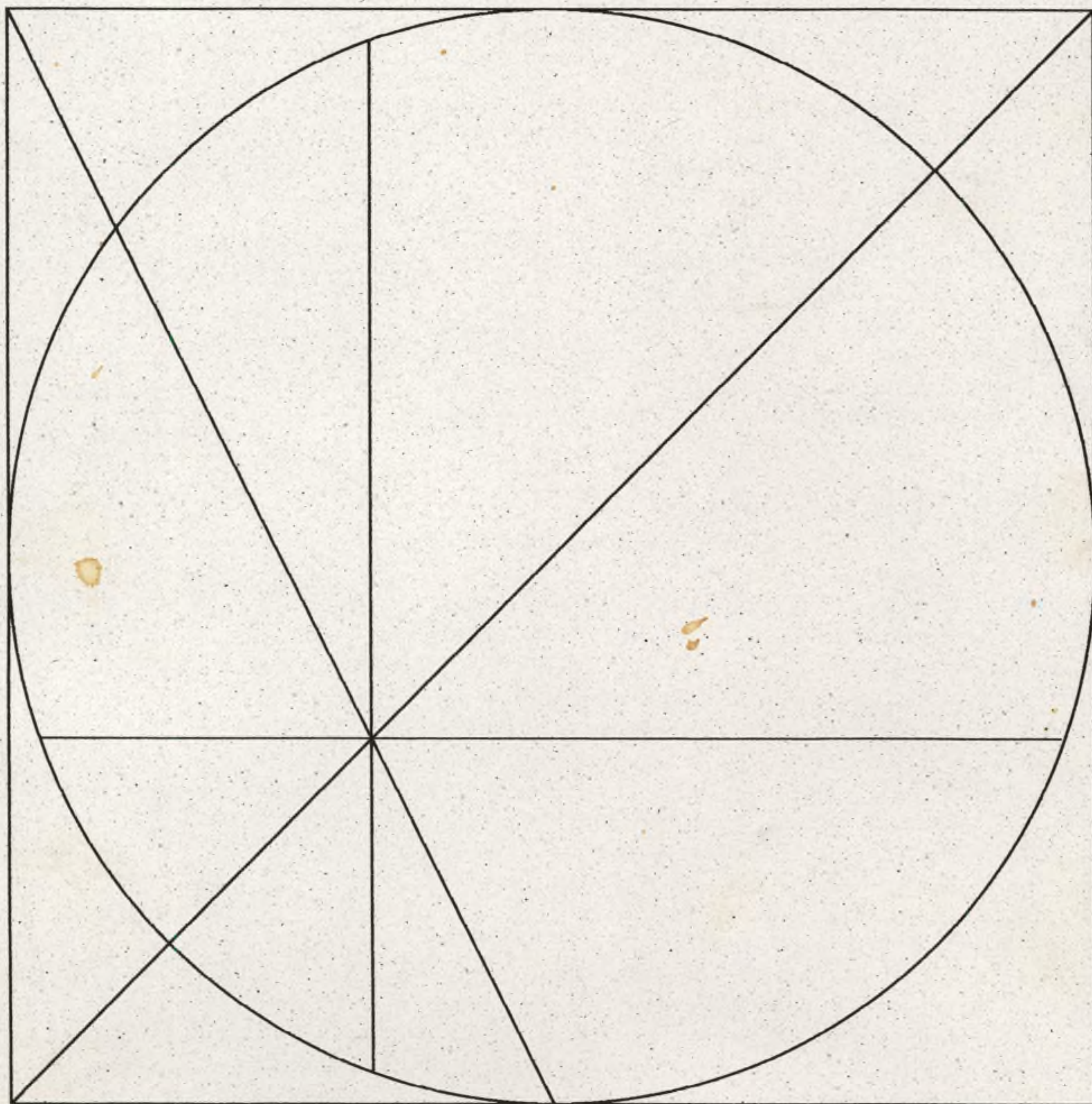
REFLECTIONS:

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



Volume 1, Number 4 Fall 1995

A Journal for the Helping Professions

REFLECTIONS:

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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A Journal for the Helping Professions

REFLECTIONS:
NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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REFLECTIONS' purpose is to publish narratives, personal accounts that describe and explain the process of helping others and shaping social change over time. The journal seeks to build a literary tradition and a record of wisdom for critical study and fruitful discovery. It encourages stories that convey a sense of immediacy, portray practice across diverse populations and capture the range and variety of strategies and systems within the helping professions. Priority is given to articles that provide new understanding of practice. The journal publishes stories of professional helpers such as ethicists, psychotherapists, community organizers, case and group workers, policy makers, family and child practitioners, health and mental health care providers; and educators, researchers, and administrators in the helping and academic professions.

REFLECTIONS' central theme is narrative inquiry of professional practice. It publishes personal accounts of professional action designed to aid and support human and social development. The stories have a literary presence, offer new perspectives on practice, and demonstrate the conceit of failure as well as success. The narrator explains the reasons for the action and freely identifies the mistakes made in the practice. The purpose of the narrative is not to demonstrate achievement; rather, it is to capture the experience.

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE . A narrative is a story worth telling. Narratives are personal stories that give readers a fresh perspective about the practice of change. Written in a temporal sequence, narratives recount the helping process. Narratives are explored within a contextual frame and supply a rich textual description of the experience: They take into account time, place, action, persons, behavior and interaction. Narratives explain and describe events; results; conflicts; complicating actions; and how, why, and what was done. In narratives the writer evaluates the experience, whether or not there is a resolution. Some narratives end with a coda, that is, a perspective on what occurred.

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1. Authors are expected to use the most recent APA publication format.
2. The manuscript length depends upon the temporal sequence of the event.
3. Include on separate page a brief abstract written in the same style as the narrative.
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A CELEBRATION DAMPENED

By The Editors

This issue is special, not so much because it deals with a special topic, but because it completes our first volume. *REFLECTIONS* has been greeted with warmth, exuberance and praise. It offers, say many, a creative forum for practice unavailable in other practice journals. We welcome the praise, and wish to thank all who have helped in many ways: planning, writing, and subscribing.

While, we should be in a celebrative mood, it is difficult. This past week saw the dismantling of our government's commitment to children and to the poor. If things continue along the current path, many will reap a dismal harvest, without the hope that some of the programs established during the past half century have offered.

If anything is to see us through, it will be the ability not to give up hope and to keep our spirits up as we continue to fight for social justice, and make our practice relevant to the hard times ahead. While we realize that *REFLECTIONS* will minutely impact the bitter future, we do believe that it can only serve as a voice, bringing the stories of people whose spirit is dedicated to a healing, caring society to a forum. It has been noted that our journal is different. This issue is evidence of our commitment. Whether of not you believe spirituality has a place in practice, we all need to be committed to celebrating diversity, the diversity of people and the diversity of ideas.

As *REFLECTIONS* goes into its second year, we ask you to help us grow. Not only is your renewal important but we need to count on your "word of mouth." Without the funds for staff, advertising or large mailings, it is your word of mouth that has so far helped us grow. Well, maybe, a little celebration, Happy New Year!

The Editors

EDITORIAL: THE REFLECTING POOL

By Edward R. Canda

The guest editor, Edward R. Canda, Ph.D., is associate professor, School of Social Welfare, University of Kansas. He is the founding director and advisory board chairperson for the Society for Spirituality and Social Work.

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As professional helpers, we must engage in careful reflection, with clear minds, to see our clients clearly and to correct the distortions inherent in the reflection process itself. Deep reflection on oneself and the world is a profoundly spiritual practice, because it leads to knowing who we are, to honoring the inherent worth and wonder of our clients, and to holding dear our commitments to be of service.

In this special issue of REF*LECTIONS*, social workers and other professional helpers reflect on the spirituality of helping. Their stories illustrate the inextricable relationship between reflection, spirituality, and helping. Spiritual development is not possible without careful reflection on the nature of oneself and the world. In turn, compassionate nonjudgmental helping is not likely without insight into self and world, clarity of moral purpose, and genuine loving acceptance of others, which are all qualities of spiritual sensitivity. The narratives in this issue were selected because the authors reveal the insights into the spiritual growth of oneself and clients that can occur through a reflective helping relationship. The spiritual perspectives and assumptions of the authors draw on many different sources ranging from humanistic psychology and existentialism to Christianity, Earth-centered spirituality, and African and First Nations' traditions. But they all share a commitment to reflection on self, the client, and the helping relationship as a path toward spiritually sensitive service.

The process of reflection holds peril and promise. Reflections can distort. The Biblical book of Sirach warns: "What is seen in dreams is to reality what the reflection of a face is to the face itself... What you already expect, the mind depicts " (Sirach, 34: 3-7). If I live as in a dream or rely on fantasies, my mental projections appear to me, unwittingly, as my own reflections. But reflections can also lead to insight and foresight. A clear mind perceives the world as it is. A Shinto oracle pronounces: "All you who come before me, hoping to attain the accomplishment of your desires, pray with hearts pure from falsehood, clean within and without, reflecting the truth like a mirror " (Wilson, 1991).

As a young boy, I was both fascinated and frightened by windows at night. From within a lit room, I liked to peer into a window, and gaze at the surreal mixture of reflections from within and outside the room. Sometimes, when glimpsing such a window out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw a terrifying face and my heart would skip a beat. As I'd draw closer to investigate, I would discover that I was

frightened by my own face, distorted by the mix of reflections. I realized this was an illusion, but I also felt there really might be something menacing lurking there. This was an important lesson, because it alerted me to be wary of distorted reflections of myself, seen in the faces and actions of clients and students, loved ones and acquaintances. What is menacing is not the reflection itself, but rather my mistaking the reflection for reality. Just like the dark window reflection, our perception of clients is often a confused mix of their reality and our reflections.

In contrast, I once heard a wonderful metaphor for clarity of reflection concerning the traditional way of educating Aztec scribes to read their sacred texts. The scribe used a mirror with a hole in the middle. The text would be read through the central hole. In this way, the reader was reminded that the meaning revealed was a product of both the message of the text as well as the reflection of the scribe's own mind. This type of reflection joins the self and the world together in clear awareness. Thus, we can understand the way the narratives of our lives are interrelated with our clients' stories. Through the interrelationship of these narratives in the helping relationship, mutual reflection and spiritual growth occurs. This is the common theme of the essays in this issue.

Five articles are by social workers. Michael Sheridan's story about her group work with African-American prison inmates demonstrates that reflective helping requires paying attention, both to the stirrings within one's heart that lead to service and to the wisdom and healing potential inherent in our clients. Mitsuko Nakashima's story describes how her ability to clarify reflection on herself and the meaning of life has been refined through challenges presented by hospice clients who deal with dying and grief. The Zen injunction to "keep clear mind," even while confronting life and death situations, is given vivid illustration. Sarah Kreutzger shares testimony about contributions of her Christian faith to helping clients from diverse religious backgrounds. But her story also shows that her development of faith involved much reflection on challenges raised by colleagues and clients. The next author, Donald Krill (BRIEF REFLECTIONS), has been the foremost contributor to writing on Existential social work. Krill's essay describes the interconnections between his personal spiritual journey and the historical development of the profession. Through his own reflection on the struggles of this journey, he created ways of incorporating existential themes into teaching and direct practice.

In this issue's feature WRITING NARRATIVES, the essay by Michael Yellow Bird departs from previous issues' focus on written personal narratives. He explains the traditional manner and purpose of oral story telling among First Nations' peoples by reflecting on his experiences within his Sahnish-Hidatsa heritage. This approach uses stories to support the spiritual well being of the people rather than to focus on the individual story teller.

The two remaining narratives come from other professional helping contexts. Maulana Karenga examines how he came to develop the holiday of Kwanzaa, which has become a highly influential component of the movement to draw on African spiritual traditions in support of African American solidarity, celebration of heritage, and work for social justice. Karenga explains that his background in grass-roots community organizing, the Black Freedom Movement, and African Studies inspired this significant cultural contribution. Stephen Buhner is a minister whose helping practice uses plant medicine in the context of Earth-centered spirituality. Buhner's essay gives a detailed account of the self-reflective process that helped him relate to plants as personal sacred beings and to use them as a healing adjunct to psychotherapy.

Whenever I visit Washington, D.C., if possible, I take a meditative walk around the large rectangular reflecting pool that spreads between the national monuments. To me, this place feels like a focus point for the tremendous socio-political, economic, and military power that the United States projects upon the world. So I circumambulate slowly, gazing at the reflections in the pool,

praying for world peace. The pool reflects many contrary impressions to me. There is a predominance of human images: visitors from many states and countries; impressive structures erected to celebrate liberty and to glorify nationalism; and many trees landscaped carefully for human pleasure. If I look closely, and lean over the pool, there is my own reflection, reminding me that the meaning of all this is a reflection of my own thoughts and feelings. But also there, the sky is reflected, transcending all this human busyness, self-preoccupation, and grandeur. I am reminded that to be a force for peace, my mind must be clear and reflective like the pool and all embracing like the sky, not imposing anything and open to everything. So really, as I am praying for world peace, I am praying for my own peace.

As you read the essays in this issue, I hope that you can approach them with this type of reflection on self and world. Of course, each spiritual perspective presented in these stories (as in any story) is a human imposition on the world, like the Washington monument. Nonetheless, each perspective reflects a valuable truth, unique to the particular life of each author. Further, like the sky in the pool, there seems to me to be another truth reflected, one that commingles with yet transcends all these particular truths.

As you read, "walk around" these stories like you are visiting a reflecting pool. Without judgment, just be open to the unique truths reflected in the stories, even where they seem to contradict each other or your own beliefs. Reflect also on the possible truth that may transcend yet unify all these other partial truths. And recognize your own reflection in these reflections.

In this manner, reading these stories can be a preparation for reflection on the stories of our clients, students, and colleagues. Then, as we practice reflection within our activity of service, the spirituality of helping naturally appears. The helping process itself is like a reflecting pool. And it is an opportunity to walk for peace in the world. □

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HONORING ANGELS IN MY PATH: Spiritually–Sensitive Group Work with Persons Who Are Incarcerated

This narrative tells the story of how I came to work with a group of men who are incarcerated on a variety of life issues related to the process of recovery. This experience has been a spiritual journey for me, as well an opportunity to be professionally involved with spiritually-sensitive social work practice. Glimpses of the group's evolving sense of purpose and connection are provided to illustrate how spirituality can be interwoven with the process of professional helping.

**by
Michael J. Sheridan, Ph.D.**

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Author's note

Most of the men's real first names have been used in this narrative as specifically requested by them. As one man stated, expressing the sentiment of the group, "I've had my name connected with negative things in the past. I want my name associated with something positive now." I have honored their request. One man who was involved early in the life of the group cannot be contacted; thus, a pseudonym is used.

The author gratefully acknowledges the participation of the men of the RESPECT Recovery Group at Nottoway Correctional Center -- Abbey, Andre, Frankie, Keith, Lennie, Marvin, Paul, Rashid, Red, Saleem, Spellman, Sylvester, Wallace, William, and Vernon - for both the many gifts they've brought to our group and for their valuable review of this manuscript. Also greatly appreciated is the support and talent of the group's two co-facilitators, Mr. Michael Crosby and Mr. Charles Clay, as well as their helpful review of this narrative.

THE PROCESS OF NOTICING

A movie about angels started the process. Actually, the seeds had been planted long before, but it was the movie's message that stirred the seeds toward expression. My husband and I were driving home after seeing the movie "Heart and Souls. " As is our custom, we talked about the movie's overall theme and its lesson. The plot was simple, at the exact moment that a baby boy is born in a car , four adults lose their lives as the trolley car they are riding in careens off a bridge to the street below. The souls of these persons intersect with the baby's new spirit at the moment of birth, and from that moment on they become his special angels. Only he can see and hear them, and the five "hearts and souls" become bonded for some purpose that none of them understand. Later on in the movie, they discover that the boy, now a man, is meant to help the four souls complete the unfinished business they left behind as a result of their untimely deaths. Once the task is accomplished, each soul is

released to continue on his or her journey, and the man left behind learns a great deal about his own true spirit in the process. My husband and I decided that the theme of the movie was about noticing when significant people "cross your path" and honoring that intersection.

The movie tugged at a part of me that had been lying dormant for some time. As a junior faculty working toward tenure, I had been focusing on my academic life at the expense of several other facets of my life. I feared that my only major contribution had been to move hundreds of graduate students through their research courses while adding lines to my curriculum vitae. This was not my idea of a meaningful life, and I felt that I was at a crossroads. I knew that this "crisis in meaning" was one that could not be simply solved through becoming better organized, or learning more creative scheduling, or volunteering to be a member on one other committee. I also sensed that the solution to my problem was going to require more of me than cognitive problem-solving or psychological exploration. My spiritual self was in trouble and, thus, a spiritual journey was needed.

So as I rode in the car going home, I began to muse about who I might not be noticing in my own life. Were there souls, or "angels in my path, "right now who could assist me in my spiritual search for meaning, connection and purpose? As I asked myself this question, a series of faces drifted across my mind's eye...

Spellman, late 50's, looking angry... Andre, 30 something, with a comical expression on his face... Saleem, about 40, serious and dignified, but with a twinkle in his eye... Carl, early 20's, looking frightened and withdrawn. About a dozen faces entered my consciousness one by one, each seemingly with a message that I found impossible to ignore.

These were the faces of a group of men incarcerated in Nottoway Correctional Center, a maximum security prison about an hour away from where I lived and worked. I had met each of them while doing a program evaluation of specialized group services for incarcerated substance abusers. This volunteer program (called the "Inner Child Workshop Series") had been provided by a woman who volunteered her services to two prisons, one for men and one for women. The workshop's focus was on understanding how unresolved trauma in childhood affect's one's belief system, emotional reaction, and behavior in later life. I had been contacted by a former student that worked at the women's prison to see if I could help evaluate the program's effectiveness. As a part of the evaluation, I had conducted post-treatment focus groups at each prison to solicit feedback about the program from its participants.

During the group interviews, it became apparent that, although both the men and women found the workshop series as immensely beneficial, it had been particularly important to the men. The women, already participating in a therapeutic community within their institution, did not perceive the end of the Inner Child Workshop Series to be a problem. Conversely, these services were unavailable in the men's prison, and they viewed the end of the volunteer program as a major loss. Most echoed the sentiment of one male participant, "I feel like I am finally beginning to understand my life and how I got here, and have some tools to turn myself around, and now the program is ending. I need a lot more."

Deeply touched by what these men talked about in the focus group, I felt conflicted about the ethics of simply "collecting the data," while ignoring the human needs. I decided to help find another volunteer to provide follow-up services for the men, since the original group leader could not continue. However, after several tries, no one had come forth. I struggled with the idea of volunteering but decided it was impossible. I sat in the car with the men's faces hovering around me; I knew I needed to pay closer attention to these souls whose lives intersected with mine and touched my heart -- these men had appeared as "angels in my path." I needed to volunteer to do the group for my own sake as well as theirs.

This clarity was soon replaced with numerous "yes, buts... " The prison was so far away -- it would take 2 hours just to drive there and back. As a full-time, pre-tenured academic, I didn't have the time; my

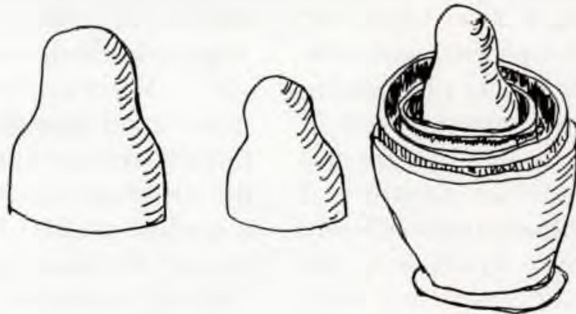
schedule was unmanageable, and I needed to spend every free moment writing. Doing the group would take up at least half a day or more each week, time I could ill afford. Also, I didn't want to do the group alone; I would need a male co-facilitator and who would that be? And working with Corrections again! I had worked for 5 years with the department before getting my doctorate and had sworn never to work in that system again. And just who did I think I was ? I a middle-aged, middle class white woman working with a group of African-American men whose lives were radically different from mine? Did I really think it could work?

On the other hand, I felt good about the possibility of putting my whole self where I had been saying my heart was. For several years I had become increasingly concerned about the plight of at-risk kids, particularly young black males. The social and political environment was becoming more threatening to this already vulnerable population. I felt a constant tug to "do something, " but rationalized that this work was better left to African-American men that were better equipped to deal with the needs of these children than I was. I began to admit to myself that my reticence had as much, or more, to do with my own fear of rejection than any sensitivity to cultural differences. Here was a chance to be involved in something truly meaningful, and it seemed to be the next step in my spiritual journey.

I also began to grow excited about the possibilities of utilizing a model that my colleague, Dr. Kate Hudgins, and I developed for work with survivors of trauma (Sheridan, in press). This approach, which we call the "Three-Child Model of Recovery," was developed in response to limitations we noted with existing "inner child" models (Bradshaw, 1990; Whitfield, 1986). Briefly, we had observed three problems with previous conceptualizations. First, when clients attempted to follow messages from their "inner child," they had difficulty in differentiating between healthy, recovery-oriented messages and other internal messages, and therefore sometimes hurting themselves or others. Second, many clients encountered "inner selves" that were so isolated or severely wounded that they began to see themselves as "damaged or defective goods. " In some cases, this reaction developed into a doomed sense about oneself that left the person incapable of mounting the energy needed to do the work of recovery, either because the task was too great or seemed destined to failure. Third, we found that some persons became so stuck in the sadness and rage of earlier trauma that they became unable to take responsibility for themselves and their own recovery. We tried to address these problems through modifying the metaphor of the "inner child" so that its positive role in recovery could be maintained, while hopefully eliminating its unintended negative consequences. We also made a conscious attempt to integrate spirituality into our biopsychosocial understanding of trauma.

Specifically, the "Three-Child Model" views the traumatized individual as a series of nesting eggs, similar to the Russian carved figures that hold smaller and smaller versions of themselves, one inside the other. The outer egg represents the "adult child;" the physically grown individual who interacts with the world and experiences problems in thinking, feeling, and behaving characteristic of trauma survivors. Below this adult self is another nested egg we labeled the "wounded child. " This part of the self is where most of the cognitions, affect, and sensations of prior trauma are held, sometimes partially or wholly unavailable to the adult child. (This was the part of the self that survivors often thought of as their "inner child.") Finally, the deepest nested egg which we came to call the "sleeping/ awakening child, " is seen as a patiently waiting spiritual embryo, containing all the positive qualities and life possibilities that the individual possesses. This deeply buried self keeps the seeds of the "true self" or "divine self" safe and protected. Unfortunately, this survival mechanism also keeps knowledge of this part of one's being away from both the individual and others.

This third child state is understood to be the person's spiritual center and the source of spontaneity and creativity or what Moreno (1941), the father of psychodrama, called the



"godhead. " Through this part of our being we can experience our own divinity and learn to accept responsibility and co-creation for our lives. Therefore, while the deepest child sleeps, so does our spirituality. Our model suggests that, in persons who are experiencing significant trauma, this core, divine self makes a wise decision when he or she realizes that the external environment is not going to provide what is needed for healthy growth and development. Part of the self simply goes to sleep, patiently waiting until the outside world evolves to a point safe enough for her/him to awaken.

Unfortunately, submersion of this spiritual, core self leaves the "adult child" and "wounded child" to battle it out among themselves, often with negative consequences. The survival tactics of denial, repression, disassociation, and rigid or acting out behaviors utilized by the "adult child" are not helpful in healing the unresolved issues held within the "wounded child." Conversely, the raw feelings and needs expressed by the "wounded child" often overwhelm the person at the "adult child" level and only serve to convince him or her to utilize old, counterproductive coping strategies even more vigilantly. We discovered that if we helped clients awaken their "sleeping child, " or their core, spiritual self, this brought a needed third voice to the conversation, one that could communicate effectively with both the "adult child" and "wounded child." It also seemed to bring the vision, the courage, and the energy needed to do the hard work of recovery at the other two levels. As a result, clients were not as likely to experience the three problems discussed earlier: confusion between healthy and destructive messages, the development of a doomed self-image, and the tendency to become fixed in a victim role.

Most of our work using this model had been with white, middle class adults who had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. I was anxious to see if the approach could be useful with a different group of people. I knew from the data collected during the program evaluation of the Inner Child Workshop Series that many of the men had reported physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse in their past. I wondered if the trauma of societal abuse and neglect, which all had experienced, could be effectively addressed using the model, too. Finally, I was interested in integrating a spiritually-sensitive approach to practice that attempted to be culturally-sensitive as well. One's racial, ethnic, and cultural background is central to one's identity and sense of place in the world. As African-Americans, I knew that the men at the prison had probably experienced significant wounding of this part of themselves. Thus, any approach, including a psycho-spiritual model such as the "Three-Child Model,"must consciously recognize, integrate, and honor racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and identities to be both respectful and effective.

The pulls toward working with the group were greater than my fears of doing. And so I decided it would just move forward step by step and trust that, if it were meant to be, the way would be cleared. As the weeks went by, each one of my perceived obstacles fell by the wayside. I applied for and got a University Community Associates Project award that provides released time from teaching one course in order to do community service. A gifted male student, Michael Crosby,

agreed to be my co-facilitator as a way of learning more about experiential practice approaches, which I planned to use with the group. He had several years of practice experience in substance abuse and group work and possessed both the strength and gentleness that I thought was needed. An independent study was arranged so that he could receive course credit for his work with the group. Permission from the correctional facility was obtained to run the group, and 17 men were interested in participating. Finally, Tuesday morning was the only time that both Michael and I had free and the institution agreed to let us come at that time. When I expressed amazement at how easily the barriers had evaporated and the way had been cleared, a friend reminded me that "there are no accidents." In any event, whether by a series of lucky breaks or through divine intervention, we were ready to begin!

The following paragraphs provide snapshots of particular group sessions and illustrate the growth in trust and risk-taking that took place over time. Four treatment goals emerged as we worked: recovery from substance abuse; recovery from previous trauma, both as children and adults; recovery from involvement in criminal behavior, including accepting responsibility and forgiving oneself for harm that had been done to others; and recovery from the negative effects of incarceration. These were the clinical goals, but they were also spiritual goals in that they involved a process of honest self-examination necessary for developing a new vision of oneself and one's purpose in life. I believe that this revisioning is required at various points in all of our lives to recognize and claim our divine nature and unique spiritual journey. Closely tied to these goals was the objective of instilling both hope and pride in oneself as an African-American man. To achieve these outcomes, we endeavored to base our work with the group in cultural and spiritual sensitivity.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

I will never forget when we first stepped into the small room that had been made available for the group. On one side of the room was a door that led directly to a counselor's office that was supposed to be vacant during group time, but was clearly occupied. If we could hear them, that meant that they could hear us. On the other side of the room was a door with a window, which allowed full view of the group by any passerby. Not exactly an ideal environment for developing trust and sharing! In between these two walls was a circle of crowded, disgruntled-looking men. I felt like a timid rabbit needing a safe place to hide. But instead we sat down and tried to begin introductions.

We were immediately interrupted by angry statements that this room would simply not do. One man said he felt like "... a sardine packed in this small room." Another said that the "whole institution can hear us through the heat vents. I ain't saying nothin." Others shared similar sentiments. It was clear we had hit our first roadblock. After hearing their concerns, Michael and I agreed that it was a pretty bad situation and that we would try to do something about it. Since we were stuck with it, we asked if we could just use the time to get the group started. With some reluctance, the men agreed, and we began to explain the purpose and expectations of the group. We talked about the group becoming a safe arena for folks to work on the recovery issues identified earlier in the Inner Child Workshop Series. Some looked interested, others looked bored, and all of us looked uncomfortable. I reminded myself that, at this point, all of us were wearing protective masks and that if we just hung in there, our true selves would begin to feel safe enough to come out.

Finally, Michael suggested playing a name game whereby each person would think of an adjective that began with the same letter of his first name. Each person would introduce himself and then introduce all the group members that had come before him to the next man in the circle. Michael

started, "I'll begin. I'm "Manly Mike." And you are?" With some awkwardness the next man said, "Well, I'm "Super Sylvester" and this is "Manly Mike,", and you are?" As each man thought up his own nickname and struggled to remember the names of others around the circle, the mood lightened and people started to chuckle -- both at the choices of names ("Relaxed Red," "Awkward Andre," "Seeking Saleem," "Sensational Spellman," "Peaceful Paul," "Wasting Wallace," "Friendly Frankie," "Kind Keith," "Attribute Abbey," "Wise William," "Caring Carl," "Learned Lennie," "Researching Rashid," "Messenger Mike,") and the game itself. At the end of the circle, Michael instructed us that we had to go back the other way through all the names. This meant that the first guy, who thought he had to remember Michael's name only, now realized that he had to remember everybody's name. When he pulled off this feat successfully, the group spontaneously applauded and felt as if something important had entered the room through the simple process of naming (and claiming) names.

By the following week, we had secured another group room with much more space and privacy. We obtained it by asking for it. This may not seem remarkable, but in a system characterized by seemingly more barriers than support, it was an amazing accomplishment. The men were impressed and felt as if someone had listened to their needs. I pointed out that the new room had been arranged through the efforts of one of the institutional teachers and the treatment program supervisor. Some stated doubts about any real support coming from anyone who worked there -- a theme that appeared many times over the weeks ahead. I noted to myself that our efforts needed to be focused on changing the relationship between the men and some of the institutional staff, as well as on the work of the group itself.

I also reminded myself not to fall into seeing the staff as "the enemy, " since that would not be helpful to the group in the long run. I vowed to act from a place of "seeing the light in everyone" when dealing with the staff, as well as the inmates. This approach was hard to pull off sometimes, such as the time we had to wait an incredible amount of time to get through security because somebody couldn't find the right paper work even though we'd been coming in on Tuesday mornings for weeks, but in general it worked quite well -- especially when I had to ask permission to do something outside of the usual routine (such as bring in a group birthday cake or a camera to take group pictures or a tape recorder each week in order to play a drumming tape for background music or candles for our closing ceremony). In any event, "mindful respect" served us well both inside and outside of the group.

In that first real session, we talked about how free one could be, or not be OK—physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually -- inside prison walls. We ended up doing a spectogram (an experiential technique designed to make internal processes external) to make our discussion more real. One side of the room, near the door, was designated as representing total freedom to be oneself, even while incarcerated. The other side of the room, in the far corner, was targeted as a place where there was no freedom -- not to act, to feel, or even to think one's thoughts. I invited the men to place their bodies along the imaginary line between these two extremes and then talk about why they had chosen that particular spot. People took many different places along the line, which surprised me, and spoke quite honestly about their respective positions.

At the totally free end, one man said "I feel pretty free in here. I have my routine... my job, my studies, and my music. I'm developing my faith here. I choose what I say to whom, but I feel as free to have my thoughts and be who I am in here as I did on the outside. Out there... that was not really freedom." At the opposite end, two men expressed how they felt totally controlled. "Man, I think they even control my thoughts

sometimes." As the men spoke, I realized that I had assumed that most would choose the "not free" end. I probably had many misguided assumptions and misperceptions about the lives of incarcerated people. I would have to stay open to hearing their truth without preconceived ideas. At this point, the masks were down a bit, and the group was in the process of becoming. Furthermore, the notion that the self may be more than the physical body had been introduced, leaving the way clear to explore our spiritual, as well as corporal selves.

UNFOLDING STORIES

In the weeks ahead, Michael and I came prepared with specific ideas about what we would focus on during each group and found that we abandoned our plans each week. I learned that I could not predict what would work with this group based on my previous experiences with other client groups. In using the Three-Child Model previously, I usually started with a brief didactic presentation of the model and then moved fairly rapidly to experiential work with each of the child states. I quickly realized that the act of simply talking (about one's ideas, experiences, or feelings) was a major experiential task for these men. Although I could incorporate some psycho dramatic techniques fairly easily (such as the spectogram described above), other techniques such as focusing (a process of guided meditation that facilitates self-awareness and connection with one's spirituality) and role-playing needed slow and needed careful introduction.

Although I was used to working with persons who carried a great deal of pain from previous trauma, generally experienced in their families-of-origin, the level of pain I perceived in these men's lives was more encompassing in that it had been experienced from the larger society as well as within their family systems. In addition, most of the men experienced their incarceration as furthering previous trauma, and worked hard to defend themselves against the pain that came with their current circumstances. We responded by slowing the process down considerably and by letting them lead us to where we needed to go.

Michael and I also directly addressed the issue racism, which resulted in one of our more productive sessions. During our third session, I asked the men how they felt about doing this group with two white people when all of them were African-American and, on top of that, how did they feel about my being a woman? After some jokes about the desirability of being with a woman for a change, several men started by saying that race didn't matter to them. "You know it doesn't matter to me what color a person is... what matters is whether they're all right or not. You know, can I relate... can I trust them? I've known some bad brothers that didn't care that I was black, you know. They did me in anyway." We spent some time talking about how people are individuals -- some good, some bad -- regardless of their color. But Michael and I gently pushed the issue and other sentiments began to come out. "Well, I'll tell you. I never trusted any white people, ever. All my life they've tried to mess with me and I don't mind saying that I don't want anything to do with most of them. Now you and Mike, I don't know. I don't know where you're coming from, you know. Why would you two white folk, professionals and all, want to come out here and be with a bunch of inmates? It makes me wonder." This set off a tense, but honest conversation about negative feelings and experiences that many of the men had with white people and questions that they had about us. Michael and I tried to respond honestly about what we were doing there and stressed that we were getting something important out of being there; that we believed that we would get as much from them as we would give.

To say that the session was uncomfortable at times is an understatement; at one point I was wiping away tears of frustration at feeling that I was being misunderstood by one man in particular. I was trying hard to be honest about my own internalized racism and I felt as if my self-disclosure was being used against me. Other group members rushed in to rescue Mike and me, but we just kept talking, sharing and risking about the very hard topic of race

and racism, and the way it affected all of our lives differently. By the end I knew that some of them were afraid we wouldn't come back, but I also knew that we had taken the group to a new level. Because we had the courage to speak our hearts and souls, as well as our minds, a sacred trust had begun to grow among us.

This new level of trust was quite apparent several sessions later when we turned our focus to their lives as children. It was on March 15th -- I remember because it was my son's 12th birthday. As I was driving to the institution, I started thinking about the differences between my son's 12 years of life and the men's lives at that age. When I compared the resources, support, and validation my son received from his community and the society at large with the lack of such factors in the lives of many young black men, the meaning of "white privilege" was crystal clear. I was angry about the differences.

With these thoughts in the back of my mind, I started our beginning focusing session with special attention to the men's lives at the important age of 12. They had been growing more and more comfortable with the technique of focusing, and I took a risk that they were ready for some early life work. After helping them turn inward through noticing their breathing and relaxing their bodies, I invited them to go back in time to a younger age - the age of 12, when a young boy becomes a "manchild;" not quite child, not quite grown. I guided them to be curious about themselves at this age and to see if they could notice what this young manchild was like. (Focusing is done slowly with adequate pauses between sentences to allow the person to notice what is true for them in that moment.)

"What is he like, this young manchild that was you? Don't push -- just notice whatever comes up as you seek to know this young man better. Can you see him or feel him or hear him? Maybe he's just a glimmer. That's fine; just notice what is there and what he has to share with you. See if you can sense how he is physically. Is he growing tall or is he still small? Has his body begun to change? Does his body have a lot of energy, or does he feel tired or weighted down? And how is he feeling inside? What is the expression on his face as you visualize him? What do you think is going on inside of him? Is he happy and proud, or sad or angry? Or maybe he's a little bit scared. What does his heart say to you? Listen. And what about his mind? Is he curious and eager to expand his growing mind? Does he think he's smart? Does he want to know everything there is to know? Has he been told anything about his mind? Good things, bad things... And, now his spirit... How is it? Can you sense it or feel it - can he? Is it growing along with the rest of him or has something happened to it? How "spirited" is he? Take him in and see the truth for him... How he really is - physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually - as he stands in this very special time - this time of 12 years - this time of being a manchild? Now see if there is some way you can make contact with him... You, now a grown man and this child inside of you - this manchild. See if you can catch his eye or pat him on the back or hold him in your lap. Whatever is OK for both of you is fine. And when you're ready, see if you can bring part of him back here, maybe to share with the rest of the group - as much or as little as you want. Take your time and when you're ready, just let us know you're back by opening your eyes.

When I finished the focusing session, the room remained quiet.

Then one man spoke, "I don't know how in the hell you picked that age -- 12, I mean. When I was 12 , that was some year... Why'd you have to pick that age? I mean, shit... I was one messed up little guy when I was 12." He went on to share that he was living with his Mom, (his Dad had never been with them) and she was tricking for money and drinking heavily and he felt so caught. He was so angry with her and loved her too, and he didn't want to be at home to watch. At about that age when he started hanging more and more with the boys, and the boys all looked up to the men in the big cars, the flashy jewelry, and the wads of money. And he wanted to have someone help him and tell him how to be a man and the drug dealers were the only men that paid attention to him, and so he turned a corner -- at the age of 12. He told his story painfully, with tears and with anger, and the other men leaned

their bodies in closer to the circle and lent their support with nods of their heads and respectful silence. One by one, they each talked about how pivotal the age of 12 had been. Mostly tales of abandonment from fathers they never knew or stories of physical and emotional abuse from substance abusing step-fathers or relationships full of negative messages and emotional distance from the few overworked father figures that were still around. And stories of mothers who kept hanging in there - trying to keep the family going and keep their children safe. Or mothers who found their only comfort in bottles or in pouches of white power or in the arms of johns. And one particularly chilling story about the day that belief in goodness and justice and "doing things the right way" was lost when a policeman tried to get a scared 12 year old to pick up a knife in an alley so that he could shoot him as he'd shot "them other niggers. "

Everyone had a story to tell, the theme of racism, abuse and neglect was clear in each account. Racism, abuse and neglect were imposed by a society that had turned its back on who these young men were and who they could be. Abuse, neglect and negative messages also came from family members living lives of despair and doing the best that they could, but did not understand the effect of the wounds inflicted on their young sons. The spiritual wounding that had occurred to each group member was another theme that rang loud and clear. Instead of being respected and nurtured, the divine child within each boy had been denied and denigrated and "dispirited. "

We closed the group session by talking about who those young 12-year- olds were meant to be if they had received the support and nurturing that is every child's birthright. What were their true, spiritual natures? Who were these young children of God? Who would they have become if their circumstances had been different? I watched them as they spoke about what they were like before they learned to hide out within themselves and in the streets - this one's loving nature, another one's zest for adventure, and yet another one's unending curiosity about life around him. Their faces began to light up, and laughter filled the room as they began to grow connected to that true self that had been lost along the way. I knew that the men were beginning to sense their spiritual core - their "sleeping/ awakening child" that could help them begin to revision themselves and their lives. As for me, I left the prison that day with a deepened appreciation of my own spiritual child and a joy about her own awakening.
This session was a turning point for the group. The level of honesty and the support that we shared that day built a basis for coming together in a different way in the weeks ahead.

The focus of group sessions was diverse. We talked about what it meant to be a man and where those messages had come from. We talked about relationships with women. We talked about maintaining ties with friends and family members on the outside and letting go of relationships that were no longer there for us. We talked about living a life of recovery inside an institution that mirrored life on the streets where drugs and other negative activities are readily available. We talked about how to deal with feelings and how to express frustration and anger constructively instead of falling into the old cycle of perpetrator and victim. We talked about what spirituality or religion meant to each of us and how we could incorporate it in our everyday lives We talked about learning to trust and open up. We also joked and teased, griped some about the institution's rules, ate cake and cookies, shared talents, waited it out during weeks of lock-down, learned to confront each other's behavior, and came to care a great deal about each other. Far too quickly, the 12 weeks we'd planned came to an end.

...ENDINGS

For our closing session, Michael and I wanted to do a special ceremony to signify the importance of what the group had meant. Unfortunately, when we arrived to begin the group, we were told that since our usual meeting room was being used for other purposes, we'd have to use the staff dining hall instead. This hall is not air conditioned, and we had to choose between sweltering heat or some relief from a large, noisy fan that drowned out our voices. We

chose to live with the heat in order to hear one another. We were also occasionally interrupted by other inmates preparing lunch that day and by correctional officers walking in and out of the area. It reminded me of our first session when the men had complained so about the small, cramped room that we had been given. But this time, we simply set about trying to have a meaningful closing ceremony without too much complaint. I had chosen to use the power of a ritual, rooted in both African—and Native -American tradition, to mark the group's ending. On the floor of the dining hall I placed a woven mat of many colors. In the center was a wooden bowl filled with water, a small hand towel, and a large lit candle. Around the edges lay leopard-skin jasper stones from South Africa, which had special meaning to the men given the recent liberation of South Africa. Finally, there were small individual candles for each group member. One at a time, each group member, including Michael and me, knelt before the bowl of water and the candle and began the ritual. First, each person washed his or her hands in the water while saying, "As a result of this group, I wash away..." One by one we washed away "fear of my own feelings, " "hate for all white people," "the belief that I can never get anywhere," "self-doubt and self-hatred, " "the need to control everything," and so on. After drying our hands on the towel, we each selected a jasper stone as a symbol of freedom and as a reminder of the negative thought, feeling, or behavior that we. had just released, acknowledging that we would probably have to remember to release it again in the future.

After everyone had his turn at letting go, it came time to claim what each had gained from the group. Again, one by one, each group member took a small candle and lit it from the large candle, which symbolized the power of the group. This time each stated: "As a result of this group, I claim my power to..." "give and receive love, " "grow in my art, " "be a positive force in the world," "turn my life around," "do the work I need to do," "take responsibility for my life." After each statement, the person would join the standing circle, holding his lit candle, while the rest of the group spoke his name and proclaimed: "We honor your power to...", thus affirming the positive trait that had just been claimed.

At the end, we all stood with sweaty faces and lit candles, oblivious to the noises and stares from persons walking in and out of the room. The group was a group, a sacred trust, and it didn't matter where we were. What mattered was what we had shared and what we had become. Our differences were noted, respected, and celebrated -- but our common ties and shared humanity were recognized and honored.

TRANSITIONS...

Following this "closing" ceremony, the group decided to continue, although with some changes. My co-facilitator, Michael Crosby, was entering doctoral school and could not continue. My weekly time with the group, provided through the Community Service Associates program, was for one semester, making it impossible for me to continue on a weekly basis. However, I wanted to be with the group in whatever way I could. My initial sense that the men and the group were essential to my own spiritual journey had proven correct. My time with was giving me the sense of meaning and connection that I needed and was fueling the evolution of my own spirit. I was learning to integrate my head, my heart, and my spirit in my work with others, and I was experiencing a sacred human connection. The question was not if I would continue; it was how?

After discussion of various options with the institution, it was clear that our choices were to meet only monthly (when I could find the time to come out) or to meet with another institutional counselor weekly and have me join the group once a month. Given some of the feelings about institutional staff, it was a real sign of growth that the group chose this latter option. Charles

Clay, an institutional counselor, became my new co-facilitator and leads the group during the weeks I cannot attend. It is significant that, after about a month, the men voted to give Charles his own jasper-stone as a symbol of his commitment to them and their trust in him.

And so we continue. It's been well over a year since the "12-week" group began. The men have formally named themselves the RESPECT Recovery Group ("respect for self - respect for others - and respect for the community") and we have weathered the transition from the "old" group to the "new" one. A couple of the men dropped out. One man has been paroled and another awaits his release soon. Several men have been transferred to other institutions, which felt like a real wrenching of parts of our soul - but we still count them as part of us. Michael came out to visit during December and will probably come again. And we've developed mechanisms for accepting new members, and have welcomed "Mannered Marvin" and "Victorious Vernon" to our midst. New stories will be shared and our own collective story will evolve.

BEGINNINGS, ENDINGS AND TRANSITIONS... THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUALLY-SENSITIVE PRACTICE

In working with this special group, I tried to consciously integrate spirituality in four major ways. First, we've purposely talked about it -- not a lot, but as an appropriate topic for conversation among many others.

This may not seem like much of a technique or focus, but in much of social work practice the topics of religion or spirituality are seen as outside of the legitimate realm of social work, and therefore, are considered taboo. I do not talk about it as a religious expert or a spiritual leader or even as a professional with expertise in the area, but rather as one human being to other human beings, all having spiritual parts of self to explore and share with one another. For example, I've asked the men who are Muslim to explain the meaning and ritual of Ramadan to me so that I could better understand their faith and its importance to them. I've talked with other men about how connected or unconnected they feel to the faith traditions of their childhood and where they are now in their beliefs and practices. We've talked as a whole group about spirituality as one component of the human experience, one that can be attended to and developed just like one's mental, physical, or emotional self. We've also strived as a group not to be judgmental of religious or spiritual differences, but to accept, respect, and support our individual paths.

Second, by teaching the group the "Three Child Model of Recovery, " with its explicit reference to the "sleeping/ awakening child" state as one's spiritual center, I've also reinforced the spiritual aspect of self as an important focus for exploration and change. As a frame of reference for doing recovery work in many areas, this model communicates the perspective that growth and development are not merely physical or psychological process, but rather an enterprise best approached holistically. It is important to utilize processes that emphasize a sense of purpose and meaning and connection, as well as cognitive, affective, and behavioral change. Furthermore, the model suggests that the spiritual core of self provides the vision and energy for doing the hard work at other levels. For example, when the men discovered and shared the true nature and potentialities inherent in their 12 year old "manchild" selves, they started to regain a vision of self that had been lost and, hopefully, found some of the energy needed to recapture and redirect that vision.

Third, many of the techniques or approaches that we've used in the group have a spiritual component. The very act of "focusing", for example, is a process for turning inward for the purpose of gaining deeper knowledge about one's core self. This process of deeper connection with self usually leads to more meaningful connections with others and often with a life force beyond oneself - whether that life force is known as God or Allah or the Great Spirit or the Goddess or the mystery or the power of the group. Other specific exercises helped group members to focus on where they were developmentally in terms of

spiritual, as well as physical, mental, and emotional growth. And the use of ritual, as in our "closing" ceremony, directly brought a sense of the sacred into our human interaction and provided both meaning and symbolic memory for future endeavors.

Fourth, the frame of reference I've employed in entering into my work with the group and my relationships with the men - initially and before every group session, recognizes the spiritual nature of the work itself. At the very beginning, as I rode home from the movies asking a prayerful question of myself and the universe: "Who am I ignoring that I should be paying attention to?" The answer was immediate and clear, as the pictures of the men at Nottoway began to parade before my eyes. During a time when I was searching for meaning and purpose in my personal and professional life, the group emerged as a sacred experience that has furthered my own spiritual path.

As such, I try to utilize one of the methods of "holistic prayer" that Canda (1990) describes in his discussion of the many approaches to prayer that can be appropriately utilized in spiritually-sensitive practice. I try to take the time to prepare myself before each meeting with the group, to picture and think about each individual, to ask for guidance and support in my interactions with them, to thank the Mystery for the opportunity to be with them, and to center myself so that I can be wholly present and genuine during our time together. Sometimes the hectic reality of my life results in my spiritual preparation being less than I would like. But at all times, I view my work and my relationships with these men as a gift - one that graces my life and one that I hope enhances theirs.

This combination of a conscious, nonjudgmental focus, a therapeutic model that includes spirituality, the use of spiritually-based techniques, and a recognition of the spiritual nature of the work itself all blend together into "spiritually-sensitive practice." It is certainly not the only model of such practice, but it works for me with this group of men at this time. It will certainly evolve and change as we do, and I look forward to the new experiences and lessons that lie ahead.

POSTSCRIPT: THE MANY FACES OF ANGELS

As I was writing this narrative, I received a letter from one of the men from the group. He asked me if I had ever seen a television show on Saturday night about an angel, and he went on to say that it reminded him of me. My first knee-jerk response was to caution him quickly not to put me up on some kind of pedestal, as I certainly was no angel -- and I did ask him not to be idealistic about me when I wrote him back. But as I later realized, and included in the letter, we all have the capacity to be angels to one another, and so I thanked him for the compliment. I also told him that I had seen the "glimmer of his own wings" in group a time or two. I, for one, am grateful that I noticed the "angels in my path" and am very, very glad that I paid attention. □

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SPIRITUAL GROWTH THROUGH HOSPICE SOCIAL WORK

This essay reflects on my helping relationship with dying and grieving people through hospice work and shows how my experiences helped me to grow spiritually. I was born and raised in Japan and influenced by various Eastern religious philosophies and their practices. Yet through my experience with hospice, I found that spiritual issues can be addressed in a way that transcends religious and cultural differences. Thus, my clients and I benefit mutually. As I help my clients to prepare to die, I go deeper inside myself by asking questions of life and death through self-reflection.

by Mitsuko Nakashima

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INTRODUCTION

My work with hospice clients facilitated my personal and professional growth. I am required to bring personal growth issues to my practice to represent truthfully who I am to the client. The relationship of my own self with the client lays the foundation for the helping process. Through working with dying people and their families, I discovered that my ability to care for my soul directly relates to my capacity to nurture my clients as whole persons. Self-reflection and acceptance of myself are essential for me to cultivate compassion and a non-judgmental attitude toward clients.

I have been working for hospice as a social worker for over two years. Hospice is a health care organization whose approach toward client care looks beyond merely relieving physical pain. In hospice, an interdisciplinary group of professionals, including social workers, strive to provide comfort for the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain of dying people and their loved ones. For me, helping patients and their loved ones in the dying and bereavement process has been a powerful source of learning, fulfillment, and transformation. It has uncovered many personal growth issues which were unexplored previously in my life. For the majority of hospice patients, the suffering of dying is more than physical pain. It often encompasses emotional, social, and spiritual distress caused by the changes and losses that accompany physical decline. In helping others deal with this distress, I am stimulated to work through my own related issues, and to grow in a sense of spiritual integrity and wholeness.

In my perception, my whole being consists of different parts: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. A holistic view of human life integrates all aspects of human experiences. Yet, I have always believed that a key to learn who I am exists in the spiritual area of my life. My understanding of this spiritual realm is conveyed by a word in my native language, Japanese. The word, tamashii, can be translated as soul or spirit. It has two meanings: the essence of life of all living creatures that survives physical death and a life force that directs the actions of a person. In Japan, a person who is severely depressed or in a catatonic state from shock is often described as a person whose soul fell out of the body. Earlier this year I saw many of these people in newspaper pictures and on TV when the aftermath of the earthquake in Kobe was reported. This idea of the soul suggests that the spiritual part of me is the core of my being that integrates my body, mind, and heart. Confrontation with death in hospice

work challenges me to increase my spiritual awareness and integration of self.

MY PATH TO HOSPICE WORK

Many people talk about spirituality by referring to their own religious orientation. Some even think that religion and spirituality are synonymous. However, I have come to realize through my life experiences that spirituality includes religion but is not limited to it.

I was born and raised in Japan where I was exposed to various Eastern religions and philosophies including Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism. These different religions coexist harmoniously. My family practices different rituals from different religions and integrates them in our daily lives. For example, we annually go to a Shinto shrine on New Year's Day to pray for good luck in the coming year and typically choose a Shinto ceremony for weddings. A Shinto altar in the kitchen is greeted with a brief prayer in the morning to start the day. However, funerals are conducted in the Buddhist style, and we commemorate our ancestors periodically in a room with a Buddhist altar. My grandmothers were devout Buddhists and made it their regular practice to chant sutras(sacred texts) daily in the morning and evening. We find no contradiction between this and going to nearby Shinto shrines to make special wishes. In addition, my mother goes to see a local shaman to get advice when the family faces a major financial decision. This general acceptance in society and my family to practice rituals of various religions imprinted in my mind the knowledge that religion reflects spirituality in its teachings and rituals, but religion itself is not spirituality. However, many different religious practices can support one's spiritual growth. My belief has been reaffirmed in hospice work. I have found that I can usually discuss spirituality with my clients without letting our different religious orientations become an obstacle.

I found myself being fascinated with the concept of death and dying in my late teens. My aunt died unexpectedly and soon afterward my grandmother suffered a fatal injury in a car accident. The idea of death, which had been a remote concept to me, rose up to face me. At that time, I already had a belief that a human soul survives the physical body and reincarnates. However, a big question arose: for what purpose do we reincarnate? Meanwhile, in high school I had an assignment to write a reflective paper in my Japanese literature class on an early modern novel titled *Sensei* (teacher) by Soseki Natsume. The novel depicts a process in which the main character struggled with his conscience about a sin that he believed he had committed; his remorse finally led him to commit suicide. This assignment, along with the family tragedies, gave me opportunities to think seriously about the meaning of life and death for the first time. Once I was exposed to this critical question, there was no way of going back to my old self and pretending as if I had never faced these difficult existential questions.

I came to the United States to pursue graduate education. I chose to study gerontology shortly after I started a master's program in American Studies. Later, I continued this interest while completing an MSW degree at the University of Kansas. From my cross-cultural experiences and study in Japan and the United States, I saw that as people grew older and prepared themselves for death, they faced the same kind of challenges despite cultural differences. Many people died feeling that their lives were unfulfilled. In classes, I learned that coming to terms with one's life and attaining a sense of peace were developmental tasks in the later stage of life regardless of differences between people's life experiences.

Unfortunately, discussion of developmental theory in classes usually neglected the spiritual component of life. If there were any discussion, the role of religion was mentioned briefly, and then the class moved on. However, I felt strongly that the spiritual aspect of life experiences is essential to understand the later stages of human development because of my experience that spirituality is an essential component of a human being. Resolution of life issues requires a great deal of introspection in which an individual reviews life experiences and draws meanings from them.

The degree of acceptance of one's life determines how peaceful one can feel. Approaching human development solely through consideration of physical, emotional, and social aspects seemed incomplete to me. I believe that spirituality is a nucleus of human existence that directs our thoughts and actions to seek a sense of peace and power by connection to the supreme and holy source of existence, whatever it is called by individuals.

Fortunately, during the last semester of social work graduate school, I took a class titled "Spiritual Aspects of Social Work Practice." In this class, the concept of integrating spirituality into understanding human experience was wholeheartedly embraced. Religion was discussed as institutionalized forms of belief and activity that can support clients' spirituality. The importance of addressing existential questions about the resolution of life and death issues to support personal growth was reaffirmed. This class helped prepare me for hospice work by giving me an introduction to spiritually sensitive social work practice.

Hospice work interested me immediately when I learned about its existence. Because of its regard for the crucial role of spirituality in facilitating the well-being of a person, I intuitively felt that my quest for deepening spiritual self-knowledge could be enriched through hospice social work.

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM CLIENT CARE

Serving my clients has been an eye-opening experience as I have struggled along with them in facing life and death issues. I clearly remember the time that my first hospice client sat with me at her kitchen table on a cold winter day a week before her death. She was extremely weak and looked like a skeleton after suffering tremendous weight loss. As she sat and talked to me, her consciousness went in and out. She said, " I don't' know what's there (after death). I never really thought about it." She closed her eyes and some moments passed. Her consciousness returned and she opened her eyes half way again and repeated, "I don't know." Another female client who had firmly believed that she was going to heaven and would experience reincarnation after death sobbed in her bed and said, "I don't know why I can't go now. Why do I have to suffer more? I am ready!" These clients' questions mirrored the questions that have occupied my mind since I was a young adult. Each client and situation have added insights from different angles to my understanding of life and death questions. They will probably revolve inside of me for as long as I live.

Looking into the mirror of my own fear and resistance

Even though I believe that I will be reincarnated after my death, I had strong feelings of uncertainty and dread regarding death and the dying process when I started hospice work. I felt fear and sadness about separation from this life.

Closely working with a dying person and being deeply involved with his or her life-death transition made me feel like I was going through a rehearsal of my own death. As each client shared with me how he or she was dealing with dying and mourning, I repeatedly scrutinized my own internal existential questions through different scenarios and life situations. This self-reflection forced me to seek meanings in my own life events, and to question the value and nature of my life. Although this self-reflection can lead to valuable insight, it is easy to become caught in preoccupation with my own personal issues, clouding my focus on the helping process and hindering it tremendously. So I learned that self-reflection should not become a distracting self-preoccupation.

Once I had a client with terminal cancer who was in her late 50's. She had a simple life style. She said that her life had been uneventful since she had always wished to live quietly and unnoticed. Although she was a person of few words, people around her could feel her warmth and kindness. She had a solid marriage for over 30 years. Her husband was a hard working man with a strong work ethic. But he was also very stoic and unable to attend much to her emotional needs. As she approached her death, their youngest daughter visited from out of town and attempted to talk to her father to prompt him to show tender feelings toward her mother. Despite her repeated pleadings, this man never changed his stiff attitude before his wife died. During my involvement with this client and family, I was extremely frustrated with her husband and even felt anger toward him. Reflecting on the case later, I realized I had transferred my own personal issues into this family's dynamics.

I imagined my parents acting out the same scenario with me as I, the youngest daughter, visited my home country after a long absence. Like this patient's daughter, I would try unsuccessfully to alter my parents' way of treating each other according to my ideal picture and wishes. It was intolerable and painful to think that my mother might die without loving closure or tender good-bye moments with my father. Being far away from them for many years, with only an occasional reunion every few years, I have missed seeing them together

and lack understanding of how their marriage developed in their later years, since they do not talk to me about their relationship. How I want them to be could be totally different from what they want and how they accept their relationship. By self-reflecting about my involvement with this client and her family, I witnessed the result of my failure to handle my own transference issues. Working with this situation helped me to be more conscious about my own family relationships and issues that I need to work to resolve.

Each client's situation is a mirror which often reflects my own fear and unresolved life issues. As I became aware of these mirrors, I quickly started paying more attention to my own feelings during hospice work. A red flag is raised as I talk to a client if I sense discomfort within myself. This is a sign that our conversation has touched me somewhere in which I don't feel comfortable; it suggests that I want to avoid something due to uncomfortable feelings. Sometimes, there is an issue that is totally unfamiliar to me and I do not feel confident dealing with it. Then, I must go beyond my intellectual understanding of psychological transactions by trusting my gut feeling as to how I should respond or where I should lead the conversation. At these times I feel a tightening sensation in my torso or throat. It is the same sensation that I experience when I am angry, upset, or frightened, but is not as strong. When I experience this unpleasant sensation, I make a point of reflecting on it after the visit with the client. Many of the lessons I get from my clients come from examining my discomfort.

This introspective processing also happens simultaneously during conversations with my clients. As I concentrate on our conversation and try to take in every detail of the client's expression, both verbal and nonverbal, I feel as if I have two consciousness: one is a self who is a helper totally engaged in the dialogue with my client and another is a self who is observing the interaction from a little distance with some detachment. When I am able to maintain this witness stance, I am very calm. Discomfort and fear lose their power over me. I am less reactive even in emotionally charged situations and more effective in my work with clients. This combination of total engagement and calm witnessing helps me to identify my issues that are reflected in the client's suffering. This has become one of my most powerful ways to cultivate self-awareness. It empowers me to be attuned to the spirituality of both myself and my clients.

NURTURING THE CLIENT'S SPIRITUALITY

It is a challenge to promote a sense of well-being for people during the very end of life. While experiencing physical deterioration and the loss of control over what one has achieved in the past, how can a dying person feel comfort and a sense of peacefulness? As a helper, how can I facilitate this process of spiritual healing?

During the initial phase of my hospice work, I suffered from the "savior complex." In an abstract way, I understood that I could not fix a client's life-long dysfunctional relationship problems or make a person give up resistance to relinquishment and accept the losses and changes about which he or she was grieving. I thought I knew that I could not expect clients to die the way that was ideal and acceptable to me. However, in order to develop truly empowering relationships with clients, it took me many lessons to learn to set my need "to save" them aside. In my effort to help clients maximize their sense of emotional and spiritual well-being, I needed to explore what it meant to be sensitive and nonjudgmental toward clients' spiritual orientations and needs.

I had a female client in her mid 40's who was dying from cancer. She was partly Native American. When she was referred to our hospice, she was identified as Baptist on the admission record. However, as I got to know her, I realized that her spiritual beliefs were much

closer to traditional Native American spirituality. She cherished nature and outdoor activities. She considered her life a part of the greater whole of nature that surrounds us on earth. She found a close association between her own soul and nature. Due to her advanced cancer and heart disease, she was home bound. She had a difficult life and carried many worries. It was especially hard for her when she thought about leaving her elderly mother and teenage son behind. However, she revealed moments of serenity when she recalled outside activities that she used to enjoy or looked at nature portraits painted by Native American artists. I assumed that she must have had fear and doubt concerning what is beyond death, but she never appeared to be in despair. When her little nieces asked what would happen to her when she died, she explained that she would become an eagle and go back into nature. Her remains were spread out over the plains close to a Native American reservation.

The most meaningful time we spent together involved life review sessions in which she freely talked about her life-long association with nature. If I had not identified this client's spiritual orientation and source for hope in the face of imminent death, I doubt that I could have established an effective helping relationship with her. This experience proved to be extremely important to alert me to be more sensitive to the client's spiritual orientation, including ones that are unfamiliar to me.

Not all clients are willing to talk about their religion or

spiritual perspective. Some never may have considered themselves religious or spiritual and thereby do not find it necessary or desirable to bring such an issue to my attention. Yet, from my point of view, each client that I work with has a spiritual aspect, whether it is explicit or implicit. The challenge is to find a compassionate and nonintrusive way to identify the spiritual elements of his or her daily life and to understand how the client nurtures his or her soul.

As a client tells the story of his or her life, the client naturally reveals what he or she values and holds dear as a life philosophy. One might talk about childhood, relationships, hobbies, work, suffering of illness, or losses of loved ones. As I listen, I seek to learn what life enhancing beliefs or strengths the client possesses. My belief is that one's life force is deeply connected with his or her faith, by which I mean the set of ideas that is held to sustain life in a positive way. This seems to me to be the core of our spirituality. Facilitating a client's emotional healing starts from nurturing this source of empowerment and life affirmation.

Once I encountered a client whose religious beliefs and spiritual orientations were drastically different from my own. I found her beliefs not merely different, but odd and bizarre. During a period of brief but intensive service , I learned how I could be supportive of this client without letting the difference between our beliefs stand in our way. She was a woman who firmly believed that her cancer related pain was a

punishment from God and that she deserved the pain. I was shocked to discover that she chose to stay in pain. She declined suggestions from the hospice staff to alleviate her discomfort. She did not want to use a hospital-style bed, take medicine, or use other remedial actions. This client eventually died with much discomfort. The hospice chaplain, nurse, and I visited with her frequently to explore what measures might be acceptable to her to remove her pain, but not one of us was able to draw a response. Her belief appeared very foreign to us. I myself do not share the idea that God gives a person physical pain for punishment. During my repeated visits with her, I recognized that the only way I could be supportive for her was to non-judgmentally listen to her spiritual pain as well as the physical and emotional suffering she underwent. When I was with her, I tried to be a supportive listener who was merely another human being on the same path, sharing many questions and emotions mixed with fear, doubt, and hope about death. Who am I to judge what is right and wrong? In an attempt to embrace both life and death, I walk with my clients side by side asking the same existential questions.

One dies in much the same way as one has lived life previously. The dying process is a part of living; it is a continuation of the life pattern that one has already established. If this client lived through 50 years of believing that pain is somehow a vehicle to come to peace with God, then working to strip that belief from her in the last stage of her life would be both impossible and cruel. I realized that this client's self-determination must be respected and honored. This experience taught me that I should and could be a meaningful presence for someone beyond the barrier of a radical difference in beliefs.

I have also discovered that striving for spiritually sensitive practice calls for an ability to help a client explore symbolism related to images, visions and dreams that the client experiences in connection with his or her religious or spiritual perspectives. For example, a participant in a recent bereavement support group shared a series of experiences that featured a cardinal. After her husband was diagnosed with a brain tumor, she started noticing that the red bird frequently appeared in her sight on significant occasions. When she reflected on the incidents, she came to realize that the cardinal appeared to alert her or to assure her that her trouble was being taken care of. She talked about her interpretation of each incident as the other group members listened sincerely and encouraged her to share the story. Her interpretation was that her husband started communicating with her through the cardinal after he lost an ability to speak in a comprehensive manner due to his brain tumor. She later shared with me that finding meaning in the red cardinal was a significant factor providing comfort, encouragement, and reconciliation during her grief process.

Many of my clients have shared with me unusual visions and dreams that drew their attention. Their reasons for disclosing these experiences vary. Some want validation of the meaning they have attached to them. Others want to process these images through discussion because they feel puzzled or frightened. As a result of these encounters, I no longer dismiss so-called supernatural experiences as imaginary. I am not interested in gauging the veracity of claims; I wish to help the client explore the meaning of these experiences. Once a meaningful association is established in the interpretation of a certain symbol or event, a client often can derive a sense of significance, harmony, and peace.

Moment by Moment Awareness

My effort to tune into other people's spirituality and nurture it have helped me become a more self-loving person. Caring for others increases my sense of self-worth. It also challenges me to find ways to replenish my energy so

that I have enough to give to others. I came to realize that the only way I could continue to work at hospice, given the stresses of dealing with death and grieving, was to nurture my own soul and be more sensitive to my physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Self-criticism and self-doubt had to be gradually released if I wanted to be more caring toward myself. To the degree to which I can be nonjudgmental and accepting of myself, I can treat others in the same way. One of the best ways I can do so is by keeping my awareness centered in the present, moment by moment.

I prepare for home visits by mentally running through a care plan and topics that I intend to discuss with a client. However, it is not unusual to find myself caught in an unexpected emotionally difficult or awkward situation at a client's home. In a home with a dying person, outbursts of emotion or the prevalence of chronic anxiety are common. It took me a long time to learn to trust myself completely "to go with the situation during visits with clients. Through long hours of training as a social worker, I was taught that I had to start each session by determining where each client stands regarding the most urgent needs or important issues for his or her time with me. However, perceiving each moment without trying to take control of the interaction has a totally different meaning from starting where the client is. Not taking control does not mean that one is a completely passive listener going along with whatever the other says. It takes a great deal of concentration and alertness to let the process unfold naturally. Surrendering to the natural progression of interaction with a client can be unnerving. But, it often leads me to an unexpected positive outcome. And by relaxing into this process, my own stress is relieved.

Recently, I visited an elderly female client who had cancer. She also suffered from major depression with psychotic episodes. When I arrived at her home, she was sitting up on her bed. With a stiff expression on her face, she groaned and swayed her body. She did not respond to any of my questions. Her husband said that she had been very agitated. According to him, her pain-control and psychotropic medicines had been increased dramatically during the previous several days without reducing her moaning and groaning. He was not certain if physical or emotional pain were causing her occasional emotional outbursts and constant groaning and moaning. Even the reason she was not speaking was unclear. I decided to sit with her. She looked at me with a blank stare.

The only reasonable way I could communicate with her seemed to be by gentle touching. When I touched her back, it felt very stiff. I gave her a back massage. I commented on the tightness of her body and suggested to her that we work on body relaxation exercises together. She laid back on the bed, and we worked to relax her muscles from her toes to her head gradually. Her groaning did not stop. To the contrary, it became louder and louder. Feeling a little nervous, I nevertheless continued the exercises as she did not resist or indicate that she wanted me to stop. I decided to surrender myself completely to the unfolding moment. After the exercise was over, she continued to moan. But her moaning gradually changed to singing. At first, the words were blurred. They increased in clarity. I could hear the phrase she was repeating. It sounded like chanting. She repeatedly sang, "Jesus, help me, Jesus help me." She sang for about ten minutes. When she stopped, her body was much more relaxed and her groaning stopped.

This is an example of how the process of spontaneous interaction has healing potential which can be activated if I am well tuned to it. I have to be fully present with the client in the moment of silence and then respond to an inner intuition about what to do. The client and the spontaneity of our relationship drive the process completely. My trust in what is happening each moment seems to be vital to this process. I need to accept openly what will happen in each moment with a spirit of adventure. If my presence can help the client, I feel immense gratification. At the same time, I cannot push the client or hasten the process. Accordingly, I have had to learn not to impose the interaction on the client.

Pursuing the right action moment by moment requires

100% awareness and great concentration. However, I do not mean that one should tense up the body and mind. To the contrary, I find that it is more helpful if I can find a way to relax myself. In order to relax, I find a comfortable physical position and let the busy chattering in my head cease. In dialogue with clients, and especially when helping them to work through difficult feelings and thoughts, the degree of my attentiveness rather than what I say determines the depth of our interaction. To be fully present with my client, I need not always engage in a conversation. Sometimes, it may be better to only hold the client's hand or to sit down together to look at birds through the window. I believe that it is a sense of togetherness in sharing the same space and time at the right moment which nurtures the healing process. Feeling connected to someone in a meaningful way alleviates some of the sense of isolation and fear that dying and grieving people frequently experience.

This way of relating with hospice clients is consistent with one of the major teachings of my spiritual tradition of Zen Buddhism: To be fully alive in the present moment (Hanh, 1992). One's grasp of this concept must go beyond intellectual understanding. It has to be practiced and experienced to make it a natural habit. For me, although moment to moment awareness is natural, maintaining it is not always easy. In my busy schedule, I often feel impatient and hurried, moving from one task to the next. But, being with my clients in a difficult situation forces me to focus and practice this principle. When I successfully live in the present moment, I feel more centered, grounded, and peaceful. Time itself seems to slow down.

GROWTH AND HEALING THROUGH DEALING WITH LOSS

The dying and grieving process is extremely painful emotionally for the majority of people. Facing imminent death or experiencing the loss of a significant other can present a spiritual crisis that challenges the foundation of the meaning which supports one's life. These experiences often force a person into intense soul searching. Under those circumstances, one strives to hold an elusive peace and stability, and to ward off feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness. My clients have often described this sensation as an emotional roller coaster; they go through many ups and downs, heart wrenching and stomach twisting.

Yet, I have witnessed people who use this crisis as an opportunity for spiritual growth and life-enhancement. For example, I once encountered a client who liked to discuss life and death issues and the meaning of human existence. However, she never wanted to talk about her daughters, who stayed away from her due to some unresolved problems. She

was angry with her daughters and considered them uncaring. Despite the fact that the client tried to present herself to the hospice staff as a person who had come to terms with life and was ready to die at any moment, she had frequent episodes of panic attack. With encouragement from the staff, the client opened up more to her daughters to discuss honestly what kept them away from having a satisfactory relationship. Initially, the client's daughters were reluctant to talk to her due to bitter memories of the past. But gradually they responded in a positive manner to their mother's sincere approach. After some reconciliation, the client's panic attacks ceased, and it was apparent to the hospice staff that she was more peaceful and serene.

When I examine closely the source of turmoil and chaotic feelings my clients describe, I find that their unresolved issues concerning personal relationships often play a big part in the determination of their worth and the meaning of life. Regrets, unresolved issues, and strained relationships often become magnified during the crisis of the dying process. Resolving these difficult feelings requires the person to reflect and take action. It takes courage and commitment to restore harmony to a relationship long entrenched in conflict.

When one chooses to make efforts to confront and work on relationship problems in a sincere and honest manner, the healing brought about at the emotional level seems to have a powerful effect in promoting spiritual integrity. Emotional and spiritual dimensions of life seem to be very closely related.

Recognition of death heightens the sense of human mortality. One becomes keenly aware that this living moment will cease and not return. This sense of urgency can sometimes activate dormant power for healing and reconciliation that has never realized one possesses. We once received a referral from a local nursing home. An elderly man dying of cancer moved into the nursing home with his wife who had Alzheimer's disease. They used to live in their home in a rural area of Kansas, but their daughter arranged for them to move to Topeka where she lived. This daughter was the only child and was feeling the heaviness of caregiving responsibilities. Nursing home placement became the only solution for her to provide adequate care for her parents. However, she suffered from agoraphobia. It was tormenting to her that she had to go to a crowded nursing home to see her parents. Due to this circumstance, her anxiety was extremely high and she could not go into the nursing home by herself. Initially, to cope with this, she visited her parents accompanied by her husband or hospice staff. But, it was a great inconvenience to her because she had to visit according to other people's convenience. Because of this, she started testing herself to see how far she could push herself to go alone into the nursing home. With the support of her family, the nursing home and hospice staff, and members of a support group for people with agoraphobia, the daughter was finally able to go to see her parents by herself when she wished.

Whether mending a relationship or developing a new ability to cope with crisis, a key to reaching a positive outcome seems to be in an individual's courage to face his or her own fear. Commitment, love, and mutual support can be a source of power to boost courage and activate change. A Japanese word, kiki, provides insight into this. Kiki means danger or risk. It consists of two Chinese characters that mean danger and opportunity. I believe that danger and opportunity are different sides of the same coin. A life risking situation, or the final stages of dying, bring both danger and opportunity. In general, people at first relate to the dying process with a negative response because it is so threatening and unknown. However, if we look at the other side of the coin, and strive to draw opportunity out of the risky situation, even the tragic experience of dying or losing a loved one can contain possibilities to enhance life and facilitate personal growth.

CONCLUSION

A notable activist in the field of spiritual support for the dying, Stephen Levine, said, "In a sense, we are not preparing people to die. We are learning to die ourselves." (Levine, 1980). As a person who has worked with dying people and their

loved ones, I experience the truth of his statement. Through hospice work, I am not only helping clients. I am also preparing myself to die the death that will come someday. The major difference that I observe in myself now, compared to when I began this work two years ago, is that my fear of death is reduced and the dying process presents me with some elements of hope.

My spiritual growth was made possible by addressing the meaning of life and death with hospice clients. I still don't know why suffering is inherent in human living. But my understanding of human suffering has more depth. I am grateful to those clients who provided me with this opportunity for growth by allowing me to participate in their efforts to raise themselves through struggle. When I see my own reflection in my clients and in their emotional and spiritual pain, I feel humble in knowing that we are walking on the same path of spiritual growth.

I also learned through hospice work that I will never be able to die a good death if I am not fully alive in my daily life. There is a question of how to find peace while our modern lives are so busy, since we seem to be perpetually fighting against time and being chased by the dreaded "to do" list. I have pledged myself to live in the present moment, but how easy it is to forget the present moment and to slip into the future and past! Going into clients' homes and visiting with them repeatedly reminds me to embrace the precariousness of living in this very moment.

At hospice, my awareness of spirituality is continually rekindled by the teaching of my clients. Through preparation for my own death, I have come to live more consciously. The lessons I have learned from them have reinforced my conviction that spirituality is a crucial dimension of human life that needs to be perceived and treated in a sacred manner. □

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SPIRITUALITY IN FAITH

As a young social worker in the 1970s, I worked with seriously-ill patients in a hospital setting. I discovered that my religious values and beliefs, "my Jesus thing," opened many avenues of discovery and service. This article recounts some stories of the connections between my spiritual perspective and the relationships and activities with patients.

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Author's Note

I am grateful to Dr. Suzanne England for her many kind comments and helpful suggestions in the incipient and final versions of this paper.

Bob was a physician in the state-run university hospital in north central Florida that employed us both during the decade of the 1970's. He asked if his wife Sherry could interview me about a psychology project she was doing on religion in the work place. I was flattered since Bob and I often kidded each other about our respective religious beliefs. On more than one occasion, he told me that I would make a good member of his non-trinitarian denomination if I could just give up "that Jesus thing." I agreed that he was probably right and also agreed with Sherry's request to look at how I used my religious faith in my medical social work practice.

Sherry was a bright and energetic researcher. I answered general questions about my religious background and training. We were doing well, I thought, until I innocently told Sherry that, while I did not actually pray with my clients, there were times when I said silent prayers before and after the sessions, as well as when we seemed to be "stuck." I mentioned a recent case where a woman had dragged her very reluctant husband in for counseling for a rapidly failing marriage because of his new relationship with another woman. He was adamant that he wanted out of the marital relationship as soon as possible. I admitted that even I was surprised that after I said a silent prayer for guidance, he suddenly made a 180 degree shift and agreed to further counseling. Sherry had no trouble understanding my implication that God had heard my plea for help.

But Sherry was not impressed with my magical thinking. Her facial expression and negative tone of voice reinforced her barely concealed disdain as she grilled me relentlessly until I shrank under her reprobation. I began to feel somewhat desperate and told her about research at Duke Medical Center by Dr. William Wilson (Wilson and Jones, 1978), a psychiatrist, on the efficacy of prayer with psychotherapy patients — all to no avail. In her mind's eye, it seemed, I had eliminated myself from all claims of professionalism by exemplifying the stereotypical version of an evangelical religionist: hopelessly irrational, unredeemed even by my liberal-humanist training. To her, I seemed to be a "True Believer" (Hoffer, 1951) in the sense of fanaticism, doing god-knows-what damage to my helpless clients.

In at least one respect, Sherry had assessed me correctly.

I am a "heart" more than a "head" person. I am a member of the United Methodist Church, a religious tradition which has historically been known for its "people of the warmed heart." Like Hillary Rodham Clinton (Woodward, 1994, p. 23), my faith was honed on the legacy of the Social Gospel, or what John Wesley had earlier called, "practical divinity." This is the call to act on behalf of others in response to God's unrelenting love and action in our own lives. I couldn't explain this to Sherry because her own sense of professionalism appeared to be wedded to an empirically-based agnosticism that precluded openness to even gentle metaphysical intervention in therapeutic practice. Nor could I explain this to her husband because it is all connected in my soul with "that Jesus thing."

I had tried for a while to

ignore "my Jesus thing." I went into social work because it allowed me "to save the world" as a secular missionary during a long period in early adulthood as I rotated among cycles of agnosticism/atheism/agnosticism. As a young student, I had eagerly embraced the new god, Freud. I embraced the methodism of psychoanalytic theory as the newer way to human perfection. I believed his prediction in "The Future of an Illusion," i. e., that religion would disappear as humankind relinquishes this harmful illusion in favor of progressive scientific knowledge (Freud, 1961). I worked diligently as my professors urged me to remove all traces of my middle-class morality and to become value-neutral in the fight to save humankind by objective and scientific methods. I spent time in confession with my supervisor repenting of careless remarks to clients that betrayed my misguided beginnings in the morality of my childhood. She duly recorded my misdoings in my evaluations, which served as a kind of absolution by humiliation. And I dutifully filtered my thoughts and words to reflect these new doctrines.

To this day, I'm not sure when my belief in this newfound knowledge began to falter and become hopelessly entangled with my older religious beliefs. I suspect that it occurred when I had children. Having children made it more important for me to forge connections between my past and future. Probably a large part of it occurred, however, because I was a lousy atheist in one significant way: I couldn't quit going to church. Despite my best efforts to disengage, I still loved the feel of church: the rituals, the symbolism, the music, the people, the fellowship, the shared values, "the going onto perfection." In short, I loved the connection with the community, the symphony of good people doing good works. There the *Hound of Heaven* (Thompson, 1986) found me and howled until its peace made a place within my soul.

This positive connection to church became reinforced in my work. As a beginning social worker, I found myself relieved, for example, when I discovered that my dialysis patients were heavily involved in their churches, especially those patients from rural communities. I knew from experience that support systems would likely be formed to feed the family, to comfort them, and in many cases, to work to raise money for the 20% costs of treatment not covered under Medicare. One of my first cases involved such a person. Dean, an unmarried, white, 19 year old, was the first person in his very supportive family to graduate from high school. His father was a hard working, barely literate farmer who tried diligently to understand his son's medical condition even if he could not understand the psychological pain of being an adolescent hooked three times a week to a dialysis machine. He brought his son regularly and

never gave up hope that somehow Dean would recover and realize his potential.

Unfortunately, the attending doctor had not seen Dean's potential in quite the same way. In fact, Dean was deemed mentally disabled and therefore (this was the early 1970's) unfit for the limited resources of our unit. Because, however, the small community, under the leadership of a determined lay woman from their Pentecostal church, had so rallied around the family with almost monthly fund-raisers and corresponding publicity, I could make the claim that the family had the financial resources and emotional support to go on dialysis. A hospital committee agreed; thus the young man was treated for two years until his death after a failed transplant from an older sister. This interval gave the other medical personnel time to know and care for this family as much as I did.

My recognition of and comfort with the language of religious belief had also enabled me to work with the family and church community before and after Dean's death. I had already discovered that families were often reluctant to talk with professionals about spiritual matters because of their astuteness regarding the invisible barriers signaled by professionals uncomfortable with this area. As a result, I had tried to become an open and friendly oasis in an unexpected place by being sensitive to the signs of subtle forays into this forbidden zone. I found that simple affirmation, merely a positive nod in agreement with religious claims, created an atmosphere conducive to exploring the benefits of a religious ideology that builds on the strength of positive belief.

Over and over again, I discovered that the patients were openly relieved to find someone to share their very real fears and the existential questions that come in moments of personal crisis. I learned to listen with new ears to the familiar language of the heart as people reached out in hope and prayer for the miracle of healing, or at least for the miracle of understanding and acceptance. And in that familiarity, I was allowed to share the deeper levels of their experiences and to learn from their courage and strength. My clients became my teachers and I, in turn, shared their lessons with the others who would follow me.

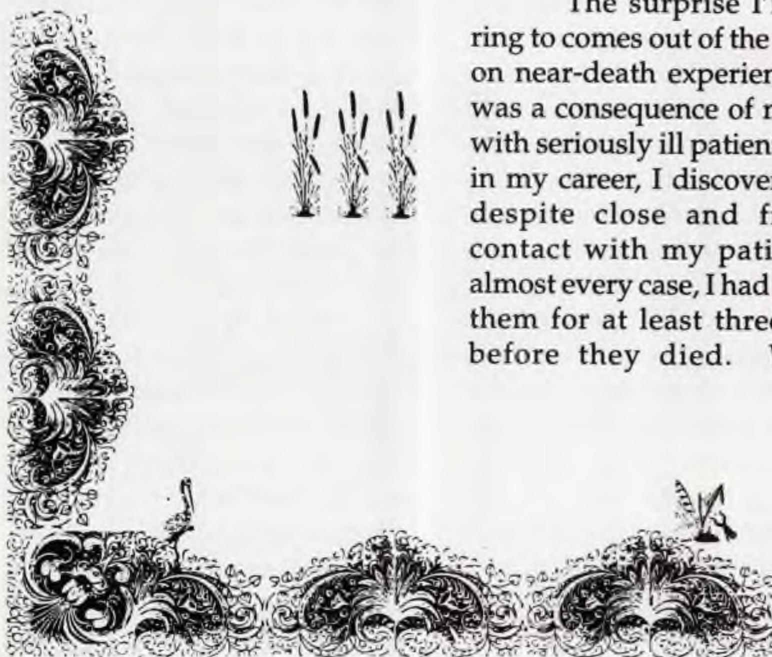
Of course, these lessons were forced upon me time and time again. On one occasion I worked with a 32-year-old, married, African-American blacksmith named Mike whose diabetes had, over the past four years, made him blind, impotent, and disabled with the loss of one leg. Although Mike had grown up in a devout Baptist family, his desire to work while he was still able crowded out his previous church-going activities. This caused him to relegate religious concerns to the shadows of his mind. There they stayed, surfacing briefly through his other medical setbacks and emerging full blown when kidney failure forced him into a long hospitalization. He became understandably depressed, and he and I spent many hours reminiscing about his past in preparation for an uncertain future. In a long session when we were exploring the existential questions of his fate in terms of ultimate justice and mercy, I over-stepped my bounds with a glib apologetic about God's will in relation to his predicament. I explained to Mike that although God's ways were often inscrutable, I was sure that he was not being punished for past sins as he supposed. In retrospect, I realize that in my eagerness to defend God, I had not listened to what Mike was really saying and had brushed aside a major coping mechanism: bargaining with God. In other words, in Mike's world view, if he could seek God's forgiveness, then God might lift the punishment of devastating illness, or at least lessen his suffering.

Fortunately, Mike paid no attention to me until I called in our hospital chaplain who was able to offer realistic comfort (and absolution) through the ascribed power and authority of his sacred position. From that time on, the chaplain and I worked as a team, with mutual consultation and concern about the patients who requested spiritual guidance.

Sometimes, even acceptance and openness to religious language and issues were not helpful in working with patients. Mrs. S., an elderly Jewish woman, had tested the patience of every staff member with her incessant demands, including one that all of us working with her belong to her religious

culture and tradition. When she was referred to me, she objected strenuously because I was outside her faith. However, she softened a bit when the resources I was able to secure on her behalf made her stay more comfortable. Still, she continued to complain until I told her (truthfully) that one of my ancestors *may* have been Jewish. At that moment she relaxed, told me that she suspected this all along, and worked amicably with me from that point on. Had I not had that ancestor, I suspect that she would have still worked with me, but not as quickly or as happily.

Another man, an elderly writer named Mr. G., at the end stage of a devastating form of cancer, faced his death with a proud atheistic stance despite the incessant pleas of his family to return to the comfort of their Reform Judaism. After I was able to secure his trust by respecting his decision, my work focused on helping the family accept it as well. Because they knew that I, too, would have been happy for Mr. G. to reverse his decision, we were able to talk candidly about their disappointment and grief balanced with his right to self-determination. Since Mr. G.'s atheism was characteristic of a life-long pattern of self-mastery and control, his behavior was easier for them to accept when we discussed it in the context of Mr. G.'s strength of personality and his integrity. He could apply this strength toward dying as he had lived. In the remaining two weeks of his life, Mr. G., his wife, his two grown children, and I shifted the focus of the discussions into memories of pleasant times together and the beliefs and values that they shared in common. Mrs. G. never fully gave up hope that Mr. G. would change, but he died with his unconquerable soul intact. I prefer to believe, how ever, that he had a surprise waiting at death.



The surprise I'm referring to comes out of the research on near-death experiences that was a consequence of my work with seriously ill patients. Early in my career, I discovered that, despite close and frequent contact with my patients, in almost every case, I had not seen them for at least three weeks before they died. When I realized this avoidance, I was forced to face my own fears of death. I still held tremendous guilt, for example, that I had avoided Dean as his health declined, at a time when he needed me and others the most. In an effort to deal with these fears and failures, I attended a workshop given by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, author of several books and one of the pioneers in the Death Education Movement. Dr. Kubler-Ross mentioned research done by Dr. Raymond Moody, who at that time had not yet published his best-seller, *Life After Life* (Moody, 1976). I wrote to Dr. Moody and attended one of his workshops. With a fellow-church-member cardiologist, I began some of the very early research in that area, using some of the experiences of my patients who had quietly hidden these episodes from us until we asked (Sabom and Kreutziger, 1977).

While this work did not prove that there is life after death (for me such a belief is still in the realm of faith) it did show that for many people the experience of death is a peaceful and painless experience. It also fit into my spiritual belief that a Benevolent Power ("that Jesus thing" again) would be there in the bad times as well as the good. This offered a comfort that could be shared with those nearer to death at that time than I. Since there was a tremendous amount of publicity about the study then, patients sought me out for this information, which I offered only at their request and to the extent that they were interested. To some it gave immense relief; to others it was too mysterious and

alien. But for me it offered enough peace about death to calm my fears. From that moment on, I was present with my patients until their ends, and I connected with their families for many months, sometimes years, beyond.

Of course, as the allegorical tale of Lucifer tells us, everything God-given and therefore good, has the potential for misuse and destruction. Opening ourselves up to the spiritual realm of our patients' lives also opens up the dangers this can bring and the pitfall we must watch for. I suspect that this is often the reason social welfare professionals shy away from exploring the transpersonal values of their clients/patients. Several of my cases raised important questions about the misuse of spirituality and the challenge of responding appropriately for healthy reframing and healing.

One of my continuing challenges came from patients or clients who understood enough of my religious tradition to trample upon its good intent in socially dysfunctional ways. The husband of a seriously-ill patient, for instance, enlisted my help in getting churches and other charities to donate money for his wife's care, which he really used to feed his drug habit. In another case, a recovered cardiac patient wanted my help in applying for social security benefits. In such situations, the dilemma for me was how to establish appropriate boundaries with these individuals when my religious values stressed unconditional love and service.

This dilemma actually was the easiest to resolve since Christian belief also stresses accountability for one's actions as part of our covenant with the Creator in response to all empowering grace. I believe that as temporary stewards of the creation, all of us, worker and client together, are obliged to hold all gifts, including the gift of love extended in service, in sacred trust until these gifts are returned to their Source. Speaking this truth from a stance of "tough love" was part of my vocabulary long before I read, "The worker who does not permit the client to exploit him (sic) and who scrupulously makes clear that he (sic) will not settle for the superficial has a good chance of engaging the client in an active identification process" (Zentner, 1984, p. 258). Committed religionists have long known that "cheap grace," i.e., love without cost or fixing limits (Bonhoeffer, 1963), prohibits building strong helping relationships with individuals just as it prohibits building strong societies.

Another challenge I faced in the realm of working within the context of religious commitment arose from the dilemma of helping people to stay connected with religious supports even when they might expose clients to harm. For example, a mentally disturbed woman, who was connected to her church's supportive network, attempted suicide after misinterpreting a sermon urging sacrifice of one's life so that others (interpreted as her ill daughter) might live. Mrs. M., a white, 39-year-old, married housewife was an active member of a small church whose theology stressed rigid accountability to biblically-based codes of behavior and adherence to reified doctrines about sin and salvation. She was close to members of her congregation. She sought the advice of her minister while she fought off physical exhaustion and depression while she took care of her 17-year-old daughter who had a debilitating illness. He and the other members of her church visited her regularly after her hospitalization for her attempted suicide. The psychiatrist and I decided to make him a part of the treatment effort since he seemed eager to help and was somewhat embarrassed about the unintended consequences of his preaching. He wanted to make sure, as did we, that Mrs. M. didn't attempt suicide again. Since Mrs. M. was far more willing to listen to him than to us, we were able to enlist his help in interpreting and reinforcing beneficial therapeutic interventions in Mrs. M.'s life by a mutual examination of the causes and dynamics of a psychotic depression. After several weeks, Mrs. M. was released after a very successful recovery. The continued follow-up and consultation between us and her minister provided

important monitoring and support for her.

Bill, a 42-year-old, white, married businessman, who was being evaluated as a potential transplant donor for his sister, presented another problem in terms of diagnosis and treatment. He spent over an hour during a very intense initial visit trying to convert me to his evangelical view of Christianity which had saved him, he said, from a life of alcoholism. After I finally told him that I was already in the fold, he relented enough to allow me to continue the interview. In my report, I interpreted his rigid traits as a warning sign of a personality that I felt was loosely integrated and held in precarious balance only by the strong, structured tenets of his religion. However, I was the single person on the medical-psychiatric team to note any concerns. Since Bill turned out to be the only eligible donor, the decision was made to go ahead with the transplant. Right be- fore the operation, Bill had a psychotic break, making my words prophetic. My diagnostic ability had been greatly enhanced, I believe, because Bill had sensed my openness to his religious views. He did not hold them in check as he had with other interviewers, allowing me a glimpse of his character and its vulnerabilities. Fortunately, after several months of psychiatric treatment, which he was willing to undergo in order to help his sister get well, the transplant was successfully completed.

Perhaps the greatest ethical challenge for me arises from the gap between the psycho-medical environment and possibly misguided religious beliefs. For example, I was challenged by patients or families who refuse life-saving medical care because of their religious values. As a Christian I believe in spontaneous healing and the power to control one's medical destiny in limited ways, but I also believe that healing comes through traditional medical methods as well. Sometimes, reframing the situation in such a way encouraged immediate cooperation. However, my experience has been that time and process play larger roles in cases where the final decision is made to accept standard medical care. Obviously, patients also have the right to refuse treatment, but they usually do so before they reach the hospital. Sometimes, the patients change of heart occurs when the medical symptoms become too obvious to be denied, and other times it occurs when these individuals are introduced to others who share their experiences and therefore understand their doubts, concerns, and fears.

In one such case, an acquaintance named Lynn, who knew of my hospital experience and religious commitment, invited me to her home to share her holistic spiritual beliefs and values as context for her argument for miraculous healing. She gave many examples of how her organic, vegetarian diet and meditative methods made her 15-year-old daughter Susan, who had serious kidney disease, feel better. I listened, explained as much as I could about others' experiences with renal failure (including the dietary need for protein), prayed with her at her request, and then asked her to meet with another friend named Mary who had gone through the same experience with a child suffering from end-stage kidney disease. She did. Some weeks

later, when I checked on the progress of the helping relationship, Mary admitted that she had lost contact, but agreed to call Lynn and see her again. When she did, Lynn's daughter was so critically ill that they both took her to the hospital. When the doctor refused to treat Susan unless it was done in the medically approved manner, Lynn relented and allowed Susan to be dialyzed. Susan did well, eventually received a transplant, and had a very successful recovery. Lynn now attributes Susan's remarkable progress to the power of prayer and the community's support. Lynn, in effect, did her own reframing.

In a sense, Lynn's story is symbolic of what happened to me and others who choose to share the journey of faith of seriously ill patients. We start with our own sense of truth, enter into relationships with others whose difficult situations force us to face with them some of life's most challenging questions, and reframe our beliefs and values based on what we hammer out within those interactions. This process occurs in the context of what theologian Paul Tillich (1963) called "the eternal now." Seriously ill individuals and those who love them often do not have time for abstract philosophical meandering along existential pathways, no matter how alluring. They are confronted with a direct threat to their temporal future. They force those who care about them to confront that threat as well. They need all the resources available to them, including ones that offer spiritual comfort and solace.

For those who accept the challenge to walk the more narrow path with them, and who do not shun their religious beliefs and values, the rewards are enormous. My patients and clients helped me to refine skills I had learned in Sunday School. They taught me to listen to the silence of thoughts too profound to express. They taught me how to respond carefully to the quiet of these meditations. I learned that words have great power for healing if used wisely and potential for great harm when they are not. I learned that just being with Dean or Mike or Lynn was often as important as anything I could do tangibly. "The evidence of things not seen" is a powerful corollary for any treatment derived from science.

My patients forced me to confront my own existential anxieties in order to help them face theirs. I had to move beyond my youth and inexperience and wobbly religious faith in order to fortify my practice and knowledge for their benefit. I had to leave behind romantic and shallow notions about what it meant to face major disability and the possibility of death as those with whom I worked allowed me insight into their private struggles and suffering. I had to acknowledge my own reluctance to give up the fight to keep my patients from giving in to the inevitable when they had clearly signaled that they were ready to do so. I had to risk exposure to values and beliefs far different from those I had grown up with and to respect the integrity of their right to coexist with mine. Most of all, I had to learn to support the courage that comes from staying the course minute by minute, day by day, just as the accumulated wisdom of my religion teaches me to do.

The growth process was emotionally and physically exhausting, but it helped me define the limits of my strength in ways that still serve me. I've learned to wait in order to let each situation unfold enough so that I can clearly respond to the realistic needs and desires revealed, rather than to my own compulsion to **do** something. I've learned to appreciate the strength of support systems for recovery, both for the patients and their families and for those of us who work on their behalf. I've learned to prioritize by separating the wheat from the chaff in the context of the gift of each new day that comes without any guarantee of another. I've learned to take time to renew my spirit through worship, music, prayer, and play.

Each renewal of these lessons recaptures the memory of the serendipity of those earlier experiences. I use the memories as part of practice wisdom to pass on to the students whom I

now teach. Whether I consciously realized it at the time or not, the learning that my patients and I forged together, undergirded by my religious faith and values, emphasized the healthy aspects of behavior and belief, long before words such "empowerment" and "working with the client's strengths" became fashionable. I owe my patients much. □

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MAKING THE PAST MEANINGFUL: Kwanzaa and the Concept of Sankofa

The African American holiday of Kwanzaa has become an important cultural practice among millions of African American peoples throughout world African community. This is a narrative of the process of conceptualizing and institutionalizing Kwanzaa, its emergence in the thrust toward re-Africanization during the Black Power Movement of the 60's, its relationship to the Black liberation struggle, the development and meaning of its symbols, and its communitarian vision and values as expressed in the core values of Kwanzaa, the Nguzo Saba.

by Maulana Karenga

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The creation of the holiday Kwanzaa is rooted in and reflective of the 60's liberation movement, the conception of my role as an activist-scholar and, the vanguard role of my organization **Us** as a cultural nationalist structure dedicated to creating, recreating and circulating African culture and the struggle for a just and good society.

As an activist-scholar in the 60's, I had felt a profound need to use my knowledge in the service of the people, and make it available to the masses to improve and enrich their lives. This commitment to serve came from the life and lessons of great men and women I admired and studied, and from the lessons and expectations of people from my childhood. Our mother and father, our immediate and extended family, our friends, our public school teachers, and the sheltering ancient oaks we called "old folks" and "elders" all expected and predicted that I would do something of lasting value to serve our people and honor our family.

With this in mind, in 1965 I left the University of California, Los Angeles and the doctoral program in political science with a specialization in African Studies. I began to organize and teach in the community, sharing my knowledge, shaping circumstances, and searching after what would be good for the future. My activities expanded after the Watts Revolt of 1965, a turning point in the Movement and a point of departure for my involvement in "the struggle."

I had worked in the civil rights movement earlier, demonstrating against chain-stores with segregation policies in the South, and assisting in fundraising, rallies, and forums on and off campus on the meaning and goals of the struggle. The Revolt became a sign and symbol for the need to turn inward, establish community control, acquire, and practice what came to be called Black Power. I defined the goals of the Black Power Movement as a collective thrust to achieve and maintain three things: (1) self-determination (freedom in the general sense and community control in a specific sense), (2) self-respect (self-understanding and self-appreciation rooted in paradigms from our own culture), and (3) self-defense, (the collective capacity to end existing oppression and abuse,

and prevent future oppression and abuse by the state, especially by the police).

The urgency of this project was underlined by the assassination and sacrifice of Malcolm X, and the models of liberation by African countries. The Revolt illuminated and framed the issues in the discourse of power. The central message was that students like me had a special obligation to work on the project as we were, more idealistic, less economically vulnerable and less restrained by the demands of daily life. We agreed that we must dare to struggle, win, and build the new moral community we wanted to live in.

To do my work and to achieve something of lasting value, I created two basic instruments, an organization called Us and a theory called **Kawaida.** The name Us was chosen to indicate two things: the communitarian views, values, and practice of the organization and our commitment to us as a people distinct from them, the rulers of the established order. **Kawaida,** in Swahili means tradition, but in the context of its theory, it refers to an ongoing synthesis of tradition and reason directed toward cultural grounding and social change. Within this framework I conceived the project of Kwanzaa and enumerated the **Nguzo Saba,** (The Seven Principles) the core of its conception and practice.

From 1965 on, the expression and process of the Movement was essentially Black Power. One of its central tenets was the need to "return to the source," to get "Back to Black," in a word, to return to all things African, especially the most important things. The focus was on recovery, reconstructing African culture, reappropriating it, and reaffirming it as a living tradition. In this context cultural practices such as renaming oneself and one's children with African names; wearing the natural or Afro hair style and African clothes such as the buba, kanga and dashiki; relearning and learning African languages, especially Swahili; and reinstituting African life-cycle ceremonies such as naming **(Kutaja jina)**, nationalization **(Akika)**, wedding (**Arusi),** and passing **(Maziko)**,were and are developed.

Within this thrust for re-Africanization, Black Studies was established in the academy, and the network of community institutions to restore and reinforce African culture was expanded. These institutions included cultural centers, independent schools, theaters, art galleries, and brotherhood and sisterhood formations. Re-Africanization also involved a return to Africa itself for cultural and spiritual revitalization, and the reestablishment of mutually beneficial relationships and exchanges. At the core of this commitment to re-Africanization was the attempt to recover and recommit oneself to learning and living African values as an indispensable way to rebuild and reinforce family, community, and culture. Kwanzaa as an institutionalized cultural practice serves as a central way of reappropriating and reaffirming African culture.

I moved to this position and became a leader of this movement for several reasons. First, the civil rights struggle had revealed the weaknesses of ideas about assimilation. Certainly, we all wanted desegregation, but I and others rejected integration. Desegregation would destroy barriers to the exercise of rights and free exchange, but integration, as I read it, assumed that we as persons and a people wanted and needed to be with whites to achieve and fulfill ourselves. This, I rejected of necessity. Second, I began to conclude that cultural pluralism was the best way to achieve quality relationships and mutually beneficial and cooperative exchanges in society. I had championed cultural pluralism in a letter to the editor in 1960 in the *Daily Collegian* at Los Angeles Community College. Then, my position was a liberal cultural pluralist one. Now, I advocated a cultural nationalist pluralism. Third, I emphasized re-Africanization because I perceived that cultural identity was the most fundamental way to understand and realize oneself. One's concept of humanity is inescapably tied to the cultural paradigms. As an African, I chose to understand and realize myself in and through African culture.

I embraced this position with greater fervor when I discovered the rich, varied, and ancient character of African culture. As an intellectual, I had

been surfeited with and turned off by the Eurocentric approach to human knowledge. It seemed at one point that all subjects taught were openly or surreptitiously long and boring self-congratulatory narratives of Europe and European peoples. I needed to know and understand my culture and the cultures of other peoples of color, but especially my own. So, I detached myself from schools and the circles of associates and friends from the civil rights movement and turned inward and toward Africa. I found, in both continental and diasporan African cultures, models of human achievement and human possibility that informed my conception of self, the good life, and the just, good society. Within this context I began my process of re-Africanization, returning to my own history and culture and building structures and processes to achieve and spread my views.

My organization Us formed the vanguard in the re-Africanization process. Us argued that culture is the key crisis and challenge in Black life. Moreover, Us maintained that the crisis is solved and the challenge met by self-consciously overturning oneself, by institution-building and by the social struggle which re-shape persons, culture , and aids in the creation of a just and good society. Us linked the improvement and enrichment of African American life to the rescue and reconstruction of its culture and the struggle to reshape, reappropriate, and create a new society.

This position was argued within movement organizations. Some organizations argued for strength through education; others for economic development; and still others for "picking up the gun." We maintained that all these ways were necessary but not sufficient because what was needed, as Fanon said, was a total solution on the objective as well as the subjective level. Such a solution required culture, i.e., the totality of thought and practice of a people. We concluded that we could find guns anywhere, especially in the hands of the oppressor. What was necessary, was for the people themselves to decide that struggle itself is necessary and then determine and develop their means. Thus, we argued for a cultural revolution to create a new logic and language of liberation and new institutions to house and advance our aspirations.

We understand that the stress on culture would justify itself if it were inclusive enough to deal with the demands of daily life and struggle. Therefore, **Kawaida** theory defined culture in its fullest sense as the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself, and introduces itself to history and humanity. It occurs at least in seven fundamental areas: history, religion (spirituality and ethics), social organization, economic organization, political organization, creative production (art, music, literature, dance), and ethos, i.e., the collective psychology which results from practice in the other six areas of culture.

Kawaida maintains that the quality of social practice is directly related to the quality of the cultural views and values which inform and ground it. Values are defined as categories of commitment and priorities which enhance or diminish human possibilities. What one considers important and places first in one's life determines the quality and direction of one's life with both persons and peoples.

These assumptions about culture and values led me to study African cultures and ask what was the social cement that held these societies together and gave them their humanistic character? Moreover, how could I make these ancient traditions live again? How could I use and teach others to use the past to inform and give foundation to the present and future? How could I use the lessons of the past to move effectively in the history we now live?

My conclusion was that the core of humanistic African culture is its communitarian values, values which reaffirm and reinforce community and human flourishing. The challenge was to assemble a set of communitarian values which reflected both the best of African tradition and modern ethical reasoning to establish a core set of values for the African community. Moreover, they had to be values that spoke to the needs of the community and the demands of the struggle. Values that would enhance the people's

sense of identity, purpose, and direction and support their efforts to live free, full, and meaningful lives. Such a set of values would have to have be conceptually elastic to allow for rich and varied interpretations to accommodate the diversity of thought and practice of African peoples, and represent a core value system that could be easily grasped and learned because of its manageable number and meaningful focus and message.

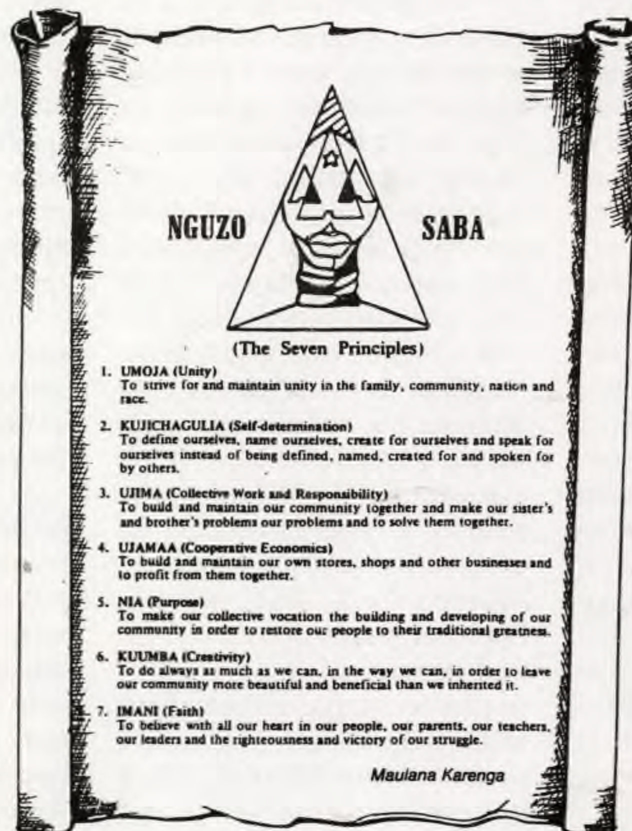
Sankofa, an **Akan** concept of historical recovery, literally means "return and retrieve it," but conceptually is more expansive. It requires a recovery, the result of intellectually rigorous, culturally grounded and future-focused research. What I wanted to do was not simply extract from the past but to discover and recover values that pose models of human excellence and suggest paradigms of human possibility. The practice of Sankofa requires constant dialog with African culture. A central self-understanding of **Kawaida** is that it seeks answers to the fundamental concerns of the African and human community to define the best of what it means to be both African and human. This dialog was conducted inside Us and with other African groups, institutions, and scholars, and in public and community forums with the masses. The central dialog was inside Us, for recovery and reconstruction of African culture and its use in enriching and expanding our lives as our central mission. Therefore, the struggle was not simply to defeat our oppressor, but to imagine a new way of being human, and new paradigms of human relations and human society to bring into being. Paradigms of possibility for Us resided in the ancient and varied richness of African culture. In this context I conceived and put forth the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) as a core Black value system which reaffirms and reinforces family, community and culture. I developed Kwanzaa as a fundamental way to introduce, institutionalize, and spread these principles. **Kawaida** theory and the **Nguzo Saba** gave form and substance to Kwanzaa, making it a fundamental mode of cultural recovery and reconstruction.

Kwanzaa was created first as a fundamental way to rescue and reconstruct African culture in the midst of a movement for re-Africanization. It was to recover a valuable and ancient way of building family and community, shaped so it spoke to current needs and aspirations as a paradigm of possibility. Secondly, I created it to introduce the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) and to reaffirm the centrality of communitarian values in building and reaffirming family, community and culture. Kwanzaa was also created to serve as a regular communal celebration which reaffirmed and reinforced the bonds between us as African people both nationally and internationally. And finally, Kwanzaa was created as an act of self-determination as a distinct way of being African in the world. It was conceived as a cultural project, as a way to speak a special African truth to the world by recovering lost models and memory, reviving suppressed principles and practices of African culture, and putting them in the service of the struggle for liberation and ever higher levels of human life.

The first celebration in 1966 was essentially an organizational celebration with guests and friends of Us. It set the pattern for subsequent celebrations which I outlined in a typed paper and sent around the country to other nationalist

organizations. The process included ingathering, rituals of thanksgiving; remembrance and recommitment; and celebrations of the good. As an intellectual I was always concerned with laying groundwork and setting forth a clear and definite framework, but I was equally concerned with allowing flexibility for developmental change as distinct from destructive change. In 1966, I put forth the basic framework and content of the Kwanzaa celebration. It anticipated and allowed for changes that reaffirmed its basic principles and lessons, and enriched and expanded celebrants' understanding, appreciation, and practice of the holiday.

As Kwanzaa developed, I continuously stressed the need for thinking and talking about Kwanzaa as a way to reaffirm and reinforce family, community and culture. This way of approaching Kwanzaa as reaffirmation and reinforcement serves at least two purposes. First, it does not deny strengths African peoples already have but stresses the ongoing need to expand on these. As Nkrumah says, we must "go to the people; start with what they know and build on what they have." Thus, Kwanzaa seeks to reaffirm and reinforce the internal strengths of the people by emphasizing communitarian life-affirming, struggle-supporting and achievement-encouraging values which come from our own culture.



Second, to stress Kwanzaa's drawing and building on the best of our culture is to reaffirm the need to protect and expand it. If we respect African culture and above all African people, we must struggle to create the context in which both can flourish. While the vision, values, and practice of community strengthen the people, their own struggle will liberate them and lay the basis for a just and good society.

I posed the core values of Kwanzaa, the **Nguzo Saba,** as a system, a set of moral values by which the African community could reconstruct our lives in our own image and interests and pose a critical model of family, community, and culture. These Seven Principles are: 1) **Umoja** (Unity)—to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race, i.e., the world African community; 2) **Kujichagulia** (Self-Determination)—to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named for, and spoken for by others. As the ancient Egyptians taught, to think with our own mind, feel with our own heart, see with our own eyes, hear with our own ears, speak with our own mouth and walk with the strength and dignity of our own person; 3) **Ujima** (Collective Work and Responsibility)—to build and maintain our community together and make our sister's and brother's problems our problems and to solve them together; 4) **Ujamaa** (Cooperative Economics)—to build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together. In a word, to share work and wealth, and build and control the economy of our community; 5) **Nia** (Purpose)—to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their historical greatness; 6) **Kuumba** (Creativity)—to do

always as much as we can in the way we can to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it; and 7) **Imani** (Faith)—to believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle. In a word, faith in ourselves, in our Creator, in our mothers and fathers, our sisters and brothers, our grandfathers and grandmothers, our elders, our youth, our future and faith in all that makes us beautiful and strong. We need faith in the righteousness and victory of our cause, faith that through hard work, long struggle, and a whole lot of love and understanding, we can and will self-consciously step back on the stage of human history as a free, proud, and productive people. I used Swahili because it is the most widely spread African language and thus represented the Pan-African character of my political and cultural vision. For this same reason my organization Us had introduced Swahili as the African language of the Movement and fostered its use in language classes; in naming persons; organizations and buildings; and in greetings and useful phrases.

I constructed the order of the principles to start with **Umoja** (Unity) and to end with **Imani** (Faith). I started with **Umoja** (Unity) because there is no family, community, or culture without unity. It is, of necessity, the beginning and continuing need. But then come questions of unity for what, around what values and practices, and how to achieve unity in thought and practice? The other principles help explain the nature, purpose, and practice of unity. Unity for and through **Kujichagulia** (Self-Determination), and unity directed toward community and African self-determination in the cultural, economic, and political sense. It is a unity for and in freedom which is, in fact, the practice of self-determination, in and through community. Unity, in turn, requires **Ujima** (Collective Work and Responsibility). This teaching of ancient Egypt says that the good done for others is good we, in fact, do for ourselves. In doing good, we are building the moral community we, ourselves, want to live in. We also commit to **Ujamaa**, the principle and practice of cooperative economics through shared work and wealth. Ujamma makes all beneficiaries and bearers of responsibility, reinforces cooperative values, and lays the basis for cooperative projects. Moreover, establishing national purpose **(Nia)** and reassessing and redefining it constantly is an imperative. This national purpose becomes our collective vocation as a people. It is important that it is always informed by our best moral vision and values. There is the challenge to always be creative, to act like the Creator, to constantly bring into being the good and the beautiful, and to strive to leave our community better and more beautiful than when we inherited it. This is the principle of **Kuumba.**

Finally, **Imani** (faith) is the principle from which all principles are drawn. We require faith in ourselves and each other to constantly practice. Thus, we say, let us all and each have profound and continuing faith. We can and will return to our own history and self-consciously step back on the stage of human history as a free, proud, and productive people.

Kwanzaa like all other holidays requires symbols. The symbols, like the holiday itself, represent a synthesis of tradition and reason, ancient practice and modern engagement, and continental African culture and African American culture. In choosing symbols I was concerned with cultural authenticity and relevance for the present and the future.

Certainly, being in the midst of an historical struggle for freedom would have to be reflected in both the symbols and their interpretation. Moreover, the symbols had to reflect not only the demands of struggle, but reaffirm and reinforce the best of our cultural values. These would begin with the values and symbols of communitarian and first-fruit celebrations of which Kwanzaa was an expression.

Kwanzaa has seven basic symbols and two supplementary symbols. These traditional and modern symbols evolved out of the life and struggle of African American people. These basic seven symbols are: 1) **mazao** (crops); 2) **mkeka** (mat); 3) **kinara** (the candle holder); 4) **muhindi** (corn); 5) **zawadi** (gifts); 6) **kikombe cha umoja** (the unity cup); and 7) **mishumaa saba** (the seven candles). The two supplementary symbols are a poster or other representation of

the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) and the **bendera ya taifa** (the national flag or standard).

The first symbol the **mazao** (crops), represents the historical roots of the holiday itself and the rewards of collective productive labor. The concept of Kwanzaa, as a first-fruit celebration, has its roots in the communal agricultural celebrations of continental African peoples.

Mkeka (mat), the symbol of tradition and history, is the foundation for correct knowledge and understanding of self, society, and the world. Therefore, all other Kwanzaa symbols are placed on the **mkeka,** and it too becomes a foundation. The **kinara** (candle holder) is symbolic of our parent people, the continental Africans, our ancestors as a collective whole, both the African man and the African woman. The **muhindi** (corn) represents children and all the hopes and challenges attached to them. **Zawadi** (gifts) are symbolic of the seeds sown by the children (i.e., commitments made and kept) and of the fruits of the labor of the parents. **Kikombe** (the unity cup), or its full name—**kikombe cha umoja**, serves two basic functions. First, it is used to pour **tambiko** or libation for the ancestors, and second, it is the ritual drinking cup to reinforce unity in the family and community. The **mishumaa saba** or seven candles represent The Seven Principles which are the heart and spirit of Kwanzaa. The candles are placed securely in the **kinara,** the symbol of ancestry, to symbolize the rootedness of the ancestral principles. The lighting of the candles is a daily ritual during Kwanzaa which symbolizes giving both light and life to the principles themselves and raising up light to lessen darkness in both the spiritual and intellectual sense, an ancient African concept. As the Husia, the sacred text of ancient Egypt says, "I have driven away darkness so that light could be lifted up."

Two supplementary symbols are the **Nguzo Saba** and the **bendera**. The **bendera** are the Black, Red, and Green colors given to us by the Hon. Marcus Garvey. In the 60's we reordered the colors and slightly adjusted their interpretation to correspond to our current needs. Thus, we said the colors are Black for the people, Red for our continuing struggle, and Green for the future we shall build out of struggle.

Kwanzaa is organized around five fundamental kinds of activities which reflect both its origin in the practice of first-fruit celebrations and its rootedness in communitarian values. Regardless of differences in language, name, and cultural location, Kwanzaa and other first-fruit celebrations revolve around these common activities. First of all, Kwanzaa is a time of ingathering of the people. It is a time to come together and reinforce the bonds between us as a people in spite of our diversity. Thus, Africans who are Muslim, Christian, Jew (Hebrew); followers of the ancient African traditions of **Yoruba, Maat, Dogon, Ashanti,**

Dinka, and other religious traditions celebrate Kwanzaa. It is a cultural holiday not a religious one. African culture is diverse and the home of innumerable religious traditions. Old and young reach across generations and embrace and find in Kwanzaa a common ground of heritage and promise. It is a special time for calling home all family members, reaching out of friends and neighbors as well as the community at large and reinforcing the bonds of family, community, and culture. And so all are urged to reach out; reconcile and re-embrace each other; forget differences and celebrate commonality as family, community, and culture; and to enjoy the goodness of peaceful togetherness.

Kwanzaa is a special time for reverence for the Creator and the creation. Therefore, its observance emphasizes spiritual grounding; rejoicing, and giving thanks for the gift of life, thanks for our families, our community; and our culture and the promise of our future. Because it is based on ancient African harvest celebrations, it is also a time for giving thanks for and committing ourselves to respect for nature, its beauty and bountifulness. The agricultural and harvest focus of the holiday gives an excellent context for special appreciation of nature and the universe and concern for the continued health of the earth; natural abundance; and our right relationship with the Creator, humans and nature. The ancient Egyptians and other African peoples teach that the Divine, human and natural are linked; that harm to one is harm to all; and that good done to one must and does include good done for all. Thus African people remember and meditate on this, teach it, and cultivate the principle and practice of right relationships with the Divine, human and natural.

Kwanzaa is a special time of commemoration of the past. It provides an excellent context for teaching and celebrating the most ancient history and culture in the world—African history and culture. We remember Fannie Lou Hamer's statement that there are two things we must all "care about, never to forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over." And thus we embrace Kwanzaa, a special time to teach the rich beauty of our history and to praise the great bridges who carried us over—Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Mary M. Bethune, Malcolm X, Ida B. Wells, Martin L. King, Anna J. Cooper, Marcus Garvey and others. We also praise the small and sturdy bridges who did not make the history books, wear kente cloth or speak an African language, but still taught us African values by teaching us to dare struggle, speak truth, do justice, and walk in the way of righteousness.

As a people conscious of our culture, we know both the meaning and value of memory, the moral obligation to raise and remember those who gave their lives, love, and labor so that we might live fuller, freer, and more meaningful lives. And we teach these to our families and community and honor the ancestors by living their best and most beautiful lessons. Moreover, we take seriously the obligation given us in the teachings of Mary McLeod Bethune who said "We are heirs and custodians of a great legacy," and we must bear the burden and glory of that legacy with strength, dignity and determination.

Kwanzaa is a time of recommitment to our highest ideals. It is a time of focusing on thought and practice of our highest cultural vision and values which in essence are ethical values—values of love, sisterhood, brotherhood, and respect for the transcendent, the human person, for elders, and nature. There the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) serve as the central focus of Kwanzaa. These communitarian values are both cultural and ethical and enrich our lives as such.

We are, in the final analysis, defined by our values and the practice to which they lead. Thus, Kwanzaa teaches us to remember and act on the ancient African teachings of Maat which say, "Speak truth, do justice and walk in the way of righteousness." The **Husia** says we must always show preference for the most vulnerable among us, "give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked and a boat to those without one." We must be " a father to the orphan, a husband to the widow, comfort to the sick and a staff of support for the aged, a shelter to the needy, a float for the drowning and a ladder for those trapped in the pit (of despair)."

In this special time of recommitment to our highest ideals, Kwanzaa is especially a time of sober assessment. The major day for this is on the last day of Kwanzaa, January first, but all through the holiday one is challenged to think about what it means to be African. Those rooted in African culture reaffirm that, above all, being African is being culturally and ethically grounded. Being committed to culture and its ethical core that teaches us to struggle for liberation constantly and ever higher levels of human life, to speak truth, do justice, love rightness, serve the people and realize that "everyday is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future."

We embrace Kwanzaa as a time to ourselves and to ask members of our families and others three basic questions which Frantz Fanon says we all have to ask and answer. They are: "Who am I?" "Am I really who I am?" and "Am I all I ought to be?" "Who am I?" is a question of identity. It reminds us we are an African people—fathers and mothers of humanity and human civilization who taught the world in the midst of Nile Valley civilization some of the basic disciplines of human knowledge, sons and daughters of the Holocaust of Enslavement, and authors and heirs of the Reaffirmation of the Sixties. The question, "Am I really who I am?" is a question of authenticity, realness, genuineness. It reminds us not to mask our Africanness, distort our appearance, deny the rich and varied beauty of our people, or do anything that damages our inherent human dignity or demean our history as an African person and people.

The last question—"Am I all I ought to be?" is a question of ethical and historical obligation. It reminds us that as an African people who are fathers and mothers of human civilization, we must always strive for the highest level of achievement; that as sons and daughters of the Holocaust of Enslavement; we must oppose all forms of human oppression—especially racism, sexism, classism; all forms of enslavement, external and internal; and we must remember and honor the millions lost by completing their struggle for freedom and by living the full and meaningful lives they intended for us.

And finally, as authors and heirs of the Reaffirmation of the 60's, we must not let our oppressor be our teacher; we must create and put forth, out of our own understanding of our history and culture, a new paradigm of what it means to be human, of human relations, and of the just and good multicultural society.

Kwanzaa is a time for celebration of the good, the good of life, family, community,

culture, friendship, the bountifulness of the earth, the wonder of the universe, the elder, the young, the human person in general, our history, our struggle for liberation and ever higher levels of human life. Celebration is a ceremony, commemoration, a respectful marking, an honoring, a praising and a rejoicing. This and more is our holiday of Kwanzaa, ancient and modern thought and practice, a joyful achievement and an ongoing and unending promise.

Activities must be collective, cultural, and reaffirming and always honor to the dignity of our people and culture. The celebration of our history and struggle, our ancestors, our love, the awesome beauty of nature, the promise of life, and the achievement of hard work, are of necessity, called forth. Men and women who are rooted in their culture model and mirror the best of what it means to be African, and build a beautiful and beneficial future. They know that every word and act must teach and help us to move effectively in the history we are now living. These persons of culture know that Kwanzaa is part of that living history and rich tradition and play a vital role in celebrating and reaffirming the legacy of our history and the promise of our future.

Each year has seen the further growth of the holiday of Kwanzaa with an estimated 18 million African people celebrating it throughout the world African community. It grows among African people in the U.S., Africa, Brazil and other countries of South America, Canada, the Caribbean, and Britain and other European countries. Last year it began in India. And the question is always raised, "why does it grow among African people?" The answer, of course, lies in how it speaks to them; serves their needs; and points to ways of celebrating, and reinforcing family, community and culture. In fact, as I have so often stated, Kwanzaa grows among African people because it speaks to their need and appreciation for its cultural vision and life-affirming values, values which celebrate and reinforce family, community, and culture. It grows because it represents an important way Africans speak their own special cultural truth in a multicultural world. It grows because it reaffirms a rich and ancient tradition which lays claim to the first religious, ethical, and scientific texts and the introduction of some of the basic disciplines of human knowledge in the Nile Valley. It grows because it reinforces our rootedness in our own culture in a rich and meaningful way. And it grows because it brings us together from all countries, all religious traditions, all classes, all ages and generations, and all political persuasions on the common ground of our Africanness in all its historical and current diversity and unity.

When I see the growth of Kwanzaa and its rootedness among African people, I am obviously pleased. It is clearly a celebration which millions embrace as a cultural legacy of significant and lasting value. Therefore, it has become a work which contributes both to my self-definition and my self-understanding. Moreover, it stands as a central part of my overall work as an activist-scholar; my development of **Kawaida** theory and building the organization Us out of which Kwanzaa emerges; my work in the cooperative founding and development of Black Studies, including contributions to the concept of Afrocentricity and my pioneering work in ancient Egyptian ethical philosophy as a critical field in Africana Studies; my general Sankofa project of historical recovery and reconstruction as expressed in the development of rites of passage programs and other life-cycle rituals; the creation of the **Simba** Youth Movement as a model of possibility and promise; my political organizing and activities in and of Black united fronts and national leadership formations; and finally, my development of the Nguzo Saba which are used as a fundamental theoretical and value orientation in literally hundreds of organizations around the country. Certainly, I feel fortunate, even blessed, to see my work established and flourishing in my life time. For so many who deserved this did not see it. And yet I am always conscious of the fact that there is still so much more to do, because as the ancestors taught, "it is good to work for the future," because the "good we do for others we are actually doing for ourselves" and because "every

day is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future." □

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other tasks during my daily schedule.

As I worked experientially with plants, I began to notice that plants possess specific and distinct "feeling tones." As I spent weeks, and often months, with each plant, I came to be able to distinguish one "feeling tone" from the other. I worked with this for over a year until I could distill the essence of each "feeling tone" into usable knowledge. That is, I learned what essential elements lay at the heart of the "feeling tone, " those things which gave it its distinct emotional flavor, different from all others.

For example distinguishing "feeling tone" is easy to visualize if you think of taking ten people at random from a mall and having them line up before you. Without thinking, you look at each one and describe the overall feeling you have when first perceiving them. This "feeling tone" is often distinctly different among people of similar backgrounds, dress, and socio-economic class. People, quite often unconsciously, use this facility of intuition when "taking to" a person or not. This facility to distinguish specific "feeling tones" does not begin and end with human beings, but can be applied to anything in our world. I had used this technique in my psychotherapeutic work for some time, but this was the first time I had used it specifically with plants. I found that all plants, as indeed all living things, possess a distinct kind of energy or "feeling tone" which can be perceived if one directs personal awareness toward sensing it. This sensitivity seems to be analogous process to that experienced by most people when encountering a puppy. There is an almost instantaneous emotional response which is unique and specific to the human meeting a puppy. Over the years I cultivated that basic process through internal meditation and experimentation until I could stimulate that reaction into activity.

Perhaps one of the most striking examples for me in my exploration of this phenomenon with plants was the first time I encountered Angelica. Angelica, a relative of Osha, is a somewhat uncommon plant in this area. I rarely find it in abundance. It grows along shady streams at the bottom of north facing slopes. The first time I met Angelica, I was walking along such a stream, following a small game trail used mostly by bear, coyote, and deer. I was making my way, my senses filled with the environment in which I found myself: the sounds of the stream as it hurried over the stones, the deep greens marked with stripes of bright sun where the light found its way through the deep canopy of forest, and the inexpressible smells of old forest and lush understory. As I turned along the edge of the path, my whole attention was captured by a plant growing next to the stream. It stood some six feet tall. There was a strong, rather large stalk crowned by large, softball sized clusters of seeds and large splays of leaves standing out from the plant at irregular intervals up the stalk. The plant itself exuded some special quality of its own which was strong enough to make me pause and turn aside from my exploration. I made my way to the plant and sat down near it. The major "feeling tone" that I got from the plant was a quiet and pervading dignity and maturity of spirit. I spent perhaps an hour there that first time. Over the years I have spent many hours with her children and their children, grown from her seeds in that same place. Over this time I have come to understand the underlying qualities of the plant, those things which make up its particular "feeling tone. "

Angelica possesses a supreme dignity and sense of wholeness. In some manner it

balances the polarities often encountered in nature and the human condition. Angelica's stem is hollow and rises straight and true, a bridge between heaven and Earth, exquisitely balanced. Its nature is completely and totally female in the deepest sense of the word.
As I studied Angelica's uses among the world's herbalists, I found that it is commonly used for reproductive balancing and healing and for treatment of so-called hysterical asthma in women. The most famous Angelica is perhaps Dong Quai (Weed, 1986), a Chinese relative, sometimes called the female ginseng.

I found that after I had been sitting with the plants for several years, I would often enter a kind of waking-dreaming state in which the plants began to come and speak with me concerning their uses as medicine. One of the strongest of these experiences came from a plant called Usnea, a widespread lichen that grows on trees throughout North America. Usnea is a strong antibiotic, to some extent rivaling penicillin. One day as I was sitting with the plant, focusing on its "feeling tone," I entered a state of mind similar to what sometimes occurs when one is just waking or just drifting off to sleep. My vision was softened; colors seemed more enhanced, and I felt the "feeling tone" of the plant wash over me to such a degree that my usual boundaries and sense of self were left behind. At that moment the plant appeared to me in the guise of a young man, hair curled and growing like the plant itself. He smiled and told me that Usnea's primary function in the Earth's eco-system is to heal the trees. He said that it acts as an antibiotic for the lung system of the planet and that its effects in humans are only a byproduct of its intended effects for the trees. He went on to tell me that Usnea is specific for infections in any lung system. He left, and I gradually became aware of my surroundings again, waking from the state I had entered. In my later reading about contemporary scientific studies of Usnea, I found that it indeed is specific for infections in the lungs (Hobbs, 1990).

As these capacities developed within me, I became acutely aware that the wild plants were not only living beings but also that they had their own destiny apart from humans. I found myself entering a world peopled by a multitude of living sacred beings whom, in my slow fashion, I was beginning to understand. The many plant allies I had met agreed to teach me about deeper elements of sacred plant medicine, but only under certain stringent conditions. If I wanted to work with them as allies, if I wanted to be able to talk with the plants and hear their responses, I had to agree to treat them with respect as equals. I had to agree to speak out on behalf of the plants whenever I taught in order to allow their voice to be heard once again in the world. These agreements were not difficult to make, but they have been sometimes difficult to carry out. As I later discovered, such conditions are an integral part of sacred plant medicine the world over.

SEARCHING ANALYTICAL UNDERSTANDING

In the meantime, I had to come to terms with the idea of talking with plants. The idea that knowledge can be gained through sacred experience is alien to many people in our contemporary world. Although I had strong experiences of the sacred since I was 17, I was keenly aware that receiving knowledge through direct spiritual experience is highly unusual in our culture - so much so that it is often considered abnormal and sometimes even pathological.

My work with plant medicines was creating a double-bind for myself. On the one hand, I knew that I had been healed by the spirit of Osha, and I was delighted to be talking with plant spirits who were ready to

teach me about healing with plants. On the other hand, the idea of using plant medicines on the basis of information received from plants themselves challenged even my paradigms of healing.

Like many Americans, I was raised in a strongly analytical tradition which tends to devalue things of the spirit and feelings of any sort. Modern science has focused on describing only the surface of things, a single dimension of reality, and over time, our culture, and the children of our culture, have come to look through this lens when they view the world in which they live. Indeed, as humans have come to view themselves through this lens, the deeper spiritual dimensions of human and sacred experience have been lost. Thus, spiritual life, non-rational and non-linear by definition, is often in conflict with a science and world view which have no room for something which cannot conform to statistical analysis. Yet, within myself, like many people in the world in this time, I feel the pull of both worlds and a desire to reconcile them if at all possible. I longed for an analytical model of what I had been experiencing and to find a sense of my place within an historical framework of human experience.

Several years earlier, while working on my bachelor degree in cross-cultural religious traditions, I was encouraged by my academic advisor to formulate an analytical model of how mystical visionary experiences happen. Now, as my experiential studies with sacred plant medicine continued to deepen, I decided to try to repeat that type of research so that I could supply myself with a model to understand what was happening to me. I found that I was in strong need of a conceptual map of this new territory of experiencing the sacred. The only place I could find traces of similar experiences was in ethnologists' accounts of the use of plants by indigenous cultures of the Americas. As a result I focused on this area in my research.

When I began my research on sacred plant medicine, I expected to be able to go to the public library and consult a great number of books on sacred traditions of working with plant medicines. I was sorely disappointed. I was able to find some ethnobotanical guides to medicinal plants, but they tended to gloss over or ignore the spiritual dimension of healing with plants. There were a few scholarly books that described the sacred use of hallucinogenic plants among indigenous peoples, notably Weston La Barre's *The Peyote Cult* (1989), but most popular books on the magical and spiritual properties of herbs treated the subject in a rather superficial, amateurish manner. I was forced to dig deeper.

From time to time in my readings, I came across references to obscure sources that indicated that many shamanic cultures have developed deep sacred relationships with plant spirits. These references were few and far between; it took some five years before I felt I had sufficient sources to begin study in earnest. Although my research eventually led me into a fascinating realm of the deeper spiritual realities of sacred plant medicine, my initial research took me on a journey through a jungle of biased reports and conflicting cultural viewpoints.

Finding reliable, substantive information on indigenous medicine traditions turned out to be extremely difficult. Many early ethnographers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to view Native American medicine beliefs and practices as either unchristian or unscientific superstitions, so their observations on the spiritual use of plant medicines were often superficial and antagonistic. This attitude in the researchers' work seemed to reflect my own internal conflict between non-rational, non-linear experiences of the sacred and linear, analytical, rational thinking.

As a result, my effort to create a map of this new territory forced me to wade through my own Euro-American culture's conflict with the same issue. However, I did find some early ethnological reports and a number of unpublished doctoral papers which included detailed transcripts of first-hand observations made by shamans and other Native healers. These records provided invaluable insights and observations into the traditional ways of sacred plant medicine.

THE GIFT OF PLANT MEDICINE

In the literature I reviewed, I was quite lucky to find material which contained the words of the medicine people themselves. In every instance they were quite clear that the primary source of their knowledge was visionary experience of the sacred. While many indigenous cultures value and use empirical knowledge about medicines passed down from generation to generation, they typically attribute their most effective healing knowledge to visions or dreams of the plant spirit or other helpers.

Ethnobotonists working in South America over the last several decades have accumulated a great deal of information on how indigenous peoples use plants. As a result, most ethnologists now recognize that indigenous shamans and healers are often far more knowledgeable about their native plants than the best-trained western botanists. For instance, the Kuikuru Indians of central Brazil can identify and name each plant in their territory, in any stage of growth, from seedling to dead leaf (Carneiro, 1978). Indigenous people are extremely acute observers of the plant world and often make distinctions about plants which are more complex than western taxonomy (Conklin, 1955; Messer, 1978).

Partly as a result of this, western scientists have assumed that indigenous knowledge about plant medicines was accumulated over thousands of years of trial and error experimentation. The trial-and-error scientific model might explain why indigenous peoples all over the world use Yarrow to stop bleeding. If one applies Yarrow to a cut, it stops bleeding (Moerman, 1986). However, it is more difficult to explain, using the trial-and-error hypothesis, why disparate cultures often attribute the same spiritual qualities to a particular plant. Cedar, for example, is recognized throughout the world as having benevolent spiritual qualities and the ability to counteract sorcery and other negative forces (Moore, 1979; Moerman, 1986; Gilmore, 1919). The shamans and medicine people themselves, when asked, say that the real source of their knowledge comes from the spirit world. I was finding, in my literature search, that the experiences I was having, while considered uncommon in contemporary Euro-American culture, are and have been for millennia, a common human experience.

Most indigenous cultures have many stories of how people, during times of physical illness or emotional crisis, were spontaneously gifted with healing visions from the spirit world. The most famous is perhaps that of Black Elk, the Oglala Sioux holy man, whose story is recounted in Neihardt's Black Elk Speaks (1932). Such visions were, however, not limited to times of crisis, but were, and are, an integral part of the life of people who live close to the Earth. Unfortunately, many of the works I read in trying to give some objective outside perspective to my experiences tended to overemphasize the analytical and downplay or even denigrate this other primary, spiritual, and visionary aspect of the human condition.

I found the gulf between ethnologist and indigenous healer to be a wide one. It has been exacerbated by widely differing cultural viewpoints and attitudes: one placing emphasis on experiential processes, the other, placing emphasis on mental observation and objective non-involvement. Across this gulf the two attempted to communicate about a realm of sacred experience through the medium of language with all its inherent limitations.

In my own experience, the amorphous, non-linear nature of the spirit world is very difficult to describe in analytical language. Nevertheless, by comparing my own personal experiences against the accounts and observations made by others who have reported on their journeys into the realms of sacred plant medicines, I was able to gradually identify some fundamental principles which

underlay the experiences I was having with plants.

BODY HEALS BODY; SPIRIT HEALS SPIRIT

Many holy people the world over make a distinction between the physical body of the plant and its spirit. They learn about the plants in visions or dreams or sometimes under the mentorship of an elder. They think that the sacred properties of the plants are what heals. The physical body of the plant helps but is not the main factor in healing. In many cultures, herbs do not become medicine until the medicine person activates them into medicine through ceremony. For example, the Seminole the use the breath for this purpose (Sturtevant, 1955).

The Seminole call Creator "fisah ki':ko'mihci':" which means "Breath Maker" or "Life Maker." Mikasuki medicine men focus the power of Creator or "Breath Maker" through their own breath and into the plants, awakening them into "medicine." The physical body of the plant helps ease the physical body of the sick person but does not cure. The root of illness, coming from the spirit world, needs both the awakened power of the plant spirits and the focused intention of the medicine person for healing to occur. There seems to be a universal element to this. Healers, no matter what their tradition, develop over time an internal capacity to evoke a living presence and to touch deeply the person needing healing. Within the tradition of sacred plant medicine, plants are simply a necessary medium.

Working with plant medicines does not seem to require the accumulation of extraordinary spiritual powers, but it does require the ability to walk and talk in sacred territory. In my own studies, I was shown how to call on the spirits of the plants through prayer, the respectful offering of tobacco, and talking to the plant. I was taught to continue "talking" all through the process of finding the plant, making a relationship with it, harvesting it, and preparing it for medicine. I believe that, with a little guidance and dedicated effort, most humans could develop the ability to work with and activate the sacred spirits of plants as allies in human healing. The main ingredients appear to be directed intention, sensitivity to "feeling tone," and the capacity to treat the plant as an equal, no greater and no less than the human.

HONORING THE GIFT OF PLANT MEDICINES

Many indigenous cultures teach that human beings should always be conscious of their place in the circle of life. When one goes into the world, makes contact with it, or takes something from it, one should do so with prayer and the giving of a tangible gift, such as a pinch of tobacco or cornmeal. Different medicine cultures and teachers have developed elaborate prayers, offerings, and rituals for harvesting plants used in healing. While it is always important to honor particular traditions, I believe that it is essential to understand the difference between the form of an act and its essence.

Indigenous healers whom I was fortunate to work with over the years have taught me that nothing in life is free. When we take a plant's life, even for its use in medicine, we are obligated to give something to life in return. The offering is partly for our benefit. It reminds us that the medicine plants are gifts from Mother Earth and the Creator, that we are all related, and that we are all interdependent. The ritual offering of tobacco is, however, more than a symbolic exchange of gifts. It affords us the opportunity to communicate with and engage the help of the spirit of the plant.

In my experience, the offering of tobacco means little unless it is accompanied by a sincere appreciation for the plant's sacrifice and a genuine feeling of reverence for all life. However, making some type of offering may be essential. The ritual of pausing to make an

offering encourages us to take a moment to reflect on and appreciate the gift of life made by the plant. If we dispense with offering a token of our appreciation, we may not stop to remember the plant's sacrifice or to enlist its assistance respectfully.

Although I experience that plants, like other living things, can sometimes sense" our thoughts and feelings, it may be helpful to give voice specifically to our intentions and desires. Obviously, it is not the words per se that communicate with the plant spirits. But the process of formulating and giving voice to our intentions can help convey subtle feelings which do seem to reach across interspecies communication barriers. I have noticed that the plant spirits move much more slowly than we do. They are embedded in the life web, attending to matters other than human concerns. Letting the plants know what we intend to do with them is more than just a common courtesy; it is essential to awaken them from their slow pace and to activate their capacity for becoming medicine.

COMMUNICATING THROUGH PRAYER AND SONG

One of the fundamental premises shared by most shamanic cultures is that plants can talk to humans and that humans can talk to plants. The idea of developing a relationship with plants and conversing with them does not make sense for many Western-educated people. We have been taught to denigrate the idea of interspecies communication as being either irrational superstition or naive, romantic projection. In contrast to the Western scientific paradigm, most shamanic and mystical cultures recognize that all things have awareness and that all things are made from the fabric of Spirit, in short, that all things have a soul (Halifax, 1979, Underhill, 1961, Densmore, 1918, 1959; Eliade, 1959, 1972). These traditions teach that because of our common birth out of Spirit, we have the innate capacity to communicate with each other through spirit.

In my experience, one of the best ways to communicate spirit to spirit - with plants or any other species - is through prayer. Prayer - almost by definition - reaches into the realm of the sacred and out of the realm of the secular. Prayer establishes a transconscious link or bond between the plant medicine, the healer, the patient, and the Creator.

During my experiential work with plant spirits in waking-dream states, my "talking" with plants often becomes a blend of humming and talking, sometimes approaching what could be called a song. In many traditional cultures this "talking" process may actually involve the use of formalized song. The association of plant medicines with songs is pervasive among indigenous peoples of North America. In many cultures people believe that the healing spirit or power of a plant is experienced and expressed as a song. In some cultures, such as the Seminole, the ancient medicine songs that are passed down from generation to generation were originally received as visionary gifts.

Because these medicine songs were used to invoke the help of spirits during the making of medicine and healing rituals, the songs were often considered the source of the medicine person's power. Some ethnologists have noted that medicine songs were treated as possessions belonging to the medicine person. However, it is not commonly understood that the medicine songs sung by the medicine person may not be the actual "song" of the plant but may be, in fact, mnemonic devices. In other words, part of the value of the medicine songs is their ability to elicit powerful memories of the original visionary experience. As the songs recreate a certain state of consciousness, the person recreates a link with the plant spirit and evokes the power of the sacred. When the songs are sung by others or used out of context, the songs may evoke little power in themselves.

In some cultures, people sensitive to the spirit world exchange or even buy (often at great expense) knowledge of plants and the curing songs to be used with them. But even in that case, what is transmitted is the direct experience of the plant's song. If one has not experienced the meaning or power of the underlying medicine song, little will be evoked by using it. For this reason it is useless merely to mimic another person's medicine song (Mooney, 1932).

PLANT MEDICINE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

This process of seeking to understand my own experience and formulate an analytical model for it eventually accomplished what I desired. My experiences became more integrated, less unsettling, and more useful to me. I had learned that my experiences were not completely outside the normal range of human experience, but were part of long-standing religious and spiritual traditions common to indigenous cultures the world over. These traditions contain elements of great similarity: respect toward all life forms, the belief that all things possess a soul, communication with other life forms through prayer, the generous offering of tobacco or an equivalent gift when something is to be taken, the concept that other life forms can communicate with human beings, and the understanding that knowledge can come through channels other than linear, rational, analytic thought. As I integrated this knowledge it became a more and more useful adjunct to my psychotherapy practice within the context of an Earth-centered spirituality.

I have long been a strong believer in the necessity of healthy bonding of relationships for psychological wholeness. It is a core belief of Regressive Treatment, the psychotherapeutic modality in which I have trained. Within this tradition there is a hierarchy of bonding at different levels of living systems: mother, family, self, community, nation, humankind, Earth, God (or Spirit), in that order. The human being moves up the levels of bonding as far as desires, capabilities, and personal scripts allow. My experiences with clients who have borderline personality disorder and some forms of schizophrenia have led me to believe that they, especially, have a strong need for bonding with Earth and Spirit.

Clients with severe psychological difficulties rooted in severe relationship problems may be able to correct them to a great extent through healthy bonding later in life. However, complete healing seems to require bonding with Earth or Spirit. This bonding, when healthy, is not a flight from or denial of personal pain. Rather, it supplies an essential element that human beings in crisis can use to attain and maintain a healthy level of functioning. Although there seems to be an element of religiosity in the words I am using, religious words are not crucial. What is crucial is direct experience of sacred reality. In my experience, there has been little necessity for the trappings or language of religion for the bonding to take place. This bonding of a human being with the Earth feels much like the experience of bonding with one's family. There is a deep sense of belonging and being cared for, a constant sense of friendly companionship with all life. This kind of bonding can make a significant difference when introduced into psychotherapy practice.

I remember the first day I introduced a client with borderline personality disorder to plants. The client, a woman, about 28 years old, was extremely fragile and unsettled. She was in the midst of a very painful divorce and was experiencing strong rage. During the many times we met, she expressed her feeling that she was empty inside. She could describe this feeling of hollowness vividly, even where it was located in her body. As she described this, I had a strong and visceral response about one particular plant which might be of help. So one day we went for a walk and I took her along a stream, deep in the shadows and intermittent sunlight of old forest. Soon, we came upon the children of that Angelica plant I had met so long ago. I was watching her carefully and saw the impact that plant made on her. She stopped and drew in a deep breath. Her body steadied and the constant trembling ceased. The skin across her forehead softened and relaxed. Her eyes lost her characteristically rigid fixed stare and became moist. She turned and looked at me and remarked, a small smile playing on her lips, "It's wonderful!"

As we sat, I spoke with Angelica in the ways I had learned, introducing her to this woman I had brought to meet her. I shared with my client what I knew about Angelica. The woman's hands were in constant motion, fluttering about the plant, touching its leaves as if it were a lover. I asked her to relax and close her eyes and begin speaking to the plant in her

mind. The connection for her, as she afterward reported, was very strong. The plant seemed to her a tall, strong, mature woman. I asked her then, when she had talked with the plant awhile, to ask it to come in to that hollow place within her. At the moment that she did that, her body straightened, the lines of her face filled out, the little girl look vanishing. When she opened her eyes she said, "For the first time I don't feel hollow and alone inside."

In the days that followed I had her practice that exercise many times. She practiced walking and talking and doing her daily work with Angelica inside her. I gave her a root to keep with her and some of the tincture of the root to take internally. It helped a great deal. It was not a panacea since many other things were needed to help her, but this one need it did fill.

My experiences with plants have led me to ponder, many times, the need that all of us have for deep contact and bonding with the Earth. I have felt grateful, many times, for the events which led me to my own connection with plants and study of the wisdom of indigenous people and healers. My practice of spiritually oriented helping continues to deepen and unfold. The process of bonding with the Earth becomes a stronger part of it. As a result of my calling to work with sacred plant medicines, I now experience the world as a more magical place, full of wonder and mystery. The analytical tradition I was reared in has its place, but it is only one part of the heritage of human knowledge and experience. This humbling journey into the world of sacred plant medicine has helped bring me to a greater sense of wholeness in myself and in relationship with the Earth and Spirit. □

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MY SPIRITUAL SOJOURN INTO EXISTENTIAL SOCIAL WORK

This is the story of my origins in existentialist thought and my struggles to link it with the social work profession. I describe how my emerging spiritual understanding found affirmation in existentialist writings and increasing openness in the profession to spirituality. This process enabled me to apply the existentialist perspective in "use of myself" as a social work educator and direct practitioner.

by Donald F. Krill

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During the last few years I have been teaching two graduate courses for social work students, one having to do with Existential Philosophy, as it can be integrated with social work, and the other entitled Religious Issues in Social Work Practice.

Thirty-nine years ago, as a graduate social work student myself, such a set of courses would have been unheard of in our university. When my Dean of that era, was approached by a neighboring school of theology and asked to consider some joint degree arrangement, he told them quite bluntly that social work had no connection with religion. Today, one of my faculty duties is that of liaison between that same theology school and our social work program in relation to two joint degree programs, one for a Masters of Religious Studies and the other for a Masters of Divinity. I would like to trace the changes that made this possible, within myself, the profession, and in our graduate school in relation to the interplay of social work and spirituality.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

As a student in my final quarter of studies during 1958, I presented a paper to my classmates on the subject of religion and psychotherapy. This was an embarrassing experience because so much of my paper was made up of quotations from other sources that it was that apparent to everyone I had not been capable of making such ideas my own. I was also aware that I used quotes to show my peers that I was not the only person interested in this subject. This seemed necessary to me because the intellectual environment at our school had been Freudian for some time. If the term "religious" came up in a class it was invariably in a derisive context. In 1958 even the term "spirituality" was avoided at our school. When I inquired of one of our psychiatrist teachers as to the place of Carl Jung in American psychiatry, I was told that he had almost no relevance and that he was considered "a kind of mystic." In those days I felt quite conflicted about developing my philosophical base for practice.

I had been raised a Lutheran and had lucked into a theologically sophisticated minister, a former college teacher, who had recommended my reading such religious existential writers as Kirkegaard, Tillich, Niebuhr, and Buber. About the same time, while in undergraduate college, a Cuban Spanish language professor, whom I greatly admired for his forthright critical opinion of American culture, recommended I read the major existentialists of the day: Camus, Sartre, and Marcel. The artistic environment at that time included the Beatnik culture, so many existential writers were being translated into English and were available on the paperback bookstands. A year after I graduated from social work school, Rollo May published the first major work in English about existential psychology, *Existence*. This was followed a few years later by two journals, *Existential Psychiatry* and *The Review of Existential Psychology*. I devoured these writings as I remained especially hungry for some alternative to Freud. While these were stimulating intellectually, they only sharpened my personal conflicts.

I was a depressed rebel in those years of my late 20's. I experienced a strong sense of alienation from the societal values of the day, which were stressing achievement, pragmatic thinking, security, and a generally conforming assurance that "all was well" except for those "annoying Communists" in our midst. Existentialism spoke to my personal despair, while my budding interest in Zen Buddhism lightened the intellectual atmosphere with humor, irrationality, and mystery. Following undergraduate studies, I left my Pennsylvania Dutch homeland to go west, settling in Colorado until I was called into active duty as an Air Force ROTC Officer. The Korean conflict had just ended and I was stationed in Japan. There I had my first exposure to Zen while studying the martial arts as an Air Police Officer. I was becoming increasingly detached from Protestantism, as I heard it preached, although I still valued theological writings. Upon completion of my Air Force duty, I returned to Colorado where I attended University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work.

In the 50's when I was a student, there was the left-over optimism of Roosevelt's "New Deal" era regarding the organizing of social institutions to serve the poor better. What was then termed "psychiatric social work," however, was already geared to the needs of an expanding middle class culture. Freud was the great hope of that time and Freudian-guided casework was even utilized among the poor, despite its questionable results.

My personal conflicts were multiple. I was trying to impose structure from my readings to a rather shaky personal identity. I did not yet understand how to integrate existential thought into my practice. Both the social work and psychiatric settings where I was employed were strictly orthodox Freudian in point of view. My social life with friends, and my relationship with my wife, and growing family left much to be desired. Finally, I took a leap of "unfaith" by entering personal analysis with a Freudian. It seemed the only therapeutic game in town and I decided to enter the lion's den. I couldn't do any worse than what I'd done on my own. Anyway, I preferred to experience psychoanalysis rather than read about it.

My four years of analysis were an eye-opener in several respects. My depression soon lifted, and I found more energy to deal with my social and family relationships as well as my job as a "psychiatric social worker" in a university-based children's psychiatric clinic. The community mental health movement was spreading throughout the country. It resulted in many new approaches to psychotherapy, most of which parted company with the Freudians. I had established a part-time private practice where I could make use of many of these exciting developments without worry about the critical eye of some traditional supervisor. My boss at the university clinic was a closet rebel who began upsetting the rest of the staff by his interest in family therapy and community psychiatry. Family therapy especially appealed to me because of the shift away from the medical model of pathology to a systems model that emphasized here-and-now family relationships. I also realized, through my personal analysis, that the value of therapy for me had little or

nothing to do with "recovering and working through" long buried unconscious material, but rather lay in the relationship itself between me and my analyst. I concluded that healing could have occurred far more quickly by a focus upon our and other current relationships, rather than upon the analyst's preoccupation with past history and the cause-effect insights regarding "transference."

Upon completing the analysis, two important events occurred, both of which provided a release for my flowering spiritual quest. First, I decided to pursue meditative practice following the lead of Phillip Kappleau's book *The Three Pillars of Zen* (1966). I began regular Zen practice the day after terminating analysis. Second, my rebel boss moved to another state, and the staff found a Freudian to replace him, so I quit my job. I had already published two articles on existentialism and its relation to psychotherapy and social work. This impressed my former graduate school dean, who offered me a job as a temporary teacher as few other faculty were publishing at that time.

During the 60's and 70's social workers were enlivened (some threatened) by the stream of new theories and direct practice methods. Systems theory replaced intrapsychic theory for the most part as social workers became increasingly politicized and aligned with the poor and minorities. Spirituality was viewed with suspicion as it had been since our school's origin in the 40's. "Doing" was important, so spirituality was viewed too much as a nondoing, nonpragmatic, navel gazing activity. Interestingly enough nearly all articles in social work journals written about existentialism appeared during this time period.

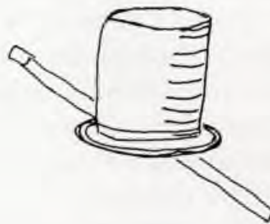
To be a professor in the late 60's was a glorious opportunity. Student unrest reflected the overturning of societal values and even professional traditionalism. There were the Kennedy and King assassinations, the March on Washington, the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War protests, the hippies and student radicals. Along with the new therapies, stemming from public excitement over mental health, there were the encounter groups and the personal growth movement—the forerunners to what Marilyn Ferguson (1980) called the "Aquarian Conspiracy" that wedded spirituality and psychology. Researchers were toppling the cherished dogmas of the Freudians and calling for new approaches to psychotherapy. I had become a Unitarian because of the intellectual stimulation and liberating atmosphere this group provided many of my friends and me.

University life permitted more time to write. I no longer had to spend all my time supplementing my full-time job with two part-time jobs to support my sizable family. I continued publishing and soon gained a national reputation on the subject of Existential Social Work. The 60's and 70's were ready-made for existentialism, and its Asian companion, Zen. Even the magic of American Indian Shamanism, popularized by Carlos Casaneda (1972) fit the thrust of existential thinking. Students in a mood of liberation were responsive to my course in Existential Social Work and its related text (Krill, 1978). As psychological and social theories competed for professional adoption, theoretical confusion became more evident. The time was ripe for existentialism's primary focus on the therapeutic relationship.

The 80's and 90's saw a cautious retrenchment in social work as the political climate allowed the slashing of social service budgets and social programs. Freud was again embraced, now under new trauma terminology. The re-emphasis upon control underscored diagnostic categorization. Professional advocacy and social action expanded "diversity" concerns from the poor and minorities to focus more and more upon gender issues. Women more strongly influenced the profession, both in population and policy making. A large number of graduates were pursuing jobs in private practice. Direct practice was often urged to be short term in response to the watchful eyes of both state legislatures and

insurance companies. Interest in spirituality, however, was on the rise, perhaps as a luxury of the middle class women flooding the field, or as a result of the growing influences of feminist psychology and its linkages to Jung, or because religious differences appeared to be a further extension of diversity concerns. I found more students than ever before seriously interested in spirituality. Even the Council on Social Work Education recently affirmed the inclusion of religious ideas in graduate curricula. This increasing openness to spirituality has afforded more opportunity for me to infuse existentialist interests into course teaching.

In the early 80's, I had retrenched myself a bit in relation to spirituality. I left the Unitarian Church community in order to join the Episcopal Church. I was feeling the need for a rerouting in Christianity, especially with some of its more mystical traditions. I also became a volunteer with a Catholic community that sponsored a lay counseling center for the poor. Existential thinking had always proclaimed a healthy doubt about the optimism of social and political institutions. I found myself strongly identified with one of existentialism's offshoots, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Esslin, 1961). This was a portrayal in drama of the various alienating forces of modern society and their subtle expression in human relationships. I set forth many of my own professional doubts and critiques in *The Beat Worker* (Krill, 1986). Having been a magician entertainer since my teenage years, I developed a new psychic magic act entitled, "The Absurd Theatre of Black and White Magic." I hoped to use magical entertainment as a dramatic form of unsettling an audience's mundane views about "reality." Through the interplay between these personal and professional developments, I formed a spiritual perspective strongly influenced by existentialism, linked with my activity as a social work educator and practitioner.



MY SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

What is spirituality? For me it is sometimes experienced as personal power, almost magical, that stirs the imagination and can be willed in new directions. Yet, paradoxically, it often requires resignation before an elusive mystery, sought out of a deep yearning, and discovered—usually by surprise—in wondrous moments some call "grace." Whether in beauty, horror, rhythm, or intimacy, there is inevitably a great intensity that parts company with my mundane, everyday, memory-based attitudes. For me such "peak experiences" are commonly found in solitude, especially in nature. But sometimes I also find them in personal encounters with others, when I risked exposure of wants, fears, prejudices and meandering thoughts. Spiritual awareness arises out of human freedom when I willingly let go, or am forced to let go, of self preoccupation about worry, regret, security and self aggrandizement. In this regard spirituality is often entwined with my own personal suffering since the "letting go" process usually involves a degree of loss and disillusionment with myself or others. Yet, spirituality is also a sense of meeting, or better, a participation with an immense and affirming "Presence" that occurs in my here and now experience. This boundless "Presence" may take the form of a passive "suchness, " "being with," or waiting, and a sense of beauty, wonder, and harmony. Sometimes it comes as an active response to my feeling "addressed" and sensing the need to respond and act in the world about me in an obedient service to a power beyond myself.

I must say that I am attracted to the Christian conception of "The Kingdom of Heaven," not so much as an awaiting heaven-beyond death, but rather as a presently available possibility "to be in this world but not of this world" as Albert Schweitzer (1951) once distinguished Christianity from other religions. Beyond my Unitarian years, I found contemplative Christianity, particularly as described by the

Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton (1961), most to my liking theologically, especially because he was quite open to valuing non-Christian religions and Christian variations in the pursuit of spirituality.

In recent years I have come to value the relationship between the arts and spirituality. The idea of the poet's creative "muse" seems much like the contemplative's awaiting of

some spiritual presence. In psychological terms we may speak of right-brain activity, or intuition, or the artistic side of our professional practice. Zen had long associated its spiritual practice with the arts, and my earliest introduction to Zen was through Sumie Brush Painting and some martial art forms (Suzuki, 1959). My favorite existential philosopher was Nicholas Berdaev (1962), whose best known writing was the *Meaning of the Creative Act.* I had not only been interested in the performing arts, since before my social work career, but had aspirations of becoming a fiction writer. Creative work in the arts spoke of an experienced transcendence of our hum-drum everyday life. Here was an active presence of the realm of spirit.

Existentialism speaks of a two-part process that can occur simultaneously. First is the pessimistic disillusionment with the social realities we have learned along with the faulty definitions of secured happiness. Second is the realization of freedom, transcendence or spirit as a given possibility for all human beings. The depression of my 20's was, in part, related to the anguish of having known freedom through the arts and nature, while at the same time remaining confused about my own, societal-based expectations of controlled "happiness and maturity." Through the years of practice and teaching of social work I came to understand more fully the spiritual dimensions of the creative process.

My experience of social work students is that a number of them come to school with a healthy amount of intuitive ability that they had already discovered in informal efforts of helping others. I find most regrettable that training programs for professional helpers are so intent upon discrediting students' intuitive abilities and forcing them into a mold of left-brained pragmatic thinking that stresses theory, techniques, policy, research, and politics. The artistic component is seldom mentioned, and few have ideas about how to teach it. Despite the fact that I had a healthy intuitive sense from the start, it had taken me many years of experimental trial and error to find a natural expression of this in my work. No guidelines for this were provided in the teaching and supervision I had undergone. I have the existential perspective to thank, along with my resurfacing intuitive spirit, for a persistence that eventually linked me with other professional brothers and sisters of an artistic spirit. These allowed me to connect my spiritual perspective to social work education and practice.

APPLICATION TO SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

In my classes dealing with existentialism, I tell students that "practice wisdom" is a path one can begin while yet a student. Research of psychotherapy results continues to produce the same finding: In general, no theory or related therapy model proves itself superior to any other one (Krill, 1986). So I emphasize that effective psychotherapy does not result from theory itself. I then propose another idea: it's not what you know, that is important, but who you are! I define practice wisdom as the integration, and continuing reintegration, of one's theory with one's personal religious or spiritual or philosophical beliefs and with one's personal subjective experience of oneself. Therefore, the course combines philosophical reflections, exercises, and discussion of practice implications. Exercises and sharing with one another are utilized throughout the course to heighten students' awareness of how such integration may occur for them (Krill, 1990). Students usually respond very positively

to this class format.

Exercises are shared in student dyads, in journals for the teacher's examination, and sometimes among the whole class. They are aimed at both personal disillusionment and a realization of the reality of personal freedom to change and expand personal meanings. I attempted to telescope much of my own spiritual quest into this single course. Commonly, students express surprise at the prevalence and power of their own value positions, based in both personal history and societal reinforcements. Many are dismayed as they discover their own responsibility for maintaining problematic attitudes, behaviors and symptoms that they had thought to be alien to what they want. Yet, there is also an uplifting discovery for them as they realize the mystery and possibilities for personal freedom and transcendence beyond these time-worn habit patterns.

I had found over the years that when I inquire about student attitudes on religion, the response is consistently negative. Certainly , an understandable barrier for many students is religious terminology that has negative and distorted connotations stemming from early negative memories or the politicized "religious" debates in our current news. Most social work students seem to fall into three categories: non-religious; advocates of spirituality but rejecting the religion of their family tradition (if they had one); and religious yet often hesitant to reveal this in the presence of a school atmosphere obviously hostile to religion. While students are great advocates of diversity, they are often outspoken in their criticism of the very religions that are typically embraced by the poor. Because of many students' inability to appreciate religion as a key resource in the lives of so many of their clients, I instituted the course on "Religious Issues in Social Work Practice." In this course I provide students an opportunity to experience and discuss varied viewpoints on religion. One way of doing this is to set up groupings made up of the three categories of students aforementioned. They relate themselves to questions such as the nature of ultimate concern, absolute/relative truth, evil and their own shifting views of religion during their lives. Another means to engage student thinking is to have visiting speakers who are professional social workers and also follow a personal faith that is commonly shared by many poor people. Finally, practice situations involving matters of spirituality or religious belief are discussed in class.

APPLICATION TO DIRECT PRACTICE

Most important in my own direct practice with clients has been the realization of spiritual components of the therapeutic relationship itself. The writings of helping professionals who have most significantly revealed and clarified these components to me include religious as well as humanistic (non-religious) practitioners: Thomas Hora, Walter Kempler, William Offman, Carl Whittaker, Carl Rogers, Frank Farrelly, Irvin Yalom, Sydney Jourard and Hanna Colm. Other writers have helped clarify the place of spirituality in human understanding and the practice of helping: Otto Rank, Carl Jung, Rollo May, Viktor Frankl, Milton Erickson, Maurice Friedman, Ken Wilber, and Ram Dass.

By-and-large, the practitioners who emphasize healing-as-revealing in the therapeutic relationship speak of what I would term a need for promoting personal humor, intensity, spontaneity, and forthright honesty by the worker. This vitalizing, often unbalancing activity usually occurs within a context of both detached caring and intuitive knowing. The "detachment" is from the emotional melodramas used by clients to control another's responses. The "knowing" is beyond theoretical categorizing and has to do with grasping a client's favorite repetitive organizing values that govern life decisions and also result in problems of complaint. The spiritual quality of such relationship work has to do with providing the client an experience of freedom, or self transcendence, and its related assumption of responsibility.

Freedom occurs in the heightening or expansion of the client's self awareness, in the effort of the worker to understand and clarify this understanding, and in providing genuine feedback from the

worker's personal value stance in relation to what has been understood. The worker must be in a state of mind that is as free as possible from his or her own categories, conclusions, judgments, and worries. In my experience, healing occurs to the extent that the client's own awareness, understanding, and assumption of personal responsibility for a problem-related value stance are stimulated by the worker's caring and engaging activities. Healing is actually a mutual process affecting the growth of both client and worker. It is a creative process involving two human beings aware of their unique selves in this particular hour and willing to use their energies to struggle together toward understanding. Both must be willing to venture beyond social expectations, societal value assumptions, professional theorizing, and the mechanical application of techniques.

For several years I had endured rounds of boredom, irritation, dismay, self-doubt and angry frustration with clients who were not responding to what I deemed well intentioned treatment efforts. Then I read Corsini's *Critical Incidents in Psychotherapy* (1959) and saw a glimmer of light. Not until I read Frank Farrelly's *Provocative Therapy* (1974) and William Offman's *Affirmation and Reality* (1976) did I realize "the way." At last I could not only stay awake in sessions, formerly drab, but I could actively play by means of using my own vitality and spontaneity. Therapy became far more than support and insight. It became human engagement at a level of honesty in which the healing of both parties was at stake. The possibility of spiritual growth in such a relationship is in the risk of going beyond mechanical, habitual social exchanges so that a new level of understanding might emerge. Instead of seeing therapy as a means of matching categorized clients with prescriptive techniques, I now feel the freedom, the wonder, and the excitement of therapy as a meeting of unknown feelings and possibilities. Love is this affirming engagement of unpredictable personalities as well as that third party I call "Spirit."

CONCLUSION

My disappointment with social work has been with its strong tendencies to be a conforming, tag-along profession hoping to derive its status from "more respected professions." Despite our protest movements and human rights advocacy, we have largely embraced the values of our larger culture, dominated by rationalism, technology, and organizational management. Our need to be in control is based upon fear. We fear public criticism and the risk of loss of funding. Control seeks rational explanations, justifications and procedures. There is little place for intuition. We prefer to see ourselves as pragmatic problem solvers and tend to be overserious in going about our "matters of importance." We have overly invested ourselves in theoretical reasoning to the detriment of our own spiritual sensitivities.

What I enjoy about social work, and am proud of, is the absurdly expansive array of human problems with which we cope. If human suffering, humility, and spirituality are intrinsically connected, which I believe they are, we have the makings of a profession strongly rooted in spirituality. I have personally found the major tenets of existentialism regularly available in my social work practice, whether direct or indirect. Disillusionment, suffering, freedom, dialogue, and commitment are experiential possibilities to enable the growth of our clients, our students, and ourselves. I have found no better way to challenge my own growth than to work with people whose lives and problems appear quite different from my own. □

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SPIRITUALITY IN FIRST NATIONS STORY TELLING : A Sahnish-Hidatsa Approach to Narrative

In this narrative I share four aspects of storytelling that support the spirituality of First Nations' people. I begin with a portion of the Sahnish genesis story and its identification of our spiritual beliefs and history. I discuss the significance and purpose of traditional narratives in relation to the manner of storytelling by the elders in our village. I then explain how the telling of narrative in our indigenous languages is diminishing, illustrated by a story that my mother has shared concerning my grandfather's "Indian" boarding school experience.

by
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WRITING NARRATIVES CORRECTION

Because of editing errors in Roberta Wells Imre's article PERSONAL NARRATIVES DO NOT COME EASILY TO THE PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED SELF,Vol. I (2), it will be reprinted in Vol. II (1).

SAHNISH-HIDATSA NARRATIVE

Storytelling among First Nations people has a long and rich history. In my village, the oral traditions of my people remain one of the most important ways to define and give meaning to our Indigenous spirituality. Our stories teach us that spirituality is the knowledge of, value for, and participation in our sacred ceremonies and traditions. The telling of certain sacred and non-sacred stories and events by different members of our peoples often is intended to support and preserve our spirituality. For example, many of our narratives present circumstances, places, persons, or events that ensure that our people remember who we are, how we should behave, what we should know and value, and where we came from. Our stories help us to honor and respect the struggles and experiences of our ancestors and contemporaries and enable us to pass on our oral histories to our children and grandchildren.

In this article, I prefer not to use the words "Indian" or "Native American" to name my peoples. We are not from India. Also, the term "Native American" could refer to anyone who is born in the Americas. I prefer to be called Sahnish and Hidatsa, which are my Nations. I also prefer the terms First Nations, Aboriginal, or Indigenous to refer to my peoples collectively.

The purpose of this article is to share four different aspects that relate our people's storytelling to spirituality. To set the context, I begin with our Sahnish genesis story along with our spiritual beliefs and history. Then follows a discussion of the way storytelling helps to promote spiritual thinking and actions among our peoples. Next, I tell the way elders in my village share their personal narratives in a community setting as an example of a traditional form of storytelling. I then discuss the reasons the telling of the stories in our indigenous language is diminishing, illustrated by my mother's narrative about my Hidatsa grandfather's "Indian" boarding school experience.

The Sahnish-Hidatsa approach to narrative that I share throughout this paper is based upon my own experiences and constructions and should not be construed as definitive. The Sahnish and Hidatsa are two different nations. Each has its own rich and wonderful stories, storytellers, and ideas of what stories mean and how they should be told. I hyphenate the two nations since I am a member of both groups.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR GENESIS AND HISTORY IN SAHNISH NARRATIVE

Recounting our people's genesis and history is one of the most important examples of the way our oral traditions support our spirituality. Our people, like many other First Nations, believe that we have lived and moved throughout "Great Turtle Island" (the Americas) since time immemorial (Wright, 1993; Maracle, 1993). Our origin stories have always helped to create within our peoples a sense of belonging, purpose, and relatedness with all other forms of life. For eons, the genesis narratives of the Sahnish have taught us that we, along with all other living things, existed first in an embryo state deep within the womb of Mother Earth. As our desire to attain a higher state of perfection grew, Neshanu Natchiktak (the supreme being of power and wisdom) and Mother Corn (the intermediary between humans and Neshanu Natchiktak) heard our cries, pitied us and helped us emerge from Mother Earth. Mother Corn gave us the gift of corn which gave us life and enabled us to live as human beings. She guided us on a long migration from the south to show us where to live. Our traditional narratives teach us that, as we developed into humans and journeyed to our destination, we endured many hardships and tragedies which often compelled us to call upon Mother Corn to intercede on our behalf. We are taught to have reverence and gratitude to Mother Corn for all she has done for us. Our oral traditions also clearly point out that our emergence from Mother Earth occurred in this part of the world in the southern hemisphere. Indeed, none of our sacred bundles, which represent the most ancient memories of our people, tell us that we crossed the Bering Strait as anthropologists suggest.

Our peoples now live on the Fort Berthold reservation, located around the Upper

Missouri river in North Dakota. I come from a small Sahnish village called White Shield, which was named after one of our most respected Chiefs. In our languages, Sahnish means "the people" while Hidatsa means "river or willow crow." My father is Sahnish and my mother is Sahnish and Hidatsa. My father's people are closely related to the Skidi Pawnee who once lived in Nebraska but now reside in Oklahoma. My mother's people, on her father's side, are closely related to the Crow Nation who reside in southeastern Montana.

Sahnish refer to the Missouri river as the "Mysterious or Holy River" since it was important to many of our most sacred ceremonies. Before 1953, we lived along the flood plain of this river and raised several varieties of corn, squash, and beans in the rich soils that were deposited there. We also grew potatoes, melons, pumpkins, sunflowers, and tobacco, all of which are indigenous to Great Turtle Island (Weatherford, 1991; Gilmore, 1987). The caretakers of our gardens were the women who engaged themselves in highly complex planting and harvesting rituals. In between these two seasons, they would clean and water the gardens and sing to the crops as if the crops were their own children. We often traded many of our crops with other Indigenous people for horses, buffalo meat, robes and other things we may have needed.

I was not raised on our traditional homelands beside the holy river. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, despite our elder's protests that our lands were protected under the "Treaty of Fort Laramie, made in 1851" (Meyer, 1977, p. 217), built the Garrison Dam just south of our reservation, which flooded out 155,000 acres of our richest lands. Our gardens, timber, sacred sites, and ancient way of life were inundated to control floods and produce electricity for people further down stream whom we never even knew. We were relocated to higher, more barren grounds on our reservation and given welfare as a substitute for our sustainable way of life. I never saw the wonderful gardens of our people or experienced the traditional village ways. But my grandmother (White Eagle Woman), always said, "Oh, it was so beautiful there, you children just don't know how beautiful it was."

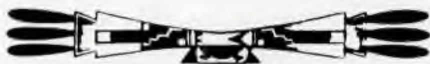
The Sahnish genesis story reminds us of our connections to the land, the sacred beings, and the ways of our ancestors. It also reminds us to protect and to honor our spirituality since it is often violated for the sake of other peoples' "progress" and "development."

A SAHNISH-HIDATSA APPROACH TO NARRATIVE

While personal narratives are told to assist the storyteller to process everyday experiences and events, they are also shared to help promote spiritual thinking and behavior among the village community. Many times narratives are told to help reaffirm our identity and to remind us of our purpose in life and in death. Since I am related to many people in my village, the stories usually tell me something about the emotional and spiritual state of our peoples. Narratives are told in order to teach our people about morality and to raise awareness and concern for one another. They help to instill in the individual and the village membership a passionate desire for both greatness and humility while stressing the importance of sacrifice, prayer, and courage. Narratives help to keep our Indigenous spirituality alive by reminding us of our responsibilities in ancient rituals and ceremonies.

There are two aspects that I think are very important to a Sahnish-Hidatsa approach to narrative. The first aspect is a particular manner of the storytelling which is affected by the place where the story is told and the person telling the story. This manner is illustrated by the way our elders tell stories. The second aspect is the language in which the story is told. Traditionally, stories are conveyed orally and personally. The meanings are closely tied to

the nuances of the particular spoken language. Unfortunately, storytelling in our Indigenous languages continues to diminish at a steady rate. Many of the elders in our village, who in earlier times would have passed the languages on to us, are not fluent speakers because they attended federal government and religious mission schools where they were coerced to learn English. Although the children in our village spend some time learning our language in school, they spend significantly more time learning English. The use of English to tell our stories is problematic since it changes the tenor and manner in which a story is told. Many times there are no comparable words in English that can convey the intent and meaning of our languages. For me, the declining use of our languages to tell our stories further threatens the loss of our identity and contributes to our emotional and spiritual distress. This point will be conveyed through the story of my own grandfather.



THE PERSON TO VILLAGE NARRATIVE: STORYTELLING BY THE ELDERS

In many instances, the narrative among my peoples has not been an individual person-to-person event. In my village, one traditional approach occurs when an individual shares a narrative with several people at once. The best example of this is when our elders "stand up" during public gatherings or ceremonies and share their personal stories. Sometimes they are asked to "offer some words," while at other times their sharing is a spontaneous action. Depending upon the event, the narrative may be either very humorous and uplifting or very painful and sad. Sometimes it can admonish the listeners for the injustices, failures, and unnecessary complacency in the village. At other times, the stories are gentle, motivating, and inspiring and call upon the generosity and kindness of the people in the village to address a pressing issue.

There seems to be a predictable pattern in the process and delivery of this type of oral story. The speakers usually begin by explaining to the audience their hope that what they are about to share will help the people in some way. Then, they generally put forth a disclaimer that their knowledge is limited and apologize for taking this time to talk about themselves or share what they know.

I expect that most outsiders would think this type of opening means that the storyteller has a lack of confidence or poor public speaking skills. On the contrary, by opening this way, the elders are reminding us to "respect what you know," "remember you don't know everything," and "think for yourself." When I compare our elder's opening statements with those of other speakers who claim to be "the experts" but convey little, I now realize that my elders were really teaching me humility and intellectual freedom.

Following the opening, elders generally share one or more of their own meaningful experiences, especially those with special relevance to the occasion, the audience, and the request that has been made of them. During this time many of their narratives convey some of their deepest emotions of grief, anger, humor, and delight. As I have listened to their stories, I have found that many of the things that they share are very emotionally and spiritually liberating. I find myself fully listening and reaching for the important messages that may be conveyed in the narrative.

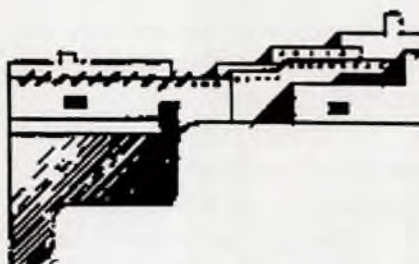
Often their stories are quite lengthy and, at times, contain long pauses between different words and ideas. Sometimes certain words and phrases are said in our Sahnish language which I cannot understand. Many times I have turned to my mother or father and asked, "What did they say?" They generally do not look at me but usually answer with a slight frown and quick point at the speaker with their lips, which means "pay attention, something important is being said." I'm generally quiet after this directive. As I reflect on my grade school experiences, I am reminded that our elders' style of narrative was clearly in conflict with how the local Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school teachers expected us

"Indian" kids to speak. They often pointed out to us that we needed a quick, to the point, "look at me when I am talking to you" kind of delivery. Learning this style of speaking made me impatient with our elderly storytellers. However, it also made me very nervous about what the government teachers would say whenever I would slip into the traditional style of narrative delivery at school.

One of the things I remember most about the traditional manner of storytelling is that, despite all of the time taken to tell the narrative and the indeterminacy of certain expressions, no one in the audience would ever interrupt or tell the person "we are running out of time so you have to hurry up," or "would you please define or explain what you mean." As listeners we were expected to develop patience and search for answers to the questions that were triggered by the person's narrative.

Each elder always had his or her own way of ending the narrative. Some would finish by adding a bit of humor to their story by telling a joke. Others would tell an amusing unexpected story about themselves or someone else, which usually got a big belly laugh and "happy" tears from the audience. I believe that this ending is very important since one of the chief codes of our peoples is not to dwell too long in angry words or thoughts and not to leave in an angry way when speaking publicly.

When the storyteller is finished, he or she again thanks the audience for their patience and time. The speaker often repeats the statement "I don't know that much" and apologizes for taking time to talk about him or herself. When the person sits down, members of the audience often seek out the storyteller and offer some tobacco, a blanket, some gas money, or a handshake to thank him or her what was said for the benefit of the people. To me, this entire process reaffirms the importance of this type of narrative for creating a sense of spiritual well-being and connection. It also demonstrates the position of our elders as our most prominent storytellers.



THE DIMINISHING SAHNISH NARRATIVE: THE POLICIES OF THE "GREAT WHITE FATHER"

Sharing a personal narrative in the traditional language has not always been possible. When First Nations peoples were "removed" to reservations, many Indigenous children were federally mandated to attend government and religious missionary schools for "civilization" purposes. Our peoples were among those who had to participate in the "Great White Father's" (United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs) forced acculturation programs.

As a matter of public

policy, which was usually directed by the Great White Father, these schools prevented First Nations children from using their Indigenous languages and deliberately neglected any discussions that would allow the children to promote or understand their Indigenous identities. For example, on July 16, 1887, J.D.C. Atkins, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote the following to all schools that educated Native students:

"Your attention is called to the regulation of this office which forbids instruction in schools in any Indian language. This rule applies to all schools on an Indian reservation, whether government or mission schools. The education of the Indians in the vernacular is not only of no use to them, but is detrimental to the cause of their education and civilization. You are instructed to see that this rule is rigidly enforced in all schools upon the reservation under your charge. No mission school will be permitted on the reservation which does not comply with the regulation." (Prucha, 1976, p. 175).

Two years later, another Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas J. Morgan, issued a

directive calling for the "Inculcation of Patriotism in Indian Schools" (Prucha, 1976, p.180). In this order he states that

"In all proper ways, teachers in the Indian schools should endeavor to appeal to the highest elements of manhood and womanhood in their pupils...and they should carefully avoid any unnecessary reference to the fact that they are Indians" (Prucha, 1976, p.181).

The punishments were often very severe for children caught speaking their language or identifying with their people. Children as young as 4 and 5 years old who attended these schools (I call them forced acculturation camps) were tortured, abused, and ridiculed for speaking or acting like an "Indian." After these children returned to their homelands, grew to adulthood, and became elders, many refused to or could not teach their children or grandchildren their traditional language. I am certain that these years of colonialist imperialism and inculcation caused many of our peoples to be ashamed of who they are and contributed to the lack of interest in learning and teaching our languages.

My family's narrative of the "Indian" boarding school experience, similar to that of many other Indigenous peoples, has a lot to do with surviving and trying to understand that experience (Haig-Brown, 1988; Knockwood, 1992). It is especially significant since it is the historical juncture where personal narratives in our own Indigenous languages began to decline.

Over the years, my mother has shared with me my Hidatsa grandfather's personal story of his experiences in the "Indian" boarding school system. For me, it is one of the most profound and difficult stories to hear. Whenever I hear his narrative, I often go through many intense emotions: grief, anger, and fear to name only a few, and react with long deep silences. As my mother tells me his story, she often begins by describing how my grandfather was taken from our reservation in North Dakota and sent to Hampton Institute in Virginia. She never forgets to tell me that most of his experiences there were very terrifying and lonely. He was one of the "Indian" children who didn't have a choice - he had to go! The "Indian agent" would go among the people and select different children they thought would benefit from being sent away. She says that he was "just a little boy when he went there, maybe 6 or 7 years old." What he remembered most about his experience was being severely beaten and punished many times. He said "sometimes they just used their fists, but other times they used a horse whip." The part of the narrative that she shares most often with me, however, has to do with his not being able to understand or speak English. "He could only speak Indian and didn't know what they were saying to him or what they wanted him to do, so they would beat him up," she says wiping her nose and eyes. Whenever she tells me his story, her tears always well-up, and she never looks directly at me, which is unusual for such a loving mother. But my response is usually the same, so I rarely look at her when she tells me this part. She tells me that "many other bad things happened to him there." She suggests that maybe many of the difficult times that he experienced in his adult life had a lot to do with his beatings and cruel treatment at the "Indian" boarding school. Sometimes while she is telling me his story, my mind recalls the pictures I saw in a book about Hampton that showed the headstones on the graves of the little "Indian" children who died there. Being a parent, I often think of how heartbroken and shattered these children's moms and dads must have been when they learned of their children's death. Unable to hold their child for the last time or perform the proper burial ceremonies, they must have undergone tremendous shock and grief. I know as long as I live I will never forget these images in the stories my mother has told me.

I often think that my grandfather's narrative now belongs to my mother. While it is a horrible story, I know that she faithfully guards and shares it as a tribute to his surviving the "Indian" school boarding experience. I sometimes dream that when she is telling me his story, his spirit is rescued and lifted free from his terror and suffering for being an "Indian." And, although she has never said it, I am sure that she wishes she could have been there to cradle and protect this child from his "civilized" tormentors.

I am certain that the

horrible and inhumane experiences suffered by First Nations children in these schools changed, forever, the meaning and sharing of the personal narrative of Indigenous peoples. I know that my grandfather shared the Indian boarding school stories only with my mother when he was an elder in our community. He did not tell anyone what happened to him until he had been the tribal judge and served on the tribal council. I wondered why he waited so long to share his narrative. Maybe the reason is he wanted his daughter (my mom) to avoid having to carry his pain, and thus, "giving " it to his grandchildren. Then he thought it was necessary to tell her these things when she became a mother and responsible for keeping her children safe. Or maybe he waited because, somewhere in his dreams, there still lingered a nightmare of Commissioner J.D.C. Atkin's "rigidly enforced" rule which brutalized Indigenous children for speaking their languages or acting like an "Indian."

When my grandfather did share his personal narratives with my mother, they were not in our Indigenous languages; they were in English. When my mother shared with me my grandfather's stories, they were also in English. And now, I share these same narratives with my children in English. In 1887, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, J.D.C. Atkins, wrote, *"No unity or community of feeling can be established among different peoples unless they are brought to speak the same language..."* (Prucha, 1976, p.175). After considering this statement of the "Great White Father" on different occasions, I often wonder why then there have been many times that my grandfather, mother, and I, all

English-speaking people, have never really felt like "Americans" or like a part of the American community. As I ponder the reasons for our feelings, I think maybe there have been too many John Wayne movies and too many John Wayne "wannabees." Maybe there have been too many presidents like George Bush who have said "I never apologize for the United States of America. I don't care what the facts are" (Wright, 1993, p.212). Or maybe there have been too many Washington Redskins or Atlanta Braves games with too many tomahawk chops and too few protesters. I'm not sure. What I do know, however, is that, now, I rarely wonder why my English-speaking children's personal narratives contain many splinters of the same fears as my grandfather's mother's , and mine. Often, I wonder how long the "Great White Father's" "civilizing efforts" will haunt us.

On the one hand, my grandfather's "Indian" boarding school experiences are partly responsible for my family's inability to learn or speak our languages. Without our languages it is extremely difficult to teach and practice our spirituality or to share our most sacred traditional stories in appropriate and meaningful ways. On the other hand, his experience reminds me that our Sahnish genesis story teaches us that our lives have not been without difficult and tragic times, and maybe it is now time to call on Mother Corn.

SUMMARY

Storytelling in my village is one of the most important ways to define and give meaning to our spirituality. Our stories teach about our ceremonies and traditions which we should value and participate in. There are four different aspects of storytelling that help to point out the relationship between our people's narratives and spirituality. The first is the perspective provided by our Sahnish genesis story , which helps to create a sense of purpose, belonging, and relatedness among our peoples and all other life. Indeed, telling

our history reminds us of who we are, where we came from, and what we should expect from our future. The second aspect is that personal narratives are often used to help individuals or the village membership to reaffirm their identity and purpose in life and death. They also tell us something about the emotional and spiritual state of our peoples and remind us of our responsibilities to one another and our traditions. A third aspect is the manner in which our stories are told. An example of this aspect is the way in which our elders publicly share their personal narratives. This traditional approach teaches the village membership about humility, respect, and patience. The fourth aspect relates to the impact of the policies of the "Great White Father" which censured the use of Indigenous languages by Indigenous children who were forced to attend federal government and religious boarding schools. As my grandfather's "Indian" boarding school experience illustrates, not only is there a loss of traditional language among First Nations peoples, there are also many emotional and spiritual scars that remain.

The narratives in my village attest to the pain, loss, resiliency, hope, and humanity that is found among our peoples. Persons in the helping professions who are interested in Indigenous narratives must understand that not all First Nations peoples are willing to share their personal stories in public gatherings or in private. It is important to remember that narratives will vary according to the traditions of each First Nations group. Most of all it is important to listen carefully and honestly and to be sensitive and respectful to the storytelling protocol of each group. □

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THEATER REVIEW: "ANGELS IN AMERICA"

By Mary Ann Jimenez
Arts and Media Editor

"Angels in America", the Pulitzer Prize and Tony award winning play by Tony Kushner, examines the possibilities for spiritual regeneration during the siege of AIDS along with the devolution of altruism and social commitment that characterized the Reagan era. The Jewish left, the City of Manhattan, the money grubbing yuppies of the 1980's, former drag queens, a domestic drug addict, closet gay men, the henchman of the McCarthy hearings, Ethel Rosenberg, repressed Mormon mothers, feckless lovers and loyal friends—all are the subject of Kushner's play.

Now touring in a national company, the two separate plays that make up Angels in American, part one, "Millennium Approaches" and part two, "Perestroika" tell the story of two men enduring the ravages of the AIDS virus during the mid 1980's. The first, Prior Walter, is an entirely sympathetic, sometimes foolish former drag queen; the second is the thoroughly evil Roy Cohn, a character based on the real-life lawyer who assisted and encouraged the persecution of politically suspect artists and politicians during the McCarthy hearings. Cohn also was primarily responsible for the conviction and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg on charges of espionage. The stories of these two men offer a point-counterpoint saga about the search for human meaning beyond selfishness, competition and narcissism, qualities that seemed to dominate the morally wizened 1980's. In the first play neither man seems likely to be redeemed. Prior is deserted by his lover, Louis, who cannot face the physical deterioration and anguish promised by the virus, and Cohn denies his gay sexual orientation, infuriated at the doctor who gives him the AIDS diagnosis. Cohn rages through his last days, still attempting to manipulate everyone around him to serve his egoistic ends. Louis meets Cohn's assistant, Joe Pitt, who is unhappily married to a Valium addict, Harper, and has closeted his gay sexual orientation from everyone, including himself. Both Louis and Joe betray their needy partners by beginning an affair with each other, while Harper and Prior writhe through their personal torments with only the solace of drug and fear-induced hallucinations. In one of these hallucinations they meet, and the playwright offers us a vision of human decency, encased in human frailty, as these two guileless characters connect in a surreal landscape. As the first play ends, Roy Cohn is visited by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, who tells him that his time is up; Prior is visited, in a stunning

theatrical moment, by an Angel, who literally bursts from the ceiling to tell him that he's a Prophet and their work together is about to begin. This ending seems to offer Prior and the audience a spiritual destination beyond earth, out of reach of the terrible human struggles and suffering that both have witnessed thus far. The Angel seems poised to save Prior, to offer a meaning that his life apparently does not have, to rescue him from us, the disappointing and feckless human world.

The second play," Perestroika" turns this idea of spirituality on its head as the Prior's Angel becomes his tormentor—appearing in the middle of the night, flailing him with largely unintelligible speeches set in stentorian cadences, full of pomposity and utterly deprived of wit. "SUBMIT, SUBMIT, TO THE WILL OF HEAVEN," she orders. Prior crawls frantically away from this fierce Angel and begs her to leave him alone. When she calls him a "Prophet" he cries out, "I'm not a prophet—I'm a sick, lonely man." The Angel is bereft, for God has left heaven, "bored with his angels, bewitched by humanity" in whom he had unleashed the "Sleeping Creation's potential for change." Humans (infected with "the virus of time")have proved more interesting to God than the angels, who represent stasis and entropy. Beguiled by time and its possibilities for change and indeterminacy, God has deserted the angels; no one knows where God is, including Prior, who acknowledges that God "walked out on us" too.

Kushner offers indeterminacy as the most compelling aspect of human existence, underlining the role of chance and the unexpected in human relationships. Even the humans

Prior meets in heaven allay their boredom by playing cards, for the only pleasure in Heaven, where "everything is known" is the possibility of an unknown future that a card game offers. "Perestroika" shows us how its characters are interconnected in unexpected ways. Louis meeting Joe leads to Joe's repressed Mormon mother from Utah meeting, and ultimately succoring, Prior. Cohn's manipulations and deviousness secure him a stash of the experimental drug AZT; upon his anguished and unrepentant death, Prior's best friend and fellow former drag queen Belize, who is also Cohn's nurse, take the remainder of the drug for Prior. One of the most moving scenes in the play occurs when the leftist Louis, who sees Cohn as the "polestar of human evil", is enlisted by Belize to help obtain the unused drug from Cohn's room after his death. Belize urges Louis to say Kaddish for him, "It isn't easy...it's the hardest thing. Forgiveness. Which is maybe where love and justice finally meet." As Louis reluctantly stumbles through the Hebrew prayer for the dead, Ethel Rosenberg appears to join him. Kushner avoids the scene's potential sentimental pitfall, (while leaving the message of atonement intact) by having her end the prayer with "You sonofabitch."

Prior rejects the still emptiness, the cessation of heaven and death and demands "more life", in spite of the angel's warning that " You have not seen what is to come." She cannot understand how he can refuse her offer of surcease. "What will the grim Unfolding of these Latter Days bring That you or any Being should wish to endure them? Death more plenteous than all Heaven has tears to mourn it...,"she warns. Yet Prior has no qualms. "I want more life. I can't help myself I do. I've lived through such terrible times, and there are people who live through much much worse, but.... You see them living anyway." Prior reminds us of the profound courage of persons with AIDS when he tells the Angel "We live past hope. If I can find hope anyway, that's it, that's the best I can do." The angel hurls Prior out of heaven and back to his feverish sick bed where he wakes with the words

of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz and greets his loyal companions.

Relationships reconfigure at the end of the play; everyone reconnects but Joe, whose inauthenticity and lack of courage leaves him the only atomistic character outside the quantum universe Kushner has created. As the play ends, it is five years later; we see Louis, Belize, Prior and Joe's formerly repressed mother, Hannah, (who has been transformed into an aware and empathetic New Yorker),all enjoying a beautiful day in Central Park. Prior, who has been given longer life with AZT, is blind in one eye and lame. He has refused to take the repentant and more mature Louis back as a lover, but their bond seems deeply forged nonetheless. Louis and Belize are arguing about Israel and the Palestinians. Prior, who has developed a sustaining friendship with Hannah, breaks the circle of the play to speak directly to the audience. In the eloquent and deeply moving peroration, Kushner offers a valedictory for those who have died and will die of AIDS. "This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come. Bye now," Prior waves to the audience." You are fabulous creatures. each and every one. And I bless you: More Life. The Great Work Begins."

The Great Work is not the work of the Angels, as "Millennium Approaches " implies, but of humans: of life, of change, pain, forgiveness, reconciliation, love, courage, loyalty, and above all, "living beyond hope." God is hiding in the tenacious human spirit, Kushner seems to be saying. We may not see him now, but his reappearance and our regeneration depend on human interconnection, not on a world outside of human existence. The Angel may have offered a false promise of spiritual salvation, but Prior is truly a prophet, for he sees the potential for change and spiritual meaning in the human spirit—we are the "fabulous" creatures, not the Angels of our feverish dreams.

Kushner does not waste time decrying failed or even missing Gods in "Angels", for his characters find God in the collective. The playwright models human relationships on quantum physics, where all things are connected and in continuous motion, where change is the rule and causality is nondeterministic and dynamic. Separation and fixity are illusions, the particle universe teaches us that all is change and movement. As Harper reflects during her flight to San Francisco to begin a new life, "Nothing's lost forever. In this world there's a kind of painful progress; Longing for what we've left behind, and dreaming ahead."

"Angels in America" reminds us that the most important spiritual realm is here on earth; the challenges of living an authentic life in the face of horror draw on and nourish our deepest spiritual strength. "Have you no decency, sir?" the question asked of Joseph McCarthy by Joseph Welsh during the McCarthy hearings is the question Louis asks Joe at the end of their relationship; it is also the question Kushner is asking those embracing empty materialism and greed as their lodestar, as well as those politicians and policy makers who have turned away from the AIDS epidemic.

Finally Kushner asks the audience to reflect on our capacity for decency and spiritual growth. "Perestroika" means rebuilding; abandoned by God and ideology ("It's all too much to be encompassed by a single theory now," Louis says at the end of the play),life is wholly inductive. To live it we must make a great leap of faith. The Hebrew word for blessing, Kushner writes in a preface to the play, is translated as "more life." "Angels" reminds us that embracing life with courage and faith in each other is our greatest spiritual challenge. □

BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Moore

***Soul Mates*. Harper Perennial. N.Y. 1994. 267 pages. Paper.**

By Paul Abels, Book Editor

Soul Mates and social work are both deeply involved in the same spiritual and philosophical areas. Both are concerned with helping people build and enhance relationships with each other, and with themselves. While Moore proposes his book is about "soulful" relationships, our work is about "helping" relationships. Are they the same?

What is the soul? Is it spirit, essence, morality, is it our spiritual being? Is it our unconscious laid bare by Shakespeare's Macbeth, or riddled with holes by Beethoven's ninth? "Alle Menschenwerden Bruder." All mankind are brothers (and sisters), "soul brothers," and soul food, is that what the soul does, connect us with our roots? Does it connect and resonate like "soul music": the blues for African-Americans, slack key guitar for Hawaiians, klezmer music for the Jews?

Thomas Moore, sees the soul as a fundamental element in our ability to build relationships with people. Thus the title *Soul Mates* suggests a strong bond among people, a relationship which helps unite them in a way that overcomes difference and goes beyond the rational, mind-set. The heart has its own reasons, love is not rational because it is enmeshed in the soul. The soul is mystery, relationships are mysterious, and love is a mysterious adventure. Why love this person and not that one? "A soul mate is someone to whom we feel profoundly connected, as though the communicating and communing takes place between us were not the product of intentional efforts, but rather a divine grace."

In *Soul Mates*, Moore offers a manual for "...fostering many kinds of soulful relationships, first by becoming aware of the nature of the soul, and especially its role in intimacy, and then by discovering concrete ways in which such relationships can be tended." His Jungian oriented therapeutic approach emerges through the support of myths and cross-cultural stories related to gods and goddesses who were the gatekeepers of intimacy and love. Case examples of people struggling to make connections, or to untangle crossed connections, and how they are helped through "soul work" add concrete foundations for the more spiritual aspects of the material.

Intimacy, creativity, imagination, sex, love and intermingled souls are the fundamental themes of *Soul Mates*, and Moore's work with individuals and families. And a large portion of the book deals with ways in which persons' souls do influence or could influence their lives. A fine

example is his use of the film "A Trip to Bountiful" as a metaphor of the soul's abundance and resonance. While it seeks connections with the past, it needs to build relationships for its life in the future. The soul is bountiful and paradoxical, it has room for success and failure, bravery and fear. We can help the soul take a balanced place between attachment, solitude, and freedom. Moore also speaks to the need of the helper to examine how his/her own soul may impact the client. S/he must care for his/her own soul. On one occasion he discusses his own paranoia and reflects on how this might have interfered with the help he hoped to give. *Soul Mates* takes paying attention to, it is new territory, terra incognita if you will. He provides a map, but there are pitfalls, particularly for those of us who are used to more scientifically oriented texts. *Soul Mates* needs reading with the "third eye." If the eyes are the gateway to the soul, than this book provides the doorway. *Soul Mates* has rewards, not only as a guide book for helping, but as a source of enlightenment for the self in becoming a soulful person. *Soul Mates*: Read It. □

Bertha Capen Reynolds

***An Uncharted Journey*. First Edition by Citadel Press, N.Y. 1964. Second edition by Practitioners Press. Hebron Conn.**

The essence of our profession, its spirit, is made available to us through the works of those who framed our profession, lending a vision to society of the social web that connected us with all people, joined in the struggle for social justice. The Abbots, Breckenridge, Addams, Florence Kelly, are just some of those who dreamed the good dream, and acted on their crusade. They were the first wave. They were not of my time.

For me, the spirit of the profession is embodied in the actions of Bertha Capen Reynolds.

A social work educator, practitioner, social activist, scholar, who in spite of the profession's disregard, contributed extensively to its growth, and stuck by it in spite of itself. She was of her times, a victim of her times, and ahead of her times. In *An Uncharted Journey*, we get to see why.

Boston in the early 1900's embodied the enlightened spirit of philanthropy, among the numerous private social welfare agencies it could boast 16 settlements, This atmosphere was instrumental in shaping Reynolds' world view. (Imagine what 16 settlement houses in Los Angeles might do to shape the community, pressure the city council, or influence young people in their career choices.) She attended one of the first classes for social workers in Boston, and then went on to a position with the prestigious Boston Children's Aid Society (BCAS). A growing concern with the number of war veterans

returning in 1918 with "shell shock" led to the development of a program aimed at their rehabilitation. A call went out for a first class of 60 people. Reynolds describes her inner struggle, knowing that if she took the class it would be a new journey . She resigned from BCAS and followed her spirit. We share the excitement she felt as she is made aware of "new" psychiatric theories and interventions. At graduation, after six months of training, the class was assigned to state hospitals and to the Red Cross to work with the veterans.

She remembers the send off. "Miss Jarrett had a serious talk with the class before we left Northampton. She said the future of our new discipline held two possibilities: we could think of ourselves as assistants in psychotherapy, working under the direction of psychiatrists much as psychiatric nurses or psychotherapeutic aids do; or we could develop a profession in our own right bringing into psychotherapy the social outlook and skills which would require our thinking for ourselves, (not mainly following orders) and would place us alongside the psychiatrist as another different but allied professional."

Reynolds went to work at Danvers Hospital, where she supervised Smith College social work students for a few years. This led, in 1924, to an invitation to join Smith College School for Social Work as associate director of the school, a position she held for approximately 13 years. In that position she introduced a number of educational innovations (see Learning and Teaching in the Practice of Social Work). She was active professionally in a number of causes related to social justice, becoming involved in supporting the labor movement. This led to her being asked to leave Smith College "...because she wanted rank-and-file workers to unionize to improve their working conditions and the lives of their clients"(Quam 1995). We learn of the efforts of social workers, to organize, of foot stomping papers presented at conferences during the 30's, papers by Mary van Kleeck, whose progressive social action influenced Social Security, and the programs of the New Deal.

She writes: "During the seven years from 1934 to the outbreak of war at the end of 1941, I was growing slowly, but fortunately as I said in the company with a vital young generation of social workers. The simple principles that the so-called rank-and-file workers of the Depression years were putting into practice were not new to social work. It was only a new thing to take them seriously. They were, first of all, that social work exists to serve people in need... Secondly it exists to help people help themselves...Thirdly, social work operates by communication, listening and sharing experiences... Fourthly, social work has to find its place among other movements for human betterment... civil rights... equality of opportunity... Finally, social workers as citizens cannot consider themselves superior to clients...It all added up to a maturing process in our profession." She expressed her ideas in a journal, *Social Work Today*, and in a book written in 1934, *Between Client and Community*. It placed the social worker clearly in the middle in a helping role. Because of her stance, she believed she was denied a number of jobs, she notes how she was turned down by the Red Cross in 1942, at a time they were desperately seeking social workers.

A short time later, she was offered a position with the National Maritime Union, which served seamen and their families. It was a joyous and fortuitous experience for her, leading to innovative practice innovations adopted by the profession in later years. While that position ended with the end of the war, she continued to address the issues of the day, prodding her profession to remember its ties to social justice and democracy.

For some, she was considered a "trouble maker, " and at times it carried a painful price. She was once barred from study at a seminar she had previously been accepted for, after an announcement of a paper she was to give was circulated, the title "McCarthyism vs Social Work." Many of her speeches and writing were directed to the profession, which she dearly loved, was dedicated to, but feared was moving away from the struggle for social justice. "The way we do our professional work contributes inescapably to the outcomes of that struggle. If we think social work is not a force in the battle of ideas, the enemies of the

people know better. Either we serve the people' needs or we evade them. Either we make democracy real or we reduce it to an abstraction which the foes of democracy do not object to at all. Either we use all that science can teach to help people build a genuinely good life for themselves or we build a professional cult that takes the place of interrelations with other advances in human knowledge." She noted that the speech..."did not add to my popularity with leaders in social work or with some of my colleagues who were personal friends."

When I read her comments about the reaction to that speech I can't help but remember some of the negative reactions Harry Specht received when he spoke of his ideas in *Fallen Angels*. The times may change, but the reactions to critics within the field are seldom accepted graciously, particularly if they are close to the mark.

Uncharted Journey is not only the story of a great social worker, a great teacher and an outstanding human being, it is a living history of an exciting period of growth in the social work profession, its tortured search for acceptance, and its movement along the road to professionalism. Along that road it both rejected and honored one of its theoretical and moral leaders. Its a story worth knowing, absorbing, and telling to others. □

Quam, Jean K, (1995) Bertha Capen Reynolds. *Encyclopedia of Social Work.* 19th Edition, Washington D.C.

FORTHCOMING
Special Issues: Call for Narratives

HEALING

Nancy Oliver and Lyda Hill

The special focus of this issue is healing. We recognize the infinite dimensions of healing and envision that the narratives will come from individuals whose descriptions might be from a clinical perspective; or education research, administration, community organization, and policy and program development. Student submissions are encouraged. We are concerned with the meaning and interpretation of events experienced as healing; rich descriptions of techniques or individual experiences and outcomes; or formal patterns of healing modalities integrated into professional practice. It is expected that patterns of healing concepts will emerge from the different perspectives as authors share experiences. We also recognize that sharing of experiences has the potential for healing.

Our intent is to identify the potential for integrating these healing modalities into daily personal life and professional practice. The following suggestions are offered as considerations for inclusion in the healing narrative:

- The professional's thoughts and feelings related to the healing experience(s);
- Awareness of the way the healing impacts the personal life of individuals;
- Mutual benefits experienced by those involved in the healing experience(s).

Narratives should be compelling enough that the implications for the audience become evident, without the author's articulation of "healing completed" or "what ought to be learned". This issue will include narratives about different modalities used by professionals in their daily work: imagery, humor, music, touch, hypnotherapy, prayer, meditation, or relaxation techniques. We also encourage accounts of isolated healing experiences that had a profound impact on life's events.

Stories about healing from many different disciplines and perspectives will expand the domain of healing. This is an opportunity to share professional and personal experiences.

Send manuscripts to:

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Submissions are due

December 1, 1995. □

TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE COMMUNITY TRAINING EXPERIENCE

Janet Black, Editor

Most educational programs for the helping professions provide hands on training for students, i.e. field work, internship, residency, fellowship, legal clerkship, student nursing, student teaching, etc.

The teaching and learning experiences provided within the various settings offer a rich arena to develop narrative, personal accounts of the process of teaching and learning, from the perspective of the training teacher and the student in training.

This special issue invites professionals that teach and learn in the context of the community, such as training supervisors, field work instructors, clinical instructors, residency training chiefs master teachers; and students in training in community settings such as courts, clinics, schools, hospitals, social service agencies and community organizations, to submit narratives that describe and explain their teaching and/or learning experience.

We encourage teachers and students to share their experiences in the teaching and learning process. Examples of specific issue or interest areas include:

- identification of successful and unsuccessful teaching and learning approaches;
- exploration of the conflicts and concerns that emerge in the teaching/leaning process;
- amplification of the teaching/learning experience through the use of client/patient focused practice examples;
- examination of the external and internal forces that support and/or hinder the teaching/learning experience.
- discussion of the process of integrating theoretical and practical application concepts in the community experience

Send manuscripts to:

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Submissions due January 1996

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