

Counseling Basics for Wiccan/Pagan Clergy

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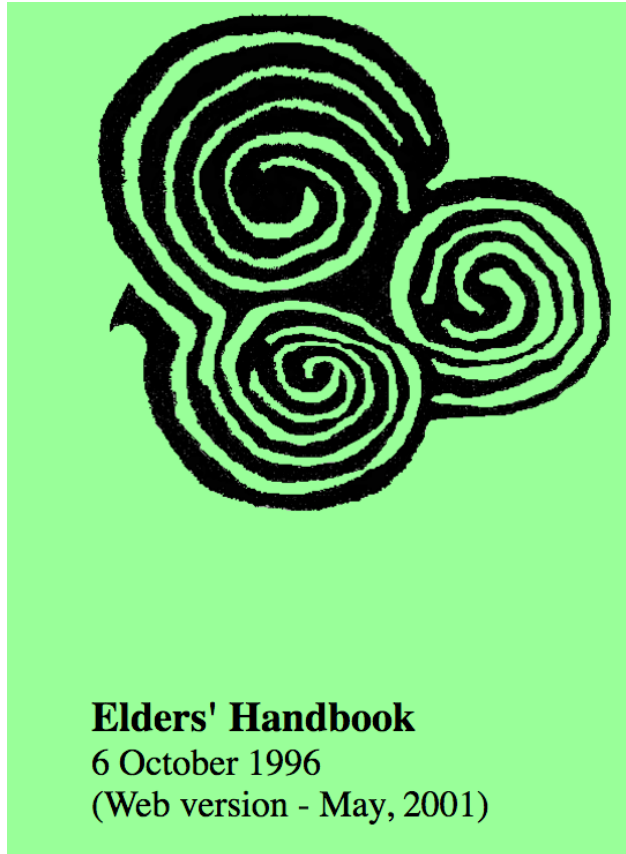


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Charge of the Counselor

Thus spoke She who is the guardian of the heart, the speaker of the words of life, singer of Earth and Time, dancer of wholeness, she who weaves breath:

"As My priestess, you are charged with the care of hearts and the guardianship of life-roads. To you I give the gift of the steady foot, to walk the path of life with those who ask you to accompany them. I give the gift of legs strong enough for the journey, and wise enough to know when to sit down and talk with your fellow journeyers, and when to halt and suggest that they reconsider their way, asking one another, their own hearts and the path itself for direction. I give you the gift of a sturdy back, for the bearing of your own burdens and for when you need to carry someone else or to give others a boost up to a high branch along the way, for two together can reach what one cannot reach alone. I give you keen senses, to be aware of the dangers and the opportunities that arise on life's road, to look and listen and smell and touch them for yourself and for those others who trust you to walk their path with them. I give you a sharp mind and a soft heart, and a mouth that only opens to give good counsel, not to insist, manipulate or condemn. Finally, I give you ears and a heart that will listen ten times more than your mouth will speak. With all these gifts given you, oh counselor, I ask only that you use them wisely, with compassion and understanding, and in the service of Life and Love."

Margaret Hammitt-McDonald, PhD

Introduction

by Gwyneth Harrow

Advice to the reader: these notes are abridged from the workbook which we use for the Counseling Basics workshops. The Counseling Workshop was first taught as a series of five weekly classes by Judy and Marjorie, later as a series of two-day retreats by Judy and/or Gwyneth. Really learning to counsel takes much more than just a weekend, but even in the short time available for our workshops, we can work on acquiring some of the basic counseling 'survival skills.' The Counseling Workshop continues to evolve -- we invite you to let us know what we could do to improve it. Please email your feedback to Judy.

You will not become a counselor by reading these notes, or any other book. Real training in counseling is experiential, in-person and in-depth. On the other hand, most working priest/esses have learned a lot about counseling from the hard school of experience. Reading can help you put your experiences in context and integrate the skills and understandings you have developed through your work.

As you might expect from Wiccan High Priestesses, our primary religious vocabulary is Wiccan. But these notes are intended for Pagans of all Paths, and for anybody else who may find them useful. We hope that our Druid, Heathen, and Reconstructionist (and anybody else we may have missed) readers will not feel left out, and will make any translation that is necessary to suit their own Paths.

Opinions expressed here are solely those of the authors, and must not be construed as being the opinions, practices or precepts of any Tradition or organization. May these words and the manner of their sharing bring harm to none, good to many, and honor to the Ancient Gods.

from Marjorie's Notebook:

A definition of counseling

The central purpose of counseling is to facilitate wise choices and decisions. Counseling is initiated when the person faces a problem that s/he feels inadequate to handle without the assistance from a professional or helping person.

Counselors must have a genuine sincere interest in each client -- as s/he is now. The client must feel received -- make it clear that you are interested, you care, and that this person has

your undivided attention. Turn on the answering machine. Turn off the phone. Make eye contact.

Make the client feel safe and respected -- confident in you. There is no simple way for winning confidence. This is an ongoing process, by demonstrating that you can be trusted. Don't express your views as you would in conversation with a friend. Be mindful of transference.

We should always remember our limits: *we cannot help everyone who comes to us*. Some people need help from psychologists, surgeons or other clinicians -- pastoral counseling is for them at best an adjunct to the help they really need, and at worst it may do them harm.

Common False Impressions about Counseling:

- 1) Objectivity** - the assumption is that anyone is capable of total objectivity (impersonal, free of bias, free of judgement, not influenced by personal history or feelings)
- 2) Truth** - assumption is that we can see truths about the other person that s/he can't see him/herself assumes we have abilities above and beyond those of others -- more knowledge
- 3) Power to Change Others** - assumption is that we can change others, that this is desirable -- assumes we have the right to change others

The critical dimensions of counseling

by Judy Harrow

Counseling is the process of helping a person who has come to you with a problem to sort out what's happening and how they feel about it, to look at their options, to choose a course of action that fits their values, resources and lifestyles (not yours), to implement their decisions, and to evaluate the practical and emotional results. Counseling is not about mental illness, except rare cases of emergency "first aid" and referral. It is about helping normal, functional people handle the usual problems, opportunities and choices that come up in any life. We do this primarily by providing them with a safe time and place in which to figure out their own situation, and secondarily by sharing our specialized knowledge and resources with them when asked.

There are five "critical dimensions" of counseling, developed by researchers in the field, and also described in other words by workshop members. We think of these as the five points of the counselor's pentacle. Here are some short definitions of the critical dimensions:

[Empathy](#) is our ability to perceive the client's feelings, and to demonstrate accurate perception to the client. When the client feels understood, a sense of trust ("rapport") and safety develop. As rapport grows, we may begin to perceive feelings of which the client is not yet conscious. By cautiously and tentatively communicating that perception, we may enable the client to understand and accept ("to own") more of his or her complexity of feelings ("additive empathy"). Additive empathy is not adding feelings the counselor might feel; it is adding conscious understanding of feelings the client is already feeling. The counselor's open acceptance of *all* feelings permits the client to own feelings that are not conventionally respectable. Knowing how one feels as fully as possible is essential for making proper decisions. (note: feelings here means emotional states, not opinions, judgments or physical sensations, although the word is commonly used to mean all of these.)

[Warmth](#) is also called "unconditional positive regard." It involves accepting and caring about the client as a person, regardless of any evaluation of her or his behaviors or thoughts. It is most often communicated through our non-verbal behavior.

[Respect](#) is our belief in the client's ability to make appropriate decisions and deal appropriately with his or her life situation, when given a safe and supportive environment in which to do so. Often, we show respect best by what we do not do, as when we avoid facile advice giving or cheap comfort. Our ability to sit in silence during a session while the client works out a solution is a manifestation of respect, and so is our willingness to provide information and resources for which the client has asked. A more familiar term might be "empowerment." By respectful behavior, the counselor demonstrates that s/he values the integrity of the client.

[Congruence](#) (or genuineness) is being honest and authentic in our dealings with our clients. The minimum it requires is that we only work with clients for whom we can have real empathy,

warmth and respect, rather than role-playing or "techniquing" those qualities. It also involves know our limits in terms of skills, time and energy and not committing ourselves beyond those limits. Another important component of genuineness is to be aware of how engaging in counseling (or coven leadership) fills our own old and unmet needs and how our own emotional agendas from other times and places can color our reactions to our present relationships with clients and coven members.

[Confidentiality](#) normally means that anything discussed during a counseling session is held as absolutely private and not discussed elsewhere. This is essential to the client feeling safe in speaking about intimate and painful matters. Secular counselors have a legal duty to break confidentiality when there is danger that the client will harm self or others. Legally, religious counselors may be exempt from this requirement, especially in those states which have major Catholic political power. Our religious tradition forbids revealing that anyone else is a Pagan or Witch, and normally requires that we avoid discussing whatever happens within a cast Circle with those who were not there. So, we would have a theological basis for invoking the absolute protection of religious confidentiality, but may not have the resources for the major test case that might follow. Beyond that, we may not in conscience want to stand back and allow harm to be done. Perhaps the [Wiccan Rede](#) mandates limited whistle-blowing? Although the basic question must remain with the individual priest/ess counselor's conscience, the counseling dimension of genuineness requires an open discussion with the client, before receiving their confidences, of the counselor's position regarding confidentiality.

Ground Rules

by Judy Harrow

If you're acting as priest/ess of a coven or grove, teaching classes on Goddess spirituality, facilitating open rituals or workshops, whatever you may be doing to serve the Old Gods or Their people, you've probably already been doing some counseling.

Know your limits. Counseling is *not* psychotherapy

You'll feel better, and be more effective, if you acknowledge and honor the [limits](#) of your training and experience. Some people do have serious emotional impairments arising from terrible personal history or even from organic and physical malfunction. Their need for healing services is very real, sometimes tragically real. You'll want to help, but this is one case where "fake it till you make it" just doesn't do it. The very best thing you can do for them is to help find someone Pagan-friendly who is also thoroughly clinically trained. Pagan-friendly therapists aren't always easily found in all areas, sad but true. In cases of serious mental illness, clinical competence is the priority.

What counseling is

Counseling is the art of helping basically healthy people work through the normal developmental issues, decisions, problems and even crises that come to all of us in life. Some examples: choosing a career, losing a parent, divorce. Sometimes it just helps to have somebody to talk to, somebody whose compassion we trust and whose wisdom we respect.

Clergy of all religions are often seen as such persons. People particularly turn to their clergy when they are working through religious issues. Since most Wiccans are actively working on their own spiritual development, and since our smaller "congregations" give us far better access to our clergy than the mainstream groups, I think we seek our priest/esses' counsel more than most folks do. So when secular issues come up, it's easy and natural to turn to the one who's been helpful in the past.

There are many philosophies and [theories of counseling](#). My own approach is pretty eclectic, but comes from a "Rogerian" base. Carl Rogers was an American counseling psychologist of the mid-twentieth century who advocated "client-centered" counseling. He believed that all of us have within ourselves the capacity to make and implement good decisions in our lives, and that the role of the counselor was simply to provide the client with a safe and supportive space in which to examine the pending issues and make decisions. To me, this is entirely compatible with the Lady's teaching us that we will find what we seek within ourselves or nowhere.

Counselors don't do what psychotherapists do, but they do more than what any sympathetic friend might do. Training and experience do make a difference. There are techniques for helping

the client feel safe and supported, and I hope to share some of these. From what I can see, most working priest/esses already have the basics from good instinct and hard experience. More important than filling in the few gaps is helping our working clergy and clergy-in-training to feel more confident in what they already know.

Recommended reading

There's an excellent book available, written for non-counseling professionals, such as teachers, physicians, lawyers, who need to use basic counseling skills in support of their primary professional activities. If you want to know a lot more than we can pack into these notes, look up *On Becoming a Counselor: A Basic Guide for Nonprofessional Counselors and the Helping Professions, 3rd edition* by Eugene Kennedy and Sara C. Charles (NY, Crossroad, 2001) ISBN 0-8245-1913-2.

When Not to Counsel

by Lark

Knowing when not to counsel is probably the most important part of being a counselor. Much as we would like to be able to help others with our advice and support, there are times when the problem being presented is just going to be too complicated for someone without professional training to handle. In those cases, you could act in a way that you thought would help and end up responsible for a tragic outcome. Don't let your ego or your desire to help get in the way of providing what is best for your student/counselee. Remember, the Wiccan Rede says, "An it harm none"!

1. The problem you are being asked about conflicts with your own value system.

Each of us must walk their own path, and it isn't fair to impose your beliefs on another. If the question being asked conflicts badly with what you believe, you may not be able to be objective in your recommendations. For instance, if you strongly believe that monogamy is the only "right" way to conduct a relationship, you may have difficulty helping a student or other coven member work through problems arising from a polyamorous or open relationship. It would be better to refer the person to another Initiate who shares that person's beliefs more closely.

2. Counseling would involve the sharing of information of an intensely personal nature which either individual might later regret having shared.

Relationships change. How would you feel if you spoke to someone about a very personal and painful problem and then found that you and that individual were no longer particularly close? Also, in the pain of the moment, a person might tell another something very personal and painful which they would later regret having said. Now they must sit in circle knowing that someone knows some of the darkest secrets about their personal lives. If the problem is so uncomfortable that the counselee has difficulty being willing to share it with you, suggest that a professional might be a better choice.

3. The problem is a long-standing psychological one.

A non-professional is not apt to be much help in solving the effects of child abuse, prolonged depression, drug abuse, etc. Offer your support and love, but suggest that professional help is needed.

4. The individual is hearing or seeing things which are not there and which are telling him things which are not true.

We are a religion which believes in perceiving the unseen and in the powers of intuition. However, as Initiates we must be sure that we can tell the difference between intuition/vision and delusion. If you are unsure as to which the person you are counseling is describing, try to ask them some additional questions to clarify the issue, or talk with someone else in the Initiate's council and get their opinion as well. The Powers with whom we deal would not tell someone to do an act that would cause harm. Hallucinations or delusions could be the sign of a serious psychiatric problem and could lead to someone harming themselves or others. They need professional help to recover.

5. The individual is expressing intention to harm themselves or others.

Unless the person is clearly joking, always take statements of this kind seriously. Don't put yourself in the position of being responsible for a tragic outcome by trying to handle this yourself.

6. The individual is in professional counseling already and is coming to you to validate what his counselor is telling him.

Counseling for a long-standing problem can be a difficult process, and people are reluctant to give up ingrained behaviors. They may seek to avoid what the counselor is trying to have them do by attempting to get others to say that there is no problem or that the counselor is wrong. Send the individual back to their counselor with their questions.

7. The individual is depressed.

Clarify what is going on. If this depression has been short term and caused by a specific event such as the breakup of a relationship or a bad day at work, it is probably acceptable to work with them. If the depression has been going on for more than 2-3 weeks, or if there is a significant change in the person's ability to function on a daily basis (i.e.: he can't get out of bed to go to work in the morning) professional help is necessary.

8. The individual is expressing a sense of total hopelessness or if there is any discussion of suicide.

People will often not talk directly about suicide, but they may give clues to the fact that they are thinking about it in other ways. Expressing feelings of hopelessness, that things will never get better, is one way. Or they may say things such as "the world would be better without me", or "I wish I could sleep and never wake up". A person suddenly disposing of their possessions could be another clue. These are warning signs of a potential suicide and should be treated very seriously.

9. Avoid becoming involved in marital disputes.

All married couples have the occasional argument or problem, and it would not be out of line to discuss possible solutions with a person if asked. However, there is any long-standing problem with the relationship, or any indication of violence or abuse, it is not an undertaking for a non-professional. Remember that many dysfunctional couples may initially turn to an outsider for help, then turn on that individual afterwards. Taking sides, or getting in the middle of a marital dispute helps no one and could get you hurt. There are shelters available and professional counselors as well that can assist in this type of situation.

Working Models: theories of counseling

by Judy Harrow

In all our activities, people work from some model of the world, some understanding of How Things Are and how they interact. This working model guides our choices of what to do next, so the more accurate it is, the more effective our actions are likely to be. Most professional fields have a body of theory, the condensed wisdom of the ancestors, that guides the work, and the further exploration, of contemporary practitioners. This cumulative heritage of knowledge is what allows each profession to develop. Without it, each generation would have to start again from scratch.

Counseling - like all psychology - is a relatively new field. There are many ideas about how people thrive and about how things go wrong for people, and many models, competing paradigms, for how to work with people for their healing and growth. Each of these theories of human development generates a set of techniques, a way of working that is consistent with that particular perspective.

You will be happiest working from a theoretical base that is congruent with your own personal values and with your own personal talent and temperament. So, it's best to "shop around" a bit before settling. For a good overview, I recommend an anthology called *Current Psychotherapies*, edited by Raymond Corsini. We used it twenty years ago in graduate school, and it's still in use in a new edition.

The process of developing your own comfortable style of counseling involves becoming familiar with several of these theories, and finding the one - or, far more likely, the synthesis of several - that fits you best. As you work through this exploration, you should, of course, also pay careful attention to what seems to work best with different sorts of clients or different sort of issues. The object of the exercise is to support their growth, not to amuse yourself.

I think it's important to notice that all of the current theories work with some clients and that none of them work with all clients. This tells me that all of them are partial, that each of them describes some particular aspect of human function, healing and growth, but not the whole thing.

Discovering our own Meta-Model...

In one of our own great symbols, the quartered Circle, I find a meta-model that puts several present-day counseling theories into context, guides me in choosing which one to draw on in any particular situation. This is how it works for me:

East - mind, knowledge, intelligence

Cognitive theories address themselves to the models that clients use in their daily lives. Does the client hold irrational beliefs, perhaps things s/he was taught as a small child, that lead to unrealistic expectations or maladaptive behavior? The goal of cognitive therapies is to make such beliefs conscious so the client may choose whether to change them. One good, accessible introduction to cognitive therapy is *A New Guide to Rational Living* by Ellis and Harper (1975). Another particularly useful book from this perspective about depression is *Feeling Good: the New Mood Therapy* by David Burns (1980).

South - passion, will, energy

Psychodynamic theories hold that we invest a tremendous amount of psychic energy defending ourselves against old, painful memories. Some people have so many traumatic memories, and such ugly ones, that little energy is left for living their lives well here and now. So the object of therapy is to make these old hurts conscious and work through the grieving process, thus freeing the client to get on with life. This approach is, of course, rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud. His basic insight is still important, despite his reductionism, his sexism, his obsession with early childhood sexuality and other serious limitations.

West - insight, wisdom, compassion

Archetypal theories hold that there are certain basic issues, or themes, or energy patterns with which all humans must eventually deal in the course of their growth. Different cultures, even different individuals, will express these in different ways, but the core issues remain the same. Archetypal therapists are generally the most comfortable with spiritual issues, and have written many useful books about mythology, divination, etc.

The intellectual father of archetypal therapy was Carl Jung. The leading contemporary proponent is James Hillman, author of *Facing the Gods* (1980). More fine resources from this direction include *Personal Mythology* by David Feinstein and Stanley Krippner (1988), *Jung and Tarot* by Sallie Nichols (1980), or *Working with Dreams* by Montague Ullman and Nan Zimmerman (1979).

North - manifestation, the body

Body theories postulate that old traumatic memories become stored or anchored in the body. So, sore spots or stiff spots that don't stem from some specific physical injury may in fact hold old tensions. Body therapists will often combine massage or other touch with talk, and will certainly guide their clients to tune in to posture, breathing patterns, etc. If you've ever calmed yourself by deliberately breathing slowly and deeply, you share the basic insight of bodywork. Wilhelm Reich was one of the early thinkers along these lines. Alexander Lowen is more contemporary. Another good resource is *Focusing* by Eugene Gendlin (1981).

Watch out! Some conditions result from serious and correctable imbalances in brain chemistry. These are not counseling issues, but psychiatric ones. Bi-polar disorder, for example, is best managed with medication; traditional "talk" therapies do no good and may do harm. Conditions like these are beyond the scope even of professionally trained counselors. For a priest/ess doing ancillary pastoral counseling to tackle such situations is beyond irresponsible.

Behaviorism is another aspect of the North. This theory holds that meaningful change begins with changes in behavior, and is sustained by the different responses (the reinforcement) we receive from those around us when our behavior changes for the better. A slogan that well expresses behavioral therapy is "you don't think yourself into a new way of acting, you act yourself into a new way of thinking." The truth in behaviorism is that once a person has understood their situation and decided how they want to change, the way to change is to change. So behaviorism tells us a lot about how a person can maintain and extend a change for the better, but little about how they get ready to take that critical first step. The best known proponent of behaviorism is B.F. Skinner.

Center - choice - balance - integration

At Center we balance the functions, make our choices, and take responsibility for our own lives. I have placed two schools of thought in the Center, because neither alone seemed adequate. First is the person-centered approach of Carl Rogers, my own philosophical base. Rogerians believe that each person has within themselves the full capacity to make and implement appropriate choices about their own life. Counselors provide a safe and supportive environment in which people can work through their own issues; we don't do it for them. For me, this is just another expression of the Wiccan teaching that we will find what we seek within ourselves or nowhere. One good introduction is Rogers' book *On Becoming a Person* (1961). The definitive classic is his *Client-Centered Therapy* (1951).

Second are the many theories that describe each person as a nexus in a web of relationships: family, community, workplace and many others, obviously including our covens. A lot of the thinking about what it means to come from a dysfunctional family, for example, is rooted in such theories. This approach, in contemporary counseling, is rooted in the work of Alfred Adler. Another important writer about interpersonal therapy is Harry Stack Sullivan. Although they are no longer trendy, the theories of Transactional Analysis really do describe human communication and its pitfalls. A couple of key books about Transactional Analysis are *Games People Play* by Eric Berne (1964) and *I'm OK - You're OK* by Thomas Harris (1969). My personal favorite, one of my graduate school texts that is still in print and in use, is *Born to Win* by Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward (1971).

To me, these are two utterly essential insights. No recognizably human life takes place outside of a social context *and* each of us is ultimately responsible for our own choices.

Deepening Your Understanding

Some of us are drawn, by talent and temperament, to the practice of counseling. If you find yourself spending increasing amounts of time this way, and it seems to you like counseling is going to be one of your major contributions to the Pagan community, you'll probably eventually want to take some classes or workshops to deepen your understanding and build your skills. Somewhere along the line, you'll also want to figure out what your own personal theory of counseling is, the model that works best for you and for those who seek your help. To that end, Dr. Richard E. Watts has suggested a practical and systematic approach for graduate students in counseling. I have adapted his steps for use by priest/esses who do some counseling in the course of their clergy function.

1. Explore your personal values and convictions about human beings and life in general. How are these values informed by the teachings of our religion? Do not be afraid to test your personal values and beliefs. Any value or belief worth having is one that can withstand close scrutiny.
2. Explore the major theories of counseling and psychotherapy. Choose the one that most closely resembles your own personal values and beliefs. That's your first approximation, your base.
3. Study your chosen theory in depth. Read all you can by its founder and by those who have developed it further. Take any available workshops to get supervised practice with associated techniques. Identify what draws you to this theory, and why. Identify also your areas of disagreement, and the reasons for them. If you find that disagreement outweighs agreement, begin the process again from the beginning.
4. Apply what you've learned in your work with coveners and clients. Observe how well this approach works for you. If you feel uncomfortable or ineffective working this way, it might mean you need to study the theory and its applications more thoroughly. Or you might simply be discovering your limits, identifying those situations where this theory doesn't seem to work well for you. If, on balance, this way of working doesn't suit you after all, begin the process again from the beginning.
5. When you are feeling well grounded and comfortable working with your theory of choice, re-examine some of the other theories that you considered. Do they seem offer any technique that fit well with your chosen theoretical base? If you can explain these

techniques in terms of the theory you are working from, try them and see how they work in practice.

6. Do any of these other theories offer any explanatory concepts that are philosophically consistent with your base theory, and perhaps cover situations in which your base theory seems weak to you? Do these concepts also blend well with your own personal values and beliefs and those of our religion? Be mindful of philosophical and theoretical consistency, and of consistency of theory and practice.
7. Keep learning about ways of understanding and working with people. Keep checking theory against your own lived experience. Keep cycling through these steps. Gradually, through them, you will discover your own personal working style.

The most important thing to remember is that it never stops. As your mind and heart stay open, you will keep learning from your experiences of working with people, in and out of the Craft. Others will be learning too, and publishing their own new insights and theories. You will be weighing each new contribution to the field against your own experiences and perceptions. So, as the Gods grant us young and agile minds, our understanding of How Things Are and how they interact will never be set in concrete. A working model - a model that works - is one that is constantly being refined as our understanding grows. The dynamic interaction of theory and practice continues throughout our working lives.

Religious Counseling: what makes it different?

by Judy Harrow

Research done with both self-identified feminists and self-identified Fundamentalist Christians who are seeking counseling indicates that members of both groups would rather work with a counselor who shares that self-identification. Why?

Shared values:

- 1) **Secular counseling believes itself to be value-free, but this is not so.** There are definite values about process (i.e. openness, power-sharing, autonomy), although the typical secular counselor will be neutral as to outcomes. One could understand the "critical counseling dimensions" to be professional values.
- 2) **Fortunately, the process values associated with secular counseling** are completely compatible with Wiccan religious values, so at least that presents no problem. e.g. "respect" = find what you seek within.
- 3) **When working with a counselor** who shares our religious values or lifestyle orientation, we can also assume some common beliefs about outcomes. This can make the decision making phase of the counseling process more efficient. Consider this: a man comes to you with the complaint that his wife is refusing to accept his natural role as head of the household, and undermining his authority. Could you and he effectively work together?
- 4) Also, specifically for Witches, there are two other issues:
 - a) Some secular therapists still believe that "magical thinking" is by definition crazy or that anybody who "thinks they are a Witch" belongs in a nice, safe place. Conversely, we need to know that not everybody who hears voices is hearing the voices of the Gods.
 - b) Sometimes the problems being worked on involve initiatory material, which cannot be discussed even with an unprejudiced cowan therapist.

Shared vocabularies

1. **Much of what will be discussed involves feelings rather than objective data.** These are very subjective, subtle, hard to define. But in many cases, the client will not need you to help them analyze the objective aspects of their situation nearly as much as to help them consciously understand just how they feel about it. Few of our people are dumb or disadvantaged.
2. **Within the Craft, we share several sets of metaphors** (e.g. myths, tarot trumps, elemental attributions) that allow clients to describe the vague and mushy, but very important, stuff by analogy.

3. **Also, we have two "large" symbol complexes** that provide extremely useful models for understanding life, the universe and all that in the light of Wiccan/Pagan values:
4. **a) The [Wheel of the Year](#)**, or the three phase Lunar cycle both are models for the cycles and changes of life. Helpful for understanding phases and processes within relationships, projects, careers or adjusting to life passages.
5. **b) The [quartered Circle](#)** is a model of balance and integration of different modes of human psychological function. [cf. the Jungian quaternity: intellect, passion, intuition + sensation.] In the information gathering phase, a reminder to include data from all four aspects.

Also consider the quartered Circle as a diagnostic system:

1. **East:** irrational beliefs or expectations (cf. Beck, Ellis)
2. **South:** bottled up or displaced feelings (cf. Freud)
3. **West:** archetypal problems and/or problems accessing intuitive wisdom (cf. Jung)
4. **North:** behavioral difficulties (cf. Skinner); issues encoded in body (Lowen, Gendlin)
5. **Center:** problems related to the family or group context (cf. Adler)

Wiccan/Pagan techniques

When we do counseling within our own community, we can draw on our own old ways.

1. [Divination](#):

- **useful** in the information gathering and decision making phases of the counseling process.
- **purpose** (in a counseling context) is to access the client's own intuition and wisdom (which includes subliminal observations and unconscious integrations, as well as anything psychic). Also a Wiccan querent is likely to be familiar with the traditional meanings of the cards, hexagrams, whatever. So, when divination is used for the purpose of counseling, encourage the querent to do as much of the talking as is possible.
- **When divination is in service of empowerment**, as the values of both Wicca and secular counseling mandate, it is to increase choices and enable better choices, never to take away choice. Therefore, any statements to clients that indicate a fixed future are inappropriate.

- **Also consider other receptive magic** (tuning in) techniques, such as dream incubation and interpretation, meditation, trance art and play techniques, etc.

2. Magic:

- **"Magic is the art of changing consciousness** / causing change in accordance with will." Whichever definition you prefer, magic will work well to enable an individual to make desired changes in him or her self.

For the action/implementation phase, consider rituals to help program the unconscious mind to make the desired changes. E.g. visualizations, affirmations, candle magic, making & charging talismans in short, the entire gamut of active/projective magical workings. **The very familiarity of these techniques** will in itself invoke the placebo effect, and amplify their natural effectiveness.

Spiritual Counseling and Wiccan Clergy:
not psychotherapy in disguise

I have been a psychotherapist for the past thirteen years, and a High Priestess for eight. I have come to believe firmly that there is a real and important place for counseling among Wiccan clergy -- but equally firmly that that place is not the same as that of a psychotherapist.

I became a psychotherapist by what seemed to me at the time to be the easiest and simplest of routes: a Master's Degree in clinical Social Work, with a six month clinical internship; followed by four years of agency practice with two hours a week of specialized supervision, and, finally, licensure in my state to practice independently. In order to remain licensed, and to continue to be eligible for malpractice insurance and third-party reimbursements, I must complete thirty hours of continuing education through accredited programs every two years. The qualifications for licensure in psychology or psychiatry are tighter than these, and, in reality, most clinical social workers (including me) put in a lot more ongoing training and supervision than what's required of us.

It is hopelessly unrealistic to expect weekend workshops at Pagan gatherings, even supplemented by independent reading and a good bit of sweat equity, to turn Wiccan clergy into psychotherapists. Just as many Witches are competent herbalists and energy healers, but don't feel that their work is the equivalent of conventional medicine, I would not encourage Wiccan priests to consider our religious training to be the equivalent of a psychotherapist's. More importantly, Witches have a job to do that no psychotherapist without our religious training could possibly do: spiritual counseling for our communities.

The work of a psychotherapist depends highly on the kind of thinking Starhawk calls "flashlight beam" vision, "a grid through which we view the world, a culturally transmitted system of classification." Anyone who has ever waded through the DSM IV (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association) knows just how rigid a grid a psychotherapist must view the world through. Must view the world through: if I do not have a DSM IV diagnosis documented in each "patient's" chart, I not only can't bill insurance for my work, I risk a malpractice suit. The critical distinctions between Schizotypal Personality Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Acute Reactive Psychosis are, to be sure, very important to understand. This grid is not entirely based on delusion, and it can be useful. But I am often deeply aware, sitting with therapists, of how we can miss the individuality and the soul of the men and women who seek our help. They can become numbers, liability issues, and case histories as we practice (another implication of the medical model and its grids) defensive healing.

Thank all the Gods we serve, this is not the only way to be with people in pain! As Starhawk also writes, "Extraordinary consciousness, the other mode of perception that is broad, holistic, and undifferentiated, sees patterns and relationships rather than fixed objects. It is the mode of starlight: dim and silvery, revealing the play of woven branches and the dance of shadows, sensing pathways as spaces in the whole." As a full-time psychotherapist, I cannot tell you how deeply I wish I could bring more of this kind of awareness to my daily work! But, though it isn't ever entirely absent, neither would it be appropriate for me to speak prophetically in a therapy session with clients who seek me out for conventional, not spiritual counseling... Any more than it would be ethical for a Christian psychotherapist to inject his spiritual beliefs and practices into such a setting.

What's more, it wouldn't be appropriate even with my Pagan clients. So much of the work of psychotherapy depends, not on my knowing the answers to my clients' problems, but to their improvising solutions for themselves, that please themselves. Therapists are already cultural icons of wisdom, and it's hard enough to step down off of my pedestal and move out of the way of clients finding wisdom for themselves. If I were to Draw Down in session, to do divination, or even just share what a marvelous ritualist I am in the context of therapy, it would be too much—High Priestess and psychotherapist, friend, and psychic all in one package? I would risk making people in vulnerable parts of their lives feel too overshadowed to do the work they came to me to accomplish. (Not to mention setting myself up for a fall when, inevitably, my feet of clay started to show.)

But in the context of Pagan community, we are all striving, all the time, to be as whole as we can. No one who has spent much time in a Wiccan coven has failed to notice that the same High Priestess whose ringing invocations shake the stars also tends to forget the ritual candles, or trips on the hem of her robe after her share of the ritual wine. Because we work intimately in small groups, none of us can sustain an illusion of Goddess-like wisdom for very long. And though some of us are foolish enough to try to act selflessly in our roles as clergy, most of us figured out a long time ago that the reason we aren't paid for doing what we do is that the doing is meant to be the pay. So, if we're not getting something back from our coven-mates, we're doing something wrong.

Detachment is the model for traditional psychotherapy; engagement for Wiccan teaching. No expectation of reciprocity is the norm in psychotherapy: but expecting our students and coveners to pull their own weight is the norm in the Craft. Both can be valuable ways of teaching and helping others to grow -- but they are different paths, and that needs to be acknowledged. What have I done as a High Priestess, by way of sacred counsel, that I could not have done as a therapist?

When one Witch's husband had just died, I held her and rocked her in my arms for hours as she cried. I gave her Reiki so that her body would have the strength to hold her pain. I have played Trivial Pursuit with one coven-mate the night of his mother's funeral, when that was the only form of comfort he was able to let in. I have driven nine hours to eat fast food with a community member hospitalized for depression, painted the pregnant belly of a first time mom with anointing oil, and done Tarot for the mother of a dead baby, who needed to know he was out of pain, safe in the next world. None of these things would be options for me in my other world, as a psychotherapist, and all were profoundly healing and sacred events -- for myself, as well as the theoretical "recipient" of the care.

Is sacred counsel an adequate substitute for psychotherapy? No: the issues I deal with in my private practice are real, and in many cases, too explosive and charged to be dealt with in any other setting. Psychotic breaks, suicidality, multiple personalities and post-traumatic stress are all issues I deal with as a therapist daily, and not issues I'd advocate doing depth-counseling work with as a Priest or Priestess. Therapy does some things priestly counsel can't for the counseling that comes with Priest-craft is not psychotherapy. It is something harder (for the giver and the recipient) because it is more powerful, more real, and more personal.

And there's no place to get it but from ourselves. If Wiccan clergy attempt to fill the role of traditional psychotherapists, who will be left to fill our role?

Willed Change: the spiral process

by [Judy Harrow](#)

One way to understand the process of change is as an ongoing spiral. Like all models, this is simplified, but the simplification helps us understand a very complex process. On the flat surface of a computer screen, it looks like a closed cycle, a pattern of repetition. In reality, when we go around the cycle, we reach each point changed by all that has happened since we last were there. Also, of course, no one single spiral can describe a human life. Every human being has many facets. We can grow at a different rate (or even regress) in each facet, in different periods of our lives. Remember that a skilled counselor can help you work through each segment of the spiral. Here, in simplified form, are the steps involved in conscious, willed change:

1. Identify the goal: It's important to describe the change you want in terms of a goal, rather than a problem or a deficiency. Start a sentence with the words "I want ..." and continue it with "so that ..." Be as clear and precise as you can, always in positive terms, about your goal, but not its specific manifestation. Always leave some scope for the Goddess' wonderful surprises. She may know of an even better job, or home, or lover than the one you had in mind.
2. A well formulated goal is:
 - positive - describe what you want rather than what you want to fix or change
 - possible - magic extends the sphere of possibility, but there are still limits.
 - Alas, one cannot teleport between the coasts!ethical - your magic is either self directed or directed toward a person who is willing to receive it. It is invasive to work your will on another person without their consent. Such workings are also a lot harder to do and far more likely to backfire.
 - ecological - your goal is in harmony with your values and with your other needs and desires
 - observable - you will have a way of knowing when this goal is achieved.
3. Gather information: Before you act, you need to know as much as possible about the situation and your feasible options within it. For example, if you want a new home, you should have a good idea of your budget, research current mortgage rates and possibilities, check out neighborhoods, learn how to recognize basic structural soundness, look at real estate ads, ask around to see if anyone knows of available places. If you want a career change, look into job market prospects, places where your current skills would be welcomed, available training programs, possibilities for financial aid. This kind of very normal, secular, information gathering comes first.
4. Another kind of information comes from inside yourself, from your own heart and gut, and perhaps from the "still, small voice" of Sacred contact. It's pivotally important to

reach within, to find those perceptions and emotional responses that have not come to consciousness.

5. Feelings count, because whatever does not ultimately feel good will not be sustainable. Of course, people can work through temporary unpleasantness to advance a long-range goal. For example, learning a new skill can be tedious, even painful (I recall blistered fingertips that eventually turned into a guitar player's callouses). What makes the process worthwhile is a personally satisfying goal, not just something you think you should want or should do. The truth of this, too, lies deep within you.
6. People know far more than they realize. The amount of sheer sensory data that pours in on us is more than we can consciously notice or integrate, but we store it all. Our unconscious minds notice patterns and relationships that our conscious minds might miss. And, of course, we have emotional responses that we never bring to surface. In short, our conscious minds may be very intelligent, but our unconscious minds are very much wiser. And beyond even that is the wisdom of the Gods.
7. Seek inner (and Otherworld) wisdom: Our Pagan heritage of magic includes some receptive techniques, ways to reach deep within and beyond ourselves for guidance. Here are the three I consider most important:
 8.
 - [Divination](#): There are a host of divinatory methods, such as Tarot, Runes, the I Ching, scrying. Use whichever you like. There are good books, classes and workshops available for most of them.
 - [Dreamwork](#): Traditions of dreamwork are as ancient as recorded history and as modern as contemporary psychology.
 - [Meditation](#): This is the purest, most accessible, and yet most difficult method of all. Just sit and let your mind go where it will. Don't try to structure or follow your thoughts, just watch them.
 -
9. Finally, does what you are considering harmonize well with your religious values? Is it in keeping with your core ethic? with the specific ethical teachings of your Tradition? with the great myths that you have found inspiring over the years? If you or your Tradition have a particular tutelary deity, is what you are planning congruent with the spirit and energy of that deity?
10. Decide: When you have gathered all the information you can from all possible sources, put the whole matter on hold. Give your decision as much time as you can to gestate. A day is good, a week is better. When you have the luxury, a full lunar cycle is optimal. By then, you will probably know your desire. For a final check, sit quietly and just ask inside yourself if any part of you has any problem with this decision. Then, place yourself at Center and ask for guidance from the Guardians of the Directions, like this:

11.

- East: Do I have all the information I need? Does this make sense?
- South: Do I have the energy to carry this through? Do I feel enthusiastic, even passionate, about my plan?
- West: Is my plan wise? Is it compassionate and loving to myself and to others it will affect?
- North: Do I have the material resources to carry out my plan? Do I have the skill? Do I have a way to obtain whatever I still need?
- Below: Am I capable of doing what I plan? Do I have the requisite talents and temperaments?
- Above: Is my plan in keeping with my ideals and values?
-

12. Empower your decision: Projective magic refers to that set of skills by which we project our will out into the world to empower change.

13.

- Raise power: Write or choose a simple chant that is related to your goal. While chanting it, imagine that your goal is already accomplished. Imagine this as actively and as specifically as possible. What do you see from your new living room window? How does it feel to be riding a horse again with your arm fully healed?
- Store power: Find a small object that reminds you of your goal, something small enough to fit in your pocket or purse, or even an unobtrusive piece of jewelry. Consecrate it to your goal. Hold it while you chant, while you imagine your accomplished goal. Then keep it with you at all times until your goal is achieved. When you get tired or discouraged -- and we all have those moments -- this talisman will help you keep going. Hold it and repeat the chant that was used when the object was charged. It will bring you back, in memory, to the power you felt at that moment.
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14. Act in accordance: The focus now shifts to everyday, ordinary, secular life. We have many names for the world outside of Circle: the world of form, the plane of manifestation, the Clockworld. Whatever you call it, this is where you hope to see results, and it is also where you need to direct your efforts now. Action in the material world requires that you expend time, energy, and possibly money, which will not then be available for other purposes. By committing your resources, you show the Gods and your own deep mind that you are serious about your goal. Secular follow through also provides your magic with a channel for manifestation.

15. For example, you might want a new job. Start by making a realistic and sequential plan - big projects are done in small steps. What can you do this week - update your resume, get a haircut, check your interview wardrobe? What can you do when that's done - contact headhunters, look at the want ads, send out resumes, schedule interviews? Some goals take longer than others. If you want not just a new job but a whole career change, you might have to retrain. The first step might be taking some aptitude tests or researching available training.
16. Whatever your goal is, there is some small, immediate practical step that you can take this very week. If you're having trouble figuring out what that step is, a counselor can help. Be prepared to report back at your next session on how it went. Evaluate your progress: So you return to your counselor and tell them what you tried, how it worked, what you discovered, how you feel about it. If you never got around to taking that first small step, they will help you figure out what the obstacles, inner or outer, may have been. Perhaps there's something else, something you didn't even think of, that you have to do first. They will hear you out, perhaps ask a few more probing questions. They may have some insights to share, some related experiences, even some bits of advice. You will either celebrate success or decide what your next small step will be.

And so it goes, round and round, long as we live and perhaps beyond, for the spiral of change is the spiral of growth is the spiral of Life!

From Marjorie's notebook

Steps in the Counseling Process

1. Establish a safe, trusting environment
2. **CLARIFY**: Help the person put their concern into words.
3. Active listening: find out the client's agenda
 - a) paraphrase, summarize, reflect, interpret
 - b) focus on feelings, not events
4. Transform problem statements into goal statements.
5. Explore possible approaches to goal
6. Help person choose one way towards goal

DEVELOP A PLAN (may involve several steps)

7. Make a contract to fulfill the plan (or to take the next step)
8. Summarize what has occurred, clarify, get verification

EVALUATE PROGRESS

9. Get feedback and confirmation

Lark's Counseling Tips

by Lark

I. Introduction:

As Initiates, we take on the role of mentor and teacher for those who wish to follow the Wiccan path. In doing so, we are acting in the role of priest or priestess with all that implies in terms of providing the comfort and counseling expected of clergy in any faith. Unfortunately, most Initiates come to this role without the benefit of formal instruction in how to provide counseling to another individual. That should not be taken to mean that we are not able to meet the needs of our students. One does not have to delve into the deepest Freudian secrets to be a counselor. The following material is designed to give the non-professional some tools with which to approach the task of counseling with confidence, and some warning flags to tell you when professional help may be needed.

Most of us have been approached at one time or another by someone who asked for our help or advice with a problem. Generally what happens in this situation is that the person asked for help tends to tell the other person what they "ought" to do, on the assumption that this will move the counselee to a more positive behavior. This creates difficulty for both people involved, since it denies the counselee the opportunity to work through his problem to a solution which fits him/her, and it creates a dependency on the counselor. The next time the student/counselee runs into a problem, he can only come back to his counselor for help because he has gained no insight or tools which will help him to solve his own problems. Furthermore, whether the outcome of the solution given him is satisfactory or unsatisfactory, the counselee has no part in responsibility for the outcome. Since we are a religion which stresses individual responsibility, this is hardly what we want to be doing. Allowing the student/counselee to find their own way through their problems helps them to grow stronger and better able to handle whatever life throws their way. Whenever we use titles like Initiate/Student, we activate certain circuits in our brain which suddenly define one as having authority and one as having none. This can interfere with communication and create an uncomfortable atmosphere. To avoid this, discuss early on with your students how you see your role. A positive example might be "I have information I would be happy to share with you." This creates a feeling of being companions on the same path without the overtones of authority.

II. The Counseling Environment:

In order to be effective, counseling must take place in a conducive environment. It is the responsibility of the counselor to establish an environment in which the person being counseled

feels safe and protected when bring forth his problems. The following items are essential parts of the counseling environment:

1. Before you attempt to counsel anyone, make sure that they want your help. The counselee always reserves the right to determine what he wants to deal with, how deep and how fast he desires to proceed, and whether he wants your help at all. Don't feel you have failed if the person does not want help at that time, simply let them know that you care and that you are there should they change their mind.

2. The physical setting is important. No one wants to talk about things which might embarrass or upset them where others might hear. Chose a place and time where you will not be interrupted or disturbed. Turn off you phone if it is likely to ring. Arrange some comfortable furniture so you can sit close enough to be engaged easily. Provide tissues and something to drink if you like. The idea is to be as comfortable as possible and to assure the person being counseled that you are there to hear what they want to say.

3. The heart of the counseling process is what Carl Rogers called "Unconditional Positive Regard". This is an atmosphere in which the Initiate makes no judgmental statements, offers no criticisms, makes no evaluation, and rarely asks any direct questions of the student/counselee. Instead, try to put yourself into an empathic mode where you try to look at the problem through the other person's eyes. Suspend all judgment on your part and work at correlating the person's expression of feelings and his statements of his problem in a calm and accepting manner.

4. Finally, the counseling setting must contain time limits. None of us have the ability to spend all the time we might want on a counseling session. When setting up a counseling session, tell the person being counseled when the session must come to a close. That will prevent them from bringing out things which they do not have time to work through in that session.

III Counseling Skills:

Contrary to what you may believe, it isn't necessary to have a degree in psychology or other esoteric field to be an effective counselor. Most people have the basic skills without even knowing that they have them.

1. The most important skill for any counselor is the ability to listen, listen, listen. Listen to what the other person is saying. This means using fewer words yourself, avoiding interruptions, and not allowing the conversation to be turned back to you. Avoid the pronouns I and me, since using those words turns the focus back on you and not on the person you are counseling. Once that happens, counseling stops. Stop talking and listen, both to what the counselee is saying verbally and how he expresses himself physically. body language such as facial expressions and gestures

are all clues to what a person is feeling. Sagging shoulders, clenched fists, tears, all are indicators of a person's emotional state.

2. As you are listening to the person, ensure that you understand exactly what the person is telling you. You can't work on a problem until both of you are in agreement as to what the problem is. If you are in any doubt, try repeating back to them what you think you heard. "I hear you saying that....." Keep this up until you both agree that you are hearing what he is saying.

3. Work to reflect the emotions of the person being counseled. You will need to look for clues to the emotional feelings in play. In reality, there are only four generally agreed upon sets of emotional behaviors: Anger, Sadness, Fear, and Joy. Anger and joy are both fairly easy to identify since we all tend to use the same behaviors to express these feelings. Sadness and fear may be more subtle. Listen to what the counselee is saying. Does it make you feel sad or afraid...then it is likely it makes the other person feel the same way. Tears are a clear indication. Other indicators may be changes in the patient's daily habits such as disruption of appetite, sleep disturbances, loss of interest in their usual activities, of a change in grooming/hygiene.

Once you have identified a feeling, reflect it back at the person. "You seem to be feeling sad...." We are essentially creatures of emotions and our emotions often guide our behaviors more than our intellect does. Identifying the emotion behind the behavior allows the person to clarify why they feel angry, sad, etc.; and then allows them to look at that reason rationally.

Sometimes it is difficult to pick up a specific feeling. In that case, sit back, be quiet, and wait.

4. After the person being counseled has had the opportunity to ventilate his feelings fully, it is appropriate to help lay out the possible options and reflect on the outcomes of possible choices. Remember, these options should be explored without manipulation on the part of the counselor, and the person being counseled must be allowed to choose his own path to take. A person is always more committed to attaining his own goal than he is in attaining a goal set by someone else. You may choose to help them work through the process with statements such as:

"I know you must have given some thought to this problem, and I wonder what possible solutions you might have come up with?"

"If you do that, what do you suppose will be the outcome? Is that what you want?"

"You tried that in the past and it didn't work, what other options do you see yourself having?"

"Have you thought about.....?"

IV: Goals of counseling:

1. Allow the person to ventilate his feelings in a safe and accepting atmosphere. Sometimes this will be enough to help the individual. For instance, if the person has just lost a loved one, being

able to express their sadness and loss in a caring setting may be all that is needed to provide the help they require.

2. Help the counselee to place his problem in the context of reality without his emotions getting in the way.

3. Enable the individual to choose among possible options the one which seems good for him.

V. Confidentiality

Confidentiality of what is said in a counseling session is absolutely vital if the person to be counseled is going to be able to be open about their feelings. Remember always that we stand as priest or priestess, and that the same rules apply to us as in the confessional. Make this clear to the counselee in the very beginning. Tell them that what they tell you will be held in confidence between the two of you, and perhaps shared with the High Priest/ess or another Initiate only if you need assistance in helping them.

The only exception to this rule of confidentiality is in that situation where the counselee threatens harm to themselves or others. In that case, it is your responsibility to bring that statement to the attention of others who can protect the person adequately from their own actions.

Active Listening

by Judy Harrow

Counseling is based on the very Wiccan-compatible faith that each human being has within themselves the full capacity to make and implement appropriate decisions concerning their own life. By that faith, the counselor's only role is to help the client to make such decisions, not to tell the client what to do, and certainly never to try to run their life for them. But, just what do counselors do? How exactly do they help clients? The core technique, the art, the spiritual practice of counseling is the process of active listening.

The easiest way I've found to explain active listening is to say that it has three main components:

1. Listen.

2. Let them know you're listening.

3. Ground.

Just like the *Wiccan Rede*, this is the kind of profoundly true statement that I can say while standing on one foot but will have to spend a long time figuring out how to apply to real life. So, let's slow it down.

Listen

Most of the time, most of us listen with only part of our attention. While the other person is still speaking, we are thinking about what we want to say next. Or, sometimes, we are thinking of something entirely unrelated ... "I think I'll paint the kitchen green." When we are listening to emotionally intense stories, the kind we often hear in counseling sessions, we can get caught up in our own emotional reactions, how we would feel if we were in a similar situation, based on all those experiences that formed us, instead of on the experiences that formed the speaker.

Remember always that the client is the world's greatest expert on their own experiences and feelings.

To listen empathically (watch for that word, we'll revisit it later), setting aside as much as we can of our own "stuff" and entering as deeply as possible the perceptual world of the speaker, is actually a form of meditation.

And here's a great secret: the same kinds of techniques that you use in learning to listen to the Gods are equally helpful in learning to listen to people and vice versa.

Let them know you're listening

Listening is absolutely necessary for counseling, but not sufficient. I could listen intently and openly -- and invisibly -- from the other side of a one-way mirror. That might well be instructive for me, but not helpful for the client. What the client needs is to *know* that they are being heard. This evidence that they are valued as a human being and supported in working through their issues creates the sense of safe space for their deeper internal explorations.

While open, active listening may be a spiritual practice, we let them know we're listening by a series of fairly simple skills. Look at the person, make eye contact, give the occasional encouraging nod. I sometimes joke that my whole first year of graduate school consisted of learning to say "uh-huh" at appropriately random intervals.

More important: occasionally repeat back what you have heard. Through this "reflection," they get to hear what they've figured out so far. State your perceptions always a little tentatively. Accept their corrections. As you build trust, besides telling them what you're hearing, you can very gently and tentatively describe to them the emotions that you seem to be perceiving from their tone of voice, body language, etc. Be even more ready to accept their corrections about these inferences. They will come to understand their own feelings by explaining those feelings to you. That's the best of what counselors do for clients.

Ground

This is what Witches know that is not generally taught in graduate schools. As a counselor, you will hear a lot of stress, pain and grief. In offering the other person the comfort of being heard, in opening yourself to them, you are also absorbing energies that nobody needs to retain. Unless you discharge these energies, you risk "burnout," a condition in which the counselor just can't hear anymore. Burned out counselors may cease counseling activity or, worse, they may stay on the job but "shut down" emotionally, becoming the stereotypical bureaucratic social worker type. You deserve to take care of yourself, and if you're serious about being in this for the long haul, you need to take care of yourself. Do whatever you need to do after each counseling session to let the energy go, clearing the slate for the next counseling session, or for other parts of your life. Whatever works for you: bathe in salt water, hug a tree, play tennis.

And also do whatever maintains your health and energy. Eat well, exercise, get enough rest. Through ritual, meditation or simply being in nature, connect with Mother Earth, who will support you as you work for the comfort and growth of Her children.

To learn more:

The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships by Michael P. Nichols, PhD

(NY: Guilford, 1996) ISBN 1-57230-131-7

What is Active Listening?

from Judy's notebook

Content/Relationship Distinction

Communication takes place on two levels: the Content Level - the subject matter we are discussing - and the Relationship Level - what we communicate to the other person about how much we value them or accept them. The Relationship Level operates primarily on feelings: "I feel - valued, accepted, comfortable." If there is mutual respect and trust at a Relationship level, it is possible to agree or disagree with equal comfort. But, if the mutual respect and trust do not exist, then every Content Level issue can also become a test of the relationship.

Acceptance of Feelings

One way we communicate acceptance, trust and respect at a Relationship Level is by communicating acceptance of feelings as well as facts. If we only accept facts from people, we are accepting them conditionally: "I will accept only certain parts of you; I will accept you as long as you aren't expressing feelings." People, however, come fully equipped with feelings and that is a great part of what makes them uniquely them. The result is that when people express feelings and they are not accepted, they tend to push harder as if to prove that their feelings are justified, or to prove to themselves that it is really all right to feel the way they do. On the other hand, when feelings are accepted, they now come out less pressured, less accusatory and less defensive. In addition, once expressed, other deeper feelings can flow in behind.

Acceptance is Different from Agreement

We have been talking about accepting feelings, but let's distinguish acceptance from agreement. You express acceptance when you say: "I understand that you feel such-and-such a way about this topic." You express agreement when you say: "You couldn't be more right. I feel that way too." In the first you accept that the other person feels the way he does, but in agreement you *ally* yourself with the other person. One way we run into problems with feelings is to assume that, if someone has a different feeling than ours, one of us must be right and one of us must be wrong. But another way of looking at it is to consider that when two people react differently to the same situation, they are reacting within the rules of

their own upbringing, training, experiences and values. Because upbringing, training, experiences and values are absolutely unique to each person, the rules which govern feelings are also absolutely unique to each person. Since the rules are different for each individual, I cannot assume that just because I was horrified by an event means that someone else may not be delighted - and be perfectly consistent within his or her individual reality. *Yet we have a tendency to try to obliterate the other person's feelings and try to prove that ours are correct.* This proves nothing. It is a fact that he feels the way he feels. The only appropriate behavior is to accept this fact and begin to report the way we feel. We may not have the same reactions to the same experiences, but we can begin to share enough of what is going on in us to begin to understand each other.

Facilitative and blocking responses

Research is a way of gathering and sharing the collective experience of a community. In the secular counseling profession, as you might expect, a great deal of research has been done on which responses foster or hinder the work. Here are some responses that help:

- summarizing (I want to be sure I understand what you have told me)
- interchangeable responses, especially those which are worded so as to reflect feelings and beliefs (I hear you saying that you are angry that your covenmate gossips about you and others.)
- invitations to clarify (Would you like to talk about it some more? Could you tell me more about your confusion? Could you give me another example of a time when you got that angry? Let's see if we can figure out the assumptions behind that point of view. How do you think you might act upon that feeling?)
- "I messages" (I am curious as to how you dealt with that difficult situation. I am eager to know more about your thinking on this issue. I am pleased to know that things worked out so well for you. I am disappointed that things did not work out the way you hoped. I am confused about what you are saying to me.)
- low-level inferences (It seems like you were really disappointed that you weren't consulted. I have a hunch that it was very difficult for you to be assertive in this situation)
- combinations (I hear the anxiety you are feeling. I sense you were especially disappointed that your supervisor did not tell you sooner about that decision. I wonder if you took that to mean that you opinions are not valued in the department.)

And here are some other responses that, in the experience of professional counselors, tend to discourage the clients, to make effective inner work more difficult and less likely:

- put-downs and personal criticisms (You have got to be kidding when you say that! Get real!)
- criticisms of viewpoints and beliefs (Your reasoning makes no sense at all here)
- rejection of feelings (You know that endings are part of the Cycle. You have no right to resent them, let alone to get angry with the Gods!)

- giving orders or pressing for some course of action, especially before relevant facts are known (Look, it's really very simple, what you need to do is ... You are just being lazy or timid or whatever)
- support giving in a patronizing way (Lots of people get mixed up about that. it's normal; don't worry about it)
- lecturing, moralizing, sermonizing (When I was a Dedicant ...)
- opinion giving, especially if offered so that there is no room for another to present an alternative point of view (Well, of course the knife is Fire.)
- asking a series of data gathering questions or interrogating (What are your interests? Do you prefer Tarot or astrology? Do you prefer being with people or being alone when you are nervous?)
- asking "why" questions that require justifications (Why did you bring up that coven problem at the public Sabbat, where the discussion could be heard by people who are not in our group?)
- taking sides with people in conflict (Mary, I think Bill is right about this matter. You do show a lot of scorn for his ideas)
-

Please be aware of the complication here: the last four items are things you might very appropriately say or ask in other areas of your work as a High Priest/ess. Anyone who does ancillary counseling is engaged in a "dual role" relationship, and these are always complicated. The best you can do is to be as clear as possible about which role you are playing in the moment. Consulting with others who do similar work is another great help. For more information concerning dual-role relationships, see [*The Dual-Role Dilemma*](#).

Asking Good Questions

1. Ask open-ended questions, not yes or no questions. Those will get a one-word response and give you little information. They close off thinking rather than helping the client to think into their own problems.
 2. Don't restrict answers by asking questions that can be answered with a list unless you want a list.
 3. Instead, use phrases like:
 - 4.
 5. "tell me all you can", "describe as completely as you can" "what were your feelings?" Don't use "why." It accuses, assaults, and puts the person on the defensive like when a parent asks (demands) "why did you do that?"
 6. Ask just one question at a time. If you ask two or more part questions, you will probably only get the answer to one part.
 7. Don't interrupt, put words in the person's mouth, or anticipate their answers. You may be wrong, and even if you are right it will be disempowering.
 8. Use common vocabulary. Don't talk over the person's head, and don't talk down to them. Know their level of education.
 9. Don't be too blunt.
-

Clarifying Values

by Judy Harrow

Another important thing for the client to understand before making any decisions is what s/he values and how these values affect behavior. By clarifying what we hear a client thinking and saying about what s/he values, we may help her/him understand what is really important to her/him.

It's important to understand the difference between attitudes and values. Attitudes are general opinions and beliefs. They can provide important clues about how a person thinks and feels. But it is possible to hold many different attitudes at once, even some that are contradictory. In the situations of real life, we set priorities and make choices. [Values](#) are about how we resolve contradictions and what we do first when we know we can't do everything.

Counselors and educators have their professional jargon. One phrase you'll often hear is "values clarification." All that means is making clear *to ourselves*, (or helping our clients make clear to themselves) what we hold important and what priorities we set. There are several steps in the process of values clarification.

They are:

Prizing one's beliefs and behaviors

1. prizing and cherishing
2. publicly affirming, when appropriate

Choosing one's beliefs and behaviors

3. choosing from alternatives, and within limits
4. choosing after consideration of probable results
5. choosing freely

Acting on one's beliefs

6. acting
7. acting consistently

The counselor's role, as always, is to try to understand what the client is saying (thinking, feeling) about his/her world, this time in terms of what is more or less

important to her/him. Most importantly, our job is to help our clients understand what is really important to them, to make well-considered choices, and to fulfill those choices through behavior. For this, we can use the same active listening and reflection techniques we use to facilitate any kind of self-exploration, as well as exercises designed specifically for the purpose. One excellent source for such exercises is *Values Clarification*, by Sidney B. Simon et al , (1972).

Empathy: the spirituality of counseling

by Judy Harrow

Counselors help clients make and implement life decisions. There's always an emotional dimension to decision making. The better we can understand our own inner reactions, our memories, hopes, fears, dreams, the better "insight" we have, the better the decisions we can make. This interior realm is often called the person's "inscape." Empathy is intimate participation in the inscape of another.

The word "empathy" is actually a poor and misleading translation of the German word "*einfihlung*." A more direct and correct translation would be "in feeling" or "feeling into something."

So, empathy is not something we have, not just passive receptivity to the client's inscape, but something we do. Empathy is the active practice of feeling into the inscape of another. By the classic definition, this is an act of magic. The counseling session is another kind of set-apart time, devoted to the client, during which, by the client's permission, and by our own focused will, we change our consciousness. For that time, as best we can, we set aside our own inscape to enter theirs, hoping to help them explore it more fully.

Allowing another into our inscape is an act of great trust. Entering the inscape of another is an awesome privilege and responsibility. No one is ever perfectly "ready" for such deep contact. Still, if you are serving as a priest/ess, someday, somebody will nervously ask you if you have a few minutes to talk. Then, ready or not, you are acting as a counselor. The work itself will be your best teacher.

This is the Goddess' on-the-job training program: You do the best you can. You keep working on your own growth in insight. You stretch your skills, but do not go beyond them. You keep track of how your clients do, You find an elder to talk things over with. And, above all, you acknowledge your mistakes so you may learn from them.

When you sit with a client, the first challenge is to listen as openly as possible, without expectation or judgment. Always remember: this person is not you. No matter how similar they may seem, they came through a substantially different set of formative experiences. Race, class, gender, culture, region, specific family history, specific personal history, all have their influences. You will hear them better, and they will feel safer to speak, if you can set your theories aside and just listen.

You may be uncomfortable in the presence of grief, pain, anger or confusion. Bear with it. Don't rush to shut them up with slick answers or cheap comfort. That only cuts off their process. The client needs somebody to just be there, listen, and accept what they are saying. They haven't always had that. Being free to speak even the most hurtful things, feeling heard, understood and accepted, this is what it means to feel safe. All their experience, from earliest childhood to the way you respond to them today, builds or destroys that sense of safety.

Some of the client's message is verbal, some is non-verbal (tone of voice, facial expression, posture, and very much more). Some of the client's message is consciously chosen, some comes from their unconscious. You will receive some of it consciously, some of it subliminally. What you have received subliminally will also shape your reactions. If you really listen, and really care, you will inevitably have emotional responses to what you hear.

The second challenge is to listen as openly as possible to yourself. This will allow you to distinguish emotions you are picking up from the client, and likely sharing with them, from those that are entirely your own. For example, confronted with a very angry client, an empathic counselor would feel into the client's anger. But, if the counselor had previous painful experiences with anger, s/he might also be feeling some fear. It's important to be clear about where each feeling comes from.

So, the client shared as much as s/he could in this moment. Don't press or pry. The client knows how much s/he can face right now, and how safe s/he feels far better than you can. You opened yourself as far as you could, to both the verbal and the non-verbal parts of the message. Since non-verbal communication is often also unconsciously sent, you may be aware of some things that are still not consciously available the client. The third challenge is responding with acceptance and encouragement, so the client may feel safe to explore further.

Most often, you'll simply reflect back to the client what you have heard. This is called reflective, or passive, or "resonant" empathy,. A model commonly given to counseling students is "_____, I hear you saying you are feeling _____ about _____." (Don't worry, you'll find more natural wordings.) Such easy and comforting responses belong in the early phases of the exploration, while the client is getting used to working with you, and possibly to the whole idea of exploring their inscape. You'll also use reflective responses whenever the client is assimilating some new inner discovery, or if you sense that the client is getting stressed or upset. Gentle pacing helps maintain the client's sense of safety, without which no real work can take place.

As the client becomes more comfortable with you and with the exploration process, you may occasionally want to use a more active form of empathy, sometimes called "additive" or

"imaginative" empathy. In these responses, you will be describing your perceptions of the client's non-verbal communication. The model is "_____, I hear you saying you are feeling _____ about _____. I am also sensing _____." Additive empathy does not mean adding to the client's feelings; it means adding to their conscious knowledge of feelings they were already having inside.

Always remember that you might be mistaken. You are still likely to be viewing their inscape through the lens of your own, and that might dull or distort the client's message. No one can perfectly distinguish perceptions from inferences from projections. Be sure to present any additive empathy responses very, very tentatively. If you insist that you know better about their life than they do, you will erode their sense of safety.

They may shut down. Worse yet, they may start telling you what you want to hear. Worst of all, especially if they have come to see their priest/ess as an authority figure, they might believe that you know better than they do about their own experiences, perceptions and feelings. If things deteriorate that far, their inscape becomes less accessible not only to you, but to them. Then you haven't just failed to help, you've actively done harm. Instead, realize that, for this work, you are a helper, not a leader. Make your suggestions, but let them control the process.

Please, as you do this, have reasonable expectations of yourself. It's important to understand that empathy is not an inborn talent but a trained skill. It's also an ideal, a model, a goal we work toward but never completely achieve. For one thing, our capacity varies with what's happening in our own lives. It's harder to open to the other when you are tired, scared, hurting. Also, even at our best moments, our own inscapes still shape and color our perceptions.

The practice of empathy, then, requires us to explore our own inscapes, develop our own insights, create the inner clarity that makes real listening possible. This deep self-exploration will bring us to our own hard, frightening, and painful moments. Sometimes we will recall ugly memories, or face, name and integrate the parts of our own hearts and minds that we were taught by example to reject. Neither is it easy to identify and take responsibility for our strengths. Be careful not to push yourself too hard too fast. Be as gentle and respectful - and as thorough - with yourself as you would be with one of your coveners. Remember, this process is not altogether new to you, and you already have some good tools. Much of Wiccan practice supports self-exploration. Awareness meditation helps, as does journal work. And you may want to get some individual help from someone you trust who has preceded you on this Path.

Empathy is an intellectual, emotional, and, ultimately, a spiritual discipline. Like all others, it requires consistent and patient practice. Practice helps us to listen openly at the times when it

isn't easy. Insight helps us distinguish our "stuff" from theirs. Be patient with yourself. Give yourself room and time to grow.

To learn more:

Berger, David M. *Clinical Empathy* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1987

Margulies, Alfred *The Empathic Imagination* NY: Norton, 1989

Warmth and Respect: the polarity of counseling

by Judy Harrow

Some say that magic is any process not yet sufficiently understood. Others - most of us - say that magic is the art of changing consciousness in accordance with will. By both of these definitions, counseling is magic. We don't completely understand how it works. What we do know is that it works best when the counselor can maintain certain attitudes while working with a client.

Empathy is the extraordinary ability and responsibility to explore the inscape of another person, to see their world through their eyes. Empathy is so contrary to the way most people usually think or act in this culture that we even had to make up a new word for it.

By contrast, warmth and respect are everyday words, used to mean something very close to their common-sense meanings. Warmth means acceptance of and caring about the client. Respect means believing and expecting that they can do what is needful to make their life work. These exist in dynamic tension with one another. Either can be overdone. Each balances and complements the other. Together, they form a polarity that can be described in metaphors that come right out of our own traditions: between mercy and severity, people change, heal and grow. Warmth is caring about a person without any desire or attempt to own, judge or control them. It is prizing them exactly as they are here and now, even if they are "stuck" or seem to be deteriorating. That's why some of the older counseling literature refers to warmth as "unconditional positive regard." There are no conditions to warmth; warmth is not earned. In reality, most counselors and priest/esses are naturally warm, nurturers by instinct and nature, and drawn to work as helpers by our own strong inclinations.

We express warmth best when our non-verbal behavior shows focus on and concern about the client. This is called "attending behavior." Although some of these techniques can be practiced and learned, it far more important just to let yourself be free and spontaneous in expressing your naturally warm feelings. Warm feelings are a pleasure both to give and to receive.

The paradox is that this open and unconditional acceptance is just what best creates a safe environment for the client's self exploration. So by not demanding or requiring that they grow, we allow them to grow at their own safe and comfortable pace.

Self-exploration is an inner activity, primarily about feelings. Feelings cannot be forced and should not be judged. All feelings are acceptable, even if they are unpleasant and uncomfortable. Only by facing these feelings, understanding and owning them, can the client know enough to make proper decisions about their own life.

Here's the catch: all feelings are acceptable, but not all behavior. Unconditional positive regard can sometimes give people the mistaken idea that what they do doesn't really matter. Behavior does matter. Some actions are harmful to ourselves, other people, or the Earth. Should we, as counselors, accept behavior that is manipulative, malicious, coercive, destructive? I don't think so. Sometimes we need to draw some lines, even if saying no is uncomfortable for us. Some other human behavior is particularly generous or creative or brave. We want to honor and reinforce such actions. If we treat people as though the way they act doesn't matter to us, we disempower those that are acting well while giving covert permission to those that are acting poorly.

Warmth is appropriately unconditional because it is primarily about feelings. Respect, in contrast, is about behavior. Setting and maintaining appropriate standards is respectful of the client's ability to do well: to make and implement wise decisions concerning their own life. Respect includes the faith that the client can, and should, learn, grow and overcome obstacles, even if they are not doing so right now.

This is even more obvious in our role as priest/esses. The ethical limits that we set don't just help our coveners *feel* safer, they actually increase their safety. When we set goals and standards - even challenges - for a student, the achievement adds to their sense of personal competence. But - and this is hard for us - the only real test is one that is failable. When they don't quite make the mark, we will have to give them honest and specific feedback, which is stressful for both sides. If they persevere, the end result is their empowerment. People take more pride in passing a tough course than an easy one.

The practice of respect can demand self-restraint, holding ourselves back to give the client room to grow, instead of facile advice or cheap comfort. Sometimes we sit with them in silence, allowing them to work through a problem and develop a solution. Sometimes we back off to give them room to try their wings. Sometimes, as every parent whose child has learned to skate or ride a bicycle knows, a person's growth is facilitated by allowing them to take risks, and even to take the occasional fall. Respect is tough love.

So, warmth to support and nurture, respect to challenge. Held in balance within the mind and heart of the counselor, these create an important part of the necessary and sufficient conditions for growth.

Congruence: getting real about counseling

by Judy Harrow

Carl Rogers taught us that the real heart of the counseling process is a special kind of relationship between counselor and client. This relationship is focused on the client's feelings and needs, while the counselor offers consistent empathy, warmth and respect. Given these "core conditions," people seem able to explore their inscape and their issues; not just the easy ones but those that go deep, perhaps hurt bad, and potentially release real change.

Now, fifty years later, the very latest research still shows no correlation between any particular therapeutic method or theory and successful results. What really counts, as always, is the relationship in which two people meet to engage on a deep level with the issues of one. As Witches and as counselors, we know that spiritual, magical or psychological growth comes from the client, from the client's own motivation, courage, and wisdom. All of us have within ourselves the capacity to make and implement good decisions about our own lives, to grow. All a counselor, or priest/ess can do is offer conditions that support our use of this natural capacity for healing and growth.

These core conditions can't be faked or technique'd. They only work if they are real. So, the next critical counseling dimension is often called "congruence," a fancy word derived from the Latin *congruere*, meaning to meet together or to agree. Other writers simply call it "genuineness." We'd call it walking our talk.

Here's a bitter little joke:

Question: "Do you know how a New Ager says 'screw you'?"

Answer: "No. How?"

Punchline: place hand gently on their forearm, look deep into their eyes, make your voice soft and intense and say: "Trust me."

Although there are techniques you can use to let people know you are listening to them, no amount of "I statements" or eye contact or any other stereotyped patterns of words or gestures will convince people that you care if you don't really. No one can fake empathy, warmth or respect.

People who have had emotionally rough lives usually have excellent phoniness filters, filters that they may have been developing since early childhood. In dysfunctional and abusive situations,

good phoniness filters are nothing less than a survival skill. They aren't going to open up, they shouldn't open up, unless their own gut is telling them that this space is safe, that this person is genuine.

We can't fake it, but as Witches, we can create it. We can generate within ourselves **real** (that is unfaked) and **accurate** (that is undistorted by our own projections) empathy, warmth and respect. We can shape our own consciousness in accordance with will -- that's a classic definition of magic -- but, like any other technology, this magic has limits.

Your consciousness, my consciousness will only stretch or bend so far, can only encompass so much. These limits are different for different people. so it's important to understand and respect your own limits, whatever they are. Know, for example, how much training, experience and skill you have. Don't take on situations you can't handle with confidence. Know what situations may hit on your particular sore spots -- if you come from an abusive, alcoholic household, you may not be able to work supportively with an alcoholic. Know how much time and energy you have, while still honoring all your other life commitments. Don't commit yourself to anything you can't realistically follow through on. Of course, all of this applies equally well to your coven work.

And, unfashionable and embarrassing though they may be, know your prejudices. If you have an irrational aversion to gay people, or fat people, or older people or any arbitrarily defined group of people, seek counseling of your own to help you work towards resolving this handicap. But until it is resolved, don't try to push yourself through it on your client's time. At best you are exploiting the client. Think about how many Witches you've heard complaining about having to spend the first several hours of therapy educating the therapist about Wicca -- and, often as not, paying for the privilege of doing so. Worse, if it doesn't work, the client may sense your prejudice -- and that may actually do them harm.

Another thing to watch for is to what extent you may be unconsciously using your role as a priest/ess or counselor to fill your own long-unmet needs or desires. A common example is the person who needs to feel needed, and so fosters dependency in client or covener instead of helping them grow toward autonomy.

Empathy, warmth and respect are the essential conditions of the counseling relationship. We can nurture these ways of being within ourselves, develop them over time, but we cannot fake them or force them. We might hurt ourselves or our clients if we try faking or forcing them. So it's best to be honest about our limits and only attempt to enter into counseling relationships where genuine empathy, warmth and respect are really possible. Where theory and practice can meet together and agree, there is congruence.

Confidentiality: drawing the circle

by Judy Harrow

Counseling is another "art of changing consciousness in accordance with will," like magic in many ways. Counselors help our clients change their consciousness and their lives by offering them a "safe space," a time set apart in which they can examine their lives and reconsider their choices. The change may begin with consciousness, but it never stops there. When consciousness changes, behavior changes, and different behavior calls forth different responses. So changing my consciousness carries the possibility of changing any aspect of my life.

A coven Circle is another kind of safe space, of set-apart time, in which we can work toward many kinds of change: healing, and job magic, and closer conscious contact with the Ancient Ones. The style of the work may be very different, but both the goals and many of the underlying processes are much the same. Our work as counselors is consistent and mutually reinforcing with our work as priest/esses.

Willed change can come hard. Old hurts and old habits block the way. The work may involve facing painful memories, long buried. It may require the sacrifice of major components of the client's self image, and significant behavioral risk-taking. Those who experiment with themselves are vulnerable. They need privacy, especially in a community as small as ours. Pagans live in a fishbowl. Few would risk such deep self-exploration if their work seems likely to become common gossip. So a counseling session is like a cast Circle: whatever is said or done within should normally not be discussed with anyone who was not present. Safe space is private space.

By tradition, Witches keep secrets. Our commitment to silence arose as a response to persecution, an effort to protect each other and our Craft from harm, an implementation of the *Wiccan Rede*. Confidentiality is still a survival issue in some places, and part of our community's social contract everywhere. We are trained to it, bone deep. And we are vowed to it, bound to keep our secrets by strong spells voluntarily and co-operatively worked between initiate and initiator.

Nothing in nature is so very pure. Although confidentiality is a way of life for us, we need to understand both the practical risks and the ethical limits. Sometimes life presents us with hard and tragic choices.

The risks are legal. We'd like to think that as priest/esses, as clergy, our communications with those who seek our aid are legally protected, "privileged" communication. We'd like to believe that our religious status safeguards us, at least, from the threat of jail. It's not that simple. In 1994, the members of Iron Oak Coven in Florida faced a different freedom of religion issue. They fought and won their case - yes - but had to take a second mortgage on their house to pay their lawyer. What about those of us who have no house to mortgage? Our legal rights are only made real when we have the resources and the determination to defend them. Beyond that, the legal right of any clergy to remain silent varies from state to state, and with the type of case. Many states, for example, mandate the reporting of child abuse. In 1984, also in Florida, a fundamentalist Christian minister, Rev. John Mellish, counseled a child abuser in his congregation. The man subsequently confessed, pled guilty, and still the court demanded the pastor's testimony. Pastor Mellish refused on principle, and went to jail for contempt of court, setting an honorable example for all clergy of all religions. Understand, where the law denies the privilege of confidential communication to all clergy, a Witch cannot claim religious discrimination.

Each of us needs to research what the law actually is where we live, in order to assess our risks and protect ourselves as best we can. No protection is perfect. Living by our values is not always comfortable or profitable or even safe, but it is the meaning of the word "religion." The risks are legal and practical, but the limits are ethical. There are a very few, heartbreaking circumstances in which the *Wiccan Rede* itself, the heartspring of our religion, might require us to break silence.

The secular counseling profession has its own strong tradition of confidentiality. But professional counselors acknowledge clear limits to that confidentiality, and good reasons for those limits. Witches can learn from this example. In the early '70's, Tatiana Tarasoff was a student at the University of California. Another student, obsessed with thoughts of murdering her, sought help at the University counseling center. The counselor kept silence. Tatiana, unwarned, was later murdered. Her parents won a wrongful death suit. The California Supreme Court upheld the decision on appeal (*Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California*, 1976) and so established a legal "duty to warn" in situations of serious danger to self or others.

Very rarely, a crisis may arise which is truly beyond our ability to handle within the community. At such times, secular law commands us to get whatever outside help is needed: a doctor, a fire-fighter, a cop. Silence then could leave us legally liable, but that alone is not a good enough reason to break oath.

Secular law does not own my conscience. I'd far rather be in trouble with the courts than with

the Crone. But where there truly is imminent danger of serious harm -- then and only then -- I believe that the Rede supersedes the oath. Silence is merely one application of the Rede.

Harmlessness, not silence, is the core ethic of the Witch.

And how shall we know when the potential for harm is imminent and serious enough? Here's a guideline: until and unless you are prepared to look the Crone in the eye, tell Her "yes, I broke my oath, and here's why," and accept Her judgment, keep silent.

Confidentiality Questions

by [Judy Harrow](#)

As priest/esses and as counselors, we hear other people's secrets. We keep other people's secrets, except in very specific and limited circumstances. Here are some thought experiments to help you recognize your personal limits. Which secrets would you reveal or keep? How would you handle each of the following situations? Why? It might help to discuss these with trusted friends and colleagues.

1. You've been counseling a married couple. You are convinced that one of them is behaving in ways detrimental to the marriage, behaviors rooted in the way his parents treated him. Finally, he leaves her. She takes it very hard and acts out spectacularly in public. After this, the community gossip mill brands her the guilty party.
2. Later, a member of your own coven seems to be starting a relationship with him.
3. A former member of your coven phones and, without even asking if this is a good time to talk, starts telling you about her new husband's criminal behavior. Among other things, he has broken into a Wiccan neighbor's house and stolen some valuable ritual tools. Then she says "and you can't talk about what I just told you because you are a priest/ess."
4. Someone has published an article about Wiccan history, giving several people's legal names without their permission. You react strongly and publicly to this breach of confidentiality. He responds "but I had Sarah's permission." True enough, but there are six other people named whose permission he decidedly did not have. You are being pilloried in some Pagan magazines for being mean to the guy, or for practicing censorship.
5. A community member whom you know has an active and diverse sex life comes to you for counseling. He is HIV positive.
6. You've often seen Lady Moonglow's two year old daughter wandering around the campsite at various festivals, looking dirty or hungry. Once, you heard the camp nurse saying that the child was running a fever and appeared malnourished. Certainly, the little girl was wandering near the lake last Saturday, while her mother partied. Now, the people from child protective services have asked to speak to you.

7. You hold the mailing list for the local community networking group. An active member has been murdered. There's no sign of a break-in at his house, so the police suspect that he opened the door to a familiar face. They ask to see your mailing list. When you decline, they threaten to subpoena it.

The Limits of Confidentiality

The counseling process involves the sharing of very personal information. People will not feel safe discussing their situations and feelings with a counselor unless they are confident that their privacy will be respected, and their issues will not be casually spread around. Nonetheless, there are times when sharing such information is appropriate, or even necessary.

Here are some **clear instances**:

- your client presents an imminent, serious danger to self or others
- your client requests that you share information with others
- another person is present in the room, clearly visible to your client (and, most often, at your client's request)

Here are some **borderline situations**. You should discuss these with your client before you share their story with others.

- you feel the need to get input from a Craft elder, or from a counselor whose experience or insight you respect, or from another professional whose expertise is relevant to your client's situation (e.g. doctor, lawyer, teacher)
- you are presenting your client's case as part of ongoing supervision
- you normally share Craft concerns with your working partner, particularly when those concerns relate to a student or covener.
- you have someone trustworthy assisting with your record keeping

Finally, there may come times when you are under **legal pressure** to break your client's confidence. It's very important that you become familiar with applicable law where you live. In situations like these, you must weigh all possible legal and karmic consequences and make your best conscientious decision:

- a court orders release of information
- your client is a legal minor, and parents demand disclosure
- "mandated reporter" situations, which vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. These

may include child abuse, suicide risk, drug use or other problems

Our strong suggestion is that you ponder these situations, and any others that you can recall or imagine, before they arise. How do you think you would respond to them? As you understand your own reactions, you can let your clients know where your limits are. This allows them to decide how much personal information they can comfortably share with you.

As a rule, before sharing anyone's private information, *always ask first!*

Confrontation: the dark mirror

by Judy Harrow

When somebody tells you they've had a confrontation, do you think about a tense, angry argument or possibly even a brawl? Most people do. Even my trusty *American Heritage Dictionary* tells me that "confront" means "to come face to face with, especially with defiance or hostility." In radical contrast, my old counseling textbooks refer to confrontation as "an act of grace" or "a true act of caring." This is one of those annoying times when a specialized, professional use of a word is nearly opposite to the way people normally use it. Still, the concept of "appropriate" or "loving" confrontation is critical to what counselors, and priest/esses, do.

Remember, counseling is helping people make and implement good decisions about their own lives. Good decisions grow out of good information about our situation, our resources, and our feelings. Feelings can be elusive. Sometimes there are things we don't yet understand or even have hidden from ourselves, shadow areas inside. These often give rise to behavior that seems inconsistent with what the client is saying. Most likely, the client is describing how it is with them the very best they know how.

Exploring the inconsistencies can be a fast track to better self-knowledge. Confrontation, for counselors and priest/esses, means telling clients about inconsistencies that the clients may not yet have spotted for themselves. It's hard to do, harder to do right. Here are some things to think about:

Timing is critical. Effective confrontation can only happen after the counselor and client have had a chance to get to know each other. As a counselor, you know that first impressions are often off base and almost always superficial. It takes some time to feel into another person's experience, and even more time to sense when they are ready to face and work through their more difficult issues. Clients need some time to size up whether the counselor is competent, caring and honest. It takes time to build trust, but only trust can allow the client to accept and integrate information that might be frightening, even painful. Appropriate confrontation can only happen in an atmosphere of trust.

There are two main circumstances in which priest/esses and counselors might offer confrontation, two very different kinds of inconsistencies: those between what we say and how we feel, and those between what we say and what we do.

Sometimes a person tells you they feel a particular way, but their voice, facial expression,

posture and the general feelings you are getting from them seem to be saying something else. If you feel the person is ready to take another step in self-understanding, you might choose to tell them what you've noticed, and what you think it might mean. This is what I discussed in an earlier essay as "additive" or "imaginative" empathy. If you offer additive empathy, remember to be sure to own your inferences, present them tentatively, and gracefully accept correction from the client. Your role is to invite self-exploration, not to compel it.

Other times, a person tells you they want or believe one thing, but their behavior seems unlikely to bring them to that goal, or to be inconsistent with those beliefs. They don't seem to you to be walking their talk. Again, confrontation means telling them about the inconsistency that you perceive, caringly and as gently as possible.

Here are some sensible guidelines for confronting inconsistent behavior. Pick a calm and grounded moment for both of you. Speak gently. Only address one or two key areas at a time. More is more than a person can process at once. Only discuss things the person realistically could change. Be as specific as you can about how the behavior is interfering with the person's stated beliefs or goals. Check that communication was clear. Have the person restate what you said if possible. Allow time for discussion of what you have presented. Be prepared to handle a defensive or angry initial reaction. Be as firm and as patient as stone.

In a secular counseling situation, the goal is entirely the client's to determine. To resolve an inconsistency, the client can either adjust their behavior so that it will be more likely to achieve the goal, or decide that they were mistaken when they identified this goal, that the likely outcome of this behavior is what they actually want, or some middle position. The counselor's job is to help them resolve the inconsistency in any way they choose, and the outcome usually doesn't affect the counseling relationship.

For a priest/ess working in a mentoring role, the situation is quite different. The goal - the student's training - is an assumption on which the student/mentor relationship is based. If this goal is brought into question, and is abandoned or seriously modified by working through those questions, the basic relationship may well change. If we hold the thought that Wiccan training is a process of exploration and discovery, then it is as valid to discover that priesthood is not this student's true goal as that it is. Any experiment that yields results is successful, even if those results refute the original hypothesis, even if they are disappointing.

When working one-on-one with an individual, about either feelings or behavior, never confront them unless you are willing to deepen your involvement with them. Normally, offering loving confrontation means volunteering to be there with the person as they work through the implications of whatever they learn from what you share with them. It means volunteering to

be even more of a counselor to them than you were before.

For a priest/ess working with a group, the situation is sometimes quite different. One person's inconsistent behavior can disrupt or even endanger the whole group, and your primary responsibility is for the coven's safety and good functioning. You can't let one person spoil it for all.

If someone seems on their way to doing that, try to confront them well before matters become irreparable. Tell them, as specifically and as objectively as you can, how their behavior is affecting not just themselves, but other people or the group as a whole. Remember that confrontation merely offers them the opportunity to examine their inconsistencies, the choice to change their behavior. They may choose otherwise. And you may have to ask them to leave. The last thing you owe them as their priest/ess is an exit interview, including another full explanation of what behavior was unacceptable and why. Basic courtesies still apply. Except in extremely rare situations of imminent and serious danger, wait till you can be in private, and for a time when neither of you is tired or hungry. Be as calm and centered and as specific as you can in talking with the person.

If at all possible, tell them under what circumstances you would consider re-admitting them. Don't place any theoretical limits on the Goddess's healing powers or the human capacity for learning, growth and change. Although you won't be there to help them work it through, She might direct them to other helpers, other resources, when She sees that they have become ready.

Now, I'd like to throw out some questions. The main advantage of religiously-based counseling is that counselor and client share both basic values and a vocabulary, often metaphoric, for discussing them.

Most religions have some consensus about what constitutes maturity, right action, wisdom, spirituality or even enlightenment. So the counselor has a basis for behavioral confrontation, a shared goal that the client may in some way not be moving toward. Do we have such a consensus? Are we ready to start articulating one? How does a religiously mature Pagan act? What extra behaviors are expected of a Priest/ess? an Elder?

It seems to me that our polytheism complicates the quest. Many Gods bless many Paths in life. What is congruent behavior for a priestess of Artemis might not be for a priestess of Aphrodite. If the counselor is oriented to one and the client to the other, hidden assumptions might make their work together unduly complicated.

So there are more questions for us, as we try to articulate our model: What core values do we all have in common, and what behaviors flow from those? Where and how do people's Paths diverge? What do I need to bear in mind when working with a person whose Path is different from mine? How is it for the person, like me, who follows different Deities at different life-phases? And can we describe the particular markers of maturity, ethical conduct, wisdom, spirituality for priest/esses of different deities, at least of those most frequently worshipped in our own time and place?

Feedback Guidelines

from Judy's notebook

"Feedback" is a way of helping another person to consider changing their behaviour. It is communication to a person (or a group) which gives that person information about how they affects others. As in a guided missile system, feedback helps an individual keep their behaviour "on target" and thus better achieve their goals.

Some guidelines for useful feedback:

1. It is descriptive rather than evaluative. By describing one's own reaction, it leaves the other person free to use it or to use it as they see fit. By avoiding evaluative language, it reduces the need for the individual to react defensively.
2. It is specific rather than general. To be told that one is "dominating" will probably not be as useful as to be told that "just now when we were deciding the issue you did not listen to what others said and I felt forced to accept your arguments or face attack from you."
3. It takes into account the needs of both the receiver and giver of feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end.
4. It is directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some short-coming over which they have no control.
5. It is solicited, rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the receiver has formulated the kind of question which those observing can answer.
6. It is well-timed. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behaviour (depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.)
7. It is checked to insure clear communication. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback received to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.
8. When feedback is given in a training group, both giver and receiver have opportunity to check with others in the group the accuracy of the feedback. Is this one person's impression or an impression shared by others?

Feedback, then, is a way of giving help; it is a corrective mechanism for the individual who wants to learn how well their behaviour matches their intentions; and it is a means for establishing one's identity -- for answering "Who am I?"

Confrontation / Feedback / Constructive Criticism

by Judy Harrow

"All confrontation is an invitation to self-examination."

Always uncomfortable.

Occasionally necessary in any counseling situation.

Especially relevant to our dual role relationship as teacher (and evaluator of student's process, granter of degrees) and counselor.

When to confront:

1. After a rapport and trust base has been built. (When working with your own coveners, this will be very quick. With referrals and friends of friends, allow a couple of sessions.)
2. Only if you are willing to deepen and increase your involvement with this person. Once you offer a confrontation, it becomes your responsibility to help the person to work through its implications, and to implement any decisions that result.
3. In normal counseling situations, only when the person is ready and able to hear what you have to say. Sometimes, when it is a problem in the coven, you may not be able to wait for the person's readiness. But, except for emergency, always in private, and if at all possible not when the person is particularly upset, tired, hungry. etc.

How to confront:

1. When possible, be calm and facilitative. Don't confront when you are angry. The idea is to help the person understand and change, not to punish them.
2. Only address one or two key areas at a time. More is more than a person can process at once.
3. Present observations or data first.
4. a) Be as specific as possible.
5. b) If it is data about the person's behavior:
 - Try to present it as soon as possible after whatever happened ideally in real-time.

- Only offer constructive criticism or feedback about things the person realistically can change.
- When possible, offer specific and objective information about how the behavior is affecting other people, or interfering with the person's stated goals.
- Distinguish clearly between observations and inferences or interpretations. As always, own your inferences and state all interpretations tentatively.
- Use "I messages."
- Check that communication was clear. Have the person restate what you said if possible.
- Allow time for discussion of what you have presented. It is your responsibility to help the person work it through and take it in. Be prepared to handle a defensive or angry initial reaction.

Psychotherapist and Wiccan Clergy: The Ethics of a Dual Relationship

by Ellen C. Friedman, MA, LPC

Abstract

Wiccan clergy psychotherapists encounter complex ethical dilemmas due to dual roles. In an attempt to understand the extreme complexity of the multiple roles, this discourse begins with examination of current ethical codes of the professional societies. Recent literature related to dual relationships in rural and small communities is surveyed, as well as decision-making models effective in these situations. Common ethical complexities experienced by clergy psychotherapists are reviewed. Informal communication with Wiccan clergy psychotherapists confirms the multidimensional nature of the ethics. Options for Wiccan clergy psychotherapists are considered.

In the course of studying ethics as a candidate for a master's degree in counseling, I became aware of complex ethical dilemmas when considering the implications of the fact that in the near future I will practice as both therapist and Wiccan priestess. The point of this discourse is to identify the current views held by counseling professional societies and to review recent literature relevant to the dilemmas encountered by Wiccan clergy psychotherapists in their practice. Since no literature was available on the specific topic under consideration, I conducted informal research with people currently fulfilling the dual roles.

Dual Relationship Dilemmas

A dual relationship exists when a psychotherapist serves in the capacity of both therapist and at least one other role with the same client. Most commonly the second relationship is social, financial, or professional and may be concurrent or subsequent to the therapeutic relationship. In 1992, the American Psychological Association published research on common ethical dilemmas experienced by their members. Dilemmas arising from "blurred, dual, or conflictual relationships" were the second most frequent ethical dilemma cited by 679 psychologists (as cited in Pope & Vasquez, 1998, p. 27). "Dual relationships form the major basis of licensing disciplinary actions, financial losses in malpractice suits involving psychologists, and ethics complaints against psychologists" (Pope & Vasquez, 1998, p. 195). The Code of Ethics for the American Counseling Association (ACA) strongly advises avoidance of harmful dual relationships whenever possible:

Counselors are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. Counselors make every effort to avoid dual relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of harm to

clients. When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, counselors take appropriate professional precautions such as informed consent, consultation, supervision, and documentation to ensure that judgment is not impaired and no exploitation occurs. (ACA, 1995, Standard A. 6.a.) The ethics code for the American Psychological Association (1992) states that multiple relationships may be unavoidable and recommends that therapists remain aware of the potentially harmful consequences. They recommend refraining from multiple relationships if harm may occur. The ethics codes of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (1998), National Association of Social Workers (1998), and the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (1994) recommend avoidance of multiple relationships that exploit or harm clients. All of the above codes strictly prohibit sexual activity between therapist and client. All but the AAPT code warns against superior/subordinate dual relationships such as when a therapist has an administrative, supervisory, or evaluative role with a client.

Pope and Vasquez identify common ethical concerns about dual relationships (1998, p. 193-195). Dual relationships can erode and distort the professional nature of the therapeutic relationship. They may create conflicts of interest that compromise professional judgment or create situations where the therapist is engaged in meeting his or her own social, financial, or other personal needs, rather than putting the welfare of the client foremost. Dual relationships can affect the current and future benefits of therapy. Pope and Vasquez claim that the power differential between a therapist and client is one of the main reasons that exploitation and harm can occur. They also mention the concern that the therapist is held legally liable and may be called to testify in court regarding the patient's diagnosis, treatment, or prognosis. They admit that not all dual roles are unavoidable, and caution therapists to take steps to minimize harm when multiple relationships do occur by utilizing informed consent, negotiation, and professional consultation. Pearson and Piazza (1997) classify dual relationships into five categories in order to aid the decision making process of whether or not a dual relationship will cause harm: circumstantial roles, structured multiple professional roles, shifts in professional roles, personal and professional role conflicts, and the predatory professional. Circumstantial multiple roles are those that occur by pure coincidence, such as running into a client at their sales job in the mall. Structured multiple professional roles are acceptable if the nature of all the relationships is professional. Shifts in professional roles include difficulties that arise when a teacher or supervisor counsels a student. Personal and professional role conflicts include sexual or romantic, social, and peer-like relationships, such as occur when collaborating on publications or engaging in a shared pastime. The predatory professional is a therapist who exploits the therapeutic relationship to meet personal needs rather than client needs. Pearson and Piazza do not agree that dual relationships are inherently unethical, "Multiple professional roles such as advisor-instructor, supervisor-mentor, counselor-advocate, and others enhance our effectiveness as counselors and educators. However, risk of harm, or the perception of harm, seems to increase

as both level of intimacy and power differential increase. In addition, the influence of the power differential is not always obvious" (1997).

The ban and demonization of dual relationships has come from an attempt to protect the public from exploiting therapists. Regretfully, it has emerged as a simplistic solution to a wide and complex problem. Even worse, the ban on dual relationships and the isolation it imposes on the therapeutic encounter tends to increase the chance of exploitation and decrease the effectiveness of treatment. It enables incompetent therapists, to wield their power without witnesses and accountability. In addition it buys into the general cultural trend towards isolation and disconnection (Zur, 2000).

Ofer Zur, one of the most outspoken supporters of the benefits of dual relationships, states that the term "dual relationship" has been used interchangeably with "exploitation", "harm", "abuse", "damage", and "sexual abuse" (1999). He cautions us to remember that neither dual relationships nor any relationship with a differential of power (i.e., parent-child, teacher-student) are inherently exploitative. (2000). Dr. Zur states that behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, and existential therapies do not consider dual relationships harmful, and that some therapies, like Family Systems therapy, rely on the inherent duality of relationships that exists. He recognizes that for some clients dual relationships cause anxiety and other difficulties, necessitating the need to consider each dual relationship on an individual basis. Dr. Zur developed extensive clinical recommendations to aid therapists in negotiating boundaries prior to entering a dual relationship, to help in developing treatment plans, and to ensure clinical integrity and effectiveness (1999). Dr. Zur finds dual relationships frequently aid the therapeutic relationship and outcome, "for the most part it has significantly increased my effectiveness, reduced the length of treatment and enhanced my ability to care for my clients" (2000).

In a healthy society, people not only admit to, but celebrate their complex mutual reliance on each other. The more multiple relationships, the richer and more profound the individual experience. In a healthy society, the witch doctor, the wise elder, and the practical neighbor are all part of the fabric of advice and guidance, of physical and spiritual support. In administering to the needs of the members of a healthy society, therefore, its healers, rabbis, priests, or therapists will not shun dual relationships, but rather rely on them for the insight and intimate knowledge that such relationships provide (Zur, 1999).

Dual Relationships in rural and small communities

In rural and small communities, multiple relationships are unavoidable and are not considered inherently unethical. (Brownlee, 1996; Schank and Skovolt, 1997). "Due to the lack of anonymity, rural psychologists are inherently active participants in the community. They have a

more holistic view of clients and must balance the accepted and more easily defined single role of an urban setting versus the complexity of simultaneous relationships in a rural or small-community" (Schank and Skovolt, 1997). Schank and Skovolt (1997) published qualitative research produced through interviews with sixteen psychologists who live and practice in rural areas and small communities. All of the psychologists identify dilemmas involving professional boundaries as a significant concern. Emerging themes include the reality of overlapping social relationships, the reality of overlapping business relationships, the effects of overlapping relationships on members of the psychologist's own family, and the dilemmas of working with more than one family member as clients or with others who have friendship with individual clients. All sixteen therapists state that dual relationships are the most frequent and complicated of all ethical dilemmas that they face in daily practice. Three different criteria are cited by the psychologists to make decisions about whether to see a client when a dual role exists. Some psychologists use their own comfort level to gauge whether they could successfully manage the overlapping relationship. The type and severity of the clients' presenting problems is also used as an indicator when deciding to enter a dual relationship. Therapists are more likely to enter a dual relationship if the client is seeking problem-solving and would likely avoid a dual relationship with a client if they suspected a complex issue such as a personality disorder. Other therapists involve prospective clients in the decision-making process to decide if the benefits of entering into a dual relationship outweigh the risk. Schank and Skovolt conclude by suggesting safeguards to minimize the risks when entering into dual relationships which include ongoing consultation, setting clear expectations and boundaries, informed consent, documentation. Keith Brownlee (1996) describes ethical decision making models especially suitable for rural therapists since the complete avoidance of dual relationships is not a realistic option. "Pivotal to any decision making based on the codes, are the two central principles, impaired objectivity, and risk of exploitation. Both of these principles are very broad and the counselor is left to judge for him or herself what kind of relationship would qualify as impairing objectivity or increasing risk". He cites Kitchener's ethical decision making model which is based on role conflict, and three variables associated with increasing risk of harm. First, the risk of harm increases as the extent of incompatibility of expectations between roles increase. Second, the risk of divided loyalties increases and objectivity decreases as the obligations associated with each of the roles diverge. Third, the risk of exploitation increases as the difference in prestige and power between the therapist and client increases.

Brownlee (1996) cites Gottlieb's ethical decision making model, which is based on three dimensions: power, duration, and termination. The model recognizes that relationships have a power differential ranging from low to high (minimal to profound personal influence). Duration refers to the length of therapy (brief or long-term). Termination refers to whether a specific time span for therapy can be decided upon or whether the client is likely to require therapy for an indefinite period. Gottlieb's model involves the following five steps:

1. Assess the current relationship in relation to power, duration, and termination.
2. Assess future relationships in relation to power, duration, and termination.
3. Counselor makes decision upon the role incompatibility of these relationships. Gottlieb suggests a decision to proceed with the dual relationships if the relationship between counselor and the client in question appears to be mid-range to low in power differential and conflict.
4. Seek professional consultation on decision.
5. Discuss the possible ramifications that could emerge from a dual relationship with the potential client, utilizing treatment contracts, and negotiation of boundaries to aid in making ethical decisions.

Dilemmas special to the practice of clergy psychotherapists

"The legacy of dual training, insufficient attention to professional ethics, as well as differing role expectations and professional socializations as clergy and counselor make it imperative for clergy psychotherapists to be particularly thoughtful about boundary issues in counseling" (Haug, 1999). "A 1994 report by the Maryland state regulatory board indicated that 40% of the psychologists accused of sexually inappropriate behavior were also ordained ministers." (as cited in Haug, 1999). Haug states the power differentials are particularly high for clergy psychotherapists, "Client's vulnerability might be heightened when they consult clergy psychotherapists. Due to the ministerial background of clergy therapists, clients may have exaggerated expectations of their ethical conduct and of the safety, if not 'sacredness', of the counseling relationship". Haug stresses the importance of setting, communicating and maintaining distinct boundaries in order to maintain the integrity of both roles, Clergy psychotherapists who work both as pastors, priests, rabbis, and so forth, and as therapists, face more complexities negotiating what constitutes appropriate behavior in which context. It is crucial for counselors, particularly clergy psychotherapists, to ask themselves these questions: Who will benefit from this boundary crossing? Who really needs this hug, this financial advice, this get-together outside the counseling room? What are the possible negative, unintended consequences for clients and those close to them, for the public, and for the profession at large? Am I satisfying personal needs, for instance for services, social contact, self-revelation, financial stability, and so on, that might and should be met otherwise? Could this multiple relationship be avoided? Am I rationalizing away my concerns? Am I comfortable having this course of action made public?

Haug maintains that clergy are particularly vulnerable to unethical behavior due to their lack of professional ethics education, gender inequalities in some religions, a tendency to be idealized by the public, poorly defined job descriptions and expectations, and the expectation of warm and friendly social interactions. Haug identifies common boundary dilemmas which include

non-sexual multiple relationships, sexual and sexualized multiple relationships, confidentiality issues, and issues related to client autonomy. Dr. Haug concludes with recommendations to prevent abuse of power and boundary violations which include ethics education, professional consultation with other clergy psychotherapists, and personal therapy. "Awareness of the differences in what is expected and deemed professional and ethical in the two professions, however, is the first step toward preventing a lapse in ethical conduct and client harm." (Haug, 1999)

Special problems encountered by Wiccan clergy psychotherapists

Dual relationship dilemmas faced by Wiccan clergy psychotherapists are similar to dilemmas identified concerning practice in small and rural communities, and by clergy psychotherapists, but there are concerns and complications specific to practicing in Wiccan communities. The structure of Wiccan community consists of autonomous clergy serving and leading autonomous covens. Covens are small worshipping and teaching congregations (generally three to twenty persons). The larger Wiccan community could include as little as a handful to as large as a few thousand members. In some places the community expands to include the pagan community, which is comprised of countless magickal traditions, orders, religions, and autonomous individuals with little common ground.

"The dual nature of our covens makes the situation even more complex. They are not simply worshipping congregations, kept small to maintain personal intimacy and spiritual intensity. They are also, by tradition, the places where we train and develop our future clergy. This places the coven leader in two roles that are almost directly contradictory: mentoring and evaluating" (Harrow, 1996). "If you see coven as a support group for the psycho-spiritual healing and growth of the members, which it is, then the leader serves as facilitator, mentor and counselor" (Harrow, 1996). Harrow recommends that coven leaders meet their own needs in other social relationships, not through the coven. Harrow points out that the matter is further complicated because covens also serve many Wiccans as families of choice.

Oakwood, a non-clinical psychologist and Witch, commented that "given the hopefully intimate relationships inherent in covening, there might be a role conflict, as there would be in counseling one's best friend. However, I do not see a role conflict inherent in counseling someone the therapist is less intimately related to, for example, a member of the community at large, or, in some traditions, the outer court." (Oakwood, personal communication, July 27, 2000). She recommends open discussion of boundaries, "It should be clear to the client that the counselor may be showing up for rituals, or even running them. If the client is not comfortable with that from the beginning, then you should not accept them as a client. You should choose that course rather than choosing to stay away from a ritual you would normally attend or run." Oakwood

stresses that radically altering your life for the comfort of a client only leads to resentments, which will negatively impact the therapeutic experience.

"Running into your therapist in the grocery store, a restaurant, or even at the same political demonstration is not the same as encountering them in a ritual context," explains Cat Chapin-Bishop, a psychotherapist and Wiccan priestess (C. Chapin-Bishop, personal communication, August 2, 2000). "Ritual settings and Pagan gatherings tend to encourage intimate connection. Therapy too is intimate, but in a very different way: for one thing, in a therapy session, my clients have my undivided attention. Coming into a ritual setting where I am present, many of my Pagan clients have brought that expectation into the new setting--- after all, all around are people hugging, connecting, telling one another deeply personal stories. The setting (unlike a restaurant) conveys the legitimacy of pursuing connection, and the therapy has given rise to the expectation of how that intimacy 'should' feel." She continues, "Undivided attention rarely happens for anybody, but folks often feel abandoned and rejected when it is suddenly taken away, and in ways that prove very disruptive to the therapy afterwards." At this time, she sees Pagans and Wiccans in a pastoral setting but not a psychotherapeutic one. Chapin-Bishop identified the importance of the type and severity of client presenting problems in consideration of a dual relationship, "Smoking cessation, behavioral desensitization, or short-term couples' counseling evoke very different transference issues than long-term trauma and grief work." The presence of clients dealing with abuse issues at rituals she leads would impede her performance as a priestess. Wiccan clergy need to be in a safe and controlled space in order to perform the skills required of their ritual role, which can include trance possession by deity, commonly known in Wiccan circles as "Drawing Down the Moon". Chapin-Bishop expresses a need to minimize the role stress, "If I therefore adopt a detached, non-intimate stance toward my community and my Gods, so that I can manage the transference issues of any clients who are present, I cheat myself of my main source of spiritual nourishment." Chapin-Bishop recognizes that clergy therapists are idealized. "If you are in a dual wisdom role, both the all-powerful priestess and the all-compassionate therapist, you're on the pedestal before you even properly begin your work." From her viewpoint:

We are, as Pagan clergy, members of our communities in a way that Christian pastoral counselors are not. Our community and ritual structure favors intimacy and connectedness, and while many of our priests are talented and charismatic, our pews do not face forward. We don't favor group structures that create the kind of emotional detachment that would keep transference issues from becoming noticeable. Quite the reverse: our drive toward connection, as whole persons, one member with another as equals, tumbles us together in ways that almost ensure that people's idealized expectations will meet with disillusionment. It's bad enough to be a High Priestess who is 'caught' yelling at her child. To be both Pagan clergy and psychotherapist to the same subject is to be at ground zero for some positively nuclear pyrotechnics.

Conclusions and Implications

The professional societies of the helping professions agree that sexual dual relationships between therapists and clients are unethical (AAMFT, 1991; AAPC, 1994; ACA, 1995; APA, 1992; NASW, 1996). These codes agree that therapists should not meet their own needs through relationships with clients. The AAMFT, ACA, APA, and the NASW strongly caution therapists against supervisory and evaluative dual relationships with clients. As far as non-sexual dual relationships, the codes caution therapists to avoid harmful and exploitative dual relationships, and when relationships cannot be avoided they obligate the therapist to employ methods to minimize harm.

Abuse of the power differential and loss of objectivity is at the heart of the risk of harm (Brownlee, 1996, Haug, 1999; Pearson and Piazza, 1997, Pope & Vasquez, 1998). While far from suggesting that all dual relationships are beneficial, Ofer Zur (1999, 2000) strongly supports the use of dual relationships to enhance the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship and minimize exploitation. Brownlee (1996) and Schank and Skovolt (1997) agree that dual relationships are not inherently exploitative and that they are unavoidable in rural and small communities. Clergy psychotherapists are especially at risk of unethical behavior and face complicated dilemmas when entering into dual relationships (Haug, 1999). There is strong agreement in the literature that the therapist should employ ethical decision making models, professional consultation, informed consent through open discussion of benefits and ramifications, and case documentation in order to decide whether or not to enter into a specific dual relationship, and to minimize risk when the relationship is avoidable or consensual (Brownlee, 1996; Haug, 1999; Pearson & Piazza, 1997; Schank & Skovolt, 1997, Zur, 1999; Zur 2000).

Wiccan clergy psychotherapists appear particularly vulnerable to ethical dilemmas caused by dual relationships. Complications unique to Wicca include the intimacy required of its clergy within the ritual context and within their covens. Covens serve not only as congregation, but also as seminaries and in some instances as family of choice. The lack of professional training for Wiccan clergy and the adolescent development of Wiccan ethics is a considerable problem. Wicca is a young religion and has yet to develop in these areas to the extent found in older religions. Ethical decision-making often relies on an intuitive grasp of the "Wiccan Rede", which states "An' it harm none, do as ye will".

Wiccan clergy psychotherapists will need to ask themselves many questions in order to find their own boundaries concerning dual relationships. What type of relationship does the clergy therapist have with the Wiccan community? What type of therapy does the clergy therapist

practice? Does the clergy therapist meet personal needs through their community membership or are they isolated from social contact with the community? How will the therapeutic relationship affect their family or coven members who also live in the community? Options for Wiccan clergy psychotherapists include:

1. Avoid dilemmas as much as possible by not seeing clients who are also Wiccan or Pagan. Cease any therapeutic relationship if client becomes a member of the Wiccan and Pagan community.
2. Practice low power, short-term, advice-oriented, solution-focused or pastoral counseling within community. Avoid high power, long-term psychotherapeutic relationships.
3. Practice deep psychotherapy with community members and negotiate each relationship on a case-by-case basis. This may necessitate that the therapist has less socially intimate relationships within the community. There may be a need for therapists to practice within their religion since some prospective clients seek out therapists of the same faith. I recommend that Wiccan clergy therapists avoid counseling coveners. The role conflicts encountered in this situation include existing teacher-student relationships, and possible familial relationships since covens foster reliance and intimacy in order to facilitate deep personal spiritual work.
4. When consciously entering into a multiple relationship, use the ethical decision making models and guidelines available (Brownlee, 1996; Zur, 1999). Employ consultation and supervision with other Wiccan clergy psychotherapists, and with other psychotherapists who are not also Wiccan clergy. Openly discuss role boundaries with clients, obtain informed consent, and document the agreements. Be aware of the reasons why you choose to enter a dual relationship.

I do not believe that dual relationships are inherently harmful. Personal experience has proven a wealth of opportunities for growth to exist within consensual dual relationships. As both clergy and future therapist, I am aware that these waters can be muddy and require careful navigation. For nineteen years, I have lived my life openly in the local Wiccan community. I will not deny myself the nourishment and intimacy I receive from my spiritual family and home. Due to the fact that I meet personal needs in the Wiccan community, and that I prefer to err on the side of caution as I embark on my career as a therapist, at this time I will continue to function as a priestess and pastoral counselor and in the future will likely avoid most psychotherapeutic relationships in the Wiccan community. As counselor and clergy, my primary responsibility is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of those that I serve. As a human being, I also have responsibilities to my own welfare. Occasionally, these obligations may conflict. I am thankful that my dual training provides me with exceptional resources and tools with which to navigate these waters.

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Five Basic Methods for Resolving Conflict

from Judy's notebook

method	how it works	when to use it	when not to use it
denial or withdrawal	person tries to solve problem by denying its existence - results in win/lose	issue is relatively unimportant; timing is wrong; cooling-off period is needed; short term use	issue is important; issue will not disappear, but build
suppression or smoothing over	differences are played down; surface harmony is emphasized; results in win/lose; leads to resentment and possible sabotage if issue remains suppressed	issue is relatively unimportant; preservation of the relationship is primary; timing is wrong; cooling-off period is needed	issue is important; others are ready and willing to work on the issue
power or dominance	decision by majority rule or by person in authority; results in win/lose and resentment by the loser	when this method has been agreed upon in advance, process is seen as fair; authority is respected and trusted	losers feel unheard ignored, or disrespected
compromise or negotiation	each party gives up something in order to meet halfway. results in win/lose if "middle of the road position ignores the	all parties have enough leeway to give; they trust and respect each other; resources are limited	issues of deeply-held principle rather than material interests; parties are not fully committed to the relationship

real diversity of needs or viewpoints

collaboration	abilities, values and expertise of all are recognized; each party's position is clear, but the emphasis is on group solution. results in win/win for all	there is enough time available to complete the process; parties are committed to relationship and process; and trained in use of process	when time, abilities, commitment and/or trust are not present
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to learn more, read:

Avruch, Kenneth, et. al., eds. *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991

Coover, Virginia, et. al. *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution* Philadelphia: New Society, 1985

(see part 2: "Working in Groups" pp. 43-99.)Fisher, Roger and William Ury *Getting to Yes* NY: Penguin, 1981

Gastil, John *Democracy in Small Groups* Philadelphia: New Society, 1993

Kaner, Sam, et. al. *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making* Philadelphia: New Society, 1996

A Pagan/Polytheistic Understanding of the Twelve Steps

by Nora

I need to write this essay under a pseudonym because, while I need to discuss my own experience, I also need to respect the tradition of anonymity in the Twelve-Step Programs. Anonymity is needed, not so much to protect my privacy, but to protect the program against my potential megalomania. Although I would be happy to identify myself to anyone privately, I must abide by the Eleventh tradition, which states, "We need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

As for my qualifications for writing this essay: I have over 6 years of sobriety in the Alcoholics Anonymous program, and 1 year of recovery in the Adult Children of Alcoholics, and Al-Anon programs. Although I have been a consciously practicing Pagan and Witch for only 1 year, my personal theology has been polytheistic for over 15 years.

I will discuss each of the twelve steps in turn, sharing my understanding of these steps within the context of a Pagan theology. I can only share my own experience and my own understanding. I in no way claim to speak for all Pagans or for all members of Twelve-Step programs. I wish to share what works for me in the hope that some or all of it may work for someone else.

As I was told at my first meeting, "Take what you like and leave the rest."

I do not see these steps as a set of directions; rather, they are a description of a process, the process of spiritual and emotional growth. My understanding of this process has continued to evolve, mature, deepen. I've come to believe that the only step limited to those of us with some type of addictive/compulsive behavior is Step 1; the rest of the steps can be experienced by anyone. The process of Steps 2 to 12 -- reaching toward divinity, knowledge of self, attainment of serenity through knowledge of the divine -- has been described by Socrates, Aquinas, the Kabbalists and other Ceremonial Magicians, the Shamans, and others (to greater or lesser extents). I propose that what Bill Wilson and his colleagues did was describe this ancient spiritual process in a vocabulary that could be understood by the working-class drunk. In no way did this diminish the power or mystery of spiritual metamorphosis.

As in the ancient schools and spiritual / magical disciplines, you do not walk the journey of the 12 Steps alone. The role of Mentor/Teacher within

the Anonymous programs is fulfilled by the Sponsor; and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the men and women who have held my hand during my journey: Gina, Pat G., Dorothy B., Jim R., Nancy, and Despie -- Blessed Be!

Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol -- that our lives had become unmanageable.

In September 1981 I could not deny that I was powerless over alcohol; that from the moment I took the first drink I could not predict my behavior. I could also see that a lot of the unmanageability I was experiencing in my life was a direct result of my drinking. This insight was a double-edged sword; the knowledge that I was controlled by a substance that I thought I controlled was completely demoralizing; but I was liberated by the message that I would be free by refusing the first drink.

I am one of the lucky ones. I haven't found it necessary to take that first drink since my first meeting (not everyone who comes to A.A. is given this blessing). However, with this blessing comes the knowledge that the unmanageability in our lives is not due only to our drinking. Step 1 does not say "therefore our lives . . ." If there were a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the drinking and unmanageability, there would be no need for Steps 2 through 12. As the alcohol left my system, I began to understand the threefold nature of the disease of alcoholism: physical, emotional, spiritual. Once the physical part of the disease had been dealt with, by the actual detoxification and abstinence from alcohol, I became aware of the emotional and spiritual sickness in my life, and I began my journey through the steps.

Step 2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

My initial panic with this step was over the phrase, "restore us to sanity." All my life I've known I was different, been told that I was crazy! How could I be restored to something I had never experienced? Gina convinced me that at some point, maybe when I was two cells big, I was sane. I have come to believe that the gods intend for me to be healthy and sane, that I can be "restored" to sanity even if I am being restored to something that had previously existed only as an intention.

Now, I could look at the first part of the sentence, "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves." I knew I couldn't re-store myself to sanity; therefore, if it could be done, it would have to be done by a power

greater than me.

(I'd been reared in a Catholic household, and I had been a "searcher" since about age 12; that was when I decided that there was a logical inconsistency in Catholicism as I saw it: if God was infinite, why would He have only one path leading to him? An infinite god would have infinite paths. Curiously, this led to six years of constant battle with my parents as I explored one church after another. Unfortunately, I'd never connected with one that met my needs, not until February 2, 1987, when I met The Lady.)

So, yes, I believed there was a power, divine, greater than me, who could restore me to sanity. I didn't know what or who it was. Would "it" restore me? If it didn't, I would die: this I KNEW. I chose to believe it would until proven otherwise.

Would anyone who had not (at some level) reached the cross-roads described by this step begin to search for a connection with divinity? I think not.

There must be a need, a void that must be filled, before someone will begin the arduous journey toward the gods; the search inside and outside yourself for the Maiden, Mother, and Crone, the Child, Father, and Wise One.

Step 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

Again, I started at the end of the sentence. Did I understand God, and if so, how? My understanding has undergone tumultuous evolution throughout my sobriety. Sometimes I needed the white-haired, long-bearded father of my childhood fantasies; the ethereal nonentity / energy / force of my adolescence. I still couldn't pigeonhole god. The Siddha tradition beckoned, but wasn't the answer. My mind could not encompass undifferentiated infinity; yet any attempt to define it denied the infinite reality of the divine. The polytheistic pantheon model of divinity answers my need. I can communicate with subsets, or aspects, of the infinite godhead. The gods and goddesses are nodes in the holograph that is divinity.

Could I turn my life and my will over to the care of the gods? What of "free will," that essence of being human? Would it be taken from me? I felt that the key was in the word "care"; to be cared for is not the same as to be dominated. To be cared for is to be given direction, but the decision to follow that direction was still mine. The decision of this step is actually a conscious affirmation of our relationship with the divine: we

are children of the gods. My initiation as a Priestess of the Craft, a dedication of my life as a member of The Lady's clergy, was a dynamic Third Step; it was taking this step into a dimension I had never experienced, in fact, had never dared to dream possible.

Step 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

With Step Four we identify the recurring patterns of our lives, in order to see where our personal strengths and weaknesses lie. Some people reach this point in their program and attempt to write elaborate autobiographies. On more than one occasion I have seen others become mired in confusion by approaching this step in that manner. I have found that listing specific subjects, and then looking back to see how I have handled these in the past, is the clearest way for me to spot patterns.

- Relationships:
 - How do they tend to begin
 - How do they tend to end?
 - Do my partners have common characteristics?
- Money:
 - How do I earn it?
 - How do I spend it?
 - How do I control it?
 - What have I owed?
 - What do I owe now?
- Time:
 - How do I spend my time?
 - Do I "run out" of time?
 - How would I prefer to spend my time?
 - Why don't I spend my time the way I want to?
 - Are there activities I want to add or eliminate?
- Self-image:
 - How do I perceive myself:
 - Physically
 - Intellectually
 - Emotionally
 - Spiritually
 - What is the external evidence:

- Weight?
- Academic achievement?
- Mood swings:
- Time devoted to meditation/spiritual reading?
- Where does my perception match the evidence and where does it differ?
- Why?

There are an infinite variety of subjects that could be used to find our behavior patterns. It is very important to remember to look for our positive characteristics as well as the negative; this is not an exercise in self-flagellation! It is an honest appraisal of who we really are: what we like about ourselves, what we don't like but cannot change (I'm never going to be any taller than I am today), what we don't like that we can change (I've been divorced twice, and I don't want to go through that again).

During Step Four we do not concern ourselves with how we're going to change our behavior or mend broken relationships. This is an information-gathering process. Again, as with Step Three, the Craft offers tools with which to work this step in an entirely new dynamic.

By using the "Meditation Room" (internal astral temple), path-working, Shamanic journeying, and totem identification as information sources, I have been able to learn more about myself than ever before. When my spirit guide made Herself known to me, I spent weeks meditating on why this particular aspect had come to me. I knew that Her identity held a key to who I really was, what I was looking for, what I needed in order to recover.

I've also been able to use these magical tools to identify the child within who had been abused by my parents, and to identify other ACA issues.

Step 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

First, when working with a pagan theology, we can choose which God/Goddess/Gods to work with here. In Alcoholics Anonymous, Athene or Apollo would be appropriate; for Overeaters Anonymous, Demeter comes to mind, etc.

Next, this is NOT an act of confession, a search for forgiveness or absolution. It is a continuation in our journey to know ourselves honestly. It has been my experience that we share not only our wrongs, but also our

rights; we share what we have learned in Step Four.

My personal theology is based on divinity as simultaneously transcendent and immanent; so admitting to "God" was inherent in the process of writing and talking with another person.

Why the other person? Because humans are very gifted at lying to themselves. What I had learned about myself in Step Four was of no active use to me as long as it remained my secret. I have an incredible ability to "forget" what I have discovered if that discovery remains silent. The other person is also important because I tend to be unreasonably hard on myself, to chastise myself when it is not appropriate, to fail to give myself credit for the good I do and for my talents. The other person is our reality check.

I have worked this step with sponsors and my therapist. As I shared with them, I would be confronted if my perception of myself was being warped or clouded by insecurity or egomania. In no way did I expect these people to forgive, heal, fix, or change my life for me. The act of verbalizing my feelings about me and my behavior made it impossible to deny that this was indeed how I felt. My mind could no longer play its circuitous game with me, sending me spiraling down through never-ending discovery and denial. That pattern was broken; so now I could begin to break the others I had identified.

Step 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

We have the same choices with the word "God" here as we had in the previous step. The "defects of character" are the patterns that we identified in Step Four and shared in Step Five, and that we no longer wish to repeat. Some defects were at one time very useful defenses.

As a child I maintained a fantasy life in my head, that I could escape to, in order to survive in the violent, abusive environment I grew up in. But as an adult, maintaining a parallel, fantasy life was blocking my attempts to manifest the life I wanted. A sophisticated and successful childhood defense had become a destructive defect.

As long as a "defect" is useful, we cannot become willing to have it removed; but once we grow beyond the defense and recognize the behavior as destructive, as a "defect," we can become willing to live without it.

This decision, this change in perception, this willingness, is the entirety of this step. It is very simple and sometimes extremely difficult.

Step 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

I change "Him" to "Her/Them" in my understanding of this step.

There is a legend in A.A. that someone once asked Bill Wilson (who wrote the Steps) why Step Five refers to "wrongs," Step Six to "defects of character," and Step Seven to "shortcomings." He replied, "I didn't want to repeat myself."

To be "humble" is to be conscious of your defects: so if I ask to have a defect removed, I am, by definition, humble. There is no groveling inherent in the concept of humility.

I ask the gods to remove these unwanted patterns of behavior, because I cannot do it alone. If I could live my life without the gods, I would never have sought a conscious connection with them. That connection is that spark of divinity within me that gives me life; it is the true essence of my humanity. Therefore, I am capable of nothing without the gods, for I would not Be without the gods.

However, could the gods change my life and the patterns of my life without my knowledge or petition? Most certainly, that happens to me all the time. When I ask for help, to have something removed from my life, I am affirming for myself what was already to be. For once a pattern is recognized as useless, it will cease to exist. The petition to the gods is not what causes the removal; the petition is to remind me of my relationship with divinity. The strengthening of my understanding of my relationship to the gods is the spiritual journey that will heal me.

Step 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

As I analyzed the patterns of my life in Step Four, I became aware of the people in my life who had caused me pain and those that I had hurt in some way. I went back and listed the people I had harmed and a brief description of the circumstances. I asked myself if I was willing to apologize for my behavior within the relationship, and became willing to clean up my side of the street.

My experience has been that this step helps me understand how I behave in interpersonal relationships. I could no longer deny my possessiveness, my neediness, my lack of tact or subtlety, the times I had resorted to emotional blackmail in order to get my way. And, as my sponsor instructed me, I put myself on the list. I owed myself amends. I could

see when I had allowed myself to become the "doormat," to be victimized. I could not expect my parents to make restitution for their abuse, but I could talk to the child within, hold her, allow her to play and have her fantasies realized. I have been able to do these things in my internal "meditation room." The experiences have been very powerful, and have left me feeling whole and serene.

Step 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

A sponsor's guidance with this step is imperative; often a newly sober alcoholic will cause unwarranted pain and chaos while attempting to make right all the wrongs of the past. My sponsor stopped me when I wished to apologize for what I knew I had done, whenever the "wronged" party was unaware of my actions; for the amend would have caused pain instead of healing. And, I was told, I was one of the "others". If in making amends I was endangering myself, I was to wash my hands of the relationship and not attempt the contact, or else send a letter instead of facing the person directly.

My apology to my first husband was done via letter for this reason. I was afraid of physical violence if I went to see him, and yet I needed to own my wrongdoing in the relationship. I sent a letter; he wrote back saying he was sorry I was still so mentally ill. So I learned another hard lesson with Step Nine: we have no control over how our attempts to mend the torn relationships in our lives will be accepted.

I have found that to do what is ethically right, without expecting right action in return, is often very difficult, sometimes frightening, and sometimes horribly painful.

For me, the most difficult spiritual lesson I have learned from this step has been a recognition of my personal rights, and the knowledge that the times when I have done the greatest harm to myself have always been when I have tried to meet someone else's needs at the expense of my own physical, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing.

Step 10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

A continuous analysis of the status of our lives allows us to monitor our recovery, to clean up the wreckage of our all-too-human errors. I have come to view "guilt" as a form of self-bondage; when my actions within a

relationship haunt me, I need to take action to restore the serenity that I now view as my rightful way of life. Often the guilt I feel is the result of my having denied my own rights in a situation: by failing to provide a safe environment for myself, by shrinking away from stating my wants or needs, by denying my right to live happily. There have been times when, in order to make amends to me, I've had to walk out of a situation, a job, a relationship. Doing so has been frightening, and painful; but I've become more whole, serene, and healthy as a result of taking care of me.

Step 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

I am filled with such gratitude for the tools of conscious contact with the divine in the Craft that it is hard to find words to describe what this step is like for me now. I spent years looking for a form of prayer and meditation that would work for me: in Circle I have felt Her arms around me.

The grounding and centering meditations, the path workings, trance inductions, divination, Cakes and Juice, are all dynamic, life-giving forms of prayer. I no longer accept the existence of divinity on "blind faith"; I've seen Her, talked with Her, cried in Her arms, and have been healed by Her. I know that because of the gift of the Craft I have experienced a depth to this step that few of my "mundane" friends in the program will ever imagine, let alone experience.

To ask only for the gods' will for me, through divination or any other tool, seems to me why the tools are there. If the gods' will were of no consequence, we wouldn't bother the oracles in the first place.

Whenever we invoke the gods, ask their protection, draw the power of The Mother into our bodies, we are asking for the power to do their will. They are the source of power, and as with any power source we must take the action to allow empowerment by connecting.

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The result of these steps is spiritual awakening, the continual process of growing closer in understanding to the gods. These steps are a continual journey, for life doesn't stand still. We are either growing or decaying, recovering or sliding backwards. And, like physical life, spiritual life

requires regeneration.

We need to pass on the gift of sobriety and serenity, pass on our personal understanding of the steps, in order to keep those gifts for ourselves.

The process unfolds, becomes new, leads me to a new understanding, each time I've sat with a newcomer and shared my experience, strength, and hope.

To carry the message to others in need is not proselytization in order to increase the size of the fold. In some ways it is much more selfish than that: to carry the message to others is the only way to continue the journey myself and to ensure my own sobriety.

Thinking the process through in my head, alone, will get me nowhere. I need to share the program in order to keep it alive. As a wise Rabbi once said, "Belief without action is meaningless." I cannot believe my way toward spiritual health: I must act my way toward it.

As a final note, I would like to mention my gratitude for the amount of support I have received in the Neopagan community. When I was first invited to a gateway Circle, the High Priestess asked if I had any problem with wine in Circle. I told her I didn't have any problem with it being there, but I couldn't drink it. From that Esbat on, the HPs used both juice and wine in Circle, in clearly different cups. This same HPs also ensured that there were sugar-free cakes available, since my consort also abstains from sugar. There have been well-attended A.A. meetings at the festivals I have attended, and these festivals and large Sabbats in our area have also had juice available in Circle. This understanding that some of our members need to abstain from alcohol is a sign of the spiritual strength within our community.

Nora is a High Priestess of the Protean lineage. She wrote this essay for the Covenant of the Goddess *Newsletter* sometime in the mid 1980s, and was amazed to discover that it is still available in several places on the Web. The experiential qualifications she states at the beginning are now very old. It's more like 20+ years of recovery and 15+ years in the Craft. Re-reading the essay recently, she found herself still comfortable with the substance of what it says and gave permission to post it here.

Empowerment Twelve Steps

Created by Selena Fox in June, 1995

For use by Pagans in recovery from addictions who are in Twelve Step based treatment programs

Step 1 We have recognized that we have given away personal power by addiction to substances or behaviors, that this has resulted in dysfunctional living, and that it is time to begin reclaiming our power and restoring balance to ourselves and our lives.

Step 2 Came to acknowledge that the Divine Power within can bring about healing change and harmony.

Step 3 Chose to allow the Divine within of our own spiritual path to be the central guiding force in ourselves and our lives.

Step 4 Examined ourselves deeply and honestly on all dimensions -- physical, mental, behavioral, emotional, and spiritual.

Step 5 Acknowledged to the Divine, to our egos, and to at least one ally what is healthy and what is unhealthy in our bodies, thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and souls.

Step 6 Were ready for the Divine within to work transformation to restore balance to ourselves and our lives.

Step 7 Sincerely invited the Divine within to dispel barriers to change and to facilitate transformation.

Step 8 Made a list of all beings we have harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step 9 Made direct amends to such beings as much as possible, except when to do so would cause harm to them or others or make a difficult situation worse.

Step 10 Continued our process of self-examination, acknowledging our strengths as well as our problems, and promptly acknowledging our mistakes and our successes when they occurred.

Step 11 Sought through spiritual activities to strengthen our relationship with the Divine within and to allow this transpersonal dimension of ourselves to be the guiding force in our lives.

Step 12 Having had a spiritual rebirth as a result of this process of healing transformation, we continue our work with these principles and are willing to share our story with those who come to us in need.

Visit the [Circle Sanctuary](#) web site

Read [Anodea Judith](#)'s revision and commentary on the Steps for Pagans and [Nora's](#) Pagan/Polytheistic Understanding of the Twelve Steps

Very strongly recommended: *The Recovery Spiral* by Cynthia Jane Collins (NY: Citadel, 2004) ISBN 0-80652-512-6

Stepping Through to Recovery

A Pagan approach to the Twelve Step programs

by Anodea Judith

The problems of addiction and dysfunctional behavior patterns have become epidemic. In a culture out of balance with Nature, the sexes, races and religions and which employs barbaric child-rearing practices, it is no surprise that we encounter a constant barrage of human problems. Therapists are often expensive and friends undertrained or overwhelmed. As a result, many have found solace and healing through the use of "12-Step" groups that are available nearly free of charge across the nation.

Originally created in the 1930's for Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12-Step Program proved to be far more successful than other therapeutic methods for keeping alcoholics out of relapse and restoring a sense of satisfaction to their lives. When it was found that partners and family members of alcoholics also had dysfunctional patterns, the 12-Step Program was expanded to include them as well. At first called "co-alcoholic", the concept has been expanded to include drugs, sex, food, gambling and other behaviors. The term is now "co-dependent", meaning one who is a part of another's addictive process or who is so focused on the other that she neglects her own needs. This, too, has come to be seen as an addiction.

Today there are 12-Step groups for almost any problem, with the understanding that we are all "adult children". This is a term popularized by John Bradshaw, a leading figure in the recovery field, meaning adults carrying with them programming and wounding from various dysfunctional childhood environments which were once taken as "normal" in our society and are still rampant. The 12-Step programs provide a structure and a human support system for treating additions and other disorders. Working through the steps (see below) one at a time and attending regular meetings, one has the chance to share personal stories with others who are struggling with similar issues. Additional support is obtained by choosing a sponsor (someone who has been in the program a little longer) to call upon or report to when needed.

12-step programs incorporate both practicality and spirituality, and in many cases have been a great success. However, the spirituality of the 12-Steps is steeped in Christian theology. As a Pagan priestess and therapist, I have a hard time arguing with a client who refuses my recommendation to attend such meetings on the grounds that they cannot stomach the concepts or wording of some of the steps. I have not found affinity with 12-step groups for the same reason.

Some have suggested simply changing a word or two, such as "...turned our will over to God as we understood Him (*or Her*).". While this change can be muttered under the breath at a meeting, it does not address other more inherent discrepancies with Pagan theology which are built into the conceptual framework. Notable are the implications that divine force exists solely *outside* ourselves, the injunction to abandon our will, and the concepts of sin and guilt.

Also, many people object to the *labeling* used in 12-step programs, wherein every person introduces himself by saying something like "My name is Bill, and I am an alcoholic," even if Bill has maintained sobriety for five or ten years. Admittedly, there are some good reasons for this practice. Since Bill can never drink alcohol again, the label is a reminder that his relationship to the substance is forever tainted by his misuse of it. Yet, in magic we know that names have power and can invoke the concepts they imply. Perhaps "My name is Bill, and I am recovering from alcoholism," speaks more to the truth we are trying to create.

There are ways of approaching some of the steps that are more fitting for Pagans and still do not force religious dogma on anyone. The adapted steps listed below are my own, except where noted, but the thinking behind them has been stimulated by each person I have talked to or who has sent me their material. Where possible, I give credit at the end. I am open to feedback and suggestions for those steps and encourage each person to make any adaptation they need, in order to have the steps serve them the best way possible. Standard steps are listed in *italics*, adapted steps in **bold**, and commentaries in regular type.

Step 1: *We admitted we were powerless over (alcohol, food, co-dependency, etc.) -- that our lives had become unmanageable.*

We admitted we had a problem and that we were squandering our power.

This could be shortened to simply: **Admitted we had a problem.**

The purpose of the first step is to counteract the denial that says "I can quit anytime, I just haven't tried hard enough yet." Admitting a certain powerlessness *can* enable us to be more open, to give up on holding on to a certain behavior and to let go of the part of our ego that interferes with receiving help from others. Seeing *that our lives have become unmanageable* is a way of admitting the severity of the problem, but many people have addictions precisely *because* they feel powerless, so this step can block them from all that follows. Tell a person who has been gang raped to stand in front of a crowd of strangers and admit powerlessness and you'll find a lot of resistance. Also, if people whose lives have not yet become unmanageable, but who still have a problem with a substance or behavior, can get help sooner rather than later they may avoid "bottoming out," and can nip the problem in the bud. Having to admit your life is unmanageable can deter such people from connecting with the programs. It is more empowering to say we have *mismanaged* our lives than to say they are *unmanageable*, and this can apply to a broader range of conditions.

Step 2: *Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

Came to believe we could realign the power within and the power without such that each served to enhance the other.

It could also read: **Came to believe there was hope for recovery.**

This step is about becoming an *open system*. In order to become open we need a sense of hope to reach out, to ignite the enthusiasm necessary to get through the difficult parts of recovery. The power within and the power without are interconnected and our pain results from their severance. An open system has greater power than a closed system.

Step 3: *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.*

Made a decision to connect the powers within and without and see them as One.

Addictive processes are the result of *already* having turned our will over to something else -- the challenge is to *reclaim* our will. If it is "turned over" -- even to something "better" -- we do not necessarily change the addictive *process*. Those who have been sexually abused or suffered the religious abuse of an angry God will not want to turn their will over to Him or perhaps to anything else. When we consciously choose to connect the powers within and without, however we define them, we are making a decision of empowerment of which we are a part and which gives us a sense of pride.

Step 4: *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

Took an intelligent look at our behavior, seeing its relationship to family patterns and dysfunctional culture.

The importance of this step is to understand the chain of cause and effect that has influenced us, to step *beyond* judgement, to see our behavior as an attempt to cope with a cultural situation that is off-balance, and to empower ourselves by creating more productive strategies for coping. Not all of the ways we were shaped by our family were our fault, and the shame that results from taking on the blame is often the very fuel of addiction. Much of recovery rests on learning *self-acceptance*: not acceptance of damaging behaviors, but rather a fundamental acceptance and understanding of *ourselves* that gives us the strength to let go of damaging behaviors. Let us not set ourselves up against a moral standard to see if we are worthy enough to continue, but instead look at ourselves as part of a process we once had no control over, then learn the causes and effects so that we can change them. We must understand in order to make permanent change.

Step 5: *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

Shared our searching with others, seeking feedback.

We need the reflection of a friend, a coworker, partner or therapist to accurately get the intelligent perspective sought in the previous step. We are by nature blind to our own programming, so another perspective is necessary to help us see.

For Pagans who want to use ritual in their recovery, putting what we understand into a ritual form and sending it to a god or goddess or spirit can be helpful. For example, I once did a ritual in which I stripped off my clothes in a circle of friends and invoking Erishkigal, lay on the ground and admitted aloud all the things I was aware of that had gotten me to this terrible time in life: my pride, my carelessness, etc. I asked for Her to see I was learning my lessons and to let me out of the Underworld. Two days later I got a new job and all the other circumstances unwound themselves gracefully in the weeks that followed.

Step 6: *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

Made myself ready and willing to let go of old patterns.

Nothing *other*, mortal or immortal, can do the work for us, but the *willingness* to change is an essential prerequisite. This may sound too obvious: if we weren't willing to change, why would we be in recovery? Yet this is one of the most difficult steps of all. Old patterns were put there for a reason -- they are part of an outmoded survival strategy. Being ready to let go of what we once truly needed is as scary as jumping off a cliff, and very similar in that there is a period of time where we are in free-fall, when we have to let go of something old *before* we can get something new, before we even know what we are replacing it with. The alcoholic who uses alcohol to be able to socialize or the marijuana smoker who uses it to stimulate creativity may go through a period of being socially dull or uninspired until the natural juices kick in. Old patterns also have secondary rewards: the co-dependent gets ego gratification out of caretaking; the addict gets attention or simply the high that lets him endure. Letting go of patterns means letting go of their rewards as well.

Step 7: *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*

Learned to ask for help.

Those from dysfunctional situations often have a hard time with this important step in the process of connecting our inner power with the power around us. Outside forces don't do it *for* us, but there is much help in the form of the divine as well as people, programs, experiences, books, and self-initiated activities such as meditation or vision quests. By asking for help we become open to power flowing through us. This implies being receptive to omens, prayers, miracles, coincidences and support around our changes. The Goddess is in everything!

Step 8: *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and becoming willing to make amends to them all.*

Made a list of harm done, and searched for ways to restore balance.

When we are unconscious we hurt ourselves and others. It is important to come to terms with this and make an effort to reconstitute what has been lost, persons as well as other *things* that may have been harmed such as environment, animals, institutions, creative projects, our own aspirations and other parts of ourselves. It is sometimes equally important, in the process of recovery, to confront those who have harmed *us* and ask for acknowledgement and compensation. If it cannot be given, as is often the case with parents or old relationships, then we must commit ourselves to finding a way to take the restoration into our own hands.

Step 9: *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

Carried out rectification and balancing wherever possible.

This step could also be stated as: **Cleaned up karma.**

This is carrying out the willingness from the previous step. It can take a lot of time and be very difficult. It is important as it allows a thorough "grokking" (understanding) of the effects of our patterns and it allows everyone a chance to grow. It may involve hearing anger from children or former friends or lovers; it may even cost you money, but it brings freedom.

Step 10: *Continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

Made the commitment to continue the process of recovery, knowing that change takes time.

Changing life patterns of behavior takes longer than any of us would like to spend with it, so we must be gentle with ourselves. Even after we understand, we still repeat, we are still blind, and we still need to monitor ourselves. Thinking we've "done it already," is a mistake, as is giving in to the temptation to stop the process once we have gotten a few "big" insights. What we resist persists and admitting our blind spots helps defuse them.

An important added step, contributed by Charlotte Kasl, Ph.D., from her forthcoming book (see [Part 4](#) of this article) can be inserted here: **Continued to trust my awareness, and when I knew what was right I promptly acknowledged it, and refused to back down.** We need to overcome the tendency towards collusion with oppressive forces that invalidate our truth. In this patriarchal society, this is especially true for women and minorities.

Step 11: *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*

Pursued the strengthening of our connection with the web of life through appropriate activity and spiritual practice.

Our sense of connection may come through meditation, ritual, dreams, political action, therapy groups, community service, writing in a journal, walking in the wilderness, or standing on our head. We may even search for omens, but in the end it is we who choose our path and employ our will to walk upon it. If we haven't severed our will, we are more able to find the strength to walk that path. The pursuit of wisdom takes conscious effort and is an ongoing process. Deity is immanent and our understanding comes through personal effort and exploration in combination with openness and trust.

Step 12: *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Having experienced a stabilized change from our awakening, we sought to help others along the path.

Central to the 12 steps is the concept of a spiritual awakening. How we define that awakening is personal and varies in content and intensity, but there is always some fundamental change in our view of self, the world, and the connection between the two.

They say a teacher teaches something until she finally learns it. Helping others completes the karmic cycle that helped us, and can also solidify what we've learned. When we have been through struggles with a particular problem we are in touch with the process and our spark of understanding can sometimes help another on the path.

Some additional steps, also credited to Charlotte Kasl, can be added as follows:

Step 13: I examine my life story and my addiction (and codependency) in the context of my role in a patriarchal, capitalistic system.

Another good book to read on this is Anne Wilson Schaef, *When Society Becomes an Addict*.

Step 14: I use the events life brings as lessons for growth and accept my mistakes as part of my humanness.

Very important for keeping sobriety -- how not to fall down when life presents difficulties. Seeing problems as opportunities, having a sense of compassion for ourselves when we fail to be perfect, and learning from mistakes are valuable steps to ongoing progress.

Step 15: We grow in our awareness that we are sacred beings, interrelated with all living things and, when ready, take an active part in helping the planet become a better place for all people including ourselves.

We could include a few other species here simply by saying "all" and leaving off the word "people." This solidifies the connection between ourselves and the web of life, again between the power within and the power without.

This adaptation is meant to coincide with the 12-steps as they are now, but we could combine steps 2 and 3, steps 4 and 5, and steps 8 and 9, making each pair into a single step. The additional three steps listed above could then be included for a total of twelve. Or throw them out altogether and start fresh, but however we proceed, the value does not lie in any of the individual steps but in the creation of a structural program. It takes more than wishing to change a lifelong pattern: we have to adopt a strategy, a plan, and then carry it out for a substantial period of time. The plan needs to fit the problem, and then each of the various wounds we suffer from this culture may require different programs.

The other deep value in the twelve step program is its inclusion of a spiritual dimension in the recovery process. Spiritual connection and healing are part of the same thing because a wound to the soul is a rupture of spirit. Since spirit has many forms, to truly become an open system we avoid qualifying spiritual experience for other human beings. Both the creation of a program and the experience of "spiritual awakening" are personal and profound. These steps are meant as a guide to creating a program that offers empowerment of the individual and validation of a variety of spiritual experiences. The paths are many. The journey brings its own reward.

A SUMMARY:

A PAGAN 12-STEP PROGRAM BY ANODEA JUDITH

- 1. Admitted we had a problem and that we were squandering our power.**
- 2. Came to see how the power within and without had been misaligned and made a decision to reconnect them, seeing them as One.**
- 3. Through sharing and feedback from others, took an intelligent look at our behavior, examining our relationship to family patterns and dysfunctional culture.**
- 4. Made myself ready and willing to let go of old patterns.**
- 5. Learned to ask for help.**
- 6. Made a list of harm done, and carried out rectification and balancing wherever possible.**

7. **Made the commitment to continue the process of recovery, knowing that change takes time.**
8. **Pursued the strengthening of our connection with the web of life through appropriate activity and spiritual practice.**
9. **Having experienced a stabilized change from our awakening, we sought to help others along the path.**
10. **Examine my life story and my addiction (and codependency) in the context of my role in a patriarchal, capitalistic system.**
11. **Use the events life brings as lessons for growth and accept my mistakes as part of my humanness.**
12. **Grow in our awareness that we are sacred beings, interrelated with all living things and, when ready, take an active part in helping the planet become a better place for all including ourselves.**

Also by Anodea Judith: [Out of the Frying Pan - Into the Fire](#): Dysfunctional families and group energy.

You can visit Anodea Judith's website, [Sacred Centers](#).

Very strongly recommended: *The Recovery Spiral* by Cynthia Jane Collins (NY: Citadel, 2004) ISBN 0-8065-2512-6

Spiritual Emergence or Psychosis?

by Selene Vega

Some of the signs and behavioural symptoms that the *DSM III-R* (American Psychiatric Association, 1987) classifies under schizophrenia appear in individuals who may be experiencing a non-ordinary state of consciousness that is not indicative of mental disease. It is, rather, a potentially transformative state that can, with proper treatment, lead the individual through the crisis into a higher state of being. Christina and Stanislav Grof (1986) maintain that "these experiences - spiritual emergencies or transpersonal crises - can result in emotional and psychosomatic healing, creative problem-solving, personality transformation, and consciousness evolution."

Although these states have historical and multi-cultural precedents, our society has no categories for these experiences and the people undergoing them, and the similarities to the symptoms of psychosis lead the authorities to treat what might be considered a mystical state as pathology. The *DSM III-R* does acknowledge the difficulty of distinguishing the "beliefs or experiences of members of religious or other cultural groups" from delusions and hallucinations and cautions us not to consider them evidence of psychosis when shared and accepted by a cultural group. This might cover mystical experiences that occur under the auspices of a particular sect or within a cultural context, but it does not address the variety of states that might be considered spiritual emergencies or mystical experiences.

The Grofs have grouped the spiritual crises they have seen personally and reviewed in written accounts into six categories, which I will summarise here.

1. Awakening of Kundalini (Serpent Power)

Kundalini is an energy described by Indian scholars as residing at the base of the spine. When aroused, it can rise through the chakras (psychic centres situated along the spine from the tailbone to the top of the head), creating physical symptoms ranging from sensations of heat and tremors to involuntary laughing or crying, talking in tongues, nausea, diarrhoea or constipation, rigidity or limpness, and animal-like movements and sounds.

Kundalini does not rise only in those who know about it and actively seek to arouse it. A variety of spiritual practices can bring it on, and it has been known to occur in people who have done nothing consciously to awaken it. A discussion of this spontaneous awakening can be found in Sanella (1978).

Kundalini awakening can resemble many disorders, medical as well as psychiatric. The physical nature of the symptoms can bring to mind conversion disorder, and it might also lead to a misdiagnosis of epilepsy, lower back problems, incipient multiple sclerosis, heart attack or pelvic

inflammatory syndrome. The emotional reaction to the awakening of Kundalini can be confused with disorders involving anxiety, depression, aggression, confusion and guilt.

Unlike those suffering from psychosis, individuals experiencing Kundalini rising are "typically much more objective about their condition, communicate and co-operate well, show interest in sharing their experiences with open-minded people, and seldom act out" (Grof, 1986).

2. Shamanic Journey

Shamanism occurs in various forms in many cultures all around the globe, and the preparation for the shaman usually involves an experience of a non-ordinary state of consciousness that provides an encounter with death and rebirth. This can take the form of a dream or vision of descent into the underworld where torture and annihilation take place, followed by rebirth and return to the upper realms. Within the appropriate cultural context, this journey is often a resolution for an illness that had been diagnosed as a shamanic or initiatory illness, and the shaman returns from the journey not only healed, but able to heal others.

The Grofs note that the psychiatric interpretation of the behaviour of the shaman relates it to hysteria, schizophrenia or epilepsy. In actuality, shamanistic cultures "clearly differentiate between a shaman and a person who is sick or insane" rather than attributing shamanism to any bizarre experience or behaviour they do not understand.

Nevertheless, certain characteristics of the shamanic experience parallel those of the pre-psychotic (Pelletier and Garfield, 1976). ". . . hypersensitivity prior to the shamanistic experience, powerful emotional reactions to personal traumas and/or impasses, feelings of inadequacy, and difficulties in relating to others approximate, if not duplicate, the symptoms of the pre-psychotic." Silverman (1967, cited in Pelletier and Garfield, 1976) claims that the behaviour and cognition of both the schizophrenic and the shaman are a result of a particular ordering of psychological events. He sees the essential difference between the two states as a matter of the psychosocial environments that exist around them. The emotional supports and mode of working with the shamanic illness found in a shamanic culture are generally unavailable to the schizophrenic in our culture, and this leads to an entirely different outcome. The cognitive reorganisation that takes place in each is patterned by the expectations of the culture, so that although the original state is similar, the end state is not.

3. Psychological Renewal Through Activation of the Central Archetype

This category is based on the ideas of J. W. Perry (1974, 1986), a psychiatrist who has worked with psychotic patients in ways that support a transformation involving "emotional healing, psychological renewal, and deep transformation of the patients' personalities" (Grof 1986, p.11). When this transformative process was not suppressed with the standard anti-psychotic drugs, Perry found patterns that express what he calls the central archetype. This involves a theme not unlike the shamanistic death and rebirth, but on a larger scale. Here the cycle is a world cycle, and the individual often experiences him/herself as holding a central position in a global or

cosmic conflict. For women, this can take the form of giving birth to a saviour, while for men the experience is more likely to be their own birth as messiah or other world leader.

The spiritual crisis here resembles ritual dramas of renewal that have existed in one form or another for five thousand years (Perry, 1986, p. 35) From this standpoint, the pre-psychotic condition of the individual is considered the psychopathology, while the psychotic episode is a process of healing and transformation.

4. Psychic Opening

The *DSM III-R* regards belief in parapsychological phenomena as part of the criteria for schizophrenia, but there has been enough scientific research yielding positive results (Targ and Harary, 1984) to warrant at least an open mind. Psychic opening is a state in which an individual experiences a large number of occurrences that can be considered paranormal. These might include clairvoyance (visions of past, future or remote events) out-of-the-body experiences, telepathy, or poltergeist phenomena. Synchronistic events are often a feature of this type of transpersonal crisis, occurring in a way that defies statistical probabilities.

5. Emergence of Karmic Pattern

This crisis is marked by the experience of reliving events that appear to take place in another time period and usually in another place. The individual experiences these sequences as memories from a previous incarnation, and often sees various emotional, psychosomatic and interpersonal problems in his or her present life in a new perspective. Biological birthing is often relived in combination with the past life experience and a curious pattern has emerged linking the two. For example, strangulation by the umbilical cord is often associated with memories involving hanging or strangling in a past life. Scenes of suffering in dungeons, torture chambers and concentration camps correspond to experiencing the first stage of labour, involving contractions within the uterus.

Many individuals caught up in the experience of a past life scenario see this as bizarre and insane, as our culture does not present any concept that might explain it. These visions can continue for months or years, causing distortions in interpersonal relations as well as a variety of emotions and physical sensations. These experiences can be dramatically therapeutic when integrated, alleviating emotional, psychosomatic and interpersonal problems of long standing. Regardless of the origin or true cause of these sequences, they can be utilised by an individual to understand his or her own current life more fully.

As for understanding the true basis for this phenomenon, there are no definitive answers. Certainly the belief in reincarnation is widespread in other cultures. In addition, interesting corroborative information has been obtained by following up on the few experiences that have provided enough specific clues to allow for that. There are other possible explanations for this, so we have no proof of reincarnation, even if we can find proof that an individual's past life experience provides historically correct information that they could not have known otherwise.

6. Possession States

The Grofs describe this crisis as the emergence of an archetype of evil that is identified as demonic by the possessed individual. They say that this type of possession state "can underlie serious psychopathology such as suicidal depression, murderous aggression, impulses for antisocial behaviour, or craving for excessive doses of alcohol and drugs. They imply that there might be some relationship to multiple personalities as well.

The Grofs describe therapy hours that resemble medieval exorcisms when the archetype appears during the session. Often there is choking, projectile vomiting, or frantic motor behaviour with temporary loss of control. To resolve the problem, the archetypal pattern must be allowed to emerge and exteriorise, leading to a liberating and therapeutic experience. The Grofs do not go into detail about what type of support is required from the therapist in this situation beyond the need to be "not afraid of the uncanny nature of the experiences involved."

In addition to the demonic sort of possession state that the Grofs describe, I would imagine that more benevolent possession states would also fit in this category. There are many cultures where the deliberate induction of possession states is part of a valued religious experience. This includes Haitian voodoo ceremonies where specific deities are invited to 'ride' the bodies of the worshippers during specific ceremonies (Metraux, 1959, p. 121), as well as the dancers of Bali who become the entity they are portraying in ritual drama. Even in our country there exist religious groups who consider it desirable to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, with physical manifestations that include shaking and speaking in tongues (Sargant, 1975). P. Buckley (1981) cites Erika Bourguignon as concluding that possession trance is an ability that is part of the human potential, as his world-wide studies show that it is utilised in a large percentage of societies.

Not covered in these six categories is the classical mystical experience that is understood as a union with the divine. Much of the historical written literature describing mystical experiences falls into this category and comparisons have been made of these accounts with those of psychotics. Buckley gives an example comparing St. Augustine's mystical experience with the description John Cusance wrote of his psychotic experience (Buckley, 1981). These descriptions demonstrate beautifully the similarity (at least in the retrospective description) between the two experiential states. It would be difficult to distinguish between them on the basis of the 200-300 words of description that Buckley excerpted.

Buckley delineates several specific concepts often found in descriptions of both mystical and psychotic experiences.

1. *Feeling of being transported beyond the self to a new realm*
2. *Feeling of communion with the 'divine'*
3. *Sense of ecstasy and exultation*
4. *Heightened state of awareness*
5. *Loss of self-object boundaries*

6. *Powerful sense of gnoesis*

7. *Distortion of time-sense, particularly time-distortion*

8. *Perceptual changes*

A. *Synesthesia*

B. *Dampening or heightening*

9. *Hallucinations*

The hallucinations found in mystical experiences are more often of the visual than the auditory type. A frequently described vision for both states is "the sensation of seeing and being enveloped in 'light'" (Buckley, 1981).

The heightened state of awareness can also be understood as a "lowering of perceptual thresholds that allows greater awareness of alternate states or of inner life" (Zinberg, 1977, cited in Oxman et al., 1988). Buckley refers also to a breakdown in the 'stimulus barrier.' This characteristic, as well as many of the others mentioned by Buckley, is shared by hallucinogenic drug states. In all three states there is also an increase in primary process thinking.

Oxman et al. conducted a computerised content analysis of written passages describing schizophrenia, hallucinogenic drug experiences and mystical experiences with autobiographical accounts as controls. According to their findings, "schizophrenic subjects emphasise illness/deviance themes; hallucinogenic accounts emphasise altered sensory experience; mystical accounts focus on religious/spiritual issues; and normal control subjects emphasise adaptive and interpersonal themes."

Although this study produced data showing that individuals experiencing these distinct states use certain categories of words more frequently, I am not convinced that the authors' conclusions follow. They say, for instance, that the schizophrenics associated their experience with "a sense of impairment, inner badness, and illness" based on the fact that words from the Deviation and Medical categories appeared with higher frequency. The examples that they used to illustrate this seem to point more to the way those around the schizophrenics responded to and labelled the experience than to an intrinsic sense within the individual. The authors feel that their findings imply a clear dissimilarity among altered states, but what I understand from the information they offered is that the retrospective descriptions of altered states reflect the attitudes prevalent in the cultures that surround the individuals experiencing them.

There are differences between schizophrenic and mystical experiences other than those put forth by Oxman, et al. One major difference is that disruption of thought is not seen in most mystical states. Disturbances in language and speech and flatness of affect are also not characteristic of this state. Apart from possession states, self-destructive acts and aggressive and sexual outbursts are not seen in mystical experiences either. In addition, the mystical state is self-limited and generally brief.

Rama, Ballentine and Ajaya (1976, p. 198) contend that what distinguishes the seemingly similar euphoric psychotic states and what they refer to as the experience of higher consciousness is the fragmented nature of the psychotic experience. The euphoria may abruptly reverse itself and

become a horrific vision of the psychotic as a sinner in hell. The mystic is able to integrate the sometimes contradictory inner world from an expanded consciousness, unlike the psychotic, who is at the mercy of his/her disordered thinking processes.

Wilber (1980, p. 156) views the schizophrenic break at its best as a regression in the service of the ego that can leave the individual with a healthier ego, despite the fact that the experience was not sought after and happens against his or her will. The mystic, on the other hand, while exploring the same realms as the schizophrenic, is mastering those realms rather than being overwhelmed by them. "The mystic seeks progressive evolution. He trains for it. It takes most of a lifetime - with luck - to reach permanent, mature, transcendent and unity structures. At the same time, he maintains potential access to ego, logic, membership, syntax, etc. He follows a carefully mapped out path under close supervision. He is not contacting past and infantile experiences, but present and prior depths of reality."

As this quote suggests, there is a difference between the individual who consciously embarks on a journey of what Wilber refers to as a progressive evolution and the schizophrenic who experiences a break without prior preparation. This difference does not totally account for some of the varieties of mystical experience that the Grofs describe (spontaneous Kundalini awakening, for example), nor does it deal with the fact that for some the schizophrenic experience can be a transformative healing process while for others it is not.

One study (Rappaport et al., 1978) found that for some patients anti-psychotic medication is not the treatment of choice if the goal of treatment is long-term clinical improvement rather than immediate symptom reduction. The authors argue that "the stormy phase of schizophrenia can be looked upon as an attempt at reorientation, at solving problems of living." Anti-psychotic medications that reduce neurological sensitivity may interfere with the individual's reintegrative responses, decreasing problem-solving ability, sensory and psychological sensitivity, and ability to learn. It also makes it physiologically nearly impossible for a psychotic to maintain whatever stimulus attenuation manoeuvres he/she has developed to provide a 'safe space' in which to problem-solve.

The need for 'retreat' or 'safe asylum' is emphasised by Perry, as well (1986). He points out that in the high state of arousal of the individual experiencing a psychotic break, the mundane world's activities can feel painful and confusing. The individual needs to have the freedom to experience the mythic world he/she is dwelling in. This can be facilitated by an environment of supportive people willing to be with an individual exhibiting bizarre behaviour. Perry has set up a facility staffed by people who know "the difference between a meaningful inner process and pathology, not through hearsay or because of a liberal intellectual view, but as a result of actual experience" (Perry, 1986). Rather than medicating the symptoms, a therapeutic environment is created to offer support to the renewal process that is unfolding in the individual in crisis.

The question becomes one of deciding who is appropriate for the type of treatment that is being suggested here. Rappaport, et al. found that young males at the onset of a first or second acute schizophrenic episode with good rather than poor premorbid histories and with time-limited

paranoid characteristics at the onset of their break were the most likely to benefit from non-medication treatment. The study did not include females and chronic or other subgroups of schizophrenics, so no comments could be made about these groups in this paper.

I am making an assumption here that the schizophrenics in the Rappaport, et al. study are of the same type as those that Perry works with and that Buckley was quoting from in his examples of psychotic experiences that bear some resemblance to mystical states. Certainly the treatment procedures employed by Rappaport, et al. and Perry are similar. Both advocate a treatment milieu with a supportive staff able to tolerate bizarre behaviour and to understand the acute schizophrenic episode as "a period in which there is an opportunity to reintegrate and to return to a better personal and interpersonal level of functioning" (Rappaport, et al.).

It seems that the issue for the therapist faced with a client who appears to be experiencing a psychotic break is more involved than whether or not this could be a mystical experience that is being interpreted as 'craziness' due to our lack of cultural acceptance for non-ordinary states of consciousness. Even if it appears to be a psychotic break there is the question of whether this individual could grow and evolve from this experience into a healthier and more integrated person with the appropriate treatment. Unfortunately, there are few facilities that approach schizophrenia with this attitude, and mistreated, this individual might miss the chance for a transformative experience and find him/herself stuck.

Wilber (1984a,b) has created a system for understanding the cause and treatment of mental disorders, ranging from those we are most familiar with (psychoses, narcissistic-borderline disorders, psychoneuroses) to disorders that occur further along the spectrum of consciousness development. He agrees that at the psychotic level physiological or pharmacological intervention is the appropriate treatment. However, he points out that further up the evolutionary pathway of consciousness, psychic pathology can resemble psychosis. At this point of development, the recommended treatment is Jungian therapy involving some structure building.

Wilber sees psychopathological possibilities at every level of psychic development, and suggests appropriate treatment for each. The Grofs, while acknowledging the logic behind Wilber's classification system, contend that the clinical realities are not so pure and clear-cut. They recommend a basic trusting relationship with the client as a foundation for mediating a new understanding of the process the client is undergoing. If the therapist can convey respect for the healing and transforming nature of the crisis and support the process, its positive potential can be utilised.

The Grofs have developed a therapeutic technique involving hyperventilation, music and sound technology and body work that they use to assist individuals in transpersonal crises. They suggest the use of artistic and expressive therapy techniques such as drawing, psychodrama, dance, and sand-play. Of course, when the crisis is so intense as to prevent the individual's functioning in the world, there is the difficulty of finding a facility that is willing to work with alternatives to the medical model. There are actually three 24-hour facilities in the U.S., two of

which are in California, that are knowledgeable about and willing to work with spiritual emergencies, and hopefully this number will grow in years to come.

There is a growing amount of information available about transpersonal crises, what they are and how to treat them. There is also a growing number of therapists with the expertise and experience to treat them. The Spiritual Emergency Network, an information and referral network for transpersonal crises, has been in existence in Menlo Park for several years now. It is my hope that these are indications of a growing sophistication in the field of psychology that will allow for a deeper understanding of non-ordinary states of consciousness than the *DSM III-R*'s categories allow for. We have, as human beings, barely scratched the surface of our capabilities and potentials, and as we explore further we will surely find much that does not fit our current understanding of the mind and body and how they work. If we can maintain open minds, there is much we can learn.

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Out of the Frying Pan -- Into the Fire:

Dysfunctional Families and Group Energy

by Anodea Judith

The human force behind the New Age Movement is made of people who, for better or worse, are survivors of the previous generation's child-rearing philosophies. This is nothing new: every generation has had its legacy of cultural mores to plough through, outgrow and transform. Within the family, a semi-isolated and barely conscious evolutionary unit, this happens slowly and painfully.

However, the evolutionary thrust of the New Age movement seems to be removing itself from the traps of family dynamics through group activity, such as men's groups, women's groups, environmental groups, parent's groups, magical groups, newsletter groups, 12-step groups of every kind. Through the support of our peers we venture into the unknown, challenge the assumptions of our inherited legacy, and try to create and embody a more productive life plan. There is a certain "fallout" from this transition. While the effects of a long-standing tradition of dysfunction are being removed from the family situation, they are being insinuated into our group situations. Let us examine the way that we, as individuals, sabotage the work we are doing by recreating our dysfunctional family patterns in our present group activities.

Dynamics from our family of origin will be played out in subsequent family situations. Many groups are designed specifically to offset this process, such as Adult Children of Alcoholics. Because of this focus and because of "generational bonding" (common values), such groups are expected to be immune to these dysfunctional patterns and provide a safe place for us to go through our personal transitions. Thus we often fail to see these patterns when they do occur. Working with other survivors of dysfunctional families, our own neurotic patterns fit like hand in glove with those of our co-workers. We may be aware of our authority issues when dealing with a parent figure, but we are blind to them when it comes to friends of our own generation and shared belief systems.

First, what do we mean by "dysfunctional family"?

A dysfunctional family is a group energy system which either fails to perform its intended function or is dependent upon --harmful or counter-productive methods in -order to function. It's a system that doesn't work very well or one that hurts the people in it Counter-productive actions are repeated again and again until they become an intrinsic part of the system because the overall functioning of the system becomes more important than the means.

A family's purpose can be seen as the living, sharing, nourishing and development of life.

When this purpose is no longer fulfilled, as when making a living or caring for children becomes immersed in addictions, lies, violence, or personal manipulation, yet still continues, that system has become dysfunctional. If Dad's drinking or abusing Mom allows him to continue working at his meaningless job, on which the family is dependent, then this behaviour becomes accepted as part of the family system. Because the child is born into it, the family's method of functioning is seen as "normal." This form of dysfunctionality is shrouded in non-communication, alienation, fear, denial and anger which, while shared by all, is not permissible to express.

These feelings get channelled into standardised behaviour patterns designed to keep the ailing system functioning as smoothly as it can under the circumstances. The patterns become second nature, part of our basic survival mechanisms which we carry through into all our subsequent situations.

Non-communication and secrecy

Because dysfunctional families believe they are dependent upon their patterns to survive, it becomes the unwritten rule not to talk about feelings. It only brings up pain, which the family feels is unsolvable. When dysfunction occurs in a subsequent group there is the same tendency to avoid speaking about it and the same feeling of futility about being able to change anything. This may make us want to drop out of the group, blame everyone else, and do almost anything but communicate.

Anger and fear

As a result of the lack of communication, the child is left with a constant level of anger and fear, which becomes normal and is later exacerbated by any situation which threatens to mimic the original.

When you have a group of people who carry left over anger, that anger gets triggered easily, making the group a potentially volatile medium. The anger may or may not be justified in the present circumstance, but likely as not the vehemence of the anger is greater than the situation deserves because it is in part a carryover from childhood. The force or frequency of the anger may obscure its rightful cause and the end result is frustration for all concerned.

Competition

The dysfunctional family operates within a model of scarcity -- that there is a limited amount of love, time, money, food, clothing, safety, etc. The members of the family learn that all of these things must be earned through competition. Rather than developing means of working together, family members pit themselves against each other. Competitiveness exacerbates all of the problems listed here and is easy to spot in group situations. As we strive towards collectivity, competition polarity undermines our more benevolent ideologies. Group members may feel like they don't get enough time or appreciation (usually true) or feel they have to

compete with each other to get a word in edgewise, to perform as well as others or to jockey for a power position.

Unequal power structures

Most dysfunctional families of the previous generation operated within the Patriarchal Power Model: the father had the most power, the mother was dependent upon him, and the children dependent upon her. Her powerlessness with regard to her husband was compensated for through her power over her children. The children were powerless against their parents and sought to make pecking orders among themselves and their peers. Because we learned to operate within unequal power structures we are often incapable of perceiving anything other. We either believe these dynamics are in play when they are not, or we strive to create them by our own actions so that we may remain in familiar realms. One-down or one-up power positions may be familiar -- equality may not be. In the familiar our roles are defined; in new territory, we have to feel our way, and feeling our way is what we once learned not to do.

Dependence

Because no one was allowed their own power for fear they might rock the fragile boat, what developed was the shadow of power -- dependence. Each member of the system became dependent upon people and behaviours they didn't feel good about. This manifests later in people being terrified to let go of destructive patterns, behaviour which may seem baffling to an outsider.

Guilt and shame

All the previous qualities, especially the latter one, result in individuals within the system feeling an indefinable sense of guilt and shame. Powerless, dependent, fearful and angry, the emotions are funnelled into the subconscious through secrecy. The end feeling is one of malaise, low self-esteem and lack of trust, with an underlayer of shame.

Lack of trust

is the end result and continuing state of the dysfunctional family survivor. It both causes and increases all of the above.

Roles within the family

In addition to these characteristics, members of dysfunctional family systems resort to taking on roles within the family that allow the system to be tolerable. These roles are played right through adulthood and are especially prominent in group situations.

The Good Child

tries to transcend the malaise of the environment by behaving like an angel. The Good Child takes on adult responsibility at a young age, strives to excel at everything, takes on other people's problems and generally compensates for feelings of inferiority with a drive to accomplish and prove themselves. When this takes the form of parenting younger children, the child becomes "parentified" and plays out the "higher-powered" parent role in later relationships. In group situations, the Good Child takes on too much responsibility, disallowing the empowerment of others. They run things, but without much joy or satisfaction. The Good Child can get self-righteous or persecutory if they are feeling unappreciated.

The Problem Child

is the circuit breaker for the wiring of the family dynamics. The Problem Child (in therapy, often the "identified patient") does poorly in school, gets into trouble, turns to drugs, gets pregnant or otherwise causes problems that take focus away from the family problems. The child does not do this consciously, but is driven by her own intolerable sensitivity. In group situations the Problem Member role may dance among a few people. They are often in crisis, which distracts the group from moving forward. There is more permission to leave in a group than there is in a family, and the Problem Child may do just that. Then the group may then find that problems suddenly pop up in another member. This is also true for:

The Scapegoat

If the Problem Child does not leave, they may serve another function in the system: the Scapegoat. The Scapegoat (not always synonymous with the Problem Child) is the one who gets the blame for the dysfunctional system. ("Johnny causes such problems, I can't get anything done.") The group itself is rarely able to perceive that their whole way of functioning is ailing and instead puts all their anger into scapegoating, which, of course, increases the problems.

The Scapegoat may be the newest group member, the group leader, the editor of a newsletter, or the one who generally has the most problems with the group process. Like the Problem Child, they may choose to leave; but another person will quickly become the Scapegoat in their place.

The Clown

keeps himself and the family distracted by playing the entertainer. The Clown denies that there is any problem, gets attention for himself through bringing some joviality into a grim situation, and keeps the emotional pain at a tolerable level. Later in life the Clown is still distracting group process, often getting strokes for it because they do alleviate a dreary situation, yet they prevent true work from being accomplished. They're the ones we can't live with, and can't live without.

The Fixer

Sometimes the same as the Good Child, the Fixer is constantly trying to smooth things out. They become a Co-dependent -- one who is fixated on solving others' problems in a way that ignores their own and allows the others to continue in self-destructive behaviour. No group would be complete without them, they are often seen as the group's saviour, yet their fixing is more like an aspirin than a cure.

The Ghost

is the Hidden One, the child who tries to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, is withdrawn, never asks for anything for himself, is neither seen nor heard, and is often confused with the Good Child, except he is not competitive. This type of person is less likely to join groups, but if they do, they are quiet and unobtrusive, or they may do their disappearing act after they have volunteered for something.

Considering the family as a whole

The patterns that occur are as many and varied as the people we are. The mistake comes from focusing too much on the individual roles, and failing to see the dynamics of the system as a whole. We can focus on the plight of the poor Scapegoat, or the burden on the Fixer, but we tend to focus on an individual, through the lens of our own roles, instead of learning to think as a system.

In a family or group system, everything affects everything else. Scapegoat or Clown, Leader or Ghost, the whole system is affected by each action and presence (or absence). Those who obviously have power are no more important than those who appear to have less power, and all have equal ability to topple the system. To think systemically we need to step back, look at what the group is trying to accomplish, what roles are necessary to accomplish this goal, and how those roles compare with the current ones being played out.

What is your group's purpose? Can you get it down to a few words? Does everyone in the group agree on the purpose? Is your purpose multiple? (If so, each purpose may dictate different roles.) Or is the group trying to achieve a secondary purpose that is unstated, such as a group whose purpose is working magic while also trying to act as a support group? Does it work or does it put the group at cross-purposes? Is your personal reason for being in the group in keeping with its collective purpose?

Starhawk, in *Truth or Dare*, describes four main types of groups; intimate groups, whose purpose is "being,;" task groups, whose purpose is "doing; support groups, whose purpose is "changing;" and learning,, groups whose purpose is "education. Purposes may overlap, but when they get crossed, such as learning groups who try to make people change, there may be some covert manipulation going on to which members have not all agreed.

What are the needs of the group as a whole compared to needs of the individuals within the group? The group may have financial pressure which creates a need to get things done quickly, efficiently and professionally in order to continue its purpose. Individuals within the group may have a need for intimacy or creativity which cannot be met within the group without changing the group function. Members who share this need can get together or start a subgroup rather than undermine the stated purpose.

What is your role in the group, both officially and non-officially? Is this the role you want? Is it the same role you played as a child?

What are the roles of some of the other members? How did they get these roles and how do they feel about it? (Ask, don't assume.)

How is power handled/distributed? Living in a society that has, by and large, unhealthy power models, the handling of power within a group is often the basis for conflict. Our first experiences of power were in relationship to our parents and teachers. If this was negative it will affect how we behave when in a position of power ourselves or how we respond to those who are in powerful or leadership positions. Ideally power and leadership should not be synonymous, though it is often hard for people, no matter what their role, to remember that leadership, because of its parental overtones, is a touchy issue in groups.

Again, to quote Starhawk: "Two basic myths exist about leadership. The first is that someone must always be in charge or nothing will get done. The second is that leadership is always oppressive. Although both myths contain kernels of truth, each is based on an essential confusion between power-over and power-with."

There are many questions to ask about leadership within a group. Is it necessary? If not, what models would work better? If so, are the leaders responsible in their positions: do they reflect the needs of the group and accomplish the purpose? Is their leadership recognised? Are they respected or resented by the group?

The leaders usually receive the parental projections of the group members. For those who were abused by their parents' authority much anger may be projected against the leaders or founders of a group, undermining their ability to do their job. This may also prevent leaders from emerging, which can leave the group floundering without direction. Watch for competition and lack of trust in such dynamics.

For those who act in the role of leaders, internalised family dynamics may lead to an abuse of their power. Their only model may have been power-over. This may be entirely unconscious, in which case effective communication and feedback from the group needs to be offered and received. Internalised shame may make the group leader need a lot of encouragement, while the group may be resisting a projected power-over situation instead and undermine the leader's confidence.

Are the same people always the leaders? Is this appropriate or can the roles be rotated?

The other end of the spectrum from leaders, who have usually been in the group a long time,

are the newcomers. Newcomers run the greatest risk of becoming the Scapegoat, because they are the least incorporated into the system and the least knowledgeable about its unspoken rules and agreements. Newcomers and leaders alike get the largest doses of lack of trust and often have their competitive urges triggered by having to prove themselves. If and when they do prove themselves, the role is then defined and the next step is dependence upon that role. Variation in dynamics in family and group situations is endless. Being conscious of these dynamics goes a long way towards avoiding traps. Understanding your own family dynamics is invaluable, as communicating current group dynamics (as you perceive them) is essential. The best way to avoid roles is, ironically, to assign them. A consultant is a Fixer, but recognised, respected, and usually paid for their position. The Ghost who watches everything and says little can be sought out and given a role as a vibes-watcher. The Clown can be given special time for entertainment and group diversion-time where they can get strokes for their humour, and the group can be treated to an enjoyable break. The Problem Child can be given the role of problem solver, thus taking the focus off them and onto the group, wherein the dysfunction lies anyway. The competitive Good Child can be given a reward for their good work by asking them to help newcomers or people who are struggling in the group. The Scapegoat can be put in an honoured position where they have no responsibility and then the next time something goes wrong, it can't be their fault! (Though in truth, the only real way to absolve the Scapegoat is for group members to deal with their own shadows.)

Another common maelstrom of dysfunctionality arises along the compliment/criticism continuum. Do you remember what it felt like when your parents jumped on you for what you did wrong, yet failed to show an equal but opposite reaction over your accomplishments? Unfortunately, I have seen this dynamic repeated in almost every group, and the effects are the same: alienation, lack of enthusiasm, and resentment. Having clear roles can help this process, because we know what our job is, what it takes to do it well, and can receive appropriate recognition when it is done well.

It is also important for the group to give itself strokes as an entity when it has done something well. A feeling of pride in the system makes co-operating with the system a joy instead of a burden.

To make this occur more often, keep your group's goals realistic so that they can be achieved. In our group we tend to have long agendas for meetings that drag us all down and leave us feeling inadequate if we don't get through it all, burned out if we do. When we have shorter agendas we finish our work and still have time for socialising. We get a feeling of accomplishment and a sense of entitlement to the pleasure of visiting afterward.

Having "non-work" time is replenishing to group energy. Our coven schedules socials once a month in addition to our magical workings. In the Church of All Worlds, non-work time makes us remember why it is we work so hard or put up with this crazy family. It gives us fuel for our work and our vision and the love and bonding to get through the difficult parts when they arise.

The most important thing to work on is ourselves. When is our behaviour a carryover from our family situation? What can we do about that when it does happen? How can we communicate across that gap? How do we manipulate the system to meet our personal needs?

And lastly, to remember that the group is a system and must be viewed as a whole. How do we accomplish our tasks? Do we use the same methods over and over even when they don't work? What did we do right when things did work? For example, when our group examined what we had done well or enjoyed most, we found that those were projects that had a defined leader who was supported and accepted by the group. That was very enlightening for us because we always tried to avoid having leaders. Since then we have taken to assigning definite roles for various projects and we find things go more smoothly.

And if, Gods forbid, someone in the group does foul things up, it is always helpful to look at their behaviour in view of the group dynamics. Were they given adequate instruction, tools, encouragement, communication, time to accomplish their task? The group system should be suspect before the individual is criticised. And if the problem cannot be found in the group dynamics, ask the individual. They will probably tell you very quickly where the system is flawed. And wouldn't it be nice if their criticism was coupled with appreciation?

Recommended reading:

Bradshaw, John *The Family: a revolutionary way of self-discovery* Pompano Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1988.

Starhawk, *Truth or Dare: encounters with power, authority, and mystery* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

Candlelight and Praise

what Witches can learn from Behavioral Psychology

by Judy Harrow

You might think that behavioral psychology has nothing at all to do with magic, and less than nothing to do with mysticism. It's about cold-eyed scientists in white coats who focus on measurable trivia, willfully ignoring any consideration of consciousness or soul. That's the stereotype.

It ain't so. Witches use behavioral psychology all the time, although many of us don't know it and some would truly hate to admit it.

Behavioral psychology is the study of what people actually do, of observable behavior. It's largely about understanding how we change what we do, how we learn. In fact, behaviorists define learning as "a relatively permanent change in behavior that results from experience." Notice that the this definition says nothing at all about just what kind of change is being made. That, rather than the methodology of change, is what makes Witches and other spiritual types different from most other people.

It's important to understand that the behavioral model of learning is not the only possible model. Cognitive psychologists define learning quite differently, as a change in the way we mentally represent our environment, a change in our understanding. These might just be two different ways of describing the same learning process, but I don't think so. I think behavioral learning and cognitive learning are actually two very different activities, which we might call training and education.

Education, cognitive learning, creates understanding. Training, behavioral learning, builds skill. Although these are different, each nurtures the other. Both are important, but for different purposes. Understanding the biological processes of yeast is not the same as being able to perceive when the kneaded dough in your hands is ready to form loaves. You need the sensory, experiential knowledge to bake good bread. You need both kinds of knowledge to create new recipes.

Our religious practice involves specific behavioral skills: trance, dream recall, ritual skills and more. In tribal cultures, such skills are routinely taught to children, but the children of western industrial society receive very different inputs. So, for most of us, Wiccan development has to begin with actual training, the acquisition of skills neglected in our upbringing. Still, it need not, and should not, end there. Although education follows training, it is just as necessary for the continued life and growth of our traditions.

Here's another very mundane example: I'm what the computer jocks call a "dumb end user," pretty good at word processing, but clueless about circuits or computer code. I am trained to use the computer, but not educated in computer science. Within limits, I can do what I want. I could write this article. But if I ever want to do something new or unusual, I ask my resident programmer to write a program for me. Without him, I'd be limited to existing software.

On the other hand, someone without practical experience working with software packages is unlikely to write a very user friendly - or useful - program. Without education, we are limited to rote repetition of what has worked in the past. Without training, we can't even do that much. Behavioral psychology has nothing to do with education, but it has everything to do with training, with learning in the sense of changing, improving, what we actually do. So the paradox here is that to learn about behaviorism is to obtain education about training. We know some ways of training people. If we can understand the process of training better, perhaps we can design even more effective training systems.

Behaviorists talk in terms of "conditioning." Two generations of behaviorists developed two different models, called "classical conditioning" and "operant conditioning." Wiccan training can benefit from both of these models.

1. ***Classical Conditioning:***

- 2.

3. Remember the old joke about the mad Russian scientist, Ivan Pavlov, who was so well-trained by his dogs that, whenever they salivated, he would ring a bell and feed them?

4. Here's how it really went: Salivating at the sight of food is a normal response for a dog. So the food is called the unconditioned stimulus and the salivation is called the unconditioned response. Pavlov rang a bell whenever he fed his dogs. After a while, the dogs came to associate the sound of the bell with food. Eventually, they would salivate whenever they heard the bell, even if there was no food around. Once this response was firmly established, the bell tone would be described as a conditioned stimulus. Salivation in response to the bell tone alone would be called a conditioned response.

5. What classical conditioning techniques do is to link experiences such as tasting food and hearing bells. By careful attention to the conditions under which certain responses naturally occur, and by carefully created and maintained associations, we can gain voluntary control over behaviors that are otherwise spontaneous or erratic. This means that we can turn some easily repeatable experiences into cues to enter magical states of consciousness.

6. Candlelight, incense smoke, the tactile sensation of robes or of nudity, particular patterned words, any or all of these, and much more, can become conditioned stimuli. We in fact have two sets of carefully orchestrated conditioned stimuli for a two-stepped transition, one into the state of consciousness appropriate for being in Circle at all, and the second for entering deep trance. (Using stimuli in groups this way, rather than singly, is a safeguard against unintentionally eliciting the response outside of its proper context. You will very rarely want to go into trance during a romantic candlelit dinner for two, so you don't want candlelight alone to be your stimulus.)

7. This is what it means when we say the power is in the mind, not the things. Ordinary objects, things like knives and cups, can by carefully created and maintained associations,

become conditioned stimuli. These things have no intrinsic power, only the power we invest in them, power that comes through us. By our own will and skill, we come to perceive consecrated objects as taking on a magical "charge."

8. To turn some sight or sound or smell into a conditioned stimulus, use it every single time you want that response and no other time. To take another secular example, insomniacs are well-advised not to read, eat, chat on the phone or watch television in bed, in order to establish a firm association of bed with sleep. The more you can keep the use both consistent and exclusive, the more firmly the habit will form.
9. To consecrate something is to set it apart for sacred use. To profane it is to handle it as though it were secular, to weaken its association with the Sacred. Our inhibition against using consecrated objects or ritual words or gestures outside of their sacred context is rooted in sound, scientifically based behavioral psychology. What we call profanation, Pavlov called extinction, the erosion of a conditioned response. When he rang his bells just ten times without feeding them, his dogs stopped salivating at the sound.
10. At the beginning of my pre-initiatory training, I was asked to obtain a Circle necklace, one that was not to be worn at any other time. I remember with embarrassment hunting for the cheapest necklace I could find, not wanting to "waste money" on something that would have only limited use. Today, there's no way I would consider wearing my precious amber-and-jet mundanely.
11. When I put that special necklace on, and expose myself to a whole variety of other conditioned stimuli which address all the various sensory channels, I am telling myself in very powerful ways, far deeper than words alone could reach, that magical and mystical behaviors are now in order. The vocabulary is very different, but the process is the same as the one that Pavlov demonstrated with his dogs.
- 12.
13. ***Operant Conditioning:***
- 14.
15. Not to be left out, operant conditioning has its own tired old joke. B.F. Skinner, it seems, liked to pace the platform while lecturing. One semester, the students in the first couple of rows conspired. Whenever Skinner came close to the edge, they would look real interested and write in their notebooks. Within a week, they say, Skinner fell off the platform.
16. This is the difference: classical conditioning is directed toward the stimuli, toward what happens *before* the behavior we would like to establish or change, operant conditioning is directed toward what happens *after*, toward the feedback that the behavior calls forth. So classical conditioning works best for evoking a response, while operant conditioning works best for developing a skill.

17. The story about Skinner pacing is either a fable or an illustration of baneful use. Either way, it illustrates the two most important things Witches can learn from operant conditioning: successive approximation and positive reinforcement.
18. Skinner did a lot of his own research with pigeons, and the pigeon lab is still the popular image of his work. It's also the source of a good illustration of how we can teach new skills by reinforcing successive approximations. Suppose you want to train a pigeon to peck at the center of a target on his cage wall. At first, you give the pigeon a pellet if he even faces toward that particular wall. When he's doing that regularly, you wait till he takes a step toward the wall before feeding him. Then you increase the number of steps required to earn a pellet. Eventually, the reward comes when he actually touches any part of the wall. Next, you wait till he touches the outer ring of the target, then the next ring and so on. Finally, bull's eye!
19. Incidentally, another technical term for training by reinforcing successive approximations of the goal is "shaping" behavior. To shape, to bend -- root meanings of the word "Witch." Interesting, yes?
20. Positive reinforcement for a pigeon may be a food pellet, but notice that the front row students did not offer Skinner a cookie as he paced a little closer to the platform's edge each day. Most of the people we're likely to be training, like Skinner, already get enough to eat, but still hunger for attention and approval. For a lecturer, this might well take the form of students taking note of what he says.
21. One of the major applications of operant conditioning is biofeedback. The only reinforcement those machines provide is information. Just by giving people a way to see how they are doing, biofeedback allows people to assume control of bodily functions such as blood pressure that, until recently, were thought of as entirely involuntary. These subtle changes in the body certainly facilitate changes in consciousness, with obvious relevance for mystics and magicians.
22. Initiations and elevations are certainly a form of attention and approval, major positive reinforcement. They are, however, very big rewards, spaced far apart and requiring a great deal of work and major personal learning and change. If those are the only reinforcements available, it's something like withholding the pellet till the pigeon actually pecks at the bull's eye. The odds of success are much greater if we provide smaller and far more achievable rewards in between.
23. Put that way, it sounds like common sense, but it goes against the habits of mainstream Euro-American culture. We tend to take note of problem behavior - "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" - or of extraordinary achievement. Quiet success, everyday competence, gets ignored. When somebody is "just" doing their job, this is not even considered noteworthy, let alone praiseworthy. But, in the view of operant conditioning, behavioral extinction results from the repeated performance of any behavior in the absence of reinforcers. Or, in plain English, ignore it, and it *will* go away.

24. From Skinner and his pigeons, we learn that behavior can be most effectively changed -- that new skills can best be taught -- if we divide the grand goal into many small incremental steps, and warmly acknowledge each small achievement, even the ones we fully expected.

So, back to poor old B.F. Skinner, falling off the platform. Behavioral techniques are fairly easy to use. All they really require is some consistency. They are also very effective. Whether or not they actually were used to play a stupid, cruel joke on Skinner, they certainly could have been. They can also be used coercively, as they are in some workplaces, to make somebody do what you want for your own selfish reasons. Or they can be used manipulatively, as they are in some social programs, to alter someone's behavior without their consent in ways that you may believe are "for their own good." Well, so can our magic, and bread knives can murder. Does this potential for unethical usage make the tools or techniques themselves unethical? Hardly. As with all magical workings intended to change someone, ethical use hinges on that person's consent.

You don't need to sneak behavioral techniques in. They work every bit as well, if not better, when openly used. Understanding them does not detract from their effectiveness. A willing recipient can cooperate with the conditioned stimuli, and even apply them herself. A willing recipient can learn to give himself "strokes," small positive reinforcements when he achieves small goals.

Furthermore, it seems to me that permission is inherent in any freely chosen student/teacher relationship. When I ask someone to teach me, or sign up for their class -- whether I'm learning carpentry or Witchcraft -- I am asking them to teach me as skillfully as they know how. When I agree to teach someone, I make a commitment to teach them as well as I can. From that perspective, a teacher ethically can and should acquire and apply any skills, including those of behavioral psychology, that will help her students learn better.

In other words, behaviorism is perfectly OK -- as long as it is practiced between consenting adults, dogs, or pigeons!

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