
Psychotherapy as Search and Care for the Soul

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Abstract. To capture characteristics of moments when the process of the soul comes to life in psychotherapy, a “soul research project” has been started. Analysis from a good outcome case illustrates how the experience of connectedness determines whether or not the soul shows itself; how this process can be experienced by paying attention to the body; and how rituals can be nurturing to the soul. The soul is understood as a bodily felt inner compass which gives direction to the individual life. This inner felt process transcends the limited self through the experience of belonging to a larger process: connectedness with people and nature, and for some, with more subtle energies that are not the same as everyday material reality. Therapists are encouraged to communicate an attitude of openness to the full range of human experience, and to integrate the client’s spiritual life as part of their psychology.

Keywords: soul, body, presence, rituals, spiritually integrated psychotherapy

Psychotherapie als Suche nach der Seele und Fürsorge für die Seele

Um charakteristische Momente zu erfassen, wann der seelische Prozess in der Psychotherapie lebendig wird, haben wir ein Forschungsprojekt zur Seele begonnen. Die Analyse eines Falles mit gutem Outcome-Resultat illustriert, wie es letztlich die Erfahrung von Verbundenheit ausmacht, ob sich die Seele zeigt oder nicht, wie dieser Prozess erfahrbar wird, indem man dem Körper Aufmerksamkeit schenkt, und wie Rituale der Seele Nahrung geben können. Die Seele wird als körperlich gespürter innerer Kompass verstanden, der dem einzelnen Leben Richtung gibt. Dieser innerlich gespürte Prozess transzendiert das begrenzte Selbst durch die Erfahrung, Teil eines umfassenderen Prozesses zu sein. Dies beinhaltet ein Gefühl von Verbundenheit mit den Menschen, mit der Natur und für manche auch die Verbindung mit subtileren Energien, die nicht dasselbe sind wie die alltägliche materielle Wirklichkeit. Therapeutinnen und Therapeuten werden ermutigt, dem gesamten Spektrum menschlicher Erfahrung gegenüber eine offene Haltung zu zeigen und das spirituelle Leben des Klienten oder der Klientin als Teil ihrer Psychologie zu integrieren.

Psicoterapia como búsqueda y cuidado para el alma

Para capturar las características de momentos en los que el proceso del alma cobra vida en psicoterapia, se ha comenzado un proyecto de investigación del alma. El análisis de un caso con buenos resultados ilustra

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cómo la experiencia de conexión determina si el alma se muestra o no, cómo este proceso puede ser experimentado prestando atención al cuerpo, y cómo los rituales pueden ser nutritivos para el alma. Entiendo al alma como un compás/una brújula interno/a sentido/a corporalmente, que da dirección a la vida individual. Este proceso sentido internamente trasciende al self limitado a través de la experiencia de pertenecer a un proceso más grande. Incluye una sensación de conexión con la gente, con la naturaleza, y, para algunos, con energías más sutiles que no son iguales a la realidad material de todos los días. Se alienta a los terapeutas a comunicar una actitud de apertura a toda la gama de la experiencia humana y a integrar la vida espiritual del cliente como parte de su psicología.

La psychothérapie comme recherche et soin de l'âme

Un projet de recherche concernant l'âme a été initié pour repérer les caractéristiques des moments où le processus de l'âme s'éveille en psychothérapie. L'analyse d'une étude de cas réussie illustre la manière dont l'expérience d'être en lien détermine quand l'âme se montre, la manière dont ce processus peut être vécu en prêtant attention au corps, et la manière dont des rituels peuvent nourrir l'âme. L'âme est comprise ici comme une boussole intérieure du sens corporel qui donne une direction à la vie individuelle. Ce processus du sens corporel intérieur transcende les limites du self à travers l'expérience d'appartenance à un processus plus large. Il comprend un sentiment de connexion avec autrui, avec la nature et, pour certains, avec des énergies plus subtiles qui ne sont pas celles de la réalité de la vie quotidienne. Les thérapeutes sont encouragé(e)s à communiquer une attitude d'ouverture à toute l'étendue de l'expérience humaine et à considérer la vie spirituelle du client ou de la cliente comme partie intégrante de sa psychologie.

A psicoterapia como procura e cuidado pela alma

Teve início um projecto de investigação da alma, de forma a captar os momentos típicos em que a alma ganha vida em psicoterapia. Através da análise de um caso bem sucedido, ilustra-se de que forma a experiência de conexão determina a manifestação ou não da alma, como este processo pode ser experimentado prestando atenção ao corpo e de que forma os rituais podem constituir o alimento da alma. A alma é entendida como um compasso interno, sentido através do corpo, que fornece direcção à vida individual. Este processo sentido interiormente transcende os limites do *self*, ao permitir a experiência de pertença a um processo mais amplo. Inclui um sentimento de conexão com as pessoas, com a natureza e, para algumas pessoas, com energias mais subtis que se distinguem da realidade material do quotidiano. Os terapeutas são encorajados a oferecerem uma atitude de abertura ao espectro total da experiência humana e a integrarem a vida espiritual do cliente como uma parte da sua psicologia.

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INTRODUCTION: SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

During a workshop I sometimes invite therapists to reflect on experiences or events that have affected their lives, with questions such as:

- Were there experiences that changed your life?
- What kind of struggles did you have in specific stages?
- Were there moments you found extremely difficult or that you regret?
- What gave you peace or comfort, strength or courage, joy or gratefulness?
- Were there peak moments, moments of special intuition, special dreams?
- Have you ever had a time when you felt deeply and fully alive?
- What gives you the feeling that you are making the best of, or receiving the best from life?

Feedback from participants shows that during their training as psychotherapists, the emphasis was mainly on healing wounds from the past. During this workshop, however, they realize that they use their strengths during their work as therapists, even more than their vulnerabilities. Participants are positively surprised by this discovery, as one of them expressed in the following way: “I knew before where my weak spots and leaks were, but now I know where I can find my fuel.”

This encouraged me to pay more attention to exploring where people find their personal sources of inspiration. This way of working goes hand in hand with the use of Positive Psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2001). Taking seriously the contributions of virtues and strengths alongside vulnerability in psychotherapy is already a paradigmatic shift. However, the questions given above dig deeper than is usually the goal in Positive Psychology. These are questions adapted from Pargament (2007) and Griffith and Griffith (2002). With similar questions they elicit the client’s spiritual story, or guide therapists in the telling of their autobiographies in order to explore their sensitivities on the level of religion. I prefer to keep the questions more global so that participants can stay perceptive to whatever comes up in their life story. The questions do not refer directly to higher powers or religious practices. Instead they use psychologically meaningful concepts. Nevertheless, participants experience that these questions point to their soul.

I would not be surprised if Gendlin (1984) introduced the term “felt sense” to prevent preconceived ideas of religion and spirituality to come to mind when hearing the word “soul.” Among psychotherapists there is a long tradition reflecting allergy when it comes to topics related to religion or spirituality. For instance, Freud’s dogmatic attitude became increasingly disturbing to Jung who demonstrated a sympathetic attitude toward religion, and the psychoanalytical orientation ended up with a division because they had growing frustration over their differences (Wulff, 1997). Rogers’ later move toward spirituality was for some colleagues in the person-centered community an outgrowth they didn’t want to embrace (Van Belle, 1990), and there are internal arguments between those who see the spiritual dimension in human experience as an important source of life — and thus as an approach to psychotherapy and well-being — and those who see it as an unfortunate diversion which

threatens to bring the whole approach into disrepute.

Diverse points of view reflect differences in opinion that are centuries old, and that cannot be resolved by positivist versions of science. The essence of these differences relates to various interpretations of a transcendent dimension. When self-transcendence is seen in a *horizontal* dimension, then the larger process, of which a person feels part, is situated in objective observable reality. Full attention is given to contact with people and the world that surrounds us (Snijder, 2007). Many visions of existential therapists are examples of this. In this view, spirituality is accepted as an openness which brings out the best in people and finds meaning and depth in life (van Kalmthout, 2006). When the concept is formulated in such a broad way, it seems acceptable to almost everyone. But there is less consensus as soon as the self-transcendence follows a *vertical* direction and takes into account more subtle energies that are not the same as everyday material reality. We know from the research of Bergin (1991) that psychotherapists differ strongly from the norm because, of all groups of people, they least of all trust or believe in higher powers. Skeptics are supported by Western materialistic culture and conventional empirical science that limit their scope to evidence collected through the physical senses and tend to believe that thinking can open every door (Elkins, 2005). But when we take the position of “radical empiricist,” as William James (1902/1985) did, human science can give attention to a much wider range of evidence and include introspection, intuition, values, and meaning. “None of these things are measurable, but they are just as much part of our experience as the measurable data delivered by our senses, and need to be taken equally seriously as evidence of the kind of universe we inhabit” (Neville, 2007, p. 283). Many psychotherapists remain committed to a limited range of views, and some retreat to a dualistic position of right and wrong views.

My personal concern is that the field as a whole would become impoverished if a single perspective were to dominate. I wish to communicate an attitude of openness to the full range of human experience. It is, then, also an attitude of humility to what lies beyond our rational comprehension and control, to what lies beyond the instruments of the positivistic scientist, especially to the mysterious. Coming to terms with the complexity of multiple perspectives is a challenge for this subject, and attaining a pluralistic perspective is difficult. But at least we can look for terms sufficiently broad to encompass the multidimensional inner world of clients.

The choice to look at psychotherapy as care for the soul came from my experience that “soul sessions” belong to the most helpful and pivotal moments in clients’ process. In a previous article I concluded: “Nowadays it has become clear that there is no longer any need to separate the spiritual dimension from the psychotherapy process as if it were a subject so esoteric that it falls outside the bounds of effective treatment. Moments of change are very different in nature and sometimes they appear as peak experiences or spiritual moments that nourish the soul” (Leijssen, 2008, p. 224).

More than anything else I want to value the language of clients. Clients do not name their experiences in our professional language as for instance having a “felt sense” and for them human personality and spirituality exist on the same continuum. I am touched by how clients sometimes indicate healing processes as their “soul coming to life.”

SOUL RESEARCH PROJECT

To approach the process of the soul in psychotherapy, I started to pay special attention to moments in therapy when the client would spontaneously use the word *soul* to express the experience at hand. I also collected sessions where I as therapist introduced the spiritual dimension. Then I made an analysis of the sessions where the narratives included the word *soul*, or synonyms that people use to relate to this experience. With this study I tried to capture important conditions and characteristics of moments when the process of the soul came to life. My “soul project” covers eight cases from individual psychotherapy with the client taking the initiative in speaking of the soul, and three cases where the initiative came from me by my offering expressions for the experience at hand, or where my questions evoked the process of the soul. This means that during their therapy, which could consist of just one session or up to fifty sessions, one-third of the thirty-three clients I have seen in the last two years sometimes speak of experiences that are related to the process of the soul.

I added measures to evaluate therapy outcome, the level of bond, agreement of goals, and experience of depth of the sessions. Finally the client was invited to reflect more deeply on the therapy process guided by the Client Change Interview that is offered by a colleague in order to have an independent observer (Elliott, Slatick, & Urman, 2001). The major topics of that interview were the changes that the client had noticed since therapy began, what he/she believed may have brought about these changes, and the helpful or unhelpful aspects of the therapy. This study is still in progress and I will refer only to fragments of the findings. It is already obvious that in a psychotherapeutic process every person experiences the soul in his or her own way. It provides an individual revelation that may not be relevant to other people. I will first give an idea of what people mean when they speak of the soul.

THE SOUL

Soul is a very old concept with a long history in philosophy as well as in various religions. I do not intend to give a long discourse about this complex phenomenon. My primary focus is on the relevance of the soul in the practice of therapy. Body, mind, and soul are different orders of reality, each with its own perspective (Elkins, 2005). The body's reality consists of sensations and emotions, whereas that of the mind consists of thoughts, feelings, and theories. Our experience is more than a combination of these, so that we need to distinguish a third perspective.

The soul is the invisible, forming and organizing principle in life, which can show itself in various experiences. It is about *how* to live and about what really matters. It gives direction and meaning to the individual life. It is a bodily felt knowing that is different from intellectual insight. This inner felt process transcends the limited self through the experience of belonging to a larger process. So, on the one hand, the soul is tangible as a sort of *inner compass*, a bodily felt “inspiration.” On the other hand, that *inward*-oriented movement is inseparably linked to an *outward*-oriented movement of *connectedness* with something that transcends the person. These movements go together like the process of breathing in and breathing out.

The concept “soul” does not stop at the boundaries of the person; it transcends the person. It points to the mystic dimension of human experience. Mysticism is a process through which a connectedness to a larger process is experienced. Rogers (1980) has written about the “inner spirit” or “transcendental core.” Through the centuries, people have named the subtle experience of self-transcendence with such diverse terms as the true self, source of life, higher consciousness, consciousness of unity, non-local consciousness, selfless self, Buddha, Tao, and so on. Sometimes people use a capital letter “S” to distinguish the experience of the Self from the everyday sense of the self as a person (Corbett & Stein, 2005).

Being mindful to what presents itself in the here and now improves the opportunity to arrive in the domain of the soul. The immediate experience of the soul can be many things, but it is never boring (Pargament, 2007). It can show itself in the form of joy, poignancy, gratefulness, astonishment, connection, but also as remorse, guilt, regret, disappointment. For example, sadness or anger can hint at sacred loss or violation. The soul also expresses itself through our capacity for love, or the quality of tenderness (Thorne, 2006). The soul does not concern the “outside” as much as it concerns the “inside” of things. Compared to this experiential knowing, wisdom from books and theoretical knowledge are just as far from the immediate experience as a text about sexual reproduction is from a lover’s embrace. The experience of the soul is not a wandering condition; it is an experience which is specially grounded in our earthly existence and in what can be bodily felt.

The human soul is like a garden. To create a garden the gardener has to take into consideration the natural propensities of various plants, the lie of the land, the climatic conditions and so on. Creating a garden cannot be a forced, mechanical business. You can’t grow just anything anywhere. The organic aspect is crucial. But the gardener does not just let things grow as they will — that would produce something, but it would not create a garden. It would not create anything. Creation requires familiarity with the natural forms and forces at play in a situation, but also a vision that will transform the situation. Creativity brings something new to the forms that are already there, so that these forms themselves are changed. . . . What makes the garden different from a merely organic system is the vision of the gardener. If we apply this to human life in general we see that what makes us different from the animals is our capacity to reflect on our desires and aversions and to make efforts to transform them in the light of what we see as good or valuable. (Purton, 2002)

For some people the problem with the term *sou* is that it has collected all kinds of concepts and meanings through the centuries that block fresh understanding. Actually the whole first part of Gendlin’s theory “Thinking At the Edge” is about “breaking the language barrier” (Lou, 2008). When one employs commonly used language, one cannot possibly express something that is in process of forming. That is why it is sometimes important to look for another term to capture the process of the soul.

ILLUSTRATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AS CARE FOR THE SOUL

To make concrete how the soul is approached in therapy I have chosen a vignette from the twelfth session of a good outcome case. This client came to therapy because of serious traumas in her youth: physical and sexual abuse by the father while her depressive mother allowed these excesses of the father. The client has broken off all contact with her parents because previous meetings always ended with aggressive outbursts by the father. At the start of this session, the client lets me know that she wakes up in panic every morning; she feels desolate and experiences that her *soul* no longer wants to be in this world. She repeatedly calls: “mum and dad, help me!” That does not help to get rid of the panic; on the contrary, she feels even more abandoned, like she has no ground left under her feet. I let her know that I understand how much the soul needs to feel welcome in this world, with the aid of loving parents who help the child to find comfort in its body. I tell her that I understand that her “waking up ritual,” namely the calling for her parents, comes from a deep desire of the child that still hopes to find the holding and support it never received. The client continues by saying that she felt touched by a text from Nelson Mandela.

I suggest we take a moment to focus on what her body is trying to express when she wakes up in the morning. I invite her to close her eyes, to pay attention to the center of her body and breathe deep inside her abdomen. Then I ask her to wait in a welcoming attitude with the question: “What do I need when I wake up in the morning?” After a long pause she answers: “Something that makes me feel carried and supported.” After reflecting that back, I invite her to sense if her body can let her know what it experiences as carrying. She discovers: “Nature, earth; literally working with soil.” For a moment, she can feel this as something very comforting.

But then she says: “Something big is beginning to loom over me, and I feel I am becoming very small.” I ask her to step back in her imagination and look at what it is that is coming to loom over her. She recognizes it immediately: “My father who makes everything look ridiculous and makes me doubt everything.” She gets tears in her eyes and says she feels very small again, because nothing or no one can stand up to her father. Even nature shrinks under her father’s destructive power. I suggest trying the following: “Imagine Mandela in your father’s place.” She immediately feels a big shift in her experience. She feels she is becoming powerful and beautiful. Her body posture and her facial expression change. The ground beneath her feet feels warm and secure, she feels she is blossoming. She is touched by her faith in her personal strength and in the supporting ground of this existence.

I explain to her that her usual morning ritual is very discouraging and ask her to check in her body how it would react to the initiation of a new morning ritual. During a dialogue we come up with the idea of putting a picture of Mandela next to her bed and of making contact with ‘Mother Earth’ as the supporting ground in which she can anchor herself to start the day. The client feels strengthened by the idea that in the following days she will be able to rely on a ritual that allows her to actually make contact with her strength and beauty. A strong woman leaves the session.

In the Client Change Interview the client reports that this session belongs to the most helpful moments in her therapy. The panic of the past years has made way for a special

calmness and pure feeling. This session was characterized by diverse aspects that proved to be crucial for experiencing the soul.

I will go on to explain how the experience of connectedness determines whether or not the soul shows itself; how the soul can be experienced by paying attention to the body; and how rituals can be nurturing to the soul.

EXPERIENCE OF CONNECTEDNESS

The client reported that, when in the presence of the therapist, she felt really safe and held. She could more easily stand the tremendous pain of the past and no longer felt an immense loneliness. She also experienced that the therapeutic relationship had evoked a deeper potential within her self, a vital strength arising from being part of “Mother Nature.”

In my training as a person-centered psychotherapist I learned much about how the relationship defines what is being experienced and how to become a companion with people who suffer from life. Effects of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence are that the client can relive traumatic events in a more benevolent context and reconstruct the story of her life. Other effects are that the client can bring more awareness to the ongoing experiencing process. Later in his therapeutic career Rogers (1980) discovered “presence.”

I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my *presence* is releasing and helpful to the other. (p. 129)

Geller and Greenberg (2002) found in their research that today presence is seen by many person-centered therapists as the deeper quality that allows for realization of the core conditions. “Presence involves being completely in the moment on a multiplicity of levels, physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. It also includes being grounded in one’s self, with an expanded awareness and receptivity to others and the world around us” (Geller, 2008). The concept of “relational depth” is another way of promoting profound contact and healing engagement between two people. It is an attempt “to bring the soul of our work to a higher level of awareness” (Cooper, 2006, p. 228). The therapist cannot make presence happen. But he or she can make the choice to be more or less prepared for it, more or less open, more or less centered for it to happen (Schudel, 2006).

In a concrete way this has implications for me as a therapist, so that at the beginning of a session I consciously make time to step back from the ongoing rush and sharpen my awareness by clearing my internal space. In the therapeutic encounter sometimes I can note that my style shifts to profounder developmental nurturance, fresher compassionate witnessing, more risk-taking authenticity, using opportunities of synchronicity, rather than clever engineering or complicated technical solutions. Thorne (1991) captures his understanding of those moments in the following: “I have no hesitation in saying that my client and I are

caught up in a stream of love. Within this stream there comes an effortless or intuitive understanding and what is astonishing is how complex this understanding can be” (p. 77). For me it is also helpful to connect myself to some larger source of love in order to be present to extreme forms of suffering. There are many ways to relate to representations of absolute presence or love.

Many people brought up in a Christian culture see pictures and symbols from the Christian tradition when they meditate. . . . The Jesuit and Zen master Father Enomiya Lassalle gave me the following to think about: many Christians consider Buddhists to be immature because they have not yet arrived at a personal God; many Buddhists would say the same of Christians because they still stick to a personal God. “What is it really about here?” asked Lassalle. It dawned on me that he meant presence. Absolute presence. With or without names, personal, transpersonal, beyond the transpersonal. All this is not the point. Absolute presence is undivided, not fragmented. (Schillings, 2008)

In the language of the Jungians, this is about an archetype. The archetype is the capacity to form an image, not the image itself; it is a potential with contents that are not given until they are filled in with lived experience (Corbett & Stein, 2005). For example, the Great Mother archetype, or the feminine aspect of the divine, is a transpersonal principle found in all mythologies and religious traditions. She is given local names, like Mary, Sophia, Shechina, Kali, Durga, Quan Yin, Tara, and so on. From an archetypal viewpoint, these differences in name and form are simply a matter of local folklore and emphasis. They are all manifestations of the same underlying archetypal principle.

Although I do not talk about my personal image of absolute presence and love, clients are sensitive to my openness for this potential. I think we can't avoid that at relational depth; personal issues of the therapist and what he or she manifests ring through the meanings that clients experience and what they dare to express or do not talk about. Colleagues of Carl Rogers said for instance that they learned not to talk about religion with him because that was a taboo subject and it was uncomfortable for him (Barrineau, 1990). But as we know, the last period of Rogers' life was characterized by a deep interest in the transcendent. In his words: “I am impelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension” (Rogers, 1986, p. 200).

HUMAN LIFE IS A BODILY PROCESS

In the vignette I asked the client to bring her attention to her body. For me personally, it was a turning point in my life when I discovered during a workshop with Gendlin what happened when the focus of attention changed to the body. I was formed in an academic environment where the rational approach was self-evident. Listening to the body introduced a new development in my consciousness.

There are different ways of paying attention to the body in psychotherapy: breathing exercises, relaxation, body awareness exercises, nonverbal communication, movement, physical contact. The effects on the client's process are many and multifaceted (Leijssen, 2006). Working with the body immediately invokes the actual. It makes one alert to what is palpable, alive and relevant. It increases self-awareness, it helps slow down responses and delay automatic behavior. Strong affective memory can be triggered; it can resolve blocks and facilitate cathartic release. It has a stress-reducing, grounding and centering effect. And finally, it touches the transcendent ground of our ongoing life, as it is a vital doorway into the realm of cosmic consciousness.

For justification of working with the body in psychotherapy, I rely on Gendlin's theory (1984, 1996). The human being, the body, is understood as a process that is environmental from the very beginning; in fact the body cannot exist without its environment. The word "body" is used here, not to indicate the "complex machine" we can look at from the outside, but the *inwardly felt body*, the living process that grows by itself in interaction with its environment. The body that knows about what we value, about what has hurt us and how to heal it. The body that knows the right next step to bring us to a more fulfilling and rewarding life. If our awareness is directed toward our bodily felt experiencing process, Gendlin speaks of focusing. Focusing is the process by which we become aware of the subtle level of knowing that speaks to us through the body. Focusing is not just one therapeutic technique amongst others; it is rooted in a profound philosophical analysis of the relationship between experiencing and symbolization, which in turn is central to our understanding of what it is to be a human being (Purton, 2007).

In his theory of personality change, Rogers, talks about the "the organismic experience" as a kind of bodily wisdom which goes further than the intellect (Ikemi, 2005). Gendlin differentiated Rogers' concept by explaining that it is not about content but process and not about feeling but "felt sense." Gendlin gave the new name *felt sense* to the process of experiencing body sensations that are meaningful.

The felt sense is holistic in nature and contains within it much more than we can easily think or emotionally know about our situation. As the therapist and client spend time with the felt sense, new and clearer meanings emerge. The felt sense, of its own accord, brings the exact word, image, memory, understanding, new idea, or action step that is needed to solve the problem. The physical body, in response, will experience some easing or release of tension as it registers the "rightness" of what comes from the felt sense. This easing of tension is what tells us that we have made contact with this deeper level of awareness and that we are on the right path. (Focusing Institute, n.d.)

There are strong resemblances between the *soul* and the concept of the *felt sense*. For myself at least, I can say that the focusing process led to experiencing my soul in a very concrete and vital way. My feeling that "soul" and "felt sense" are similar processes was confirmed by the theologian Dorothee Sölle who says that "the soul is only shorthand for experience" (Schillings,

2008). Many colleagues from the focusing community give an account of spiritual, transcendental experiences when the felt sense is treated with attention. The experience of the felt sense originates in the body but reaches beyond the body's limits: the person feels themselves to be part of a larger process (Campbell & McMahon, 1985). In the words of Gendlin (1984): "The felt sense that I also call *the edge of awareness* is the center of the personality. It comes between the conscious person and the deep universal reaches of human nature where we are no longer ourselves. It is open to what comes from those universals, but it feels like 'really me'" (p. 81). The felt sense opens up a process which implies more than we can describe in words and which incites us to reach for metaphors, symbols or images to express that "more." The chosen metaphors are never independent of what appeals to us in our environment.

Focusing can be one way to carry implicit bodily experiencing forward. Other methods that are characterized by attention to the body — *Mindfulness* for instance — can lead to similar processes. The bodily felt experience serves as an entrance gate, and the focusing attitude of a friendly, nonjudging presence at what is experienced here and now is cultivated as crucial. Finding a positive relationship to the experiencing process can be a big stumbling block. That is why for most persons the presence of a companion is crucial for finding a caring welcoming attitude to their bodily felt experiencing process. Or even more, the process gains considerably greater depth in the presence of a good listener who is also welcoming of the content. In my soul research project, for example, some clients explicitly said that they had the experience of digging much deeper into distressing aspects of their religious background because they felt secure that I would treat such content nonjudgmentally. In contrast, as Griffith and Griffith (2002) noted, there are also ways that clinicians can shut off soul dialogue from the start.

RITUALS AS A WAY TO NOURISH THE SOUL

In the vignette, we developed the idea of a ritual the client can use to start her day. In the Client Change Interview she reports the long-lasting effect of this ritual. Every time she looks at the photograph of Mandela she feels a wake-up call to her soul. It reminds her of courage, resilience, optimism, pureness, solidarity, love for human life, despite struggles and bad conditions.

In psychotherapy I experience the introduction of rituals as particularly important when words are simply not enough to capture the needs of the soul. Rituals express basic truths of life simply through images, symbols, and actions, without over-explanation. The change brought about by the ritual is mostly understood or experienced in the gestures, which carry more meanings than what we rationally see in them.

During therapy we sometimes need rituals to give enough recognition to drastic experiences that have occurred in the life of the client. The client mentioned in the vignette above needed in the fifth session a purifying ritual to rid her on a symbolic level of experiences of a dirty and violated body after the incest. The need for a ritual expresses that something

beyond the containment capacity of the individual has happened. This is often accompanied by the need for transpersonal help to transform the situation. Rituals that are created by the therapist and the client themselves have the power to address the soul when they contain personal elements as well as archetypal elements, for example, water in all cultures is seen as having a purifying and transformative power.

Effective rituals reinstate a sense of connectedness in clients by placing their lives within the context of greater truths about existence (Pargament, 2007). They encourage emotional catharsis and help make meaning of change and transition. Without rituals, people can become stuck in particular emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, shame) or particular life conditions. The actions in the ritual are the vehicle, the means, to remember that human beings are part of a community, that they can hold a safe space and give or receive support in difficult situations. They also give hope that there is “something more” to rely on when the individual can no longer comprehend life.

For the rational thinker this might bring about some suspicion because it sounds like *magic*. With magic, a direct causal connection is made between the utterance of certain spells or the performance of specific actions, and what happens after these actions. Words or actions are magic spells to which a person links magical powers, like a football player who is convinced that he should always wear the same underwear in order to score goals. With these forms of superstition, man attributes effectiveness to the signs; an effectiveness that actually should be attributed to the causes. The magic departs from the ‘omnipotence of thought’; the person believes that what he/she desires or fears will actually happen. But rituals are not about miraculous events in the magical sense. The effectiveness of the ritual is not “causal” as in magic. The ritual supports the intentions of the persons executing it and it carries the meaning attributed to it by a community. During the ritual, symbols are used to restore connection with important others or with what is larger and more powerful than the small, isolated self. That does not take away from the fact that it is a difficult balancing exercise to draw on this special potential, without slipping into forms of magical thinking or the denial of existential givens.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Shortage of space does not permit me to describe other experiences in the therapeutic encounter which nurture the soul, such as working with dreams or exploring domains of creativity. Psychotherapy is a challenge par excellence to face the truth about one’s life and to value what really matters. Soul moments are highly influential moments of therapy and very similar to what Grafanaki et al. (2007) have found in their research on *flow* moments in psychotherapy. The experiences of being connected, being attentive to the here and now, being inspired by bodily felt resources, are core ingredients of these peak moments. In these moments, the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of life are integrated in one felt process that is evolving from moment to moment. That experience of wholeness is part of the healing process.

The life of the soul takes a great variety of forms, depending on one's temperament and personality structure (Leijssen, 2007). We all have our preferred channels to the soul. The client from the vignette is a person that fits the path of the heart or *the path of feeling*. The emotional experience of the sacred is then felt deep in the bones and provides the person with basic trust in life. Others have more affinity with the *path of thinking* (or the path of knowing). They search for ultimate wisdom through the use of systematic tools of reason, questioning, study and science. The ancient Greek philosophers were exemplary for this rational path. For others the *path of action* is the preferred route to their soul. These persons enact their understanding of the world through practice. In daily relationships they perform acts of love and compassion and by service to the community they participate in something holy. For some other people the *path of silence* is the best condition to meet the needs of the soul. Different forms of meditation or prayer are then vital ingredients that cement their immediate encounter with the sacred. Various combinations of ways of feeling, thinking, action and silence are possible. As a therapist I try to find connection with the affinities of the client and I support the pathway that is meaningful for each particular client. In my experiential approach I do not try to offer a universally applicable method based on my personal preference or any particular experience.

The ethics of our profession demand that we reflect on our way of working and that we look for more than personal preference to argue that there are good reasons to include the soul in our work as psychotherapists. The findings in my humble research project are supported by the growing amount of empirical evidence that points unequivocally to spirituality as a potent predictor of health and well-being (Pargament, 2007). The research that demonstrates the effectiveness of spiritually integrated psychotherapy is inspiring in many ways. Nevertheless I'm not in favor of "promoting spirituality" in psychotherapy. Spiritual overenthusiasm feels to me as problematic as spiritual myopia. I value spiritually oriented techniques, but I do not introduce them into the therapy room as primary modalities. I prefer to work on the material that spontaneously emerges and I do not feel the need to follow a cultural compartmentalization, because, in my experience, the individual's spirituality is not separated from his or her psychology.

However, one of the functions of psychotherapy is also to offer a space for topics and experiences that are cultural taboos. In Freud's time, sexuality was a cultural taboo. I think the movement towards spirituality in psychotherapy (Sperry & Shafranske, 2005) in this age could be seen as a sign that ultimate concerns, and especially that there is "something more" to human experience, are taboos in a materialistic society. In addressing transcendent realities, science is limited; it hasn't the tools to grasp or the language to articulate what William James (1902/1985) named the "reality of the unseen." Science offers us understanding of our observable, physical world, but how do we grasp the meaning of our being in existence? The point is that these are matters of personal faith, rather than observable, testable realities for which reductive scientism enjoys a method of inquiry. Science cannot ascertain the existence or verify specific contents of transpersonal experiences; it can, however, allow for a more holistic approach to psychological interventions and examine the effects of beliefs and practices on health and well-being. The theoretical questions do not have to be fully resolved before we

can work with the process of the soul in psychotherapy. Our bodily felt knowing may well be an important key to unlock the depth of our human existence.

The rich and varied routes people create and follow as they try to live on the fertile ground of the soul are fascinating. Also the search for the soul may be taking place beneath the surface of our awareness. Every client entering the therapy room can sharpen our sensitivity to different worldviews and has the potential to teach us something new and valuable. “Although a caring therapist can nurture a client’s soul, it is important for clients to realize that psychotherapy is not simply a place where people can come to have their souls nurtured by someone else but that it is also a training ground where they learn how to care for their own souls” (Elkins, 2005, p. 141).

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