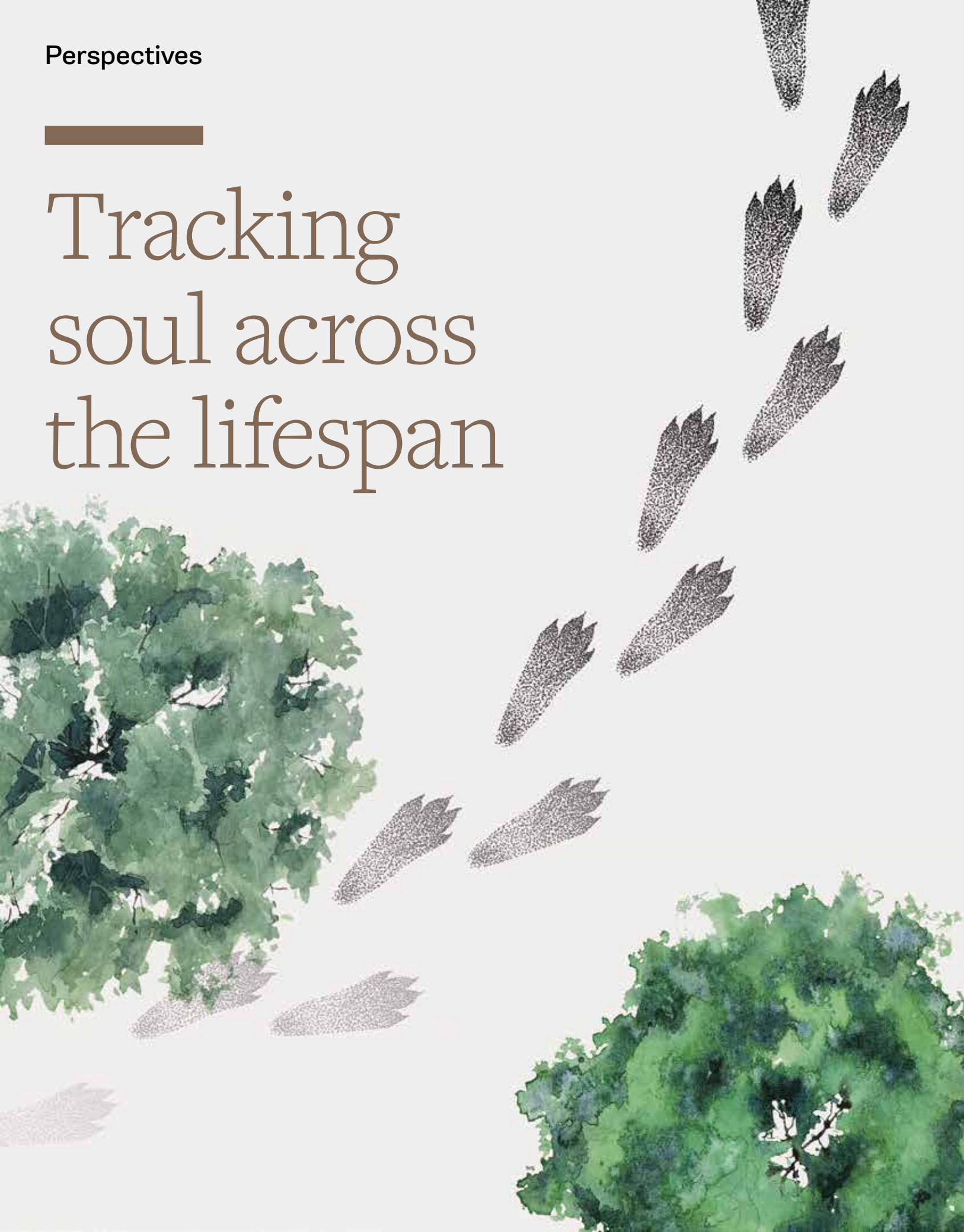
Biography

Els van Ooijen has a doctorate in psychotherapy from Middlesex University and a private psychotherapy, counselling and supervision practice in Bristol. Els has written a number of books and articles and is currently working on a book with the provisional title: *Soul Work: a therapist reflects.*

Tracking soul across the lifespan



Keith Hackwood explores soul terrain in therapy

It was in Thebes, the Greek city state which he would soon come to rule, that the wandering Oedipus, fresh from an unconsciously patricidal road-rage incident, had his perilously liminal encounter with the chthonic and deadly Sphinx, who asked him her infamous riddle and demanded an answer (an accursed affliction upon Thebes and her people, the Sphinx ate and devoured anyone who failed to answer correctly).

'Which creature has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?'

Answering successfully, 'Man', Oedipus broke the grip of the demonic beast over Thebes, then witnessed the Sphinx hurl herself to her death and in due course is crowned King (fulfilling the prophecy of his own birth, that he would kill his father and marry his mother).

This moment of the Oedipal myth, emerging from the heroic age of Greek culture, can be seen as the passing of one Age into another, heralding the advent of the familiar Olympian gods and a newly psychological era. Partly for this reason, it has fascinated hearers ever since, from Freud to Cocteau via Sophocles. While the apparently simple solution Oedipus provides to the Sphinx's riddle relates to the human progression through age and time, in fact there have always been more occult dimensions to his answer, often relating to the sacred geometry of the soul. Things of the soul are never so clear and simple as they may seem, no straight lines or right angles here, so much as spiralling, meandering beelines.

Why do I mention this, except for its Freudian provenance and connection to the Ur-myth of psychoanalytic, therefore psychological, tradition? Well, to answer that truthfully one must begin to observe as might a tracker, one who reads marks and signs left upon the landscape by the passage of others and other-than-humans. From such a vantage point, the Riddle of the Sphinx and the story it appears within are some of the oldest tracks we have to pick up on and follow. But follow what, exactly, and where, through time and the enterprises of soul as she marks her passage across the terrain of mind and psyche?

As a great tracker has said, 'A lost trail always extends beyond the evidence, and even the trails we find are only fragments of the trails that lie beyond our comprehension' – a truth that any therapist might well relate to in their client work and perhaps, more widely, within the culture that gives rise to therapy itself.[1]

But what kind of a being is soul, that we might seek to track it in this way? Certainly that question itself will conjure riddles, as it does across many cultures and places and times. One might say that soul, etymologically, derives from *seola*, and many cognates in northern languages of the proto-indo-european family, suggesting 'animate' and 'alive', while hinting at the primal waters of birth and death. Where we come from, where we are going, what we belong to. In everyday usage, soul is a sort of shorthand for the living, thinking, feeling quality of a person, the character and texture of a place, or the trace of those deceased. Soul trips off our tongues freely in combinations and fusions: soul music, soul food, old souls, wise souls, the soulful or soulless buildings or people we encounter on our way. We both know, and are yet mystified by, soul, a paradox made all the more manifest when we consider that soul is elusive to measurement, the pre-eminent methodology of the dominant culture's scientific-materialist worldview.

Observation is our great ally here, allied to an instinct to slow down, to cultivate silence and stillness. Crouched in such a posture for a while, it is as if some part of us grows transparent to the world around us, things go about their business and we, in our stillness, become participatory witnesses. Someone begins to speak about themselves, perhaps, in a new way, minus the official narrative or the prevailing identification, and we might glimpse them as if for the first time. Our ears read the signs in this example, hearing what is said and what is not said, following the spoor onwards, downwards. Did I mention soul's propensity for seeing in the dark?

In many psychologically alert understandings of soul, the key insight is something like this: soul has a true nature, it has luminosity and motility, it is experience – not the experiencer. Unlike the structures of the personality, the learned patterns and conditioned ego, soul makes no claims upon identity,

Observation is our great ally here, allied to an instinct to slow down, to cultivate silence and stillness

How much richer, then, might our tracking of soul across the landscape of a life be if we, from our therapeutic chairs, cultivated an open humility and curiosity for this sauntering of soul?

nor does it justify or defend a position. Rather than being interested in whether a life is 'going well' or manifesting 'success' or an enjoyable time, the soul's currency is founded upon intensity and calibrated within the individuated form. (How deeply felt is this experience? How far is it mine, rather than conditioned or expected of me? Am I being myself?).

Soul, from this angle, has often been defined in distinction from the body, which it is seen to 'wear' or inhabit, to animate, but also to transcend. While obscured by binary-oppositional thinking, this pairing does succeed in distinguishing the immaterial nature of the soul. The relative aspect can only express itself through pairs of opposites. Yet subtler cultures than those associated with the dominant contemporary mode have spoken of numerous gradations of soul, often numbering well into double figures (for example, souls of personal dream, body parts, one's own dying, and the 'free soul' that survives death) and thus avoided the binary trap.

Broader understandings still derive from animism, which by its very nature dignifies all phenomena as presences expressing soul (traditional so-called shamanic understandings often have this aspect, embedded within landscapes, fully indigenous in the sense of 'belonging to a place'; from this perspective, each stone, flower, sand grain, river, tree, insect or object, being alive, is animated by soul. Is soul). Significant cultural expressions of this are found in understandings of stories as 'living' or ensouled propositions, living beings in their own right, or in the practices of naming potent objects, for example swords, let alone objects that pertain to beauty (prized cups or bowls or tea-sets etc).

How much richer, then, might our tracking of soul across the landscape of a life be if we, from our therapeutic chairs, cultivated an open humility and curiosity for this sauntering of soul? In this regard it is, one could say, the *manner of our approach* that soul most recognises and respects. Come at her with linear assumptions or measuring tools, come only from the arrogance of the knowing-mind and she will withdraw stealthily, going to ground in the forest cover of her natural terrain. But come with open hands, or like Jung's Personality number 2, slowly gesturing, making simple, heartfelt offerings that attend to what she may ask of us, not intent upon breaking her to our bridle, and perhaps we will catch a flash of fur, or a glint of a wild eye, perhaps her song might come to us on the breeze, or her scent draw across us.

What might such a thing look like in practice, in the therapy room?

In a way, the question starts off being literal – how conducive is the space, the room itself? Is it manifest or virtual, spacious or contained, a defence against presence or an invitation to risk it all? What does it say of our soulfulness?

In part, the more obvious trails of soul can be seen in the fresh clay of developmental psychology, or footprints in the sand of layered pathology. That the soul speaks in symptoms is well established in certain therapeutic schools, yet what anxiety or depression or the lingering affect of trauma is whispering, remains specific and nuanced, rather than generalisable. We are in the realm of wisdom here, rather than knowledge. These are like Oedipus's answer to the Riddle of the Sphinx: clever beginnings, playing for time, they keep us alive and initiate the trail. But on firmer ground, over bare rock, across deep rivers, or in the clear skies – how shall we continue to track soul then? There are human beings even today who possess such skill, whose attunement to the one they follow is subtle enough to bring dead trails alive, or to anticipate movements not yet made. The track itself speaks, is not other than soul, if we can hear it right. And the very fact that there is a track, well it makes for companionship, something or someone has been here before us and has left this trail, subtle as it is, to draw us closer.

It may also be the case that this tracking business is entirely wrong-footed, backwards oriented – through the eyes of soul it seems highly likely that in the painstaking stalking of a quarry, we, rather than she, are the prize. Who is following whom? So likely does this seem that in fact there is only danger in speaking of soul with the tongue of knowledge, as if one knows something for certain. For the uninitiated, the un-eldered, the competence-addicted, our utterances will impress none but the similarly un-endowed. We are like children, making claims beyond our capacity.

Perhaps a truer approach would begin instead in a kind of grieving, a recognition that we do not command soul to dance attendance upon our perceived need for her comfort. This is not the advertising copy for a New Age workshop, promising the sunlit uplands of soul's embrace. She has severity in her left hand, and mercy in her right. This is an adult proposition.

Soul, after all, survives the passing squalls of how we might feel about our relationship with her, and will continue to await our ripening, being made of

the substance of time and space, rather than subject to experiencing either. Patience is no problem for soul.

Let me end by returning to the Sphinx, where we began, a displaced being, some say wrought from the depths of the earth, or abducted from Africa to guard the Greek city state. Turned monstrous, demonic, even, we might perceive another clue. Who monstered the monster? And what relief might the Sphinx have experienced in leaping to her doom, free at last of her cursed duty to kill? Oedipus, as heir to that convoluted crown, becomes the curse-carrier now, a new kind of monster and very distinctly our ancestor. But what has really happened?

Might we not say that, rather like the stories told of Lord Shiva, in Kashmir and elsewhere, there are five faces always simultaneously at play. Might it be said that in this manner, soul herself, waking out of oneness, enters into a dance of *creating, sustaining, destroying and of concealing and revealing*, in each moment, in each action? The Sphinx then, a thoroughly liminal being, made of various parts, lion-bodied, woman-breasted and headed, eagle-winged, serpent-tailed, is a fusion creature, *a way of seeing through,* and is also our dodem (totem), our founding non-human ancestor.

If we want to observe closely, and to see soul moving in our therapeutic work, and in our lives in general, we need to consider what feeds her, since she appears to be starving. Furthermore, as with the Sphinx, how do we feed that which has starved us all along?

She eats of intense experience, clear-seeing, deep-feeling, embracing limitation. She rumbles in the belly, like the Questing Beast of Arthurian tales, signifying thresholds.

Soul then comes at a moment in the mist on the trail, sitting like a hare at the margin of a wood. We are momentarily eye to eye, stillness, the thing itself gazing back into us. The hare bounds away; what now is our proper response? Might we, as the poet John Moriarty invites, drop to the ground, easing our head against the stil-warm form, the ghost impression of the living creature? With our ear to the earth, could we beseech the hare-soul to 'suck our education out', restoring to us the eruptively sacred ground?

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Biography

Keith Hackwood is a psychosynthesis therapist, supervisor and mindfulness teacher. He is a member of the BACP Spirituality Executive Committee. Keith lives and works in Newport, South Wales and he recently released an online course in Creative Mindfulness, available through his website.

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A question of soul: the importance of being in the therapeutic relationship

Mike Moss explores what connects client and therapist

He was in the waiting room. I noticed he dropped something from his bag and I wanted to step back to let him pick it up, but then it rolled towards me, something moving back and forth. I was drawn to it and it seemed to be drawn to me and it landed softly at my feet. I picked it up and looked through the end. I was curious. I had an immediate flashback to my childhood. I was holding a kaleidoscope. I gazed through the aperture and saw a child inside a star looking through an aperture at a man outside looking through an aperture at a world of many different shapes and colours.

We then found ourselves sitting opposite each other in another room. Just the two of us, with the kaleidoscope back in his bag. This was our first therapy session. I knew we had chosen to be in this moment and trusted there had been a deep calling in us that brought us here. And in all our struggles, hopes and dreams, we were now sharing the possibility of there being something else in our meeting, something larger. We did our best to recognise the space between us and invited all the possibilities of change and growth and healing. A candle was lit and we acknowledged the uniqueness of the moment. This wasn't about fixing, it was about caring. Caring for ourselves and caring for the other and caring for the world. Then we listened. We listened deeply with our hearts and began to offer each other hope. 'Who are you?' 'Who am I?' 'Why are we here?' These questions seemed to disappear as we found acceptance of our being in the presence of a stranger acknowledging we were not alone. Client and therapist as two travellers, soul companions on our way home. Meeting at depth on many different levels in one moment, a kaleidoscope of fragments of light and shade, of love and fear, reflecting stories inside and outside of us, longing to be connected to the story of the world.

Psychotherapy may be an opportunity to access the essence of ourselves. Not just by being encouraged by our developing skills and theories of therapy, and our openness and search for healing, but through the lived, felt experience of our being. Exploring what connects client and therapist in terms of our being human and beyond, may find us in the territory of the soul.

When it comes to trying to understand any therapeutic relationship in depth, recognising what we all have in common feels like a good starting point. I wonder if the client and therapist can ever be separated when relating at depth. The story of each therapeutic relationship is unique and may offer the paradox of there being commonality and the possibility we are on the same journey of being human. If so, I believe we have the potential to connect to each other from the core of our being human in therapy.

Even though one may be an observer at times to the other's experience, if we turn this around, like a kaleidoscope, we may see that we are both the experiencer and observer at the same time. If we turn it around even more, we may look deeper and see images that connect all the different parts of ourselves with the other, with the world and with the soul.

Mia Leijssen, professor of person-centred/experiential/existential psychotherapy at the University of Leuven in Belgium, believes therapy is a spiritual practice and observes that the *'soul'* or *'life force'* is a quality of experiencing life which can deepen, enrich and also potentially transform us in therapy.[1] She also quotes Eugene Gendlin, acknowledging what he calls a *'felt sense'* where '...the human body plays a remarkable role in developing an awareness of spirit' and that by attending to this *felt sense*, we may capture the process of the soul.

Leijssen also identifies *'soul moments'* in psychotherapy, which she sees as becoming part of the healing process, and understands there are different dimensions of our physical, social, psychological and spiritual life. She believes these different dimensions can '...become integrated in one felt process, evolving from moment to moment in therapy'[2] and that they inspire us and can connect to our bodily felt resources. She also makes reference to ways of nourishing the soul in therapy where there can be communication through images, symbols and actions without what she terms *'over explanation'*. I agree there are times where explanation is not needed in therapy, and there is just a being with what emerges, letting moments fill with what is becoming. I have also experienced this as an intuitive communication in clinical supervision, where somehow I connect intuitively to the client by imagining space for the healing the client may be seeking. If we consider the kaleidoscope image I used earlier, different aspects of our being may somehow be linked to how we experience the therapeutic and supervisory relationships. Where something happens that can appear one moment as a thought, feeling or an

> We may choose to turn the kaleidoscope, see we are part of something larger and connected to all life, and indeed this awareness may be the awakening of the question of the soul

image which seems incredibly important and may offer so much more at the time or in reflection, depending on how we look at it.

For instance, I looked up the origin of the word 'kaleidoscope' online.[3] It comes from the Greek words *kalos*, which means 'beautiful', and *eidos,* which means 'shape'. I liked the idea of finding something more, and looked further and checked out the word 'scope' and learned it means 'to observe'. So, I then looked up the origin of the word 'observe' and found it described as 'a sense of distance the mind can reach'. I really like this description. I think these words have a lot of power. By digging deeper, I may have discovered something at the root of the word 'kaleidoscope' which for me seems to describe the territory of the soul. For example, I wonder if as well as there being a felt sense, the soul may also appear like a beautiful shape in my imagination that can travel a sense of distance the mind can reach. Of course, we can only imagine these things, yet in our imagining, perhaps we can actually connect to something more, something deeper, inside and outside of us.

Jung, writing in *The Red Book*, considers this inner and outer world. And as we become part of what he refers to as the 'manifold essence of the world' through our bodies, we also become part of the manifold essence of the inner world through our soul, and he believes that this inner world is truly infinite.[4]

Bernie Neville, professor of holistic counselling at the Phoenix Institute of Higher Education in Australia, shares Rogers' belief of an *actualising tendency*; that when the conditions in the therapeutic relationship permit, we are not only involved in an event, but '...we are tapping into a tendency which permeates all organic life.'[5] I find this possibility inspiring, and have written about it before, where I considered there is something which intrinsically moves us towards self-actualisation and asked if we can experience its presence.[6,7] I also find the question of the soul takes us further into the actualising tendency, which may be represented as our being part of a universe, as well as our potential for growth and change and healing, deep within our being.

Neville also poses a view from the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, that when we observe the therapeutic relationship, we see two individuals who make up the relationship; however, we may have this back to front. He states that: 'In each moment of experience it is the relationship which holds the two experiencing subjects into being, not two individuals who make a relationship happen' and that they are directly connected as aspects of a single cosmic moment of experience. He goes on to suggest: '...the universe is not made of people or chemicals or atoms. It is made of relationships which bring people and atoms and chemicals into being.'[5]

I find this view compelling, and I wonder if the soul can be described in this way as that which brings us into being. Kaitlyn Steele, a person-centred spiritual accompanier and pastoral supervisor, also shares Rogers' view of the actualising tendency and believes that when he spoke of our *'organismic nature'* or our *'transcendental core'* he was essentially talking about the soul, and that where there is meaningful encounter in the therapeutic relationship, it is as if '...one soul reaches out and touches the soul of the other'.[8]

I once worked with a client who told me she saw the cosmos when she closed her eyes at night and felt really connected somehow to the stars and planets. Janet (not her real name) had never spoken about this before and had felt hesitant about sharing this with me. She wondered if I would think her strange or think that she was going crazy; of course, I didn't think that.

When clients start to tell me something and say things like, 'You might think this is really weird, or you may think me crazy...', I find myself moving towards them that little bit closer as I am particularly interested in what they might say. In my experience, what they talk about are usually matters of the soul; not revealing things to another person may be a kind of protection for the core of their being.

Janet was experiencing an incredible loneliness in her life. She had clearly been hurt. The physical part of her had healed she said, but there was a deep scar inside her that wouldn't heal. It had destroyed her sense of believing in herself and believing in her safety in the world. I noticed early on she seemed to be holding something in her body by the way she sat with her arms crossed over her lap as if covering a wound. She seemed to find some relief and even some comfort in just sharing her story. At the end of our work together, she said she experienced me as being kind and that having been listened to was so important for her. It also seemed she had found kindness for herself too.

I think as therapists we can only ever come close to understanding the client's story and similarly only ever come close to understanding the soul. There may always be a distance, even when we feel that we connect. But it feels so important that we are able to respond

from a deep place within us when listening for the soul in the other, sharing and being in relationship and imagining matters of the soul as they emerge.

In shamanic practice, there is a belief that parts of the soul may leave the body at times of trauma and can only be retrieved by the help of a shamanic practitioner, who visits the world of spirit on the client's behalf.[9] I have limited knowledge of this; however, I do accept the possibility and I am attracted by the imagery. I can imagine many clients I have worked with, having reconnected to parts of themselves in their healing and in discovering new ways of being. I also think that where there is suffering, it may be the soul's process of seeking healing, with parts of the soul trying to reconnect. Perhaps, even in therapy, there is a way of calling these fragmented parts of the soul back home.

Janet's life had been a struggle. She was self-harming and taking risks with alcohol and sex and had believed she was of no value. She also thought no one cared for her as she had lost the sense of caring for herself. She also acknowledged that something felt like it had been taken away from her. Having an image of a lost part of Janet helped her imagine where it might have gone and what it looked like and if it might ever come back. Over time, she was able to experience some of the qualities of the lost part of herself and, rather like the shamanic view, she believed something of her essence had been returned, was able to manage better and had found a confidence in herself.

Whatever questions we may have of the soul, I think it is important we accept there may be an enabling of life we have at our core that stays with us through life. Part of our journey may be further empowered in the therapeutic relationship by a therapist or someone accompanying us towards our dark places to find what has been lost.

Hearing the *healing* in the client's story feels important as it may be a story of the soul, which is also our story and the story of the world. I believe that in the therapeutic relationship, we may discover we have the power to enliven life with a thought, awareness, a reflection and maybe even an intention or intuition, where the outer world connects to our inner world. We may choose to turn the kaleidoscope, see we are part of something larger and connected to all life, and indeed this awareness may be the awakening of the question of the soul.

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Biography

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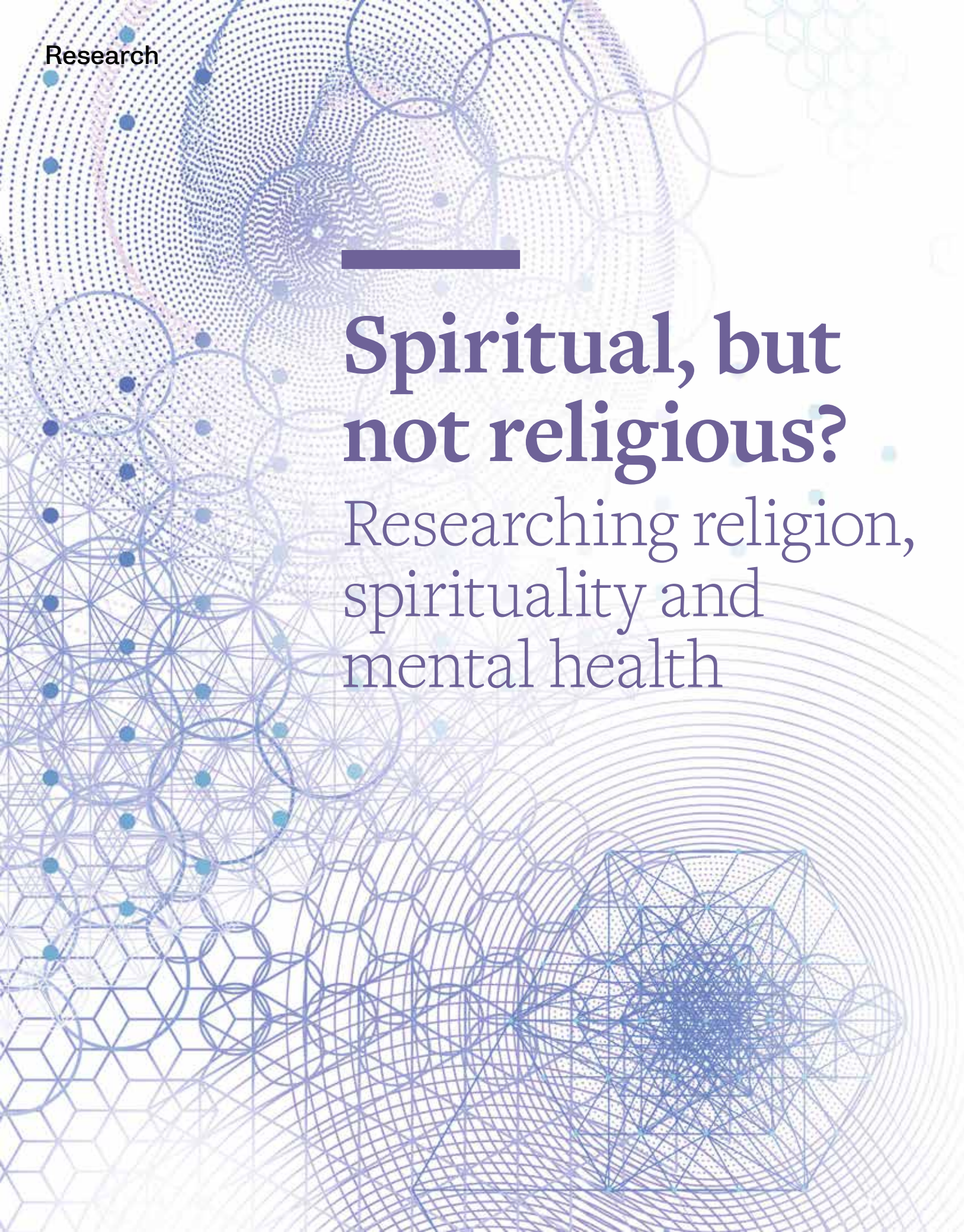
Spiritual, but not religious?

Researching religion, spirituality and mental health



Jane Hunt explores critical questions for researchers

What are the benefits of being religious? Will it make you happier? Will you live longer? Or does it depend on what kind of religion or spiritual practices you follow? These are key questions for researchers in the area of psychology of religion and mental health.

Recent research claims people with higher levels of religious involvement have better mental health.[1] This includes better coping strategies for dealing with illness, physical disability, depression and negative life events.[2,3] Controversially, some researchers have even claimed that those who identify as spiritual, in the absence of the institutional framework of organised religion, have worse mental health both than those who are religious, and also than those who identify as neither religious nor spiritual (page 71).[4]

But what do these categories of 'religious' or 'spiritual' actually mean? If we can't define our terms clearly, how can we trust measurement tools and research claims? In this article, I want to explore some of the challenges in defining religion and spirituality for research purposes.

Spirituality

There's no real agreement among researchers about what 'spirituality' is.[5] Within religious traditions, spirituality has been understood as a particular devotional path, designed to deepen one's relationship with God.[6] Outside this context, spirituality has been understood as the search for the sacred,[7] for transcendence,[8] for meaning and purpose in life, for spiritual connection, wholeness and integration,[9] in a way which involves non-ordinary levels of consciousness.[10] But for research purposes, these terms can be difficult to pin down or operationalise. It can also be difficult to isolate them from more generic measures of human flourishing or wellbeing.[5,11] Monod and colleagues warn that 'no definition of spirituality is universally endorsed and no consensus exists on the dimensions of spirituality within health research.'[12]

Religion

Defining 'religion' is complex too. Religion can be seen as the doctrinal teachings, beliefs, values, and ceremonial practices of a specific institutional world faith, such as Christianity or Islam.[13] This definition sounds straightforward enough. However, open a book on anthropology and religion, and things get more complicated. In cross-cultural studies, for example, anthropologists have often focused on what religion 'does' by observing social networks and practices, rather than what religion 'is' in terms of beliefs and doctrines.[14] By contrast, psychologists have tended to focus on defining religion by beliefs. But is someone 'religious' if they believe in God, but don't go to church? Do we define a religious person by the beliefs they hold, or the practices they engage in? Or is it a mixture of both? Some researchers have argued that research in this area has suffered by over-emphasising individual beliefs, and ignoring the wider psychological impact of participation in religious communities, cultures, and practices.[3]

Spiritual, but not religious?

In a book exploring contemporary religion in the UK, the sociologist Linda Woodhead argues there has been a shift in recent years away from 'religion', towards 'spirituality'.[15] This shift is mirrored in recent research in psychology. In a systematic review, for example, Monod and colleagues note that over the last 15 years there has been a move to measure *spirituality* and health, rather than *religion* and health.[12] This shift has led to attempts to make a demarcation in research between participants who identify as 'religious' and those who see themselves as 'spiritual'. Some argue it can be helpful to have even more categories, which distinguish between those who are 'religious', 'religious and spiritual', 'spiritual but not religious', and 'neither spiritual nor religious'.[9]

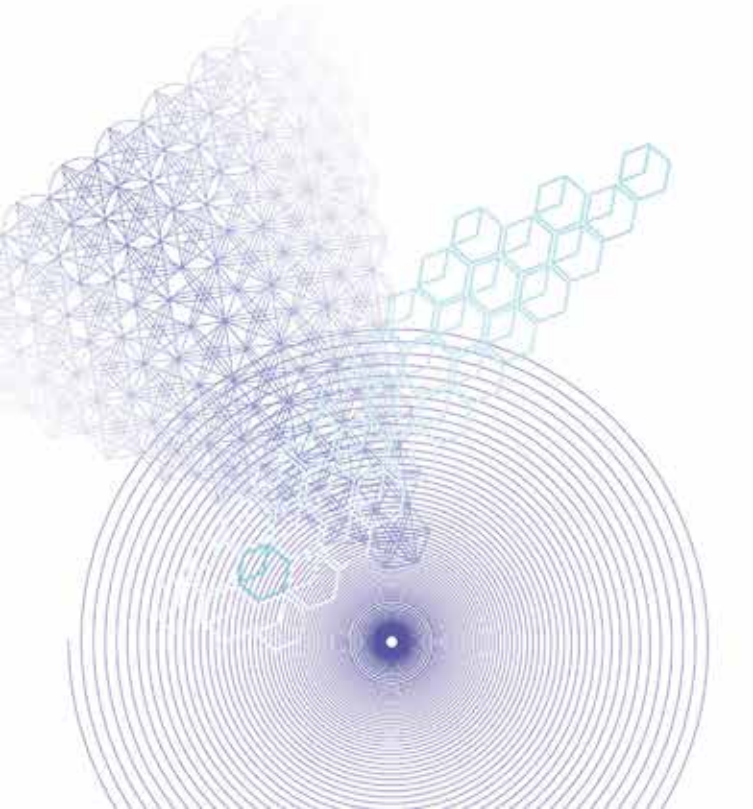
This approach can result in religion and spirituality being defined negatively against each other.[8] So, for example, for some researchers, spirituality can be seen in a positive way, concerned with meaningfulness, the search for transcendence, and focused on personal experiences; and is contrasted with religion, seen in a negative way as authoritarian, institutional, restrictive, and legalistic.[16] Alternatively, others will see religion in a positive way as a communal and ethical tradition, which generates social cohesion; and contrast this with spirituality, viewed as an individualistic practice that has become commodified in the market-place.[17]

But can religion and spirituality be distinguished so easily? Can the two phenomena be disentangled? The

philosopher Charles Taylor argues that any spirituality that searches for the transcendent is in fact born out of religion. In his seminal work, *A Secular Age,* Taylor is not interested in the 'truth' of religion, but in exploring the conditions of belief in modern society.[18] He charts how Western society has moved from what he calls a pre-modern social imaginary, in which belief in God and an enchanted world is taken for granted, to a modern secular social imaginary, with a disenchanted world in which belief in a transcendent God is hard to sustain. But for Taylor, our consciousness is still haunted by the pre-modern social imaginary. We therefore want to believe, but the conditions of belief are untenable. Instead, we 'mourn' and 'search' for the transcendent in different ways. If Taylor is to be believed, then attempting to define the spiritual without reference to the religious that went before, is a failure to understand the social and cultural contexts of secularised modernity.

As researchers and practitioners, we need to be cautious of any research claims about the benefits or harm that religion or spirituality cause, without scrutinising carefully what precisely is meant by religion or spirituality. As Loewenthal argues, 'because of the range of ways in which religion has been defined and measured, we cannot make general inferences about the relationship between religion and mental health. We need to know which aspect of religion is under examination when considering findings and conclusions'.[13]

In research, as in therapy, asking critical questions is always a good place to start.



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Biography

Jane Hunt is a programme leader at Metanoia Institute. She is also a member of the BACP Spirituality Executive. Jane's research interests lie in exploring the relationship between psychotherapeutic theory and religious constructs, as well as considering how therapeutic training programmes equip therapists to work with spirituality, religion and belief.

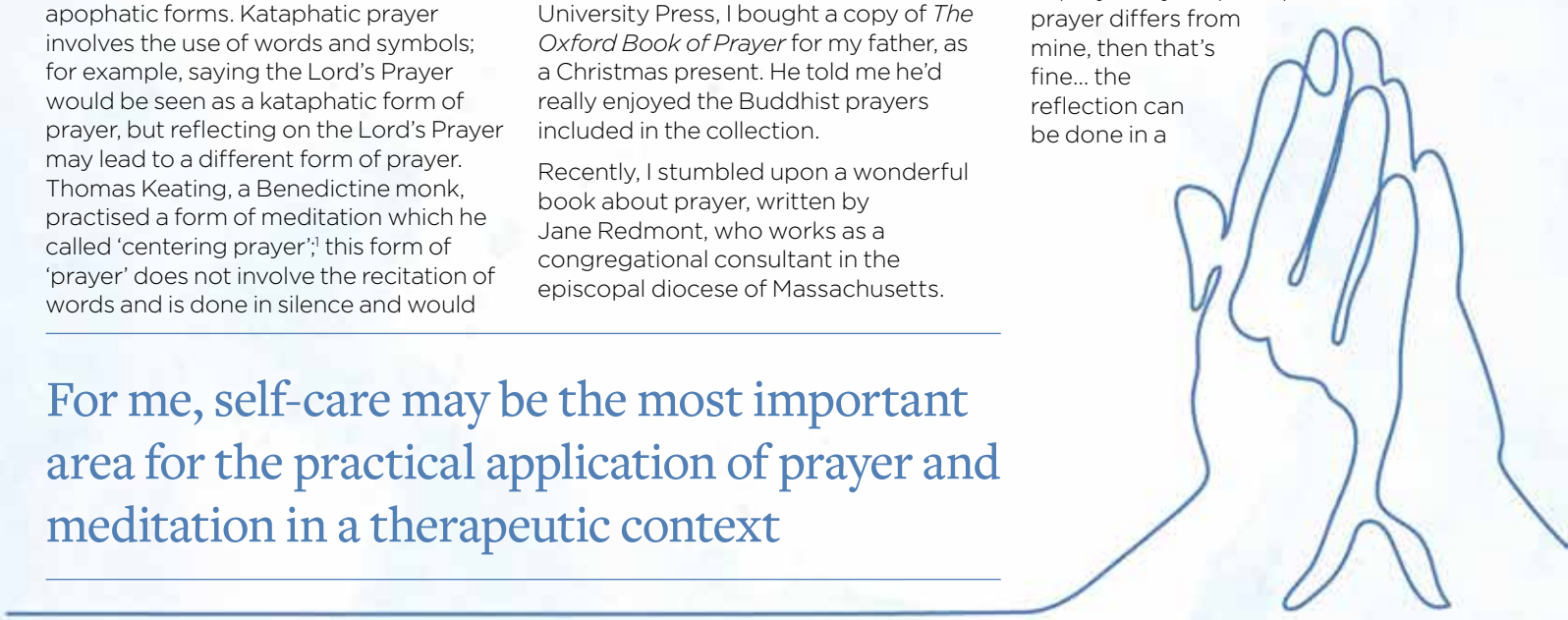
Prayer: its role in therapy

Amanda Anderson explores the ethical implications of using prayer in therapy

What is the difference between prayer and meditation? Some people may say that prayer is active and meditation is passive. I would not agree with this. Meditation practices can be very far from passive. Defining prayer can be a tricky business, as can defining meditation. For example, there are kataphatic forms of prayer and apophatic forms. Kataphatic prayer involves the use of words and symbols; for example, saying the Lord's Prayer would be seen as a kataphatic form of prayer, but reflecting on the Lord's Prayer may lead to a different form of prayer. Thomas Keating, a Benedictine monk, practised a form of meditation which he called 'centering prayer';[1] this form of 'prayer' does not involve the recitation of words and is done in silence and would be perceived as apophatic. There are many different forms of meditation within Buddhist practice. There are cultivation practices, where the meditator plants seeds of, for example, loving kindness *(mettã)* in their mind and broadens the focus of the meditation to include individuals and then moves on to wider groups. However, reciting the *mettã sutta* (a Buddhist text) is more conventionally prayer-like in its focus.[2] When I worked as an editor at Oxford University Press, I bought a copy of *The Oxford Book of Prayer* for my father, as a Christmas present. He told me he'd really enjoyed the Buddhist prayers included in the collection.

Recently, I stumbled upon a wonderful book about prayer, written by Jane Redmont, who works as a congregational consultant in the episcopal diocese of Massachusetts. *When in Doubt, Sing* is her exploration of what prayer is, and she includes many practices. She believes there is no right way to pray, and writes: 'So much depends on temperament, circumstances and time of life'.[3] I enjoyed her honest approach and find it inspiring that she includes imagination as an important part of prayer: 'The first step of prayer is telling the truth about who and where we are. It is also, at the same time, learning the truth about who and where God is. We are the ones who tend to place limits on the mercy of God. Prayer involves a capacity to stretch our imagination, to imagine and therefore to begin knowing a God who is not a projection of our own self-condemnation.'[3] She includes chapters about praying with anger, writing as prayer and spirituality and social justice.

There are many types of prayer in various spiritual and religious traditions, and I believe aspects of Buddhist meditation can be perceived as a form of prayer. In the book, *Spirit in Session*, the author Russell Siler Jones invites the reader to focus on their experiences of prayer in a therapeutic context (see section from *Spirit in Session* reproduced on pp26–27 of this issue).[4] This article is a response to that invitation, and in this article, I am going to regard my own practice of meditation as a form of prayer. If your perception of prayer differs from mine, then that's fine... the reflection can be done in a



For me, self-care may be the most important area for the practical application of prayer and meditation in a therapeutic context

way that suits your practice. I am going to explore my own experiences as a client, trainee psychotherapist and in supervision and self-care.

Experience as a client

I remember feeling rather uncomfortable when my therapy sessions started with a long body scan meditation (10–15 mins), led by the therapist. I confess, I thought: 'I don't want to do this during my sessions. I can do this at home by myself.' I was really conscious of the cost of therapy and wanted to get what I perceived was my money's worth. Eventually, I was able to say that I didn't wish to spend so much time doing such meditations and we agreed to spend a few moments in silence at the beginning of each session. I do believe spending time on the body can be immensely valuable, but I think it needs to be timed carefully and sensitively and attuned to each particular client and what they're able to access. I really question the use of longer guided meditations in the therapy hour. I think therapist and client need to negotiate carefully about the use of such 'techniques'. For me, it felt rather formulaic and I sometimes felt I was waiting to get on with the 'real' business of the therapeutic hour.

I really question the use of longer guided meditations in the therapy hour. I think therapist and client need to negotiate carefully about the use of such techniques

I wondered if it might be to help the therapist get through a session and reduce the time he had to spend listening to me. It put him in control of the first part of a session.

Experience as a trainee psychotherapist

During my training at the Karuna Institute, we did various group exercises making use of Buddhist *brahma vihãrã* meditation practice. The *brahma vihãrã* practices are seen as a form of cultivation practice. These practices involve the use of 'phrases' and include loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity. A lot of material has been published about loving kindness and compassion. I was fortunate to attend a recent workshop at Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London that was taught by the Dalai Lama's translator, Thupten Jinpa, on the practice of compassion (which is regarded as an extremely important part of Tibetan Buddhist practice). He has developed an eight-week compassion training course. He gives an example of the phrases that can be used in compassion practice:

'May you be free from pain and suffering

May you be free from fear and anxiety

May you experience peace and joy.'[5]

In a Buddhist form of psychotherapy, the presence of these qualities (loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity) may be perceived as providing an ideal holding environment for a client. I believe we could benefit from more focus on joy and equanimity.

Non-disclosure can be a challenging aspect of working as a counsellor or therapist. I remember thinking, 'I mustn't mention my interest in Buddhism' and then feeling amused when one of my clients in a placement asked me: 'Have you heard of mindfulness?', opening a conversation about how he had found mindfulness practices to be very helpful.

Experience in supervision

I told one of my supervisors that I sometimes did loving kindness practice for my clients. He responded that he was not so convinced that it was such a sensible thing to do. He felt I might be spending too much time focusing on my clients outside their session time. I felt sadness on hearing his response. Was I doing something wrong? I wasn't so convinced. I've been reflecting on this for quite a few years and am still left wondering. Is it OK for a counsellor or therapist to spend time between sessions holding their clients in mind and wishing them well? Of course, I do believe there are dangers in choosing to do so for some clients and not others (a form of favouritism). As a trainee psychotherapist, my clients did come to my mind between sessions and I found it helpful to find a way to try to surround these thoughts with loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity. Of course, meditation is a practice and it isn't easy to do (I explore the possible dangers in a section below.)

Experience in self-care: as a resource for the therapist

For me, self-care may be the most important area for the practical application of prayer and meditation in a therapeutic context. Karen Kissel Wegela's book, *Contemplative*

psychotherapy, provides a model for the use of the *brahma vihārās* in therapy.[6] Clinical psychologist John Welwood, turned to the practice of Buddhist meditation to enable him to cultivate the core conditions of person-centred counselling.[7]

Paul Fulton, a clinical psychologist and meditation consultant, explores the use of various Buddhist meditations in the training of therapists and counsellors in the book, *Advances in Contemplative Psychotherapy*. He describes equanimity practice as helpful in understanding our limits and as a 'sober balancing'.[8]

The potential dangers of spiritual practice (focusing on the brahma vihārās)

Sharon Salzberg, a Buddhist meditation teacher, describes the danger of practising loving kindness and compassion unskilfully: '...we can slip into a sense of owning people and then trying to manage them'.[9] I recall my mother saying to me, 'I only want you to be happy' (with the possible implication of 'I can't cope when you're not.'). I believe a genuine wish for someone's happiness (without strings attached) is very commendable.

Each *brahma vihārā* (loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity) has a near enemy and a far enemy. The near enemy shares some characteristics with the quality of the *brahma vihārā*. The far enemy is the complete opposite of the quality. Desire is the near enemy of loving kindness and the far enemy is ill will. Grief is the near enemy of compassion and the far enemy is cruelty. Any identification with a client's suffering might lead to overwhelm, attempts to rescue or fix problems, or to being dismissive, contemptuous or disengaged. Joy in the home life is the near enemy of altruistic joy, and aversion and boredom are seen as the far enemy. I find it much easier to hear and rejoice about the accomplishments of my 19-year-old niece (I suppose this is an example of joy in the home life, the near enemy), than to hear about an ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend. Sharon Salzberg's challenging question: 'Can we allow the lives of others to be different from ours and feel happy for them?' seems very pertinent when working with clients in a therapeutic context.[9] Sarah Shaw, a Buddhist scholar and meditator, names 'unknowing' (I think this could be more easily understood as indifference) as the near enemy of equanimity and the far enemies as desire and resentment.[10]

Suzanne C Hidore, a person-centred counsellor, compares the *brahma vihārās* to Carl Rogers' core conditions (unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding and genuineness) in person-centred therapy.[11] Hidore describes how the near enemy of loving kindness, attachment, creates fear and control as opposed to love and freedom. Unconditional positive regard can be compared to equanimity, and Hidore points out that indifference can occur when a therapist puts themselves into a position of an authority on right and wrong and doesn't allow the client to be their own authority and denies the client their own responsibility for their actions. The near enemy of compassion is pity, and this could lead to a therapist attempting to rescue someone from their experience. If a therapist attempts to rescue a client, then this action would deny the client their opportunity to experience the life they have. As Hidore elegantly puts it: 'When love becomes attachment, compassion becomes pity, or equanimity becomes indifference, therapists do not serve the good of their clients or themselves. Traps may lead to dependency, self-doubt, fear and confusion. Instead of creating a relationship, the near enemies create separation... between the client and therapist, within the client, and within the therapist.'[11]

Biography

Amanda Anderson is the editor of this journal and has trained as a psychotherapist

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When I read the section on prayer (reproduced on pages 26–27 of this issue, following this article), written by Russell Siler Jones, in his book, *Spirit in Session*, I found the points for reflection very helpful.[4] I would suggest making use of these points and questions in a group discussion. In a smaller group, the whole group could work through the points and discuss them one by one. In a larger group, pairs could focus on several points and report their findings to the whole group. I encourage readers of *Thresholds* to spend time reflecting on their own practices of prayer and how they are or could be a fruitful resource for self-care and their potential uses during client work.

Prayer

Russell Siler Jones reviews important ethical issues around the use of prayer in counselling and therapy

Anne Lamott has a wonderful book about prayer titled *Help, Thanks, Wow.* The name alone expresses much about the reasons people pray: to ask for help, to say thanks, and to express wonder. Some people pray regularly, others occasionally, and some not at all. Some pray with a particular deity in mind, some to their ancestors, some to the Earth itself, or to the Universe. Some pray words they have memorized, some pray their own words, some pray in utter silence. Others pray with their hands, with their feet, or with music.

In all its diverse forms, for all its diverse motivations, prayer is a spiritual resource for many clients. And we can integrate prayer into psychotherapy in a variety of ways.

Most easily, we can suggest prayer as an out-of-session intervention. For clients who report prayer as one of their spiritual resources, we can encourage them to deepen their connection with prayer: to talk with spiritual leaders or friends about prayer, to ask others to pray for them, to pray at regular times of the day, to pray at moments in which they don't usually think about praying, and to explore different ways to pray (writing their prayers, reading prayers others have written, doing more listening than talking, and the like).

We therapists can also pray for our clients: outside of session; silently, in the middle of session; and aloud, in session.

Praying aloud with clients in session is an intervention some therapists are open to using, even enjoy using, and some are not. Either way is fine. But if you do pray aloud with clients, it's important to recognize that this is an intervention in which we are most likely to impose our own spiritual beliefs and practices on our clients, and we should proceed with great care. Several authors have written helpfully on this topic,[1–5] and if you are considering praying aloud with your clients, or if you already do, I encourage you to read these works and take them to heart.

While you have this book in hand, though, let me offer several thoughts about using in-session, out-loud prayer as an intervention. First, there are many good therapeutic reasons to pray in session with clients. Here are eight, borrowed with some adaptation from the work of Peter Gubi:[1]

1. To build rapport and trust
2. To help with emotional regulation
3. To deepen a client's connection to emotion or somatic experience
4. To deepen a client's capacity for honesty and reduce self-deception
5. To deepen a person's connection to God or his spiritual experience
6. To strengthen a client's capacity to ask for help
7. To validate an already expressed thought or feeling
8. To gently lead a client toward understanding or articulating a previously unrecognized thought or feeling.

Can you think of others?

If you do take the prayer plunge, I hope you will keep several thoughts in mind:

Never pray to proselytize. There are honorable professions where proselytization is expected and permissible, eg rabbi, pastor, imam, etc. Therapist is not one of them.

Pray aloud only if you have a clear sense of who your client is spiritually, what language they speak, whether prayer is meaningful to them, and how they pray.

Pray aloud only in the language that is native to your client, and only if that language has integrity for you.

Pray aloud only if it is something you can do with authenticity. Only pray in a way that feels real for you (the style of prayer), and only for things you are comfortable praying for (the content of prayer).

If you're not comfortable praying aloud, don't. If your client asks you to pray and you don't want to – not with him, in particular, or not with anyone, ever – just say that prayer is a private practice for you, and not something you want to do aloud. Then ask him

In all its diverse forms, for all its diverse motivations, prayer is a spiritual resource for many clients. And we can integrate prayer into psychotherapy in a variety of ways

how your response lands with him. And offer to listen to his prayer.

Pray aloud only with your client's consent. Sometimes your client might ask you to pray for her or with her. Sometimes you might offer to pray for your client or with her. But never just start praying.

Be very careful about initiating prayer with clients who have trouble setting boundaries or who are prone to please you or follow your every suggestion.

Be careful that praying with you is not creating an easy out for your client. For some clients, prayer is a way to avoid seeking truth and being challenged. Ask yourself if praying with you will weaken the client's resolve to change – by implying that there's an outside fixer who can take care of this issue for the client, just the way the client wants it – without the client having to stretch himself.

Be careful that praying with the client is not creating an easy out for you. Therapists can be tempted to pray when we find it hard to continue listening to our client, when we want to escape the pain or helplessness of being with her and her difficulty, when we want to speed the client through grief or pain, or when we are uncomfortable with her feelings and want to tidy them up. Will offering to pray give us an escape but leave our client feeling abandoned?

Pray aloud only if you have considered how it might affect the transference. Will praying aloud create any subtle pressure for the client to think, feel, or act like you?

Also consider the countertransference. Are you feeling pressured to pray? Will you feel performance anxiety? Are you feeling overexposed and more vulnerable than you want?

Connect with your heart before you speak a word, and whatever you say, keep it short and simple.

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Biography

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This article is an extract from *Spirit in session: working with your client's spirituality (and your own) in psychotherapy*, by Russell Siler Jones, published by Templeton Press, 2019.

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Prayer is deeply personal, so sharing our way of praying with our clients would need very careful thought as would any self-disclosure. The first ethical commitment set out in BACP's *Ethical Framework* is to 'Put our clients first by making clients our primary concern while we are working with them' (Commitment 1a). Members using prayer within a counselling session would need to ensure that the prayer was for the benefit, and with the informed consent, of their client, and that the prayer did not transgress any appropriate professional and personal boundaries. Boundaries need always to be 'consistent with the aims of working together and beneficial to the client' (Good Practice, point 33a).

Dr Susan Dale
Good Practice Guidance Manager, BACP

Prayer connotes connection and communication and communing with a source or deity. It may involve attending, listening, responding – a potentially deeply intimate dialogue. BACP therapists need to hold an openness to honouring faith, spirituality and prayer practice as clients who come for therapy may well view these as integral to their identity. (BACP's *Ethical Framework*, Respect, point 22a). If clients speak of praying, then it is often helpful to explore the emotional importance of the prayer practice, what desolation or consolation it engenders, and how it affirms (or negates) their dignity, belovedness and capacity for compassion for self and others. Prayer as a therapeutic intervention needs careful ethical consideration. BACP Spirituality division comprises practitioners (for example, counsellors, chaplains, pastoral carers) who offer therapeutic/spiritual support in diverse contexts. Practitioners' positionality around the place and presence of prayer in their practice will be informed by their own worldview, their work role and context, its appropriateness to the presenting needs of their clients and due consideration for the ethical framework to which they adhere.

Maureen Slattery-Marsh
Chair of BACP Spirituality

Book reviews

The search for meaning in psychotherapy: spiritual practice, the apophatic way and Bion
Judith Pickering

Routledge
ISBN: 978-1138193062
£105

This scholarly book offers a profound inquiry into the contemplative, mystical and apophatic dimensions of psychoanalysis. As Judith Pickering reminds us, patients usually enter into therapy in order to explore a deeper sense of meaning, often asking things that are intrinsically spiritual.

The mystery beyond comprehension inspired this book. Thus a core element of it is the application of the apophatic way of unknowing to psychotherapy. Pickering argues coherently that this way has much to offer psychotherapy because in its seeking to avoid false certitudes and stale presumptions of knowledge, the apophatic avoids dogmatism, and essentialism, and in turn enables a quest for the meaning of life beyond any denomination or psychoanalytic school of thought. The apophatic mystics were a major source of inspiration for Bion, and Pickering articulates the relationship between this and Bion's understanding of Ultimate Reality and O.

The book is divided into two major sections. The first section explores the relationship between the practice of psychotherapy, spirituality, meditation, contemplation and reverie. It argues that the interhuman connection of compassion, love and bearing witness is mirrored in the psychotherapeutic relationship. An examination of the relationship between spirituality, religion, the mystics and psychotherapy and an elaboration of the ethic of hospitality are included. Other chapters in this section helpfully explore the benefits of the regular practice of meditation and the analytic potential of the analyst's state of mind, and the relevance of Buddhist teachings on meditation to psychotherapy, illustrated with an outline of the teachings of Dzogchen.

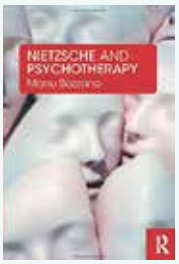
The second section explores the clinical relevance of the apophatic way. The work of Levinas is used to explore the ethic of alterity (Pickering understands alterity as the interpersonal dimension of the apophatic). The history and core elements of the apophatic way are explored. An examination of the work of Dionysius, Moses, Meister Eckhart and St John of the Cross is included. The last two chapters in this section are Pickering's reflections about Bion's writings.

The book appropriately ends with an 'Inconclusion' and thus does not draw conclusions. Judith Pickering's work strongly demonstrates that the apophatic way has much to offer psychotherapy but that all attempts to describe it fall short of the mark. As this book set out to do, it offers much food for consideration and helps and encourages the reader to think about and to discover their own sources of inspiration.

This is a powerful, engaging and immensely insightful book that is widely and thoroughly researched. As such, it is not an easy read but rather a reference book to be cherished and spent time with. Helpfully, the clinical vignettes included in each chapter, some of which are deeply personal, assist with the understanding and application of the range of theories and practices that Pickering explores. This is very useful with the depth of material presented. Also dotted throughout the book are a range of poems and prayers that evoke un-knowing, and hence are a rich route to thinking and being while reading.

I would see this book as essential reading for trainee and accomplished psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, analytical psychologists and counsellors. It is also relevant to those with an interest in spirituality and psychology, including spiritual directors, priests and scholars of religious studies.

Dr Jill Buckeldee
Psychotherapist and supervisor



Nietzsche and psychotherapy
Manu Bazzano

Routledge
ISBN: 978-1138351257
£26.99

It's hard to know where to begin with Friedrich Nietzsche. Professor at 24, admirer of Heraclitus, Goethe and Schopenhauer, stateless after renouncing his Prussian citizenship and, philosophically, firmly in the camp of experimentation and individuation (self-direction), he is effectively the author of a large flare, beneath which stand highlighted his many original, yet often contentious, ideas.

Bazzano does an excellent job of introducing us to a great swathe of Nietzschean thought, unashamedly pitting his subject as a luminary doing battle against a parochial world. Indeed, from the very first page, we are told that Nietzsche's thoughts are 'destined to remain untimely, even more so at a time when psychology and psychotherapy are being increasingly dominated by neopositivism and managerialism'. This is significant and ties in with Daniel Chapelle's view that 'most of those concerned with "mental health", "behavioural science", and "wellness" – those handmaidens of social-political hygiene – have no clue'.

Strong stuff. And certainly a recurring theme throughout the book, and not unwarranted. For Nietzsche's ideas, however muscular and bold, resonate deeply and are not afraid to question everything. Philosophy is, after all – need we be reminded – another word for authorship or finding one's own voice. And Nietzsche, through his unwavering challenge to that around him, provides the tools and provokes something vital inside the therapist that might otherwise have been left cowering or feeling marginalised and insubstantial.

God is dead. Fear has transformative potential. Individualism is but the narcissistic search for authenticity. The self is plural. Incongruence is inherent to human existence, with the self emerging from only a portion of the

experiencing organism. All these bear the distinct Nietzschean hallmark, yet it is the beautiful line from Bazzano which focuses on Greek culture's 'Socratic slide into rationalism' which really gives potent leverage to this book; Socrates, that well-known, respected sage, brought to life by Plato yet thoroughly lambasted and admonished in this text.

The very soul of the philosophical endeavour is at stake, Bazzano is asserting, and, by association, therapeutic space. Giving primacy to becoming is our task, thus purging the neat, Western obsession with being. What does this mean exactly? Well, I would echo Bazzano's words and suggest that it amounts to accepting 'the importance of struggle and conflict in human affairs' (polemos) rather than constantly being weighed down by the abstract extremes of being and nothingness.

Absolutes do not help us. Transcendental narratives merely have us waiting around for some fictitious divine glory. The self is not found but rather achieved – this seems to be the central premise upon which Nietzsche's words toil. We are to honour and trust the senses and free ourselves from the shackles and fixation that the self can be made singular and whole.

Nietzsche is for the artist, creativity, axiology (the nature of value) and nihilism (life by itself is meaningless without elevation), and Bazzano impressively tasks himself with the 21st century responsibility of pulling us away from the bloodless 'cult of "left-brain" reasoning' into a formidable yet worthwhile land.

This review first appeared in the December 2019 issue of Private Practice*, published by BACP*

Jeff Weston
Writer/existential psychotherapist, author of *WAGENKNECHT*
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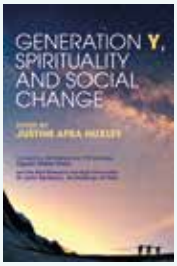


Generation Y, spirituality and social change
Justine Afra Huxley (ed)

Jessica Kingsley Publishers
ISBN: 978-1-78592-305-0
£16.99

The tiny church of St Ethelburga's nestles in the shadow of the glass-and-steel Gherkin, in the heart of London's financial district. After being almost completely destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1993, this 15th century church was restored over the course of a decade and reopened as a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. It aims to be a 'maker of peacemakers', supporting young adults from all faiths and cultures to become leaders and advocates for peace in their communities. There is a particular interest in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers by training young people to become allies to displaced people.

This book brings together the stories of some of the young adults involved with St Ethelburga's, along with mentors who have worked with them, and other spiritual activists, mostly told through a series of interviews with the Centre's director, Dr Justine Huxley, 'over a pot of coffee'. She believes that there is a need for some 'deep listening' of young people by their elders, if we are to stand any chance of healing our fractured society. The result is a collection of interviews with young adults about their spiritual journeys, activism, influences and beliefs. The millennials featured come from a cross-section of backgrounds and faiths, but they share the courage to question the status quo, a belief in social justice and a willingness to get actively involved in makinga difference to their communities and the planet.

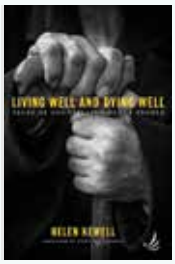
Twenty-seven stories in all are told, grouped into seven sections, each of which opens with a short, insightful chapter on trends and current thinking from Huxley, covering Natural Leadership, Evolving Traditions, Sacred Activism, Complex Identities, New Spaces, Challenging Orthodoxy and Protecting Earth. Each individual story within these sections is memorable, from James Adams, a young cancer survivor and Christian who set up a community centre to support the long-term unemployed, to Sukina Douglas, a hip-hop poet and convert to Islam who founded Rumi's Cave, a space for young people to explore faith and creativity. The underlying theme running through all the interviews is that spirituality can no longer be a private matter and that for the sake of humanity, we have to integrate our faith with action.

Huxley is a former investment banker, now a member of a Sufi order, with a PhD in Psychology. She says she has a belief that 'language is tremendously important', and her love of words shows in this, her first book, which is as lyrical and engaging as a good novel. Although not specifically written for counsellors, it has much to offer therapeutic practitioners, particularly those who work with millennials, by giving insight into the challenges many are facing, and how they find meaning and purpose, despite those challenges.

Huxley wonders how young adults 'hold onto personal goals in the face of impending chaos'. But in her Afterword, she reflects that every crisis is an opportunity to 'put our egos aside and to rediscover the joy of service'. This book plays its part in igniting that joy, by offering an ultimately uplifting collection of stories and an introduction to a remarkable group of young people, whose vision and bravery leave me with renewed hope for the future.

Sally Brown
Therapist and coach in private practice, and Deputy Chair of BACP Coaching

Book reviews



Living well and dying well: tales of counselling older people
Helen Kewelli

PCCS Books
ISBN: 978-1910919415
£13.99

There seems to be a widespread belief that older people (people of a 'certain' generation) would not wish to speak with a counsellor or therapist. However, BACP's Public Perception Survey shows that 71 per cent of people aged 55 to 64 and 78 per cent aged 65 and over would rather speak to someone about their mental health than take medication.[1] There is an increasing need for access to talking therapies. The survey, which was carried out by YouGov, also found that 90 per cent of people aged 55 to 64 and 88 per cent of those aged 65 and over, feel it is important that counselling or psychotherapy should be accessible to everyone who wants it.[2]

Helen Kewell, a humanistic counsellor, has written a moving and thought-provoking account of her work with older clients in *Living well and dying well: tales of counselling older people* (one client is in their late 70s and the rest are in their 80s). She writes about her experiences of working in care homes and visiting people in their own homes. There is an interview with the author on the BACP website, giving some background to the book.[3]

Each chapter contains a case study and reflections on the issues faced by the client, and an exploration of the impact of the work on the counsellor, including aspects of supervision. The author's thoughtful and honest approach shows her ability to pay very focused attention to her clients. Her capacity to feel her bodily responses to her clients, and to observe theirs, is very apparent throughout the book.

I believe Helen Kewell succeeds in having authentic I–Thou relationships with her clients. She has an ability to listen and hear what is important in the stories she's being told. Her clients' stories are placed in their historic and social contexts and she works hard to understand her clients and find what holds 'meaning' for them, allowing them to express themselves in potentially healing ways. I appreciate her honesty about the more frustrating aspects of working in short-term contexts (often six sessions, with negotiation necessary for more sessions) and clients not feeling they are benefitting from the counselling experience.

All of the clients presented in this book had been recently widowed and had children; and some had experienced significant bereavements earlier in their lives. There's an interesting exploration of loneliness and solitude in one of the chapters. It is a huge adjustment to face when a partner of many years dies. I wonder if single people without children have a very different experience of loneliness and solitude. If someone is accustomed to living alone, then perhaps they may find it easier to appreciate solitude.

I found myself very moved by the responses of the author's clients to the counselling relationship that she provided. I was curious about how she worked with a client with dementia, and found her account very inspiring.

Death features very prominently in this book. The author's clients are facing the deaths of significant others in their lives and they are also facing their own physical and mental decline and their own mortality. The counselling relationship allows them to explore their fears and express how they feel about death.

Living well and dying well is an excellent resource for anyone working with older clients. The book blends vivid case material with deep reflections on the therapeutic relationship, theoretical material, external supervisory experience and the birth of a keen internal supervisor. I have never worked with clients in a care home setting, nor in their own homes, and I could sense the opportunities in each environment and how the author worked skilfully in each context. The author celebrates 'the power and possibility of being with another person who is attuned to what is happening in the room and does nothing other than witness, notice and journey alongside another'. She encourages her readers to 'look beyond the perceived limitations… beyond the greying hair, lack of independence, restricted mobility, loss of bodily strength' to challenge our perceptions of ageing in a most life-affirming way.

Amanda Anderson
Editor of this journal

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…clients' stories are placed in their historic and social contexts and [the author] works hard to understand her clients and find what holds 'meaning' for them, allowing them to express themselves in potentially healing ways

The way of psychosynthesis: a complete guide to the origins, concepts and the fundamental experiences, with a biography of Roberto Assagioli
Petra Guggisberg Nocelli

Synthesis Insights
ISBN: 979-1220033336
£20.15

This comprehensive textbook will be an invaluable companion to any student of psychosynthesis, transpersonal psychology, or indeed any therapy training. The author has been brave in commencing with a full biography of its founder, Roberto Assagioli, rather than diving directly into the subject. She then boldly devotes the next section to a highly informed potted history of the 'four forces' that have shaped our contemporary psychotherapy world, which helps to situate and contextualise psychosynthesis.

What makes this translated book particularly useful to English-speaking practitioners and students of psychosynthesis is that it introduces so much that has been written in Italian by Italian theorists, some of whom were clearly closer to Assagioli, such as Alberto Alberti. The extensive Italian bibliography, running into many pages, far outweighs the list of English language publications. Psychosynthesis in Italy has developed differently from most other parts of the world in that there are numerous centres of study there that are not geared towards formal psychotherapy qualification. This gives Guggisberg Nocelli's book a 'classical' psychosynthesis feel, which is both its strength, in conveying the unique perspective on the transpersonal, and perhaps its weakness, in that the psychodynamics of the lower unconscious are covered rather glibly. After all, the author states, 'It is now unanimously acknowledged that Assagioli, at the age of only 16, was the first in Italy to deal with psychoanalysis and to have translated Freud, recognizing the revolutionary extension of his discoveries.'

The forward nature of Assagioli's thinking is discussed well, particularly his early formulation of 'biopsychosynthesis', which criticised 'the materialistic orientation of medicine, which deals with curing the body while neglecting the human being in his/her totality'. Assagioli also made moves to embrace quantum physics by positing a 'fifth force', which he called 'psychoenergetics', and which embraced theories of different spiritual traditions.

The extensive and well-argued treatment of 'personal psychosynthesis', as distinct from 'transpersonal psychosynthesis', is where the book comes into its own, and the author states that 'confusing the two approaches can lead to serious mistakes both from a diagnostic point of view and also from a therapeutic, educational and self-training perspective'. Assagioli's classical 'egg diagram' is explored in detail as the author takes the reader systematically through the main models and exercises employed by practitioners, and emphasises 'the will', which is a defining difference between Assagioli and his friend Jung. Guggisberg Nocelli does not shy away from the old chestnut of essentialism, providing an extensive discussion on the difference between 'self as an object' and 'self as a process'.

Certain areas of the book may be unfamiliar (though useful) to English-speaking psychosynthesis readers, such as the classification of subpersonalities into depressed, obsessive, hysterical and schizoid. Also, personality typologies – which the author recognises as intrinsically problematic – situates the 'organising type' principally in terms of ritual, dance and acting, rather than in their wider manifestations. These issues aside, the book should prove to be a solid resource for those wanting to grasp the sophistication and subtlety of psychosynthesis as a modality.

This review first appeared in the December 2019 issue of Private Practice, *published by BACP*

Keith Silvester MBACP (Snr Accred) Psychosynthesis psychotherapist, supervisor, trainer, coach and Alexander teacher working in London

If you wish to review – and keep – one of these books, please send your full contact details, including postal address, and any experience/interest relevant to the topic, to Thresholds.editorial@bacp.co.uk

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