

Psychotherapy & the Spirit:

A Great Work of Love in the Writings of R. Tomas Agosin, M.D.

Edited by

Fredrica R. Halligan, Ph.D.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to
all psychotherapists and to
spiritual seekers throughout the world;
may a Spirit of Love and
Global Unity prevail.

Contents

Chapter 1. Tomas.....	page 4
Chapter 2. Tomas Agosin: Introduction to Psychotherapy & Spirituality (Albert Einstein Summer Institutes, Cape Cod 1990).....	page 22
Chapter 3. Celebration.....	page 30
Chapter 4. Celebration of the Family.....	page 33
Chapter 5. Mysticism & Psychosis.....	page 38
Chapter 6. Beyond the Superego God.....	page 45
Chapter 7. Inner-Dialogue Meditation.....	page 53
Chapter 8. Forgiveness.....	page 56
Chapter 9. Exploring the Divine in Psychotherapy.....	page 70
Chapter 10. Psychosis, Dreams & Mysticism in the Clinical Domain.....	page 74
Chapter 11. Disidentification.....	page 109
Chapter 12. Who Am I?.....	page 112
Chapter 13. Difficulties: Obstacles or Opportunities?.....	page 116
Chapter 14. Looking Inward: Psychotherapy & Mysticism.....	page 120
Chapter 15. Spiritual Awakening: The Discovery of Love.....	page 123
Chapter 16. Epilogue.....	page 126
Charts and Figures.....	page 144

“Tomas”

“The Lord is here!” A forty-three year old, Chilean psychiatrist expressed the joy in his spirit as he came out onto the deck of the Cape Cod cottage on a crystal clear July morning in 1991. Wind whispered in the pines; the metallic sound of his crutches died away; otherwise there was silence. The house--really an architect’s delight--was situated far back from the road, with a sparkling view of the bay where no boats were yet traveling. It was 7:00 a.m., time for the team to gather for morning meditation. This house amid the pines would be shared for the week by the Agosin Team, a group of five mental health professionals who would teach the weeklong seminar on Psychotherapy and Spirituality at the Cape Cod Institute run by Albert Einstein College of Medicine. For this one week each summer, the house on Cape Cod was to become a center of vibrancy: fun, families, serious reflection, trading psychological jargon, good food and (especially) a sacred spot for daily meditation.

Tomas Agosin lowered his slim body into a deck chair, straightened his back and bowed his blond head, settling into a half hour of silence, as his other team members joined him. Peter Cohen, Mark Finn, John McDargh and Fredrica Halligan came from different religious traditions and various approaches to depth psychotherapy but were united each morning in openness to the Spirit of the universe. This team felt deeply its commitment to teaching others about the importance of addressing the influence of clients’ spirituality in the practice of psychotherapy. This was a heady time in the mental

health world, a time when psychology and psychiatry were just beginning to look at a vibrant, interesting area that was close to the hearts of many. For about three years now, Tomas Agosin had been bold about opening the world of psychotherapy to examining spiritual issues. But it was still a “dangerous” time when criticism from the mental health establishment could wreck a career or pour shame on the head of an unsuspecting practitioner. It was a time when humility and courage were both needed for the work.

Tomas Agosin was a man of both courage and humility. As he told his own life story the first morning of the 1991 teaching seminar, he spoke of his early life in Chile, of his struggle with medical complications prior to and following the amputation of his right leg. He spoke poignantly about how his personal brushes with death had brought him into a deeper relationship with the Divine. He always liked Carlos Castenada’s image that, when “Death is sitting over your shoulder,” you tend to find the meaning and purpose and value of life. The existential value of life! Tomas sometimes said: “When you look death right in the face what can you do but celebrate life!” So with a humble, yet joyful, even exuberant appreciation of life, Tomas Agosin went about breaking down barriers and speaking about the spiritual dimension in human life and in psychotherapy.

The source of Tomas Agosin’s humility was a practiced form of spirituality. On the one hand, he was confident and he knew that he was presenting in “the big time” in coming back, now for a second year, at the Einstein Cape Cod seminars. But, on the other hand, he worked hard to prevent his ego from getting engorged or inflated by that success. He said, “The higher you fly, the closer you get to the sun, the bigger the shadow you cast.” So he worked inwardly to surrender his ego, to prevent hubris that would absolutely endanger the work he was doing. He said “The most important thing is

the inner work,” and for him this particular summer, he said, “My inner work right now is surrender.”

For the team, flying high was exhilarating, so the risk of hubris was real. This team of presenters found themselves much in demand, and to know one is having impact is a heady, almost addictive experience. As journalist Russell Shorto tells it, what was happening at Cape Cod that summer, and had begun in Manhattan just three years earlier, was a “psychospiritual renaissance.”

Hundreds of psychologists, psychiatrists, and others in the mental health professions have participated in it and come away with the once outrageous-seeming notion that it was permissible to develop a spiritual demeanor, and that encouraging a patient’s full emotional development might involve encouraging spiritual development.

(Shorto, 1999, p.74)

This radical idea took hold in the Cape Cod Institute. When the Establishment says “It’s OK”, then others dare to open their minds to new possibilities.* And Albert Einstein College of Medicine was definitely Establishment. Situated in New York, its training program is well respected by the elite of psychoanalysis and psychiatry. For most of the century, New York was second only to Vienna as a center for the exploration of Freud’s ideas and methods. Freud, of course, was vehemently opposed to the worldview of religion. For him, reliance on faith was seen as infantile, and the strictures of religious mores were seen, more often than not, as superego voices that could lead to neurosis. It was thus not an unrealistic fear that the old guard would disapprove, as this bold young

group of mental health practitioners began to challenge the established assumptions of Freud and his followers.

One of the questions Agosin and his team asked was: How do we know when religion is healthy and when it leads to pathological consequences? How do we know, for example, when religion is supportive and life giving to a practitioner versus when it leads to neurotic, obsessive-compulsive modes of thought and behavior? That question then led to many others. For example, how do we define the differences (if any) between religion and spirituality? How can psychotherapists work, respecting both their own professional boundaries and traditions, and at the same time honoring the religion or spirituality of their patients?

The answers to the questions that Tomas Agosin and his friends raised formed a collage that came from many different traditions. From Judaism came the idea of the importance of study: To assess the patient fully would require an in-depth understanding of the role that religion or spirituality played in his or her life. From Zen Buddhism came the idea of the koan: Is it one or two? The question at heart is how psychotherapy and spirituality are both alike and different, both one and the same, and two quite different approaches to healing and uplifting the soul. From Christianity came reflections on the role of spiritual direction and how that might facilitate the therapeutic endeavor. From an esoteric Hindu tradition came exploration into the role of kundalini energy in empowering a spiritual awakening. From Sufism came an appreciation of music and dance and prayer. From Shamanism came an appreciation of the ancient healing rites of Native Americans and other tribal peoples. From feminism came explorations of the role of gender in God-images.

A myriad of questions unleashed a fireworks display of eclectic exploration into the many facets of the interface between psychotherapy and spirituality. All this creative energy had been released when Tomas Agosin and his friend, Peter Cohen, initiated a series of seminars that met each month, beginning in May of 1988. The seminars met at the Cafh Foundation loft in Manhattan. In a simple, open, carpeted space, one floor above the bustling traffic of Broadway, each month a speaker would address some aspect of the vibrantly interesting topic; and mental health practitioners, numbering anywhere from twenty-five to sixty, would sit around on plain metal chairs and dive into the discussions. Mark Finn, one of the early presenters and a Buddhist psychologist, once said of the group that it was “refreshingly non-competitive.” Where else would an open-hearted, open-minded group of psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, other mental health professionals, and an occasional clergy person meet on an equal footing to share their practices, their beliefs and their wonderings. An emphasis on the clinical domain made the presentations highly professional as well as deeply creative. The dynamic was free-wheeling and outright fun.

In the eclecticism of the meetings lay one of the group’s most profound strengths. Since the meetings were sponsored by Cafh Spiritual Order, an underlying respect for all human concerns was fostered. Cafh is a relatively small order of spiritual seekers who embrace the mystical traditions of all the world’s religions. Founded in Argentina in the mid-1930s, Cafh flourished in South America. It was brought to New York by the two Chilean brothers, Manuel and Tomas Agosin. Even today, practitioners tend to come from predominantly Christian and Jewish backgrounds and they share an over-riding desire to participate in and celebrate the unity of all humanity. What better setting--what

better mind-set--to empower the dialogues that were to foster the “Psychotherapy and the Spirit” seminars.

Psychiatrist, Tomas Agosin, and psychologist, Peter Cohen, were both members of Cafh, and they had known each other for many years when they decided to “come out of the closet” as spiritual seekers by initiating the Psychotherapy and the Spirit seminars. They met originally in medical school and, as Peter tells it, their first encounter was dramatic. He was heading out for a swim at the pool in the Nurses Residence of Jacobi Hospital where Albert Einstein medical students had access. Arriving at poolside he was shocked to see a one-legged man poised above on the high diving board. Startled, he yelled, “What’s that guy doing up there?” The diver responded, “A one-and-a-half,” and executed the dive. That diver was Tomas Agosin, who was then another first year medical student. After that encounter, Agosin and Cohen became fast friends. Their friendship was to last two decades, leading them into pioneering paths. It was a relationship that reached its culmination at Cape Cod in 1991.

It comes as no surprise to friends and colleagues, that Tomas Agosin was a brave diver. He never let the handicap of his amputation slow him down. There were tales of how he used to play soccer as a youngster. Someone even circulated a photo where he had just kicked the ball and there was no supporting leg holding him to the ground!

Tomas’ handicap and the vibrancy with which he overcame obstacles was at once the reason why people loved and respected him, and his own avenue to transcendence. Tomas never complained about his struggles. Most people never knew about his pain. They saw instead his loving, light-hearted, almost boyish personality, and they sensed the profundity of his spirit.

Tomas Agosin was a man undaunted by challenges. In fact, he seemed to have reveled and thrived on them. When he came to the United States during his adolescence, he became a favorite of the rehabilitation team at the Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine of New York University where he was receiving treatment. The pediatric and adolescent unit at Rusk is a bright, colorful, hopeful setting where the therapists work hard, pushing their young patients to help them reach their optimal level of development. Everyone loves a patient who works hard to cope with his difficulties and to be all that he can be. The professionals at Rusk loved Tomas. And he loved them in return. It was during that time, partly as a result of the good care he received at Rusk, that he decided to become a physician. Tomas' rehabilitation was a success, and he was a faithful, loving alumnus. Throughout his adulthood he credited his coping ability to much of what he learned and experienced at Rusk.

Tomas attended college at New York University in lower Manhattan, and then went on to medical school at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. Despite his strong Spanish accent, he was becoming a thorough New Yorker. From Greenwich Village to the Upper East Side, Tomas gathered his friends from a diverse and sophisticated milieu. His professional development is well expressed in Russell Shorto's biographical description:

Agosin cruised through medical school, became a psychiatrist, and advanced quickly to become associate director of residency training at Albert Einstein. He made a name for himself as an administrator and teacher but especially in his clinical work. Unlike virtually all psychiatrists in the 1970s and 1980s, he carried his spiritual sensibility

right into the clinical setting. (Shorto, 1999, p. 66)

That spiritual sensibility was what made Tomas Agosin so uniquely well-qualified to inaugurate the renaissance of interest in the psychotherapy and spirituality interface. Fellow psychiatrist, Tony Stern, once referred to Tomas Agosin as “a model of a soulful psychiatrist.”

Because of his own leg-amputation and his outstanding capacity to master challenges, Tomas was also well situated to work with the handicapped. He served as role model of courage and perseverance; he also taught therapists how to be sensitive to the issues of patients who have chronic or life-threatening illnesses. The first time I met Tomas Agosin he was supervising group therapy at the Multiple Sclerosis Center of Albert Einstein. Although he didn't speak overtly about spirituality in those days, he showed such a tremendous respect for human nature, and such an archetypal understanding of human suffering, I knew there was something very special about this physician. I, and others who worked with him, could sense there was something very rare and deep--something essentially spiritual about him; and it was communicated in completely non-verbal ways.

Ten years later, in July 1991 after the Cape Cod conference, I saw Tomas for a session ending another year of supervision. He was going to see his younger son in a karate tournament in Ohio, and his older son playing soccer for the US in Europe. (He was so proud of them both!) But then because “the timing was all off,” as he said, he would have to take his eight-day annual Cah retreat in California rather than New York. I commented that perhaps the timing was “just right, just what was meant to be,” thus reflecting Tomas' own attitude about the “rightness” of natural events as they occur.

Then his plan was to be back to pick up his family for their annual month-long vacation on Martha's Vineyard. As I left the office that day he said, "I'll see you in five weeks."

* * *

In early August Tomas returned from retreat and shared with his family the fact that the retreat at Wildomar, California was centered around the topic of "Death," which had always been ultimately fascinating for him. During that eight-day retreat he wrote to the Spiritual Director of Cafh, expressing how much he had appreciated the path of Cafh; and he shared with him an archetypal dream he had just had about death.

* * *

That week, the car carrying Tomas with his wife, Brenda, their teenage son, Mikhael, and eleven-year-old Paulie, crossed the Bourne Bridge onto Cape Cod, turning south onto Route 28. Tomas knew the way like a homing pigeon, barely needing to glance at the sign that pointed toward "Falmouth and the Islands."

His heart always lifted as he came across that bridge. For many years he had taken this one-month time to be exclusively with his family. Tomas gave so much of his time and energy to others in his professional life, that he truly treasured this yearly time alone with his family. He would have many hours to relax on the beach, and he had brought along *War and Peace*, a good thick novel he had been wanting to read.

When traveling, Tomas especially practiced and valued here-and-now awareness. On this trip, like so many others, he reveled in the sights and sounds, aromas and tactile sensations of the space in which his journey took him. He absorbed the roadside beach pines and scrub-oak, the grasses and blueberry bushes. He smelled the sea air, and delighted as the sandy soil gave promise of beaches nearby.

Once the island ferry left the dock, with the ocean surrounding them, Tomas bathed his senses in the call of seagull, the cool spray and the churning water of the wake behind them. He looked back at the Cape lovingly, wondering momentarily whether Gil Levin would invite his team back to present another conference at the Albert Einstein Institute. Then he looked forward to Martha's Vineyard: to his home away from home, to the beautiful piece of nature where he most easily found his center. Tomas was entering his beach haven--for the last time.

* * * * *

The end came for Tomas Agosin just a month after that second Cape Cod seminar series. Tomas was only forty-three years old at the time of his death. In August 1991 the ecumenical chapel of the United Nations filled to overflowing. Psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists of all kinds rubbed shoulders with various others: priest and nun, minister and lawyer, economist and simple folk. Family members of Roberto Tomas Agosin joined with the enormous gathering of admirers to commemorate the life and death of a very deeply spiritual psychiatrist.

Many close friends and colleagues spoke at that memorial service, about the meaning that Tomas had brought into their lives. His brother, Manuel Agosin, gave the ceremony its keynote with the following eulogy:

Manuel's Eulogy for his Brother Tomas

We would like this ceremony to be not one of mourning but one in which we honor Tommy and celebrate what he meant to all of us. This huge turnout is testimony to how much people from all walks of life cared for him. Tommy was like a comet that illuminates the sky but passes quickly, only to depart for an unknown destination.

With a group of his closest friends and associates we decided that I should officiate at this ceremony, because of my special relationship with him. I am his eldest brother. But besides this family relationship, we were spiritual companions since adolescence, and best friends. Together we founded the groups of Cafh in New York in 1967, and we worked together at this task until 1988, when my wife Barbara and I went to live in Geneva. Many people benefited from Tommy's enthusiastic and loving work to build this environment for spiritual growth, and they are continuing to do so.

Since 1988 we became sort of spiritual guides to each other. I was privileged to be one of the few in whom he confided his most intimate thoughts---he didn't talk about himself easily. He saw me through very difficult times in these last three and a half years; he listened to me for long hours when we saw each other, and gave me simple yet effective and profound advice. We wrote to each other long, frank but always loving letters. In spite of the Atlantic Ocean between us, our relationship grew and became more profound.

We feel unspeakable sorrow about his departure. We feel cheated by life, since he had so much to give and we loved him so much. But we must remember that he was completely un sentimental and he was always prepared to go. That was one of Tommy's living teachings: his constant, un-morbid and clear-eyed preparation for death. I think I know what he would have wanted us to do with the sorrow we feel: to transmute it into solitude, that profound understanding that we stand alone before the Divine, or whatever you wish to call it. For me, this transmutation will take time, because the sorrow of his departure is immense and incomprehensible, but I owe it to him to give it my best effort.

Tommy was a master at the art of transmutation. From an early age, he learned how to transmute personal suffering into love and understanding. In the family, we saw that process unfold. He was born with a tumor in a leg; at age four, he had to have the leg amputated, and from that time on until his death he had to undergo numerous and sometimes life-threatening surgical interventions on his stump. Mom and Dad were by his side constantly through his childhood and adolescence, doing everything that was humanly possible to save his life and give him the best. Besides, we lived a kind of Helen Keller-Anne Sullivan story at home, as Mother helped him mould his character, develop a positive attitude toward life and not succumb to depression or self-pity. It was Mom's finest hour. Partly as a result of this process--and I advisedly use the term "partly," because Tommy was, like all of us, much more than the product of his home environment--Tommy developed into the wonderful and luminous being that we remember and loved. Our dear friend Bob Magrisso commented to me the other day in Worcester where he was accompanying us that, when people die, we tend to remember their luminous aspect and forget their defects; but that Tommy had been as luminous in life as we remember him now. This is true--he had a contagious enthusiasm, a selfless dedication to others as friend, spiritual guide, healer, therapist, father and husband. He knew how to enjoy life and loved it intensely.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Tommy's character was his ability to reconcile opposites: for example, the spiritual and the material. He seemed to have an easy relationship with the unseen, perhaps because of his many brushes with death. Yet he was no flaky spiritualist, and kept his feet on the ground, trying to help effectively his fellow human beings; he had more patients than he could handle, and was an effective

teacher of the discipline he loved. Moreover, as I have said, he enjoyed the life of the senses immensely, and was extraordinarily personable.

Another aspect of his capacity to reconcile opposites was his interest, at the same time and with the same intensity, in both the scientific and the un-provable. There was no flight of fantasy in his way of thinking: he was trained as a medical doctor in the best that academic life can offer, and he had a healthy respect for scientific discipline. Yet this did not prevent him from devoting a good part of his time to the life of the spirit.

He was interested in the mental health of the individual and in social issues. The day I departed on this sad journey, I received a beautiful letter from him in which he tells me that he had been working with a group of colleagues at Albert Einstein on the psychological underpinnings of racism and discrimination.

In the last years of his life, he was engaged in a new task, that of trying to reconcile psychotherapy and spirituality. I had been goading him to do so for some time, and he was intensely motivated to undertake this wonderful task. He, our old friend Peter Cohen, and others, including Mark Finn, started serious reflection together on how to marry these two areas. This effort was beginning to yield fruit: an extremely well-attended monthly program at the Cafh Center on Broadway, in which some of the most eminent people working on the subject have spoken; a week-long program for the last two summers at Albert Einstein's summer institute in Cape Cod; and preparation for a book, which I sincerely hope will go forward in honor of his memory.

Above all, Tommy was an accomplished psychotherapist and a healer of the spirit. He had achieved in himself the synthesis he was so lovingly searching for in his work.

Gracias a la Vida

A song by Violeta Para

The following song, originally in Spanish, was said to be Tomas Agosin's ever-favorite song. It so aptly expresses the enormous vitality and love of life that Tomas exuded. His lifelong battle with the specter of death is what made Tomas so deeply, so profoundly, in love with life. The quality of his exuberant, mystical appreciation of the ordinary things of life is expressed herein. At the end of his forty-three years of life, this song was played at his memorial service, as it is given here, in both Spanish and English. **

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.
me dio dos luceros que cuando los abro
perfecto distingo lo negro del blanco
y en el alto cielo su fondo estrellado
y en las multitudes el hombre que yo amo.

Thanks to life that has given me so much.
It gave me two eyes that when I open them
I perfectly distinguish black from white,
and in the high sky its starry background
and in the multitudes the one I love.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto
me ha dado el oido que en todo su ancho
graba noche y dia grillos y canarios,
martillos, turbinas, ladridos, chubazcos,
y la voz tan tierna de mi bien amado.

Thanks to life that has given me so much.
It gave me my hearing that in all its breadth

night and day records crickets and canaries,
hammering, turbines, barkings, downpours,
and the voice so tender of my beloved.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto
me ha dado el sonido y el abecedario
con el las palabras que pienso y declaro:
madre, amigo, hermano y luz alumbrando
la ruta del alma del que estoy amando.

Thanks to life that has given me so much.
It gave me sound and the alphabet
and with it the words I think and declare:
mother, friend, brother, threads that lighten
the path of the soul of the one who is
calling.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto
me ha dado la marcha de mis pies cansados;
con ellos anduve ciudades y charcos,
playas y desiertos, montanas y llanos,
y la casa tuya, tu calle y tu patio.

Thanks to life that has given me so much.
It gave me the walk of my tired feet,
with which I covered cities and puddles,
beaches and deserts, mountains and plains,

and your house, your street and your
backyard.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto
me dio el corazon que agita su marco
cuando miro el fruto del cerebro humano,
cuando miro el bueno tan lejos del malo,
cuando miro el fondo de tus ojos claros.

Thanks to life that has given me so much.
It gave me my heart that is moved
when I see the fruit of the human brain,
when I see the good person so far from the
evil one,
when I look deep down into your clear eyes.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto
me ha dado la risa y me ha dado el llanto
asi yo distingo dicha de quebranto,
los dos materiales que forman mi canto
y el canto de ustedes que es el mismo canto
y el canto de todos que es mi propio canto.

Thanks to life that has given me so much.
It gave me laughter and tears.
That is how I distinguish happiness from
sorrow,
the two materials that form my song

and your song that is the same song
and everybody's song that is my own
song.

Gracias a la vida...!!

Thanks for life...!!

* * * * *

In Memoriam

(Published in *Seeds of Unfolding*, fall 1991)

Tomas Agosin, M.D., co-founder in 1988 of the Cafh seminars, "Psychotherapy and the Spirit," died suddenly this past summer. He was on vacation in Martha's Vineyard with his family when an embolism put him in a coma from which he never regained consciousness. He was flown to a hospital in Worcester and died there on August 18.

Tomas has been a member of Cafh Order since 1964. Just before he died, he was on a weeklong retreat. For Tomas, a conscious ongoing relationship with death was integral to living with meaning and purpose. Tomas lived life to the fullest. All who knew him have been deeply imbued with his courage and compassion. We will remember him and carry forward his work. His is a spirit of hope and transcendence.

* * *

It has been many years since he died and I still think of him every day--well, to be more honest, it's almost every day. He sits with me as I do psychotherapy, and like the ever-present supervisor, he advises me on what to say and how to be creatively open to each client who sits before me. He is often in my heart when I mediate. Almost every

year since he died, I have visited his grave on Good Friday. I sit on the ground with my back against the black marble stone and I meditate there with him:

Divine Mother,
Let me enter the Temple of Your Heart.
Here at the temple of Tomas' grave
I come to You.
I leave my problems and difficulties
At the doorstep of Your Temple,
Even as I used to leave them in Tomas's office
So long ago.
Thank You, Divine Mother
For the gift of Tomas Agosin in my life.
For ten years I learned and grew
And became more of who I really am,
Through his tender care and consolation.
Now, with Tomas still in my heart,
I ask for Your Consolation.

Reference:

Shorto, Russell (1999). *Saints and Madmen: Psychiatry Opens its Doors to Religion*.

New York: Henry Holt & Co.

* Other establishment centers followed suit, including Harvard and Stanford Universities. Tomas Agosin led the first panel on Psychotherapy and Spirituality at the American Psychiatric Association. Other members of the Agosin team similarly broke ground at the American Psychological Association.

**Thanks for English translation by Tomas' friends, Isabel Heredia and Delia Tolz.

Tomas Agosin: Introduction to Psychotherapy & Spirituality

at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine Cape Cod Institute, July 1990

In the first of what was eventually to become fifteen years of weeklong Psychotherapy & Spirituality seminars at Cape Cod, four therapists presented their views. Their leader, R. Tomas Agosin, M.D. was by then well entrenched and a respected teacher in the department of Psychiatry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He had been speaking out for two years in New York and several other workshop venues, but this was the opening to a wider audience at the highly prestigious Einstein Cape Cod seminars. He began informally, by telling his audience of mental health practitioners about his own life, as a way to describe the unfolding and growing interest in the interface of two fields that had previously been notably contentious.

To me, psychological life and spiritual life are the most intimate companions. Together they make up what is subjective in life, and to even separate them, as we often do, is rather arbitrary and kind of silly. I guess we need to talk about it--our subjective life--from different points of view, and that's why we separate it into the psychological and spiritual dimensions. But I've struggled for a long time, wondering whether they are the same, or how they may be different. It's like a Zen koan: are the psychological and the spiritual one and the same? Or are they different? Is it one or two? That question more than anything else motivates me to explore those issues.

Psychotherapy supposedly is the healing of the psyche, the healing of the soul. So even the name of what many of us do, psychotherapy, has to do with this question. We know that as therapists we ourselves, as well as our patients, bring both the psychological and spiritual aspects to our work, and we see both also in our own private lives. The problem is that generally anything that smacks of religion or spirituality is ignored in our profession. There is remarkable little training, little that I know of at least, in the straight world of psychiatry, psychology, and social work that really addresses this question in a

direct and ongoing way. Usually the only way spirituality is dealt with is that it is interpreted as regressive or as “pathological behavior.” But I come in a very personal way, wanting to integrate psyche and spirit. I want to make this integration as a psycho-clinician and in my own life.

I will tell you a little bit about my life and how these two aspects of my subjective experience have come together. I was born to Jewish parents in Chile, which is a Catholic country. My parents were not religious. They were politically leftist, which is almost a kind of religion in itself. My spirituality was from very early on tied to social service and bringing justice to all, so that the benefits of society could be available to everyone. It is not difficult to think that way in a very poor country where you see poverty all around you. At the age of thirteen, I had my Bar Mitzvah. At the time, it was not exactly clear to me why I wanted to do it. I was the only one in my family who actually went through the ritual, but there was something pushing me to do it, to ritualize and to mark the event of becoming a man, to make the initiation into adulthood by being involved in making a connection to God. By reading the words of the Torah, I wanted to raise and open my consciousness to the Divine. I was impelled to do this even though, as I said, my parents were not religious and nobody in my immediate family had done it before. I did not know at the time--I did not know what my parents knew--that I was under a death sentence; but clearly that was what was pushing me in the direction of the spiritual life. Then, at the age of sixteen, I made a very important connection between spiritual life and service. This connection came to me as an epiphany, a sudden understanding. At that time I felt that the main problems of the world were due to selfishness. I realized that if I were going to help the world--if I was going to transform

the world, it would have to be by transforming my own selfishness. And at that point I started on a spiritual path that I have been involved in ever since. Now that was one branch, the religious branch of my early life.

Then there was the other side; there were other forces operating inside of me. Clearly a most important factor was the fact that I was born with a tumor on my right leg. The leg was amputated when I was four years old. When I was six, my parents were told--and I did not know this until much later in my life when my parents told me--that the rest of the tumor that had remained in the stump had become malignant and the doctors thought there was no possibility for me to live very long. That diagnosis was reversed when I was thirteen. But my parents knew, and people around me knew, and so that death sentence produced in me probably an unconscious, or maybe it was a more subconscious need to look towards the meaning of life. I was vitally interested in existential issues; the Divine must have pushed me in that direction. I think there are some studies, especially from Kubler-Ross and others, that report on how kids who have cancer and are going to die soon awaken to these questions of meaning very early in their lives. And I think that, even though I didn't know it at the time, that need for existential meaning was very much operating inside of me.

I decided to go into medicine, which I think was a good compromise formation, satisfying both psychological and spiritual needs. The psychological aspect had to do with an identification with the aggressor who had done terrible things to me. I identified with the doctor who cut off my leg. And, at the same time, the spiritual aspect had to do with finding a way of service, a way of giving to others.

In college, I discovered depth psychology when I took two courses on Jungian psychology, “Satan and the Psyche” and “Dreams, Imagination, and the Religious Experience.” These courses led me to the discovery of Jung, which became a very important part of my life. I continued in my spiritual path at the time, and also--since it was the 60s—had a few psychedelic experiences, while I continued my spiritual search.

In medicine I found psychiatry, which I feel has been my true vocation. Here I found a place to deal with and heal the soul. This was the field where one would attempt to heal the whole being, not just an organ or system of different organs. I started residency training in psychiatry, and began to look around for my training analyst. Since I already had a very strong, positive transference to Thayer Greene who had taught me those two courses in college on Jung, I started Jungian analysis with him. I think I also wanted to go into Jungian analysis for a couple of other reasons. One reason was because I feared that in Freudian analysis my spiritual life would have been interpreted away, or would be seen as pathological. And where did I get that idea? I got that idea, first of all, because everything I knew of Freud’s thinking about religion gave sort of a negative connotation to it. Religion was pathologized, was considered regressive, was considered infantile.

The second reason was due to an experience in my first year of training that had quite an impact on me. During a case conference given by a very revered teacher, a Freudian psychoanalyst in my program, it came to light that the patient who was being presented in the conference had been in Jungian analysis. It was said that the Jungian analyst had had the gall to discuss religion with the patient, and they had read books together, and they had discussed these books about religion as part of the treatment. The

residents sneered and laughed, and the attending psychiatrist talked in a very derogatory way about how terrible the treatment was. I had just started my own Jungian analysis at the time, which nobody in the room knew. At that moment I truly understood what it means to be “in the closet.” I felt mortified. But I also felt that I was in a way reliving the events of 1914 when Jung and Freud parted their ways.

Let me just digress a moment to talk a little bit about Freud and Jung because I think it is important. They parted their ways because of two main differences. One was a different understanding of libido. Freud saw it only as sexual in nature. Jung saw it as a much broader, psychic energy, the psychic force of the soul. It has a sexual component, but it has more than that. And second, they disagreed because of the role of religion and spirituality in the psyche. You know, so much attention has been paid to the relationship between the two men, but I think it says something about the importance of the topic of spirituality too. As you probably know, Jung became very involved in the psychoanalytic movement early on and, after reading *The Interpretation of Dreams* in the early 1900s, he got personally very involved with Freud. Jung became Freud’s “favorite son.” And he was going to be the one to take psychoanalysis to the world. He was the only non-Jew of the inner circle at that time, and so he would not be subject to anti-Semitic prejudice and, therefore, he was going to be the one to bring about exposure of psychoanalysis to the world. He became the first president of the International Psychoanalytic Association. In 1909 Freud and Jung came to the United States together, and it seems that there was the beginning of the end when they really spent all that time together. Their split culminated in 1914 when they parted their ways, primarily because of theoretical problems, especially concerning the issue of religion and spirituality in the psyche. You probably

also know that when he left Freud, Jung had a deeply troubled time; and over a period of several years he discovered his own relationship to the unconscious which, he found, had other aspects besides just infantile sexuality in it.

Now to return to my introduction of me: I was there struggling with all this Freudian training and being a closet-Jungian in this psychoanalytic institution. At that time in my residency training, there was absolutely no talk about religion and psychiatry except in ways that religion was seen as pathological and regressive. That's the only thing I ever heard about it. During those years, the spiritual and psychological were totally dichotomized in my life. I had to really separate them. I had my spiritual practices on one side, and on the other side I had my psychiatry training which was dealing with patients. The two worlds were kept totally separated. I saw my patients as bringing only psychological issues to the consulting room. That's usually all they talked about. Whenever spiritual issues did arise in the treatment, I put them aside; first of all, because I didn't know what to do with them; and second, because I was afraid to bring them to supervision. I would usually "forget" that those issues had come up. I was very afraid that I too would be seen as pathological if I talked about the religious things my patients said. What was important at the time was that I saw my patients strictly as "psychological people." I didn't see them as having anything to do with the spiritual life. They were my psychological world.

With my spiritual companions and friends, I spoke about spiritual issues. Now obviously, at times when we would talk, there were clear personal concerns, conflicts, psychological struggles they were going through, but I would think to myself, "Well, their spiritual practice will take care of that." Again, what was important was that I was

seeing them as “spiritual people.” They were totally dichotomized: the psychological and the spiritual. I lived in two worlds.

Slowly with time, however, I began talking psychology with my spiritual companions, and spiritual issues with my patients. And finally, I have come to be comfortable with the reality that they are always there together, psychology and spirituality intertwined, impossible to separate. I have come to know that even when, on the surface, it appears to be the most anguished of psychological issues, it is there where the spirit shines. And the other way around too, where the issues appear to be spiritual ones, the psychological dimension is always present as well. Now I am continuing to struggle on how to work with this, in my personal life and in my thinking. It is very important, I think, how we conceptualize and do our theoretical thinking in the clinical domain.

I will give you just a few examples that have appeared recently, examples where the interface of psychology and spirituality comes up in the clinical world.

- A psychotic man tells me that half of his body is Al Capone and the other half is Jesus Christ, and that he can't tolerate anymore dealing with this struggle. “Please help me,” he says.
- Last week in psychotherapy a Buddhist woman told me the following dream: “I was giving the Dali Lama some wine, some liquor. I very reverentially passed the cup to him and he smiled at me.” She woke up in a state that she described as having been in the presence of the Divine.
- A psychiatric resident confessed to me with great fear that she had intuitive powers, feeling she probably was a psychic. She said sometimes she can tell

what is going to happen next, and it happens. And then she senses what people are going to say next, and they do say it. And she told me that she is scared to mention it to me, and that in secret she often has felt she might be psychotic.

- In a chronic ward of a state hospital, an eighteen-year old Black woman is terribly agitated, screaming, running around the ward, randomly violent, impossible to control--except when she hears the voice of Jesus. Then she is calm, well-related. She said, "The Lord is speaking to me," smiling with a beatific smile, after she has rampaged through the ward.
- A social worker in therapy confesses missing having talks with God.
- A forty-nine year old scientist, very successful in his field, comes to his session and tells me how ecstatic he feels as he walks on the street, that he sees all people as being made of light, and he is in a state of ecstasy.

These are all examples of how the psychological and the spiritual, or the numinous, appear together in the psychotherapeutic process. (Rudolf Otto and Jung also used the word "numinous" to describe the feeling a person has when one encounters the Holy.) I don't think it's just an issue of language. We can't just say that the Al Capone is evil or a bad object, with Jesus Christ being goodness or the good object. I think it is not just that, but something more complex. A spiritual, or numinous, feeling always is experienced, by the person who is going through it, as something very powerful and important. I think that feeling, that phenomenon, is very important for us to understand. We need to look at that and see how we can make some sense of that spiritual/psychological phenomenal world, so that we can become better therapists.

Celebration

To begin to give the flavor of Tomas Agosin's personal outlook on life, here is a brief piece of his writing that was done for a spiritual retreat. It was found, neatly handwritten, double-spaced on yellow paper, among his personal and professional papers. He edited this work, as can be seen by a few words and a sentence scratched out, with alternative phrasing added. Tomas, who spoke both Spanish and English fluently, was always conscious of his desire to perfect his English. (In this paper, words and capitalization are exactly as he wrote them.) These are well thought-out, heartfelt comments for a talk he was to give, followed by an exercise for spiritual seekers to practice. What we have here is a window into his own wise, spiritual-and-therapeutic understanding of the human person, and his own deep appreciation of the mystery and sense of the sacred in the ordinary.

To celebrate!

To rejoice in the awareness of what is.

To appreciate!

To save what is being taken for granted and to give it value.

To transform the common place, the ordinary into something solemn and sacred.

When we celebrate we feel blessed. We feel we are in touch with reality in a deeper way. So much of the time we are involved in a very superficial relationship with what we come in contact with. When we celebrate we focus, we pay attention, we stop to notice. That increased awareness makes us feel blessed.

We spend so much of our time worried about things that usually do not deserve the amount of time and attention we dedicate to them. And even if they are important, much of the mental energy spent on those things tends to be excessive, wasteful and not productive. When we STOP the worried wanderings of the mind we can enter into a new relationship with what life is: to see, to appreciate, to celebrate.

Much of our mental life is spent going over events in the past: what we did, what happened, what we could have done different, etc...To celebrate is to awaken to the PRESENT. To celebrate is to love in the here and now. Celebration is in this moment: this person, this event, this aspect of life, this plant, this quality, this food, this time, this element, this animal, this immediate truth in front of me. That which is being celebrated fills our consciousness at the present moment. We make space for it in our hearts and minds.

Much of our mental life is spent fantasizing and projecting ourselves to the future. We plan; we wonder how we will deal with a particular situation; we hope; we wish; we create all kinds of scenarios about what is to be. When we celebrate we leave the future for when we will meet it and return to the moment, to the reality in front of us, which we embrace in a joyful way.

It feels good to celebrate. We notice what is there and we learn from it. Life becomes marvelous, miraculous, awesome--because life is. Water. Fire. Air. The earth. The universe. The true. The stars. The body. The window. Wood. Metal. Snow. The utensils I cook with. The table. It is all mysterious and wonderful: Full of wonder.

Nothing is more important than anything else. No moment of the day is more valuable than any other instant. Our minds tend to categorize and qualify everything. We make scales of value with every aspect of our lives. To be at work is of more value than the times spent getting to work. A meeting with the boss is more important than a routine breakfast with one's child. Writing a poem is more valuable time than vacuuming the living room. But life is made of all the moments in our day. No event, no moment is more important than anyone else. If any moment can be the last moment of

my life, how do I want that moment to be? Each event is essential. To love that moment fully; to do what I need to accomplish; to feel what life brings to me at this moment; to be fully in each instant, whether brushing one's teeth or meditating or creating. That is happiness. That is to celebrate!

Celebrations are usually reserved for Holidays. Maybe if we can learn to celebrate in a daily way we can transform every day into a Holy day.

A life of celebration is a joyous life.

A life of celebration is Spiritual life.

A life of celebration is a sacred life.

To appreciate.

To rejoice.

To celebrate!

Exercise:

To say in one's mind: "I celebrate you....." 10 times per day, to different things, people or events one encounters during the day. (i.e., "I celebrate you people in the bus"; "I celebrate you maple tree"; "I celebrate you clouds"; etc...) Whenever it is thought, make sure that your full attention, even if only for a few seconds, is given to your celebration. Enjoy!

Celebration of the Family

This paper was written by R. Tomas Agosin, M.D. and was published in the spring 1991 edition of *Seeds of Unfolding*, the quarterly journal of Cafh Foundation. The mystical tradition of Cafh, which draws from the spiritual roots of all the world's religions, is well expressed here in these simple and yet profound reflections on family life and the interconnectedness of all humanity. Dr. Agosin was first and foremost a deeply loving family man.

To celebrate the family! To celebrate the family means to affirm one's family as the human group where one shares and unfolds. Whatever one's feelings for one's family of past, present or future, they are the human community with whom one is connected.

Every human being is born from another person. During the first few years of life, we are totally dependent for our survival on other human beings. These two facts--that we emerge from another human being and that we are completely helpless and dependent on others early in our life--connect us to other beings in a most intense way which continues for the rest of our lives. We are social beings. We are "people-seeking," longing to connect with others, in real and symbolic ways.

The family is the human group with whom we first connect. It is in the relationship with those, at first, awesome, powerful, omnipotent beings--our parents or caregivers---that we begin to form an inner sense of relationships. The early relationships and experiences with our family of origin are the most important in our psychological make-up due to our intense dependence on them. They form the imprints on which all relationships will be compared and measured. As life unfolds and we experience new relationships, the earlier molds can be changed and modified. How dependent we are on

our early scripts and how much we can change our internal world is something that psychology and spiritual teachers debate and struggle with endlessly.

To celebrate the family! The family comprises the beings with whom one is most intimate. They are the people who stimulate most of the thoughts and feelings in us. They are the souls we spend the most time with in an inner, psychological way. To celebrate the family is to affirm that these beings are the human group one is closest to psychologically and spiritually.

When we think of our family, we tend to think of the past generation and the present generation--grandparents, parents, spouses, children, and grandchildren. But a more accurate understanding of the family is to realize that one is part of an endless chain of generations. The family tree we belong to has very profound roots that go back thousands of years. We are all probably more connected with each other, family-wise, than we realize. I like to think that if we could all trace back our ancestors thousands of generations into the past, we would find that we truly are one human family and that we are all relatives. And, if we think of the family tree as growing upward, into the future, we can also imagine the widespread array of human contacts that our descendents will make. It inevitably will touch every religion, every nation, and every race. We are one branch of an immense tree that spreads in every direction endlessly and which connects us in some way with all human beings who were, are and will be.

When we celebrate the family, we celebrate the Human Family. We celebrate all of humanity by appreciating and rejoicing with our particular family. When we celebrate with our individual human group, we celebrate in the name of the whole world---we remember that our family goes beyond these few people I know. I celebrate fully with

them because they are the representatives of the whole. As a marvelous bumper sticker says: Think globally; act locally.

We celebrate the family because it is with them that we are most truly ourselves. We bring the best and the worst of ourselves to them. Our greatest love and our deepest difficulties are shared with them. To celebrate the family involves a continuous inner work to create the best human community we can develop. When we perfect our relationship with our family we perfect the world, we create a better human community.

To celebrate our parents! How hard it is to see one's parents as real people, ordinary souls, struggling to find meaning and happiness like anyone else. Because of the early dependent relationship we had with them it is difficult for them, and for us, to see one another as equals. As children, we experienced them as powerful, omnipotent, giving, and frustrating, but clearly as the most important people in our lives, people whom we admired and imitated. As adolescents we saw them as "square"--they were the embodiment of a great deal of what we rejected and rebelled against. But, as Mark Twain said, it is amazing how much parents grow in a few years when one goes from adolescence to young adulthood! From our twenties on, we slowly worked at and realized how much our parents are just like other people. With time we see them more clearly for who they are with their flaws and their good qualities. We come to appreciate them. We celebrate them the way they are! Many of us will have to reverse roles and take care of them one way or another in their late years. The freer we are from unfulfilled expectations and old grudges, the easier it will be to accomplish that task, and the easier it will be, when the time comes, to say goodbye.

To celebrate our spouses! To celebrate our lovers! To continually appreciate the human being with whom we are most intimate and most real. It is easy to do this at the beginning of the relationship when everything is magic. The work is to continue to see the beauty, the mystery, the excitement, the wonder of our companion. Patterns of relationship become fixed; assumptions about who the other person is become crystallized; each other is taken for granted; the energy invested at the beginning is withdrawn. No wonder so many marriages and partnerships end!

Woody Allen expressed it well when he mentioned how difficult intimate relationships are: we want our close partner to be like our parents but at the same time to undo all the bad things our parents did and make up for all their failings. Not easy for anyone to fit the bill! To celebrate our companions is to see them as they are, and not as we want them to be. It is to appreciate the particular ways in which they have come to face life and have unfolded in it. It is to celebrate their qualities, to bring the best of ourselves to them, and in the process, to bring out the best in them.

To celebrate our spouses is to rejoice in their growth and changes. We are thrilled when we experience new things, when we grow and transform. We are much less excited when our spouse changes because it demands that we see them anew and that the relationship change also. When we can rejoice in the new forms our partner and our intimate relationship takes, we can make our marriages places of continuous celebration.

We celebrate our children! As Kahlil Gibran said:

“Your children are not your children, they are the sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you yet they belong not to you.”

Children are such a miracle: from birth, to infant, to toddler, to child, to teenager, to young adult. To witness all the changes and to be part of their experiences is such a joy! How stifling and sad when we have expectations and demands that only distort and limit their endless possibilities.

To celebrate our children is to let them be free--to allow them to be themselves! We provide love, stability, a firm structure, values, and then we just watch them unfold. We celebrate their accomplishments. We celebrate their failures, for we know those will provide great lessons to them. We celebrate their struggles. And all along we are there in appreciation, in witness of their unfoldment.

To celebrate the family! To celebrate the human beings we are closest to! The world we personally live in is the world we create in our most intimate community. This is where we transform ourselves; this is where we create a new society. As we perfect our intimate relationships, we open new possibilities for all humanity. We rejoice in our small family; we celebrate the Human Family!

Mysticism & Psychosis

During the last three years of his life (1988-1991), Tomas Agosin, MD. was a leader among the group of mental health practitioners and teachers who have worked to bridge the worlds of psychotherapy and spirituality. Primary among his activities was a monthly series of seminars that he and Peter Cohen, Ph.D. led at the Cafh Foundation Center in Manhattan. At the first of those seminars, Tomas, Peter, and their friend, Mark Finn, Ph.D. each presented a short talk on some aspect of the interface between mental health, psychotherapy and various forms of spirituality. Tomas, being a psychiatrist, led off with a comparison of psychotic and mystical phenomena. A portion of that talk is given here. (The remainder is given later in his final paper entitled, "Psychosis, Dreams and Mysticism in the Clinical Domain.") This presentation was transcribed from an audiotape of the session. Although Tomas' strong Spanish accent cannot be duplicated, the casual, colloquial flavor of his talk is preserved here.

The way I got interested in this topic goes back to the beginning of my residency training in psychiatry. At that time I started working in an inpatient setting taking care of psychiatric patients. And I kept on thinking whether these people were considered saints in a previous time, and whether the saints of those previous years might be patients today in a ward. And so I started thinking: Is the mystic psychotic? Is the psychotic mystic? And there's some confusion about the topic. I won't give you the punch line. I hope we will develop it together. Just to give you some examples of this, or maybe some personal descriptions: I'll read you personal experiences that people talk about, and I want you to tell me whether it's a mystical experience or a psychotic experience. Here's the first one:

From the first, the experience seemed to me to be holy. What I saw was the Power of Love--the name came to me at once--the Power that I knew somehow to have made all the universes, past, present and to come; to be utterly infinite, an infinity of infinities, to have conquered the Power of Hate, its opposite, and thus created the sun, the moon, the

planets, the earth, light, life, joy and peace, never ending....In that peace I felt utterly and completely forgiven, relieved from all burden of sin.

The whole infinity seemed to open up before me, and during the weeks and months that followed I passed through experiences which are virtually indescribable. The complete transformation of “reality” transported me as it were into the Kingdom of Heaven. I feel so close to God, so inspired by His Spirit, that in a sense I am God. I see the future, plan the Universe, save mankind; I am utterly and completely immortal; I am even male and female. The whole Universe, animate and inanimate, past, present and future is within me; all things are possible.

What do you think? Psychosis? Raise your hands, those who think it’s psychosis. Four. Mystical experience? All the rest (of sixty mental health professionals present.) That was a psychotic experience. I mean maybe it was a mystical experience too. This was a description of John Custance’s psychotic experience as quoted by Peter Buckley in *Schizophrenia Bulletin*. That’s what we need to think about, whether this dichotomy is necessary.

Okay, now listen to this one:

All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire, an immense conflagration somewhere close by in that great city; the next, I knew that the fire was within myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among

other things, I did not merely come to believe, but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then; I saw that all men are immortal; that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we call love, and the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain.

What was that? Is that a mystical experience or a psychotic experience?

That was a mystical experience by Dr. Burke, actually a Canadian psychiatrist, who related it.

Here are two briefer experiences. The next description is:

When I walk the fields, I am oppressed, now and then, by an innate feeling that everything I see has a meaning, if only I could understand it. And this feeling of being surrounded with truth, which I cannot grasp, amounts to indescribable awe sometimes. Have you not felt that your real soul was imperceptible to your mental vision, excepting a few hollow moments?

With that sense of awe, does that come from a psychotic moment or a mystical sort of experience? That one is mystical. That's described by Charles Kingsley in *Christian Mysticism*. He was a Christian mystic.

Now here's the last one:

I am simple; I need not think. Feeling is all; feeling is love. God is

love. Love is the expression of God. Feeling is only fire. Fired by God. The dancer becomes the divining motion. Dance is the divine in the world. The Dionysian religion. Love is God. I am love; I am God.

Was that part of a psychotic experience? Who votes for psychosis? Mystical experience? That was Neginski describing his psychotic moments. Neginski was ultimately hospitalized for a very long time. You can see there are obvious similarities, but I think there are also differences. *

The mystic develops a strong ego first, differentiating him or herself from others. And he or she then slowly starts separating from identification with the ego. And there's transcendence of the ego identifications, until there's an expansion of the sense of self. And then mystical experiences happen, through openness to the archetypal layer of the psyche. It happens through an awareness or openness to the unconscious. Afterwards, I think the consequence you'll see is that the mystic (or the previously undeveloped person who has expanded the sense of self) will be more committed to life. There's a more committed sense to life.

Now the person who ultimately becomes **psychotic** may start in the same place slowly developing a differentiated ego, but that **ego is weak**. That's an ego that can ultimately get overwhelmed by the unconscious. And that ego has trouble in dealing with conflict and anxiety, so that ultimately this weak ego is continuously eroded by experiences with conflict or anxiety, as opposed to growing through those experiences. I think that a person who ultimately becomes psychotic doesn't have a strong sense of self. Then a psychotic experience may come along, which as Perry says may be the psyche's

attempt to heal itself, but if the person is unable to work it through and integrate it or develop and grow from it, then they may develop a very narrow sense of life. It becomes a very reduced connection to the world; the person becomes very isolated from the world.

So I think two differences between the psychotic and the mystic are seen to be: both developmental, and in terms of the ultimate consequence of the experience. Another difference has to do with relationship to the world. In mysticism there is also a gradual reduction of attachment to the world, but it is done for the sake of expansion. So this detachment or gradual reduction of attachment to the world is not in the sense of being uninvolved, but in the sense of seeing things as transitory; seeing things as not ultimately that essential or important. There is something else that is deeper or more profound to which the mystic connects.

In psychotic people, chronically psychotic people, there is actually profound attachment to whatever world is there for them, because they don't have sufficient ego to differentiate from it. So they fuse with whatever is in front of them. There's a fusion and a continuous shifting of the world, either positive or negative, depending on what's going on inside of them at that moment. Because they don't have a separate sense of self, they fuse with everything. And this weak ego has no place to stand on itself to be able to look at the experience. So they sort of attach and merge with everything.

Another difference has to do with how the person relates to change. A mystic, or a spiritually-developed person welcomes change, out of their own sense of having grown or of having new growth opportunities. On the other hand, when you work with people who have a tendency toward psychosis, change is viewed as very, very threatening. In

fact change is one of the biggest precipitants of another psychotic episode. Almost invariably the episode is precipitated by some kind of change, even in the smallest things.

The mystic tends to take responsibility, not only for themselves, but also for all aspects of life around them. The psychotic does not take self-responsibility but rather projects out of themselves those things that seem especially negative.

The mystic tends to reduce self-importance. They reduce themselves to a minimum, seeing themselves as a “nothingness” in the face of the immensity of the sacred. In contrast to that, the psychotic tends to have inflated self-importance. They see themselves as omnipotent, omniscient, feeling all-important and as “center of the world.”

The mystic usually tends to have ever increasing serenity. This has to do with the detachment and recognition of the transient aspects of life. They are not going up and down so much with the emotions and the changes of life, but they are more involved with a deeper aspect of life that they connect with. In contrast, the psychotic tends to have very little serenity. The only peace they find is when their possibilities are very reduced; when they have a very, very small margin of thought, of feeling and of pre-occupation in life. Obviously, the increasing serenity of the mystic will lead him or her to be more open in life, more involved in life, and more loving towards all beings. The psychotic tends to be very closed, having difficulty relating with anybody, and clearly withdrawing from the world.

Now just a few other phenomenological differences regarding the experiences: first, the mystical experience will rarely be described as thought-disordered. Although it is ineffable, usually it is coherent and what is described is clear. The psychotic person tends to be thought disordered so their common thought processes are not working well,

and their descriptions often are not very lucid. The mystical experience is self-limited, usually brief, even though it leaves so vivid an imprint that it can be remembered clearly twenty-five years later (as we saw in Dr. Burke's description.) The psychotic person gets stuck there and may be unable to come out of the experience. Often the mystical experience (with the exception of what John of the Cross called "The Dark Night of the Soul") tends to be less frightening and less aggressive. In the psychotic experience there is usually more aggression and more paranoia. It is a more frightening kind of experience.

There are times when it is very difficult to know what it is that a person is going through, and it is only the result of the experience that clarifies retrospectively what it was. Most importantly, I hope this discussion will make us more sensitive to the personal, subjective experience of others. We need to remain open and respectful, without judgment, helping the psychotic to heal, and helping the mystic to live fully all the possibilities latent in the human soul.

*Portions of this talk were published in *Seeds of Unfolding*, VI, 4, p. 12-14. Dr. Agosin's comparison of similarities and differences between mysticism and psychosis can be found there; and in the present volume a more fully-developed comparison can be found in the table and descriptions found on pages 85 to 96.

References:

Burke, Dr. as cited in William James (1902/1961). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.
New York: Macmillan, p.313f.

Custance, J. as cited in Buckley, P. (1981). Mystical Experience and Schizophrenia.
Schizophrenia Bulletin, 7, 3, p. 517.

Beyond the Superego God: Commentary on John Shea's Article

A frequent topic for discussion at the Cafh Psychotherapy & the Spirit seminars was the various god-images that people carry; that is, the image of the Divine One that grows and develops over time, and one that can be studied by psychologists and other therapists. For one of those seminars, the presenter was John J. Shea, OSA, a Catholic priest and professor of Pastoral Counseling at Fordham University. Following John Shea's presentation, Tomas Agosin gave a reaction from a psychiatric perspective. Both papers were published in *Seeds of Unfolding*. First, Fr. Shea's paper is summarized here:

John Shea explained that our understanding of God and our relationship to God is meant to grow and develop as we mature. He described a concept that he called "the superego God"--an image of God that stems from childhood and which evolves as we unfold spiritually. He went on to describe the corresponding characteristics of the "God beyond the superego God" as follows:

- When I relate to the superego God, that God seems to me an external object. As I grow inwardly, I experience God as close and present.
- While the demands of the superego God appear completely external to me and impossible to fulfill, the laws of the God beyond the superego God seem like something within me begging me to set some direction for my life.
- Guilt is transformed as I become capable of responding to the call I hear in relating to God.
- The power and might of God beyond the superego God become like an energy that I can participate in and help to further.
- The battle for control disappears with the new representation beyond the superego, and I have a sense of self-surrender.
- Personal experience replaces belief as the way of knowing God.
- While I previously tried to run away from the voice of the superego God, now I have to stop and pay attention to the voice of God within. It fosters a sense of responsibility in me.
- My relationship to the superego God is static, but my relationship to the God beyond the superego draws me into further mystery and meaning.

Following this presentation, the discussion emphasized the fact that the topic here is God as experienced by human beings, not the Reality of God as defined by theologians. Dr. Agosin's formal remarks are as follows:

When discussing the concept of the superego God, John Shea avoids the question of whether or not God really exists. Yet the discussion remains valid: Ninety seven percent of American people have a relationship with something we call God, whether or not "God" exists in reality. John, who is a priest, has more of a theological perspective than I do as a psychiatrist, but I think he has developed two interesting views that people have of who God is. Basically, he seems to be thinking about what we psychotherapists call "internal god representations." Let me expand on these ideas a bit.

The two god images John refers to are both verifiable experiences of the Divine. One god image is what he calls the superego God. This is in contrast to the religious idea of the God who is transcendent, beyond all possibilities of understanding. I think that the superego God may, in fact, be the internal representation of that Transcendent God. Through our experiences with parents and the things we are taught as children, the transcendent God is the way many people think about God through what we in psychology call transference. We develop an internal representation of a God that we can understand.

Yet I also think, for many people, there is a God beyond the manifest, everyday reality, and later I want to discuss that Transcendent God in a little more depth. At the same time, there's another God, as John described it. This is the Immanent God--the God in all things. This is the God that we know personally, intimately. This God is everywhere and in all things.

A few years ago, Ram Dass was speaking at a conference, and he mentioned the difference between himself and a psychotic. He said that a psychotic may think that he is Jesus Christ. He feels he is the Christ, he and no one else. Ram Dass, on the other hand, also thinks that he is Jesus, but he believes that everyone else is the Christ as well. Everyone is Jesus Christ; everyone is God; everything is God. [This corresponds to the Hindu idea of the *Atman*, the God within and without, an idea that was very influential on Ram Dass's spirituality, as well as Tomas Agosin's. (Ed.)]

The experience of this Immanent God is being able to see, feel, experience everything--from the clouds, to the garage, to each of you, even to the pain in my back--as God. To have a relationship with God, so intimate that we know that immediacy of God in all of reality, is to have a different experience of God, one that is closer to what John calls the Personal God.

So there is the Immanent God who is personal and can be related to in a personal way; and there is the transcendent God, the image of which can be buried in childhood so that it becomes like a superego God. But I want to raise that God to a better light.

The God who is Transcendent is beyond all manifestation, that is, a God that cannot be put into words, a God that cannot be made into an image--that is the God beyond all understanding. Maybe that Transcendent God can be experienced and known only in the most profound of silences, in the moments where there is no concept, where there is no feeling, and where we are beyond all reality that we know. It is the God--the Who and the What--that is there when your mind is empty.

Another way to look at the contrast John has pointed out is to see his god representatives as gendered god images. The first, it seems to me, relates to a patriarchal,

masculine God, whereas the second is a feminine, maternal God. The first, the superego God, is the God of the Old Testament who is a God of demands, a God full of wrath. We also see Him as pointing the way: He is the God of the Ten Commandments, the God of “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not.” He is a God of action and a God of creation. To create something, it is necessary to be outside of that thing that is created. The superego God is outside of oneself. One prays to God the Father, the creator of Heaven and Earth.

In contrast, one can think of the Personal God who is the feminine, matriarchal God found in some images of the Divine. This is a God of acceptance, a God of mirroring, a God of love. It is also the God of being--no action, no doing--and the God of consolation. Oftentimes, the feminine images of God bring out in the soul the feeling of surrender and hence, a more intimate relationship. This relationship is clearly seen in the following prayer:

I adore Thee, Divine Mother
and I offer Thee my affections,
my thoughts and my actions.
May I be a pure nothing
that Thy adorable Will be
fulfilled, now and always.

Besides the contrasting views of gender regarding God, Peter Cohen has found, through his research, other interesting perspectives. He has studied psychoanalytically trained, religiously committed clinicians and asked them about their belief in God. Those trained in psychoanalytic theory tend to have a somewhat reductionistic view of religion. What Peter found was a contrast between what people would admit in public and their

more private experience of God. In public, clinicians were willing to share their view of what Peter coined “The Cocktail Party God.” “Yes,” they would admit, “God is the force of the Universe,” or “It is the Aesthetic Value of Things,” or “It is the Goodness in Everyone.” These views tend to be abstract but are consistent with psychological development where, after a while, adults say, “I don’t believe in that guy with the long beard and robe. That’s primitive stuff.” Yet, what these clinicians are willing to say publicly remains abstract and undefined.

But then there is the personal experience of God, what Peter calls the “Ear-nibbling God.” This is the experience of God that appears in a personal crisis. This Personal God is the God one can love, the God to whom we offer ourselves. This is also the God at whom we can get angry when things go wrong. This God is much more relational, immediate, and intimate.

Let me share with you a personal experience. As a child, I had a leg amputated because of a tumor. That operation saved my life and affected me, well into adulthood, in many deep ways. Then, eight years ago, while on vacation, I was playing around on the beach when, out of the blue, I had a massive pulmonary embolism due to a blood clot from my leg. I fainted because I had a seizure, and I could have died. I was picked up by a helicopter and flown to a hospital. When I came to, I started to pray. It wasn’t an abstract prayer at all. Looking back on it is very interesting. It was a real life-or-death crisis. Such a time as this in life is when you know your real relationship with God. And what I prayed was, “Divine Mother, let thy will be done.” That is, I had an experience of surrender. With that prayer, which I said like a mantra, I had an image of these arms that were holding me. The image was just right. I had no fear; I had no sense that I was

necessarily about to die. It was very strange. I was there, looking outside and hearing this incredible helicopter noise while I was seeing the water below, flying out to Boston. And all the while I was feeling the presence of the Divine Mother. That is, I think, the Personal God, the real God--not the abstract concept of God.

In his paper, John Shea talked about the god representation, and he referred to Ana Maria Rizzuto who is an analyst from Argentina, now in this country. She wrote an excellent book, *The Birth of the Living God*. She discusses how the god image develops, that is, what psychoanalysts call the “object representation” of God. She writes that it is “out of this matrix of fact and fantasy, wishes, hopes and fears, in the exchange with those incredible beings called parents, the image of God is concocted.” Family events, life events, religion and so forth all play a part. But it comes down to the fact that our representation of God is rooted in very early experience, as John described.

I think there is one point that John didn't emphasize enough. According to the Object Relations school of psychoanalysis, God exists as a “transitional space” or as “transitional object,” which are terms coined by the English analyst Winnicott. Winnicott depicts a particular relationship that the toddler has, when he or she needs to move away from total dependence and fusion with the parents into autonomy. In fact, older children and adults sometimes have that same need. But you cannot move out of that state of dependence without carrying with you some concrete representation of the security that the parent has provided early in life. You need eventually to carry that security inside you, but before it gets internalized you often need to carry it in the form of some particular object to help you deal with the anxieties, the fears, the panic of becoming one's own person.

We call this “the transitional object,” which is for the child Linus’s blanket, a teddy bear, or some other beloved toy. What this concrete thing does is to evoke the feeling of security, of comforting that the mother provides. According to Rizzuto, God lives in that thing. God is that transitional object. In those early images that are very childlike but also very attractive, we see, for a certain period in our lives, an image of God.

I was born in the Jewish tradition, but I remember going to churches during my childhood in Chile and being terrified to see the image of Christ on the cross. For me as a child, the suffering of Christ was very real. I think God does exist as a transitional object. That image helped me to deal with my own suffering. God, apart from those images, does not have real, concrete form. The images of God are made up of one’s own internal representations, images and symbols. Religion and society provide us with the symbols that we can use.

The elaboration of the god representation usually occurs in moments of crisis, as does our Personal God. I think that crisis and tragedy are the particular times when we deepen our relationship with God and with life as a whole.

The Hindu Kali and the other images of the dark goddesses are associated with destruction and death, and they, I believe, show us a realistic view of life. Through our suffering, we transcend our Pollyanna-like view of life and come to terms with the darkness, the horror of life. We need to discover that both the horror and the beauty of life are inside and outside of us, and God partakes of both.

I think that, in some way, we awaken to the awareness of the union of opposites when we go through moments of crisis. I think, also, we grow in the psychospiritual

dimension as we work on our relationship with God, as we transcend our more limited view of God and see how we can expand it, and go beyond!

In discussion subsequent to this presentation, Tomas Agosin came to the viewpoint that psychospiritual development may very well progress in stages, from belief in the superego God to a more Personal God (as described by John Shea); but then a later shift (for some people) may allow a more mystical, experiential appreciation of the God who is both Transcendent and Immanent, both vast, beyond all comprehension, and intimate, incarnate in all that is around and within us. Note also that Tomas Agosin was an experienced meditator, so that his comment that “God--the Who and the What--that is there when your mind is empty” is a concept that comes from his own personal experience.

References:

- Glaser, John W.(1973). “Conscience and Superego: A Key Distinction,” in C. Ellis Nelson (Ed.) *Conscience: Theological and Psychological Perspectives*, New York: Newman press.
- Homans, Peter. (1968). “Toward a Psychology of Religion: By Way of Freud and Tillich,” in Peter Homans (Ed.)*The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jacobi, Mario (1984). *The Analytic Encounter: Transference and Human Relationship*. Toronto: Inner City Books.
- Rizzuto, Ana Maria (1979). *The Birth of the Living God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Inner-Dialogue Meditation

As a member of Cafh Spiritual Order, Tomas Agosin practiced and taught several methods of meditation. In his efforts to bring the gifts of spirituality to the mental health world, he sometimes taught meditative practices to his colleagues at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and at the monthly Psychotherapy & the Spirit Seminars that were sponsored by Cafh Foundation. One such method, usually known as the Discursive Meditation, is comprised of a three-part process. Each part takes five minutes. In the first five-minute period, the meditator invokes the Divine, asking for guidance or help for a personal issue. In the second five-minute period, the meditator tries to quiet the mind so as to incubate the question. During the third period, the meditator responds, from his or her own deeper Self, to the question that was posed in the invocation. Amazing wisdom is often found in this process of inner dialogue.

Underlying this fifteen-minute meditative process, Cafh suggests that the meditator may follow a different spiritual theme each day, so that progress along the spiritual path is fostered. Visual imagery is often helpful in keeping the focus and deepening the meditation. Tomas Agosin gave the following teaching about four specific themes for what he called the Inner-Dialogue Meditation.

Theme: The Two Roads

Effect: Disattachment

The meditator finds himself at a crossroads, for he realizes that in order to discover his inner self, his inner voice, he must search deeply within himself. However, he is constantly confronted in his search by his attachment to his personality, his emotions, his mind, and his view of his role and place within society, his family and his profession, and so forth. In order to search deeply for a new possibility for his life, he must free himself of these attachments so he may see himself as he is, without images and illusions. Only then will he be able to set foot on a new path of inner discovery. The meditator experiences this as being at the junction of two roads--the old road of an unfulfilling personal past and the new road that offers the possibility of wholeness, love and offering. Although specific characteristics of the new road may not be well-defined, the meditator knows he cannot hope to discover them until he begins to disentangle

himself from his web of attachments. He therefore tries to understand how strong his attachments are and asks for the strength to leave them in order to open himself to a new road.

Theme: The Standard

Effect: Election

This meditation is one of definition regarding one's life. The meditator asks himself what is the most important vision he has for his life. What are his deepest expansive possibilities, what could be the underlying meaning to his life. For the first time, he sees the possibilities of a new life and is able to discern some specific aspects of that life. He has the desire to follow these possibilities, to give his whole life in faithfulness to them. The meditator sees a new life of authenticity and love before him and chooses to follow and to become this life.

Theme: The Golden Temple

Effect: Consolation

The previous two meditations have been ones of action and work; this is a meditation of stillness, a meditation of being. The road of discovery has led the meditator to the realization that what he seeks--meaning, authenticity, wholeness, the giving of himself--lies deep within himself. Here the meditator asks simply to be, to be bathed in the comfort and consolation of this understanding. In the stillness of his inner being, the meditator is alone with his mystery, centered deep within himself in wholeness and harmony.

Theme: The Veil of Manifestation

Effect: Joy

The wholeness and harmony the meditator has encountered within himself transforms his vision of life, and he emerges from the Golden Temple to view the world with new eyes. In a sense he rediscovers the world, for he now sees it as a unity and wholeness. He realizes that the differences that separate men are only superficial. He knows from his own experience that the wall of superficial differences crumbles before the eyes of love that see the true essence of human beings common to all. The meditator asks to open himself to this oneness, wholeness and unity of life, to love all life and to offer his life to Life. A deep inner joy results from knowing that one can see the world without preconceptions and can see into the essence of life.

Forgiveness: Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions

By R. Tomas Agosin

While he was a practicing psychiatrist in New York City, Dr. Agosin felt and thought deeply about the issues that his clients and patients were working on in their therapy. The following paper represents an early formulation of ideas that were developing in his mind during the last few years of his life. He presented this work originally at the Psychotherapy & the Spirit Seminars in the Cafh Center in Manhattan, and it was subsequently published in *Seeds of Unfolding* in 1990-1991.

Introduction

Forgiveness is clearly an experience that has profound consequences for anyone who experiences it, but interestingly, it has not taken up much space in either the psychoanalytic or psychological literature. It has been of great concern to religion and theology, but not much has been written about it in terms of the psychological mechanisms that may be determining it and its psychological consequences.

Forgiveness is one of the human experiences where the whole topic of spirituality and psychological life come together. Aside from the personal aspect of forgiveness, since it clearly touches all of us, my interest in this topic developed when I encountered it several times in my clinical practice and found that I did not have any clarity with which to think about it or work with it. In spite of the lack of psychological literature on the topic, it is starting to attract more attention in workshops, self-help groups, and psychospiritual conferences. Forgiveness is a central issue in all of our lives--all of us have been hurt, and all of us have hurt others. Many have said that forgiveness is the central issue in religion. I have also been thinking that forgiveness may be the central issue in psychotherapy. At the end of successful psychotherapy, what has happened is that we have forgiven ourselves and we have forgiven those who have hurt us.

Clinical Vignettes

Let me start with three examples from my clinical experience. The first is a middle-aged married female who was narcissistically wounded. She had an idealizing transference to me and expressed her desire for an overtly erotic relationship. Of course that is completely against professional ethics so I had no difficulty in telling her that would not be possible. She became angry with me and told me I was “stuffed with books and textbooks” and that I was heartless and unfeeling. We worked with the issue of her disappointment that I would not be for her in the ways she so ardently desired. Through dreamwork she came to realize that I represented her cut-off religious dimension; that I was a Christ-figure for her and that her love for me was of a deeper kind of yearning than the merely erotic. She longed for a Savior, and she had projected onto me her need for a spiritual connection in her life. The next session, she came back very excited to tell me

that she has a totally new experience. She had had a dream of a Christ-figure and she had discovered forgiveness. Not only had she forgiven me for not holding her physically, but also she had discovered that she had forgiven her parents for the ways they had mistreated and abandoned her in childhood. It made me begin to wonder: How did this forgiveness come about? What had happened within her psyche? What had changed?

A second clinical example: A middle-aged man came to therapy because of his great rages at his wife of ten years who had a substance-abuse problem. He wanted to forgive her but could not. Whenever his wife acted out by drinking, he became as if possessed and “could not” not react--he felt he simply had to react. He had gone to Al-Anon many times but had not learned very much there; the pattern repeated itself over and over again. He prayed to find forgiveness and to be able to control his reactions, but he could not. Why not? What is the forgiveness he sought?

A third clinical example: A twenty-three-year-old woman, a teacher, came to treatment because of generalized vague feelings of anxiety. After a few months of therapy, she remembered that she had been sexually abused, severely and repeatedly, by her father, from the ages of four to ten. She didn't feel anything as she recounted her dreams and memories. Yet she talked often about never being able to forgive.

What does it mean to forgive such brutality? Is “not forgiving” a way of defending oneself, protecting oneself? Is it even possible to forgive? I have heard holocaust survivors say, “I will never forgive! Nobody should forgive such atrocities!” Is that a healthier response?

Let us look at the word “forgiveness.” It contains the word “give” within it, that is, forgiveness is a gift. It is a gift for the one who is forgiven, but even more than that, it

is a gift for the one who forgives. One usually thinks that forgiveness is something that one does, but actually it is something that is given to the ego, to the self, to oneself. It “happens” to you, as it happened to the woman in the first clinical example.

Forgiveness in this sense is very closely related to the experience of grace. As with grace, some terrible inner state is alleviated. The ego “receives” forgiveness and experiences the relief of guilt, anger, anguish and other painful emotions that have consumed the self.

Forgiveness is more than resignation. To resign oneself is to give up; it is an experience of defeat. To forgive is much more than that. It is more than passive acceptance of what had been dealt to us by life. There is a true process of transformation here.

Stages

There are five stages involved in reaching forgiveness. First is the experience of being hurt. There is an evil that has been done; something has been destroyed; someone has been wronged. An aggressive act is committed and someone suffers.

The second stage of forgiveness is that there has to be total awareness that something bad has happened. One cannot ignore what has happened, even if it is very painful to think about it. Consciousness is essential for forgiveness to come about. The woman in the third clinical example had to remember what her father had done to her. The wrongdoing must be recognized and acknowledged.

To forgive others I have to have total clarity that I am hurt and that someone has wronged me. To forgive myself, I have to realize that I have committed an act that has hurt someone. I know in my own marriage, healing and renewal could only come about

when there was consciousness that we had both been hurt. It was only when we stopped pretending that everything was so perfect that we could resolve our difficulties. I had a dream once in which our marriage had changed from a game to a fierce confrontation, which then led to healing and a new life.

Similarly, several recent films dealing with the Vietnam War are an attempt to bring to our consciousness the very serious wrongdoings that went on there and, through that awareness, to facilitate the possibility of healing. When I saw **Platoon** and **Born on the Fourth of July**, I felt at first manipulated by the horrific, detailed scenes of warfare. But since then, I have realized that these movies are a way of trying to heal ourselves in a collective, societal way. It is through the vivid portrayal of the reality of the situation that we are forced to overcome our desire to deny what happened, to pretend “it wasn’t so bad.” It is through conscious recognition that an evil has been committed that the second stage of forgiveness comes about.

The third stage of forgiveness requires a special component: not only must there be recognition of the wrongdoing, but the story needs witnessing by another; it needs to be told; it requires confession. Not only must one become aware oneself of the aggression, but someone else must also hear about it, someone else must know about it. This is a very powerful and important step in the process of healing, and clearly a very important aspect of psychotherapy.

The role of the priest as spiritual director, and the role of the psychotherapist as doctor, is to hear what has happened; what has been committed in all the painful details. The victim must have his or her story heard; and the victimizers, in order to find forgiveness, must likewise confess their misdeeds. When the story is told, the listener

receives it without judgment, without reaction. Jung felt that confession is central to psychotherapy and he even went so far as to say that psychotherapy is built upon the practice of confession.

Yet there is another important aspect of forgiveness. We are not able to forgive unless we ourselves have been forgiven. Our inner life is created in relationship with others, and we cannot come to accept ourselves (or others, for that matter) unless we have had the experience of total acceptance. John Gartner, Ph.D. wrote a very nice paper on the capacity to forgive in which he talks about the persons in our lives in terms as the inner and external “objects” with whom we relate. He states, “The need for forgiveness by an object outside of the self is a psychological necessity. Paul Tillich, the theologian, has argued that self-acceptance in a vacuum without the mediation of a forgiving other is logically impossible. The same self cannot at once seek absolution from guilt and possess the moral authority to grant absolution.” We need the experience of others knowing our flaws, limitation, and darkness, and still accepting us. Then we can come to accept ourselves.

The fourth step in this process of forgiveness is the feeling or emotional experience accompanying the awareness of the act that has been committed--to fully feel all of the feelings of the hurt that has occurred; to go through the emotional experience of the pain from the evil act that has been perpetrated. Before we can forgive others, we need to feel the rage, to weep the sorrow, to feel the hurt, to experience the vulnerability. Before we can forgive ourselves, we need to feel that we are flawed, to feel remorse and guilt for the evilness of the act that we have committed. It is necessary to see clearly our imperfections and to acknowledge the dark side to our personality. Once one has faced

this reality, only then can one fully come to the realization that, in spite of one's badness, one is acceptable and one is good.

This is the working-through stage in which one needs to feel what needs to be felt, without judging it, without holding back. And this is the place where most people get stuck--they are unable or do not want to go through the purgative experience of anger, sadness, or guilt. The patient in the third clinical case did not feel anything when she recalled what her father had done to her. She had not entered this stage yet. Other people sometimes cannot go beyond the feeling stage--the man in the second example could not transcend his feelings of rage at his wife. He had to work through those feelings. *There is no possibility of forgiveness unless there is full awareness and a full emotional response to what has happened.*

This is the crux of the matter in working with persons who have been abused and have not regained a full emotional and factual recall of the abuse. So, in summary, after a wrongdoing has been committed, consciousness of the wrongdoing must take place. Then it must be witnessed; it must be felt, and only then can the fifth state in the experience of forgiveness come about--the transformative stage. Aggression is transformed into forgiveness and acceptance. Resolution and peace find their way into the soul. As the woman of the first clinical example expressed, "It happened to me." The all-consuming and painful emotions are resolved. In spite of the recognition of the evil that has been committed, somehow we remain in communion, in understanding. The person moves from hurt to healing, from rage to forgiveness, from disruption to communion.

How does this transformation take place? This almost miraculous process, so necessary to all of us in varying degrees, will be the focus of the remainder of this paper. To forgive, we recall, is more than resignation. To forgive is more than passive acceptance of what has been dealt to us by life. Forgiveness is an inner process that has much in common with the concept of grace.

Four Theories on Forgiveness as Transformation

I am going to venture here four possible theories that may explain how this transformation comes about. All of them involve the transformation of aggression, which I think, is the central experience of forgiveness.

The first theory I will call “transpersonal.” This theory was stimulated for me by the first patient, the woman who had a dream of a Christ-figure and later found herself in a state of forgiveness. Forgiveness comes about when the ego is touched and/or overwhelmed by the archetypal layer of the psyche in its positive aspect. It is when the Higher Self--what some people call the God within--in some way touches the ego or takes over the ego. The ego, which knows of its evil, is infused with an experience of goodness, of love, of light, which it does not experience as coming from itself but from “somewhere else.” Remember the woman in our example who said, “It just happened to me.” She received the “gift” of the ability to “forgive,” and transformed the dark feelings within her into love.

This inner transformation seems to be related to the experience of conversion recounted by some people. In the book *Bill W.*, the biography of one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, there is a description of his “bottoming out,” followed by a religious experience. It is as if the ego arrives at the total recognition that it has reached

bottom. It is a total awareness of one's limitations, one's own evil. Although one is aware of it, one is helpless. The ego is totally helpless, totally powerless. It is at this precise moment that the archetypal transpersonal psyche emerges, infusing the ego with a different experience of life. The self is transformed. It experiences forgiveness and love.

In forgiveness, then, the ego becomes conscious of its limitations and imperfections, making itself vulnerable and humble. In that state, it opens itself to the archetypal, transpersonal forces in the psyche--forces that heal it and give the ego the experience and capacity of forgiveness.

A second theory of forgiveness could be called the "transformation of the superego." From a punitive, sadistic, authoritarian superego ("You're bad; you must be punished"), the ego takes on more of a maternal quality, with the ability to forgive and be of assistance. For such a transformation to take place, there first has to be forgiveness of self. This can occur when there is humility--humbleness--vulnerability, which comes from the awareness of one's own imperfections, flaws, and dark side. At first, our superego demands perfection, and we defend ourselves and our position---we insist, "I'm OK." When we become conscious of our imperfections, the punitive superego makes us feel, "I'm all bad." When we reach forgiveness, the superego becomes more benign and accepting. We feel, "I am imperfect but I'm OK."

The same process takes place when we forgive others. It is our judging aggression toward others that is transformed. We acknowledge that what has happened was wrong, but our feelings about it have changed. In the case of the woman in the first example, she found forgiveness--her feelings were transformed regarding her relationships with me, and with her abusive mother and her deserting father. All her

aggression was modified and transformed into forgiveness, love, communion and acceptance.

How this process happens can also be explained in a third theory, one of “identification and empathy.” I believe that what happens here is not only the transformation of a judging superego into an accepting one, but also an identification with others through the recognition of our own dark side. All of us are imperfect, flawed evildoers. For example, you have committed an evil act. The same act I could have committed. We both need forgiveness. The recognition that we each have a dark side takes us away from the paranoid position that says, “I am good and you are bad.” It connects us with one another. It allows for the possibility of identification, compassion and connection.

I think Jung is helpful here when he speaks about the shadow, our unacceptable dark side: “The inferior and even the worthless belongs to me as my shadow and gives me substance and mass. How can I be substantial without casting a shadow? I must have a dark side too if I am to behold. And by becoming conscious of my shadow I remember once more that I am a human being like any other.”

When we realize we are all the same, we all have a dark side, then we can stop projecting our dark side onto others. We can become compassionate with those who are not able to control themselves because those are the same impulses that we have. No human being should be considered unacceptable to the human community; at the core we are all really the same.

Does this apply even to terrible crimes? Well yes, if you think about it, all of us have hurt others, even killed, in the sense that in our unconscious, in our dreams, we have

done such things. In our dreams we have done all sorts of things that would be unacceptable to us in our waking state. The difference between those of us who do terrible things and those of us who don't is simply that they act out the unacceptable and we don't. They remind us that that stuff is inside of us too. It is the empathic connection that allows for healing, for forgiveness. Then are we able to stop categorizing people with judgments of "good" and "bad."

Let me just summarize here the three theories of forgiveness we have discussed thus far. The process of forgiveness can be explained in terms of the "transpersonal" in which the higher self takes over the ego. In "superego transformation," the ego recognizes its own imperfection and comes to accept it, transforming the punitive, authoritarian attitude it had previously directed towards others into acceptance and tolerance. In the theory of "identification and empathy," the ego recognizes that all human beings have a dark side and all are capable of evil. Thus the ego identifies and empathizes with others, even when they do wrong, leading to a feeling of communion.

The fourth theory of forgiveness that we will discuss comes from a paper by Dr. John Gartner. He states that the incapacity to forgive is a manifestation of splitting, and that forgiveness comes about through the integration of both the good and bad aspects of oneself and others. He writes: "Mature forgiveness is an integrated, realistic view which contains both good and bad aspects of self and others" (because all of us are both good and bad). "Forgiveness allows us to absorb the full impact of the evil that men do while not losing sight of their humanity." This is where all four theories relate: "Self-forgiveness must be the integration of good and bad self representations in the same way that the forgiveness of others involves the integration of good and bad object

representations. The nature of both the religious and therapeutic process is to hasten this integration.” It reminds me of the prayer to “Our Father”: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Forgiveness comes about when there is an integrated view of oneself and others. And this is a crucial point: the “badness” is not split off and projected, but it is an integral part of life.

Forgiveness of Self and Others

Within each of these theories is the discussion of the forgiveness of oneself or the forgiveness of others. I think both of them clearly should be thought of as always going together. It is not possible to forgive others unless you forgive yourself. Let me go back to the examples to illustrate this. In the first example, the woman who had the Christ dream was able to forgive her mother who beat her and her father who abandoned her only when she had forgiven herself for the rage that filled her heart. In the second example, the forty-four-year-old man wanted to forgive his wife for her incapacity to stop abusing alcohol and all of the hurt that it created for him, the family and everyone. But he also needed to forgive himself--for his judgment, for his rage, for all his feelings. In Al-Anon, they speak of forgiveness as twofold--forgiving the loved one for all the things they have done under the influence of alcohol and forgiving oneself for having judged. And in the third example, the woman who had been sexually abused had to learn to forgive her father and she had to forgive herself for all her rage and other pent-up feelings. One cannot just forgive the other; one also needs to forgive oneself.

Consequences of Forgiveness

What happens to us when we go through this experience of forgiveness? What are we left with? What has happened within? First of all, forgiveness clearly has a

redeeming quality. To redeem, as defined in the dictionary, is “to release from blame, to be free from blame, to free from the bondage of sin; to atone.” Forgiveness redeems that which we are forgiven for and that which we forgive. It redeems our darkness. Father Thomas Hopkoff, a priest of the Orthodox Church of America, says it very well: “Forgiveness is breaking the chain of evil.” All too often, as we know very well from clinical experience, the ones who have been abused are the ones who abuse others: sexually and physically abused children tend to grow up to abuse their own children. The victimized become the victimizers, continuing an endless chain of hurt, from generation to generation, to generation. Only with the recognition of that hurt and the full experience of that pain, can the transformation of forgiveness come about.

To stop the chain of victimization is something that applies to all of us. We need, for example, to forgive our parents so that we do not repeat with our children the hurt that was inflicted on us. In order to do this, we need to recognize that our parents also have been hurt. We empathize with them and come to understand them. Perhaps all therapy can be understood as a forgiving of the failings of our parents and others we have loved, so that we are really free to love. Thus forgiveness redeems.

Forgiveness transforms our darkness into a great state of gratitude. In spite of our inferiority, we are graced by the infusion of acceptance. The self is deeply touched. We feel a profound sense of appreciation and thankfulness.

But even beyond redemption, humility and gratitude, forgiveness leads us to communion and love. To quote the theologian Paul Tillich: “Nothing greater can happen to a human being than that he is forgiven. For forgiveness means reconciliation in spite

of estrangement; it means reunion in spite of hostility; it means acceptance of those who are unacceptable; and it means reception of those who are rejected.

“In the midst of our futile attempts to make ourselves worthy, in our despair about the inescapable failure of these attempts, we are suddenly grasped by the certainty that we are forgiven, and the fire of love begins to burn.”

It is in the recognition of our limitations and our darkness that we find the light of love. Only when we face and embrace aspects we find unacceptable can we feel unconditionally acceptable. It is that state of our soul that opens our hearts to the deepest love, connecting us with all human beings, barred none.

References:

Anonymous. (1968). *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*. New York: Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. p. 120.

Gartner, John (1987). “The Capacity of Forgive: An Object Relations Perspective.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association. August, 1987, pp. 5 and 10.

Hopkoff, Fr. Thomas (1987). “Living in Communion.” *Parabola*, Vol. XII, No. 3, August, p. 55.

Jung, Carl Gustav. Cited in E. Tedd (1985), “The Value of Confession and Forgiveness According to Jung.” *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.39-48.

Tillich, Paul (1987). “To Whom Much Was Forgiven.” *Parabola*. Vol. XII, No. 3, August, pp.40 and 45.

Thompsen, Robert (1975). *Bill W*. New York: Harper & Row.

Exploring the Divine in Psychotherapy

The following paper originated as a talk that Dr. Agosin presented for the Psychotherapy & the Spirit series at the Cafh Center in New York. It was subsequently published in *Seeds of Unfolding* , 6, Summer 1989, p. 8-11. In giving an excerpt of his own dreamlife, Dr. Agosin gives a little of the flavor and style of his work with dreams, which became an important avenue for his access into the spiritual domain in psychotherapy. A portion of the paper is omitted here, as the client's case and reflections are included in a later paper, which is given below.

People come to psychotherapy for many reasons; whatever their incentive may be, they bring all of themselves to the analytical process. Not only will their neurotic conflicts emerge in the therapeutic journey but also their highest possibilities. This paper comes out of the desire to underline the importance of seeing the spiritual dimension in psychotherapy. The more that I considered the topic of this paper, the clearer it became to me that a different title might have been more suitable: rather than "Exploring the Divine in Psychotherapy," we could have called it, "Recognizing the Divine in Psychotherapy." There is not much exploration that can be done when the sacred appears; it needs to be recognized as such, validated and then left alone. It is not to be analyzed or reduced to anything else--just to be cherished for what it is. When the Divine appears, or better said, when the person becomes aware of the spiritual presence, this dimension will always have a powerful impact on the individual. It is the recognition of this presence that is so important.

Whether we talk of recognizing or exploring, we are speaking of the Divine--a term that brings very intense associations in everyone's mind, and which needs clarification. I speak here in a totally individual way: I will be using the term Divine to mean that which a person considers sacred, holy, meaningful or numinous. It is that

aspect of life, which the person relates to with awe, that which is valued. Often we think of the Divine as associated with God, but I am using the term more broadly: that aspect of life that one relates to with reverence, that which we consider larger than the Ego or personality of the individual.

I would pose that every human being has a relationship with the Divine, the sacred as defined here. Everyone believes in something that transcends him or herself: God, nature, physical law, an ideal, a project, or a concern. Everyone relates to something transcendent--it is a need of all human beings, theists, atheists, agnostics alike. The reason I wanted to discuss this topic is that it has been my experience that the relationship to the sacred--to that which is meaningful--always appears in psychotherapeutic work. At times patients come to treatment because of it--people who feel there is no meaning in their lives; at other times it becomes an issue after the immediate conflicts have been analyzed and worked through; at still other times it is totally enmeshed in other concerns and needs to be uncovered.

It is essential for the therapist to recognize the spiritual as such and not to try to analyze it or reduce it to anything else. Since most often it appears in religious symbology or terms, and because many therapists have been trained in psychoanalytic theory, we tend to feel uncomfortable with it. In psychoanalytic theory many spiritual concerns have been interpreted as "collective neurotic obsessions"--God being the projection of an infantile relationship to the father (Freud); or as the reappearance of primitive object relationships; or as regression to symbiotic oneness with primary objects. But to reduce the numinous to something else is to do injustice to the being. **We all have and need a relationship to the Divine**--it is what gives meaning to our lives. To help

patients clarify and expand their relationship to the sacred is the most healing and exciting aspect of our work. You may say that that should be left for priests, rabbis and ministers; I would say (and Carl Jung said it before): If your therapeutic work is deep and intense enough, it will always be there and needs to be addressed.

Every encounter with the Divine--in a dream, a fantasy, a meditation, a concentrated activity--has a strong impact on the person's psyche. He or she knows something important has happened. It needs to be talked about, validated, in order to recognize its numinous aspect and then it must be left for that. Some people write about it in their journals, they draw or paint pictures of it. Others simply refer to it as a healing and renewing symbol. The work of the therapist is to recognize the reality of the encounter and let the psyche do the work.

To illustrate, here is an example of a personal dream. At the time I was full of doubt about my personal spiritual practices, which were very connected to living in a very simple way and always trying to be aware of living in the presence of the sacred. I had gotten interested in psychedelic experiences and had just read *The Teachings of Don Juan* by Castenada, which had a powerful impact on me.

I dreamed that the Pope--John XXIII--was in a satellite and was running out of oxygen. Unless he returned to earth immediately he would die. I woke up very anxious.

To just understand this dream as an Oedipal patricide wish would have missed the central concern I was struggling with at the time: that my connection with the spiritual aspect of my life was in danger. The Pope--specifically John XXIII--represented a loving connection, a bridge between the transcendent and human aspects of life. My

spirituality--imaged here as the Pope--was in danger because I had become too concerned with an intellectual, airy, Logos orientation to the Divine: highly intellectualized ideas--psychedelics, astral planes and so forth--disconnected from the earth and earthly concerns. I was in danger of total disconnection and death of my spiritual life. This dream had great impact in my practices and my spiritual life.

As therapists we will often be witnesses to images that represent that Divine presence. It is our work to recognize it and allow our clients to heal themselves, to find meaning through their individual inner journeys.

Psychosis, Dreams, and Mysticism
in the Clinical Domain

By R. Tomas Agosin, M.D.

In April of 1991, just four months before his untimely death, Dr. Agosin was a speaker at a vibrant conference, which was held at Fordham University in New York City. The conference, called “Fires of Desire: Libidinal Energies and the Spiritual Quest,” was given in commemoration of nine lectures that Carl Jung had given at Fordham in 1912. In those early psychoanalytic lectures Jung had expressed the beginnings of his disagreement with Freud. He had raised the question of a broader meaning of “libido” than merely sexual energy as Freud conceptualized it, and he had expressed his belief that libido could be generated in any form of “passionate desire,” including “spiritual libido.” Therefore, the central issue of the 1991 conference was: *What is the nature of libidinal energy and how does it further the spiritual quest?* This question was given to each of the speakers for a year-long preparation period. Dr. Agosin pondered deeply this question and his response was a ground-breaking paper that, as it turned out, was the culmination of his life’s work.

In this paper, Tomas Agosin gives us an overview of his own perspective on Jungian thought as well as sensitive glimpses into the human condition. His long experience in working with a broad range of patients and a deep appreciation of spiritual traditions combine to evoke our compassion for his patients who seek to find their fullest experience of Self despite their many hardships and difficult life circumstances. We experience too the clarity with which Tomas Agosin addressed his therapeutic work. In his examples he shows how the ego and Self are interrelated in persons who suffer from psychosis, depression, or normal life transitions. And he articulated well the comparison between psychotic and mystical experience, providing astute guidance for many who seek to understand the similarities and differences between these deep and intense psychological states.

The following paper was first published by Crossroad Publishing in a 1992 book, *Fires of Desire: Erotic Energies and the Spiritual Quest*, (Edited by F. R. Halligan, & J.J. Shea) in which the conference papers were collected. Here is Dr. Tomas Agosin, again speaking, with his well-integrated insights, from the heart as well as from the intellect.

It is particularly meaningful for me to participate in the work commemorating Carl Jung's 1912 lectures at Fordham, since Jung has been the voice of integration of the spiritual and psychological aspects of human experience. I present myself as a clinician and as a spiritual seeker, as a soul who has struggled hard to bring psyche and spirit together. At the beginning of my career these two worlds, the psychological and the spiritual, were totally dichotomized in my life. During my training in a Freudian, psychoanalytically oriented Department of Psychiatry, there was absolutely no understanding of the spirit in any terms but as regressive, as a return to infantile, childish ways of thinking and being. Thus, I saw my patients as bringing only psychological issues to the consulting room, and wherever spiritual issues came up in treatment, I redefined them in psychological terms or ignored them. I saw my patients as psychological beings. At the same time, I was involved in a spiritual path and doing meditation practices. With friends and spiritual companions, I spoke of spiritual issues. At times, I could clearly see they had personal concerns and conflicts of a psychological nature, but I was convinced that their spiritual interest would solve those problems. What is important is that in my dichotomized thinking I saw them as spiritual beings only. Slowly, with time, I was talking psychology with my spiritual companions and spiritual issues with my patients. I have come to be comfortable with the notion that both, psychology and spirituality, are always present, intermingled. I have come to know that even when what appears on the surface as a purely psychological issue, things of the spirit will be there as well, and vice versa.

You may wonder why this preamble about psychology and spirituality. It is because as a clinician, to speak of God, the Divine, the sacred, the awesome, can be

considered breaking the boundaries of clinical work. It is the realm of the religious and not the consulting room. But I have found that the spiritual realm and the divine cannot be left outside of the clinician's concern.

I will be using the terms "spiritual" and "divine" to mean that which we consider sacred, holy, meaningful, *numinous*. I speak of these terms in a way that is specific to each individual, and not of a universal Deity. I am referring to that aspect of life to which each person relates with awe, that which one values and considers sacred. Most often, the spiritual and the divine are associated with God; actually, the dictionary defines divine as "relating to God," "religious," or "holy." I am using the terms more broadly, referring to the aspects of life we relate to with *reverence*, that which we consider larger than the ego, or personality, or sense of oneself.

Insert figure 1 about here

Jung's Model of the Psyche

JUNG'S MODEL OF THE PSYCHE (See Figure 1)

Jung was the first modern psychoanalytic thinker who integrated psyche and spirit. His model of the mind gives a central role to the religious need in the human being, and he actually sees religion as the primordial motivator of human behavior. Our "quest for wholeness," as Smith (1990) calls it, is our psychological and spiritual path, a journey of life that Jung named the path of individuation. This path of individuation is both a process of becoming a separate individual and, at the same time, a process of becoming more connected to the transpersonal, spiritual nature of our being. We become

individuated by becoming increasingly more conscious of who we are in a personal and universal way. This is a process of making the unconscious conscious.

The ego-consciousness, which has emerged from the unconscious, as we will see, unfolds in all its possibilities by looking toward the unconscious. First, it meets all the unacceptable aspects of its personality, which inhabit the personal unconscious and which are organized around what Jung called the shadow. This is the dark part of the personality, the Freudian unconscious with its infantile sexual and aggressive drives. It is by knowing the shadow that we go beyond a one-sided view of who we are. By making the shadow conscious and integrating it as part of ourselves, the ego expands its possibilities and also becomes more humble.

After confrontation with the shadow, the path of individuation leads to an opening to the collective unconscious. This part of the psyche is made up of archetypes, the primordial images of humankind, which we all share. As we inherit a biological reality so we take from our ancestors a psychological inheritance of primordial images, potential forms that inhabit our collective unconscious. Archetypal images include the great mother, the wise old man, the hero, the child, the journey, the central archetype of the Self, and others. The ego consciousness makes contact with this deeper layer of the unconscious psyche through its contrasexual, unconscious personality: the anima (in man) and the animus (in woman). By making conscious, establishing a relationship with, and integrating the anima/animus, the ego reaches towards the collective archetypal unconscious and brings this rich, archaic, primordial aspect of existence into consciousness. It is through this connection that we find meaning and purpose in life.

Therefore, the path of individuation seems to involve two central aspects. One is to become increasingly more of a separate individual who owns all aspects of his or her being and who projects internal reality to a minimum, so that he or she becomes increasingly conscious and responsible for whom he or she is. The other is an increasing connection and openness by the ego to that which transcends it. It is what Jacobi has called the establishment of a “dialogue between man and his personal God, between the ego and the Self.” (Serrano, 1966, p. 66)

In his development of the collective unconscious and the Self, Jung brings together psychology and spirituality. “The Self,” said Jung, “is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.”(Serrano, p.56) It is the archetype of totality and wholeness. It orients the process of individuation, giving the ego a path to traverse and an intention in its soul. It is the God-within, from where we emerge and to which we aim to return, but now with consciousness and awareness. As Jung put it, “The thing which I call the Self is an ideal center, equidistant between the Ego and the Unconscious, and it is probably equivalent to the maximum natural expression of individuation, in a state of fulfillment or totality. As nature aspires to express itself, so does man, and the Self is that dream of totality.” (Serrano, p. 50)

When the ego makes contact with the Self, it usually has an experience of the awesome and numinous aspects of life. The numinous comes from the word *numen*, which has to do with awe, terror, and ecstasy as the ego has an experience of the sacred and the transpersonal. The phenomenology of the Self is usually seen in the religious life because the archetypal Self has tended to be carried by the religions of the world. It also appears in particular symbols such as the mandala, the circle, the quadrated circle, the

number four (the number of wholeness), the lotus, the Divine Child, the Christ, the Buddha, great spiritual masters such as the Dalai Lama, and any other symbol carrying the numinous.

The Self is also the creator, the Father from whence the ego, the Son, is born. Edinger has created a model of development where the ego slowly emerges from the Self, maintaining a connection between them through the ego-Self axis (see Figure 2). This connection between ego and Self is made up of imagery (images and symbols), thought (ideas and theories), emotions (feeling experiences), and bodily experiences. It is maintained and fueled by libido. Libido, according to Jung, is “the energy which manifests itself in the life-process and is perceived subjectively as conation and desire.” (Jung, 1961, p.125) This psychic energy can take the form of desire for self-preservation (nutritional libido) or erotic desire (sexual libido) or spiritual desire (religious libido). To quote Jung again, “Libido is the energy which is able to communicate itself to any field of activity whatsoever, be it power, hunger, hatred, sexuality or religion.” (Jung, 1967, p.137) That is, libido is experienced subjectively as desire, whatever its aim.

Insert figure 2 about here

Development of the Ego-Self Axis

In terms of which avenue the libido takes, Jung seems to believe that the way to get libido to attain a higher level of experience is through the limitation of discharge of the instinct in its more primitive manifestations. By not discharging libido through one avenue of human experience, it becomes available for something else. As he put it, “The world of instinct...reveals itself on the primitive level as a complicated interplay of

physiological facts, taboos, rites, class systems, and tribal lore, which impose a restrictive form on the instinct from the beginning...and make it serve a higher purpose. Under natural conditions a spiritual limitation is set upon the unlimited drive of the instinct to fulfill itself, which differentiates it and makes it available for different applications.” (Jung, 1970, p. 418) Here Jung demonstrates an ascetic understanding of the transformation of libido. By imposing a “spiritual limitation” upon the instinct it becomes available for higher purposes. The implications of this model are that by not discharging erotic libido it becomes transformed or available for spiritual life, a view with which most religions and spiritual paths would agree.

But another way to understand the relationship between sexual and spiritual desire is to see that all desire is truly an attempt to return to the spirit. Erotic desire is just a disguised longing for the Self. It is a way of returning to a state of wholeness by uniting with one’s opposite, with the other, which carries the projected, unconscious, disowned parts of our personality. We long for the union with the sexual other so that we may become whole, the same way that we long for divine union to find meaning and purpose in our lives. In a similar light, we can see that in orgasm that we are swept away in the same way that the ego is taken over by the Self in mystical union.

Using Edinger’s developmental model of the ego-Self axis and its vicissitudes, I will discuss three different clinical situations, highlighting each relationship of ego and Self and the corresponding libidinal transformations involved. One will be immersion of ego in the self, which presents as psychosis and/or mysticism. The second will involve the alienated ego disconnected from the Self, which is projected onto the therapist. The

third example will demonstrate a strong, healthy connection of the ego with the Self as it is mediated through the anima (see Figure 3).

Insert figure 3 about here

The Ego-Self Axis and its Vicissitudes

EGO AND SELF MERGED: PSYCHOSIS AND MYSTICISM

A thirty-two-year-old Jewish, single, socially isolated man came to see me because he had heard I was a psychiatrist interested in spiritual issues.* The spiritual was of great concern to him, and he needed psychiatric help. He told me he had been hospitalized five times in the last three years, each time after feeling he was God--a very beautiful, intense, and extraordinary experience. He had had a psychotic episode many years before and had been symptom-free for a long time, until he started on a spiritual path, doing meditation practices. The last time he was hospitalized, he had been picked up by transit police while walking on the subway tracks. He thought he was God and could stop the subway with his power without being subject to any danger. I listened very carefully, especially to the intense emotional tone with which he told of his longing for a connection with the Divine, becoming God, and being hospitalized. He was in despair, fearing that his seeking of God was putting him in great danger. I told him that I understood that those times were the most precious and meaningful moments in his life. He became teary and remarked how most clinicians would address only his need for medication when he had those experiences. We talked about the need to make his ego stronger so that it would not be totally taken over by the Self, the God-within, the central

archetype of wholeness and oneness in Jung's psychology, or the Higher Unconsciousness as described by Roberto Assagioli. At those times there was a total identification of the ego with the Self, a marvelous but dangerous state. What was needed was a stronger ego that could maintain a vital, living connection with the Self.

After three years of treatment, which involved psychotherapy and medication, and after much spiritual work on his own, he left for another part of the country to continue on a path with which he had become seriously and responsibly involved. Two years passed, and then one day I got a desperate call from him, that he was in New York City and needed to see me immediately. He had stopped his medication to see if he could manage without it, to see if his "ego was strong enough on its own." When I met him, he was feeling that "energy was exploding all around him." He felt that he was God and had created consciousness in the world. He felt that he had "taken all the suffering of the world" unto himself, and that he could not tolerate it anymore and needed help. We talked about being an incarnated being and, as such, that he needed to take care of his body: to rest (he had not slept in days), to eat (he had eaten little and sporadically), and to keep his mind connected to material daily life, the life of work, relationships, service, and love in the world. He agreed to take medication again and to see me on a daily basis until the "ecstatic suffering" passed. A week later he was ready to fly back to his wife, his house, his work, and his spiritual path.

This is a typical example of a manic psychosis where there is a marked increase of energy (libido) in the psyche, which leads to an increase in mood and well-being, an increase in erotic interests, a lack of need for sleep and food, a great deal of extroversion and social behavior, a great deal of expenditure of money without judgment. Ultimately

this leads to a break with reality and the emergence of grandiose delusions, aggression, irritability, and painful ecstatic experiences with a total lack of control over the emotional life. Interestingly, it is well known that manic episodes of this nature begin with an increase in erotic interest (sexual libido) and end with religious ecstasy and feeling one with God (religious libido). It seems to me that in mania the libido is liberated and forces the person to seek an object, a person, to connect with and discharge that erotic love. As the infusion of libido increases, the ego becomes overwhelmed and fused with the original object, the Self, the God-within. This awakening of the libido, which moves from the erotic to a union with the Divine, has a quality reminiscent of what some yogis have called the Kundalini awakening, where through specific spiritual practices, energy that is coiled at the base of the spine and connected with sexual energies rises through the spine to the top of the skull to produce a state of enlightenment.

I remember another man who had manic episodes. At first he would become very social and interested in women, especially with the desire for a sexual connection. With time, he would come into my office and tell me that, “all beings are blissful and full of light.” Now his love transcended the sexual or emotional realms to include a sense of oneness with all beings.

In all acute psychotic episodes (not only mania) we will tend to find religious elements side by side with sexual and aggressive fantasies. I believe Jung’s understanding of the psyche can explain this phenomenon very well. The ego can no longer repress the unconscious elements of the psyche, and they flood the conscious inner reality of the person. The personal unconscious, with its sexual and aggressive elements, appears, and the collective unconscious, with its libidinal energies tied up in archetypal

and religious imagery, also emerges into consciousness. Another way of putting it is that in psychosis there is a withdrawal of libido from the outside world into fantasy. The outer world loses all luster and the inner world becomes the reality that attracts the person's attention and interest. Freud called this process the decathexis of objects (loss of emotional investment in people and the world) and a movement towards hypercathexis of the self (hyperemotional investment of the self.) (Freud, 1960, p. 70) But this is not just the self that is made of the individual personality and the personal unconscious. It is also a withdrawal from the world unto the collective unconscious and the archetypal Self. As Saint Teresa of Avila writes in *The Interior Castle*: "in the orison of union the soul is fully awake as regards God, but wholly asleep as regards things of this world and in respect of herself.In short, she is utterly dead to the things of this world and lives solely in God." (James, 1961, p. 321) What we find inside our psyche is the sexuality, aggression, and the archetypal layer of the psyche. According to John Perry, a Jungian analyst who worked with acute psychotic patients, the turn inward is an attempt at healing and renewal by an injured Self. The ego turns towards the archetypal layer of the psyche to repair a debased image of itself. Thus, according to Perry, it is essential to accompany the person through this archetypal journey so that healing can come about.

Another experience (apart from psychosis) where the ego opens up and merges with the archetypal layer of the psyche, and especially the Self, is mysticism. I speak of mysticism as a state of union: The union of the human (ego) and the Divine (Self). Since psychosis and mysticism seem to involve similar psychological processes, how do we distinguish one from the other? Are the great mystics of the past the same as psychotic patients living presently in state hospitals? Would the patients I care for have been

considered great saints in the past? Is the mystic psychotic? Is the psychotic patient a misunderstood mystic?

I believe the psychotic experience and the mystical experience have many aspects in common, but they are also different and can be differentiated.

SHARED CHARACTERISTICS OF PSYCHOSIS AND MYSTICISM (See Table 1)

1. *Intense subjective experience.* Both the mystic and the psychotic, while in their altered state of consciousness, are totally focused inwardly. Their attention has moved from the external world to the inner life. There is a compelling attraction to what is happening inside so that the outside world and the daily, ordinary, routine aspects of life seem irrelevant. The external world is relevant only to the extent that it reflects the profound subjective experience the person is going through.

2. *Sense of noesis.* As William James expresses it, there is a “noetic quality” to the mystical experience. “They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime.”(James, p. 300) The same with psychosis: the individual has a feeling that something important and of great significance is happening. They are both experiences that cannot be ignored. They rivet the person’s attention with a sense that an important message or knowledge is being discovered.

Table 1

Shared Characteristics of Psychosis and Mysticism

SIMILARITIES

INTENSE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

SENSE OF NOESIS

INEFFABLE QUALITY

LOSS OF EGO BOUNDARIES

DISTORTION OF TIME SENSE

PERCEPTUAL CHANGES

INTENSE AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCES

ALTERED STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

ATTEMPT AT RENEWAL AND HEALING

DIFFERENCES

SELF-IMAGE

EGO IDENTITY

SERENITY

RELATIONSHIP TO CHANGE

THOUGHT PROCESSES

PRESENCE OF AGGRESSIVE, PARANOID BEHAVIOR

QUALITY OF HALLUCINATORY EXPERIENCE

TIME COURSE

CONSEQUENCES

3. *Ineffable quality.* Both psychosis and mystical experience are very intense situations that the person has trouble putting into words. As James puts it, they “defy expression.” One cannot describe them in words that could communicate all the richness and intensity of being lived. To know them, they “must be directly experienced.” They both transcend the rational, usual, ordinary way of experiencing life; thus, they cannot be easily translated into words.

4. *Loss of ego boundaries.* Both experiences are accompanied by a loss of boundaries between the self and other objects. The person experiences a sense of oneness with others, nature, the universe as a whole. The limitations of the ego are transcended. New connections between one’s self and the external world are discovered. The clear boundaries of inside (self) and outside (other) are blurred. There is an expansion in the sense of self and in how one defines oneself.

5. *Distortion of time sense.* In both situations, the linear sense of time (past-present-future) is lost, with the present emerging as the only reality. As in dreams, there is no time in the experience of the moment. There is a distortion in the experience of time so that only the present exists. Because mysticism and psychosis are such intense experiences, the awareness of present time is also different, giving a sense that it is eternal, that it lasts forever.

6. Both involve *perceptual changes.* There is heightened perception in all sensory modalities; synesthesias and hallucinatory phenomena (especially visual and auditory) are very common. Visions are common in mystical experiences. Dr. Burke, a Canadian physician, writes of his own mystical experience: “All at once, without warning of any

kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud.” (James, p. 313) St. Teresa of Avila talks both of hearing the voice of God and of seeing the Divine appear to her in many forms. The following vision is very interesting, not only from the point of view of hallucinatory experience but also as an example of libidinal forces involved in the mystical experience. She describes how God’s love appeared to her in the form of an angel:

He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest ranks of angels, who seem to be all on fire....In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. (Sharfstein, 1973, p. 6)

Hallucinations are also extremely common in psychosis. Hearing voices and having visions are part of the perceptual distortions accompanying the psychotic process.

7. Intense affective experiences. Both psychosis and mystical moments involve intense emotional experiences. Joy and ecstasy are an almost universal description of the feelings accompanying the mystical experience. Great moments of terror are also described in both, but they tend to be more common in psychotic processes. The ego feels totally taken over by the intense feelings in the experience; it is swept away-- which can be terrifying if the ego cannot give up its central position in the psyche.

8. Both are *altered states of consciousness* that appear after a period of restlessness or preparation followed by a sudden realization. In her book *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill (1955) describes very clearly this progression from preparation to sudden mystical experience. In *Retreat from Sanity*, Malcolm Bowers (1975) describes this process of increased anxiety and the sudden change in state of consciousness leading to a psychotic state.

9. Both are an *attempt at renewal, transformation, and healing*. The mystical experience involves an expansion of one's present state of consciousness. It is an attempt of the psyche to transcend a limited identification of one's Self. It is the psyche's effort to break the boundaries of the personality so that it is no longer totally trapped in the ego. Mystics see their connection with all of life and through that new vision expand their identity and sense of Self. The mystical experience heals the narrow, limited concept of the Self, transforming the smallness of ego identity into a more deeply connected being with all of life.

Psychosis is also an attempt at renewal and healing. The person has reached an impasse in his or her psychological life, and the only way it can be resolved is through such a drastic transformation. Here is where John Perry (1974) in *The Far Side of Madness* has made a great contribution to the understanding of psychosis. Instead of seeing the psychotic process as bad and something to eliminate quickly, he talks about psychosis as an attempt to borrow the energy and images of the archetypal layer of the unconscious to heal a broken sense of Self. He describes how in acute psychosis the individual goes through a symbolic process of death, rebirth, and renewal as a healing

process (see Table 2). As the late Ronald D. Laing put it, “Madness need not be all *breakdown*. It is also a *breakthrough*.” (Laing, 1989, p.54)

As we have seen, mysticism and psychosis have a great deal in common. But they also have great differences and, most important, they tend to lead to very different places. As Ram Dass (1988) put it at a conference on Buddhism and psychotherapy, “The only difference between a psychotic brother and myself is that he believes he is Jesus Christ and only he; I believe I’m Jesus Christ but everyone else is too.” A great difference between the two.

Table 2

Elements of the Mythical Journey of Healing

JOURNEY TO CENTER

DEATH IMAGES

RETURN TO BEGINNINGS

COSMIC CONFLICT

THREAT OF OPPOSITES; ENCOUNTER WITH SPIRITS

APPEARANCE OF KING AND / OR DIVINITY

SACRED MARRIAGES; DIVINE UNION

NEW BIRTH; REBIRTH

NEW SOCIETY; NEW AGE

QUADRATED WORLD; MANDALA IMAGES

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PSYCHOSIS AND MYSTICISM

1. *Self images*. Mystics generally seek to reduce their sense of self to a minimum. Mystics want to be an infinitesimal point of consciousness, with the smallest possible ego, so that they can perceive life in the least distorted way. The personality is seen as a

barrier, a filter that does not allow one's consciousness to perceive life in its truest form. The mystic sees himself or herself as a grain of sand in the immensity of the universe. And mystics rejoice in the beauty of God and all its manifestations, which are perceived as wondrous and extraordinary.

Psychotics often see themselves as omnipotent and omniscient. There is a great increase in self-centeredness with a feeling of being all-important. They are the center of the world, and only they are sufficiently important to matter. This all-encompassing grandiosity leaves the psychotic person isolated, alone, cut off from society and the world.

2. Mystics shed *ego-identity*. They work on themselves to transcend the smallness of ego and try to find a more expansive sense of Self. But there is a strong and firm ego that allows the mystic to function in the world in an efficient manner. Psychotics usually have not acquired a strong ego-identity and often cling to whatever fragments can be found of themselves. Those fragments of ego are often not enough to navigate the simple tasks of daily living. The psychotic individual often cannot function well enough to take care of basic needs and to be a productive member of society.

3. Mystics find increasing *serenity* through detachment from the temporal and transient. They strengthen their identification with what does not change and with what they find most sacred and valuable. In that deep identification they find *peace* and inner *tranquility*. The psychotic has little serenity in life except through the reduction of emotional life. When one is psychotic, one is inexorably involved in the ever-changing surface of life. One of the characteristics of the psychotic process is the incapacity to maintain one's attention in a particular situation. The emotional and mental life of

psychotics is completely fragmented, pushed and pulled by whatever involves them at the moment. There is little possible peace in that state. Fear and lack of control of one's mind are the predominant states.

4. The mystic welcomes *change*. The mystic is open to new possibilities. The psychotic tends to reject change. Psychotics are frightened of anything new for change brings with it a whole new set of circumstances to deal with; and since there is little ego-identity to relate to the new situation, psychotics tend to reject anything new. They cling tenaciously to what they know and are used to.

5. In the mystical experience there is no disruption of *thought processes*. The mystic can usually relate experiences in a clear, coherent and orderly way. In the psychotic experience, thinking usually becomes fragmented and disordered. Psychotic individuals are usually incoherent. In psychosis the mind jumps from one thought to another without a clear link between them. Psychotics become lost in a fragmented internal world of thoughts, affects, and images that are often difficult to understand.

6. The mystical experience has little of *aggressive or paranoid elements*. In contrast, psychosis often involves paranoid feelings and thoughts with a great deal of aggressive elements that are often difficult to control.

7. In mysticism *hallucinatory experiences* tend to be visual in nature. Often these are descriptions of visions in which the mystic sees light and beautiful visual phenomena. The mystic tends to have a positive affective relationship to these phenomena. The psychotic individual tends more often to experience auditory hallucinations. These hallucinatory phenomena often tend to be experienced as negative and frightening because they are projected, unacceptable thoughts that can no longer be kept buried in the

unconscious. Or they are projected superego condemnations (reproaches of conscience) that attack the already beleaguered ego.

8. The mystical experience is *self-limited*. It is often short-lived. But even though it may last a relatively short time, it always leaves an intense memory and it has a profound impact on the person who goes through it. Although short-lived, it leaves one with a new sense of oneself and of the world. Psychosis can become a chronic condition, causing great pain and suffering for the individual and others.

9. The most important difference between mysticism and psychosis is the *consequence* of the experience. Because both experiences can be phenomenologically so similar, I believe that it is only the result of the experience that can truly differentiate the two. The mystical experience leaves the individual more connected and involved in the world. The mystic expands the capacity to love and to serve. One becomes more appreciative of the beauty of all life. The mystical experience leaves the individual with a feeling of reverence for life, embracing all of life as sacred. Through the experience of becoming one with the Divine (union of ego and Self) the individual becomes more compassionate and acquires a sense of meaning to life.

Psychosis, unfortunately, most often leaves the person more self-involved. It narrows the possibilities of connection to the world because psychotics need to protect themselves from the anxiety that the involvement in the world produces.

The psychotic often has no choice but to reduce his or her capacity to love because self-forgetfulness is impossible. The psychotic is involved in a struggle of self-survival and there is little psychic energy for anything else.

Even though I have been trying to differentiate mysticism and psychosis as two separate states of consciousness, I hope it is clear that at times it may be very difficult for the clinician to know what the person is going through. It is only the result of the experience that clarifies retrospectively what it was, and even then we may never know.

There is a need beyond academic interest to distinguish one experience from the other, because as a clinician one responds very differently to one or the other. In the mystical experience, one would want to support the person undergoing that state and not interfere. In the chronic psychotic conditions, one would treat with medication in addition to support. David Lukoff (1985), in a very helpful paper called “The Diagnosis of Mystical Experience with Psychotic Features,” tries to differentiate psychotic states that need medical attention from those that may be closer to the mystical realm of life, and thus should not be treated medically. (See Table 3) He sees the latter as psychotic episodes representing positively transforming mystical experiences. His criteria for this particular type of psychosis include: (1) a psychotic process is present (reality testing disturbed, with presence of hallucinations; delusions; attention riveted to inner experience; difficulty with handling commonsense levels of functioning; bizarre behavior possibly present); (2) a mystical experience is involved (ecstatic mood; sense of newly acquired knowledge; perceptual alterations; delusions with mythological themes; no conceptual disorganization); and (3) the experience has fit criteria for positive outcome (good history of social and vocational functioning prior to episode; acute onset; clear evidence of a precipitant leading to the episode; positive exploratory attitude toward the experience; little evidence of risk factors suggestive of suicide or homicide). (See Figure 4)

Table 3

Diagnostic Criteria for MEPF:

Mystical Experience with Psychotic features

[Psychotic episodes representing positively transforming mystical experiences]

I. Psychosis Present

Reality testing is disturbed; primary process operates more than secondary process. (Phenomenologically psychosis is very difficult to distinguish from mystical experience.)

1. Hallucinations---perceptual distortions
2. Delusions---idiosyncratic thinking
3. Attention riveted to inner experience
4. Difficulty with handling commonsense levels of functioning
5. Bizarre behavior

II. Mystical Experience Involved

According to Lukoff, there are five criteria for mystical experiences

1. Ecstatic mood
2. Sense of newly gained knowledge---noesis
3. Perceptual alterations
4. Possible delusions with themes related to mythology
5. No conceptual disorganization

III. Criteria for Positive Outcome

1. Good pre-episode functioning
 - a. no previous history of psychosis

- b. social network
 - c. intimate relationships
 - d. vocational success
2. Acute onset
 3. Precipitants
 4. Positive exploratory attitude toward the experience as meaningful, revelatory, and growth-promoting
 5. Low risk of suicide or homicide

Enter Figure 4 about here

Overlapping Mystical Experience and Psychotic Disorders

EGO AND SELF DISCONNECTED:
ALIENTATION, DEPRESSION AND PROJECTION
OF THE SELF ONTO THE THERAPIST

A thirty-eight-year-old obese married woman came to see me for depression. She was very intelligent, interested in leftist politics, and totally nonreligious. When she first came to treatment, she had been in bed almost a year, doing what was absolutely the minimum for her family and feeling depressed with a sense of meaninglessness about everything. She had tried several medications for depression, but they had not helped. The only thing that occasionally got her out of bed and gave her some solace from the

emptiness in her life was to go to a political demonstration. In the past, what had truly given her a sense of meaning and excitement was to fight for a political cause that would right the wrongs of the world; she had been, and could still be, passionate about that. I thought, at that time, that leftist politics carried the Self for her. This was because of her personal history; she had had a psychotic mother who abused her and a father who was a professor at a university, who adored her and was very active in political causes. So the political world carried the promise of peace and justice (to undo the horrors and injustices of home), and at the same time it was linked to her libidinal strivings; it was the place where she had experienced love and a sense of being special.

During the first months of treatment, she “awoke” from her depression by becoming obsessed in her love for me. She developed a very intense idealizing and at times devaluing erotic transference to me. She lost over fifty pounds in a few months and got involved in many jobs related to political causes. However, as I did not reciprocate her sexual and romantic approaches, she became increasingly angry and upset with me. Her depression returned, and she became increasingly more suicidal. During a particularly difficult time between us, she was enraged because I had not held her physically when she had asked me to. At a moment when she was very distraught, she had the following dream:

“You [the therapist] were crucified as Jesus Christ. You were almost naked on the cross. I was kneeling at your feet and had a bowl in my hands, collecting your blood and drinking it.”

She awoke very moved by the dream.

To have understood this dream just as sadistic tendencies with cannibalistic, oral-incorporative drives would have been to miss its numinous, archetypal, spiritual dimension, although those elements were clearly there as well. My understanding was that she had projected the Self on to me, and I was carrying the numinosity in her life. I had become the Savior, the meaning of her life, the Center. Her need for me had a religious, devotional quality. Jung extensively developed the symbolism of the Self as represented by Christ. He wrote, "Christ exemplifies the archetype of the Self. He represents a totality of a Divine or heavenly kind, a glorified man, a son of God, *sine macula peccati*, unspotted by sin." (Jung, 1959, p. 37) In Western culture, Christ is the central paradigm of the Self and the individuated ego. The one who is born from the Father (the Self) and has fulfilled his mission. He has traversed the path of individuation to wholeness. As Edinger (1973) expresses it:

Christ is both man and God. As man he goes to the cross with anguish but willingly, as part of his destiny. As God he willingly sacrifices himself for the benefit of mankind. Psychologically this means that the ego and the Self are simultaneously crucified. The Self suffers nailing and suspension ... in order to achieve temporal realization. In order to appear in the spatio-temporal world it must submit to particularization or incarnation in the finite. The Self's willingness to leave its eternal unmanifest condition and share the human condition indicates that the archetypal psyche has a spontaneous tendency to nourish and support the ego ... For the ego, on the other hand, crucifixion is a paralyzing suspension between opposites. It is accepted reluctantly out of the inner necessity of individuation

(the wholeness-making process) which requires a full awareness of the paradoxical nature of the psyche. (p. 152)

The dream was telling us that like leftist politics in the past, I was holding the archetype of the Self for her. Her erotic longings for me were a desire to connect with and feel nurtured by the Self. To have sex with me would have felt to her like the betrothal that St. Teresa sought with God. Her longing was libidinal in the sense of Freud's sexual libido, but it was also libidinal in Jung's understandings of libido, which is desire, not only sexual desire but also desire for meaning and for union with God.

Notice that her dream did not present her desire as erotic or sexual. In the dream she was drinking the blood of the crucified therapist, Christ's blood. The archetypal quality of the dream is confirmed by the fact that similar symbolic representations appear in other contexts, like one of the visions of a medieval mystic, Hildegard of Bingen (1986), of "The Sacrifice of Christ and the Church" (see Figure 5). Jung, in his *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, talks about renewal of the psyche symbolized in a fifteenth-century parable, "Cantilena" by Sir George Ripley, of the queen eating peacock flesh and drinking the blood of the green lion. He later develops the symbolism of the green lion as Christ. (Jung, 1970, p. 274) According to this discussion of the symbolism in the dream, my patient was seeking renewal in her psyche, which had become stuck in a negative transferential relationship with me. The dream was telling her to drink of her Self so as to rejuvenate her psychic life.

Insert Figure 5 about here

The Sacrifice of Christ and the Church

This interpretation is given further credence by Edinger's discussion on the blood of Christ. Blood has always symbolized the essence of life; it is "considered to be the seat of life or soul," "the Divine fluid" that maintains, nourishes and purifies incarnated life. It energizes the cells of the body by bringing nutrients and oxygen to every corner of our material being. It is the fluid that carries materialized energy (libido). The blood of Christ has particular symbolism in Christian mythology and practice. Christ said "Drink of my blood," and with that act the faithful realize their relationship to the Divine. "God Himself has undergone a change, so that the cementing and redeeming fluid which unites man with God, i.e., the ego with the Self, is now continually available through the initiative of the Self as Christ." Through the sacrament of the drinking of the wine, which is the blood of Christ, the individual connects with Christ, with God, and with all other human beings who drink from the same chalice. (Edinger, 1973, pp. 225-259)

All my patient could tell me about the dream was that it felt very meaningful, but that she had no associations to it. The only thing I said to her was that I had become a Christ-like figure to her, her Savior, because she had projected her need for a spiritual connection onto me; that she wanted to devote her life to me as one devotes one's life to a great ideal; and that she wanted to drink of my blood to nourish herself as she needed to nourish herself from the source of meaning in her life. We discussed how the dream was showing us new understanding of her need for me. In the past I had always interpreted it as a reawakening of the deep love she had for her father; now we could see her longing for me as a need to establish a connection to something meaningful and transcendent in her life. This was the archetype I had been carrying for her.

The next session she was excited and eager to tell me that she had discovered forgiveness, a new experience in her life. She forgave her psychotic mother who beat her and locked her up in closets as a child; she forgave her father who had abandoned her; and she forgave me for not having a more intimate relationship with her. She felt gratitude and love.

Here we can see how contact with the Self transforms the state of the ego. From anger, depression, emptiness, and a clinging love, to forgiveness, gratitude, and expansive love. The ego's connection with the Self brings new possibilities and understanding. It is the Self that can transmute the level of aggression and the clinging, devouring love that my patient showed. It is the numinosity of the Self that can also transform the hook of addiction, as many alcoholics and drug abusers experience when they "bottom-out."

But a sudden or sporadic contact with the Self is not enough. Once the connection has been made, the ego has to nourish the ego-Self axis. The ego has to spend time and effort in directing its energies towards the Divine. The ego has to value that connection by seeking and maintaining it. The connection to the spirit needs to be nourished through prayer, spiritual practices, ritual, religious participation, twelve-step meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous, creative efforts (painting, poetry, sculpture, gardening). The ego has to value the connection with the Self by working on maintaining an openness toward the Self. If not, there is a return to disconnection, alienation, and depression. Unfortunately, my patient was unable to find a way to nourish that infusion of libido from the Self, and she soon thereafter returned to a depressed, suicidal state.

HEALTHY EGO AND SELF CONNECTION:

THE ANIMA / AMIMUS MEDIATES

A sixty-year-old married Jewish retired lawyer who was not religious came to treatment because he did not know what to do with his life; he was no longer working and felt depressed. He had worked very hard all his life and had been very successful as a lawyer. He had been a man of action, dedicated to work and to providing a good life for his family, which he had done. He contributed to several liberal causes and spent time listening to music, which was one of the great loves of his life. When he came to therapy, he mentioned to me that since his retirement, he felt for the first time in his life somewhat lost, not knowing what to do with his energy and time. He was taking courses at a university, was reading more, was enjoying his favorite sport, but none of it seemed fulfilling. One and a half years into treatment he had the following dream:

I am across from a high mountain. There is a small, hanging bridge that connects me to it. It is quite dangerous. I feel a compulsion to go to the other side, especially because at the end of the hanging bridge there is a young, but mature woman calling me and encouraging me. With much fear and a sense of danger, I go across and get to the other side. As I reach there, I have the experience that I am embracing the whole mountain. As I awoke, I had the feeling of having had a religious experience.

When we talked about the dream, he told me that he realized he needed a more direct connection with the spirit. He said that in therapy he had discovered his capacity to feel (a very undeveloped aspect of his personality), represented by the young woman in the dream, and that “she” was calling him to connect and embrace life in a new way.

In Jung's understanding of the mind, the anima (the feminine aspect of the male psyche) and the animus (the masculine aspect of the female psyche) are the archetypes that connect the ego (consciousness) with the deeper layer of the psyche (collective unconscious). These archetypes tend to represent "the other" --they are the other in gender--but also tend to carry the underdeveloped aspect of the personality. Following Jung's principle of compensation, the unconscious compensates; it brings the opposite to the conscious ego attitude. The anima carries ego-feeling connections for men (supposedly less developed in man), and the animus provides the logos-judgment function in women.

Since my patient's dream involved an anima figure, I will develop that concept a bit further. According to Whitmont (1969):

The archetype of the anima represents those Divine elements which are related to life as life, as an unpremeditated, spontaneous, natural phenomenon, to the life of the instincts, the life of the flesh, the life of concreteness, of earth, of emotionality, directed toward involvement, the instinctual connectedness to other people and the containing community or group....As a pattern of emotion, the anima consists of the man's unconscious urges, his moods, emotional aspirations, anxieties, fears, inflations and depressions, as well as his potential for emotion and relationship. (p. 189)

It was clear to me that his anima had matured. He had had two previous dreams where a feminine figure had been central. The first anima dream was of a four-year-old girl who had gotten lost in Macy's department store. The second was of an adolescent girl running up a hill on a beautiful sunny day. Now she was here again, as a young

woman calling him to make a connection with the transcendent aspect of life. Here she was calling him to come to the mountain, which he embraced in a religious union. The mountain has always been the symbol of ascent towards the Divine, the place where the One dwells, which has to be climbed to encounter God. For example, Shiva, the Hindu deity, sits in a state of meditation on the summit of Mount Kailas. The mountain is where Moses received the Ten Commandments. Many mountains are endowed with sacred meaning: Mt. Fuji in Japan, the Himalayas in Tibet, and many others. As Mircea Eliade has said, “The symbolic and religious significance of mountains is endless.” (1974, p. 99) Bernbaum puts it well when he says that “mountains have the power to awaken an overwhelming sense of the sacred.” (1988, p. 12) For my patient, the mountain was a representation of the Self, the Spirit, the Divine.

I told him that I agreed with his interpretation and that I was moved by the power and importance of this discovery. This was a gift from the unconscious, giving him a clear direction towards which to work. Two weeks later he discovered he had a brain tumor. The dream was not only a call to the Spirit, but a premonition of his death. The next, and last, eighteen months of his life were some of the most intense, spiritual, and meaningful to him. His love of music deepened. He became more interested in Jewish studies and the Bible. Through the first two verses of his favorite psalm, Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” he discovered a whole new understanding of surrender and acceptance.

The last time we met was in his bedroom. His large body was half-paralyzed from the tumor and deformed by edema from chemotherapy. We talked about dying. He told me that he was tired and was ready. He spoke in a way that he had not done before.

We sat in silence and recited together the psalm he loved so much, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” over and over again. When I left, he was calm and peaceful. A relative called me forty-eight hours later to tell me he had died.

Here we see how the anima mediates the connection between ego and Self so that the ego is healed and given a new avenue of life, a new relationship to the Divine. The ego is not overwhelmed by the Self (as in psychosis); it is not cut off from the Self (as in depression); but it is connected in such a way that it can receive the Self’s energies to establish a vital, meaningful, and more sacred relationship to life.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have attempted, by using Jung’s model of the psyche and Edinger’s “ego-Self axis” concept, to show the different relationships of ego and Self as they appear in the clinical domain. My hypothesis has been that libido fuels and maintains that connection. Whether libido is experienced as erotic desire or as mystical longing, it always represents the attempt of the psyche to find meaning and fulfillment in life. That can only occur when we are fully ourselves, as a personal history and as a universal being connected to the transcendent aspect of life.

Over the doorway in Jung’s house there is a Latin inscription that says, “*Vocatus adque non vocatus Deus aderit,*” “Called or not called, God is present.” As psychotherapists, we need to always remember that divine presence in our patients’ strivings. The Divine is present so that they may heal themselves and find purpose in their lives. As spiritual seekers, we need to see our libidinal force as a desire to connect with the Divine, who nourishes our existence at every moment and awaits our opening to its transcendent truth.

DIALOGUE

Question:

While not minimizing the value of the positive aspect of the Self that is exhibited in divine union, there is also a dark side of the Self, symbolized perhaps by world chaos and destruction. The psychotic knows this well. Your three cases show a negative as well as a positive outcome--for example, the brain tumor, and the return to depression.

Agosin:

I think that's a wonderful comment. Again how easy it is to fall into the light and dark and not hold both together. It is dichotomized thinking. It is so seductive because we want to keep the bad out. We don't want to think about it. I really appreciate that comment for reminding us that it is both, absolutely both.

Question:

I had a personal response, a kind of image, after you completed your explication of shared characteristics of the psychotic and the mystic. As an educator, I thought I was listening to a profile of the average adolescent. How can educators and parents learn to see these same qualities in adolescents? How can we nurture these mystical qualities; how can we facilitate their growth toward wholeness?

Agosin:

I think the experience with altered states of consciousness does need to be nourished and the way is simply to talk about it. There are some studies that show that mystical experiences or out of body experiences and all kinds of strange things are *very common*.

People just don't talk about them because they think they are too weird. If you open the door for people to describe this kind of experience, to talk about it, to have a place to discuss these experiences, you will hear much more about it. That would be a way to nurture this awareness and to validate the experience. We're so rational, or at least we value that so highly--the need for control--that we have trouble with surrendering to something larger and more complicated. I think the way to nourish it is by validating it. That would be enough really. We need to hear a lot about it.

*Ages and non-relevant life factors have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

References:

- Bernbaum, E. (1988). "Sacred Mountains." *Parabola*, 13, 4.
- Bowers, Malcolm (1975). *Retreat from Sanity*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Edinger, Edward (1973). *Ego and Archetype*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Eliade, Mircea (1974). *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. New York: New American Library.
- Freud, Sigmund (1960). Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia, 1911. *Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12. London: Hogarth Press.
- Hildegard of Bingen (1986). *Scivias* (Trans. Bruce Hozeski). Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company.
- James, William (1961). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan.
- Jung, Carl Gustav (1970). *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, *Collected Works*, vol. 14. Princeton, NJ: Bollingen.
- Jung, Carl Gustav (1967). *Symbols of Transformation*, *Collected Works*, vol. 5.

Princeton, NJ: Bollingen.

Jung, Carl Gustav (1961). *Freud and Psychoanalysis, 1912, Collected Works*, vol. 4.

Princeton, NJ: Bollingen.

Laing, R.D. (1989). Transcendental Experience in Relation to Religion and Psychosis, in Stanislav Grof and Christina Grof, (Eds.), *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. Los Angeles: Tarcher.

Lukoff, David (1985). The Diagnosis of Mystical Experience with Psychotic Features, *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 17, 2.

Perry, John (1974). *The Far Side of Madness*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Ram Dass (1988). Second Conference on Buddhism and Psychotherapy, New York, October 12, 1988.

Serrano, Miguel (1966). *C.G. Jung and Herman Hesse: A Record of Two Friendships*. New York: Schocken Books.

Sharfstein, Ben Ami (1973). *Mystical Experience*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company.

Smith, Curtis (1990). *Jung's Quest for Wholeness*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Underhill, Evelyn (1955). *Mysticism*. New York: World Publishing Company.

Whitmont, Edward Christopher (1969). *The Symbolic Quest*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Disidentification

By Tomas Agosin

The themes of “Surrender”, “Detachment” (also called “Disattachment”) and “Disidentification” are spiritual practices known throughout the world in the various mystical traditions. Each in its own way serves to reduce ego-centeredness and thereby to enhance Self (in Jung’s sense of spiritual wholeness) and/or Cosmic-consciousness. In the following paper, Tomas Agosin gives a simple, profoundly human way to think about and practice the act of reducing the ego for the purpose of deeper spiritual awareness.

I used to think of spiritual transformation as a mysterious process that happens to someone who is very special, learned and spiritually developed. I also had the idea that it was a process full of exalted feelings and supernatural experiences. These images made spiritual transformation a distant, if not impossible, goal for me. But I have discovered that spiritual transformation is a much simpler reality than the mental concepts and associations we have about it. Now I think of spiritual transformation as the process of change from the present way of being (acting, thinking, feeling) to one that is more consistent with my spiritual ideals.

To make our lives more consistent with our spiritual aspirations, we have to start by knowing who we really are and not what we think we are, not what we wish to be, not what we feel we should be. Then we will know what needs to be changed, what needs to be dropped, what needs more emphasis in our lives so that we reflect more closely what we want to be, the way we want to live.

Disidentification, the capacity to observe myself, is a wonderful tool and practice that can give self-knowledge in an objective way. When I am totally identified with my thoughts, feelings or actions, that is all I am; I then become the transient circumstances of

my life. But when I observe my thoughts, feelings, reactions and ways of doing things, I learn to see clearly who I am, and can take some distance from my experiences.

It is important to practice this exercise without judging. To see myself objectively without judging or being critical is to just observe, as if watching a movie, taking some distance from my experiences and suspending all comments. Later on there may be time for critical analysis, but not while observing myself. To just see myself as others see me (in terms of my actions) or as others would see me if they could read my mind and heart is particularly difficult in our culture, but it is essential if this exercise is to be fruitful. This practice of disidentification helps me acquire self-knowledge in an objective way.

We can practice disidentification at every moment of the day. There are some ways to facilitate this habit. The first is to remember to observe ourselves: What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What opinion am I giving? How am I reacting?

We can practice disidentification by changing our sense of self from **being** to **having**; that is, to change from “I am” to “I have.” When “I am” something, it is forever and it is the totality of me; when “I have” something, it is temporal and limited. “I have” also has a “not me” quality to it which helps me see that my deepest sense of self transcends the particulars of the moment. For example: “I am depressed” versus “I have a depression,” “I think...” versus “I have a thought...” Thoughts, feelings, reactions, judgments are all transient experiences of our being. Disidentification helps us see them as passing; and relative so they don’t acquire the profound importance that they have when we are totally immersed in them. We learn that they are not “Me,” but only a small part of “Me.” We learn that all experiences pass, no matter how painful or how wonderful. We learn that momentary feelings, opinions, thoughts, reactions are for this

moment and no more. In this way we learn to see how we think, what we feel, and how we react. With time we discover that everything is transient, that everything passes.

We can practice disidentification by remembering that we are not just the thought or feeling that we are experiencing at the moment. Thus, I can repeat to myself: “I am not my thoughts,” “I am not my feelings,” “I am not my opinions,” “I am not my memories,” “I am not my reactions,” and so forth, depending on what is gripping my consciousness at the moment. Again, the tactic here is to create some distance in order to acquire more objectivity and to center myself in what transcends the experience of the moment.

In this way, disidentification leads to an expansion of consciousness because, by separating myself from what is transient--thoughts, feelings, reactions--I can be centered in what is not bound by time and space. There is an aspect of my consciousness that does not change--it only “Is.” That “Isness,” that pure consciousness, is my capacity to observe myself. If I can remain centered in the transcendent, I open myself to life with a new awareness. I can then integrate the transcendent and the contingent at each moment, because both dimensions exist always.

Thus, disidentification helps us to know ourselves as we truly are, and to remain connected to the transcendent dimension of consciousness, expanding our sense of self. This paper, Disidentification, was published in July 1985 by *Seeds of Unfolding*, 3, 22-23. It originated as a talk and exercise that Tomas Agosin gave for Cafh in New York City. On the same page of *Seeds of Unfolding* was published a companion Inspirational Thought form the *Bhagavad Gita* as follows:

To the follower of the yoga of action,
The body and the mind, the sense organs and the intellect are instruments only;
He knows himself other than the instrument;
And thus his heart grows pure.

Who Am I?

By Tomas Agosin

Among Dr. Agosin's papers at the time of his death were several write-ups for spiritual exercises and introductions to those exercises. These were presented to members of Cafh Spiritual Order and to members of the general public who came searching for spiritual enrichment.

"Who Am I?" is probably the most perplexing, profound, difficult, exciting and interesting question we can pose to ourselves.

Perplexing because through the many answers and definitions of ourselves we are always left dissatisfied. There is always more. No matter how we answer we tend to feel: "But that's not exactly it!" It seems like such a simple question, maybe the simplest: "Who Am I?" and yet it leaves us baffled and confused.

Profound because since we have been given the gift of consciousness, of self-awareness, it is of our deepest concern. Ever since man could think he has posed this question to himself and pondered about it. What can be more important than to understand the nature of being? What has more depth than the question of who is me, the consciousness that habits this body and lives in this historical time?

"Who Am I?" is a most difficult question because it has a myriad of answers, and also more. Just asking the questions makes us somewhat anxious and uneasy. We can feel it is a relevant question but something in us refuses to think about it, wants to distance from its demanded answer. It is such a basic concept that it embarrasses us that we don't have a clear, ready-made answer. But any reflex answer leaves us dissatisfied. When we stop to think about it more deeply, we realize how complex and intriguing a question it is; and the more slippery and vast it seems. Many people become scared of the question, and therefore, drop it as being "too abstract" a preoccupation to give any

time to it. Or they may say it is for the philosophers to answer; or that it has no relevance to my daily life. But how can it not be relevant! It is so basic, so essential; although difficult and requiring attention, time, thought and a sense of adventure about it.

To start asking ourselves this most simple question, “Who Am I?” becomes a very exciting proposition because a whole field of personal exploration opens in front of us. That is, the question is a door to our inner life. When we ask the question seriously, in the intimacy of our being, with total objective honesty, naked in front of ourselves, we start discovering a great deal about who we are. What are our identifications? Where do they come from? What are the limitations we place on ourselves? What are our prejudices? What are our self-definitions? How do we see ourselves? It is exciting---at times painful, at times exhilarating---to get to know ourselves in depth.

But it is not only excitement that we find in the journey to answer this question. It is also fascination because a tremendous field opens in front of our eyes: the field of inner consciousness. We have a subliminal knowledge of this aspect of our inner life, but we barely have any relationship to it. And as one understands more and more, it becomes clear that there are no limits to the answer, and that one discovers new horizons of our reality. Fascination and marvel are the only words to describe this process. There really isn't a clear or simple answer to this question. The issue of “Who Am I?” is more of a tool to explore one's inner life than just a question. It can be used as a window (or microscope) through which to look at ourselves and explore the nature of our being.

We can approach the question in a systematic way:

I am a body. We all have a body, and thus this aspect of our being is the most obvious to see. Our body has different characteristics: some strengths and some weaknesses. We

need to be aware of its different aspects, and to maintain it healthily. But we are obviously more than our body because if a part of our body is removed (e.g., a limb) we continue to be ourselves; there still is an “I.” I am a body, but there is more....

I am a person who reacts emotionally. We need to know our emotional responses, our moods, what triggers them. We need to become objective with our emotions, observing ourselves react. I am emotions, but there is more....

I am a historical being. We live in a particular time in history. The world was very different before and the world will change completely in the future. We live in a moment, as part of a historical continuum. We are very determined by the historical times, but there is more....

I am a culture. We are all immersed in a culture. But there is more....

I am part of a nation. National identity is a very strong identification. We identify with its history, its people, its customs. There are symbols that tie us to a nation, increasing our emotional connection with it. “I am American,” “Japanese,” “Chinese,” “French,” “Chilean”....strong identifications. But there is more....

I am part of a family. The family we come from, the family we fantasize, the family we create. Remember how engrained our name is in our consciousness, and how much a part of ourselves it is. But there is more....

I am the result of my education. But also....

I am a set of thoughts. But if I can change my thoughts, I am more....

I am a set of defects. But there is more....

I am a routine. All of us have a routine that becomes part of us. Our habitual connection to it makes it difficult to change it....It is part of us. But there is more....

I am a worker. A person who performs a job. This is one of our strongest identifications we have. We easily equate what we do to earn a living to who we are. We spend so much time performing our jobs that we become them. I am a teacher, a student, an engineer, a mechanic....when in reality, I am a person who teaches, who studies, who practices engineering, who fixes cars. So there is more to me than my job....

I am someone who aspires to a better life. All human beings aspire to happiness and to make a better world....

I am a set of values.....

I am love.....

I am spirit.....

I am mystery.....the unknown.

EXERCISE

Sit quietly for fifteen minutes each morning in a quiet place, comfortably, with a straight back and crossed hands. If possible keep your eyes closed. Breathe deeply three to five times to create calmness.

Repeat slowly aloud: "I am Not...." Filling the space with every possible identification you can think of, i.e., my body, my job, my family.....until exhausted of definitions. Then remain silent, with the idea that you are a mystery, an unknown.

Difficulties: Obstacles or Opportunities?

By Tomas Agosin

Difficulties are a natural part of life. We call difficulties “problems” because we attribute negative consequences to our difficulties. But difficulties are just that: difficulties. Depending on our relationship to them, they become insuperable obstacles or wonderful opportunities to grow and transform our lives.

Even though we all know difficulties are an integral part of life, we are always surprised when they come our way. The immediate reaction is “Why me?” But, “Why not me?” We are all human beings sharing in the human condition. Whatever happens to one of us can happen to anyone of us. It is not that we should masochistically enjoy and seek difficulties and problems. We do not need to look for them; if we have not experienced them yet we certainly will. Life brings them to us without exception.

There are several reasons we have such a negative reaction to difficulties. In the first place, difficulties burden our lives with sorrow. Everyone has problems, and everyone suffers. It is one of the aspects of life we share with all other human beings. Some people have more immediate problems and suffer more than others, but all individuals suffer. It is our pain, our suffering that makes us more empathic and connects us with all other beings.

Secondly, we hate difficulties because they force upon us the realization that life is not just a “bowl of cherries.” We all harbor a secret longing for a paradise-like world free of pain, free of discomfort, where all wishes are made instantly true. Difficulties shatter that infantile view of life and force reality with its problems and limitations upon us.

In the third place, we shun difficulties because they demand that we make an effort to overcome them or to live with them. We cannot just ignore them. We usually try to; denial tends to be the first line of defense. But they usually cannot be avoided and they demand an answer from us. Those answers tend to involve some form of attention, effort, creativity, and/or adjustment. Difficulties demand that we change one way or another. It is through this tension that we transform our lives; that we grow, that we try to find creative solutions to our existential dilemmas.

Our difficulties are many. We can mention a few:

- personal imperfections and limitations, e.g., being clumsy with one's hands, having a bad memory
- physical illnesses or having a particular physical handicap
- getting old and losing some agility
- natural disasters
- difficulties in relationship, with one's family, one's boss, one's friend
- fears
- financial difficulties
- unanswerable existential questions.

Difficulties become obstacles when we don't face them and don't accept them.

Unfortunately, they don't go away and if we don't tackle them one way or another, they become true obstacles to our growth and flowering as individuals. If we don't work "on" them and "with" them, we remain stuck in a particular way of being. At the same time, it is because difficulties demand an answer from us--it is because they force themselves on us so clearly--that problems and difficulties are an opportunity for us. Why would we

ever change if it wasn't for the suffering produced by our problems? What else could impel us to be creative and try out new ways of living? What else forces us to make an effort so that we may become better human beings? Maybe we can stop thinking of difficulties that life present to us as problems, but rather think of them as something that we need to work on. That way we can transform them from obstacles to opportunities.

For example, if we become ill, instead of thinking "Why me?" maybe we can think of our illness as an opportunity to learn about physical suffering. We can learn in our illness how millions of people have to live day in and day out with their limitations, and we can start to truly understand their plight. When we become ill we start appreciating our health, which before we took so much for granted. And it is only when we are ill that we start facing our own mortality and thus, we can start living more fully with the knowledge that we will not be here forever.

Another example could be the difficulties we have in a relationship with a loved one. At first, we usually long for the other person to change since we usually think of difficulties in relationship as the other person's fault. But since the "other" most often does not change, the difficulties become a test of our love. A love that is not tested never acquires depth and remains merely a romantic ideal. It is through patience, tolerance and acceptance that we transform and perfect our relationships. Problems also help us to discover new things and ourselves; and a committed friendship where difficulties are worked out becomes an extraordinary school of life.

Spiritual life transforms our attitude toward difficulties from one of obstacle to opportunity. It does not do away with difficulties; nothing ever will. But it helps us face our difficulties so that we can learn, grow and expand our lives. Our sufferings

ultimately are the great “teachers” in our life so that we can become more human, more compassionate, wiser and more loving.

EXERCISE

Sit in a quiet place for fifteen minutes and concentrate on one particular difficulty you have. This difficulty can be of your own doing (i.e., a bad habit) or because of a bad circumstance (e.g., and illness). For five minutes, see it in all its negative power; how it affects you life, how it limits your possibilities, how it inconveniences you, how it creates problems for you or others. Then for the next five minutes, try to quiet your mind and try not to think about anything. You may repeat the word “Silence” or “Peace” or you may have a beautiful image in your mind to accomplish this. Then for the last five minutes see how that difficulty provides specific opportunities for you and how you will use those opportunities to grow in your life.

Looking Inward: Psychotherapy & Mysticism

By Tomas Agosin

Traditional psychology and mysticism often find themselves at odds and in different camps, with people committed to one or the other as opposite ends of a continuum of ways to understand and approach life. Often mental health practitioners criticize and degrade mysticism as being a regressive way of looking at the world. Meanwhile, mystics complain that the psychological approach is limited, narrow and futile in solving human needs.

Fortunately, there have always been thinkers who attempted to bridge these two traditions, like William James, Carl Jung, and Roberto Assagioli. In the last few years, our culture has been experiencing a reawakening of spiritual needs and interest, and new thinkers are trying to make connections between mysticism and psychology. One of these is Arthur Deikman who approaches the relationship between these two modes of understanding life in *The Observing Self*.

Deikman states that the central difference between psychology and mystical science is that psychology concerns itself with studying the contents of consciousness, while mysticism deals with consciousness itself. The contents of consciousness are our thoughts, feelings, memories, perceptions, and actions. Thus, we have a thinking self--all the thoughts in our mind; an emotional self--the emotions and desires of our being; a functional self--our capacity to act in the world. But that is not all. There is a more primary aspect to us, the observing self--awareness itself. The "I" that exists before one thinks, feels, or acts. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." Deikman says, "I am aware, therefore I am."

For Deikman, this “observing self” is particularly important because it is the only realm of our existence that cannot be objectified. Everything else can be objectified, and thus, everything else is limited. The observing self has no limit--it can never be objectified. It has no boundaries. It has no beginning and no end. It cannot be located. It cannot be seen. The observing self is featureless. But it undeniably exists as our experience demands we acknowledge. And it is knowable. When we empty our consciousness of all content, we penetrate into that realm--the realm of pure awareness--the realm upon which all mystical traditions have focused.

Psychology has been so concerned with understanding the mechanisms, dynamics and features of the contents of consciousness, but until recently, it has not dealt with awareness itself. To some extent psychotherapy attempts to develop the observing ego, which is awareness of the contents of consciousness; thus it attempts to create some distance between content and consciousness itself, but it hasn't developed a science of the awareness function. Mystical paths have. They use techniques to increase the observing self: meditation, story telling, prayer, etc. These practices and techniques are ways of moving away from rational thinking and opening new forms of perceiving reality.

This concern with awareness itself is very important because it is the aspect of life that brings meaning to the person. The need for meaning is central to the human being, and there have been some (e.g., Viktor Frankl) who feel that the search for meaning can be seen as central to human existence. Since the contents of our mind--thoughts and feelings--are limited and ever-changing, they cannot bring lasting meaning to the person. But the observing self, in its limitless, timeless present helps the individual establish a

profound relationship to all of life. It therefore helps the person discover a different realm of life: the mystical reality.

We have been so involved with the contents of awareness (our thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, roles), the “trance of ordinary life” as Deikman calls it, that we have lost the capacity to develop our mystical life. All we have to do is to disidentify from the contents of our experience and open ourselves to a new possibility. Deikman’s “Observing Self” can be the focus for a new bridge between psychology and mysticism; and thus, the beginning of mystical psychology.

Spiritual Awakening: The Discovery of Love

By Tomas Agosin

The following paper is the epitome of Tomas Agosin's psychospiritual outlook. This paper was found handwritten among his personal and professional papers that were devoted to the interface of psychotherapy and spirituality. Although the date of the paper is unknown, at the end of his lifetime those who knew him well could all agree, this is the insight, the mandate by which he lived. Luminous soul that he was, he was ready to expand into the infinite.

Love is the beginning and end of the spiritual road.

Love is the beginning of the path because with the awakening of our spiritual possibilities comes the longing to expand, and love is expansion.

When we love we expand, because we transcend ourselves, we go beyond the limits of who we are, we go beyond our personality. When we love we include an OTHER in our mind, in our thoughts, in our heart; we think of another person, we feel what the other feels; or we open ourselves to the reality of an object we appreciate, a flower we admire. Love expands the boundaries of our being. We enhance and become OTHER.

When we love we extend ourselves. We do things without thinking of ourselves (a friend calls upset and you drop everything to respond to his or her need.) We do things in spite of ourselves (a baby cries at 3:00 a.m. and his mother awakens; she is tired and all she wants is her sleep, but she gets up and responds to that cry.) When we love we extend ourselves to respond (we see a paper on the floor and we pick it up; that too is love.)

Love, as discussed here, is not something abstract, but something very immediate. Love, not as an ideal but as a way of life, as a possibility to be expressed every minute of

the day. Love as a state of responsiveness to other; as a state of openness to other--love as transcendence of self, as expansion of self.

Love is a much used and abused word, and we all have different concepts of love. Most often it is associated with an emotional movement; an emotional investment accompanied by particular feelings that one has toward an object, person or ideal. But that is only one kind of love, or one way of expressing love. Love, as mentioned above, may, or may not be accompanied by particular feelings. To think of love just as that movement of our emotions, although wonderful and beautiful, would be to limit it too much. Love needs to be explored, discovered and rediscovered again: to see it one time as something we like, something that gives us a sweet feeling in our chest; to see it another time as the creative vibration of the universe that we use to attune ourselves to; to see it as a thought; to see it as an act; and so forth, through many other possibilities.

Love is the beginning of the path because love is what gives meaning to our lives. We feel happiest when we love. Love is what endows our life with purpose. However that love manifests itself--giving to a cause, a friend, a form of study, a need of the moment, loving God--whatever form it takes, when we give, when we love we infuse our life with meaning and happiness.

Love is the beginning of the path because when we awaken we long to purify our love. To purify love is to take away, to remove the personal aspects from it, to remove the personal desires from our love; to love and expect less and less in return, until we want nothing for our love; to stop bargaining with love. First, is to want nothing material for our love; then, to want nothing emotional in return; then, to not even want a "Thank you"; then, to not even want others to know about our love; then, to not even want to feel

good about our giving and loving. More and more we find ourselves called to just love. To love because we cannot do otherwise. To love because we love.

Love is the end of the road because, when we love, we are fulfilling our highest possibilities. So when we love we have reached the end. As we love in this moment, we are at the end of the path; we are at the end NOW--not when we become perfect beings, not when we have all the teachings, not when we become enlightened. But now! When we love we fulfill our purpose, our highest possibilities, and then, we accomplish our call. Our work is to transform all reactions into a response of love, and then we have arrived. Our task is to purify our love so that we may love without distinction--then we will have fulfilled our destiny.

Spiritual awakening is the discovery of love. The spiritual path is the perfecting of love until we become love itself. Then we stop loving another and another and another, and we are love itself. To stop loving and to be love! To stop loving this or that, to just love! That is the beginning. That is the end.

Epilogue

When Tomas Agosin's life ended, his many friends and colleagues felt a commitment to carry on his work. The Cafh Psychotherapy and the Spirit seminars continued to meet monthly in Manhattan for ten more years, and a smaller group met in St. Louis for three years. The annual Cape Cod seminars also continued for a dozen years after Tomas' death, with the leadership dubbing themselves "The Agosin Team." Many professional therapists were touched by these workshops, and gradually the natural ethos changed, so that it became "OK" to assess and to examine spiritual issues as part and parcel of a more holistic approach to psychotherapy.

Those who had worked most closely with Dr. Agosin--in supervision with him or as his colleagues at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Bronx Psychiatric Center--shared stories and "teaching tales" they had learned from him. Two favorite aphorisms are as follows:

- When, as often happens, a patient complained about taking his medications, saying he or she did not want to use medications "as a crutch," Tomas Agosin would inevitably say: **"What's wrong with a crutch? Use what you need and get on about your life!"** The patient would look at this one legged physician who walked with two metal crutches, and the point would sink in.
- When a supervisee or other mental health trainee was impatient, moving too fast with a patient and not taking sufficient time to explore and let the natural psychotherapeutic process unfold, Tomas would inject a gentle reminder: **"You can't make a plant grow faster by pulling on it!"**

Tomas Agosin was a master therapist and a masterful supervisor and teacher. With his existential outlook and underlying (often unspoken) spiritual reverence for the human person and the therapeutic process, he was successful and well respected in his work.

Supervision:

I had the privilege of working under Dr. Agosin's supervision for five years. The last two years I also became a member of Cafh Spiritual Order and worked closely with him and Peter Cohen, teaching and coordinating the Psychotherapy and the Spirit seminars in New York and Cape Cod. I thus had in-depth opportunities to talk with Tomas about spiritual issues in the therapeutic relationship and in the therapist, as well as in numerous clients. Shortly after his death, I consolidated some of my learnings so as not to lose the treasures I had received in the supervisory sessions with him.

Dr. Agosin's conceptualization of cases was essentially psychodynamic. His understanding of transference and counter-transference, of the importance of therapeutic boundaries, of inner "objects," of ego and self, was classic, yet up-to-date psychodynamic theory. This is the debt he owed to Freud and the various groups of Freud's followers. (See Fred Pine's *Drive, Ego, Object and Self*.)

For example, Tomas taught that termination, is a highly significant period in depth psychotherapy. With his extraordinary appreciation of the psychological realities and inevitability of death, Tomas likened termination to the loss one experiences with death. Even the hiatus of the therapist's vacation time is similar to a mini-death for the client. Exploring those themes at times of termination provides a rich opportunity to address major issues such as death anxiety and abandonment fears. In similar fashion,

depth psychotherapy encounters periodic death-anniversary phenomena, when the calendar may dictate a patient's tendency to depression or grief reactions. Again, death is a major theme to work with in depth, provided the therapist has worked with it sufficiently in his or her own psyche.

Tomas especially appreciated, and would hand on to his supervisees, Laura Huxley's description of her husband, Aldous Huxley's spiritual approach to death (See Huxley, 2004). Tomas also conceptualized termination in terms of Mann's view of conscious and unconscious processes related to Mother Time and Father Time. From this perspective, most of therapy is experienced as "Mother Time," a rich, nurturant experience where time seems eternal. Then, with the onset of termination, "Father Time" enters the process. Father Time is practical and time-limited. It may be experienced as harsh and abrupt, generating similar feelings to those of a child being called in from play. The task of termination is to go through the process with awareness, integrating the experiences of endless Mother Time and the practical, time-limits of Father Time. The termination opportunity is rich, if it is undertaken with full awareness. (See James Mann's chapter, "Time: Conscious and Unconscious" in *Time-Limited Psychotherapy*.)

Awareness--not unlike the Buddhist sense of "mindfulness"--is a state of mind that Tomas Agosin practiced and recommended to his patients and his supervisees. Once, when he was leaving for a month-long summer vacation, he recommended to me, as a "transitional object," a book to fill the gap while he was gone. It was Deikman's *Observing Self*.

Thus termination is a rich time to work through major therapeutic themes so that death and endings never have quite the same power to destroy or to devastate the psyche.

When he practiced psychotherapy or supervised therapists, Tomas also drew more subtly on his knowledge and experience with the approaches of Carl Jung. As seen in his presentation of “Psychosis, Dreams and Mysticism in the Clinical Domain” (page 74-108 of this volume), he drew on archetypal pattern recognition, with special reverence for the emergence of the archetype of the Self or psychospiritual wholeness. Since, in Jung’s conceptualization, “Self” is the union of opposites, Tomas Agosin taught that a therapist can facilitate the emergence of Self by helping the client to articulate the seemingly polar opposites: the marriage of inner male and female, for example, and the recognition of the valid presence in the psyche of both persona (outer image) and shadow (hidden defects). Understanding and acceptance of both sides of the polarities was a therapeutic method he frequently taught and modeled.

Honoring the dream life of his patients was Tomas Agosin’s primary access route, not only into the personal unconscious, but also into the spiritual dimensions of the psyche. As he stated in his paper, “Exploring the Divine in Psychotherapy” (page 70-73 this volume), not much needs to be said, but the spiritual dimension needs to be honored, even revered, when it arises. “That’s a fabulous dream!” he would say and he would help the patient to recognize “the inner marriage” or “the Self emerging.” When an especially potent dream arose, he would often recommend that the patient, “Rest with that image,” and inevitably he would wonder with the patient, “Why that dream is coming up right now.”

The Jungian concept of the archetypes in the collective unconscious is a theme that provided the underpinning of much of Tomas Agosin’s work. Even when he did not talk spirituality--and for many years, in many settings, he did not voice this theme--he

drew upon his Jungian understanding. The universality of the human predicament was something he approached with compassion and even reverence. For instance, when he supervised psychotherapy at the Multiple Sclerosis Center of Albert Einstein, he often communicated--largely in a non-verbal way--his empathy for the handicapped patients and his appreciation for the spirit that sustained them through the great difficulties of a chronic, debilitating disease.

Tomas believed that the collective unconscious is what connects us to all humankind. We are all in this together; we participate on some level with every aspect of the human condition. Each patient can teach the therapist a deeper appreciation of what it means to be human. Each patient can awaken in us an awareness of our own frailties, vulnerabilities and of our own enormous spiritual potential. "When you're in your own therapy at the same time you're working with psychotic patients, you will have an extraordinary opportunity to plumb your soul and grapple with you own core tendencies," he would say. The deepest and most frightening issues, for instance childlike dependency and narcissistic woundedness, would become less overpowering with the recognition that here, at least, one is participating with the struggles of all humanity.

Transmutation of Affect:

Shortly before his death, Tomas Agosin shared with me some of his insights from his own explorations through the inner work on the spiritual path of Cafh. He sometimes said, "It's the inner work that is most important." By that he meant that the most important work a therapist can do, in order to excel in the craft, is to work on oneself.

In his eulogy for his brother, Manuel Agosin said Tomas "knew how to transmute sorrow into solitude." That statement is profound, but it probably has little meaning for

those who have not spent significant practice in this particular spiritual work. I shall endeavor to explain.

We are all no doubt familiar with the idea of “transformation” and we can easily sense how it applies to an individual seeker who becomes sanctified as she or he progresses on the spiritual path. “Transmutation” has a slightly different, though related, meaning. According to *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, the word transmute (which comes from Middle English *transmuten* and French *transmutare*) means “to change or alter in form, appearance, or nature especially to a higher form;” or secondly, “to subject (as an element) to transmutation” or “to undergo transmutation.” Similarly transmutation is defined as “an act or instance of transmuting or being transmuted: as **a**: the conversion of base metals into gold or silver, **b**: the conversion of one element or nuclide into another either naturally or artificially.” As Carl Jung has pointed out, in the medieval European spiritual traditions, transmutation was taken as an aim whereby the *nigredo*--the dark, base material--of ordinary life is changed into the gold of spiritual perfection. Thus the idea of transmutation is related to the metamorphosis of a personality into a highly spiritual being.

The varied spiritual paths differ as to what they recommend for spiritual work and how they approach the emotional life of the aspirant. As background and contrast, we will look briefly at two related Eastern approaches to transmutation and change in the emotional life. Tomas Agosin would agree with both these suggestions, as wise guidance for spiritual growth. In the Buddhist tradition, Thich Nhat Hanh writes about mindfulness:

Every day we have many feelings. Sometimes we are happy, sometimes

we are sorrowful, sometimes angry, irritated or afraid; and these feelings fill our mind and heart. One feeling lasts for a while, and then another comes, and another, as if there is a stream of feelings for us to deal with. Practicing meditation is to be aware of each feeling. (Hanh, p. 31)

In contrast, this Hindu *sadhana*--spiritual work--is taken from *The Bhagavad Gita*, where God teaches man--the warrior, Arjuna--as follows:

Work hard in the world, Arjuna, but for work's sake only....The central points of issue, Arjuna, are desire and lack of inner peace. Desire for the fruits of one's actions brings worry about possible failure....Then your anxiety robs your energy....

The ideal, Arjuna, is to be intensely active and at the same time have no selfish motives, no thoughts of personal gain or loss. Duty uncontaminated by desire leads to inner peacefulness and increased effectiveness. *This is the secret art of living a life of real achievement!*

To work without desire, substitute thoughts of Divinity. Do your work in this world with your heart fixed on the Divine instead of on outcomes. Do not worry about results. *Be even tempered in success or failure* [emphasis added]Work performed with anxiety about results is far inferior to work done in a state of calmness. Equanimity--the serene mental state free from likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions--is truly *the ideal* attitude in which to live your life. (Hawley, 2001, pp. 20-21)

Tomas Agosin, like the Buddhist monk, understood the value of mindfulness and being aware of one's natural feelings. And like the warrior, Arjuna, he understood the

goal of transcending feelings--of going beyond attraction to pleasure and avoidance of pain--in order to gain a state of equanimity or inner peace.

In supervision during the last two years of his life, 1989-1991, I had the opportunity to ask Tomas how to work on transmutation of the emotional states. (This of course is a key dynamic in maintaining therapeutic equanimity in the face of counter-transferential emotional reactions.) He replied by telling me how he personally worked on transmutation. Often he used the meditation techniques of Cafh (See for example the meditations on pp. 53 to 55 of this volume.) Then he expanded his teaching to give his own perspective of the spiritual work of transmuting affect.

The emotional life of human beings is highly complex, but feelings can generally be classified in four groupings: fear, sorrow, happiness, and anger. Each category can be transmuted by applying different spiritual techniques. Tomas Agosin's methods are as follows:

Fear

Mental health professionals know that feeling afraid or anxious is a natural part of the emotional life of every human being. Like other feelings, it comes and goes and is probably felt at least momentarily by each person every day. Fear is a natural warning in times of danger and is therefore a protective device. Much of what people tend to fear is illusory, however, and it becomes neurotic when a person is paralyzed or overly defended by anticipatory or free-floating anxieties. Anxiety is especially common at times of transition and change. "Existential angst" is a heavy dread that is normal whenever one approaches something new. All humans sometimes feel inadequate and afraid because, at one time in the past, we were all small children who were actually powerless and

incapable in many ways. Anxiety should not prevent us from trying new things, however. In fact, as Tomas pointed out, the mystic welcomes change. Generally we are empowered to become all that we can be by our connection with supportive people who believe in us and encourage us to risk. A sense of connection with the Divine can also be anxiety reducing and therefore freeing and empowering.

When anxious or fearful, that energy can be transmuted, Tomas Agosin said, by using the *Golden Temple Meditation*. (See, for example, the meditations on page 21 and page 54 of this volume.) The essence of the method is that ordinary problems and worries are “left at the door” when entering, in the imagination, into an inner space of peace, comfort and consolation. The meditator can use visual imagery to assist the process, for instance:

Now I see myself climbing the steps outside the temple. At the top step there is a veranda. I loosen my backpack and lower it to the ground. All the burden of the problems I carry I leave here outside the door. I open the door and enter into the cool, dark, pleasant space of this temple. As I walk forward I have a deep sense of the Presence of the Divine here. I breathe deeply and let myself feel this Presence.

In this case the “consolation” that the meditator is seeking is peace of mind and a sense of calm. The factor of “leaving one’s burden at the doorstep” is one aspect of transmuting this energy; the other aspect is the sense of resting in the Presence of the Divine. Both these factors work together to shift the energy and bring a sense of peace, while letting go of the anxiety or fear. The security is internal, and the meditator affirms that state by resting in the internal, calm “Temple.”

Sorrow

Tomas Agosin knew that sorrow is a very important emotional state. At times of loss, the natural grieving process entails remembrance of times past. Loving feelings may be very prevalent when separation is from someone with whom one has been close. When we leave someone we love, whether we are willing or not, or when that person leaves us, we need time for grieving and remembering. Letting go is a natural step-by-step process that may include symbolic rituals for saying good bye in many ways. Tomas would remind a grieving client, "You always have your memories." Taking photographs is one example of a ritual of leave-taking. High school and college yearbooks build on such a human need.

That which we love most seems the hardest to lose. In that light, it seems that *sorrow is an affect intrinsically involved in the process of letting go.* (Sometimes it involves letting go of our hopes and expectations, as one must do in realizing that a situation or relationship will never be what we might have wanted it to be.) Regarding the process of letting go, Tomas once said of himself, "When the time comes for me to die, I will probably go kicking and screaming because I love life so much." But Tomas also knew that sorrow, like mourning, takes time. It requires having compassion on oneself and others.

Unlike normal grieving, depression is an indication of something--some emotional process--that is stuck. Depression of course has many causes including biochemical, and anger turned in on oneself. There is a wide range of aspects of sorrow that include depression, unnecessary guilt, demoralization, discouragement and depletion of energy (burnout).

Tomas Agosin, as therapist and supervisor, taught that these sorrowful emotions all need to be entered into fully. For example, when a woman is grieving for her dying mother and she says, “I feel like *my* life is ending,” all the sorrow must be addressed: her own sense of life-unlived, as well as her loss of the mother who can no longer be there to love and support her.

So sorrow takes time. It requires open-space, time unfilled by other activities. Sorrow is naturally transmuted when sufficient alone-time is allowed; or when deep, intimate sharing time is given, as in a therapeutic relationship. When Manuel Agosin said that Tomas knew how to transmute sorrow into solitude, he was acknowledging that Tomas’ own way of transmuting sorrow was to enter solitude and allow all the nuances of the sorrow to be felt. Then gradually the sorrow evaporates. (The love remains.)

Happiness

The uplifting emotions--love, bliss and other nuances of happiness--seldom present problems. We humans welcome those happy feelings and generally we find that other people tend to like us and want to be with us when we are feeling happy. Under those circumstances, there is no need to transmute the feelings at all.

When happy feelings are too intense, however, or when they are out of synchrony with other people who are feeling differently, there may be a need to transmute the affect even then. An example would be a manic state where euphoria reaches unrealistic peak proportions. Tomas Agosin addressed this issue in several ways in his paper, “Psychosis, Dreams and Mysticism in the Clinical Domain” (pages 81 to 96 of this volume). For the manic, medication is usually necessary. So too is care for the body necessary: rest, sleep, appropriate eating. And Tomas emphasized grounding the mind in loving, responsible

ways: caring for work and relationships with others. But Tomas also expressed empathy for the manic who felt a tremendous surge of spiritual power: “those times were the most precious and meaningful moments in his life.” (See page 81 this volume.)

In like manner, erotic libido may need to be transmuted when, for example, there is no appropriate outlet for release of those energies. In his “Fires of Desire” paper, Tomas addressed this issue:

Libido, according to Jung, is ‘the energy which manifests itself in the life-process’.... That is, libido is experienced subjectively as desire, whatever its aim. In terms of which avenue the libido takes...the way to get libido to attain a higher level of experience is through the limitation of discharge of the instinct in its more primitive manifestation (p. 79 of this volume).

Tomas Agosin comments that Jung had an ascetic understanding of the way in which a “spiritual limitation” on the erotic instinct can make the energy “available for higher purposes.” This of course is the essential spiritual purpose of celibacy for clergy, monks and nuns in various spiritual traditions.

Then Tomas Agosin gives another small hint of how happiness and erotic desire can be transmuted.

... another way to understand the relationship between sexual and spiritual desire is to see that all desire is truly an attempt to return to the spirit.... We long for the union with the sexual other so that we may become whole, the same way that we long for divine union to find meaning and purpose in our lives (page 80 of this volume).

In our discussions before and after the “Fires of Desire” conference, Tomas talked about transmuting erotic energies. First let the energies arise, he advised, and then offer those energies to the Divine. Through imagination and will, the libidinal energies can be surrendered; the desire is given over to merge with divine desire and love is offered, absolutely unselfishly, toward the world.

Anger

The most problematic emotion among humans, today and throughout the history of the world, is anger. Its expression is so often destructive. To find lasting peace in our lives, it is essential both to understand anger and to learn to transmute its energies creatively.

Like the other emotions, anger should not be simply ignored. Too often the attempts to suppress anger lead to repression; that is, anger goes underground, where it accomplishes its destructive ends by operating out of the unconscious. Repressed anger leads to resentments and eventually to outright hostility, which as we know is a most potent destructive force. Hostility is cold and calculating, un-empathic and un-caring. So, in the long run, repression of anger is not helpful. But neither is it helpful to act out the aggressive impulses that accompany the state of anger. Even verbal expression of anger can have very negative consequences if it is accompanied by intense energy. So how is the energy of anger transmuted?

On many occasions Tomas Agosin pondered the problems associated with anger. He said: *“To transmute anger you must first be fully aware of the anger, its causes and its effects. Then (and only then) you can offer that energy to the Divine.”*

We recall, from his paper on “Forgiveness” (pages 56 to 69 of this volume), that Tomas often emphasized the importance of fully understanding a situation, a relationship, and the nuances of the emotions that are elicited in us. When he spoke of the processes of forgiveness, for example, he emphasized that one must first understand what happened. (Often this may mean bringing to awareness some negative emotions that have been defensively repressed in the unconscious.) Only after the knowledge is in awareness does forgiveness happen.

In supervision we often talked about cases of childhood abuse, in particular the case of one nun I was seeing for long-term psychotherapy. She had been very severely sexually abused in childhood and her memories were initially repressed along with her hurt, anger and fear. As we gradually worked through to recall of the events of her childhood traumas, her emotions began to flood in. Tomas validated the uncovering process and helped to titrate her growing awareness along with the rage and depression that followed. When she began to feel suicidal, he provided anti-depressive medication. Yet he valued the emergence into consciousness of what had happened to her. “She has a right to her memories,” he would sometimes say. Only years later was she able to consider the possibility that someone (probably God) could forgive the perpetrators who abused her.

So psychotherapy is itself a form of transmutation of emotion. Psychotherapy may be a prelude to and an accompaniment of the gradual process of forgiveness. Tomas emphasized that only after knowledge of what occurred is present in awareness does forgiveness happen. When the time is right, when the psyche is ready, forgiveness just

happens. We cannot effectively forgive by simply willing to forgive. The awareness must first free us from the unconscious aspects of the anger or rage that possesses us.

In most situations, it is very important to talk through any interpersonal conflicts that are fueling the anger of either party. When all parties are aware of what happened, and how things were perceived by each, then the avenue is open for forgiveness to occur. Unfortunately, anger often broods and breeds in silence. When the issues and feelings are not addressed openly, or when the angry person(s) goes around telling *other* people but not talking honestly with the person who angered him or her, then nothing can be worked through and the parties remain stuck in their anger.

When faced with a choice of how (and if) one should express one's anger, Tomas Agosin would often tell one or two of his favorite teaching tales:

There was a Guru who was shouting at his disciple. A passerby looked upon this scene with puzzlement, wondering why the Guru would do such a crass thing. At that moment the Guru looked up and winked at the passerby. (His message was: Sometimes the disciple needs a teaching and he will only hear it if the Guru gets his attention by shouting. The Guru was shouting in love, not anger.)

And then another story:

There was a snake that came to a Guru saying how he was very unhappy because people all hated him. The Guru responded, "Of course they hate you. You go around biting people all the time. If you stop biting them the people will stop hating you." So the snake went back and reformed his ways. But soon he found he was still unhappy. Now elephants

stepped on him; monkeys played tricks on him and hid his food. After five years of experiencing much abuse, he went back to the Guru. The snake was mangled and emaciated, a mere tattered remnant of his old self. He told the Guru what had transpired and how animals were cruel to him now that he no longer bit them. The Guru said, “Of course. I told you not to bite. I didn’t tell you not to hiss!”

Clearly there are times to express a warning when others are trespassing on one’s terrain. There is a need for genuine assertiveness in many situations. When one is being hurt by the behavior of others it is necessary to speak up. *How* one does speak up (*assertively, not aggressively*) is a complex question, and one well worth serious reflection. There is much in the psychological literature about ways to address anger. What Tomas Agosin added was a Jungian and a psychospiritual dimension to that discussion.

From the perspective of the collective unconscious, it is clear that the energy of anger is a human reality that is universal. The fires of fury are often not easily quenched. As Jungian analyst E. C. Whitmont has pointed out, the energy storms of anger are not unlike the ubiquitous electrical storms that we find in nature:

In analogy, the energetic disturbance, created by a storm center in the human spectrum, tends to spread into the adjoining areas....

When the extension meets a barrier the energetic flow is reflected; turning back, it adds to the original disturbance, changing its pattern and bringing forth expressions in different directions.

(Whitmont, 1991, p. 185)

When confronted with the fact of one's own anger, when the storm does not easily abate, there is need for inner work to transmute the energy. Two spiritual methods that Tomas taught are:

- To *see the other individual as a manifestation of the Divine*. Each person contains a spark of the Divine Life within. If one can see or imagine that spark, then the anger tends to diminish.
- Another even more radical approach is to offer the energy to the Divine. This does not mean to give the anger itself (What a miserable "gift" that would be!), but rather to *offer the ENERGY of the anger to the Divine One, for use wherever it is needed in the world*. To offer it up is a genuine letting go. The local energy dissipates; and if it returns, the offering is given again, until it is gone. (The underlying belief is, of course, that the prayer is answered and that there is indeed some place in the world where a bit of extra energy is needed.)

I have personally found both these approaches very helpful; and they are not methods one finds in the usual psychological literature. To transmute the energy, one becomes not less human but more so; by transcending the emotional storms that keep us imprisoned, one is able to achieve that state of equanimity that is described in the *Gita*. "Equanimity--the serene mental state free from likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions--is truly *the ideal* attitude in which to live your life." (Hawley, 2001, p. 21) Serenity, or equanimity is the beautiful result of working inwardly to transmute the energy of excess emotion. The "luminous" personality that many people recognized in Tomas Agosin was the result of his own inner work on himself.

So in his life and in his work, Tomas Agosin understood and worked on many levels: On the biochemical level he provided medication for some patients; on the personal therapeutic level, he valued exploration of one's personal past experiences and discussion of better ways to manage relationship difficulties; at the archetypal level, he easily recognized and tuned into the universal dimensions, where each one of us participates with all others in the vast human domains; and finally he would accompany souls in the journey to the spiritual domain of union with all that is, where past and future blend into a deep experience of the interconnectedness of all of life.

References:

Deikman, Arthur(1982). *The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy*. Boston: Beacon press.

Hanh, Thich Nhat (1987). *Being Peace*. Berkley, CA: Parallax Press.

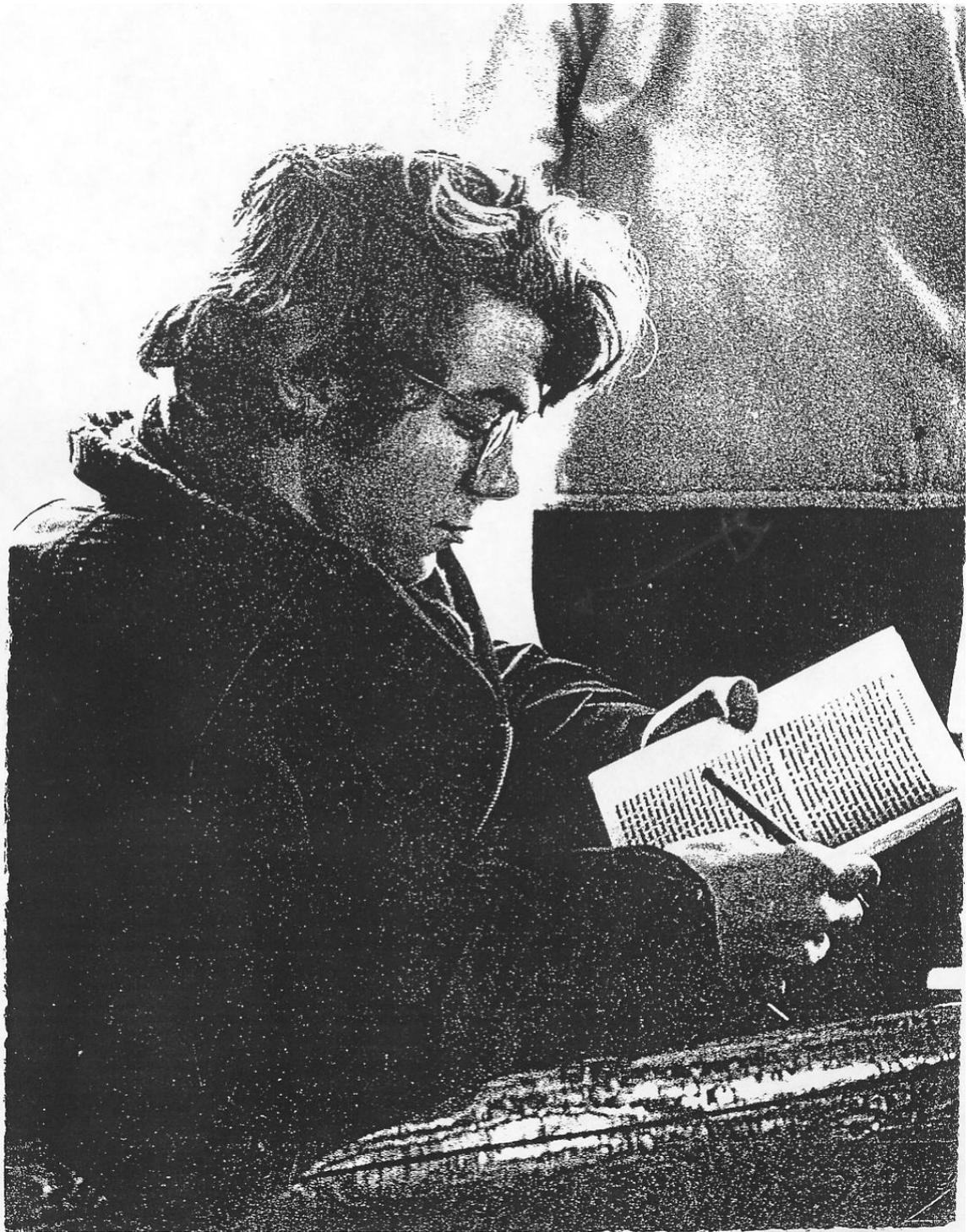
Hawley, Jack (Ed. and trans.) (2001). *The Bhagavad Gita: A Walkthrough for Westerners*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Huxley, Laura (2004) *This Timeless Moment*. Berkley, CA: CelestialArts Publications.

Mann, James (1973). *Time-Limited Psychotherapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Pine, Fred (1990). *Drive, Ego, Object and Self: A Synthesis for Clinical Work*. New York: Basic Books.

Whitmont, Edward C. (1991). *Psyche & Substance: Essays on Homeopathy in the Light of Jungian Psychology*. Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books.







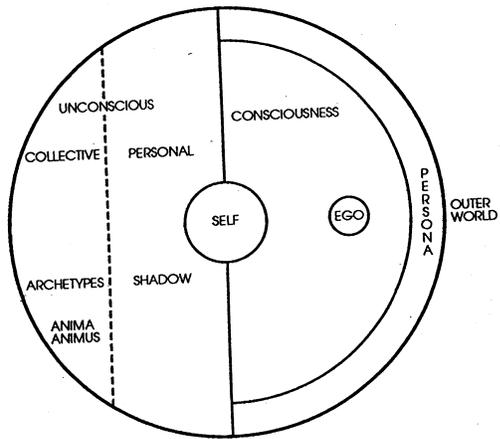


Figure 1
Jung's Model of the Psyche

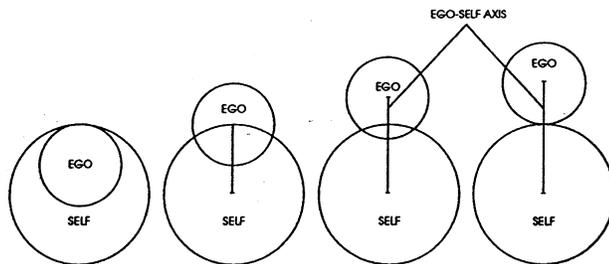


Figure 2
Development of the Ego-Self Axis

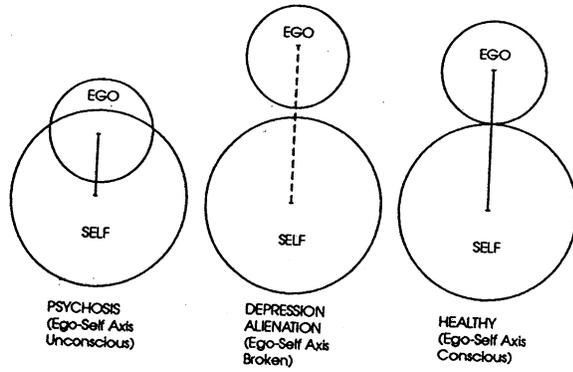
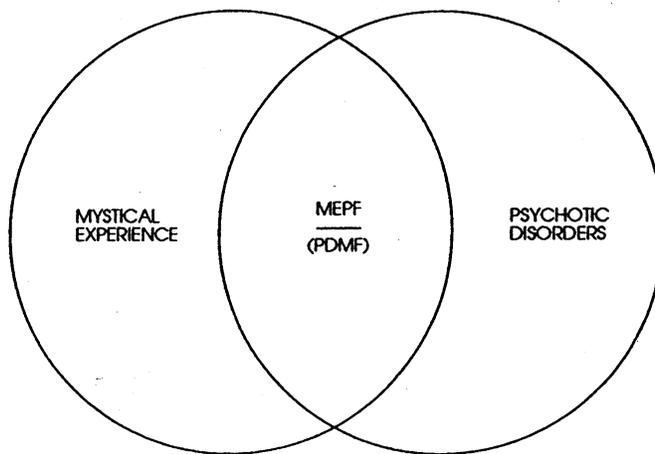


Figure 3
The Ego-Self Axis and Its Vicissitudes



MEPF: Mystical Experience with Psychotic Features
(PDMF: Psychotic Disorders with Mystical Features)

Figure 4
Overlapping Mystical Experience and Psychotic Disorders



Figure 5
The Sacrifice of Christ and the Church

