

# Thresholds

Counselling with spirit

April 2022

‘The spirit with which he described nature revealed his sense of the sacred’

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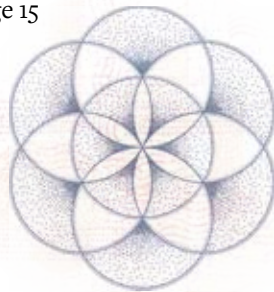
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*'For someone who is deeply embedded in a particular religion and its culture, who has been in it for decades, trained in it, worships in it, this multifaith assertion can be provocative'*

- William Bloom

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

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#### Case studies

All case studies in this journal, whether noted individually or not, are permitted, disguised, adapted or composites, with all names and identifying features changed, in order to ensure confidentiality.

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BACP Spirituality enquiries

For divisional enquiries, email spirituality@baccp.co.uk

# Connecting with writers and readers

At BACP, we recently sent out a readers' survey asking what you think and what you'd like to see us cover next in our divisional journals. Although, I can't lie, it's daunting to receive anonymous comments, I also delighted in getting the feedback.

As I type the word 'feedback', I find myself with the sensory impression that comes with the word in its auditory sense. Because it does feel a little like that. Every three months, I put out – emit, if you like – a dozen or so pieces that authors lovingly craft, then continue to relate to with great soul and care as we prepare the piece for publication.

As editor, I find myself in the midst of the writer's relationship with their text and am often shaped by the process too. This is akin to therapy, where, as counsellor, I sit alongside a client's relationship with self.

I've realised recently that I absorb traces of each article: a form of embodiment. Sentences or images from the articles rise up in me at the quietest times, sometimes many months later. And I think that is because of the heart that goes into it – the spirit, you might like to say.

So, yes, when I receive a list of things readers have liked, I experience it as a series of vibrations back from the original. Of equal interest was the list of things readers would like to see in the future. This is precious. The *Thresholds* readership is incredibly diverse. It's something I came into this job aware of and it's something I try to accommodate and gauge as best I can. It's diverse because some of you are counsellors and some of you are chaplains, or spiritual accompaniers. Some of you have a longstanding faith

and some of you are atheists. Some of you have a spirituality of your own. Hey, it's a big old world. And it's diverse because of the career stage that people are at. Some of you are starting out. Some of you are retiring. Some of you want practical tools. Some want contemplation. Others want to read the latest research.

**As editor, I find myself in the midst of the writer's relationship with their text and am often shaped by the process too**

So, this list, as I said, matters to me. I think I would have liked it even better if I could have had a conversation with each of the readers who took the time to respond. I would have liked to talk. I would have asked them if they would like to write the piece that they would like to see written (That's what they say about writing a novel, isn't it? Write the book you'd want to read). I would like to take that relationship I mentioned one more link down the chain to the final reader. You.

So, if you did respond and you would like to connect further, please do get in touch with me. I'd love to hear from you.



**Amy McCormack**  
thresholds.editorial@baccp.co.uk

# The network

News from the BACP Spirituality division



The new Belfast spirituality network co-ordinator, **Vivian Ogundice**

## Could you tell us a little more about yourself?

I am an integrative counsellor who focuses on helping individuals to help themselves. Cognitive behavioural theory has a significant influence on my therapy, and I also try to work with issues in the most efficient way possible.

**I'd like to see us explore different themes, like healing and forgiveness, post-traumatic growth and spirituality**

## How do you work as a counsellor?

My approach is very client centred, and I work with individuals dealing with anxiety, depression and other mental health issues on a long-term and short-term basis. I use cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help people change unhelpful patterns of behaviour or thinking that cause anxiety. CBT is a collaborative style of therapy, in which sessions are supplemented by exercises and tactics that the client can learn and practise daily to help overcome distorted thoughts that lead to depression and

anxiety. I work with clients from a variety of backgrounds, with interpreters.

## What does spirituality mean to you?

I believe life is spiritual. Spirituality, to me, is a desire to be connected to God. My fascination with spirituality networks came about due to my counselling work within the communities and with minorities.

## What does the Belfast spirituality network mean to you?

For me, the spirituality network is a safe space and provides resources for people of different backgrounds and spiritual pathways to embark on their journeys. It encourages wellbeing and growth.

## As the new network co-ordinator, what are your hopes for the network meeting?

I hope that the meeting will assist individuals both socially and emotionally. I also hope it will help them to find meaning and purpose in their lives and that it will provide compassion to those grieving. I hope to add to the BACP's spirituality network in Belfast.

## What sort of themes would you like to see the group explore?

I'd like to see us explore different themes, like healing and forgiveness, post-traumatic growth and spirituality.

## PARTNERSHIPS

# Expanding networks

BACP Spirituality Executive members met with the Chair and editor of the International Network for the Study of Spirituality (INSS)<sup>1</sup> to consider possible ways we could engage and collaborate for the mutual benefit of our membership, particularly in the area of disseminating research, scholarship, education and practice.

It is hoped to develop resources linked to spiritual competences. There is also scope for collaboration with INSS in terms of work already done and being done in this area by research practitioners. There are other networks, such as the Transforming Shame network,<sup>2</sup> where valuable ideas and research of interest to BACP members can be accessed. If you know of other networks, please do get in touch at: [thresholds@bacp.co.uk](mailto:thresholds@bacp.co.uk)

<sup>1</sup><https://spiritualitystudiesnetwork.org> (accessed 14 February 2022).

<sup>2</sup>[www.transformingshame.co.uk](http://www.transformingshame.co.uk) (accessed 14 February 2022).

CONFERENCE REPORT

# Research news

BACP Spirituality Executive member **Kevin Snow** offers a round-up of the spirituality research news he picked up at a recent conference.

At the Royal College of Psychiatrists conference, 'Taboo or Together: is there a place for spirituality in CAMHS?', Professor Mary-Lynn Dell shared an overview of her research showing that, overall, spirituality was protective for young people's mental health. She emphasised that one of the advantages of being spiritually informed when delivering care is that it engages with spiritually minded young people using their existing intrinsic resources. Understanding spiritual context is, of course, essential in helping young people make sense of trauma arising within a religious family or wider faith community.

Dr Ryan Campbell described interactive techniques for enabling young patients to open up about existential and spiritual issues when facing death, bereavement and pain. He spoke about the use of 'a third thing', such as listening stones, to overcome the unequal power dynamic between therapist and child and offer a way of safely opening up confusing and painful questions.

Dr Lucy Grimwade spoke about assessment and formulation, as well as how to differentiate between spiritual and psychotic experiences. Professor Bryony Beresford described developments in, and barriers to, optimising NHS chaplaincy care. Obstacles can include resourcing levels and resistance by medical staff on some wards. Bryony reflected on the impact of hospitalisation on a young person, including loss of voice and agency impairments to their developing identity. She also spoke about how chaplains can intervene therapeutically and about a 'whole-family' approach.

Reverend Paul Nash talked about developing chaplaincy services for Birmingham CAMHS. Paul described creative projects that promote engagement and wellbeing, and act as a catalyst for discussions about ultimate questions.

Roger Duncan took the conference into the realm of eco-psychotherapy. He described working outside in a social group with a meaningful context and how this enabled adolescents to become deeply grounded within themselves, in line with the wisdom of traditional cultures of Australia and



Africa, who today still understand the need for the individual to be embedded within community and nature.

Theologian Dr Sue Price described her research into the innate spirituality of severely disabled non-verbal young people. Relational consciousness is apparent, argued Sue, and sitting in silence with a severely disabled young person can feel like a deep conversation.

Find out more about the speakers and their research at: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)

DIVISIONAL UPDATES

## Network forum round-up

**West Midlands**

At our recent network meeting, Dr Jo Barber presented her research study on how religion or spirituality impacts on mental health recovery and why people experience the interaction between these two things differently. Her research questions stimulated group sharing on 'Why some people with mental illness have negative personal spiritual experiences (for example, hallucinations or delusions with religious content). Why might spiritual

well-being be so important in personal recovery? Can we ever distinguish between religious experiences and symptoms of psychosis?

Jo is hoping to recruit mental health service users who have had distressing or difficult personal religious experiences (eg. distressing religious voices or visions or other psychotic symptoms with religious content).

If you would like a copy of her presentation, or to assist with this Birmingham and Solihull-based research project, please email: [jo barberbpo@gmail.com](mailto:jo barberbpo@gmail.com)

**East Midlands**

At the February meeting, participants tried out the SIEVE model for reflection-in-practice and reflection-on-practice,

devised by Executive member, Keith Duckett, which featured in the January 2022 issue of *Thresholds*. We used the SIEVE process to explore in turn story, impact, experience, vision, values and vocations. We shared our insights and perspectives on how spirituality is experienced in the therapeutic relationship and its positive and negative capacities. We were all keen to go away and try the SIEVE and share it in our own contexts, or perhaps use it again at a future network meeting.

The next meeting of the East Midlands forum will be face to face. This is taking place on 26 June from 10am to 12.30pm. See: [www.bacp.co.uk/events/nms2606-bacp-spirituality-network-meeting](http://www.bacp.co.uk/events/nms2606-bacp-spirituality-network-meeting)

*Maureen Slattery-Marsh*

# In my beginning is my end... In my end is my beginning

Maureen Slattery-Marsh is Chair of BACP Spirituality.  
To contact Maureen, please email: [sonas@slatterymarsh.com](mailto:sonas@slatterymarsh.com)



**T**he headline above, which is the opening and closing lines of *Part II: East Coker* of TS Eliot's poetic masterpiece, *Four Quartets*,<sup>1</sup> resonates with my current life circumstances. I am in a phase of negotiating significant endings and pondering new beginnings, both of which draw me naturally into a period of retrospective reflection.

After six years serving as Chair of BACP Spirituality, I will be stepping down from the role as spring ends. So too will Kathy Kinmond, who has served as our Deputy Chair since 2019 and as an Exec member since 2013. Throughout that time, she has offered wise counsel to us on many occasions, and I have appreciated in particular her ability to cut through complex threads of thought to present us with clear choices for consideration.

These changes have heightened my awareness of intermingling affects: the pending relief that comes from shedding certain burdens of responsibility, and an emerging sadness with the loss of immediate connections to an inner circle of envisioned colleagues. Alongside these feeling states, I notice wafts of anticipatory excitement, sensing that in my ending is a new beginning. There is the promise of a slower-lane existence, with more time to stargaze.

In my beginning, as with other Chairs who take on this voluntary role, you never know quite what you are letting yourself in for! I had some sense of the upfront aspects of the role: presenting and representing, leading, supporting and enabling, advocating and networking, writing and resourcing. Less obvious to me, at the outset, were the hidden tasks associated with preparing and planning for meetings and events: the time needed for processes such as envisioning, strategising, consulting, delegating, interviewing and recruiting. Thankfully, I was not alone in all of this. I soon found my stride working alongside gifted and able Exec colleagues, forging networks with members of the BACP Spirituality division, Chairs of other divisions and key BACP staff. I also linked up with external partners whose aims were also to promote the vital importance of spirituality

I am in a phase of negotiating significant endings and pondering new beginnings, both of which draw me naturally into a period of retrospective reflection

#### References

- <sup>1</sup> Eliot TS. *Four quartets*. London: Faber and Faber; 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> [www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2021/9-july-new-communities-of-practice-platform](http://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2021/9-july-new-communities-of-practice-platform) (accessed 14 February 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> [spiritualitystudiesnetwork.org](http://spiritualitystudiesnetwork.org) (accessed 14 February 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> [www.transformingshame.co.uk](http://www.transformingshame.co.uk) (accessed 14 February 2022).
- <sup>5</sup> Valters Paintner C. *The soul's slow ripening: 12 Celtic practices for seeking the sacred*. Notre Dame, US: Sorin Books; 2018.

in therapeutic practice (see p4 for our latest partnerships work).

#### BACP Spirituality update

At our January 2022 Executive meeting, Kathryn (Kath) Lock-Giddy was elected to serve as Chair of the Spirituality Division, to the delight and approval of all present. Over the next few months, the outgoing Chair and Deputy Chair will offer support to Kath as needed, to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. A change in leadership offers fresh opportunity for renewing vision and strategy, coinciding with BACP's consultation process for setting wider strategic aims over the next four years. You will hear more about this from Kath in July's *Thresholds*. We hope to recruit at least three new members to the executive team in the next few months, once BACP has completed their review of the roles and terms of reference for volunteers.

Amy McCormack, *Thresholds'* Editor, joined the Executive Committee last spring. A year on, having reviewed her life and work commitments, she has taken the decision to step down from the Committee. We are deeply grateful to Amy for volunteering her time and expertise to the division and in spearheading new ways of engaging with spirituality in practice. Amy will still be working closely with us as she continues her role as editor of *Thresholds*.

Plans are underway to trial a Spirituality in Practice online group as part of BACP's Communities of Practice initiative.<sup>2</sup> Kevin Snow and Kathryn Lock-Giddy have been involved with shaping the Communities of Practice platform since last August, alongside other volunteers, led by Tina Tanner, BACP's Communities of Practice Lead. You can find out more about Tina in the new feature, *Inner me*, on p8.

I offer a parting thought on the threshold of significant endings, from Paintner's reflections on *The Soul's Slow Ripening*:<sup>5</sup> 'When we are able to fully release our need to control the outcome, thresholds become rich and graced places of transformation.'

Maureen

## WORLD

## In solidarity with Ukraine

BACP stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine as they face the devastating human tragedy of a catastrophic war.

The aggression unleashed on them, their loved ones and their country in the past few weeks has been shocking. Individuals, families and communities are dealing with indescribable losses, grief and uncertainty.

The humanitarian crisis and the long-term psychological impact of this war will likely continue for many years.

We know this war is also extremely concerning for people in the UK, raising feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, sadness, anger and a sense of injustice and helplessness. For some, it may stir up past traumatic memories; and for others, it may exacerbate psychological issues they've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As therapists, you may be dealing with your own emotional response as well as supporting your clients through theirs. We've brought together a series of self-care resources for members, available here: [www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/self-care-resources/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/self-care-resources/)

## RESEARCH

## BACP's 28th Research Conference

BACP's annual Research Conference will be on the theme of 'Striving for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Research, Practice and Policy'.

The conference will take place in Dundee and online with co-hosts Abertay University on 19 and 20 May 2022 and content will be available to view on demand until August 2022.

There will be three keynote presentations along with research papers, discussions and methods workshops (in-person events only), lightning talks, poster presentations and symposia.

Full details and information about how to book here: [www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/research/conference](http://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/research/conference)



## Research journal on international counselling

The latest issue of BACP's *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research* journal includes a special section on international counselling, which is guest edited by Dione Misfud and Catherine Smith, and is available here: [www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/counselling-and-psychotherapy-research-journal](http://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/counselling-and-psychotherapy-research-journal)



## Culturally informed services for refugees

As the world follows the desperate plight of refugees fleeing war in Ukraine, there remains enormous unmet need among refugees from other conflicts.

The experience of recent arrivals from Afghanistan under the Government's Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme has highlighted the need for increased access to specialist psychological support.

Afghan refugees require culturally informed services that are sensitive and responsive to spiritual beliefs and cultural norms and expectations.

BACP has provided a briefing for the Afghan and Central Asia Association and has contributed to the Northern Ireland Government's consultation on a draft strategy on the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. We have also supported The Race Equality Foundation's call to policy makers and commissioners to engage with marginalised communities to ensure the therapies are culturally appropriate and geographically accessible. The Foundation calls for practitioners in all disciplines to increase their understanding of cultural and faith beliefs and how these impact on mental health.

BACP's Third Sector Lead Jeremy Bacon said: 'Members have noticed inconsistency in the availability of psychological support from place to place and the retraumatising risks associated with crowded temporary accommodation.'

If you would like to share your experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers, please email: [publicaffairs@bacp.co.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@bacp.co.uk).

# Inner me

We talk to BACP Communities of Practice Lead, **Tina Tanner**, about the things that inspire her



**Tell us a little more about what you do**

My role at BACP is to launch the Communities of Practice website. It connects members so that they can share their knowledge and learning with each other. I work with members to make sure the Communities of Practice are accessible, and I support member moderators to create content for the free Communities of Practice member website.

**Is there a spiritual aspect to your work?**

I hope that my beliefs and values guide my work. In this project, making meaningful connections with the member volunteers who have supported the project has been such a good experience for me. I have always been a positive person and look to support and 'lift' others in my work by making strong connections.

I believe that, with considered collaboration, anything can be achieved. I am always mindful to treat others as I would wish to be treated, and the feedback from the members seems to show this has been the case.

**What moves you in life?**

It's knowing that, as humans, we can show strength in adversity and support each other, regardless of our own

**Running partner:** Tina's dog, Lola.



circumstances. When COVID-19 first appeared, everyone was scared. What I experienced was people pulling together, helping neighbours. I saw nature return to areas and people show consideration for others again.

My biggest inspiration has to be my grandchildren. Their innocent fascination with new things reminds me to be 'in the moment' whenever life gets too busy.

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**It's about selfless acts of kindness, such as collecting litter as I run in the mornings or stopping to help someone in distress. To me, this shows supreme consideration for others, without any expectation of reward**

---

**Are there any wellbeing practices or rituals that sustain you ?**

I run in the mornings, before work, just me and my dog, Lola. It's about connecting with nature in the quiet morning: watching squirrels run in front of us or the swans gathered at the lakeside waiting for the fisherman to throw the unused bait to them. It helps me feel positive and ready for the day.

I am mindful to take breaks from screen time too. One can quickly become overwhelmed without self-care.

**What are your sources of inspiration?**

Many things inspire me, but it was a person who has inspired me most: a service user I encountered when I worked for a homelessness charity.

**Tell us about a mystical, or memorable moment in your life**

As you can probably tell, animals feature quite highly in my life. I helped a local farmer to show his pedigree Hereford cattle in my teens. We had a young bull called Lewis and I formed a strong bond with him from the start. When I came to the yard and called him, he would canter up the field for a cuddle and head scratch. At shows, I would curl up with him in his stall and read a book, often falling asleep resting my back on his tummy. We won first prize at the royal show and the cup was presented by the Queen. Lewis was retired to live out his days at a dairy farm after that.



**Strong bond:** Tina with prize-winning bull, Lewis.

They came to the centre infrequently, but obviously needed support. One day I made a connection with them, and from there was able to get them a work placement. They showed such growth when they were supported to be the best they could be and given the time to heal life's damages. They returned to visit me regularly with updates about their life. That person inspires me to overcome any adversity life can throw at me.

**What does the word 'divine' mean to you?**

It conjures feelings of serenity, peace and co-existence. It's about balancing the 'noise' of life with centring yourself. Divine, to me, is being the best you can be and supporting others who wish to, too. It's about selfless acts of kindness, such as collecting litter as I run in the mornings, or stopping to help someone in distress. To me, this shows supreme consideration for others, without any expectation of reward. As I grow, I hope to attain a peace with myself, knowing I am the best person I can be.

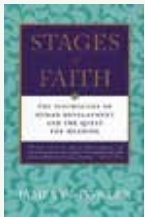


# Student voices

The section for students to explore working with spirituality while in training

## The classics

In this series, BACP Spirituality Executive member **Kevin Snow** introduces students to the books that shaped his understanding of spirituality in a counselling context.



**Stages of Faith, 1981**  
**James Fowler**  
HarperOne

*Stages of Faith* has come to be regarded as established knowledge in the realm of psychology

and spiritual development. Widely used in pastoral training, Fowler's book has directly influenced the work of other writers in the field, including fellow Americans, Ken Wilber and Scott Peck.

Fowler builds a model of faith development from infancy to maturity, drawing on interviews with people at different stages of spiritual growth. The book attempts a universal definition of faith, applicable to any form of spirituality or worldview. For Fowler, faith includes social relations, personal identity and the making of personal and cultural meanings. Faith extends beyond religious beliefs and practices and is: '...an integral, centering process, underlying the formation of the belief, values and meaning'. By this definition, a person of any spiritual orientation, or an atheist or agnostic, develops through the same stages. Through their own particular beliefs and circumstances, argues Fowler, some people may

ultimately develop to transcend to the universal ground of spiritual being.

Although he does not reduce faith development to cognitive capacities alone, Fowler assumes that spiritual growth is based upon the unfolding stages of cognitive abilities and structures. He draws primarily on the cognitive-developmental work of Piaget and on those who applied Piagetian ideas to moral development, though he also cites the psychosocial stage theory of psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson.

Perspective-taking is the central evolving capacity of the six-stage theory. As the child develops into adolescence and then adulthood, she learns to take on the perspectives of others and to view concepts and rules more abstractly. While the individual can live fully and productively in their culture at any level of faith development, a small minority learn to explore perspectives at more sophisticated levels, where they can view beliefs and rules critically, entertain the paradoxes apparent in metaphysical ideas and appreciate the tensions and contradictions of being both an autonomous individual and utterly dependent on others. In the final stage, a person can embrace all peoples and faiths, and all investment in beliefs and institutions that are self-serving are given up. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and Mother Theresa illustrate this ultimate stage. The final stage is Fowler's weakest, drifting from psychology into metaphysics, and revealing underlying Christian-centric assumptions and the Western biases implicit in secular liberalism. Fowler sincerely attempts to break free of the ethnocentric hierarchical approaches of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and others in the 19th and 20th centuries, but he doesn't quite succeed. Despite this, *Stages of Faith* remains influential and has spawned a body of empirical research. While vulnerable to criticism, it is hard to dismiss Fowler's rich and compelling approach.

## Wanted: student writers

*Thresholds* is looking for regular student writers for this page. If you are a trainee therapist and are interested in writing about how spirituality and beliefs are explored in your training and development as a counsellor, then please get in touch with the editor: [thresholds@bacp.co.uk](mailto:thresholds@bacp.co.uk).

## BACP student spirituality network meeting

The student network meeting is for practitioners engaging with the interface between spirituality, belief, faith and religion in their practice. It offers a safe and informal space to share learning, pose questions and address ethical and practice-based issues, in a spirit of openness and enquiry.

At the next meeting, students and newly qualified counsellors will be invited to reflect on the theme of spirituality in training. There will also be an opportunity to explore the Good Practice in Action resource: *Race, Religion and Belief within the Counselling Professions* and to reflect on spiritual themes that arise in client work.

The meeting takes place on Saturday 21 May from 10am to 12.30pm. Book here: [www.bacp.co.uk/events/nms2105-bacp-spirituality-network-meeting](http://www.bacp.co.uk/events/nms2105-bacp-spirituality-network-meeting)

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# Making the *spiritual* *explicit*

**Avigail Abarbanel** looks at how the transpersonal emerged with a client who did not identify as spiritual

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**I**n over two decades of private practice, I have worked with many clients whose presenting problems directly concerned spiritual practices and beliefs, their relationship with God or the divine, or a religious group or a faith. In this article, I discuss a case that, on the surface, might seem to have nothing to do with spirituality. Indeed, another therapist may have worked differently with this client.

*I believe that naming and addressing the spiritual (and existential) dimensions in this client's therapy process is what made the difference. As we are living through a pandemic, and fear-based responses are prevalent, I thought it was worthwhile to share a case that demonstrates the struggle we all face between merely surviving and our fundamental need for spiritual development.*

#### **Introducing the client**

Jeremy,\* in his 30s, the youngest of five sons, is married and in full-time employment. He completed school without enjoying it and later studied environmental science. He came to therapy to work on distressing mood cycles he had experienced since late adolescence. At high points, he felt positive. At low points, he felt



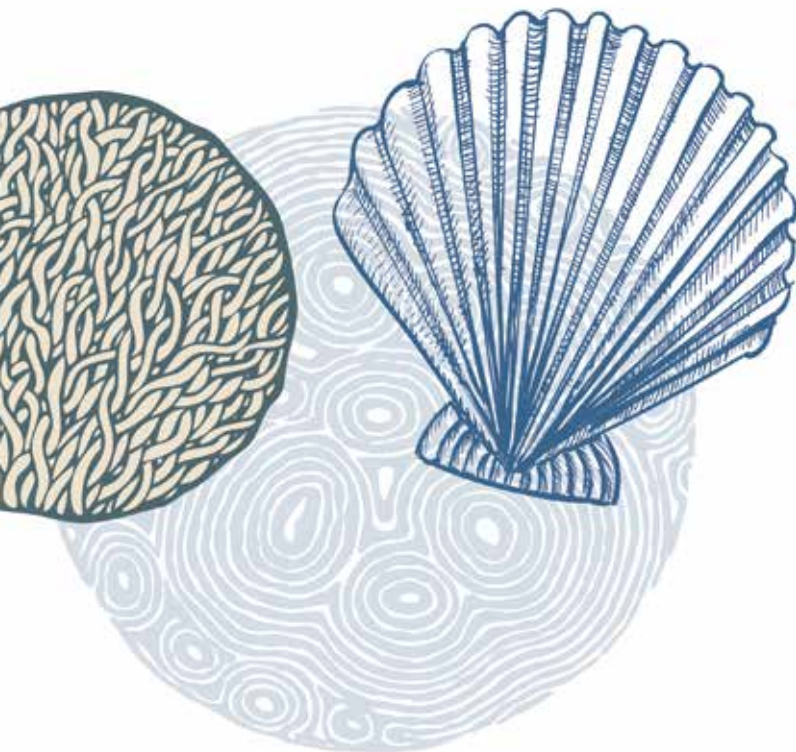
negative, would not talk and did not want to do anything. He described this as an inner war. He was aware of what he wanted from his life, but 'made excuses' and 'analysed everything'. He wanted to live on a rural property but told himself it was impossible. One side of him felt dissatisfied. The other said, 'Why aren't I happy with what I've got?' He felt like he shouldn't even be in therapy and didn't have a right to spend money on himself.

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## Over time, it became clear that it was a need for permission rather than fear that held Jeremy back

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Jeremy was prompted to start therapy by his wife, who was both encouraging and impatient with his 'dark moods'. He, too, was tired of them and said he wanted clarity and to feel more peaceful. Jeremy had a few minor health problems, but was afraid of dying young or 'ending up like his father', who was forced to retire early due to ill health. Jeremy had a social life and no history of alcohol, drugs or suicidal ideation. Recently, he'd started reading self-help books, to try to understand himself better. He had attended four hypnotherapy sessions that he said had helped him to open up but had not solved his problem.



### Existential concerns

Jeremy's comment that he wasn't living his life stood out to me, as well as the tension between what he felt was expected or sensible and what he felt drawn to do. He described his life as suburban. He felt emptiness, purposelessness and anxiety on shopping trips with his wife at the weekends. But he also felt that he should 'feel OK' about it and was angry with himself that he didn't.

In my reflections and supervision, I wondered if Jeremy might be at a point in his life where his need for meaning and purpose had become more pressing. There was little room in Jeremy's life for his own ideas or creative energy, which Erikson described as the seventh stage of development: '...a widening commitment to take care of the persons, the products, and the ideas one has learned to care for'.<sup>1</sup>

Our need for meaning is innate.<sup>2,3</sup> Yalom argues that '...to live without meaning, goals, values or ideals seems to provoke... considerable distress'.<sup>4</sup> Jeremy's father, his 'only male role model', often commented how fortunate he was to have been 'thrown into' his job as an engineer. He used to tell his sons: 'You boys stopped me from living my life'. Perhaps Jeremy's father's inability to face what he felt was the loss of his dreams, made him impatient with Jeremy's sadness. Jeremy was taught to believe that his feelings and inner experience were a nuisance that took him away from what was important in life: being a good financial provider. However, he saw himself as 'unsuccessful' because he could not apply himself to the task of acquiring material possessions as well as others. Jeremy knew what was important to him, but was taught to think of it as indulgent. He felt that nothing he could produce from his 'heart and soul' could possibly be of value to anyone. I was aware of an instinctive desire in me to 'make it better' for Jeremy by telling him that what he had to offer was valuable. But I realised that if I did, it would be to meet my own need to rescue and I would fail in joining Jeremy in his reality as it was. Jeremy routinely questioned his own inner experience and doubted it. Rescuing him would have done more of the same.

According to Maslow, '...the most basic consequence of satiation of any need is that this need is submerged and a new and higher need emerges'.<sup>5</sup> He considered self-actualisation and spirituality to be the highest human needs. But people cannot begin to attend to their spiritual/self-actualisation needs until their more basic needs are met.

Fromm argues that 'having' gives us a sense of security:

'...for what we have we know; we can hold on to it, feel secure in it. We fear, and consequently avoid, taking a step into the unknown, the uncertain; for, indeed, while the step may not appear risky to us after we have taken it, before we take that step the new aspects beyond it appear very risky, and hence frightening.'<sup>7</sup>

Over time, it became clear that it was a need for permission rather than fear that held Jeremy back.

Prioritising his self-actualisation needs placed Jeremy in opposition to his family's (and our society's) values. I knew I did not have the power to offer Jeremy the permission he was seeking. He needed it from himself. But I was also aware of my impatience, of wanting to push him. I also felt afraid for him, that maybe he truly didn't have what it takes. In supervision, I realised that my conflicting feelings paralleled Jeremy's inner struggle. By fully exploring them within the container of the supervisory relationship, I was able to harness the insight these thoughts were giving me into his world. I needed to sit with my inner tension and not act on it. Doing so enabled me to continue to engage with Jeremy as a facilitator, rather than as problem solver.

### The role of symptoms

Jung captures Jeremy's dilemma when he says, '...the inner man wants something which the visible man does not want, and we are at war with ourselves. Only then, in this distress do we discover the psyche; or, more precisely, we come upon something which thwarts our will, which is strange and even hostile to us, or which is incompatible with our conscious standpoint.'<sup>8</sup>

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## If we humans are sacred, then everything about us is sacred (...) Treating symptoms like an 'enemy' would therefore be desecrating something sacred

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Jeremy did what was expected, felt deeply unhappy, but saw his unhappiness as a flaw in himself. In my processing, I observed that Jeremy treated the part of himself that suffered like his enemy. He expected therapy to agree that there was something in him that was not good (or was 'sick') and help him 'fix' it so he could adapt better to his life as it was.

Existential and humanistic approaches do not pathologise symptoms. Symptoms are 'creative adaptations' that help us survive in adverse conditions.<sup>9</sup> Drawing on Eastern philosophies, Gestalt sees self-acceptance, wherever and whatever one is, as a pre-condition for change, and change is a settling into or an 'alignment' with authentic existence.<sup>10</sup> It seemed to me that Jeremy's spirit was suffering, and, as May said, '...spirit, far from being something morbid for which we are to be ashamed, is actually a proof of our great possibilities and destiny.'<sup>11</sup>

If we humans are sacred, then everything about us is sacred. Sacredness is present in the everyday and ordinary:<sup>12</sup> in what people might see as ugly, disturbing or useless, and in the pain and suffering people bring to therapy. Treating symptoms like an 'enemy' would therefore be desecrating something sacred. I did not collude with Jeremy's assumption that his symptoms



were the 'enemy'. I shared with him that I thought of his symptoms as his ally and as pointers to where the problem really was.

### The spiritual dimension

According to Cortright, 'Regular people with ordinary problems who are also on a spiritual path are ... looking for therapists who will honour their seeking for something sacred and who can respect their whole being - in its psychological and spiritual fullness.'<sup>13</sup>

Jeremy had no conscious faith in anything, nor obvious spiritual vocabulary, and it would have been easy to overlook this. But not having a spiritual practice, awareness or vocabulary does not mean that a person's journey is not spiritual. Jeremy was brought up within the prevalent materialist paradigm, which holds that only matter, what we can touch, count and measure is reality. According to this paradigm, our subjective experience, dreams or hopes, and what we call 'spirit', are a product of our physical brain and therefore not real.<sup>14</sup> Jeremy suffered precisely because he was told that his inner desires and dreams, his essence or spirit, were not valid; that only what he did or owned was real. I could see that Jeremy's spirit was hurting, but I knew that if I suggested this too early, it would potentially worsen his inner conflict, because I would be 'choosing sides'. I could only introduce this when all of Jeremy's inner parts felt welcome and equally valued in our sessions.

### The therapeutic process

I developed a good therapeutic alliance with Jeremy, attended to process and to our relationship in the here-and-now. I explored with Jeremy the possibility that he could be an introvert (Myers-Briggs framework<sup>15</sup>). He didn't take time for himself because he felt he 'didn't have a right'. I encouraged him to meet his need for solitude where possible, to recharge his energy and process his thoughts.

I assumed that if Jeremy began to accept his suffering and dilemmas as important, if he respected the parts of him that suffered, his symptoms would start to diminish on their own. I related to Jeremy in a way that modelled acceptance and appreciation of who he was as a full person, which in itself was challenging for him.

A few months into the therapy, there was a significant turning point. In response to my question about what he enjoyed doing, Jeremy said he liked water, swimming and being in nature. He said he found nature unbelievable and that he loved the mystery about it. He said it was a miracle. When I asked what he thought about what he had just said, he responded, 'I'm a boring person.' I shared with Jeremy that far from sounding

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## Clients often feel conflicted between what they believe is expected of them and the call of their soul, and psychotherapists are placed at the heart of this conflict

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boring, what he had described made me think of his spiritual side. Jeremy said he had trouble taking this in but was quick to add that he didn't want to toss it away either. He reflected tentatively: 'Maybe there is more to me than I thought.'

The spirit with which Jeremy described nature revealed his sense of the sacred, perhaps his *axis mundi*, a symbol for him of the point where heaven meets earth.<sup>16</sup> I had a sense that this might be connected in some way to his desire to help others, which is something that he had expressed in other sessions. Tacey suggested that discovering spirit and sacredness within ourselves can lead us to '...go outside ourselves and serve others and the world'.<sup>12</sup> Following this session, Jeremy began to make a series of significant decisions. He discovered ways to fulfil some of the dreams that he thought were impossible and, as a consequence, changed his life dramatically. Rogers argued that:

'... when we provide a psychological climate that permits persons to be ... We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all of organic life - a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable. And on an even larger scale ... we are tuning in to a potent creative tendency which has formed our universe ... perhaps we are touching the cutting edge of our ability to transcend ourselves, to create new and more spiritual directions in human evolution.'<sup>17</sup>

## Reflections

Clients often feel conflicted between what they believe is expected of them and the call of their soul, and psychotherapists are placed at the heart of this conflict. Cortright remarks that '...in a transpersonal approach all...psychological work on the self is placed in a larger context of spiritual unfolding'.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, our profession is increasingly steered away from humanistic, existential and spiritual frameworks, towards symptoms management and medicalisation of mental health. To be true to its purpose, psychotherapy must do its own soul searching and return to embracing the spiritual and existential nature of humanity.'

*Jeremy now volunteers, helping people in need. He has developed his own business doing what is meaningful to him. He no longer suffers from mood swings and is satisfied with his life as it unfolds.*

\* not his real name

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## Biography

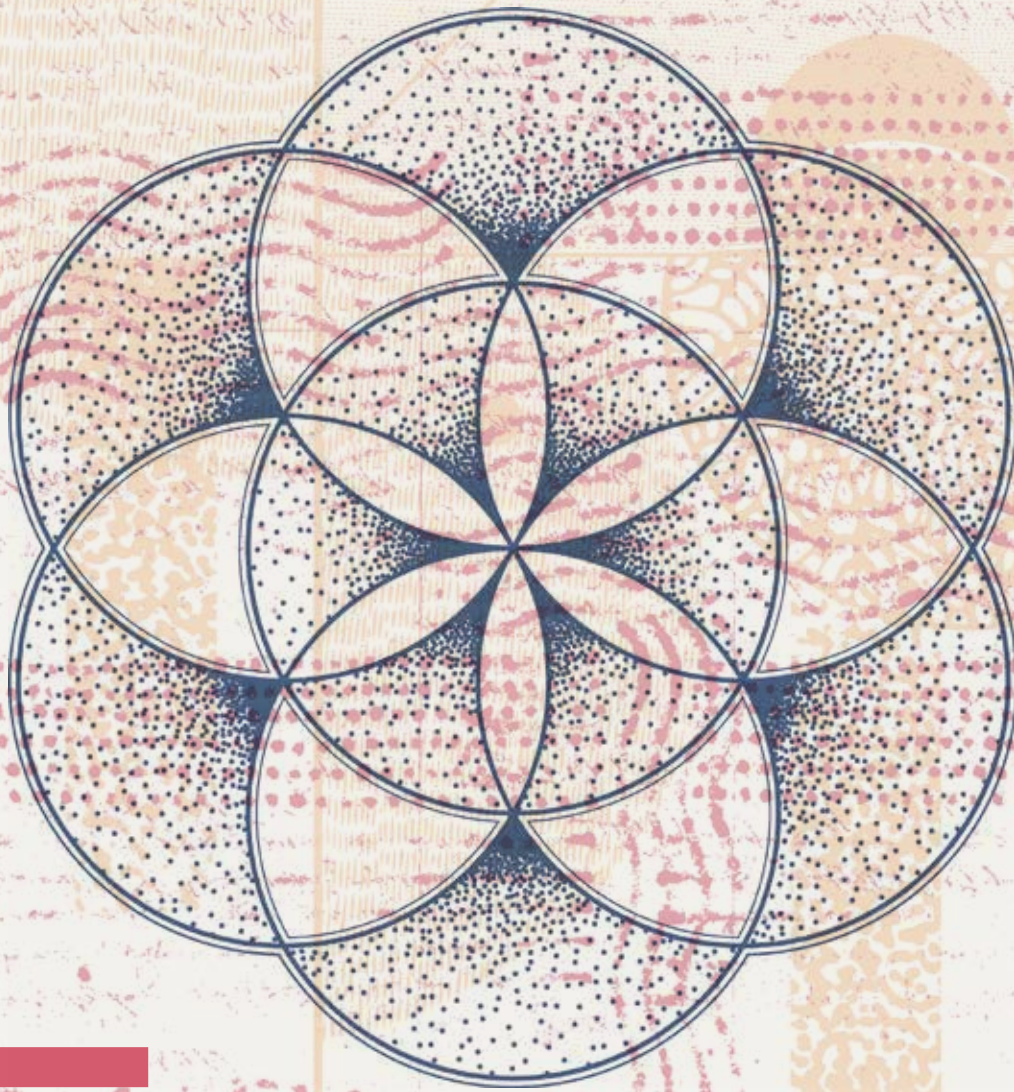


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# A home for spiritual caregivers

**William Bloom** of the Spiritual Companions Trust explains why the organisation created a register for spiritual, not religious, caregivers

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If you want to offer pastoral care or chaplaincy work in a hospital, hospice, university or prison, with a few rare exceptions, I have found that you need to demonstrate alignment with a traditional religion and faith community. When for example I did voluntary pastoral work in a prison, I was allowed in under the umbrella of the Quakers. I was not a Quaker, but the gatekeeper for the prison's chaplaincy needed any pastoral worker to come in

as part of an established faith community. So some Quaker friends brought me in as part of their team. I would not have been able to volunteer simply as a person of goodwill, with the appropriate caring skills and a generally spiritual approach to life.

Historically, chaplaincy or pastoral work was the preserve of ordained priests. In the UK, these were Christian clergy, with priests of the different denominations - mainly Catholic,

# Discussion

Anglican and Methodist – serving their particular flocks. In an increasingly multicultural society, chaplaincy expanded to include clerics from other religions, most usually Rabbis and Mullahs, and more recently Buddhists and Pagans.

Because of their shared interest in compassionate care, these chaplaincy team members from different religions are respectful and supportive of each other. They engage in *interfaith* dialogue, in which different religions listen respectfully to each other. This is different from a *multifaith* approach, where religious approaches are entwined as if they are all, in some way, expressing similar truths. In fact, a multifaith approach can cause distress to some adherents of a particular faith, because it can seem to water down its uniqueness and claims to truth. Anglican church law, for example, explicitly bans multifaith 'syncretism'.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, it is understandable that the gatekeepers to chaplaincy and pastoral roles may therefore be reluctant to welcome someone whose approach is multifaith, or more generalised and holistic.

A psychiatrist friend, for example, who volunteered to give unpaid pastoral care in the hospital where he works, was not welcomed because he was not explicitly affiliated with a particular faith community. The chaplaincy team of that hospital missed out on gaining a valuable asset.

## Providing validation

The new UK Register of Spiritual Caregivers (UKRSC) is a project of the educational charity, the Spiritual Companions Trust, which I lead, and is working to provide a helpful and constructive solution to the kind of problem I have just described.

Its purpose is twofold. The UKRSC provides a passport and validation for suitable folk, who are not aligned with a particular faith community, to take on voluntary and professional pastoral roles. It also provides the chaplaincy gatekeepers with a reliable and trustworthy reference, so that they can confidently welcome spiritual carers who are not aligned with a specific religion, but who for the sake

of semantic and cultural ease can be named as belonging to the spiritual but not religious community.

The rejection of my psychiatrist friend or my going into prison as a member of a Quaker team are not unusual. For example, in another chaplaincy context from my own experience, I needed to assert my love of Jesus before being allowed access. In that context, I did not add that I also loved Buddha, Krishna, Kuan Yin and other representatives of the great mystery that some people like to call 'God', a word with which I am generally uncomfortable because of its patriarchal associations.

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## ...a multifaith approach can cause distress to some adherents of a particular faith, because it can seem to water down its uniqueness and claims to truth

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There are also particular circumstances that have prompted the initiation of the UKRSC. Over the last decade, we in the Spiritual Companions Trust have developed a 400-hour vocational qualification, the Diploma in Practical Spirituality and Wellness, which is on the Ofqual Register.<sup>2</sup> It was originally being developed as a master's qualification at Westminster University, but we realised that academic work at that level tended to dissociate learners from the actual business of spiritual practice and compassionate care. We therefore chose to pitch it as a Level 3 vocational (pre-university) qualification so that it would, we assert, be accessible and appropriate for anyone, from hairdressers to archbishops. (Do you get more real care from a hairdresser or a priest?)

## Compassionate co-presence

At the heart of the qualification, learners foster their own understanding and practice of spirituality. This is a person-centred approach. The very first question addressed to the student is:

'In what circumstances do you most easily connect with the wonder, beauty and energy of life? How does this feel for you? What do you like to call it?'<sup>3</sup>

We then foster the skills of compassionate co-presence. This is very similar to Rogerian unconditional positive regard but, for our learners, has an explicitly spiritual dimension. We add to our own personal compassion, the benevolence that we believe permeates the universe. We also fully address the shadow aspects of spirituality, ranging from fundamentalism through to psychotic crises and spiritual breakthroughs. We particularly make explicit the power dynamics of a caring or pastoral relationship and deconstruct them.

Because the qualification is pitched as vocational, we have a wonderful mix of learners, ranging from care assistants with virtually no qualifications, through counsellors, to fully fledged professors of psychotherapy and psychiatry, as well as the occasional clergyperson.

But our graduates – and others who are equally well qualified and have similar skills – can experience difficulties accessing pastoral roles because they do not explicitly belong to a traditional faith community. The UKRSC bridges that divide.

There is also an interesting diplomatic and political dimension here, which is why we are careful to assert that we provide care for the spiritual not religious (SNR) community.





## Wariness of multifaith approaches

As I wrote above, chaplaincy workers from traditional faith communities can be wary of spiritual carers who take a multifaith approach and who claim that they can care for anyone, regardless of that person's religion and beliefs. For someone who is deeply embedded in a particular religion and its culture, who has been in it for decades, trained in it, worships in it, this multifaith assertion can be provocative. A multifaith individual, who claims they can administer to people of any and all faiths, can be perceived as presumptuous. Where is their heritage, their training, their roots — especially when compared with someone who has been dedicated to their faith for decades and may also have committed to a training of several years to become clergy? My personal belief is that the different religions do represent different aspects of the same spiritual reality, but I have learned to appreciate that this approach is often unproductive in the chaplaincy and pastoral world.

It is because of this context that the UKRSC explicitly asserts that it represents the spiritual not religious community. Chaplains and sociologists of religion are fully aware of the growth of this culture. Research shows varying statistics, but we can estimate that somewhere between 20% and 40% of the UK population is aligned with this growing community.<sup>4,5</sup>

The creation of a rigorous and trustworthy register of spiritual caregivers with the relevant codes of conduct, entry requirements and insurance, means that chaplaincy gatekeepers can comfortably welcome in voluntary and professional carers from the *spiritual not religious* community. Our code of conduct, for example, has been carefully developed over a decade, combining best practice from the worlds of both therapy and spirituality.<sup>6</sup>

This growing community also merits representation on those bodies where policy around spiritual care is developed. The UKRSC helps to achieve this.

## Person-centred enquiry

Finally, because I am writing this piece for a journal read by counsellors and psychotherapists, a more personal note. It is appropriate that you know my personal motivation in helping drive this project.

## The very first question addressed to the student is: 'In what circumstances do you most easily connect with the wonder, beauty and energy of life? How does this feel for you? What do you like to call it?'<sup>3</sup>

I do not have a psychotherapy qualification, but I was fortunate as a young man to spend three years in psychoanalysis, partly exploring whether my spiritual inclination was real or a pathology, before taking a two-year, off-grid spiritual retreat. (My parents were kind but cynical humanists). I am a meditator, educator and companion, not a therapist, but I regularly use counselling and therapy to help unravel my knots. My doctorate is in social psychology and identity politics. Reflective practice and peer supervision are embedded in my neural networks.

That said, I own to being personally, ideologically and intellectually dismayed by the disrespect I may still receive from religious conservatives on the one side and from atheistic humanists on the other. I want them to loosen up and welcome a more person-centred enquiry into spirituality.

The UK Register of Spiritual Caregivers is therefore a practical solution, providing a reliable bridge between chaplaincy gatekeepers and carers who do not belong to a traditional faith community. This means that psychotherapists and counsellors who want to give pastoral support will have easier access.

## Deconstructing religious hierarchies

It is also culturally engaged, helping to deconstruct religious power

hierarchies and build a more inclusive cultural space for holistic personal development. The main way in which it does this is in our assertion that everyone, simply by being alive, is connected to the beauty, wonder and energy of life, by whatever name you may call it. So, for us, the main task of spiritual care and spiritual education is to help people uncover how best they experience and explore this dimension. This is very different from those religions which claim some unique access to the 'truth' and whose main interest is in inducting people into their particular faith.

My experience is that one can go into almost any space and ask the questions that I mentioned above: *In what circumstances do you most easily connect with the wonder, beauty and energy of life? How does this feel for you? What do you like to call it?*<sup>6</sup>

A good, interesting and creative conversation will always follow.

For more information about the register, see: <https://spiritualcompanions.org>

## Biography



**William Bloom** is director of the Spiritual Companions Trust. His books include *The Power of Modern Spirituality*, *The Endorphin Effect* and *Feeling Safe*.

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# Simplifying life *with Rén*

Yen Ooi applies Confucius' principles  
to her personal life

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I've worked as a project manager in different industries and roles for more than 20 years, and my CV says that I am organised, good at time management and prioritisation. These are positive traits that every employer wants to see, and though I am all those things for work, I've only recently learnt that I'm not very good at applying them to my personal life and wellbeing.

It was my PhD in Chinese science fiction that led me to research ancient Chinese teachings. And that is when I discovered I could use Confucius' teachings at a personal level. I was surprised at how effective his

philosophy on Rén is when it comes to developing a direct and simple mindfulness practice. It has brought clarity and organisation to my life and mind. As a worrier and overthinker, this was a welcome discovery.

In Confucius' philosophy, Rén is one of five virtues - and the most important. The Chinese character for Rén 仁 combines the word for 'person' 亻 and the number 'two' 二, representing human connection. In the past, it has been translated into English, using words like 'benevolence' and 'humane', but these limit the concept of Rén, which explores our (human) relationship with the world around us, including people and nature.

My journey towards simplicity wasn't as straightforward as it may seem in my retelling. It was only once I had finished writing a book about my mindfulness practice using Rén that it struck me - all the tools that Confucius has given me through his teachings are there to help me organise and simplify my life. Through Rén, Confucius

taught that understanding our role in this world can help us be better humans, and this begins with ourselves. In project management, I would start by doing this anyway, as clarity in roles and responsibilities always simplifies the workings of a project.

It seems so obvious now. Granted, I would still need to seek out tools – like those from Confucius – to guide me, but why had I never thought to apply my project-management skills to my own life? Most of us would apply organisational skills for various things, like shopping, moving house, a DIY project, or even when we're having friends round. We plan, prepare and take action on our lists and schedules. But what about our relationships, our thoughts, our mental health?

There is something romantic in thinking that life is just to be lived and enjoyed, and practical ideas of organisation should only be applied to work or specific events or projects. This is emphasised by popular media and storytelling that often tell us to just 'be in the moment' and remind us that 'life is too short'. This may bring joy, but living in the moment doesn't have to be complex, and life being too short shouldn't stop us from getting organised. When we talk about our lives and relationships, it has become trendy to use words like 'messy' and 'complicated'. As if having a tidy or simple life would make us uninteresting! The contrary seems to be true – as time often feels fleeting, taking control of our lives through mindfulness creates a sense of organisation that can help us be more efficient and effective, and have more fun!

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## Through Rén, Confucius taught that understanding our role in this world can help us be better humans, and this begins with ourselves

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### Rén philosophy

Confucius' teachings and wisdom were passed on to his immediate disciples, who compiled them soon after his death into a collection called *The Analects*. These, together with continued teaching through his disciples, has helped to uphold his philosophy. More than two millennia later, we are able to draw upon them to help simplify our lives by applying a sense of order.

*Rén is most beautiful. If we are wise, when there is a choice, why would we not choose Rén?*

The Analects 4:1

### Practical applications

Counsellors and psychotherapists may find it useful to explore how Rén can be used as part of a reflective or self-care practice, or may even like to use the exercises as a creative tool to support their clients' reflections.

In my book, *Rén: the ancient Chinese art of finding peace and fulfilment*,<sup>1</sup> I share some areas to explore and simple reflective exercises. I have included some of them here:

**Understanding our roles.** In our lives, we will tend to find ourselves in specific positions in different situations. Confucius simplified these into three roles:

- 1) parent-guardian, in which we seek to nurture and protect those around us.
- 2) child-follower, in which we respect and learn from others.
- 3) sibling-collaborator, in which we share and engage to support each other.

These roles are applicable in any setting. For example, at a school, the teachers would be parent-guardians, the students child-followers, and among the students or among the teachers, they would see each other as sibling-collaborators. At work, senior management would be parent-guardians, junior staff would be child-followers, and those who are in similar ranks would see each other as sibling-collaborators. These roles dictate to a certain degree our responsibilities and thus our actions. This allows us to view different situations in a more organised manner.

*Being Rén depends on no one but yourself.*

The Analects 12:1

## Reflection

If there is an interaction or relationship in your life that bothers you, consider your role in the situation. Are you in a position to nurture and guide? Or should you be learning from the other person? Or, are you peers, who would benefit from mutual support? Whichever you decide upon, list down the reasons why you feel that you should be in such a position. Is it your seniority, knowledge, status, etc? Once you feel content with your position and reasons for it, consider if the other person is aware of it, and whether that influences the way they interact with you too.

Giving yourself time to explore relationships in this way will help clarify what you feel are your responsibilities in a specific situation. And knowing that you've acted appropriately, or finding errors in your ways, but setting yourself on a path for improvement – even if it was an uncomfortable situation – will allow you to move on from it.

**Aspire, rather than desire.** It's common for us to use achievements as a measure of success, and being goal oriented can give us a purpose or drive in life; but we need to be careful of the types of goals we set for ourselves. Things we desire are things that are out of our control and that rely on others (such as a promotion at work, or a gift from

# Reflections

a friend). These desires cannot be achieved by our actions alone and can therefore become problematic. In Rén, our focus is always inward, towards ourselves, and here we can consider using aspirations as our goals instead. We can aspire to be better at our jobs – to improve on certain skills, take on more responsibility. This offers better opportunities for progression. If there are material things that we would like, we can aspire to be better at saving money to afford them. If it is attention that we seek from others, we can work towards being better friends.

*Do not worry about being unappreciated.  
Rather, aspire to be worthy of appreciation.*  
The Analects 4:14

## Reflection

Write a list of your desires. These can be things that you want or even goals that you would like to achieve. Consider whether they are reliant upon others. If they are, rewrite them as aspirations instead. Think about aligning them with your self-development goals as specific action points.

When we are able to reduce, or even remove, the expectations we place upon others in our lives, retaining only goals that we can action ourselves, we are relieved of unnecessary burdens and anxiety.

**Reflect and learn.** At the end of each day, we can take time to reflect on all that has passed through the day – good and bad. In Rén, this practice is an act of kindness to ourselves, so that we may move on from things that burden us. Through reflection, we consider what went well and what can be improved. Taking the time to acknowledge errors or areas for improvement creates opportunities for setting healthy aspirations. At the same time, recognising our positive achievements – even (and especially) day-to-day tasks – gives us permission to appreciate all the wonderful things that we do, which are often ignored.

*Rén is within reach when we learn extensively,  
deepen our resolve, question in detail and reflect  
on issues.*

The Analects 19:6

## Reflection

Try and check in with yourself often – throughout the day or week – taking note of the range of things that make you emotional (happy, sad, anxious, angry, etc). Be kind and gentle with yourself in this process.

Learning what makes us happy and content means that we can try and create more opportunities to nurture this. And acknowledging what brings up more difficult emotions can help us understand more about ourselves and, thus, how to cope better.

When we begin to 'tidy up' our lives using small tools like the ones above, we can start to find more time and space for ourselves to embrace things that heal and fulfil us, like our friendships, hobbies, or even just rest!

*The \*learned is free from worries and fears.  
If our conscience is clear, what have we to worry  
about or fear?*

The Analects 12:4

For me, I have found that since practising Confucius' teachings of Rén, I am calmer and more aware – with more patience and headspace to engage with things 'in the moment'. I'm able to step back more often during the day and just enjoy what I'm doing, focusing on the company I'm with and making memories that bring positive energy into my life. Being organised in my mind means that I can be content with the things I do. It allows me to be better with my thoughts, especially the negative ones. Practising Rén mindfulness helps me to dialogue with self-criticism by coming up with plans for improvement. It also reminds me to take stock of my positive achievements and to acknowledge them with celebrations.

Like Rén, life is a journey to experience. When someone goes on a trip, we often wish them 'an uneventful journey' because we want it to be smooth and enjoyable. Life doesn't need to be messy. It can even be uneventful as it means we will be content and fulfilled through the experience.

## Notes:

- \*learned is Confucius' reference to someone who is studying and practising to become Rén.
- Confucius (Kǒng Qiū 孔丘) was a philosopher and teacher from ancient China. Born c 551 BCE, his teachings have been with us for over 2,000 years, and in that time, they have been assimilated into parts of East Asian and South-East Asian culture.
- *The Analects* is a collection of Confucius' teachings and wisdom that he passed on to his students and is believed to have been compiled by his immediate disciples soon after his death.

A copy of Yen Ooi's book, *Rén: the ancient Chinese art of finding peace and fulfilment*, is available to review. If you would like to write a review, and keep the book, please contact: [thresholds@bacp.co.uk](mailto:thresholds@bacp.co.uk).

## Biography



**Yen Ooi** is a writer-researcher whose works explore East and South-East Asia culture, identity and values. A PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London, she writes fiction, non-fiction, poetry and computer games. Her latest book, *Rén: the ancient Chinese art of finding peace and fulfilment*, is now available. [www.yenooi.com](http://www.yenooi.com)

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# Travelling gently



**Alistair Ross**

## Alistair Ross meditates on the strength to be found in gentleness

A friend of mine, an equine therapist, has recently acquired a new horse, Beau (French for 'beautiful'). I went to see Sarah and meet Beau, an ex-competition horse, who was as beautiful as I had been led to believe. As I stood next to him, he nudged me, looking for treats, making his considerable presence felt. He was both strong and gentle.

Travelling gently with or alongside another's soul is a privilege we encounter in such rare moments that they need to be treasured. Yet when was the last time we allowed another person to travel gently with our soul?

I then stood at the top of the paddock, overlooking a secluded valley in a picturesque part of rural Devon. The experience was breathtaking and not just because of the chilling wind. Watching a herd of horses canter and play together was elemental and freeing. Some things are hard to express, but are deeply felt, which is the whole rationale of equine therapy. So many spiritual experiences cannot be put into words but touch deep places in us, and our clients. Our fumbling words never fully capture the encounter, but still we try. As the horses cantered down the hill, they evoked verse:

*Wind-blown mane  
Soft thunder of hooves  
Snorts of delight  
Movement  
Fierce feelings of aliveness*

*Wind-blown watcher  
Soft heart, beating  
Transport of delight  
Stillness  
Fierce feelings of aliveness*

All of us long for a person, a community, a set of religious and spiritual beliefs, or a series of ethical and philosophical values that allow us to find and appreciate our strength, while also encountering a gentleness in us and others. If only it were that easy. Gentleness can often be confused with weakness, when it is anything but. My osteopath was previously a European kickbox champion, so her strength is not in question. Yet when she treated my broken ankle, she used just two fingers to massage and stretch the damaged joint and ligaments. Her gentleness was far more effective than any other form of physical therapy, leading to a 'good-enough' recovery. Part of our skill as a therapist is to know when to hold back the power and knowledge we possess, and when to focus instead on the use of two metaphorical fingers to bring healing to a damaged psyche.

### Laying down our defences

Travelling gently with or alongside another's soul is a privilege we encounter in such rare moments that they need to be treasured. Yet, when was the last time we allowed another person to travel gently with our soul? It calls us to lay down our defences, allowing another person to enter into what feels sacred. I can own that my best defences are (surprise, surprise) intellectual. Yet this is difficult to say because of psychological scars from my early punitive educational experiences that literally beat the spirit out of me. An exploitation of power led to punishment rather than any understanding or gentleness. No wonder I find gentleness a highly attractive trait in others and one which I try to cultivate

in myself. I am not always successful. Yet, even our moments of failure offer a fresh opportunity to travel gently with ourselves and others, captured in the title of a book by my friend and philosopher of religion Bev Clack, *How to be a Failure and Still Live Well*.<sup>1</sup>

### Finding aliveness

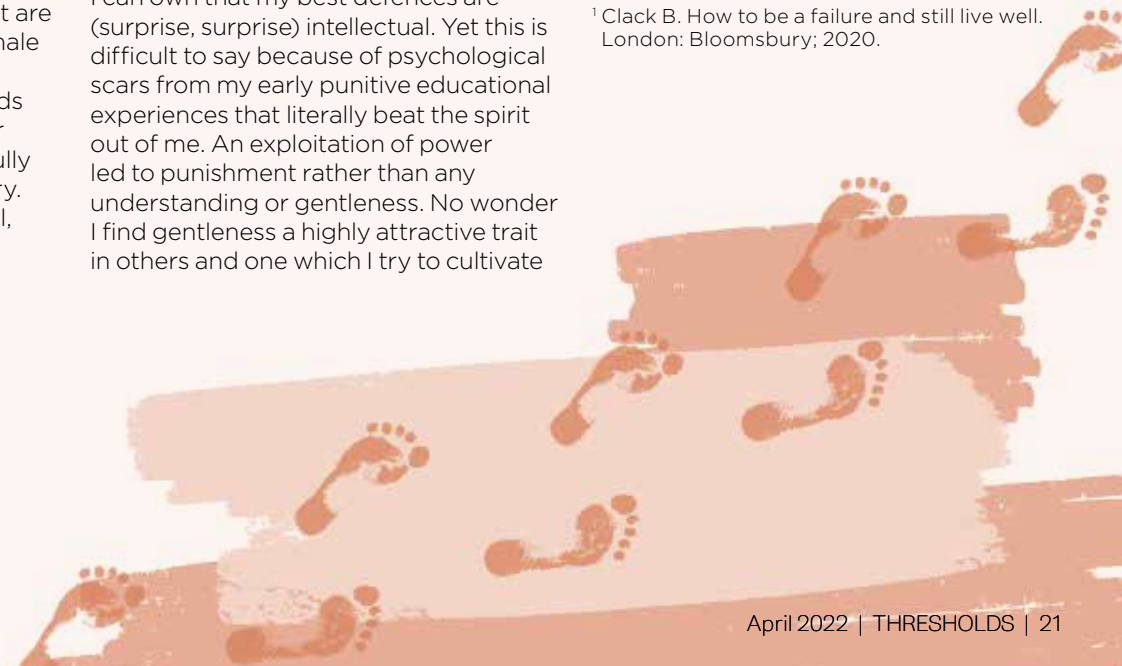
One enjoyable and life-enhancing task we can set ourselves in the coming months is to find our aliveness as we travel gently, backwards, sideways or forwards. This aliveness may be buried, it may be lost, and so we need to start searching. We may become anxious or distracted. We may be grieving, or caught up in loss, or facing losses we fear will come. We may be struggling just to keep ourselves afloat. I suggest it is at just such times that we can take a moment to pause and become thankful we have a life, and a life that deserves to be lived fully. We may need to learn to be gentle with ourselves. We may need to ask a friend for their insights into us, to help us in new ways. This is a demonstration of our strength, held gently. May you discover your own fierce feelings.

### Biography

**Alistair Ross** is Associate Professor of Psychotherapy at Oxford University, Director of Psychodynamic Studies and Dean of Kellogg College. His most recent book is *Introducing Psychodynamic Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Open University, 2019). He is currently writing an encyclopaedia on Freud. Alistair's research focus is on spirituality and psychoanalysis. Email: [alistair.ross@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alistair.ross@conted.ox.ac.uk)

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# Holy loitering

## Delroy Hall talks to Amy McCormack about his role as chaplain at Sheffield United Football Club

**D**elroy Hall calls his work 'holy loitering'. The BACP registered psychotherapist, who is also an ordained Christian minister and was once an athlete himself, came to the role of chaplain at Sheffield Football Club by chance four years ago after the previous chaplain decided he would be a good fit and introduced him to the club.

'Essentially, I am there as a listener. I am there for the players, the staff and the fans as well. So, on a typical day, two to two-and-a-half hours before the match, I go to the pitch and I meet people. I meet the stewards, who know me now, then I get round and speak to people who are selling food, selling merchandise. It's essentially forming relationships with people,' he said.

Delroy, who is affectionately known as 'Revs', will also see players and staff on match days and then pay a visit to the grounds in the week while training is taking place at the academy.

'It's literally putting my head around the door and saying, 'Hey, how are you doing?' and if they are busy, I know they are busy; but over the years, people have developed trust and then they start to talk and they'll open up.'

This is something that will usually take place on a one-to-one basis: 'One of the biggest issues with footballers is, 'Who can I trust?' It's not easy to share stuff about their lives with people outside, so developing trust takes time,' he said.

'Initially, I'll spend literally five minutes with the whole team, in which I will say, 'This is who I am. This is why I am here. This is my experience. I've never been a footballer at your level, but I have been an athlete, a 400m hurdler, so I know what it's like, training, getting injured, not training, not competing, so I have some insight into the mind of an athlete.'

As a former sportsman, who is now supporting people in the same position, he is keen to emphasise that football players are people first: 'I remember very clearly, once, saying to the players: "I respect the fact that you are footballers and so forth, but I am really interested in you as men, as husbands, as fathers, as brothers, as uncles. That's what's really important to me because there is a life outside of football; so I respect your professionalism and I respect that this is what you do, but that is what my concern is."

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**...I really am interested in them as human beings because football can be quite a hard, brutal game, and men do have feelings, so how can I be of service to somebody who is going through a tough time?**

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'I finished and I was shocked because they all applauded. I really was taken aback by that. And I really am interested in them as human beings because football can be quite a hard, brutal game, and men do have feelings, so how can I be of service to somebody who is going through a tough time?'

Over his four years at the club, Delroy has had a chance to reflect on what it is about professional football that can be detrimental to a person's wellbeing. He talks about an overall culture that he likens to the Madonna song, *Material girl*, and the pressures and pitfalls of money and fame. He also talks about how precarious it can feel:

'Whatever position you play, there are many other footballers vying for that spot because footballers want to play, so that can bring pressure, and then if players get injured, they don't tell anyone because they're thinking: "If I tell someone, does that mean I won't play again, and that if another person takes my spot and has two or three good games, I will then not play in that position?" So all that type of insecurity can play on people's wellbeing.'

Part of supporting players' wellbeing involves inviting them to consider a future beyond football, and this is something the club's academy also emphasises.

'One of the questions I ask the players is, "How long have you got left in the game?" Thinking about a future, even though you are playing football, can really help people's mental wellbeing, as opposed to getting to the end and thinking, oh, I don't know what to do now.'

'You know that many footballers, once they have left the game, really hit a downward spiral because their identity was in the game and the game is no longer there. So, who am I? It's an existential crisis that they experience.'

He calls for the wider industry to become more aware of players' mental health and for wider culture change and more conversations: 'These are human beings. I know you want to see them play well on the pitch and that it's about points

# Conversations

and money, but treating someone as a human being doesn't take away from the passion of the game.

'I think chaplains' work can be seen quite often as you being there only for a crisis, but I'm very clear that before a crisis happens, we think about whether we can do any prevention. I am very committed to preventative work.'

He is particularly interested in extending thinking around equality, diversity and inclusion to consider principles of belonging, acceptance and community. He mentions the academic John Swinton, and the American writer John Williams, who have explored these concepts.

Delroy is also a committee member for Sheffield United Club Community Foundation, the community arm of the football club, and part of this role involves training staff.

'EDI is political and superficial, very tick box-ey and transactional, whereas I talk about belonging and acceptance and community as relational, so it demands more of the individual. You can create an environment in the workplace where people will really want to come to work. Belonging, acceptance and community for me are pivotal for human functioning, so that's what I share with individuals. That's the type of work I try to do, to help people to think beyond political initiatives and so forth: can we think deeper about this? It gives more meaning.'

When it comes to spirituality within the game, Delroy observes that it is often 'under the radar' and can be a 'very private' thing. He notices too that it tends to be more openly talked about among foreign players.

'I try to connect with people at a human level, so some of the fans have said, "Oh, you know, I'm not religious", and I have said, "Yeah, OK, that's fine, but there are some things that connect you with the owner of the club, the manager of the team, the captain and the other important people here." They say, "What?" And, I say: "Well, illness, difficulties in your marriage or relationships, difficulties with children, terminal illness, parents dying..." and they get it; so even though they may not be religious, we all have common human

experiences. Whether you are a billionaire or not, there are certain life events that you face, because it's life.'

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**Part of being a chaplain is being able to feel comfortable being a lemon at times, because people don't want you there, you know; they'll be thinking: "What the hell are you doing here?" But actually, you come into your own when people have difficulties, and crises and so forth, and then your place is assured**

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Delroy is also very clear that faith should not be a source of conflict: 'My parents were very committed Christians, but faith was never something that we argued about at home, ever, so I just saw them live out the faith, and when I was a pastor for 30 years, I never pressured people into making commitments of faith. For me, it's always a conversation, and you leave people to make a choice.'

He also believes it extends far beyond religion alone: 'I think spirituality's far wider and deeper than we actually think, but I think sometimes our understanding is incredibly narrow, so if somebody does not go to church, they're not spiritual. Well, I stopped believing that years ago.'

'Spirituality for me is much wider than what happens on a Sunday morning at church, or in the gurdwara, or the temple or the mosque. It's much broader, and to limit it to just the time that we gather together is to limit an understanding of God, and I just don't have that at all.'

He also draws attention to the fact that, for many at the club, the game itself is a form of spirituality: 'It's amazing; if you go to a Pentecostal church or a Charismatic church, you see people with their hands raised. You go to a football match, certainly Sheffield United, and

when they sing the chip butty song, which is the emblem of Sheffield United Football Club, you see thousands of men with their arms raised in the air, singing. For me, that is a form of worship.'

'If you talk about church, or any religious gathering, there is a social aspect to it, so there is one of worship, there is one of celebration, there is one of rejoicing. I actually think to worship is to be human.'

Often, it will be the way that Delroy lives his life rather than anything that he explicitly says about faith or spirituality that will intrigue the people around him at the club: 'Many people have asked me: "What is it about you that is so peaceful?" Then, it is an opportunity to share your experience. For me, that's about my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It's not something that is pressurising. I talk about prayer and the importance of prayer. I think it draws an interest if you live in a particular way and is often a start to a conversation. That's it.'

Delroy is aware that sometimes the presence of a chaplain is not required, or even welcome: 'When I trained as a chaplain, the first image on the screen was a lemon. Part of being a chaplain is being able to feel comfortable being a lemon at times, because people don't want you there, you know; they'll be thinking: "What the hell are you doing here?" But actually, you come into your own when people have difficulties, and crises and so forth, and then your place is assured.'

'Listening is key, without judging and condemning, because sometimes players can have these thoughts; and because it's quite a macho culture, there are certain things that you don't talk about.'

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## Biography

**Delroy Hall** is a BACP registered psychotherapist, ordained Christian minister, trainer, teacher, academic, published author, coach and mentor. He is chaplain at Sheffield United Football Club. [www.delwes.com](http://www.delwes.com)

Look out for the podcast of this conversation at *Thresholds* online: [www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/thresholds](http://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/thresholds)



# A contentious collaboration



**José Luis Leal**

## José Luis Leal explores the crossover between spirituality and therapy

Spirituality and therapy are inextricably linked, though the ways in which they interact can be controversial. Initial reactions can be polarised: either clients and therapists are eager to jump in and combine them as soon as possible, or there is an open aversion which results in trying to keep them as separate as possible. Spirituality is an inherent human dimension, especially if we understand it as a need to relate to something larger than our individuality or use it as a space where we can process many of life's situations and discover deeper meaning in them. We humans have a religious function, as Jung called it; something autonomous in the psyche that needs to experience life inwardly and have a personal relationship to the divine, or a larger reality.

### Renunciation, transformation and liberation

Let's start by considering the many areas of collaboration between therapy and spirituality. Both engage in paths of renunciation, transformation and liberation,<sup>1</sup> and involve isolation from everyday life to explore inner realities.<sup>2</sup> They are concerned with finding one's true and integrated self,<sup>3</sup> and focus on restoring healthy relationship through authentic exchange between therapist and client.<sup>4</sup>

To enhance the benefits of combining spirituality with therapy, I think an ambivalent attitude can be helpful. If we engage in spirituality with enough scepticism and doubt, we can ground and translate different spiritual experiences to nourish the client's psychological health. If therapy is approached with an open mind,

without a dogmatic perspective towards any specific therapeutic school and recognising the larger and unknowable realities in which both therapists and clients engage, the therapeutic encounter will be energised, enriched and connected to a mysterious reality where the possibilities for creativity and healing may be unlimited.<sup>5</sup>

## An ambivalent attitude protects us from going too fast

An ambivalent attitude protects us from going too fast. The hype that meditation, mindfulness, hypnosis and other spiritual practices have undergone in the past decades can lead to one-size-fits-all-type interventions, offering the promise that these practices will definitely help, or that they are the ultimate solution for psychological pain.

### Getting the timing right

I am not saying these techniques are not useful. However if their usefulness is overestimated, and if we hide our anxiety as therapists behind these techniques, or make a poor judgment call in the timing of these interventions, then spirituality and therapy can – and will – bring harm to one another.

For instance, many clients who have had previous harmful experiences in which spiritual practices played a part, may not feel comfortable with them. Clients who do not like these techniques or do not engage in spiritual practices may feel that these topics are being imposed. Other clients may need to work through something as part of the therapeutic relationship, and jumping into these practices may prevent this from arising. Others will need to strengthen their ego before dealing with the Self.

### Collaboration in practice

How would this collaboration look in the counselling room? We need to understand the spiritual dimension of our clients. If they do not want to talk about it, we can ask about what inspires them, what gives them meaning in their lives, how they transform difficult situations, which ideals or values inspire or guide their lives. At the same time, we can keep an eye open for psychological conflict reflected in spiritual issues: is this experience being used as spiritual bypassing? Can their spiritual practice illuminate the psychological wounds in a different manner? Are there any conflicts that could keep their spirituality from being grounded, and how can we gently stir them towards those issues?

As therapists working with spirituality, we are faced with a Herculean task: working in the thresholds between these two worlds, which will sometimes try to override each other. We are in the midst of spirit and matter renouncing, transforming and creating our inner and outer worlds and those of our clients.

### Biography

**José Luis Leal** has an MA in Jungian and Post-Jungian Studies from the University of Essex and an MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy from the Milton Erikson Institute in Monterrey, Mexico. He works as a psychotherapist in private practice with adults, teenagers and couples and has taught meditation workshops since 2005. José has been training with Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés since 2013. Email: [j.lealgonzalez@gmail.com](mailto:j.lealgonzalez@gmail.com)

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# Self

in internal family  
systems therapy

**Emma Redfern** talks to **Robin Shoet**  
about her new multi-author book  
showcasing supervision in the internal  
family systems model

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**A**s one of few approved internal family systems (IFS) clinical consultants in the UK, certified IFS therapist, Emma Redfern felt called to create a book for the IFS community showcasing supervision and consultation of the model. Inspired by her training in Hawkins and Shohet's seven-eyed model of supervision,<sup>1,2</sup> she developed a corresponding model for IFS, with the support of colleague Liz Martins. One aspect of this model is called the eight facets of IFS supervision. Facet 1 (the additional 'eye'), relates to Self, the 'game changer' at the heart of IFS.<sup>3</sup>

Robin Shohet recently read a pre-publication copy of the IFS supervision book, *Internal Family Systems Therapy: supervision and consultation*. Here, he talks to Emma to find out more.

**Robin:** *I haven't read all of the book yet, but it has had a very interesting impact on me and made me want to know about IFS. Could you offer a summary of what it is for readers, please?*

**Emma:** IFS posits that the natural state of humanity is one of multiplicity, with each of us having many autonomous personalities inside, called 'parts', as well as an inner healing energy, called 'Self', who is the ideal leader of the

inner system. The parts are experienced as either protective or protected. By this, we mean some parts, called 'exiles', hold aspects of experience, memories, qualities etc, called 'burdens,' that the system feels are dangerous. The parts called 'protectors' have the task or job of keeping these vulnerable and wounded parts exiled so that we can each function and survive well enough in our lives and in our societies. IFS can be used as a psycho-spiritual practice for living, and it is a transformative psychotherapy<sup>4</sup> in which exiles can release their burdens, return to their natural state, freeing protectors to find new and often less demanding roles inside.

**Robin:** *Tell me more about how IFS differs from other therapies that conceptualise 'parts' or 'subpersonalities', say voice dialogue or the subpersonalities of psychosynthesis?*

**Emma:** It's about building relationships between the parts, and between Self and these parts, which can bring more harmony inside. IFS also includes healing and transforming those parts that need and want healing by using the IFS model and the transformative relationship with Self.

An aim of Hal and Sidra Stone's voice dialogue is '...to learn how to channel

every self, as well as our vulnerability, through an aware ego.'<sup>5</sup> Another goal is to learn to embrace all the inner 'selves', which they might also call the parts. I believe they place less emphasis on healing parts than IFS does.

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**Self is our innate ability to connect and be present, to not fear and to know we are connected to life. Self-energy is both immanent and transcendent**

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**Robin:** *How do I know if I'm in my 'Self' or not?*

**Emma:** Self is our innate ability to connect and be present, to not fear and to know we are connected to life. Self-energy is both immanent and transcendent. When Self-energy is actively available in a person, it can be recognised by the qualities (known in IFS as the eight Cs) of curiosity, compassion, connectedness, courage, confidence, clarity, creativity and calm. In addition, we open to an attitude of non-agenda, openness and acceptance that comes alongside our attachment to things - which is something the parts bring to our lives.



**Robin:** So, if I called this ‘Self’ your ‘Buddha nature’, would you object to that?

**Emma:** No, not at all, and in fact Schwartz has co-written a book in which he draws out the parallels with the various spiritual descriptions of *atman*, Buddha nature and so on.<sup>6</sup> They are different names for the same stuff we all swim in.

**Robin:** How about you ask me how I understand ‘Self’?

**Emma:** Robin, how do you understand Self?

**Robin:** As I understand it, we are born with this Self with a capital S as part of our inheritance, our humanity, just as we are born with faces and arms and legs. It is both personal to us and impersonal simultaneously. The parts, as I understand it, are what I would call introjects: the beliefs we have swallowed undigested about ourselves and the world around us.

**Emma:** Well, in IFS terms, we are born with parts, some of whom do take on such beliefs. Parts are also more than the beliefs they hold; they are how Self navigates the world.

**Robin:** So, some parts get reinforced by experience, and yet it’s not all about taking in beliefs because you can look at a baby and think it has a very distinct personality.

**Emma:** Yes, it has distinct parts active and available in life. However, parts do what they need to do to survive, and some may take on extreme beliefs and characteristics from authority figures or because of difficult experiences. On

the other hand, you can sense a baby’s Self-energy. If the baby has good-enough holding, the baby’s parents’ Self-energy acts as a tuning fork for the infant’s Self-energy to resonate. Children of Self-led parents may, for example, grow up with fewer parts in conflict inside.

**Robin:** So, you’ve got these different parts and one of the things the book talks about is blending and differentiating the parts. So, if I have understood it correctly, if a part blends, one minute I can be compassionate and the next minute I could just turn on you.

**Emma:** That’s right. I often use the metaphor of an inner psychic bus, full of parts and Self, and it’s a question of who is driving the bus. One minute there is compassion and openness (metaphorically speaking, Self is in the driving seat), and the next minute, as you say, someone’s having a tantrum or is in tears driving the bus. This happens when a part in distress is blending strongly and that Self is no longer available to drive (ie lead the inner system). Ideally, we don’t want parts who are terrified driving our inner psychic bus and choosing who we marry or how we parent. This happens; it’s a fact of life; but ideally, parts can draw upon the resourcing that Self provides.

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**Ideally, we don’t want parts who are terrified driving our inner psychic bus and choosing who we marry or how we parent. This happens; it’s a fact of life; but ideally, parts can draw upon the resourcing that Self provides**

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**Robin:** And how do you help a part differentiate? Having a part drive could be compared to driving while under the influence of alcohol, and, of course, people who are driving under the influence of alcohol have a false sense of how capable they are at driving. So

*how do you help a person recognise they’ve got a part in the driving seat?*

**Emma:** Well, that’s a major focus in the three levels of IFS training. For now, I’ll provide examples of differentiating parts of a person in a way with which readers might be familiar.

When reflecting back what a client has told me, I might say, ‘Let me see if I’ve understood. When you first got the news, a part got triggered that felt angry and expressed that, then it sounded like a part felt bad for being angry.’ I may then invite the client to turn to what is happening in the moment, and say: ‘And now you are looking tearful and I’m wondering how old you feel in this moment?’

Another example of differentiation would be, ‘As you notice the part of you who really needs to make a decision on this, how do you feel towards it?’ If the client responds that they feel calm and compassionate (for example), then this suggests the presence of Self-energy. As a therapist, I would try to facilitate the Self of the client meeting the part.

Also, as a therapist, I am working internally with my parts to have my Self available inside me and for the client. So, it is important therapists spend time getting to know and differentiate their inner systems.

**Robin:** Emma, that reminds me, in your chapter you write about your early life – about being in an incubator and what that did for you.

*I love autobiographical stuff because we are all living out our autobiographies – I don’t care what people say. This is my own story: I spent three weeks alone in hospital after my mother gave birth by caesarean, having been very miserable carrying me. She’d wanted an abortion, but she couldn’t leave my father because she had me. So, I’ve got a really deep pattern for dissociation and I’m quite difficult to touch. To compensate for this, I became very smart. It was very useful as a survival strategy. So, I’ve used a combination of being disassociated and being able to go up into my head and get my information from outside my body and from my intuition. My cleverness*

has worked brilliantly for me, but it's all a defence at some level.

**Emma:** Yes, and that's one reason I love IFS so much because it brings out in us an appreciation for those defences or protector activities. For example, I would like to take a moment to appreciate those protectors you've just highlighted. They have helped you survive and flourish in the world. You went on to develop your supervision model, with colleagues, and this has been highly influential for me, in my training as a supervisor, which in turn influenced my journey towards getting this book published.

**Robin:** I love the use of the word 'protectors' because it is a language without judgment. IFS offers a beautiful framework and hope for working to release core beliefs, while honouring the protective layer. So, conceptually, it's not difficult to understand. Why does it require so much training?

**Emma:** I like that question. Although it's very simple in terms of its premisses, it is hard to put into action. So, for example, therapists have lots of therapist parts that might want to rescue or counter and control and tell a client to change their thoughts, or whatever. So, it's helping those parts to trust therapist's Self and give space to follow the client, meet the client (their parts and Self) and learn to not know what's going to come out of the client's mouth before it comes out of the client's mouth. That's hard for us therapists sometimes, so practice helps with this. There are mantras and acronyms we pick up in the training, such as Just Ask (ie ask the client and the client's part(s)) or WAIT (Why Am I Talking?).

It's the relational aspects we need to practise.

**Robin:** I think IFS appeals because it's saying what we all know intuitively.

**Emma:** Yes, I think that's part of the integrity of the model. Schwartz learnt it from his clients. They taught him, it was what was coming up between them, and he was noticing it and trying things, getting things wrong and the client would steer him right again. IFS is organic and intuitive when parts don't

try and control things, do things their way, or approach the process in a way that they learned from previous non-IFS therapy training, which may not be compatible in the moment with IFS.

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**...as a therapist I am working internally with my parts to have my Self available inside me and for the client. So, it is important therapists spend time getting to know and differentiate their inner systems**

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**Robin:** One of the reasons why I'm sympathetic to IFS, is a shared awareness that the best resource you have as a supervisor is to know yourself and that your job is also to help the therapist to know themselves.

*In the interview with Schwartz in the book, he says he doesn't need to know a lot about the client and that's something we have in common. I say there is no client, there is only the therapist's version of the client ... the person in front of you is talking about themselves ... I've gone further and have even said to supervisees, 'Just think about the client and we'll tune in.' I also thought when I read the interview with him, well I just say the same thing in different language. What he's talking about is that difficulties in the therapy are always the problem of the countertransference of the therapist.*

**Emma:** Indeed, and hopefully readers of this article and the book will be inspired to learn more about the model, and about their own inner worlds, as well as bringing curiosity and compassion to others in their worlds. Thank you, Robin, for being an inspiration and speaking with me today.

**Robin:** Thank you. And, if readers are interested in IFS, what should they do next?

**Emma:** I find one of the best ways to find out more is to have IFS therapy, to learn it from the inside. They can also find out more about the IFS training available by visiting the IFS UK website: [internalfamilyystemstraining.co.uk](https://internalfamilyystemstraining.co.uk)

#### Biographies



**Emma Redfern** (BACP senior accredited psychotherapist and supervisor, certified IFS therapist and approved IFS clinical consultant) currently works online from Devon in the south-west of England. She is editor of a multi-author book, *Internal Family Systems Therapy: supervision and consultation*, due to be published in July 2022 by Routledge. Details of IFS supervision training can be found at: <https://emmaredfern.co.uk>



**Robin Shohet** is a pioneer of supervision. He co-wrote *In Love with Supervision* (2020) with Joan Shohet, which is a record of their 40-plus years of working together in this field. Co-author of four editions of *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, his edited works include *Passionate Supervision* and *Supervision as Transformation*. For details of his books, training in the seven-eyed model and more, see: <https://cstdlondon.co.uk>

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Look out for Emma and Robin's *Ten minutes with...* interviews at *Thresholds* online: [www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/thresholds](http://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/thresholds)



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Therapy,  
beauty *and*  
*truth*



## Dorothy Hamilton contemplates the presence of beauty in the therapy room

**B**eauty is not much spoken of in our profession – certainly not in my own branch of it, the psychoanalytic one. I find this surprising, in view of its importance in our lives. Not only is it understood almost universally to matter to people in ordinary ways – a sudden view, a baby animal, a loved piece of music, to which we respond with immediate delight – but it has been acclaimed by great thinkers throughout history as essential to our nature. C14 Mohammedan mystic Hafez found that the essence of life is the expression of beauty,<sup>1</sup> and Dostoevsky suggested: ‘Beauty will save the world’.<sup>2</sup> Religious leaders, sometimes referred to as the predecessors of psychotherapists, have ranked beauty with the transcendentals of love and truth.

**...many of us understand beauty to be beyond words, though, if challenged, might say it is intrinsic to what we do**

Our own founding fathers knew its importance. Freud, while deploring the fact that ‘psychoanalysis, unfortunately, has scarcely anything to say about beauty’, claimed that it was ‘...essential to the civilised world’,<sup>3</sup> and Jung called it ‘...one of the most excellent of God’s creations’.<sup>4</sup> Yet the analyst Meira Likerian claims that the aesthetic capacity has been ‘...assigned to purgatory’ in psychoanalytic theory;<sup>5</sup> and James Hillman suggests that beauty has actually been repressed into the unconscious mind of the profession: ‘...that factor which is most important but most unrecognized in the world of our psychological culture, could be defined as “beauty”, for that is what is ignored, omitted, absent’.<sup>6</sup>

This absence might possibly be accounted for by the strong association of beauty with spirituality. Any close consideration of beauty inevitably points to the spiritual dimension of human experience, one that has gained

# Creative self



widespread recognition in psychoanalytic thinking only comparatively recently, perhaps because it has been conflated with organised religion. Here, it is interesting that Freud's term, *die Seele*, may be seen to encompass spiritual aspects of our nature: Bettelheim, in *Freud and Man's Soul*, deplores the translation of *die Seele* into 'mind' in the English Standard Edition, so discounting the spiritual connotations of the German word.<sup>7</sup>

Then again, it may simply be that many of us understand beauty to be beyond words, though, if challenged, might say it is intrinsic to what we do. I am not convinced that this is a sufficient answer, and believe that beauty should play a greater part in our discourse, and indeed in that of all psychotherapies, though those from other modalities will be better qualified than I to comment on this.

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**Hopkins' phrase, 'self flashes off frame and face', might have been written with our work in mind.<sup>12</sup> It recalls the immediacy with which beauty can catch us in the work with our patients**

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Its absence may be thought particularly puzzling too, in view of the close affinity of beauty with truth, a central plank of psychoanalysis, seeking as it does to discover the underlying realities of experience. The beauty-truth connection has been amply illustrated. Plato said that only in the contemplation of absolute beauty are we '...in contact not with a reflection but with the truth'.<sup>8</sup> Keats famously equated beauty and truth, and also declared: 'I never feel certain of any truth, but for the clear perception of its beauty.'<sup>9</sup> But we do not need recourse to philosophy or theology to see the connection in our own lives. The most obvious example is likely to strike us when we look at the person we are in love with, or at our own baby. At such moments of intense love, the person perceived is beautiful to our eyes (even if we recognise others might judge differently), and this is invariably accompanied by a sense of truth, the feeling of 'this is what it's all about', this is reality. The same deep emotional response is likely to be felt for scenes of great natural beauty.

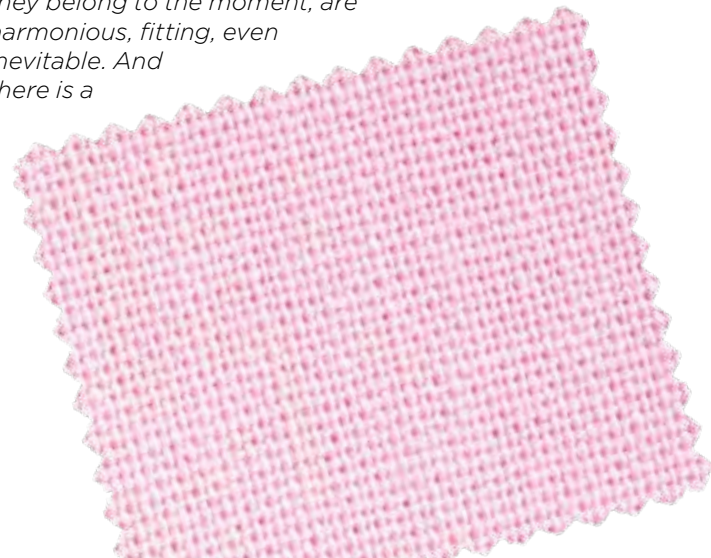
Beauty is integral to the search for truth and must thereby hold a central place in the therapeutic encounter, acknowledged or otherwise. Hopkins'

phrase, 'self flashes off frame and face', might have been written with our work in mind.<sup>10</sup> It recalls the immediacy with which beauty can catch us in the work with our clients. Since my own explorations into the significance of beauty in psychotherapy, taken while writing my book, *A Place for Beauty in the Therapeutic Encounter*,<sup>11</sup> I have experienced an added sensitivity to beauty in working with my psychoanalytic patients, and I give extended examples of two of these in the book. Each was deeply influenced by beauty in some way during the course of their therapy, and each powerfully illustrated for me what Donald Meltzer calls 'the beauty of the method'.<sup>12</sup>

Meltzer, one of the very few analysts to give close attention to the subject, speaks in his book, *The Apprehension of Beauty*, of the '...beauty of the method which Freud discovered and developed, a method that enables two people to have the most interesting conversation in the world...'.<sup>12</sup> This may culminate in a time when patient and analyst come to recognise the beauty of what they are doing together, something most likely to happen in the later stages of the work. It is the sense of fit, of rightness, even of poetry; it recalls Wilfred Bion's 'becoming O in the therapy'. And he suggests we should bear in mind that we are 'presiding over a process of great beauty'.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the analyst Leon Wurmser, speaking of 'the feeling of fit', describes 'the feeling tone of insight' between analyst and patient, comparing such moments to '...the happiness described by artists when they have found the right form and by scientists when they have discovered the right formulation. In both instances a type of beauty is attained'.<sup>14</sup>

And to quote from my own book:

*'While the whole psychoanalytic idea, and way of working, together with the principles that govern them, may be called beautiful, Meltzer's phrase seems to belong particularly to a time that may happen when the method comes into its own and becomes, as it were, immanent in the process evolving between the two participants. This is the realisation of what Meltzer calls 'aesthetic reciprocity'. Here, words or silences come seemingly from beyond conscious control; they belong to the moment, are harmonious, fitting, even inevitable. And there is a*





trust, or knowledge, that the other is equally in tune and will speak words that belong, to be responded to accordingly. The utterances are to be trusted because the source from which they arise is trustworthy. It is as though one were speaking in obedience to something independent of oneself, yet entirely oneself. This, one supposes, is, or closely approximates to, Bion's 'becoming' psychoanalysis.<sup>11</sup>

Such experiences call for an image more expressive than words. The Aeolian harp, in which art and nature combine, perhaps provides a fitting analogy. Jung said: 'The utterances of the heart – unlike those of the discriminating intellect – always relate to the whole. The heartstrings sing like an Aeolian harp only under the gentle breath of a mood, an intuition, which does not drown the song but listens. What the heart hears are the great, all-embracing things of life, the experiences which we do not arrange ourselves but which happen to us.'<sup>15</sup>

The harp suggests an openness to, and resonance with, the free-floating currents below the surface of the session, which may provide a key for something more profound than what is being talked about.

The harp image is used by Murray Cox and Alice Theilgaard, as described in their book, *Mutative Metaphors in Psychotherapy: the Aeolian mode*.<sup>16</sup> All psychotherapy depends upon metaphor and analogy, and to that extent is based in the aesthetic dimension of experience (as fully explored by Meg Harris Williams in her book, *The Aesthetic Development: the poetic spirit of psychoanalysis*<sup>17</sup>). But the Aeolian mode is a method based explicitly in the aesthetic. It is a way of listening for the metaphor in the patient's communications that confronts the therapist with an 'aesthetic imperative' – an 'irresistible summons' to respond, as the harp 'picks up the music of the wind'. The therapist's 'associative resonance', and the client's response, give them both '...augmented access to the patient's inner world [which] is catalysed by poetic association and poetic induction'.<sup>16</sup> Using this mode in their work with psychiatrically ill patients, Cox and Theilgaard say: 'An image could safely hold experience which was too painful, too brittle or too broken to be firm enough to tolerate psychoanalysis'.<sup>16</sup> They frequently describe the mode in images of beauty, as when citing Heidegger's examples of poesis, the process of '...calling into existence something that was not there before'.<sup>16</sup> This, they say, is not only of a poet creating a poem, but also of '...the blooming of a blossom, the coming-out of a butterfly from a cocoon, the plummeting of a waterfall when the snow begins to melt'. They quote Gaston Bachelard: '...the image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface.'<sup>18</sup>

The harp is depicted on the cover of my book. It was written in the hope of shedding some light on what has hitherto been a somewhat shadowy corner of our thinking, and to suggest the value to us of bringing beauty more fully into consciousness in relation to work with our clients.

## Biography



**Dorothy Hamilton** is Chair of the Association for Group and Individual Psychotherapy (AGIP); a founder member of the College of Psychoanalysts; and Honorary Fellow of the UK Council for Psychotherapy. She holds an MA with distinction in Psychology of Religion from Heythrop College, London University, in which she mapped the language of psychoanalysis to that of religious experience.

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# My embodied spirituality

**Maria Kefalogianni**



In this column, writers talk about how spiritual experiences shape their understanding of the world

## Maria Kefalogianni shares the healing that took place after a difficult birth

In September 2020, I gave birth to my second child. The first time around, I experienced a magnificent, natural homebirth. This time, my baby was delivered with forceps. The wait was agonising, the labour long, and the birth very traumatic.

This experience, along with pandemic restrictions and sleepless nights, left a toll on my body.

Some months later, in July 2021, I asked my friend to offer a sound healing session. I felt this would be an important moment. The vision that came through during the healing was a woman's body on the floor on her knees. I didn't attribute any meaning. I simply observed and let go. I am grateful I often tend to forget these experiences. I suspect it is a way for my mind to try to remain neutral and in a receiving state.

Two days later, I experienced acute groin pain, which affected my ability to walk. Interestingly, I noticed that this pain arrived the same day I took the decision to access therapy for some further support to process the experience of my second birth. Was it my body responding to my mind? I had a deep intuition that this experience was my body's wisdom needing to

process/release some of the birth trauma. My whole self was opening up to something deep: it felt preparatory.

At night, the pain was so acute that it took my breath away. I had to leave my bed so that I didn't wake my husband. I soon felt that I was being guided by my body towards my living room, and to the yoga mat that happened to have been left unfolded in the middle of the room. I placed my forehead on the ground. In that moment I felt a compelling urge to seek guidance from my guides/spirit. In that state of opening, one can feel messages emerge effortlessly into consciousness. The message I heard was 'Surrender. Give us your pain. Let us hold you. We are all here ready to deliver your birth, to catch your head if you are ready to push with your feet.' This didn't make any sense in the moment.

My cognitive mind had taken a back seat. Then an intuitive knowing emerged. I felt that this pain wasn't only mine. The trauma held in the pelvis of the women before me seemed to bodily emerge. I had a strong transcendental sense of my ancestors accompanying me: my aunts and grandmothers. The more I acknowledged their presence and pain, the more my physical pain intensified. My body began to shake and move. I felt spontaneous tremors. I felt a compelling urge to state my boundaries on this spiritual plane. My body was calling for a spiritual disentanglement. I shouted: 'No'. It felt cathartic. This felt very significant, but I was yet to understand how or why it felt important.

When deep transformative embodied experiences occur, they are often accompanied with immediate changes in day-to-day life.

The ripples of this particular journey within spread far and wide. The following day, female relatives got in touch and shared things with me that they had never said before. I had a sense that on some spiritual/transcendental level, we had connected more meaningfully. On reflection, a disentanglement of spiritual knots between me and people in my wider family took place: the healing of an archetypal wound that runs deep and manifests as me taking the role of 'rescuer' and 'mediator' in my family.

## When deep transformative embodied experiences occur, they are often accompanied with immediate changes in day-to-day life

I find the way I now respond to family conflict is different. I lean in deeper and yet with a stronger sense of non-enmeshment. My boundaries feel more embodied and solid than before and, paradoxically, effortless. A new sense of grounding and power has emerged from within that feels more tangible in my day-to-day interactions. It has cemented my sense of attunement with my own body through a process of surrender and trust.

### Biography

**Maria Kefalogianni** originates from Crete. She is a trainer in the counselling department at the University of Salford, where she teaches across all Bsc/Msc counselling programmes. She is also a supervisor trainer and sound healing practitioner. She leads on bereavement and loss and shares leadership on the PostGrad Certificate in Supervision. Maria's current research interests are spirituality/heuristic inquiry and creative embodied practices. [m.kefalogianni@salford.ac.uk](mailto:m.kefalogianni@salford.ac.uk)

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