

Depth Psychology and Spirit Depth

By “depth psychology,” I mean those types of psychology which focus on the interior depths of the human person. Therapy in behavioral psychology focuses on changing outward behaviors, but therapy in depth psychology focuses on assisting the client to discern the difference between truthfulness and self-deception in the client’s own inward reflections. A depth psychological therapy includes listening to the client and then assisting the client to be more truthful in what he or she is saying to others and to himself or herself. The therapist brings wisdom to assist the client toward interpreting inward experiences more truthfully. To the extent that the therapist is skillful, these interpretations are not imposed upon the client, but rather the client is assisted to see for himself or herself a more truthful interpretation of the experiences which the client, not the therapist, is having. Good therapists may vary in their styles of doing this but the aim of good depth therapy is to allow or provoke greater insight within the client. When the purpose of the therapist is merely to impose theory or explanations or ideological dogma, this is bad depth therapy.

The client, as well as the therapist, is responsible for bad therapy. The client may be seeking someone to be the authority who will tell him or her what is so, rather than finding the courage and the responsibility for doing his or her own interior seeing and interpreting. The responsible client is learning to see and interpret in a more honest and less self-deceiving manner. Psychologist Sheldon Kopp has challenged all authority-seeking clients with this ancient saying, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.” That is, if you find someone who you think has all the answers for you and thus can relieve you from the responsibility for living your own life, cast that person out of your life.

The Challenge of Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud was first among the influential initiators of modern depth psychology. Freud focused on assisting us to reclaim the biological psyche which the typical member of our over-rational culture had been suppressing. His aim was to help people be more truthful about their actual experience. His terminologies, explanations, and interpretations were intended to assist the client to see inward realities that could become obvious to the client. So why has Freud been so sternly criticized? Some did not want to see what he showed us. Others saw more than he showed us. And still others saw that some of the ways he interpreted what he showed us were misleading.

How do we sort out these controversies among psychological writers and therapists? We have to look into our own inner lives and note what we see when we look! By learning to see our own self-deceptions, we also learn to see through the self-deceptions of others. Our self-deceptions can be as simple as going along with the common views of our family, religious body, or culture. Depth psychology, at its best, has been a prophetic challenge to the general culture. At its worst, depth psychology has done little more than assist clients to adjust themselves more peacefully to the existing culture. If the existing culture is sick, then such adjustment is also sick. So our best depth psychologists have claimed that the fully sane person will, in many ways, be maladjusted to the cultural herd. Here again, how do we decide who is less sane than the culture and who is more sane than the culture? The culture cannot tell us. We have to learn to look into our own lives and to interpret truthfully what we see.

Freud was an enthusiastic interpreter of everything he saw. He saw religious activity going on in the human species, and he interpreted it. He understood the religion he saw as a defense mechanism, as a means of keeping our hysteria in check. When human beings face the trauma of their actual existence, Freud says, they are tempted to hysteria rather than realism. According to Freud, human beings invented religion as an unrealistic alternative to hysteria. It is comforting to believe, Freud explained, that we are in the care of friendly gods, rather than an impersonal fate. So the essence of religion, he said, is the invention of an illusion that assists us to escape from the living of our real lives.

The irony is that Freud is correct about most religion. Most religion is serving people as a means of escape from the living of their real lives. Speaking from the ground of looking into my own interior life, I can assert that Freud was pointing to what I call “bad religion.” Good religion came into being to serve exactly the opposite purpose. Good religion is a means for giving expression to the full trauma of our existence and to the possibility of living that existence fully and abundantly. Good religion is an expression of a deep “courage to be.” Good religion is an expression of a depth of selfhood which I am calling “Spirit.” Freud and other therapists have challenged all religious thinkers to say clearly what we mean by “Spirit” and how the healing of our Spirit dimension is different from and related to the healing of the finite psyche.

Jungian Soul-Making

Karl Jung saw something more positive than Freud saw in the ever-present preoccupation of the human species with religious symbols. He claimed that beneath the vast diversity of religious symbolism we can discern fundamental archetypes that express our deepest humanity. These archetypes express universal human themes like birth, mother, father, the wise old man, the crone, the conscious self, the shadow side of the self, the feminine, the masculine, and so on. I see much validity in this. I can envision that millions upon millions of common human experiences have ingrained these archetypes or root symbols into the collective psyche of the human species. Much of this material, Jung claimed, is active in our lives only in an unconscious manner. So Jung envisioned a more expanded unconscious than Freud, a “collective unconscious,” Jung called it. The collective unconscious contains these archetypal symbols as well as images of suppressed desires and feelings. He therefore believed that Freud’s view of our inner dynamics and our needed therapies was far too simple. He also felt that Freud’s view of religious symbols was far too disparaging.

For decades now, hundreds of Jungian intellectuals have been doing complex analyses of all these intriguing matters. Jungian “soul-making” or “care of the soul” has virtually become a new religion. It is important to ask what this “soul-making” is all about and how it is related to Spirit with a capital “S.” Is this Jungian psychological religionizing part of the recovery of good religion or is it something less grand than that? I am thankful that Jungian psychology does not take religious symbols literally but rather attempts to use religious symbols in ways that are helpful to our practical living. Yet I find that most of this “soul-making” is lacking in what I mean by “Awe” or “Spirit.” It stirs around the religious symbols of our past, and discovers many novel and true insights. In this stirring, “soul” is “made” by expanding the scope of our awareness. I believe that such insights are good for people, but such “soul-making” does not go far enough to qualify as what I call “Spirit healing” or what some psychologists now call “transpersonal therapy.”

Ken Wilber summarized my feelings about Jungian psychology when he wrote:

I am in almost complete accord with most of that Jungian perspective, and in that specific regard I consider myself a Jungian.... But the crucial point is that *collective* is not necessarily *transpersonal*. Collective simply means that the structure is universally present, like the capacity for sensation, perception, impulse, emotion and so on.... We all collectively inherit ten toes, but if I experience my toes, I am not having a transpersonal experience.¹

Transpersonal Psychology

So what is a transpersonal experience? How is a Spirit happening or a Spirit healing different from Jungian soul-making?

It is helpful, I believe, to distinguish “Spirit” from “soul.” The word “soul” is one of the most slippery terms in modern English. Most conservative Christians mean by “soul” an immaterial or immortal part of the human being. Jungians, in general, do not mean by “soul” something immaterial or immortal; they mean something more down-to-earth. Another interesting meaning of the word “soul” has been forged by the music community. In this context, to have “soul” means to be in contact with your emotional being or with the deep currents and rhythms of your biological vitality. I believe that soul music (black or otherwise) does provide some fresh ground upon which ecstatic Spirit happenings may occur. But the meaning I want to reserve for the term “Spirit” is something more than any emotional or biological understanding of “soul.”

Whether we are talking about an immortal soul or about Jungian soul or the soul of black America, soul is not Spirit and Spirit is not soul. Spirit pertains to a relationship with the Infinite. “Soul,” as used by most conservative Christians, is not a relationship but an ethereal substance. “Soul,” as used in both the Jungian community and the soul-music community, has to do with important but quite finite relationships.

So where have we seen a transpersonal psychology functioning in our culture? Any psychology or therapy that emphasizes decision, intentionality, or freedom is touching upon the transpersonal or Spirit realm of experience. Freedom is one of the key qualities of Spirit, as I define “Spirit.” In my own study of psychology, I was absorbed many years ago by the work of Victor Frankl and Rollo May. These and other “existential psychologists” made “choice,” “freedom,” and also “creativity” central in their therapeutic theory and practice. You might say that such therapists focused on the interplay between rational meaning and transrational experience, or between “the personal” and “the transpersonal.”

In my continuing study of psychology, I began to realize that these existential therapists sometimes neglected the feeling-sensitivities within human experience. Karen Horney was one of the first psychologists who instructed me on the importance of feeling-sensitivity, personal relationships, and the sort of developments that suppress feelings and construct neurotic personalities. She also delivered the psychology of women from the unconscious patriarchal biases of Sigmund Freud and others. Other psychological theorists and therapists also helped me with what I am calling the feeling-sensitivity side of psychology: Alexander Lowen, Stanley Keleman, Fritz Perls, Harvey Jackins, John Gray and others.

Some of these psychological writers integrated their emphasis on feeling-sensitivity with the existentialists’ emphasis on intentionality, freedom, and creativity. To the extent that any of these writers have emphasized freedom, I consider them “transpersonal therapists.” These therapists plus a large number of psychologically influenced philosophical and religious thinkers have helped me to see with my own eyes that being a structured person

¹ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (Shambhala: 1996) pages 214-215

or personality is bordered on two sides: (1) On one side, my personality is bordered by being a natural animal complete with a wide range of desires and emotional feelings. (2) On the other side, my personality is bordered by being a deep well of freedom and creativity that can transcend the personality that I now am and move toward being a personality I have never been before. Some therapeutic thinkers call the first personality-border “the prepersonal” and the second personality-border “the transpersonal.”

This distinction between the prepersonal and the transpersonal has not always been clearly maintained. Some psychological writers have suggested that the experience of a human infant in the womb is a transpersonal experience. An infant may indeed be in union with its feelings, its mother, and even with the whole of mammalian evolution, but this “oceanic” experience is not an experience of the Infinite. The infant is only having an experience of finite nature, not a personality-transcending experience of freedom or creativity which are experiences of the Infinite. To have an experience of the Infinite, one must first become a self-conscious person and then transcend that finite personhood into a quality of selfhood that is self-consciously a “relationship with the Infinite.” Thus the infant and the young child are manifesting a quality of selfhood we might appropriately call “the prepersonal.” The prepersonal is a very important dimension of our humanity and should not be suppressed by our over-controlling willfulness. Nevertheless, it is confusing to assume that the prepersonal, oceanic union with nature is an experience of “the transpersonal” or of “Spirit” as I have been defining “Spirit” in these discourses.

When, however, an adult human manages to reexperience his or her own infant experience, this rather extraordinary union with biological nature may rock the adult personality and thus allow the wind of transpersonal freedom to blow through that personality. Whenever a person who has been suppressing natural feelings and desires becomes more united with his or her natural being, that person’s old suppressing personality is dying and that living human being is creating a new more nature-affirming personality. Such dying and rebirth is a transpersonal experience. Also, a union with natural feelings and desires can enrich rather than distract from transpersonal experience. Indeed, our transpersonal selfhood (or Spirit) manifests its presence in both our feelings and our thinking. A human being is not merely a feeling-animal nor merely a rational-animal. A fully realized human being is a “trans-feeling” and “trans-rational” being manifesting his or her “transpersonal” presence in both feelings and thinking. We might also say that the fully realized human being is a “trans-personality” being manifesting his or her presence in a perpetual revolution of personality structures.

Thus the following three statements need to be maintained in order to have clarity about the role of transpersonal therapy (or Spirit healing): (1) the prepersonal is foundational for the personal; (2) the personal is foundational for the transpersonal; (3) and the transpersonal is not the same as the prepersonal. The “**prepersonal**” means the type of consciousness we share with the other higher mammals. The “**personal**” means that finite, structured array of uniquely human consciousness processes. And the “**transpersonal**” means neither of the first two but points to a relationship with the Infinite, to Spirit with a capital “S.”

Psychological Re-emergence and Spirit Healing

In order to clarify further the creative tension that exists between healing the finite psyche and healing our Infinite relatedness, I want to conduct a dialogue with the theory and therapy of Harvey Jackins. Jackins founded a peer-counseling movement called Re-evaluation Counseling. One of the strengths of this movement is its emphasis upon enabling everyone to be a counselor as well as a client in the therapy process. This has the

advantage of making every person responsible not only for his or her own healing but for the healing of others. Thus human beings are not divided into invulnerable healers and their dependent clients. All are vulnerable clients and all are capable of assisting in the healing of others.

To make such a movement work, Jackins devised an easily teachable theory of psychological understanding and therapeutic method. This theory and method, though basically simple, has also turned out to be quite profound and has led into ever-expanding complexities and subtleties. One can clearly spend a lifetime practicing Re-evaluation Counseling and still experience that one has much more to learn about this simple but profound process.

I want to give a brief description of this theory and process and then reflect upon its relationship with transpersonal therapy (or Spirit healing).

Jackins suggests that every human being enters the world with elemental positive potentialities: emotional expressiveness; close affectionate relations with others; flexible intelligence; lack of self-depreciation, intimidation, or victim images; lack of compulsion to do violent harm to others; and many other such qualities that we might call “good” or “healthy.”

Jackins then asks, “How did we get the way we are: emotionally suppressed, isolated from other persons, confused in our thinking, inwardly oppressed, compulsively violent, and so on and so on?”

Jackins answers this question by describing what he calls distress recordings. Each of us, as we attempt to survive in the natural and social environments given to us, encounter experiences that are traumatic to us, hurtful to us, intimidating to us. In these extreme moments our self-protective psyche records these experiences in a literal fashion. We carry in our heads these recordings which are like little pieces of tape that rerun whenever anything happens to us that is remotely similar to these tapes, these distress recordings.

For example, my father was a rather controlling and strong-willed sort of man who was unconscious of the needs of others to participate in the decisions he was making on their behalf. Growing up with this man, I must have recorded many layers of bad-feeling moments of being abused in this manner. So in my later life, which was far removed from these early experiences, I found myself over-reacting to occasions that looked like someone was bossing me around. I either withdrew in terror or I got angry and lashed out inappropriately. My wife might ask me to help her make the bed, and I would become intensely angry about this “invasion of my life” before I had even considered the request rationally. She was aware that my interpretation of her request was misinformed; but I mistakenly saw the situation in the light of these earlier experiences which were present to me as distress recordings.

Maladies of this sort go on in the lives of virtually all people, sometimes leading to very destructive behaviors such as beating wives and abusing children. Such distress recordings may also lead to being inappropriately fearful and careful--or perhaps to feeling that we are no good, that we might as well die.

Some of these distress recordings only operate when “restimulated” by some external event. Other distress recordings have become so fully established as part of our personalities that they run all the time. When we are in the grip of one of these “chronic”

patterns of distress, we may feel that this way of operating is simply being who we are. But this is not actually so. We are not being who we are. We remain our original potential for wholesome functioning. Our distressed functioning, however well established, can be healed.

How? Jackins noticed that the human person naturally heals by emotionally discharging the old hurts that happened to him or her. If you and I as children had had the opportunity to properly process our deep hurts, they would not have become distress recordings that dominated our later lives; rather they would have relaxed or evaporated. For example, a small child when hurt naturally cries, cries to others, until the hurt is handled and then proceeds on as if nothing had happened. The crying is not the hurt but the discharging of the emotional energy associated with the hurt. But if such crying is not permitted and listened to, the hurt remains as a distress recording. The good news is that we can relax or dissolve our distress recordings by bringing back into memory these occasions of hurt and doing the crying or whatever other activity it takes to discharge them in the present.

There are many types of discharge: crying, shaking in fear, laughing, yawning out old pains, talking things through in a non-repetitive fashion, and so on. The counseling process uses techniques that encourage the client to take the time to do some appropriate discharging in relation to the most distressing aspects of his or her living. Having done this adequately, the client is in a new place, a place within which some new choices can be made about re-evaluating the ways that his or her life is going to proceed next.

It is important to note that these re-evaluating decisions play an important role in this healing process. We might say that the discharge experience locates for us the precise places in our psychological makeup where these re-evaluating decisions need to be made. Instead of attempting to defeat old distress patterns by directly fighting them with sheer willpower, the client takes time to dissolve the emotional power of these old patterns and thereby locate the underlying healthy humanity that preceded the distress patterns coming into being. Then this healthy humanity is found to have the power to choose to live differently.

My description of the healing process of Re-evaluation Counseling has been brief, but anyone who has actually practiced this process extensively has become convinced that there is a great deal of truth contained in this simple theory. My aim here is not to convince the reader of the benefits of Re-evaluation Counseling, but to use the above description of therapeutic healing as a foil for talking about the difference between the healing of the finite psyche and Spirit healing.

Distress recordings are maladies of the finite psyche not the Spirit. Dissolving these inward tyrants of our optimal functioning is not Spirit healing. It may be a very important type of healing which releases the healed person to explore Spirit healing more sanely and successfully. But, in order to be clear about Spirit and Spirit healing we must be clear that a state of complete re-emergence of that natural and good humanity that Harvey Jackins described is not yet a Spirit awakening or a Spirit healing.

However, it may be that Spirit awakenings and Spirit healings are taking place simultaneously with the re-emergence of the capabilities of the finite psyche. Therefore, it is easy to confuse the two dimensions of healing with one another. This confusion is what I want to sort out.

Spirit, as I have carefully defined it in previous discourses, is freedom (as well as trust, compassion, tranquility, courage and other aspects of Spirit). This freedom is clearly

operating within the Re-evaluation Counseling process. In freedom one decides to do and continue to do the counseling process. In freedom one decides to learn to be an effective counselor and a successful client. In freedom one decides to allow discharge to happen and to continue happening until it completes its healing effects. In freedom one decides to re-evaluate one's living and make the effort to live beyond the old patterns that have restrained optimal functioning. In freedom one decides to make learning, organizing, and leading the Re-evaluation Counseling movement part of one's service to humanity. This Spirit freedom is a health that undergirds and makes the Re-evaluation Counseling movement possible and effective.

But such freedom, properly understood as the Spirit freedom it is, does not emerge from discharging old distress patterns. Spirit freedom emerges in another way. Spirit freedom emerges through a death experience, an oblivion experience, a dreadful parting with some old self that I thought was me, perhaps the valid me, perhaps the tragic me I thought I was unfortunately stuck with. Spirit freedom is like a wind that blows into my life--blows between the personality I am leaving and the personality I am becoming next. Spirit freedom is a "free doom" to every sort of certainty about who I am. And Spirit freedom is an entrance into the overwhelming possibility of becoming by choice who I have never been before. Spirit freedom is my consent to be a relationship with the Infinite and to part company with being any of the finite selves I have ever been or ever will be.

Such Spirit freedom is part of the undergirding reality that allows a client practicing Re-evaluation Counseling to choose to re-evaluate profoundly the way he or she is living. But discharge did not create this freedom. And distress patterns are not the only restraints upon this freedom. This freedom is capable, even in the absence of all distress patterns, of refusing to be freedom and thus entering into that "place" we have called "despair." Despair is not a distress pattern. Despair is not caused by some old hurt incompletely discharged. Despair is caused by each and every Adam and each and every Eve choosing to eat off the tree of illusion. And the grand central illusion is the illusion that I am infinite--infinite in my knowledge-- knowing without doubt what is good and what is evil. This fall from Reality, this crime against Reality is not an animalistic reaction to some deep hurt. It is the conscious, self-responsible rebellion of a Spirit being against the dread and terror and overwhelming demand of the "too intense heat" of being the free and profoundly uncertain Spirit being that I am. The freedom to be freedom is a courage of profound depth. The freedom to not be freedom is a cowardice of profound tragedy. The stated process of Re-evaluation Counseling does not deal directly with this Spirit tragedy or with the regaining of this Spirit courage. Yet without the presence of Spirit freedom and without the presence of Spirit healings, the Re-evaluation Counseling movement would not have lasted a week. It would not have become the remarkable healing enterprise it has become.

So, how would we augment the theory of Re-evaluation Counseling to take into account the actuality of Spirit as an enduring part of this movement? We would not have to subtract anything (or very little) that its current theory holds. We would only have to add something. We would have to explore why anyone chooses to go through the pain of seeking re-emergence and why anyone chooses to give their time and effort to organizing this movement or any other compassionate movement. Whence comes this freedom? Whence comes this compassion?

Yes, freedom and compassion are part of our original goodness--Adam and Eve before their fall. But Spirit freedom and Spirit compassion are something more profound than what is included in that list of optimal finite psychological functioning that Jackins describes as our good humanity. Our good humanity also includes a relatedness to the Infinite, a

relatedness which has the ability to relate to itself in affirmation of this Spirit relatedness or to reject it and thus fall into the entire range of evil of which humanity is capable.

Re-evaluation Counseling is not wrong; it is simply not sufficient for advising us and assisting us with regard to a full healing of humanity. And this same statement can be made for all other therapies that do not focus directly upon the transpersonal or Spirit dimension of human existence.

Let me illustrate this with an imaginary or fictitious case study. Let us say that a man begins doing co-counseling and sticks with it for a while, finding it helpful to have other men and women who will listen to him, understand him, and encourage him. But eventually it becomes clear that proceeding any further with re-evaluating his life is going to confront him with the possibility of deeper changes than he is willing to make. Perhaps he tells himself, "I'm not ready for this." Or perhaps he tells himself, "Co-counseling was a bad idea to start with." Or perhaps he just passively drifts away from any further efforts toward a fuller re-emergence of his optimal human functioning.

Was this choice to stop counseling simply the acting out of a distress pattern? Perhaps the choice was consistent with some distress pattern. But let us assume it was also a raw choice to flee freedom--to flee the freedom required to part with an old self and to press on toward unknown selfhoods. This sort of panic is not simply an old distress recording running once again. It is a chosen fall from freedom into a life of enslavement--continuing some unfree patterns. This fall cannot be explained as anything else than a failure of nerve, a lack of courage, a choice to not have courage, a choice to not feel fear, a choice to not move through that fear courageously. This is a Spirit issue.

If we are going to be an agent of healing to such an issue, we will need to do three things: (1) Assist this man to be aware of the reality of his own choices and of the truth that there is no excuse for them, for he can respond differently. (2) Assist this man to see that his failures of nerve are not the end of the world, but that he is welcome back right now to the land of the courageous. (3) Assist him to see that his freedom and courage are restored by simply accepting this welcome back to the freedom/courage/compassion which is an ongoing gift of Spirit that is being given to each of us.

This is how all Spirit maladies are healed: (1) awareness by the person in question of the Spirit malady and its deadening consequences, (2) the dawning of the acceptance home to Reality of this person in spite of this person's own responsibility for this particular Spirit malady, and (3) the acceptance by this person of his or her particular Welcome Home.

This dynamic of healing is something very different than, though not inconsistent with, discharging old hurts and choosing new patterns of behavior. One of the differences is that the psychological re-emergence of our finite array of goodnesses takes time--years, decades to complete (perhaps total re-emergence is never complete). But the Spirit healing of a specific Spirit malady is instantaneous: Lo, I was crippled, and now I walk. I was blind, and now I see. I was dead, and now I am alive. There is no waiting list. There is no purgatory. The Reign of Reality is open for membership at every moment. A simple "Yes" or "No" to membership is required. This is the Eternal Either-Or. Either we live our lives as they are being given to us, or we refuse to live our lives as they are being given to us. If we refuse we may do so in a desperate hope for something better, or we may enter now into a desperate hopelessness--believing the untrue belief that it is impossible to ever be truly alive.

Though a hundred years of psychological re-emergence may not bring one to the place of Spirit aliveness, you or I can go to that place right now. And after going there now, we can continue with our psychological re-emergence for the rest of our lives.

Psychological health, like all categories of finite health, is always incomplete. But Spirit health, Eternal health, is either HERE or ABSENT.