International Journal of Yoga and Allied Sciences (ISSN: 2278 – 5159)
Volume: 6, Issue: 1; Jan- June 2017

The Relationship between Yoga-Psychology and Western Psychology and Its Implications for Psychotherapy

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Abstract:

"There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."
Leonard Cohen
Canadian singer, songwriter, musician, poet and novelist (1934 - 2016)

This paper does not attempt to achieve the impossible of bringing the east and west together. Instead, it is an exploration of the promotion of the highest ideas, which are common to the whole world. The east and west still conduct experiments on the right ways of living. It seems that primitive ideas of extremism are not going to help humanity to attain the higher step of civilization for which we all strive. Regardless of whether one lives in the east or west, a person is a human being first and, as such, a member of the cosmos. There is a paradigm shift going on in world culture. The old psychology just does not work anymore. Too many people have been analyzing their pasts, childhoods, memories and parents, and realizing that it does not do anything — or that it does not do enough. People are lost and bored, and quick to jump at any fix. There is a great demand for self-help industries, perhaps because we feel deprived of something by our psychological culture. So, there is a sense that there is more to life than making quick fixes. This paper explores some of these crucial areas of difference between Yoga Psychology and Western Psychology, investigating those cracks with the possibility of light emerging

Keywords: *s*pirituality, transpersonal psychology, vedanta, Yoga psychology.

Introduction:

All knowledge is based on experience; this is the major common factor, both in Yoga and psychotherapy. As therapists, we do not hand over solutions and formulas to our clients; we explore their emotions to help them be in contact with their experiences, which they have suppressed for a long time. The teachers of the science of Yoga declare that religion is not only based upon the experience of ancient times, but that no man can be religious until he has the same perceptions himself. Yoga is the science that teaches us how to get these perceptions.

About 900 BC, or perhaps earlier, Patanjali crystallised some of these teachings. His "Eightfold Path" is the basis of Raja Yoga. The Vedas and Upanishads were direct cognitions of the mechanics and structure of the universe, which came to *Rishis* (seers) in a higher state of consciousness. In experiencing this inner knowledge, sound was of great importance. Vibration of sound (*sruti*) evoked such energies and physically

prepared one to the level necessary to withstand the powerful experience of the spirit's integration with matter. Sacred geometry through Mandala was the most powerful tool in understanding one's own inner nature.

Vedanta was another development in this area, whose chief exponent, *Shankracharya*, brought to light its creative evolutionary aspect. From the 19th century, there was a renaissance in Yoga. The key figures in this movement were: Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Shri Aurobindo, Vivekanand and others. The idea of this movement was to improve society, which was globally going downhill. The emphasis was on the idea of the creative evolutionary aspect of the Self in relation to society.

During this time in the west, Freud, Adler and Jung were trying to make sense of "What is life about? What is the role of mind in creating our realities and delusions? What is self and how is it different and unique from one person to another?" It was all very analytical. It was all very ego-based and external, separate from one's inner experiences. As it appears, for a long time women were not given much consideration in western psychology; the feminine aspect of human nature was totally overlooked and ignored. Thus, western psychology remained under the construct of the masculine nature only, missing out on the feminine qualities of openness, receptivity, intuition, insightfulness, creativity, an ever-changing feminine aspect, both rational and irrational; whereas in eastern traditions this aspect of masculine and feminine was well integrated, thus less threatening for a person to go inwardly and experience oneself as a whole. According to old scripture, duality is an important step on the ladder to self-realisation, but where it stops is not the end. Instead, it opens up a new beginning of another dimension or reality. As Shri Aurobindo argued, "absolute reality in its essence is non-dual, non-conceptual, and logically indefinable. It is only accessible to direct experience through the penetrative insight of pure spiritual intuition" (Rama, 1999: p. 83). According to non-dualism (*advaita*), reality is beyond materialism, causation, structure and number. This same conviction is expressed in the philosophy of Nirguna Brahman in Vedanta, in the concept of *shunyata* in Buddhism, in the concept of Tao in Chinese philosophy, and also in the philosophy of *tattvatita* in tantra. In contrast to tantra, Vedanta stresses the method of self-inquiry. Shri Aurobindo's integral Yoga philosophy, therefore, lies in the active and effective awareness of the individual with the superconscious Divine.

In eastern philosophy, the goal of life is to realise the infinite, or the absolute, or Self. The emphasis is on direct experience, rather than intellectualising. As the word Brahman comes from the root *Bri*, which means to grow or expand the Ground of Being, this also points towards our unlimited potential. That is to say that our own essential nature is unmanifest Brahman. There lies within us the possibility of experiencing it, which is consciousness itself. As this consciousness vibrates, it becomes the substance of our own thoughts and experiences. Pure consciousness is the Self (*Atma*). It is not the personality, ego or the contents of the mind, just as a beam of light is not the object it illuminates. In transpersonal psychotherapy, the therapist is that beam of light or like the sun which is available with its vitality and qualities, not imposing or enforcing them, but trusting that the client will take whatever is needed to unfold his or her potential, like a sunflower unfolds in the presence of the sun.

Vedantic philosophy reveals that there is interplay
between *Prakriti* and *Purusha* (anima and animus). *Prakriti* is the primordial

potential for matter, unconscious creative energy, whereas *Purusha* is spirit, Consciousness. The creative energy of nature is manifested in humans as psychic energy (*Chitta*). Whatever nature does is for the enjoyment or *Bhoga* of liberation of spirit. *Bhoga* also means participation in the dualities of existence. In that sense, it seems that when Freud talked about it as the "pleasure principle", he remained limited to the animus part of it only, making the relationship with the mind's manipulative nature, and did not fully participate in the duality to perceive the bigger picture where, through union, liberation from suffering is possible. Even C G Jung, who mastered the feminine and masculine (anima/animus) principle of human nature, could not allow himself to go beyond archetypes of the contra-sexuals. It appears that although there are some interesting and noticeable points of similarities and difference between western psychology and Yoga psychology, it would be unfair to compare them, since Yoga psychology is a finished product, whereas western psychology is still developing and continually changing. Because of this difference, western therapists who do not recognise the existence of the Atma (the Godhead within) are unable to help their clients achieve the union of perfect Yoga. They go along with their own sense of security, beyond which they cannot allow themselves to go. Even though they recognise the possibility and outstanding advantage of such spiritual integration, due to their own fears, they prefer not to make it a part of their therapy. The two, therefore, are kept separate.

According to Skynner (1983) there are some similarities between psychotherapy and spiritual traditions, as follows:

a) In both, man's perception is clouded and distorted whether by *samsara* (illusion) or like Plato's shadows on the walls of the cave, or by denial, projections, idealisation or withdrawal into fantasy.

b) In both, man is seen as being divided. His problems and suffering are believed to stem from this fragmentation, failure to become whole and to take responsibility for himself.

c) Self-knowledge, whereby he can find the lost parts of himself and become whole again, is seen as the key of rediscovery to integrity, so that he is no longer divided against himself and projecting rejected parts onto others.

d) This rediscovery and reacceptance is expected to be a painful process, but can lead to healing and growth. A clearer perception of the world – and a greater capacity to understand, accept and relate to others – comes from this self-acceptance and objectivity.

e) Both see man as possessing hidden resources, which cannot become available without this greater self-knowledge and integration – although the scale of this hidden potential is perceived differently within different psychotherapeutic traditions and even more in spiritual traditions.

f) As a corollary, much of our suffering and pain is an unnecessary product of ignorance, blindness, confusion and complexity resulting from inner division, deceit and subterfuge necessary to preserve some illusion of coherence.

g) The searchers shall be in regular personal contact with teacher, guide, guru, analyst or counsellor, who has been through the same experiences, has seen, understood and accepted at least some aspects of self, and escaped from some of his or her own fragmentation and distortions.

Pathology and spirituality:

It would appear to be consistent with previously reported findings to speculate

that our identification with affective experience may provide us with the most consistent sense of self. In the first few years of a child's life, affect perception and cognition are intimately woven together. As adults, affect and cognition may continue to be fused, and it may become the task of psychotherapy to assist a clarification of affective elements from situations and relationships that give rise to them. As we have seen in spiritual development, relationship with affect may change profoundly. A person may encounter earth-shattering qualities of emotion, and also disassociate and modify many habitual emotional patterns. Intuitive knowledge, which is experiential and direct, is developed over time through sensitivity towards subtle and affective inner experiences.

At the same time, in the field of mental health, affect is mostly perceived as negative, inappropriate or incongruent. Some profound affective experiences can be at a very unconscious level, expressed in symbols and metaphors, and not experienced physically. They can be disturbing in the sense that they reach the unconscious depths before touching the surface.

It is generally agreed that people who are experiencing psychotic episodes find it hard to interpret these inner experiences, and thus their mood and feelings may remain unidentified or misunderstood. Affect is usually only physically demonstrated (what may be known as "madness"), but not connected with feeling emotions.

In different cultures and societies, affective experiences are perceived and expressed in different ways, as many cultures in the world recognise the affective experience of soul loss rather than depression. Our language is also greatly responsible in shaping our exposure to our feelings. The richer a language, the more one is able to express oneself. Often it is hard for someone to name a spiritual experience because it seems to contain all sensory modalities, as well as being affectively and significantly infused. Both profound ecstasy and anguish can be perceived as "not normal". While pathologising such human experiences, the role of culture, language and religion is widely ignored or overlooked. For example, an Inuk ("Eskimo") who is culturally greatly associated with snow, and has over 60 words or names for snow in his language, can easily identify many different types of snow. On the other hand, an American belonging to a capitalist and materialistic society could also identify dozens of types of ice creams. There is a subtle difference in both states. One is to do with the nature of ice beyond form, and another is ignoring nature and focusing on the form only.

Sometimes a culture allows these psychic energies to emerge and express themselves, so that illness can be avoided; for example, the *Zār* (or *Zaar*) ceremony in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, where women begin to behave strangely and talk in different voices. They are seen as possessed by a spirit and the male member of the family needs to pay for a special ceremony, including all desired things by the woman in question. This allows the woman to behave in a manner she is normally not allowed to by society: dancing, smoking, making sexual advances and so on. This experience is not regarded as any kind of illness; it is accepted and respected as a spiritual expression of oneself. Yet, it takes care of repressed emotions, physical and psychological needs, and arguably promotes a reduction in stress levels.

Western categorisation of people suffering from "mental illness" is very much a social construction. David Lukoff, Lu & Turner (1992) questioned DSM categories that

pathologise or ignore religious and spiritual dimensions of experience, and suggested a new diagnostic category of a psychoreligious or psychospiritual problem. They argue that this new category would help reduce misdiagnosis and inappropriate intervention. Indeed, Bragdon (2012) said that: "For a psychiatrist to effectively work with an indigenous healer or treat the patient directly, he or she must understand the patient's cultural construction of the illness. When the cultural context of the individual is considered, some problems which present with unusual religious or spiritual content are, in fact, found to be free of psychopathology".

Walsh (1993) compares altered states of consciousness – shamanic journey experiences, Buddhist meditational states, Yogic meditational states and schizophrenic states – and concludes that they are very different. It might be argued that there is a need for transpersonal/spiritual psychology, more than ever, in order to broaden society's acceptance of the potential for such experiences to lead to discovery and personal growth.

My philosophy:

Needless to say, this entire paper is about my philosophy of life, culture, language, environment and spirituality, and how they have played a huge role in the making of "who I am". It was a long and rough journey before I began to feel at home with myself. It was not just a struggle, but rather a furious battle learning to incorporate cultural, linguistic and spiritual differences, yet retain my identity. I no longer try to resist, defend or make compromises with these differences: I remain who I am. It is a very hard challenge to be authentic with others who have such divergent value systems. It seems that people from other cultures often compromise by suppressing their cultural and spiritual needs. By doing so, they not only devalue themselves, but also deprive the western world of an opportunity to learn about eastern mystical and spiritual traditions. Both parties have avoided taking risks. There is no creativity without risk-taking. For a bridge to be built over this river of diversity, it will be necessary to risk our personal fears and insecurities, take our masks off and show ourselves as who we really are. When one has a strong sense of self there is no fear of rejection. How can anyone reject you when your existence is not dependent upon the approval or disapproval of others?

Ordinarily, society is divided into only two categories: "heads" (bosses) and "hands" (labourers). The "heads" rule and dominate the "hands". Sadly, there is no third category – the "hearts" – yet mastery and authenticity belong to this third category. We have lost the language of love and compassion, as these do not have a place in traditional western psychology. Love is confused with being polite, nice, approving and being totally inauthentic. Whereas love is the complete opposite: being true to yourself and others, believing in directness, honesty and equality. It appears you are more likely to be accepted in society if you speak the same language, but love is beyond language: in fact, it is wordless; it is simply a way of being. Therefore, when one stands up and speaks the truth – the source of love – and creates his or her own communication, you are not liked, because you are causing a disturbance, shattering illusions, giving a shock to preconceived ideas and prejudices. You become a danger to the very foundation of western beliefs, which rests on logical and rational discourse. You destroy their consolations and their rationalisations. Certainly, confronting this fear is a fearful task in itself. But for the west to meet the east, and a bridge of universal unity to be built, it is necessary to confront such fears of culture, language

and spiritual differences. Western narrowness and superiority need to be challenged. The east has to provide a mirror for the west to scrutinise itself and conduct a painful self-examination and criticism. The western ideal of external progress could be married to the eastern mystic's desire for withdrawal into the soul; we could then rightly appreciate the rich possibilities of a full life and live in harmony.

Psychological growth is very different from spiritual growth. It is again like love and compassion: compassion is higher than love, so love is an integral part of compassion, but compassion is not an integral part of love. Psychology deals with effect only, whereas spirituality deals with the cause to facilitate holistic transformation. As defined and practised by people like Erikson, Maslow, Perls, Rogers, the neo-Freudians, or the neo-Jungians, psychotherapy does not, in a real sense, transcend the nature of ego structure. In western psychology, the focus seems to be on developing a functional ego structure to enable one to cope effectively and adequately with existing culture. They do not investigate the depth of one's identification with ego structure. The psychological world is primarily interested in worldly adjustment, happiness, pleasure, achievement and so on. Psychology also labels sadness as a negative and happiness as a positive state. It is more ego-mind orientated.

Spiritual growth, however, contains all the phases of life: the rational, irrational, the feeling sensations and willpower. In spiritual growth, identification with ego structure is essential in order to transcend ego. For a deep transformation to take place, the death of who you think you are is important. It requires working with all those things that bring comfort and then being willing to let go of that comfort through realms of different kinds of neurosis, like despair and crises. It is like *Dwija*, or "twice-born": once physically and then spiritually to your original innocence. It appears that in the west this kind of possibility of transformation gets confused with other goals. Perhaps ego structure in the west is different than in the east. In the west, God is perceived at a distance, allowing one to be judged by Him, thus taking it personally and on an individual level. Clearly western ego is very much separated and independent from the unconscious. As Jung argued, whatever you do not see in the west does not exist. Whereas in the east, your ego is tied to family and community structures, and they are conscious of a greater social and spiritual totality.

As *advaita* teaches us that man is individual in being universal, and not in being particular, you are immortal only when you are whole. You are fearless and deathless only when you are the universe.

In spiritual practice, the basic question is not about the particular structure of the individual or collective ego, which is in the realm of the content of mind; it actually focuses on the nature of the activity of mind. The work in practice is to harmonise both perspectives. This narrow ego, which is identified with separate individuals, creates immense anxiety when westerners start any kind of intensive meditation practice. Their ego structure is not capable of handling the severe discipline that it requires. John Welwood (1983: p. 41) puts this very clearly when he states: "For one thing, westerners do not have the depth of resource that other cultures have provided their spiritual seekers. In India the practitioners are coming out of a culture steeped in the understanding of rebirth and karma. There is a social system to support their practice. All of this is so deep in their beings from the beginning that they have a greater understanding of what spiritual practice requires than we do".

Welwood, therefore, seems to suggest that the western spiritual movement asserts itself into psychological systems that keep the ego very strong. Moreover, by associating it with enlightenment, they cause further distortion to eastern traditions. He also suggests that for the masses to benefit from eastern spirituality, instead of the odd few who are willing to go beyond their cultural restraints, new metaphors have to be found that are more suitable for western cultural needs. Welwood also talks about the danger of distortion while using psychological language and concepts in translating or interpreting eastern spiritual experiences. Psychology and science play a great part in both western religion and culture, hence they cannot be ignored, though with extra care and higher awareness a middle path is possible as a bridge between east and west.

Concurrent with the above findings, it is evident that spirituality runs as an undercurrent through philosophy, religion, culture, language and psychology. The relationship between psychotherapy and eastern spiritual practices, such as meditation and yoga, has been repeatedly questioned. It is generally agreed that the task of psychotherapy is to expand a person's awareness of who he is by integrating the parts of himself that he so far has disowned. Psychotherapy has different levels and functions to it, depending on the goals and the understanding of the client and therapist. It is an effective way of solving life's problems and of developing a functional sense of self. It can also help people deepen feelings and their sense of their inner life. In some cases, it may even help people begin to break through the protective shell that surrounds the heart, thus enabling them to be more receptive and open to the world around them, and be able to meet others more fully. In short, it is a process of sorting out confusion and self-integration, but not self-transcendence. It only helps the participant to expand his "I" sense, not dissolve it.

Spiritual practices, such as meditation, provide an opportunity to let confusion arise and be there, living it, witnessing it, being completely immersed in that moment in your totality, without any "I" fixation. Meditation helps us to tap into a deeper, wider awareness, which takes us directly to the root of confusion – it allows us to face our fears. It provides us with an opportunity to experience directly our fixed identity as a defence against the uncertainties surrounding our lives. For a meditator, anxiety is not considered to be a problem. By not trying to find release from the anxiety but letting it be, facing it mindfully, the meditator strengthens the "muscles". This strength allows him to ride his mind, or go beyond his fear-creating mind, which further helps him accept his life as it is, and trusting the process of life.

A western perspective: A case study (Joseph Ryan):

I was born in England, but had an Irish father and a mother who came to Britain from Uttar Pradesh, India. With fantastical tales of the subcontinent ringing in my childhood ears, I was keen to learn about the country of my mother's birth, but the Christian child that I was found it strange to hear of the pantheon of gods that inhabited her homeland. Nevertheless, I had some kind of inherent spirituality (perhaps from a previous incarnation or else hotwired into my genes) for my dreams were visited by a Hindu goddess, who called me to examine myself and my cultural roots. The problem is that I am also a product of the west, with all its intellectualism and materialism. The fault was made concrete by Descartes: "Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am), which led to an all-pervading emphasis on the small, ego-based "I" and the ever-present triumphalism of thought as the most

powerful tool of the rational, logical, cerebral, technology-worshipping west. There is also an interest in spirituality, but the question asked of the teacher is "How fast?" and "How much?" rather than an acceptance of the hard work, sacrifice and time needed to reach spiritual maturity. The west wants a "quick fix" for everything. Even I, knowing the problem, cannot easily transcend my circumstances. Buddhist psychology appeals to me, but I might easily drown in the depths of the Vedas. My life seems short and I feel that I cannot drink the ocean in one gulp. If I left safe harbour, where would my tentative steps into the Vedantic tradition lead me? The culture, language and symbolism are alien and the effort seems too hard, with an uncertain outcome, so I empathise with my fellow, struggling westerners, as they try to make sense of their narrow cosmos.

Culture and language:

In psychotherapy, culture and language also play a very significant part. For a long time this aspect of psychotherapy was ignored and overlooked, but recently it is beginning to get valued attention and much research has been done. One can say that culture is about individual differences, though many are uncomfortable with the reality of dealing with people who are different from us. While most therapists do not openly engage in discrimination and oppression, there is always an indirect way; for example, failing to acknowledge cultural differences and judging others negatively when they fail to conform to the standards of the dominant culture. The reluctance to acknowledge racial and cultural differences is often due to the individual's fear of dealing with the meaning of difference (Green, 1985), and possibly coming face to face with their own oppressive and racist attitudes.

There are some people who feel that difference is not so important and more attention should be paid to sameness. In my view, too much emphasis on sameness can be an excuse for not appreciating the difference. While there are similarities between people, there are also wide-ranging differences, such as race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender, social class and physical disability. Our differences make us interesting and they can be very enriching, if only we allow them to be. Counselling, therefore, demands a diverse approach, which "means valuing differences and treating people in ways which bring out the best in them" (Ansari & Jackson, 1995: p. 11).

Counselling and psychotherapy have their own norms and values. In other words they have their own culture. One can say each theoretical orientation in counselling or psychotherapy sets up its own culture. So there is a psychodynamic culture, a cognitive-behavioural culture and so on. It is possible that the person who is subscribing to a particular culture could be very rejecting of others who are not of the same orientation. It is quite obvious in their behaviour, in their response to their colleagues who do not use the same theoretical language as they do, and whose approach to case conceptualisation is different from their own. Sometimes this type of behaviour can lead counsellors to question their competence and to feel deskilled.

Fernando (1988) wrote that therapists had to recognise the barriers to communication that may arise from cultural differences; for example, a therapist's personal prejudice, linguistic problems, lack of knowledge of the cultures from which the client comes and so on. Therapists are part of society and, as such, are not exempt from prejudicial attitudes towards difference that can be seen in society. A prejudiced attitude can block your hearing and can rob a therapist of the patience that is needed to listen to someone with a different accent. The therapist might also lack the skill necessary to work with

people of different cultures. Korman (1974) considered it unethical to provide counselling for people whose culture we do not understand and for whom we are not competent to provide a service. Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1995) went further, stating that culturally unaware counsellors would be engaging in harmful and unethical cultural oppression.

While living in modern multicultural societies, our need to understand other cultures cannot be overlooked. Clearly, it is not the difference but the fear of the unknown that gives rise to all these biases.

The unknown is that which is not yet experienced. It is human nature to resist taking painful risks. It is much safer to sit and make assumptions in one's head about another person's culture, feelings and thinking than actually to engage in the experience with that person. Falling in love is a good example: how one resists taking the risk by making all sorts of assumptions about the other – the fear being loss of ego and stripping oneself to the exposure of vulnerability. It seems like bias is just another form of defence. I believe when a difference becomes a division there is always an element of fear involved, and fear is just about absence of experience. This is the very reason that all esoteric methods of self-realisation are highly experiential, to dissolve fear. In "tantra yoga" practices, practitioners have to sit on a dead body all night through, in the midst of a dense forest (*shumshan*), meditate on mantras and then drink blood from a freshly cremated human skull, to overcome aversion and fear. This is not a written text taken from a book, but it still happens in India and members of my family have been involved in such practices. The same kind of methods were used in ancient Egypt, where practitioners were forced into having the most fearful experiences, which they would not normally bring on themselves, so that when they had similar things happen they would become stronger and less fearful. Of Egyptian initiations, the "Crocodile Initiation at Kom Ombo Temple" is a fine example of such craft (Melchizedek, 1994).

It appears that in ancient "esoteric" traditions, the word "holistic" holds much deeper meaning than how it is understood by current psychology. It did not just mean bringing one's mind, body and spirit into balance. Instead, it meant to bring every cell of one's body (*Mer-Ka-Ba*) in balance. Special emphasis was put on getting masculine (*Purus*) and feminine (*Prakriti*) in balance, to have no tension between these two aspects of being. Any such imbalance was considered to be a block in an initiate's evolvement. Ancient races, therefore, discovered long ago that in order to survive in the higher worlds, we must overcome our fears first.

Psychotherapy can be more effective with deeper understanding of the masculine and feminine aspects of human nature. It seems most disturbances are caused by tension between masculine and feminine. Jung did try to grapple with this also. Tantra Yoga, Egyptian alchemy and ancient western occult traditions have used it as the basis of their spiritual growth process. William Reich also developed the so-called Reichian Therapy based on a similar concept of bio-energy as a modified form of sex drive (libido), which is supposed to control the whole human organism.

When one individual suffers then society also suffers; and when any society suffers then all humanity suffers. I do not see any better way of bridging this gap other than accepting and respecting these differences. This can only be possible, however, if one accepts and respects oneself. Some therapists belonging to the dominant culture are uncertain of their own racial and cultural identity. One can say that the reason for this uncertainty is that they have never had cause to look beyond the fact

that they are part of that dominant culture. As suggested by Rowe, Behrens and Leach (1995), Whites might not experience a clear sense of racial identity in the same way as ethnic minority members of society because, for Whites, the salient factor that they must come to terms with is not their own difference, but rather that others are different. These therapists need to be engaged in self-exploring activities to find their own cultural identity. Spending time in an environment where they are in the minority could be a useful way for such therapists to appreciate their difference, as well as to acknowledge their sameness to others. Intercultural mixing is one of the keys to dispelling myths about other cultures.

In order to provide an effective service to the culturally different, it is important for counsellors to have the necessary training in cultural diversity. It might even be useful to work with traditional healers. Cultural differences could come in the way of establishing a therapeutic relationship between the client and the counsellor. Normally, the element of trust between the client and the counsellor depends upon the degree to which both perceive themselves as similar and acceptable to each other (Marsella & Pedersen, 1981).

Cultural differences might also make communication difficult, even in situations where people speak the same language. In some cultures, English words are used differently from the ways they are used by an English person, where words have a different meaning due to one's experience according to their philosophy, culture and language. If the counsellor is unaware of a client's usage of certain words or phrases, there could be a communication problem. Sometimes counsellors continue a conversation with a client thinking that they understand what is being said when in reality they do not. At other times, they might allow the client to continue speaking, even when they are unclear about what the client is saying. One of the reasons can be that they are afraid to admit that they do not understand, and eventually this leads to more confusion and distrust within the relationship (Vontress, 1981).

The counsellor's worldview also has a huge impact on a therapeutic relationship. Indeed, "Counsellors who hold a world view different from that of their clients and are unaware of the basis for this difference are most likely to impute negative traits" on the client (Sue & Sue, 1990: p. 137). For example, non-religious counsellors who have a tendency towards conceptualising problems from a psychological perspective will come across a block while working with religious clients who view their problems from a purely religious perspective.

Against this background, the transpersonal approach to counselling, psychotherapy and psychology admits that there is more to the person than body, mind and emotions. Kasprow and Scotton (1999: p. 13) support the idea that: "Mainstream psychotherapeutic systems have largely ignored human spiritual and religious experience, except as sources for psychosocial support". Beyond the gross personal aspect of being, therefore, there is the subtle nature of soul; a part of us that seems largely unfamiliar, but without which we remain unfulfilled, even despite worldly riches.

In conclusion, it can be said that in the west the transpersonal is the only therapy that is trying to employ methods of expressing spirituality in psychological terms and language, along with meditation and prayers. It helps to dismantle the barriers that keep us away from the divine. In fact, Rowan (1993) states that all therapy is a spiritual exercise, because in facing ourselves we increasingly have the possibility of coming to know the divine within.

Within the conventional framework, the sacred work must be created beginning with the therapist's surrender of self-concern. The best therapy is completely empty (*shunya*) of ego. *Shunyata* (emptiness) means the therapist is wholly there for the client, the other. As therapy proceeds the client also becomes *shunya*. They can then examine their lives without ego getting in the way. The client's ego is getting in the way of their life. The therapist's ego gets in the way of the therapy. To love is to surrender the ego. Therapy, at best, is an experience of *shunyata*.

My topic is about transitions or the stuff out of which life is made, liminal and archetypal situations. The word "liminal" refers to being over the threshold, but not through to the other side. It comes from the Latin word "limen" meaning that place in between or *Bardo* (a state in between death and dying), neither who we used to be before we got into this transition, nor have we crossed over that threshold to where we will be settled next. Sometimes those transitions are very long, as when people talk about being in dark tunnels and taking a long time to even see the light at the end of the tunnel. There is always an ending of one phase of our lives in order to develop and grow into another phase.

Every now and then, cracks on the walls of our psyches appear to tell us that the structure of our being is in need of attention. What is interesting to me is how we gather light from those cracks and what we chose to do with it; what we keep and what we chose to leave has much to do with what cracks inform us about moving into the next stage of transformation.

It is valuable to acknowledge the difference between eastern and western approaches and learn to apply this knowledge, as it helps broaden our spectrum not only of psychotherapy but also of the entire human race.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Dr Joseph Ryan, whose skill in editing helped to clarify complex eastern ideas for the western readers. I am ever so grateful for his valuable suggestions and dedication in the preparation of this paper.

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