



The Muttart Fellowships



**Radical Relatedness:  
Exploring the Spiritual  
Dimension of Family  
Service Work**

Michael Shane McKernan

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May 2004

## Published by:

The Muttart Foundation

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## National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

McKernan, Michael Shane, 1954-

Radical relatedness : exploring the spiritual dimension of family service work / by Michael Shane McKernan.

(Muttart fellowships)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-9730679-4-2

1. Family counseling. 2. Family social work. 3. Spiritual life.  
4. Social service—Religious aspects. I. Muttart Foundation  
II. Title. III. Series.

HV697.M33 2004

201'.76282

C2004-901115-4

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# Preface

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This document is a souvenir of an amazing experience. I spent a whole year devoted full time to the exploration of spirituality and its application to family serve work.<sup>1</sup> In the two years following this time, I did my best to put into words what I learned. It has not been easy. I have had a hard time finding the words and ideas that capture the experience. Also, I experienced a degree of self-consciousness that comes from addressing a topic that has much emotional intellectual baggage for social work and the many other professions that participate in family service work.

In 1978 when I began my social work career in a high intensity psychiatric clinic, writing or speaking about spirituality and social would have crossed the line of professional credibility. Over the next 25 years, I have harboured the suspicion that spirituality was a more integral part of family service work than the training programs and textbooks would ever admit. While my family's religious tradition supported the suspicion, it did not give me the words or concepts to help explore this dimension of social work. As for the training, texts, and supervision that defined credible social work to me, nothing was said. What easily could be read between the lines was that spirituality was beyond the pale of the credible professionalism that we all sought to attain—"just don't go there" summed it up nicely.

I learned to keep these questions to myself and a few trusted colleagues—a kind of underground inquiry. To be sitting here now, I feel as though I am closer to a perspective on social work that leaves

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<sup>1</sup> For those who would like a description of the activities for this year, I have included a summary of the events attended and destinations visited that year in Appendix A.

out neither credibility nor recognition of the spiritual. It is not fully formed yet, but it is in a place that I am ready to share. I sincerely hope that this can provide a foundation for a more meaningful exploration and application of spirituality in social work for the profession at large.

# A Note of Thanks

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For the richness of this year, I have many people to thank. I have enjoyed the kindness of strangers I have met on my travels who were not afraid to speak from their hearts about the spiritual and how it has taken shape in their lives. I have felt blessed with the opportunities to see the world in new colours through the genius of popular leaders and truly wise people who are not afraid to ask tough questions or to live authenticity. I have learned to realize that the world is full of inspiring stories lived by people who are willing to share if you take the pains to ask.

Most importantly, though, I am grateful to many folks who have given me financial and personal support to live this year. The generosity of The Muttart Foundation, Bob Wyatt, and Cristine Poulsen, and my colleagues at Catholic Family Service has been a gift of a lifetime. I remember the support of my friends and interested colleagues who reminded me of the importance of this topic to them—especially at times when I struggled with this writing. They asked encouraging questions, endured my bubbling enthusiasm to talk on and on, and were not shy to give a few humbling pointers.

I reserve a special gratitude for my family in their support of me to be away in travels or preoccupied with the labours of writing. Tara, my partner, has been my most loyal teacher. She and my three adult children, Maura, Patrick, and Kathryn, helped me to remember that all my noble questions did not exempt me from the task of being real and honest about the day-to-day business of being a father, and a husband, and helper of other families.

**Introduction**

# Introduction

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Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of things shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are en-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

-T.S. Eliot  
“Little Gidding”<sup>2</sup>

The creative spirit ranges out there beyond the boundaries.  
- Joseph Campbell<sup>3</sup>

I am not interested in a spirituality that cannot encompass my humanness. I find little comfort or guidance in traditional dogma or unqualified new age optimism. Because beneath the small daily trials are greater paradoxes, things the mind cannot reconcile but the heart must hold if we are to live fully. Profound tiredness and radical hope, shattered beliefs and relentless faith, the seemingly contradictory longings for personal freedom and a deep commitment to others, for solitude and intimacy for the

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<sup>2</sup> “Little Gidding,” *The Top 500 Poems*, William Harmon, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 994.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 8.

ability to simply be with the world and the need to change what we know is not right about how we are living.

- Oriah Mountain Dreamer<sup>4</sup>

Family service work has, at the heart of its mission, the urge towards community. The richest sense of what we offer our clients is an experience of meaningful connection with themselves; with the community of family, friends, and fellow workers; and with society in general. Resolution of distress is in the restoration of the experience of belonging to oneself, to others, to the world as a whole. It is through these empowering connections that our clients are able to move ahead in their lives—that is, take the necessary risks, engage in healthy discipline, and feel freer to give and receive help.

The spiritual dimension of family service work emerges when we follow the logic of extending circles of community. If our work invites clients into a conscious relationship with self and others, why would we not extend this principle of connection and meaning to include the cosmos as a whole? Our contemporary models of helping in family service work do not look to these larger connections and unknown depths.

Attention to mystery and cosmology has been dismissed from the modern professional agenda. The inspiring perspectives contained in the language of religion and spirituality have been banned from our professional vocabulary. Our theories and diagnostic systems offer no cosmology of who we are. Spirituality, as explored in this work, seeks to restore a connection between the particular experience of our clients (and our professional organizations) with the cosmic realms that contain them.

How can we work with our clients as participants in the psychological, the relational, and the cosmological? This is the question that I have pursued through this research.

## **Spirituality in Family Counselling Today**

The common practice of family service work has ignored the spiritual perspective for at least a century. The formulas of social work, psychology, and good business practice do not allow for the language

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<sup>4</sup> Oriah Mountain Dreamer, *The Invitation* (San Francisco: Harper Audio, 2000).

of spirituality. Words such as soul, god, grace, spirit, and sacred have no place in the ways we describe the experience of our clients. Notions of an afterlife, karma, divine intervention, or miracle healing have no place in our accepted perspectives on client and agency experience. The church bases of many family service agencies are often diminished to the point that many employees will not even know that their agency was originally started by a particular church or the combined efforts of several spiritual groups. Spiritual references are seen, at best, as peripheral to the helping process. From what is considered a neutral perspective, we may see a client's references to spiritual issues as idiosyncratic, antiquated, or even as a sign of pathology. Freud's notion of religion as "obsessive compulsive neurosis" captured the unyielding scientific orthodoxy that has firmly warned off any spiritual attentions for the past century. Spiritual language, if not pathological, was at least unscientific and unprofessional.

Legitimate concerns have been raised about the inclusion of spiritual language and ideas in agency business. Sectarianism (focus upon the agendas of a particular religious group) and dogmatism (expressing strongly held opinions in a way that suggests they should be accepted without question<sup>5</sup>) are two common concerns. As will become clearer later, many objections to spirituality are focused on experiences of the dark side of religion. This can include the history of persecution of people for their beliefs, wars perpetrated in the name of religion, or more recent examples of criminal abuse and cover ups by clergy. The objection to the religious perspective in public service to families is further bolstered by broadly held criticisms that it is rigid, irrational, sexist, outdated, and patriarchal. These are some of the reasons why religion has lost much of its credibility in the helping professions despite being the major force for helping families not that long ago.

Thus, agency names are changed, programs are revised to exclude services and training that involves spiritual practice, and relationships to churches are kept at arm's length or excluded completely. The work we do to help families—once the province of priests, spiritual leaders, and shaman—is now de-constructed to basic psychological formulas that keep the focus off the cosmic and on the DSM-IV.

In spite of these objections and many more, it is my sense that we are at a time in our history when the absence of a spiritual perspective for

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<sup>5</sup> From the *Encarta World English Dictionary*.

the work we do poses a serious problem for clients and workers alike.<sup>6</sup> In order to explore the significance of what we leave out when ignoring the spiritual, we need to begin by sidestepping the issue of religion as a particular creed or institution and focus on spirituality as “searching for a trustworthy wisdom that will connect us with the larger purposes and meaning of everyday life.”<sup>7</sup>

A definition such as this does not prescribe a particular belief. It does not even suggest that “trustworthy wisdom” is limited to religious traditions and texts. For some people, spiritual questions will be located in their particular religious beliefs and practice. For others it may be their art, their community, or a body of beliefs of another sacred tradition outside of their own, including a personally defined philosophy. Once we get past the issues of compulsory belief and the foibles of any particular institution, we are more free to explore the role of the spiritual in family service work. Once we can allow for the value of spirituality as defined above, we have a valuable perspective worthy of exploration.

The goal of this work is to explore the spiritual dimension of family service work—pitfalls and all. The exclusion of the spiritual based on half-truths and negative generalizations about organized religion is not good enough. With rising interest in spiritual matters expressed in books, in the media, and by clients, we must begin asking questions about the “knee-jerk” exclusion of spiritual perspectives from the work we do. I am not merely arguing for tolerance of various religious and spiritual perspectives that clients and therapists bring to their work. I believe the richer goal is to discover in what ways a spiritual perspective expands our ability to support creativity, healing, and growth in our clients, our staff, and our organizations.

To proceed with this research I begin with two vitalizing assumptions:

- that vital spirituality can face up to the scrutiny from the very best of what social work and psychology holds to be true;

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<sup>6</sup> There is much that could be said to introduce a more balanced perspective on the role of religion and spirituality in serving the community. This is not the right moment to examine these concerns in adequate depth. To have a more balanced perspective, we should remember that most hospitals, schools and social service activity in this country was started by churches. Also, it is worth noting that the vast majority of volunteerism and charitable donations come from members of organized religion. Also, research into the positive effects of organized religion has highlighted greater relationship stability, and greater physical health.

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), p. 2.



- that vital family service work can benefit from the best of what our spiritual traditions have to teach us.

With this in mind, we must begin asking serious questions that can help to promote an open exploration of the spiritual and its significance to the work of family-serving agencies:

- What do we mean by spirituality?
- Is there a dimension of family service work that stretches beyond the ordinary into the field some would call “spiritual”?
- If so, what does the spiritual perspective have to offer us in helping families and communities?
- Is there a difference between spirituality and religion?
- What are the qualities of healthy spirituality
- Are there spiritual trends in the world today that are important to family service work?
- Is there a way of talking about spirituality that does not lock us into division and dogma?
- What difference does spirituality make to the way we work with clients?
- What are the insights and practices of our spiritual traditions that matter to the goals we have for helping families and even how we organize our agencies?

These are the major questions that I have sought to address through this work. The order of the questions basically outlines the sequence of topics covered in successive chapters.

## **My Approach to the Research**

My researching of these questions was defined by several goals:

- Spirituality will be explored from a variety of perspectives including the great religions, esoteric and aboriginal traditions, the so-called new age and holistic health movements, and insights of the new science emerging from quantum physics and

chaos theory. I would not rely on any one dogma to understand this but would go far and wide, across cultures, disciplines, religious and esoteric traditions, across the barrier between science and spirit.

- I seek to describe findings in as plain a language as possible and include stories, poetry, and examples from many different perspectives to pursue this exploration.
- One goal of this work is to open up the topic of spirituality in a way that is accessible to family service workers—not merely the ideas but also the practice and the language. How do we communicate about spiritual issues in a way that does not offend common sense or get bogged down in dogma and prejudice?
- I will not seek to prove something, measure something, or form a firm conclusion. While I will cite valuable examples of quantifiable research that explores specific spiritual questions, this work will settle for a broad survey of the spiritual dimension relating to client, worker, and agency.
- That I will stretch myself through adventurous approaches to learning that will include experiential workshops, and exploring ideas and traditions that I have avoided until now. My aim at the beginning of this year was to make it a lifetime experience. The most authentic learning I could undertake would be the best and most unique piece of research that I could offer.

The strategy for research was shaped by my passions more than by some systematic research method. I decided on four different ways of exploring:

- Participating in many different groups working with spiritual issues.
- Interviewing people who present interesting, thoughtful, and vital personal spirituality.
- Having fun by conducting research in different locations, hanging out with impressive people. This meant following my intuition about where I needed to go and who I would spend time learning from.

- Using my own experience as a source of information. This meant paying attention to my experience not merely on the level of knowledge and professional concerns but also tracking my goal to become a better person as a result of what I have learned.

The research that follows has sought something more than the weighing and measuring data to a conclusion. It is probably already evident that this research is more of an attempt to provide substantial and credible support for a broad conclusion that I already hold. I have sought to use images, ideas, and experience to weave a web that links spirituality with credibility. I am not sure how successful I have been. I have, however, avoided using dogmatic formulas from science or religion to explore these issues. Dogma separated from experience, intuition, or collective wisdom has no place in healthy spirituality and healthy science.

## **Some Points About the Research Format and Writing Style**

My research cannot help but reflect my experience as a counsellor. I suspect that one who is not a counsellor will find that my perspective emphasizes a counselling perspective a bit excessively. The fact that a specific chapter is devoted to counselling and the psychological perspective shows the importance I give to this area. I hope that there is enough emphasis upon community and the non-counsellor work of family service agencies to keep it accessible to all.

In this same vein, I have placed considerable emphasis on understanding and integrating the wisdom of the spiritual traditions into family service work. I have not attempted to discuss family service work to the same depth. This is the way I wanted to focus it.

The format of my writing is in the form of an imaginary dialogue between a curious interviewer and me as the researcher sharing ideas. I used this format for two reasons. The first because I found it easier to write as though I were sharing my ideas in conversation. I find I have the extrovert's tendency to process better when in conversation with others. Writing to an unknown reader can get lonely and disconnected for me. Books like Ken Wilber's *A Brief History of Everything* and Brian Swimm's *The Universe is a Green Dragon* have used this format very effectively.

The second reason is based on my concern to keep this presentation as down to earth (humble and sensible) as possible. The interviewer represents the pragmatic, “I need to make sense of this,” perspective that I hope will give readers an honest chance of following the ideas shared.

The third reason is that the interviewing persona allows room to be a bit playful.

The bold face type signifies my friend, the interviewer. The regular type is me, sharing my research.

While the question/answer format in this work may imply that I am speaking from some sort of expertise, the truth is that I am seeking to learn something that I believe will be of interest to others. I subscribe to the belief that “if you want to learn something, teach it.” My path of inquiry has been the pursuit of my intuitions and ignorance with the support of the great traditions of wisdom, contemporary writers from many different disciplines, and the amazing fellow seekers whom I have met along the way. At times, my ignorance or fumbling will show; sometimes, my hubris. I have tried to keep the exploring transparent to the human factor so that what follows is not a model of laboratory research but the record of a journey.<sup>8</sup>

The flow of writing follows the image of concentric spheres. I have often been intrigued by the wooden dolls made in such a way that there are many smaller ones contained inside. The biggest contains a smaller one, this one contains a smaller one still and so on. The biggest sphere or doll is the most inclusive and the beginning point. Others, more specific, are smaller and are contained within this larger sphere. The largest sphere is that of human experience which is the source of the spiritual dimension for clients and workers alike. This I have included in Chapter 1 entitled “In the Beginning: Defining the Spiritual Dimension of Family Service Work.” The progression of chapters moves towards a more specific focus on the experience of the agency, and then on counselling and agency leadership. The flow is from the more universally human to the specific issues of family service work.

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<sup>8</sup> The research style of this work is technically called “phenomenological research” which means observing and reporting rather than research based on controlled experiments.

The quotes at the beginning of each chapter seek to capture the theme to be discussed. They are inspiring words that reflect the creativity and genius of individuals and traditions encountered during my research.

My approach assumes that I am speaking to a stakeholder in family service work—client, staff, board member, or funder. The target is spirituality within the family service experience, but a good part of this work is defining the terms as issues of the spiritual perspective. The first seven chapters are an introduction and exploration of the spiritual perspective. The last three apply the perspective in the family service context.

Through this, I seek to make a case for the value of the spiritual perspective in everyday family service work. The working hypothesis is that the distinction between science and spirit is artificial and arbitrary, and that effective family service work must combine the riches of our spiritual wisdom traditions with the best of technique and our scientific tradition.

## The Personal Roots of this Research

Allow me to back track to an earlier point about the question that prompted this research. I presented it in terms of my current professional perspective but it began much further back. As far back as I can remember, I have struggled with the question of a credible spiritual outlook—one that blended my experience of everyday life with what I was taught in church. Through my growing up years, “credible spirituality” became an oxymoron. The world of school, friends, and work seemed to have little place for the world of God, guardian angels, and miracles taught to me in my church. Growing up in the Catholic tradition in a non-Catholic community brought this issue into sharp focus. For example, refusing the hot dog at the Friday night father and son hockey banquet was an act of belief that did not jive with public consensus. Belief seemed to be a lot of rules and claims that did not make sense to the world I lived in day-to-day. I shared something with the hero from James Joyce’s *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* who put elegant words to the doubts and struggles I felt in linking spiritual and the publicly credible:

The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments  
I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious  
than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born

in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, there seemed to be little room in worldly commerce for the expansive vision of a cosmos of meaning, life after death, and meaning before birth—ideas that held an intuitive resonance for me. Entertaining such an outlook, I learned, would best be done in silence or only in the company of those you knew shared such intuitions. My studies of psychology, including Freud, and the great prophets of the psychological world spoke with a pragmatism and “scientific validity” that seemed to banish the religious imagination to the backwaters of superstition and obsessive-compulsive neurosis.

In my world, spirituality and credibility seemed—to borrow on Hugh McLennan’s novel describing the French/English question in Canada—like two solitudes that were undeniable yet irreconcilable. In this scheme, spirituality held a marginalized status. I felt a citizen of both cultures and in, in a curious way, the gap became a pressing energy that I have brought into my work in the healing profession.

In the 25 years I have spent as a therapist and supervisor and director in various psychiatric and community service contexts, I have come to see that a spiritual outlook matters to many clients. It matters to many professionals as well.<sup>10</sup> I have also noticed how the pitfalls of religious thinking as well as the prevailing myth of scientism (that all knowledge is based on the rational and empirical exploration of physical reality) have made spiritual issues difficult to talk about. I have noticed how I and many others have been uncomfortable and even fearful of the consequences of openly speaking about the spiritual. Ironically, I felt bound to the scientific orthodoxy of my field—possibly because my field of social work is insecure status as a “true science.” Maybe too, I remembered how my spiritual questions made no sense to my friends or to the teachers. Maybe it is as simple as knowing that, like our emotional world, if we experience this aspect of ourselves as private, vulnerable, and unnameable, we lack a sensible vocabulary and therefore the confidence to communicate about what matters to us.

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<sup>9</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking, 1970), p. 203.

<sup>10</sup> Later we will look at some of the demographic research about spiritual interest in Canada. For now it is worth noting that interest in matters of spirituality is very high among Canadians and that this interest is not limited to mainstream religion. See Reg Bibby, *Restless Gods*.

After all, it is only when there is implicit and explicit support to explore openly that we begin the difficult process of finding the words that reach past the diversity, distortions, and anxiety of sharing something so precious.

I remember the long-awaited lectures in high school biology about sex. This was before the days when sexual information was available to seven-year-olds from any television program that they chose to watch. Sex had the aura of mystery and power and for that reason, the promise of an exposure of the divine truth held me with a compelling interest.<sup>11</sup> How disappointing then, that the lecture settled for the dry and uninspired focus on the sex life of the tsetse fly. My hope is not to repeat this mistake by settling for some dry, academic rebuttal of the usual objections to spirituality in the practical realm. I sincerely believe that the most useful approach comes from the power of wonder, awe and deep juicy questions that lie at the heart of what I understand to be the spiritual.

William Carlos Williams, quoted in David Whyte's work, *The Heart Aroused*, provides a rich image of this:

My heart rouses  
    Thinking to bring you news  
        Of something  
that concerns many men. Look at  
    what passes for the new.  
    You will not find it there but in  
        despised poems  
    yet men die miserably every day  
        for lack  
of what is found there.<sup>12</sup>

So, what about family service work? As someone who has worked in the field for nearly 25 years, I am convinced that the whole realm of

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<sup>11</sup> For those that find the equation of sex and spirituality intriguing, I refer you to Charles Pickstone's *Sex as Spirit*. In it he quotes Malcolm Muggeridge : "Sex is the mysticism of the materialists." This has such an ring of true insight to it. Pickstone's focus is that sexuality today carries the energy and power that religious icons held for people of the Middle Ages. This I believe helps to account for the rate of sexual obsessions and addictions, and the power of sex to sell that has been exploited so extensively in our advertising media

<sup>12</sup> William Carlos Williams, "The Heart Aroused" in David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America* (New York: Currency, 1994), p. 18.

spirituality confronts us in our work with the simple realization that we are working in a wondrous enterprise. Supporting life and the growth of community is at heart a spiritual undertaking. As I shall discuss in the upcoming chapter, the work of family service agencies is rooted in spiritual traditions. It is time to explore what we mean by spirituality and how this is relevant to family service work.



The background of the page is a solid blue color with a pattern of concentric, slightly blurred circles that create a ripple effect, centered towards the bottom right.

**Chapter 1**  
**In the Beginning:**  
**Defining the Spiritual Dimension**  
**of Family Service Work**

# In the Beginning: Defining the Spiritual Dimension of Family Service Work

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I could not agree that subjects connected with religion should be banned from intelligent discussion as syphilis and sex had been a few years earlier. Could we not overcome our reluctance to use the religious resources, which clients might choose in their communities for better mental health?

- Bertha Reynolds, teacher, 1926<sup>13</sup>

“Whoever uses the spirit within him creatively is an artist.”

- Henry Miller<sup>14</sup>

We are such stuff as dreams are made of.

- William Shakespeare<sup>15</sup>

Bewilderment about the fact that there is anything at all, and the curiosity about meeting that fact is a wonder, is the best part of man.

- Goethe<sup>16</sup>

If so many human beings live by appearances and exhaust themselves in the theatre of the world, it is in order to cover over the depth of the abyss. For if the immemorial voice continued to murmur to them, they would no longer be able to believe in progress, money, success or glory.

- Jean Sullivan, French Priest

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<sup>13</sup> Bertha Reynolds quoted in Beth Baker, “Spirituality and Social Work,” from Ann Simpkinson and Charles H. Simpkinson, *Soul Work: A Field Guide for Spiritual Seekers* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hierononymus Bosch* (New York: The New Directions Publishing Company, 1957), p. 111

<sup>15</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, (IV.i.148).

<sup>16</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, Third Edition* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 230.

The idea of God can become the final obstacle to God.  
- Meister Eckhart<sup>17</sup>

It is instructive to consider that the word “health” in English is based on an Anglo Saxon word “hale” meaning “whole”: this is, to be healthy is to be whole, which is, I think, roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew “shalom.” Likewise, the English “holy” is based on the same root as “whole.”

All of this indicates that man has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living. Yet, over the ages, he has generally lived in fragmentation.  
- David Bohm, quantum physicist<sup>18</sup>

### **Welcome! *The Spiritual Dimension of Family Service Work* is a hefty topic. Where would you like to start?**

I would like to encourage the many folks involved in agencies providing service to families—clients, workers, volunteers, clerical and management staff, board members, funders—to take a step back from the issues that concern them and marvel at what a rich enterprise this really is! When we as workers get caught up in the day-to-day tedium of service hours, getting paper work done, feeling under paid or just overwhelmed in business we lose sight of what a noble thing it is to devote one’s professional life to the service of those in need. The stories that our clients tell us contain the raw issues of what it means to be alive—the fears and the foibles as well as the longings and the courage to survive. If we spend any time reflecting on the richness of what we encounter, we are brought face to face with two facets of what it means to be spiritual: miracle and mystery.

### **What do you mean by miracle and mystery?**

People come to a family service agency because they have a need—typically based on some kind of suffering and loss. It is at these times that we are most acutely aware of how precious the gift of life and belonging really is. Joni Mitchell reminds us that “you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.” In this way, our work with clients brings

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<sup>17</sup> Meister Eckhart quoted in Sam Keen, *Hymns to an Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 3.

us onto the sacred ground of awareness that life, relationships, health, and inner peace are gifts beyond value. In the most raw, most pain-filled stories, one can hear a reverence for these gifts. To be a witness to this—as a worker, a volunteer, or supervisor—is a kind of gift for in these stories we can be awakened to the gift of our own lives.

Take for example the act of breathing in and out. We come into this world with our first breath and leave it with our last. Breath ties us into the miracle of being alive with all the physical processes that are tied to breath—heart beat, digestion, healing. Someone with asthma—who knows the experience of losing breath can teach us what a gift it is to breathe. Most of the time we are not conscious of the breathing process. Yet, to remember a time when breath was threatened—say coming close to drowning or having the wind knocked out of you so that you are gasping for breath—is to know about this gift.

Family service work makes us witness to life's precious issues of belonging, meaning, health, and so forth. At the same time, our work grants us a regular glimpse of life's mystery—how things happen as they do. I do not believe that the theories of human functioning taught to us in the professional schools of psychology and social work provide us with a means of reckoning with mystery. Our explanations for why things happen as they do, derived from family systems theory, neurology, physiology, and so on only give us an educated guess about how things happen. They do not empower us to explore why they happen.

### **Is this the spiritual dimension?**

To wonder why things are as they are is to speculate about the connection that exists between my individual experience and the way the world works. I don't think that we can support our clients or ourselves to discover the connection between our story and the Big Story without wondering about the unseen connections that shape our lives and those of our clients. This is what I see as the spiritual dimension of our work: marveling at the miracle of life, its mystery, and the connections that join human experience and the world at large.

The event of 9/11 is an example of spiritual dimension emerging suddenly from the ordinary business of living. In an instant, the world is brought to an awareness of the preciousness of life, its mystery, and how even those living thousands of miles away were profoundly connected to the event. I remember people saying how much they

wanted to just go home and hug their kids, how they were moved to grief and connection with perfect strangers. The fact is that 9/11's happen all the time. The clients that come through our doors all have a story of being shaken in some powerful way that left them dislocated, out of life's rhythms, upset. Our witness to their experience, the connection that links the agency to this person or that family is, in this sense, a spiritual issue.

**What difference does it make to pay attention to the miracle of life or the connection between a worker and a client?**

It is my experience that while we don't have to be aware of this at every moment to be effective workers, I believe that serving families and communities is at heart a spiritual business. The value of paying attention to gift, mystery, and connection in our work is that it keeps us close to what really matters—the most crucial aspect of our work. If we can discover a way to sensibly include spiritual perspectives in our work, we not only stay close to the most precious aspect of our work, we also discover some enriching perspectives on healing and belonging that can make us more effective.

It is my sense that most family service practice makes no attempt to reckon with these issues and, as a result, we lose touch with an essential ingredient of our work. I know that when counsellors suffer in their lives, through loss of marriage, parents, or health, spiritual questions become important. In these times, they are challenged to confront these questions in some way whether through some specific religious connection or outside of conventional religion.

**You bring up a couple of points here. Your points about how spirituality is dismissed from ordinary professional practice will need to be pursued. But for now, I think we need to clarify some of the terms you are using. What do you mean by the term “spiritual”?**

Well, let me start with a simple definition. Spirituality is “searching for a trustworthy wisdom that will connect us with the larger purposes and meaning of everyday life.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, p. 2.

I like it because it suggests that spirituality is a verb (action, changing, not fixed) rather than a noun (a thing that is static, definable). The sense of connecting of larger purposes and everyday life describes what I believe is the crucial function of the spiritual process. It seems to me that it is one of the great questions that we humans carry within us—“does my life matter in some ultimate sense?” We seek to discover the connection between our inner experience and the events of our lives and even the awesome world we see when we look up into the night sky.

“Spiritual” derives, among other sources, from the Latin term “spiritus” meaning breath or wind. Breath is what distinguishes life from death. The vital essence that is our life is connected to breath. Many terms for god or for transcendent energy use breath as the core concept. “Searching” implies a process that is not complete. I would add that this search cannot be limited to any particular dogmatic formula but seeks wholeness by drawing upon all aspects of the human condition.

Meaning is based upon a sense of relatedness. The title of this work, *Radical Relatedness*, draws from this dynamic. I believe this is also the common ground that links family service work to the spiritual dimension—the task of supporting people to discover a wisdom that joins people to their own experience and joins families to community.

### **What about wisdom? What does this refer to?**

The common description of wisdom emphasizes knowledge, but its original meaning drew on the notion of “seeing” and “observing shapes, sorting, way.”<sup>20</sup> During some time I spent with Matthew Fox, he described wisdom as “long seeing.” This to me is an essential function of the spiritual dimension. When we support our clients to be “long seeing,” to see shapes of meaning and relatedness, we are inviting them to discover both with ideas and through intuitive perception, a spiritual dimension to their experience.

I want to share a second definition that adds another important piece. I believe that a broader definition of the spiritual is more useful than a specific one because the emphasis needs to be on inclusiveness.

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<sup>20</sup> John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), p. 575.

Speaking of spirituality, Werner Heisenberg, the great quantum physicist, says:

The world “religion” is thereby endowed with a rather more general meaning than is customary. It is intended to cover the spiritual content of many cultures and different periods, even in places where the very idea of God is absent.<sup>21</sup>

For those interested in a psychological take on this issue, William James asserts that:

Were one asked to characterize this life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists in the belief that there is an unseen order and our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.<sup>22</sup>

### **What difference does spirituality offer to family service work?**

Let me identify a number of spiritual themes that connect to the business of family service work:

- **Spirituality sees patterns of meaning and connection that is not evident to the five senses.** In Western culture where materialism dominates the outlook of our professional fields, there is no room to take seriously the notion of reality outside of the five senses. Intuitive knowing, belief in an “unseen hand of God,” notions about life after death, living out of a sense of destiny and connection to others are not taken seriously. Science refuses to ask the whys of meaning and settles for the simpler explanations of cause and effect. These days, that is simply not enough. People are asking these questions—particularly at crucial times in their lives. However, clients and professionals alike have trouble reckoning with these questions when the philosophy allows no credence for things that we cannot see, feel, control, and replicate in controlled conditions. Many professionals in such diverse fields as biology, physics, psychology, medicine, and business have raised serious questions about the material perspective and its inability to support us in

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<sup>21</sup> Werner Heisenberg quoted in Ken Wilber, *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists* (Boston: Shambala, 2001), p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1958), p. 58.

our questions of meaning and connection. It is time to explore these questions and respect our clients' intuitions and needs.

- **Spirituality sees compassion as a fundamental principle for our work.** Professional ethics encourage us to follow practices that are respectful, that do no harm. Spirituality focuses upon the practice of compassion for clients. Compassion arises from the implicit respect for the miracle of life and the belief that we are all connected in God or creation. Much of the history of family service work is based on initiatives from religious communities that reach beyond the notion of social obligation to view people in need as deserving of compassion. Joseph Campbell sees the act of compassion one human being can have for another who is not connected to them is a sign of the fundamental spiritual impulse in life. He draws from the philosopher Schopenhauer when he asked:

How is it possible that suffering that is neither my own nor my concern should immediately affect me as though it were my own, and with such force that it moves me to action?<sup>23</sup>

To this question, he observes that:

This is something really mysterious, something for which Reason can provide no explanation, and for which no basis can be found in practical experience.<sup>24</sup>

Putting aside the trivializing notion that we are simply providing a socially mandated service or exercising a social obligation or simply having a job, it is clear that the business of family service work is more than that. When we as professionals and volunteers seek to help others “who are not our concern,” we are engaging in a spiritual process. To explore this spiritual dimension can enrich and highlight the value of the work we do.

- **Spirituality is a subtle reality that draws attention to the subtle energies that shape human experience:** our thoughts, our actions, our intentions, our day-to-day living. Psychology and social work certainly hold this to be true but on a much coarser way. For example, we regularly encourage our clients to

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<sup>23</sup> Fredrich Schopenhauer quoted in Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That* (New York: New World Library, 2001), p. xi.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.



be aware of the impact of their beliefs and choices on the kind of experience they have. Spiritual thinking suggests that our experiences are not merely affected by our perceptions, the very energy of our thoughts and intentions affects others. What is most intriguing in these days, is that this more subtle understanding of human experience is being borne out in the discoveries of quantum science.

The insights of quantum physics has helped us to see that on the sub-atomic level of reality all matter is composed of energy. Our belief that we are solid bodies separate from other people is not borne out in the discoveries of quantum physics. Instead we are confronted with the notion that we are composed of fields of energy that are interconnected with all other energy fields. Our field is constantly having an impact upon others as they are upon us. While it is a bit of a leap to suggest that the recent discoveries of quantum physics are confirming the beliefs of spiritual traditions, we have arrived at a point in history where meaningful conversations between science and spirit are helping us to recognize the need to be careful about what we assume is true about human experience. According to quantum science, all matter is composed of energy, that the most basic of sub-atomic particles found so far actually move in and out of existence, that they are connected to other particles in ways that cannot be explained in conventional cause and effect thinking.

- **Spirituality includes the power of prayer.** Recent research into the power of prayer highlights the dramatic discoveries of recent times that prayer can have a measurable and significant impact upon healing under controlled experimental conditions. Spirituality challenges conventional family service practice to seriously examine why it would ignore a tool of healing that can make a difference in its client's life.
- **Spirituality offers a perspective that helps us to reckon with the issues of life and death in ways that allow for the recognition of soul that exists outside of body and mind.** Recent research into the beliefs of clients suggests that that the majority of clients believe in a transcendent force or god. Reg Bibby's research suggests that approximately 87 per cent of Canadians believe in god, and that over half of these believe they have had a direct experience of God that has changed their life;

70 per cent believe in miracle healing, 63 per cent believe in angels and more than half believe in reincarnation. One does not need to debate the validity of these beliefs to realize that trust and respect for client beliefs demands a willingness to support them in reckoning with their life issues using a perspective that is vital to them.

The fact that serious research into consciousness, parapsychology, quantum physics, and other fields is raising serious spiritual conclusions simply adds to the importance of developing a sensible vocabulary and confidence to deal with spirituality in our work. Most clients will not bring up spiritual concerns if they do not feel the worker is open to this.

- **Spirituality challenges us to recognize the principle of wholeness.** (Wholeness comes from the term “holiness.”) This challenges us to work with the whole person. We must learn about and collaborate with physical medicine, alternative health care professionals, and healers from different spiritual traditions. We have much to learn and nothing to lose from an effort to see our clients as the richly complex and miraculous beings that they are. Every healing tradition has something important to teach us. The day of segregation and specialization with all the isolation, mistrust, competing beliefs, and separate vocabularies is over. Family service work, no less than other professional groups, has had its own brand of arrogance that has limited our understanding of client experience and compromised the quality of care offered. Spirituality, separate from the competing denominations and small-minded thinking that can be part of religion, challenges us to seek a more expansive outlook and to seek to integrate our psychosocial wisdom with the wisdom of medicine, traditional healing, and the insights of alternative health care.
- **Spirituality challenges the worker and manager to work with greater attention to their own health.** One can debate various spiritual beliefs but one cannot debate the fact that we all have spirituality in the sense that is defined above. Further, one of the central features of any spiritual outlook is attention to one’s own beliefs, attitudes, daily discipline, and connection to the world they live in. Further, the spiritual outlook asks us to surrender the idea that we “heal or fix” people. Instead, we are enabling them to participate in their own greater health. Also, as workers with a

spiritual outlook, we begin to see ourselves as facilitators of healing energy that comes through us rather than from us. One weakness in our professions has been the lack of emphasis upon our own health through attention to our physical, psychological, and spiritual wholeness. There is attention to ethical guidelines, the expectations of employers, legal guidelines for proper practice. Spirituality emphasizes a humble awareness and reverence to our life and the lives of our clients. This promises to make a better worker and a better organization.

**You are skimming over some pretty big points. I'm assuming you will elaborate on these later. Right now, though, what is the difference between religion and spirituality?**

Sure. Religion is the territory of practice and belief while spirituality is the experience that emerges regardless of what it was called or how it is understood. Put another way, spirituality is the forest and religions of the world are the trees.

The term “religion” derives from Latin sources to mean “to tie back or to bond” in that larger sense of becoming a bond between humans and the gods.<sup>25</sup> Until recent times, the terms religion and spirituality could be used somewhat interchangeably. Now, though, “religion” refers to the institutional practice of spirituality and “spirituality” refers to the private, direct experience of the divine. Thus spirituality has less to do with dogma and more to do with experience, less to do with belief and more to do with knowing through experience. Religion tends to promote a central authority that mediates between people and the divine, while spirituality suggests that the experience is direct.

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<sup>25</sup> John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins*, p. 438.

Here is a chart that spells out this difference in another way:

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Spirituality</b>
Product of a certain time or place	The goal more than the path
Meant for a group	Meant for private personal
Focus more on path, prescribed belief	Contains elements common to all religions
Codes of conduct	
A system of thought	An adventure, moving towards one's source
A set of beliefs, rituals, ceremonies to move along the path	A state beyond the senses (Beyond even thought)
Institutions and organizations	Inquiry into True Self
A community	Transition from uncertainty to clarity
A way of life <sup>26</sup>	

**Looking at the chart above, another difference appears to be that spirituality isn't necessarily contained in the language of religion.**

I think your point is very important. In fact, I would say that this is one way that spirituality is much more compatible to the psychological and relational perspectives of family service work. I am aware that a broader definition of spirituality allows for metaphors beyond the pale of institutional religion that can describe the transcendent perspectives that link our everyday experience to larger patterns of meaning. Some of the truly insightful spiritual works are written by leading thinkers in their field without any traditional religious language. A few examples would be: David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Ted Kapchuck's *The Web that Has No Weaver* (exploring Eastern medicine), Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science* (exploring the applications of chaos theory to management practice), and Tony Schwartz's *What Really Matters* (interviews with some of the leading visionaries in America today).

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<sup>26</sup> Jack Hawley, *Reawakening the Spirit in Work* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 4.

**You're suggesting that spirituality that is separate from religion is more compatible with family service work.**

To apply the principle of connection between one's particular experience and that of the larger whole, we do not need to get bogged down in a particular ideology or dogma. A cosmological vision of interconnectedness extends the horizons of psychology and systems theory.

One point of compatibility is found in the notion of relatedness. In *Soul Work*, a comprehensive survey of spirituality in the helping professions, social work concerns the fundamental relatedness of client issues to many aspects of their particular lives, their family systems, and their culture. Spirituality merely extends the principle of relatedness more deeply inwards to address the notion of essence or soul and outwards to include cosmos.

**Are there other ways in which you see spirituality overlapping on the perspectives of psychology and social work?**

The applications of spirituality as a path of greater awareness and greater connection fit well with the notions of community building. Family service work makes no sense unless it is cast into a context that emphasizes greater connectedness. It makes no difference whether we are talking about work in the community, teaching, or counselling. This is why I believe the trend in family service work towards greater outreach, championing of diversity, and connection of the individual with the community is so important in keeping with a spiritual outlook.

**Doesn't this create a problem for people who feel their religious practice is devalued by a distinction that seems to imply religion is faulty?**

I see two problems in a perception that religion is a flawed version of spirituality. First, it ignores that fact that any sort of organized spiritual practice involves rules, and matters of power and authority—hence religion. Many times I have seen different “spiritual leaders” who trade on the antipathy towards institutional religion while recreating their own institution of dogma, authority, theology, *etc.* I will say more about this later, but it is my impression that the declining attendance in most mainline churches is not so much a failure of the churches as a shift in consciousness in the global culture.

The rising tide of individualism in our culture has created impatience with authority-mediated truth. We are coming to trust our own experiences over those of institutions. Instead of large corporate gatherings under the banner of a particular ideology, there are small networks of people discerning their truth in smaller, familiar groups. Research done by the Gallup organization reports that 40 per cent of Americans are involved in some form of small support group.<sup>27</sup> Marilyn Ferguson, in *The Aquarian Conspiracy* defines a major trend away from impersonal institutions into smaller networks of folks that are defined less by institutional ideology.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to emphasize here, that while institutional religion is losing its influence, this research does not seek to devalue institutional religion. Every major religion has, at its core, the “waters of life,”<sup>29</sup> or a vital spiritual truth. In this sense, all religious belief systems are capable of being an empowering spiritual path. Some have become encrusted with institutional agendas and historical distortion that make it difficult to access their own truth. Tom Harpur, an Anglican priest and commentator on religion opens his book *For Christ’s Sake* with a parable that highlights how the vital truth of religion (what he calls the waters of life) becomes buried by regulation and management strategies.<sup>30</sup>

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest from Albuquerque, New Mexico, believes that most Christian churches have lost touch with Christ-consciousness reflected in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>31</sup>

In the end, our particular, personal practice becomes our religion regardless of what form it takes—whether it is traditional, a creative hybrid of New Age practice, or even an unconscious one. All the same

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<sup>27</sup> Anne Simkinson and Charles Simkinson, *Soul Work: A Field Guide for Spiritual Seekers*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998) p.14.

<sup>28</sup> Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher Inc., 1980), p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> Tom Harpur, Anglican priest and journalist, offers this observation in *For Christ’s Sake*. He shares a mythic description of the decline of vital spirituality into a bureaucracy of rules and control that blocks access to the “waters of life.” As a result, this experience of the vital spirituality of religion gets lost and becomes more of a rumor or a vague sense that beneath all the fanfare lays the truth of life.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Harpur, *For Christ’s Sake* (Toronto: McClellan and Stewart, 1993), p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Rohr, *Experiencing the Enneagram* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), Audio Tape.

foibles of dogmatism, elitism, abuse of power, and so forth, remain. It is naïve to think that newer forms of spiritual practice are better because they have somehow escaped the pitfalls of religion.

### **When you say “unconscious religion,” what are you referring to?**

I think that many people engage in what I would call unconscious religion. Where do we place our highest values? What do we devote our most precious energies to? In this sense, parenthood can be a religion. So can the Super Bowl, shopping at Costco, and addiction in its many forms. It is not a question of whether we worship a god but rather “what god do you worship?” In the face of uncertainty and fear, where do we turn for solace or hope?

*The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker won the Pulitzer Prize for its brilliant insight into our tendencies to back away from the reality of our own death. Unconsciously, we shrink the universe down to a level that suits our ability to cope. Thus, life can become focussed on getting the most recognition, getting to the top in our field, or having the most things. We can also shrink our lives to a world ruled by our depression, our traumatic story, or our addiction.

Many of our clients are stuck in the limits of unconscious religion. Freud rather simplistically observed that all religion was obsessive-compulsive neurosis, but this observation does have validity from this point of view.

This is what I mean by unconscious religion. It is often more powerful in our lives than the spiritual outlook we claim. In therapy, it is often a very powerful moment, usually quite painful, when a person begins to see how some unconscious formula based on fear or greed has governed their life. I seek to encourage them to value the impulse or longing for meaning that is evident even if it has cost them. I would describe this as the first step to more conscious spirituality.

### **So you would say that everyone is on a spiritual path. The issue is, is it conscious or unconscious.**

Yes. Richard Rohr does a fine job of defining effective spirituality as consciously embracing a path and an outlook that connects daily life to

larger meaning.<sup>32</sup> His concern is that many people, religious or not, lack a conscious focus of meaning in their lives. The danger is that we become scattered by many commitments and superficial connections. Vital spirituality involves discerning and living out of our sense of calling. In this sense, calling means a deep sense of what our life's purpose is. For example, as a parent this means being able to value the significance and meaning of bringing life into the world. The lack of value for parenting in our culture can change only when the ingredients of our culture—each of us—can value parenting for each other. As a teacher, a homemaker, a counsellor, a construction worker—how do we value this path as a connection to God and meaning in life?<sup>33</sup> How can we value one another's paths?

In a conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Richard Rohr introduced me to the idea that there are many paths that people live. These include ministry, the path of the artist, the path of the scientist, the lover. Ironically, he sees the path of religion as one of the most dangerous spiritual paths. His discussion of this issue provides a valuable perspective of balance in recognizing both the value and the danger of institutional religion:

The most dangerous path is the path of law and duty and religion. I believe that it has stopped the creative, erotic life giving flow of so many people towards God and pulled it into a self-serving salvation—a self-image of self protecting itself instead of surrendering itself. I am a priest...I represent religion. I even represent institutional religion and you know that. But I have to say that it is the best and the worst. It's led too many people to darkness, too many people to denial. Too many people in darkness in the bad sense of no way through, no way out, not learning from it; too many people to a place of lifting themselves up by their own boot straps; places of bigotry and narrowness.

But still, it's a good path. Dangerous doesn't mean it's not good. You've got the words there, you've got the symbols. Without the scriptures, without the name of Jesus, I'm not sure I would have the courage to name the humble, broken poor part of my own soul. Do you understand? That's what religion does. It gives you the metaphor, gives you the name, gives you the symbol, gives you the word for the realities that you can trust your own heart,

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Rohr, *Experiencing the Enneagram*. (New York: Crossroad, 1992) Audio Tape.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



and trust your own soul. But do you know what most people do? They worship their own symbol and get all involved in protecting their symbol instead of the reality. And then defend our metaphors—I've got the true one, you've got the true one. Do you know that that is called? Idolatry.<sup>34</sup>

### **So spirituality is not defined by a particular set of beliefs or practices?**

I think that a particular beliefs and practices is the by-product of culture and history. As noted above, it is very easy to become attached to our own particular metaphors drawn from our particular historical and cultural context. Besides institutional religion, another place where this gets to be a problem is the so-called New Age spirituality where people can create a belief system that is selective and self-serving. People can become attached to the words or symbols that give them comfort because they justify their opinions or because they do not challenge them to grow beyond their own particular, personal history. For this reason, I have come to see that the great traditions can teach us about the pitfalls of careless belief and the need for a critical and disciplined attention to the words and beliefs we use to name our spiritual experience.

In addition to attention to words, though, is attention to one's level of consciousness—what is the frame of mind or rather, the level of awareness that we bring to our spiritual outlook? In looking at spirituality this way, we are able to look past prejudices bound by science, culture, and history to draw from ancient wisdom, from the traditions of the great religions, and from the vision of indigenous peoples. Spirituality in its broadest sense does not define a specific community, a specific code of practice, or a specific understanding of how the world works. It describes the territory of experience. Beliefs are inevitable in our reckoning with experience, but they are merely the containers for our experience.

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Rohr in a talk given on the Enneagram in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1998.

**So is part of the challenge to learn to appreciate the different forms of conscious spiritual expression?**

We must accept that on some level, we all have a particular experience, a particular tradition, and particular beliefs. The goal is to value each particular path—including religion—in its particular forms. I have deep respect for the different traditions that I have had some experience with. When I witnessed early morning chanting in Buddhist monasteries, meditation sittings, Hindu pujas, sweat lodges, the mass of the Catholic tradition, Twelve Step meetings, or authentic practices in the New Age realm, I have felt utmost respect for what this represents. In fact, my own experience in looking at spirituality from so many different angles has deepened my own beliefs and practice. I simply do not wish to limit the definition of spirituality to religion in any particular form. Religion is one vehicle, probably the strongest one we have, for becoming conscious of the spiritual dimension.

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**Chapter 2**  
**Defining the Spiritual**

# Defining the Spiritual

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Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than out right exposure. Live is either a daring adventure or nothing.

- Helen Keller<sup>35</sup>

The more I study physics, the more I am drawn to metaphysics.

- Albert Einstein<sup>36</sup>

Between the finite limitations of the five senses  
And the endless yearnings of men for the beyond  
The people hold to the humdrum bidding of work and food  
While reaching out when it comes their way  
For lights beyond the prisms of the five senses  
For keepsakes lasting beyond any hunger or death;  
That if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams,  
And endeavors to live the life he has imagined,  
He will meet with a success  
Unexpected in common hours.

- Carl Sandburg<sup>37</sup>

Its clear to me that the Universe is not only more formidably fantastic than we can imagine, it is more fantastic than we ever could imagine. The philosophies and cosmologies and gods we have created are far too small.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> [http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Helen\\_Keller/](http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Helen_Keller/).

<sup>36</sup> Calaprice, ed. *The Quotable Einstein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> Fulghum, Robert. *Words I Wish I Wrote*.

<sup>38</sup> Lord Haldane from Robert Fulghum, *Words that I Wish I Wrote* (New York: Caedmon, 1997), audiotope.

We are all seeking greater insight into these remarkable times, when there is so much cause for both despair and hope. Even though our political and institutional leadership is losing respect and credibility, and core societal crises fester, we are gaining a greater understanding of how the universe works. An historic shift in the Western scientific-materialistic view is occurring.<sup>39</sup>

...suffering opens us to the deepest form of human connection... it is through suffering that we overcome our isolation as atomistic individuals in a narcissistic world. The woven threads of loving witness, the sturdy presence of another consciousness, these gifts alone can embrace and comfort the one who suffers within a communion of selves.<sup>40</sup>

**It seems from what you have said that spirituality is defined by how it challenges the limits of conventional psychosocial practice in family service work.**

Listening to the stories that clients and employees share is the richest and most rewarding privilege of my work as therapist and supervisor. I become a witness to the most heart-felt images of what matters most to the people who come through our doors or who we meet in the community. Many tell of painful struggles with loss, abuse, and/or longing that are the defining ingredients of identity. The full power and depth of these experiences cannot be grasped by our psychosocial theories.

In our professional training, we have learned to impose explanation, justification, and corrective practice. Yet I think this “solve it” approach is over-rated. When we seek to simply witness the power of these stories, I think we cross the limits of explanation and enter the vital realm of meaning and belonging contained in the spiritual.

Like the spiritual journey, our client’s healing and growth often begins in darkness—often at times when we have lost our way. Here are the words of the great poet, Dante written roughly 700 years ago:

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Senge quoted in Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1998), p.8.

<sup>40</sup> Catherine Frazee, “The Power of Intense Fragility,” *The Toronto Globe and Mail*, Jan. 18, 2002, p. A13.

In the middle of the road of my life,  
I awoke in a dark wood  
where the true way was wholly lost.<sup>41</sup>

I remember a couple with whom I had been working for a number of sessions. He was threatening to leave when they had an unexpected pregnancy promising a fourth child. He felt financially and personally overwhelmed. He was angry and resentful of this looming new demand. Beneath that, he felt alone and lost. The recurring thought was to run to a “real” life out there somewhere. She was scared, too, but also resentful of his lack of support, his use of pornography, and his lying. Each was scared and stubbornly resentful of the other. I remember asking him when he last had felt loved. His defensive anger and distress melted into tears. This question opened a heart-felt issue of belonging that no amount of “clarifying the issues” could touch. He spoke of loneliness in his family of origin and in his relationship with God. The longing and disappointments were less defensive. He began a new story—a heart-felt one—that created a new foundation for marriage and fatherhood.

**At the heart of a client’s experience is the realm of spiritual experience. This is hard to define.**

Try as we might, the mystery of human love and community eludes the most elegant theories. Our spiritual traditions tell us that mystery is not always to be conquered or “solved.” As I see it, the spiritual perspective challenges us to expand our cosmology (our understanding of order in the universe) to abide mystery and to trust the processes beyond what we can see or control.

The principles of control and influence that are central to our professional techniques sees a different world than the one cast according to the spiritual principle of entering into relationship with that which we cannot control. Edmund Friedman, rabbi and psychotherapist, contrasts the wilfulness of technique with the willingness to be open to influences beyond ourselves. In this sense, he argues that much of the struggle in our client’s lives (and our own, for that matter) is rooted in the urge to control what we cannot control. We can will “being together” with our spouse but we cannot will togetherness; we can will good living but cannot will health and long

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<sup>41</sup> Dante, “Commedia,” quoted from David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused*, p. 1.

life; we can will our partner's concern through communicating but we cannot will their response.<sup>42</sup> I believe that this distinction between willingness and wilfulness is one of the core distinctions between the spiritual perspective and conventional psychosocial practice.

### **Spirituality touches the places beyond our control or understanding.**

I wrote part of this book while my father-in-law was dying. I have not known a kinder, gentler man. I have witnessed his courage to embrace the dying time with love and a sense of preparation for something more. My textbooks on grief and dying can describe this process in terms of stages, but they offer little in the way of information about how to *be* in this space. They can tell me how dying happens for the body and the mind. They cannot help me understand why we are alive, what exists in the territory after life, or how to die well.

### **How do spiritual traditions address this indefinable experience of being?**

What I see is that any particular religion, any particular mythic belief system from the great traditions or the esoteric (hidden) ones or the New Age Beliefs, are vehicles for exploring our relationship to the Big Questions that contain our sense of being and purpose. I might add here that I do not restrict the exploration of spirituality to religious language. For example, the work of David Biggs in chaos theory offers particularly enlightening metaphors to understand the field of the Big Story:

Paradoxically, the insights of the newest science share the vision of the world's oldest indigenous and spiritual traditions...the enduring insights of these cultures will help us to elaborate the metaphor of chaos and highlight the way chaos re-envision ancient wisdom in a brand-new form relevant for our high tech, high-octane, cyber-saturated age.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Edmund Friedman, audiotape proceedings of "Spirituality, Magic and Therapy," a conference sponsored by the Alberta Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, October, 1995.

<sup>43</sup> John Biggs and David Peet, *Seven Life Lessons in Chaos: Spiritual Wisdom from the Science of Change* (New York: Harper Trade, 2000) p. 7.

While credible ideas are important to promote sensible discussion, the experience of the spiritual is less about a truth and more about the experience of connection. I worry less, in this book, about “proving” or justifying spiritual truth. Spirituality is by its nature beyond proof or disproving. This is one reason why more orthodox scientists dismiss spirituality as a viable outlook. In fact, the mystical traditions would say that any claim to truth is suspect because we speak from within the limitations of language and human logic. In the end, it is not truth of fixed conclusions that is the focus of the spiritual journey. It is more about the courage to ask the questions and the community of support necessary to abide the great uncertainties of life.

### **So you are saying that spirituality depends upon communities of support?**

It is not the specific belief so much as the living of this belief and the support to live this belief that can only come from others—some sort of community, whether it is formal or informal. Following my father-in-law’s death, I was among 1,000 people attending his wake. As part of the receiving line, I shook hands with most of them. I was struck by the commitment these people showed to honouring a member of their church community—the gifts of food to the family, the kind words shared over and over again, the many gatherings to console, to tell stories, the remembering of a loved one, and the piece of them shattered by loss. I was particularly struck by the power of the open casket that gathered us in tears, in heavy-hearted remembering, and in pondering the mystery of death. The body is both the “remains” of my father-in-law and no longer him. It was a profoundly moving experience that cut beneath the assumptions of ordinary life. In the poetry of Bruce Cockburn:

There you go,  
Moving deeper into mystery,  
Here I remain, only seeing what you used to be.  
Stared at the ceiling ‘til my ears fill up with tears,  
Barely got to know you, and suddenly you’re out of here.  
Gone from mystery into mystery,  
gone from daylight into night...<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> From Bruce Cockburn, “Dart to the Heart.” (Toronto: High Romance Music Ltd. 1993).



Death lifts the veil and exposes the mysterious depths of life in each of us. The tradition of the wake, so familiar to the Celtic culture, Prince Edward Island culture, created the communal support to be present to this mystery.

### **So you are saying that death awakens us to the spiritual?**

Death or any other sort of crisis. In ordinary times, when things are going mostly according to plan, soul and spirit may seem to be peripheral or romantic abstractions. In times of crisis, however, when ordinary life is undermined, the instinct to seek deeper meaning becomes central. The recent terrorist events in New York provide testimony to that. In times such as these, our ordinary formulas are not enough, and we are forced to grapple with the big questions. Why? What is the purpose? Is there a lesson? What if I were to die today? What must I do now? As the old saying goes, “there are no atheists in the trenches.”

Robert Romanishyn is a professor of psychology at Pacifica University I interviewed in Southern California. In *The Soul in Grief: Love, Death and Transformation*, a personal memoir following his wife’s sudden death, he comments poignantly that “all my training in psychology had not prepared me for this.”<sup>45</sup> In the modern era, we have dispensed with the world beyond the five senses, holding firmly to the empirical and the rational. This leaves us poorly equipped for those moments when the vast rhythms of life and death take us beyond the shores of the familiar, the measurable, and the controllable.

### **You sound like you re speaking from experience.**

Sixteen years ago I, like Robert Romanishyn, had an experience that plunged me into a darkness for which all my training as a therapist in psychiatry, psychology, and social work did not prepare me. My oldest daughter, then 6, was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and was not expected to live. Many colleagues have faced such deep struggles and many, like me, found themselves in the spiritual spaces where professional maps became useless. That further territory can be entered only through mythic images and metaphors of our spiritual traditions.

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<sup>45</sup> Romanishyn, Robert. *The Soul in Grief: Love, Death and Transformation* (New York: North Atlantic Books, 1999), p. 47.

These are the Big Stories that give context to our small stories. In my case, my Christian upbringing became the lens. I sought out the consolation of prayer, the community of friends from a church community, and hope for a healing miracle. Dreams of punching God in the face gave voice to my anger; consolation came from the Jesus' encouragement to

Consider the lilies: they do not spin, they do not weave; but I tell you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these. If God clothes in splendor the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown on the fire tomorrow, how much more will he provide for you....<sup>46</sup>

For someone very committed to the ideas of Freud, Jung, and the psychological perspective, such spiritual images did not fit easily, yet they had more power at that time to reach the visceral, soul-bending fear and sadness that gripped me.

Interestingly, an image came to me in the form of a joke that I had heard at one time or another:

There was a man out walking one day without realizing that he was on the very edge of a cliff. Without warning, he tripped, fell over the side and was barely able to escape the fall by grabbing some roots sticking out of the side of the cliff. As he hung there, he called out "Help! Is there anybody up there?" These desperate cries were met with a reassuring response. "This is God, Joe. I am here to help you." "Thank God" Joe uttered, while continuing to cling desperately. "Joe," said God, "Just let go." "Are you crazy?" said the astonished Joe, "No disrespect intended, but if I let go, I'll fall to the bottom and die!" "Joe, do you love me and trust me?" "Yes," uttered the chastised but desperate Joe. "Then let go, Joe." A long, tense moment passed with Joe desperately calculating his choice. Finally, he called out, "Help! Is there anybody else up there?"

It is not the humor that sticks with me but the poignantly human dilemma of Joe that I remember: being oblivious to the preciousness of life and being caught between my ideas of how things must be and what life seems to demand from me. The image of clinging desperately, which is so much a part of the formulas of conventional counselling practice, is a familiar reflex. The poet and priest, Gerard Manly

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<sup>46</sup> Luke 12:26-28.

Hopkins echos the sentiments of this experience:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap  
May who ne'er hung there...<sup>47</sup>

**Fear of the uncontrollable and the unnamable keeps us on this side of spirituality.**

Our heritage of rationalism and materialism has kept the western mind operating upon the principle of control, calculation, and technique. There are times, though, when conquering the problem is not the answer. Instead the challenge is to let go and endure. This is the spiritual principle. Consider the words of Taoism's great teacher, Lao Tsu:

He who stands on tip-toe  
doesn't stand firm.  
He who rushes ahead  
doesn't go far.  
He who tries to shine  
dims his own light.  
He who defines himself  
can't know who he really is.  
He who has power over others  
can't empower himself.  
He who clings to his work  
will create nothing that endures.  
If you want to accord with the Tao,  
just do your job then let go.<sup>48</sup>

We hear how in the Twelve Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous challenge the addict to surrender to the truth of their addiction and to the aid of a higher power. "Letting go" is a familiar phrase in spiritual literature. It is the paradox of death leading to life. We see in every great spiritual tradition.

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<sup>47</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, quoted in Sam Keen, *Hymns to an Unknown God*, p. 93.

<sup>48</sup> Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper,1994) p. 154.

I tell you that unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.<sup>49</sup>

The image of hanging on that cliff has returned to me again and again. Some times it is in my own life, and sometimes it is in my work with clients. I have even come across this same story done slightly differently in Buddhist literature. The choice to let go sometimes comes to me as a willingness to die to certain attachments or to beliefs about how things must be. Sometimes it comes with a twist of irony—when I let go, I only drop six inches and then I'm chagrined to see how the image of great catastrophe was so off base. I suspect every reader can summon up stories that reflect this image of spiritual challenge.

The challenge is to marvel at the wondrous unfolding of life and to trust that this wondrous unfolding somehow includes you and your most painful experience. Sometimes, we see this in our client's lives—there simply isn't anything that can be done. We sit with clients who report historical sexual abuse, a painful loss of relationship, or health crisis. In these times we know that our client is confronted with a spiritual journey. We can use our techniques and support to help them face it but the healing, if it is to come, is beyond our control. If we only envision our service as "getting them out," we may feel helpless and frustrated by our inability to help. Yet, I am reminded time and again how much our service is more through presence and caring than through technique. An awareness of the spiritual perspective can be of great assistance to both therapist and client.

One day, in the midst of the treatment of my daughter's cancer, I met with the radiologist who was to explain the process for an experimentally high level of radiation treatment for this very aggressive brain tumor threatening my daughter's life. At the end of the description of the technical steps involved he said that saving my daughter's life would take the "water of medical treatment and the oil of spirituality." I was very impressed by this unexpected philosophy—coming as it did from a technologist. It awakened a sense that the quietly-held spiritual convictions of prayer and faith sustaining me may in fact have a place in medicine.

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<sup>49</sup> John 12:24

I have carried this sense of “oil and water” into my research.

This experience made me wonder. If this is what was important to me, are there other people, clients, and workers in my field who also need this sort of support? Would we not want to give the very best we have to offer our clients as they grapple with devastation in its many forms? What about the incredible discomfort that I felt about discussing spirituality—my spirituality—in professional contexts? What about foisting values or beliefs onto my clients? How do we reconcile the spiritual and the psychological? How do we explore these things with our clients, given different spiritual backgrounds? Why shouldn't I simply refer clients to the nearest spiritual director, minister, priest, medicine man, imam, or rabbi?

Spirituality is not any particular theology but rather the willingness embrace a cosmology that is grander than the visions of our textbooks and policy manuals. We are challenged to see family service as more than well-schooled technique and management, more than sticking to a plan.

### **So how does this lead to the research work you've done?**

I began the year with much enthusiasm for gathering in a rich harvest of ideas and information from workshops, books, and fellow learners. The first part of my year was marked with huge excitement for the information I was gathering. I could not read enough nor ask enough questions to keep pace with my appetite to understand spirituality in plain ways that made sense to family service work. I am afraid I made myself a bit of an annoyance to workshop leaders by my incessant questions. Certainly my fellow workshop attendees teased me to that effect, mostly in good humour though there were hints to “get out of my head.”

In the second part of the year, more and more increased energy went into probing my personal response to the remarkable information I was learning. This is what I call “heart work.” In retrospect I would say that this is a very healthy and necessary stage of the journey. I simply did not anticipate that I would feel so personally challenged by the material. This, I suppose is the difference between the knowledge so

easily accessible in this information age and learning. Seeking the latter is a messy process that demands much discipline and honesty. This is the tough work of spirituality. No longer is it picking ripe and luscious cherries in an orchard. Instead, it is seeking diamonds by digging in mud and hard rock. Lao Tsu, the author of the Taoist text, *The Tao Te Ching* puts it this way:

To gain knowledge one must add a little on each day. To gain wisdom, one must take away a little each day.<sup>50</sup>

As a Hindu holy man (called an Avatar) said to me during a two-month stay in India, “you cannot study spirituality, you can only live it.” The research was shaped by the willingness to take the personal struggles as part of the valuable learning. These, I believe, represent the spiritual journey that links the particulars of my Small Story to the grander perspective of the Big Story that includes us all.

**So I’m gathering that you see a spiritual perspective as demanding a great deal more personal reckoning from the worker.**

Too often, professionalism in the modern sense advocates an abstract, impersonal approach to the client needs. More recent research has shown that the healer who has the courage to be present to his own authentic experience offers the most powerful help to clients.<sup>51</sup>

I remember a comment by a corporate consultant who suggested that organizations in times of struggle can benefit greatly from the leader who has the courage to speak authentically about personal response to the stresses the agency is facing.<sup>52</sup> She cited an example of a CEO who spoke forthrightly about his own personal anxieties and who shared a story from a crisis time in his own life. Without implying a need for sympathy, he demonstrated the task of linking the authentically personal with the big struggle facing their organization. By modelling openness and making a meaningful connection, he inspired and energized the staff group.

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<sup>50</sup> Ralph Allen Dale, Trans. *The Tao Te Ching* (New York: Watkins Publishing Ltd., 2003), p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> Barry Duncan, “The Future of Psychotherapy,” *Psychotherapy Networker*, July/August, 2001: p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Jaworski’s story in his book *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* is an excellent type of this sort of leadership by authentic example.

Spirituality not grounded in personal experience risks becoming wooden, fragile, defensive, frightened, and easily twisted to suit any agendas. The philosopher and transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, made this observation of the shift from an authentic response to experience to a formulaic practice:

In the beginning the goblets were wooden and the men were golden. In the next generation, the goblets were golden and the men were wooden.<sup>53</sup>

### **So how did this affect your approach to the research?**

It shaped my expectations of the teachers claiming to have a spiritual perspective in their work. Some workshops I attended during my research (I spent more than 80 days in formal learning contexts during this year) were outside my comfort or knowledge range so I could not judge the quality of the ideas because they were too new to me. Instead, my compass became the personal qualities of the leader: openness, playfulness, and willingness to share authentically. Not everyone could pass this test. Some people claiming to teach do not “walk the talk.”

When we view spirituality as powerful information there is a danger that we can overlook the discipline, uncertainty, and need for community that is part of the spiritual perspective. One of the weaknesses of the so-called “New Age” spirituality is that rich ideas are trimmed of their ambiguity and hard work and so are passed off as romance, magic, or a quick fix. Spirituality, by my estimation, is a way of being—not perfect but committed to integrity. Strong spiritual leaders and facilitators can be remarkably firm in their convictions without becoming exclusive. They can be challenging of other lines of belief without demonizing other practices. They are ready to identify the linkage between their ideas and the daily practice of living because they develop their ideas from the inside out. Joy, reverence, and openness are part of the package.

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<sup>53</sup> Emerson quoted in Sam Keen, *Hymns to an Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life*, p. 74.

Consider these words from D. H. Lawrence:

This is what I believe:  
That I am I  
That my soul is a dark forest  
That my known self will never be more than a small clearing in  
the forest.  
That gods, strange gods, come forth from the forest into the  
clearing of my known elf  
And go back;  
That I must have the courage to let them come and go.  
That I will never let mankind put anything over on me.  
But I will try always to recognize and submit to the gods in me  
and the gods in other men and women.  
This is my credo.<sup>54</sup>

**You have spoken about the need for integrity in the spiritual.  
How about its sources in day-to-day experience?**

Matthew Fox, a former Dominican priest with whom I studied for three weeks in Oakland, California, observes that humility is derived from the Latin “humus” or earth. Spiritual exploring that is not grounded in one’s Small Story can become abstract, inhuman, and irrelevant.<sup>55</sup> This is one criticism of western religion—its tendency to rise above the earth and body. To be humble is to speak from the earth not above it. This includes our bodies—linked as they are—to the substance of the earth.

This challenge is very real for me. I am fond of grand abstractions, clever ideas, and intellectual explanation. I know that the intellect has a rich contribution to the story we tell ourselves about our life, the world, and our gods. However, my research brought me, time and again to the realization that our story is rooted in a wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. Each part must be included.

To this end, I took the risk to work with teachers who understood the psychological perspective but addressed it through body work, ritual, creative dance, yoga practice, and even approaches such as EMDR (Eye Movement, Desensitisation and Reprocessing—a therapy

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<sup>54</sup> D.H. Lawrence cited in Robert Fulghum, *Words I Wish I Wrote* (New York: Harper Audio, 1997).

<sup>55</sup> Matthew Fox, lecture, Oakland, CA, September, 2000.



approach commonly used for post traumatic stress issues) that I believe approach the spiritual dimension through attention to the body.

### **How would this be true for our work as counsellors?**

Well, in the first place, I am reminded of a story of initiation in native spirituality that has stuck with me for a long time. I do not remember where I first heard it but it has a poignant meaning for me as I have faced some of my own personal ordeals.

In the First Nations traditions, the initiation of the shaman/healer involves a symbolic death in which, for three days, the soul of the healer descends to the lower world where the body is feasted upon by various carrion birds. Each bird has the name of one particular affliction in life. Every bird that feasts upon the body of the initiate confers the ability to heal, and the Shaman can bring this to the healing of others.

As a counsellor I have seen this to be true in my own life. Reckoning with the trauma and grief resulting from my daughter's cancer has empowered me to be present to those who have been thrust into this territory by fate. Other colleagues of mine bring a special depth to issues such as suicide, marriage loss, childhood disease, and so forth. Theory and technique have value but they are no substitute for heart work. How do we as managers and supervisors support our staff to integrate heart work into their work?

### **Put this way, the spiritual dimension means engaging the aspects of our experience that we would rather run from.**

While conventional psychosocial models tend to focus on helping clients through removing of their afflictions (this is the allopathic model of healing that comes to us from Western medicine), the spiritual perspective asks: should this affliction be endured rather than stopped? Real learning is not won cheaply. The Koran says it this way:

Do you think you would enter the garden of bliss without such trials as those who have passed before you?<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted from the television series, "The Power of Myth," with Bill Moyers and Joseph Campbell.

In the end we must surrender our clever formulas and wonderful ideas to the recognition that our intellectual island kingdom is surrounded by deep, abiding energies, archetypes, and just plain gut forces that can topple our kingdom like the Tower of Babel.<sup>57</sup>

Spiritual work challenges us to get our own psychological houses in order. It is only then that we can experience enough clarity to reckon with the energies which surround and shape us. Only then can we work with the energies that connect us to the larger rhythms that shape life.

### **So this is part of what your Hindu teacher was saying when he said that spirituality can't be studied only lived?**

This has been my experience. A Chinese proverb says, “The one who leaves on the journey is not the same one who returns.” When thinking of the path I have followed through this research, I am reminded of the difference between a vacation and a pilgrimage: in the vacation, we see ourselves moving from the centre of what is real and true toward the outer edges. A pilgrimage is when we see ourselves moving from the outer edges of what is most true to the centre. This research started as a kind of vacation and ended as a pilgrimage.

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<sup>57</sup> I was very intrigued by an article from the *Globe and Mail* pointed out to me by a colleague suggesting that the image of the burning tower, such as we witnessed September 11, carries that powerful archetypal allegory of the collapse of our illusions of power and security—in other words, the cosmic antidote for *hubris*. I have lost the specific reference for this article but believe it to be from a November, 2001 edition of the *Globe and Mail*.

The background of the page is a solid blue color with a pattern of concentric, slightly blurred circles that create a ripple effect, centered in the lower half of the page.

**Chapter 3**  
**Spirituality Entering**  
**Family Service Work**

# Spirituality Entering Family Service Work

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The greatest gift we can give the world is a fully healthy self.  
- Carolyn Myss (quoting an unnamed teacher)<sup>58</sup>

The enemy of vision is reasoning power's divorce  
from imagination, closing itself in as steel.  
- William Blake<sup>59</sup>

Therefore we as human beings are not self contained but in fact,  
focal points of intelligence in the unified field—inseparably  
interconnected with the patterns of intelligence that pervade the  
whole universe.  
- Deepak Chopra<sup>60</sup>

I am done with great things and big things, with great institutions  
and big success and I am for those tiny invisible moral forces  
that work from individual to individual through the crannies of  
the world like so many rivulets or like the capillary oozing of  
water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest  
monuments of man's pride.  
- William James<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Carolyn Myss, *Energy: The Science of Personal Power, Spirituality, and Health*. (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 1996), audiotape.

<sup>59</sup> William Blake, "Jerusalem" cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, Third Edition* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 88.

<sup>60</sup> Deepak Chopra, *Quantum Healing* (New York: Bantam Audio, 1989). [audiotape].

<sup>61</sup> William James in correspondence to Mrs. Henry Whittman quoted from Robert Fulghum, *Words I Wish I Wrote*, audiotape.

Unless one is oneself, one cannot do much for others. And the best will in the world and even with the best intentions, one will always, to a certain extent, give people stones instead of bread and both sides know it.

- Isaac Dennison<sup>62</sup>

People do not care what you know until they know that you care.

- Sister Lucy, Roman Catholic Nun<sup>63</sup>

### **Defining spirituality seems a little ironic. Aren't we talking about something beyond words and definitions?**

A friend of mine once pointed out, Lao Tsu began his timeless work, *Tao Te Ching* with the words, "The Tao that can be talked about is not the eternal Tao" and then spent the next 25,000 words describing how that is true. Our culture, living in the legacy of 400 years of rationalism and materialism, experiences the spiritual dimension as obtuse and frustrating. Fan Lizhi, a Chinese physicist talks about this dilemma:

A man who asks "Why are we here?" is addressing a universal issue, yet he expects a reasonable, logical, comprehensive answer. He demands that his answer conform to logic, as man understands proceeds only in logical forms. The requirement to conform to logic, however, strongly restricts the formal laws that govern the universe. Very few universal laws satisfy the requirements that they be inherently logical.<sup>64</sup>

My sense, and the opinion of folks from whom I have learned, suggests that science without the sensibilities of the poet and the artist will lack the imagination and intuition essential to the spiritual dimension. I include quotations from poets and artists, because I do believe that conceptual words that aim to package and define will often fail us. Instead we must seek the words that point beyond concepts. This is the language of image and metaphor.

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<sup>62</sup> Issac Dennison quoted by Richard Rohr, Enneagram speech, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1998.

<sup>63</sup> This quote comes from a friend, Blair Collins, speaking of a childhood school experience.

<sup>64</sup> Fan Lizhi, *Chinese Physics*, quoted in Ted Kapchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine* (Portland, OR: Contemporary Books, 2000), p. 47.

It seems to me that we have to get past this split that has left many people feeling that when they go to their churches they must leave their critical intelligence at the door and when they enter their professional roles they must leave their intuition and imagination at the door. The training for most family service workers stresses some sort of scientific angle to enhance its credibility in a world where empirical evidence and proof is the currency. Ironically, though, the soft science of human experience really allows us to be attentive to both dimensions. There is room for both the scientific and the spiritual when we sit down with families. My goal is to explore how these different perspectives combine to speak to a larger truth.

### **So where do we begin to see how spirituality found its way into family service work?**

Actually, the more accurate question would be how family therapy and its psychotherapy predecessors found its way out of spirituality. H. F. Ellenberger, in his work *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, “traces back some of the roots of modern psychiatric practice to classic beliefs—Stoic exercises in concentration and meditation, Galen’s methods of individual therapy as evidenced by his treatise *On the Passions of the Soul and the Religious Cure of Souls*.”<sup>65</sup> Similarly, work such as *The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Kurtz and Ketcham and *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* by David Bakan are just two examples of scholarly exploration of the practice. It is surprising the extent to which the desert ammas and abbas of the early centuries of the Christian era, the great Jewish teachers such as Maimonides, or the healers of ageless Shamanic practice spoke to the realm of human experience and healing long before modern thinkers articulated these insights in today’s language.

The fact is, pre-modern history is marked by a worldview that does not separate what we would call the spiritual and the material worlds. Looking back as far as 70,000 years we have evidence of human concern with life and meaning beyond our physical life experience. Black Elk, the renowned Sioux visionary, call it, “the world behind this world.”

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted from Jean Hardy, *Psychology with a Soul* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1987), p. 183.

Psychology and social work in their modern, professional formats have existed for little more than a century. As recently as 1884, the dictionary of psychology defined therapy as healing of the soul.<sup>66</sup>

The separation of the spiritual from the material perspective began maybe 300 years ago. In the West, this began largely as a political event and a new way of seeing the world. Given the dominance of the Christian church upon our understanding of the cosmos, much of what was held true about healing was drawn from the revelations of the biblical tradition rather than from independent investigation and proof. The discoveries of Newton, Galileo, and other scientists of the day wrestled a view of the universe from the belief-regulating authority of the church of the day. In the end, science threw the spiritual baby out with the religious bath water. When this happened, a rich empirical world opened up for the precursors of modern family service work but a lot was lost as well.

I sense that many of the explanations that reduce love or spiritual experience to neurochemistry and interactive causes are an attempt to shrink the universe to what we can grasp and control within our mechanistic model of the universe. I believe more people are becoming impatient or even discouraged with trying to live in such a shrunken world.

### **And you believe that the spiritual perspective offers a larger world to live in?**

From the wisdom of Buddha who lived 2,500 years ago, to the Sufi poet Rumi from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, to the medieval Christian mystics, to the insights of quantum physics, about the nature of reality, there is a remarkable sense of vitality and expansive vision about human experience. We in the family service field would do well to pay attention. We are naïve to think that the work we do today is more advanced or more complete than the many, many forms of healing that have developed within the world's spiritual traditions over thousands of years. This observation alone brings up important questions:

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<sup>66</sup> Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (San Francisco: Shambala, 2000), p. 9.

- What difference does a perspective based on a cosmology of meaning and transcendent purpose make to the way we understand and work with our clients?
- How we look at the work we do from a spiritual point of view?
- What is the spiritual perspective on the structure and process of our organizations?

**I assume that these are the questions that you have explored in your research?**

Yes. Certainly they started out in a more personal way about my experience as one human being trying to find his way, then to the applications it had in my work as a therapist, and, finally, to my role as a director in family service work. The image I have is that of throwing a pebble into a pond—the initial ripples are focused on the very spot that the stone landed. Soon, though, the ripples extend outwards in larger and larger circles. In this sense, when we ask our most important questions about the life we are living, the ripples extend to all aspects of our life.

**So these questions about the spiritual—and I assume that one of the “stones” creating ripples has to do with your experience with your daughter—how has that become important to your work of serving families?**

Spiritual matters must always be, in their heart, a powerful, personal question. We all have spiritual issues. It does not mean that these are always seen as spiritual; I believe that this is where spirituality begins. I also think that, if we are able to see spirituality in a sufficiently general, non-dogmatic way, then all crucial matters are spiritual at heart. To use the stone-in-pond metaphor, the ripples inevitably extend beyond what we can know, beyond what our five senses can tell us, into the realm of meaning and connection that is addressed by our many spiritual traditions. It seems to me that the places beyond the rational and objective formulas of psychology and social work are places where we need to go. When we sit down with a family that has suffered a serious loss of some kind, it is never enough to explain the symptoms and the struggles. Family service workers must never be content to explain. In a more meaningful sense, they become caring witnesses to the human drama that pits the assumptions of everyday



life against the profoundly moving energies of the extraordinary. They are challenged to be present to grief, fear, addictions, and so forth. This is the business of spirituality in family service work.

In *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, Ernest Kurtz and Catherine Ketcham recite a story from the spiritual context that may help to highlight an important difference in emphasis between conventional counselling practice and spiritual focus.

A story told by an Episcopal priest relating her own experience may shed light on the difference:

Once, on her annual retreat, she sought out as confessor, a Jesuit priest of long experience. In that context, she rehearsed with him the behaviours that troubled her, especially those prominent in the past year—a dawning area of insensitivity, a tendency to domination, and so forth. Then, drawing on what she had come to know of herself from recent reading and especially from her participation in groups, she began to detail how these behaviours seemed connected to her experience of being related to an alcoholic.

At that point, the grizzled veteran confessor reached out and, gently patting her hand, asked: “My dear, do you want forgiveness... or an explanation?”<sup>67</sup>

### **So how did the spiritual dimension disappear from the maps of contemporary healing practices including family counselling work?**

Not that long ago, the work done by family service professionals was the province of priests, shaman, and holy people. Their work joined the ordinary and the extraordinary. Healing in their perspective was the restoration of balance and connection between the world of the five senses and the world beyond the five senses. This may seem to be a far cry from the “scientific” (empirical/rational/material) vision of the work we do in family service agencies.

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<sup>67</sup> Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Story Telling and the Journey to Wholeness* (New York: Bantam: 1994), p. 27.

**So is it as simple as saying that spirituality in the West was simply displaced by the agendas of science? Healing shaped by spiritual perspectives was overwhelmed by science, and in a relatively short time healers traded prayers, rattles, and incense for lab coats, objectivity, and “provable” formulas about how people heal?**

I think it’s a matter of changing worldviews. Clearly some of the cosmologies of our spiritual traditions simply could not stand up to the more sophisticated analysis and logic of science. Some of this, as many writers on matters of spirituality would say, was necessary. Western science has given us sophisticated diagnostic systems, understandings of brain functioning, and functional patterns of emotions and relationships. All of this has been very helpful as we serve families in the office or in the community.

Science also has dissected the working ingredients of human function and dysfunction, and we have narrowed our scope of inquiry. We do not ask why we are alive or what is the ultimate meaning of our struggles. The implicit assumption of materialism is that there is no meaning about which to ask. We have lost the cosmology of our spiritual traditions that speaks to meaning. When we dismissed the antiquated science of our spiritual traditions, we also threw out the wisdom of relatedness.

**Do you really see family service work as that mechanical and objective?**

When I look at the work of my colleagues, I see much of what I would refer to as spiritual—compassion, caring, and skills as being present. When I look at the professional journals of our field, I find many that present dry, multi-syllabic renditions of objective, rational, and logical analysis. In short, there is a mixed bag. My question is how we can more richly synthesize the scientific wisdom of the head with the intuitive, passionate wisdom of the heart. This is the rich spirituality that can speak to the rich quality of compassion and knowledge that we see in our best family service workers. Exploring the realm of the spiritual is aimed at recovering the vocabulary and the courage to speak about matters of spirituality with the same sense of confidence that we now have in our scientific language.

**It seems to me that bringing the language of spirituality into our field has a long way to go. The dogmatism and the anti-scientific postures of much of religious spirituality seem opposed to what we are doing in our agencies.**

The familiar perception of religion as anti-scientific, tribal, and dogmatic is giving way to an increasingly popular perception of spirituality as a principle that crosses the lines that have separated different religions and have separated science from spirit. In his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Thomas Kuhn highlights the ways in which the desire for power and security rather than reason shaped the ways in which popular science has evolved.

**Is this split between science and spirit being addressed in family service work?**

I have certainly noticed that there is considerable interest in spirituality among many colleagues. A number of them have taken on very serious personal learning and growth in this area. We have agencies debating the role of spiritual topics for groups. We have agencies debating the role of prayer in agencies during times of crisis such as the September 11 shock, to start meetings, or for the well-being of clients. Books such as *Soul Work*<sup>68</sup> and *Spiritual Resources in Family* do a fine job of summarizing many clear initiatives that include spirituality in family service work.

However, I also see a mixed response based, I think, upon long-standing prejudices that a spiritual perspective lacks the pragmatism to address “bottom line” issues of money and results. There are the usual issues of “imposing values” as well as the negative experiences many therapists and clients have had at the hands of organized religion that make the exploration of the spiritual perspective such a complex and deeply-felt issue.

**Would historical persecution in the name of religion be a factor here?**

Certainly. We still live in the shadow of the Holocaust, of Lebanon, the embattled break-up of Yugoslavia, of Rwanda, and Afghanistan. How

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<sup>68</sup> All books referred to are listed in the bibliography.

many people have knowledge of persecution of religion in their family experience? Aboriginal Canadians, the Irish, Muslims, Hindus, Ukrainians, and more have known discrimination, ridicule for their beliefs, exclusion from employment, from housing, and so forth. The more subtle exclusion of religion, sometimes in the name of “political correctness,” is also an influence. We see this in schools where “Suzy Snowflake” and “Frosty the Snowman” have replaced the mythic images of the Christian Christmas story in order to not offend.

I have always thought that, instead of being afraid of one another’s spiritual traditions, we might consider the possibility that each tradition of myth and ritual shares a rich truth about each culture and about what is ultimately true. As we gain confidence to learn from each other, we can take on the rich enterprise of growth through integration—“the inclusion of those factors which enable us to gain awareness of a thing in its totality.”<sup>69</sup> Why not have a winter season concert that includes the spiritual stories instead of excluding them? In doing this, I think we support the business of creating a split between publicly acceptable truth and that to be hidden or dismissed. We are also missing a wonderful opportunity to support education to be a process of learning and sharing from each child’s own story. Our schools must encourage children to explore who they are and how their life matters in addition to mathematics, science, and history.

Bewilderment about the fact that there is anything at all, and the curiosity about meeting that fact is a wonder, is the best part of man.<sup>70</sup>

### **Where does the initiative for exploring spirituality in family service work come from?**

Family service is not the place where the role of spirituality is being explored most vigorously. When I compare my experience of attending many different conferences and learning groups around the country and around the world that are exploring this issue, it is my impression that family service workers tend to be rather conservative and dogmatic in

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<sup>69</sup> Jean Gebser from his foreword to P. J. Saher, *Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought: The Psycho-Cybernetics of Comparative Ideas in Religion and Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969), p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Goethe quoted in Sam Keen, *Hymns to an Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), p. 20.

their own way. Institutional religion is not the leader either. Instead, it is in the margins of convention—small discussion groups, support groups, the so-called “new age” groups, the less convention-bound writers and thinkers that are spurring this process forward. Possibly because of the technical sophistication of communications these days, the word is getting out, the questions are being written about on web sites, and discussed in an infinite array of workshops dealing with spiritual themes.

**You’re suggesting that the family service arena is not raising the issues but is responding to creative questions from the margins of organizational and institutional thinking.**

Yes. I might add here that there are plenty of exceptions to the rule—such as university programs that are addressing matters of spirituality and churches that include much creative inquiry. On one level this relates to the practical necessity to deal with the thinking and perspectives that our clients connecting to. Many want and even expect that their counsellors be able and willing to address the spiritual dimension of their struggles.

**You’re referring to a trend of interest in matters of spirituality among the general public.**

You bet. I think we need to begin by looking around us and looking at the remarkable popularity of the topic. Let me share with you a few word images that show what I mean:

Today, with the historical Jesus a regular on the covers of the national news weeklies and jargon ridden academic books on the subject making bestseller lists an enterprise that began with closed door timidity has become part of popular culture.<sup>71</sup>

Something is happening today in America that is worthy of the sharpest reporting and analysis we can bring to it.<sup>72</sup>

Telus ad: “we are your source”

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<sup>71</sup> Russel Shorto, *Gospel Truth: The New Image of Jesus Emerging from Science and History and Why it Matters* New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), p. 12

<sup>72</sup> Bill Moyers, 1994 Speech to Religion News Writers Association, quoted from Sam Keen, *Hymns to an Unknown God*, p. 18.

Any journalist worth his salt knows that the real story today is to define what it means to be spiritual. This is the biggest story—not only of the decade but of the century.<sup>73</sup>

The great malady of the 20th century implicated in all our troubles and affecting us individually and socially is “loss of soul.” When soul is neglected, it doesn’t just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and the loss of meaning.<sup>74</sup>

To be human means to be spiritual. Human beings have longings and aspirations that can be honored only when the person’s spiritual capacity is taken seriously.”  
- Carolyn Gratten<sup>75</sup>

Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we, with our modest powers, must feel humble.  
- Albert Einstein<sup>76</sup>

A recent discussion with a manager at a local major bookseller confirmed my impression that the surge of interest in things spiritual over the past 10 years has been dramatic. We are living in a time when spirituality crops up everywhere. In the entertainment scene, movies playing out the dramas of apocalyptic events, exorcisms, life after death, angels, and demons are common fare. Scott Peck’s *The Road Less Travelled*, James Redfield’s series based on the *Celestine Prophecy*, and Gary Zukav’s *The Seat of the Soul* are three major titles that have enjoyed amazing sales. I could cite many more. Peck’s book set a record for its time on the bestseller lists.

Go to the bookstore and see the host of books, good and bad, proclaiming every dimension of spiritual interest possible. Some write from conventional Christian tracks; many are not. Flip through the so-called new age journals such as *Synchronicity* and witness a catalogue of spiritual therapies drawing from ancient mystery schools; alchemy;

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<sup>73</sup> Bill Moyers quoted from Sam Keen in *Hymns to an Unknown God*, p. 22.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Carolyn Gratten *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> H. Dukas and B. Hoffman, eds., *A. Einstein, The Human Side* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 49.

holistic spiritual practices including body work, yogic practice, and channeling; psychic readings; feng shui; celestial music; soul retrieval; and many more. Moving past the wide range of spiritual topics on daytime talk shows are serial drama and comedy shows based on witches, angels, after life, and so on. Hear about the work of Dr. Larry Dossey reporting the positive effects of prayer on healing that has prompted hundreds of studies sponsored by major, traditionally conservative medical bodies including Harvard Medical School.<sup>77</sup> Notice the inclusion of “Spiritual or Religious Problem” being introduced by the DSM-IV. Take note of the rise of the fundamentalist right, the decline of mainstream religion, and the widespread interest in “new age” spirituality.

Pick up with Dr. Reg Bibby, a respected sociologist of religion in Canada from the University of Lethbridge. He reports that 86 per cent of all Canadians surveyed report that they believe in God, that 74 per cent believe in miracle cures, that 61 per cent believe in angels and, surprisingly, 25 per cent believe in reincarnation.<sup>78</sup>

### **Okay, so what can we take from this?**

Well, first off, spirituality is becoming more approachable for many. Winifred Gallagher, in her descriptive study of spirituality in the West, reports that only a few years ago, a comment about spirituality at a dinner party would lead to uncomfortable silence and now it leads to a lively conversation.<sup>79</sup> We are more at ease with the topic.

I am surprised at the ease and interest that people have had in my work. When I was at a furniture store buying a mattress and the young fellow behind the desk asked me about my research, he shared a story of a friend’s spiritual struggle. In India, I visited the ashram of Sai Baba where between 10,000 to 50,000 people stay at any given time—at least half of them westerners from Europe and North America. People want to know how to make sense of the rapidly changing world that we live in.

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<sup>77</sup> In a recent interview with Deepak Chopra, Larry Dossey says that more than 350 studies document research into the relationship between prayer, spiritual practice, and healing. This interview can be found at <http://www.howtoknowgod.com/>.

<sup>78</sup> Reg Bibby, *Restless Gods*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 2002), p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Winifred Gallagher, *Working on God*, p. 42.

The events of September 11 highlight the importance of a spiritual perspective for responding and coming to terms with tragedy. Public prayer, people gathering in churches around the world in great, silent, and heart-felt numbers gave testimony to the fact that we are a global community feeling and responding to experience beyond words. In Calgary thousands gathered in prayer for the victims of September 11. I was impressed by the wide-ranging inclusion of representatives from many different religions from around the world.

**People are being flooded with change, uncertainty, and fear. This sounds like negative grounds for spiritual interest.**

Although it sounds like doom and gloom, the trend in the literature suggests that our culture is reaching a threshold of change. Marianne Williams, a popular writer and speaker on matters of spirituality, says, “There is a spiritual renaissance sweeping the world. Most people feel it, some deride it, many embrace it, and no one can stop it.”<sup>80</sup>

Just like individual people, the human race has reached a point where its traditional beliefs are becoming less useful. Symptoms of distress are showing. We live in a time of widespread anxiety, ecological crisis, and great uncertainty. Developmental theories say that any time we are pressed to change; there are usually signs of stress. Stress is the transition from an old way of being into a new way of being. The most stressful time is when we are neither old nor have we become new. In the big picture, the question is, what is the new stage we are headed towards?

Joseph Jaworski, son of the Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski, suggests that the exploding of the atomic bomb ushered us into a new age and a new vision of reality and power.<sup>81</sup> Einstein’s theory of relativity, which envisioned the immense power of the atom, has taught us that matter is energy. In fact, we are energy—the common perception that we are solid matter must be re-cast to understand that we are flowing energy. Deepak Chopra suggests that we must surrender the old notion of ourselves as fixed, solid entities and see

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<sup>80</sup> Marianne Williamson, *Illuminata: A Return to Prayer* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler Pub., 1998), p. 65.



ourselves more as flowing rivers of energy. Such a dramatic re-visioning of who we are or what we are is the stuff of spirituality.

**So you're saying that the shifting image we have of ourselves offered by science is part of the stimulus to greater interest in spirituality.**

Yes. A more recent example of this is the rapid crumbling of the Iron Curtain symbolized in the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Suddenly the familiar division of the world into communism and capitalism—the two sides of the cold war—disappeared. Few people would have predicted such a rapid change in the world order.

**So it's not just the rapidness of the change that is unsettling but also the crumbling of familiar walls that have helped to define the world we live in.**

Consider the globalization of our economies and our cultures. Can anyone honestly say that his or her life and work haven't been seriously changed by the shrinking globe? Who cannot recognize the greater cultural diversity of our cultures or how events in distant places have immediate impact on how we are living? September 11 has made this point explicit, but there are many more subtle examples that show that we are living in a different world than the one occupied by our parents.

How about the ways that the boundaries between government and private industry have been blurred by the deregulation of services ranging from telephones and electricity to schools and prison systems? In a similar way, many of our so-called social institutions such as marriage, work, and parenthood have become deregulated. There is a dizzying array of choices available about how we will live and an increasing instability about the durability of any of these choices. The high rates of relationship breakdown are testimony to that.

**The well-ordered universe is becoming a rapid flow of change.**

Yes. Because of our communications technologies, we are now no more than two conversations away from any other person in the planet. This was driven home for me on a recent trip to Asia. In the smallest villages of India where I may have been the only Caucasian at the time, I observed cell phones and satellite dishes and Internet access. At a

Buddhist monastery, I observed with amazement and not a little disappointment, a large group of young monks gathered around a television parked directly in front of their temple, watching a violent and low grade action movie involving car chases and gun fights. The attention was as rapt as any meditative state although the consciousness was drawn down rather than up.<sup>82</sup>

For good or for bad, we inhabit Marshal MacLuhan's global village. While some might say that this is simply an argument to return to traditional answers or the "good old days," my sense is that this a sign of human culture on the edge of a new order of meaning or a new consciousness. This has great meaning for the trend towards greater spiritual interest.

### **What exactly are the trends in spirituality?**

Well, an obvious trend is for the greater sharing and intermingling of information about different spiritual traditions—acknowledgements of Ramadan; participation of westerners in Buddhist and Hindu meditation and ritual; the inclusion of non-natives in sweat lodges, vision quests, and sun dances; and so forth. Westerners are becoming Buddhist monks and initiates into native shamanic practice. In my visits to Buddhist temples, Hindu Ashrams, and pujas (sacred rituals of Hinduism) in Canada, the United States, and India, I was struck by the large number of Westerners involved. This is particularly true of Buddhism, which has gained great popularity in some parts of the West. At a place called Spirit Rock located near San Francisco, I participated in a meditation and talk on a Monday night that involved more than 300 people. Ninety per cent were Caucasian—many appearing to be very involved and seasoned participants of this particular form of Buddhist practice.

A second trend is the availability of vast amounts of information to many people. The remarkable information technologies and multicultural sensitivity that has risen up in recent times creates increasing familiarity with spiritual traditions from different parts of the world and different times of history. Through the Internet and rapid, relatively inexpensive travel, workshops and practices of esoteric

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<sup>82</sup> In order to avoid false impression, this was a celebration time of year when the usual rigor of the day was suspended.

traditions allow people pursue questions of meaning along any number of wisdom traditions.

A third trend is an extension of the individualism of modern culture. People are clearly valuing their own internal experience over arbitrary authority. They also are free to pursue their own version of spirituality more than ever before. Interest has risen in many so-called New Age spiritual practices, or practices reputedly derived from ancient spiritual traditions. Interest may start with the search for alternative healing methods for physical or psychological stress<sup>83</sup> and extend into spiritual practice. The Twelve Step programs are a good example. Others would include use of sweat lodges, meditation, practices of yoga, and the use of the Enneagram.

### **What sort of numbers are we talking about?**

Numbers are difficult to define. Some would suggest as low as 2 per cent of the population is formally engaged in alternative spiritual practices. Others would suggest that the numbers are much larger, especially if one considers those who have engaged in alternative spiritualities without seeing themselves as having left the tradition in which they were raised. Paul H. Ray and Sherry Anderson report that a group they call the cultural creatives are exploring new horizons of belief, including spirituality, and constitute about 25 per cent of the American population.<sup>84</sup>

### **So these are some of the trends. What's happening as a result?**

From what I have observed, there is huge upheaval in the way we see the world. We are caught between the massive anxieties about global warming, pollution, and rapidly changing economic prospects. We are caught, it seems, between a hopeful vision of increased possibilities and serious anxiety that we are, as a world, on the edge of disaster. Times of great uncertainty tend to be a seedbed for spiritual questions.

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<sup>83</sup> According to the 1997 consumer book, *Five Steps to Selecting the Best Alternative Medicine: A Guide to Complementary And Integrative Health Care*, by Mary and Michael Morton, Americans in 1991 made more visits to alternative health providers (425 million) than to conventional doctors (388 million). Taken from Ann Simpkinson and Charles Simpkinson, *Soul Work*, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Paul H. Ray and Sherry R. Anderson, *Cultural Creatives*, p. 49.

## **The average person must be a little overwhelmed and confused by these trends.**

In the midst of all of this, the struggle for meaning is on the rise. For a long time, perhaps 300 years, we trusted science and technology for answers to our most pressing concerns for security. During this time, Reg Bibby reports that, “Questions about the meaning of life and the significance of death were regarded as of no or only remote interest.”<sup>85</sup> However, technology has not delivered on its promise of more and more security, more and more control. Salvation through technology has lost its shine. We are forced to look beyond control through technology to address the long held questions about life’s meaning and ultimate purpose.

## **Is the search for meaning putting people back in the churches?**

Certainly not in Canada. If we take the low percentage of regular church participation as an indicator, the churches of the West are seen as a limited resource. While fundamentalist churches show some gains, regular attendance at churches and synagogues has been progressing downwards for some time. To quote Reg Bibby:

Something is wrong. Canadians are asking religious questions at a time when the nation’s churches have never been emptier.<sup>86</sup>

Joseph Campbell shares a similar observation when he writes that: “The world is reeling under the loss of the myths that have been rationalized out of existence. We await the new myths that can add meaning to the patterns and the striving of our lives. Only now, any new myth will have to be global—the old bounded notions of local belief can no longer work. We are challenged to discover this myth.”<sup>87</sup>

## **So here we have it. We live in a fast-moving world where familiar ways are disappearing. We face big problems and the institutions of technology and religion are losing credibility. What does this mean for spirituality today?**

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<sup>85</sup> Reginald Bibby, *The Bibbey Report: Social Trends Canadian Style* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 131.

In my estimate, it means some remarkable trends. We find ourselves at a crossroads but have the greatest access to information, have the greatest communications technology, and face the most pressing issues of our entire history. This creates very powerful possibilities. Let's look at four major trends that I have observed in contemporary spiritual discussions. This can help to summarize what has been said to this point.

**1. We are moving away from institutional regulation.** With our exposure to the multi-faceted spiritual traditions, many people are seeing spirituality as something outside of the agendas and dogmas that have traditionally defined spirituality. How this applies to spirituality is that most of the influential trends regarding spirituality are occurring outside of institutions. This is important when we realize that, with only 15 per cent of Canadians attending church regularly (and, according to the Bibby Report, declining by 1 per cent per year), the exchange of information among people, the exploration of new ideas, and visible trends are mostly occurring outside of the regulating voice of Churches. Even before the advent of the Internet, Marilyn Ferguson reported persuasively about the trend towards the informal interconnections of small groups or networks that represented for her a shift in the way ideas were shared. It also showed that institutions no longer call the shots about social policy, and government policy that might once have set the pace now follows in the wake of rapidly shifting public sentiments. Empowered by the individualism of recent decades, people are freer to ask their own questions and "create their own spiritual practice." I heard one person call this smorgasbord spirituality.

**2. Spirituality is a search for relatedness and meaning.** Spirituality is moving away from a focus on a particular body of belief to more of a worldview that draws from diverse sources. J.B. Priestly said in 1960, "Only religion can carry the load of the future, not the religion of churches but the spiritual dimension that transcends custom and politics."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, p. 54.

**3. Spirituality is an integration of many perspectives.** The dominant belief of the past three centuries has been that all things can eventually be explained by reason and science. Just as in counselling field where we find more than 350 different schools of thought, the world of science has become so specialized that different specializations cannot talk to one another. People have come to know a little piece of the pie very well but little about the rest of the pie. We have become a Tower of Babel. We have become fragmented within our culture, suspicious of those seeing the world through a different specialized lens.

Marilyn Ferguson says it best: “The great shuddering, irrevocable shift overtaking us now is not a new political, religious, or philosophical system. It is a new mind—the ascendance of a startling worldview that gathers into its framework, break-through science and insights of earliest recorded thought.”<sup>89</sup>

The trend is away from fragmentation to integration. We are challenged to find the vision that brings our experience into a pattern of meaning.

**4. The “Berlin Wall” separating spiritual traditions from business, science, and from everyday wonderings is crumbling.** Now we see spirituality figuring into the transformative vision for business, emerging as a cutting edge of anthropology, and bringing together mathematicians, physicists, and poets. We see biologists such as Rupert Sheldrake talking about soul, and physicists such as Frijof Capra bringing quantum mechanics and eastern mysticism into the same room. Contemporary theologians are bringing mystical traditions of every great and esoteric religion onto the same page. Ancient texts from the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the *Vedas* (ancient Hinduism) are gaining fresh presentations in business conferences.

**Okay. So what about the whole business of soul, guardian angels, and things like that? I’ve notice that you have steered away from using some of these words.**

Yes, that’s true. I guess I harbour some reservations about using these words with an audience of whom I am unsure. Words like “guardian angel” and “soul” have taken on a more refined and credible meaning for me as a result of the exploring I’ve done. I am also aware that such

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

words have been used flippantly and without any rigorous definition. One of the great criticisms against the broad range of beliefs and practices called “New Age” is the tendency to use words from spiritual traditions in careless and idiosyncratic ways. Having said that, let me share a little from the work of James Hillman whose bold and irreverent scholarship has put these words back into the vocabulary of counselling and psychotherapy.

Hillman began his book, *The Soul’s Code*, with a description of the Myth of Ur drawn from the latter chapters of Plato’s *Republic*. In this myth, souls before birth actually choose their destiny. The memory of this choice is then sealed off so that the individual has none of this information about the destiny s/he has chosen. Hillman argues that the issues of destiny are the character of the soul being expressed in the way choices are made. Our idiosyncrasies are not to be eliminated by the perfectionist agendas of psychology but valued as expressions of our unique soul destiny. All that we are is a manifestation of the “acorn of our souls” growing into the oak of our lives. We are challenged to work with these manifestations rather than trying to manipulate and control our lives (as though we could).

Such a bold statement of belief from a world-renowned writer and psychologist was quite an eye-opener for me. At first I thought he was talking “tongue in cheek.” How could anyone say such outrageous things in a text on psychology? My research has since explored the context of spiritual and philosophical traditions that speak quite earnestly about “soul,” “spirit,” and “guardian spirits.” I call this the “hypothesis of soul/spirit.”

On a personal level, I have thought back to the teachings about guardian angels, soul, and so forth that I got as a child and have dismissed as fairy tale material not suited to adult intelligence. It is only when I have explored some of my assumptions about soul, spirit, or guardian angel as fairy tale material that I actually noticed the remarkable range of thinking from wise people through the ages who cast these notions into what I would call a “viable hypothesis.”

Another thinker who turned my head on this matter was Gary Zukav. Many readers may be familiar with his work that explored the revolution of quantum physics and its relation to Eastern mysticism. His next book, *The Seat of the Soul*, brought forth a dramatic vision about the world beyond the five senses that would have saw him branded as a frivolous thinker in many scientific circles. There were

neither footnotes nor bibliography. Yet, the book made some sort of intuitive sense to me that stopped me from dismissing it. I subsequently learned some of the dramatic personal experiences of this popular and well-informed scientific thinker that lead to his dramatic shift in vision and his courage to share it.<sup>90</sup> Apparently it made sense to quite a few people. The man is on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” regularly. The book has enjoyed bestseller status for a good stretch of time.

Reading this brought me into contact with an amazing field of spiritual visioning that stretches over a long time—Greeks like Plato, Pythagoras, and Plotinus; the mystics like Meister Eckhart and Hildegard of Bingen; the alchemists; early spiritual psychologists like Carl Jung, William James and Roberto Assagioli; the American transcendentalist movement of the late 19th century led by Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson; the transpersonal psychology movements of Maslow; the human potential movement led by Michael Murphy; the consciousness research of Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, Richard Tarnas, and Russel Targ; the quantum philosophers of Werner Heisenberg, Louis Debroglie, Niels Bohr, and Fritjof Capra; and the integrationist thinkers like Ken Wilber and Tony Schwartz. The list goes on to include thinkers from India such as Sri Ramakrishna, Eknath Eswaren, Parmahansa Yogananda, Deepak Chopra, and Sri Aurobindo. Many of these writers have books listed in the bibliography.

The point in throwing down all these names is not to overwhelm but to suggest there is a vast amount of serious exploration of the soul/spirit hypothesis. This has bolstered my confidence to carry this forward to a fuller, richer appreciation of the horizons the soul/spirit hypothesis applied to family service work.

### **I notice there is only one woman’s name in that list.**

I noticed that, too. When I think carefully of the women whose writing and teaching have had an impact on my research, I realize there are many. Today there are some very impressive women doing serious research on spiritual matters. Marilyn Ferguson, Riane Eisler, Marianne Williams, Jean Houston, Mary Daly, Madonna Kholbensschlag, Helen Palmer, Margaret Wheatly, Winifred Gallagher,

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<sup>90</sup> Gary Zukav, *Authentic Power* (New Dimensions Radio Archives, 1990), audiotape.



Veronica Goodchild, and Carolyn Myss are some that have come to my attention. Again, some of their books are in the bibliography. I must add that I have found more men in the literature who helped me in my research, but more women in my travels who have shared their journeys and their remarkable integration of a spiritual perspective into their work as professionals.

### **Do you see some difference between men and women in their approaches to spirituality?**

Yes. Not on the level of quality, but in terms of quantity. There are simply more women doing this work.

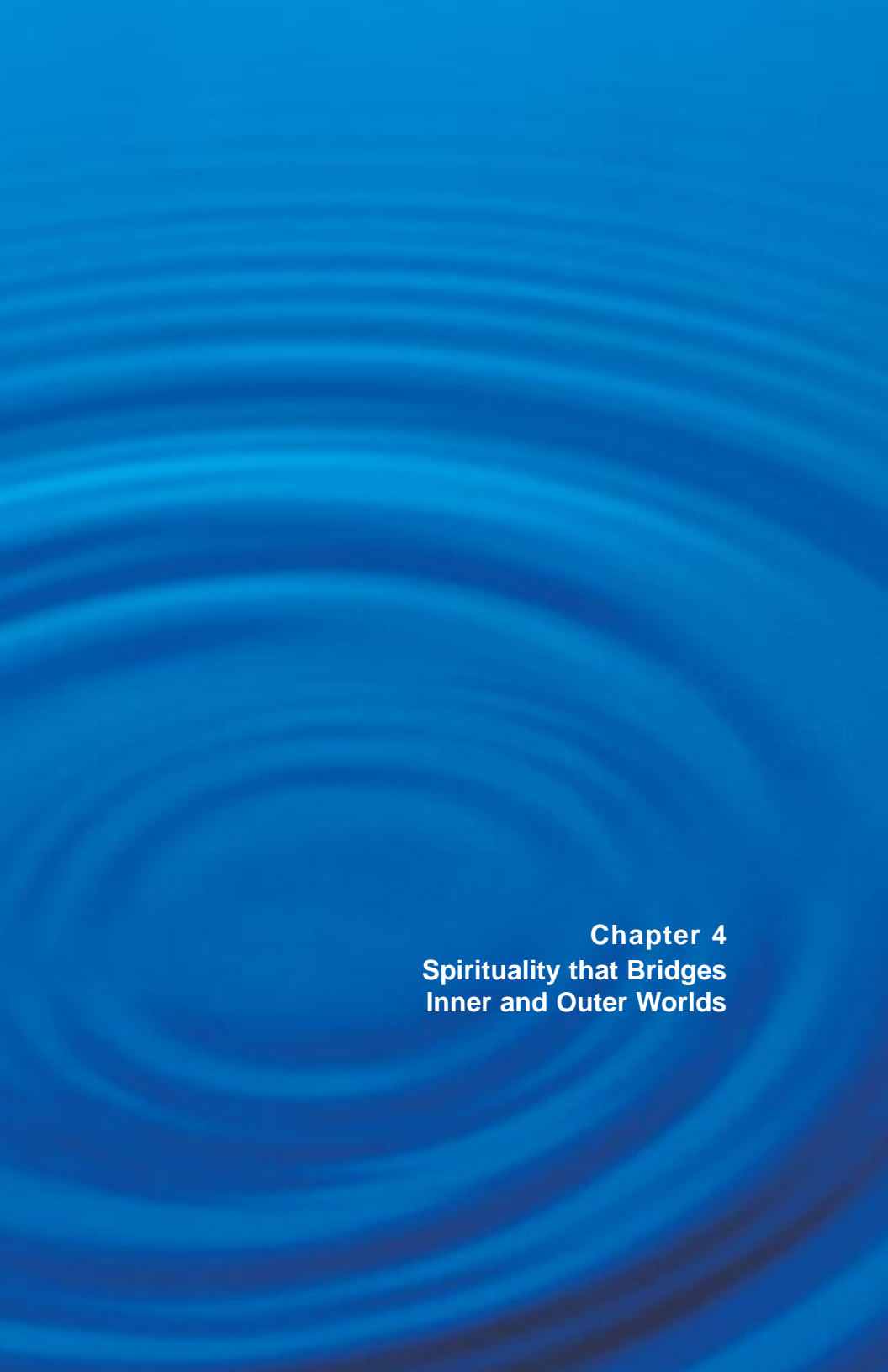
### **Why do you think this is so?**

I'm not sure. My sense is that women are more familiar with the viability of inner experience—possibly because of the experience of or potential to give birth, socialization, or the power of the feminist vision to affirm women's experience in a day when the masculine perspective is being questioned. My guess is it's a little of everything. In general, through my work with men and men's issues, I would suggest that the inward journey of spirituality is embracing the feminine principle talked about by Jung and others. For men, this means a larger step. I think that men have more to learn to enter the spiritual arena in larger numbers. I might add that this is purely my impression. In any case, I do believe that women and men tend to approach matters of spirituality in different ways—particularly through body and relational attention. Ironically, it seems that men may be more often the leaders in Western church communities but women make up the majority of attendees.

In my experience, though, I have been deeply moved by the many men and women whom I have learned from in this year. I think that my own learning away from head and into heart has disposed me to appreciate the heart wisdom that I have seen in many of my female fellow searchers.

## **So where did all this take you?**

It opened the door to reading the mystics of a number of different traditions, travelling to India, and attending conferences with a number of the most highly acclaimed explorers of consciousness. This put me in touch with many very impressive people who have been exploring these issues for years. I have spoken with poets, noted spiritual writers, scientists, artists, alternative healers, monks, and people travelling the world on their own healing journeys to deal with life-threatening disease, addictions, and other life-altering events. It is difficult to express the impact of such meetings. Probably the most powerful dimension of these encounters was the authentic dialogue that regularly emerged. In this sharing, we moved from the ideas we were exploring to the experiences of spirituality that were at the heart of these ideas. In these dialogues, we enjoyed the freedom to share our most influential experiences and where these ideas were leading us. This, to me, was a type of spiritual experience in itself.

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**Chapter 4**  
**Spirituality that Bridges**  
**Inner and Outer Worlds**

# Spirituality that Bridges Inner and Outer Worlds

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The time will come  
When, with elation,  
You will greet yourself arriving  
At your own door, in your own mirror,  
And each will smile at the other's welcome,  
and say, sit here. Eat.  
You will love again the stranger who was your self.  
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart

To itself, to the stranger who has loved you  
All your life, whom you ignored  
For another, who knows you by heart.  
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,  
The photographs, the desperate notes,  
Pell your own image from the mirror.  
Sit. Feast on your life.<sup>91</sup>

There are at least two kinds of games. Finite to win; infinite to continue the play. Finite play with in boundaries, infinite players play without boundaries. Surprise causes finite play to end. It is the reason for Infinite play to continue.  
To be prepared against surprise is to be trained.  
To be prepared for surprise is to be educated.  
The finite play is serious.  
The infinite play is joyous.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Derek Walcott, "Love After Love," quoted from Ann Simpkinson and Charles Simpkinson: *Soul Work: A Field Guide for Spiritual Seekers*, p. 19.

<sup>92</sup> James P. Cars, *Finite and Infinite Games*, quoted from Robert Fulghum, *Words I Wish I Wrote* (audiotape).

Eternal life means that man may live again, here and now, out of his ground, and that releasement may accomplish itself, so that God, man, and the world play their identity. In the beatitude promised for today, this interplay swallows up every difference or otherness. This blessed identity is already in me, not in germ, but in totality, exactly in the same way as God is in me: not according to his effigy, but in totality.<sup>93</sup>

I used to feel sorry for myself  
while being carried by the Wind  
through the clouds.  
-From the Chippewa Tradition<sup>94</sup>

Our relatedness to Mystery generates a quest for meaning which functions in an ultimate way.... It is at the limits of human powers that the quest for meaning becomes most acute. When we cannot explain the events which engulf us, when we cannot endure the suffering which overwhelms us, when we cannot beat the evil which defeats us, we do not become submissive but highly imaginative. We formulate symbols which account for and even celebrate the darkness and ambiguity.... The instinct to meaning will not be denied.<sup>95</sup>

Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we, with our modest powers, must feel humble.  
- Albert Einstein<sup>96</sup>

## **So far you've talked more about the politics of spirituality versus religion. Let's talk about the sources of spirituality.**

Spirituality is an inner path. It seeks to discover what is true from the deeply personal and its relationship to that which is beyond. It seeks to

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<sup>93</sup> Matthew Fox. *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, (not in bibliography), p. 335.

<sup>94</sup> Chippewa saying quoted from Anne Simpkinson and Charles Simpkinson, *Soul Work*, p. 149.

<sup>95</sup> John Shea, *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography*, quoted from Janice Brewi and Anne Brennan, *Mid-Life: Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 27.

<sup>96</sup> H. Dukas and B. Hoffman. *A. Einstein, The Human Side*, quoted from Jean Hardy, *A Psychology with a Soul: Psychosynthesis in Evolutionary Context*. p. 86.

validate the role of intuition, exceptional experience, and “inner knowing.” The rising interest in spirituality in the professional realm is a departure from the focus on the external and the material that has been the “clockwork universe” coming to us from modern science dating back to the work of Newton, Kepler, Descartes, and others in the 17th and 18th centuries.

From the spiritual perspective, family service workers serve their clients best when they work from their most authentic awareness of themselves and their relatedness to what is universally true. In many traditions such as the Ayurvedic system of chakras, the heart is the joining place that links the outer and inner experience. Spirituality is, in this light, a kind of “technology of the heart.” The healthy balance between openness to outer experience and inner awareness is the focus of the spiritual dimension of family service work. This is tough work that involves disciplined attention and willingness to confront our limitations and fears when dealing with the lessons of life.

I cannot begin to say how that has been true for me in this time of research. I do know that, in spite of the rich body of information and clever thoughts that I have compiled in my notes, I am humbled to realize that there is much that cannot be known except in facing the challenge to live authentically. This is a tough, narrow path guided by intuitions we cannot see and the wisdom of those who have gone before us. We can only begin by taking up the questions as they present themselves in our lives. In this way, we are able to authentically challenge our clients to pick up the questions that confront them in their times of need.

### **Where does the urge for come from for a spiritual side to family service work?**

This is a good question because it takes us to the heart of the matter. I think that spirituality is an expression of profound awe and wonder.<sup>97</sup> It is not about ideas but about experience. The most profoundly moving experiences of our lives have the power to arouse a sense of connection to something that extends beyond us. In our ordinary lives, when things are going relatively smoothly, it is easier to see life in terms of the demanding agendas of ordinary life: work, traffic, money, what’s on

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<sup>97</sup> Rabbi Heschel cited in a lecture by Matthew Fox, October, 2001.

TV tonight, and plans for the future. In these times, it is easy for questions about life beyond these horizons to be abstract and limited in significance—“life is what it is.”

However, any crisis can awaken deep questions about what is true and what really matters. Think of September 11, 2001. For many, many people, the world was transformed in a few short hours into a place of great uncertainty. People ran home to hug their children or gathered in churches and civic squares to pray. We heard the Russian President say “this just didn’t happen to you, it happened to all of us.” The urge for belonging and meaning became powerful. As the old saying goes, “there are no atheists in the fox holes.”

### **Does spiritual wonder only come from painful or distressing events?**

No, I don’t think so. The positive disruptions of love, the birth of a baby, or a beautiful sunset can also awaken a sense of being a part of something grand. However, most spiritual writers agree that pain is the great teacher of matters spiritual. This is what makes family service work such a spiritual enterprise. When people come to us in distress, they have been awakened, through distress over loss or fear, to the questions of meaning and connection. It does not always mean that the individual will take up this as a call to greater awareness and connection. For many, the agenda is relief of pain rather than a call.

### **This is where a counsellor can offer support to see the larger question.**

Yes. In this sense, the spiritual horizon is a means of supporting the client to become aware of pain as a call to awareness. We can support the client to see the pain or fear in a context of meaning. Often pain merely evokes fear, a sense of failure, futility, vulnerability, and powerlessness. In a world that values power as control, any disruption in our lives becomes a failure or pathology. However, if the therapist or family service worker is willing to support the client to look past all the labels and judgements that the client and others (including professionals) may hold about themselves in this difficult time, then the door to new ways of growth and self-awareness are possible. They are empowered to ask, “What can I learn from this experience?” or “How can I live differently?” This question is very different from one that settles for, “How can I get rid of this pain?”

Just so this does not sound too “head-focused,” let me add that the most powerful message that our clients get from good family service work is the experience of compassion—the sense of feeling cared for. As I will discuss later, the acts and attitude of compassion are central to the spiritual dimension of our work.

**“What can I learn from this experience?” is a question that sees the event as meaning rather than affliction.**

Yes. Now analytical therapies do this all the time—what is behind the behaviour or the thought. In this sense, we see meaning in terms of the individual’s particular experience. The spiritual perspective casts our struggles in the context of ultimate purpose rather than simply serving the individual’s particular psychological needs. In spite of the pain, it is possible to discover an opportunity for growth. This then becomes a way of seeing our life as a pattern of meaning.

**A form of radical relatedness—to borrow from your title.**

Yes. In all spiritual traditions there are stories that highlight the sense of connection that one person can feel for others that defies self-interest. Whether we think of the mystery of Jesus’ sacrifice, the labours of Hercules, or the heroic sacrifice of a soldiers for their country, or a mother for her child, there is captured here a sense of purpose that transcends self-interest. Joseph Campbell, in his popular series, “The Power of Myth,” cites the story of a Hawaiian police officer who grabbed the arm of a person just as he attempted to leap to his suicide. The weight of the falling person was dragging the officer over the cliff as well and it was only the arrival of his partner that prevented him from going over the cliff with the jumper. Asked later why he hadn’t let go of the jumper, his response was “If I had let go, I could not have lived with myself.”

**I guess you could say that some of the work done in service to the marginalized folks of society by family service workers and others has this transcendent dimension to it?**

Yes. Whether they chose to see their work in religious terms, I have no doubt that we need the spiritual perspective to make sense of selfless service.



**You're saying that the spiritual angle is holding out a vision of meaning that encourages us to reach past our fears in order to confront the challenge.**

Yes, that's about it. The Twelve Step programs, while not for everyone, have helped countless people to come to terms with life-destroying addictions. They suggest that our first step to healing is admitting powerlessness and opening up to a connection to the help of one's Higher Power. The "Serenity Prayer," attributed to Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr is a centerpiece of this perspective:

God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the Wisdom to know the difference.

In Buddhism, there is a saying: "Why worry? If it can be changed, change it. If it can't, then let it go."

Eckhart Tolle says, "It is useless to fight that which already is. The alternative path is one of surrender to hidden meaning."<sup>98</sup>

**Isn't this the insight of psychology dressed up in spiritual language?**

I agree that this is a common understanding about assisting clients to face that which frightens them. However, spiritual depth is added when we hold the image that we are connecting up to hidden but crucial meaning in the Big Story that contains our lives.

**Doesn't this approach, in spite of the noble vision, ignore the practical realities where people do need relief from pain or a simple alternative way of living to avoid the problem in the future?**

I don't know of a more inadequate spiritual perspective than one that does not incorporate the wisdom of the psychosocial perspective of empowerment to change. Just as the psychosocial perspective typically ignores the perspective of meaning beyond our particular experience, so has the spiritual perspective, at times failed to engage sensibly in respecting the practical demands of suffering. To suggest that a terrible

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<sup>98</sup> Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*, (Vancouver: Namaste Publishing, 1997) p. 35.

affliction is “God’s will” or that a loved one “has gone to a better place” deeply insults the human experience of pain and loss. This is why there is such a widespread interest in the insights of psychology in theology programs, spiritual direction, and pastoral care.

Jack Kornfield, a leader in the Buddhist Vipassana movement in the United States, has written very powerfully about the pitfalls of accomplished spiritual leaders who lack awareness of the psychological dimension of their experience. He cites examples of spiritual leaders from the East who have fallen prey to addictions, sexual acting out, and so forth because they failed to come to terms with their own psychological and relationship issues. Some have used meditation as an escape from facing the practical issues of their lives.<sup>99</sup>

**Would this be part of the difficulties that we see too often leading to disastrous situations for priests, ministers, and other religious leaders?**

Yes. I think that spirituality that ignores the wisdom of the psychosocial perspective has resulted in harmful self-destructive behaviour by leaders who have demonstrated great skill and wisdom in other aspects of their lives. This is a tragedy because it is an avoidable tragedy on psychological and spiritual terms. As well, it reflects a systemic blindness in some churches, both East and West, to the challenges of integrity. I do not think this is any different from the corrupted behaviour of family service leaders which has resulted in behaviour which is at the heart of what they seek to help others avoid. Here I think of directors of child welfare services charged with abusing their children and leaders in the addictions field charged with impaired driving. Credible family service work has to include both psychosocial and spiritual wisdom.

**There seem to be two important points here. One is the importance of integrating a psychosocial perspective into the spiritual. I think some people might assume that service to families is either psychosocial or it is spiritual.**

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<sup>99</sup> For a well-grounded and sensible exploration of spiritual practice used for neurotic avoidance, I recommend Jack Kornfield, “Even the Best Meditators Have Wounds to Heal” found at <http://www.buddhanet.net/psymed1.htm>.

We have to stop thinking that one way of viewing the world excludes the other. When I say that the psychosocial models do not extend far enough, I still believe that there is much wisdom and insight in the psychosocial perspective. The other point worth noting here is that much of what we cast as psychological wisdom is not new. One only has to take a little time to explore the Vedic traditions that explore the integration of body, psyche, and soul found in the Chakra system to see that modern psychology is only a restatement in the vernacular of contemporary science and humanism. This is true of other wisdom literature such as the Torah, the Gospels, Buddhist Sutras, Sufi poetry, and so forth. There are many other examples of rich psychological wisdom coming to us from scholarly inquiry into the past: the writings of the Essene community contemporary to the time of Jesus,<sup>100</sup> the mystical Islamic poetry of Rumi going back 800 years, the insights of the Egyptian mystery schools (see the work of Greg Braden such as *Walking Between the Worlds*), the alchemists of the middle ages (see the work of Carl Jung), or the ancient wisdom found in the mythic systems many different traditions (See Joseph Campbell's work such as *Hero of a Thousand Faces*). Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* written in 1946 provides an excellent perspective on this point. The language of psychology particular to our time is founded upon the essential wisdom recorded thousands of years ago. It has contributed a rich technology and new insights but it does not exist in a spiritual vacuum.

### **So what difference does this make?**

One difference it makes is to suggest that we should be careful about assuming that the spiritual traditions have little relevance to contemporary healing practices. Approaches to healing in medicine are being challenged by the rise of alternative medicine coming from many different spiritual healing traditions that have introduced us to the chakra system, the concept of energy medicine, and the Jewish mysticism of the Cabala which addresses the relationship of the body to the path of spiritual wholeness. Just look in Synchronicity magazine to see the amazing selection of healing options for every problem available. People are taking this seriously. A recent Gallup poll found that there is at least as much money being spent on alternative health

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<sup>100</sup> See the work of Edmond Bordeaux Szekely in a four-volume work, *The Essene Gospel of Peace* (Nelson, B.C.: International Biogenic Society, 1981).

care practices drawing from ancient healing models as are being spent on conventional medical care.<sup>101</sup>

### **What are the disadvantages of this trend towards diverse spirituality?**

The rise of diverse spirituality can create casual and self-serving formulas that may sound good but lack substance and critical self-awareness. Tom Cocheran, a high status rock singer and writer, talks about “fast food religion.”<sup>102</sup> Instead of entrenchment, we see spirituality becoming like a fast food cafeteria in which people can create convenient beliefs. Often they become neurotic spiritual practices based on fear, exclusion of a painful past, or wishful thinking. New spiritual formulas not grounded in the wisdom of a tradition that has been honed and matured through many centuries risk becoming naïve idealism that lacks the authentic disciplines and corrective mechanisms essential to healthy community. People surrendering to naïve idealism are risking serious disappointment at best and, in worse scenarios, exploitation and harm.

Carolyn Myss notes that the popular new age slogan of “you create your own reality” can easily be trivialized to represent some form of wish-fulfilling agendas that are merely an extension of ego. We then hear about variations on a theme of “praying for wealth.” The notion of creating our own realities, according to Myss, follows from living out of a consciousness gained through scrupulous self-awareness and daily practice. The discipline of surrendering personal agendas to greater and greater degrees of openness and self-responsibility is a far different path from attachment to an attractive slogan.

### **Is there not a danger that family service work could get caught up in trendy but flaky ideas and practices?**

This is an important concern. If there is a weakness in the spiritual perspective, it is the tendency to an uncritical or ungrounded response to the intuitive realm. Ken Wilber notes “much of spirituality today is

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<sup>101</sup> Ann Simpkinson and Charles Simpkinson, *Soul Work* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998) p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> From the cover notes of Tom Cocheran: “Songs of the Circling Spirit.”

strong feeling.”<sup>103</sup> Wilber is one of the most comprehensive examiners of the issues of spirituality from a psychological and philosophical perspective. He argues in *A Brief History of Everything* that we have three ways of coming to truth: through subjective experience, through community consensus, and through objective analysis. Spirituality grounded only in one’s personal experience and lacking some validation in the community and some scrutiny of science is shaky. Each area represents a legitimate way of knowing, but it is not complete in itself. If we settle only for truth based solely on communal consensus, we stay locked in the moulds of conformity and culture. If we settle for the rational/analytical methods, much of the inner world, images, intuition, and so forth are ignored. When we can apply all three methods, we have a chance to define a rigorous means of exploring spiritual ideas or any other ideas for that matter.<sup>104</sup> Wishful thinking and wishful feeling may represent a deep longing for more in life, but they cannot stand as the basis for productive spirituality.

### **What about the lack of research to critically examine spirituality objectively?**

First, research is exploring matters of spirituality. Larry Dossey cites 350 research projects that have explored the role of prayer on the healing process.<sup>105</sup> The definition of spirituality that I offered earlier is inclusive enough to see the research into psychic phenomena that has been in existence for the past century beginning with the British Society for Psychic Research in the 1880s. Owing to the controversial nature of their research, they have, according to Ken Wilber, taken extra pains to be rigorous in their research. The work by researchers into consciousness studies: Russell Targ, Charles Tarte, and others, has contributed to our understanding of the “transpersonal psychology” that overlaps on my definition of spiritual. In psychology, the work of William James, Abraham Maslow, and others has opened the frontiers of religious experience and mystical states to scientific scrutiny.

It is also very intriguing to note that the hardest of all sciences—physics—has produced some of the most eloquent philosophers to

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<sup>103</sup> Wilber, Ken. *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists*. (Boston: New Science Library, 1984), p. ix.

<sup>104</sup> Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston: Shambala, 1996), p. 120.

<sup>105</sup> See interview with Deepak Chopra and Larry Dossey at <http://www.howtoknowgod.com/>.

speculate upon the findings of quantum physics and mystical experience. People like David Bohm (protégé of Albert Einstein), Werner Heisenberg (one of the early founders of quantum physics), Frijof Capra, Michael Talbot, and Gary Zukav have explored the data of the new physics in terms that overlap the great schools of mysticism in the East and West.

Extensive demographic research done by Reg Bibby in Canada and the Gallup organization in the States has shown us a very interesting profile about reported beliefs and practice that says some very interesting things about spirituality today.

Spirituality presses for recognition of empirical research based on inner experience. Feminists in the past 40 years at least, have pressed for greater respect for intuitive knowledge. I believe our culture has, in the past 300 years, over-valued rational and logical over intuitive and non-logical. It seems to me that our culture is moving to balance this through a rising interest in things that we feel we know in our hearts to be true even if we cannot prove it.

The dramatic acceptance of counselling and psychology over the past 25 years—moving from a marginal practice to a common practice that people are not nearly so ashamed to seek out—is testimony to how we have moved toward seeing the inner world as just as real as the outer material world. Spirituality simply extends that thinking to include intuition, discernment, and knowing through mystical experience.

**This is certainly a stronger research dimension than I would have thought.**

There is a misunderstanding about this issue of researching spirituality. Contrary to the common opinion that spirituality cannot be researched or at least has not, there is much fascinating work highlighting fascinating findings in these areas of psychic research (exploring psi phenomena such as pre-cognition, psychogenesis, and distant viewing), healing through prayer and spiritual practice, and near death experiences. I recently came upon a research paper from Princeton University testing out the concept of “global consciousness.”

William James, in his classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* categorizes many different case examples of mystical experience.<sup>106</sup> Recent work by an epidemiologist by the name of Jeff Levin has highlighted a rich survey of crucial research into the health effects of religious practice and the power of spiritual practices to heal.<sup>107</sup> In 1985, Levin found more than 200 “peer-reviewed articles reporting the statistical findings on the impact of religious involvement on health and illness.”<sup>108</sup> Some of these findings include work from leading universities such as Michigan, Yale, Duke, Berkeley, Rutgers, and Texas:

- People who regularly attend religious services have lower rates of illness and death than do infrequent or non-attenders.
- For each of the three leading causes of death in the United States—heart disease, cancer, and hypertension—people who report a religious affiliation have lower rates of illness.
- Older adults who participate in private and congregational religious activities have fewer symptoms, less disability, and lower rates of depression, chronic anxiety, and dementia.
- Religious participation is the strongest determination of psychological well-being in African Americans—even more important than health or financial wealth.
- Actively religious people live longer, on average, than the non-religious. This holds true even controlling for the fact that religious folks tend to avoid such behaviors as smoking and drinking that increase the risk of disease and death.<sup>109</sup>

According to a team of British scientists who researched the topic closely, religious and spiritual beliefs “may be at least as important as the more traditional psychological and secular social factors in the illness process.”<sup>110</sup> In an interview with Deepak Chopra, Larry Dossey

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<sup>106</sup> James, William. *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982).

<sup>107</sup> Levin, Jeff. *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2001).

<sup>108</sup> Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

reports that there have been over 300 studies reporting positive findings about the role of spirituality in health.<sup>111</sup> In fact, he reports in another context that, “Future historians of medicine will describe the 20th century as a period in which spirituality, after a long absence, began to return to healing....”<sup>112</sup> Dr. David Larson, National Institute of Health Research president contends that:

While medical professionals have been privately assuming and publicly stating for years that religion is detrimental to mental health, when I actually looked at the available empirical research on the relationship between religion and health, the findings were over-whelmingly positive.<sup>113</sup>

### **So does this mean that we have a basis for proving God?**

The scientific method cannot prove or disprove the hypothesis of God, higher power, spirit, or soul, but many important initiatives research practices involving spiritual matters. We are not nearly as scientific in our work as we would like to claim. Much of what we do is based on judgement, intuition, and caring. These belong as much to the spiritual realm as the scientific. A Buddhist teacher said in a lecture that 90 per cent of what we claim to know to be true is simply faith in someone else’s contention that this is true. We have not investigated the distance to the sun or the structure of the atom. Rather we accept the word of what we view as credible sources. This is not scientific in the sense of the scientific method.

Whether we cite scientists, philosophers, or religious sages, we are participating in an exercise of faith and belief. Given that, what can we do if our goal is to trust our own experience? Once we step outside authoritarian religion that says “do it because that is the law,” we are empowered to use our brains and the empirical method (learning from careful experience) that is the hallmark of empowered learning. I remember a quote beside a statue of Buddha near the Dalai Lama’s Palace in Dharamsala. It said, “Don’t do this because you admire me,

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Deepak Chopra and Larry Dossey at <http://www.howtoknowgod.com/>.

<sup>112</sup> Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. vii.

<sup>113</sup> David Larson: “Have Faith: Religion Can Heal Mental Ills,” *Insight* (March 6, 1995): pp. 18-20.



do it because you've tried it out in it makes sense." This takes a lot of the irritating feel from the spiritual approach and keeps our practice in science and spirituality both open to the scrutiny of experience.

**So you see criteria for credible spirituality. What about where dismissal of a spiritual perspective is merely fear of what we don't understand?**

Sometimes "flaky" is used for something that makes no sense to us from our present perspective. Certainly the goal of family service work is to draw from valid, effective thinking. What I think we need to be concerned with is effective science versus flaky science in the same way that we need to distinguish effective spiritual perspectives from flaky ones. If we accept that there must be some form of scrutiny of spiritual experience or belief or practice, then we must take care to realize that the term "flaky" becomes code for "unacceptable because it doesn't make sense." Not long ago, someone claiming that we would travel to the moon or fly in aircraft that would hold 500 people would have been considered weird or flaky. Now we see this as a given. It is now flaky to think that this is not possible. Leonardo Da Vinci was seen as eccentric in his day, and now we think of him as a genius. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity is absolutely outrageous when you think about it. Matter is the same as energy? Time is not absolute but relative? We still do not fully grasp the meaning of his proposal that the world is nothing like how it appears to human senses. Yet he is the most widely recognized scientist in the world.

This is a challenge to both science and religion to transform their earth-bound and restrictive visions of the possible. Thomas Kuhn's work *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* give an eloquent case for how science has evolved as much under the influence of prejudices, control, and politics as by reasoned discovery.<sup>114</sup> In this same vein, Philip Novak puts a reasonable challenge to religion:

Let us readily admit that not all aspects of these traditions are enduringly wise. Their cosmologies have been overtaken by modern science, and their social blueprints drawn from times

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

long gone need revision in light of changed social circumstances and the continuing quest for justice.<sup>115</sup>

Vital spirituality must integrate the wisdom of science and spiritual tradition. It demands a serious and results-oriented model that extends to the furthest reaches of the spiritual vision—in every direction. The scientific perspective will be as important to spirituality as spirituality will be to science. This vision is based on a model of integration that will result in neither a new religion nor a new science but something that we are only beginning to sense.

We don't yet have the structures set up in our fragmented technological culture to cultivate all that we know is possible. What interests me is identifying and supporting these disciplines that lead to positive transformation. Integral practices engage all parts of one's being—physical, emotional, intellectual, volitional, and spiritual.<sup>116</sup>

Allow me to share one such perspective that, I believe, speaks directly to our experience in these times:

### **A Hopi Elder Speaks**

You have been telling the people that this is the Eleventh Hour, now you  
Must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour.  
There are things to be considered...  
Where are you living?  
What are you doing?  
What are your relationships?  
Are you in right relation?  
Where is your water?  
Know your garden.  
It is time to speak your Truth.  
Create your community.  
Be good to each other.  
And do not look outside of yourself for the leader.

Then he clasped his hands together, smiled, and said, "This could be a good time! There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will

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<sup>115</sup> Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), p xv.

<sup>116</sup> Jean Hardy, *Psychology with Soul*, p. 49.

try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly.

Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above water.

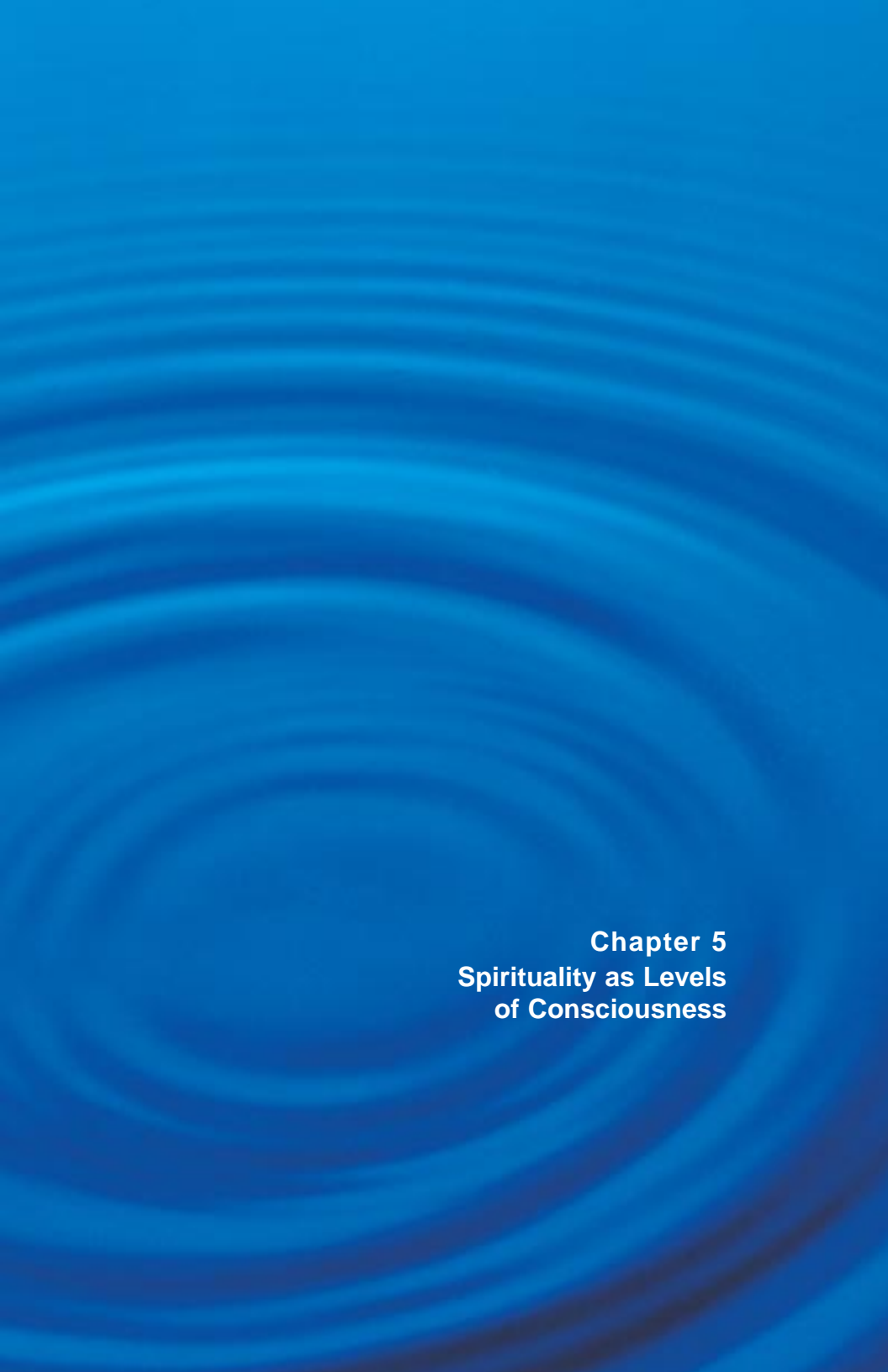
And I say, see who is there with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally. Least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the world “struggle” from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we have been waiting for.

Oraibi, Arizona<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Anonymous Hopi teacher found in *Transform Yourself 2*, an unpublished booklet from The International Institute for Transformation and Tanis Helliwell Corporation, p. 65

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**Chapter 5**  
**Spirituality as Levels**  
**of Consciousness**

# Spirituality as Levels of Consciousness

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**You spoke earlier about the value of spirituality that is not exclusively rooted in one belief system.**

What has been intriguing and challenging to me is that the spiritual perspective is not limited to any particular religious tradition. A truly spiritual view cannot be so attached to its beliefs and formulas that there is no room to hold a respectful and even reverent view of alternative spiritualities. This does not mean that there is no room to challenge flaws and weaknesses in one's own or another system.

**But doesn't that become a little hard to swallow for a devout believer? Can my belief about ultimate reality as revealed by my particular sacred tradition be wrong?**

There is a difference between viewing belief as right or wrong and between true and more true. We have a strong attachment to the notion that if one thing is right, then an alternative possibility must be wrong. In matters of spiritual belief, we would do better to adopt a "both/and" perspective rather than an "either/or" perspective.

**Does that mean that all beliefs are automatically true to some degree?**

Nietzsche, the great German philosopher, once said there are no facts, only interpretations. I think this gets at the false debates about particular words or beliefs. Interpretations can be misleading or wrong in the sense that they contradict a fundamental aspect of authentic inner experience, the wisdom of tradition, or the findings of science. As discussed earlier, all three aspects provide helpful guides for the quality

of truth. It is simply not sensible to suggest the racism of Aryan Nations is as true as more traditional Christian churches. In speaking of the spiritual practice of discernment (the process by which we determine what is ultimately true), the Catholic theologian Richard McBrien suggests that we can never be absolutely certain that our beliefs emerge from authentic awareness. He suggests that there five negative criteria that help us to distinguish between dangerous/misleading and authentic beliefs. I will paraphrase them here:

- If the discernment process does not issue forth in the classic “fruits” of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity, it is not authentic.
- If the beliefs clearly contradict moral- or tradition-based convictions, they are suspect. It is possible that new truth can displace old beliefs, but this must be done with scrutiny.
- If beliefs intensify isolation or spiritual eccentricities rather than enhancing the move to community, then it is suspect.
- If the beliefs ignore important information or reject the counsel of those who have knowledge and experience in the matter, than the beliefs are suspect.
- If the process of discernment formulates its judgments by imposition rather than by collective reflection, it is suspect.<sup>118</sup>

I think that there is a rich perspective on spiritual experience in every tradition. We cannot forget that our interpretation, our practices, and our formulas can still distort the spiritual truths. Thus, healthy spirituality must include, as Ken Wilber says, a healthy self-critical dimension. The great religions all show records of prophets and holy people speaking out against hypocrisy and distortion of belief. Vital spiritual traditions must sustain a healthy balance of perceived truth and challenging questions. Spiritual groups lacking a self-critical practice represent the dangerous dimensions of cult practice.

Robert Anton Wilson, an accomplished social critic and student of psychology and quantum physics, says that if we can include “maybe”

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<sup>118</sup> Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper Books, 1994), pp. 980-981.

in our belief system, we can save a lot of grief in the world. Instead of saying Christianity is the one true religion, we might say “maybe” Christianity is the one true religion, or “maybe” our beliefs contain it all.

**That could have saved a few wars.**

Religion for so long has been a tribal practice that has pitted one group and its particular beliefs against another. There is not room to get into examining history through this lens except to say that we are, at this time, challenged to step outside the tribal mind and begin to engage in a spiritual outlook that extends beyond particular denominations and creeds. As McBrien suggests, spiritual authenticity is enhanced by expanding the circle of discernment. Genuine spiritual practice that does not engage in exclusion and hate to justify its beliefs has the potential to become a unifying force.

When I attended the interfaith prayer service at Calgary’s Olympic Plaza for the victims of September 11, leaders from many different faith traditions shared prayers for condolences and peace. I was truly impressed by the many different ways that authentic spirituality can offer meaning and solace.

**I suppose you could say that the influence of a spiritual perspective is to encourage agencies to use those five points above as a guide to good management practice.**

Yes, you have an important point here. I will discuss this more in the final chapter on spirituality and agency management.

**Is this one of the advantages of being sympathetically familiar with other religious traditions?**

Very much so. My research has deliberately focused on many different traditions and disciplines. My experience of the sacred in Hindu ashrams, Buddhist monasteries, sweat lodges, evangelical churches, and the musings of great poets and quantum physicists has enriched my outlook. I believe that we can learn much about our own beliefs, whether they are consciously spiritual or not, by spending time learning from other traditions. While in India, I felt that I was at the other end of the universe from western living. Each new experience of something strange—say the rules for traffic—taught me something about the

assumptions that I make about the way things are. There are many different ways of being in the world.

Matthew Fox, an Episcopalian priest and theologian, suggests that we are moving into a “post-denominational age” when the tribalism of particular beliefs shaped by particular history and geography is changing. We now see more open dialogue between different Christian denominations; we see the Dalai Lama becoming a highly-respected figure around the world. Through communication technologies and ease of travel, our increasing familiarity with different traditions has the potential to turn our attention away from particular ideas and beliefs. We all have particular ideas and beliefs, but we must pay more attention to where they are pointing.

**Okay. I can see that we can get into a pretty philosophical discussion. I wonder if it is possible to focus on a sensible spiritual outlook that could be useful to how we work with families.**

You are right. We could get bogged down by some of the age-old debates about truth and about how we know what is true. Interestingly, all the talk in family therapy about constructivism and the way we represent our truth has been focused on the way that our gender, our history, or our culture shape the way we see the world. In turn, they shape the choices we make. I don't have the tools to go into philosophy too far.

A sensible spiritual perspective requires that we not get lost in one particular kind of belief or another. Instead, it requires that we pay attention to the way that we see the world. There is a big difference between believing that we live in a world that is “what you see is what is” and a worldview that recognizes that there is more to the way events occur than what we can see. It also makes a difference whether we see events as being random events caused by various forces at work in the world or if we see events as having a pattern of meaning. The spiritual outlook, of course, does infer meaning and reality beyond the five senses. The language and content of the spiritual outlook matters less than the attitude of openness and a consciousness that whatever words and images we use reflect our way of defining this experience for ourselves and others. The more enlightened outlook cautions us to not get too attached to any particular way of ours.



**That sounds nice but we run into disputes all the time about what is true. We see disputes between different schools of therapy, between different religions, and even among different sects of the major religions.**

Yes that's true. However, many of the disputes are disputes between different ways of knowing. We are all familiar with the story of the blind men and the elephant. One man grabs the tail and concludes that it is very like a rope. Another grabs a leg and believes that the elephant is like a tree. Another grabs the ear and so on. Interestingly, Deepak Chopra reports that this story is a parable of the limits of knowing the world through the senses. In the traditions of the East, there is a sixth sense referred to as "mind." Our thinking is seen as but another way of taking in the world. The point of the parable is to recognize the limits of the senses to really "know" what is true.<sup>119</sup>

There is something very compelling about the truth of our own experience. The saying "seeing is believing" makes the strong intuitive point that our senses provide the strongest validation for what is true. Yet, unless we are willing to learn from the experience of others, we stay stuck in the limits of our own experience. Likewise, the wisdom of any particular tradition contains beliefs that have made sense to our ancestors but, when insights from science challenge these beliefs, what do we do?

**So whether you are talking about your own experience, our culture or enshrined truths, each way of knowing has its limits.**

Ken Wilber points out that we have three different ways of defining what is true. We have our own subjective experience; we have the collective opinion; and finally we have the knowledge that comes to us from objective study. How much sense does it make to dismiss one's inner experience because we have not been able to prove it in the laboratory? Or, how much sense does it make to become so attached to an idea that we have traditionally held to be true when there is convincing evidence from science that there is a more viable explanation? Wilber points out that all ways of knowing have their value and that, sensible belief must be open to all three. The task is to reconcile all three sources. When we can apply our best sense of what

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<sup>119</sup> Deepak Chopra, *Quantum Healing*, audiotape (Sound Horizons: Mystic Fire Audio, 1990).

is personally true with what comes to us from the wisdom of our traditions and from science, we have our best chance at sensible spirituality.

**So you are saying that it is not the particular belief but openness to all three sources of knowing that helps create a sensible spiritual perspective.**

Yes. I was asked one time by a newspaper reporter to comment on how we can decide if we should leave our marriage. After all, someone might feel in their heart that the relationship is over but worry that they will be condemned by their church or that they will read a piece of research that shows how children are hurt by divorce. I followed Wilber's idea by suggesting that no one criterion is sufficient. If one took their best sense of their intuitions, what their church had to say about divorce (look carefully, consult a sympathetic priest or minister), talked to people whose judgment they trusted, and read carefully about all aspects of divorce (there is research that points in different directions), then the best decision has a chance to emerge.

**I gather you are also suggesting that we have to be a little cautious about the fixed beliefs that we hold onto.**

This is an example of the difference between religion and spirituality—it is my sense that religion is about belief and spirituality is about experience. When we cultivate a degree of self-awareness that allows us to become less attached to the beliefs that we hold—Robert Anton Wilson's "maybe"—spirituality becomes more about consciousness than about belief.

**And this is where you see spirituality as consciousness rather than belief.**

That's right. In the end, it is not belief that defines the spiritual outlook. It is consciousness that draws upon the wisdom of inner experience, collective experience, and science.

**To value each of these three ways of knowing is important.**

That's right. In a certain way, they keep each other honest. Insight without the discernment of community and objective inquiry can

become delusional and self-serving. I would say that “New Age” spirituality has this pitfall. On the other hand, collective belief that has no room for individual inspiration can become oppressive and stale. Many people have suffered the intolerance of fixed belief both in science and religion. Truth, in the spiritual sense, must be a process of discernment that is open to all three. Science that ignores intuition and imagination is as incomplete as spirituality that shuns rational inquiry. Don’t get me wrong—this is still a complex process that demands discipline, trust, and value consciousness.

### **It also demands a high tolerance for not knowing for sure.**

Yes. More mature spirituality tends to be less sure of itself and more open to the genuine sense that there are real limits to what we can know. In this way, we create space for wonder, curiosity, and the “maybe” thinking of Robert Anton Smith. It is my sense that one legitimate criticism of conventional religion is its tendency to attach itself to fixed ideas about what is true. In this way, a lot of energy is spent defending this position and defining membership as those who believe this way. This puts more focus on words and ideas than upon experience. It also places limits on what is considered to be legitimate experience. Carl Jung argues that “religion is a defense against the direct experience of God.”

In another vein, I am reminded of a Taoist parable that speaks of a farmer whose horses broke through their corral one night and ran off. The neighbors commiserated with the man saying “isn’t that terrible.” The farmer said, “Maybe yes and maybe no.” Later that week, the horses came back to the corral leading a group of wild horses that had joined the herd. The neighbours were quick to congratulate him on his good fortune but, again, the farmer responded with “maybe yes, maybe no.” Later, while attempting to break one of the wild horses, the farmer’s son fell and broke his leg. “Too bad,” said the neighbours. “Maybe yes, maybe no,” replied the farmer. Shortly, the king’s guard came by to conscript young men for the army but passed the farmer’s son by given his broken leg. And so it went. The farmer reminds us that we are wise to refrain from believing that we know what is good and what is bad.

**This brings us back to Nietzsche’s quote about there being no facts only interpretations.**

If we can relax in our need for certainty, we can spend less energy needing others to see the world as we do and more energy discovering the way that our experienced is enriched by the wisdom of the world that is outside of our experience—be it our partner’s experience, the experience of another culture, or the experience of wisdom traditions honed through the millennia.

**This is a useful guide for family services work, both with clients and with agency management.**

Yes. The spiritual point here is that a well-run organization demands discipline (consciously living out of one’s inner truth), trust (respect for what we can learn from one another), and a quality of uncertainty that keeps us from getting too closed. A truly creative organization requires a means of drawing upon all three perspectives of truth.

**What about the role of religion and science? It seems that if you take one seriously you would have to dismiss the other.**

It has been said that to enter the world of science you must leave your intuition and imagination at the door. To enter the world of religion, one must leave their critical intelligence at the door. Worse still, it seems that it is simply not possible to live in both worlds. What science has to say contradicts religion and vice versa.

From the perspective of this research, I believe that healthy living requires that we can draw from the wisdom of each area. It is only when we get stuck on certainty that we cannot adopt a flexible perspective that makes room for the fruits of scientific inquiry and the wisdom revealed in the inspired revelations of religion. I believe that they help to keep each other honest. Religion’s answers to questions of the physical world are often based on outdated science. Science’s refuting of the great mythical perspectives on the creation of life and the nature of the universe reveals a failure to engage the mytho-poetic imagination. Religion cannot settle for refuting the findings of science that contradict their sacred texts any more than science can seriously believe that the only meaningful questions are settled through rational inquiry. There must be room for healthy debate that acknowledges science’s empirical strengths and the intuitive and visionary

perspectives of religion. Science can expose some of the out-dated cosmologies of the major religious traditions, and religion can expose the weakness of the reductionistic and materialistic assumptions of science.

I have observed, time and again where the rich integration of scientific and spiritual perspectives have created powerful learning. Newton was a mystic as well as a mathematician. Einstein was a very spiritual man whose use of imagination inspired his great discoveries. Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud were teachers who had strong familiarity with both science and spiritual traditions that lead to creative understandings of human experience and critical barbs fired against sloppy science and sloppy religion. The work of Ken Wilbur is an excellent example of how good science and spiritual thinking contribute a richer understanding of our human experience.

**Don't you think that there have been some pretty blatant and unresolved conflicts between religion and science? What about the evolution versus creation debate?**

Of course there has been much struggle on points such as this. However, my sense is that much of the problem lies in our inability to appreciate that there is more than one way of knowing. When we pit the mytho-poetic imagination against the empiricism of science, we struggle with the idea that one is right and the other is wrong. My sense is that a more sophisticated spirituality allows that both ways of knowing have validity.

As an example of this fuzzy thinking Michael Harner<sup>120</sup> speaks of how we have been tempted to dismiss the words of shamanic healers when they speak of passing through mountains or visiting other worlds. It sounds like the ramblings of primitive science that is seriously out of date. Yet he points out that the Shaman themselves are fully aware of the difference between material reality and non-material reality and when they communicate to each other, they can assume the other understands when they are referring to material reality and when they are speaking of non-material reality. Taken out of context by someone less facile in working with both perspectives at once, it is

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<sup>120</sup> Michael Harner, *The Way of the Shaman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), p. xxi.

misunderstood and dismissed. We need to take care about the assumptions we make when we study the spiritual perspectives.

When you refer to the issue of evolution versus creation, Darwin certainly struggled with this issue and, towards the end of his life, was quite embittered to religion. However, Darwin had a partner who worked with the same information that Darwin had and entertained a spiritual perspective that did not pit science against religion. Further, the issues of evolution and creation were integrated in a masterful way by Theilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest and an accomplished paleontologist. His work drew the wisdom evolution into a very highly respected spiritual outlook that got him into trouble with his religious superiors. In a survey of creative thinkers conducted by Marilyn Ferguson conducted in the 1980s, Tielhard de Chardin was named the most influential spiritual thinker of all time.

In short, spirituality is a process seeking greater openness and greater authenticity with all our critical faculties in tact.

Take a look at this comment from the great quantum scientist, Werner Heisenberg:

If there is much unhappiness among today's student body, the reason is not in material hardship, but the lack of trust that makes it too difficult for the individual to give his life meaning. We must try to overcome the isolation that threatens the individual in a world dominated by technical expediency. The theoretical deliberations about questions of psychology or social structure will avail us little here, so far as we do not succeed in finding a way back, by direct action, to a natural balance between the spiritual and material conditions of life. It will be a matter of reanimating in daily life the values grounded in the spiritual pattern of the community of endowing them with such brilliance that the life of the individual is automatically directed towards them.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ken Wilber, *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists*, p. 42.

## **So this rigor around values, truth, and trust—is this what you mean by spirituality as consciousness rather than beliefs?**

I believe that the truly spiritual person can be recognized by compassion and reverence. These are qualities of consciousness. Regardless of what beliefs or metaphors are used, these qualities should shine through to some degree.

## **Compassion and reverence. What about reverence?**

By this I mean holding all aspects of life as sacred. This follows from the spiritual perception that what we see is both just what we see—this person, that situation—and a manifestation of a greater wholeness. This is why, for example, proclaimed religious belief that denigrates the beliefs of others is plainly unspiritual. In the same vein, non-religious language that holds out implicit value to life—say an ecological perspective—has a spiritual ring to it.

## **These are the qualities of a good family service worker.**

I think you're right. One only has to look at the research determining the most effective aspects of the counselling process. After the qualities that the client brings to the counselling relationship, it is the experience of feeling cared about that has the greatest impact for clients. This is part of why I see good family service work as conscious spirituality. It seeks to promote compassion and reverence.

In speaking of the health benefits of faith, Dr. Harold G. Koenig, a Duke University psychiatrist, described 11 characteristics that may be associated with hope and therefore with mental and physical health. I think these illustrate how attitudes like compassion and reverence that are valued in our spiritual traditions figure into family service work:

- emphasis on interpersonal relations
- stress on seeking forgiveness
- provision of hope for change
- emphasis on forgiving others and oneself
- provision of hope for healing

- provision of a paradigm for suffering
- provision of role models for suffering
- emphasis on a sense of control and self-determination
- promise of life after death
- promise of ready accessibility
- provision of a supportive community.<sup>122</sup>

**In this sense, belief and practice become vehicles for cultivating compassion and reverence.**

Yes. I believe that compassion and reverence reflect higher qualities of spiritual consciousness. Greg Braden, a scientist and student of spiritual practice from New Mexico, pointed out in a recent lecture in New York City that prayer is significant, not for the specific words used (ideas and beliefs), but for the intention cultivated.<sup>123</sup> Larry Dossey's research into the effects of prayer on healing suggests that it appears that the most useful prayer is the one that simply offers support without a specified outcome.<sup>124</sup>

**So, there is a very practical and positive reason for including the spiritual dimension.**

Yes. I'll say more about that in the next chapter. But for now, let conclude this chapter with an observation from Victor Fankl:

When a patient stands on the firm ground of religious belief, there can be no objection to making use of the therapeutic effect of his religious convictions and thereby drawing upon his spiritual resources.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. 129.

<sup>123</sup> Greg Braden, cited from a lecture at the Prophet's Conference, New York City, May, 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Larry Dossey, *Prayer is Good Medicine* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), p. 66.

<sup>125</sup> Quoted from Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. 144.





**Chapter 6**  
**Mapping the Spheres of**  
**Spiritual Consciousness**

# Mapping the Spheres of Spiritual Consciousness

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One of the truths of our time is this hunger deep in people all over the planet for coming into relationship with each other.

Human consciousness is crossing a threshold as mighty as the one from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. People are hungering and thirsting after experience that feels true to them on the inside, after so much hard work mapping the outer spaces of the physical world. They are gaining courage to ask for what they need: living interconnections, a sense of individual worth, shared opportunities....

Our relationship to past symbols of authority is changing because we are awakening to ourselves as individual beings with an inner rulership. Property and credentials and status are not as intimidating any more.... New symbols are rising: pictures of wholeness. Freedom sings within us as well as outside us.... Sages and seers have foretold this second coming. People don't want to feel stuck; they want to be able to change.

- M.C. Richards<sup>126</sup>

As increasing numbers lose faith in the institutions of state and church alike, people often find themselves adrift in a spiritual wasteland. This is the mythic desert space, which, contrary to popular opinion, does not alienate people from God and from meaning but awakens a renewed sense of the sacred, often setting the seeker on a lifelong journey of spiritual exploration.

- Diarmuid O'Murchu<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> M.C. Richards, *Crossing Point*, quoted in Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*, p. 72.

<sup>127</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Our World in Transition* (New York: Crossroads Classic, 2000), p. 39.

**In the previous chapter we talked about spirituality as a level of awareness. If this is so important, why didn't I hear about this in school?**

I expect that your children will. Frankly, though, institutions such as those of education or religion are inclined to be conservative and will be exploring this only after it is fairly well-established in the thinking of many people. Inspired leadership can make a difference, but the dominant value in institutions is preserving the institution rather than exercising creativity. A common criticism of today's educational programs is that they press more for accumulating information rather than developing self-awareness and understanding how to learn. Understanding how we learn is to pay attention to how we know what we know. This describes the field of consciousness studies.

**So how is this related to a spiritual perspective?**

Exploring human consciousness is central to the spiritual perspective. As noted in the previous chapter, the quality of consciousness rather than the content of belief is the measure of spirituality. I see many of the creative minds that are exploring dimensions of human consciousness. The work of Charles Tart, Ken Wilbur, Marilyn Ferguson, Michael Murphy, and Greg Braden are just a few of the current minds who place great importance on consciousness studies. From the work of transpersonal psychology, through the drugs and consciousness experiments of the 1960s, the biofeedback studies of Elmer Green, and on to the work in hypnosis, altered consciousness, and neurochemical mapping of the brain, we have seen wide attention paid to the role of mind in health. What we have understood for some time is that our state of mind influences perception. What we are beginning to hear more and more is the role of mind in altering immunity, synchronicity, pre-cognition, and positive effects of healing through the effects of prayer. It is not feasible to go into a detailed examination of the research and documentation of human experience that challenges our limited sense of human potential. It is a fascinating

exploration.<sup>128</sup> They have shown me a way to bridge the wisdom of science with the wisdom traditions in a modern way.<sup>129</sup>

### **How are these useful for our focus on family service work?**

Well, I believe to develop a more critical awareness of the assumptions we make about the world and ourselves as professionals, we need to take a step back and explore both the assumptions and the mind behind them. One of the real limitations of psychology and social work is that they take the mind as a starting point. In the spiritual traditions, particularly those with a mystical approach, there is a belief that the mind has its limitations and is not the full measure of the person.

### **Are you referring to soul?**

Yes. In a loose sense, what is being referred to is the sense that the spiritual traditions teach us that who we are extends not only beyond death but also beyond mind that, in western culture, we assume defines our being. Spiritually, the culturally ingrained assumption that we are our minds has a limited history. In the time of the Greek philosophical golden age, the word “entelechy” was used to mean the sense of intelligence extending beyond cognition to mean the life giving force that was our essence. To become aware of the life giving force that abides within us, we must not take our thinking as the beginning point. Instead we must place attention to the life force within us. This may seem a difficult concept to grasp, so let me illustrate this point with a story.

Eckhart Tolle has shared the story of the beginning of his conscious awareness consciousness beyond mere ego functioning. At one point in his life he felt a degree of despair that drove him to the thought, “I

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<sup>128</sup> would refer the interested reader to books such as Michael Murphy’s *The Future of the Body*, P.D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous*, and Russell Targ’s *Miracles of Mind*.

<sup>129</sup> Some of these people are Sri Aurobindo, Michael Murphy, Stanislav Graf, Carl Jung, Charles Tart, Michael Harner, Marilyn Ferguson, Ken Wilber, Elmer Green, Tielhard de Chardin, Richard Tarnas, book from Kathryn’s room. Most of these are in the bibliography. Tony Schwartz’s book *What Really Matters*, Marilyn Ferguson’s *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, and Richard Tarnas’ *The History of Western Consciousness* are three fine summaries of consciousness studies that contribute research based thinking to our understanding of the spiritual perspective.

cannot stand myself.” This phrase stuck him, at that moment, as odd. Was he the “I” that could not stand himself or was he the self that couldn’t be stood? It clear to him that there were two levels of self, one more familiar and on more elusive but powerful. The notion of self behind self is very familiar in many spiritual traditions. Black Elk, the Sioux prophet speaks of “the world behind the world.” In the Vedic traditions of India, it is called “second attention” or “witness consciousness.” In the Christian tradition, it is referred to as soul consciousness versus personality consciousness.<sup>130</sup> This sense of human experience is not included in conventional family service work yet the importance of placing value on the life force energies that shape our consciousness is great. As we shall see later, the way that we understand the issues of healing and transformation is very different depending on whether we limit our understanding to “personality consciousness” or include the spiritual dimension of “soul consciousness.” William James, for example, created a lasting challenge to conventional modern psychology when we wrote of the vast horizons of the human psyche suggested by many mystical experiences that he documented in his famous work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

### **Doesn’t this take us into the really heavy stuff that no one has time to read?**

It’s worth the trouble. By exploring these people’s ideas, I learned to see how:

- Psychic research into exceptional abilities helps us to recognize the greater potential of all humans.
- Our model of consciousness says a lot about how we believe healing occurs for ourselves and our clients.
- We can begin to see how the accepted dogmas of history about human experience and healing change over time and that in this time we are engaged in what is popularly understood as a shift in culture consciousness (see Huston Smith, Marianne Williamson, Ken Wilber, Tielhard de Chardin).

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<sup>130</sup> Tanis Helliwell pointed this concept to me in a workshop I attended with her in October, 2000.

- In spite of the spread of history and the advancements of science, many of the great teachers of several thousand years have something to say here and right now about the issues we face in helping clients.

Plato, over 2000 years ago, said that spiritual wisdom is subtle, elusive, and mysterious. It is not something that can be put into words like other branches of learning. Only after long partnership in a contemplation community devoted to this very thing does “truth flash upon the soul, like a flame kindled by a leaping spark.”<sup>131</sup>

It is intriguing to see how much of this is excluded from conventional training programs for social workers and psychologists—to say nothing of introducing this to grade school children. As you will see, I suggest that spirituality is a level of consciousness that goes beyond conventional models of human experience described in family service work.

### **Do you have some way of summarizing the ideas about consciousness in a way that can be helpful to family service workers?**

Based on my research, I have constructed a simple model of consciousness that has three levels. They are as follows:

- material consciousness
- psychosocial consciousness
- spiritual consciousness.

These are progressive levels of awareness that represent different levels of awareness by which we live.

### **What does each of these refer to?**

Basically, this is a description of three stages of consciousness. I’ll get to a fuller description of each level in a minute. By identifying a level of consciousness beyond what is commonly understood in family service work, my goal is to clarify how the spiritual perspective is a logical extension of developments in our culture over the past 50 years.

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<sup>131</sup> Plato cited in Anne Simpkinson and Charles H. Simpkinson, *Soul Work*, p. 45.

Since the explosion of the atom bomb, the advent of the nuclear age has challenged us to envision our world in a very different way. We have seen the rise of popular acceptance of the psychological perspective since the 1950s and 1960s as a shift in popular understandings about the world. While it was a common insight among psychologists since Freud, popular acceptance of this perspective in business, health, education, and so forth was much slower. More recently, I have observed the rising interest in matters of spirituality as not so much a new discovery for we have held this notion in our religious practices and in the work of philosophers, poets, and theologians. However, the popular examination of spiritual ideas in the work place, education, and health care reflects a more widely developing acceptance for the spiritual point of view. This is not just new information; it is a new way of seeing the world—a new level of consciousnesses.

These are three different ways of seeing the world—not unlike the three blind men and the elephant. The experience of the world as a purely physical experience is very different from the symbolic and relational perspective of psychosocial consciousness. The third level of spiritual consciousness sees the world differently again.

Try to picture these as three spheres, one larger than the next; the larger containing and including the others. This image helps to convey that these three spheres represent expanding degrees of awareness with each stage necessarily including the one before it. It is hard, in words, to convey the sense of a dynamic field of consciousness that, unencumbered by restriction (unhealthy living, narrow prejudices of tradition, wounds that keep us from being open to growth), grows from a center to greater and greater degrees of inclusiveness.

**Hold it. I'm getting a little lost here. What I get here is that there are three categories of meeting reality. Somehow these are connected in a way that means that one leads to the next and represents a more inclusive perspective.**

That's right. When we see the world is only as material reality (what you see is what you get), the individual experience of people shaped by perceptions is not important. It is only when we incorporate an outlook that recognizes that reality is also shaped by our ideas, perspective, and so forth that we begin to see a richer, more complex process that means there is more than one truth. In counselling, for example, we often challenge clients to see how the point of view of their partner can also

be valid. There is room for greater inclusiveness of experience with this higher level of consciousness. The introduction of the multicultural perspective, the perspective of gender, of socio-economic experience and so forth, all advance and enrich our ability to meet our client's experience *as he or she experiences it*.

### **So what about the spiritual perspective, how does this expand our ability to meet our clients?**

The spiritual traditions offer us an enriched perspective that goes beyond merely recognizing that our cultural and psychological perspectives shape our reality. The notion of the Great Chain of Being provides a wonderful illustration of this more expansive perspective. The vision of all life linked together in an unbroken chain from the simplest of life through to God was passed on down through the centuries by Aristotle, embraced by the medieval Christian Church. Allow me to quote from the eloquence of Richard Rohr to offer a glimpse of a comprehensive vision of life beyond the insights of psychology. Rohr says that the Great Chain of Being:

was a “cosmic egg” of meaning, a vision of Creator and a multitude of creatures that excluded nothing. The great chain of being was the first holistic metaphor for the new seeing offered us by the Incarnation: Jesus as the living icon of integration, “the coincidence of opposites” who “holds all things in unity” within himself (Colossians 1:15-20). God is One. I am whole and so is everything else.

This is a kind of vital circle of life. Each aspect is a crucial dimension of spiritual consciousness.

### **So why are there three separate stages instead of just one?**

The problem of limitations of consciousness arises when we become locked primarily into one level of experience. In this sense we are stuck and the potential to experience ourselves as wholeness is blocked. This happens on the individual level when trauma, faulty beliefs, or poor resources of health or material security lock us into a limited scope of consciousness. This can happen on a cultural level. We can look through history and see times of creativity and health in contrast with times when the culture is in a more regressed, primitive mode of functioning. For example, the Renaissance contrasts with the dark



times of the Middle Ages. Arthur Lovejoy quotes Huston Smith to make the point that the close of the Middle Ages resulted in the collapse of the view of the universe as a spiritual vision.

It was only the power of the scientific revolution in the methodology and discoveries of Bacon, Galileo, and Newton, and the dualistic and/or materialistic philosophies of Descartes, Locke, and Hobbes, that brought about the eventual collapse of the hierarchical outlook. For “modern science requires only one cosmological level, the *physical*.”<sup>132</sup>

### **What about these times?**

I think what we can conclude about our times are up for debate. I sense that we are at a crossroads. There is the potential for a remarkable age of expanding spiritual consciousness and also the capacity for destroying the planet. In his book *Synchronicity*, Joseph Jaworski, an expert in the field of leadership studies, says Shell International has a think tank in which they generate plans for future development based on two possible scenarios. One has things going really badly. The other has things moving along well.

### **So how do we proceed from here?**

First, let me put out a few words of caution about this map. First, I am afraid it gets a bit philosophical and abstract. Maybe as I understand this level better I can be a bit more clear and down to earth in my words. Those who are not interested in exploring the philosophical basis of spiritual outlook may wish to skip this part.

Second, these stages are presented as though people belong to one stage or another when in fact they may be living at more than one level at a time. Things are always more complicated in life than in the textbooks.

Third, there is an ebb and flow in our level of consciousness. I am sure that everyone can remember the experience of being on holidays when

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<sup>132</sup> Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth*, p. 6 quoted from Arthur Lovejoy in an internet article located at [www.kheper.net/topics/cosmology/great\\_chain\\_of\\_being.htm](http://www.kheper.net/topics/cosmology/great_chain_of_being.htm).

life felt free and as if things had spiritually come together. Then, upon return to ordinary life with its anxieties and pressures, everything seemed like a battle and that sense of spiritual peace seemed unreal—like a romantic delusion. It is also true that the more threatening a particular issue is, the more we have a tendency to shift back into more basic ways of dealing with the world. Thus, the level of consciousness we live out of fluctuates depending on our self-possession and circumstances.

Spiritual disciplines and practices are attempts to support the individual and the community to sustain a higher level of consciousness especially during times of great stress. September 11 was a great exercise in the competing urges to see this tragedy as incitement to a military response from many political leaders versus the urging of spiritual leaders to greater awareness of the role of fear, cycles of violence, and our own participation in the tragedy.

### **Before we explore these stages, can you say a little about how you arrived at this map?**

With the help of various thinkers. Ken Wilber has done a lot of work in drawing together developmental perspectives from many different perspectives. His work provides a model that describes a continuum that links spiritual consciousness with more conventional models of psychological development.<sup>133</sup> The intriguing thing about this model is that Wilber sees it as common to all spiritual traditions, and it presents a cosmology that links all life into a wholeness of creation.<sup>134</sup> This is a

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<sup>133</sup> Wilber has written a number of books that put forth his ideas on the continuum of consciousness. A good introduction to his ideas is found in *A Brief History of Everything*. A more in-depth discussion is found in *Integral Psychology*, where he demonstrates a synthesis of many different models of development that address the spiritual levels of awareness to varying degrees. Wilber did not produce this out of a vacuum, however. The work of Aristotle, Plotinus, the medieval mystics of Christianity (Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, St. Bonaventure) and Arthur Lovejoy (he wrote *The Great Chain of Being*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936) all have embraced and enriched this vision.

<sup>134</sup> Ken Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Spirit* (Audio Renaissance, 1998).

foundation that helps to understand the relationship of the psychological and spiritual perspectives.<sup>135</sup>

My goal with this model is to provide a sketchy map of spiritual consciousness and show how it is related to the models of material and psychosocial consciousness that are much more familiar to family service work.

### **Okay. Let's talk about material consciousness.**

The physical level of experience sees matter as the foundation of reality. What we can experience with our five senses is real. All else is not. Johannes Kepler describes this well:

The universe is clockwork.

This is what is referred to when we speak of the Newtonian model of the universe that is attributed to Isaac Newton and based on a belief that ultimate reality can be accounted for by laws of motion studied through sophisticated mathematics. Life was a table of billiard balls rolling around according to the balls and the laws of motion. Everything is as it is as a result of physical influence. This is the heart of modern western allopathic medicine: everything has a cause that can be altered or eradicated with proper awareness and intervention.

This perspective views the psychological realm as suspicious and unreal ("It's only in your head." "I'll believe it when I see it."). Power

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<sup>135</sup> Another contributor to these model stages of consciousness is the work of Madonna Kholbenschlag. In her work *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-bye*, she presents three stages of development for women: heteronomy (conformity), autonomy (individual self-awareness), and theonomy (spiritual consciousness). She got some of her inspiration from the Danish philosopher Soren Kirkegaard and the American theologian, Paul Tillich. I also felt that Carolyn Myss has been very helpful. Her work develops a model of psycho-spiritual development that draws from the chakra system of Vedic medicine with the Jewish Cabalist model of the Tree of Life and the Christian model of the seven sacraments. These may seem to be strange bedfellows, but she has created a sensible model for showing how the richness of the spiritual traditions matter to physical, psychological, and communal healing. Her work, well-summarized in *Energy Anatomy* provides an amazing perspective on levels of consciousness. She applies this to cultural development as well as to individual development.

is measurable in physical terms as the degree of influence wielded. The core belief is “dominate or be dominated.” Control is a central value and goal: control of destiny, security from risk. Possession is a crucial measure of power. Survival is the principal motivation.

In this level of awareness, reality is external. We see our life’s issues cast in terms of the things that happen to us or the things we do. Accumulation of physical goods either as a group or an individual is a virtue. Self-esteem is linked to the opinions of others. This tends to reflect a tribal orientation to rules, tradition, and the role of authority.

Body is perceived as a machine, and the mind is valued for logic and strategy. Intuition and inner knowing are suspect. Religions persecute their mystics. Rules, regulations, enforcement, and adherence to tradition are all important. There is a definite right and a definite wrong. There are definite and distinct roles for the genders. Spirituality on this level would be linked to traditional religion and firm beliefs with a strong moral edge.

**I sense that we are talking both about an individual perspective but we can also see this as the “group mind” of a culture.**

True. Those familiar with developmental psychology (such as Piaget’s stages of cognitive development or Erickson’s developmental stages for example) will recognize that this can be both a stage of life and a lens through which to see the world. This lens would not only express the personality of the individual but also reflect the socialization experience.

Michael Adams, co-founder of Environics (a Canadian market research corporation), describes this level of consciousness as reflecting about 77 per cent of elders and about 19 per cent of the general population.<sup>136</sup> According to Adams, the strengths of this group include: hyper-rationality, aversion to complexity, everyday ethics, and pursuit of recognition, duty, and search for roots. The vulnerable side of this group includes: struggles with equality between the sexes, struggles with spontaneity, adaptability to life’s complexity, and introspection.

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Adams, *Better Happy Than Rich* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2001), pp. 39-42.

## **So, this is a description of material consciousness?**

What I want to put forward with this model is that people or groups tend to operate at more than one level at once. This is simplification for the sake of clarity. There is nothing implicitly wrong with it. The fact is, without this level of consciousness, we do not have our feet on the ground. We are in danger of overlooking practical realities. No matter how grand the vision of an agency, if it does not have an effective means of managing its budget, the vision will evaporate.

The last point that is important, is that each successive level must incorporate the vision of the one before it.<sup>137</sup>

## **Okay. So what is the next level?**

The second level, that of psychological and relational, places greater attention to the symbolic and the internal world. Rather than focusing on control as the central issue, power at this level is perceived as knowledge, or the management of meaning. Unlike the motto of “I’ll believe it when I see it,” this level says “I see what I see because I believe what I believe.”

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<sup>137</sup> For a fuller description of these levels of awareness, I refer the reader to Ken Wilber’s work, *A Brief History of Everything*. Wilber draws from author Koestler’s brilliant model of “holons” to develop a very sophisticated model of development that is sensitive to many of the problems in any arbitrary system. Wilber’s research brings together a wide array of models of development—some which include spiritual levels and some do not. This valuable package of information can be found in *Integral Psychology* also by Wilber. He borrows from the remarkable vision of Plotinus—a Greek philosopher of the neo-platonic tradition, who lived in the sixth century, and Sri Aurobindo, a spiritual leader and teacher from India whose influence has extended to the West. Wilber uses the concept of the Great Chain of Being to define a continuum that leads from life in its most primal levels through physical, psychological, and spiritual consciousness. Let me add a commentary that gives a good description of Wilber’s work: “...Wilber expanded the scope of modern Western psychology by not only including immature and abnormal states of consciousness, but also the supernormal or transpersonal states of consciousness described and cultivated by practitioners of Indic traditions of yoga and meditation. He has shown that western consciousness can benefit enormously from the thousands of years of empirical experimentation in the field of consciousness studies and psychology conducted by these practitioners albeit under different names. Wilber’s debt is particularly notable with regard to Sri Aurobindo, who created a schema of states of consciousness. (From: Global Renaissance and the Roots of Western Wisdom by Rajiv Malhotra and David Gray Institute Of Noetic Sciences Web site)

**This is like the political “spin doctors” and the power of advertising.**

Yes. These people have developed a science of influence based on the power of image to shape our perceptions and beliefs. This is a perfect example of psychosocial consciousness. Power at this stage may still be linked to “power over” but has the potential to be “power with.” Competition can shift to negotiation. Attention to internal realities dims the power of traditional authority. Breaks from tradition and from arbitrary rules are likely at this level as people claim greater personal autonomy.

**The rise of feminism beginning in the 1960s coincides with the rise in popular acceptance of counselling and therapy as viable ways of getting help.**

Yes. Anyone of the baby boomer generation has witnessed the rise of the psychosocial level in the 1960s with the work of Abraham Maslow, the human potential movement, and feminism. These are all manifestations of psychosocial consciousness. The popular acceptance of therapy, which is a very recent shift in western culture, is an indication of how we have shifted from the predominance of one level of consciousness to another.

The standard for marriage and family relationships, at this level, is different in that fulfillment is not merely following the rules or “doing one’s duty.” Instead, there is emphasis on connectedness and emotional satisfaction. The goal of psychosocial awareness is not limited to survival but extends to satisfaction even at the risk of shucking duty in favor of personal satisfaction. The perspective of individualism, placing individual needs over those of the institutions, has moved us from “getting by” as the acceptable standard to maximizing potential and questioning limits.

In the psychosocial level, nothing needs to be a given. The challenge of individualism is its tendency to stray from familiar standards of value except for the value of autonomy. It is as though collective thinking loses power to the value of inner experience. In this way, traditions and institutions become suspect for their way of ignoring the individual experience. With the rise of individualism we see the reverse

happening. The compelling truth becomes individual experience.<sup>138</sup> Thus we move from the broad conformity images of times past (engaged more with material consciousness) to a kind of diversity of individual choices that is both enriching and confusing.

**This would have a lot of relevance to family service work.**

For sure. Family service work at this level, shifts from the arbitrary and proscriptive models to more complex models of service involving “therapy” and “relationship.” Simple cause-and-effect formulas of the 1940s and the 1950s become the “it takes two to tango” model. Help is not fixed on the rules of a church or government but more upon negotiating, understanding, and “awareness.” Here it is possible to talk about “value neutrality,” “deconstructing” beliefs, and value perspectives.

This is where things become a bit weird. There is a lot of “psychobabble” that gave us a new language to talk about experience. In fact, there were new books coming out all the time with new ideas about what the “crucial variable” and the new therapy. Books like *The Feminine Mystique* and *I’m Okay You’re Okay* told us all kinds of new things about what our problems were and what the answers were.

The psychosocial level of consciousness gave us the autonomy to begin to define our own realities independent of and sometimes against the prevailing beliefs of the generations before. One of the enriching dimensions of psychological consciousness is the valuing of inner experience. This, of course is not a recent invention. The importance is the popular acceptance of this point of view. People born into a generation with a strong acceptance of psychological consciousness were empowered to name their experience. Instead of being engaged in exercises of conformity with moral injunctions from church, state, and “what would the neighbors think,” people began to speak in terms of their own needs and experience.

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<sup>138</sup> I note here that this comment makes no distinction between self-deluded thinking and authentic inner experience. Richard Rohr makes regular distinctions between individualism as self-absorption and authentic self-awareness. There is a continuum of maturity regarding inner awareness that I do not have the time to investigate.

**This saw the rise of racial equality, gender sensitivity, and rights of the disabled, and to victims of physical and sexual abuse speaking out.**

Well, at least in theory. I believe that we have a long way to go to live consistently with the “politically correct” ideas that have emerged in recent years. The bright side of the rising psychosocial consciousness is the valuing of individual experience and the importance of the inner world to healing.

The rise of the human potential movement in California that gave rise to experiential therapies, of making the unconscious conscious or, in more plain terms, “letting it all hang out,” embodies this sentiment on a level of collective experience. People are asked to shift from “doing right” and “being adequate” to matters of individual awareness and what feels right. Counsellors moved to a position of validating their client’s experience as the criteria for health.

The rift between mind and body that is characteristic of the physical level of consciousness is mended somewhat by the rising attention to the relationship between attitudes and illness. The body, on this level, is seen as influenced by the ways we think and feel. Such researchers as Karl and Stephanie Simonton, Dean Ornish, and Bernie Segal found connections between attitudes and disease process. Their research suggests that our thoughts can make us sick. In turn, research into body has found that “body memories” shape our thinking and that proper body care such as regular exercise and good diet lead to better psychic health.

The flood of different therapies and the many different models that draw attention to particular dimensions of human experience—gender, race, violence, sexual preference, and the ways the brain works—have all translated into new “schools” of practice and technique. Family service agencies have moved into the era of counselling that is as varied and confusing to therapists as it has been for clients. One can see the shift of perspective away from central authority and the hegemony of “what will the neighbors (or my father, the university, etc.) think” towards a new era of “self-determination” and the “I’m OK, you’re OK” school of thought. The many schools have made a single school or method seem too limited on its own. Much of family service work has been freed up from the guidelines of tradition or at least one fixed tradition.



**I can see some rising problems in this huge shift from material consciousness to psychosocial consciousness.**

The empowering effects of individualism cannot be overlooked. This level of consciousness has paved the way for voices to be heard. The rights and needs of minorities are having impact. One cannot ignore the quality of justice that follows from sexual abuse victims gaining a legal clout to speak out, or attention to the rights of individuals who do not fit the norms (the disabled, different sexual preferences, race, etc.).

This also has implications for institutions. Think of fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, and take this image of institutional power in decline even further. We see examples every day of public institutions struggling, whether they are educational, medical, governmental, or religious. While it is naive in this age of the mega-corporations and mega-mergers that wield so much influence to suggest that institutional power is in decline, but public institutions are certainly looking shaky. Deregulation in government services is widespread. Even our languages with new words being brought into common usage that defy the rules of grammar reflect this deregulation of institutional authority.

**The changing face of marriage has that sort of theme, too, it seems.**

Certainly this is an example that fits with family services. The diversification of marriage to include common law marriage, same sex marriage, and multiple marriages in the lives of many people suggests this. Marriage was once managed and defined by the church and then by the state. I would suggest that church and state are now struggling to come to terms with the diverse trends as well as the dramatic rate of marital breakdown. There is room to ask if we are not moving into an era that will shift marriage into different forms based more on psychosocial and spiritual principles rather than state or religious regulation. As in all instances, there is no single trend here. The emerging trends of diversity and instability, though, can be suggesting an evolutionary shift shaped by higher levels of consciousness. The work of Marianne Williams and Daphne Kingma's book *The Future of Love* takes up this question in very powerful ways.

**One impact of this shift to psychosocial consciousness is the rapid pace of change and expanding diversity.**

The psychosocial level of consciousness has ushered us into an age of dramatic change, diversity, and uncertainty. The search for security has led some to long for the “good old days” or to the days of “traditional family values” (whichever days these were is not clear). For others, the compelling agenda is to be a little of everything—a “super mom” or a “new age man.” The multitude of trends has drawn folks into smaller and smaller groups with whom they identify. The shift is away from fixed sense of things. Ironically, change seems to be the only constant.

**What impact has this trend had on the role of religion and spiritual belief?**

Spirituality at the psychosocial stage moves from authority-mediated truth to the primacy of individual experience; in sum, less satisfaction with traditional religion. This is reflected in the statistics gathered in both Canada and the United States. Church attendance is in serious decline. Reg Bibby’s research of religious practice in Canada summarized in the *Bibby Report* indicates that attendance has declined progressively since the late 1940s. According to his latest figures, only 17 per cent of Canadians attend church regularly.<sup>139</sup> There is more freedom to question and fewer imperatives to abide by traditional formulas. Personal selection at this level creates both smorgasbord religion and churches struggling to attract members by shifting their “spin” to be more attractive to churchgoers’ needs.

**So we move from the outer-directed world of material consciousness to the more inner-directed paths of psychosocial consciousness. How has that changed the way people express their spiritual beliefs?**

The rising value of individual experience has led many folks out of the churches and into a wide variety of choices including a withdrawal from the questions of religion altogether. This issue is not altogether an issue of the failure of institutional religion so much as a failure of the institution to meet the rising consciousness of our culture. This is not a

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<sup>139</sup> Reginald Bibby, *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style*, p. 77.

new issue—the mystical branches of every faith tradition have been a challenge to the institutional model of spiritual practice. The dramatic rise in interest in the mystical traditions of the East by Westerners is certainly testimony to this. Equally important, although less dramatic, is the rising interest in the mystical traditions of the West, including the traditions of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the Rhineland mystics of the Middle Ages (Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Metchild of Medburgh), the Transcendentalist movement of Henry David Thoreau (remember *Walden Pond?*), Native spirituality, and shamanic practice.

Not unlike the dramatic diversity of counselling and healing models, spiritual practice has become a marketplace that drew upon current dissatisfaction with institutional churches and created a confusing panorama of beliefs ranging from fundamentalist and traditional orientations to every flavor of revived tradition and new movements resting upon combinations, inventions, and distortions. Hate groups and reactionary groups have their voice and following as well.

**You had mentioned earlier the research into Canadian social values by Michael Adams. Does he have something to say about this trend?**

Michael Adams' social values research has tracked the mindset of Canada's population and might summarize the psychological/relational perspective as embodied in the "boomer generation." It would be naive to assume that everyone born in the post-war years is focused on the psychosocial level. However, it is worth noting how the trends of a whole generation contribute to the collective consciousness that dominates an age. In a private conversation I had with him, Adams notes that as time progresses we move into more statistically definable groups—we are becoming more diverse, particularly as we observe the more diverse generation X'ers who are located all over the map in smaller, more distinct groups.

**You have mentioned a general rationale for the shift in public awareness from material to psychosocial consciousness, but what about this shift on an individual level?**

In her work *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-bye*, Madonna Kholbenschlag says this shift usually occurs in through crisis. Depression or anxiety drives people to such a state of dislocation that they either collapse into

some sort of chronic neurotic pattern or claim the power to define their own reality. This is certainly manifest in the feminist movement of claiming authority from what they view to be patriarchal domination. Another way to describe it would be to call it “claiming one’s power.” This is a very familiar theme in counselling in which we witness individuals claiming their personal power to define their experience rather than settling for the limiting judgements internalized from tradition, culture, religion, family, traumatic events, etc.

### **This brings us to the spiritual level.**

The spiritual level is a further leap of awareness. The material hypothesis is that there is nothing but what we can grasp through the five senses. If we cannot see, hear, taste, touch, or smell it then it does not exist or it is “just a figment of your imagination.” At the psychosocial level of awareness, we recognize that the way that we interpret what we see alters our experience of the world. At this level, beliefs, assumptions, and perspective are understood as important in shaping our experience. Thus, feelings and thoughts become crucial to our experience of the world. We are now empowered to explore the world of a depressed people who use the same sense faculties but have different assumptions or beliefs that make their experience different from those who are not depressed. Let me share again some lines from T. S. Eliot that capture the powerful yet elusive quality of the spiritual dimension:

Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, her, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of things shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are en-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *The Top 500 Poems*, William Harmon, ed., p. 994.

From Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" Comes a kind of credo about the unity of all things:

The grass before me and the very soil of the earth  
I am made of those.  
I am not separate from anything  
That has atoms.

**This is certainly stretching things beyond the conventional reality of family service work.**

It is interesting to note how the term "reality" applies to that which fits into the level of consciousness of the perceiver. For example, someone limited to the material level would say that psychological stress is "all in your head"—meaning "not real." It is not uncommon to hear psychologists suggest that spiritual experience is merely a product of neurochemistry or arbitrary belief—not credible as anything more than the psychological. There is a lot of politics and culture behind what is commonly held to be real and what is not real. Let me share three perspectives that may help to make this perspective seem more real:

1. Russel Targ, scientist and former contract employee of the Central Intelligence Agency speaks about the extent to which the CIA does extensive research into ESP (extra-sensory perception) experimentation in such areas as remote viewing (the ability to visualize things that are hundreds or thousands of miles away), pre-cognition (knowing about events before they occur).<sup>141</sup> When security organizations take this level of experience seriously, one has to think twice about dismissing it as flaky or flawed thinking.
2. The Gallup organization polled Americans regarding religious belief and found that over 90 per cent of Americans believe in God or some form of higher power.

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<sup>141</sup> From a lecture given by Russel Targ in New York City Prophet's Conference, May, 2001. A more elaborate discussion of this material is found in his book *Miracles of Mind: Exploring Non-local Consciousness and Healing* (Novato, Ca: New World Library, 1998).

Of these, about 50 per cent report they believe they have experienced some form of direct experience of God that has changed their lives.

3. How many people in social services work in the field because they believe they have a special calling related to their purpose in life?

### **Can you say more about the patterns of meaning that you are referring to?**

When I talk about patterns of meaning, I refer to a view of the universe as a meaningful interconnectedness of all things. This is the fundamental outlook of all mystics through many traditions and through the ages. For example, the Jewish perspective of history found in its scriptures implies a meaningful flow of events. Ted Kapchuk, in speaking of Chinese medicine, asserts that “Chinese medicine, like Chinese thought in general, begins and ends with the notion of a whole, within which all the particulars are related to each other and to the whole.”<sup>142</sup>

Allow me to share a quote from the renowned philosopher Jean Gebser. His words highlight the linkage of quantum science with the emergence of spiritual consciousness:

The spiritual dimension of science comes even more strongly to light in another result of nuclear research, our present knowledge of atomic structure. We know today that the elementary particles of which the dividable atomic nucleus is composed are so minute that we can no longer speak of them in terms of spatially perceptible matter. In other words, the basic elements of matter—the elementary particles of which atoms are constituted—are ultimately of non-material derivation. As a result, the atoms which form matter are themselves of nonmaterial origin. But the non-material is at the same time the spiritual: it is at least a quality or characteristic of the spiritual. For the West, the world of material phenomena now becomes equivalent to maya! However, the West doesn't not consider this world of phenomena to be an illusion, but an aspect of the non-material, that is to say, of the spiritual, which one has to accept as a reality despite its

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<sup>142</sup> Ted Kapchuk, *The Web that Has No Weaver* (Portland, Ore: Contemporary Books, 2000), p. 10.

unreal origin. It should be obvious that this way of looking at phenomena has nothing to do with materialism any more. This is further confirmed by the fact that neither pragmatism nor Marxist materialism recognizes this spiritual dimension, although it is logical consequence of the scientifically investigated nature of matter.<sup>143</sup>

Let me follow this up with a piece of an 800-year-old poem by the Sufi poet Rumi:

We began  
as a mineral. We emerged into plant life  
and into the animal state, and then into being human,  
and always we have forgotten our former states,  
except in early spring when we slightly recall  
being green again.

That's how a young person turns  
toward a teacher. That's how a baby leans  
toward the breast, without knowing the secret  
of its desire, yet turning instinctively.  
Humankind is being led along an evolving course,  
though the migration of intelligences,  
and though we seem to be sleeping,  
there is an inner wakefulness  
that directs the dream,  
and that will eventually startle us back  
to the truth of who we are.<sup>144</sup>

What I believe is significant about these times and therefore important to family service work is the observation that the insights of the wisdom traditions of Greece, Hinduism, Taoism, the Desert mystics of Christian tradition, and many more are echoed in the most recent speculations of quantum physics, chaos theory, holographic theory, and eco-systems thinking. I am not suggesting that all scientists and researchers in this area are advocating a spiritual perspective. Instead, I am suggesting that there are remarkable parallels between ancient wisdom and new science. One only has to read the richly spiritual outlook of many of the foremost quantum theorists to see that

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<sup>143</sup> P. J. Saher, *Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought: The Psycho-Cybernetics of Comparative Ideas in Religion and Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969), p. 11.

<sup>144</sup> Rumi, "The Dream That Must Be Interpreted," *The Essential Rumi* Coleman Barks, trans. (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 112.

something is coming together. In effect, new science is providing a new metaphor by which we observe the fundamental interconnectedness of all things. This vision of wholeness (derived from “holiness”) moves us from the universe of isolating individualism with lack of meaning towards a vision of underlying, implicit meaning. This trend echoes the medieval vision of the Great Chain of Being. Here are quotes from three highly regarded physicists of the quantum era:

The general notions about human understanding...which are illustrated by discoveries in atomic physics are not in the nature of things wholly unfamiliar, wholly unheard of, or new. Even in our own culture they have a history, and in Buddhist and Hindu thought a more considerable and central place. What we shall find is an exemplification, an encouragement, and a refinement of old wisdom.

- Robert Julius Oppenheimer<sup>145</sup>

For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory...[we must turn] to those kinds of epistemological problems with which already thinkers like the Buddha and Lao Tsu have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence.

- Niels Bohr<sup>146</sup>

The great scientific contribution in the theoretical physics that has come from Japan since the last war may be an indication of a certain relationship between philosophical ideas in the tradition of the Far East and the philosophical substance of quantum theory.

- Werner Heisenberg<sup>147</sup>

**So you are saying that quantum science is giving us new metaphors outside the language of religion to speak of the spiritual level of experience.**

Yes. What’s helpful about that is that the realm of spiritual experience is made more accessible to more people.

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<sup>145</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, p. 27.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 4.



## **If you see family service work as focused on the psychosocial level, then how does the spiritual level of awareness fit in?**

Tanis Helliwell best describes the difference between the psychosocial and the spiritual when she speaks of moving from personality-centered living to soul-centered living.<sup>148</sup> On psychological level, ego or mind is the central definition of who we are. There is very little attention to the source of consciousness. The spiritual plane focuses upon discovering the self beyond the dimension of us that thinks, plans, and has relationships.

## **So is it moving beyond identity with body and mind that leads to spiritual awareness?**

That is how I have heard it put many times, particularly in the mystical traditions of East and West. Spirituality, as I have said before, is the wondrous expansion of awareness of our sense of life that goes beyond our particular selves and circumstances but also includes them.

I think we have to be careful here to not get hooked on the cliché of “killing the ego” or more simply, devaluing the full range of human experience. I mentioned earlier that psychological consciousness cannot stand up without healthy material consciousness—good social work practice has to keep its feet on the ground. In this same vein, spiritual awareness depends upon healthy ego. A healthy sense of self-connection includes a balance of physical and psychological and relationship needs. Alienation from one’s body through lack of attention to our nutrition, regular physical checkups, and exercise has an impact on our state of mind. The body is the carrier of our psychic experience.

So too, our psychological health based on healthy relationships with one’s inner life, needs, and relationships is the foundation of healthy spirituality. This is the tenet of developmental theory. The body-denying or self-denying practices we observe from different spiritual practices can produce some very strange kinds of asceticism and can be very destructive. Jack Kornfield, a leading Buddhist practitioner and teacher in the United States speaks frequently about spiritual leaders

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<sup>148</sup> Lecture, Tanis Helliwell, Parksville, BC, October, 2000.

who fall prey to alcoholism and sexual abuse of their followers because of a failed awareness of psychosocial experience.<sup>149</sup> Spiritual consciousness, as I have learned to see it, moves us beyond body and mind to a perception of self as connected to a field of meaning described by soul and spirit. I have described this earlier as the linking of our Small Story to the Big Story.

### **I am still not sure I get what you mean by the spiritual level of consciousness.**

I understand. I find that when I try to put this in words, it gets abstract and fuzzy. I don't think there is any easy way to describe this concept. The easiest way to understand is by drawing from our own experience: like falling in love, or like the experience of witnessing my father-in-law's death and funeral. These experiences can put us in touch with a sense of something beyond the experience easily understood in material or psychological terms. At the same time, it seems to connect to something deeply true in ourselves. In the words of one scientist:

In all directions the scientist's investigations bring him face to face with an insoluble enigma. He learns at once the greatness and the littleness of the human intellect—its power in dealing with all that comes within the range of experience, its impotence in dealing with all that transcends experience.<sup>150</sup>

A well-respected theologian, Frederick Buechner refers to the spiritual level of consciousness in another way:

The passage from Genesis points to a mystery greater still. It says that we come from farther away than space and longer ago than time. It says that evolution and genetics and environment explain a lot about us but they don't explain all about us or even the most important thing about us. It says that though we live in the world, we can never be entirely at home in the world. It says

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<sup>149</sup> Jack Kornfield “*Psychotherapy, Meditation and Spirituality: Even the Best Meditators Have Wounds to Heal*” downloaded from <http://www.buddhanet.net/psymed1.htm>.

<sup>150</sup> Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, quoted from P.J. Saher, *Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought: The Psycho-Cybernetics of Comparative Ideas in Religion and Philosophy*, p. 32.

in short not only that we were created by God but also that we were created in God's image and likeness. We have something of God within us the way we have something of the stars.<sup>151</sup>

## **How does the spiritual make itself known in our experience?**

Sometimes the spiritual dimension can be better recognized by its absence. We can sometimes sense the emptiness of meaning in our work and in life in general. When a situation or a meeting lacks soul, we are, by implication showing an intuitive awareness of the spiritual. When a man comes to counselling struggling with questions about his job, his marriage, I believe he is sharing a struggle that goes beyond particular problem issues to include a lack of connection to meaning—a sense of feeling at home in the universe.

There is a phrase attributed to John of the Cross, a mystic of the Middle Ages: “dark night of the soul” which captures the “loss of soul” in poignant terms. These are the times when I think Tannis Helliwell's reinterpretation as “dark night of the personality” fits more accurately. How often do we see this in the issues our clients share with us as their problem?

Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now*, once described his life as having reached a suicidal crisis. He could not stand who he had become. At some point he puzzled over who was the “I” that could not stand “me”? In western spiritual traditions, we have used words like soul, over-soul, guardian angel, higher self, God, spirit, genius, wisdom, or daemon to describe this underlying awareness that abides within us. Apart from the part of us that wants a better life, feels joy or sadness, notices ourselves getting older, there is a point of view that is set apart.

Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as a starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, “My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.” Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, and love, hate... If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself.  
- Monoimus, a Gnostic teacher<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> “The Ellul Forum for the Critique of Technological Civilization,” January, 2000, p. 37.

<sup>152</sup> Sam Keen, *Hymns To An Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life*, p. 32.

In the tradition of meditation coming from India, this is termed “witness consciousness.” This consciousness is something that we have all had occasion to encounter. We need only think of a time when awareness about ourselves, in the midst of a crisis when time seems to stand still or when we literally stood outside of ourselves and the experience that was happening to us. We hear this experience described by victims of war or trauma. In these moments we are encountering this dimension that is recognized on the spiritual level of awareness but not at the psychosocial level. Many times continual chatter, business, or mind-numbing practices keep us from consciously being aware of that part of us that stands outside the changes and the experiences.

If one looks carefully at the strategies of spiritual discipline—meditation, prayer, contemplation, sacred ritual, retreats, walking a labyrinth, ecstatic dance, shamanic journeying—there is clearly an emphasis on awareness that reaches beyond the particulars of self as my body, self as mind. They also give a means of discerning the call to greater awareness that comes in the midst of our most painful times. This is not the religion of consolation or protection. This is the raw force of life that confronts us with the terrors of transformation.

Conflict, pain, tension, fear, paradox... these are transformations trying to happen. Once we confront them, the transformative process begins. Those who discover this phenomenon, whether by search or accident, gradually realize that the reward is worth the scariness of anaesthetized life. The release of pain, the sense of liberation, and the resolution of conflict make the next crises or stubborn paradox easier to confront.<sup>153</sup>

Is there a relationship between what you are describing and the out-of-body experiences that are described in severe trauma such as sexual abuse or near-death experiences?

Yes, I think so. Having listened to many stories of sexual abuse that involved out-of-body experience (different from the many degrees of dissociation) and some of the people who have shared near-death experiences with me, I see the same sort of dispassionate removal from the physical and psychological markers for who we see ourselves to be.

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<sup>153</sup> Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*, p. 76.

One colleague that I interviewed spoke of a near-death experience as a sense of detachment from the body he saw on the hospital bed.

**I can see how, once removed from a spiritual tradition of discernment and wisdom that there are an awful lot of free-flowing interpretations about soul and spiritual experience.**

This is absolutely true. If there is one important concern about the individualized spirituality that is emerging these days, it is that there are few guidelines against the “interpretations of convenience” that allow people to create a set of beliefs that can be dangerously self-deluding or at least more a defense against spirituality. One of the hallmarks of these times is the vast amount of information about spiritual beliefs and traditions that can be “cobbled” together to suit one’s prejudices, fears, and wounds, or be a compensation for wounding experiences of the past.

Carolyn Myss comments on the problem of understanding the spiritual law that “we create our own reality.” This is simply not true for those who have not done the serious work of growth beyond the attachments to personality-centered living. Yet many folks will preach this belief as an exciting enticement into a new spiritual vision.

**So what are the remedies for inauthenticity at this level of awareness?**

First, our own gut sense of a person’s authenticity is a start. In spending time with many different spiritual leaders—some claiming status as holy persons, others claiming to be vehicles of spiritual truth through channeling or through teaching of what they claim comes from their wisdom—it seems to me that there are four key factors that one should be able to see: openness to questions, humility, reverence, and a sense of joy (often manifest in a sense of humor). If any of these ingredients are missing, I wonder about the quality of teaching. When in India I had the good fortune to sit in on lectures given by very senior Buddhists and saw their reverence, humility, and openness—and frequent giggles and jokes.

A second piece was referred to in the previous chapter. There must be a willingness to submit one’s questions to personal scrutiny, collective knowledge and values, and objective questions to ensure valid spiritual teaching. The support of a historically sound body of teachings seems to me to be crucial here. I have had the occasion to see many teachers

claiming support from many rich traditions. Most inspired me deeply as authentic people. They challenged participants to examine their own truths; they told their stories so as to keep their personal agendas up front; and they taught with affirmation.

I have also witnessed teaching that became suspect. Drawing on the power of charisma or the ignorance of attendants, they taught from prejudice or convenience. I can cite a couple of occasions when there was genuine abuse of the ideas or the tradition to promote hatred, aggression, and prejudice against other people. One happened in Montana and another in India.

### **So you're saying that discernment as you've described it is a crucial piece of the spiritual journey?**

You bet. I emphasize here the importance of drawing upon the support of people you trust to help you in this process. In talking to the director of an international consulting firm, I learned how she saw the role of leadership as a facilitator for collective discernment within the organization. The leader can still make the decisions but the effort to draw upon the energy and insight of staff leads to a vision and a plan that is far richer than any one person can create.<sup>154</sup>

### **How do you understand the rise of spiritual awareness on the individual level?**

Well, I believe that the past three centuries in the West has promoted an attachment to control and materialism that makes the spiritual awareness obscure and seen in a negative or cynical light. The rise of the relativity of post-modern thinking that emerged from the psychosocial viewpoint took a lot of the power out of traditional religious myths to remind us of the transcendent perspective. The result was a universe that became empty of ultimate meaning. In this context, the ultimate questions stopped being asked. Professional service aimed at helping people with the most crucial aspects of their lives (medicine and family service work, for example) avoided these questions as irrelevant or of limited value. I think the collective psyche of the West is agitating for meaning. The spiritual horizon is the missing link in healing.

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<sup>154</sup> Scottish lady from the group

### **Is the spiritual level best?**

No. It is tempting to view these three levels as good, better, and best. I believe that we live most fully and effectively if we can encounter the world on all three levels. I like a phrase I heard from Pema Chodren, a Buddhist nun who leads a monastery in Pleasant Bay, Cape Breton Island. She says that we must keep our feet on the ground and our heads in the stars.

The basic notion here is that the psychological level rises above the physical and includes it. Thus a people who have consciously integrated the psychological are also connected to their physical level of experience. People who have integrated or are integrating their spiritual levels (or selves) will have connection to their psychological and physical levels. In short, the spiritual perspective is that there is only one fully integrated level of experience. The critical thing is that people can encounter the world in a flexible way that results in their being alive to their experience in the richest possible way.

### **How does the spiritual awareness level open up to an individual?**

I realize that this seems a little like talking about “where can I buy a ticket?” I don’t mean to present this as simplistic as a three-step dance. The fact is that many of the different models of levels of human development and consciousness have 10 or 15 levels. I refer you to Ken Wilbur’s book *Integral Psychology* for an extensive listing of many different models.

There seem to be two roads of growth. One is with disciplined awareness coming through some psychospiritual practice; the other is through a life crisis that presses us to find a new solution to our issue at another level. From what I can see, most of us tend to take the latter—at least that’s what I have noticed in my life and that of my clients. The opportunities for spiritual growth, in other words, often come disguised as frustrating marital difficulties, painful losses, and so forth. When I sit down with clients who tell me that they are so tired or discouraged about their struggle that they can no longer continue on the same way, I know that they are confronted with a spiritual opportunity.

**So you are making a case for the fact that family service work by its very nature is called upon to reckon with the process of spiritual growth.**

Yes. It does take sensitivity and experience at the spiritual level of awareness to have the confidence and readiness to work with it this way.

**The family service worker must be committed to travelling his or her own spiritual road.**

Yes, and the supervisors and managers must be prepared to encourage this and promote an environment where this risk is reasonable. While some agencies and training programs still overlook the importance therapists and other family service workers dealing effectively with their own lives, I believe we need to take this further to support spiritual awareness in all staff. This can be done easily and without dogma when we cultivate genuine concern for our colleagues, work hard to deal with obstacles to communication, and encourage one another to look at our own needs. Some agencies have policies supporting workers financially to get help for problems they are facing and some have this built into their evaluation formats. In the end, it depends upon agency leadership to hold a value around the commitment to personal growth for its staff. This I believe is an expression of support to staff that will also be a challenge to “practice what we preach.” I think that it also requires a quality of openness to matters of spirituality reflects the agency leadership’s vision of the work it does and the purpose captured in the mission and vision statements.

**How do these three levels of awareness challenge family service work?**

We are faced with a world (and the best of family service work) that can only move forward through what Joseph Jaworski calls a “fundamental shift of mind.” We must bring forward a new model of living that reaches beyond the limitations of a universe of the five senses. The wisdom of family service work is its capacity to see the linkage between health and the quality of our relationships. This can include our relationship with ourselves, significant others, and communities. Much healing comes from restoring breaks in these relationships. The innate potential for healing often needs little more



than the restoration of broken relationships. The spiritual perspective simply extends the scope of relatedness on levels different from the physical and psychosocial. Our spiritual traditions are a technology of transformation that link the individual to the Big Story energies of the universe. In short, greater goodness in this world depends upon the quality of spiritual endeavor we can summon forth. As Jaworski describes it, “it’s about a shift from seeing the world made up of things to a world made of relationships and possibilities.”<sup>155</sup>

Spiritual traditions challenge us to be careful about anchoring our ideas about ourselves in rigid identifications with our body, our thoughts, and our roles. Our capacity to cope with a wildly changing world is made more difficult by rigid self-definition and rigid expectations about how things must be. We see this in the reactionary positions of fundamentalist politics, religion, and other ideologues who attach their goals to fixed formulas of being.

### **This is beginning to make a bit more sense. Where do people find this in their lives?**

In traditional religion, we are taught to find the spiritual in the preserved stories of our ancestors and in our faith. Ken Wilber makes a good point when he suggests that having a spiritual experience is pretty common: the birth of a child, falling in love, mystical experiences where, for example, we have had moments of awe at a beautiful sunset, a starry sky, in profoundly moving dreams or feeling a deep admiration for another human being. In each of these instances, we are called beyond the ordinary formulas of the material and psychological; connectedness and meaning make deep intuitive sense. William James’ book on the psychology of spirituality, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, cites a large number of documented mystical experiences. Go to any bookstore or library, and you will find them reported in abundance. The challenge for authentic spirituality is to sustain this experience more and more frequently in our daily life. This calls for the discipline and practice offered to us by every spiritual tradition.

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<sup>155</sup> Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, p. 10.

I had this sort of experience while visiting a Buddhist monastery in South India. I had a dream in which I had the experience of meeting the gaze of a monk and a ball of energy moved from him to me and when it hit me, I had a feeling that I would describe as ecstatic. After waking, the dream remained vivid and even disturbing because it was so unusual. I spoke to a Buddhist scholar about this the next day and he indicated that this is a dream that is very familiar in monastic practice. There is even literature that discusses how to sustain this experience in every day life.

**So spirituality is not just about having experiences. It is about the discipline to work with them.**

You bet. This is one way you can distinguish authentic spiritual systems from ones that are based on self-serving fantasies. Spirituality is not magic. The richness of spiritual experience requires work. Anyone suggesting that it is about results gained without work is not talking about authentic spirituality.

**What about the spiritual material that comes from near death experiences, from drugs, or from psychosis?**

We also see spirituality in evidence in religious delusions of psychosis, in the experiences of hallucinogenic drugs. Through consultation work with religious organizations that I have done over a number of years, I have had the opportunity to listen to many stories from people believing that they are possessed by the devil or in the grip of some sort of evil. The majority of the claims that I have seen are examples of schizophrenia or organic psychosis. Others represent a naïve idea that can be better explained through conventional psychological or medical systems. What has been intriguing to me, though, is the sense that religious delusions of this type cannot be fully dismissed as non-spiritual. In my own opinion, vulnerable individuals whose psychology and/or medical state is shaky may be catching glimpses of the spiritual realm that they cannot integrate. While their condition may leave them open to spiritual experience, this condition also makes healthy integration nearly impossible.

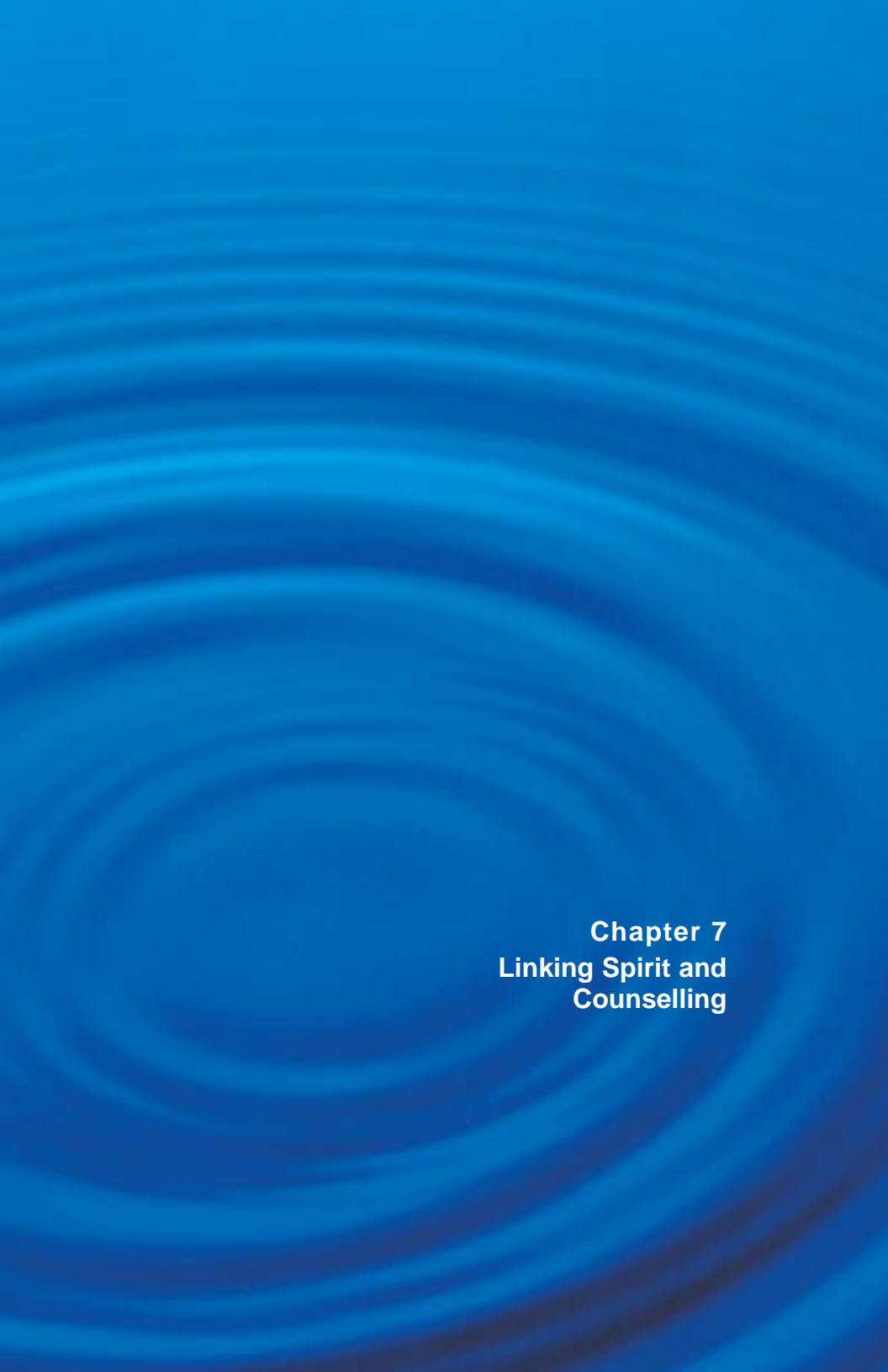
Regarding drug experiences, I am again cautious about automatically dismissing the spiritual material reported by some using hallucinogenic drugs. Many shamanic traditions employ drugs in a ritual way to enter

into spiritual states. There is a careful practice and a systemic belief system built around the practice. I don't think this can be dismissed so easily. I have had the opportunity to listen to some of the renowned experts in studies of the effects of hallucinogenic drugs—people like Ram Dass (a.k.a. Richard Alpert) and Stanislov Graf. Ram Dass' writings suggest a highly controversial dimension to this whole question. It also suggests that there is something here that can't be dismissed lightly because of the controversial and careless aspects to some of the research. There is a serious side to this that provokes questions. For example, Ram Dass' work with Timothy Leary revealed remarkable parallels in the experiences of subjects with the revered writings in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In a recent lecture in New York City, a much older Ram Dass, now in a wheelchair from a stroke, suggests that while there may have been some real spiritual value to the drug experimentation such as his work at Harvard in the 1960s, today's culture is not suited to this.

Again, I see the importance of getting past spirituality as “neat experience” whether induced from drugs or drama, and focusing on spirituality as an outlook and a discipline.

Regarding near death experiences (NDEs), there is lots of fascination and controversy. Deepak Chopra, in *How to Know God* (audiotape version), some scientists suggest that we can reproduce all the phenomena of NDEs in circumstances where the brain is being starved of oxygen. It may be reducible to that. However, when I observed the literature that highlights the ways in which people's lives are changed by this experience I am not ready to dismiss it. I have spoken to some who have had such experiences and there seems to be something there. Also, for the sake of argument, we can also produce sensory perceptions in the brain artificially through electronic stimulation. It does not mean that the phenomena experienced don't also exist.

Most of us live predominantly in psychological and physical consciousness. Many people like me have intuitively sensed the potential for a more sustained spiritual consciousness. There are many examples cited in research into psychic phenomena and in our religious traditions that point to the possibility of living in greater and even predominantly spiritual consciousness. As more people develop this through discipline and the support of a good teachers and supportive communities (and this is where spiritual method and “religion” has relevance), the world will begin to change.

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**Chapter 7**  
**Linking Spirit and**  
**Counselling**

# Linking Spirit and Counselling

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By faith, by virtue and energy, by deep contemplation and vision by wisdom and by right action, you shall overcome the sorrows of life.

- Dhammapada <sup>156</sup>

To omit the spiritual element from our medical worldview is not only narrow and arbitrary, it appears increasingly to be bad science as well.

- Larry Dossey<sup>157</sup>

Most people think of therapy as a modern concept, although the term originated in Homeric Greece, and its first connotation was of spiritual healing. In recent times, partially as a result of the practice of medicine being more and more transformed from art to science, most forms of therapy have also come to understand their “healing”—how they “make whole”—as other than spiritual. Therapy, in other words, has become scientific: attentive to measuring, demanding proof, relying on technique.

- Ernest Jones and Katherine Ketcham<sup>158</sup>

The search for the “one” force, the ultimate source of all understanding has doubtless played a seminal role in the origin of both religion and science.

-Werner Heisenberg<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p.144.

<sup>157</sup> Larry Dossey, “Whatever Happened to Healers?” *Alternative Therapies and Health in Medicine* 1(5) 6-13: p. 12.

<sup>158</sup> Ernest Jones and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, p. 26

<sup>159</sup> Werner Heisenberg quoted in *Quantum Questions: Writings of the World's Great Physicists*, p. 41.

All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the forces of Nature; but the person lost in selfish delusion thinks that he himself is the actor.

- Bhagavad-Gita<sup>160</sup>

Q: “How will I know when I get there?”

A: You will not be afraid.

Q: With so many mysteries and dangers, how can I not be afraid?

A: Your little body is full of mysteries and dangers yet you are not afraid of it for you take it as your own. What you do not know is that the entire universe is your body—so you need not be afraid. You may say you have two bodies, personal and the universal. The personal comes and goes, the universal is with you always. The universal body is all around you just that you call it the world.

- Bhagavad-Gita<sup>161</sup>

In all traditions except the Western medical one, the first step in healing is to re-establish the proper relationship with the cosmos and get connected again.

-Ted Kapchuk<sup>162</sup>

### **Let’s talk about how spirituality becomes important to the counselling process.**

Okay. We can begin by exploring what the spiritual perspective brings to a client who is suffering some kind of distress—say depression as a result of a marriage break-up. If we draw from the discussion of the last chapter, material consciousness focuses upon the experience of pain as an affliction, something to be gotten rid of. We seek to restore the control and security that is lost as a result of the pain. From this perspective, an external event and or person causes the pain. The response is to seek relief by changing the external situation. In this instance, the recourse is to get the partner back or to complete the legal and emotional adjustments in order to “get over it.”

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<sup>160</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, p. 89.

<sup>161</sup> Deepak Chopra, *Quantum Healing*, audiotape.

<sup>162</sup> Ted Kaptchuk, *The Web that Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*, p. 184

**This seems very human and very familiar.**

You bet. Most of us have that sense of loss as a bad thing to be gotten over with as soon as possible. As we shall see, however, this is not the only perspective. Psychosocial consciousness extends the horizon to include the sense that our distress is part of a context of relationship. The source of distress is located in a circle of relatedness. We are challenged to move past either/or, cause-and-effect thinking to include the interactions. Pain becomes a signal of disruption in the system of which the person is a part. Healing then become more than simply “getting rid of the problem.” It also includes adjustment of the meaning we give to the experience of loss. Pain can become a signal of faulty beliefs, destructive habits, failed initiatives, and inadequate attention to needs of the relationship. We are a part of the problem. Healing calls for adjustments to beliefs and habits. It is not enough to look at one person’s beliefs and habits but to examine the contexts of relationship and culture.

**Psychosocial consciousness is not quite as simple as fix and repair.**

It does not mean that we ignore the relief of pain—that would defy common sense. However we might ask about the meaning of the distress. How does this pain open doors to learning? In this way, we can begin to ask how we can make different choices. Mechanistic medicine and counselling practice focuses on the particular pain and ignores context. The wisdom of the psychosocial perspective is to see pain as a doorway to growth.

**But what is the point in getting your client to feel pain more deeply and see the issues more deeply? Some people would say that counselling should focus entirely on the solution.**

I am not suggesting this is an either/or process. This is a crucial difference made by the spiritual perspective. The spiritual traditions suggest that pain can lead us to greater consciousness. With the support of a counsellor who can model a willingness to be present to their experience, clients can experience their distress as a journey of transforming their attention to wholeness (holiness). All that we experience is part of who we are. If we are able to be conscious of the experience without choosing to run away, we engage in relationship with more of who we are.

Marilyn Ferguson quotes Herman Hesse from his journal written in 1918. He describes a dream in which he was confronted by two voices. One spoke to him to seek out “forces to overcome suffering, to calm himself. . . . But the second voice—which sounded much farther off, like “primal cause”—said that suffering only hurts because you fear it, complain about it, flee it.”<sup>163</sup>

You know quite well, deep within you that there is only a single magic, a single power, a single salvation...and that is called loving. Well, then, love your suffering. Do not resist it, do not flee from it. Give yourself to it. It is only your aversion that hurts nothing else.<sup>164</sup>

### **Not everyone is ready to ask questions of meaning or responsibility.**

Yes. That is the pitfall of those who seek only pain relief. There is a likelihood that they will be back again with the same problem. But let’s appreciate that this is tough work. As workers, we need to stay grounded in our own experience of the fear of change and the satisfying urge to blame others for one’s own pain. People have their own thresholds for change. We can only make the invitations and offer compassion to those who are not ready to take up the tough work of inner change. Sometimes the greatest gift the counsellor can give to the client is the encouragement to know that their struggle has meaning and they are not alone.

### **What can we do when we encounter clients who are not ready to risk exploring their struggle on the psychosocial level of consciousness?**

Much good literature talks about issues of resistance, motivation, and counter-transference (therapist’s issues that are activated in the presence of the client’s distress and struggles in counselling). I won’t repeat that. What comes to mind from a spiritual perspective follows from the advice of a Tibetan monk.

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<sup>163</sup> Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, p. 76.

<sup>164</sup> David B. Larsen, “Have Faith: Religion Can Heal Mental Illness,” *Insight* (March 6, 1995): p. 20.



## **So what's the advice?**

At the end of a wonderful Canada Film Board presentation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, an old monk and his young apprentice are travelling back to their monastery from a home where they had been providing traditional support to a young man who had died. They are reflecting on the many things that people do to themselves that cause unnecessary pain. The old monk reflects sadly on the mystery of how common self-imposed suffering is. After a weighty pause, he says that “for this reason, we must have compassion for all people.” Then he adds, “And it doesn't hurt to have a sense of humour.”

I believe all spiritual traditions give us this advice when we witness the struggles of another. Compassion, by the way, is not merely a feeling. The long history of social justice in Christianity, which is part of the foundation of family service work, is compassion based on service.

## **Compassion and humor. These are noble offerings. What about prayer?**

Prayer, defined generally, is a heartfelt act of compassion put out as a petition for divine assistance or it can be seen as an extension of loving intention to another. This may seem kind and harmless enough response to the plights of our clients who are not ready to go further on their growth.

I have developed a lot more personal confidence about the role of prayer in our work. What has become intriguing to me is the emerging empirical research that shows that prayer does make a difference in healing and recovery. The research that I am familiar with is primarily in medicine. Dr. Larry Dossey is the most well-known researcher who has promoted this information. Others include Dr. Neil Sheahy and Jeff Levin (*God, Faith, and Healing*) who are other notable voices raising up a new paradigm for the spiritual dimension of medical healing. Levin cites as many as 200 studies highlighting the positive effects of religion and spirituality in medicine. As Dossey and others suggest, if we find something that works, we have an ethical obligation to offer this to our clients. Once again, if we get past the dogmatic issues of a prayer from a particular religious belief system, we are simply offering our highest wishes for the welfare of another when we pray for them. How can that be a bad thing?

Dr. David Larson, National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) president said:

While medical professionals have been privately assuming and publicly stating for years that religion is detrimental to mental health, when I actually looked at the available empirical research on the relationship between religion and health, the findings were overwhelmingly positive.<sup>165</sup>

In an interview with Deepak Chopra, he reports that there have been 1,600 studies since the beginning of this century highlighting the effects of prayer on healing.<sup>166</sup> When Larry Dossey discovered study after study highlighting the positive effects of prayer for medical practice, he reports how this put him in a dilemma:

It never occurred to me that religious practices such as prayer could be assessed like a new drug. At the time, I did not pray for my patients, and soon I found myself facing an ethical dilemma. If this study was reliable, how could I justify not praying for my patients?<sup>167</sup>

**And you are suggesting that these findings have direct implications for the questions we should be asking ourselves in family service work?**

Absolutely. I am not arguing for a conclusion; I am arguing that we should not be afraid of asking the questions. I know that in my own personal times of crisis, faith and prayer matters. I know many other therapists and healers whom I have spoken to in this year of research who are aware of how important it is to them in crucial times. The issue then becomes, should we not want to offer the very best of what we know has helped us? The next question is, how can we share this wisdom with our clients in a way that does not prescribe a specific belief or practice? Encourage them to ask their own questions and draw upon their own belief traditions. Victor Frankl puts it this way:

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Quoted from Deepak Chopra at his web site: [www.howtoknowgod.com](http://www.howtoknowgod.com).

<sup>167</sup> Quoted from Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. ix.

When a patient stands on the firm ground of religious belief, there can be no objection to making use of the therapeutic effect of his religious convictions and thereby drawing upon his spiritual resources.<sup>168</sup>

### **What is the research saying about why prayer makes a difference?**

I think that the question why is a lot less important than whether it does or not. I think we need to be cautious about the explanation we give. First because, like most any other effective tool, it can work on a number of different levels.

Jeff Levin outlines a number of different levels of influence for prayer and spiritual/religious practice in general:

- Religious affiliation and membership benefit health by promoting healthy behaviour and lifestyles.
- Regular religious fellowship benefits health by offering support that buffers the effects of stress and isolation.
- Participation in worship and prayer benefits health through the physiological effects of positive emotions.
- Religious beliefs benefit health by their similarity to health-promoting beliefs and personality styles.
- Simple faith benefits health by leading to thoughts of hope, optimism, and positive expectation.
- Mystical experiences benefit health by activating a healing bioenergy, life force, or altered state of consciousness.
- Absent prayer for others is capable of healing by paranormal means or by divine intervention.<sup>169</sup>

Second, let us appreciate that the stories we tell about why things are the way they are remain stories that suit our perspective. Our culture,

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<sup>168</sup> Victor Fankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Clarion), p. 14.

<sup>169</sup> Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. 13.

beliefs, and particular experiences all will shape the story we tell about the “facts” we observe. We can get very bogged down in debates about “why.”

Finally, there is the issue of the level of consciousness by which we address the experience. From a material consciousness perspective, the effects of prayer make little sense. We can see how meanings or good intentions become a type of force that the recipient can experience as a positive help, but there is no way we can talk about the “non-local” (influence over distance without some mediating force) and still be classified as living in reality.

**But we still can’t account for how prayers can be effective when offered anonymously for people some distance away and for people whom you don’t know.**

Yes, that’s true. This is how we can introduce the sphere of spiritual consciousness. Larry Dossey provides a historical perspective for medicine that parallels the three levels of consciousness that we have been talking about. In *Recovering the Soul*, Dossey describes three eras or paradigms of medicine this way:

- **Materialistic medicine:** Until 40 years ago, medicine held to a local, Newtonian vision of the universe in which treatment and illness were seen as mechanical, chemical, and the result of physical interaction.
- **Mind-body medicine:** The result of the influx of psychosomatic and behavioral research and therapies held that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour affected health and healing. Innovations such as behavior-change programs, psychotherapy, biofeedback, and psychoneuroimmunology are examples of this era.
- **Mind/body/spirit medicine:** “Minds are spread through space and time; are omnipresent, infinite, and immortal; are ultimately one.”<sup>170</sup>

**Wow. Number three certainly topples conventional ideas about the nature of healing.**

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p.206.

According to many observers including Marilyn Ferguson, Carolyn Myss, and Jeff Levin, we are in a time of shifting to a model of healing that brings together body, mind, and spirit all as crucial agents of the healing process.

While the mystics of East and West, and our shamanic practices have spoken of non-local healing for millennia, science also is creating a foundation for a worldview that takes us far beyond the paradigms of our psychosocial consciousness. Einstein has shown us that time and space are relative, that matter and energy are interchangeable. Bell's Theorem and Hinesburg's Uncertainty Principle also contribute astounding observations from the lab that challenge our assumptions about a predictable and familiar Newtonian universe.

Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, "We're not in Kansas any more, Toto." It is no longer impossible to see how the spiritual dimension is finding its way into a tentative but powerful partnership with the formulas of quantum science. It is inevitable that family service agencies and their workers will have to come to terms with this new vision sooner rather than later.

### **Are there signs that this is happening?**

One writer, in writing about the cultural sensitivity issues related to the new diagnostic category of "Religious or Spiritual Problem" now in the DSM-IV says this:

In the face of psychiatry's long-standing tendency either to ignore or pathologize the religious and spiritual dimensions of human existence, the inclusion of a religious or spiritual problem in the DMS-IV marks a significant breakthrough. For the first time, there is an acknowledgement of psychological problems of a religious or spiritual nature that are not attributable to a mental disorder...(This) new diagnostic category could help to promote a new relationship between psychiatry and the fields of religion and spirituality that will benefit both mental health professionals and those who seek their assistance."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> From Robert P. Turner, David Lukoff, Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Francis G. Lu (1995), "Religious or Spiritual Problem: A Culturally Sensitive Diagnostic Category in the DSM-IV," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 183 (1997): pp. 442-443.

**I think that many folks in the health care field have trouble trusting this outlook.**

This is what trust is: believing without knowing for sure. Within the material sphere, we rely upon logic and physical evidence to secure our confidence. In the psychosocial sphere, information is the foundation for trust in the methods of change. On the spiritual plane, no information can convince or prove the “hypothesis of spirit.” The only way to address the field beyond information, substance, and logic is to trust our experience. I repeat the words of a Desert Father of the Christian tradition, Monoimus:

Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as a starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, “My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.” Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate... If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself.<sup>172</sup>

The spiritual threshold cannot be crossed with our familiar ways of knowing intact. We are challenged to see the inevitable struggle to surrender control or knowing. This can be very frustrating to those looking to be convinced. D.H. Lawrence, poet and novelist, describes this threshold like this:

This is what I believe:  
That I am I  
That my soul is a dark forest  
That my known self will never be more than a small clearing in the forest.  
That gods, strange gods, come forth from the forest into the clearing of my known self  
And go back.  
That I must have the courage to let them come and go.  
That I will never let mankind put anything over on me.  
But I will try always to recognize and submit to the gods in me and the gods in other men and women.  
This is my credo.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Sam Keen, *Hymns To An Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life*, p. 32.

<sup>173</sup> D.H. Lawrence quoted in Robert Fulghum, *Words I Wish I Wrote* (Harper Audio, 1997).

This is why I believe that it is only intolerable distress that drives us past our tenuous understandings and guiding beliefs. The many stories that I have heard about encounters with a genuine experience of the spiritual have this in common: they start in our guts rather than our heads, they emerge when we are willing rather than willful, and they involve a sense of connection between self and wholeness. Lao Tzu says it this way:

Those who know don't talk.  
Those who talk don't know.

Close your mouth,  
Block off your senses,  
Blunt your sharpness,  
Untie your knots,  
Soften your glare,  
Settle your dust.  
This is the primal identity<sup>174</sup>

### **This reminds me of your title, *Radical Relatedness*.**

This reminds me of a story shared with me by a staff psychologist at Esalen. Andy is a very conscientious man with a very energized presence. He spoke of an incident in which his hand was crushed severely by a large rock. It was so bad that tissue was actually squeezed out the side of his hand. His years of meditation helped him overcome the familiar reflex to disconnect from his pain and let panic and fear take over. He made a point of literally speaking to his hand saying, "I am with you" over and over like a mantra. Gradually the pain reduced. Over the next months, he underwent many surgeries with minimal anesthetic. This he attributed to the sustained sense of connection that he held between himself and his injury. It was the opposite of dissociation. He believed that the greatest pain we suffer is in our withdrawal from our fears, our disconnection from our experience.

**When one observes the urge to withdraw into panic, anger, tears, or denial, one can see how this principle of relatedness is central to healthy living.**

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<sup>174</sup> Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*, p. 152.

A culture such as ours, rooted excessively in the material sphere, is very attached to the separateness of things and the relegation of many vital aspects of human experience to the dust bin of irrelevance or “unmeaning.” This, the ecologists and eco-biologists suggest is the foundation of today’s environmental crisis. Similarly, it is our habitual denial of relatedness that is the source of much of our clients’ distress. Marilyn Ferguson, author of *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, puts it this way:

Personal denial, mutual denial, collective denial. Denial of facts and feelings. Denial of experience, a deliberate forgetting what we see and hear. Denial of our capacities. Politicians deny problems, parents deny their vulnerability, teachers deny their biases, children deny their intentions. Most of all, we deny what we know in our bones.<sup>175</sup>

So, in the worldview emerging from the spiritual perspective, we are talking about a kind of fundamental relatedness of all things and the healing on some level is the restoration of relationship that has been cut off through ignorance, bad habits, and faulty outlook.

### **So the spiritual perspective connects a conscious sense of relatedness to healing.**

Yes. I think it is a remarkable insight to suggest that the pain of separation is often greater than the event that causes the pain in the first place. Eckhart Tolle talks about how the experience of trauma fractures our experience of wholeness into limited awareness. For example, someone who has suffered sexual abuse in childhood can live within the mould of “I am a victim of sexual abuse.” This becomes their identity. Another person may identify with a loss of a parent as to a defining quality who they are. This can become entrenched because it provides a reason for the distress they experience or why they cannot change. It helps us understand why clients can become so attached to an experience from the past that they live as though it were still true now.

To stand outside of this identification with our past is to see how incredibly limiting it is. Clearly these are painful events, and a certain healing is needed to move forward. For many, the issue of attachment to this “pain identity” means that they have not completed the journey.

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<sup>175</sup> Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*, p. 74.



The journey of letting go is difficult and involves fear and the sadness of loss. Not everyone is ready to surrender the advantages and the familiarity of the prison cell of this pain identity.

How we understand the difference between ego and spirit is crucial to understanding that our essence lies not in identification with our thoughts and feelings (level two consciousness) or our body (level one consciousness) but in our awareness that we exist beyond thought and feeling. The spiritual traditions tell us that the role of the body and mind (defined here as the psychological and emotional field or ego) serve to facilitate the connection to this world. However, they are merely vehicles of experiencing this connection.

Eckhart Tolle says that when we identify with our thoughts and feelings as though they are all we are, we become unconscious of our true selves. This ignorance of our fuller being is the focus of the great spiritual teachings. Buddhism articulates this in its exposition of the Four Noble Truths:

**Suffering**, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow... and pain... and despair are suffering, dissociation from the loved one is suffering.

Thus **the origin of suffering**, as a noble truth is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being, accompanied by enjoyment and lust—in other words, craving for sensual desire, craving for being, craving for non-being.

**Cessation of suffering**, as a noble truth is this: It is remainderless fading and ceasing, ...letting go and rejecting, of that same craving.

**The way leading to a cessation of suffering**, as a noble truth is this: It is simply the eightfold noble path of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.<sup>176</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore, considered by many to be the greatest contemporary Indian poet, describes the pain of the split this way:

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<sup>176</sup> Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*, pp. 65-66.

He in whom I  
Enclose my name is  
Weeping in this  
dungeon. I am ever  
Busy building this  
Wall all around; and  
As this wall goes up  
Into the sky day by  
Day I lose sight of  
My true being in its  
Dark shadow.

I take pride in this  
Great wall, and I  
Plaster it with dust  
And sand lest a least  
Hole should be left  
in this name; and for  
All the care I take I  
Lose sight of my true  
Being.<sup>177</sup>

When our identity is limited to mental and physical experience we become lost to the more expansive soul perspective. Our experience is that life happens to us, things make us feel good or bad, and people make us feel good or bad. In this sense, we operate out of a sense of powerlessness. Religion on this level becomes a process of appeasing or manipulating the gods out of fear and powerlessness.

It is only when we have the courage to be present to our experience and observe without judgement that we can dis-identify with the mindset, the conditioned thoughts, and patterns of feeling, and allow space for the fuller experience of being or soul. This is the space that gives rise to joy, love, and peace.<sup>178</sup>

**I am thinking about the many initiation rights in different religious traditions that involve some sort of painful test. Is this a symbolic way of teaching the initiate about the path into greater consciousness?**

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<sup>177</sup> Uncertain source. This poem was passed on to me by a friend.

<sup>178</sup> Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*, p. 58.

Yes, I think you've got a good point. Sometimes the pain is symbolically presented in the form of a tap on the cheek of the initiate becoming confirmed in the Catholic Church or the tap on the shoulders with a sword in the initiation into knighthood. It can also be knocking out a tooth, scarification, or some sort of endurance test such as a vision quest, the sun dance ceremony, or the ritualistic death when initiates spend three days in a ritual coffin. When they emerge, they are transformed.

I believe I spoke earlier about the initiation rites in the shamanic tradition as a time of death in which the afflictions that visit themselves upon the spirit of the initiate become healing powers. The German poet Rilke says it well when he suggests that when you pray, pray not to be delivered from your afflictions but rather, pray for the power to endure.

**So pain and struggle are understood to be part of transformation from one level of consciousness to another.**

Yes. In this sense the notion of dying, such as that presented by Jesus ("Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies...") represents the "dying" to an old level of consciousness. When we shift important beliefs about who we are, we are withdrawing psychic energy from a certain way of seeing life. This is a kind of death. For example, when young adults leave home, they are challenged to leave dependence upon their parents behind. Another example is the theme of death in dreams where images of dying convey a fundamental change of outlook for the dreamer. I have worked with dreams for many years and have come to appreciate the dream state as a field of transformation that occurs every night. The images of death rarely mean actual physical death. Instead this is the language of the psyche for deep change.

It is helpful to learn from those who have devoted their lives to spiritual living and share this struggle. Pema Chodren speaks of her learning path in a monastic community in which the teacher, Choyim Trompe Rimpoche, asked all the monks to talk about what they do when "their heart is squeezed"—that is, when things really fall apart. The monks were so surprised by the question that they answered without guile, one by one, and with some embarrassment, that they would simply fall apart, forget all their spiritual discipline and fall into anger, fear, and whatever. In her audiotape presentation of "When Things Fall Apart," Chodren speaks of the need to return again and again to the disciplined cultivation of wisdom to enter the transformative path.

The sacred texts of the great religions cite the struggles to greater consciousness in daily life. Just one example would be St. Paul who says, “What I want to do, I do not do, and that which I do not wish to do, I do. What a wretched man am I.”<sup>179</sup> Buddha warns that the journey is like walking the edge of a knife. Jesus warns us that the path is narrow. And, in another place He speaks of the need to forgive others and ourselves many times. In short, we are challenged to see the process of growing consciousness not as some path perfection but one of imperfection. Mistakes and struggles become the vehicle of learning and increasing awareness of the full context of our lives. The sin is not in the mistake or the transgression but in the failure to respond with compassion and willingness to learn from the experience.

### **Is this what the discipline of meditation is intended to assist?**

Yes. My experience of meditation is a practice to cultivate awareness of the miracle of life that we are living. I see this to be so regardless of what meditative tradition we are speaking of. It could be the Ignation exercises and contemplative practices of Christianity, the shamanic journey, ecstatic dance of tribal Africa, or the meditative traditions of the East. Pima Chodren, a well-known Buddhist nun who leads a monastery in Cape Breton Island, speaks of the awareness of self as an expansive, creative state of being. Meditation in its best sense is a means of cultivating awareness of our habits of behaviour, thinking, and feeling. Meditation encourages us to distinguish between our sense of who we are and what Eckhart Tolle calls Being. Within this split arises pain of being lost and disconnected. Spiritual practice seeks to restore this connection.

### **Give me an example of what you mean by healing this split between our sense of self and Being or soul.**

One example would be in the field of addictions. Gerald May, psychiatrist and brother of the more widely known Rollo May, speaks of the addict’s beliefs about life as focussed on their drug of choice and the belief that their survival depends upon their continued supply. Life is struggle and it is all up to us. In a very real sense, addiction is an unconscious religion in which their attachment (drug, alcohol, sex, gambling, work, etc.) is the sacrament and they are seeking to be their

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<sup>179</sup> Romans 7:22

own god. May's work with addicts has led him to the spiritual principle of grace as an essential ingredient in healing. In *Addiction and Grace*, he says:

It is most important to remember, however, that it is not the objects of our addictions that are to blame for filling up our hands and hearts; it is our clinging to these objects, grasping for them, becoming obsessed with them. In the words of John of the Cross, "It is the things of this world that either occupy the soul or cause it harm, since they enter it not, but rather the will and the desire for them." This will and desire, this clinging and grasping is attachment.<sup>180</sup>

In this way, addiction becomes a powerful example of the isolated, limited experience of being cut off from that larger sense of Being. May then adds at another point that:

because of our addictions, we simply cannot—on our own—keep the great commandments. Most of us have tried, again and again, and failed. Some of us have even recognized that these commandments are really our own deepest desires. We have tried to dedicate our lives to them, but still we fail. I think that our failure is necessary, for it is in failure and helplessness that we can most honestly and completely turn to grace. Grace is our only hope for dealing with addiction, the only power that can truly vanquish its destructiveness. Grace is the invincible advocate of freedom and the absolute expression of perfect love.<sup>181</sup>

From the perspective of this discussion, we can draw upon May's perspective on grace to see an example of how the loss of connection between our limited selves and ultimate Being is restored.

### **Grace. This is a radical concept for family service work.**

I think so, too. Grace is certainly a foreign concept to our psychology textbooks. This is part of that further frontier of spirituality I have spoken of before. In conventional religious perspectives, it is the notion of "let go and let God." From another perspective altogether, Margaret Wheatley uses the perspective of quantum science and chaos theory to describe how transformation occurs in individuals and organizations

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<sup>180</sup> Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), p. 18.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

through openness to connections beyond the boundaries that separate self from others. Similar to Gerald May's notion of grace, she speaks of the innate self-organizing principle of chaos theory to describe how individual and organizational transformation occur when we can support this quality of openness.<sup>182</sup> I will explore this application to organizational change in the last chapter.

### **Is this another example where the language and metaphors of religion and spirituality coincide with those of science?**

Yes. I am not suggesting that they are exactly the same. I am not a scientist or a theologian. I am encouraged to believe that this kind of apparent shared perspective makes for an enriched perspective for both religion and science.

### **And for family service work.**

Yes. So you can see that the religious term “grace” and the notion of the self-organizing principle coming to us from the science of chaos theory help us to describe a healing dimension of the spiritual perspective. Mahatma Ghandi, one of the world's great leaders of transformation, said it this way:

Without devotion and the consequent grace  
of God, humanity's endeavour is in vain.<sup>183</sup>

### **What about “necessary failure”?**

It is bizarre to think of failure as necessary. At least, who wants to suffer failure as a means to greater awareness? Yet, it becomes clear that the path of failure and darkness is well-charted in the spiritual traditions. Jesus spoke to this in the Sermon on the Mount:

How blest are those who know their need of God:  
the kingdom of heaven is theirs.  
How blest are the sorrowful;  
For they shall find consolation.

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<sup>182</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, p. 49.

<sup>183</sup> Quoted from Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*, p. 17.

How blest are those of a gentle spirit;  
They shall have the earth for their possession.  
How blest are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail;  
They shall be satisfied.<sup>184</sup>

Tony Schwartz says, “the spiritual journey is a journey of falling on your face.”<sup>185</sup>

Meister Eckhart, the great medieval Christian mystic, puts it this way: “God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction.”<sup>186</sup>

### **Is suffering the only doorway? What about enlightenment or service as spiritual pathways?**

I often reflect with my clients in a playful way about why one has to suffer to grow. Isn't there some sort of high road that doesn't mean going down? My work, particularly with men (especially myself), has taught me to appreciate that loss is the doorway to greater openness. I liken it to the necessary cracking of the egg before the chick can be born. Richard Rohr says that there are three spiritual paths: the path of redemption of failures, the path of love, and the path of heroic service. But, he offers, we must all begin with the path of redemption of failures. If each of us were to think back on the big changes that have occurred in their lives, how many would have to admit that the change began because a problem forced us to change? After all, how many of us are that spiritually free that we welcome change without a struggle?

### **This paints a pretty dreary picture for the spiritual path.**

Ironically, it is when we can face our deepest fears and be present to our suffering that we become capable of joy.

I remember a conversation I had with a Hindu holy man. In unsteady English but confident tones, he said that we too often confuse happiness with joy. Happiness is getting what we want. It is fleeting and is something that we share with all animals. Joy is the unique result of service in the needs of others. This thought gave me pause to reflect

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<sup>184</sup> Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*, p. 245.

<sup>185</sup> Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters*, p. 68.

<sup>186</sup> Quoted from Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, p. 132.

on the meaning of the family service profession and the power of joy possible when we can truly experience our work as an act of service.

I am also struck with the frequently observed irony that Western culture, which has so much of what it seeks materially, is less familiar with joy than cultures that have so little of what they need.

The spiritual path, marked as it is by unavoidable suffering and the challenge to surrender control, holds out a promise for joy. Joy is not often a concept that is offered in the textbooks of family therapy. It is in this sense that Ken Wilber said, “Suffering, truly, is the first grace.”<sup>187</sup> This was poignantly illustrated in his autobiographical *Grace and Grit*. In this work he wrote in plain and deeply honest terms about the death of his wife and the life change it inspired.

In *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker draws attention to our fear of confronting mortality and the strategies of shrinking the universe down to our particular version of fulfillment be it money, relationship, alcohol, work, or sex. The cracks in our illusions of immortality—(failure, health crises, relationship breakdown, or job loss to name a few)—become our worst fear. The suffering is not merely in keeping with the loss itself but the existential experience of being “cast over the edge” or looking into the abyss. There is no greater fear than to lose ourselves, our plans, and our security.

To be cast out of the egg of a particularly defined security is painful, yet it becomes an opportunity for growth. I think of men who, in their suffering, let down their guard with their partner or children and how it was at that time, when they may have felt most weak, that the family felt most close.

### **How does the notion of necessary failure as a path to wholeness relate to family service work with clients?**

There is nothing more disturbing and useless than to suggest one’s pain is “God’s will.” It is a sad truth, though, that the journey to transformation typically begins in failure and loss. I have had this driven home to me both in my personal life and in my work with men. So many angry, unhappy men have at the heart of their violence and

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<sup>187</sup> Ken Wilber, *One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber* (Boston: Shambala, 1999), p. 52.



addictions a deep core of sadness that they avoid at all costs until something forces their hand.

Pain, in these times, becomes a great teacher. Richard Rohr says that failure and repentance is the single path that is available to us in the beginning.<sup>188</sup> If we are able, with support, to face our pain, fear, and sadness, we begin the heroic journey from dependency and the experience of others to greater self-responsibility and therefore, greater choice and power. There is much literature written of the heroic journey going back thousands of years to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Iliad*, the legend of Buddha, and the passion of Jesus. In this light, we can witness consciously the heroic journey of our clients struggling with the burdens of poverty, single parenthood, severe depression, or the profound dislocation of the refugee experience.

The struggle is great, but it has meaning because it represents movement to new life. There are some aspects of this journey that no one can do for another. We can pray for grace, peace, relief, etc. We are even tempted to take on the work of our clients so much that we sometimes find things bogged down because we have not respected their right and need to face these challenges on their own terms as they are ready to do so. I am reminded of a piece of research, source unknown, in which it was found that the chicks who were helped to break the egg shell suffered greater mortality and illness than those allowed to struggle on their own.

### **So the spiritual traditions offer a framework of encouragement for the “journey through the valley of the shadow of death?”**

Joseph Campbell speaks of the role of myth as a guide that supports us and leads us into the unknown places of new life in his classic work, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. He says that “myths are the stories told by human beings throughout the ages to explain the universe and their place in it. It expresses the mystery transcending all human research.”<sup>189</sup> In *The Power of Myth*, Campbell writes eloquently about the spiritual path outlined by our spiritual traditions:

We have not even to risk the adventure alone for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known.

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<sup>188</sup> Richard Rohr, *Experiencing the Enneagram* (New York, Crossroads, 1992), audiotape.

<sup>189</sup> Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *Power of Myth*, p. 5.

We have only to follow the thread of the hero path and where we had thought to find an abomination we will find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves, where we have sought to travel outward we shall travel to the centre of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.

**This becomes a powerful change perspective for family service work.**

Absolutely. I have talked to counsellors who have talked about their use of prayer at times when they are stuck in their work with clients. For one particular counsellor, it represents a surrender of the idea that she or her client can have all the answers. A silent prayer becomes a cultivation of the conscious openness to what she describes as Spirit.

**Aren't myths just stories that are not true?**

Myths are all we have. Even our scientific formulas are based on a myth of scientism—that the world is constructed of interacting forces and that what is real is what can be taken in by the five senses. Reading other people's myths helps us to see that the creative imagery and story of myth conveys heart truths that serve to guide us, give us meaning, teach our children, and give us rules and guidelines for living. Our own myths we assume to be literally true while the myths of others are easier to see for what they are: creative images and stories that “give us clues of the spiritual potentialities of human life.”<sup>190</sup> The idea that a myth is true or untrue seems to be defined basically in terms of the myth of scientism—can I produce evidence or show how this is true? If not, then it must be false.

**Is the path of the hero not more of a male image? What about women's experience?**

Well, there are two points I can make about that:

- First, we don't lack heroic women, our culture just fails to honor heroism based on sacrifice and devotion rather than achievement.

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<sup>190</sup> Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 5.

Women's stories are emerging, and in that sense, we are beginning the long journey to redeeming an image that has been tainted by sexism.

- Second, I believe that the notion of a solitary hero is not fully adequate. In my work with men, I have been struck by how many models of development see singular achievement and separation at the top of the scale. It is my sense that heroic living can only happen with community support. We might go back and add the story of the supporting cast to the "self-made man" tales. These tales have been terribly misleading and have created a false ideal that has left men deficit in the relational sense of the word. I like what Tanis Helliwell and others have said when speaking of these times: "the time of the lone wolf is over." The age of the Piscean hero, conquering and prevailing, has given way to the Aquarian image of redemption through the corrective relationship of community. We can look more carefully at the great stories to see the importance of community in the lives of great leaders. None of us can do it on our own.

### **So myths are the wisdom of spiritual traditions designed to teach and guide us in our lives?**

They are that and more. Myths lead us to interpret our life experience in the context of spiritual meaning. With myths, we are no longer abiding in the empty and alienating explanations for why we hurt; rather they endorse the experience of hurt as a path to meaning. Myths as the language of the spiritual traditions give us a perspective that is different from that offered by the mechanistic- and technique-oriented formulas of the psychosocial view. It is not that these do not have value, but struggle is an experience looking for meaning and support. Psychology and social work can help us to some degree but without a perspective on transcendent meaning, grace, and the notion of being on a path, meaning is lost.

### **So we are back to the notion of struggle as spiritual growth.**

I learned to appreciate that real learning requires stepping outside our comfort zone. Life sometimes pushes us there. If you are like me, you have to take care how you respond to the unexpected, the unanswered prayer, or the "stupid" mistake. G.K. Chesterton once said:

A problem is an adventure wrongly considered.  
An adventure is a problem rightly considered.<sup>191</sup>

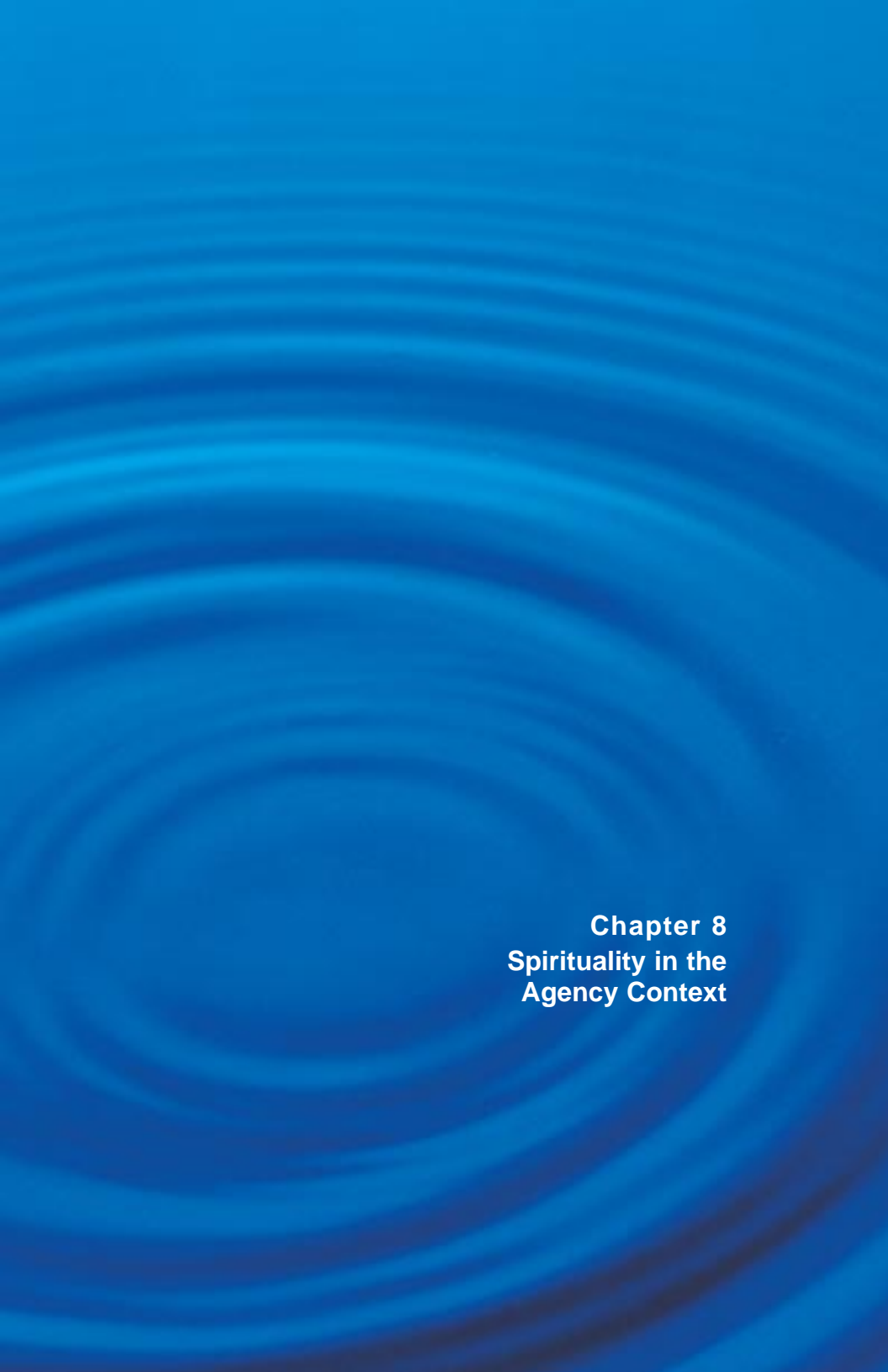
### **Does this apply to family service work as well?**

Yes. I think that it is only if we have the courage to approach our work on a spiritual level that we can experience fully the rich and complex challenge of being present to our clients, to the organization as community, and to ourselves. As one teacher, Tanis Helliwell, declared, “To be a force of change, you must change yourself.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Anne Simpkinson and George Simpkinson, *Soul Work: A Field Guide for Spiritual Seekers*, p. 42.

<sup>192</sup> From a workshop given in Parksville, BC, October, 2000.

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**Chapter 8**  
**Spirituality in the**  
**Agency Context**

# Spirituality in the Agency Context

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To be human means to be spiritual. Human beings have longings and aspirations that can be honored only when the person's spiritual capacity is taken seriously."

- Carolyn Gratton<sup>193</sup>

It is instructive to consider that the word "health" in English is based on an Anglo Saxon word "hale" meaning "whole": this is, to be healthy is to be whole, which is, I think, roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew "shalem." Likewise, the English "holy" is based on the same root as "whole." All of this indicates that man has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living. Yet, over the ages, he has generally lived in fragmentation.

- David Bohm, quantum physicist<sup>194</sup>

In the face of psychiatry's long-standing tendency either to ignore or pathologize the religious and spiritual dimensions of human existence, the inclusion of a religious or spiritual problem in the DMS-IV marks a significant breakthrough. For the first time, there is an acknowledgement of psychological problems of a religious or spiritual nature that are not attributable to a mental disorder.... (This) new diagnostic category could help to promote a new relationship between psychiatry and the fields of religion and spirituality that will benefit both mental health professionals and those who seek their assistance."<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, p. 137.

<sup>194</sup> David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p. 3.

<sup>195</sup> Robert P. Turner, David Lukoff, Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Francis G. Lu (1995), "Religious or Spiritual Problem: A Culturally Sensitive Diagnostic Category in the DSM-IV," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 183 (1997): pp. 442-443.

“While medical professionals have been privately assuming and publicly stating for years that religion is detrimental to mental health, when I actually looked at the available empirical research on the relationship between religion and health, the findings were over-whelmingly positive.”<sup>196</sup>

Unlike the scientifically based practices of psychiatry and psychology, social work has roots in the Christian and Jewish charitable work movements. Early on, however, there was a push for professionalism and a gradual abandonment of social work ties to religion.<sup>197</sup>

If there is much unhappiness among today’s student body, the reason is not in material hardship, but the lack of trust that makes it too difficult for the individual to give his life meaning. We must try to overcome the isolation that threatens the individual in a world dominated by technical expediency. The theoretical deliberations about questions of psychology or social structure will avail us little here, so far as we do not succeed in finding a way back, by direct action, to a natural balance between the spiritual and material conditions of life. It will be a matter of reanimating in daily life the values grounded in the spiritual pattern of the community of endowing them with such brilliance that the life of the individual is automatically directed towards them.<sup>198</sup>

For the first time in history, the scientific spirit of inquiry is being turned upon the other side of consciousness. There is a good prospect that the discoveries can be held this time and so become no longer the lost secret but the living heritage of man.  
- P.W. Martin writing in the 1950s<sup>199</sup>

In my experience, everyone who has reached these levels develops convincing insights into the utmost relevance of the spiritual and religious dimensions in the universal scheme of things.  
- Stephan Grof<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> David B. Larsen, “Have Faith: Religion Can Heal Mental Ills,” *Insight* (March 6, 1995): pp. 18-20.

<sup>197</sup> Anne Simpkinson and Charles Simpkinson, *Soul Work*, p. 66.

<sup>198</sup> Ken Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, p. 39.

<sup>199</sup> P.W. Martin quoted in Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*, p. 387

<sup>200</sup> Stephan Grof quoted in Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2001), p. 89.

## **I know that you've touched on this before but isn't spirituality in family service work a bit of a reach?**

I used to think so. After all, we've all been raised in a world that separates church and state. Spirituality and professional practice have been held as opposites. We may speak of God on Sundays, but come Monday the family service worker speaks the professional lingo of the unconscious, behaviour, community politics, or what have you. For some folks in the family service field, spirituality in agency practice is a non-starter. They have some pretty convincing arguments, too. Some see this as a misguided movement onto the turf of organized religion—a move backwards into superstition. Spirituality conjures up the sectarianism and the dogmatic biases of organized religion. This is an affront to the principles of good business practice. To paraphrase Pierre Trudeau, spirituality has no business in the board rooms of the nation.

## **Given these concerns, why go ahead?**

Over the years, much has been done to enhance the “professionalism” of family service work. Much of this has to do with increased standards for training that focus on the scientific method of “objective,” empirical, and rational formulas. In the name of “scientific credibility,” family service workers have been schooled in theories, research, and systemic diagnosis. More recently, we have seen agencies pressed towards increased record-keeping, accountability, and more rigorous policies to address issues of legal liability. These efforts add rigor to our work. They also provide reassurance to funders concerned about the “soft” science of family service work. All of this emphasizes control and assumes that the world of family service work is limited to things we can see, measure, and control. However, anyone who listens carefully to the experience of clients understands how little of our lives is under our control. Further, much of what our clients face provokes deep questions about what is really true about their lives—questions like meaning, hope, purpose, and suffering. Our theories and business practices can explain but they can't meet our clients in those places of deep uncertainty and suffering. This is the field of spirituality.



**In recent times spirituality and professionalism seem to be opposed to one another.**

Yes, it seems that way. I do not think that there would be any problems with a spiritual attitude of respect and compassion for one's clients. But when it comes to practice ideology, it seems to me that professional practice has steered clear of the spiritual perspective.

Most family service workers have been trained to see spirituality as a personal matter separate from the professional endeavours of serving clients. I see this as rooted in the false dualism that pits science against religion and spirituality. The evidence of history suggests that at the time of the great divorce of science and spirit—roughly 300 years ago—science rose to displace the dominance of religion. The separation of science from religion appeared to represent a greater freedom to pursue objective truth rather than the superstition, dogma, and controlling authority of religion.

However, there was a “throwing the baby out with the bathwater” experience here. In overpowering the authority of the church to define what is true, science focussed on truth as a product of empirical investigation. As science became empowered as the arbiter of truth through the investigation of what could be measured, observed, and manipulated for study, the truth of intuitive experience and the wisdom of the spiritual traditions became marginalized. To put it simply, if it couldn't be demonstrated, replicated, and proven logically and rationally, then it could not be accepted as true.

**So what you're saying is that our history has been to shift from marginalizing science and the validity of independent rational inquiry to marginalizing of the inner, intuitive dimension of our experience.**

This is what I mean by a false dualism—either this is true or that is true. Organized religion has been just as guilty of fighting the discoveries of rational inquiry as science as been to dismiss what we can't observe with our senses and prove rationally and experimentally. Ken Wilber observes that:

There is bogus and pseudo science just as much as there is a genuine and bogus religion, and the only worthwhile battle is between genuine and bogus, not between science and religion.<sup>201</sup>

I believe that the integration of both perspectives is necessary for us to believe that we are addressing the full realities of this world. In social work, we have observed the value of client and therapist intuition as a valuable tool to be taken seriously in serving our clients along with the research based information on such issues as developmental psychology and systems functioning.

On a more political note, I believe that the rise of feminism as a critique of established ways of looking at the world contributed a valuable challenge to integrate inner and outer experience in a way that reflects a spiritual outlook. Remember the popular feminist slogan “the personal is political”? Social work has been witness to the suffering of the poor, the racially or culturally marginalized, and the struggles of whole communities of gay and lesbian people that is based on the dogma of established scientific or religious thinking. For example if there is a strong religious conviction that homosexuality is immoral, then the needs of this community become ignored. The slow and ambivalent response to the AIDS crisis is testimony to that fact. Another example is bias in the Alberta Government leadership where the priority of “balanced budget” and “fiscal responsibility” become the rationale for withdrawal and denial of funding for high needs groups such as the mentally ill, the deaf and hard of hearing, or the physically handicapped. When social work strives to challenge these barriers to justice, I believe that it is striving for a more expansive, inclusive outlook that is embodied in my sense of what it means to be spiritual: compassion, seeking to understand rather than judge, respecting diverse perspectives.

### **So why pursue the role of spirituality in family service work now?**

Times have changed. The rise of spiritual interest in recent years reflects a shifting need in the public mind and heart for a spiritual perspective.

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<sup>201</sup> Ken Wilber, *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists*, p. 21.

### **So is this coming full circle?**

If you mean returning to the mind set of the seventeenth century before science displaced the church in the West, I don't think so. Today's spiritual vacuum cannot be met with organized religion alone. Second, I believe that a sensible spiritual perspective must respect the wisdom of our scientific perspective. Thus, we are really moving towards a potential integration of these two ways of knowing.

There is great promise to be found in looking at our work with families that combines scientific rigor with spiritual rigor. Science that does not admit to a spiritual dimension is no more viable than spirituality without a scientific dimension.

### **So you believe that the signs are pointing in the direction of family service work that reckons with the spiritual.**

Yes. Family service agencies must make the effort to reckon with these trends towards the spiritual. This would benefit clients who want the support of spiritual wisdom and practice as they tackle critical life issues for themselves, their families, and their communities. Also, once we see spirituality stripped of dogma and compulsive belief, how can we not see our work and our own organizational needs as being central to the spiritual issues of meaning, belonging, and justice?

### **How do we address spirituality in family service work when there are so many different theories about what matters and what is effective?**

Our long tradition of reductionism that has bred more and more specialized study has got us to the point where there is far too much isolation and suspicion among different models of practice. For example, my training as a social worker asked you to declare whether you were a "community focus" or a "clinical focus." Then, if you were a clinical focus, were you analytical psychology, family systems, behaviourist, etc. If you focussed on family therapy, were you a strategic family therapist, or a structural family therapist, did you follow the model of Virginia Satir, the family of origin work of James Framo, or what? Community organization folks were suspicious of clinical social workers, clinical social workers doing traditional case work with the poor were suspicious of private practitioners doing work with the more "well to do." If you were a behaviourist you were

suspicious of the language and philosophy of the psychoanalytical work based on Freud and the neo-Freudians. And so it goes....

One professional journal put the number of different “schools” operating in our field to be approximately 350.<sup>202</sup> Each has its own particular focus on the crucial variable to be focussed upon and the proper technique to utilize. Many are effective in their own particular way, but I think it is safe to say that they all over-simplify the human experience. Worse still, we have witnessed a kind of competition among different groups that creates confusion and frustration for clients who want to know which one they can trust. It also has led to some rather stupid politics within family serving professionals.

Our work in family service agencies is hampered by our isolation from other community groups serving the interests of the homeless, the mentally ill, and the developmentally handicapped. It seems that our different perspectives, specializations, and the competitive politics of funding have kept us from really collaborating. We get lost in the competing beliefs and claims of psychiatry, family medicine, pastoral counselling, rehabilitation medicine, the wisdom of chiropractic training, homeopathy, or naturopathy.

### **This looks like the battles and intolerance we have seen in the different denominations of Christianity.**

I would agree. Let’s take, for example, the suspicion and alienation between medicine and social work. Recent shifts in our understanding of medicine have increased the integration of the physical, emotional, and relational factors in illness. Work in immunology (resistance to disease), for example, has moved from being merely a biological issue to one that recognizes the importance of life style and beliefs in health. Dr. Dean Ornish’s work in reversing heart disease by incorporating spiritual, nutritional, and positive lifestyle is an example. His integrative approach to health seriously challenged the prevailing medical opinion at the time that nothing could be done to reverse heart disease once it happened.

In another realm, I have observed increased dialogue between different Christian denominations including formal agreements to work

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<sup>202</sup> Barry Duncan, “The Future of Psychotherapy,” *The Family Therapy Networker*, (July/August, 2000): p. 27.

together. One such example is an agreement between Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches to work more closely together in a covenant agreement in the Calgary region. This, to me, is getting past ideology and difference and seeking the common truth packaged in different ways. Family service work that adopts a more integrative attitude is reflecting a more spiritual outlook. This integrative outlook has led to more interest in how the spiritual dimension of our client's experience is important to our ability to help our clients.

The perspective of the spiritual seeks a vision of wholeness that we have been lacking in our isolated healing professions. How much sense does it really make to see healing of the body isolated from the healing of the mind, which is in turn separated from healing of the soul?

**Okay. But still, what business do we have dealing with spiritual matters? Isn't that the job of priests, ministers, and rabbis?**

A few years ago I probably would have agreed with you. However, we have become the priests and ministers of the post-modern age—at least when it comes to offering counsel. Robert Woolfolk notes this when he observes:

So endemic to contemporary life is the therapeutic perspective that its categories and assumptions shape our conceptions of what it is to be human. What were once the controversial assertions of arcane psychological theories now are taken for granted and have become our common sense and conventional wisdom.<sup>203</sup>

In times past, people automatically sought out their religious leader for assistance on important life issues. Now, as the psychosocial paradigm for living has taken hold and people are attending church in much smaller numbers, many more people would seek out a counsellor first. Like it or not, people bring their whole selves to the business of dealing with their problems. The spiritual vacuum of need, created by ignorance and avoidance, cannot be ignored when we are dealing with the most vital issues.

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<sup>203</sup> Robert Woolfolk, *The Cure of Souls: Science, Values and Psychotherapy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 1.

**But doesn't this softening of the boundaries between spirituality and family service work make for a lot of confusion?**

Yes. There is confusion about where we turn in times of trouble. However, it is important to appreciate that many family service organizations are historically rooted in the initiatives of religious communities that resulted from increased urbanization, historical times of crisis, and the decline of the extended family connections. Family service work has risen in its many forms because communal support that was once the responsibility of geographic neighbours and people belonging to the same belief group has vanished. Many family service organizations arose to fill the gaps of community. Some arose from church initiatives to meet this need; some from local social planning initiatives to provide more specialized and professionally trained help for families in need. The independent nonprofit organizations with their complex array of programs and multi-million dollar budgets began as the caring arms of church and community groups whose vision and commitment is often lost to history. I did a little investigation of local Calgary institutions such as local school boards, family service organizations, and hospitals. I found that a significant number began as the initiative of small groups of religious pioneers responding to the needs of the pioneers who settled in this area 100 years ago. The willingness to undertake the creation of services that are now school boards, hospitals, and family service agencies began often with a committed spiritual vision to serve others in need. Often enough, their service was based on the courage of faith convictions. For example the Calgary Catholic School board began from the work of a few dedicated religious over 100 years ago travelling through this region seeking to provide education to the children of settlers in the area. In more recent times, local helping organizations such as Catholic Family Service, Holy Cross Hospital, the Drop in Centre, Calgary Counselling Centre (formerly known as the Pastoral Institute), Woods Homes (formerly known as Wood's Christian Homes), the Mustard Seed, and the Mennonite Friendship Centre were founded on the initiative of religious groups seeking to honor the spiritual commitments of their tradition to see those in need. Even in instances where no formal religious group was involved, the initiatives of committed, compassionate people can be found behind the founding of such organizations as Calgary Self Help. After all, spiritual vision in social services has not been limited to religious organizations.

Too often we see only the negative, destructive side of religion in the fall-out of scandals of residential schools, sexual abuse charges against religious leaders, and such. While this deserves to be dealt with, we cannot forget how their spiritual courage and service forms the foundation upon which existing government services and modern private nonprofit agencies now stand. We owe these visionary and courageous people and many committed and compassionate leaders a debt of acknowledgement and gratitude.

### **Amen!**

In the course of the past 50 years, nonprofit family-serving agencies have become the substitutes for family, community, and guiding religious authority. Theories of human behaviour and therapies by the hundreds have become the substitute for the older spiritual models of healing and living. In a very real sense, we have become the spiritual authorities of today—if only by default.

The important concern here is that we do not always recognize the responsibility, inherited from the healers and teachers of the past, to provide a kind of cosmology that describes not merely what is in our heads and bodies but also the nature of the world we live in. We counsellors have steered carefully clear of addressing what I would refer to as the “big questions” of life. In a simplistic and even defensive sort of way, we have tried to claim neutrality about matters of morality, meaning, and purpose. We have pretended to have no commitment to any particular cosmology. We have sought to carve out careful distinctions between the spiritual, the physical, and the psychological.

This is changing. In recent times we have discovered that the physical and the psychological are deeply interconnected. The notion of the important relationship between body and mind is a commonly accepted belief. It challenges medical health practitioners to employ a psychological perspective to the treatment of physical health issues. In a similar way, this shift in perspective has challenged family service workers to see matters of physical health as intimately connected to their clients’ psychosocial health. The integration of the spiritual dimension is a further step in recognizing the interrelatedness of all dimensions of human experience.

**So is it as simple as suggesting that family service agencies should be set to replace the churches?**

That's taking my point too far. This is not about taking over, but rather of joining up. My research does not argue for family service agencies to become spiritual centres any more than appreciating the bodily dimension of human experience compels us to become medical centres. It does challenge us to become more conscious of the issues that our clients bring to us and to be more vigorous in collaborating with medical and spiritual services.

**I see what you mean. But what about including a chapel in a family service agency for example? After all, hospitals have chapels even though they are medical services.**

I think you make an interesting point. I could picture a non-denominational chapel in a family service office. Schools and universities have chapels. Wouldn't this be a practical way of acknowledging the spiritual dimension and creating a space to honour clients who wish to include prayer or meditation before or after their sessions?

**Are there other steps to take to acknowledge the spiritual dimension that follows from a serious reckoning with the spiritual?**

I believe that we are challenged to put this issue "on the table" in our clinical and management meetings. We are challenged to learn more, communicate openly about this issue, and raise questions of collaboration with agencies in the community that have greater experience and expertise in spiritual matters. Groups of professionals must devote time to exploring the role of spirituality in the lives of clients and in the treatment process. This could be done within agencies, but could also include explorations across agencies and professional groups through workshops, meetings of agency leaders, and initiatives to promote attention to the role of spirituality in the community. For example our agency has sponsored a public education series that presents four evenings exploring the psychological and spiritual aspects of marriage.



## **What about the role of community in spiritual family service work?**

As agencies, we struggle to create the kind of community that becomes the seedbed for synergy and creativity. I believe that exploration of the spiritual perspective is necessarily a community-building outlook. The common spiritual thread in many traditions challenges us to discover, as Jesus challenged, just “who is our neighbour”? The leadership of social justice movements such as Amnesty International ask us to act as though the political prisoner in Afghanistan, Korea, China, or Canada is our neighbour. The work of Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), a government-funded agency serving many diverse needs groups, draws tax dollars into the support of isolated single parents, pregnant teens, addicts, people in trouble with the law, victims of abuse, and many more people.

The spiritual dimension of such impressive reaching out is not hard to see. To put words to this spiritual perspective, to consciously value the act of treating all people as our neighbour—this is a vision of community that links the material, psychological, and spiritual. The language, vision, and practices of community creation are the essence of spirituality. Community creation and its opposing condition of neglect or chaos provide a useful foundation for discovering the common ground of family service work and its spiritual horizon.

## **Can you say a bit more about spirituality as the building of community?**

My effort to explore spirituality in family service work began by seeking to discover the bridge between the wisdom of our psycho/social/medical traditions and the wisdom of our spiritual traditions. After some time of searching for common ground, it struck me that the notion of relatedness is central to both our spiritual traditions and family service work—particularly in social work. It is my sense that the term “community” embodies the experience of belonging that is so central for all human beings. The greatest support we can offer to our clients is a sense of community.

It is not “fixing” problems or giving expert advice that helps the most. Once the basic issues of security and basic needs are met, clients are looking for support that provides belonging and purpose that would empower them to live out of courage and out of their gifts. People

coming to family service work are too often suffering from isolation (physical, emotional, or spiritual), and the problem that stymies them has power over them only because they lack a true sense of belonging and connection. Our job, as family service agencies, is to offer support and challenge our clients to discover community.

### **How is chaos the opposite of community?**

Chaos, the condition of random experiences without apparent meaning, helps us to see the contrasting experiences of meaning in the sense of justice, relationship, and integrity. When we work with clients suffering from conditions of great anxiety, depression, serious conflict, or loss, we are witnessing the loss of community in the sense that there is a community of the body, of the mind, and of the person. When a person's sense of community or belonging is fractured, we witness the impact of chaos. Sometimes we see people who have been living with such fractures for a lifetime. One example would be a person living with the psychic wounds of childhood sexual abuse. More extreme versions of fractures in the community of body, mind, and soul are evident in psychosis, violence, addiction effects such as Fetal Alcohol Effects and family breakdown.

It is important that we realize that all fractures of community are not pathological. When we think of the fracturing of an egg hatching into birth for a bird, we see that some fracturing is essential for growth. For this reason, we must always ask whether the fracturing we are witnessing has an edge of growth. In such cases, we must support the client in enduring the fracturing time. The spiritual perspective asks us to discover how the fracturing of community can represent new growth or new possibility. The perspective of community leads us to see the importance of such fractures. Spirituality encourages us to discern whether we are dealing with a fracture that needs healing or a fracturing that is leading to new possibilities for community. With clients who are depressed, for example, it is possible that the fracturing experience of depression is related to a deep instinct to break away from a destructive belief about ourselves or from an intolerable situation.

The poetry of Bruce Cockburn, from his song "Pacing the Cage" makes this point more eloquently:

Sometimes the best maps will not guide you  
You can't see what's round the bend  
Sometimes the road leads through dark places  
Sometimes the darkness is your friend.<sup>204</sup>

### **Is this true on the broader scale of culture as well?**

What I have learned to see is that much of the upheaval we are witnessing today is related to a movement towards global consciousness. Community based on race, religious beliefs, or nationality is breaking down. Many would say that breakdown of the tribal culture in the western world is liberating.

In breaking out of fixed collective belief into an age of individualism in which our choices are not set for us, the rules are not so fixed and universal. We are empowered to choose our life path—our career, our mate, where we shall live, whether we have children, who we affiliate with, etc. Nor are we compelled to remain silent about the corruption or contradictions of our belief system or about the ways that we have suffered by established beliefs.

On the other hand, we have lost a ready-made sense of where we belong, how we must live, and what the ultimate purpose for our lives is. The disappearance of the corporate model of community and loyalty is a case in point. The prevailing model of “give us your loyalty and we will take care of you” has rapidly disappeared and has left many lost and disillusioned workers in its wake. I have seen many men in therapy where the sense of betrayal they feel when they were let go by their company is a source of grief and a sense of being lost after placing so much of their life's purpose in a company role that proved to be made of sand. Similarly, I can think of many women who have felt betrayed by their spouses at the time of a marriage break up. So much of their identity was invested in a relationship that did not reward the years of loyal commitment they had given to it.

Joseph Campbell describes the spiritual dimension of community as being challenged by a loss of a prevailing myth that gives meaning to our way of life.

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<sup>204</sup> Cockburn, Bruce. *The Charity of Night*. Rykodisc, 1997.

We have lost gods who have been rationalized out of existence.  
We are challenged to create a new global myth.<sup>205</sup>

We have lost our faith in science, our sense of security in the stability and protection of big corporate employers, and our confidence in the institutions of medicine and religion. I do not mean here that there are not many fine churches, and I hear often enough about very positive experiences in getting help from medical doctors. I am talking about the progressive uncertainty in these institutions that used to serve as our means of belonging and meaning—our community. We are now challenged to discover a new model that offers a new template for community.

This time, though, the challenge is not on the level of tribal groups reaffirming their identities. Instead it is about a global village trying to reconcile the tensions of diversity, the pressures of global conflict, and the divisive effects of remarkable wealth and horrendous poverty. A prevailing vision of meaning seemingly cannot emerge without a serious reckoning with beliefs that separate, trivialize, or dismiss the experiences of others. This, I believe, is the spiritual call to community.

### **I hear a strong tone about justice in your idea about spirituality in the global community.**

Yes. It is an unnerving realization that spirituality is linked to the questions of justice. This is not merely an international issue. Family-serving agencies are challenged to reckon with issues of advocacy and justice for the needs of disenfranchised groups in their community.

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<sup>205</sup> I take great care to say that there is a great difference between tribal breakdown coming from the growth from within the tribe rather than the horrendous and genocidal abuses that have been heaped upon tribes by outside powers. Some might also say that the positive side of the decline of the tribal mind has come with a price of a loss of commitment to the communal vision, and the welfare of the tribal group. I am particularly interested in the shifting mindset that moves my sense of neighbour from someone in my own tribe, clan, church, home town to a mindset that sees connection to those who are not part of my group but are also my neighbour. I would add, as well, that this viewpoint may reflect my own bias as a privileged middle class Westerner who has enjoyed access to resources that have allowed for a freer approach to life outside my family clan, my Roman Catholic upbringing, my rural Alberoots, and so forth.

Spending time exploring the spiritual dimension challenges some of our family service practices but affirms others. This is one way in which we can appreciate the spiritual enterprise of family service work already happening. From what we have discussed, you do not need religious language or structure to appreciate the spiritual dimension that already is active in our agencies.

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**Chapter 9**  
**Spirituality in the**  
**Counselling Process**

# Spirituality in the Counselling Process

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All that psychology has accomplished is to make the inner life the subject matter of science, and in doing this it dissipated the idea of soul. But it was the idea of soul once linked man's inner life to a transcendent scheme of cosmic heroism.

- Ernest Becker<sup>206</sup>

Each of the several hundred forms of psychotherapy, in addition to subscribing to a scientific or quasi-scientific psychological theory, also has at its foundation an extensive picture of human existence that is both descriptive and evaluative.

- Robert Woolfolk<sup>207</sup>

...we sometimes look to nonscientific explanations because the question being asked cannot be addressed by science. It is sometimes not impatience but necessity that lead people to supplement science with others kinds of explanations.

- Reginald Bibby<sup>208</sup>

What we were experiencing began where Western psychology left off.

- Ram Dass<sup>209</sup>

Psychology Horizons that do not extend far enough. The question of psychology today is that its view of the world is too shrunken; therefore the field that has grown up around it is too shrunken. It shrinks by virtue of its own limited worldview.

- James Hillman<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Ernest Becker, *Escape From Evil*, p. 42.

<sup>207</sup> Woolfolk, Robert, *The Cure of Souls: Science, Values and Psychotherapy*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>208</sup> Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods*, p. 230.

<sup>209</sup> Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters*, p. 68.

<sup>210</sup> James Hillman, from unpublished workshop proceedings, Seattle, WA, October, 1992.

In the office of the modern psychoanalyst, the stages of the hero adventure come to light again in the dreams and hallucinations of the patient. Depth beyond depth of self-ignorance is fathomed, with the analyst in the role of the helper, the initiatory priest.  
- Joseph Campbell<sup>211</sup>

We must move beyond psychology and look for cosmology and mysticism, social justice, and feminist wisdom if we are to survive as a species.  
- Otto Rank<sup>212</sup>

Psychoneurosis is the sufferings of the soul that has not yet found its meaning,  
- Carl Jung.<sup>213</sup>

Mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one is and what one should become. What man needs is not homeostasis but spiritual dynamics in a field of tension.  
- Victor Fankl<sup>214</sup>

## **Where do we start to explore the spiritual dimension of the counselling process?**

I would like to begin by sharing from a book entitled *Soul Work: A Field Guide for Spiritual Seekers*. The writers, Anne and Charles Simpkinson, have extensive experience in exploring and writing about spiritual themes in the counselling field. In their book, they describe some common elements of “spiritual psychotherapy”:

- People have within themselves the seeds of their own healing.
- The therapist’s own state of mind is a critical aspect of healing.
- The therapist is reciprocally affected by the client.

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<sup>211</sup> Campbell, Joseph, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 129.

<sup>212</sup> Matthew Fox, *Wrestling with the Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 200.

<sup>213</sup> Veronica Goodchild, *Chaos and Eros: The Sacred Mysteries and Dark Shadows of Love* (York Beach, Maine: Weiser Books, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> Victor Fankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, pp. 104-5.



- Clinical diagnoses such as depression can have spiritual implications.
- Mind, body, and spirit are interrelated.
- All approaches to healing contain implicit values.
- There is awareness of other levels of knowing.
- Here is a place for intuition, Divine guidance, and grace.<sup>215</sup>

This provides a nice summary of points made in the previous chapter. Attention to the spiritual dimension challenges some of the limiting assumptions made by models emerging from psychology and social work in the last century about client experience and the dynamics of healing. Exploration of the spiritual dimension of the counselling process begins with two further assumptions:

- We are, by our very nature, spiritual beings.
- A community of professionals providing service to a community is a spiritual enterprise.

I would like to begin exploring spirituality in the counselling process by identifying some of the limitations of the psychosocial model as it is commonly practiced. Then I would like to present some history (I believe that our current practices are rooted in the wisdom traditions pre-dating the modern era). Next, I would like to highlight the way science is providing new metaphors that help us address the spiritual dimension. Finally, I want to talk about some specific approaches to counselling that reflect a spiritual consciousness.

### **That's a pretty tall order.**

You're right. In trying to answer such a tall order, I have learned some things about therapy and spirituality that have enriched me personally and professionally. I would like to try to share this. I have found that comparing conventional social work and psychology to the spiritual perspectives on healing is the best way to show the value of the spiritual dimension in a fairly practical way.

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<sup>215</sup> Anne Simpkinson and Charles Simpkinson, *Soul Work: A Field Guide for Spiritual Seekers*, p. 69.

**Are there no areas where you see spiritual perspectives included in the work of counselling?**

Yes, there are, but they are limited. I believe that what we will see in the future will be a more confident inclusion of the spiritual in family service work. Presently, there are many small pockets of therapists, particularly in the United States, exploring therapy and spirituality. We see formal steps to explore spirituality in some organizations such as the National Association of Christian Social Workers, the C.G. Jung Society, The Association of Transpersonal Psychology, Esalen Institute, the Institute of Noetic Sciences, the Omega Institute, and so on. In Canada, groups like the Transpersonal Psychology Group and counselling ministries such as at Stephen's College are doing this as well. You can also see "hot and cold" examples of integration of the psychological and spiritual in various holistic healing practices. They are, however, in the minority. I believe that the efforts by many counsellors to pursue training in such areas as Integrative Body Psychotherapy, Reiki, cranial sacral energetic work, inclusion of the arts, holistic medicine, and visualization all represent a building trend of active incorporation of spiritual perspectives in counselling work. So do the many counsellors who actively collaborate with medical doctors, nutritionists, physiotherapists, practitioners of feng sui, tai chi, and so forth.

**You mention "hot and cold" which I assume means effective and ineffective. What are you observing here?**

One of the principle ingredients of change is the agitation and creativity that comes not from the center of an established order but rather from the edges. This is a concept that I find fascinating because professionalism and administrative rigor often become agents for regulation and control of thinking and behaviour rather than creative experimentation. In this way, change often occurs on the edges of this organizational process—sometimes in the form of groups that agitate for a new point of view and sometimes simply as a result of crisis.

Among those groups that agitate for change such as the inclusion of spiritual perspectives (I guess that makes me a sort of agitator) are those who represent a reactionary type of position. By this I mean they form their position in opposition to the existing order. This sort of position is often informed by the emotional and reactive energies that can form a kind of prejudice about the existing order. They may not

have a clear vision of what they represent so much as what they oppose. In this way, I see groups of people with strong views on the role of spirituality that are based partly on the insight of their experience and a basic prejudice that biases their outlook. For example, some people who have been wounded by organized religion take up their objections with language and ideas that may not always represent thoughtful examination of the facts. Anger and misinformation shape their agenda. Sometimes, ironically, they can be intolerant of self-critical thinking from other members and so they begin to take the shape of the very thing that they oppose: a dominant, rigid authority that opposed criticism. My experience is that these groups sometimes do not do their research and are comfortable using their own experience as the basis for understanding the truth of their views. This makes them prone to ignorance of other outlooks and tempted to make facile and simplistic formulas for living that don't stand up to scrutiny. In its extreme form, these are cults. In the less extreme cases, these represent genuinely motivated groups that cultivate certain beliefs which can be both intriguing and misleading. Rock singer and song writer Tom Cocheran refers to this as "fast food religion." However, in my experience there is no group that is not vulnerable to this sort of flaw. I have also seen some remarkable creative and thoughtful visions for change coming from the edges of family service work regarding the spiritual perspective.

**You mention that change from the edges comes in the form of a crisis also.**

Yes. I mentioned earlier in this work how the crisis of my oldest daughter's struggle with cancer became an impetus to grapple with the role of spirituality in my personal and professional life. Another example would be the crisis of sexual abuse disclosures that grabbed the attention of the established professional approach and forced a serious review of practice concerning our failure to confront this issue sooner. The 9/11 crisis came from the edges of world attention to drive home many powerful lessons about the preciousness of life, the challenge to deal with issues of terrorism, questions of justice, and even hubris of western establishment living. Each of these examples represents a kind of event that comes from out of the blue and becomes a force of change and consciousness. Certainly, if there is one thing I have learned from my study of many different spiritual traditions, it is the challenge of the spiritual outlook to discover how every event,

every crisis, has an implicit call to greater awareness and growth. I believe that the rise of greater spiritual interest in general has become a vitalizing challenge to family service work.

### **I assume that this issue is not limited to psychology.**

No. Social work has its own particular path in relationship to matters of spirituality. Beth Barker summarizes the roots of social work this way:

Unlike the scientifically based practices of psychiatry and psychology, social work has roots in the Christian and Jewish charitable work movements. Early on, however, there was a push for professionalism and a gradual abandonment of social work ties to religion.<sup>216</sup>

She adds, afterwards that, in the United States:

...the NASW has neglected spiritual matters historically. There's been a re-emergence of spiritual religious matters (in the public eye), but for the most part the profession hasn't given much attention to that.<sup>217</sup>

The insights of systemic interconnectedness have been the heart of the social work view. However, when it stops short of working with the spiritual level of consciousness, it settles for relatedness of function and context but not relatedness of the radical sort.

### **So what about some of the limiting assumptions of the psychosocial model of family service work?**

Let me start by identifying three specific beliefs that are at the core of counselling theories and practice:

- myth of perfectionism
- notion of ego as the defining essence of the human person
- assumption that all pain is a problem to be eliminated.

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

### **So let's start with the myth of perfectionism.**

James Hillman speaks about the “myth of perfection” that assumes that psychology can achieve a prescription for perfection by focussing on specific problems and by applying methods to solve those problems.<sup>218</sup> Theoretically, we could make take every issue our client has—low self-esteem, addictions, patterns of avoidance, depression, etc. and correct them. We take our theories as prescriptions for perfect human functioning and through the application of the right techniques we can repair our client's situation.

### **This sounds like the mechanistic formulas of an auto repair service.**

Yes. There are several problems with this assumption. One is we are looking at our clients in terms of their imperfections and at counselling as about correcting imperfections. Second, it assumes that we can prescribe what our client needs. Third, it assumes that the “cure” or correction comes from the therapist and the method. As I mentioned earlier, the spiritual sphere of consciousness sees healing as the restoring of relatedness. The therapist is not the healer but the facilitator of the healing process.

As a profession, counselling has become very attached to the trappings of professionalism: our techniques, theories, and programs for practice regulation. These issues have their importance as guidelines for ethical treatment and teach the “tried and true” methods of the profession. Rather than perfection of our clients or our therapists, spirituality calls for a condition of wholeness or completeness that sees our struggles as part of our essence. James Hillman sees our flaws and imperfections as markers of the soul's particular and unique destiny. If we distinguish between the self-imposed or culturally-imposed limitations and those qualities that seem to emerge from our very nature, we are speaking about imperfections that are rooted in our spiritual journey.

### **That may be cold comfort for those parents who suffer with serious problems in their children's mental or physical health**

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<sup>218</sup> James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (New York: Random House, 1996).

**or for those who have lived with lifelong wounds that have impaired them.**

What Hillman is saying, as I see it, is not meant to console. It is more like a challenge to look past the perfectionism of our social and professional contexts that condemns people and parents to see difficulties as a sign of failure or weakness or punishment. The spiritual outlook represents a serious challenge to prevailing government policies that are prone to see their role as saving money rather than responding to issues of need, commercials that flash perfection and invite you to worry about body odour, or a culture that has lost its sense of connection to values of compassion and community.

A book particularly full of insight in this line is Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham's *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Story Telling and the Journey to Wholeness*. They say this:

The core paradox that underlies spirituality is the haunting sense of incompleteness, of being somehow unfinished, that comes from the reality of living on this earth as part and yet also not-part of it. For to be human is to be incomplete, yet yearn for completion; it is to be uncertain, yet long for certainty; to be imperfect, yet long for perfection; to be broken, yet crave wholeness. All these yearnings remain necessarily unsatisfied, for perfection, completion, certainty, and wholeness are impossible precisely because we are imperfectly human—or better, because we are perfectly human, which is to say humanly imperfect.<sup>219</sup>

In this way we have students graduating from university programs more versed on theory and the politics of professionalism than the essential challenges of presence and caring.

**Spirituality in the counselling process becomes a kind of correction to the limiting agendas of professionalism.**

The concerns about orthodoxy, proof, and research often outweigh the attention to the commitment to presence and caring. The pressure that we see from managed care organizations and within agencies themselves to define their service by specific and standardized techniques has its point. However, it places attention more on the form

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<sup>219</sup> Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Story Telling on the Journey to Wholeness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), p. 19.

than the substance of the service process. This parallels the problems of spiritual richness being buried under the issues of power, control, and regulation in religion.

**This seems dehumanizing yet, at the same time, isn't that what people want—to fix what is wrong?**

The concern that I have is how do we know what is wrong? How do we define what is right? Books like *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Story Telling on the Journey to Wholeness* recognize that part of life's mystery and part of the richness of living is recognizing that imperfection has a place in our wholeness. Think of the rich growth that emerges from reckoning with our imperfections instead of eliminating them. Many times, the healing that occurs for clients is not in re-writing history or successfully becoming free from all weakness or imperfection. The real gift of confronting our wounds is an increased capacity to value life as precious just as it is. Being stuck on the belief that our life or this experience is wrong or bad can harden into bitterness, blame, and a sense that there is something wrong with one's life. Healing from wounds is often achieved by acceptance of what has happened. It is then that we can stop fighting reality, release the emotional attachments of anger, hurt, fear, and so forth and move on. I am reminded of the pearl. Valued for its perfect beauty, it begins as a piece of grit that becomes an irritation. Ironically, it is only when we can consciously face our pain that we gain release. Then it becomes a source of challenge, self-acceptance, and growth. When we shut down to our wounds, they haunt us with fear, resentment, and a belief that "all is lost." Remember Max Ehrmann's poem "Desiderata"?

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Quoted from the web site:<http://merilee.us/desiderata.html>.

**Doesn't this get away from common sense that says when something is wrong fix it and get on with life?**

No, I don't think so. I think of a Buddhist saying that I came across when in India. It reeks of common sense: "Why worry? If you can do something, then do it. If not, then let it go."

How much of our painful struggle in life is the inability to let go? The spiritual traditions emphasize again and again the importance of surrendering control in favour of living in a universe that has patterns of meaning that we cannot grasp.

**So good therapy is about not leaping to a "fix it" mode or assuming that something that seems wrong is wrong.**

Yes. From a spiritual perspective, each counsellor is challenged to help the client to see the path they are travelling as containing its own dimensions of dignity, hope, and meaning. We do this first by being willing to be a compassionate witness to their experience.

A psychological diagnosis is not enough. We cannot settle for a perspective defined by what is wrong. This is the weakness of the allopathic model of healing that sees healing as restoring to normal by eradicating the threatening issues. This can too quickly become a dynamic of control, of imposing a way of thinking or being upon someone. To cure them is to assume the goal is imposing something new from outside and that what is there is not enough. The alternative vision is to assume a pattern of meaning that is to be discerned through connection and awareness not simply "fixing and eradicating."

**This is reflected in the "strength-based" models of counselling.**

Yes. The spiritual perspective simply takes it further by automatically assuming value and meaning even if we don't get it at the time. The spiritual sphere of consciousness articulates a worldview that sees our experience as connected to all things and our innate capacities to heal as following from the restoration of connection between our particular self and wholeness defined in terms of soul and spirit.

James Hillman observes that "psyche," the root word of psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy and notes that:



The concept of this individualized soul-image has a long, complicated history; its appearance in cultures is diverse and widespread and the names for it are legion. Only our contemporary psychology and psychiatry omit it from their textbooks. The study and therapy of the psyche in our society ignore this factor which other cultures regard as the kernel of character and the repository of individual fate. The core subject of psychology, psyche or soul, doesn't get into the books supposedly dedicated to its study and care.<sup>221</sup>

### **There is also the matter of telling the difference between appropriate “fix it mode” and appropriate “let it be mode.”**

This is a more complex issue. The spiritual perspective need not ignore diagnostic categories. However, true understanding of an issue requires not merely the objective and statistical ways of knowing, it also draws upon inner knowing and collective wisdom found in the spiritual traditions. In the spiritual traditions, a process called discernment is crucial to telling the difference between that which calls for action to solve and that which calls to let go and simply be with. Discernment is an act of reckoning that includes one's own knowledge, the knowledge of others and something more. Discernment is defined well in the “Serenity Prayer” attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr:

Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know  
the difference.

In this sense, unlike perfection-based judgements about our experience, about fixing what appears wrong, we move into a willingness to respond to distress (ours or our clients') as part of a larger pattern of meaning. The eloquence of Shakespeare was put to this question in Hamlet's famous soliloquy in which he grapples with his plight, thoughts of suicide, and the struggle to know when our reactions are authentic or rooted in fear:

To be, or not to be: that is the question.  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing, end them.

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<sup>221</sup> James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, p. 10.

**Doesn't this result in the trivialization of pain? I hear many people talk about the anger and hurt they feel when "religious" folks say something is "God's will"?**

I believe that discernment is a process that must focus upon the individual's learning rather than prescriptions of dogmatic, thoughtless people who are likely afraid of the other's pain and dismiss it. This is not unlike the counsellor who prescribes diagnostic and treatment formulas without engaging in an act of presence. The practice of our spiritual traditions in and out of institutional religion is just as vulnerable to perfectionism and fear.

Discernment is a subtle process in which therapists must be willing to support their clients searching with that quality of presence referred to in the previous chapter. It is also, clearly, a different kind of assumption about the experience of the client: that supportive, discerning presence allows for connections between the experience of pain and a larger pattern of meaning and creative possibilities. In other words, the therapist cannot know in advance or know more than the client about his or her experience.

**This means that the therapists themselves must have some knowledge in their own life of being present to their pain rather than running from it.**

You bet. More than simply providing a knowledge base for counsellors, a training program that grasps the issue of presence and the spiritual tradition of healing must challenge each would be counsellors to do their own work.

**Aren't there different psychosocial schools that are already speaking to the value of client centred counselling?**

Yes. I see this in the narrative schools, some aspects of the solution-focussed thinking, and the post-modern constructivist schools speaking to the client as the expert on their issues. I do believe, though, that they see the client experience of a new story as emphasizing the creativity of the client's ego while spirituality would see this as leading to a connection to meaning beyond ego.

**Okay. Let's pick up with the second obstacle—the notion of ego as the defining essence of person.**

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest interested in the integration of spiritual and psychological perspectives, observes that contemporary post-modern experience has reduced all belief systems to “constructions” to be “deconstructed.” In other words, nothing has any meaning beyond what we make it mean. With the explosion of choice and diversity, publicly shared values and commonly accepted meanings have eroded to small islands of individualism. In this sense, all values are relative, and the secure ground of meaning has shrunken to “looking out for number one.”

Yet it is clear to anyone who cares to look around that our failure to reckon with our interconnectedness to all things and all people is causing great distress. Loneliness is an epidemic in our culture. The single greatest cause of death for men between 25 and 40 is suicide. Our planet is facing an ecological crisis resulting from a mindless practice of ignoring our relatedness to the environment. September 11 has become only the most recent wake-up call to the West to a collective awareness of meaning and connection. Sadly, the challenge of September 11 has been diminished to a military issue in the minds of many. However the good news and the bad news is that if we miss one call another, usually more forceful one, will visit in the future.

In short, we must rediscover the foundation of meaning that would empower us to live not merely from the imperatives of individual need and rediscover the connection between self and others. Spiritual traditions are always challenging us to see how our Small Story reflects our Big Story. This includes the link between ourselves and collective wisdom. Joseph Campbell captures the modern problem of isolation and loss of connection to the guiding myths of our spiritual and secular traditions:

The psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religious inheritance, we today... must face alone... This is our problem as modern “enlightened” individuals for who all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 142.

I have said earlier that contemporary family service work does not go far enough to satisfy the spiritual dimension of human experience. It also does not go deep enough.

Hamid Ali, a well-known teacher/psychotherapist from Berkley, CA, observes that the effectiveness of counselling:

has been limited by the lack of knowledge of specific unconscious barriers which prevent us from experiencing the corresponding essential states which make up our true nature. The effectiveness of psychotherapy has been limited by its ignorance of essential states, so that resolutions occur on the levels of ego and emotions which are not the level at which we are innately satisfied.<sup>223</sup>

He believes that such familiar client issues of loss, past trauma, and fear of loss confront us with emptiness which “looking through the prism of personality” becomes a fear of death, craziness, or heart attack, but from the perspective of essence/deeper self (soul), it is a place of expansiveness.<sup>224</sup> If we can stay there either out of courage and support or desperation, we can discover new patterns and new answers on a more enduring level than prescribed solutions to life’s problems. A crucial piece of therapy and counselling is, then, providing the container for the individual, family, or group to experience meaning and belonging on a level that extends beyond the specific and limiting ideas of self defined by ego. In spiritual terms, this is described as openness to grace or faith.

Submitting to life and risking openness is often a key aspect of the work that clients bring to us for help. What a difference it makes to see the context of our work as set in a larger context of meaning, unfolding possibility that calls us beyond our fixed ideas of who we are. This calling forth is captured in the mythic stories of spiritual heroes such as Moses in the Christian tradition, Mohammed, Buddha, and Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. It is also evident in such legends as Homer’s “Iliad.” The paradoxical truth is that wholeness is only gained through the cracks of life, through our flaws and imperfections. In other words, our wounds and fears become the means of transformation. This is so different from the model that sees recovery as based on the strength of ego (the therapist’s or the client’s).

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<sup>223</sup> Hameed Ali quoted in Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters*, p. 414.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

**You've made this point before that psychology and social work have a brief history under the management of the scientific method. They have a much longer history rooted in the spiritual tradition.**

There is no question that the psychosocial perspective has enriched our capacity to serve our clients. In the past 30 to 40 years, it has been the dominant perspective for counselling. However, through my research, I have acquired renewed respect for the wisdom of the traditions that served as a guide for thousands of years before psychology became separate from the philosophy and wisdom traditions. The prefix "psych" that is built into the basic terms of counselling work such as psychotherapy, psychosocial, and psychology comes from the Greek "psukhe" meaning originally "breath" and was adapted to mean "soul" or "spirit." While there is evidence of the term "psychology" being used in the modern sense as early as 1730, there is also evidence of the preservation of the notion of soul in the concept of counselling. In 1835, Gustav Feschner, a German psychologist credited with being the grandfather of modern experimental psychology wrote:

In the first stage man lives in the dark, alone; in the second, he lives associated with, yet separated from, his fellow-men, in a light reflected from the surface of things; in the third, his life, interwoven with...universal spirit...is a higher life.<sup>225</sup>

**This echoes your three spheres of consciousness.**

At least in a loose sense. As late as 1888 the New Princeton Review defined psychology as "the science of the psyche or soul."<sup>226</sup>

I have come to think that the work we do is like a plant in a shallow layer of topsoil that has science as its vocabulary. Like most plants, its roots sink into a much deeper tradition of soul and healing related to spiritual practice that goes back thousands of years.

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<sup>225</sup> From Gustav Feschner, *Life and Death*, quoted from Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, p. ix.

<sup>226</sup> Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*, p. vii.

## **What are examples of more recent work that preserves the spiritual perspective in counselling?**

In the cutting edge literature of psychology and therapy, we are only beginning to catch up to the discoveries of quantum physics 75 years ago and to Buddhism 2,500 years ago. We are challenged to revise how we understand the “reality” within which we live and move and have our being. The mechanistic formulas of a clockwork universe, while holding strong influence upon general psychiatry and psychology from Freud onwards, holds out that we perceive an objective world, unchanging, and separate. This notion of psychology and psychiatry and even social work as a “objective science” has been challenged by many thoughtful leaders in the field. The best known of these include: Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Victor Frankl, and William James. Each in their own particular way, argued against the assumption that counselling was not unlike what mechanics do when they fix your car.

Now let us leap over to the hard science of physics. Werner Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle said that there is no such thing as objective science. The mere act of observing something alters it. In this way, we are not able to observe something objectively. Rather, what we see includes the impact of our observation. As you can imagine, he makes a much more complex statement that I won’t get into here. The point is that quantum physics teaches us to see that we must think in terms of relatedness rather than some sort of objectivity. I am reminded of a wonderful line from the Talmud that says “we don’t see things as they really are, we see them as we are.”

## **You mentioned earlier that the images for the spiritual dimension come not only from our wisdom traditions but also from science.**

Yes. I see a great similarity of perspective for meaning and interconnectedness in the metaphors of science. For example, let me cite an example from chaos theory. Chaos, by dictionary standards, means a “state of complete randomness and confusion.”<sup>227</sup> The remarkable principle within chaos theory is its perception of an interconnectedness that exists in apparently random events. According to David Peet and John Biggs:

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<sup>227</sup> *Encarta World English Dictionary.*

We live within movements constantly affecting each other and creating an unpredictable chaos at many levels. Yet within this same chaos is born all the physical and psychological order that we know.<sup>228</sup>

Sometimes the greatest gift we can give our clients is the vision of meaning that encourages endurance rather than avoidance. In order to offer this, we as therapists have to have an appreciation for the notion of spiritual transformation that sees pain as a marker for new possibilities contained within an unseen “physical and psychological order.”

Another example of quantum science’s contribution to this sense of connection to an unseen order is found in the example of work done in the 1960s by an Irish physicist by the name of J.S. Bell. Bell’s theorem, proposed and proven mathematically in 1964 and experimentally backed up in the 1970s, argues that two particles separated by time and distance are nonetheless so intimately connected that if the spin of one particle is altered, the other is altered *instantly*. This is the notion of “non-local” connectedness—that is, a connection between two things regardless of distance and time. David Bohm, a renowned quantum physicist defined this as “hidden variables” and later developed the term “implicate order” to account for this phenomenon. This notion offers an intriguing parallel to the spiritual notion of wholeness outside of time and space.

It is also a feature of what is referred to as the non-local healing of third stage medicine such as is described in the research of Larry Dossey in which prayer is understood to contribute positively to medical healing. Third stage medicine is the vision of medicine after the mechanistic (stage one) and mind-body medicine (stage two). This incorporates the insights of quantum science and the shamanic healing traditions that have had a notion of healing over distance and time. I think it very exciting to note these examples where spiritual and scientific discoveries are allowing for exciting new understandings of healing and relationship. This is part of what drew me in to this research in the first place.

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<sup>228</sup> John Biggs and David Peet, *Seven Life Lessons of Chaos: Spiritual Wisdom from the Science of Change*, p. 4.

**For the sake of those who would like to explore this further, who are some of the influential thinkers who offer an integration of spiritual, psychological, and physical healing?**

There are many different models that see spirituality as a part of their vision:

- Madonna Kholbenschlag (drawing from Tillich and Kierkegaard)
- Margaret Wheatley's work in chaos theory
- John Biggs and David Peet's work in creativity and chaos theory
- Deepak Chopra's incorporation of the principles of relatedness drawn from the Ayurvedic traditions of Hinduism that links the chakra system as a meaningful connection of body and spirit
- Ken Wilber's integration of the insights of psychology, philosophy and spiritual traditions. (In his book *Integrative Psychology*, Wilber provides a grand summary of different models of development that include many psychological perspectives and extend to include the work of Plotinus, a fifth century Greek philosopher, and Sri Aurobindo, a highly revered Hindu leader known for his rich grasp of science and spirituality.)
- Carolyn Myss' work with intuitive medicine integrates the ayurvedic model of the charkas with the Christian seven sacraments, the wisdom of mystical Judaism (Kabala and common sense psychology (her master's thesis explored the relationship between schizophrenia and mysticism).



- Matthew Fox, a theologian and philosopher, has drawn upon medieval Christian mystics and contemporary science, art, and many different spiritual traditions to define a vision of human spiritual development he calls creation spirituality.<sup>229</sup>

Here is a marvellous version of this integrated perspective from Chief Seattle of the Duamish tribe. It does not use quantum physics but, instead, spells out a vision that has great power:

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. This we know: all things are connected like the blood that unites one family. All things are connected. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to

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<sup>229</sup> What is significant in these bodies of thought is the trend towards integration of different wisdom traditions as a way of expanding the vision of the human journey. For them, science and spirit are part of one picture, not opposing realities. For example, I spent some time working with Matthew Fox at his University of Creation Spirituality in Oakland, CA. One day he invited a physicist, Brian Swim, to speak of quantum physics. The lecture linked some astounding visions of human experience with discoveries of physics and insights of the great mystical traditions. As you will recall from the exploration of different levels of consciousness, the spiritual level of consciousness integrates the insights of both psychological and material consciousness. Spiritual consciousness as described in the writers just listed integrates current psychosocial perspectives into the larger perspective of the “non-local universe.” The foundation for this notion is found both in ancient literature of the Great Chain of Being described by Plotinus, considered by many to be one of the true geniuses of later Greek philosophy, medieval Christian philosophers, and Aldus Huxley’s work *The Perennial Philosophy*. Every great religion carries some piece of this perspective—some more articulately and some less. In contemporary contexts, a number of perspectives re-introduce us to the Great Chain of Being under the name “implicate order” (a concept coined by the quantum physicist David Bohm), creative principle (chaos theory), morphogenic field (a recent biological theory from Rupert Sheldrake) and the ecological principle discussed by Thomas Berry (Christian monk and ecologist), and in the cosmological perspectives of Brian Swim and Teilhard de Chardin.

himself. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.<sup>230</sup>

Ken Wilber sees the same principle of a grand interconnectedness of all life in his survey of developmental models in psychology in *Integrative Psychology*.<sup>231</sup> He notes that many do not extend beyond psychological development yet there are a number that see a developmental schema that extends beyond the psychological stages and extend into the spiritual ones.

**So there is, as you see it, an aspect of psychosocial thinking that does include the spiritual dimension.**

Yes. It is possible to see two trends in the past century regarding psychological and social work perspectives: one is the reductionism championed by Freud and the second is the integration of the psychological and the spiritual or transcendent dimensions.

**What do you mean by reductionism?**

Reductionism is the idea that the truth of who we are or what we are is discovered by reducing all things and experience to their most basic rational, observable components. Anything that cannot be explored this way is dismissed and even pathologized.

**Can you give a brief description of these alternative sources?**

This second perspective has been a less commonly acknowledged part of our social work and psychological traditions—particularly psychology. These teachers have not been taught in the universities. Thus, they are quieter but not invisible to those interested in observing the preservation of a spiritual dimension in family service work. One can start with the transcendentalist philosophers (Emerson and Thoreau), the brilliant and visionary psychologist William James, Roberto Assagioli (a contemporary of Freud's who presented an

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<sup>230</sup> Quoted from website [www.halcyon.com/arborhts/shiefsea/htm](http://www.halcyon.com/arborhts/shiefsea/htm) citing the *Seattle Sunday Star*, October 29, 1887.

<sup>231</sup> Ken Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion* (New York: Audio Renaissance, 1994), introduction.

integration of spiritual as an alternative to Freud), Otto Rank, C.G. Jung, Victor Frankl, and the transpersonal psychology of Abraham Maslow. Of Maslow, Tony Schwartz, author of *What Really Matters* says, “Even without using the word ‘spirit,’ Maslow was introducing transcendental concepts into the language of Western psychology.”<sup>232</sup>

Allow me to quote Abraham Maslow’s partner, Anthony Suetich, who initiated the movement known as transpersonal psychology in collaboration with Maslow. Maslow had written his long-time colleague and requested that he provide a definition for the *New Journal of Transhumanistic Psychology*. Suetich wrote back with the following definition:

Transhumanistic (or Fourth Force) Psychology is the title given to an emerging force in the psychology field by a group of psychologists and professional men and women from other fields who are interested in those ultimate human capacities and potentialities and their actualisation that have no systemic place in either First Force (classical psychoanalytical theory), Second Force (positivistic or behaviouristic theory, or Third Force (humanistic psychology) which deals with such concepts as creativity, love, growth, basic need-gratification, psychological health, self-actualization, etc. The emerging “Fourth Force” is specifically concerned with the study, understanding, and responsible implementation of such states as being, becoming, self-actualization, expression and actualization of meta-needs (individual and species-wide), ultimate values, self-transcendence, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, awe, wonder, ultimate meaning, transformation of the self, spirit, species-wide transformation, oneness, cosmic awareness, maximal sensory responsiveness, cosmic play, individual and species-wide synergy, optimal or maximal relevant interpersonal encounter, realization, and expression of transpersonal and transcendental potentialities, and related concepts, experiences and activities.<sup>233</sup>

More recently an increasing number of thinkers have contributed original perspectives to the integration of the spiritual and the psychological. The Jesuit palaeontologist, Teilhard de Chardin, has been cited as a major influence among many creative minds. Other writers who have helped me discover the sensible integration of psyche

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<sup>232</sup> Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America*, p. 90.

<sup>233</sup> Anthony Suetich, “Transpersonal Notes,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1974: p. 89.

and spirit include: John Sanford (psychologist and Episcopalian minister), Morton Kelsey (spiritual director and minister in the Episcopalian Church), the Twelve Step movement, Scott Peck, James Redfield, James Hillman, Ken Wilber, Huston Smith, Jeremy Taylor (renowned dream interpreter and leader in the Unitarian Church), Ed Green (leader and pioneer in the field of biofeedback research), Carolyn Myss, Angeles Arrien (anthropologist), Oriah Mountain Dreamer (poet and writer), Jean Hardy (sociologist), and Tanis Helliwell (therapist and trainer). (Each of these is cited in the bibliography). These thinkers are not all starting in the same place, and they are not using the same language or even the same images but they point in the same direction.

This direction is summarized by Willis Harman in his discussion of the rise of noetic science when he says that, “A new science is arising, a science of the human mind much broader than psychology has been to date. We call it ‘noetic’ science, after the Greek word for intuitive knowing.” He describes this as the second stage of a two-stage process beginning with the rise of modern materialistic science. Then he says:

The goal of the second stage, just begun, is creation of a similar body of knowledge, empirically based and publicly validated, about the realm of subjective experience. For the first time in history we are beginning to create a growing, progressively funded body of established experience about humanity’s inner life—and particularly about the perennial wisdom of the great religious traditions and Gnostic groups. For the first time there is a hope that this knowledge can become—not a secret repeatedly lost in dogmatization and institutionalization, or degenerating into manifold varieties of cultism and occultism—but rather the living heritage of all humankind.<sup>234</sup>

### **So there is a rich body of literature citing a vision of the spiritual dimension in counselling.**

Yes. This was quite surprising to me. It was also a great pleasure to see such expansive visions of meaning in the world of counselling. I realize, in reading these people, that I have been far too conservative and that what I have been taught at school did not begin to address the need for a cosmology in family service work.

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<sup>234</sup> Willis Harman, “What are Noetic Sciences?,” *Noetic Sciences Review* Vol. 47 (Winter 1998): p. 32.

**I notice that your references are primarily to psychology. What about social work given that this is the dominant profession in the family service sector?**

When I speak of psychology, I am using the term in the loose sense that reflects how modern social work, particularly in the clinical area, is strongly influenced by the ideas coming from psychology. However, I am reminded of the original vision for justice and compassion for the poor that served as the foundation for the profession of social work in the 1800s. For this reason I believe that social work is, by its very roots, is more disposed to the issues of relatedness and to the radical relatedness of spirituality. You can see this in the greater investment in “systemic awareness” that is the basis for the family therapy work and advocacy for the poor.

Social work and psychology form a valuable partnership in family service work. When I cite psychology theory, I am really addressing myself to the belief perspective of both professions.

**I would like to focus more on specific practices that represent an integration of the spiritual. I understand that you have a chart that summarizes your ideas to this point.**

Here is a chart that shows how the spiritual perspective extends the horizons of the psychosocial model familiar to family service work:

<b>Psychosocial Model</b>	<b>Spiritual Perspective</b>
Focuses on change, repair	
Growth through perfecting of strengths, skills, cognitive awareness, awareness of relationship	Self-awareness as a step to letting go, surrender of ego control
Focuses on emotions, thoughts as a means of healing problem, solving problem	Focuses energies that give rise to thoughts
Sees suffering as an affliction to be cured	Sees suffering as potentially the heart of the transformation path
Centres on strength, will, coping	Centres on the edges of experience, weakness, brokenness, willingness rather than wilfulness
Emphasizes technique	Emphasizes practices
Distinguishes between psychosocial, medical, and spiritual	Seeks integration of physical, psychological, and spiritual
Sees psyche as psychological, brain	Sees psyche as manifestation of spirit through the physical and psychological
Sees reality as the product of material force and interaction of “co-created meaning”	Sees reality as fields of energy manifest in matter, psyche, and spirit and constellated in human perception
Bases interventions on altering behaviour through information and strategic intervention	Bases interventions based on openness, surrender to larger, shaping patterns of meaning
Works with a specific time and place	Works with non-local (across time and space) healing
Relies on logic and rational explanations	Relies on creativity, revelation in human experience

**A number of issues come up here. But first I would like to clarify how this affects the experience of the counsellor and the agency.**

This has real significance for family service work. It focuses attention upon the demands for the integrity of personhood for workers in a family service agency and upon the agency as a whole. In addition to the standards for integrity from associations and agency policy manuals, there is an additional focus upon the worker's inner world and vision. The spiritual perspective does not seek conformity to standards but rather a quality of openness and discernment that can only be sustained by support from an intentional community.

**Can the agency be such an intentional community for a counsellor?**

This can be very difficult. The onus is on agency leadership to encourage agency staff to support one another in their role as "witness" to each other's growth and our clients' growth. As we hear our clients' most sacred stories, as we seek the vision to understand the blocks and the necessary corrective path, as we discern the method suited to help, the spiritual perspective challenges us to be aware of the sacred process and to be open to positive influence from personal and transpersonal ways of knowing. We must be willing to consult our colleagues, supervisors, the wisdom of our professions, and our own inner knowing.

**So therapists can become supports by being witnesses to each other's work?**

Yes. This is the spiritual dimension of supervision.

**Tell me what you think spirituality offers on the issue of the wounded healer.**

The image of the wounded healer captures the paradox that our healing power emerges from counsellors' struggles with our own wounds. The crucial issue is not that we are perfect but we are aware of our imperfection and that we will undertake the courage to grow through our struggles. This is the best of what we have to offer our clients because it contains both our wisdom and our humble awareness of

what it means to suffer. What troubles me most about professional counselling is the tendency to have a kind of intellectual pride that means we speak to our clients out of our textbooks rather than out of our hearts. The most powerful kind of counsel comes from those who cultivate their own hearts' wisdom by doing their work and never allow tidy ideas and theories to blind them to the human drama that their clients share with them each day.

Dorothy, an internationally recognized psycho-dramatist, asserts that she would rather work with a wounded healer than someone who has "born out of the head of Zeus." The only true healers are the ones who have already been on the path and so know that the possibility of healing and transformation really do exist. Their claim to hope has substance.

In short, agencies must take the spiritual challenge to self-awareness seriously as a culture and in the expectations it sets for their workers. This is how a family service agency can become a community of support for worker and client alike.

**So, what about the many new approaches to healing in the field of counselling? Do they have some connection to the trends of spiritual interest we see around us?**

Generally, yes. Too much is going on to make a broad conclusion about that. I do think, though, that new approaches that link body, mind, and spirit in their vision promote a dialogue between the psychosocial and the spiritual. Some examples of this are: EMDR (eye movement, desensitization and reprocessing—a model of therapy that draws upon neurological and psychological approaches to healing of trauma), biofeedback, Spiritual Response Therapy, dowsing, integrative body work, yoga, energetics, work with the Enneagram, and approaches linking creativity and brain states. The interested reader can find lots of good literature that describes each of these approaches.

Effective family service programs have no choice but to enter into this dialogue. Single-dimensional concepts of how we can help families and communities are conspicuously narrow. We are challenged to step out of the consciousness based on a single dimension and recognize the limited truths of any one method. The hardest work of any agency or therapist is to constantly question the assumptions of what they believe by listening openly to ideas that appear to contradict their professional instincts.



**You've mentioned before the notion of work with energy as overlapping with the spiritual dimension. What are you talking about here?**

The traditions of Ayurvedic medicine and Chinese medicine promote an awareness of energy as being the foundational notion of understanding body/mind function and healing. Shaped as they are by the religious traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, and Taoism they promote a model of the human body as a pattern of relationships based on energy flow.

While in India, I was staying at a Buddhist monastery near the city of Mysore in the far south. I had the opportunity to spend time with two Buddhist scholars. One was a former head of the American Museum of Natural History, the other a teacher in a monastery in Switzerland. One day I asked about the multitude of god images found in the temples. "Wasn't Buddhism a belief system without gods?" I asked. My scholar friend explained that each god image is a metaphor for the energies of the human psyche "extending into the infinite nothingness." In the same vein, I learned later that the sand mandalas, which are exquisite creations by Buddhist monks made of colored sand, represent maps of the journey of consciousness. Patterns of energy, psychic states, and experiences are given a cosmic face to help people recognize and make good choices.

Deepak Chopra promotes a perspective by which the human mind/body/spirit is linked in a flow of energy that sees us as rivers of energy rather than frozen matter.<sup>235</sup> By way of illustration, Chopra quotes the familiar example of putting one's foot in the river. When you take it out and then put it in again, you think you are putting it in the same river but it is not. Similarly, energy as the fundamental reality of life is echoed in the views of chaos theory and quantum science.

... the real system which endures and evolves, is energy.  
Matter flows through it, assuming different forms as required.<sup>236</sup>

Here, the neurologist Erich Jansch is challenging us to awaken to the discoveries of quantum science which notes that matter is composed of quantum particles that move in and out of material existence thereby

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<sup>235</sup> Chopra, Deepak. *Quantum Healing Workshop*. New York: Mystic Fire Audio, 1990.

<sup>236</sup> Erich Jansch, *The Self-Organizing Universe*, p. 35.

highlighting that the material form is nothing more than an organized flow of energy. Everyday thinking that assumes that there is a solid physical reality is, according to quantum science, living with an illusion. This may be an illusion of convenience but an illusion nonetheless. Buddha and Jesus would have no problem with this.

**I have heard the term “energy field” used in connection with models that claim to work with spiritual approaches. What is meant by an “energy field”?**

The term “field” comes from Michael Faraday, the genius of electromagnetic research from the late 1800s. A field is a non-visible force that has no mass and no visibility but has impact on anything entering within it. The familiar example is the electro-magnetic field surrounding a magnet. We can see it in action when we place a magnet on a table covered with iron filings. The filings will rearrange themselves into patterns that are like concentric circles. Such a field is the basis on which research such as the work of Larry Dossey has postulated the impact of prayers on the healing process.

The research of quantum physics has challenged our fundamental ideas about matter by concluding that matter is simply an energy field. In his popular *Tao of Physics*, Frijof Capra has made this point in a way that has entirely changed understanding of matter.

In modern physics, the universe is thus experienced as a dynamic, inseparable whole which always includes the observer in an essential way. In this experience, the traditional concepts of space and time, of isolated objects, and of cause and effect, lose their meaning. Such an experience however is very similar to that of the Eastern mystics.<sup>237</sup>

In *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, Gary Zukav’s explores physics in a way similar to Capra that observes the striking parallels between the findings of quantum physics and the postulates of Eastern mysticism. He remembers his amazement on hearing physics being described by a Chinese physicist as “patterns of organic energy.” To see the world not as solid matter but as patterns of energy opens up discussion with the body of wisdom found prominently in Eastern mysticism and more recently in western mysticism.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Frijof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, p. 70.

<sup>238</sup> Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (Los Angeles: Audio Renaissance, 1979), audiotape.

*The Web That Has No Weaver* provides an in-depth exploration of the fascinating differences between western and eastern medicine highlighting how diagnosis is made based on energy flows along meridians of energy linking focal points of intersection. There is less concern about physiology and more about the relationship between points of energy that may not coincide at all with the point where pain or distress is experienced.

In this way the energies of thought and intention have a direct impact upon the world we live in. The spiritual traditions challenge us to harmonize our intentions with our actions. In new age models of energy flow, it is common to hear that “energy goes where attention goes and where intention goes, results flow.”

This is certainly a leap beyond the notion of self-fulfilling prophecy that we hear about in psychology.

We are, as Deepak Chopra suggests, a flow of energy. Spiritual practice has something to do with being sensitive to the quality of energy that we hold. We see many traditions offering this formula and offering ways of managing our energy field. Many of the group rituals, traditions, and descriptions of the transformation process provide the foundation for the individual to find his or her way through the “valley of the shadow of death” as is said in the 23rd Psalm. In the Navaho tradition of hoseru, the practice of being in harmony with oneself and with the universe is another example.

### **So then, spiritual practice for counsellors is being aware of the quality of energy they hold.**

Absolutely. The quality of their moods, the direction of their attention, and the intentions that they carry are part of the quality of presence they offer to their clients. We are all aware of the sense that a particular place has low or high energy. This is an example of the impact the energy field can have upon others. In his exploration of energy in *The Celestine Vision*, James Redfield speaks about the exchange of energy as the fundamental interaction between people interacting. The dynamics of relationship on the energetic level include unconscious strategies to control and get more energy.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> James Redfield, *The Celestine Vision*, (Los Angeles: Audio Renaissance, 1979), audiotape.

Tanis Helliwell adds to this the importance of conscious awareness of the thought forms we carry that shape and obstruct the natural flow to greater wholeness. She recommends regular self-monitoring and clearing practices aimed at detaching from beliefs and memories that block the flow of energy.<sup>240</sup>

### **Can you give me an example of how this would apply to the work we do with families?**

One example of how this understanding of human experience as energy flow and relatedness is found in the area of addictions. Dan Millman makes the observation that our fear of losing ourselves in the power of this flow of energy is that we try to shut it down through various drugs, foods and behaviours. Addictions are a way of closing down to the possibilities of life with its uncertainties by clutching onto a certainty that we prefer. Addiction to sex, money, alcohol, or drugs becomes a rigid attachment to that which is the only world we are prepared to accept. Relatedness to the rest of the world, other possibilities of facing fear, and facing the risks of intimacy are cut off over and over again with each enactment of the addiction.

Gerald May offers much insight into this dynamic when he identifies the issues of attachment and grace in his work with addictions.<sup>241</sup> AA tradition has been familiar with the close affiliation that exists between addictions and spiritual crisis. There is a story about when Bill W., founder of AA approached Carl Jung for help. After some time, Jung encouraged Bill W. to look at the spiritual side of his struggle with alcohol. This is embodied in the support practices of AA beginning with the first step in the Twelve Step process: admitting powerlessness and the need for help the blowing away of the dam of fixed habits in favor of openness to new support from members and in one's sense of connection to the transcendent spiritual process of "higher power."

### **Are there other approaches that help sustain this quality of "openness of energy flow"?**

In the alternative health practice field, many approaches promise to work with the energy field to provide positive health benefits.

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<sup>240</sup> Workshop, "Transform Yourself," Parksville, BC, October, 2001.

<sup>241</sup> Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*, p. 42.

Attending the Calgary Health Care Expo in the fall of 2000, I was struck by the extent to which the services and products represented alternative health approaches to health care. The range was vast: massage, tai chi, meditation approaches, and transformation technologies of every sort. I'm sure there was a range of credible quality as well. The point is that these services are offering help for issues that are part of the family service repertoire—primarily in the form of individual afflictions of depression and anxiety. The public is interested in this and whether we see accept these as alternatives or supplements to the work we do, we must have some sense of what it is that attracts high levels of interest.

In my research I have explored cranial sacral energy healing. The six days I spent working in an intensive study and practice of energy healing impressed me. I had experiences of sensing energy fields and their impact on the physical experience of those I worked with. I concluded that this is an area of great promise that cannot be ignored. I learned that the energy field is shaped and shapes in turn, the physical and emotional experience of us all.<sup>242</sup>

The release of limits that keep us locked in lower levels of consciousness is part of the goal of the traditions of meditation and contemplation. Jeff Levin recognizes the broad theme of energy and health contained in many different spiritual traditions:

It has been speculated that one way in which altered states influence physiology and health is by activating a healing bioenergy, or life force. Such a spiritual source or energy has been given many names across cultures and religious, mystical, and alternative medical traditions. These include ether, prana, life force, wakan, Holy Spirit, kundalini, Christ Consciousness, chi or qi or ki, eloptic energy, baraka, orgone, ruakh, foatic power, huna, odic force, mana, Odyle, and so on.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> I would refer those interested in exploring this further to read: Barbara Ann Brennan's *Hands of Light: A Guide to Healing Through the Human Energy Field*, Lucille Hall's article studying energetic healing in a New York Hospital entitled "Hands of Life," and Ted Kaptchuk's study of Eastern medicine in *The Web That Has No Weaver*.

<sup>243</sup> Jeff Levin, *God, Faith And Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. 172.

## **What can a counsellor do that can insure higher quality of energy rather than a lower one?**

As indicated above, one must pay attention to one's state of energy, one's lifestyle, and one's direction of attention. This involves developing a familiarity with and skill at disciplining one's mind. The meditation disciplines of the yoga, the schools of meditation in Hinduism, Buddhism, prayer, and Christian contemplative practice all can be means of heightening the quality of attention and intention. I remember one colleague sharing with me years ago about how she would say a prayer when she felt lost or detached in a session. On the energetic level, this is a way of staying attentive and present to our client and the full possibilities of the moment. This is much different than focusing on technique alone to respond to the client's need.

## **How can the idea of transformation be applied to counseling?**

The spiritual traditions describe the transformation process in great detail. For example, the transformative path is described in *The Cloud of Unknowing* (which documents the Christian mystical path), the sand mandalas models of transformation in Tibetan Buddhism, and in the adventures of the grail myths of medieval Europe. The individual moves from the unconscious, divided state to a more conscious openness to wholeness beyond the limits of ego.

Joseph Campbell tells us that, following the vision of the grail, the Knights of the Round Table set out into the forest in their own direction to find the path where there was no path. Doesn't that sound like the experience that our clients bring to us? Something has pushed them onto a quest for relief from distress. To listen to their story is to discover the path that they are on. Good therapy must support them on their quest by accepting and discerning the path that they are on. When therapists prescribe a path without first learning what their path is, there is a serious question about whether they are helping or hindering. C.G. Jung describes this in psychological terms as "individuation."

More than anything else, spirituality is a technology of transformation. On the path of transformation, the spiritual traditions tell us that pain is not always evil, and elimination of pain is not always good. Loss of control is not always a problem and maintaining control is not always success.

**This does not seem to be a very common perspective on counselling. Why is that?**

Well, I'm not sure that it is as uncommon as it might seem. Many seasoned counsellors have their own perspectives on the notion of transformation. I also think that there is an automatic fear among funders and administrators that this makes counselling dangerous, flaky, or an expensive growth exercise rather than helping families in more direct ways. First, I don't think that this perspective implies long-term work. Sometimes it is an attitude that guides work that lasts two sessions. Just like any other perspective on counselling, clients don't have to do all their growing before they leave counselling.

Also, it is possible to see clients once every month or two over a longer period of time. The results are an efficient and effective process that truly leads the client to greater joy and vision in his or her life. When a parent or a spouse finds greater self-awareness, the family is stronger.

Finally, I do believe that we are arriving at a time when more clients will be seeking the deeper issues of their life and seeking to make sense of their struggles from a spiritual perspective.

Two implications for practice emerge:

- All training programs are challenged to move beyond simply training therapists and counsellors in terms of knowledge of technique and to enter a kind of initiation into self-awareness. The lifelong challenge of any therapist is to become increasingly conscious of this way of being.
- Agencies are challenged both in supervision in the norms for practice set by administration to be alert to the role of discernment in decision-making, setting norms for compassion, and encouraging self-awareness. This can be done through leaders' openness and courage to tell their stories to staff in ways that link the staff group to their humility and recognizes the dignity and sacred nature of their work. Using prayer and creating space in meetings for silent attention to staff and client issues are other examples.

As Eckhart Tolle observes:

But if you are fortunate enough to find someone who is intensely conscious, if you can be with them and join them in the state of presence, that can be helpful and will accelerate things. In this way, your own light will quickly grow stronger. When a log that has only just started to burn is placed next to the one that is burning fiercely, and after a while they are separated again, the first log will be burning with much greater intensity. After all, it is the same fire. To be such a fire is one of the functions of a spiritual teacher. Some therapists may also be able to fulfil that function, provided that they have gone beyond the level of mind and can create and sustain a state of intense conscious presence while they are working with you.<sup>244</sup>

### **Is this where the soul enters into the therapy process?**

From the spiritual perspective, soul represents the immaterial pattern of wholeness that links the individual to the wholeness of spirit. I am not suggesting that everyone defines these terms this way, but I believe this captures a workable meaning.

According to the great sages, there is something in us that is always conscious—that is literally conscious or aware at all times and through all states—waking, dreaming, and sleeping. And that ever-present awareness is spirit in us. It is our connection to the Goddess, our pipeline to God.<sup>245</sup>

### **This also touches on the notion of intuition. How does this connect with soul work in therapy?**

Our models of therapy tend to focus on the “how’s” rather than the “why’s” of our client’s struggle. In part, this is because the value issues of meaning lie outside the scope of science. Scientific thinking is rooted in a logic-based, cause-and-effect world. The intuitive grasp of seasoned therapists and talented healers is tolerated, even valued, but it is not reported in theories or taught in schools. We do not give our clients full value when issues of meaning and intuitive awareness are not developed in any conscious and systematic way. Robert Romanynshyn, professor at Pacifica University, summarizes this well:

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<sup>244</sup> Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>245</sup> Winnifred Gallagher, *God Work* (New York: Random House, 2000), p. 70.



I offer something closer to a poetics of the elemental forces of life which lie beyond psychology. In its worst moments, psychology can be an obstacle to these elemental epiphanies because it appeals too much to the mind and its desire to understand and control. But in its best moments, psychology can be a preparation for the disclosure of these natural forces of the soul, disclosures that can often have anuminous quality to them, a sense of something divine and holy.<sup>246</sup>

The ultimate integration is not merely between different approaches to understanding but between a person's own particular small story and the Big Story—the relationship between the human and the cosmos. A vision of higher meaning involves reckoning with that which eludes the grasp of the five senses yet holds great importance. Our clients share this struggle all the time. How do we envision in our work and our living that which we cannot see?

They may not be invisible at all but only seem so because declared so by our doctrinal binding. Is it their nature or our vision that defines them as invisible? The great task of a life-sustaining culture, then, is to keep the invisibles attached to invite them by propitiations and rituals. By great doctrines such as the incarnations, and by little intuitive gestures such as fingering beads or putting a mezuzah on the door post. All this has nothing to do with the belief in superstitions. It is merely a matter of not forgetting that the invisibles can go away leaving you with nothing but human relationships to cover your back. As the old Greeks said of their gods, “they ask for little, just that they not be forgotten.” Myths keep the daemonic realm invisibly present.<sup>247</sup>

James Hillman says that the role of an acknowledged transcendent reality is to gather a perspective that does justice to the questions of purpose and meaning we bring. He argues first that, in the great tradition of Plato, there is a means of seeing the presence of fate in our lives, a daemon that represents the highest purposes of destiny. Instead of defining ourselves as a product of chance and random interaction of variables, we can postulate that our path in life is contained in our instinctive sense of calling, in our character that comes forth in birth

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<sup>246</sup> Romanyshyn, Robert. *The Soul in Grief: Love, Death and Transformation*, (New York: North Atlantic Books: 1999), p. 58.

<sup>247</sup> James Hillman, *The Soul's Code* (New York: Random House Audio, 1996), audiotape.

with specific tendencies towards one thing and not another, one style and not another, one choice and not another. The shaping influence extends beyond the doctrine of the five senses but is evident in the way that life unfolds.

One of the most holistic practitioners that I have come across is Carolyn Myss. She provides a clear model of integration of body, mind, and spirit through her integration of Auyurvedic medicine with western models of the Tree of Life from the Cabalist tradition (Jewish mystical tradition) and the Christian notion of the seven sacraments:

When I look now at the Tree of Life, and at the Vedic system of charkas, and at the seven sacraments, I now think of what our bodies need very differently... What is essential is to honour creativity, integrity, endurance, commitment, harmony, and mercy. These are the powers that you have to have inside yourself. Learn to ask: what energy is being taught to me now?<sup>248</sup>

What I have learned from her work is a keen sense of connection between body experience, psychological experience, and the spiritual. They belong together. While the trend of the past 300 years in the West has been to separate every area into specialties that train professionals to be focussed on one aspect of human experience, Myss' work highlights how important it is to observe all aspects of experience. We are challenged to work with greater collaboration with colleagues in other areas. We also need to raise the question of why we perpetuate this separation between different bodies of awareness in counsellor training. We must seek to overcome our suspicions and prejudices about other specializations and learn from them. Family service workers must learn about basic physiology, about the research in psychic abilities, about nutrition, and about the role of prayer in healing. As one teacher who was a former priest and a practitioner in energetic medicine pointed out, we must be prepared to look at human experience from all perspectives so that eventually we have no perspective at all, just wholeness.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Carolyn Myss, *Energy Anatomy* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True Audio, 1995).

<sup>249</sup> Workshop in Cranial Sacral Medicine, Esalen, CA, October, 2000.

## What about the role of ritual?

In *Words I Wish I Wrote*, Robert Fulghum concludes that ritual, symbolic gestures, and things that hold an important place in our lives anchor us in meaning and dignity.<sup>250</sup>

I spent a week working with Jose Hobday, a Seneca Healer and Catholic Nun, who works with many groups throughout North America. She also has spent time with the Dalai Lama. Her teachings about the role of daily mindfulness through ritual made this point come alive to me. She taught through exercises in ritual that spoke of the importance of seeing our everyday actions as expressions of meaning—living consciously, paying attention to what we say by how we dress, how we walk, how we eat, and what we say to those we meet. Storytelling, she said, is an art that we must all practice. Conscious attention brings meaning and dignity to our daily activities. How we tell the story of our day is an art. We are challenged to discover the fascinating stories of our lives by paying attention and striving tell our story as a fascinating event—a thing of beauty.<sup>251</sup> There is great therapeutic value in teaching clients to see their lives as filled with meaning and beauty. Of course there is pain but why not pay attention to beauty and meaning as well? This woman of 75, wise and vital in her convictions, powerful in her vision, gentle in her presence, gave me an inspiring glimpse of indigenous spiritual wisdom.

Spiritual traditions grasp this vital integration, but it escapes the conventional approach to therapy. Mircea Eliade sees this in Shamanic traditions around the world.

In fact, one of the principle differences that separate the man of archaic culture from modern man resides primarily in the incapacity of the latter to live his organic life (in the first place his life of love and nutrition) as a sacrament... These are nothing but physiological acts of the modern, whereas they are for the man of archaic culture, sacraments, ceremonies through which he is brought into communion with the power of life itself. We shall see later that the power and the life are only epiphanies of the ultimate reality, these elementary acts become for the primitive a rite which helps man to approach reality, to insert himself in

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<sup>243</sup> Robert Fulghum, *Words I Wish I Wrote*, audiotape.

<sup>244</sup> From a course offered at Creation Centered University, Oakland, CA, September, 2000.

being, delivering himself from the automations of becoming, of the profane, of nothing.<sup>252</sup>

### **So I assume that what you are leading to is the attention to the role of ritual in the counselling process?**

Yes. Sometimes the very simple rituals of shaking hands, offering tea, or consciously clearing the counselling room before and after meetings are ways of acknowledging the issues of compassion, presence, and the invisible flow of emotional energy that shape the quality of the counselling process. This starts with the client's experience when he or she walks through the door. Do the décor and the reception participate in conscious welcoming?

### **What about the role of storytelling?**

Storytelling from a spiritual perspective is the web of meaning that we weave into the events that occur to us. As therapists we are often very helpful in the way we encourage our clients to discover and own a different story about who they are, what certain events mean, and what is possible. Michael White and his work with narrative therapy have done an excellent job of articulating the power of story and the facilitation of story that transforms a client's experience of self and the world.

There is a tendency for many therapeutic models to work with meaning based on a theory. This is seen as an "objective story" that defines the story for all of us. Therapists use the "objective story" as a template for talking to their client's story. Their focus is upon formulas of explanation limited by the scope of what can be validated "objectively" through our five senses. Spiritual traditions also have an "objective story"—a central truth that is described as theology or dogma. But when we relax our attachment to a particular story or dogma, the spiritual quest is to weave a story of meaning that extends beyond our particular circumstances to the big story of meaning that flows through the universe. This becomes evident when time is taken to explore several spiritual traditions and notice the emerging themes forming a relationship between the individual and the universal.

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<sup>252</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, quoted from Bede Griffiths, *Pathways to the Supreme* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 68.

The act of stepping outside of our ordinary perspective takes courage and a bit of desperation. In another way, we begin to see that what we are living is a story. The willingness to ask deep questions of ourselves is the act of “waking up” to our lives. We transform ourselves only as we ask questions of the story we live.<sup>253</sup> In truth, it is not as simple as asking questions of ourselves but rather, being open to the questions that are put to us by our life circumstances, strangers, and loved ones that bring us up short. Being cut off in traffic, criticisms from a spouse, a painful health condition—all these become a challenge to the story we live. From a spiritual perspective, it is the attitude that allows us to ask “what is the lesson I must learn?” or “how am I out of harmony?” With support we can look at the assumptions that become unquestioned convictions, habits, and reflexive interpretations.

Only a spiritual perspective can see the overwhelming of the ego as service to transformation. Here is a poem from the great German poet Rilke that captures this sense.

Be—and yet know the great void  
Where all things begin,  
The infinite source of your own most intense vibration  
So that this once, you may  
Give it your perfect assent.<sup>254</sup>

### **Therapy does not supply the spiritual story.**

Effective therapy is not about providing the answer but supporting clients in getting on the path to their experience of wholeness—moving from chaos to community. There is a necessary uniqueness to each client’s spiritual story. When clients are absorbed in their own subjective truth, the therapist may inquire about their attempts to get information about their concern (books, groups, developing a higher external awareness) and about their community of reference. For clients absorbed with the external formulas of a particular reference group (family of origin, a church, or a work place), the therapist may draw attention to a more articulated subjective awareness—what do

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<sup>253</sup> This idea came to me from a presentation by Gregory Possman, a creative healer, in Calgary, February, 2001.

<sup>254</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, “Sonnets to Orpheus XIII,” found at [www.geocities.com/Paris/Leftbank/4027/](http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Leftbank/4027/).

they feel, what does their intuition tell them, or how might their symptoms be a source of information of unmet need.

To teach a client this model of awareness is to set him or her upon a lifelong path of growth in awareness.

**This seems like an important point. Rather than supplying the language or the spiritual story, the therapist facilitates the spiritual dimension.**

Certainly there is much worry that incorporating the spiritual realm means imposing your beliefs upon the client. This is naïve to think that this risk only arises when spiritual concerns are brought up. Therapists get lots of training about not imposing their personal beliefs on their clients. Why would this model of respect change for the spiritual matters?

What the therapist does need is the willingness to ask the questions and to hear the client's dilemma in the context of a struggle for restoring a relationship with meaning and purpose. The language for the spiritual question must be paced to the client. The therapist must be clear enough about the spiritual journey to recognize this dynamic in their client's work. The fact is, there are many times when the therapist will not say anything that resembles a spiritual word and yet be fully engaged in a spiritual consciousness of the client's situation.

**For me, this brings up the role of prayer in therapy.**

Unofficially, I regularly hear therapists talk about the importance of prayer in helping them to be helpful. The spiritual perspective for the therapist must include the recognition that therapy is not merely drawing upon the therapist's expertise and the client's strengths. These are both valuable. So are the resources of colleagues and the community. The spiritual point is that the worker is challenged to see therapy as also harmonizing itself with the larger purposes of life embodied in a cosmic vision—in other words, working out of a perspective of radical relatedness.

There are many ways of understanding what prayer is. I am inclined towards a broad definition that means extending our intentions beyond ego and into a larger pattern of meaning. This can mean a wish for something better for the client. It can also mean, as one colleague

pointed out to me, “a prayer for guidance when I just don’t know what to do.” It can also be the mental preparation at the beginning of the session to be open and respectful.

**I assume that you also see prayer as gaining support from outside the therapist’s or client’s actions?**

Yes. I have had my own experiences in sensing that something powerful was more at work in the process. As one of my colleagues puts it, “I felt like I wanted to take notes about what was coming out of my mouth.” This requires a humble recognition that what occurs in therapy is so much a process of fixing as facilitating. We are the vehicles of healing, not the source.

**It requires care and collegial support to insure that therapists do not wander off into their own spiritual world where subjective agendas and prejudices become dangerous.**

Absolutely. I have already discussed the “three point” model of truth that must be applied to the therapist as much as the client. Therapists absorbed in their own subjective beliefs must be challenged by colleagues and supervisors to see the importance of external information and the opinion of their professional reference community. Therapists who lack a balanced perspective on any matter—spiritual or otherwise—are failing to honour their commitment to helping their clients to the best of their ability. They become prey to the neurotic distortions in matters of power, self-awareness, and authentic openness.

We need to provide a framework that gives validity, encouragement, and even critical tools for working with the spiritual dimension. We also need to encourage exploration of spiritual matters in clinical work and administrative process. The risk of more authentic sharing among colleagues is the safest means of supporting a critical awareness of how spiritual matters can be addressed effectively. Agency supervisors and managers must support and encourage this. I will speak to this more in the next chapter. In our agency we have a group that has been meeting for over three years exploring the role of spirituality in therapy. This has been supportive and clarifying.

## What about miracles?

Finally, and possibly more controversial, is the notion of healing miracles that may be described in the wide range of phenomena such as distant healing, dramatic and transformative healing, the work of medical intuition, and psychic feats of healing such as those documented in the life of Edgar Casey. I have noticed increased interest in the great spiritual traditions of miraculous healing in all of these categories and many more. Carolyn Myss' work in the field of intuitive medicine presents a credible challenge to the scope of the field of counselling and therapy, which is more conservative in its vision of healing potential.

Sixty-eight per cent of people believe in healing miracles.<sup>255</sup> From the spiritual traditions of India to those of Christianity, miracles are a matter of great importance. Yet, we are tempted to dismiss stories of miraculous healing as remarkable but exceptional. However, what if we followed Michael Murphy's<sup>256</sup> lead and saw these as indications of what is possible and then gear our vision to the standard of dramatic and even miraculous healing. If we held this perspective, I suspect miracles would be more likely to occur and more likely to be shared. As Carolyn Myss concludes, the clockwork universe works on the principle of cumulative physical causation. Do anything with diligence and persistence enough times and you can get there. But what if we saw the universe as existing on a plane of non-local healing, outside of time, outside of space? Then we would be in the position to expect what we call miracles.

**This brings up some of the 1,600<sup>257</sup> studies that Larry Dossey says have been done since the turn of the century exploring the impact of prayer on healing.**

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<sup>255</sup> Reginald Bibby, *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style*, p. 114.

<sup>256</sup> Michael Murphy's *The Future of the Body* provides an intriguing discussion about the rich possibilities of human experience. In a similar way, *Miracles of Mind*, by Russel Targ documents extraordinary psychic feats of distance viewing not only in detail but highlights the extensive interest of the CIA and the military in the United States in exploiting these "miraculous" abilities. The spiritual dimension invites us to attention to the remarkable capacities of our everyday experience.

<sup>257</sup> Over 1,600 studies done over the past century reveal that, on average, people who live some sort of religious path live longer (7-14 years) and are healthier than those who do not.



Yes. A recent article in the *Edmonton Journal* covered a conference at the University of Calgary that addressed itself to this very topic. A human interest story paired with a report on the conference tells the story of a 55-year-old woman who should be dead based on her condition, which was diagnosed as “terminal multiple myeloma.” She beat the odds.

I remember my own experience when my daughter was given a prognosis of 15 per cent chance of living. At the encouragement of a number of the nurses on my daughter’s unit, we attended a Mass at a local residence that was devoted to Padre Pio—an Italian priest who died in the 1960s with many miracle stories to his credit.

Maybe because of my Catholic upbringing and the desperation of the circumstances, I went. Just like at Lourdes and other such places, the hopes of many desperate cases and the stories of miraculous healings abide. I remember my sense of skepticism and the compassion for all those who, like myself, were seeking a miracle. I don’t have any conclusions about what this represents. My daughter did beat the odds.

India is a place where stories of impossible feats are absolutely common. In fact, these “sidhas” as they are called, are widely accepted. The focus of spiritual training in the Hindu tradition is more upon the challenge of those who have risen to this level of ability that they not be distracted from their ultimate spiritual path by the risk of identifying with this power and getting lost in ego.

There is a lot to be said and many books have been written that explore the power of so-called “miraculous healing.” According to this article, at least 1,200 studies conclude that religion does make a difference in health and healing.<sup>258</sup> We in family service agencies would be wise not to ignore this information. A therapist that has this possibility in mind may have a deeper reservoir of hope, and a greater capacity to join with clients who have miracles as part of their vision of what is possible.

### **What about the popular notions of miracles and “you create your own reality” that are popular in many new age circles?**

Take care to avoid the frivolous subscription to the notion that “we can create anything we want.” Carolyn Myss comments on the pitfalls of

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<sup>258</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, June 30, 2001, p. H4.

grabbing onto spiritual beliefs without the commitment to the rigors of spiritual discipline that transform our agendas from personality- or ego-based agendas into those of surrender to the realm of spirit. Both she and Greg Braden<sup>259</sup> have spoken from different perspectives to suggest that the power of possibility comes from the unity of thought and emotion that is understood to reside in the heart. Without the hard work for greater self-awareness and disciplined spiritual practice, there can be no integrity of feelings and belief so an act of will has little power. The spiritual traditions are very explicit:

It is not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord” that will enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>260</sup>

### **This is a very powerful statement.**

I have seen it said over and over again. On the spiritual level of consciousness, we see the world as a product of our own creation. Put in terms of energetics, we attract into our lives that which vibrates at the same level as our vibrations. A common phrase from the perspective of energetics is: where attention goes, energy flows, and where energy flows, results show.

### **Give me a practical example of how this is true.**

We are talking here about a phenomenon that is very familiar to shamanic traditions, the miracle healing traditions of Christianity, and the Saddus of India (holy men or gurus who live as mendicants). Carolyn Myss’ work is filled with stories of healings that defy conventional medical explanation. Her thesis is that the work we do to clear destructive thought patterns, such as old traumatic beliefs, can result in actual physical change in disease process. Read Norman Cousins’s *Anatomy of an Illness* to see his application of the principle of belief and outlook eliminating an illness that was considered terminal. In the field of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and

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<sup>259</sup> I am referring here to a lecture I attended in New York from Greg Braden as he discussed his convictions about the power of integration of belief and feeling derived from his studies of the Essene tradition and the book of Isaiah unearthed from the dead sea region and now housed in Jerusalem. This work is discussed more fully in his book *The Isaiah Effect*.

<sup>260</sup> Matthew 7:21.

Reprocessing), Thought Field Therapy, and other such work, dramatic shifts of behaviour and physical experience are frequently reported based upon focused attention to body experience, thoughts, and feelings supported by interventions that purport to integrate left and right brain functioning.

Elmer Green's pioneering work in biofeedback presents another model of intervention based on integration of conscious and unconscious processes. His descriptions of his theory and practice help to link the visions of possibility in science with the conventional notions of miracles from spiritual traditions.<sup>261</sup>

### **What does this offer to counsellors who are concerned that this thinking might be both unrealistic but perhaps dangerous in that it might raise hopes unfairly?**

I have two points to make here. First of all, therapist judgment about how they encourage hope must find the balance between the failure to cultivate the vision of hope for their clients and the danger of being frivolous about suggesting the possibility of a miracle. Let's face it, much of the work we do demands devotion, patience, and hard work. The possibility of a miracle does not mean that we don't have to work hard and encourage our clients to do the same.

My second point is that we must consider that demographic research in Canada and the United States,<sup>262</sup> tells us that the majority of people already believe in them. Regardless of how difficult it is to reckon with something that exceeds our rational ability to understand, it is a factor in belief and perception. As well, the spiritual tradition about miracles challenges our sense of what is possible for our clients. Hope is a central factor of what clients need to encourage their willingness to risk new behaviors and persist through immensely difficult times. Michael Murphy's book *The Future of the Body* makes the case that amazing human achievement from athletes to spiritual adepts must be considered the forerunner of what is possible for all humans rather than dismissed as aberration.

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<sup>261</sup> I refer here to a summary of the work of Elmer Green found in Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters*, p. 123.

<sup>262</sup> I am referring here to the findings of Gallup polls on religion and the research of Canadian Sociologist, Reginald Bibby, *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style*.

## **How is this related to the so-called placebo effect?**

The concept of placebo is a case in point. A lot of research shows that a sugar pill and the power of suggestion can produce amazing results. What is amazing about placebo research is that the suggestion alone seems to mobilize a process within some people that results in major changes in health. In this sense, there is a continuum of amazing possibilities for humans that ranges from the unbelievable and the improbable to the outright miraculous. In *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, Marilyn Ferguson quotes a Boston physician, Rick Ingrasci, to demonstrate the significance of healing through suggestion or the perception that something positive is happening:

As the placebo effect so vividly demonstrates to us, changing our expectations or fundamental assumptions can profoundly affect our experience of health and well-being. Healing comes as a direct result of perceiving ourselves as whole...when we reestablish our sense of balanced relationship with the universe, through a change of mind—a transformation in attitudes, values, beliefs.<sup>263</sup>

## **So you're making a connection between miracles and spiritual consciousness.**

Yes, miracles are connected with a spiritual consciousness that is not mere belief in magic but rather belief in patterns of connection and meaning that enrich what is possible. Elmer Green tells the story of working closely with a teacher who impressed him with his remarkable eclectic knowledge of Eastern and Western healing and his powers of control. One day, his teacher, Dr. Will J. Erwood, cut himself quite badly. Within three days he had healed completely and there was no scar. When asked how he had healed so rapidly, Erwood said “The body will do what you tell it to do if you know how to tell it.” He added, “the way of telling it involves (internal) quietness plus a visualization of what you want the body to do.”<sup>264</sup>

The spiritual perspective in counselling challenges us to look much further and far more deeply to understand what is possible for our clients.

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<sup>263</sup> Rick Ingrasci quoted in Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, p. 250.

<sup>264</sup> Quoted from Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America*, p. 123.

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**Chapter 10**  
**Spirituality in Management**  
**and Leadership**

# Spirituality in Management and Leadership

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There is increasing evidence that a major transformation is occurring in many organizations. In what is sometimes referred to as the spirituality movement, organizations that have long been viewed as rational systems are considering making room for the spiritual dimension, a dimension that has less to do with rules and order and more to do with meaning, purpose, and a sense of community.

- Donde P. Ashmos and Dennis Duchon<sup>265</sup>

As we are coming to understand, spiritual values and leadership are not a passing trend but the integration of a new level of awareness that will enhance community in the workplace.

- Barbara Krumsiek, President and CEO, Calvert Group, Ltd.<sup>266</sup>

What we are seeing is an increasingly felt need for people to integrate the spiritual dimension of their lives into what they do for most of the day. People are starting to realize that if they are going to spend a good part of their lives in the office, they would like that time to be spiritual as well as materially rewarding.

- William McLennon, Jr., Senior Lecturer Harvard Business School<sup>267</sup>

The largest driver of this trend is the mounting evidence that spiritually-minded programs in the workplace not only soothe worker's psyches but also deliver improved productivity.

- Business Week<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> "Spirituality at Work: A Conceptualization and Measure," *Journal of Management* Vol. 9, No. 2 (June 2000): p. 134.

<sup>266</sup> [http://www.spiritinbusiness.org/sib/app/cda/sib\\_cda.php?command=Quotes](http://www.spiritinbusiness.org/sib/app/cda/sib_cda.php?command=Quotes).

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

**In some ways, the role of spirituality in the management of family service organizations may be a bigger leap than linking it to the counselling process.**

That is certainly where I started in my exploration of this issue. I will admit that my initial reaction to exploring spirituality in the management arena was pretty flat. There are times when management seems to be about organizing and controlling which are at the other end of the spectrum from spirituality. In this sense, successful management is based on the ability to be a feisty, crusty pragmatist: keep the fanciful notions of meaning, compassion, and transcendent meaning for your private life or for the annual general meeting! The incentive to write this chapter came from my work as a manager—when I returned from my sabbatical I chose to take on a new, more senior management role. I was challenged to see how all the work I had been doing made any sense to the work I was doing as the director of operations in my agency.

**Is the role of spiritual perspective in management and leadership simply an application of the insights of spiritual experience that we have explored to this point?**

Simply put, yes. However, leadership and management are complicated in their own right. Let us begin by suggesting that the spiritual perspective in family service work began with the very reason such agencies exist. They started when people began to ask, “Who will care for those in our community who are suffering and in need?”

In the past, the obvious answer would have been the churches or government. But today, neither the churches nor government have the ability to effectively respond to the great issues of need in our towns and cities. The nonprofit sector exists as a third sector of the economy, after private and public, in which we are agents of the community’s response to the question of “who will care?” In this sense, caring and the notion of love of one’s neighbour are absolutely basic to why we exist. We cannot allow worries about budget, professional technique, or obsession with policy manuals to obscure the prime reason why we exist. Robert Greenleaf, a widely respected teacher and researcher who worked for AT&T for over 30 years, developed the notion of servant

leadership to capture his fundamental belief that leaders must be servants of the organization and its customers to be effective.<sup>269</sup> In a similar vein, Joseph Jaworski, leadership trainer and son of the late Watergate prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, promotes the conviction that as leaders and managers in organizations, we serve life's unfolding. In the work of both these men, I see a strong spiritual perspective.

**I think that we need to start by getting our bearings. What are some of the basic ideas that have helped you to observe the spiritual dimension of management?**

Firstly, when speaking of nonprofit management, we are dealing with a very rich topic. It has taken me a while to grasp this—like many people I have held the opinion that management is the dry husk of an organization. It is saddled with the unimaginative business of worrying about money, accountability, and rules. This assumption makes management a very un-spiritual enterprise. In fact, my own experience of moving into management held that sort of perspective—the more I accepted roles in administration, the further I was moving from “what really mattered” in the business of helping clients. Instead of paying direct attention to the rich and complex issues of helping people to change, I was more the organizer that supported the people who did. I felt more on the sidelines. As a manager, I felt a little discouraged about this. As I pursued my own growth as a leader and a manager, I concluded that I was paying the price of moving away from the spiritual dimension that I found so energizing and meaningful as a therapist.

What has helped to change my thinking on this is reading many very inspired writers who speak about organizations and the management process. Reading people like Margaret Wheatley, Marilyn Ferguson, Joseph Jaworski, David Whyte, Robert Greenleaf, and others showed me that depth of vision, values, and personal experience that go into a rich management perspective. Many of these people shared stories of their careers that showed the intricate connection between the deepest questions they had about their own lives and their beliefs about the essential issues of management. There was nothing dry about these

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<sup>269</sup> Robert Greenleaf's work is summarized well in a collection of essays edited by Larry C. Spears entitled *Reflections on Leadership* (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1995.)



people at all. All of these writers and others drew from spiritual traditions. They may not have used specific religious language but the broader terms of spirituality: interconnectedness, transcendence, unity, ultimate meaning, grace, forgiveness, prayer, and destiny.

In addition to these big names, I had the opportunity to speak to a number of leaders in business, nonprofit work, and consultants in the field. For example, I have spoken to a priest working as a chaplain to a number of different corporations in Calgary, executive directors raising spiritual questions with their work groups, fellow directors who carried the stories of parental death, personal crisis, and convictions about social justice into the work they did. For example, I spoke with the director of a North Sea oil company who held very conscientious ideas about leadership and organization decision making that impressed me as creating a very special place to work. Approaching these conversations with open questions and respect for diversity allowed for rich conversations that showed me how spiritually charged the issues of leadership, management, and organizational functioning can be.

A little reading in the area of management showed me that there are many, many initiatives to incorporate spirituality into organizational business. Groups as diverse as AT&T, oil exploration on the North Sea, and small and big businesses were engaged in such activities as incorporating prayer into meetings, exploring of parapsychology by military intelligence in the United States, and corporate consultation that addressed meaning, purpose, dreams, and storytelling into their business practice. The sheer volume of examples made it clear that the role of spirituality in organizational functioning is widespread. There was no shortage of material to read that spoke about spirituality and its importance to business success. I came to the conclusion, in fact, that business was much more ready to explore these issues than were nonprofit organizations.

I have the impression that family service agencies are, by and large, a pretty conservative lot and there are many more adventurous initiatives in corporate circles that we can learn from. What was encouraging is the sense that there is a great depth of spiritual interest among leaders in the nonprofit field. While there is some hesitancy to share their convictions, I think we are on the verge of a richer more confident exploration of the spiritual dimension in nonprofit work.

Finally, the last and probably most persuasive encouragement for a richer take on management came from my own personal management

experience. After the completion of my fellowship year, I took on a new, more senior role in Catholic Family Service as director of operations. Because this change involved a larger shift in our management structure, I had the fortunate experience of exploring value of the spiritual perspective in a more rigorous and personal way. I was challenged to see what value the spiritual dimension brought to the important questions of organizational structure, the way that I envisioned the work I was doing. This was a valuable opportunity to consolidate and test my research findings.

**Give me an idea of some of the basic takes on spirituality that you bring to your management work.**

Let's begin by reaffirming the distinction between institutional religion and spirituality. Spirituality in management and leadership does not mean taking on the dogma and language of a particular religion. There is no doubt that some organizations have adopted a stronger "Christian" approach to their work through such things as the introduction of prayer or particular Christian beliefs that form the mission statement or the vision of the work they do. However, I think that the language of a particular religious perspective is not the defining issue. I believe that the spiritual dimension of leadership and management has more to do with the pursuit of what we believe our organizations are ultimately about. The belief structure and language is a relative thing. Why does this organization exist in the first place? What are the ultimate issues that shape the choices we make about how we do our work? What assumptions do we make about the task of leadership and organizational management? These questions, when pursued with personal and professional rigor open up the spiritual dimension.

In short, spirituality is less about recreating religion in the workplace and more about drawing from the spiritual vision of the organization. The language that we use to describe this can draw from a great many sources. Philosophy, organized religion, the new sciences, the ancient wisdom traditions, poetry, and creativity research are some of the fields that supply us with useful words and concepts.

**So we are talking about exploring organizational experience on the level of the assumptions we make about what is ultimately important rather than importing organized religion?**

Yes. Preston Manning, former leader of the Reform Party gave an interesting interview with the *Calgary Herald*. In this article, he says that the distinction between church and state is appropriate when it comes to institutional practice. However, he offers three reasons why, when it comes to the cultural or what I would call the functional, day-to-day level, he says that:

More and more, people are realizing that you can't keep them separate. One of the reasons this is so is that the business of politics is faced with many moral and ethical issues such as cloning and embryo experimentation that can only be faced by some form of faith—religion, faith in science. Don't tell me you're a value-free politician because Canadians have a right to ask politicians their most important values...So the problem is not keeping faith and politics separate but rather how to manage it.<sup>270</sup>

**So you believe that the same is true in the business of family service management practice?**

Yes. I believe that the idea of value-free management is a false and misleading notion. The spiritual issue begins by asking what the values and vision are that shape organizational practice. Just like individuals who become more effective and are capable of greater integrity when they work with self-awareness and self-discipline, organizational management and leadership must be committed to clarifying its assumptions, values, and beliefs. Clarifying is not merely the exercise of naming motherhood values, it means the work of operating in a way that reflects these values. Unless there is leadership to address these value issues, we can observe a very wide gap between the noble mission statement and the way that work is done on a day-to-day basis. Recent headlines featuring corruption in major corporations have raised serious questions about the trustworthiness of corporate leaders.

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<sup>270</sup> "Manning Says Faith Growing in Politics," Joe Woodard, *Calgary Herald*, January 22, 2003, p. 6.

To quote a recent article from the *Globe and Mail*, “CEOs are going to have to become more humble to defuse the public rage that is building against them.”<sup>271</sup>

### **Is this true for family serving nonprofits?**

Even in the family service arena, issues of integrity have arisen that confront us with the humbling realization that a lack of rigorous attention to day-to-day practice places us at risk no matter how competent the staff group.

Organizations may seem very different from individual people but the energy and the character of an organization are merely a magnification very human energies that have shaped it. When very competent individuals crash and burn in their own lives, the issue is not their ability but the management of their ability in day-to-day living. Thus management in organizations is not merely about competence, getting the job done well, it is about managing the process, beliefs, and values that shape day-to-day practice.

This is a job that cannot be done by one person. Effective leadership must involve all staff members in the questions of great importance. This vision of leadership places more stress on the integrity of the leaders, more accountability, and more humility.

### **What are some of the assumptions that the spiritual perspective would ask organizations to explore?**

We must begin by questioning the common assumption that an organization is defined by its structure, the organizational charts, and the five-year plans. My experience, and there is a lot of literature to back this up, is that the organizational structure is the manifestation of the subtler and more influential forces of vision and values. Spiritually, the universe is a field of vast creative energy that gains form and particularity in the world that we see about us. If we do not have a spiritual discipline that supports attention to our most essential experience, the miracle of life and creation is reduced to unconscious commerce, control, and humdrum living. Vital organizations must

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<sup>271</sup> “The Era of CEO as Superhero Ends Amid Corporate Scandals,” Alan Elsner, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, October 27, 2002, p. A12.

cultivate and nurture a vision of what is ultimately true so that the energy of high purpose flows through its stakeholders.

Management guru Peter Senge, in the introduction to Joseph Jaworski's excellent book on leadership entitled *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*:

...the fundamental choice that enables true leadership in all situations (including but not limited to hierarchical leadership) is the choice to serve life. ...in a deep sense, my capacity as a leader comes from my choice to allow life to unfold through me. This choice results in a type of leadership that we've known very rarely, or that we associate exclusively with extraordinary individuals like Gandhi or King. In fact, this domain of leadership is available to us all, and may indeed be crucial for our future.<sup>272</sup>

Organizations from a spiritual perspective are co-creative forces participating in the vast creative potential through the kind of vision they hold. This is the template for choices, attitudes, practices that create a particular kind of agency. This does not have to be complex; in fact it must not be complex. In the end, the quality of consciousness of an organization should be evident in the experience of the client who walks through the door for the first time. It's in the air, in the greeting they receive, in the attention given to hospitality for our guests.

**This doesn't sound like the sort of stuff that would be limited to organizations that espouse some sort of spiritual or religious connection.**

Not at all. Spiritually informed leadership calls for the greater imagination and vision that is the hallmark of great leadership. This is not defined by a specific kind of belief, religion, or history. It takes a disciplined commitment to articulate and sustain this vision and an ability to hold the Big Story/vision together with the small story of day-to-day business to make this insight meaningful. It is easy to see that, from this perspective, organizations that have no specific religious belief orientation may be very spiritual.

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<sup>266</sup> Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Path of Inner Leadership*, p. 2.

**It also calls for a different kind of leadership style I would think.**

Well, if you mean different from a style focused on control and the skills of a particular individual, yes. The spiritual take, I think, focuses upon facilitation of relationship among all the players in the organization, between outside resources and the agency, between a vision of a creative universe and the opportunities for creative choice in any particular moment. This is very different from the idea that leadership is about a particular person of great talent. Rather than seeing leadership as tied into a particular and often unique person, I would say that talented leadership has a special strength of vision and openness to creative possibilities. Their true contribution is in their ability to facilitate a culture in which all staff participate in the leadership process. They can do this by developing a sense of ownership for all participants, promoting a conscious awareness of mission that drives the choices and questions that are made each day. Here is Peter Senge again:

Leadership exists when people are no longer victims of circumstances but participate in creating new circumstances. When people operate in this domain of generative leadership, day-by-day they come to a deepening understanding of ... how the universe actually works. That is the real gift of leadership. It's not about positional power; it's not about accomplishments; it's ultimately not even about what we do. Leadership is about creating a domain in which human beings continually deepen their understanding of reality and become more capable of participating in the unfolding of the world. Ultimately leadership is about creating new possibilities.<sup>273</sup>

**Wow. I see what you mean about a more energized view of leadership. I don't see any specific reference to a religious creed in what has been said. Is this what you mean when you say that spirituality is not about creed but about the depth of vision?**

Yes. In fact, I make the point that it is the quality of consciousness that defines spirituality not specific language or beliefs. I would say that the traditions of organized religion from all over the world have the longest record of putting this vision into words. However, it is also true that the

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

work of creativity theory, the quantum sciences and poetry also contribute to this vision in a way that does not use traditional religious language.<sup>274</sup>

From this point of view, then, consciousness is defined by the perceptions we bring to the world based on upbringing, culture, history, etc., which defines the depth of awareness. The spiritual attitude applied to management is one of creativity and the courage to share the vision in a way that inspires agency staff to see their role in the creative process of serving not just our clients, but life itself. Just as I spoke of before, spirituality challenges us to look beyond the world of five senses to draw upon intuitive awareness of the world. Intuition is a dimension of knowing that what we know in our guts has the ring of truth to it. Spirituality does not ask us to ignore our “common sense” or the empirical data that good research gives us. Instead the spiritual perspective seeks to include the more subtle intuitive awareness of what is true. In this way we are not limiting our vision of the organization to the things we can observe and validate rationally. We are also probing the vital processes of being alive—as individuals and as organizations. It is not easy to put into words those subtle perceptions of what really matters. It is even harder to share. Yet, when we have these experiences of seeing beyond the pale of our five senses, know what it means. Spiritually effective leadership seeks to value the intuitive, the rational, and the sensory in a way that inspires a more creative perspective on agency business.

**So leadership in this sense is a collective process rather than the act of one individual.**

Yes. Just like in counselling work with families, an effective counsellor inspires powerful, transforming conversations that result in change. A less visionary perspective would suggest that the counsellor creates this change. The spiritual perspective suggests that an effective counsellor facilitates openness to the rich, creative possibilities of the moment that can result in other choices. These other choices result in change.

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<sup>274</sup> James Hollis, a widely published Jungian Analyst and teacher from Houston, made this point in a lecture to the Calgary Jung Society on May 22, 2003 when he observed that “anything that reframes the ego’s experience of the world is a religious experience.”

I have spoken to many counsellors about this process and I am often reminded of those moments when the counsellor feels that the words they say seem to come through them rather than something that they have planned. This is creativity at work. And when clients are supported to join in, it becomes co-creative.

In organization leadership, the job of the leader is to tap into this same experience by demonstrating the courage to be open to different ideas, the willingness to ask difficult questions that open up space for creative possibilities. It is also evident when patience is shown to address difficult situations to examine the issue carefully for alternative ways of acting. It is also evident when managers challenge their staff to join in the solution finding process rather than foisting a solution on the situation. In this way, spirituality in management transforms leadership from merely a wielding of power and managing outcomes to a skill of facilitation of openness that leads to creativity that is not controlled but is allowed to enter into organization process. Attention to vision and the courage to ask questions are sometimes the spiritually effective tools of leaders rather than the ready answer and the fixed idea of outcome.

### **How is this different from what someone else might call creative leadership?**

This is a good question. In my research, I find that what some folks would say that the qualities that I have just described are qualities of creativity. They would see no need to use the word spiritual. I believe that creativity is simply one dimension of the spiritual. Thus, people such as Edward de Bono, long time leader in the field of creative thinking, do not concern themselves with questions about spirituality. He speaks of the vast creative potential of human thinking once we understand the rich possibilities for divergent and what he calls lateral thinking.<sup>275</sup> What his work offers, from my perspective, is support for describing this rich place of relatedness that produces rich new possibilities. As mentioned before, spirituality takes into account a vision of creativity that involves a cosmology that sees creativity as reflecting spirit and a vision of the hand of vast creative patterns of meaning. I have noticed that many different students of creativity easily overlap onto the realm of spirituality and in subsequent works,

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<sup>275</sup> Edward de Bono, *Smart Thinking* (Los Angeles, Ca: Renaissance Audio Tape, 1988).



use more spiritually explicit language. Marilyn Ferguson is one example. Another would be Margaret Wheatley.

Margaret Wheatley's exploration of management and the findings of quantum science emphasize the need for leaders to lead by facilitating creativity than by controlling outcomes.<sup>276</sup> It is a very different level of consciousness when we speak of an organization's goal as participating in the inherent creativity of the universe. In her most popular work, *Leadership and the New Science*, first edition in 1992, she drew upon quantum science to speak of expanded notions of creativity and its application to organization leadership. There were no spiritual references given in this work. This was very different in the 2002 release of her most recent work, *Turning to One Another*.

**So one central ingredient to spirituality in management is creativity.**

Robert Greenleaf, the father of the concept of "servant leadership," wrote that the limitation of control-oriented management is that it kills creativity. It is my sense that the rapid pace of change in our world gives us no choice but to give up the notion that we can predict and control our outcomes. Instead, we can benefit greatly from an assumption that our job is to cooperate with the forces of change with a depth of vision that sees us less as victims of uncontrollable forces than as partners in the unfolding of life.

**This sounds rich but don't you think that the "real world" of corruption and competition demands something a lot more pragmatic, and more results focused?**

I think it takes a lot more courage and vision to hold out for inherent meaning in difficult and complex issues of organizational life than to shrink things down to a battle of ordered outcome versus chaos. We need only think of some of the great leaders of this century to observe how the confrontation of great social evils and very difficult times was supported by a spiritual vision that sustained them. Think of Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr. Robert Greenleaf observes this:

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<sup>276</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*.

I have noted that people such as Abe Lincoln and John XXIII who held great power and did not suffer the common corruptions of power. I believe that this was because their own deep spiritual resources were strong...<sup>277</sup>

### **Isn't what you are referring to as "spiritual" simply really good systems awareness and diligent management practice?**

It is always important to not ignore that spirituality does draw upon the wisdom of systems thinking. Spiritual practice is not separate from the valuable wisdom of management and social work theory. It does extend this wisdom to address the basic assumptions about organizational functioning. Peter Senge, a popular MIT writer in the field of management and leadership, describes how Robert Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership put him in touch with a whole new level of meaning about leadership. He describes it this way:

With this phrase, Greenleaf takes us by the hand and leads us into a different universe. It's a universe in which most of us, I believe, have a deep hunger to participate. In fact, it's what the ancients called "the great hunger." It's a universe where our sense of self is very different. It's a universe toward which, in some way or another, all the great esoteric and spiritual traditions point. I believe one of the things Greenleaf was trying to do was to provide a pathway that was not based exclusively on any of their ancient traditions, but was more congruent and meaningful for us in our present day world. He was seeking a way we could live our lives productively in contemporary institutions so as to be connected with our own spiritual journey. But even the phrase "spiritual journey" is problematic today. The subtle distinctions required for its meaning to be evident have been lost.<sup>278</sup>

### **So spirituality in management is an "alternative universe" from conventional understandings of leadership.**

Yes, in the sense that the universe we live in is a product of how we see things rather than what we are seeing. I think that the notion of servant

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<sup>277</sup> Robert Greenleaf, "Reflections from Experience," in *Reflections on Leadership*, Larry C. Spears, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1995), p. 34.

<sup>278</sup> Peter Senge, "Robert Greenleaf's Legacy: A New Foundation for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Institutions," *Reflections on Leadership*, Larry C. Spears, ed., p.112.

leadership sees a process of creativity that cannot be achieved by our traditional notion of a strong, influential leader who strikes up a vision and sells it to the organization. It is more about the leader becoming a servant or a facilitator of the rich potential of the organization. This notion is contained in Herman Hesse's novel, *Journey to the East*. This is where Greenleaf says that he first discovered this idea. This is also found in the story of Jesus washing the feet of the apostles and in Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence.

**You are suggesting that an attitude of service from the leaders of an organization or a movement inspires organizational effectiveness. How is this creative?**

It is creative in the sense that the organizational attitude of openness allows for new possibilities to emerge that could not come from any one individual no matter how good he or she was. Organizations are far too complex for one individual to be "in charge." Instead of being in charge, the leader creates the field of creativity through serving the interests of staff. The day of the great visionary leader that can pull the organization along to the "promised land" is over. This sort of outlook has resulted in certain people being seen as being "gifted" or special and, by implication, others are not. Not only does this result in certain people being paid way more than others, it also results in a failure to encourage all staff to participate in the leadership of the organization. Further, it fails to recognize the wisdom of seeing the organization as a process of creativity.

I spent some time at Esalen, CA, one of the leaders of the "human potential movement" in the 1960s up to today. Much of Esalen's teaching about healing, leadership, and the arts is based on the premise that being creative—that is, producing something that did not exist before, came not as an act of will or skill but an act of openness and risking. In writing, this meant writing without pause or lifting the pen from the paper. The point was to bypass our thinking and instead, allow something to emerge from the creative realms outside of consciousness. I studied creative movement, writing, and energetic healing and in each area, the same premise applied—only when we get our fixed ideas about how things should be or how they are can we actually be creative.

This is similar to the idea that in medicine we don't heal people; we remove the obstacles to health so that the healing capacities of the

individual emerge. In this same way, the innate potentials of creativity in an organization can only emerge when we can go beyond the idea of the leader as someone who “makes things happen” and more as someone who removes the obstacles to creativity in an organization. Some of these obstacles include over-controlling management, workers adopting a passive, un-invested role in the organization outcomes, the idea that crucial ideas can only come from “the top.”

This doesn't mean that there isn't a need for people to accept responsibility for organization effectiveness. It simply means that, from a spiritual perspective, the leader is challenged to facilitate and serve the process of the organization by empowering workers and promoting the belief that outcome is dependent upon the creative energies of all staff.

So you are thinking that the leader is challenged to be attentive to the ingredients of creativity. These are identified by Margaret Wheatley as a high degree of communication and interconnectedness and openness to new resources from outside the formal organization.<sup>279</sup> The spiritual organization demands a great deal of attention to the subtle process of relatedness among staff and programs. It also demands a great deal of willingness to accept influence from many different sources. This can include clerical staff, partners in the community, clients, volunteers, students, and so forth.

**What you are describing is very different from the conventional idea about management as having effective control over staff functioning. How can you sell such a vision when it means directors give up much of the control that their boards are asking them to have?**

Giving up control is more often giving up the illusion of control. So much of what happens in agency experience has little to do with plans that have been made and more about adapting to the reality of a world in which change occurs rapidly and often unpredictably. Ask anyone working in the financial markets these days. Second, giving up the illusion of control is the only way that we can cultivate the necessary openness to respond to opportunities that present themselves. If we focus on a fixed idea of outcome, we are not likely to be noticing other possibilities that have promise but do not represent the fixed plan.

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<sup>279</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, p. 54.

Third, the movement from management as the task of control to one based on creativity puts faith in the inherently positive potential that exists in the organization. Just as spiritual practice in individual life requires us to surrender our agendas in order to be receptive to other, richer meaning, so too is the organization challenged by the spiritual principle of surrendering agendas. It is my sense that the truly effective manager in these times is challenged to have faith in the creative process and to support openness to new resources and information.

Quantum physics, the study of the sub-atomic world, further undermined the belief in a solidly physical world that could be understood and measured “objectively.” From quantum research, we have come to understand that the physical world is in fact 99 per cent space and that the sub-atomic world is composed of particles that move in and out of existence. Further, when we try to measure what we view to be the “objective world,” the very act of measuring it changes it. In other words, the world is shaped by the way we see it. This is not merely a psychological truth; it is a physical truth as well.

Here’s the way people in physics are starting to think about it. It appears that “things” are “relationships.” What characterizes reality “substance,” at a very basic level, are patterns of interrelationship...<sup>280</sup>

**This is a pretty radical conclusion about what “reality” is.**

Absolutely. This is where I got the title of this book *Radical Relatedness*. What is really intriguing is that this is where the insights of different spiritual traditions and the findings of quantum science overlap. Tielhard de Chardin, for example, suggests that we are human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience. All mystic traditions speak to the essence of our being as the non-material field of soul—something that is more real than the physical bodies we become so attached to. In Hinduism, for example, the notion of a physical, material world is seen as an illusion. Rumi, the Sufi poet, spoke of shifting our conscious attachment to our physical selves and the illusion of circumstances as

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<sup>280</sup> Peter Senge quoted from Larry C. Spears *Reflections on Leadership* (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1995), p. 225.

“waking up from a dream,” Black Elk, the great Sioux visionary spoke of “the world behind the world.”<sup>281</sup>

**This is like Christopher Columbus demonstrating that the flat earth belief that dominated western thinking for hundreds of years simply was not true. If this is so revolutionary, why do we continue to live in Newton’s universe where we say that reality is what we take in with the five senses?**

There are two reasons why this is so: first, it takes a long time for our everyday thinking to catch up to new paradigms of reality. Every day applications for new paradigms of consciousness—for that is what this is—tend to lag behind science by 75 years or more. We are only beginning to explore the quantum world in more widespread ways. Recently, we have seen an awful lot of books with the word quantum in their titles.

The second reason why quantum science is outside of our ordinary discussions about how the world works in organizational leadership is that, the quantum perspective, like the spiritual perspective, requires serious reckoning to discover how this applies to our experience. The challenge that exists for all of us is to live in a world that appears solid and fixed when we know that it is much more dynamic and vast. The spiritual approach that makes the most sense to me asks us to examine our own experience very carefully and see if we cannot begin to see the truth that mystics and quantum physicists are telling us about. It is only when we begin to explore the subtler and more complex realms of our experience that we begin to see that the cause and effect model does not hold.

This is like the recognition that Newtonian physics sometimes fail us in tracking satellites and at these times, we must apply that more subtle perception of the world based on Einstein’s theory of relativity. Or like those times when the intensity of certain experiences causes us to see past the world of materialism into a subtle sense of a richly

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<sup>281</sup> There are many interesting books that have explored the overlap of quantum science and mysticism. It is more common to speak in terms of Eastern Mysticism. Gary Zukav’s *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, Frijof Capra’s *The Tao of Physics*, Greg Braden’s *Walking Between the Worlds: The Science of Compassion*, and Deepak Chopra’s *Quantum Healing* are only a few.

interconnected world of meaning and belonging. Sometimes this happens only when our old view of the world has been shattered.

In the management field, it is still possible to operate in a world of linear cause and effect thinking. When linear thinkers see a problem, they simply eliminate it. It is still common to think of an organization as a physical entity with organization charts that we manipulate and production targets that dictate operations. However, managers of quality realize that they cannot manipulate an organization and the staff into success. Such an outlook is a recipe for costly failure.

An organization as complex as today's family service agency is composed of many different players: volunteers, clients, professionals, managers, partners, funders, and so forth. The mere idea that there can be a simple strategy to get everyone doing "the right thing" is naïve.

The spiritual organization is based on a notion of creativity that sees the management task as bringing itself into harmony with the vital life energies inside and outside of it. I really resonate with the writers such as Peter Senge, the chaos theorist David Peet, and Robert Greenleaf who suggest that management is much more a task of creativity where we target relationships rather than results. Let me share two quotes from Robert Greenleaf that say this so well:

The most productive organization is one where there is the largest amount of voluntary action; people do the right things, things that optimize total effectiveness, at the right times—because they understand what ought to be done, they believe these are the right things to do, and they take the necessary actions without being instructed.<sup>282</sup>

In another context, Greenleaf speaks about the difference between leadership based on control through "weeding out the problems" and leadership based on supporting the creative, health-building forces of the organization. There are many things that can go wrong, yet to try and eliminate the problems falls short of the spiritual sense of co-creating organizational health:

Who is the enemy? Not evil people. Not stupid people. Not apathetic people. Not the "system"...The better society will

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<sup>282</sup> Robert Greenleaf quoted in Anne T. Fraker, "Robert K Greenleaf and Business Ethics: There is no Code," Larry C. Spears, *Reflections on Leadership*, p. 46.

come, if it comes, with plenty of evil, stupid, apathetic people around and with an imperfect, ponderous, inertia-charged system as the vehicle for change. Liquidate the offending people, radically alter or destroy the system, and in less than a generation they all will be back... The healthy society, like the healthy body, is not the one that has taken the most medicine. It is the one in which the internal health-building forces are in the best shape.<sup>283</sup>

### **Tell me how a leader/manager would do that.**

Well, first, the leaders must see their job as supporting an inherently creative process that is manifest in the physical structure of the organization and the staff group. They must focus on the idea that they are facilitating an effective organization rather than inventing one.

Second, it would draw upon the notion of dialogue as the basic mechanism of creative exchange. Meetings would support the exploration of questions, the free flow of ideas among participants. David Bohm, one of the most widely recognized quantum physicist in the past 50 years believed that dialogue is the means that groups become able to create new ideas and strategies. His understanding drew from the original source of the word: “dia—logos” which translate from the Greek to describe meaning flowing through. More important than the fixed notion of decisions and plans is the idea of a creative process whereby the participants generate new meanings and possibilities that enhance the quality of organizational functioning and reflect the individual’s deepest convictions about what really matters. This is captured in Robert Greenleaf’s concept of “entheos” which he believed to be an essential quality of successful leadership. He believed that entheos is a

sustaining force, a support for “venturesome, risk taking action, a prod to the conscience keeping one open to knowledge, an influence on keeping the future in the present, and a link between one’s religious beliefs and one’s work a day actions.”<sup>284</sup>

This highlights the extent to which leadership is effective when it focuses firstly upon supporting the visionary capacity to focus on what could be called the quality of consciousness in an organization. Of

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<sup>283</sup> Robert Greenleaf quoted in Peter Senge, *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>284</sup> Anne T. Fraker, “Robert K Greenleaf and Business Ethics: There is no Code,” Larry C. Spears, *Reflections on Leadership*, p. 43.



course results matter, and of course there are times when the leader will feel a need to intervene in processes viewed to be unhealthy or unproductive. However, the spiritually inclined leader will intervene with a focus on supporting the quality of relationships and the quality of openness in an organization.

**You said earlier that leaders have to be alert and attentive to their own spiritual issues.**

You bet. The power of leaders is as much on the kind of example they set for others and the quality of their actions. Leaders do not have to be perfect but they do have to develop the kind of spiritual discipline that will allow for openness to feedback, transparency of agendas, and a willingness to speak authentically.

Let me outline three basic values that I believe are central to spiritually effective leadership and management:

- 1. Kindness:** recognition of the interconnectedness of all life, of our purposes with the purposes of all life, leads us to tread with care and compassion for each other. A culture of kindness reflects the spiritual sense of recognizing that there is no separation between inner and outer life, between our intentions and our actions. It places greatest value upon the way we conduct ourselves in relation to our staff, colleagues, and clients. This more than a moral imperative. Rules and obligations only go so far in creating healthy culture in an organization. The quality of consciousness is, from a spiritual perspective, blocked by failures of attention, openness, and respect. By extension, the integrity of a leader's inner life is reflected in the quality of the organization.

Robert Greenleaf's notion of servant leadership is important here. Contrary to the more familiar notion of effective leaders as powerful, the spiritual requirement is that they hold themselves as servants for the good of the organization.

Kindness cultivates attention to belonging and connection that vitalizes people by allowing them to feel a part of something larger than their own intentions. Developing a culture of giving and getting support becomes the foundation for community. Community becomes the foundation for the creative blending of workers' talents and wisdom which then leads to powerful

results. An elegant saying from Confucianism comes to mind:

If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be  
beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the  
character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is  
harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.  
When there is order in each nation, there will be peace  
in the world.<sup>285</sup>

**2. Community:** a sense of being a part of something larger than ourselves, bind us to the experience of community. In the spirit of what has been said thus far, a sense of community is an essential ingredient in the spiritual outlook. It allows us to see how what we do is linked to the experience and work of others. We cannot think or act in isolation of this context of belonging. For the manager, this sense of belonging creates the expectation that all staff are a part of this, that it is not up to the manager alone. This can lighten the load of the manager and provide the crucial sense that “I am not alone.” The spiritual outlook also takes the notion of community past the sense of working together to see that the community is shaped by my thoughts and intentions as well as my actions. Further, that my experience is shaped by the field of community energy. This comes back to that sense of what clients experience when they walk through the agency’s door.

**3. Effectiveness:** as a reflection of the spiritual discipline that calls for service and sees the support of spiritual energies, we believe that the quality of work we do is as high as possible. Being spiritually sensitive does not compromise the ability to be effective. Instead, it allows us as managers to expect that we can create a culture of co-creation with staff that draws the best of gifts from all who work. In this sense, the effectiveness of an organization is facilitated through the skills of a manager who sees the flow of energy, gifts, and resources as the creative forces that can serve the mission of the agency. The principle of stepping forward as a leader in this way invites the organization to experience the power of following its mission with the conviction that the support will be there.

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<sup>285</sup> Quoted from an unknown Chinese source from the website:  
[http://www.regentour.com/china/phi\\_rel/](http://www.regentour.com/china/phi_rel/).

This is translating Joseph Campbell's notion of "follow your bliss" into the organizational imperative to "follow your mission." Effectiveness is no longer limited to the powers of the leader to make things happen through calculation and imposing of one's will.

- 4. Openness:** The "will to power" that has dominated Western consciousness for the past four or five centuries is shifting to a conscious "willingness." This includes developing a culture that values the feminine principles of openness, connectedness, and creativity. The structure of such an organization must include a degree of openness and risk taking with other staff that allows the self-organizing creative energies to follow the agency vision and mission.

In this way, effectiveness is a "getting out of the way" management style: asking more questions, creating forums for connection among all staff, empowering management groups to make decisions in a collective fashion. It does not throw out the role of a leader taking responsibility for the outcome. In other words, hierarchy has its place. Ultimately, the responsibility for effective decisions and results must be clearly held by certain leaders in the organization

- 5. Fun:** in the spiritual lingo, the actual term is joy. This is the abiding feeling that an individual experiences when they are truly participating in a spiritual experience of life. In the organization, joy can be achieved as the energy of belonging and connection that is facilitated by effective leadership. Surrendering attachments to control and isolation and competition, a climate of kindness and commitment to effectiveness through openness to the forces of creativity can result in a climate of fun.

It also creates the expectation that all staff are a part of this, that it is not up to the manager alone. The ingredients of fun in the spiritual sense include: gratefulness, playfulness, and faith in the process that liberates us from abiding and unnecessary anxiety. "Fun" in the spiritual sense is not conditional to things working out right, it is conditional to organizationally being on the path. Fun can emerge from the experience of routine kindness, calls to participate that give people a sense of being a part of something that matters, and the willingness to commit to "finding a way through" difficult or complicated issues that have no easy answer. Fun is the by-product of effective community.

**In outlining these values you seem to alternate between citing these as a reflection of the leader and at other times a reflection of the agency culture.**

The less separation between different levels of leadership the better. Leadership from a spiritual perspective is a process that involves the whole agency. Within that, each person can contribute in different ways—some in formal leadership roles and some in quiet, less obvious but equally important roles. Formal leadership must accept responsibility for facilitating a “leadership culture” so that each member of the agency feels empowered to have a hand in the way the agency turns out. It means claiming responsibility for supporting the vision of the agency. It also means empowering everyone, clients and staff alike, to act from their own sense of highest meaning in the day-to-day business of the agency.

**We have not talked about prayer even though that would seem to most people to be at the heart of what one would call spiritual practice in or out of the agency.**

Any focus on spiritual awareness for leaders cannot ignore prayer. Praying for the health of our organization, for help in times of need, or praying for the welfare of particular people or groups is based not merely on faith in a god or higher power, it is also based on the experimental research of Larry Dossey and others<sup>286</sup> whose research on the effect of prayer tells us about the world on non-local interconnectedness that quantum science is telling us about. This has been discussed in previous chapters.

I find that raising the issue of prayer, when it is done without compulsion and acknowledges that there are many different forms of prayer, gets past the issue of particular sensitivities and focuses on the intention of prayer which is focusing our energy upon the well-being of others. When Larry Dossey discovered study after study highlighting the positive effects of prayer for medical practice, he reports how this put him in a dilemma:

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<sup>286</sup> Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. 8.

It never occurred to me that religious practices such as prayer could be assessed like a new drug. At the time, I did not pray for my patients, and soon I found myself facing an ethical dilemma. If this study was reliable, how could I justify not praying for my patients?<sup>287</sup>

### **Can we talk about what is actually happening regarding spirituality in the work place today? What are the researchers saying?**

Recent survey from Gallup, 48 per cent of workers surveyed said that they had spoken of spirituality in the work place in the past 24 hours.<sup>288</sup>

A survey completed by Melleroff and Elizabeth<sup>289</sup> concluded that workers have a great deal of interest in spiritual matters but lack a sense of how they might address this in their work. They fear offending colleagues, bosses, and clients. I have had opportunities to sit down with work groups to discuss the role of spirituality in their organizations. On two occasions I observed the kind of ambivalence that forms at the meeting of genuine interest and fear of being forced to adopt a “party line” or being obliged to share something very personal before they felt safe to do so. There is no real surprise in this.

### **Has this resulted in more attention to spiritual themes in workplace training?**

Yes. *Training Magazine*'s 1996 Industry Report shows that 37 per cent of United States corporations provide training in ethics and 68 per cent in personal growth. Increasingly, these training programs in personal growth are offering explicitly spiritual material.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Quoted from Jeff Levin, *God, Faith and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*, p. ix.

<sup>288</sup> Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton, “A Study of Spirituality in the Workplace,” *Sloan Management Review* (Summer, 1999): p.188.

<sup>289</sup> Tara Fenwick and Elizabeth Lange, “Spirituality in the Workplace: The New Frontier of Human Resource Development,” *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 12, 1 (May 1998): p. 65.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

## **Do you see these times as being particularly significant to the rise of spiritual questions about agency work?**

Yes. David Whyte indicates that the workplace has shifted away from the familiar concern about benefits and security.<sup>291</sup> There is much more uncertainty, more cynicism, and more questions about meaning and value that have no real framework in our conventional workplace vocabulary. If security is no longer the medium of exchange, then meaning has become the focus. What is meaningful work? Are managers not just as interested in meaningful work?

## **So what are the reasons for this change?**

One reason, based on some of the major changes in the workplace over the past 30 years, is increasing interest in the spiritual perspective. Leigh cites three reasons for this shift: dispirited workers reeling from decreased organizational support and increased demands, need more purpose and meaning in their work; trainers believe the workplace is a key source of connection and contribution for many people; and workers are expressing a desire to be of service.<sup>292</sup>

## **So what benefits does this approach offer?**

McMillen (1993 cited in Fenwick and Lange) says that putting resources into spirituality can produce more fully evolved and developed human beings, creating workers highly attuned to their identity, their strengths and weaknesses, and their special place and contribution. Spiritual employees bring more energy, effort, and clarity to their jobs. Thus, issues of initiative, responsibility, motivation, commitment, and productivity resolve themselves. Issues of absenteeism and health insurance costs are also positively affected. David Whyte observes that the organization tuned into its spiritual dynamics is able to address the dark dimension of personnel struggles more directly and effectively because the spiritual outlook is open and cognizant of the path into the darker issues of human experience.

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<sup>291</sup> David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001), p. 10.

<sup>292</sup> Quoted from Tara Fenwick and Elizabeth Lange, "Spirituality in the Workplace: The New Frontier of Human Resource Development," *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 12, 1 (May 1998): p. 72.

Without this spiritual openness to reckoning with tough issues, a much bigger bureaucracy must be put in place to cover the contingencies of personnel management.<sup>293</sup>

On a cynical note—and here we revisit the issue of interest versus investment—Lee and Zemke (1993 cited in Lange and Fenwick) say spirituality is simply a buzz word of the 1990s and it is only smart business to associate with hot trends.

### **How true do you think that is?**

I do think there is a “buzz word” dynamic to some spiritual initiatives. However, there are factors other factors at work here. I think it is relatively easy to tell the difference because actions will either show serious interest or reflect a very loose and “flavour of the month” mindset.

### **I think it would be useful here to talk about the issues of management in terms of the three levels of consciousness that you discussed in Chapter 3. Can you start with the first level of material consciousness and how this shapes management styles?**

The first level is the physical plane of cause/effect thinking. The only thing that is real is what we can observe with our senses. Efficiency is measured in purely physical terms: the bottom lines of money and productivity. The task at hand takes precedence over process issues such as staff morale. Rules are clear and roles are well-defined. This is basic bureaucracy. Management uses the power of position to ensure compliance.

### **Okay. Sounds like a sweatshop approach to management. What about the second?**

Organizations that integrate the psychosocial sphere of consciousness see the world as linked by emotional and psychological interaction in addition to the physical. This model believes that the subtle issues of relationship and emotional factors have causal influence just like

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<sup>293</sup> Whyte, David. *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*, p. 22.

physical events. This model, as I understand it, became popular following World War II. Organizational health became more than just the financial bottom line. Manager training for addressing the emotional and psychological dimensions of employee experience has become more popular since that time. We have seen the fads of encounter-style work groups and the popularity of retreats. The organization on this level is now measured in more subtle terms of connection between management and staff and levels of staff satisfaction in addition to the bottom line. The structure of bureaucracy is less firm with importance being placed on employees about their role in the organization.

The concept of teams arises on this level of awareness as well. Teams exist more often in name than in practice. I say this because I think that many organizations have adopted the concept of a level-two organization but in practice they still resemble level-one organizations. Just as in developmental psychology, the stress of economic downturns or major changes to personnel can result in organizations withdrawing from the second sphere to the first—teams get scrapped or bypassed for the critical decisions. In the life cycle of any organization, I have seen cycles of stress when level-two organizations become more rigid and arbitrary, and the separation of management and staff becomes more pronounced. On the other hand, there are times—possibly with changes in management or after a difficult time—when the organization moves into a greater degree of inter-connectedness.

**The quality of consciousness in an organization is affected what is happening in their world.**

Yes. However, I would suggest that the quality of consciousness in an agency is reflected in its ability to deal with stressful issues without being swamped. An organization that is locked into low level-two consciousness tends to resort, pretty quickly, to imposing order on difficult situations through arbitrary decisions. As one moves into higher levels, there is a greater “team” or community force that allows for more effective collaboration between staff groups and with management groups. There is no doubt, though, that events such as a change of executive directors or serious financial setbacks requiring lay-offs can have a big impact on endurance of a willingness to preserve dialogue between different groups and individuals.



**It seems, too, that things have changed in terms of historical trends.**

As the world moved from the struggle for security brought on with the depression and the world wars, expectations rose for what people could hope for. Survival was not enough. Emotional fulfillment became more important. We see this in the pattern of marriages that went from a partnership for survival—the man “brought home the bacon” and the wife cooked it—to a perspective where emotional fulfillment became more central. The roles were, in keeping with level one consciousness, clear and central to how a good marriage was measured. With the rising expectation of emotional fulfillment, we find ourselves moving up Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. We see couples, particularly women, using the vocabulary and values of emotional fulfillment to describe their sense of satisfaction in marriage. This led to increasing flexibility in roles and more personal formulas for achieving satisfaction. From the perspective of level-two consciousness, satisfaction is not defined arbitrarily according to traditional rules based on the idea that the authority of the tribe or the culture knew best. It required a more subtle process of negotiation that emphasizes communication, problem solving, and mutual understanding.

**So the expectations rise and the rules slide.**

Well, yes. There is in fact another set of “rules” that kick into play. These new rules or expectations were based on values of individualism—the empowerment of the individual perspective over the group mind. It also created more confusion. My ideas about satisfaction may not be yours. There is a greater challenge to negotiate this less well-defined territory. This can be a real headache for managers who lack patience and or negotiation skills.

In the work place, this same process was at work. This resulted in a major challenge for managers who now were forced to manage not from a fixed set of rules and expectations. Instead they had to address the challenge of individual worker needs and temperaments. The changing times, partly from the trends of unionization but more significantly from the perspective of the rise of the power of the individual. Old management styles did not work. Managers were challenged to develop the skills of negotiation, recognizing that what worked with one worker did not necessarily work for another. Also, it provided the additional challenge and opportunity for managers to

examine their own needs. If they were to deal effectively with the demands for new skill and the stress of a more complex management task, they had to become better communicators of their needs, and better negotiators with other people that they worked with—bosses, colleagues, and those who reported to them.

### **This sounds more complicated.**

It is. Ask any manager how easy it is to be sensitive to the diversity of viewpoints within their staff. Add to that the effects of greater individualism leading to less common understandings of how things get sorted out, and you can see the importance of a marriage or an organization paying attention to the more subtle processes of relationship, communication, problem solving, and values. A huge industry has grown up to fill this need—organization development, human resource development, organizational consulting, etc. It is not hard to see how our culture has adapted to the psychological point of view. It is a central part of business management practice.

### **You are talking here about the demand for processing of issues that can consume a lot of time.**

Processing demands patience and balancing so that meetings do not become fruitless exercises in talking without results.

### **So that's two. What is the third?**

The third is the sphere of spiritual consciousness. It means envisioning the organization, as part of a larger pattern of meaning. In *Re-claiming Higher Ground*, Lance Secretan advocates creating organizations that inspire the soul and move from survival and strategic psychology into “true productivity” by creating a spiritual sanctuary in the workplace. Business is reinvented as a “community of souls through shared values, love, trust, and respect.” I have found Margaret Wheatley’s *Leadership and the New Science*, Joseph Jaworski’s *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, and David Peet’s *The Seven Life Lessons of Chaos Theory* to be particularly helpful in fleshing out an understanding about the fundamental qualities of a spiritual organization.

Interestingly, and I have noted this before, not one of these authors uses what I would consider conventional spiritual language, yet—and this is

a key piece of my own vision—they share a vision of organizational functioning that is very consistent with spiritual consciousness found in the ancient wisdom traditions and of the great religions. What is left out of the picture is a specific theology or dogma. They use the metaphors of science and philosophy to speak of a spiritual outlook applied to organizational process.

The inherent tendency of living systems is to move beyond equilibrium, through instability to adopt a new life-enhancing structure. If we allow ourselves to be with the chaos and move through it, we move to a new and more creative way of being. Chaos is a pre-condition or stimulant for activating the self-organizing creativity inherent in all living systems.

-Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Peace Prize winner

I urged them to create more information than I could possibly handle. I guaranteed them that at some point the info would self-organize in the crystallizing into interesting forms and ideas.<sup>294</sup>

**You have said that leaders who do not have a sense of the spiritual perspective in their lives would have trouble seeing the value of the spiritual perspective to the organization.**

Leaders do not need to be the smartest or most informed individuals in the organization, but their power to influence organizational process often results in the organization's becoming a reflection of their level of consciousness. When a leader has the courage to take the risks and be transparent enough to facilitate the energy and resources of the organization, amazing things are possible. I often see examples of issues sorting through in ways that clearly involve issues such as unexpected fortuitous events occurring at just the right time (synchronicity), or a sense of deep connection to a purpose that goes beyond the agency mandate, or a sense of being aided or called forward that comes from beyond them. Many people have mystical experiences that they are reluctant to report; yet my sense is that many leaders know the experience of feeling part of something greater than they can understand or of feeling connected to forces of influence that extend beyond their own ability. I hear about therapists and managers talking about times when they felt powerfully inspired by an intuition or a sense of being helped that they could not account for.

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<sup>294</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, p. 150.

Joseph Jaworski's book *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* documents one man's transformation on the path to remarkable achievement as a leader in the international field of leadership. He overcame personal struggles and limitations that blocked connection to a higher order of possibility after his marriage ended and he faced the consequences of impulsive living. This is a highly accomplished leader who writes frankly about his personal struggles and how they became a springboard for new learning that made him a stronger leader. Jaworski's book maps personal growth that translated into effective leadership for the organizations that he joined.

This is very familiar to me. One of my most difficult issues as a leader is to continue learning about my ways of coping with issues—especially how I impose personal limits because “I can't do that” or “they would never consider that” or “where would the resources come from?” One experience that challenged this style of thinking (referred to as negative feedback loops in chaos theory or negative thought forms in spiritual circles) came about five years ago. In a management retreat, we were given an exercise to envision how we would ideally like to live day-to-day. When the other managers in the group began to report back their ideal images, I was unable to picture an ideal day that involved coming to work. People talked about getting good sleep, maybe an afternoon nap, lunches with people they enjoyed, getting to work at the time that was ideal for them, etc. I felt a little embarrassed because this image betrayed my unhappiness about work at that time. I was not feeling particularly inspired and so drew up a picture that had me getting up early, going for runs, spending time reading and working on becoming a writer, taking afternoon nap, making a nice supper with the family, taking an evening walk, and maybe going for a show with my wife. It was nothing too dramatic, but it represented the things that were truly important to me. I relished the vision but felt that it was completely unrealistic until I had sufficient resources to retire.

Two years later I heard about the Muttart Fellowship that paid salary for a year to do a small amount of research and even money to travel. Interestingly, I give it a little thought and then passed it over. It was a year and a half later that I had the Muttart Fellowship brought to my attention once more. This time I applied. What amazed me was that, once I decided on the proposal that I would submit, I was possessed by a certainty that I would receive the fellowship. Considering this was a competition open to many people in four provinces and the territories, this certainty seemed both a little excessive and not in keeping with my

typically cautious attitude towards success. When I did the final interview, I felt very pessimistic about my chances. I didn't think I had handled some of the tough questions very well. I puzzled over my certainty, given that I had plenty of reasons to be more cautious.

Happily, I did get it. Now, towards the end of my fellowship year, I realize that I have been living exactly as I had envisioned. I have no question that the process that led to this—the Fellowship being brought to my attention more than once, the unusual experience of certainty—reflected an influence extending beyond me that lead me to realize the vision that I had produced four years before.

Until one is committed, there is Hesitancy,  
The chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness.

Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation)  
There is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which  
kills countless ideas and splendid plans:

The moment one definitely commits oneself,  
Then Providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would otherwise  
Never have occurred.  
A whole stream of events issues from the decision,  
Raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and  
Meetings and material assistance,  
Which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

- W.N. Murray, in *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*<sup>295</sup>

### **So how does the spiritual sphere of consciousness change the way management happens? Could you give an example to illustrate?**

Okay. Let's identify a familiar struggle with money. Let's say that there has been a program cutback resulting in a budget shortfall. Something has to be done. With level-one consciousness, there can be a very real appreciation of the implications of the situation: the agency has finances, programs are threatened, and something must be done.

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<sup>295</sup> Quoted from Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, p. 64.

Level-two consciousness would tune into the subtle relational issues: the “vibes” that filter through the organization resulting in staff and supervisors reacting according to established habits and ways of decision-making. This sort of anxiety can filter through to clients, not necessarily directly but in an atmosphere of higher stress when a client comes through the door. It may even be more noticeable in the ways that anxiety affects the way work gets done or doesn’t get done. Staff collaborate differently in times of anxiety—sometimes pressing for more discussion and support and other times drifting into “closed door” meetings and sub-grouping that creates isolation and more anxiety. A manager tuning into these more subtle energies of level-two experience may seek to promote “up front” processing on staff and management levels—offering as much information as appropriate, enlisting feedback, and discussing options.

The third level might show itself in the form of questions such as “what is the lesson here?” It might hold open the field of possibilities by avoiding familiar ways of attempting to shut down anxiety and allowing this to be seen a part of a larger pattern of energy that connects all aspects of self and agency. Spiritual thinking would challenge a person about coming to conclusions that this is a “bad situation” and so encourage managers to hold open for creative possibilities that are not immediately evident.

Because the spiritual perspective represents an integration of the previous levels, the spiritual take does not mean that the manager would ignore the risk issues if there is no money to finance a program. Nor would he or she ignore the value of collaboration and processing so as to manage the reactive anxieties of staff and enlist their support for creative options. Spiritual thinking would also include faith in how things unfold. This issue would be viewed for how it fits into a larger pattern of meaning that may not be understood for now but will serve the highest good. Of course, if there are self-destructive elements at work—that is poor management strategies of one kind or another then the spiritual perspective would do as the other levels would—correct it. This line of thinking is consistent with a Buddhist quip that I saw several times while in India: “Why worry? If it can be fixed, fix it. If not, let it go.”

Such a view overlaps with the essential goal of spiritual discipline, which is to develop a capacity to respond to the experience of chaos from the spiritual consciousness. The challenge in many of these

distressing situations is to hold together the opposing perceptions of a spiritual instinct that demands meaning and the experience of chaos that threatens to overwhelm us. F. Scott Fitzgerald calls this a true test of a first-rate intellect:

The test of a first-rate intellect is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.<sup>296</sup>

I can think of many examples describing the spiritual discipline to face this issue. None better comes to mind than the ideas of Pima Chodren, Buddhist nun and leader of a monastery in Cape Breton Island. She speaks of the challenge to surrender our thoughts and ideas about how things should be and our sense of failure because things are not as we have planned them. Instead, we must trust this time of emptiness (chaos) by being willing to be present to the fear, anger, and protest. To shut down in face of fear is to engage in an attempt to control that which cannot be controlled. By facing the fear, we stay present to the possibilities. Some things are meant to die. Some things cannot stay as they are. There is nothing more insane than to fight what is. The courage to be fully present both to the hope and the fear, the vision and the emerging reality, creates the field of possibility in which a new order can emerge. This is the spiritual process of discernment.

**Doesn't such a rich vision invite a leader to become passive and see all things, all problems, as things that will take care of themselves? What do we need leaders for if "all manner of things shall be well"?**

I go once more to the spiritual discipline of discernment described so well in the "Serenity Prayer" quoted earlier. When must we act, and when must we endure? The wisdom to know the right thing follows from the belief that as the community focuses on the issue, openness and creativity will allow us to stay cognizant of both sides of the issue and as Richard Rohr suggests, we can then allow the best part to be chosen.<sup>297</sup> This kind of guided choosing requires the group's best wisdom to emerge.

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<sup>296</sup> Quoted from Robert Fulghum, *Things I Wish I Had Written*, audiotope.

<sup>297</sup> Richard Rohr, *Experiencing the Enneagram*, audiotope.

To draw from Joseph Jaworski's work, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, leadership is best focused on facilitating the envisioning of agency goals through focusing on this vision and believing that the very act of visioning can lead to the manifestation of the new level of organization. The focus of leadership is not order itself but on *facilitating* the natural order:

At a level we cannot see, there is an unbroken wholeness—an implicate order out of which seemingly discrete events arise, like the ink droplet in the glycerin that gradually manifests from its implicate state. All human beings are a part of that unbroken whole which is continually unfolding from the implicate and making itself manifest in our explicate order. One of the most important roles we can play individually and collectively is to create an opening, or to “listen” to the implicate order unfolding, and then to create dreams, visions, and stories that we sense at our center want to happen...<sup>298</sup>

Further along in the book, he contrasts the traditional notions of leadership based on “positional power and conspicuous accomplishment” with “creating a domain in which we continually learn and become more capable of participating in our unfolding future. A true leader thus sets the stage on which predictable miracles...can and do occur.”<sup>299</sup>

I remember a colleague of mine who had his program threatened when his lease was not renewed. This created a great crisis for all sorts of reasons, not the least of which was that he liked the location of his program and didn't want to move. He was not even sure there was somewhere to move to. As it happened, a space became available in a location just down the street, he got a better rate than he had been paying at the old site and there was an opportunity to have a freshly finished work space designed to suit his current needs. We must take care how we judge the events that unsettle us!

### **Is there room to talk about love and compassion as guiding principles for management?**

Certainly. Love manifest in compassion (“philadelphia” or brotherly love as described in the Christian tradition) grants clients the experience the caring so central to healing. Compassion manifest in the

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<sup>298</sup> Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, p. 182.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182



servant leadership model provides staff and management with the respect and support so essential to remaining vital while doing the hard work of service or managing the stress of difficult times. We are kidding ourselves if we think that techniques and strategies get people to be something that they are not. Techniques and strategies are the means of channeling vision and compassion.

In the spiritual perspective, love manifest in service to others rises beyond the notions of obligation and duty to become a desired way of living. In the spiritual disciplines, individual people are challenged to envision a flow of energy and meaning that calls for a willingness to enter into greater openness, trust of what is unfolding, and the to courage invite staff into this larger vision. The essential tools of compassion, collaboration and creative questioning represent, I believe, the spiritual dimension of management.

**When you have spoken of these three levels of consciousness, you have emphasized that each level is part of the picture. Can you say a bit more?**

I think that effective managers who include a spiritual perspective in their work do not stray from the common sense realities of meeting each situation with what is needed. There is a notion called “situational leadership” that essentially says that we lead in a way that responds to each situation on its own merits. Thus, in a difficult personnel management situation, we may draw upon a commitment to compassion for what an employee is struggling do even though his or her behaviour is problematic. A spiritual perspective may also seek to discern through collaboration, reflection, prayer, or appropriate meetings, what the issue really is. In the end, managers may conclude that a disciplinary action or a firmly worded memo may be the right intervention.

**The spiritual perspective doesn't exclude fierce pragmatism.**

That's right. Effective managers are able to integrate the full range of consciousness into their work. A spiritually oriented manager who is afraid to challenge destructive processes in the organization is no more effective than a manager who sees the situation only from his or her own point of view and sees everything as a challenge to personal

control. We cannot confuse a philosophy of being “nice” with spiritually aware leadership. In fact, the discipline and the demands of a spiritual vision of our work will push workers and managers past the comfort zone into the healthy stress of growth. Healthy stress is still threatening and demands a healthy work community able to collaborate and support one another effectively. This can happen through healthy struggle that leads to greater clarity.

### **What would you say to those that would classify your thinking as naively optimistic?**

First, I understand the concern. This is one concern that I have about some of what emerges from what we call the “New Age” sector. Here are some points to think about:

- One only has to observe the optimism of the great spiritual traditions to realize that old ways of thinking are understandably suspicious of new paradigms.
- Wouldn't it be a shame if we dismissed rich possibilities for our lives simply because we didn't understand?
- I would encourage people to do their own research on the possibilities of human experience by looking more carefully for the dimensions of hope and transformation that exist. Jesus said “taste and see”; Buddha said “don't believe these things because I have said them, believe them because you checked them out and found them to be true.
- If we have, through our own learning based on struggle and hope, found richer new possibilities for transformation, do we not have some ethical obligation to offer these perspectives to our clients?

### **Can you say a bit more about your take that the family-serving agency is a community of unfolding meaning?**

Let's start with the vision of the organization as a collaborative, supportive community. The work of Margaret Wheatley, Joseph Jaworski, Peter Senge, John Biggs, and David Peet all point to a model of organization that is a far cry from the view of the agency as a self-contained enterprise. The notion of the organization as a community of vital energy has emerged from my research and experience as an

effective metaphor for the spiritual perspective. Further, this community is not self-contained but is a part of larger communities of organizing energies. We are part of the emerging community of all related agencies who are a part of the larger community of all those who are part of these concerns. Ultimately, this vision sees all human experience as part of one vast community of being that includes all life.

**And this becomes another way of describing what the great spiritual traditions have been saying. In a way, science is offering spirituality in a new vernacular.**

Yes. I think one of the ways that religion has failed to communicate the spiritual vision to contemporary community life is its failure to adapt its metaphors and mythic perspectives to meet contemporary experience. New science is providing a kind of bridge here. I am very cautious about jumping to conclusions but I must say that my research has encouraged me to take these ideas further. Our spiritual traditions and the recent findings of chaos theory and quantum physics have come together to offer a richer and more dynamic view of organizations. Leadership and management are transformed into a richer spiritual enterprise. Accepting the spiritual hypothesis of connectedness suggests a different management model focused on uncovering relatedness and facilitating the flow of energies of staff, resources, community connections, and needs. We need less of the five-year plan and more commitment to the disciplines and strategies of openness and creative attention to the unfolding patterns.

The nonprofit sector, by virtue of its reliance on government, private, and contract-based funding, has been forced to accept the role of community collaborator. What I really want to emphasize here, though, is that the spiritual vision posits that we are all part of a unified field of experience. Forces emerging from that interconnectedness shape us. This is not merely the connection to other agencies, client communities, and government agendas; it is also about connection to the creative possibilities that exist because of this interconnectedness.

There is no doubt that the notion of meaning unfolding in the chaos of organizational experience takes a real leap of faith. Spiritual traditions have been speaking of this for millennia. What is important, as I see it, is the insights emerging from quantum physics and being integrated into management books today.

As Biggs and Peet in their recent book *Seven Life Lessons of Chaos* observe:

We live within movements constantly affecting each other and creating an unpredictable chaos at many levels. Yet within this same chaos is born all the physical and psychological order that we know.<sup>300</sup>

Chaos science focuses on hidden patterns, nuance, the “sensitivity” of things, and the “rules” for how the unpredictable leads to the new.<sup>301</sup>

### **Can you give an example of chaos emerging into patterns of meaning in an agency?**

One example would be to observe, on the one hand, the chaos that seems inherent in maintaining good quality staff. Some leave, others go on maternity or health leaves. Sometimes we don’t make good hiring choices and struggle with issues of fit.

We must work hard to hire new people. With all the uncertainties implicit in hiring new people, it is always amazing to see how things unfold. On occasions like special anniversaries in our agency, I have found myself taking stock of the people who have become a part of the agency and I have a sense that all the employees and volunteers form a rich community. I do not think that any of us in management could have planned this. Many of the gifts and skills of our workers become evident only over time. In the end I have the sense at that the people working for our agency were meant to be here. Even when things have not worked well, I have learned something and I suspect that all our struggles become the rich learning opportunities that can make us stronger—if we have the discipline to stay attentive.

### **It sounds like you have moments when you have a glimpse of “spirit at work.”**

Such a perception of order that demands awe and respect. Different traditions have a notion for this: call it grace, the self-organizing

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<sup>300</sup> John Biggs and David Peet, *Seven Life Lessons of Chaos: Spiritual Wisdom from the Science of Change*, p. 4.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

principle of chaos theory, the tao, wu wei of Chinese philosophy, the guiding hand of God, the implicate order (David Bohm), morphogenesis (Rupert Sheldrake), and the Dharma of Buddhism. Consider this thought from the great Jesuit paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin:

I am trying to write a Christology that is wide enough to incorporate Christ. Christ isn't just an anthropological phenomenon with significance for humanity, but Christ is also a cosmic event with significance for the planet.<sup>302</sup>

When one fails to notice these patterns, an opportunity to observe the spiritual dimension is lost. A lack of faith in unfolding patterns and chaos can result in thoughtless reactivity that blocks the emergence of richer potential and can even precipitate a more devastating cycle of chaos.

I think here of Margaret Wheatley's example of controlling minor natural fires in the scrub of the desert that results in a richer array of growth that leads to larger, more devastating fires. What difference would it make to live in an attempt to harmonize with this pattern rather than force the creation of a different one?

The spiritual perspective argues that leadership and management has the task of discerning patterns of interconnectedness of agency life and our relationship to the patterns of the chaos. Chinese medicine contributes something valuable here:

In the Chinese view, the truth of things is imminent; in the Western, truth is transcendent... The desire for knowledge is the desire to understand the interrelationships or patterns within the web, and to become attuned to the unseen dynamic."<sup>303</sup>

The way that we describe our sense of this pattern of interconnectedness among apparently strange and meaningless events represents a kind of spiritual instinct. It is also a kind of implicit faith in the emerging patterns of beauty or the potential beauty that lies in all things). The language we use becomes our perception of this order.

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<sup>302</sup> Matthew Fox, *The Reinvention of Work* (San Francisco: Harper Books, 1995), p. 17.

<sup>303</sup> Ted Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver*, p. 15.

In some sense much more fundamental than is implied in conventional psychology, our belief systems create our reality. The influence of these principles can be brought to bear on social and business decision-making right now.<sup>304</sup>

### **This is easier said than done.**

No one said the spiritual path would be easy. It is a genuine skill to facilitate the energies of an organization, remain constantly alert to new possibilities, and be willing to act with conviction on difficult matters. It means guarding against the tendency for organizations being grabbed by patterns of thinking—specific beliefs which are self-justifying or felt to be the “only real choice,” assumptions about what is necessary, or what is “tried and true.”

The rich point made by David Whyte is that as long as we shy away from the spiritual discipline, we will have to settle for a more complex bureaucracy of control. This same point is made by Robert Greenleaf with his concept of servant leadership that links the role of leader with the spiritual concept of leader as servant:

The ultimate aim of the servant leader’s quest is to find the source of character to meet his or her destiny, to find the wisdom and the power to serve others.<sup>305</sup>

### **The spiritual perspective has implications for the agency form that will be needed to rise to the challenge of this rapidly changing world.**

Spiritually speaking, the organization is a flow of energy resulting from the interaction of intentions of leadership and staff, and the underlying order of the universe itself. Margaret Wheatley describes this sort of organization as a “process structure.”<sup>306</sup> The agency maintains form over time and yet must have a fluid structure. It must be prepared to accept the death of programs and risk pursuing new opportunities that are different from anything they have known.

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<sup>304</sup> Willis Harmon, director of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, web site.

<sup>305</sup> Robert Greenleaf quoted in Larry C. Spears, *Reflections on Leadership*, p. 113.

<sup>306</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, p. 43.

Peter Drucker suggests that the evolution of different models of team work reflects this call to greater and greater flexibility. Drucker suggests that we must become more like a jazz group that sets the tempo (the defining values and vision) but does not define the music.<sup>307</sup> The pace of change in our culture is adapting itself to the spiritual challenge of openness to the greater patterns of meaning that demand much organizational flexibility and readiness to change. As the great spiritual traditions remind us, we must face death daily—we must be prepared to let some programs die and new ones arise that will force reorganization. Increasingly, Joseph Jaworski observes, hierarchies bound up in inflexible ways of responding to challenge are weakening, and institutions of all sorts—from multi-national corporations to school systems will need to work through informal networks and self-managed teams that form, operate, dissolve, and reform.<sup>308</sup>

### **How do you see this happening in your work?**

I think that, in addition to the familiar notion of committees that are struck for specific issues and then dissolved, there are ongoing partnerships that happen and then end because the purpose was served. There are also the staff changes that create new opportunities for new people to carry different responsibilities. These also are a good time to ask questions. Does this need to continue? Is there a better way? Does the same model of programs and supervision still work? Are we willing to change the way we do things even if it has worked for a long time? I think that there are different problems or crises that push an agency to ask these questions. I think that spiritually vital agencies can ask these questions and work to manage the stress that comes from them. Margaret Whitely offers a useful series of questions to push us along this path:

- What are the sources of order?
- How do we create organizational coherence where activities correspond to purpose?
- How do we create structures that move with change, that are flexible and adaptive, even boundary-less, that enable rather than constrain?

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<sup>307</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Managing in Times of Great Change* (Beverly Hills: Dove Audio, 1995).

<sup>308</sup> Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, p. 2.

- How do we simplify things without losing differentiation and control?
- How do we resolve personal needs for freedom and autonomy with organizational needs for prediction and control?<sup>309</sup>

**I guess that means that there is more room for dissent and debate among staff and management?**

Yes, I think so. When you are facing a difficult problem with a staff member, loss of program funding, or questions about continuing to offer a given service, the spiritual dimension is to welcome these questions as vital openness. I believe that the field of compassionate interest can promote good morale because staff are asked help resolve issues and face the rigors of difficult issues. By involving them, there is a better chance that the most insightful perspective in the organization will surface.

This will demand an emphasis on the quality and number of meetings required to manage this style of organization. David Bohm, the renowned quantum physicist, pursued his notion of the quantum universe to the level of human functioning with a focus on the role of dialogue in facilitating quality human connection. This can be a very useful guide for meetings:

In dialogue, the goal is to create a special environment in which a different kind of relationship between the parts can come into play—one that reveals both high energy and high intelligence.<sup>310</sup>

Taking time to come together on a regular basis in true dialogue gives everyone a chance to create a space in the heart of the activity—a space where everyone is ...<sup>311</sup>

**This is a far cry from the “nuts and bolts” bureaucracy model that tends to dominate most agencies.**

You mean the “there is a box for everything, a supervisor for every box, and accountability loops back to the executive director and the board”

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<sup>309</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, p. 47.

<sup>310</sup> Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, p. 113.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.



kind of organization. While this is, in my impression, the model that is rewarded by accreditation bodies and government funders, the most recent research on systems functioning does not support this model. I cannot speak with authority about the full breadth of administration theory—that’s a pretty broad field. What I can speak to is a range of literature that draws upon what I would call a spiritual perspective. What concerns me is the fact that so much of what funders, accreditors, and business community supporters seem to emphasize is level-one focus on values of control, results, and accountability.

There seems to be increasing stress on being “in charge” and engaging in the compulsive rituals of control—namely lots of paperwork.

### **What’s the spiritual perspective on these “nitty gritty” stresses of paperwork and such?**

There is no doubt that legal issues, accountability, and “bang for buck” concerns have risen to the point where we are at risk (if we have not already crossed the line) of spending more energy on maintaining the agency than serving the clients. The spiritual outlook does not ignore the values of control and order; it simply puts them in a perspective in which they serve the higher value of creating a more open, creative organization.

First, I believe that we as agencies are challenged to develop and promote a vision of how we can operate that does not ignore the fundamentals of accountability but opens our vision to something much richer—something that encourages all staff to be creative and innovative in carrying out their job descriptions and that places more value on living in a richer world of possibility and creative change. I believe that there is room to promote a healthy debate that does not let fear and compliance to the agendas of other partners become the template for how we think. Sometimes I am tempted to measure my work as a manager in terms of compliance to paperwork needs and then carry a package of stress and guilt around if I have chosen not to do some of the paperwork in order to have room for other valuable issues. The problem is that I carry around the mental template of compliance: doing is good; not fitting the standard is bad. That means that in spite of practical management decisions, I am stuck in the feeling of not doing a good job. Chronic feelings of this sort are key aspects of burn-out. Challenge yourself, your organization, and the many associated partners on these points. Everything is valuable to some degree, but there is a hierarchy of values.

**You have said before that you think that family service workers appear more conservative than the business community. Does this make the call to more spiritually inspired management a bigger problem for us?**

I don't think social workers and psychologists are less spiritual, but I wonder if we have the same courage to risk "pushing the envelope." Possibly this is because so much of what we do is privately shared with clients and colleagues. Maybe there is a certain degree of conservative thinking that comes from folks who aim to please. I also think that the general tone of leadership among the family-serving agencies is not very visionary. I do not wish to seem disrespectful for the good work that is done, but I have the sense that we often operate in a field of "poverty thinking" rather than "possibility thinking." Leadership in promoting new ways of doing business and new ways of being together as an organization are important here.

**This is a pretty high level of commitment.**

Yes, but not unrealistic. I think of the high price agencies pay when they have failed to engage their staff in a commitment to agency values and vision.

**What are some of the potential pitfalls of spirituality introduced into the workplace?**

Potential problems can include:

- Spiritual slogans may be used in cynical or manipulative ways—"exploitation of spiritual longings"(Fenwick and Lange); the commodification of people's hearts, minds, and souls (Fenwick and Lange).
- Conflicting values or perceived conflict based on rigid ideas and language about spirituality that may upset some.
- It can be potentially coercive if a program becomes compulsory informally or informally in a way that people feel compelled to join or fear losing their jobs.
- Spirituality might be presented in a way that prohibits rational debate, where there is no means of supporting an internal

criticism of the spiritual ideas shared, where there is only superficial commitment, and where management does not offer the time or resources to work with the critical issues.

- There may be limits of employee groups that can work with this material or relate to it. Can McDonalds work with its employees this way? Maybe the management people should be at least worked with in these terms.
- The potential exists for fundamentalist groups to creating restrictive spirituality where certain rituals, certain buzz words, are acceptable and others are not.<sup>312</sup>

Spirituality is not incompatible with productive business but one must be aware of the importance of “genuine motivation” from the organization, an open recognition that the needs of the organization must be served for this to make sense, and that the authentic service to individual employees is a “slippery slope” that requires slow and tentative steps in the direction of addressing spiritual issues all the while keeping an “ear to the tracks” for manipulation, false or superficial agendas, and staff reactions needing attention.

### **What are the qualities of a spiritually healthy organization?**

We know the difference between vital organizations and those that are caught up in problems. They feel different. Clients can walk in the door, sit in the waiting room, and tell the difference. Here are a few points identifying qualities in spiritually healthy organizations. This will serve as a useful review of what has been said to this point.

- Leaders see their role is as developing people and consciousness rather than developing five-year plans and policy manuals. They are challenged, as individuals, to promote higher degrees of openness that integrate personal and professional behaviour that leaves no room for the separation of who people are from what they do. The notion is that the bottom line is not the ultimate goal and that spiritual integrity and profit are not mutually exclusive. This requires leaders to have the vision and courage to share their

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<sup>312</sup> Tara Fenwick and Elizabeth Lange, “Spirituality in the Workplace: The New Frontier of Human Resource Development,” *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 12, 1 (May 1998), p. 72.

whole person rather than operating in the familiar persona of power, judge, and “not letting down their guard.” Instead there are times when authentic sharing of story, examples from the leaders’ personal lives, may be the most inspiring motivator. The spiritual process seeks to engage staff on the level of authentic humanity.<sup>313</sup>

- There is integrity of mission statement and daily action; all staff know it and believe it.
- Internal self-critical capacity demands honesty, courage, and the willingness to take issues, people, and agency actions to task.
- New members and people independent of status experience a freedom to speak. Meetings encourage and make space for this. A leader having the courage to speak authentically in difficult times can set the pace for authenticity and the courage to speak out. The willingness to listen to all participants is matched by the readiness to make tough decisions. These issues will be addressed as matters of value and open to scrutiny according to these value standards.
- Courage exists to tackle the most difficult issues openly and • respectfully.
- Rituals support transitions for people who come and go.
- People and programs are acknowledged; a culture of gratitude is cultivated.
- Meetings include real dialogue rather than being limited to announcements of decisions, dogma, and information.
- There is be room to speak of spiritual matters in ways that acknowledge different traditions and allow recognition for matters that affect the agency’s internal and external functioning. This is not to say that one specific tradition cannot be of great value in giving direction on important matters. It is simply that no one tradition will be as useful as all relevant traditions, even those not represented by staff of the agency.

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<sup>313</sup> Phenix, Connie. Personal interview. September, 2000.

Robert Greenleaf observed in his work on servant leadership that a truly effective organization is one in which all participants are learning and growing.

**This brings up an important piece of spirituality in the organization: community. You've spoken of the importance of community as a spiritual practice throughout our discussions. Where does it fit in here?**

This is a good note to end on. If there is one concept that summarizes a spiritually healthy organization, it would be the experience of vital community. Community joins agency mission to the daily experience of workers and joins all workers with one another. All agencies are communities defined by the employment contracts, by the shared space, and the work done together. The challenge is to support the development of conscious community. This takes the commitment of management to the time and courage to challenge groups and individuals to experience a shared vision.

Successful community experience in an agency is evident in that there is a "culture of community" wherein all members pay some attention to issues that affect the quality of morale and shared purpose. Community is not something that any one person can create or maintain. It relies on the momentum of what has happened in the agency's past, upon the attitude of the board, and the experience of individuals. It is evident when concern for productivity and attention to personal welfare of staff go hand in hand. Like the spiritually healthy person, an agency consciously engaged in community experiences the full range of feelings, is not afraid to laugh or cry, and pays careful attention to daily experience. The result is a sense of dignity and ease that clients can feel when they walk through the door. The first service that the agency should offer to their clients is the experience of welcome. This is the invisible yet powerful effect of agency as healthy community.

Leadership is challenged to become a cultivator of the depth and expansiveness of vision that we find in our wisdom traditions. In this sense, issues of justice and vision for the community bring the challenge of agency leadership into partnership with the prophetic spiritual traditions.

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**Epilogue**  
**“At the End of Exploring”**

# “At the End of Exploring”

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We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploration  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And to know the place for the first time.

- T.S. Eliot<sup>314</sup>

I am writing this closing note almost three years after I set out to explore the question of spirituality in family service work. A lot of ground has been covered in this time—travel to different parts of the world, rich conversations, and workshops with many fascinating people, hundreds of books, and many personal questions. I feel like an explorer who has returned from a venture to a new land. I would imagine that many of the explorers of new lands left with great uncertainty about what they were seeking but were driven on by an intuition that this journey was personally important in some vital way. It was a calling that could not be ignored. I would imagine, too, that regardless of what they brought back with them, the journey itself changed them. It is at this point of return that we have the clearest perspective about the journey for it is at this point that we can compare our experience of “home” with our experience of being in these foreign parts. At the end, the foreign place does not seem so foreign and home is not the same.

In this sense, I feel that this journey has given me a richer appreciation for the spiritual dimension of daily life—including the familiar turf of family service work. Spirituality does not seem so strangely disconnected from the work I do. Nor does the daily business of family service work seem as mundane. The freedom to explore many different

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<sup>314</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *The Top 500 Poems*, William Harmon, ed., p. 994.

spiritual perspectives has helped me to be more flexible in my understandings, more confident and enthusiastic in addressing myself to this topic at work, and more aware of the bridge that joins the mundane with the extraordinary.

Concerning the value of this work to stakeholders in this field, I am hopeful that this has shown a way of addressing the spiritual perspective that is both sensible and valuable. While the written record of this journey may be confusing or a little long in the words, it is my hope that this will offer support to others, like me, who struggle with the intuition that spirituality and their best professional practice can exist in an integrated and sensible way. In particular, I believe that interpreting the spiritual realm into the psychological language and perspectives familiar to most of us, makes the wisdom of the world's great spiritual leaders available to our everyday practice in family service work. When we can address the spiritual outside of rigid dogma and compulsive belief, we are able to restore the deep questions of meaning and cosmology to our approach to client need and organizational management. Without the enriching perspective of spirituality, we lack essential skills to meet clients in their most essential experience. Without a working spirituality, we stop short of the creativity that is part of the universe and we lack the skills for endurance that help us as organizations and individuals during times of great uncertainty.

In the end, clients, board members, volunteers, managers, and workers are all challenged to ask their own important questions and know that the wisdom of our many spiritual traditions is a complement to the wisdom of psychosocial insights gained from science, our universities, and personal experience. We can only marvel at the path that connects the stories of our clients, the stories of the workers, or the stories we have of the agency. It is the foundation for belonging and health. When we are conscious of the rich relatedness of our own stories with those of the larger human community, we see again the business of service to families with new eyes.

I believe that this research has led me to a more confident grasp of the role of spirituality in my personal and professional life. In this way, the gap between the personal and public everyday belief has been reduced. The work has affected me in the sense that I feel more humble, less certain, and more confident that our confusion and imperfections connect us to a deeper spiritual truth in the same way that polished



professionalism and defensive expertise do not. I have learned that we are often more effective helpers when we can meet clients in their experience of being not only with our skills and experience, but with awareness of our own human frailties and the rich possibilities in the vast mystery of life. In this sense I have come to see the insights of psychology, social work, and management practice are not replaced by the spiritual. Instead, the spiritual horizon extends what we see through psychological eyes. When we learn from each other, we build the bridges of community. The creative power of our deepest sharing can change our work with clients, the way we work together as an agency, and the vision about how our agencies link up with the Big Story.

Doing this research has raised questions about who I am and about integrity. The spiritual dimension is not the easy road. I have winced at my ignorance and at the contradictions of my life. My consolation is that in meeting my experience honestly, my imperfections open me to more freely accept self and others. We cannot leave our human imperfections out of the equations of family service work or out of organizational practice. In fact, the courage to be present to who we are and the kind of agencies we are is rewarded with the experience of being a partner in creation. In this, the spiritual traditions tell us, we become more effective as healers and as organizations.

I also have learned that there is no ultimate truth that we can put into words. There are, however, many legitimate paths or stories. It is the exploring rather than the concluding that enriches us. I am reminded of the words of poet Rainer Maria Rilke:

Be patient to all that is unsolved in your heart  
And try to live the questions themselves.  
Do not seek the answers that cannot be given you  
Because you would not be able to live them.<sup>315</sup>

One image I had while doing this research was of creating a patchwork quilt. The quilt comes from discarded scraps of material from many different sources. The colors may not seem to belong together and yet, once assembled, there is a way that the various patterns and colors become a whole. All this cutting and sewing together of different scraps becomes guided by sensitivity about fit and an intuition about

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<sup>309</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* found at [www.geocities.com/Paris/Leftbank/4027/](http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Leftbank/4027/).

the whole picture. There were many moments when I had no idea how these research scraps could fit together.

I believe that some folks may be very critical of some of my sewing. I have joined together such different traditions and philosophies that, from a critical scholarship point of view, glosses over critical differences. Clearly, just like the quilt, clashing colors and patterns come together to form beauty. This is one way of representing an image of how all things fit together into the wholeness envisioned in spiritual tradition. Family-serving agencies are challenged to discover the thread that joins the many rich and diverse undertakings that occur in their work. The intuition that there is a thread and a pattern is the inspiration to a spiritual point of view.

Personally, I feel enriched and changed by this time of exploration. I have a deep sense of gratitude for the many people who have joined me in conversations or workshops or as companions on the journey. What I bring back to my work at Catholic Family Service is a sense of the remarkable mystery reflected in every aspect of the work we do: budgets, clients, frustrations, and fun.

Work, when experienced as a creative undertaking, becomes a calling that bridges the personal agendas of finances, career, and learning with the larger patterns of meaning that are contained in any good mission statement. This calls for balanced attention to the different levels of awareness. It is important that we continue to develop the skills to do our work well and that we never lose the quest for larger meaning. Excessive concern with control and narrow agendas suffers the same fate as religion's preoccupation with piety that does not validate the business of day-to-day. Either way, the loss of a sensible integration of psyche and spirit results in the loss of vitality implicit in any vital organization.

If I were to recommend further steps, I would focus on two areas. First, I would challenge workers, managers, and clients to take the risk to address their deepest concerns in the work they do. When people ask questions, we challenge and learn from each other. This can happen in staff development addressing spiritual questions and in the support to see the spiritual dimension of our business in the same way that we pay attention to financial, political, and psychological perspectives. When an agency names its mission statement and when a client shares his or her needs to a social worker, the spiritual dimension is open for naming and exploring. Second, I expect there are people who can take up

specific data gathering to test some of the ideas about spirituality applied to the workplace. This could include demographic data as well as pooling the data of reported experience. This would add to our understanding of the spiritual dimensions of client experience and the healing process.

We are on the verge, I believe, of a popular re-discovery of the common ground between spirituality and all of our modern services aimed at healing our psychological, social, and physical ailments. This ground has been known to many of the esoteric, mystical, and shamanic spiritual traditions. This integrative vision needs to be recast with the knowledge and wisdom of modern experience. When we can strive for a unity of psyche and spirit, we can get past the limiting biases of religious dogma and the excessively narrow scope of science and open the door to a more comprehensive and creative vision of human experience.

Current attention to the spiritual dimension of our work promises to restore this larger perspective to what we seek for our clients and our selves. Consciousness studies, energy work combining healing of body and mind, healing through prayer and health practices based on spiritual awareness are just a few of the possibilities for the work available to clients of family service agencies.

The summer before I began my sabbatical, I was on holiday in Prince Edward Island. This is my wife's home and a place I have adopted as mine as well. I had an experience that I shared later with one of my colleagues and she encouraged me to use it as a great starting point for expressing my own passionate sense of what I meant by "spiritual." After all the writing and editing, though, I felt it belonged at the end of this work. The final words on spirituality are appropriately addressed to image and experience rather than ideas or conclusions.

North Cape, PEI is a remarkable place. This northerly point of Canada's smallest province looks out upon the meeting place for the currents from Northumberland Strait and the currents from the Atlantic Ocean. You can see the tracings of a line upon the water's surface marking the continuous flow of these two tides up against one another. Beneath the surface of the water, extending from the shore, runs a ridge that is hidden from sight. Although not visible, it is only two to three feet below the surface. It is the remnant of land worn away by the action of these two currents. Three summers ago, I walked out on this ridge for at least a half a mile. I was walking along hidden pathway that

edged onto immense ocean depths. With my back to the land, I was looking out onto the eerie vastness of rolling, grey blue waters. The barks from seals, their glistening dark heads bobbing among the waves told me I was a long way from the security of shore. The current of my Prairie boy's innate fear of immense watery depths flowed up against the profound exhilaration of being out of ordinary space and time—a kind of mythic passage to Avalon hidden from ordinary view. I felt as a mountain climber gazing down from some precarious perch—beauty and danger each clamouring for attention. In the light of late afternoon, the waves rolled gently against my body—these countless waves moving to a great cosmic rhythm. In that moment, I felt a part of something very Big.

## Appendix

# Appendix A

## Itinerary for Fellowship Year

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The following dates and locations provide an overview of formal learning events that were part of the research activity of my sabbatical year. In addition, personal interviews with many people in Calgary and at many of these workshops and presentations to different groups interested in my progress added to my learning. This was combined with extensive literature reviews.

April 1-2, 2000—Calgary Spirituality and Therapy

May 14-18, 2000—John Dominic Crossan biblical scholarship and the Jesus Seminars

June 12-13, 2000—Calgary St. Stephen's College Workshop with Matthew Fox

September 2-17—Oakland, CA University of Creation Spirituality (daily studies and lectures in ritual, creation spirituality, music quantum physics, and psychology with Matthew Fox)

September, 2000—Three-day workshop with Jean Houston in San Raphael, CA on mythology, diversity, and healing

September, 2000—One-day workshop with Jack Kornfield in Marin Country, CA

September, 2000—10-day study of energy medicine, creative writing, and extemporaneous movement expression in Esalen, CA

October, 2000—One-week group study with Tanis Helliwell in work and spirituality in Parksville, BC

November, 2000—Six-day study in energy work and ancient modelas of healing from ancient Egypt

December 4-12, 2000—Prophets Conference in Palm Springs, CA on interviewing for research

February 27-April 14, 2001—Seven weeks in India. Two weeks at an ashram in Peedham, near Madras, attending approximately five to seven hours per day of pujas (sacred rituals); attending Sai Babb's Ashrm in Puttiparthi; two weeks in a Buddhist monastery in village Mysore in south India attending rituals and chants and spending time with a scientist studying Buddhist culture; two weeks in Dharamshala in north India attending lectures and workshops on Buddhism, meditation practice, and Buddhist history.

April 14, 2001—Workshop on Spirituality and Work in Vancouver, BC

April 21-25, 2001- Canadian Centre for Philanthropy Conference in Toronto, ON

April 27-30 and May 3-6, 2001—Studying spiritual discernment practices with Robert Detzler in Calgary, AB

May 17-27—Prophet's Conference in New York, NY

June 15-23—Shamanism Workshop at Esalen Institute, Esalen, CA

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## The Muttart Fellowships



### **Michael Shane McKernan**

2000 Muttart Fellow

Born March 12, 1954, Michael Shane McKernan found himself first the oldest of seven children spent primarily in small rural Alberta towns. A love of learning and travel shaped his young adult years in alternate ventures in university (BA in psychology at the University of Alberta and MSW from Wilfrid Laurier University) and extensive travel through Europe and Canada. He met his life's partner early on and he has been enriched by 28 years of marriage and three children: Maura Erin, Patrick Ryan, and Kathryn Meghan.

The Irish theme in the names is no coincidence as he and his family have enjoyed a long standing connection to his Celtic heritage both through travel in Ireland and many visits to his wife Tara's birth place of Prince Edward Island—Canada's answer to Ireland's beauty and character.

In his career, Michael has woven the spiritually seeking temperaments of an Irish monk with the pragmatic determination of a German farmer (his paternal grandmother connects back to Germany). Early career options in law and the

priesthood lost out to a career in social work that has spanned 25 years. Beginning as a researcher and a therapist, Michael has also worked as a supervisor and finally a director at Catholic Family Service in Calgary. The scholarly intrigue with human experience and the valued sense of being of service have not dulled over all these years. Areas of professional focus have included: men's issues, altered states of consciousness, work with couples, leadership—and probably most compelling of all the spiritual frontier of human experience. He has enjoyed the opportunity to write, teach, and consult in these topics in a variety of professional contexts.

A true career highlight is the sense of having grown personally and professionally with many fine colleagues. In particular, the past 16 years at Catholic Family have taught him much about the intricacy and power of community. A second highlight was his good fortune to be awarded a Muttart Fellowship that saw him spend a dream year in study and travel through the world seeking to name the spiritual aura of family service work. Through the Muttart Michael was able to give his Irish monk energies free rein to travel, study, and meet with fellow spiritual seekers throughout the world.