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Spiritually Oriented Social Work Practice

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CHAPTER 3: Methods in Spiritual Transformation



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METHODS IN SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

METHODS OF TRANSFORMATION

This chapter is an overview of the seven paradigms of spiritually oriented practice. In Chapters 4 through 10, each of these seven paradigms of spiritually oriented social work are further described. In the first part of this chapter, *methods* of spiritual transformation are introduced. The characteristics of transformation are described here.

Radical Change

Transformations are radical because they involve root-level change. Observable changes in behavior, which by themselves may not be maintained or generalized over time, are rooted in changes in mind, heart, and soul.

Integral Change

Transformations bring about more integrity, or wholeness. The person rediscovers parts of herself that have been lost. She finds that her heart, mind, body, and spirit have become aligned, so that each part of herself cooperates in forming a balanced, common view of how she fits in the Cosmos.

Enhanced Equanimity

Transformations also bring a calm, centered approach to life. Rather than going into unconscious or destructive reaction to life events, equanimity allows the person to make proactive and creative decisions about how to think and act.

Temperance

Transformations also tend to foster harmony and moderation. The person learns how to mix emotions, thoughts, and behaviors and other aspects of self in order to establish a balanced pattern of being.

Greater Ecstasy

Ecstasy occurs when the person sits in his witness or supervisory self, from where he can watch his personality, the Cosmos, and Creative Spirit with equanimity. He does not sit there alone, but in fact sits in increased intimacy with Creative Spirit, made possible by his movement from “immersion in” to “observation of” the material world.

Increased Capacity

Transformations create more capacity for consciousness, love, compassion, and wisdom. Capacity is also increased for spiritual power, transrational knowing, imagination, and aliveness. The person has greater capacity to not only develop the highest levels of well-being but also to examine the shadow aspects of self.

Here-and-Now Change Potential

The potential for transformational change always exists in the here and now. Although each person is a unique embodiment of Creative Spirit, every person can initiate her own unique next step in her transformational process at any time in her life.

New Value Hierarchies

If there are no changes in values, then there has been no transformation. Transformations bring new value hierarchies. The person in transformational change helps co-create communities of spiritual diversity and communities of universal diversity, in which the Highest Good of all individual parts and the Highest Good of the collective whole are highly valued.

Service-Activism

If there are no changes in behaviors, then there has also been no transformation. Transformations bring new patterns of behavior, rooted in evolving value hierarchies. Transformations lead to greater response-ability for service and spiritual activism in support of the Highest Good of other people, living things, and ecosystems.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Methods of transformation do not necessarily replace any interventions that professional helpers currently use, but they do *add* the spiritual dimension to all practice situations. This relationship can be described by the expression:

$$\text{Intervention} + \text{Spirituality} = \text{Transformation}$$

TABLE 3.1 Some Theoretical Assumptions Underlying Interventions and Transformations

| METHOD | ELEMENTS IN INTERVENTION* | ELEMENTS ADDED IN TRANSFORMATION |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Microlevel Change | <i>Emphasis:</i> Personality <i>Disease model:</i> Dysfunction <i>Goal:</i> Function, symptom reduction <i>Technique:</i> Cognitive-behavioral <i>Change agent:</i> Practitioner and drugs | <i>Emphasis:</i> Transpersonality <i>Disease model:</i> Spiritual disconnection <i>Goal:</i> Reconnection with Spirit <i>Technique:</i> Invite and allow Spirit <i>Change agent:</i> Spirituality |
| Macrolevel Change | <i>Emphasis:</i> Productivity, competition <i>Problem:</i> Success of enemy <i>Goal:</i> Wealth, power, status <i>Technique:</i> Economic-military force <i>Change agent:</i> External coercion | <i>Emphasis:</i> Global healing, Highest Good <i>Problem:</i> Suffering of others <i>Goal:</i> Deep peace <i>Technique:</i> Universal community making <i>Change agent:</i> Spirituality |

*Characteristics of interventions often observed in current practice

Thus, a spiritual perspective can be taken with any of the existing intervention methods, to create more inclusive methods of transformation. Interventions help people create a functional personality; transformations help people welcome Spiritual Power into their lives. Such power helps people stop identifying solely with their personality, with consensus reality, and with the material values of the culture they are in.

A brief summary of some of the differences between the theory that guides typical methods of intervention and the theory that guides methods of transformation is given in Table 3.1. In general, interventions focus on helping people reduce their symptoms, function in society, and create a self. In contrast, transformations help clients move beyond their self-focus to a more spiritual focus informed by Spiritual Values.

Spiritually Inclusive Practitioner

The most effective practitioner is spiritually inclusive, which means that she is open to including spirituality in her practice assessments, methods, and evaluations. She is open to continue using any existing intervention strategy she has learned, and she is also open to discovering what might happen when she invites the spiritual dimension into her work with her current practice strategies.

Spiritual Values

Like all methods of practice, spiritual methods are rooted in a set of values. Since spiritual work is potentially the most powerful of all practice methods, the spiritually inclusive practitioner especially needs to have a set of values that serve to help guide him or her toward fostering the Highest Good and reducing the possibility of causing unnecessary suffering.

BOX 3.1**A POSSIBLE SPIRITUAL-VALUES PRACTICE HIERARCHY**

| SPIRITUAL VALUE | IMPLICATIONS FOR WHAT PRACTITIONER EMPHASIZES WITH CLIENT |
|------------------------|--|
| Service | Taking responsibility to foster the Highest Good of people, life, and ecosystems |
| Consciousness | Developing each person's prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal development |
| Love | Holding intent for the Highest Good in self, others, and ecosystems |
| Imagination | Imaging the Highest Good for one's self and divine self |
| Integrity | Approaching every moment with all parts of one's self and divine self |
| Connectedness | Living in interrelationship with self, divine self, and Cosmos |
| Ecstatic Aliveness | Developing capacity to experience joy and suffering from observing self |
| Meaning Making | Developing capacity to find spiritual significance in all of life experiences |
| Sacred Mystery | Approaching life and its mysteries with awe, gratitude, and respect |

Spiritual Values are radical because they deal with the fundamental roots of such experiences as suffering, happiness, and ecstasy. Values by definition exist in a hierarchy of levels of importance. Box 3.1 shows a possible hierarchy of Spiritual Values that might guide the practitioner in working with a client. As can be seen, service and responsibility to other people, living things, and ecosystems is held as the highest value in this hierarchy.

Apparent Dualities of Transformational Work

Spiritual transformations may superficially seem to be full of conflicting realities, but a study of spiritual processes indicates how these apparent dualities are not mutually exclusive. For example, although spiritual transformation may involve subtle body–mind–spirit processes, they can also lead to the most dramatic changes in self and the world. In addition, although spiritual work can look self-absorbed and self-serving, it can lead to radically selfless spiritual activism. Finally, although spiritual work deals with the most serious life challenges and can require facing the most painful experiences, spiritual interventions can also be fun and can bring the highest ecstasy possible in life.

PARADIGMS OF TRANSFORMATION

The methods in this book are organized into seven interrelated paradigms of transformation (see Table 3.2). These new paradigms are built on traditional practice paradigms, symbolized by the simple expression:

TABLE 3.2 Seven Paradigms of Spiritual Transformation

| NEW PARADIGM OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION | THEORETICAL BASE NEW PARADIGM IS BUILT ON | WORK WITH INDIVIDUALS, COUPLES, FAMILIES, AND GROUPS | WORK WITH LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITIES AND ECOSYSTEMS |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Spiritual momentum | 1st Force: Psychodynamic | Transforming individual spiritual momentum | Transforming collective spiritual momentum |
| 2. Mindful daily living | 2nd Force: Cognitive behavioral | Developing a pattern of mindful living | Teaching mindfulness and Right Actions to others |
| 3. Spirit with heart | 3rd Force: Experiential-humanistic | Developing consciousness by experiencing and sharing the full range of emotions | Teaching love, forgiveness, and compassion in service to other beings |
| 4. Religious self | 4th Force: Transpersonal | Developing consciousness by using rituals from world's wisdom traditions | Teaching the rituals of any of wisdom traditions |
| 5. Bio-consciousness | Biopsychosocial | Developing consciousness through body work and the embodiment of experience | Teaching the embodiment of consciousness |
| 6. Community consciousness | Community organizing Global work | Developing consciousness through local and global community work | Co-creating and practicing in communities of spiritual diversity |
| 7. Eco-consciousness | Deep ecology Ecotherapy Shamanism | Developing consciousness through ecowork | Co-creating and practicing in communities of universal diversity |

Traditional paradigm + Spirituality = More inclusive paradigm
of transformation

The first four paradigms of transformation correspond to the four forces of psychology: psychodynamic, cognitive behavioral, experiential humanistic, and transpersonal. Since transpersonal psychology is essentially a study of human consciousness, it is the paradigm that changes the least when spirituality is added. The other three paradigms build on several other theoretical areas that are not included in the four forces. These are biopsychosocial theory, various community-level models, and ecological theories.

The paradigms represent seven levels of transformation. The levels represent increasingly complex, large-scale, and subtle transformational work. The first five levels are about developing a spiritual self (through work on the past and future, the

mind, right actions, the heart, wisdom traditions, and the body). The last two levels move “beyond” sole focus on self to focus on the more inclusive divine self (communities of people, other living things, and the ecosystems that support all life).

Each of the seven levels has two interrelated service methods: Spiritual Practice and Spiritual Activism. *Spiritual Practice* transforms individual consciousness, individual heart, and individual mind, whereas *Spiritual Activism* transforms collective consciousness, collective heart, and collective mind. In the fourth column of Table 3.2, the term *teaching* is used in an inclusive manner, referring not only to instruction but also to mentoring and modeling. Since individual consciousness is inseparable from collective consciousness, each type of service leads to the other, as shown by the expression:

Spiritual Practice <—> Spiritual Activism

The most effective practitioners utilize methods of both Spiritual Practice and Spiritual Activism drawn from all seven paradigms because the paradigms, when added together, address the major aspects of self and divine self that interact with our spirituality.

Spiritual Momentum (Chapter 4)

These methods build on the traditional first force or psychodynamic paradigm of practice. The goal of traditional first force practice is to help people gain insight into the historic origins of their internal conflicts so that their current needs are better understood and met. The goal of *spiritual momentum* is to free people to foster transformations of momentum so people can be fully present in the here and now. Spiritual momentum is the overall direction that a person’s soul is heading, and could be thought of as similar to the concept of karma, without the requirement that soul direction necessarily continues across lifetimes. The primary methods of transformation are the use of altered states of consciousness to take healing journeys across time and space and the use of these journeys to gain insight into how issues in the past and future still obstruct the individual’s ability to be present in the here and now.

Mindful Daily Living (Chapter 5)

These methods build on traditional second force or cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) methods. The goal of the traditional CBT methods is to help people develop more “functional” ways of thinking and acting. The goal of *mindful daily living* is to foster a pattern of right actions that is rooted in a discipline of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the development of a spiritual perspective through intellect. Right actions are behaviors that are consistent with the individual’s own spiritual perspective, and are consistent with the value of service for the Highest Good. The principal methods involve the use of intellect to transform the mind and the use of intent to transform behavior.

Spirit with Heart (Chapter 6)

These methods build on traditional third force or humanistic-experiential methods of practice. Those third force methods traditionally focused on helping people become aware of, accept, and express their emotions. The goal of *spirit with heart* is to foster transformations of the heart in the here and now, which ultimately fosters greater love, forgiveness, and compassion. The methods utilize awareness, acceptance, and expression of the emotional self to explore and express spirituality.

Spirit through Religious Self (Chapter 7)

Religious self methods foster development of the religious self, which is the manifestation of spirituality in the social dimension. The religious self is capable of relating with loving intent on any or all of the prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal levels of consciousness. These methods adapt, sometimes modify, and apply techniques drawn from the wisdom traditions of the world. These methods support the individual's lifelong free choice and wise use of a menu of spiritual disciplines that best support his or her spiritual development and ultimately the spiritual development of other people as well. Key tasks in this lifelong quest for spiritual maturity are the development of temperance and equanimity. The development of the religious self leads to increased responsibility that the individual takes in helping her or his religion become a community of spiritual and universal diversity.

Bioconsciousness (Chapter 8)

Most interventions utilize talk therapy, which can be primarily an above-the-neck activity. These methods build on biopsychosocial theory, which describes a body–mind connection in all human beings. The goal of *bioconsciousness* is to foster that connection, which leads to healthy functioning. Whole-body (above, below, and including the neck) methods are used, such as aerobic exercise, expressive dance, slow stretching, breath work, and martial arts. Body-consciousness transformations expand the definition of health (or wholeness) to a biopsychosocial–*spiritual* connection. Practitioners help clients learn to listen to Creative Spirit with their bodies and learn to embody spirituality in their daily lives.

Community Consciousness (Chapter 9)

These methods build on family and group counseling theory and community-level practice strategies, which help people by changing family and group dynamics and institutional and social policies and other local and global community structures. The goal of *community-consciousness* transformations is to co-create and practice communities of spiritual diversity that support the development of individual consciousness and the individual and collective Highest Good. Methods include conscious intimacy, conscious dialogue, conscious service, and conscious activism designed to support the development of communities of spiritual diversity.

Eco-consciousness (Chapter 10)

Eco-spiritual techniques build on the theories of ecotherapy and shamanism (the earliest-known religions of people). The goals of deep ecology and ecotherapy are to foster better caretaking of the Earth's life and supporting environments, which in turn fosters the well-being of people who live on the Earth. The goals of shamanism are complex, but usually involve the use of ecstatic journeys in which healers use visualizations that incorporate drumming; journeys onto different levels of consciousness; and the intent to heal. *Eco-consciousness* methods build on these ancient and recent traditions for the purpose of fostering spiritual transformations and developing communities of universal diversity. These methods might include visualizations involving animals, plants, and landscapes; experiences that combine therapy with interactions with nature, and activism in the service of other living things and ecosystems.

Spiritual work could be viewed as the fostering of individual and collective spiritual development. Since humans are biopsychosocial–spiritual–environmental beings, the dimensions of human development are all interrelated. Each of the seven paradigms has a focus on one dimension of human development (see Box 3.2).

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUALLY ORIENTED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Spiritual and Religious Transference and Countertransferences

Often, the first clue that the practitioner has about where the client is at in his or her life spiritual journey comes from spiritual and religious transferences and countertransferences (see Table 3.3). All of these reactions are normal aspects of human

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BOX 3.2

DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE SEVEN PARADIGMS

| | |
|---|--|
| Level One: <i>Spiritual momentum</i> | Development of orientation in time and space |
| Level Two: <i>Mindful daily living</i> | Cognitive development |
| Level Three: <i>Spirit with heart</i> | Emotional development |
| Level Four: <i>Religious self</i> | Social (religious) development |
| Level Five: <i>Bioconsciousness</i> | Physical development |
| Level Six: <i>Community consciousness</i> | Community development |
| Level Seven: <i>Eco-consciousness</i> | Ecosystem development |

TABLE 3.3 Definitions of Spiritual and Religious Transferences and Countertransferences

| | TRANSFERENCE | COUNTERTRANSFERENCE |
|------------------|--|--|
| Spiritual | Feelings and beliefs (with roots in both the client's past and present experience) that client has about the practitioner's spiritual nature and path | Feelings and beliefs (with roots in both the practitioner's past and present experience) that practitioner has about the client's spiritual nature and path |
| Religious | Feelings and beliefs (with roots in both the client's past and present experience) that client has about the practitioner's religious affiliations, beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and practices | Feelings and beliefs (with roots in both the practitioner's past and present experience) that practitioner has about the client's religious affiliations, beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and practices |

interaction, and are *always present in every helping relationship*, although they can vary in intensity. These transference and countertransferences usually have roots in both the past and present. Past roots occur when their interactions on the spiritual and religious levels activate previous experiences and associated emotions and beliefs that the client and practitioner have had with other people. Present roots occur because the client and practitioner also can have here-and-now reactions to each other's spirituality and religiosity. The work of the therapeutic relationship is to sort out what reactions are rooted in the past and what reactions are rooted in the here and now.

The practitioner can respond to spiritual and religious countertransferences in a variety of ways, utilizing any of the seven paradigms for spiritual transformation. In Table 3.4, examples of methods of practice drawn from the first three paradigms are summarized.

Conscious Use of Higher Self in the Spiritual Partnership

The quality of the *relationship* that the practitioner can build with the client is the most important factor in successful therapeutic outcomes. It is through that relationship that the client learns to love herself and develop her consciousness. Conscious use of Higher Self in the spiritual partnership is the intentional engagement of the practitioner with the client, with the aim to foster the spiritual development and Highest Good of the client.

The characteristics of the practitioner are typically associated with the quality of the helping relationship. Decades of research show that practitioner characteristics are more important than techniques and client characteristics in predicting such outcomes. Perhaps most important of all of these characteristics is *genuineness*, which is the ability of the practitioner to be fully present with the

TABLE 3.4 Selected Methods of Practice in Response to Spiritual and Religious Transferences and Countertransferences

| | TRANSFERENCE (T) | COUNTERTRANSFERENCE (CT) |
|------------------|--|---|
| Spiritual | <p><i>Level One: Spiritual momentum</i> Identify any past spiritual wounds that may contribute to the client's T</p> <p><i>Level Three: Spirit with heart</i> Establish spiritual intimacy in helping relationship in which issues related with client's T can be safely discussed</p> <p><i>Level Two: Mindful daily living</i> Replace client's old T reactions associated with spiritual woundedness with new ways of thinking and acting</p> | <p><i>Level One: Spiritual momentum</i> 1. Identify past spiritual wounds that may contribute to the CT reaction 2. Then find what client characteristic(s) may also contribute to the CT reaction</p> <p><i>Level Three: Spirit with heart</i> Practitioner is "transparent" with client about her own CT and spiritual wounds</p> <p><i>Level Two: Mindful daily living</i> Practitioner responds proactively with the intent to foster the client's Highest Good</p> |
| Religious | <p><i>Level One: Spiritual momentum</i> Identify past religious wounds that still echo in here-and-now transferences</p> <p><i>Level Three: Spirit with heart</i> Explore emotional and spiritual intimacy with practitioner in which T can be safely discussed and thus healed</p> <p><i>Level Two: Mindful daily living</i> Replace destructive reactions coming from religious woundedness with more creative, loving, and service-oriented ways of thinking and acting</p> | <p><i>Level One: Spiritual momentum</i> 1. Identify past religious wounds that may contribute to the CT reaction 2. Then find what client characteristic(s) may also contribute to the CT reaction</p> <p><i>Level Three: Spirit with heart</i> Practitioner is "transparent" with client about his own CT and religious wounds</p> <p><i>Level Two: Mindful daily living</i> Practitioner responds proactively with the intent to foster the client's Highest Good. Spiritual and religious diversity is respected and supported</p> |

client in integrity in each moment. Although genuineness may be conceptualized as the part of the normal state of human consciousness, most people learn to give up parts of their integrity or wholeness as they navigate through the often painful experiences of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Another important characteristic is *love*, because if the practitioner does not care about the client and somehow show the client that love, the client may not benefit from the work. The effective practitioner also accepts the client as she or he is in the here-and-now moment.

Clients also *want to be seen*, although their initial reaction to being seen by the practitioner may be characterized by guilt, shame, and defensiveness. Therefore,

the effective practitioner strives to eliminate obstacles to his ability to see his clients accurately, such as biases, fears, and other reactions.

Clients also develop most quickly when they experience *radical acceptance* from the practitioner. Radical acceptance means that the client is viewed by the practitioner as being perfect, lovable, and on her spiritual path in every moment. Such acceptance does not mean that the client is therefore free to do whatever she wishes to do. Rather, the practitioner knows that as people learn to truly love themselves, they become more responsible for fostering the Highest Good of themselves, other people, and ecosystems. The practitioner is compassionate and forgiving toward the client, but she also challenges the client to move toward transformations in his life. There really is no duality between the goals of creating an atmosphere of safety and acceptance and challenging the client to grow because the most radical changes occur when the person loves himself. Said differently, the best way to *not* have a spiritual transformation is to hold on to guilt and shame about one's self.

Since love and narcissism are so often confused in our culture today, the practitioner needs to make sure he or she can distinguish between the two opposite characteristics. Love of self combines self-awareness with self-acceptance; narcissism is characterized by a sense of self distorted by self-hatred and compensatory self-inflation.

Spiritual Self-Work

The effective practitioner engages in spiritual self-work throughout her career. The goal of such work is to continue to foster the practitioner's own spiritual development through service to herself, other people, and ecosystems.

In preparation for practice, the practitioner engages in her own personal exploration of every method that she wants to use with her client. The client is more likely to respond favorably to a practitioner who has done the same work that she is asking the client to do.

In response to practice, the practitioner also views each client as a spiritual teacher, in the sense that the client has come into her practice for a reason and that there is always something to learn. Thus, the practitioner always considers what lessons are to be learned during the course of any case.

Ritual

The word *spiritual* includes the word *ritual* within it, suggesting that rituals help us embody spirituality in our lives. Rituals are sacred ceremonies during which aspects of spirituality can be played out. Rituals can be done individually or collectively, and can be spontaneous or planned and repeated acts.

The practitioner strives to co-create rituals with her or his clients that are enjoyable and relatively safe to do. The practitioner also works with the client to co-create meaning for every part of the ritual. All the methods in this text can be seen as rituals of spiritual growth and healing.

Ethical-Value Issues

Some general principles of ethics and values can be described here.

1. The practitioner needs to be aware of the current literature that describes the methodologies he is using. The practitioner makes himself aware of the various theories, debates, outcome research, and state of the art practices in the methodologies used.
2. The practitioner is aware of the general potential risks and benefits of the methodologies. She is also able to assess potential risks and benefits specific to each of her clients, and can describe these specific risks and benefits to each client.
3. The practitioner is able to relate his spiritual practice to more conventional theories and interventions and ethics in his profession. He can see similarities and differences, and can describe ways to integrate both views into his practice.
4. The practitioner can form an effective helping relationship with the client, in which she employs conscious use of self in that relationship (see Chapter 6).
5. The practitioner continues to develop himself, in the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions, across his lifetime. He also is responsible to the Highest Good of other people, other living things, and the ecosystems that support all life.
6. The practitioner can evaluate her practice and make appropriate modifications in her practice, based on these ongoing evaluations.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are transformations? How are they different from interventions?
2. What kinds of spiritual transformations have you experienced in your own life? What seemed to facilitate those transformations?
3. Which of the eight aspects of transformation are most important to you today? Which of these are most developed in yourself? Which are least developed?
4. What are the seven paradigms of transformation developed in this text? Which of these paradigms seem to be the most interesting to you? Why do you think they appeal to you?

RESOURCES

Derezotes, D. S. (2000). *Advanced generalist social work practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book explains

1. How to include all the dimensions of human development as well as all the dimensions of the human environment in assessment
2. How to use both the art and science of practice
3. Biopsychosocial, local community, and global community interventions.

Derezotes, D. S. (2005). *Re-valuing social work: Implication of emerging science and technology*. Denver: Love.

This book discusses

1. How hierarchal values systems can help inform social work practice
2. How new knowledge and theory from other disciplines can help inform social work practice

