

SUMMARY OF DR ENG-KONG TAN'S PRESENTATION ON "THE SPIRITUAL IN PSYCHOTHERAPY"

presented at the AAGP Sydney Meeting 2016

The presenter introduces the topic by first defining the two terms. Psychotherapy has to do with the healing of troubled minds. The spiritual is an ingredient in human behaviour characterised by wisdom and compassion combined with a sense of the sublime, the good, the beautiful and the truth. Obviously the two overlap. The presenter suggests that from a spiritually inclined psychotherapist's perspective spirituality is human and universal. It's an attitude, a beingness of the heart. It is an enhanced sense of inner and outer awareness. It transcends to the ultimate, nirvana or heaven depending on your faith. And it makes a difference – adds maturity, fulfilment and peace. Now we have begun to touch on Bion's concept of "O", Lacan's register of the Real and Winnicott's concept of "Chaos".

There are similarities and differences between the two traditions. Both agree that our ordinary human perception is clouded. Self-knowing is a key to rediscovery. Both journeys require personal regular contact with a therapist/teacher and painful processes are encountered to cure or liberate. We have inner hidden resources. The spiritual aims for much greater goals and higher purposes. The patient/therapist relationship differs from the disciple/teacher; one is transference based, the other transcends to a higher level. The two differ in their views of consciousness - psychoanalysis takes an archaeological view of digging the unconscious, as meanings and messages, to make them conscious whereas spirituality uses consciousness as a medium to cultivate for enlightenment or connection to the ultimate. In the psychotherapy journey, working through the transferences is part of therapeutic action whereas in spiritual development, transcendence are moments of growth. The therapeutic relationship rests on the bond between the dyad whereas in spirituality it's the bond with Ultimate Reality/Buddhahood/God. The therapeutic relationship has faith and devotion whereas the spiritual connection, in addition, is sacred.

Spiritual moments occur in long-term analytically oriented therapies. Often during silent mutually meditative moments in the therapeutic dyad, towards later stages of the journey. These moments can be direct communion, an "at-oneness" between the dyad and/or the universe. They can be moments of experiencing higher order positive emotions, values and virtues in wisdom and compassion. Or finally finding hope and faith from one's inner self. How does the therapist manage these moments? The therapist attunes and acknowledges these moments and join in the reverie. They are NOT to be interpreted. Should the patient requests for more they are to be referred to spiritual/religious teachers of the patient's own choice.

Through the years various psychoanalysts have delved into the spiritual. Freud started off as thinking about religion as a collective obsessional neurosis and God as an idealised projection of the father! He misinterpreted Romain Rolland's reference to the spiritual experience of "an oceanic feeling" to that of a restoration of limitless

narcissism! In "*The Future of an Illusion*" he asserted that "in the long run nothing can withstand reason and experience, and the contradiction which religion offers to both is palpable" Freud hoped that in the future science will go beyond religion and reason will replace faith in God! In an afterword to "*An Autobiographical Study*" Freud states that his "essentially negative" view of religion changed somewhat after "*The Future of an Illusion*"; while religions' "*power lies in the truth which it contains, I shows that that truth was not a material but a historical truth*"!

Jung was the first psychoanalyst to appreciate spirituality. His work on himself and his patients convinced him that life has a spiritual purpose beyond material goals. Our main task, he believed, is to discover and fulfil our deep innate potential. Based on his study of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, Taoism and other traditions, Jung believed that the journey of transformation, which he called individuality, is at the mystical heart to all religions. It is a journey to meet the self and at the same time to meet the Divine. Jung believed that spiritual experience was essential to our well-being, as he specifically identifies individual human life with the universe as a whole.

Bion posits psychoanalysis as a sacred transformative process and that the transcendent position is like Milton's allusion to the "deep and formless infinite". This nameless dread, absolute truth, ultimate reality, Kant's "things in themselves", reverence and awe he named "O" With "Transformations" Bion, in describing Truth as "O" he left behind the preconceptions of the psychoanalytic establishment and ventured inward in a soul-searching, mystic journey.

Symington in "Emotion and Spirit" considers religion as institutionalised good. The spirit is good. Similarly psychoanalysis is an inner action of intentional good, transforming destructiveness to constructiveness. The anti intentional good is buried in the sensual and the desires. Meaning in life is detachment from desires and greed. Perhaps, when Symington likens psychoanalysis as a transformation of narcissism he shares spirituality that leans itself to "no-self", as in Buddhism, a diminution and dissolving of "I, Me and Mine" in all of narcissism.

In concluding, the presenter suggests that the psychotherapist might sometimes be standing for the spiritual in a secular world. Quoting from Jungian analyst Nathan Field in "The spiritual dimension in psychotherapeutic practice", before Freud's Pleasure to Reality Principle, there is Ogden's, Bick's, Meltzer, Tustin, Bion and Winnicott's autistic contiguous position. And beyond Klein's Paranoid-Schizoid position to the Depressive Position, there is the Fourth Position – the spiritual giving meaning. Bion's at-one-ment, ultimate reality, ineffable, and unknowable are glimpses of this position.

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