Spiritual Development: Spiritual Crisis as Positive Maladjustment

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1. Introduction
Introduction

I feel guilty for the pressure of food in my full stomach and the heat of the sun on my unworthy face. I try to pray to God to help me understand what I’m going through, but I cannot find Him. Either He is not available to me, or I am no longer available to Him, I don’t know how it went or why. I’ve pulled away from my faith and for reasons unknown to me I cannot enter a church without a wave of emotions; nameless and washing over me, sweeping the self I thought I knew out to a sea of bewilderment and anguish.

I bob in this sea alone, with nothing but antidepressants and therapy to keep my head above water. Many times I have wanted to hold myself under to end my life of trying to stay afloat for a purpose I can not see or feel, but am assured exists. I’ve treaded here for years searching for something, anything to hold onto long enough to understand how I got in as deep as I have. I am in the midst of so many things in my life. I didn’t have to feel so lost. This is not supposed to be happening…
Introduction

• Such experiences exist during times of suffering in the darkness.

• An experience that missiles one further into the blackness...

• Or, towards the light...
Introduction

- Historically, psychology has been separated from spirituality/religion.

- Psychology = psyche + logos
  = “study of the soul”

- More recently, research has found spirituality/religious practice to be impacting on mental health.

- Psychology cannot ethically disregard spirituality/religion.
Introduction

• Renewed interest in spiritual concerns.

• Religion is central to one’s view of the world.

• Impact of religion can be positive or devastating.
Introduction

• Differences between religion and spirituality.

• Interchangeability of terms.

• Spirituality:

  Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality. Spirituality is a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging. The spiritual person is committed to growth as an essential, ongoing life goal. Spirituality draws us in to the depth of our being, where we come face to face with ourselves, our weaknesses, and with ultimate mystery.

2. Spiritual Crisis & Development
Spiritual Crisis

• Several Definitions:
  – Armentrout
  – Miller
  – Moore
  – Grof and Grof
Spiritual Crisis or Mental Illness?

• Grof and Grof:
  - Strong inner knowing
  - Visions
  - Feeling an energy presence
  - Hearing voices
  - Connections with nature
  - Losing contact with material world
  - Feeling at one with the universe
  - Past life memories
  - Out of body experiences
  - Talking in tongues
Spiritual Crisis or Mental Illness?

- **Carl Jung**: Reflection of collective unconscious

- **Abraham Maslow**: Experiences in self-actualization

- **Ken Wilber**: Connection with realities beyond ordinary sense
Spiritual Crisis: Our Definition

Not in finding out what has been happening to/with a client,

but...

How they will derive/construct meanings from such experiences as experienced, understood, and interpreted by themselves.
Dark Night of the Soul

- St. John of the Cross:
  - Model of spiritual development
  - Draws individual initially further from their beliefs, but then ultimately closer
  - Time in between this is Dark Night of the Soul

- Thomas Moore:
  - Distinction between Dark Night and mental illness
3. Theoretical Considerations
James Fowler

- Theorists on faith/spiritual development
  - Ken Wilber:
    Spectral Model of Consciousness
  - James Fowler:
    Stages of Faith Development
Stages of Faith Development

• Fowler defined faith: a set of assumptions/understandings about the nature of connection with the self and the world.

• Faith development: a sequential and linear process from stage to stage equated with a particular time period.

• Concerns with a progressive & definitive model for such an individual process.
**Carl Jung**

- Embraced the connection between mental health and spirituality:
  - the object of psychology is the soul/spirit
  - the soul/spirit is responsible for becoming psychologically healthy individuals

- Archetypal framework describes inner processes related to spirituality.

- Thus, encounters with soul/spirit are necessary for psychological, hence, spiritual development.
Process of Individuation

- Spiritual process by which personality is built up and of moving toward one’s totality.

- Becoming more conscious of the unconscious.

- Embarked upon because of
  - spiritual necessity in analysis as occasioned by a neurosis,
  - external events that force humans to the centres of their beings, or
  - the inner urge to find and obtain the truth

- Accomplished by discovering the Self through a paradoxical process--exploring the darkness to find the light.
Kazimierz Dabrowski

- Mental health symptoms are signs of disintegration, and, therefore, personality development.

- Theory of Positive Disintegration emphasizes the purpose of disintegration, psychoneurosis, and inner conflict in development.

- Dark Night of the Soul: development is a natural process & involves movement through a dark night.

- A period of disintegration, or a dark night, is present during, and necessary for personality development, which includes spiritual development.
Theory of Positive Disintegration

- Movement from lower to higher levels of personal development.

- Process: Primary Integration

  - Disintegration

  - Secondary Integration

- A period of disintegration can be a spiritual crisis, or a dark night, followed by the integration of the spiritual self.
Link to Spiritual Crisis & Development

- Rigid, instinctual egocentrism → Conscious altruism

Attitudes & adjustment established in the external environment → ideal, emerging personality, authentic/autonomous values that are independent & directly opposite

“What is” → “what ought to be”

- Movement from lower to higher level emotions/attitudes are occurring in spiritual development.

- Thus, may be applied to spiritual crisis & development.
Developmental Potential

• Determines the level that can be reached & one goes through the process.

• Is seen in heightened responses to life’s stimuli, or “overexcitability,” expressed through developmental dynamisms:
  1. Genetic predisposition/biological cycle
  2. Questions social conformity
  3. Self-determination, autonomy & authenticity (also called “active conscience”)

• It is not the type or degree of D.P., or inner urge/knowing that will determine spiritual development, but also the supernatural.
Positive Maladjustment

• Crises are vital & often when individuals become aware of changes.

• Individuals adjust to their inner worlds
  – Positively
  – Negatively

• **Positive Maladjustment**: when D.P. interact with crises and psychoneuroses to result in positive adjustment to “what ought to be” and growing maladjustment to “what is.”
4. Therapeutic Considerations
Spiritual Giftedness

- **Piechowski**: Student of Dabrowski
  - Came to study spiritual giftedness through Dabrowski and Anna Marie Roeper (emotional giftedness) and his own work in transpersonal psychology
Spiritual Giftedness

• William James:
  - Visible world is part of more spiritual universe
  - Union/harmonious relation with higher universe is our true end
  - Prayer/inner communion w/spirit results in strengthened spiritual connection
  - New zest for life
  - Peaceful temperament
Spiritual Giftedness

• Edward Hoffman:
  - Spontaneous moments-peak experiences
  - Eternal presence-awareness of higher power in everything
  - Experience of life force
  - Sense of inner conviction
  - New sense of self
Counselling Considerations

• Perry:
  - Notes “spirit” in spiritual crisis
  - Hebrew for “air in motion”
  - Felt as strong energy moving through
  - Therapist to help release this pent up energy
Counselling Considerations

- Client’s reluctance to discuss religious/spiritual issues
- Therapist openness
- Referral if necessary
- Help client to nurture soul
Counselling Considerations

Jung’s Four Personality Functions & Devotional Life

- Intuition
- Sensation
- Thinking
- Feeling
Counselling Considerations

• Awareness of differing philosophical definitions

• Familiarity with literature
  – e.g., Catholic guilt

• Be open to the creativity of the soul
Counselling Considerations

• Armentrout’s Heart Cry-Biblical Model
  - Sensitivity to external and internal situations
    a) help clients out of spiral and return to restorative path
    b) use psycho-education to understand condition
    c) develop spiritual activities to increase sense of spirituality
    d) increase/sustain engagement in activities
    e) identify and remediate causes of depression that resulted in heart cry
5. Conclusion
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