

Life stories as soul journeys

Cedric Speyer introduces his psychospiritual model with an extract from his book

Extra toolkit practices online

Cedric will be discussing a soul journey-oriented approach to the assessment process in a podcast on the ***Thresholds* website**



All good therapy allows clients to tell themselves a different story about their life situation than the one limiting their possible choices. When we also consider what the soul wants, new heights and depths and breadths of personhood can be revealed. It is like looking at a person through a telescope rather than a microscope. We can see a vast interior landscape with previously unconsidered horizons. Psychotherapy is not just about deconstructing and reconstructing the plotlines of personality, giving a future to the past that it heretofore never had. There is value in that. Yet there is a whole realm of human development that cannot be defined by psychodynamic theory. It incorporates an integrative approach to therapy, drawing upon literature, art and spirituality. That is all part of the bigger story. It is the story of soul growth, which has developmental stages of its own and an evolutionary purpose. Our sense of self expands to the extent it is informed by what the literary arts have always offered: metaphors, analogies, allegories, chronicles, archetypes, mythologies and all the imaginative tapestries out of which positive life patterns are woven. What is therapy for and soul growth about, if not to bring a more expansive sense of self to the immediacy of life's built-in limitations. That is the challenge.

The following is an excerpt from chapter three (*Living in a bigger story*) from *Applications of a psychospiritual model in the helping professions: principles of InnerView Guidance*,¹ a book that I have co-written with Dr John Yaphe. It offers an introduction to the psychospiritual model called InnerView that we have developed for training coaches, counsellors and psychotherapists.

The InnerView vision positions the helping professional as a 'guide at the crossroads' where different dimensions of life intersect. The crossroads is where the crux of life's contradictions and paradoxes is acutely felt.^{2,3} The bigger story is also where the foreground and background of life's challenges are equally present. It is the perspective from which any problem takes place in the larger context of a soul's sacred story.⁴ The person can then discern what ongoing soul formation could emerge from present challenges.⁵ We explore what the client's experience and wisdom have to say about what is ultimately soul-restoring for them. We want to affirm that the client is worthy of love and belonging and help them envision their rightful place in the human community. We look for evidence of courage to face challenges, practise compassion, and become congruent with what one loves.

What would characterise the awareness of a person informed by larger infinite meanings, not limited to the immediate contingencies of day-to-day existence? That person would have a bird's eye view of reality and not be mired in the worm's eye view that lacks the capacity to step back from the immediate circumstances of their lives. They would intentionally engage the heights and depths of their humanity through the wide-angle lens of consciousness. It is the difference between a divergent form of attention, at risk of becoming scattered and ineffectual, and a convergent awareness that aligns physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels of being.

In the physical realm, we tend to deny mortality and defend against death with self-serving strategies for happiness. The bigger story involves giving oneself to projects and causes which benefit the next generations. In the emotional realm,



we tend to be absorbed in the drama of attachments, often bound up with projections of the shadow self. Yet we might also claim the freedom to navigate the complex dynamics of close relationships while anchored in unconditional love.⁶ Mentally, in the egoic state, we are prone to thinking in either-or categories. The broader view of the soul's truth is inclusive and rooted in underlying values such as honesty, courage, kindness, and compassion. In the spiritual realm, we may identify with an idealised self.

When that self-concept is split off from human limitations, it may lead to illusions of invulnerability and superiority. In the bigger story, we tap into archetypal sources of personhood that we all have in common yet express in unique ways.

Going to the crossroads

As we grow in consciousness, each of us goes to the crossroads, willingly or not, to find our way forward. The crossroads is where the horizontal dimension of life (the interpersonal, social, and political) intersects with the vertical dimension (the transpersonal, ethical, and spiritual). It is where day-to-day decisions influence the integration of individuals, families, communities, as well as the evolution of the world at large. From this perspective, there are no insignificant gestures or moments. This is where overarching wisdom is needed to embrace life's contradictions instead of polarising them. This approach helps expand the client's sense of identity by exploring where the linear progress of life meets the eternal dimension. When a client connects interiorly with the essential qualities of truth, beauty, and love, it can help make even their seemingly intolerable experiences meaningful and potentially transformative.⁷

The InnerView practitioner helps persons understand they are being summoned to explore the interior landscape where the demands of a life situation take place. That is what we call soul work. We look for the soul strengths being called forth, and the essential qualities struggling to emerge in a person's unique way of grappling with circumstances. The InnerView practitioner is always asking the same question, customised to the feelings, needs, values, and purposes of the client: what capacities are needed to stay on the growing edge of this life situation? InnerView guidance is the process of eliciting those innate strengths and bringing the essential traits informing them to the fore. This is how a client's inner and outer worlds can become more congruent. It is the landscape of what the soul wants when informed by the nuanced voice of wisdom. No matter how brief or long term, it is a therapeutic journey from present predicaments to preferred states and from conditioned patterns to empowered choices.

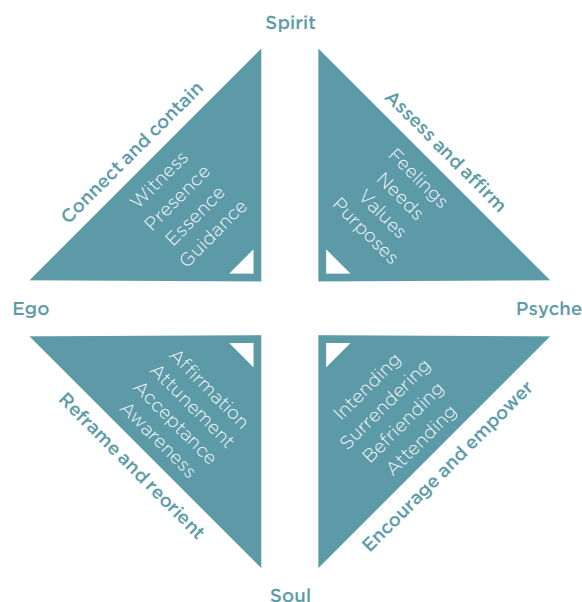
Freedom for growth

There is a shift in the balance of power between ego and spirit when we achieve freedom from depression, anxiety, addictions, codependence, and other presenting issues. Yet there is a further step for soul growth beyond symptom relief; it is freedom for the contribution we can make to the world in our local sphere of influence. In the InnerView approach to healing, we seek congruence between the interior landscape of what the soul wants and the life purpose we are meant to manifest in the world. The paradox is that we need to look within to see beyond ourselves. Inner transformation is reflected in outer manifestation. We look beneath the surface of life circumstances and put mental health in the context of the overarching perspective of soul work. Ira Progoff recommended a first step in this direction when he said: 'As the work proceeded, it became apparent that the empirical data for holistic depth psychology are to be found not in case histories but in life histories'.⁸

Depending on the client's spiritual orientation, the interior journey could be framed in terms of a quest for deeper meaning, the result of a personal awakening, or a desire to grow closer to that which they call God. Given client readiness from any of these perspectives, InnerView guidance connects persons with their inner voice of wisdom, maps out the terrain of their psychospiritual life, and brings more clarity to their life purpose. Along the way, clients learn to claim their strengths and self-worth and engage with others authentically. They situate where they have been, where they are, and where they are going on their psychospiritual path. They embrace their imperfect human nature and view their life situation through the viewfinder of wellbeing, using a wide-angle lens. They practise expanding rather than contracting their emotional capacity when facing challenging life circumstances. They explore inner and outer resources to overcome obstacles on their own path. They feel they are an integral part of an evolving human community. Through mindfulness practices, they learn to access the inner calm and confidence that helps them connect with their values.

Figure 1: The 4-Fold map path

www.innerviewguidance.com/4foldpath



The genuinely religious imagination (from the Latin word *religare*, meaning to tie, bind together) seeks to embrace the contradictions of life, with its order and chaos, comedy and tragedy, reality and revelation. The ego's tendency is to polarise these apparent opposites. From the soul's point of view, the dichotomies are contained within a unified field. Our personal perspective takes place in a landscape of transpersonal and archetypal realms. With that shift in consciousness, we then survey the inner terrain for the soul growth we want to nurture.

Risk of spiritual bypassing

Spirituality without the kind of psychological integration InnerView represents is plagued by the prevalence of 'spiritual bypassing' when genuine soul work is disregarded.⁶ It is what happens when developmental processes are overlooked, often under the sway of spiritual leaders with vested interest in the immaturity of their followers.⁹ There are various ways in which ordinary, developmental stages of maturity can be displaced by high-minded denial of shadow elements in the psyche.

John Welwood was one of the first to draw attention to developmental process skipping. 'The attempt to use spiritual ideas and practices to avoid dealing with emotional unfinished business – notably our woundedness around love,' he writes, '...usually has disastrous consequences, especially in the West, frequently leading to psychological imbalance and destructive behaviour. My term for this kind of dissociation and denial is spiritual bypassing.'⁶ The balanced alternative is to embrace the contradictions of life while holding a creative tension between our limits and potentials.¹⁰ Archetypal psychology has emphasised that we cannot explore the heights of life without delving honestly into its subconscious depths.¹¹ All genuine religious experience points towards becoming fully human in this way.

Containing the dichotomies

Whether in social, political, or religious spheres, we see the fallout from dichotomous thinking in the polarised worldview of win or lose, good guys and bad guys, and us against them. Such duality has its roots in the ancient conflicts that pit faith against science, and ego against soul, for example. Lost is the integration of opposites we find whenever co-existent qualities such as compassion and detachment are held in creative tension (see figure 1). When opposing ideas or clashing energies of all kinds collide within us or in society, we are naturally aggrieved. We tend to keep a tight grip on our emotional position and mentally or literally expel that which threatens us. Most of human history charts the violent power struggles that result from opposing and entrenched stances. Sacred history, both individual and collective, shows a third way of integration and synthesis, which is the antidote to the escalation of polarised grievances. It takes creative courage to maintain rather than escape the contradictions inherent in human reality. The intention of living in a bigger story is to resolve splits in the psyche. It is the way of, Buddha, Jesus, Maimonides, Jalaluddin Rumi, Mahatma Gandhi, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Etty Hillesum, among other spiritual heroes from all traditions.

Applying this dialectic to contemporary psychology brings us back to our therapeutic role as guides at the crossroads of developmental crises in the lives of our clients. It returns us to the study of redemptive values tempering the due diligence of clinical diagnosis. In practice, we apply the full scope of clinical expertise to the negative core issue. This is the glare of the assessment phase. Yet it is offset by a positive gaze on client strengths. While the glare provides valuable insight into self-defeating attitudes and problematic patterns, the gaze is focused squarely on the intrinsic capacity of persons to overcome, transform, or transcend painful life circumstances. It is a matter of remaining ever-alert to the intersection of the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of life. That is where the psychologically synergistic and synchronistic events take place. That is where we can show our clients, through the circumstances of their lives, that every problem exists as a means to call forth qualities from the gifts within. It suggests to clients that their perceived misery may have meaning, that healing may be hidden within the disease, and that every problem contains the seeds for potentialities of the soul.

This is an excerpt from Applications of a Psychospiritual Model in the Helping Professions, by Cedric Speyer and John Yaphe.

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Biography



Cedric Speyer is a writer, registered psychotherapist and mentor. He pioneered e-counselling in Canada, overseeing 100,000 online cases before establishing InnerView Guidance International (IGI). The vision of IGI brings together the historically separate domains of mental health and spiritual awareness in a new synthesis for the helping professions. www.innerviewguidance.com

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