OMEGA TRANSPERSONAL DRAMA THERAPY

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GENESIS

In this chapter, parallel histories of the formation of an experimental theater and work with clinical populations are woven together. They served as the foundation for this model of Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy. What follows is a selection of experiments, productions, and processes, which illustrate, each in a particular way, how the vision evolved and became more multidimensional.

The avant-garde theater of the 1960s shook people up. Plays were created to hit people over the head with everything that was wrong. People needed to be shaken out of their complacency, their indifference to the incredible number of injustices around them. Just talking about what was wrong was no longer effective; and so the age of multidimensional expression was born, the world of environmental theater, which drew actors and audience into a more intense intimate relationship. Theater Workshop Boston, Inc. was created to develop original plays about timely important issues and create new forms of audience/actor relationships within the 'environmental theater' genre. We felt well aligned with the work of The Living Theater and The Open Theater in New York. A couple of years later, the three theaters all received grants from the new experimental theater division of The National Endowment of the Arts.

Drama Therapy with Special Needs Children and Institutionalized Adolescents

In the late 1960’s, I took a job teaching inpatient schizophrenic and retarded adolescents in Boston State Hospital, through the Boston School system, which was run under an inept elderly female supervisor in the “physically handicapped” department. There were no books, no supplies, no curriculum, nor assistance of any kind. Theater became the therapeutic and educational form. In this hospital's adolescent unit, there were two classrooms, both composed of long-term institutionalized schizophrenic patients. One of the classes had relatively normal-intelligence learners, while the other, that I was given, had a range of retarded learners from severely autistic to learning disabled. I was told, “They need to be prepared with the basic academic skills as well as practical life skills to make it in the world if they ever leave the hospital.”

The only learning materials were my student-patients and myself. Using the tools of what we now call drama therapy processes, many of these patients well exceeded their expected learning capacities. Making learning fun through the use of creating a “special engaging environment” and simple theater games became a key to working with our challenged hospital students. A sterile state mental hospital classroom was transformed into a
magical theater store. Every shelf had produce and products that utilized different levels of math and reading skills. These mentally challenged adolescents learned basic math skills at their own level without embarrassment. They were either working in the produce department (with simple arithmetic) or the canned goods section (with algebra), while enjoying taking on the roles of shopkeepers, clerks, or consumers in the food section that corresponded to their level of learning. Thus, very early, an initiation into the connection between theater, therapy and education evolved organically. Using the environmental theater model we were evolving in our theater and integrating it with the education and therapy work happening in the hospital, we had discovered a new classroom process. We called it:

**E.T. Theater.**

Later, at Kennedy Memorial Hospital for handicapped and emotionally challenged student-patients, what now would be called a drama therapy program was created, using role playing, theater games, and in particular, the use of puppets, to reach these young people. The power of puppets to gain the trust of these student-patients, who had lost their trust in adults, was revealed to me, engaging them in depth emotional dialogues about their illnesses.

**THE OMEGA TRANSPERSONAL DRAMA THERAPY MODEL:**

_Transformational / Environmental / Participatory Theater_

_Drama Therapy in Educational and Socio-Political Theater_

What I knew best was theater. I had been exposed to Grotowski’s *Towards a Poor Theater*, which encourages the use of the actor for everything including sets and props, and also Viola Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theater*, which similarly demonstrates how actors can create images of people, places, and things using themselves. Spolin's work introduced me to theater games and inspired me to teach cognitive material in that modality.

In Theater Workshop Boston's first play, *RIOT*, (Portman, Rollins, 1968), a total environment was created in a church basement in which the audience had the experience of being in the center of an actual riot, of being trapped, of being unable to get out. There was no audience/stage separation. Rather than just watching a riot, they became part of one, reproduced through sound, movement and light.

*Examples of Transformational Participatory Theater*
Inspired by the power of creating a theater environment, where the boundaries between actors and audience were designed to catalyze intimate actor-audience relationships, our theater experiment was taken one step further with young people. Since children had fewer expectations about what theater should be, we experimented with creating a meaningful educational experience and environmental form, where the young audience members would become active participants throughout a well-crafted and structured play. While adults needed to be shaken out of their complacency, children needed to become more aware of what was really happening in the world.

In **TRIBE**, (Linden), children in the audience became active spectators. As soon as they entered the theater, they were immediately initiated into one of three tribes of Native Americans. In this way, they experienced directly the beauty and the joy of these cultures; then they experienced the injustice of being pushed off their land. In theatrical terms, they were forced to leave beautiful, spacious, colorful environments, in which they experienced interesting, creative rituals. They were then ordered to travel in a dark, cold, empty space, ending up being shoved together onto a crowded dark gray platform, which represented the reservation. The adults, who brought the children in the audience to the theater, were seated as elders of these tribes and experienced being left behind.

The next experiment in our Theater Workshop Boston's playwriting process was to create a play about pollution for adults and children.. In **CREATION**, (Linden, Rosenberg), adults were seated in a harried city environment exemplifying polluted values and the children physically became part of a beautiful country world of new values and natural living. There was also a third environment, between the city and country environments, a factory run by a bureaucrat, who represented the voice of selfish capitalism. Children and adults directly experienced their environments being taken over by a river filled with waste. The children were driven back to the city to take responsibility to work for change. They begged the adult audience to look at the dying world around them and listen to their pleas for action.

**TOWARD THE ONE**, a Family Board Game, (Linden, Dym) was a participatory theater piece for families that created a safe, fun environment in which family members made new discoveries about each other through improvisational play. Using many art forms within a theatrical setting, a people-sized board game was created. Each family formed their bodies into some kind of vehicle to move between experiences. A family therapist took the role of Game-Guide and was assisted by actor-facilitators. We utilized many different expressive arts therapies within the context of a family theater experience.

**SUNSONG: A PEOPLE PUPPET PAGEANT FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES**, (Linden, Sonneborn), is a participatory children's play that combines both psychological and spiritual disciplines in a healing experience, originally created for special needs students in the Boston schools. The play integrates a family systems therapy model with a Sufi
Healing breath practice, based on the healing energies of earth, water, fire and air, as an underlying framework for change. In a delightful musical piece, the whole audience become members of one of four element groups and participates in creative warm-up exercises, dancing and singing. By identifying with the qualities of one of the four elements, children begin to discover new potential to heal others and in the process themselves. They worked together to develop creative healing rituals for one of the two puppet children, in the form of songs, dances, improvisations and rituals. The audience children enact roles of one of these elements of nature in the earth, water, fire or air groups and become the healers of the people puppet family. The two puppet children receive the creative gifts of healing and learn that they can be empowered to change their family’s dynamics, by making healing changes in themselves. The concept of a systems theory of family dynamics (the underpinnings for most family therapy today) is the basis for the psychological changes taking place in the troubled puppet family. This approach helps children to realize that change is possible and that change in one family member (in this case a child) can help growth happen in the whole family.

**Drama Therapy in Organizational Development, in the Corporate World**

The earlier sociopolitical theater of the 60s rejected government, big business and corporate America, as though it were all one entity to be scorned and destroyed at all costs. At some point we realized that in order for significant change to happen, it was necessary to recognize our collective responsibility in the government we have and in the capitalistic system that we have created. Working with people in positions of power could foster significant change. We realized that there is no “them” and “us”. It's a rationalization of our mind. The sacredness of life is about realizing our essential connection to all of life's creation.

When the President of our theater's Board of Directors, George Litwin, an experienced leader in the Management Training field, strongly encouraged us to bring our skills and extensive teaching and facilitating experience into the corporate world, we welcomed the opportunity. He was a master at what he did and was a personal guide to many top executives in large Fortune 500 companies. He had experienced much of our work personally and assured us that we had much to offer these organizations. Over a period of several years, we were invited into select client jobs with him and together we co-created what we called transformational learning experiences. We wrote a paper together on *Visioning: A Transformational Process*. The essence of it was about left-brain strategic planning coming out of right brain visioning processes with the goal of building a world class company, by thinking out of the box. Drama therapy processes were interwoven into these training programs as our theater company was learning to do in a variety of other venues in which we were working.

For over two decades within the corporate world, we have worked with many of the same educational principles and values in designing creative transformational learning programs in leadership training, visioning,
creative problem solving, goal setting, (examining the company's goals in the context of one's life ideals and goals),
corporate culture change, empathy training, communication, conflict resolution, team building and company review
processes.

*Examples of Drama Therapy in Corporate Systems*

The following is an example of an innovative corporate format: Our core theater company, who were also
trained facilitators and teachers, were brought into one of the largest banking organizations in the world. They
observed a meeting of corporate managers. The actors (unknown to the managers) were each assigned one manager
to observe. At a certain point, I stopped the meeting and invited the actors to take the seats of the managers. The
actors then assumed the role of the manager they had observed. They role played the subtext of the perceived
feelings and thoughts that were not being expressed. The managers were totally astounded at the accuracy of the
portrayals. This helped motivate them to try to engage in much deeper and more honest communication. We then
worked with the managers in a workshop in which the personal dynamics and communication that surfaced in the
role plays were explored and worked through.

In that same corporation, a bank-wide training program was created called “Managing People.” We were
charged with the task of creating a videodrama for the Vice President's Annual Meeting. Many of the Vice
Presidents had 5,000 people working under them. In one case, a very bright, charismatic V.P. had just gone through
a corporate disaster. In the process of creating a mass change, he had neglected to attend to the people issues that
arose in the process. People were burned out, felt devalued, and as a result, a host of other things happened that
produced chaos and a major financial disaster. We identified the principles behind what happened and created a
script with a different situation and characters that made the point about how important it was to be conscious of the
people resources and their feelings and needs. The video production was created as a major learning vehicle that
demonstrated that bottom line success necessitates a real consciousness about our human resources, i.e., people
sensitivity is good business.

In another very large old Fortune 500 company a team building retreat was created. First, some old-timers
were interviewed, some of whom had been in the same jobs for 40 years and in some cases had never left the small
town in which they lived and worked. They were to fantasize about an ideal job. What would they do, if they could
do anything that would really inspire them and make them feel that they were being well used? They visualized it
and then told the story of what it would be like. This was done to help them stretch out of their limited self-concept
about their work. Then, during the weekend training, a number of exercises were created to help these managers
connect with deeper parts of themselves in order to be more effective on the job. We worked on relating to others
more effectively and being more honest about what they were feeling. We did psychodramatic role plays to help
them in this process. Finally, they were helped to integrate their goals and they were encouraged to take risks, be
more creative and do things that expanded their thinking and possibilities in their current jobs. They were also to do
the same with the people who report to them.

A marketing consultant for a large food corporation client elicited consulting to help design a training
program for their marketing staff on “Empathy.” The idea was to give them an experience of empathy personally
with themselves, their families and co-workers in order to develop empathy for their consumers. Several drama
therapy exercises were created to accomplish this, culminating in the creation of scenes, playing the roles of the
consumers (children, men, women, athletes, etc) of their different food products. Out of this work, new marketing
strategies were developed.

Another application of drama therapy in business was the development of a vision process for a small high-
tech start-up company. The two founders were about to have a strategic planning meeting with the new CEO who
had just joined the company. Creating a shared vision first, was suggested, out of which the strategic planning could
more clearly evolve. They agreed and so a right-brained visioning process was designed and implemented. Listening
to soothing music, the three men closed their eyes and were taken through a relaxation and guided visualization
process, which culminated in each drawing an image that crystallized the essence of their visioning process. This
was accompanied by writing a poem or a succinct piece of prose that expressed their vision. The men shared their
drawings and writing with each other and then tried to distill the best from each and integrate their collective images
into one vision that felt good to all of them. Finally, at a company-wide meeting off-site, all of the employees were
introduced to the collective vision of the three executives and invited to participate in the same process. This time,
after drawing the vision, people were instructed to gather in small groups in which they were to collaborate in
creating a dramatic skit that reflected their group's shared vision. All of the skits were performed. Out of the richness
of their collective creativity, a mission statement was created along with some guiding principles that included much
of the company-wide input. This process allowed everyone to take some ownership of the vision, mission and
guiding principles of the organization, which served to motivate people and ameliorate the particular challenges that
face a start-up company, who work long hours under a lot of pressure.

Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy in Diversity Training, Community Healing and World Issues
Examples of Transformational Arts Festivals
(see www.omegatheater.org for longer descriptions)
Coming Home

In a multi-ethnic community we created and produced the opening participatory theater event for the community’s new art center, entitled COMING HOME, in which families moved through three floors of different Ethnic Arts processes that represented the community’s diverse ethnic heritage.

The First Earth Run for Peace

In the larger Boston Community, a city wide multi-cultural arts event was orchestrated, to be the first receivers of the torch from the runners of The First Earth Run, a global torch relay, in commemoration of the United Nations International Year of Peace, beginning at the United Nations and running around the world.

Religious Diversity: The Cosmic Celebration

The Cosmic Celebration, originally called The Cosmic Mass, (Khan, Linden) is a large scale mythic pageant, celebrating the unity of the human family, through its many diverse religious traditions. It was produced for 11 years in several cities in the United States and Europe. As many as 350 people in each production were cast into roles that reflected and helped to develop some aspect of their core self. The purpose was to help the participants transform their limited sense of self to their essential self by role playing an archetypal character that represented that higher or essential part of them, as a spiritual healing practice. This large pageant form reflected ancient Greek Theater, where the plays served as healing and educational celebrations for the entire community.

Ethnic Diversity: A Festival of Light

A Festival of Light, a high school healing arts event celebrating the ethnic diversity of the entire school community, was a unique multicultural healing celebration, involving the students, faculty and staff and families.

The Omega Arts Network

World Symposium On Humanity: A symposium was produced in three countries, hooked up by satellite, to facilitate communication between leading thinkers in the fields of science, education, public health, politics, and religion to foster serious discourse on the future of humanity. We had an opportunity to suggest that artist-healers had a valuable role to play in such an important event. We accepted the invitation to organize simultaneous Transformational Arts Festivals in Toronto, Los Angeles, and London.

In the process of creating the guidelines for what kind of visionary and transformational artists and artistic work the arts festivals would present, we created The Omega Arts Network of Artist-Healers, who saw themselves as vehicles for transformation and healing.

The Omega Arts Network is an expression of the principles of Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy. Our vision was “To unite artists of all cultures who are consciously working toward creating a vision of a better world with works that are healing, transforming and uplifting for the spirit.”
Revisioning a New World: SEJECHO: Voice of the Earth

Through The Omega Arts Network, we encouraged artist-healers in all art forms, to reenvision “a new world” during the 1992, 500th anniversary of Columbus’ journey. We created a weekend event that included a multiethnic concert/theater evening, a juried exhibition of contemporary transformational art called “Visions of a New World,” and an original participatory sacred musical theater event for planetary unity for people of all ages, called The Finding Place (Linden, Grant, Gebel). Part of our purpose was to help call forth a new myth and a positive vision for a new world. All generations were invited to experience these artistic-healing events together.

Women’s Issues:

Eartheart, an original theater piece about the stories of two Jewish women as children, adolescents and adults, reflects the larger story of the earth. As female drama therapists, we wanted to share our perspective of the feminine voice, needing to be heard at this time for conscious healing.

Motherblood, a ten-minute play, is an encounter between two mothers, one who is Israeli, the other is Palestinian, both of whom have survived significant losses. The play was created to be a powerful educational and transformational vehicle for learning about the major issues in the Middle East conflict from both the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, inspiring people to experience that it is possible to make a difference with global issues one woman to one woman.

OMEGA TRANSPERSONAL DRAMA THERAPY

FRAME OF REFERENCE

Psychodrama Origins

In the second year of my job at the state hospital, another teacher was hired, Ildri Bie Ginn. She and I decided to train with Jacob Moreno, the founder of Psychodrama, to help us in this challenging clinical/education situation. With him and his wife Zerka’s inspiration, we began to experiment in our clinical setting with the psychodrama techniques we were learning. We were experimenting with the same techniques to explore highly charged emotional issues in our personal lives.

Working with traditional Psychodrama and cathartic experience alone was often insufficient to get the needed insight or perspective. In one such psychodrama, I connected with the light in a lamp in the room. I began to identify with the light and internalize it. I closed my eyes and essentially role played, becoming the voice of that light, or as I understand it now, the voice of my soul or higher wisdom self that is always clear. In this way, I was able to view the world and my life more clearly from a mountaintop perspective. Each time I did this, I was able to gain insight and clarity in a way that astounded me. This became the beginning of my understanding and work in
developing methods of accessing and identifying the parts of one’s being that have the answers, that know what is best, and that can offer specific advice to the part of one who is in emotional turmoil and confusion. The development of our therapeutic approach includes many ways of accessing the soul essence or source of one’s strength and clarity beyond the client/patient’s limited view of him/herself. This has become the foundation of The Omega Process.

**Sufi Origins and The Omega Process**

The therapeutic disciplines in our actor, teacher and manager training allowed our students, clients and audiences to be more honest and direct about their feelings and to find solutions to their immediate concerns. At the same time, we were gaining insight about how the childhood experiences of our clients (and of ours too) have affected everyone's adult lives. Through this work, our actors and teachers became more aware of their bodies, and learned to discover where fears and tensions were stored up. We noticed that as the psychological work deepened and intensified, a focus on a self-centered ego perspective tended to prevail. We felt a need to expand our consciousness and our awareness of who we really are. We turned to meditation.

Many of us were attracted to the Sufi path, known as the “path of the Heart.” This tradition has a long history of integrating spiritual perspectives with expression through the arts: poetry, music, dance, architecture, and the visual arts. Maybe that is why it is also known as the path of the metaphysics of ecstasy. Today, the path of the heart has captivated readers and audiences all over America. In fact, Jelaludin Rumi, a 16th Century Sufi Poet, has in recent years been recognized as the most widely-read poet in the world. These are some of the Sufi themes that appealed to us in our work: the search for truth through experience of the inner nature of reality; consciousness of a larger reality beyond our immediate selves; and unity within the diversity of creation. The teachings and practices evolved from the mystical branches of many ancient traditions, (including the early mystery schools), provide an energy source for opening individuals and communities to the potential for dynamic change. The emphasis is on practicing inner discipline while working in the world, with the goal of experiencing states of increased joy, strength and peace. The work includes meditative practices based on breath, light and sound vibrations (mantram or wazifa), sacred dance and walks.

I had been introduced to the powerful role of archetypes in transformation and healing and what can happen when people truly identify with an archetype that is resonant with who they are in their essence. Viewing the soul, pure in itself, as the “I” clothed in the personality, our theater company and I began to understand how people become trapped in a limited perspective or a negative self-image by a mistaken identification. Since we already viewed healing as one of the main purposes of our theater, the Sufi teachings we had experienced helped expand our
perspective. We learned that the healing process involves awakening to the eternal qualities of the soul, one’s essential self, rather than identifying with the limitations of the personality. We wanted to create in theater, with our students, clients and audiences, an experience of the total human condition in which emotional, social, political and spiritual goals unite in a new vision of what is possible.

Processes within transformational theater work and individual client work evolved to help people identify with the cosmic view. From this vantage point one is able to view more clearly the essential self, one’s true nature, beyond their limited view of who they take themselves to be. We called this the Omega process, taken from a phrase of the Christian Mystic, Teilhard deChardin's: Omega consciousness, moving from Alpha, which is the cause, one's history to Omega, which views the larger purpose toward which we are heading.

Originally called Transformational Theater, the Omega Process describes the stages and methods that are used. With the later evolution of drama therapy as a field, the approach is now identified as Omega Transpersonal drama therapy with Transformational Theater as one of the central ways of working within a broader landscape of methods. The core goals in this healing model are to help clients and audiences to learn to identify with their essential nature or higher self, while they work through their limited self images from early and later conditioning. In order to go more deeply into healing the traumas and challenges of one’s life, the client/student is taught to identify with his/her source of strength, that quality that h/she can always rely on. When this occurs, the person is usually able to be far less defended and blocked in looking at what is difficult. Those qualities are identified as soul qualities, i.e., one's essence, which transcend any limitation of one’s being.

**PRINCIPLES IN THE OMEGA TRANSPERSONAL DRAMA THERAPY MODEL**

*Transpersonal Psychology: A Definition*

The transpersonal approach begins with an assumption of a human being's fundamental health and wholeness, rather than pathology first. Whatever are the problems and challenges in one's life, they can be viewed within the context of a larger identity individually and within the greater consciousness of humanity.

The following is a definition from John F. Kennedy University’s Graduate School for the Study of Human Consciousness:

Transpersonal Psychology includes the developing wisdom and methodology of psychoanalytic, behavioral and humanistic psychology and expands beyond these approaches to incorporate an understanding of the spiritual aspects of human experience. It addresses attention to experiences in which one's sense of self extends “trans-,” meaning beyond and through, the personal or social identity of the individual to connect with a greater whole. This state of being which lies beyond the encultured personality—call it Consciousness, Spirit, Higher Self—is of special interest to transpersonal psychologists.
The following ten principles underlie the ideal practice of Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy in all of its many forms:

1. **Assuming health rather than pathology.** As Transpersonal Drama Therapists, we assume the innate health and wholeness of our clients, rather than focus on pathology. Whatever our clients’ problems and challenges, we view them in the context of a larger identity that is whole, balanced and pure, both individually and in the greater consciousness of humanity. The transpersonal drama therapist supports the individual’s transcendence from all identification, lifting the individual from his or her own world view to one in which “the individual would presumably identify with both everything and nothing” (Walsh and Vaughn, 1991).

2. **Shifting the identity from a limited sense of self to the essential Self.** We aspire to help our clients shift their identity from a limited sense of self—e.g., from an identification as wounded, a victim, an addict, worthless, inept or other negative qualities, to an identification with the essential Self, higher Self, authentic core Self, or soul. We do not deny human experience, and in fact help people honor these experiences. However, while the trauma and abuses our clients have experienced may be terrible, we help them understand that this is not who they are, but rather what has happened to them. If they can come to identify with who they are in their essential soul self, the source of their innate strength, they can heal more quickly. When our clients learn to identify with their soul's essence, they begin to overcome a personal sense of limitation and low self-esteem and work through their limited self images from early and later conditioning. As they go more deeply into the traumas and challenges of their lives, an identification with soul or “best self” qualities – compassion, beauty, love, intuition, humor, wisdom, joy, empathy, spontaneity, creativity, peace, and many others – serve as sources of strength. From this perspective, and relying on essential soul qualities, the individual is far less defended and blocked in examining painful experiences and aspects of the limited or conditioned self.

   Using the methods of ancient esoteric and contemporary spiritual traditions, clients learn the tools taught in other cultures, such as meditation and breath work, to access and identify with this essential Self. There are a variety of theater and meditation exercises that help people access this part of themselves.

3. **Working with archetypes.** The Transpersonal Drama Therapist holds an inner concentration on and identification with four archetypal roles, including healer, artist, educator and shaman or spiritual guide. The therapist is first and foremost a healer in leading the client back through the dense and dark matter of human experience to identification with his or her soul. The therapist is an artist in using the arts to help the client access the imaginal realm and find symbolic expression (i.e. balanced and healthy self), particularly for experiences so sublime – or so traumatic –that they defy words. He or she is an educator in teaching the techniques needed to maintain awareness of the essential Self, such as meditation, breath work, sound and light, and visualizations, and in using Transpersonal Drama Therapy as the vehicle to educate the body, mind, heart and spirit. Finally, the transpersonal drama therapist is a shaman or spiritual guide in working in the twilight worlds between the conscious and unconscious, matter and spirit. The shamanic part of us, as therapists, is able to see the client in his or her essential core self by using the tools of meditation and the intuitive arts. Eventually, it is possible, to sit with a client, attune to his or her breath and experience him or her on many levels simultaneously. This, of course, requires training and practice.

   Additionally, we help our clients draw on archetypal motifs in world mythology, such as gods and goddesses, heroes, masters, saints and prophets, as well as on the archetypal elements in nature, such as earth, water, fire and air, animal totems, oceans, forests, and mountaintops, to help them work through their current issues and negative memories and find meaning in their life experiences. We also work with archetypal human themes such as finding love, overcoming great adversity, returning from grief, and rising from the ashes of devastating experiences. When people can recognize and identify with the archetypal symbols in their psyches, we can help them use these symbols to find healing and transformation.

4. **Embracing love while holding all emotions as sacred.** As transpersonal drama therapists, we embrace the totality of the heart's experience. It is said that all emotions – even fear, anger, rage and frustration – have love as their base and can be used as guides back to our essential Selves. By holding all emotions as sacred, we honor all facets of emotional life as a natural part of the human life journey. In so doing, we can come to love ourselves and others authentically, thus overcoming loneliness and alienation. In our therapeutic work, we teach clients to honor their own emotions as well. We work with them in a way that feels sacred, rather than succumbing to programmed emotions such as shame and guilt. In this manner, healing can take place in a more fluid manner as clients come into their own authenticity. Holding the thought that emotions are sacred, the transpersonal drama therapist works to facilitate the client’s return to love, albeit through a hall of distorted mirrors.

   In truth, there is no split between the godly and ungodly, the holy and the profane: It is important to honor whatever feelings we experience as sacred.
5. **Creating a sacred space.** For healing to progress, it is important to enter a sacred space where we can reconnect to our soul essence, which is never tarnished by life experience. Beauty in the therapeutic environment helps to transmute the ugliness of emotional trauma. The atmosphere can become like a beautiful rose holding the client in her warm embrace and lovely fragrance. Whether working with an individual client, a therapy group, an educational group, or an audience attending a transformational theater performance, the transpersonal drama therapist creates a sacred atmosphere to inspire people to connect with their essential selves and to allow for the possibility that the client will take a meaningful step in his or her own transformational growth and healing process. Physical beauty in the healing environment – flowers, soft colors, beautiful fabrics, and works of art also help people to feel better and to open to deep, dark places that need to be healed.

Creating simple warm-up exercises that awaken the body, mind, heart and soul help participants to build trust and develop a readiness to be present with themselves and the group. In the therapeutic, educational and theatrical settings, the transpersonal drama therapist strives to create a temenos, or sacred container to hold the truth of the client’s emotions and experiences. Through the therapist’s compassionate, nonjudgmental witnessing, the temenos provides a sense of emotional safety that allows the client’s deepest Self to surface, including suppressed and hidden aspects of the psyche, and to engage in the therapeutic process.

6. **Fostering an experience of interconnectedness and unity.** The Transpersonal Drama Therapist works to create experiences of the unity, connection, and interdependence of all living things, including human beings, animals, plants and the environment. It also relates to a holistic healing approach, working with the body, mind, heart and soul connection. Much of the work of healing concerns entering the consciousness of those with whom we are in conflict and working toward embracing their emotional experiences and points of view. We thus create exercises in nature that are designed to receive the healing power of Mother Earth and set up improvisations, meditations and creative exercises that relate a person's own experience (including challenges and future possibilities) to the experience of the earth and its cycles of birth, death and rebirth and the seasons. We also create experiences that allow one individual to see into the soul of another individual, gaining insight into old wounds and conflicts and come to resolution with the ones who wounded us, whether living or dead. Transpersonal drama therapists also work with communities to help them experience that different religions, races, and ethnic backgrounds are all part of a larger system. Realizing that we are part of a larger, interconnected ecological system helps overcome the distinctions and differences that divide people and helps overcome our essential aloneness. We embrace and become part of a global culture and family. As we identify with larger socio-political concerns and issues, we realize that we exist together in an interdependent world.

7. **Seeking mastery through self-discipline.** The development of personal capacity to manifest our greatest potential depends on conscious thought and action. Discipline and focus lead toward the realization of the Self. Many great teachers and masters have taught us that mastery lies in stilling the mind and directing it toward what we desire. Whatever we think about, we will attract. If we’re feeling and thinking positively, we will attract that, if we can master the discipline of becoming mindful of our thoughts. The lesson in this principle is that, although we work in the transpersonal realm and frequently process the contents of the unbridled imagination, the work of transpersonal drama therapists—and their clients—must ultimately be grounded in the quest for personal mastery through self-discipline. This may involve compliance with recommended practices, stretching beyond our emotional comfort zone, and other forms of inner work. Mastery of our inner and outer lives ultimately produces harmony, health, balance, and the achievement of our life’s goals.

8. **Achieving balance.** The essence of the ‘Message’ of today in many spiritual traditions is balance: balance of receptive and expressive energies, yin and yang, activity and repose, inner masculine and feminine, spirit and matter, transcendence and immanence. As noted, mastery, self-discipline, and balance all work together to facilitate the client’s evolution. Accordingly, the transpersonal drama therapist nurtures experiences of balance in the therapeutic situation that can then be generalized to other aspects of the client’s life.

9. **Identifying and achieving our life purpose.** Beyond working to heal family of origin challenges, we also want to help identify for ourselves our life purpose and help our clients to do the same. We want to guide our clients to use their unique gifts to serve the larger humanity, each in his or her own way. An ancient teaching says that our purpose is like the horizon, and the closer we get to it, the further it recedes. Our interests are clues to what our purpose is. One's purpose is continually evolving.

10. **Creating life as a work of art.** The culmination of this work is when we apply our learning creatively in our everyday life; then our lives can become shining works of art that draw their inspiration from the light within and interconnectedness to our higher source, which is reflected in family, community and the world around us. This is our ultimate goal for ourselves, as transpersonal drama therapists, and for the people we serve in our work.
Techniques

One of the foundations of drama therapy and Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy, is *Psychodrama*. Psychodrama is a group therapy process with a specific set of techniques and forms within which the protagonist (client) works through challenging issues and relationships in his or her life. There is a warm-up procedure, the enacted drama and a process by which the group share issues in their lives, catalyzed by the protagonist’s drama. My early training with Jacob and Zerka Moreno inspired experimentation in developing psychodramatic structures to access higher states of consciousness. In an early book *Theater of Spontaneity*, Moreno includes many transpersonal concepts. Transpersonal dimensions of psychodrama include: the protagonist conversing with people who have already died, with angelic presences, with one’s own higher self (as mentioned previously), or with a divine quality that someone role plays like a spirit of compassion, joy, forgiveness, inspiration or clarity. All of this and much more is integrated into the Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy approach.

*Performance Sharings within a Transformational Theater Context*

As the culmination of Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy Intensives, participants create biographical theatrical pieces based on their personal issues and sometimes how their personal issues relate to larger social concerns, with healing and transformation as a goal. This can be done either as a one-person performance or as part of a larger ensemble work.

*Storytelling*

Dr. Carl Gustav Jung said that the mental health of a society is based on people’s abilities to tell their stories. The proliferation of the 12 step recovery groups, and the expansion of the storytelling field as an art form, are indications of the broad-based need for people to access and communicate their life stories. The Transformational Theater process is a development of this naturally occurring impulse in our culture at this time. Adding the dimension and support of accessing one’s source of strength or personal soul essence, people are more able to access and communicate their trauma history. This makes it possible to transform these earlier wounded patterns into the creation of a new story. The new story evolves about how they wish to live unencumbered by their limited sense of self, based on their earlier “tapes,” which all of us have, about how we are not good enough and in what way we feel inadequate.

*Music and Sound Healing*

Music has been called the universal language of the soul that transcends individual religious, racial, ethnic bias or identities. One of the most effective ways of creating an attunement within a therapy or training group or
within a public transformational theater environment is by consciously working with vibrational resonance. Weaving beautiful sound and music textures that open hearts creates a safe and nurturing chalice to contain our sacred stories. This helps participants feel safe about opening themselves to attune to the deeper dimensions of their life experience.

My colleague, Sarah Benson, helps participants find their voice by singing their soul song. These songs are created spontaneously as an expression of the person’s emotional state and transformational edge through pure sound expression. Often the client/trainee is sung to by the group as part of the process. Many times people are encouraged to move in relation to the sound, in order to fully embody the experience. In Sarah's words:

There’s no place to hide in the sound of our voice. It carries the vibration of the truth of the moment, of the life. Our fear, anger, guilt and shame—our love, joy, and delight are reflected in the sound of our voice. As we learn to release the fear, anger, guilt and shame through releasing the voice, blockages, both physical and emotional, are released and the energy begins to flow with greater ease. In the release of our emotions, we have more space to experience love, joy and soul integration, which can also be sounded by the voice. Songs of anger, songs of love walk hand in hand as we explore mysterious regions in the forest of the self.

As we experience the retelling of our story, we open to another level of expression when we let our story become our song. Or after a particularly strong cathartic release, to then translate the emotion into sound and allow the energy of the emotion to ride the current of music and movement.

SOUL SONGS. The group member is asked what name they would like to hear and a color with which they resonate. The person sits or stands in the middle of the circle. The group sings his/her name three times on the steps of an ascending major chord with harmonies. As the sound of the name rises, the arms rise with the sound. Group members are instructed to visualize that whatever that person does not need be released. As the arms come down, the group visualizes healing golden light flowing in and around that person. The person receives the energy and vibration that is mirrored to him/her. Then the person is encouraged to make sound from the energy they received and develop it into a soul song, in whatever way naturally evolves. There is no pressure to “sing a song” in tune or anything like that. Each person's song evolves organically. Often the song moves naturally into a soul dance as well.

Archetypal Exercises for Healing

IDEAL MENTOR EXERCISE. First, people are guided into a relaxed, meditative state. Second, they are guided to journey to a mountaintop or other peaceful setting where s/he finds him/herself sitting opposite an ideal mentor. It cannot be anyone that a person knows in real life, but may embody the qualities of several beings that one
knows or has heard of. Third, participants are invited to visualize first the physical attributes of this being: age, sex and actual physical appearance. Then they are asked to visualize the qualities that are positive, since they represent the ideal. Examples may include: intuitive, intelligent, calm, compassionate, friendly, good sense of humor, responsible etc.. Then, they visualize the more subtle presence of this being. Next, they are invited to draw the being as they perceive him or her. The final step in the exercise is to physicalize this being and create a sound and movement language for him or her and to interrelate with the others in the space. People learn that what they created was a picture of their own soul qualities, essence or source of strength.

Sufi Purification Breath Practice and Improvisation Exercise

This breathing practice works with the healing magnetism of the earth, water, fire and air. (See SUNSONG, p. ) Each of the elements has a corresponding breath practice. Each is done five times:

**EARTH BREATH.** (yellow), Filtering the impurities—Breathe in through the nose and out through the nose five times. Breathe in through the soles of the feet, up to the base of the spine, on up the spine to just above the crown center.

**WATER BREATH.** (green), Washing the impurities—Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth five times. Inhale through the soles of the feet and the crown center simultaneously and out through the finger tips. Feel the fluid magnetism that is continually circulating in the atmosphere, washing you clear, cleansing you of all impurities.

**FIRE BREATH.** (red), Consuming the impurities—Breathe in through the mouth and out through the nose five times. Breathe into the fire in the solar plexus, consuming the impurities. Breathe out radiating light from the heart center, through the shoulder blades.

**AIR BREATH.** (light blue), Dissolving the impurities—Breathe in through the mouth and out through the mouth five times. Inhale through the pores of the skin with palms facing out. Imagine you are porous. Expand into the vastness of space. Let the impurities dissolve.

Once people are familiar with the breathing practices, they are guided to embody these energies through walks in a circle that are practiced as an extension of each breathing practice, accompanied by the corresponding drum beat to maintain the correct rhythm. Out of the structured walk practices, people are invited to create free movement and sound. This evolves organically into the creation of improvisational archetypal characters and qualities that represent these energies. After invoking the pure elemental energies, the characters evolve from the unconscious and often become shadow or hidden energies that manifest in a variety of forms.
**Mirrors: Body, Heart and Soul**

**BODY.** In partners, One person is A, the other B. Partners are instructed to establish eye contact accompanied by dance music; person A leads a movement piece, person B mirrors the movement. Later the facilitator says, “leaderless,” and the dance evolves without one person taking the lead.

**HEART.** In the same pairs, both people either standing or sitting maintain eye contact as they chant *AH*, vibrating the heart center. Movement in the mirroring form evolves from the chant, still with eye contact.

**SOUL.** In pairs, sitting partners reestablish eye contact and mirror the same synchronized breath rhythm. The exercise becomes subtler and quite still. Here the people focus more intently on the eyes as windows to the soul.

**Archetypal Enactment**

Working with the archetypes of gods, goddesses, heroes, heroines, power animals, people create masks that reflect the archetypes. They then create characters, and dramatic scenarios unfold using these masks. In another exercise, people are invited to select something from nature with which he/she identifies in its pure form. They can then physicalize, move, sound, and poeticize it.

**Videography**

Finally, we were introduced to the power of video technology in transformational theater work by Ellen Burstyn, a wonderful friend and theater mentor. Placing a monitor next to the camera, the participant is invited to look at the image of him/herself on the screen, while being guided step-by-step from the physical to the soul level of awareness.

These are a few examples of techniques and exercises that have been developed to access a transpersonal identity that can be a source of strength in working with trauma, abuse, low self-esteem and limitation on any level.

**Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy in Relation to Other Drama Therapy Approaches**

Our Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy approach can be applied to a variety of approaches and methods in drama therapy. This approach is as much a value system, an intentionality, and a belief about what may be possible in the healing process. It also offers methods to access a broader consciousness as well as principles and practices to help navigate clients through their healing processes, which can be used within other approaches. For example, in David Johnson’s Developmental Transformations, the therapist in the play space, who is comfortable with the Omega Transpersonal approach, would be tuned to mirroring a client’s spiritual wisdom guide, if that is what comes up in the play space. In Robert Landy’s role theory, his third role of “the guide” could be developed
much further than what he has presented, which could help the client to role play his/her higher self more consciously and effectively.

CASE EXAMPLES

Ray Concord's Transpersonal Drama Therapy and Transformational Theater Journey: Freeing Our True Self From the Bonds of Addiction

Many different modalities within our work in drama therapy have evolved with serious addiction and abuse cases. This case study is an example of a healing process in the challenges and triumphs of overcoming a 20-year, two and a half pack a day, nicotine addiction will be used excerpts from Ray's own writing from his journal to attempt to describe our approach in The Omega Transpersonal drama therapy work, as well as in my private therapy sessions, which often work hand in hand for an individual student/client. The brief summary will demonstrate how the integration of a Transpersonal Psychology approach into the therapeutic work with a serious addiction, can make a significant difference in the treatment process. This approach not only facilitates the recovery process, but helps to foster the emergence of one’s true identity. This new identity is the core essence of the person, which is uncovered, gently and creatively, from beneath the dark clouds of self-denigration, trauma and despair.

What follows is Ray's own description about this therapeutic process:

“Omega Theater was a new experience. Just move around, make sounds...this was so simple, almost child-like.

“It was like being a child. Liberating. I was taking deep breaths, relaxing, and then someone began to speak about breathing: there were four ways a body could breathe, and each way was tied to an element: earth, water, fire, air; and to an archetype: teacher, healer, artist, spiritual guide.

“We were moving in a circle, practicing one of the breaths, the Fire breath, breathing in through the mouth and out of the nose, when my spine became warm, a rippling warmth up and down my spine, an emotional warmth to everyone in the room, wanting to love them, invite them into my heart; my heart opening to everyone in the room, unafraid. I was asked if I wanted to ‘sound’ what I was feeling, to create a soul song. I stood in the center of the circle and opened my mouth and my body began to move in a dance, the sounds shaping into a song, a tone poem expressing a deep love for everyone around me. I had overcome one of my greatest fears: being in front of people without having anything ‘prepared.’ The pure sounding created a vibrational
resonance in me that opened my heart and made me unafraid. I did not care. I started to play with
the sounds, modulating them, feel the vibrations in the chambers of my heart, soul and body.

“I continued the weekly classes. It wasn't so much what we did but the safe and sacred
space that was created to do it in. Stuff inside me kept loosening, floating up to my consciousness,
taking shape in stories, poems. My next experience came during a meditation exercise. We were
meditating on the chakras and when we came to the (third eye) chakra, I saw in my mind's eye this
loving eye looking back at me. It was so conscious and loving. I was overcome with tenderness.
There was a trust that was growing inside me for the process I was going through and where it was
leading.

Core Unresolved Issues

Where it was leading was not to a place, outside, but to a space, inside. My center, my
core. I was terrified. Unresolved issues with my father floated up.

My father—a good provider, loving and faithful, a good christian example,
A decent, kind, peaceable human being. It's been 22 years since my 21st birthday.

Why am I writing to him for the first time in my life to express my true feelings?

I did not know where to begin, how to deal with this pain, anxiety. I had not the courage
to deal with this, i.e., confront my father with these feelings: and even if I did, they were raw
emotions, inexpressible.

This has to do with my relationship to you...
This has to do with being catholic...
The role models you held up to me were St. Augustine and Thomas Merton...
Did you hope and pray I would become a priest?

During a private session, I was asked to imagine my father seated beside me. To tell him
everything in my heart. I start, slow at first—this is hard!—but words, tears begin to flow. When I
hit an impasse, to my astonishment, I am asked to reverse roles: be my father answering me. Then
reverse roles again; and again until I (as my father) say “I'm so confused!” I am completely
purged, relieved. This is followed by an assignment. Write a letter (which you may or may not
mail) to your father. I start it that night and come up with seven pages! The words flowing freely.
This letter became the ground, the raw material from which I shaped a dramatic presentation
called “My Father.”

The disciplines I was learning in drama therapy and Transformational Theater were
preparing me for one of my greatest challenges in my adult life: giving up an addiction—nicotine.
For most of 20 years I had smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. I tried everything from sheer willpower to acupuncture to hypnosis, as well as various eastern and western medicines and nothing took hold.

The art of role playing and writing exercises (letter, diary and journal) provided a safe space for me to explore my terrors and fears about addiction. Not only did this give me confidence in confronting past traumas and resolving old wounds but it had the net result of embodying me in the present. It felt as if moral strength and courage had been added to my core/center where fear had resided.

Such Sufi concepts as befriending your pain, transforming your inner pain into a work of art and offering it back as healing to the community, the Sufi breath disciplines (which the act of smoking was a counterfeit of), visualization techniques of principal archetypes—Teacher, Healer, Artist, Priest/Priestess; group dynamics where other participants could role play different aspects of your self; storytelling and the creation and performance of a theater piece as a concrete goal and, most of all, the safe and sacred space to birth this in—all these disciplines were tools and weapons I used, with one hand, creating a work of art out of my withdrawal process, and the other, fighting off the inner and outer demons that would pull me back.

The Cigarette Papers

I began a journal called The Cigarette Papers. I set aside a specific time each day when I would not smoke. The gap would be long enough for the need of the drug to kick in. When the pain came forth from its hiding place, screaming for release, a threshold would be crossed and

\[
\begin{align*}
&I \text{ began to yield to the pain} \\
&\text{let it seep into me} \\
&\text{up from my center to my chest and head} \\
&\text{down to my loins my legs my feet} \\
&\text{the pain becomes sweet, but it hurts so...} \\
&\text{but it is sweet and I marvel at this.}
\end{align*}
\]

I would return to my studio to write, as accurately as I could, what was going on inside me. The discipline of journal-keeping and dialoguing with the pain provided me with a container to put the “withdrawal” in, transforming itself into cosmic and tragic poetic monologues which in turn would be acted out before the group and shaped into theater pieces.

Now into my third year with Omega Theater and working with Saphira, I am beginning to realize the fruit of all I have learned and will continue to learn. I came to Omega Theater knowing a poet is not a person who only writes poems. Through the work there, I was reminded
that a poet educates, heals, teaches, and shares the wisdom of life's path. This was confirmed through my experience in the training. I had the desire and the fire. What was lacking was the container to hold the fire, the disciplines to focus the flame and harness the energy into light and warmth.

I was reading a book of poems by Denise Levertov, *To Stay Alive*. I came across these words:

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Make a place for yourself
in the darkness
and wait there. Be there.
Go down into your well,
it's your well
go deep into it
into your own depth as into a poem.
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How do you make a container for a hole? What do you surround it with to make visible the space, to contain it, examine what is in it?

It was in one of the group sessions, helping one of the members go through a particularly dark place in her past that began to open up the door in me to explore the same. Maybe it was seeing another make it through that gave me the courage; or the group functioning as a container, a net holding and helping her through the process; watching her come out the other side. During that session I felt something—a shadow rising in the back of my mind—some fear, terror reminding me of things/barriers I was unable to overcome in my past: about my family, my father, being catholic—shadowy stuff about guilt, sex, I wasn't able to break through; receded from the barrier only to pop up years later.

One worry that comes to mind: if I am healed of this dark place, this “hole” will it take away from the energy/catalyst that is part of my creative process? Part of me worries, fears to upset whatever internal balance I have—the dance I do with the dark and the light that enables me to midwife, bring to birth the poems I've created thus far.

During this time, dream journaling opens other doors. I recall all the times in childhood I “froze” when performing: in a play in second grade; little league baseball. Interesting that this comes up as I am thinking of the letter I am writing to my father.

*Exploring The Hole*

11/24
I begin to explore the relationship between intimacy and addiction. During a private session poems come up about nicotine/liquor/food. I explore the “feel” of the hole inside me that I keep stuffing with abuses. I explore the geography of the Hole/Whole. Intimacy related to my father—need unfulfilled—and trying other things—liquor, cigarettes, coffee—to fill it. My problems are in (negative space). My father's sins were sins of omission. They are harder for me to locate and define. Finger—in the gaps, cracks, what fell through the holes, fell into the dark places.

What is a hole? Empty space. Gaps. Cracks. Hole. A vacuum—sucking light and healing, negating its effects. I went to a healer to be delivered of dependence on cigarettes. The “hole” in me was so powerful, it sucked in the healing powers!

But a hole can also mean something else. A dark place, the womb, the earth—the birthing process—out of a dark place, near death/shadow of death: the woman giving birth. The seed that must die in order to sprout. Maybe the hole in me isn't bad. Maybe I should stop seeding, penetrating it with abuses. Maybe I should let the Spirit, the Life/Creative force make love to that place in me, let the seed be planted, to give birth to poems, stories and give birth to a changed, new man, leaving behind my former self. It is the old self that hinders intimacy with all beings and things (relating to them only as objects). It is as if an intimate dialogue is a prerequisite for that being/thing to feel comfortable, trust you with its essence: you bring to the intimacy honor and respect so the being feels safe and trusting to share with you its essence, allow you to “reveal” it, give voice to it, say, in a poem or work or art. St. Francis comes to mind. And the native peoples of the Americas. The reason they are so eloquent, so “poetic” is that they dwell in harmony with creation, and creation feels safe to share its “Speaking” through them as vessels.

So this hole is a sacred space that should be tended, nourished and respected. But this space inside me is in so much pain. Why I numb it with substances. Who wants pain! Yet I am reminded of what I am beginning to learn in transformational theater, what the Sufi's say: Start a dialogue with your pain. Embrace it as a friend. Let it speak, give it voice. It is a natural part of creation. Don't try to run away from it, numb it.

Now I am thinking of my letter to my father. This is what parents should be doing. Nourishing this space in the child. Being masks of the Creator until the child matures and can tend this space on their own. The soul spot. And this spot seems to be the most neglected. So what
happens? Everything—good and bad—jumps in, a cacophony of mixed messages, static and general confusions running around inside.

Now my father tried to put God/the church into that space inside me but it wasn't the living spirit of Christ, only the form. This is why it did not take hold and grow in me. Saphira suggests that the letter to my father/dialogue with the hole would be a good basis for a performance piece for the workshop.

11/25

I wake up with an old Beatles tune running through me:

  I'm fixing a hole where the rain gets in to stop my mind  
  from wandering where it will go...I'm filling the cracks that  
  ran through the floor...I'm taking time for a number of  
  things that were not important yesterday...

Holes. Holes. My mind is on holes. A good sign I am dealing with this.

Had a great feature at the White Whale in Beverly. I did very well in the space (gaps, holes) between the poems where I must relate to the audience. Good dialogue, goofing, joking with them. It's becoming easier to communicate—not just my poems, but me, who I am—to the audience.

Recording dreams, another tool used in transformational theater, helped me connect (again, a gap) the space between waking and sleeping states. What was too traumatic/dramatic to work out in the workshop was risked in my dreams: In one dream, I am performing one of my poems and all of a sudden, dance out on one of the lines right into conversation with the audience, then back to the text of the poem, then back out into improvisation. I began to lose the creative tension of the poem and the connection to the audience, but I kept at it and finish the poem. What was most important was that I did not freak out, freeze or get filled with stage fright. I just rolled with it. The weekly workshops where I must improv pieces two or three times during the course of the evening has been good training. This would involve working with a partner in a “performance piece” that would require spontaneous dialogue. On the stage this discipline is transforming itself into conversing with the audience as I am performing the poem. This is like squaring the power. I am beginning to enjoy this.

The weekly workshop was also a way of keeping the internal dialogues out on the table, in the group. It is difficult to share my story with the group. I am nervous, embarrassed but their support gives me courage. I am asked to:

  Take the resistance (the present momentary struggle) and use it,  
  its energy to create with. Step inside of it and relax and it will help
transform, become the art. Trust your instinct. Jump into the piece. The words and the art are waiting for you to shape them.

I try this with one of the members of the workshop, but spend most of my time running away, avoiding getting into my “Hole” where all the grief is. I resist doing an improv, but my partner is there to encourage me, so I give it a try. What happens is that I start off OK in centering myself in the “Hole” and the mood is serious and I am in character, experiencing the grief and somehow transmuting it to the audience, but at a certain point a split happens in me: I continue to verbally describe the “Hole” and my feelings, but my tone, mood and movement, facial expressions become radically altered: I shift into my playful/trickster mode with (as my partner describes) a smile on my face and begin to do hopscotch movements acting out the completely contrary emotion of grief. Up to the point of the “split” I am speaking and acting in a calm, slow, deliberate manner in words and movement. Then I become hyper, speak quickly and move in a jerky, mimed fashion like a clown or a circus mime. I use the joyful face of the clown/elf/trickster to deal with (numb) the pain and sorrow in me, displacing it rather than dealing with it. The feedback is invaluable, enabling me to see into the mirror of my actual actions that are contrary to the emotions I am attempting to convey.

The inner self becomes a battleground now: the place in me fighting the healer who is approaching the “Hole.” I just want to dance, skate over the emotions, just going through the motions until I am safe on the other side. I sure do not want to sink into the Pain!

O Lord, please help me with this. I know you want me to deal with this. Help me to acknowledge my pain, get to know it, accept it, experience it. Grant me Grace to find the courage to endure the pain long enough to learn what it has to teach me.

I explain to a friend how frustrating it is, fighting myself, wrestling the angel to the edge of the Hole only to run away again. He says what I am really doing is wearing down a good path each time I try, making each successive time easier because I know the path. This will enable me to tolerate staying there longer and longer, to get to know the pain.

Conclusion

What is this Core? It seems to have to do with Fear—fear of failure, rejection. The burden as a poet of not knowing each day if you're going to create, or the continual agony of holding within yourself the creative process, like grains of sand in an oyster, midwifing the poems to birth and then when you do, fearing it won't be good or strong enough. Perhaps this is Life. This
is the everyday reality of the artist. To accept it, to get to know it, dialogue with it, learn to love it. It keeps coming back to the Sufi maxims I've been learning: Get to know and embrace your pain. This tells you your heart is alive. How these truths are beginning to resonate in me!

In my private therapy sessions I talk about fusing the apparent polarities in my life that keep running off in opposite directions—the monk and the lover, the poetry and the business, the need to live wild and free and the demand of Life to grow and mature, to nourish the Child within and the maturing Adult at the same time. How many artists have stumbled trying to do this, defaulted in areas of their life, failing to incorporate the entire vision.

There is a hunger in me to unite all these different parts and aspects of my life and experiences—the personal and political, the romantic and spiritual, the metaphysical and philosophical, the holy and profane, the chaos and the order, the wild and the sober—a passion to unite, meld, fuse all of this into a vision that will span my entire life, and the art I create along the way, a deep, rich, broad tapestry with many hues and colors that is as wide as it is high as it is deep—a life's work with all its many scenes and motifs, however individual and disparate from each other, but each one, each poem having within it the intimations, harmonies, and sympathetic vibrations of the whole.

Ray has been nicotine-free now for six years. He developed The Cigarette Papers into a full one-man performance piece and went on tour with it, inspiring others with the possibility that they, too, could overcome a long ingrained addiction. As he “wrestled with his demons,” and opened more and more to his essential nature, his compassion, faith, inspiration and free spirit became more manifest. He truly embodied the artist as healer, educator and shaman through the vehicle of sharing his story with many audiences. He has told me that the stronger those identities became the more motivation he had to resist the temptation of returning to smoking cigarettes. He continues to be aware of this desire, from time to time, but how could this poet/priest/teacher/healer not “walk his talk” as he realizes part of his larger purpose is to be this messenger of an important story of faith, healing and transformation.


Aiko's Background

Aiko entered the Transformational Theater: Drama Therapy and Sound Healing program, with great interest, but also with some reticence. She had grown up in a privileged Japanese class. Her early life was characterized by an appreciation for the beauty of Japan's countryside, the wisdom of her beloved grandparents, the intelligence, strength, rigidity and severe wounding of her mother. Her mother lived daily with the unacceptable situation of her husband's six concubines and her father's total preoccupation with his very successful business life, and financial position. Over a period of hundreds of years, Aiko’s paternal ancestors were forcefully brought from Korea to Japan as slaves. Gradually, over generations, they were
able to climb the social ladder and build wealth and position, managing to erase their Korean heritage. But her father never lost the ancestral stigma of having been subjugated. Because of this, he identified with the abuser. It was an accepted practice among Japan's social elite for the men to have concubines, whom they fully support financially. In this way, he became the “slave owner” and projected his “dominator” mentality onto these women. Aiko had been sent away by her mother to Canada to study music at the age of nine. She also studied dance, as she had done in Japan from an early age. One of the first things she shared in the group was how uprooted and split she always felt, in having been cast out of her homeland.

To work with Aiko therapeutically, it was important to understand the traditional Japanese values and norms with which she grew up. It was not within her cultural norms to share intimate feelings, especially about dark family issues. Euro-American values for healing, therapy goals and processes are frequently contradictory to Asian, particularly female gender-based values. Lee and Richardson in their book, *Multicultural Issues in Counseling: New Approaches to Diversity* (1991), state that much of traditional Japanese culture can be traced to the philosophical precepts of life that were dictated by Buddhism. Within this cultural system, the individual is superseded by the family, specific hierarchical roles are established for all family members, and rules of behavior and conduct are formalized. An individual’s adherence to this code of conduct is a reflection not only on the immediate family, but on the extended kinship network as well.

The father is the leader and decision-maker of the nuclear family. His authority is unquestioned. The welfare of the family rests squarely on the father’s shoulders. He enforces family roles and is the primary disciplinarian. The traditional role of the mother is that of the nurturing caretaker of both her husband and children. The mother is clearly the emotionally devoted, nurturing parental figure. The stronger emotional attachments, therefore, tend to be with the mother.

In Aiko’s case, the father was able to maintain his life-style despite great protests by his wife and uncomfortable, unexpressed feelings by his daughters. Aiko’s mother, unlike the cultural norm, was not the emotionally devoted, nurturing parental figure, but was cold, angry and fearful. Aiko feels this was due, in part, to her unhappy marriage.

Highly developed feelings of obligation govern much of the personal relationships of Japanese Americans. The often unspoken obligatory reciprocity within relationships is a serious consideration in the life of a Japanese American. The individual is expected to express affection and gratitude as well as respect and obedience to parents and others in authority position.
In a social structure where interdependence is so highly valued, the fear of losing face can be a powerful motivating force for conforming. The withdrawal of confidence and support by the family, community or society, and the exposure of an individual’s wrong actions for all to see, is a profound shaming experience to be avoided at all costs. When Aiko began this work, she was able to express to the group her discomfort with sharing her family secrets as well as her own issues. This made it possible for everyone, both leaders and members, to actively encourage and support her in her current emotional dilemma. She soon was able to appreciate the opportunity to come to terms with and work through several significant issues.

**Beginning With Psychodrama**

In the first session, one of the group members enacted a psychodrama, which focused on that woman’s relationship with her mother. Aiko role-played this woman’s mother in the Psychodrama. Then, after the main drama, when everyone shares something of his or her own story that was catalyzed by the ‘protagonist’s’ drama, Aiko made a connection with her own mother. It was then suggested that everyone remember a moving moment with their mother and give expression to that moment by allowing a spontaneous song to emerge. By doing this, the participants created a positive container in which the more difficult object relations issues could be addressed.

Aiko referred to her mother in her first journal entry:

Oct. 2 “I wanted to remember only beautiful images of her today, and moments when she was in her elements, moments when she was joyful and vigorous. I remember her in her sunflower garden laughing in the sun. I remembered her in the Zen Village of Niigata, (on the Northwest province of Japan, facing the Sea of Japan). I remembered her bicycling, running around, laughing again. Why did I want to remember mainly good and warm memories of her? Because I now see also the tragedy of her life, marrying someone too complicated for her to comprehend. Her family was all heart feeling. My father's family was almost all mind thinking, conniving and calculating how to survive. From joy to coldness and to madness. It was too much for her. In the end, she entered into the coldness and went mad. In this mad, childlike state for a year, she took her own life.

**Introducing The Transpersonal**

From the time our work together began, it appeared that it would be most effective to relate to Aiko through a transpersonal/spiritual orientation. This was familiar to her from her Buddhist roots, which was naturally integrated into her early daily life. Zen Buddhism in its essence is the art of seeing into the true nature of one’s being. It points the way from fear and desire to freedom from suffering. The goal of Zen Buddhism is to achieve Satori or enlightenment through zazen (emptying the mind) and Koan practices. The Zen Buddhist aesthetic of unselfconscious artfulness provides the basis of classical Japanese culture. Aiko told of Buddhist Monks coming often to homes in the community for different life events, to
sit together with an awareness of their breath, and to meditate and chant. Since the transpersonal approach that is included in our work was especially helpful to Aiko, optimal opportunities were created to work on that level when it seemed appropriate. It was clear that every exercise and reference to spiritual language and experience opened Aiko to more easily face what was difficult for her, in her complex emotional history. It was natural for this Japanese woman to sit still, work with meditations and a variety of exercises that begin with an awareness of the breath including visualizations, voice and movement exercises, and the validation of transpersonal dimensions of consciousness. Reference to the purity of her soul's essence deeply resonated with her. It soon became clear that this approach did help to create the bridge from her reticence to build her trust and open her to deep, less familiar, emotional work. The transpersonal dimension can be significant in anyone's therapeutic process, but with Aiko, because of her cultural heritage, this became the “key” in opening to her buried pain.

Dreams have been discovered to be a powerful gateway to the unconscious. Marion Woodman, well-known Jungian Analyst, writer, and an expert with dream work, offers her perspective, after many years of working with people in analysis as well as in large conferences and workshops. She considers the relationship of working with the transpersonal level of the soul vital in dealing with early emotional issues. When you work on the rotten foundations, which is what we do in therapy, you have to recognize your own rot. In order to get rid of rot, you've got to dig it up. At the same time, you're finding this magnificent soul that's buried beneath it (see bibliography).

Interviewer: Did psychologists always recognize the soul?

Marion: Psyche means soul. Psychology is knowledge of the soul. Jung recognized soul. He recognized the spiritual dimension of dream images that connects a person to what he called the Self. The Self is the God-image within, like the golden ball within fairy tales. That golden ball takes you where you need to be led in order to find all the parts of yourself.

I do think a lot of people start out in therapy thinking they will find the blocks, that they will take the energy that's blocked in negative mother and negative father, for example, and release it from those complexes in order to make it available to the ego. But the journey becomes so fascinating that they tend to stay with it. The blossoming ego begins to relate to its own creativity, to the creation within. That process ultimately leads to surrendering to transpersonal energy, what Jung calls the Self. (Marion Woodman, 1989)

In Aiko’s Transformational Theater/ drama therapy group, participants were invited to remember two dreams, one from early childhood and a meaningful recent dream. The dreamer then selects group members to enact each of the dream images from both of their dreams. The dreams come back to life before the dreamer's eyes, triggering memories of parts of the dream that were forgotten, often resurfacing emotional states from that time. At other times, new feelings surface as insights and connections are made, catalyzed by watching the dream images enacted. The dreamer is helped to see the inevitable relationship between both dreams in terms of core emotional issues and ongoing life challenges. A transpersonal
dimension helps people to identify what are called soul qualities or essential parts of the human psyche that are our source of strength. Examples of these positive qualities are: clarity, magnanimity, sacredness, sense of humor, purity, majesty, creativity, peace, love, intuition. At least one and often more qualities can be seen in both dreams. The soul qualities can be identified as that place that we are able to turn to in ourselves that can never be tarnished from any abuse or life trauma. Helping people shift their identity from their sense of limitation, low self-esteem, shame, and feelings of inadequacy to these positive, essential parts of themselves is perhaps at the core of the healing process.

Participants are also helped to expand their identity to embrace the archetypes of Artist, Healer, Educator, Shaman or Spiritual Guide. Integrating these archetypes into their professional identities as well as into their general view of themselves, becomes another source of strength and tool for transformation for group members. According to Jung, “The experience of the archetype is frequently guarded as the closest personal secret, because it is felt to strike into the very core of one’s being.” (Jung, 1966). When that archetypal shift in one’s own identity genuinely begins to happen, then a person's whole way of viewing him/herself shifts, influencing all aspects of the person's life.

**Integrating The Cultural Elements**

To create the accommodation for this to happen for Aiko, a basic Japanese value needed to be understood and addressed in subtle ways. For example, in many non-Western cultures, identity is not seen apart from the group orientation. The personal pronoun “I” does not exist in the Japanese language (Sue and Sue, 1990).

There were several things that happened in Aiko’s therapy process that honored her cultural orientation. First, she was a part of a group process, where the group became very bonded as a kind of extended family. By enacting other peoples’ dreams, for example, and participating in other group exercises, Aiko became increasingly more comfortable in honoring and dealing with her own individual issues. Secondly, many process approaches were framed in spiritual language and values, so that if there was any sense of loss of one spiritual goal, in this case the valuing of the individual’s privacy, other spiritual goals were honored and expressed. Thirdly, because this Japanese woman is naturally very creative with a distinct clarity of mind (perhaps reinforced through her meditation experience), she was fascinated by the depth of dream work and what was to be discovered in the rich terrain of the unconscious, as insights were revealed.

Oct. 9  Dreams have power—my first discovery. Interpreting dreams have real power. Connecting two of my dreams, from childhood and adulthood was a surprise. Father image/male
image certainly occupies me. My father certainly did and does have profound effect on my life. All life revolved around him, when I was a child and even now. Saphira said, “Honor the pain. In our society, we numb the pain by drinking, eating, drugs and working, among other things. Do not avoid the pain. Pain will naturally occur in life. When it does, simply embrace it and honor it. If we do not avoid the darkness, then one can also see the light.” If not, then it’s often more difficult to see the light. She also said, “Breath means inspiration. From breath, inspiration springs.”

Participants are encouraged to identify, and to honor and dramatize shadow elements, in their psyches, within this work. In trying to make the unconscious conscious, people discover that there are many hidden things buried deep within. These things are not always negative and when they reach the light of our conscious self a power is unleashed in our healing and creative processes (Jung, 1958).

October 16 My Truth: I do not digest my food well. Same with life issues—There is a black despair about everything I touch.—So many unresolved issues I carry in my constipated life—Running away literally from difficult issues has been my constant state.

Delving Into The Shadow

A number of theater/therapy exercises were presented to help people discover their shadow characters and create them. These characters became an expression of hidden parts of themselves. For Asian people, overcoming the strong value of not sharing the dark side is often more of an obstacle than for Americans, as was mentioned earlier. In the safe, creative atmosphere that was created, it seemed to flow quite easily, even for Aiko. Everyone sounded, sang, and danced their shadow. Questions helped the process: Who are you? Where do you come from? How do you move and sound? Why have you stayed hidden? They told their story, sang and danced and often cried. Further expression and more developed characters were encouraged to evolve.

Aiko learned from an early age to escape—escape from the bonds of her patriarchal, oppressive family and cultural roots. In so doing, she discovered that she was also escaping from the potential joys of her current life and the possibilities of deeper intimacy in her personal relationships.

Nov. 6 Shadows are dark! My darkness was a hollow hole. Try as I previously did to fill it with harsh discipline of long hours of work; it did not fulfill this emptiness. I needed a power greater than my human effort and sweat could provide. I needed to tap into source power. Grandmother was one who guided me into this power. In this power there flowed a steady, sustaining light. My grandmother was smiling as she led me to this river of quiet energy. “River” is one of the names given to me by a Burmese Monk. When I was totally stuck in my life, frozen and broken, he gave me this name so that I may defreeze. I discovered today, that when I release from my unconscious, away from my head, (which is quick and overactive), amazing things happen. Perhaps in my unconscious is hidden my real self.

At this stage in the process, Aiko was able to receive a great deal of solace in connecting to her strong sense of peace and purity (soul qualities) which she experienced in nature, surrounding her aunt’s country house, in which she spent her early childhood. However, images of her experience of men as
violent, warlike, and powerful, symbolizing the oppressive patriarchal roots of her culture, presented itself in both of her dreams. These images suggest that owning her own female shadow and inner male (animus, in Jungian terms) is a key in her own healing process. Carl Jung also said, that if we do not face our shadow, it will become our fate (Jung, 1977). If we do not own our own rage, or violence we will play it out.

Aiko shared with the group that she has had an abortion, without her husband’s knowledge, which devastated him when he later learned of it. She described the process as being driven to do that by her own destructive impulse, without even thinking about all the pros and cons. She had told no one about what she had done until working with the group.

Through a life incident improvisational exercise, in which participants recall significant incidents as a child, an adolescent and a young adult, another woman in the group revealed and dealt with the intense emotions around sexual abuse. This woman dramatized a powerful scene with her older brother, who had molested her. This triggered other sexual abuse memories in the group, many of which had been repressed and some of which had never been shared before. Through the other woman’s drama, which the group helped to enact, Aiko got in touch with two traumatic events in her own life. One was an incident with her father, who took her away with him on a trip and tried to molest her as a young girl. The second situation was the abortion, which she first shared at this time.

Aiko’s next two journal entries reflect her discoveries and experience with her sources of strength, the light and the dark, transpersonal dimensions and the nature of the healing process that she was experiencing at this time.

Feb. 12. Sources of strength—what a wonderful phrase and they are all already inside ourselves, waiting for us to tap into them. What are my sources of strength? My kind and merciful God, forest and animals surrounding our cabin, who constantly surprise and delight me with their resourcefulness. Thousand stars and the moon, who descend so close to me every night. My patient husband, who truly has embraced me with all my faults. Rekindling what I feel in my innermost being when I move. Transformational theater where we bring our darkness into light and make friends with them.

Feb. 19. Life challenge dissolved by source of strength. Darkness dissolved by light. Seriousness dissolved by play. Shutting down dissolved by love. Tonight I really felt the power of love. When P. [group member] put her hands on my heart and sang, her love breathed into my soul and body and her intent of goodness towards me confirmed for me that life was good. Also, when we felt each other’s aura emanating heat and whatever else, we confirmed for each other that we were creatures, not only of this earth but of places beyond.

Since overt expression of angry feelings are discouraged in the Asian culture, many Japanese people somatize these feelings and are encouraged to present an appearance of peace and joy even when they are in conflict and pain. The combination of enacting one of the roles in another woman’s drama, to
help her, and then, from within the role, observing and identifying with the victim position, Aiko had a
total, full bodied, emotional experience. This is a striking example of the therapeutic value of drama
therapy.

**Final Performance**

People were helped to create final performance pieces. They were to present their challenging life
material as well as their transformational possibility, including their source of strength. They were
encouraged to speak their truth. The final pieces were created by each individual and they could have other
group members play the different roles in their drama, enacting people, environments, sound textures, as
individuals or as an ensemble. People write their story as dramatic monologues, scenes, in prose, poetry,
song, naturalistic or stylized, or a combination of the above. They can choreograph movement pieces
within it. They can incorporate music in whatever way they choose. They can build in costumes, props,
mask, set pieces or whatever helps them tell their story more authentically. The group invites family and
friends to be their audience. The process of objectifying the issues, after working through them in part,
creating an artistic form to express them and then giving it away to the audience as a gift offering, has
proven to be a very effective therapeutic tool. The process of creating the pieces takes everyone through
struggle and creative tension, proving in the end, almost always, to be a very cathartic, healing and
satisfying process for the participants. This was certainly the case for Aiko.

She chose to dress in a traditional Japanese costume and white face. She created her piece within a
movement/dance structure. Aiko had not danced for some time, but had studied dance when she was
younger, so it became important to her to work in that form. She also chose to insert phrases in Japanese at
specific dramatic moments in her piece.

**Final Performance Piece**

1. When I was born, I was immediately taken away from the warm breath of my mother. [movement]
2. She had already decided to leave my father. He had six concubines. (In Japanese, my mother
speaking): How filthy! How disgustingly dirty! How long do you think you can continue to lie to
me!!
3. Yes, the blood of incest and misguided sexual energy runs in my family. [movement]
4. When I was twelve, my father took me on a little trip, just the two of us. In the middle of the
night, I felt Father's big hand descend on me. (In Japanese): What are you doing, Dad?! What are
you doing?! [movement]
5. Today, I no longer feel, [movement] breathe, [movement] or play [movement].
6. (The group gathering around me.) Chieko-chan asobo, chieko chan asobo, little chieko, come
and play! [movement]
7. Yes, sexual impurity appeared in me, too. I aborted my first child, my only child. I willed her
death. [scream, movement]
8. (In Japanese) Please forgive me, please forgive me! [movement] I love you, I love you very
much!
9. [As if holding the baby, sing lullaby in Japanese]
10. [With music accompaniment, dance improvisation]
11. [Bringing the cloth and the group across the stage, start the transformational dance-song] (The whole group rocking), Licking our wound, licking our wound.

   Burning in the fire, burning in the fire.
   Honoring our pain, honoring our pain
   Breathing dearly, breathing dearly.
   Looking into our darkness, looking into our darkness.
   Loving our soul, loving our soul
   Trusting our impulses, trusting our impulses.
   Forgiving ourselves, forgiving ourselves.
   Loving the God in us, loving the God in us!
   [Grab the cloth in the center and start the dervish whirl as light fades.]

Aiko expressed her feelings that with the new understanding she had gained, and through the surfacing and purging of so much pain and suffering, she now could forgive her parents. Our assessment was that she had done a significant piece of emotional work and that most likely she would discover that the depth forgiveness will take more time. Furthermore, in many sexual abuse cases, after the initial anger is expressed with the perpetrator father, the often-deeper feelings of abandonment by the mother surface: Where was she when I needed her and why did not she protect me? Aiko’s feeling that she unconsciously blamed her mother needs to be further explored and those feelings validated, rather than dismissed.

Concluding reflections written by Aiko, in her evaluation of her process:

   1. Externalization of my trauma enabled me to defreeze my trauma and start to move it and to be objective about it.
   2. Defreezing of my trauma enabled me to go deep into my darkness which subsequently allowed me to go into my light.

A specific group exercise that was particularly transformative was the exercise in which I dramatized my family, by becoming my father one moment, my mother the next moment, and myself the next moment. This experience revealed to me how the whole world changes when one is in another's shoes. It allowed me to sympathize.

As a group, we became very close and caring for each other. In order to really help each other, our individual faculties as the artist, healer, educator, and Shaman were demanded to be polished to the highest degree.

My sympathies went to all members of the group who were struggling with their families. I was profoundly shocked and assured, at the same time, of our common human struggles on this earth. During this process, my patience with other peoples' struggles (outside the group) became larger.
Freedom to be who we each are
In the dance of searching, exploring
Laughing and crying
Up and down
Sideways and backwards

Can we be safe enough to not have the answers
While fully embracing the questions
Moving a single step closer
To a new becoming
Free to be our essential selves.

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