The Spiritual dimension of Gestalt Psychotherapy

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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)
Processes which give Gestalt therapy its spiritual ground
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 presentational
  - 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)
Processes which give Gestalt therapy its spiritual ground
THANK YOU