

Integrally Informed Therapy as Conveyor Belt for All Developmental Lines

by Dr. Keith Witt

Throughout the last forty years I've observed tensions between psychologists and spiritual teachers. I believe such tensions have arisen partially from ethnocentrism--an inherent bias towards *my* worldview/approach/system being superior to *yours*--and also a lack of understanding of the change process.

At least some roots of this conflict are embedded in the line/level fallacy of modernity throwing out the spirituality baby with the religion bathwater, leading to science colonizing art and religion, with modernity rejecting spirituality along with mythic religion, and religion fixating spirituality at amber.

Fundamentalist (amber) scientism scoffs at religion and spirituality as well as not distinguishing between them (to be fair, amber religion often doesn't distinguish between religion and spirituality either). The dignity of modernity becoming the disaster of modernity was especially evident in academic psychology and "evidence-based" psychotherapy in the twentieth century. This of course created schisms between academically influenced clinicians--intimidated into denying or compartmentalizing their spiritual orientations and secretly feeling guilty practicing spirit-based interventions--and spiritual teachers who (quite rightly) felt science denying spirit was like waves denying the ocean. With 79% of college students acknowledging personal spiritual orientations and 75% prayer practices, liberal education actually became scientism indoctrination in many fields, especially American psychology departments.

Fierce culture wars raged *within* the psychotherapy community. With the advent of psychoanalysis, therapists had to choose, spirituality (associated with mythological amber) or science. Freud chose science partially due to his own existential bleakness--see *The Future of an Illusion*--while the behaviorists chose science partially due to contempt for the left quadrants. Jung chose spirituality--feeling intuitively that the myths and wisdom traditions had spiritual power and insights central to deep psychotherapy and adult development (which he, interestingly, believed was organized around clients integrating and individuating--both constructs anticipating our current integral understanding). Our psychotherapy community has been healing this split ever since, most notably in Depth Psychology and tantric relationship orientations like Sanial and Linda Bonder's *Waking Down*.

Integral psychology reveals red through turquoise science, spirituality, religion, and psychotherapy. (*I really didn't see these clearly before I learned Integral--the luminary magic of Ken's work*).

Integral psychotherapy's wide embrace includes helping people establish horizontal and vertical health on *all relevant developmental lines*. Consider the advantages of practitioners knowing six levels of all these lines from *all four quadrants--inside and outside*.

Psychotherapy, like religion, needs to be a conveyor belt relaxing into a client's center of gravity on any line and reaching towards horizontal and vertical health. Therapists remediate symptoms, enhance

health, and support development, but, due to cultural, scientific, academic, and institutional pressures to designate "remediating symptoms" as *the* mission of psychotherapy, enhancing health and supporting development often become stealth agendas.

A great example of doing therapy with a 2nd tier client is Roger Walsh relating to Terry Patten in Terry's interview. There was a segment where Roger shifted into therapy mode, guiding Terry to his interior wisdom about the urgent need to be a force for positive change in the world, and then guiding and teaching from that wisdom.

In a classical case of spiritual bypassing, realized teachers again and again have offered practices and teachings that create peak experiences and altered states--wonderful, *potentially* transformative experiences--as reliable trait changes. Promising miraculous skipping of levels is guaranteed to set developmentalists' teeth on edge, not to mention irritating psychotherapists who experience every day from the inside the effort and struggle involved in personal/relational/professional growth *within* different cultures of family, work, and society. Most therapists know it takes continuing effort over time to establish better habits of thinking, relating, and being to subsume worse habits *that are supported by the cultures clients are embedded in*. Defensive relational patterns, work cultures that glorify burnout, and amber ethnocentrism that rejects compromise and worldcentric values make for tough sledding in psychotherapy. All that being said, it's clearly egoic to stay offended by anyone's critical judgments--let's keep our eye on the bottom line, helping people thrive lights up all healers.

Egoic irritation can become a rationale for therapists (especially academics) to ignore crucial messages of emerging practical spiritual orientations applied to therapy such as Roger Walsh's Karma Yoga, Michael Murphy's evolutionary panentheism, and Sanial and Linda Bonders "Waking Down" processes.

Complexity theory tells us if you put energy into a system that doesn't dissolve into pure chaos, it eventually can reach a state where a catalyst or small change can initiate a large shift in the system to greater complexity. At some mysterious instant, the penny drops and the system reorganizes to a state of greater complexity--which usually involves deeper consciousness and greater compassion in humans--and *can be* a permanent change in worldview.

George Leonard in *Mastery* chronicles how there is rapid progress--plateau--slight drop--rapid progress in development of human genius physically and psychologically. This reflects a rhythm of practice and effort, often frustrating, punctuated by periods of apparent rapid growth or illumination (totally reflected in therapy that lasts longer than a few sessions).

In addition, therapists and spiritual teachers often seem to undervalue work people have done before they encounter their therapist or guru. People train, study, do spiritual practices, often with no apparent significant effects, but then their yearning takes them to psychotherapists or spiritual teachers who provide catalysts, practices, transformative ceremonial events, which occasionally hit the right note and

helps shift a system/person/worldview into a stable higher frequency. In other words, occasionally the gradual effort/gradual development norm seems to not apply to a sudden shift, illumination, or skill acquisition.

- The human tendency at this point is for the practitioner to conclude--rightly--that their input contributed to systemic change, and then--egoically--conclude their system *reliably* creates trait changes and is superior to other systems.
- Much more persuasive is the Zen saying, "Enlightenment is an accident, and meditation makes you accident prone."
- Psychotherapy meta-analysis shows a 30% relationship, 40% client resources, 15% method of treatment, and 15% placebo breakdown in the variance of positive change in therapy, and I suspect if we did spiritual practice meta-analysis we'd find the same thing.

Having your client suddenly uplevel is intoxicating for a practitioner. Such bliss can subtly shift understanding of the natural process of "practices, plus commitment to honesty/transparency/integrity, plus receiving input from an attuned helper/healer/therapist/spiritual guide, leads to development of consciousness," to "I'm the best!"

In therapy, working *within* client cultures, a client-centered process of consistent effort/receive loving influence/gradual growth works *way better* than a mission-centered or guru-centered hierarchy.

Positive influence in therapy has less to do with the relative effectiveness of systems, and more to do with the 30% relationship and 40% client variable statistics I quoted earlier. Getting carried away with how cool you or your system is when clients transform can lead to grandiose claims that irritate other practitioners. Such claims subtly reflect a more passive role of patient being "cured" by a doctor/practitioner--a problem we all have had philosophically with traditional allopathic medicine.

Let's face it, systemic changes usually happen with extended practice. Systemic changes--trait changes--constellate gradually over time and effort, with subjective moments and periods of rapid development alla George Leonard's mastery curve.

On the other hand, we know sudden illuminations, before-and-after significant shifts, also happen, in both state and trait shifts.

When sudden illuminations happen, they're usually state changes, similar to what many of us feel in the state stages of ceremony--gross, to subtle, to causal, to nondual--or awakening/initiation, to purification/pacification, to illumination, to dark night, to unification, to benefiting all beings.

Such sudden state shifts are especially common in art, creativity, and the "aha experience" reported by Margarita Lasky.

An integral approach embraces slow and fast change, and state and trait change, and focuses attention

on what works--supporting gradual *and* sudden ontological shifts in health/happiness/success/creativity/intimacy/evolution.

An integral approach also constantly scans for what seems pathological, such as egoic investment, unrealistic claims, and overt ranking of systems rather than a relativistic (more integral) understanding of systems. Craig Hamilton and Roger Walsh kept self-observing during their interviews with Terry Patton, revealing an inner witness monitoring their conversations--a crucial skill for therapists and a specific training goal for integral psychotherapists.

In this sense, any tension between systems is best examined first as a function of shadow in the people in conflict. Once shadow is resolved, a true dialectic can generate wisdom and delight.