Healing from Trauma
*The Quest for Spirituality*
MARY JO BARRETT

Trauma interrupts emotional, psychological, spiritual, sexual, and/or intellectual development and chronically or acutely impinges on a person’s ability to cope or function. Most of the clients that I work with have been traumatized by physical and/or sexual violations. My career has been dedicated to helping my clients heal from these physical/sexual violations and from their debilitating symptoms, developing specific interventions to interrupt dysfunctional sociopolitical, familial, and intrapsychic patterns. The outcome of this work was the creation of The Collaborative Stage Model. (Trepper and Barrett, 1985) In 1992, we began doing exit and follow-up interviews with our clients. As they left the program, we asked them what they believed had changed in their lives and to what did they attribute this change. We then followed up 6 months and 1 year later, again asking whether they had maintained their changes and, if so, to what did they attribute their changes in retrospect. We have fortunately been able to interview some clients as long as 20 years after they left the program. What they told us has changed my life and my treatment of trauma.

**LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE**
A Soul met an angel and asked: “By which path shall I reach heaven quickest—the path of knowledge or the path of love?” The angel looked wonderingly and said, “Are not both paths one?”

—OLIVE SCHREINER (in Keen, 1994, p. 93)

The stories our clients told us about what they believed created the change in their lives revolved around two themes: love and knowledge. First, they believed that their own desire, will, and internal spirit created the change. Generally, they reported that in their soul they had made the following discoveries: “in the depth of my bones … [I felt that] I had [changed] and that I could change”; “Therapy was a process of getting myself back, not changing who I am but reconnecting with my spirit”; “I learned to love myself again”; “I came to remember that I deserved to be happy”; “I started to value myself and other people around me.” They had tapped into a reservoir of self-love. They also told us that the meaning of the world and what they believed about people, had changed—especially finding out that everything was not black or white, good or evil.
The clients told us of the following personal discoveries:

“I began to see that the whole world and everybody in it were not dangerous.”

“We began to treat members in our families like we were being treated in the program, with respect and care.”

“We learned that there were good people out there who wanted and could help.”

“I started to see more beauty where there used to be only gray.”

“Everyone was not good or evil; there is a middle ground.”

“The therapy renewed my faith in mankind. I just kept meeting more and more people who cared and took the time for me.”

“There was a time when I thought everyone would hate me for what I did. What I learned is that they hated what I did but not me.”

What they told us is that by being in a treatment program they changed their view of the world and the people in it. People want ways to bring meaning into their lives to provide access to the world of faith and meaning; A time to experience awe. Awe helps us to find the faith to move forward. (Hammerschlag & Silverman, 1997, p. 8) Good treatment of trauma provides faith and meaning.

The second theme of change was knowledge. Clients felt that they had become aware of their recurrent patterns and had discovered new methods of coping, functioning, and interacting. It was clear that many aspects of therapy—from the practical insights to psychoeducational processes—gave them new knowledge about how to deal with the world. They reported that they learned communication skills, how to create safe boundaries, and how to relieve their anxieties or struggle with their addictions. At the same time many clients said that they were changing on a deeper level. They felt that they were regaining the essence of who they were. As they were learning skills, methods of communicating, ways of coping with their pain and rage, they were simultaneously discovering new meaning about their world and the individuals in it. They learned through the cognitive behavioral techniques utilized as well as the practice of mindfulness integrated into their treatment and life style. The Buddha says that clinging is the cause of pain and that ignorance is the cause of clinging. (Dick Olney, in R. Moore, 1996, p. 24)

One of the first steps in seeking healing is learning. We first have to learn how negative emotions and behaviors are harmful to us and how positive emotions are helpful. And we must realize how these negative
emotions are not only very bad and harmful to one personally but harmful to society and the future of the whole world as well. That kind of realization enhances our determination to face and overcome them. (The Dalai Lama, in the Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 38)

As the clients learned more about people, patterns, and self they clung less to damaging old beliefs about themselves and the world around them. It became clear that the process of change had tapped a divine spark in the majority of clients we interviewed. They had realized a source of goodness and caring that moved them to act on principle, to do what is right for themselves and for others. The clients had learned through the psychoeducational techniques and their healing relationships with the therapists, their family members, and others in their groups that the negative self-judgment was hurting themselves and others both physically and spiritually. We spent many conscious moments helping clients see how hurting others was also damaging to themselves. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all teach that each of us is created in the divine image. What we helped clients learn was that when evil thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors present themselves to us, this becomes an opportunity to behave “Godlike.” We have the opportunity to be a “creator” instead of a “reactor.” This does not necessitate a belief in God. It necessitates a desire to feel and be different. Treatment had enabled the clients to envision the world and themselves differently. The more open I was to the clients the more I heard. The change of spirit was happening simultaneously as their behaviors changed. But as they talked and I listened it became clear that this change of spirit came from the meaning and value they experienced in relationship to the treatment teams. The healing from trauma is a quest for spirituality. This quest reflects a deep need for meaning and value.

I began to look at the work I and my colleagues did through a different lens. By no means did we throw out the vast base of knowledge we had accumulated through the years. Nor did we abandon our bag of tools/interventions. We began to add a new perspective. We added the belief system that becoming spiritually aware of ourselves would invite into our relationships an energy that would help our clients resist their usual hurtful behavior. After talking with more than 600 clients, we began to overtly introduce a spiritual discipline into our day-to-day practice, both personal and professional. As with any other body or mind faculties, the spiritual sense is a faculty that must be developed and maintained. I realized I had to focus regularly on these spiritual
moments in both my professional and personal life. I approached this shift as I approach anything else: the clients told us that therapy provided meaning and human value and connection; then I set out to discover how this happened so that I and all the therapists I train could provide meaning and value more consistently. (The Mindful Brain, Siegel, 2007)

INTEGRATING SPIRITUAL MEANING AND VALUE INTO TREATMENT

When someone is abused, whether as a child or an adult, by someone who is in a position of power over him or her and to whom he or she is attached, the result is a traumatic interruption on many levels; in this chapter we will focus on the level of spirit. Each story is different, but all clients report that the abuse has forever changed them and altered how they see the world. When individuals are abused they experience a loss of trust, a loss of innocence, a loss of peacefulness. They begin to see the world as dangerous, and there is a heightened awareness of the presence of the evil inclination. They become acutely aware of their vulnerability in the universe and they no longer feel powerful. They have split into judge and the judged. They have lost their sense of self determination. They are burdened with a sense that what they do or who they are does not have much value or influence in their world.

The Dalai Lama states, “True spirituality is a mental attitude that you can practice at any time” (The Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 300). When we view spirituality as the Dalai Lama does, we see that when the spirit is violated then the mental attitude that is practiced after the violation is one of fear, anger, pain, self-judgment, and/or self-blame. Our job then becomes helping clients practice a spiritual attitude of self-acceptance, helping them “wake up from the bad dream that they are incomplete or insufficient or lacking something” or damaged goods. (Olney, in R. Moore, 1994, p. 4).

It was no accident that at the same time that I was involved in the follow-up study I was in the midst of my own personal and professional crisis. I had come to realize that I had been vicariously traumatized. I had not been damaged physically or sexually, and not by family members. Yet, I had a damaged spirit. My happy, optimistic, energetic, divine spirit was gone. Rabbi Alan Miller describes internal spirituality as a Godliness, “The term God is rather the name we give to the interpersonal process of growth and creativity that takes place naturally among men and women striving towards authentic fulfillment” (quoted
in Hirsh, 1994, p. 4). I had found in my life that I was no longer moving
toward this process of growth and creativity. I had lost many of my
essential beliefs that had brought me to this profession and to my
specialty in trauma. My view of the world had changed. I no longer
believed that people were basically good. Rather, I had become afraid of
the evil inclination. I was feeling more certain that the evil inclination
was more powerful than the human desire to be good. I was no longer
as clear about the meaning of life. As a clinician I could view this as
depression, but I knew in my soul that it was a crisis of spirit. An
existential crisis is very different than a situational depression. Day after
day, moment after moment, my work with survivors and offenders had
taken me down the road of the most evil and painful human
experiences. Just like the clients I work with, I had been changed
forever—changed through the process of listening to them and being
compassionately there for them in their most painful narratives. Of
course, having a dying spirit made me more empathetic to my clients’
stories about their loss of spirit, but it was destroying me and my family.
I was suffering from Compassion Fatigue, (Barrett, 2008 and Figley,
1999) I define Compassion Fatigue as the depletion and subsequent
symptoms that one experiences as the result of passionately and
compassionately giving of our energy in the service of care. We are all
complex mechanisms that operate on energy; physical, emotional,
intellectual, spiritual, and sexual energy. To operate our lives as
clinicians, mothers, fathers, lovers, friends, daughters, sons, and siblings
we use energy on all five of these levels. I had spent the last 15 years
using up my energy without replenishing, and now I was running on
empty. I came to the realization that something must change radically
for me. Like any good clinician, I made an assessment and tried to
determine the symptoms and the function of each of these symptoms.

At the same time that I was becoming increasingly aware of my
painful loss of spirit and my symptoms of Compassion Fatigue, I was
also hearing, through the interviews, stories of renewal. It was
serendipitous: the path of renewal for my clients would also become the
path of renewal for myself.

**CONSCIOUS SPIRITUALITY**

The task before me was how to rebuild my spirit so that I would be
spiritually available to my clients. The next step would be how to teach
others the importance of conscious spirituality. The clients need us to
communicate with a vocabulary that offers hope, inspiration, and
comfort. How does one develop hope and inspiration and then convey this to others?

I believe that change happens in stages. The model that we have developed in working with trauma, The Collaborative Stage Model (CSM) is a three-stage model (Trepper & Barrett, 1985 and 1990). Moving the unconscious knowledge to the conscious also happens in stages. Because it has proven successful to organize treatment in these stages, it was helpful for me to think about these three stages when organizing my own plan for spiritual renewal.

**Stage 1: Creating a Context for Change**

There is an interesting story about P. D. Ouspensky, who was a student of the great Middle Eastern mystic L. I. Gurdjieff. Ouspensky had several turbulent nights in a row. He was taking a mind-altering drug each evening, then spending intense hours trying to unravel the mystery of the meaning of life. He would sometimes think that he had found the answer, but in the morning he was unable to remember it.

On this particular night, he had the idea of writing down what occurred to him. Sure enough, when he woke up in the morning, no matter how hard he tried, his nighttime revelations eluded him. When he remembered that he had written the answer down, his excitement was palpable. You can probably imagine his anticipation as he opened his notebook. Expecting to read a long and complicated explanation, what he found were these four words: THINK IN OTHER CATEGORIES.

—DICK OLNEY (in R. Moore, 1996, p. 3)

This was the first stage of spiritual renewal for me. I had to begin to “think in other categories.” I had to become aware of what was constraining me from experiencing myself and the world around me at any given moment. The first steps were to slow down, step back, and observe. My life, personal and professional, like so many others, had become so busy and filled with routine that I had lost much of my sense of awe and the time to discover beauty. I had to create a context where there would be opportunity for spiritual growth. The Buddhists speak of “practice.” I needed to create space in my life where I could practice a new attitude toward life, toward the world, and toward self.

First, I formally acknowledged the need for a shift in my spirit. I began to discuss with the important people in my life the changes necessary to rekindle my passion for humanity.

I knew I needed love and knowledge to be able to change. I asked for help. I asked colleagues, friends, and loved ones to support me on this
journey and to participate in any ways that they found comfortable. Many people close to me had commented on numerous occasions that I was different, that I had lost my spirit. It appeared that I was the last to discover my dwindling spark. They were all quite supportive of this quest. They shared their own stories and offered support. I realized I needed knowledge, and so I began to read and take courses. I read about different cultures' paths toward spirituality. I explored Native American traditions, as well as Zen and Kabbalistic philosophies of spirituality and meditation (e.g., Berg, 1993). I also read outside the field of family therapy, delving into the disciplines outside of our own that have struggled for decades with the issue of spirituality. There was much literature to read. I only skimmed the surface. Once I got over the shame of my narrow lenses and my ignorance of the fields of transpersonal psychology and humanistic psychology, I gleefully feasted on newfound sources of knowledge. The work of Ken Wilbur and Dick Olney were particularly great influences. Wilbur helped me make sense of the role of mysticism in psychology and how consciousness works on a continuum. His writings on the Eastern and Western views of personal growth truly began the integration process for me. Wilbur (1991) writes in *Grace and Grit*:

According to the mystics, when we go beyond or transcend our separate-self sense, our limited ego, we discover instead a Supreme Identity, an identity with the All, with universal Spirit, infinite and all pervading, eternal and unchanging. As Albert Einstein explains: “A human being is part of the whole, called by us Universe; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison.” . . . Indeed, the whole point of meditation or contemplation is to free ourselves from the “optical delusion” that we are merely separate egos set apart from each other [and] from eternal Spirit, and to discover instead that, once released from the prison of individuality we are with all manifestation, in a perfectly timeless and eternal fashion. (p. 18)

Through my consultations with Olney, I came to recognize the importance of experiencing one’s own sense of beauty. Olney's *self-acceptance training* is simply defined as “experiencing myself as I am without the inhibitions of self-judgement, self-criticism, or self-
evaluation. It is not a goal, but an attitude toward life which one can come back to again and again” (R. Moore, 1996).

Dick Olney often said:

You are not your body. You are not your name. You are not your thoughts. You are not your emotions. You are not your memories. You are not the content of your consciousness. You are the unspeakable. That which cannot be named. If you name it you turn it into one more concept. A better question than “Who am I?” is “What am I?” What you are is life! You are carrying the gift of life. You are a fire that has been burning for millions of years. You are your ancestors. (in R. Moore, 1996, pp. 28–29)

As I studied it became clear to me that I had become deeply imprisoned in my own “optical delusions” and what I needed was to be on the path to freeing myself. I discovered that my journey had to involve vehicles to the unconscious. This meant providing an environment for meditation, peaceful sleep, celebration of life, and prayer.

Everyone’s context for spiritual renewal is unique, but there might be some common elements. Years after I had begun renewed spiritual practice I was having a conversation with my rabbi, Brant Rosen, about spirituality and psychotherapy. He gave me an article that discussed the different needs that can be met through prayer and attempted to answer the question, “Why do people pray?” In an article entitled, “How Can Reconstructionist Pray?” I discovered that what I was doing in my office according to this article was a form of prayer. Prayer is not necessarily an appeal to God, nor is it merely asking another source to do something for us. It is an opportunity to go inside ourselves, alone or in community, and call upon our own desire and resources to create change. It is the time to look inward and draw upon our own creative, moral energy to create this positive force outside of ourselves. Prayer is a vehicle to “think in other categories” (R. Moore, 1996, p. 4) in order to unravel the mystery of life. Much of the work that was necessary to rekindle my spirit and free me from the prison I had built around myself came through different forms of prayer. It can be a form of meditation, a form of appreciation, a form of awareness of our universal membership in humanity.

I had successfully changed my environment to include the elements of prayer in my life on a regular basis. These elements seemed to summarize how spirituality works in the treatment of trauma. In fact, my own personal work and our treatment had incorporated all these
elements:

- **Spiritual discipline.** We need to discipline ourselves to focus regularly on creative, beautiful, and sacred encounters, developing and maintaining a regular practice of stepping back and noticing spiritual moments as they occur—or remembering those moments.
- **Meditation.** We all live at a very rapid pace. We can learn to welcome the opportunity to slow down to remember what has deeper meaning beyond our daily distractions.
- **Connection.** This is an opportunity to leave our spiritual isolation. Through either connection with others or connection with our own sense of value and power we can focus on and perhaps express what is really important to us.
- **Celebration.** Moments of celebration, like laughter, can transport us beyond ourselves, beyond ego, beyond self-judgment.
- **Support.** Renewal is enhanced by the support of a caring group. There is often a tangible power when the energy of a group is focused in a mutual direction.
- **Rededication.** It is easy to lose perspective, to miss the forest for the trees. We all get so wound up in a situation that we lose sight of who we are and what we stand for. We need a method to draw us out of ourselves and restore the larger picture.
- **Acknowledgment of need.** Most of us are raised to think that we have control of our lives and therefore that we are responsible for what happens to us—both good and bad. It is necessary to acknowledge our vulnerability. Removing our defenses can move us to the honest self-awareness we require to get past our personal obstacles.

It also became clear to me that what the clients had been saying to us in our interviews was that therapy and their relationships with us had been part of their getting out of prison. We had incorporated these elements into our therapy. By defining prayer this way, we had been praying for 25 years with clients and not even realizing it. By having meaningful connections with others, the clients had experienced themselves as part of the greater universe, not just seeing themselves as their body, name, thoughts, memories, consciousness but something more.

Stage 1 of CSM revolves around three primary goals:

1. To provide safety for the client, both in treatment and in relation to the team and moving toward safety in their lives.
2. To provide an environment where clients can begin to tell their story
about all aspects of their lives, through family, individual, and group modalities.

3. To acknowledge their clients’ need for change and to commit to the program.

When consciously integrating spirituality into trauma treatment we keep these same three goals. First, it is essential to provide an environment where it is safe and accepted for clients to discuss their need and desire for spiritual and moral behavior, as well as their views of it. Next we want to hear their current beliefs about people, good and evil, meaning, and relationships; what role religion currently plays in their lives; and what they think the future holds for them. Finally, how do they see therapy being helpful in this domain? Are there specific behaviors or topics about spirituality they want to integrate in their program? It is helpful in Stage 1 to teach about the helpfulness of a Mindfulness Practice. In this stage, we discuss the neurobiological phenomena of trauma and how a mindfulness practice can heal the “trauma mind”.

In my own life, Stage 1 consisted of learning about spirituality, defining it, and then creating a plan for spiritual practice. It became clear to me that this practice is an essential part of healing from trauma. This awareness developed during the interviews, and I decided to introduce this element of connection and spirituality more overtly into stage 1 of the treatment program.

All therapists at our Center have made a conscious effort to create a physical environment that is more conducive to spiritual discipline. We have the capabilities for appropriate music, aromatherapy, as well as candles, footstools, headrests, pillows, etc. This allows the client to design his or her own context for spiritual awareness. We share with them from the beginning that we have discovered from talking with our clients that there are elements of spirituality that have been helpful to integrate into treatment such as rededication, celebration, or meditation. When appropriate we share with our clients the research as it relates to the brain. [Van De Kolf] We discuss with them their definitions of spirituality and morality and how it may feel for them to integrate this into their treatment program. It is common for us to integrate their use of prayer or their religion into sessions. As might be expected, there are questions and discussions about our view of spirituality. Our answers are direct. We share the information we have received from past clients, refer them to literature, and discuss the
personal nature of each person’s journey. We are available to guide them but not direct them or instruct them on how to be spiritual. Simply put, “We are here to guide you, through the sharing of information and by example, how to transform your negative reactivity to positive proactive shifts toward self and one another.” Many of the offenders we work with “have found God” in jail. We see this not as an answer—that they are “saved” and “cured”—but instead as part of the puzzle for understanding their abusive behavior and stopping future abuse. In other words, how do they really live a God-filled life?

We introduce language that helps them begin to understand, identify, and discuss the internal conflict of good and evil. Clients who have been traumatized understand this language instinctually. They have often already identified this conflict. We will use their language for identifying this struggle: evil inclination, Satan, the dark side, or the evil part; or we might help them by introducing the Parts Model to them (see Schwartz, Chapter 13, this volume). Stage 1 is the introduction to the concepts of spirituality and the acknowledgment of need for spiritual connection within ourselves and between people. Stage 2 is the active integration of these ideas into the program and into their lives.

**Stage 2: Challenging Patterns and Expanding Realities**

Stage 2 is learning the patterns that constrain us from creating harmony in our lives; it also entails practicing new methods of being proactive that will produce expanded realities. On one level this means considering the following questions: What are the patterns in my life that produce violent behavior or behaviors that are self-abusive? What are the patterns that keep me in an abusive relationship or keep me reacting to the world as a victim? What are the constraints that stop me from changing these patterns? Then together, in family, individual, and/or group modalities, we explore alternative behaviors, create new behavioral and neurological pathways, cognitions, and feeling patterns that help the clients expand their repertoire beyond victim/perpetrator, from negatively reactive to positively proactive.

We have discovered that the absence of spiritual connection is a variable that allows people to abuse themselves and others. During stage 2 we introduce active alternatives for bringing spiritual connection into clients’ lives. The CSM model of treatment explains when to utilize cognitive behavioral techniques, such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy () or EMDR() which we actively use in our trauma treatment. These techniques also integrate mindfulness as
cornerstones of their interventions.

In my own quest, this meant utilizing the knowledge I had acquired in stage 1 and applying this knowledge into a conscious program of practice. It meant interrupting daily patterns of disconnection and expanding practices of connection. In practical terms, it can be understood in terms of input and output. I tried to find a balance between putting out positive and negative energy into the environment, and also between putting out too much positive energy and not putting positive energy into my body, mind and soul. I had to practice changing patterns in every realm of my life. I began an active ritual of meditation; I gave up caffeine in order to sleep uninterrupted. I began, with my colleague, the Self-Care Exchange, a weekend retreat at a spa for professionals. I began asking for help and support on a regular basis. I tried to change on every level: how I treated my soul, my body, my friends, my family, my colleagues, strangers. It takes a great deal of energy to be mindful. When I had been living a life that had ignored my spirit, most of my energy had been sapped. Using energy to replenish energy made more sense than using energy to deplete or maintain the status quo.

**Performance, Health, and Happiness are grounded on the skillful management of Energy.** - Jim Loehr

As if I was an elite athlete I designed a training program for myself. I had performed at intense high level for an elongated period of time without a period of true recovery. Dick Olney named his treatment model “Self-Acceptance Training,” which “includes the word training because you constantly have to be … [doing so] to accept yourself, moment by moment. You can never do it once and for all” (in R. Moore, 1996, p. 5). I have found that training oneself to be mindful of one’s spirit, in and out of therapy, is also a moment-by-moment endeavor. The Dalai Lama and many of his followers involve themselves in rigorous training to reach virtuous states of mind—compassion, tolerance, caring, and so forth. As many athletes also train rigorously with equal time spent in recovery as is in performance. I began practicing a formula of energy practice. I evaluated how much energy I used throughout the day and replenished myself energetically on a regular, frequent basis. Engaging in training or a method of bringing about inner discipline within one’s mind is the essence of spiritual life, an inner discipline that has the purpose of cultivating these positive mental states. Thus, whether one leads a spiritual life depends on whether one has been successful in bringing
about that disciplined, tamed state of mind, and translating that state of mind into one's daily actions. (The Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 309)

In Stage 2 of treatment, we actively teach methods to discipline the mind to bring about positive mental states towards oneself and one another. It is imperative that the clinician be practicing his or her own discipline and communicating this value system moment by moment in the therapy room. This practice comes easily to us family therapists. We are strength oriented, relational, discipline minded, solution focused, and strategic, all concepts necessary for spiritual practice. Another strength of family therapists is our action-oriented and involved approach to our clients. This stance allows the clients to experience us as human beings and puts us in the position of collaborators. Consequently, if we are involved in spiritual practice then our clients will experience us as spiritual beings and hopefully allow us to be collaborators in their spiritual quest. In their book *Healing Ceremonies*, Hammerschlag and Silverman (1997) discuss the importance of genuine human contact in the process of healing:

True healing only occurs when both participants (physician and patient) are connected in pursuing the common goal of healing. This connection promotes healing and should be expressed. This partnership also works both ways and affords the physician with the opportunity to grow and to become reenergized. (p. 13)

Albert Schweitzer commented “patients carry their own doctor inside. They come to us not knowing that truth. We are at our best when we give the physician who resides within each patient a chance to go to work” (in Hammerschlag & Silverman, 1997, p. 16). Indeed, this is stage 2, giving that healer inside the chance to go to work. By providing the context, the supportive relationships, the mentor, and techniques, individuals, families, and groups of people can practice spiritual healing. Being the mentor for spiritual practice is an essential ingredient:

“I watched how my therapists handled everybody and everything. How they talked to the judge, how they talked to the attorneys and how they talked to each other. They were always the same, firm but respectful. I learned a lot from watching them.”

“We had some pretty good fights during therapy but I knew he [the therapist] still liked me. I guess I learned how to fight fair during those times.”

“I always felt special, not like I was the favorite but more like I was a good person.”
“Everyone I met at the Center, and I met a lot, were all good people. I really learned a lot about how to treat people from them—particularly in group.”

Teaching clients to experience liberation from negative judgment through expressive techniques such as art, movement, poetry, music, and/or journaling can help create the sense of comfort and help them behold the wonder of their lives. Helping them practice prayer, meditation, self-hypnosis, and creative imagery can provide relief from their emotional, spiritual, or physical pain. Once they experience some relief in the office they will desire that relief and want to practice on their own. People are involved daily in altering their consciousness through hurtful and addictive patterns by abusing food, alcohol, drugs, sex, and power. I want to help people alter their consciousness in nonabusive ways. I do believe that we can become addicted to balance in our lives. It becomes a natural form of altering our consciousness.

As Dick Olney pointed out, Every time you experience liberation from your self-image you will feel a lack of tension, a wonderful sense of open space. You can just rest in that sense of comfort and ease. Each time you feel that way it becomes easier for you to recall. You have had an experience that can give you some comfort, even when you slip back in to the bad dream. (in R. Moore, 1996, p. 28)

I want to help provide our clients with literal relief from their traumas. During our interviews over 80% commented on the relief they experienced during the sessions:

“I knew there would be times when we would all be fighting and hating each other but I could also count on the times we would remember why we had all stayed together through all of this shit.”

“Sometimes, my therapy sessions would be the only time I would feel good all week.”

“I use to feel like such a loser because of all the things I did to my wife and kids. It was amazing the first time I ever saw the light in my soul.”

“I remember the first time I saw my evil side; I was scared but I knew it was it. While I was doing the imagery I was aware for the first time that I could fight him with another side of me. I remember I left the office smiling.”

“I remember the first time I learned to meditate and I saw Susie; she was always the friend who could make me smile. I still bring up Susie’s image while I am mediating, and it is 5 years later.”
“In one session I literally felt my heart break when I was talking about the abuse; I learned an imaging exercise to put it back together. I have mended that damn thing more times than I’d like to remember.”

The techniques that we teach are borrowed from many practices. The clients try out different alternatives and practice what fits them. We want our clients to feel the power of their spirit. These are people who have felt powerless, disconnected, and out of control in their lives. We want part of the treatment to be their sense of power: “When you believe yourself to be powerless in determining your destiny, you fail to thrive. Choice makes a difference…. Choice is the greatest power you have. Believing you can influence your destiny makes a difference at every level of your being” (Hammerschlag & Silverman, 1997, p. 16). It is important to remember that the clients I am speaking of are all victims and/or perpetrators of trauma, many court mandated, many on probation, crossing all racial, religious, and ethnic groups and from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Spirituality is universal and it helps us be aware of our unity.

**Stage 3: Consolidation**

Stage 3 of the treatment model is when we consolidate the changes the clients have made through the program, design relapse prevention, and ritualize through ceremony and celebration the changes they have made. We also celebrate the relationships they have made within and outside the program.

When I refer to consolidation of my spiritual journey it is something entirely different. The journey is never ending; it is constantly evolving. Our clients’ change is constantly evolving also; it does not stop once they leave therapy.

There is a form of consolidation each and every time you practice. One can end a spiritual experience with a ritual whether that is a mindful awareness of feeling good or noticing beauty or summarizing in our mind what opportunities are available to continue spiritual practices. Noticing these opportunities is a constant rededication to the commitment to living a moral and spiritual life.

I am constantly rededicating my professional life to finding ways to provide opportunities for spiritual growth with my clients. I agree with Hammerschlag and Silverman (1997): “People want ways to bring meaning into their lives to provide access to the world of faith and meaning. A time to experience awe. Awe helps us to find the faith to move forward. Ceremonies can help provide a way to get in touch with
courage and inspiration in order to find healing” (p. 3). In the consolidation stage of working with clients’ spiritual quest, we acknowledge all that we have learned about meaning. We commit ourselves to trying to use those moment-by-moment opportunities presented to us to live a moral and spiritual life. Through ritual and ceremony we rededicate ourselves to the process of this quest. We bring ceremony into the sessions. We celebrate the hard work of healing. We celebrate the existential shifts that have been made from violence to nonviolence, from victim-survivor to beyond survivor. We celebrate the behavioral changes as well as the deep changes within each person’s heart. By stage 3 of treatment the clients are committed to a way of life that integrates behaviors that lead to healing and not further suffering. Clients remembered some of their consolidating rituals:

“During one of the last sessions we looked into a crystal ball and everyone in our family looked [into it] for ways that we could possibly hurt each other again. Then we imagined alternatives to help each other get out of the angry places. When some of those times came up sometimes we would start laughing because we remembered the crystal ball.”

“In one of the last sessions, I was about 18, and I remember imagining what it would feel like when I fell in love and was safe. I carried that image with me for almost ten years. When it happened, I knew it because I had felt it once before.”

“We always ended the group with music and a special affirmation. I started doing that with my kids, a peaceful bedtime ritual.”

“My parents renewed their vows after therapy ended. We took pictures, I remember feeling like I had a new beginning.”

“It was unbelievably sad to say goodbye. It was like leaving an entire group of best friends, but I felt free at the same time. I knew I would always be connected to them and that I could always get help when I needed it.”

Lise, who had been in treatment as a teenager, wrote this poem when asked about her experience.

My Life’s Renewal
I spun out of control
Losing sight of all hope
My family turned away
And my soul bent over in pain
Feeling neglected and betrayed
My mind overflowed with rage
My behavior became unpredictable
The ability to dream, now fictional
Saturated with anger
I put myself in danger
Behaving shamelessly
Ignoring any authority
I had collapsed
I thought no one was watching until someone caught me
They helped me to see
That I could become free
With some dedication
And spiritual application
I learned to grow
Away from the pain I had known
Able to appreciate life
With more positive insight

When I hear these lines I know that they are about spirituality. The quest for spirituality is an ongoing process, but when you experience a spiritual moment you have no doubt that your spirit has been touched: That is what I call basic spirituality—basic human qualities of goodness, kindness, compassion, caring. Whether we are believers or nonbelievers, this kind of spirituality is essential. As long as we are human beings, as long as we are members of the human family, all of us need these basic spiritual values. We must still find a way to try to improve life for the majority of the people. Ways to help them become good human beings, moral people, without any religion. Education is crucial. Instilling in people a sense that compassion, kindness are basic good qualities. (The Dalai Lama, in the Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 307)

The spiritual quest during the recovery of trauma happens in stages: First, is acknowledgment, in a safe environment, how the trauma has impacted your spirit; acknowledging how you have changed and rekindling the desire to spiritually reconnect with self and other. Next, designing the personal training program that will re-create the proactive energy which lies within all of us. During this stage comes the spiritual practice that will take our personal vibrations and continue to build energy. Finally, we have the commitment to ongoing spiritual
practice—commitment to continue doing something different building on compassion, morality, and kindness toward self and humanity. To conclude, I share this meditation with you. Our clients agreed that it was helpful to punctuate endings with ritual. It can be useful to end sessions, stages of treatment, supervision sessions, or staff meetings with such a ritual. As you read each line, pause, breath, and reflect on its meaning to you:

May I be at peace
May I come to know the beauty of my own true nature
May my heart remain open
May I be whole and healed.
And may we all bring healing into the world for the highest good
Whatever that may be.

—UNKNOWN

REFERENCES


SUGGESTED READING


