

SOUL-WOUND AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

By Thomas Yeomans, (1994)

Introduction¹

Psychotherapy has developed over this century in western culture as a discipline to treat the manifold psychological sufferings of the human being. The means for this vary from school to school, but the overall common purpose is to relieve physical, emotional, and mental suffering and to restore the personality to a relatively normal state in which the person can function effectively in a given culture. As the century has progressed, deeper and deeper levels of sorrow have come to the field's attention and understanding of the sources of this wounding has grown. As a result, we now have the humane means to treat a wide range of mental illnesses and growing skill in dealing with mental, emotional, sexual, and, most recently, ritual, trauma. We know a great deal more than we used to about character disorders, addictive behavior, and dysfunctional personality and family patterns, and have developed a compendium of techniques to address these troubles. We are wiser in our use of chemical therapy as an adjunct to psychotherapy. We have explored some of the depths of the unconscious, both personal and collective, and we know something about the human will and its use to both constructive and destructive ends. The twentieth century has been devoted to trying to understand the personality and the psyche more clearly, and in this we have made considerable progress, and should feel proud of what has been accomplished. An hundred years is a short time in measuring the development of a discipline, and psychology and psychotherapy are still young, or, at best, adolescent. It will take at least another hundred years, I believe, for the field to fully mature, and we stand now perhaps at the half way point, looking both back and ahead as this century ends and a new one begins. The accomplishments are considerable, but the task is still unfinished and challenges us to keep going.

In the last twenty years, at the fringes of the profession, psychotherapists have begun to expand their thinking and work to include a consideration of the spiritual dimension and its relationship to human suffering. This expansion has come through the development of Existential, Humanistic, and Transpersonal Psychology and the advent of Buddhist and Hindu teachers in the West. It has also come through the pioneering psychological work of Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Victor Frankl, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and others, and the thinking of a few Christian, Jewish, and Islamic teachers who have been interested in Psychology and tried to bring their religious understanding to this field. To date this influence has

been eclectic and marginal. Yet a great deal of exploration and experimentation has taken place, and the field is changing fast.

I would like to point out that the explicit naming of this dimension as a focus for psychological science is what is new in these last decades. The dimension itself is not new at all, and it is only that Psychology is now expanding to include it. Also, in my experience training therapists I have often heard a seasoned professional say, "Well, actually, this is the way I work, but I would never tell my colleagues, or supervisor". In the face of suffering, the spiritual dimension is evoked in us—it is a deep human response—but a gap exists between our professional education and culture and what happens in actual work with others.

Of the various names for this dimension within the human being, the one I have found most useful is "the Soul". Others like "Self", "Higher Self", "True Nature", "Essence", or "Pure Being" are also useful, but I have found that "Soul" is particularly evocative in working with clients, for it suggests depth and meaning, and it is still common parlance. It is for this reason that I use it from among the various possibilities. And I use it with a lower case "s" to indicate that this word describes an ordinary and very human experience, which, though it has exalted and mysterious aspects, is, in essence, daily. What I mean by "soul" is that source of power, love, truth, and meaning within us through which we are capable of both being fully ourselves and being in harmonious and right relationship with all other beings. It is the central organizing principle of a human life and holds our capacity to synthesize the many differences within and around us into one lived reality that is both unique and universal, that expresses our gift to the world, and which enables us to both give and receive love.

Spiritual teachings tend to stress the unifying nature of the soul—the fact that underneath we are all one, or interconnected—and this is valid, but I want to speak here also for difference as an aspect of spiritual development, and stress the fact that, as we become more spiritually mature, we become more different, not more similar to others. We become more particular and unique as well as participating in the One, and we take a particular place and part in the whole which are different from those of all other beings. Spiritual realization of the soul is as much one of profound diversity as it is of oneness, and it is in living this paradox that true soul-realization occurs. Wherever there is loss of individuality and diversity, there is loss of soul. The soul is capable of embracing our full differentiation within an integrative context of wholeness, and, in including the spiritual dimension, particularly as it relates to psychotherapy where we are treating very personal issues, it is important to keep this balance between its unique

and universal attributes. There is an Hasidic tale to this effect, of a rabbi telling a student that, when we go to heaven God will not ask, "Why were you not Moses?." He will ask, "Why were you not you?". soul-realization is the expression of our full difference from all other beings within a context of inherent interconnection and interbeing. The more fully we can live our diversity within this context, the healthier we are.

Soul-wound

I have been involved in this exploration of the inclusion of the spiritual dimension in psychotherapy for over twenty-five years as a therapist and teacher/trainer in Psychosynthesis, and more recently, Spiritual Psychology, and over that time I have seen both a growing sophistication in the thinking about this integration and a growing need among the client population for an approach that honors and includes the soul. This latter may be partly due to the larger cultural crisis we are in, but I think it is also due to a growing sensitivity on the part of the sufferer to the need for the spiritual dimension in order to effect a full healing, and that simply rendering the personality normal is not sufficient. Clients, as well as theorists, are bringing this dimension to our attention. Therefore, in this paper I want to address a specific human sorrow that is rooted in our relationship to the spiritual dimension and which has yet to receive much attention from psychotherapists. This is the phenomenon of a wound to the connection to our soul, or "soul-wound", as I call it in the title, which, though unrecognized, profoundly affects the lives of many, if not most, people. The pain of this wound is masked by the many personal behaviors, functional and dysfunctional, which we treat, and often goes unrecognized for itself. I believe, if we want to include the spiritual dimension in our work, we now need to learn to address this deeper level of suffering directly and discover how to heal it.

I want to describe this soul-wound in some detail and discuss how it can be treated in individual work, and then mark briefly its presence at other levels of social organization. But before doing this I want to emphasize how much we are at a beginning with understanding this, how new it is. It is like watching a photo print slowly develop in a darkroom tray, the details emerging gradually out of the unknown, except I did not take the picture, and only have a sense that there is something there to see. What is visible so far has come from paying very close attention to clients', to my own, and to other colleagues', experience, and I offer it to you unfinished and incomplete, in the hopes that together we can continue to watch the picture form and describe it more fully.

I first became aware of this wound in supervising psychotherapeutic work with patients in a cancer research institute in Holland² and in talks with a Dutch colleague and friend who directs this institute. The most obvious symptom was that the person was not fully in his/her body, not fully incarnated. As we explored this, and went beneath the psychological dynamics that can contribute to this state, we touched an experience of not being welcomed as a soul on earth by the environment, family, and culture that the person had been born into and grown up in. This was in distinction to the personality being welcomed, or not, and most striking were those circumstances where the person had, in fact, received every advantage in material and psychological life, but still had not been seen and received as a soul. As we worked further, we saw that the person had an experience initially of being connected to his/her soul, and had been infused with its qualities and being. But this spirit was not seen, appreciated, or received by those around him, or her. Rather, the child was seen only as a developing personality, and treated accordingly over a spectrum ranging from severe abuse to every advantage, but with no recognition of the new and unique spiritual gift that the child was bringing the world. The child would try to express these qualities and meet with a range of rejections and lack of acknowledgment as a soul. As a result, the connection became more attenuated, hidden, and eventually lost as the personality grew in accordance to the conditions surrounding it. The point here is that the rejection was of the soul, as distinct from psyche and personality, and stemmed from the environment's inability to see and resonate at this level—the consciousness of parents, siblings, and peers was limited. Occasionally there was someone in the environment who did see the child at this deeper level—a grandparent, a neighbor, a teacher—and this made a tremendous difference, for the child experienced being received for who they knew they were as a soul. Mother Nature, too, often provided this level of nurture—a point I will return to later. But in most cases the soul was not welcomed and the connection to it consequently wounded and attenuated. I want to stress again that this wound is not rooted in how the person was treated as a personality, but in how they were perceived and received as a soul.

The person, thus wounded, continues to develop as a personality, but secretly suffers this loss of soul-connection, and seeks to buffer this pain with attempts to achieve this reception in other ways, or with various behaviors that would produce the facsimile of this experience of connection. This compensation, in turn, can lead to addictive and dysfunctional patterns, and to consequent psychological pain, or it can lead to seemingly normal function beneath which lies this secret sorrow. I have worked with a number

of highly functional people, as defined by the terms of our culture, who carried this wound, but were quite unaware of it and its psychological impact. I remember working with a client who was a dynamic entrepreneur and business school professor who realized that the soul qualities of his sensitivity and shyness had never been acknowledged and welcomed by his father and mother, though his parents had provided every advantage for his success in the world. Another client saw in her work that she had cut off her considerable psychic and intuitive abilities at an early age after being traumatized by ridicule from the rational and analytic subculture in which she grew up. Others have seen that their various addictive behaviors, though painful, were easier to bear than the pain of this soul-wound, and attachment to them was, in part, a way to avoid this deeper sorrow.

These psychological compensations can also include the phenomena of pseudo-spirituality and fundamentalism, both of which buffer and suppress the sorrow of loss of soul with spiritual materialism and dogmatism. We, in fact, live in a culture which as a whole is largely spiritually disconnected and suppressing this pain through rampant materialism and consumerism, which contributes to escalating violence, and ecological degradation. Six percent of the global population in North America consumes sixty percent of the world's resources every year.³ This to me is an image of how disconnected we are from ourselves, from each other, and from the larger whole of the planet and its life—how far we are from our souls. Mother Teresa is fond of saying to the westerners who come work with her in Calcutta, "The physical starvation here is nothing compared to the spiritual starvation in the West. Go home and find the people in your family who are starving spiritually and feed them"⁴

My point here is that, as psychotherapists, I believe we need to treat this soul-wound directly as well as the more familiar wounds to psyche and personality, and I want to describe how we are learning to do this. This is another level of trauma, distinct from the personal, and so we work with it in specific and different ways. Western Psychology, because it did not honor the soul, could not see this wound, though its effects are profoundly felt on the psychological level, and it may be the source of, or at least contribute centrally to, the psychological problems with which we are familiar.

Means of Healing

Of first importance is the spiritual presence of the therapist. A therapist's connection to his/her own soul, expressed through being present to the client from that level of being, generates a field of energy that has a powerful healing effect in, and of, itself. Secondly, spiritual presence

acknowledges the existence of soul through its embodiment in the therapist, and thereby supports the client in making contact with this source within him, or her, self. Thirdly, presence generates a context for the healing process within which the nature of the wound and how personality and psyche have compensated for it can be more clearly seen. Fourthly, it provides the intuitive information needed for both therapist and client to do the work of healing. This, of course, entails work on the personality and psyche, but it is done here in a spiritual context where they are seen as vehicles of expression of the spiritual force of the soul rather than ends in themselves.

The therapist's presence, as I said, generates, or evokes, a field of spiritual energy which envelops client and therapist and activates the client's connection to their own soul. We call this the "field" of the soul. You could say that, in this field, generated by the therapist's presence, and responded to by the client's soul, the two souls are joined in a cooperative effort to gradually restore the connection and strengthen it for daily life. The more coherent the presence of the therapist, the more powerful this field. So the practice of presence becomes a central skill in doing psychotherapy within a spiritual context. It is the therapist's being that helps heal the wound more than doing, and in the silence of this welcoming presence the client begins to experience again, little by little, that they are indeed welcome just as they are.

Another means of healing is to invoke the presence of that person in the client's life who did see them as a soul, and bring this figure together with the adult and child selves. This can be done in imagery, or externalized psychodrama, but the point is to bring this resource from the past to bear on this wound in the present. The presence of this person—grandmother, neighbor, teacher—forms an healing alliance with the therapist so that the welcoming energies of both are available to the client. If no such person exists for the client, a person they admire—living, or dead—can be called in as a spiritual ally. And this alliance can be further amplified by calling in an image of a Wise Being,⁵ who represents symbolically the energies of the person's soul, and which, in combination with the other two, coheres the healing field even more.

Within this field of combined presence, as the work continues, it becomes clear what is needed to begin to heal the soul-wound and restore the connection. Sometimes it is simply the practice of presence, at others a specific piece of psychological work helps. And in many cases we have seen that the child made a vow at the time of the wound that needs now to be undone. This is an holy vow before God, based either on "never" or

"always", that is deeply unconscious and has served both to protect the person from this primal pain and to help them develop certain qualities of soul behind this protection. This seems paradoxical, but, in fact, the vow seems to sustain the soul-connection in an inverse way until the person is ready to choose to undo it, do the healing work, and experience the soul's full spiritual force. The vow is undone by choice, just as it was made, and the person begins to live that part of the soul that was held back and integrate it with what developed in the personality as a result of the vow. There is an incredible economy in this phenomenon, for the very suffering that occurred becomes part of the gift the person can give. This does not justify the wound having happened, but the soul finds a way to use the experience to its own good.

We see this spiritual economy also in people's retrospective gratitude for a crisis that was very painful at the time, and here also the vow, though inhibiting, has generated experience that can now be used for fuller spiritual life. For example, I worked with a client several years ago who had vowed never to love anyone. His childhood was essentially loveless, except for one short period of living with his grandparents. This vow had allowed him to develop tremendous self-sufficiency and to live and be successful under difficult conditions, but his isolation was extreme. At one point he began to want to love, and found he categorically could not, even though the circumstances were now very welcoming. In exploring this, we discovered that, below the psychological suffering he was quite used to, lay this fierce vow never to love anyone. He saw he was ready now to undo it, and as he chose to, he discovered both that he had a tremendous capacity to love already in tact and that his self-sufficiency gave him the power and confidence to express it. In another case of a client's vow always to remain alone, she discovered, in undoing it, and entering into creative relationship with a wide range of people, that the solitude she had learned to enjoy by virtue of the vow helped her now keep her balance in a complex relational world. The vow seems both to protect and, paradoxically, allow the soul to mature in this protection until the person is ready to express their full spiritual being.

A third means of healing is to explore what qualities and attributes are unique to this person and to help him, or her, begin to express these actively in the world. This is healing by expression, by doing. The behavioral tools of western psychotherapy can all be used, but the context is different, for the organizing principle for this work is the soul itself, not the environment, and in this expression, the person may find themselves more and more at odds with the prevailing environment as well as more deeply connected to their

soul. But, as the wound heals, they gain the strength to bear this and still be true to themselves.

A fourth means is the on-going, and more familiar, spiritual work of gradually disidentifying from the contents of personality and psyche, becoming conscious of our attachments and letting go and realizing that we are a soul who has a personality and psyche through which to express in the world. Most forms of meditation are of great help here, for they cultivate a center of pure being that is not affected by the conditions of psyche and personality and so can observe these systems of experience and work to reorganize them into more harmonious instruments of expression. This "centering" work can also be done within a psychotherapeutic context.

A fifth means, surprisingly, is simply rest. We live as restless beings in a restless culture, and to encourage clients to slow down, to care for themselves, to rest, supports the reconnection to the soul. Time and space expand in this rest, silence often accompanies it, and clarity comes as to what one's truth is, even if it is very painful. And I might add that in order to do this, the therapist must also be at rest and in touch with his, or her, being.

A sixth means, again familiar in spiritual work, is the cultivation of compassion. This means literally the capacity to "suffer with" another and not set yourself apart, or above, this sorrow. This practice of compassion coheres the field of the soul and joins the two of you in your shared humanity of both knowing the soul-wound and seeking its healing. This also brings to the work the experience of love, and, though this needs to be carefully distinguished from the personality dynamics of transference and counter-transference, true human love is an essential ingredient in the healing of this deep a wound.

With all this, the therapist's presence remains central and prerequisite to healing. These, and other approaches, work only to the degree they are infused with the spiritual energy of that presence and the field it generates. In working with the soul-wound, presence is prime.⁶

And then, there is the gradual work of fully incarnating and being in the body, which means accepting our mortality and psycho-historical limitations, the impermanence of life, the constant presence of sorrow, joy in the moment, the possibility of love, and the full blossoming of our unique and individual being on earth. As the work of healing this, and other trauma, proceeds, this becomes more and more our experience, and we discover that our soul is most fully realized in and through our bodies, not by transcending them, and that it is expressed most fully through our feelings and mind, not by suppressing them. In short, we discover that the soul is happiest on earth, that we wanted to be fully here in the first place, and it is the wound of being

unwelcome that has kept us from living an ordinary life which is in its depth and beauty extraordinary. We knew this as children, we lost it, we come to it again, but now as fully developed people, capable of mature soul-expression.

Soul-wound and Community

The work, however, is not over. The soul has three aspects, the first of which is this experience of essential identity as oneself. The other two have to do with groups and the planet, and it is to these realms of healing the soul-wound that I want to address, albeit briefly, now.

All of us live in groups, from families to organizations to cultures, and most groups fail to welcome and receive the person as a soul. The soul, however, is group oriented, and we are meant at this deep level to be with each other in loving relationship. If a group, or culture, only recognizes personalities, this will generate a profound spiritual loneliness in the midst of the crowd, and in an attempt to buffer this pain, the person will either conform, withdraw, or rebel. These means may work to some degree to give the person enough control to survive, but they do not eradicate the deeper pain of disconnection. And, if you live, as we do, in a culture that stresses individuality, competition, and materialism, this hidden pain will be as much among the most successful in the culture as well as the least. The isolation is buried beneath personality behaviors that run the gamut from high achievement motivation to drug addiction and crime. The core suffering is a loss of connection to the human community. Leaders as well as followers suffer this loss of soul, and most of the groups we exist in perpetuate this suffering through their dynamics and structures.

Small subcultures can also be diminished in this way by the larger culture of which they are a part. We do not yet know how to live in groups in ways that will feed the souls of the members, that will honor both the differences and the underlying unity of our lives. Again, children seem to have an innate sense of this possibility and express it in their acceptance of others, until the conditioned attitudes of their families and cultures begin to draw racial, sexual, political, or religious lines. There are countless stories of children being talked out of their natural response to the stranger, which is one of wonder and acceptance, and being told to be a certain way, or that the other is a certain kind. This wound is now compounded by the growing possibility of the stranger being abusive and violent, but in both cases this social conditioning wounds the soul, and sows the seeds of fear of difference rather than welcome. From this follows defensiveness of various sorts, aggression, and a growing isolation from the human community, even if this is cloaked by the trappings of power and success. We live, sadly, in a secular

culture that has developed this condition to a high degree. Of course, there are the many exceptions, but the social conditions in which most of us live speaks of extreme spiritual starvation and its consequences of hatred, violence, rampant materialism, and profound loneliness, under which is the fear of difference. We are in danger of losing the full diversity of the human species in how we are treating each other, and as Martin Luther King said, "We will either learn to love one another as brother and sister, or we will perish as fools".

And this can be true as well of spiritual groups that seem to offer a reprieve from this suffering. In the last twenty years we have seen any number of groups that have become cults because they attempted to eradicate differences through dogma, ritual, and programming, claiming that this was the way to get to the oneness of the soul. In fact, the wound was only opened further, for, as I said earlier, wherever there is loss of difference, there is loss of soul. Out of this a pseudo-spirituality is generated that promises a connection to soul, but is actually increasing the separation. We are beginning to learn more about how this works, and see through the guise of spiritual language that often masks the need for power and control in the leader and the need for security and release from responsibility in the followers. And we are beginning to find new forms of group structure that do support the soul and heal this wound that many of us carry in this culture. Interestingly, these structures seem to be non-hierarchical and emphasize the expression of personal truth and difference within a context of shared purpose.⁷

As psychotherapists, therefore, working in a spiritual context, we need to pay attention as well to the group relations in a person's life, not just at the personality level, but at the soul's. This means looking at the person's capacity to own their power and take responsibility in group settings, and to help them do this, be it in a family, an organization, or a spiritual group. The soul-wound impairs this capacity, power and responsibility are projected onto the leader, and the follower, who has become powerless and dependent, struggles then to survive through a range of personal strategies, stretching from sycophant to conformist to critic to rebel. It is even possible for the soul itself to be thus projected either on the leader, or the larger cause, but, in both cases, the root of the problem is at the deeper level of the soul-wound, and, as this is addressed, and the person reclaims their difference and truth and takes responsibility for expressing it, the projection of temporal, or spiritual, power is reowned, and he/she can take their true place in the group and play a creative part in its destiny. The more differences a group can hold, the healthier it is, and the more connected to the spiritual dimension.

These groups are rare in our culture, but those who have had an experience of them describe it as being a place where they are completely free to be themselves, have no fear to express their truth, and where they are held in a field of energy that is vital and healing and in which there is a deep connection with the other members as fellow human beings, neither better nor worse, higher or lower, but equal in beauty and grace. This is the field of the soul I mentioned earlier, experienced at the group level, where it supports both individuality and connection to others simultaneously, and keeps the full diversity of the group intact.

We have begun to discover ways to work with groups that generate this field and help the group get connected to the spiritual dimension. It entails a new form of leadership and an emphasis on non-hierarchical structure and process. We are in the early stages of this experimentation, but I have seen enough already to know that there are ways of structuring and leading groups that heal the soul-wound and empower people to take spiritual responsibility for their own lives and for Life on earth.

For, most centrally, this social healing is about the restoration of spiritual strength, or "soul-force", as Gandhi called it, in society, the kind we admire so much in the men and women who have over the centuries contributed to the betterment of the world. It is about taking our own lives and destinies seriously, our own talents and gifts, and living them out fully ourselves, not through another, even if this sets us at odds with society at times, or makes us lonely and afraid. Even, in fact, if it leads us to face death, or actually die, it is this healing that makes life truly worth living. We need courage for this, for our personality is afraid, and we need support. But we also know that, at those moments when we are spiritually strong, the whole universe moves to sustain us.

Soul-wound and the Planet

The third aspect of the soul is the connection with Nature and all forms of Life. Again, children have this experience of connection, and sustain it until it is abused out of them. Observe the relationship of a child to a pet, or watch a child at the beach where wave meets sand. There is total union here and joy. I have worked with many people who, when we touched the pain of the loss of a pet, particularly when a parent carelessly removed it, or killed it, for "adult" reasons, felt grief far greater than if a relative had died. The soul is there and experiences the connection viscerally. And when it is broken, the wound is deep. Loss of soul is, in part, loss of our connection to Nature and to other forms of Life, and psychotherapy within a spiritual context needs to take this loss seriously and find ways to restore the

connection. The measure of our disconnection, individually and as a species, is seen in the degree of environmental degradation and pollution our life-style has produced, both in this country and throughout the planet, and it is no mistake that the growth of the environmental movement and interest in the spiritual dimension in Psychology are coincident in time. They are both part of a larger attempt to find ways to heal the soul-wound, one in relation to the person, the other in relation to the planet. Clearly we have a long way to go, and many of the considerations are economic and political, but in psychotherapy we can begin to look at the person's relationship to Nature, to other kingdoms of beings, and to ask how can this connection be strengthened as an integral part of the healing. Again, the loss of diversity—at this level, biological—attenuates our connection to our souls. In the loss of arable land, in the extinction of animal and plant species, in the pollution of air and water, we are losing an aspect of our spiritual connection and contributing not only to the suffering of other beings, but to our own spiritual starvation. Therefore, it is not a luxury, but a necessity that we begin to look at this level and the impact of the soul-wound here. The inner life alone is not enough. The personal and social life alone is not enough. We have to consider as well the life-style decisions that a person is making and the political, economic, and ecological implications of them. A person who throws a soda can out the window of a car, who neglects to recycle refuse, who thinks in economic terms only when developing a piece of land, is to a degree disconnected from his, or her, soul and is contributing, if in a tiny way, to the further destruction of not only the environment, but of our connection as a species to soul. In wounding the earth, we have wounded ourselves, and in restoring the earth, we will heal ourselves. Earth centered cultures and now Deep Ecology⁸ are reminding us of this loss, and promoting change, but the inertia of the systems we have created is vast and the destruction continues. Nothing short of a major reorientation to how we live will make the difference and this starts in each individual life.

So, as psychotherapists, we need to ask of our clients, how is your life-style contributing to your suffering, how is the way you use money and time related to your disconnection, and what choices can you begin to make that will correct this for yourself, and so for others? I have worked with people whose healing was deeply supported by a choice to become active in the environmental movement, or to plant a garden, or to reduce their living circumstances to a simpler level. Personal problems cleared up as they made this choice, and they gained a new perspective on their lives and their relationship to the larger Life of the earth. Each person has a part to play in this planetary transformation, and a responsibility to play it. The more

connected a person becomes, the more they begin to experience their relationship to the planet and want to play a part in its healing. It becomes natural to consume less and to live more simply, and you begin to see that many of the things you thought you needed were really means to compensate for the soul-wound. And, in the words of Albert Schweitzer, you begin to cultivate "a reverence for all life", which simply means that you experience that you are an integral and necessary part of this vast web of Being, that what you do counts, and the most natural thing to do is to revere and care for it as for yourself. To paraphrase Christ we might say "Love thy planet as thyself".

We are far from this, but it is what we need to do—to change ourselves, our relationships, and our world. No less than a total transformation will do, and there are many people all around the globe that are working hard for this—more and more each day. Sometimes the work is individual, sometimes social, sometimes planetary, and each person needs to find what is the right next step for them—a step that is buried in their own soul. So, there is reason to hope and the need to act. There is no guarantee and every possibility that we can do this. And if we do, we will have achieved species maturity and a realization of the heaven that earth potentially is.

A New Image of Spiritual Life

Behind all this is a new image of spiritual life that I believe is emerging at the end of the twentieth century. It is a spirituality that moves us into the earth, not away, into ordinary life, not apart, into our bodies and feelings and minds, not rising above them, into a full engagement with the issues and sufferings of the time and a willingness to dwell in the midst of the chaos of history and to take responsibility for our part in it. It is a shift from an hierarchical to a systemic understanding of relationships and the empowerment of all rather than the many being led by the few. Many are saying that it is the return of the sacred feminine principle after centuries of domination by the masculine. Others are saying it is a paradigm shift and expansion of human consciousness. I would say that, in the restoration of the soul, which includes a confrontation with species-wide spiritual starvation, and learning how to heal the soul-wound, we are uncovering and expressing an human potential that has always been there and that will lead to species maturity. We are discovering this new spirituality from within, from our immediate experience, and, as we do this work, I believe this new life will rise and make itself more and more known through our experience, through our trust of the unknown that we face, and our willingness to enter it and

learn. I don't think it will come from the teaching of any one person, or any one religion, or any one culture, but from the struggle of the planet as a whole to realize itself spiritually. It will come from each of our struggles to know who we are in all our differences as well as in our common humanity and to right our relationships with each other and with Nature and the earth.

This is a large order and, in responding to it, faith becomes a central requirement for life on earth at this time, faith to keep going in the face of what seem insurmountable obstacles, faith to keep a sense of perspective and humor, to forgive yourself for your blindnesses, and to learn from them. The labor of the planet is hard, and every day there are stories in the news that would say "give up". But there stories also—you know them, particularly if you are a psychotherapist—of the incredible courage and determination of people to be themselves, to heal this wound, and to celebrate their and all other life. This is one of the great gifts of being a therapist —that you become privy to the daily heroism of your clients, and they inspire you to be more brave yourself. You witness their spirit and help to strengthen it, and they strengthen you in their struggle to do so. At its best, it is a gift of Life that you share.

Conclusion

These, then, are some initial ideas and observations about this wound to the connection to the soul, the unrecognized suffering it generates, and how we can work to heal it in ourselves and others. And I want to say again how much we are at the beginning in all this. In this paper I have laid out initial findings from our experience with this phenomenon and, in ending, I want to invite you, the reader, to join me in continuing to explore this source of human sorrow through close attention to, and study of, your own personal and professional experience. The photo print needs us all in order to develop clearly and fully, and our careful attention to its details will help reveal over time the true nature of this suffering and how best to heal it.

And, more generally, addressing you as persons and professionals in a wide range of fields, I encourage you, as the spiritual dimension emerges in the experience of our clients and our culture, to welcome it into your thought and practice and explore how to work within this larger context that includes the soul as well as psyche and personality. In this way I believe we can contribute most effectively, through our particular vocations and expertise, to the great healing and transformation that needs to happen for all.

References

¹ This paper is adapted from a keynote address given at a conference in "Spirituality and Psychotherapy" in May, 1994.

² The Helen Dowling Institute for Bio-Psycho-Social Medicine in Rotterdam, Holland.

³ See State of the World (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 1993) and, generally, the multi-disciplinary work of the Worldwatch Institute.

⁴ Personal anecdote from a colleague who worked with Mother Theresa in Calcutta, India.

⁵ This technique is drawn from the practice of Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis.

⁶ This practice of presence and its impact is described in other language by Martin Buber's description of the "I-Thou" experience (see citation above) and by Jesus Christ in his saying "Wherever two, or more, are gathered in my Name, there will I be also."

⁷ See next paper on "The Corona Process" and also, respectively, the work that Roberto Assagioli, Carl Rogers, and David Bohm did in the last years of their lives. All three focused increasingly on issues of world peace and how psychology and spirituality could contribute to it.

⁸ See the work of Joanna Macy, particularly Coming Back to Life, (Stoney Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998).