



The Spiritual dimension of Gestalt Psychotherapy

Therese Bugeja

Historical Background:

Psychotherapy and spirituality have been kept distinct from each other for various reasons:

- **The spiritual dimension was thought to lie outside the realms of science.**
- **Practitioners did not want to impose their views on their clients.**

(O' Neil, 2001)

Consequences:

- **Little attention paid to the underlying experience that people undergo under extreme physical and psychological suffering**
- **The emergence of an existential emptiness**

(O' Neil, 2001)



Human suffering is the essential connecting factor.

Soul care is an organising force in the life-blood of the individual.

Soul care is a vital means of healing emotional wounds.

(Umoto, 1997)

Integration of Spirituality and Psychotherapy:

- **Jung**
- **American Psychiatric Association (APA)**
- **Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 1V)**



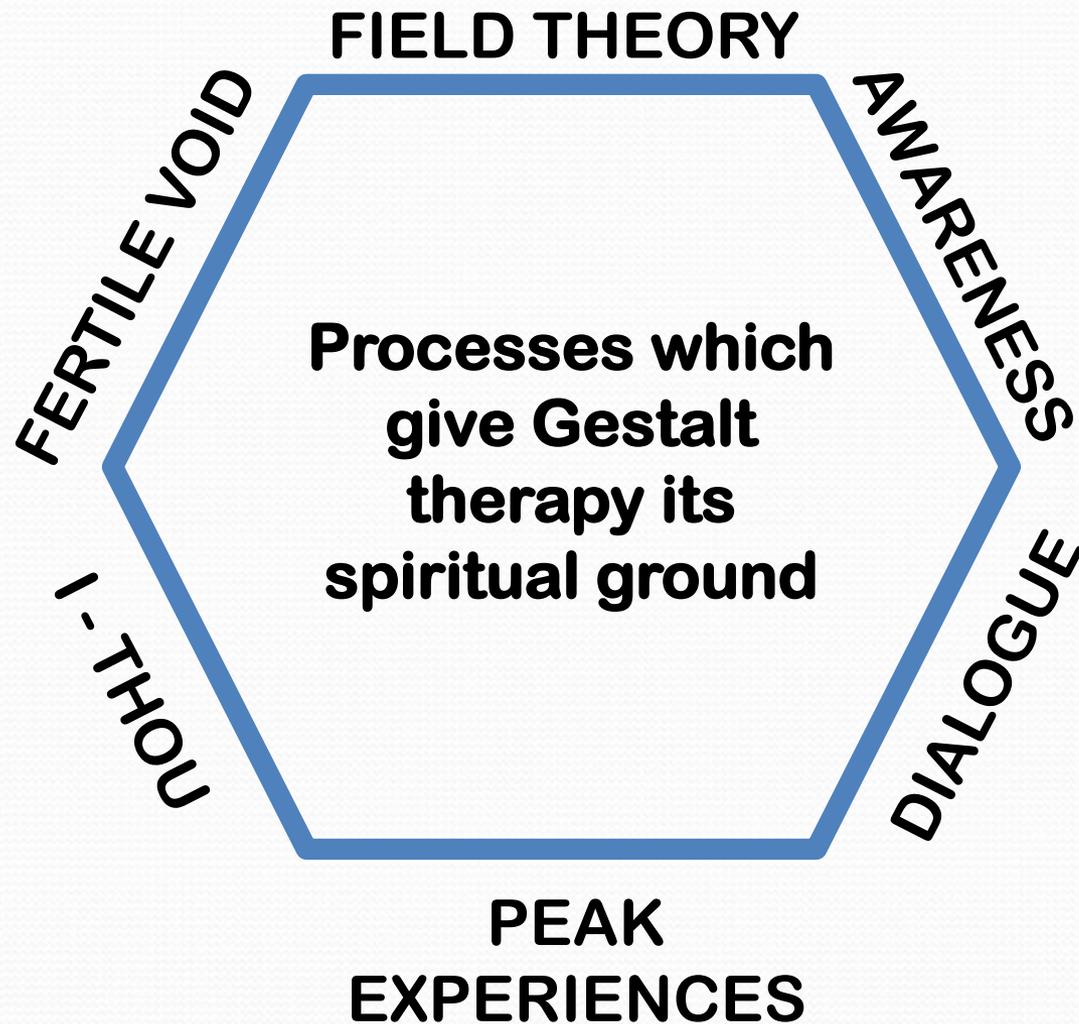
Challenge for Therapists:

To establish a system that can integrate spirituality into therapy since the therapist's attitudes and beliefs, experience with religion, and view of the world accompany the therapeutic session.

Spirituality in context:

- **Spirituality is a way of being and experiencing what comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension.**
- **It is characterized by identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.**

(Elkins et al, 1988)



Field Theory:

It is a strong foundation in the spiritual ground of Gestalt therapy.

- **The principle of organisation**
- **The principle of relevance**

Awareness:

- **It is the main aim of Gestalt therapy and the goal to spiritual awakening.**
- **It is the path towards transcendence in Gestalt therapy.**
- **It leads one to experience the 'fertile void'.**

(Naranjo, 1993)

Forms of awareness:

- **Somatic**
- **Cognitive**
- **Emotional**
- **Moment to moment awareness (Mindfulness)**

(Yontef, 1993)

Acceptance of the void:

- **Gestalt therapy accepts that everything exists in a void – a space of no-thingness.**
- **This void is a centre of possibility... Everything emerges from this void, and everything fades away and dissolves within it.**
- **It is the largest ground where everything is not yet and everything still has to become. This can only be experienced in the now.**

(Naranjo, 1993; Wolfert, 2000)

Dialogue:

- **Dialogue is the basis of relationship in Gestalt therapy – a transformative process.**
- **Concept of ‘Participatory knowing’ (Ferre,2002)**

Fundamental elements of participatory knowing:

- **It is presential**
- **It is enactive**
- **It is transformative**

(Ferrer, 20002)



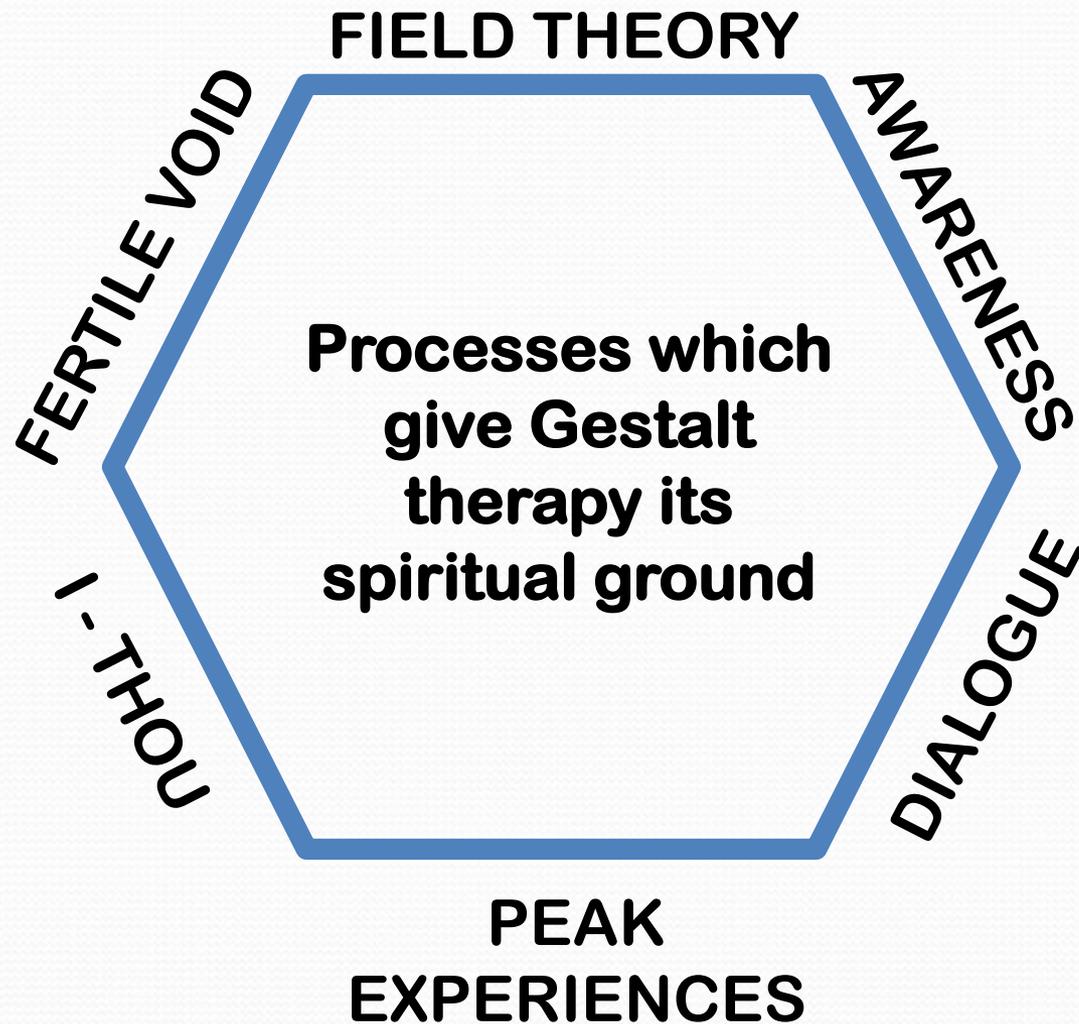
Contact:

The organising principle of the process of contact in Gestalt can be considered as a transcending of ordinary reality and entering into an experience of unity and communion, or healthy confluence.

(Wolfert, 2000)

Peak Experience:

- **Peak experiences are also known as spiritual, transpersonal, or mystical experiences.** (Clarkson, 1997)
- **Peak experiences expand one's sense of identity, or create a sense of identity that includes the person and yet is 'beyond (trans) the person'.** (Wilber, 2000a)





THANK YOU