

1-1-2005

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Recommended Citation

Burno, M. E. (2005). Burno, M. E. (2005). On therapy by means of spiritual culture. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 24(1), 85–86.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 24 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2005.24.1.85>



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On Therapy by Means of Spiritual Culture

Mark E. Burno

Therapy by means of spiritual culture is a psychotherapeutic approach in which the leading psychotherapeutic mechanism is that of creative self-expression, creative inspiration. Yet the state of creative inspiration can be felt in different ways according to the nature of the particular soul. For example, an individual with a more idealistic nature will experience spirituality and creative inspiration quite differently than one with a more materialist bent.

In Western tradition, the state of creative inspiration is often understood as something sent from Above, as to a receiver. As such, this state is called Freedom (Fromm), Logos (Frankl), Self-Actualization (Maslow), Personal Growth (Rogers), Psychosynthesis (Assagioli), Transpersonal State (Grof), and so forth. This approach is more of an idealistic relationship to a transcendent spirituality.

In Russia, there are more people of a materialistic nature of soul than in the West or the Far East. Such people feel the state of creative inspiration as an emission of their own bodies. Because of this, the Russian notion of spirituality is broader; it includes not only what is sent to us from Above, but is also Something emitted by ourselves. In this way, we can say that Pushkin and Chekov are spiritual writers, but without an idealistic, religious worldview; they are more in the natural-scientific stream.

This same distinction can be seen in psychotherapy. Alexander Yarotsky (1908, 1917), a physician with a materialistic worldview, is one of the fathers of Russian clinical psychotherapy in the natural-scientific approach. Yarotsky named his classical book, *Idealism as a Physiologic Factor* (1908). He understood idealism as a state of captivity to altruistic ideals. In Russia, there are many intellectuals with this materialistic understanding of spirituality.

With the help of many others, I have worked out this psychotherapeutic method over more than 30 years (see Burno, 2002, 2005). The essence of the method is as follows: The patients with painful feelings of inferiority study elements of clinical psychiatry, characterology, natural history, and psychotherapy in order to learn to express themselves creatively in harmony with their natural characterological peculiarities. In order to live naturally, that is, in accordance with

one's own nature, one must study one's own natural features; these then become real orienting points for following one's own spiritual nature: one's own nature, emitting spirit.

This method helps not only people of a materialistic outlook, but also those with a more idealistic nature, to find their own psychotherapy. Here is an excerpt from a group session on creative self-expression that helps individuals to feel their own outlook and understand whether they are more idealistic and religious or natural-scientific in their own nature. This session is called "Polenov and Rublev." It begins by viewing a painting by the Russian artist Vasilii Polenov entitled "Christ and the Sinner." In Polenov's picture, Jesus is a young but wise man: wholly human, realistically depicted. This is realistic pictorial art on a religious theme. Then we view an icon by Anton Rublev, the famous Russian artist and monk of the 15th century. Here we see the face of Jesus, but we do not know whether the neck is male or female. The nose looks rather like a duck's bill, and the hair is just an inarticulate mass. For the idealist it must be this way: the face of Christ should not be full-blooded and alive, for it is the origin of Spirit. If the face were lifelike, we would not see the stream of Spirit flowing from his eyes. This image of Christ is the glance of the transcendental world, of God. It reminds us of how the girl in Gogol's story speaks of the stars in the sky. She says, "The angels open the windows of their houses."

So, we have one image of spirit for idealists and another for materialists. Spirit is no less important to the materialist, but it is secondary: body (matter) emits spirit. For such a person, his or her own body is the source of spirit. So, therapy by means of spiritual culture may be creative inspiration that takes a more religious, idealistic form, or it may take the natural-scientific form of creative self-expression. The approach is different for differing patients.

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