

**Harvesting Religious Fruits in Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy:
Personal Reflections of a Jewish Psychologist of Religion**

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Introduction

This is the first time I have ever used the term “reflections” in a title of one of my papers, and I think it’s a reflection (pardon the pun) of the fact that I’m aging. But the later years in a career are a particularly apt time to take a step back and reflect on oneself, one’s own work, and the state of the field. (Of course it’s not a bad idea to do that when you’re younger too).

In this paper, I’d like to reflect on how my own approach to spiritually integrated psychotherapy has been implicitly shaped by my own identity as a Jew and how it’s been shaped as well by my encounters with other faiths. I’ve never spoken so directly to these issues before; what I’m really doing here is making something that has been implicit more explicit. This process of moving from implicit to explicit, I believe, is particularly important in spiritually integrated therapy.

There are a few assumptions that underlie this paper and that I’d like to highlight. The first assumption is that we cannot disconnect our approaches to psychotherapy from who we are as human beings, including our own gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and yes, spiritual and religious orientation. I like the way Stanton Jones (1994) put it, “One cannot intervene in the fabric of human life without getting deeply involved in moral and religious matters” (p. 197). The notion that the therapist can be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate to write on, is not borne out by the empirical evidence or the realities of clinical experience. To put it more bluntly, complete neutrality on the part of the therapist, is impossible. In fact, in a classic paper written in 1980, Allen Bergin warned us that in the effort to remain neutral and personally detached, we are likely to become hidden or subtle influencers in therapy. Being more explicit about our own distinctive identities then offers an important corrective to this potential bias.

The second assumption is one grounded in an empirical reality – the world is becoming increasingly pluralistic religiously. In this age of the internet and remarkable mobility, adherents of faith traditions are exposed to the exceptional diversity within and between religious groups. In 1991, Anderson and Hopkins captured this dynamic in the United States: “[Here] Hindu yogas teach next door to South American shamans, and Congregationalist churches share their space with Buddhist and Taoist communities. Jewish men and women become Zen masters and Catholics priests learn Japanese forms of meditation and purification” (p. 122). As a result of this movement toward pluralism, it is now a misnomer to speak of “the” Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, or, for that matter, atheist client. People have become more spiritually eclectic, picking and choosing from what Reginald Bibby (1987) once described as an a la carte menu of religious choices of beliefs and practices that can be found within and across religions.

This leads to the third assumption -- psychotherapy is essentially a meeting of worlds – the world of the client and the world of the therapist. To conduct effective spiritually integrated psychotherapy, therapists must learn about and respond respectfully to the distinctive religious world of the client, while remaining well-aware of the worlds they as practitioners bring to psychotherapy and how their own world views may shape the therapeutic encounter in desirable or undesirable ways.

With these assumptions in mind, let me begin by providing a little background on myself as a Jewish psychologist of religion.

Personal Background

From my earliest years, I knew that I was Jewish, but I didn't realize that I was *really* Jewish until some time in my 20's. I was born and raised in a conservative Jewish community in Washington D. C. Like most of my Jewish friends, much of my education in Judaism was geared to preparing me for my rite of passage into adulthood, my Bar Mitzvah, at the ripe old age of 13. I learned to read Hebrew quite well, but without understanding what I was reading. I learned to participate in Jewish customs and rituals without understanding their underlying meaning. I did a very nice job at my Bar Mitzvah, as I was told. But when that was completed, like most of my friends, I stopped my formal Jewish education. My parents didn't offer complaints – while Judaism permeated our home through customs, holiday meals, and occasional attendance at synagogue, we didn't speak about the meaning of being Jewish. Don't get me wrong, I *felt* deeply Jewish, I just wasn't sure why.

In my 20's, I read a book that profoundly affected me. It was written by Irving Howe (1976) and entitled *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made*. As the title conveys, the book presents the stories of Jews who emigrated from Europe to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Listening to the rich descriptions of their lives, I saw, heard, and experienced myself -- in their vigilance, indeed hyper-vigilance to a world that could come crashing down on them at any time; in their sense of a flawed universe and broken world in desperate need of repair; in a skepticism to external authority and even their own understanding of the world; in a love for deep thinking about questions that were so meaningful to me – most importantly, why we're here and how we should live our lives; and in a sense of humor that absolutely refuses to let suffering and tragedy have the last word. One of my favorites: two Jews have been condemned to death in the Russian gulag. Before they are about to be shot, their guard and executioner asks them if they

want a final cigarette. One accepts, but the other says he doesn't smoke. The one who accepts admonishes his friend, "Take the cigarette, Moishe, don't make trouble." I realized then that I was Jewish in a way that went well beyond whether I attended synagogue, followed all of the 613 commandments of the Hebrew Bible, or even believed in God. Jewishness was an inseparable part of my personality, my character, and my approach to life and the world. This was only a starting point for me; I was just beginning to understand how I was Jewish and I wanted to learn more.

Around the same point in time, I was pursuing studies of psychology. I went into psychology because I thought it would provide insights into what makes people (including me) tick, what the key is to a life of meaning and purpose, and how we might make the world a better place. But I was disappointed by what I was learning. I only semi-joke that my first client, Walter, was a three-pound pigeon. I met and cared for Walter in my class on operant conditioning, and Walter did in fact teach me valuable principles of reinforcement and punishment that came in handy when I worked with children or people with disabilities. But when it came to the big questions – why are we here, what's the meaning of it all, how can we deal with suffering in the world – Walter had very few words, actually, no words at all. The other major therapeutic paradigm of my time – psychodynamic – struck me as very dark and pessimistic. Not that this child of the Holocaust had to be persuaded of the darkness and evil in the world, but how, I wondered, could we help other people whose feet are stuck in the muck and mire of life when we we're standing with one foot in quicksand ourselves?

I began to wonder whether religious thought and practice might offer a way to deepen psychology. Even though I didn't agree with many of their answers, my sense was that the religions of the world shared my interest in the big questions that had drawn me to psychology. I

started to take a closer look at religious life. Early on though I decided I didn't want to focus exclusively on Judaism. I wanted to learn about the religions of the world more generally. I also found myself less interested in theological matters and more interested in the very concrete ways religion expressed itself in peoples' lives, particularly in the most pivotal times of life. So I began to go to churches, temples, congregations, mosques, and synagogues and talk to people about how religion affected them for better or worse. Initially, this was a pretty scary thing to do; after all, what was a Jewish guy doing in a church? I was always welcomed though, albeit sometimes with the hopes, I think, that I'd become a convert. And I saw what a powerful role religion played in peoples' lives, often helpful it seemed but at times harmful.

The field of psychology, I quickly learned, had its own "issues" with religion. Freud and Skinner, for instance, were not huge fans of religious life, to say the least. However, I felt that there was much to be gained by bridging the two domains of psychology and religion, and over the years, came to the conclusion that we can enhance our effectiveness as practitioners when we integrate the distinctive resources of various religions into treatment. Spiritually integrated psychotherapy, as I have written about it (Pargament, 2007), rests on that premise. It draws on the fruits of many religious traditions.

With this background in mind, let me shift to the main focus of this chapter. I would like to discuss two fruits that I have tried to harvest that are deeply rooted in (though not exclusive to) my own tradition – Judaism. I will then go on to consider how we can enrich our work as therapists by harvesting the fruits of other religious traditions and adding them as vital ingredients into the recipes of our clinical work. I will conclude this chapter with the recommendation for greater sharing of religious resources in therapy in ways that remain sensitive to and respectful of the clients' particular religious identification and commitments.

Harvesting the Fruit of Sanctification

The first fruit I plucked from Judaism is sanctification. Let me quickly state this fruit can also be harvested from other religious trees. And in fact, my collaborator in much of this work on sanctification, Annette Mahoney, is a liberal Christian psychologist. We defined sanctification as a process of perceiving seemingly ordinary elements of life as being reflective of God or higher powers and/or as possessing extraordinary or divine qualities (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). However, my own awareness of and interest in harvesting sanctification for psychotherapy was, I'm sure, implicitly embedded in Judaism.

Let me try to make the implicit more explicit here as I talk about sanctification. At the risk of overgeneralizing, I'd say that, in comparison to Christianity, Judaism is less concerned about direct encounters with God. In fact, although I haven't seen data on this, I'd guess that Jews report fewer personal experiences with the divine than Christians. In the Hebrew Bible, God tells Moses to warn the Jewish people not to gaze directly at the Lord, "lest many of them perish" (Exodus 19: 21-22).

Within Judaism, it is more common to have what Peter Berger (1979) called "signals of transcendence" or as Samuel Karff (1979) put it "intimations" of God's presence through ordinary this-worldly experiences. Judaism is very concerned with the connection between "heaven and earth." It teaches that a divine presence can be found in everyday life, in fact, we are told to look for it. How?

One way is through prayer. Twice a day, Jews recite a prayer of sanctification: "kdosh, kdosh, kdosh, adonai tsevaot, melot kol ha'aretz kvodo. Holy, holy, holy, God is great. The whole world is filled with his glory."

A second way is through Jewish laws and customs. Jewish commandments, all 613 of them, are about treating every aspect of life as sacred – how we eat, how we work, how we rest, how we treat animals, how we act toward family, friends, strangers and even enemies. In each of these activities, Jews are reminded of God’s presence. There are blessings for everything -- from waking to going to sleep, from welcoming a baby into the world to departing the world, from going on a trip to coming home. The central message of these blessings is that God’s hand is in all of life, and that all of life is a divine blessing.

A third way is through rituals. In the simple acts of lighting candles, eating a special meal, a ritual drink of wine and sharing of challah, we are encouraged to see the world in a new light. The transitions rituals -- Bar and Bat Mitzvah, weddings, circumcision, and funerals -- are more than opportunities for gift-giving and celebration. They are rites of passage, what Edwin Friedman (1985) described as “hinges of time” that offer windows into the deeper flow and currents of the universe and the eternal truths of existence – when we move from childhood to adulthood, when we join our lives together in marriage, when new lives are welcomed into our community, when life comes to an end. These rituals insist that we sit up and take note of a deeper dimension to our lives.

In short, Jews are asked to make sacred, to sanctify the world, to see the world through a sacred lens. My interest in sanctification came to me in a subtle, subterranean way, through my lifelong exposure to this perspective so deeply embedded in Judaism.

Again, I want to stress that sanctification is not exclusive to Judaism. Other religions of the world also encourage their adherents to see the sacred in various aspects of life. For example, within the Upanishads, Hindus read: “Filled with Brahman are the things we see, Filled with Brahman are the things we see not, From out of Brahman floweth all that is: From Brahman all –

yet is he still the same” (Upanishads). And Christians are taught: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who empowers them all in every one” (1Corinthians 12: 4-6, English Standard Version).

We can find rich examples of sanctification in Judaism and other traditions as well. For example, Judaism sanctifies time and, the day of rest or Sabbath in particular. Abraham Heschel described the Sabbath this way: “What is the Sabbath? The presence of eternity, a moment of majesty, the radiance of joy. The Sabbath is an assurance that the spirit is greater than the universe, that beyond the good is the holy. The Sabbath is holiness in time” (Heschel, 1955, p. 417).

Protestant theologian and minister, Frederick Buechner (1992), spoke beautifully of seeing all of life as sacred:

Taking your children to school and kissing your wife goodbye. Eating lunch with a friend. Trying to do a decent day's work. Hearing the rain patter against the window. There is no event so commonplace but that God is present within it, always hiddenly, always leaving you room to recognize him or not to recognize him, but all the more fascinatingly because of that, all the more compellingly and hauntingly. . . . Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace. (p. 2.

It is important to add that the process of sanctification may also be experienced by atheists. Though they may reject beliefs in God or labels of being religious and/or spiritual, they

too can imbue aspects of life with qualities often associated with the divine, including transcendence, boundlessness, and ultimacy, as we can hear in the words of a Swedish atheist coping with cancer:

Whatever happens in the world for me or others, nature is still there, it keeps going. That is a feeling of security when everything else is chaos. The leaves fall off, new ones appear, somewhere there is a pulse that keeps going. . . It is a spiritual feeling if we can use this word without connecting it to God, this is what I feel in nature. (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 134)

Sanctification is, in fact, not at all a rarity or an experience of only the devoutly faithful if national surveys are to be believed. For instance, in one such survey, 78% of the sample reported that “I see evidence of God in nature and creation,” 76% indicating that “I experience something more sacred in life than simply material” (Doehring & Clarke, 2002).

A number of us have been studying sanctification for several years now and our findings appear to underscore its potent role in our lives (Pargament, 2013; Pomerleau, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2016; Wong & Pargament, 2017). Let me highlight a few of these implications. First, whatever we perceive as sacred seems to act as a magnet drawing us forward, giving us something to strive for in life. Several years ago, I saw a 45-year-old woman who had come in to therapy after being diagnosed with glioblastoma, a malignant brain tumor that left her with the prognosis of only two more years of life. In talking about what she might like to accomplish in therapy, I asked her what matters most to her in her life, what she held sacred. She responded quickly, “My children, they’re sacred to me.” A Jewish woman and mother of four boys, she said she wanted to live to be present for her youngest 9-year-old son’s Bar Mitzvah. And she asked for my help in coping with the difficult treatment ordeal she would have to go through to

reach that goal. And that is what we did. It was a very onerous treatment, but I believe she endured it with such courage because she was motivated by a sacred mission. She defied the odds and lived to celebrate her son's Bar Mitzvah and most of his progress through high school. To paraphrase Viktor Frankl (1959), she had a "why" to live for.

Second, we are motivated to preserve and protect whatever we sanctify in our lives; after all, it is sacred. In one study, led by Annette Mahoney, we examined the degree to which college students perceived their physical bodies to be sacred, temples of the holy spirit (Mahoney, Carels, Pargament, Wachholtz, Leeper, et al., 2005). Those that did, we found, took better care of their bodies, ate better, exercised more, got enough sleep, and were less likely to use drugs and alcohol.

Third, what we sanctify tends to become a "precious object," a potent resource for health and well-being. A few years ago, I taught a small graduate class and asked my students to bring in and share an object each held sacred. Some students brought in crucifixes, others brought in special objects that had been given to them by loved ones. One student, a Buddhist, held up a small pendant that she always wore around her neck. Noting that her father had died when she was only 8-years-old, she said the pendant contained a small part of his ashes, and by wearing the pendant she was always able to keep him close to her heart. This was her most precious object and a source of loving memory that gave her support, strength, and solace.

The flip-side of these points is that an inability to sanctify may pose problems for people. Harold Kushner (1989) spoke to this point:

A world without [the sacred] would be a flat, monochromatic world, a world without color or texture, a world in which all days would be the same. Marriage would be a matter of biology, not fidelity. Old age would be seen as a time of weakness, not of

wisdom. In a world like that, we would cast about desperately for any sort of diversion, for any distraction from the emptiness of our lives, because we would never have learned the magic of making some days and some hours special, (p. 206)

We believe this work on sanctification also has clinical application for people from diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds. One example comes from work I was involved in with Brian McCorkle and his colleagues at the Danielsen Institute (McCorkle, Bohn, Hughes, & Kim, 2005). Our focus was on people seeking treatment for social anxiety disorder. We conceptualized social anxiety as, in part, a disorder arising from an inability to place anxiety within a larger background, a background of greater meaning and sacredness. To use the example of figure-ground illusions from Gestalt psychology, social anxiety involves getting lost in the foreground of a picture. We developed a group treatment program in which we taught people with social anxiety to see sacredness in the many dimensions of their lives: in nature, in loving relationships, and in ordinary events. We had some success in teaching people to see sacredness as measured by pre and post ratings of levels of social anxiety and of sacredness.

In short, sanctification is a fruit that I plucked from the tree of Judaism, but it grows on other trees as well, and once harvested it can add an important spiritual ingredient to the recipe of psychotherapy.

Harvesting the Fruit of Spiritual Struggles

Years ago, when I first began my studies of religious and spiritual coping with stressful life situations, it became clear to me that while most people saw their faith as a support to them in stressful times, others were experiencing struggles with their faith, struggles that were magnifying the effects of their encounters with stress and trauma. They were feeling punished by God, they were feeling a sense of divine betrayal or abandonment, they were questioning their

most basic religious beliefs, they were having conflicts with friends, family, and religious institutions about spiritual matters, they were feeling that they had failed to live up to their spiritual values and beliefs, and they were questioning what if any ultimate meaning their lives held. I resonated strongly to these struggles because they were so familiar to me as a Jew.

Elie Wiesel, survivor of Auschwitz and winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, once said: “What is Jewish history if not an endless quarrel with God” (Wiesel, 1978, p. 6). In Wiesel’s (1979) play entitled “The Trial of God” God stands accused and is ultimately convicted of the pogroms in Chmilenicki in which 100,000 Jews were murdered. Wiesel reportedly based the play on an actual small trial of God he witnessed in Auschwitz where God was also accused by a small group of inmates of crimes against humanity; God was found guilty.

Although the very idea of putting God on trial may be shocking, even blasphemous, to some, expressions of struggle such as this one are nothing new within Judaism. Sacred Jewish literature is replete with examples of exemplary figures engaged in passionate arguments with God. Moses complains about God’s mistreatment of the Israelites, Jeremiah feels betrayed and deceived by God, and Job angrily calls God to task for his suffering:

“Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the schemes of the wicked (Job 10:3) . . . Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? Will you frighten a windblown leaf and pursue dry chaff? (Job 13: 24-25).

In short, I found myself quite at home in hearing about spiritual struggles. That is a very personal reason why I so eagerly plucked the fruit of spiritual struggles from the Jewish tree. You might wonder how spiritual struggles could be a fruit; they may seem to be more of a weed. But again, from a Jewish perspective, spiritual struggles are not a sign of pathology or weakness. Questioning, disputing, debating, arguing, and struggling are built into the Jewish method of

studying Torah. At the risk of overgeneralizing once again, I'd say that struggles may be just as interwoven into the ways Jews deal with each other and the wider world. Struggle, for Jews, is a way of facing the brokenness within oneself and the world and trying to repair some of the damage.

As with sanctification, though, spiritual struggles are a fruit that can be picked from many religious trees. Consider just a few examples. Before he became the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama had to struggle with the demon Mara who presents him with the greatest worldly temptations – from lust to pride. In Jesus' final words on the cross, we hear his struggle with feeling abandoned: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Matthew 27:46)?

There is no shortage of modern day accounts of spiritual struggle. I received the following note from an undergraduate after I had given a lecture on this topic. She wrote: "I'm suffering, really suffering. My [bipolar] illness is tearing me down, and I'm angry at God for not rescuing me, I mean really setting me free from my mental bondage. I have been dealing with these issues for ten years now and I am only 24 years old. I don't understand why he keeps lifting me up, just to let me come crashing down again."

I began my work in the area with studies of positive and negative religious coping; I have shifted from the language of negative religious coping to spiritual struggles because the latter term better captures the possibility of positive transformation and growth through spiritual tensions, strains, and conflicts (Pargament, 1997). For several years now, Julie Exline and I along with our colleagues have been collaborating on further studies of spiritual struggles. We have defined spiritual struggles as tensions, strains, and conflicts about sacred matters (Exline, 2013; Pargament, Murray-Swank, Magyar, & Ano, 2005), that can occur within oneself, with others, or with the divine.

We have developed a brief measure of spiritual struggles through the Brief RCOPE (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011) and a more extensive measure that assesses divine struggles, demonic struggles, interpersonal struggles, moral struggles, religious doubt struggles, and struggles of ultimate meaning (Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014)

Our surveys show that spiritual struggles are not uncommon. We surveyed a sample of 17,000 adults and asked them whether they had experienced each of our six types of spiritual struggles in the past few weeks (Exline et al., 2014). Thirty one to 49% of the sample reported experiencing the six types of spiritual struggle. The percentages rose to even higher levels, from 39% to 88%, when we asked a national sample about whether they had ever encountered each type of struggle at any point in their lives (Wilt, Grubbs, Exline, & Pargament, unpublished data).

Spiritual struggles involve deep questions about core beliefs, practices, connections, and values. They can shake us to the core. Perhaps not surprisingly then, they are often a source of distress and disorientation. For example, in her book, “Scarred by Struggle, Transformed through Hope,” Joan Chittister (2003) described her experience as a sister in the Roman Catholic church. She had won entrance into the prestigious Iowa State writer’s workshop, fulfilling a dream she had long held of becoming a writer. A few days before she was going to leave, the head of her order told her, without explanation, that she could not attend the workshop. Here’s how Chittister wrote about the ensuing spiritual struggle:

Suddenly without warning. . . I would find myself swimming in a sea of black, my arms and legs heavy and lifeless, tears in my eyes. The frustration of it all swept over me like waves on a beach, pulling me under, upending me in deep water, washing me out away from a firm emotional shore. Day after day, the struggle raged. (Chittister, 2003, p. 91)

Chittister is not alone in her experience. A number of empirical studies have documented robust links between spiritual struggles and signs of psychological distress. For example, in a study of a nationally representative sample of American adults, Abu Raiya, Pargament, Krause, and Ironson (2014) found that all types of spiritual struggles were tied to depression, generalized anxiety, and less life satisfaction and happiness, even after controlling for demographic variables, neuroticism, social isolation, and religious commitment. Similar findings have emerged from studies across diverse religious groups and cultural contexts (e.g., Abu Raiya, Pargament, Weissberger, & Exline, 2016; Abu Raiya, Pargament, Exline, & Agbaria, 2015; Pedersen, Pederson, Pargament, & Zachariae, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2011).

Spiritual struggles have also been linked to more serious problems, including suicidality (Currier, Smith, & Kuhlman, 2017), serious pathology (Berzengi, Berzengi, Kadim, Mustafa, & Jobson, 2016), physical symptomatology (Sherman, Latiff, Spohn, & Tricot, 2005), and even greater risk of mortality (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001). For example, in a study of veterans from the Iraq and/or Afghanistan wars, higher levels of spiritual struggles were strongly tied to greater suicidality (Currier et al., 2017). For each point of increase on the spiritual struggles measure, the Veterans were 1.44 times more likely to have discussed a plan to commit suicide with a desire to die, and 1.51 times more likely to attempt suicide in the future. It is important to add that suicidality was not predicted by any of the other variables in the study, including the number of deployments, combat-related exposure, moral injury experiences, depression and PTSD symptoms. Spiritual struggles were uniquely predictive of suicidality.

These findings present a pretty dark picture of spiritual struggles. Questions can be raised though whether this picture is complete. After all, we often tell our clients that their struggles and trials can be a source of growth and transformation. In fact, each of the world's

great religious figures experienced struggles in life, from Moses and Jesus to Buddha and Muhammad. But each also experienced growth and transformation through these struggles. Neither is there any shortage of narrative accounts describing growth through spiritual struggles. Chittister (2003) went on to write: Spiritual struggle “gives life depth and vision, insight and understanding. It not only transforms us, it makes us transforming as well” (p. 82). On the other hand, a few empirical studies have examined the relationship between spiritual struggles and reports of growth and, surprisingly, the findings have been uneven (e.g., Chan & Rhodes, 2013; Gall, Charbonneau, & Florack, 2011; Park, Smith, Less, Mazure, & McKee, 2017). Given the robust relationships between spiritual struggles and distress, disorientation, and serious problems, it seems clear that we have to avoid a sentimental view of spiritual struggles as inevitable sources of growth and transformation. Growth through struggles may be possible, but it is not a foregone conclusion. It may take quite a while for people to realize fundamental change. Moreover, people may need help to move from the pain and despair of spiritual struggles to a more positive trajectory. We are working now to identify and mobilize those qualities of wholeness that may facilitate growth and positive transformation (Pargament, Wong, & Exline, 2016).

These findings underscore the importance of addressing spiritual struggles within the context of psychotherapy. But how? Here are a few suggestions. First, assess for spiritual struggles in therapy. Just as we ask how the clients’ problems affect them emotionally, behaviorally, socially, and physically, we can and should ask how they affect them spiritually. That simple question can open up the door to an important conversation about spiritual struggles. Second, we can draw on our basic clinical skills in conversations about spiritual struggles. Simply listening with compassion and without judgment can be a gift to clients who may be

feeling shame that their struggles are a sign of spiritual weakness or fearing punishment from others or the divine about their struggles . Third, we can normalize spiritual struggles as a natural part of the spiritual journey, drawing on the wealth of empirical data to say this is in fact the case. Finally, if we have the training, we can help clients broaden and deepen their spirituality in ways that foster growth. For example, Nichole Murray-Swank (2003) has developed a promising spiritually integrated therapy to address the spiritual struggles of women who have been sexually abused. Her program, Solace for the Soul, helps women discuss the ways their abuse has impacted their understanding of and relationship with God. Many can no longer worship a male representation of God – it is simply too fraught with memories of the trauma and powerful negative emotions. As a result, they have disconnected from their religious traditions. Murray-Swank helps these clients consider other images. In one of her exercises, she has her clients visualize God in gender neutral terms:

Picture God as a waterfall within you. . . pouring down cool, refreshing water. . . the waters of love, healing, restoration throughout your body. . . a cool, refreshing waterfall washing down over your head, your face, your shoulders, your neck, out through your arms, down your legs, out through your toes, refreshing bringing life, quenching thirst. . . renewing, refreshing, restoring. (p. 232)

I have highlighted two of the fruits harvested from a Jewish tree, but not exclusive to Jewish trees, that have shown real value in spiritually integrated psychotherapy. As important though are the fruits that we can harvest from religious trees that come from other fields. Let me briefly consider how therapists from a variety of religious backgrounds can draw on these fruits.

Harvesting Religious Fruits from Other Religious Traditions

The ability to draw on the richness of other traditions rests on a pluralistic understanding of religion. This perspective is non-exclusivist. It assumes that every religion may be a container of important truths, but these truths come to us through the hands and voices of human beings, who great as they are, are also frail, fallible, and flawed. Every religion is, as a result, limited. As a group, however, religious traditions may complement each other, with each bringing distinctive sources of wisdom to the therapy process. It follows that practitioners can, in their therapeutic roles, partake of not only the fruits from their own traditions, but those of others. There is, however, a danger here of communicating a misunderstanding or superficial understanding of these fruits, unfamiliar to the therapist, to clients. To avoid these risks, practitioners must be willing to develop a deeper understanding of these fruits before bringing them to the therapeutic table.

Let me give a personal example. For many years, I found myself frustrated in my clinical work with couples. Oftentimes, they came to therapy with a litany of complaints about each other that they had accumulated over the years. They were, in short, grudge-collectors, looking to me as the judge who might be persuaded by the weight of their grievances to rule in their favor. Working from a communications perspective, I helped them share their complaints with each other, doing my best to make sure they were speaking clearly and listening carefully to each other. I found though that this approach could make matters worse rather than better. Airing their grudges more articulately and paying closer attention to those of their partners seemed only to inflame their feelings of anger and resentment. One day, as another meeting with a grudge-collecting couple was winding down, I asked them, more out of my own frustration than any clinical wisdom, whether either had thought about forgiving their partner. That stopped the finger-pointing conversation in its tracks. After a lengthy pause, both admitted that they had

never given the idea of forgiveness any thought at all. This was as much a turning point for me as it was for the couple.

Like the couple, I had given very little thought to forgiveness as a resource for psychotherapy. My lack of attention to forgiveness, in part, reflected my understanding of this concept from a Jewish perspective. Within Judaism, forgiveness is described as a relational process. The individual is obligated to forgive transgressors when they have taken responsibility for their mistakes and made proper amends (Rye et al., 2000). Although forgiveness can be offered as an act of charity, there is no obligation to do so on the part of the injured party. This can leave the victim essentially at the mercy of the instigator, holding on to feelings of anger, bitterness, and resentment until the transgressor has done his/her part. In the couples I was working with, each partner was stuck, essentially waiting for the other to go first.

In my conversations with colleagues, I learned that within Christianity forgiveness is more of a psychological than a relational process. Intrigued, I wanted to learn more. So I agreed to co-edit a book with Michael McCullough and Carl Thoresen on forgiveness (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). And I was able to harvest a fruit from another religious field. In Christianity, I discovered, forgiveness is possible and encouraged regardless of whether the offender is repentant; as a result, the injured party is freed from any dependence on the acts of the perpetrator. Empirical studies also demonstrated the emotional, social, and physical benefits of forgiveness, understood and measured as a psychological process (e.g., Worthington, 2005).

Although it comes from a different religious tree than my own, the Christian fruit of forgiveness has proven very helpful in my clinical work. Let me give an example. Several years ago, I saw Mary, a 30-year-old Roman Catholic woman in therapy who presented with anxiety and depression related to repeated failures in romantic relationships. She had hoped to marry

early and have a large family, but she was continually disappointed in her relationships with men and the older she got, the more she felt her dream fading away. In exploring her history of relationships, I learned that Mary entered each new relationship with very high hopes. Within the first date or two she was imagining the wedding she would have and what their children would look like. Inevitably, however, her potential partner would act insensitively, commit a blunder, or hurt Mary's feelings. Mary would then angrily and abruptly end the relationship and isolate herself for months at a time, stewing in bitterness and resentment, until she felt "her biological clock" ticking and once again entered the world of dating.

Much of our time in the early sessions was devoted to Mary's extensive list of complaints against her former partners. A pivotal point occurred in therapy when I asked Mary whether she had ever considered forgiveness of the men who had hurt her. I told her that, although Jewish myself (as Mary knew), I understood that forgiveness was an important value within her own religious tradition. Mary responded by saying that she knew as a Catholic she should forgive, but had never been very good at it. She was, however, willing to take a closer look. The focus in therapy shifted then to whether and how Mary might be able to let go of some of her anger and resentments and take a more empathetic and compassionate attitude toward her former partners, even though they were as she put it "clueless". We explored Mary's understanding of forgiveness and drew on readings from her Roman Catholic tradition. This was productive work and Mary was able to make peace within herself about her former partners.

Now the question was whether Mary could apply her new insights to ongoing relationships. I spent several sessions with helping Mary normalize and anticipate the blunders and hurt feelings that would likely arise in forming a new romantic relationship. Rather than end the relationship in a huff though, we discussed the possibility of responding to these

transgressions by sharing feelings and concerns, making concrete efforts to improve the relationship, and cultivating an attitude of forgiveness. Again, this was new territory for Mary but she was an eager and motivated client. When Mary began dating again, she was able to apply these insights and work through the problems that inevitably arose, but this time in a spirit of forgiveness that was less a felt obligation and more a deeply felt value. I still receive occasional cards from Mary; she is now married with five children.

It's important to stress that adding the Christian fruit of forgiveness to my recipe of therapeutic ingredients complemented rather than clashed with other fruit I have harvested from Judaism. This is only one example. Psychotherapy can be enhanced by many other fruit growing in still other religious fields.

Conclusions

Spiritually integrated therapy is not simply the application of current psychotherapies to religious or spiritual clients. As the name indicates, it involves the *integration* of spiritual resources and concerns into the context of psychotherapy and, in the process, adds a vital dimension to treatment (Pargament, 2007). However, as yet, relatively little explicit attention has been given to how the therapists' own religious and spiritual orientation may express itself in spiritually integrated psychotherapy. In this paper, I have tried to address this deficit in a small way by offering some personal reflections on how, to some extent consciously and to some extent unconsciously, I have taken fruit from my own religious tradition, Judaism, in therapy. I have also described how I harvested fruit from other religious trees in my work.

Integrating spirituality into psychotherapy in the ways I have illustrated here is not without its challenges. To conclude this paper, I want to reflect briefly on some of the key questions that arise. One question is whether therapists should help clients explore religious and

spiritual resources that come from traditions other than the therapist's own. For example, should a therapist who is Christian help a Hindu client explore resources embedded in Hinduism? The answer, I believe, is it depends. It depends on whether the therapist either has or is willing to develop some familiarity with Hinduism. Of course, few of us have the time or inclination to become expert comparative religionists, mastering the religions of the world. As noted earlier, however, obligated to become conversant enough with the client's religion to engage in a meaningful dialogue about spiritual matters. If not, then the client should be referred to a practitioner better suited to his/her needs. Having said that, it is important to emphasize that even when therapist and client come from the same religious background, they will undoubtedly differ in some religious respects. As I mentioned earlier, there is no such thing as "the" Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, or atheist client. Thus, there may be no way around the need for therapists to become more knowledgeable about and engage the particular religious orientation of the individual client. Hospital chaplaincy provides a useful model for therapists in this regard. While rooted in their own faith traditions, chaplains are also well-versed in multiple religious world views and able to offer sensitive and respectful counsel to religiously diverse patients.

A second key question is whether it is appropriate for therapists to help clients explore religious resources that lie outside the client's own tradition. To use the metaphor of this paper, should therapists help clients look into the fruit that come from other religious fields? Mental health professionals are ethically obligated to respect their clients' core beliefs and values, including their religious beliefs and values. For client's deeply and exclusively committed to their own tradition, it would be insensitive and inappropriate to suggest that they explore other religious resources and options. Of course, therapists can encourage clients to learn more about

resources within their own tradition that they may be unaware of. There are clients though who come to us uncommitted to a particular religious identity or committed to their tradition, but are nevertheless interested in exploring a variety of religious and spiritual alternatives. In these instances, therapists can facilitate the clients' spiritual quest. Doing so could pose a challenge to therapists who work for a religiously-based mental health organization. It is important to remember, however, that the primary obligation of the clinician is to foster mental health while remaining respectful of the client's own autonomy, identity, world view, and values, even if they do not conform to those of the therapist or the therapist's home institution.

A final key question focuses more on the potential impact of spiritually integrated therapy on the spiritual life of therapists: Can practitioners explore religious traditions other than their own in therapy while remaining committed to their own religious or spiritual perspective? To some, the idea of learning about other religious worlds may feel disloyal or even an act of betrayal to one's own faith commitments. However, from my own experience, engaging in other religious worlds has not threatened my beliefs and practices. To the contrary, I think my personal spirituality has been enriched and deepened by my contacts with other traditions. Here, I return to my belief that every religious contains important truths and each may have a distinctive contribution to make to the larger truths we seek in the search for the sacred. It follows that we may have much to gain by drawing from the wisdom of diverse wisdom traditions, but that does not require us to move out of our own spiritual homes. This is admittedly a difficult thing to do, but we may ask no less of clients grappling with diverse attitudes, beliefs, and practices among people in their own families, communities, and cultures.

Each of the key questions I have raised above calls for self-reflectiveness on our part as therapists – a keen awareness of how our own approach to religion and spirituality shapes our

values, world view, and clinical practice. In this paper, I have tried to share some of my self-reflections. Self-awareness can be fostered in other ways as well, for example, by writing a spiritual autobiography, consulting and collaborating with colleagues who come from diverse religious traditions, and advanced training in spiritually integrated psychotherapy.

So let me conclude this way. There are many religious fruit ripe for picking. By harvesting these fruit from our own traditions as well as those growing in other religious orchards we can enrich the lives of our clients, our work as therapists, and spiritually integrated therapy as a whole.

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