Article 82

Integrating Spirituality, Embodying Religiosity, and Promoting Ego Transformation: A Transpersonal Psychology Approach to Mindfulness, Acceptance, and Values Formation

Jan C. Lemon and Rosanne Nunnery

Lemon, Jan C., is an assistant professor in the Department of Counseling and Psychology at Mississippi College. Lemon has research interests in the areas of wellness and spirituality, and she brings unique experience in the application of faith and psychological resonance to the mind-body discussion. In addition, she has presented statewide and nationally on integrating energy psychology and mind-body techniques into the counseling process.

Nunnery, Rosanne, is a core faculty member in the Harold Able School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, specifically with Mental Health Counseling, and has a small private practice. Nunnery has research interests in the areas of wellness, resilience, trauma, and self-efficacy. She desires to make therapy applicable for clients, counselors-in-training, and practicing counselors in the field.

Abstract

The search for meaning, purpose, and spiritual values has been found to be an essential element in the counseling process. Professional counselors have the unique ability to not only help clients through an emotional crisis but also to bring about changes in character, identity, and self-esteem. With the fusion of neuroplasticity and spirituality, the therapeutic process not only brings about changes in the brain but may also comprise the synergy of the client’s humanity and his or her aspects of the Divine and encourages the development of a healthy, balanced ego. The concepts of mindfulness, acceptance, and values formation in the application of transpersonal psychology are discussed in depth with an emphasis on spirituality and ego transformation. In addition, the authors will explore unconscious forces and clinical techniques that allow the individual to live life from the heart with a transformed mind and to embrace individuation and self-actualization.

Keywords: mindfulness, acceptance, values, spirituality, ego

The term “ego” began with the conception of Sigmund Freud’s structure of the personality in the 1860s and serves as the focal point of one’s consciousness manifested in cognitive-sensory functions (Vaughan, 2013). Many transpersonal psychologists
believe ego formation is an important stage in development, and, in later developmental stages, the ego can be transformed to know who we really are and to trust in ourselves as we awaken to truth. Transpersonal psychology does not discount the practical world but believes that the only way the spiritual world can manifest is through regular people in the visible world (Singer, 1991). According to Martin and Martin (2012), “Ego is the core essence of our humanity. The words ego and human are equal. A human being is an ego being, our human nature is our ego nature, and our human self is our ego self” (p. 17). As human beings, we live in the realm of our mental and emotional selves, and this human existence can either be bound to a path of anxiety, repression, and unawareness or to a path of enlightenment and transformation. James (1902/2009) stated that there must come a unification of the self in the process of spiritual growth and transformation. This unification process involves the synergy of one’s humanity and divinity and encompasses the awakening of a healthy, balanced ego, which merges with the awareness of divine nature expressed through a human being (Martin & Martin, 2012).

There is an emerging trend in the West for a wellness approach toward physical healing, and this trend has moved into the areas of spirituality and counseling. The culture of Western spirituality has embraced Eastern religious practices in the areas of prayer and meditation, and this newfound understanding of transcendence has produced not only a deeper level of awareness but also a dialog concerning spirituality. In traditional Eastern religions, spiritual enlightenment equals death of the ego. Phipps (2001) stated,

Every major enlightenment teaching in the world has long held that the highest goal of spiritual and indeed human life lies in the renunciation, rejection and, ultimately, the death of the need to hold on to a separate, self-centered existence.

(p. 38)

In the Western culture, there is an emphasis on the acceptance and transformation of one’s ego rather than its death. Myss (2006) stated, “We’re on this planet to learn to be spiritual beings in a physical body, to gain consciousness of our greater purpose. Life on Earth is all about learning to manage your power” (p. 3).

With this wellness approach in counseling, therapists are beginning to focus on higher human needs, values, states, and potentials. This article discusses the role of transpersonal psychology and the modern concepts of mindfulness, acceptance, and awareness of values with an emphasis on spiritual growth and ego transformation. In addition, the article will explore unconscious forces and clinical techniques that allow the individual to live life from the heart, not the mind, and promote individuation, self-actualization, and transcendence.

Throughout the article, the authors use both the terms spirituality and religion. Cashwell and Young’s (2011) definition of spirituality is used in the article. They wrote of spirituality as “the universal human capacity to experience self-transcendence and awareness of sacred immanence, with resulting increases in greater self-other compassion and love” (p. 7). Further, the authors also use Cashwell and Young’s definition of religion as that which “provides a structure for human spirituality, including narrative, symbols, beliefs, and practices, which are embedded in ancestral tradition, cultural traditions, or both” (p. 9).
Transpersonal Psychology

The two goals of transpersonal psychology are to heal the emotional wounding and suffering of human experiences and to awaken a person’s deeper guidance and awareness of his or her true center (H. L. Friedman & Hartelius, 2013). Cortright (2013) stated,

Just as in traditional therapy, these goals mean bringing coherence and integration to the ego, working through the unconscious defenses and earlier wounds and traumas, and allowing the authentic self to merge along with an increased capacity for intimacy, self-esteem, empowerment, and embodiment. (p. 163)

Additionally, transpersonal psychology focuses on the transformation of the client’s inner soul, which is the source of his or her light and love. This spiritual view of life promotes deep and creative work that values relationships and communication. Transpersonal psychology has its origins in the work of William James (1842–1910) and Abraham Maslow (1908–1970). James was considered a moral psychologist, and he believed that psychology was bounded by biology on one side and philosophy on the other (Frager & Fadiman, 2005). His writings introduced all areas of human experience, including the spiritual, which addressed the phenomena of transformed states of mystical union and cosmic consciousness. Davis (2000) stated, “Transpersonal psychology stands at the interface of psychology and spirituality. It is the field of psychology that integrates psychological concepts, theories, and methods with the subject matter and practices of the spiritual disciplines” (p. 5).

Modern concepts in psychotherapy, such as practicing mindfulness, understanding acceptance, and living a meaningful, values-based life, have roared onto the scene of counseling. Enmeshed with these concepts is the integration of spirituality into the counseling process. The counseling profession is realizing that spirituality is a universal phenomenon that is highly personal and developmental (Cashwell, Bentley, & Bigbee, 2007). This is not a new phenomenon but a revisited one that was brought about in the early 1960s by Abraham Maslow when he was instrumental in establishing transpersonal psychology as an alternative to strict behaviorism and pathology-based models. Maslow’s work explored the values and motivations of highly self-actualized people and found that those people had high levels of maturation, health, and self-fulfillment. He further stated that individuals have the ability to move up the ladder of self-actualization to the pinnacle of transcendence and could engage in meaningful work and service, promote justice, creatively express oneself, and find spiritual fulfillment in realizing what is true, beautiful, and good (Maslow, 1972).

Mindfulness

Related Literature

The field of psychology is moving toward a new paradigm of holistic, integrative thinking and healing. This view makes room for the physical body and for relational and nonverbal aspects of human nature (Maaske, 2002). In the past decade, many articles have been written about the relationship between spirituality and health, and many of these articles include the concept of mindfulness. MacDonald, Walsh, and Shapiro noted that “Transpersonal psychology has been actively involved in the exploration of
technologies and practices that are thought to facilitate the expression of higher modes, states, and traits of consciousness” (p. 433). Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005) defined mindfulness as “moment to moment non-judgmental awareness cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-judgmentally and as openheartedly as possible” (p. 108). Brewer, Bowen, Smith, Marlatt, and Patenze (2009) stated, “A recent consensus definition of mindfulness emphasizes two complementary elements: (a) the placement of attention on the immediate experience; and (b) adopting an open, curious, accepting attitude towards that experience” (p. 1699). These elements are essential spiritual disciplines for living in the here and now moment and letting go of the “oughts” and “ifs” of the past (Nouwen, 1994). Many authors have linked psychotherapy, spirituality, and mindfulness (Carmody, Reed, Kristeller, & Merriam, 2008; Jacobs-Stewart, 2010; Offenbacher et al., 2011; Vandenberghe & Prado, 2009). Other studies have found that mindfulness practice helps develop spiritual awareness in children and renews hope for military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Roberts, 2011; Vujanovic, Niles, Pietrefesa, & Schmertz, 2013). Martin and Martin (2012) stated that the ego exists with our physical and mental body, and when we live just from the human aspect, we become separated from God. In addition, the authors added that one’s ego strength involves the degree to which one knows, accepts, and works within human imperfections. Mindfulness helps bring the ego into balance and allows the individual to embrace human imperfections and to manage stress and conflict. Also, mindfulness allows us to share both the suffering and grace of others and reminds us that we are all connected in an unseen spiritual stream (Jacobs-Stewart, 2010).

**Mindfulness Techniques**

**Exercises in sensing.** Kabat-Zinn (1990) described a technique called body scanning. These sessions last from 10 to 20 minutes and are composed of the client deeply breathing while experiencing all of the sensations in the body. The client takes a slow journey through the body, focusing attention on one area at a time. This is done through quietly meditating while focusing on one’s breath (Lemon & Wagner, 2013). Beginning with the bottom of the feet, the client should focus on this area while continuing to breathe slowly. A spiritual affirmation may be added at each point while being totally aware of each area of the body. The affirmation may be a short phrase such as, “Jesus is my peace” or “Jehovah Shalom.” As the client becomes aware of any tightness or stress in an area of the body, he or she can allow the affirmation to resonate in that area and become mental medicine. Since the ego organizes one’s psychological functioning and serves as the birthplace of meaning structures (Louchakova, 2007), repeated practice of this mindful activity will signal the unconscious to bring peace and relaxation to the body even when the conscious mind is unaware of it. O’Connell (2009) added to the body scanning discussion, “For those with high levels of agitation, a mindfulness activity such as walking or swimming is recommended instead. Exercises with breath awareness or breath counting are given to those with high levels of anxiety and those experiencing widespread physical pain” (p. 186).

**The prayer of the heart.** Louchakova (2007) stated that the prayer of the heart (PH) is a Christian spiritual practice that consists of the phenomenological explications of the self and leads to ego-transcendence. The author further added, “The esoteric practice of the PH is a part of the contemporary oral Christian tradition, where it serves the
specific purpose of rendering experience of the living God” (p. 261). Ryan (2004) stated that this prayer is known as the Jesus prayer and involves uniting our words and breath with the inner life of Christ. The author further describes the method of this prayer: (a) choose a word that best expresses your desire to be one with Christ, (b) repeat the word continuously while synchronizing your breath, (c) meditate on your desire for communion with Christ, (d) observe thoughts without judgment and release these thoughts while continuing to abide in the heart with your word and breath. Ryan added, “In this process, we become increasingly absorbed in the Heart of Christ in our own heart, in the interior movements of presence and self-offering in love” (p. 3). This type of spiritual practice can be adjusted to any type of personal belief or religion.

Loving-kindness meditation. This meditation develops personal awareness, altruistic love, and positive attitudinal changes. Fronsdal (2008) wrote a description of how to practice this type of meditation. The author begins the instructions with sitting very comfortably and focusing on deep breaths. The participant then makes personal affirmations, which include statements such as: May I be happy; May I be well; May I be safe; May I be loved. These statements should be made slowly as the individual allows the affirmations to flood his or her body, mind, and spirit. The next step is to use imagery to focus on another individual or even a community and make additional affirmations: May you be happy; May you be well, May you be safe; May you be loved. The important aspects of the meditation are to connect the individual with a unified field of consciousness and to allow loving feelings to flow throughout the body.

Mind balancing. Linehan (2015), in her extensive research on the works of Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990, 2013) and her specific work with clients who are suicidal, implemented many different mindfulness skills. One such skill involves the attempt to help individuals balance a mind that is always busy versus a mind that is merely being. One way to do this is by taking a nonjudgmental stance. This technique involves merely observing one’s reactions to a situation rather than judging the situation. For example, if someone says a derogatory comment about one’s clothes, hair, or shoes, the initial gut reaction might be to say that person was bad or correct in that statement. Not judging the response leads to merely taking a curious look at how one reacts to such a statement. It provides permission to feel the emotions that emerge, experience the thoughts that arise, and accept it as it is without judgment (Linehan, 2015).

Acceptance

Related Literature

As more knowledge is attained regarding interconnectedness between mind, body, and spirit, there has been an emergence of a more holistic approach to not only psychiatry but the practical application from a mental health perspective (Culliford, 2011). This holistic approach encompasses the understanding that faith development continues throughout the lifespan and religion and spirituality are a means by which individuals come to make meaning out of their world (Culliford, 2011; Poole & Higgo, 2011). A part of this holistic approach is the emergence of improving quality of life for individuals and extending human life span on earth through approaching health conditions, diseases, and other public health matters from a prevention and intervention perspective (Compas, Haaga, Keefe, Leitenberg, & Williams, 1998; H. S. Friedman & Adler, 2007). This
approach has expanded because there is a universal reality that all individuals experience some suffering and attempt to find a way to heal from it and hopefully find meaning. Knowing that a common factor in the span of human life is suffering and how quickly one desires to alleviate suffering, the concept of acceptance can help increase understanding of the normalcy of suffering as a universal problem that cannot be completely eliminated (Gundy, Woidneck, Pratt, Christian, & Twohig, 2011; Hayes, 2005). A core concept in transpersonal psychology is the recognition that each part of the individual is fundamentally and ultimately a part of the whole. Transpersonal literally means “beyond the mask,” and transpersonal psychology seeks to disclose the deeper nature of our roles and self-images (Davis, 2000). Self-acceptance is an importance aspect of unifying the self.

According to Rogers, Steen, and McGregor (2013), “acceptance is central to interpersonal relationships and is considered a core element of some therapeutic approaches” (p.113). When considering this construct for psychotherapy, the authors view acceptance in a spiritual context in which a client can learn to accept all aspects of self, which include “feelings, thoughts, actions, and sensations” (Rogers et al., 2013, p. 117). According to Hayes (2005), “Acceptance is the act of receiving . . . taking completely, in the moment, without defense” (p. 45). Behind the notion of acceptance is the concept of applying meaning and understanding based upon experiences, which creates a learned reaction. As part of the human experience, individuals attempt to suppress feelings, including physical sensations, especially in the presence of somatic pain or distressing emotions that are commonly related to events (Frances, Miller, & Mack, 2005; Hayes, 2005). The attempt to suppress or problem-solve these emotions by avoidance or alleviation in various forms as a means of self-control and regulation are counterproductive (Cioffi & Holloway, 1993; Hayes, 2005; Hayes, 2012,). If an individual was swimming in the ocean and the undertow took him or her under causing a near drowning, the individual now associates the ocean with that negative event and a negative learned relationship occurs. The spiritual healing application process with acceptance includes the power of acknowledging that the very act of acceptance involves a person stepping back, acknowledging, being aware, and taking action that is value driven (Hayes, 2005; Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006). According to Gundy, Woidneck, Pratt, Christian, and Twohig (2011), “Acceptance involves making room for inner experiences and not engaging in attempts to control or regulate them” (p. 25). Lack of acceptance of the reality of pain in one’s life is an obstacle to the unfolding of the change process (Schwartz, 2013). As a result, acceptance skills and strategies can be a welcomed tool to help clients transform, understand emotions and behaviors, and learn to accept life as it is (Linehan & Wilks, 2015).

Acceptance Techniques

Cognitive diffusion: The power of a word. The primary purpose of cognitive diffusion is to recognize that thoughts are merely thoughts and not representations of reality (Brady & Whitman, 2012; Hayes, 2005). One activity involves asking the client to repeat a word rapidly for 2 minutes. Doing this rapid repetition helps to weaken the meaning of the thought and separate thoughts from the referents (Brady & Whitman, 2012; Hayes, 2005). According to Hayes (2005), “When you think a thought, it structures your world. When you see a thought you can still see how it structures your world (you
understand what it means), but you also see that you are doing the structuring” (p. 71). In this context, any word could be used as the focus. After the word is repeated, the individual reflects on the experience of the 2 minute exercise and what happened to the meaning of the word, how odd it sounds to repeat it, and how your mouth moved as it was repeated (Hayes, 2005). An individual can start the exercise using words such as hat and then move into deeper words such as love, bully, or abuse. The goal of this exercise is to help you to realize it is just a word and not attach meaning to it. This can be a powerful way to recognize that one is not a mere thought but a spiritual complex being.

**Cognitive diffusion: Floating leaves on a moving stream.** Hayes (2005) described an activity where an individual closes his or her eyes and imagines a slow-moving stream. The stream flows across land formations, such as hard rocks and stumps, and flows downward. As an individual imagines this stream, he or she is asked to stay in that image for a while and then imagine a big leaf dropping down into the stream and floating away. Imagining the stream flowing and the leaves falling periodically, the individual should place himself on the side of the stream watching those leaves floating by. Each time a thought emerges, the person is to place the thoughts on one leaf at a time and allow it to float on by (Hayes, 2005; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). Hayes (2005) further added, “The goal is to stay beside the stream and allow the leaves on the stream to keep flowing by” (p. 77). This activity helps an individual learned to observe thoughts versus becoming the thought (Brady & Whitman, 2012).

**Contact with the present moment: Silent walking.** Having present moment awareness helps individuals to enhance their understanding of personal thoughts, beliefs, and subsequent emotions and behaviors (Brady & Whitman, 2012; Hayes, 2005). Present moment thinking allows the individual to experience the power of having radical acceptance of a situation. “Radical acceptance is the ability to acknowledge whatever is happening to you right now without fighting it, judging the event, or criticizing yourself and others” (Linehan, 1993, p. 517). One activity to help an individual become more present is through the act of silent walking. The goal is to take at least 10 minutes a day and walk in silence. This walk needs to be alone but can be in a neighborhood, park, or simply around the outside of a house. As an individual walks, the goal is to listen to the content flowing through the mind, observe the surroundings, and recognize the feelings within one’s body. As one walks, recognize the thoughts or body sensations and then say them aloud three times. For example, if one thinks cold, he or she should say “cold, cold, cold.” The primary goal is to assist with keeping an individual present in the moment and move away from diffusing the thoughts and recognizing the here and now as the word is spoken aloud (Hayes, 2005). This activity can enhance self-awareness as one begins to get in touch with the internal reactions to the present and begins to promote spiritual growth.

**Minute breathing space.** Another activity that can be implemented on a daily basis and developed as a cognitive therapy approach to stay present is developing a breathing space. This practice helps develop a routine practice of focusing internally versus externally when maintaining conscious contact with the present (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). With three steps to the breathing space, an individual can develop a pattern of practicing this method for 3 minutes up to three times a day. The first step involves stopping the cycle of being in automatic pilot and asking one’s self “Where am I?” and “What is going on?” This encourages recognition of what is happening in the
present. The second step involves pulling away from all the thoughts and making the breath the focal point. The third step involved is maintaining awareness of the breath and having a heightened sensation of the body as well (Segal et al., 2002). “A transcendent sense of self is critical in therapy because unlike the conceptualized self (the object-like, evaluated self), it is a sense of self that cannot be threatened by the content of experience” (Hayes, 2012, p. 458). Wicks (2012) encouraged a similar practice where he discussed the daily practice of at least 3 minutes of silence with solitude maintaining a heightened sense of gratitude.

**Expansion, observing self, and acceptance.** The ability to make oneself open to painful feelings and sensations helps to expand one beyond trying to avoid it. This is accomplished by being aware of and paying attention in a purposeful way and using techniques to assist with accepting the plethora of emotions, sensations, and fully embracing them (Gundy et al., 2011; Hayes, 2012; McCracken & Vowles, 2014). To promote acceptance, one must expand his or her mind to recognize that experiences happen and can result in uneasy feelings, and that by recognizing these emotions, the pain is not removed. However the acceptance of the pain can promote healthy action and commitment (Brady & Whitman, 2012; Hayes, 2005).

**Willingness: The pain in your head.** Part of the expansion of one’s experience is a sense of willingness. It is about embracing all the thoughts, feelings, and memories that show up and merely accepting them. One way to capture an individual’s willingness to be open is to draw a picture of a head on a piece of paper. In that picture, an individual is urged to write down one or multiple troubling emotions, memories, thoughts or sensations. Once written down, an individual should step back and observe what is on the paper and write down what other strong emotions emerge from reading through it. The individual should continue doing this until all emotions are written on the paper. Once completed, make a copy of the head with all the words, fold it up, and keep it. Finally, the individual needs to step back and say, “I can carry this around and accept me as I am.” This technique promotes willingness from the client to accept all thoughts, emotions, experiences with no intention to avoid painful feelings (Hayes, 2005).

**Self-Awareness: I am; experientially, I’m not that.** Individuals often believe that the thoughts within their minds define them and are a “literal truth” (Hayes, 2005, p. 87). To combat this belief, it is critical that individuals evaluate self-concept on the journey of self-evaluation. One method to evaluate this conceptualized self is by responding to open-ended phrases including, “I am a person who . . . I am a person who does not . . . My favorite part about myself is . . . My least favorite part about myself is . . . I have been wronged because other people have . . . I am a person who is bad at . . .” (Hayes, 2005, p. 89). Once answered, an individual can see the clearly defined perception of self and can move into being a more observing self who is becoming accepting and present, and values can then begin to take shape. Hayes (2005) clearly articulated a way to begin to be the observing self in the following:

Simply get seated comfortably in a chair in front of a small desk near a wall. There should be several objects on the desk. Take a couple of deep breaths and then start by looking at a spot on the wall while breathing deeply and regularly. Keep your eyes on one spot for at least ten to fifteen seconds or thereabouts. At some point after that (don’t rush it), it will occur to you experientially that you are looking at the wall, and thus at an
experiential level (in some sense of the term) you are not the wall. This is a distinction that is available in direct experience. We are not talking about the verbal belief that you are not the wall. If that were the point, we wouldn’t need a meditative exercise since few of us believe we are the wall. . . . When that experiential distinction between the observing self and the events observed comes into awareness, just notice it and gently file it away (do not try to believe the distinction or your mind will start chattering away, arguing, interpreting, and so on). (pp. 97–98)

As this process unfolds, an individual will begin the process of accepting the observing self which encompass thoughts, emotions, and present moment experiences.


This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
Meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond. (p. 109)

This poem can establish a metaphor regarding the need to accept who we are as we are with all the expected and unexpected events in our lives that evoke emotions. For this reflection, the author suggests to take 5 minutes a day reading through the poem aloud. Once read, whatever words resonate from the poem can be reflected upon in silence meditation with full acceptance and without judgment.

Values Formation

Related Literature

Transpersonal psychology focuses on higher human qualities such as compassion for self and others, faith, goals, and values. Small (2000) stated, “These higher qualities exist within us and can be more easily accessed when validated as legitimate, making ordinary circumstances and difficulties in life easier to handle” (p. 9). According to Hayes (2005), values are not goals, feelings, or outcomes. Small stated that values are choices about what is worthy and strong in our lives. He added,
Values define not only what you want to pursue from day to day but what you want your life to be about. In some sense, what’s at stake here is a matter of life and death, or at least the difference between a vital life and a deadened life. (p. 166)

Horowitz (2014) stated, “Values are enduring and slowly changing beliefs that functionally operate as if they were moral reasons for and against moving an incipient intention, wish, desire, need, or aim into a plan for action” (p. 672). Values, which are consistent and congruent with concrete goals, serve to modify and facilitate behaviors (Dahl, Stewart, Martell, & Kaplan, 2013). One key aspect of the counseling process is to guide the client in affirming committed actions based on his or her declared values. Therapists have various techniques that encourage values-consistent behaviors and allow the client to take small steps toward achieving goals. Transpersonal psychology is much more than just a theory concerning spiritual experiences. It is a holistic perspective with an emphasis on meaning, purpose, and values (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). Assagioli (1991) stated that the work of self-identification is accomplished through the balance of awareness, will, and the continual orientation towards the purpose, meaning, and values that define an individual.

Value Formation Techniques

Socratic dialogue. Socrates believed that it was the task of the teacher not to pour information into the students, but rather to elicit from the students what they know intuitively. Viktor Frankl, founder of logotherapy, noted that in the depth of our spiritual dimension, we know what kind of person we are, what our potentials are, and what is important and meaningful to us (Grabar, 2003). The Socratic dialogue avoids “why” questions. Also avoided are questions that can be answered with yes or no. Instead, questions are asked centering around: what, how, when, who, where, if, etc. Examples of Socratic questions are as follows:

1) If your whole life had been designed in advance so that you would learn something from it, what would be the lesson you were supposed to have learned?

2) What is the source of meaning for your life?

3) If you only have 30 days left, how would you feel? What would you do?

Attending your own funeral. Hayes (2005) included an exercise to explore aspects of your life when choices are freely made. The client is asked to write what might be said at his/her funeral if their current struggle or problem continues to dominate in their life, or even grows. This can be a very powerful, enlightening activity that employs imagery and creativity. Now have the client write what he or she wants to hear in their eulogy if they lived their life true to their inner most values. The author adds that the way you want to be remembered will charter your course for what you value currently.

Naikan practice. Jacobs-Stewart (2010) discussed a simple, beautiful way of taking personal inventory. This Japanese practice is called Naikan and allows the individual to reflect by asking simple but profound questions at the end of the day. These questions include:
1) What have I received?
2) What have I given?
3) What difficulties have I caused?

The first questions shift our thinking from our problems to the joy of gratitude. By meditating on the small things for which we are grateful, we are able to self-reflect on the blessings in our life. The author adds that the second question moves our focus from ourselves to what we have given back to others and helps us to take stock of our deeds of altruism over a 24-hour period. According to the author, the last question involves the process of owning up to our actions and cleaning up our relationship messes.

**Stranded.** Strosahl and Robinson (2008) used an awareness exercise to help the client clarify his or her values. This exercise involves imagining that you have been in a boating accident far out at sea and are able to swim to the shore of an island in the Pacific Ocean. You turn your thoughts to your family and friends and begin to imagine what would be said at a memorial service. Close your eyes and see yourself as an invisible bird hovering above the service. What would your life partner say about you? What would your friends say? How would people describe you and your service to the community? In debriefing this exercise, the counselor would want the client to compare the actual comments with what the client would like to hear. This would help the client have a new perspective on the areas in life that are truly important.

**Classic literature.** When considering a creative approach to assisting individuals with knowing and living according to their values, the use of stories, movies, or poems has proven to be beneficial for the client (Burns, 2005; Jacobs, 1994). This can be accomplished by asking an individual to consider the use of classic literature where various values are assessed, from issues of friendship to topics of religious or spiritual beliefs. In addition, the use of classic movies, such as *The Wizard of Oz* or *Liar, Liar*, may evoke an individual to begin to question self in relation to others and to look at the priorities in one’s life. After a movie is watched, specific questions can be evaluated such as: a) What did this character value? b) What was the value conflict? and c) How could this problem be solved? (Burns, 2005). The use of various media sources can pull an individual away from looking merely at self to considering how such events, as portrayed via literature or media, might transform one’s thinking into looking at life priorities in a new and tangible way. Adams (2009) explored the use of creative literature therapy in counseling to explore ego states and found it to be quite effective as it promotes exploration of a new way to consider an idea.

**Conclusions**

Mental health counseling is now going back to the past to define the future. Many new counselor education programs encompass the heart, mind, and soul of the client with an emphasis on counselor self-awareness. The tenets of transpersonal psychology include personal growth, spirituality, being of service to the world, expanding consciousness, and working toward wholeness (Strohl, 1998). These tenets are promoted by the practice of mindfulness, by the use of acceptance techniques, and by the exploration of personal values. Mindfulness is a sound clinical practice of psychotherapy with neuro-physiological and psychology effects, which creates a lifestyle change of living in the
present moment and defines the study and culture of consciousness. Research studies have validated the emotional and physiological benefits of practicing mindfulness meditation and of experiencing the expansion of the ego and personality. Acceptance is a powerful psychological construct that allows the client to experience heartfulness and soulfulness. Self-acceptance and forgiveness are essential aspects of holistic wellness and are the foundations of releasing energetic blockages. Verbalizing and processing personal values in the counseling process allows the client to evaluate and modify dysfunctional beliefs.

Strohl (1998) stated, “Transpersonalism is an approach that does not challenge or supplant other models, but it respectfully considers an expanded view of human nature while incorporating elements of behaviorism, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology, Jungian analysis, and Eastern psychology” (p. 399). The author so beautifully adds that transpersonal psychology has a romantic worldview, which affirms the internal, transformational qualities and divine realities of human beings and encourages an experiential approach to learning and knowledge. Abraham Maslow and William James would certainly be delighted to see the current influence of religion, spirituality, and consciousness on clinical mental health practice. These great men understood that self-actualization is so much more than just enjoying the fruits of the material world. They knew that personal growth, independence, and creative freedom came from moving past the limits and boundaries of the material world to the deepest truths of life. Counselors have an opportunity to help clients become mindful of moment to moment awareness, to promote self-acceptance and courage, and to foster self-exploration of personal values.

References


*Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/vistas*