

Soul-centred Psychotherapy

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Introduction

Spirituality can be described as the striving for a deep-seated sense of meaning and purpose in life, a wholeness that brings with it the feeling of belonging, harmony and peace. It entails searching for answers about the infinite, and is particularly important in times of stress, illness, loss, bereavement and death. For some people, but by no means all, this sense of oneness is found explicitly in relation to God as the ultimate source of love.

The spiritual longing for wholeness permeates body, soul and spirit. Through the body we celebrate the gift of life in eating, drinking, making love and bearing children – the primeval spiritual impulse that seeks to merge two into one. When we are attuned to Soul, we realise that we are mirrored in each other, indeed that ultimately there is no ‘other’ - all humanity is therefore one. When we align with Spirit, we participate in the flux of the universe as it constantly creates form and dissolves back into energy, one such form being life here on Earth.

Trying to define terms like Spirit and Soul is fraught with difficulties. By Spirit I refer to the limitless and unbounded consciousness that energises this universe (and doubtless others too). I use the word Soul for the manifestation of Spirit through form. In this sense, a pebble on the beach has Soul – but it is at the level of a vibration of atoms. In the plant kingdom, Soul takes the form of a collective sentient field. In the animal kingdom, Soul has acquired awareness; dogs and cats are just as aware as you and me, and living as they do, entirely in the ‘now’, their awareness is all the more keen. But in the human species, Soul has advanced to the stage of self-consciousness, the awareness of awareness; it is a privilege which opens the door to Heaven, but which, if abused, leads to Hell on Earth.

Self-consciousness bestows on us our sense of individuality. Whether individuality, once acquired, is for ever preserved, or whether our ultimate destination is to merge with the source of All That Is, none of us can know for sure. However, I don’t doubt that for the time being, we exist in a multiplicity of virtual dimensions. It’s just that I and you both happen to be here, in this one, right now. Even though I know this reality to be a sea of energy, of waves and particles or, according to string theory, little vibrating loops of ‘string’, it is, of course entirely real, tangible and solid to me, and to everyone that shares it with me.

The soul knows it is never alone, for there is a deep connection which goes back to our divine origination. Experiencing this life as a precious but ephemeral gift, the soul views the death of the body with absolute equanimity. On the other hand, the ego is separative. Formed from our individual

personalities, it fears death, indeed tries to deny it, since it dreads the prospect of obliteration. Yet the ego is necessary to the outward journey, as it has been called, of the first half of life. This is when we desire to make our mark on life, an impression we may even think is going to last. The soul knows that any impression we make on the world is transient; instead, it takes us on the return journey, when we are obliged to harvest, for good or ill, what we sowed.

Soul and Ego must live together – for without Ego, there would be nothing for Soul to learn from the classroom of life and without Soul, we could not evolve beyond the most destructive life form on Earth. The human race killed more than one hundred million of its own kind during the 20th century. Never was the perspective of Soul more needed.

Despite this appalling statistic, I am an optimist, believing as I do that we are all here as spiritual beings on a human journey. The problem is that the human race is a very young species and we haven't yet learned how to stop acting on the impulse of Ego and listen more to Soul.

As a psychiatrist, I came to soul-centred therapy via a roundabout route that included psychoanalysis, group analysis, psychodrama, and the work of Carl Jung. Later I went on to study healing and other transpersonal approaches. But it was during my training in psychodrama that I first witnessed the power of Soul in action, and so this is where I shall begin with my case studies.

Soul wisdom

During a psychodrama session, a woman who had been deeply embittered by the loss of her son years before returned to the roadside scene of the car crash in which he had been killed. Weeping in despair, she cried out 'God, why have you done this to me'. The psychodrama therapist immediately instructed her to reverse roles with God. At once this mother's face changed, becoming calm and composed, her sobbing ceased and as God she exclaimed with immense dignity, 'I have done nothing to you. Your son chose to die, so that he would not suffer any more. Be happy for him and thankful for his life which brought you joy.'

The woman was amazed by what had come out of her own mouth. She could see the meaning of it perfectly and for the first time since her son's death she could begin to heal.

What I had observed was a defining moment for me - I was amazed by the strength and wisdom of Soul. With hindsight, I might say that it was where my interest in healing began. Incidentally, the word 'healing' comes from the same root as wholeness. Unlike the man-made concept of cure, wholeness is humankind's spiritual birth right, provided we don't mess it up.

Connecting with Soul

Christine was chronically depressed. Throughout childhood, she never felt valued for her own self. Academic success had temporarily bolstered her self-esteem. Later, it fell apart when a personal relationship failed. Her emotions froze over and she became profoundly withdrawn.

Christine had described her depression as a black cave, so I invited her to close her eyes, go inside and report back with what she could find. After some minutes she found a pair of steel handcuffs, then a rope and an iron chain. I pressed her to go on looking. After what seemed an eternity, her expression changed to one of concern, so I asked her what she had found. It was a little puppy in a dark corner. I suggested she pick it up and hold it to her. With her eyes still closed, she cradled the puppy. What could she feel? She replied that she could feel the puppy's love for her. I urged her to let her own love flow to this puppy and she began to cry. I suggested she found an image for her emotion and she chose a heart made of gold.

The process can be understood psychologically, the puppy symbolizing the child Christine. She re-discovers and nurtures this child self, which she had lost touch with, and in doing so discovers that she still has the capacity for love. In terms of spiritual object relations, we can see Christine as reclaiming her soul that had got buried in the wasteland of childhood.

Treasuring the soul

Carol's story had been one of terrible abuse and for years she had taken refuge in alcohol. During the first interview, I encouraged her to look inside herself and tell me what she found there. What Carol saw was 'her heart beating so hard it could burst'. 'What did she want to do with it?' She put it to rest in a silk lined coffin, saying 'only death will bring it peace'. But then, after a moment, the heart transformed into a little whirligig of energy. It would not be trapped but flew about the room. So she released it and watched it fly away.

Images of the soul are incapable of death. But Carol was not ready or able to harness her soul for her own benefit and she did not take up the offer of therapy, which would have meant abstaining from alcohol.

Nearly four years later Carol came to see me again, in the meantime having faced up to her drinking. This time, when she went inside herself, she found a treasure chest. I asked if she could pick up the treasure chest. She put it under her arm and soon found an archway and went through. Now she found herself in a sandy desert, by a pool of water and some trees. She sat by the water, resting peacefully and said with a sigh, 'This is for me!' (All her life she has rushed around trying to please others). Did she want a drink? She drank deeply of the cool fresh water. Now where did she need to go? She immediately found herself back home, still holding the treasure chest, studded

with jewels and very beautiful. She placed it on the floor in the middle of the room. Following this session, therapy was offered and accepted.

A soul dream

My patient had been born into circumstances of great deprivation. Fortunately he was saved from a life in care by being taken in, aged four, by a neighbour, Bob, who from that time on was father in all but name

The boy grew into a man and made good. He married, had a family and moved south. But he often went back to see Bob, now ageing and alone but fiercely independent. Then the time came when Bob grew so frail, his neighbours had to come in and start washing and caring for him. Bob couldn't bear it. One day he got himself upstairs to the spare bedroom, lay down with his cap on his head as always, swallowed a lot of tablets and died.

My patient was devastated at the news. He kept dreaming Bob was still alive only to wake up and find him gone. He fell into a severe depression.

He then told me that just before attending this consultation, something had happened which had 'knocked him for six'. He had dreamed again of Bob but this was different.

In the dream, he knew for the first time that Bob was dead. Yet there was Bob, sitting across from him, large as life, cap on head, just the way he always sat. My patient asked him outright, 'Bob, are you dead?' Bob answered him as direct as ever, 'Yes!' His next question to Bob was, 'Is there life after death?' Another emphatic 'Yes,' came right back. Then he challenged Bob head on. 'Prove it to me!' Bob pulled out a book that looked like a Bible with detailed drawings in it and, sure enough, the proof was all there.

Then he awoke. All day he could intensely feel Bob's presence. He found his emotions welling up and although it was very painful, he could say to me in that first meeting 'I know I'm getting better'.

Soul to Soul

Rosemary came to see me several years after her teenage daughter Tessa had attempted suicide, which had left her with severe brain damage. Rosemary felt deeply responsible and the torment of her grief was immense. She could no longer bring herself to visit her once lovely daughter, who now lay immobile, with severe contractures. 'I cannot bear seeing what she has turned into,' she raged, after a rare visit to the nursing home.

I had been struck by a comment Rosemary made, that she dreaded going to see Tessa because as soon as approached the room, even on the other side of the door, Tessa who normally lay silent and motionless would start to make

loud moaning noises. Could Tessa sense that this was her mother visiting?

It seemed to me there could be no healing until Rosemary was able to face her daughter. I advised her when going into the room immediately to fix her gaze only on Tessa's eyes, making sure not to look at her body while she drew near. We took time to rehearse this. When mother came the next time, she said she had gone right up to Tessa, making sure to look only in her eyes. Tessa then stopped moaning and began to fixate on mother's eyes. Rosemary found herself cradling her daughter and telling her that she loved her and would be coming again. One year later, Tessa was able to communicate a little with the help of a clock alphabet. She was now trying to crawl and surgery was being considered for treatment of her contractures.

It is no coincidence that the proverb 'the eye is the mirror of the soul' is found throughout many cultures and countries.

Reunion of souls

Joan came to see me about a year after the death of her husband, Ted, having nursed him through a long and debilitating illness. They had been together 40 years and her loss left her stricken with grief. She continually felt Ted's presence around the house, yet it brought only pain. I asked Joan if she thought there could be an afterlife. Yes, she thought there might be, but how could that help her now?

I asked her if she would like to try to make contact with Ted in a way that might bring her peace of mind. So at my suggestion Joan shut her eyes, relaxed, and was encouraged to see if she could 'find' Ted wherever he might be. After a couple of minutes, a faint smile played on her lips. I asked Joan what she saw. She replied that she could see Ted in his cricket whites playing cricket and looking very fit and happy. I remarked that he seemed to be enjoying a game of celestial cricket. Joan's smile widened and she added that cricket had been Ted's great passion. Then a look of deep sadness passed across her face. I asked whether she would like to speak with Ted. She nodded, so I suggested she walk up to him and see what might happen. After a moment, Joan said that she was now standing next to him and that he had put his arm around her. What was he saying? He was saying 'Don't worry; everything is going to be all right.' I asked Joan to look around her. Was anyone else present? Then she saw her deceased sister and parents there, smiling and waving to her. Being able to see death not as an ending but as a transition helped Joan to resume her life with hope and expectation.

A Soul that never got born

Sometimes souls are together only a short time, as with children who die young, or who never reach their day of birth.

Gillian came with a depression that could be traced back to her earlier decision to have a termination of pregnancy. She had been a young, single woman who found herself pregnant after a brief relationship. She felt sure at the time that it would be in everyone's best interests to end the pregnancy, so she sought medical advice and a planned, surgical termination was carried out. Her physical recovery was uneventful, life moved on and after some time she entered a new relationship which led to marriage. The couple tried for a child, but Gillian did not fall pregnant. She became depressed, and found herself thinking back to the earlier termination of pregnancy, which she had kept secret. She started feeling that her failure to conceive was a punishment for getting rid of her baby.

In the session, as we explored her feelings about the termination, Gillian began to cry. I asked her if she had ever wanted to talk with her unborn baby and she nodded. I suggested that we might do that now, if she wished. Again she nodded, so I handed her a pillow, asked her to cradle it in her arms, close her eyes and picture the baby she was holding. She began sobbing. 'What do you need to say to your baby,' I urged her. Gillian burst out, 'What have I done? I'm so sorry for what I did to you' 'Now let the baby speak', I said, and through her, I asked the baby, 'what did Gillian do to you?' The baby answered, 'It was a terrible shock, I was just lying there and then something came in and I was torn to pieces'.

In a termination of pregnancy, the foetus, as it's referred to by doctors, is sucked out with a vacuum tube. What is not widely known is that in the course of doing so, the tiny baby is literally torn limb from limb. Gillian was racked with remorse. 'What else do you want Gillian to know?' I asked the baby. 'Please stop crying', said the baby to her. 'It was all over very quickly, and I'm fine now'. I then said to the baby, 'Do you know that Gillian cannot forgive herself for what she did'. The baby answered her, 'You did the best you could at the time. And it was very nice being in you, even though I never got born. Don't blame yourself. I'm fine now, it's true'. I asked Gillian if she wanted to say anything more to the baby. She said, 'I'm so sorry, and I miss you and I think about you so much'. The baby answered her, 'It's only for now – we'll see each other again soon'. I then asked Gillian to take some time in silence to be with her baby. As she sat rocking and holding the pillow, she gradually quietened. Then I asked her and the baby to say goodbye to each other for the present. Before she left, Gillian decided to tell her husband what had happened. I do not know if she subsequently became pregnant but I hope her chances will have improved.

Soul retrieval

In psychodynamic therapy, terms such as projection and introjection serve as metaphors. In contrast, throughout history, shamans have treated projection and introjection as palpable, energetic realities.

Sally, in her mid-fifties, was suffering from treatment-resistant depression. Her problems had begun in early childhood, which had been blighted with

insecurity. When she was seven, she fell into the hands of a fundamentalist schoolteacher, Miss Edwards, who terrified the child with threats of hell and damnation. Sally had recurring visions of flames licking around her bed and the red face of the devil would appear at night and in her dreams.

In adulthood, Sally seemed to overcome these fears, but following major surgery, which left her body scarred, she once again succumbed to these visions, living from day to day in a state of sheer panic.

First, Sally was encouraged to visualise her soul. She located it inside her chest but as a feeble thing, not much more than a glimmer of light. I asked her to look carefully to see if there were any strands or cords running out from it into the darkness. She found such a cord, so I urged her to follow it and see where it led. After a moment she looked up and said she could see Miss Edwards, looking very old but as fierce as ever, holding the end of the cord tightly in her hand.

I then had a frank discussion with Miss Edwards, speaking with her through the agency of Sally. Miss Edwards insisted that what she did what was right, the child had to be controlled and if she instilled fear in her, it was for her own good. I pointed out that instead of helping, it had only led to a lifetime of misery and torment. Is this what Miss Edwards as a Christian really intended? She faltered and I pressed home my advantage. She herself would now be nearing the end of her life and soon facing her Maker. How will she be judged? Then Miss Edwards became fearful. She hadn't intended harm and she hoped God would have pity on her. I put it to her that she could start making amends right now by letting go of Sally's soul and giving it back to her. Miss Edwards agreed and let go of the cord. I asked Sally to draw it back into herself, after which we spent some time on healing.

Following the session, Sally reported that the red devil had lost his power over her. The next step would be to help Sally find compassion for that child who had lived with so much fear.

A soul remembers

Peter, aged 27, came to see me with a water phobia. Having been a good swimmer and with no evident neurotic traits, he was travelling on a small ferry when he suffered a severe panic attack. He had been looking over the side of the boat at the time and the thought came to him that if he were to fall overboard, he would be swept away and would drown. *No one would ever know what had happened to him.*

Going into Peter's personal history revealed no obvious cause for this acute episode. I asked him to close his eyes and re-live the scene, this time imagining falling into the water. Peter's body immediately began jerking and thrashing about. I said 'what's happening?' and he cried out, 'I can't get free, I'm drowning'. I then instructed him to go back in time to just before this moment. He said despairingly, 'We've been rammed and water's coming in

the boat'. 'Why can't you get free?' 'I'm chained to the boat!'

I took Peter forward again in time to the moment of drowning. His struggling movements became weaker and he went limp. What was happening now? 'I'm leaving my body, I'm rising up through the water and I'm going higher, up into the sky'. 'What can you see?' 'There's a bright light, I want to go there'. I said, 'before you leave, look back on this life you just lived and tell me about yourself and how old you are'. 'I'm 27' he said, and told the story of a young man fighting in the Greco-Persian wars, who had spent the last two years of his life as a slave oarsman on a Greek trireme. During a naval battle with the Persians, the ship had gone down with all on board. The young man's wife and children would *never know what had happened to him*.

By way of what is called an 'affect bridge', Peter had slipped into a 'past life'. The process can be understood in various ways, from the psychological to the transpersonal. What is not in question is that such soul dramas can have an immediate and lasting therapeutic effect.

Healing for two souls

Alice was a 43-year-old lady who came with a ten-year history of sarcoid, an auto-immune disease that was causing her to go blind. She was increasingly reliant on her husband, John, to care for her. Theirs was a loving marriage and she said of him with a smile, '*He was a good catch!*' Alice's loss of sight was challenging her to try to make sense of her misfortune. Recently she had heard about past life regression and wanted to see if it could provide any clue.

The sarcoid had begun with blinding headaches. In the session we went back to that time when she lay exhausted and crying, holding her head in her hands in a darkened room.

I ask Alice to find words for the terrible pain in her head. If her headache could speak what would it say? She cried out, 'Let me alone. Let me be free.' I suggested she give in to the longing and see where it took her. Her face relaxed and she lay with her eyes closed and a smile on her lips. At once, she found herself lazing in the warm, calm water of a tropical ocean. I asked her to look around. She could see the sandy shore some way off and beyond that, dense vegetation covering the lower slopes of distant mountains. Next, I asked her to look down at her body. She said with astonishment, 'I'm... like a fish.' Then she exclaimed 'No, not a fish, I'm a dolphin!' Her expression was one of intense pleasure. I asked if there were any other dolphins nearby. It transpired that this young dolphin had disobeyed her parents and had swum off on her own.

I then asked her to go forward in time to the next important thing that happened. She found herself lying on the sand, unable to move. (Alice's body started making ineffectual jerking movements on the couch). I asked her to check her body and she became aware of a large hole in her side. Now tears began to trickle down her cheeks. There was no pain but her strength was

ebbing. She looked up and could see the prow of a boat a few feet away. Standing on it and staring at her was a fisherman with painted face and body, holding a spear in his hand. Then the boat slid away. As darkness fell, she grew calm. Suddenly she found herself rising up into the sky and looking down, without emotion or regret, at the lifeless body of the dolphin on the beach.

Did she need to face this fisherman who had killed her with his spear? At first she was reluctant, saying 'It wasn't his fault. He never killed another dolphin'. Then she agreed that it could be important. So she waited there for a while until his turn came to die and he crossed over. Now she could see the fisherman coming closer. Involuntarily, she found herself going forward and embracing him. I asked her if recognised him. 'Of course, it's my husband John', she said, beginning to laugh and cry at the same time. 'He caught me and this time I've caught him. We are together and he is here to take care of me!'

Release of an earthbound spirit

Pat had suffered from depression for many years. Since childhood, she longed for approval but felt she could never please. Her mother would mock and belittle her and Pat was often full of anger that she never dared express.

When her mother died, Pat heaved a sigh of relief thinking she could now get on with her own life. But she found she could not, for Mother's presence was all around and she still seemed to hear her mother scorning her. Feeling possessed by her mother, as she put it, Pat had become suicidal.

I said to Pat that suicide would resolve nothing and that we needed to find a way to help the two of them separate. I invited her to confront her mother in death as she had not been able to in life. We did this by using an empty chair. Pat went right ahead; she was able to face her mother for the first time with a few home truths and told her it was time she got off her back.

I now asked Pat to sit in the empty chair and role reverse with mother. Mother came straight back, saying she had no intention of stopping! She enjoyed hanging around Pat and in any case she had nowhere else to go.

I asked the mother, through Pat, about the life she had just lived and I learned that her own mother had rejected her from an early age. She resolved to escape from home and took the first man she could to help her get away. But getting pregnant with Pat when she was 17 ended her hopes of a career and tied her to a man she did not love. Her daughter became the life-long target of her resentment.

I explained to Mother the benefits to her of moving on and to see if there were any friends or that could help take her on her way. To begin with, nobody appeared and so I urged her to look for just one person in her whole life that had shown her kindness. After a long pause, she recalled a Mrs. Cox, who

had been a nurse staying with Mother's family for a time and who made a real fuss over the little girl. As Mother recalled her nurse, her face softened and I asked her to try to find her. Then she smiled and said she could now see Mrs. Cox, looking just the way she did all those years ago. I asked her to take her hand and walk towards the light. There was no further protest and she left with her friend. When this was over, Pat looked emotionally drained but at peace. She went back to her own chair and said, 'It feels that she has really gone, for the first time.'

Suicide and spirit attachment

A young woman came to see me feeling unwell and 'not herself'. She had been told she was clinically depressed; anti-depressant medication had helped but she was still 'not herself'. I was struck by her use of the phrase.

Going into the background, I learned that a few months before the symptoms began, this woman's friend had killed herself in the patient's home, having been staying there while my patient was away on holiday. By the time she got back, everything had been tidied up and the funeral had already taken place.

Remembering how she had twice said she was 'not herself', I asked her if she had the feeling of someone else when she came back home. She replied that she hadn't wanted to mention it in case I thought she was mad, but every time she went into the house, she had the physical sensation that her friend was right there in the room with her.

Taking this at face value, I asked if she would like me to invite the spirit of her deceased friend to the consultation to see if we could get some further clues. She was willing, so I asked her to close her eyes, tune in to her friend and try letting her friend speak through her.

Her friend came through and went on to express deep regret at having taken her life. Suicide had solved nothing. She remained unhappy and lonely and seeking comfort. I explained that staying on was having a bad effect on my patient, and was doing nothing for her either. She apologised. 'If only I had known', she said, 'what I know now. I was facing the biggest challenge of my life and I went and messed it up. I feel even worse than I did before'. I said I was sure other opportunities would be given her. She was very relieved to hear this and we talked more about her hopes for another chance at life. When she said she was ready to move on, I asked her to look for the light. She exclaimed with a smile 'Yes, I can see it' and left at once. The moment she went, my patient felt the burden of oppression lift from her and it did not return.

Spirit release from a past life

Barbara, my patient, had been visiting a well-known museum and wanted to look at the paintings on the first floor. There was a big central staircase with

stairwells on both sides. Halfway up, she started feeling dizzy and could not proceed. Since that time, open spaces and heights triggered severe panic attacks.

I asked Barbara to close her eyes and imagine herself back at the bottom of the stairs. She became visibly tense and I asked her to focus on the sensation of fear and go with the feeling to the very first time it happened, wherever that might be.

With some surprise, Barbara reported that she was standing at the bottom of a stone pyramid with big steps leading upwards and a sheer drop on each side. She was wearing rough leather sandals and a long cotton skirt. I asked her what she was doing there. She replied that she was going to be sacrificed by the chief priest. She could see him waiting for her at the top of the pyramid, where he would cut her throat.

How had she come to be chosen? This took her back to a scene in the village the night before, when the elders had singled her out and said 'It might as well be her'. She had no relatives to protect her and so she was dragged away. I asked her to go back further, to her childhood in that lifetime. She told me her name was Miria. By nature she was a solitary child, who liked to play alone in the forest. Later, being fiercely independent, she scared away her suitors, which left her with no husband to protect her and no status in village life.

As if in a trance she now climbed slowly up the pyramid steps. The height made her dizzy. At the top she was lifted onto on a stone slab and the priest raised his sword. Suddenly it was over and she was free. There was no pain.

Miria floated away from the body but remaining suspended in a shadowy, featureless world. I asked her to look around and tell me if she could see anyone. Looking down, Miria saw a five-year old girl playing alone in the fields behind some houses. As she came closer, she could see that it was the child Barbara. Miria felt attracted to the little girl and so she stayed with her from that time on.

From the transpersonal perspective, Miria's spirit had remained earthbound, seeking solace in the company of another solitary child. The attachment only surfaced when the museum steps triggered a resurgence of fear in Miria, which had instantly and deeply affected my patient Barbara

Once this was explained to Miria, she agreed to leave. I encouraged her to look for the light, and after a short while, she found herself moving rapidly towards it and was gone.

'Demons' have souls too

Janet, in her mid-twenties, had been depressed for many years. Her problems went back to an abusive relationship in her teens. Soon after, she developed chronic pelvic pain, for which she was now being told a hysterectomy might

be needed.

I asked her to go within and 'scan' her body and tell me what she saw there. Right away she described 'a nasty dark red thing' attached to her womb. I invited it to speak and it explained, through Janet, that it had been there since Janet was seventeen. It was belligerent and boastful, saying it had made her ill and wasn't finished yet - it was going to give her cancer. When she heard this, Janet exclaimed 'It's a demon!'

She was anxious to free herself from this thing, so I suggested she visualise angels enclosing the 'demon' in a bubble of light. At once it cried out in fear 'stop, I'm going to burn'. I pointed out to it that it was already trapped by the light, so it had better take refuge in the darkness within itself. I urged it to go deeper and deeper, and after a while it said with astonishment that it could see a light. The next moment it cried out in wonder, saying 'this feels so good, I feel so warm and nice! Then it went on to say with great remorse, 'what have I done? I have caused such pain and misery!' I said that only by going into the Light would it find forgiveness and the opportunity for redemption. It couldn't wait to leave!

This transformation of 'negative' energy is an important aspect of spirit release work. We can see the 'demon' as being just that, an attached entity or we could regard it as a split-off complex of pathological object relations. From the clinical standpoint, the important thing is to decide when to work for integration and when to go for removal. In this case, the energetic complex was treated as a spirit attachment and released into the light. However, further therapy would be helpful for Janet to understand why she had been vulnerable in the first place, and to stay well.

Psychotherapy for soul trauma

Helen, a woman in her 40s had become suddenly aware of feeling deeply emotionally burdened. There was nothing she could identify to account for it. All she could say was that she sensed the presence of a woman calling out to her in distress.

Helen wanted to understand more about this voice speaking to her from within. Through hypnotic induction I was able to make direct contact with the woman, Marianne, as she called herself, and this is the story that she told:

Marianne had lived several centuries ago. Her mother had died in childbirth and she had been brought up by her father who was an impoverished crofter. As a small child she fell ill, and the father, at his wit's end, left her close to death on the doorstep of a convent. The Mother Superior found the child there and took her in. Marianne was nursed back to health, and although deeply affected by the loss of her father, she grew to love the Mother Superior, who showed her great kindness. The convent became her home.

When she was little more than a child, there was a civil uprising and a band of drunken militia broke into the convent. Mother Superior insisted that Marianne hide herself and then went out with the other nuns to face the militia. The nuns were all raped and killed. Marianne could hear what was happening and was terrified. Later, she crept out to find bodies everywhere. Weeping, she ran into the nearby woods and there, overwhelmed with guilt at not saving her beloved Mother Superior, she hung herself. Immediately she found herself, in spirit, back at the convent, unable to leave the scene of the massacre. From that time on, she wandered alone in a state of shock and deeply burdened by guilt, until she found herself attracted to Helen and 'moved in'.

The therapeutic task was to take this traumatised soul back to her suicide and help her complete the transition to the afterlife. As soon as she crossed over, the first person to greet her was Mother Superior. Marianne wept and asked for forgiveness. Mother Superior embraced her, saying, 'you have nothing to blame yourself for.' Marianne answered, 'but how can I repay all you did for me?' Mother Superior replied, 'I have waited a long time for you to come and you are repaying me now by enabling me to be the first person to greet you.'

Then Marianne looked round and saw her father. He had died a few years after leaving his child at the door of the convent. Still in anguish as to whether he had done the right thing, he asked her to forgive him. Finally, Marianne's mother that she had never known, appeared and lovingly greeted her. For the first time this family was complete and reunited.

Marianne never troubled Helen again. The therapeutic effect on Helen was profound, for it also addressed a lifelong concern of her own, the feeling that it was dangerous to love without reservation for fear of abandonment.

In a letter from Helen some months later, she explained how she and Marianne had both been released from what she called 'the trap of abandonment.' Through witnessing Marianne's reunion with the Mother Superior and her parents, Helen could see that no one in Marianne's family had wished to cause hurt and rejection; on the contrary, their love for Marianne was profound. In the light of this experience, Helen could now see that her own family, imperfect though it may have been, had done its best for her.

Conclusion

What is required when working with Soul? First, a willingness to consider spiritual reality to be as 'real' as any aspect of life; second, a readiness to work beyond the bounds of consensus reality and third, to trust that our patients already hold the key to their own healing, if only helped to make use of it.

I am not advocating soul-centred therapy as a catch-all. Many human problems can be explored and resolved psychodynamically without recourse to 'spirit'. Indeed, for some patients, too much 'spirituality' can be a defence

against confronting painful emotion, while other patients simply prefer to stay firmly grounded in the affairs of daily life. However, in the examples given here, the chosen field of action has been psycho-spiritual, unconstrained by the limits of physical reality, especially birth and death. Yet the aim is always to throw light on the complex challenges of human life, mindful that each scene in the play is essential to the working out of the greater whole. And when the depth and wisdom of the human soul is harnessed, it is plain to see that there is far more to life and death than, as some would claim, random mutations of 'the selfish gene'.

Andrew Powell's publications on spirituality and mental health can be found at <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups/spirituality/publications.aspx>

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