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SEEKING THE SACRED: THE ASSESSMENT OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE THERAPY PROCESS

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> The mind and the body, in fact all the various phenomena of nature, are in a condition of incessant change. But the highest aspiration of our soul is to find something that does not change. . . . And this is the aspiration of the soul after the Infinite.
>
> —D. DeLuca (2003)

Many spiritual traditions, both Eastern and Western, highlight a process of creation, maintenance, and transformation leading back to renewed creation. In this process, a person continually moves toward growth and spiritual integration. For example, in Hinduism there are the divine manifestations of Brahma, the creator of the universe, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva, who destroys and transforms in order for Brahma to create anew. Although these deities ultimately reflect one manifestation of the Supreme Being (Hindu Trinity), they correspond to the three "cosmic functions" inherent in the world: creation, preservation, and dissolution necessary for re-creation (Pandit, 2005). These cosmic functions also correspond with the sound vibration *AUM* (commonly used in yoga studies): *A*, representing creation, *U* representing preservation, and M representing dissolution and re-creation (Pandit, 2005, p. 29). Within Christianity, Jesus exemplifies the process of divine birth (creation), life (preservation), death (dissolution), and resurrection (re-creation). Within these spiritual traditions, each of these serves as an example and role model for human life, representing an ultimate goal of spiritual growth and integration.

Similarly, Pargament (2007) outlined a framework for understanding and addressing the sacred dimension in a client's life. Within this model, a person engages in a developmental process of discovery of the sacred, conservation,

and transformation (see Figure 5.1). Throughout this process, Pargament also highlighted the use of diverse methods of spiritual coping as a person confronts the realities of existence (e.g., pain, loss, death). Ultimately, the spiritual trajectory leads to spiritual integration and growth, or a sense of spiritual disintegration, disengagement, and decline. As therapists, we can assist our clients in moving toward both psychological and spiritual integration.

In this chapter, we highlight how therapists can assess the spirituality of their clients by examining the processes of discovery, conservation, and transformation (see Figure 5.1). First, we provide a theoretically grounded framework for orienting therapists to the sacred dimension. Next, we illustrate the assessment process within this model and provide some spiritual assessment strategies. We feature examples on sexual abuse, given the clinical emphasis of the first author. (All identifying facts have been changed in every case to protect the anonymity of the clients.) However, we hope that therapists can draw parallels to the myriad of concerns clients present with in therapy. Finally, we offer some cautions and caveats when engaging in this type of work.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING THE SACRED

It is useful for therapists to have a framework that guides us when working with clients. From a psychological perspective, we often look through theoretical lenses such as humanistic, cognitive–behavioral, family systems, or integrative approaches. From a spiritual perspective, it is also helpful to have an orienting map that directs us when exploring the spiritual dimension of a person's life. In this chapter, we offer a theoretically grounded approach to assessing spirituality in the therapy process. Although we highlight cases of sexual trauma, the model serves as a framework for a diverse range of presenting concerns.

There are many ways to assess spirituality and religion. For example, Richards and Bergin (2005) offered a multilevel framework, including clinical questions and potential measures to assess clients' religious and spiritual backgrounds. Similarly, Pargament and Krumrei (2009) proposed a comprehensive framework for spiritual assessment including clients' spiritual journeys, content of spiritual beliefs and practices, the context of spirituality in a person's life, and the impact of spirituality in a client's life. We do not propose that the model presented in this chapter is the only way to conceptualize a client's spirituality. It represents just one useful map to orient and guide therapists as they work with the complex and multidimensional world of spirituality and human living. Also, we offer this framework to assist therapists with clients who have spiritual and religious inclinations, beliefs, or experiences. We do not contend that all humans have a spiritually based perspective or
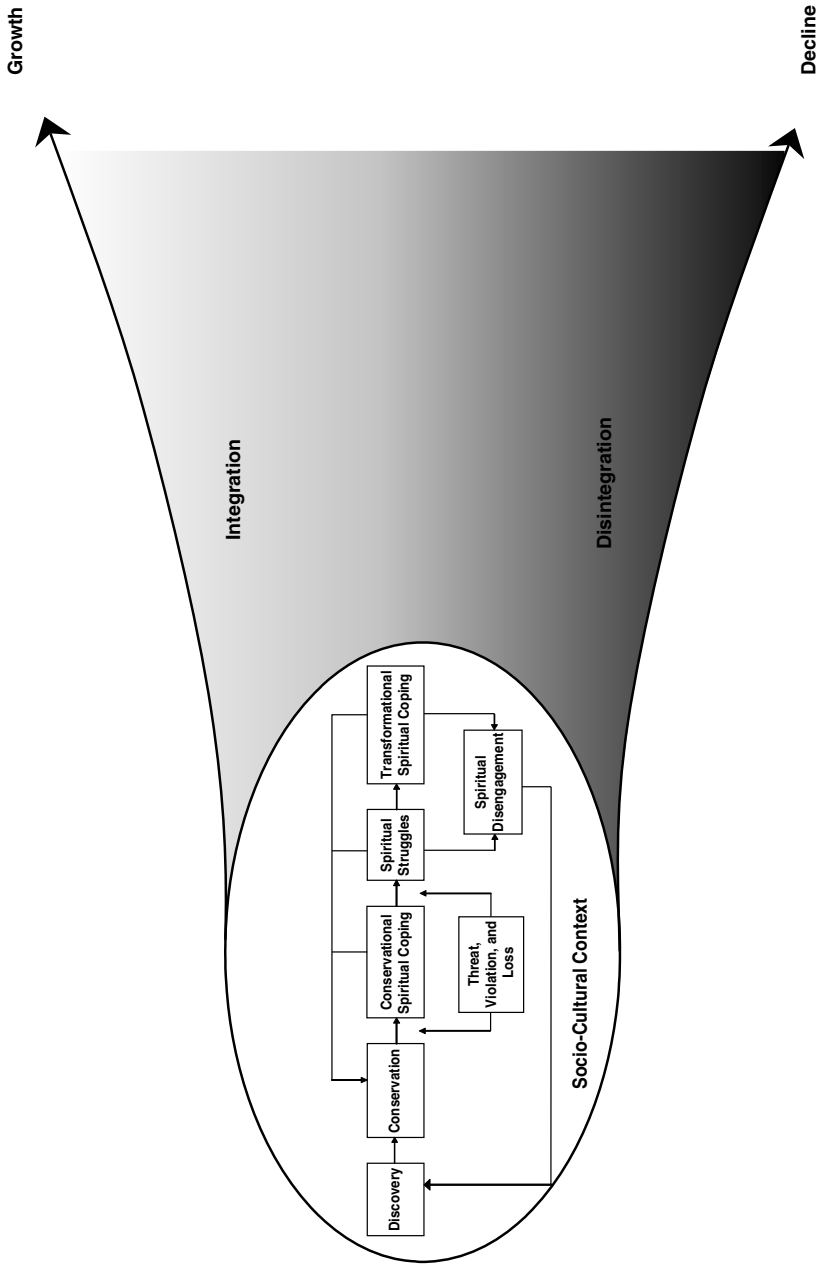
Figure 5.1. The search for the sacred. Adapted from *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred* (p. 136), by K. I. Pargament, 2007, New York, NY: Guilford. Copyright 2007 by Guilford Press. Adapted with permission.

that they should have one to be fully functioning. However, we focus on clients who have some view of spirituality in their lives.

Whereas definitions of spirituality and religion are covered in depth elsewhere in this book, in this chapter we define *spirituality* as a "search for the sacred" (Pargament, 1999, p. 12). These two important terms, *search* and *sacred*, reflect a process across a person's lifetime whereby he or she seeks the sacred. This process of seeking follows a client-specific, unique, developmental trajectory embedded within a sociocultural context. Often, the way children search for the sacred differs from the way adults do. A child who believes in an "old man in the sky" may come to view the sacred very differently as an adult. One important point is that the developmental process of spirituality includes change. From a Buddhist perspective, one noble truth highlights "impermanence": all things change, including thoughts, feelings, our bodies, and even life itself (Goldstein, 2002). Therefore, it becomes important to understand that spirituality in a client's life reflects a dynamic, changing process.

Next, we can ask the question "What are we searching for?" We use the term *the sacred* to broadly encompass the diverse ways that people seek spirituality. Depending on faith traditions, the sacred may include a personal God, Allah, Creator, or Goddess. It may include Eastern ideas of the Inner Self, Atman, Awakened Mind, or Buddha-nature. Frequently, it involves notions of transcendence, something beyond the confines of one's self, ego, and mind. In addition, the sacred can include nature, relationships, time, and places. Virtually any aspect of living can become associated with the sacred, and thus become a part of one's search for spirituality. For the purposes of this chapter, the sacred will be ultimately revealed through what the client perceives as the sacred in all its diversity.

Pargament (2007) outlined a framework for assessing this search for the sacred in a client's life. In this model (see Figure 5.1), he outlined three key processes: discovery, conservation, and transformation. *Discovery* involves the initial recognition of the sacred in a person's life. *Conservation* reflects the process of holding onto the sacred once it is found. *Transformation* includes an accommodative process of reshaping, redefining, and rediscovering the sacred in one's life.

As discussed previously, these three processes mirror fundamental aspects of the world's spiritual traditions (e.g., creation/birth, maintenance/preservation, destruction/transformation). In addition, these correspond to Kuhn's (1996) model of scientific development (i.e., "normal" and "revolutionary" phases) and to the primary cognitive functions described in Piaget's (1950) model of how humans adapt to their environments. From a Piagetian perspective, as human thinking progresses toward increasingly complex, sophisticated, and stable levels of organization, the development involves a balance between assimilation and accommodation. *Assimilation* refers to when new information

can be incorporated into existing cognitive structures (conservation). *Accommodation* (transformation) occurs when a person has to change pre-existing schemata to adapt to a new situation. Ultimately, people strive toward equilibration, a balance between these processes. Similarly, a person strives toward spiritual equilibrium and integration.

In addition to these primary aspects of spiritual and cognitive development (i.e., discovery, conservation, transformation), Pargament (2007) described the occurrence of *spiritual struggles*. Spiritual struggles result when one's efforts to conserve one's spirituality become difficult due to stressors, changes, traumas, and transitions in life. From a cognitive perspective, this struggle can occur when one's equilibrium is disrupted and new information (e.g., traumatic event) cannot be incorporated into one's existing world view; thus assimilation becomes difficult and the individual must consider a more fundamental change, namely accommodation. Spiritual struggles represent the tensions, questions, and uncertainties surrounding one's spiritual beliefs and practices and his or her external reality. Struggles are often resolved by accommodation, but if the fundamental change becomes impossible, spiritual disengagement results. Spiritual disengagement reflects the cessation of a person's search for the sacred in life. As seen in Figure 5.1, this disengagement can lead to disintegration and decline.[1] In addition, spiritual disengagement may also lead to a rediscovery of the sacred at another point in time.

Transformational spiritual coping can also lead back to conservation and the effort to sustain the new understanding and experience of the sacred, until the individual faces further challenges and the need for further accommodation. Similar to the increasing complexity, stability, and organization in cognitive development that result from the interplay between assimilation and accommodation, so too can one observe an increasingly complex and stable spiritual organization that leads to spiritual integration and growth. It can be helpful to envision a spiral, circling out toward greater expansion and growth. Of course, not all people experience times of spiritual struggle or spiritual transformation; the course of spiritual development is client-specific. However, Rosado (2003) observed, "Natural systems flow from stability to chaos to a reordering to a higher state of self-organization; it is the way of nature" (p. 13). Arguably, spiritual development, too, moves from stability (conservation) to "chaos" (struggle) to a "reordering" (transformation) to a "higher" state of spiritual integration.

All of these processes are embedded within the circle of one's sociocultural context. Therefore, the images in discovery, the beliefs and practices in conservation, the types of spiritual struggles, and what spiritual transformation

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[1]We do not intend to suggest that spiritual disengagement inevitably leads to disintegration and decline. For some individuals, spiritual disengagement may be a healthy choice and outcome. However, researchers (e.g., Pargament et al., 2004) have demonstrated that remaining in spiritual struggles and the inability to accommodate can lead to poor outcomes and functioning.

looks like cannot be separated from the cultural context. Writing about the spiritual lives of children, Coles (1990) observed in his interviews, "Often children give God their own hair color; indeed, a blond Lord, a blond Jesus, give way to darker divinities as one moves from Sweden to Hungary and Italy" (p. 44). From a developmental perspective, Roehlkepartain and colleagues (2006) noted the following:

> [Spiritual development is] consistent with developmental systems theories that emphasize the interaction between person and context, in which the child or adolescent is embedded within multiple contexts or ecologies (including culture, family, school, faith community, neighborhood, community, nation) that shape the young person's developmental path. . . . This perspective would suggest that spirituality is not only an individual quest but also a communal experience and phenomenon. (p. 10)

Therefore, attention to the cultural context and "communal" factors becomes paramount when assessing one's search for the sacred.

To summarize, we define spirituality as a "search for the sacred" (Pargament, 1999, p. 12) that involves the processes of discovery, conservation, spiritual struggles, and transformation. Ultimately, this dynamic progression can lead toward psychological and spiritual integration, as a person is able to face challenges in life and even death with internal and external resources, support, and stability. We turn next to each of these processes in more detail.

Discovery of the Sacred

Spirituality is a primary motivation in human living. Although not every person has a spiritual interest, spiritual strivings have been found across the world, in all cultures, and since the beginning of human history. From a cognitive perspective, Johnson and Boyatzis (2006) declared, "In conclusion, cognitive research leads us to believe that from early on human beings are naturally spiritual" (p. 220). In some cultures (e.g., Hindus in India), spirituality begins before human birth (Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, 2006). In other cultures, such as in West Africa, "newborns are considered the most spiritual of all living humans" (Gottlieb, 2006, p. 151). Within a personality paradigm, Piedmont (1999, 2001) has researched and described spirituality as a universal motivation and a "sixth" factor in personality. This sixth factor (after the "Big Five") organizes, selects, and inspires human behavior. Benson and colleagues (2003) described an "intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence" (p. 205). Overall, the search for the sacred is universal and cross-cultural.[2]

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[2]Although spirituality is universal and cross-cultural, we do not intend to convey that every individual has an interest in spirituality or has spiritual beliefs and practices. The focus of this chapter is on clients who do and on assessing the spiritual dimension in the process of therapy.

People discover the sacred in many different ways, at various times in their lives. To illustrate, a 56-year-old female client described her experiences of the sacred as follows:

> When I was a child, I wasn't raised in any religion. But I really connected to nature. Although I didn't know it at the time, that was spirituality to me, and it still is. When I stand looking out at the vastness of the mountains, I am connected.

Another 43-year-old female counseling student articulated her first memory of the sacred in her life:

> I first remember experiencing the sacred at a Catholic mass. My parents didn't take me to church or anything, but I went with a friend. I remember sitting in the pew and thinking, "There is this whole world of something beyond." It was really powerful for me.

Although these quotes represent adults reflecting back on the sacred in their childhood, children too have many different notions of the sacred. When my (NMS) daughter was 2½ years old, she asked me, "Mommy, who *is* God?" Stumbling at this moment, attempting to come up with a good 2½-year-old's description of God, she answered before I could: "But God lives *inside my heart,* Mommy." She depicted God much more poignantly (and elegantly) than I ever could have!

There are many sources of influence for the discovery of the sacred in an individual's life. For example, Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Marks (2006) discussed the influence of the family; Schwartz, Bukowski, and Aoki (2006) described the influence of mentors, friends, and gurus; and Newberg and Newberg (2006) examined the role of neurobiology. Some researchers have focused on the role of ethnicity and culture (e.g., Mattis et al., 2006). For the purposes of this chapter, we appreciate the variety of factors that influence one's initial discovery of the sacred. From a clinical perspective, we focus on the unique expression of spiritual discovery in a client's life. We listen for the sacred images, words, and stories that result from the myriad of influences that shape spiritual discovery. We attune our therapeutic ear to who the sacred is, when it was discovered, and how clients experience it. Overall, we listen for the spiritual narrative in a client's life; the story of discovery, conservation, and transformation.

Holding on to the Sacred: Conservation

Once the sacred is discovered, or in some traditions, recognized, people want to hold on to it. From a cognitive perspective, people are, in fact, reluctant to change their fundamental spiritual schemas. Pargament (2007) wrote, "From birth to death, people cling tenaciously to whatever they find

significant in their lives" (p. 78). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) discussed how people are most resistant to change attitudes that are central to them:

> The centrality of religious beliefs in the personal identities of devout people may account for the change-resistant nature of these beliefs. . . . Change in such an attitude would be disruptive because it would tend to induce a chain reaction of interrelated changes in associated cognition. Change is thus resisted because of the cognitive disruption it would produce. (p. 227)

Given the centrality and importance of the sacred in many peoples' lives, it makes sense that people want to maintain this source of meaning and significance. For example, a 37-year-old female client came in to see Nichole with a strong sense of her spirituality. Despite her history of childhood incest and pastor-perpetrated clergy sexual abuse, she maintained a vital and enduring connection with the sacred in her life. She described God as a father as follows:

> Strong, young, masculine, and able to handle anything. He is the creator and center of the universe. He is the king, more powerful than the riches of the world. His power radiates like the sun; it is all around. He is compassionate and merciful and cries, even though he is a man.

This client, despite her male perpetrated abuses, relied on the power and compassion of her "king of kings." Through her coping with her history of sexual abuse, she exclaimed, "My faith never wavered. Out of all the struggles, I always trusted. God was with me every step of the way." This client relied on prayer, going to the sanctuary at her church, the Bible, religious music, and spiritual friends for support and encouragement on her path to recovery and wholeness.

In general, there are many diverse pathways to the sacred. From a Hindu perspective, there are four main spiritual paths: jnana, bhakti, raja, and karma (Pandit, 2005; Teasdale, 2001). The *jnana* path involves seeking knowledge, or absolute truth, as the pathway to the divine. The *bhatki* path involves deep love and devotion; it is a relational approach. A bhakti yogi will often perform various devotional practices to honor his or her sacred relationship, such as kirtan, pujas, or rituals to the deities or to the guru of his or her devotion. *Raja* yoga involves intense spiritual practice; it is the path of meditation and experience. *Karma* yoga is the pathway of action, of *seva*, or selfless service to the divine. Although a person can practice all of these, often he or she will be drawn to particular pathways to the divine. These pathways exist to help a yogi or yogini seek ultimate spiritual union and encompass the various temperaments of human beings.

Within Buddhism, the Dzochen Ponlop Rinpoche outlined the three wheels on the path to pranja, or transcendental knowledge (Rinpoche, 2006). First, he discussed the wheel of study, of knowledge of the dharma. Next, he

described the wheel of meditation, of experiencing the nature of the mind. Last, he illustrated the wheel of action, of beneficial and ethical conduct in the world (Rinpoche, 2006).

In a similar vein, Pargament (2007) identified four primary pathways to the sacred: knowing, acting, relating, and experiencing. In the pathway of knowing, people may read the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels of Jesus, the Qur'an, or spiritual books. They may practice the Vedantic self-inquiry meditation "Who am I" as they attempt to obtain spiritual knowledge and wisdom. In the pathway of acting, people engage in spiritual rituals and practices. They may prepare a Seder meal, pray, perform pujas, or celebrate Christmas. They may also focus on service to others in the world or demonstrate a commitment to public advocacy. The pathway of relating involves connections with others and communities. People may form women's spiritual circles, men's groups, Bible study groups, or go to a synagogue. They may participate in Satsangs with a spiritual teacher as members of a Sangha. Lastly, the pathway of experiencing includes the affective and personal experience of the sacred in someone's life. This involves the way a person experiences the sacred in their lives, whether meditative bliss, "resting in the Spirit," or as a quiet wordless presence. Speaking about the religions of the world, Pargament (2007) commented, "The religions of the world differ in the specific paths they encourage their followers to take, but most religions prescribe various combinations of ways of knowing, ways of acting, ways of relating, and ways of experiencing" (p. 78). He continued, "In the broadest sense, spiritual practices encompass whatever people do to preserve the sacred in their lives" (p. 83).

In addition, there is the pathway of spiritual coping. When challenges arise, people frequently attempt to conserve the sacred in their lives by using various methods of spiritual coping (see Pargament, 1997, 2007; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). For example, they may seek spiritual support with others or spiritual connection with the divine. For example, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse stated, "My women's circle has been a lifesaver for me. We read the Bible and pray for each other. I never would have been able to make it without these women and God's help." People may make benevolent spiritual reappraisals as a way of coping. A survivor of clergy sexual abuse commented, "I prefer to think that we are all one with the universe and karma does come into action. We get what we give and I am determined to be a good person so my next life is better." A 23-year-old female client offered a scarf to her guru, who "took my anxieties away when he accepted my scarf."

There are many ways to conserve the sacred, and these efforts are generally successful. Pargament (2007) noted that "people will go to great lengths to persevere in their spiritual beliefs and practices in the face of external obstacles and barriers" (p. 99). In fact, Lydon and Zanna (1990) provided evidence that challenges and adversity increase commitment to important, "self-relevant"

values. However, sometimes attempts at conserving the sacred are no longer tenable. Or, as described as follows, the cognitive efforts at assimilation are not possible. This creates a fertile ground for the experience of spiritual struggles.

Spiritual Struggles

As described in Piaget's model (1950) of cognitive development, humans naturally strive toward equilibrium, a state of balance between the external world and the internal world of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and perceptions. As individuals encounter stressors and life events, the first cognitive tendency is to assimilate them into existing cognitive structures (i.e., conserve them). However, when this fails to work, another cognitive capacity, accommodation, allows an individual to create new cognitive structures to accommodate the information. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) commented, "In the attitudinal arena, pressures toward stability are countered by pressures toward change. A mind that is completely closed to new input would not serve humans' adaptive requirements" (p. 227). They described an ongoing conflict between a person's "openness to change and the desire to preserve a preexisting view or conviction" (p. 227). This cognitive conflict creates a platform for spiritual struggles.

From a spiritual perspective, the challenge arises when an individual confronts a situation that he or she cannot find a way to accommodate into his or her belief system. This potentially leads to a period of spiritual struggle. Pargament, Murray-Swank, Magyar, and Ano (2005) defined spiritual struggles as "efforts to conserve or transform a spirituality that has been threatened or harmed" (p. 247). They identified three different types of spiritual struggles that are important to assess: interpersonal, intrapsychic, and divine. *Interpersonal spiritual struggles* include conflicts and tensions among an individual and families, friends, and spiritual communities. *Intrapsychic spiritual struggles* represent internal doubts, questions, and uncertainties. *Divine struggles* involve an individual and his or her relationship to the sacred, in whatever form the person believes (e.g., God, Christ, Shiva, Gaia). Overall, spiritual struggles frequently result in spiritual disengagement or spiritual transformation (see Figure 5.1).

Clergy sexual abuse is an example of a traumatic event that cannot be easily assimilated or accommodated, often resulting in spiritual struggles. We use the example of clergy sexual abuse to illustrate the diverse types of spiritual struggles. However, any type of life event, stressor, or change can precipitate spiritual struggles (e.g., loss, transitions, illness, divorce). In fact, Fowler (1981) contended that spiritual struggles (e.g., stage four: the individuative–reflective phase) are a natural part of faith development. In general, we hope that readers can draw parallels with their own clients' stories.

Regarding clergy sexual abuse, Pargament, Murray-Swank, and Mahoney (2008) stated:

> Like an earthquake, clergy sexual abuse is a desecration that creates spiritual havoc. The individual's entire spiritual edifice is shaken to its foundation. Some people are able to conserve the sacred in their lives . . . but many, if not most, enter a period of spiritual struggle, one that represents a fork in the road leading either to spiritual transformation or spiritual disengagement. (p. 404)

Consistent with this statement, a national sample of clergy sexual abuse survivors found that the majority experienced significant spiritual struggles, such as abandonment by God, abandonment by their spiritual communities, spiritual disconnection, anger at God and religious authority, and a sense of spiritual betrayal (Murray-Swank, 2010; Murray-Swank, Kohn, & Doehring, 2007). In the words of one survivor, "I feel lost without a spiritual home, have a hole in my heart that nothing seems to fill, and lost my child-like innocence and acceptance of God."

More specifically, the majority of clergy abuse survivors described enduring interpersonal spiritual struggles. In the national sample, both male and female survivors strongly endorsed the following statement when coping with the effects of clergy sexual abuse: "Wondered whether my church abandoned me." In fact, this was the most strongly endorsed type of religious coping in the sample (Murray-Swank, 2010; Murray-Swank et al., 2007). Survivors expressed abandonment, isolation, anger, and confusion about their faith communities. The interpersonal spiritual struggles compound and complicate the healing process for survivors because they frequently cannot turn to spiritual communities for support, lose prior spiritual coping resources, and even experience rejection when they come forward.

After clergy sexual abuse, many survivors also experience both intrapsychic and divine spiritual struggles. Pargament and colleagues (2005) stated, "In response to pain and suffering, people may struggle to redefine their relationship with the divine" (p. 249). This redefinition can take a long time and often involves feelings of abandonment, anger, isolation, and confusion. A 36-year-old survivor of clergy abuse wrote, "I am questioning God, his reasons, his existence." Another survivor stated, "I can't understand how god would let this happen to an innocent child." These survivors are in the process of questioning their beliefs about God and struggling with the idea of how God could allow clergy sexual abuse. In addition to questioning, anger often results. A 37-year-old survivor of both incest and clergy sexual abuse declared,

> I refuse to believe in or worship a god that lets such terrible things happen to people. How could he let my father do that to me? How could a priest who represents him do that to me? I will not worship a god like that.

In summary, these voices illustrate three different types of spiritual struggles (i.e., interpersonal, intrapsychic, divine) that can occur after life stressors

and traumatic events. In clergy sexual abuse, these spiritual struggles often predominate. Survivors confront questions such as: Has God abandoned me? If God truly is benevolent and all-powerful how could this have happened? If I cannot trust God or religious leaders, whom can I trust? Has my spiritual community betrayed me?

These questions and struggles are not unique to clergy abuse survivors. The themes and three types of spiritual struggles are also common in descriptions of other significant life events (e.g., loss, illness, trauma, death). For example, adolescents often experience both interpersonal and intrapsychic struggles as they question family-held spiritual beliefs and practices. People who face a painful divorce may ask why God has abandoned them. Survivors of natural disasters may struggle with how the disaster could have happened if there is a benevolent, omnipresent higher power. A recent client caring for his dying wife questioned why a God of goodness would allow such suffering and pain. These spiritual struggles traverse the wide range of human experiences.

Discussing the importance of spiritual struggles, Pargament and colleagues (2005) wrote,

> They represent crucial moments in time, when matters of greatest value are at stake. Spiritual struggles are spiritual "forks in the road" that can lead to despair, hopelessness, and meaninglessness on the one hand, and renewal, growth, and transformation on the other. (p. 246)

In this vein, several empirical studies have demonstrated a strong relationship between spiritual struggles and impaired mental health. For clergy sexual abuse survivors, the experience of spiritual struggles was predictive of increased posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and general psychological distress above and beyond the effects of negative attributions about the event, negative affect surrounding the experience of clergy sexual abuse, and demographics (Murray-Swank, 2010; Murray-Swank et al., 2007). In a longitudinal study of patients who were medically ill, spiritual struggles were associated with increased mortality over a 2-year period (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001).

However, many of the leaders from the world's religious traditions have also endured spiritual struggles only to emerge enlightened, resurrected, or strengthened (e.g., Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus, Moses, Rama). From a psychological perspective, the experience of spiritual struggles can also result in growth and transformation (e.g., Desai, 2006; Pargament et al., 2000). In a study of the predictors of growth after spiritual struggles, Desai (2006) found that religious integration and finding meaning in the struggle were predictive of growth. Generally, Pargament and colleagues (2005) noted that struggle itself is not problematic; it is "getting stuck" in the struggles that is troublesome. In support of this, Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, and Hahn (2004) provided evidence

that the chronicity of spiritual struggles was associated with poor outcomes. Therefore, working through spiritual struggles before they become chronic can lead to growth and transformation.

Considering both the power to lead to despair and decline, as well as the potential for growth, it is vital to include an assessment of spiritual struggles in the exploration process with clients. By doing so, we can evaluate whether clients seem "stuck" in spiritual struggles or are moving toward transformation and integration.

Spiritual Transformation

As previously discussed, we define spirituality as a "search for the sacred" (Pargament, 1999, p. 12). This denotes a continual search or process of seeking the sacred throughout life. Even in the midst of significant spiritual struggles, such as those highlighted previously, many clients experience a continual seeking. A female survivor of childhood incest described it this way as she entered therapy: "I want a relationship with God back. I blame him for what happened and I am very angry at Him" (Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005, p. 196). Although she was angry with God, and had been for several years, she longed for a relationship with God in her life. She was searching for the sacred. And this opens the door to spiritual transformation.

Spiritual transformation involves the redefinition and rediscovery of the sacred during transitions or after major events in life. As discussed, the majority of spiritual traditions highlight this process of transformation as central in human development. Teasdale (2001) wrote,

> The spiritual journey changes us to the core of our being. If it didn't, it wouldn't be real. This quality of inner change is what I understand by the term *transformation:* a radical reordering and alteration of our character, and all our old habits of thought, feeling and action. (p. 144)

Of course, there are many small spiritual transformations during the course of human living. And there are also times of greater changes and transformations as people endure hardships, stressors, losses, and trauma in their lives. In his chapter on spiritual transformation, Pargament (2006) defined it in this way:

> Spiritual transformation refers primarily to a fundamental change in the place of the sacred or the character of the sacred as an object of significance in life, and secondarily to a fundamental change in the pathways the individual takes to the sacred. (p. 21)

For example, I (NMS) worked with a woman in her early 40s who was struggling with intense anxiety and symptoms of PTSD. From a spiritual perspective, she had grown up Christian but no longer felt compelled by

the "old roads" of her faith tradition. Although still attending services, at the prompting of a friend, she also started practicing at a yoga center. While learning hatha yoga and enjoying its physical benefits of relaxation and stress reduction, she also learned about Hindu deities in the yogic spiritual tradition. One particularly spoke to her: the elephant-headed deity Ganesh, the remover of obstacles. However, she struggled with this new form of the sacred. She stated, "I feel comforted, yet don't know why. It is all so weird. I didn't grow up with any of this." She began to recite the mantra "*Om gam ganapataye namaha*," a mantra taught to her in honor of Ganesh, to help remove obstacles. She described her amazement at how doing this before bed helped ease her nightmares, and she actually began to sleep through the night instead of lying awake with insomnia. She also started to feel peace of mind and experienced less anxiety and became less disturbed by images from her past. She continued with her practice of hatha yoga and mantra repetition. However, it was clear that she needed support in her process of spiritual transformation, as she discovered new ways to the sacred that were different. She began her process of rediscovery, both changing the character of the sacred as well as the pathways she took to connect with the sacred. Instead of imaging God as a white father, she began to image Ganesh. Instead of attending services and reading the Bible, she practiced the recitation of mantras and hatha yoga.

We discussed the spiritual struggles that can result from clergy sexual abuse. In our national study, turning to Eastern spiritual pathways was a common way that survivors transformed their spiritual lives (Murray-Swank, 2010; Murray-Swank et al., 2007). For example, a 39-year-old survivor of adolescent sexual abuse by a minister stated, "Those experiences certainly provided impetus to seek out deliberate spiritual disciplines, like yoga, meditation, spiritual direction." Another survivor wrote, "I am now looking toward other methods (such as yoga and meditation) to connect with my spiritual side." For these survivors, the desire to connect to the sacred and their spiritualities remained strong; however, they sought to envision and connect with the sacred in a new way. In addition, the process of spiritual transformation for many survivors of clergy sexual abuse included an increased sense of independence, "inner knowing," and contemplative paths. One survivor commented, "I have learned that God is available to me inside every day if I can make myself available to that connection." Another survivor remarked, "I am more spiritually independent now and rely on my own inner instincts."

Overall, many of the survivors described a process of creating new pathways to the sacred that no longer involved prior affiliations, practices, and images. These survivors described a process of renewed discovery and centrality of the sacred in their lives and often articulated paths that involved more depth and flexibility. Again, we discuss this specific type of trauma as an illustration.

Often, clients transform the pathways to or place of the sacred in smaller ways. For example, a Christian client grieving the loss of his wife turned to service to the poor as a way to both make God more central in his life, as well as to grieve. Another client laid off from work attended a 30-day Ignatian retreat to make God more central in his life, as well as to discern the next steps in his life.

In general, people in the midst of many transitions, changes, or difficult life events may transform the pathways to and place of the sacred in their lives. Speaking to the process of transformation, Hart (2007) wrote, "Transformation emphasizes liberation, fluidity and flexibility, movement and freshness, destruction and creation" (p. 150). He described transformation as a process of creation, regeneration, and personal reformation (Hart, 2007). It is this reformation of the sacred and one's spiritual self that leads to spiritual integration.

Spiritual Integration

Although we cannot fully explore the concept of spiritual integration in this chapter (for a review, see Pargament, 2007), we can highlight a few of the qualities that distinguish a well-integrated from a poorly integrated spirituality. In general, a well-integrated spirituality provides a person with a significant transcendent vision to strive toward, one that encompasses all of humanity within the sacred umbrella and one that offers direction and guidance in life. This umbrella is tailored to the demands and challenges raised by specific life situations, and its pathways lead the individual toward his or her sacred goals. A well-integrated spirituality has breadth and depth; its pathways are constructed out of beliefs, practices, experiences, and relationships that are capable of dealing with the full range of life experiences. In addition, a well-integrated spirituality is balanced. It applies means that are proportional and appropriate to its ends, and it is marked by a commitment to sacred pathways and destinations without sacrificing flexibility, the capacity to change and grow. Finally, a well-integrated spirituality brings out the best rather than the worst in people.

For example, I (NMS) worked with a 23-year-old client who began therapy because of her childhood history of sexual abuse by her uncle. She started our initial session very clearly: "I have a strong Christian faith and I want someone who can work within that." She also explained her spirituality and religious faith in compartmentalized terms; her faith in Jesus was "rock solid" and her sexual abuse was the problem. As we continued to work together and as she explored deeply held emotions of shame, grief, and anger around her sexual abuse, her faith started to shift or "unravel," as she described it. During one session, she arrived with a letter she wrote to Jesus. This letter expressed confusion and anger about her sexual abuse and her relationship with Jesus. She wrote, "What the hell kind of Father are you, letting this happen to me?" This letter represented a spiritual shift for her; Jesus was someone she was

angry with, even though she loved him. As she continued to express and explore feelings of anger, guilt, and loss, she started to integrate her spiritual beliefs with her psychological self. She became less compartmentalized and deepened her relationship with Jesus. Jesus was now able to encompass more of her life, including both her church life and her sexual abuse. Beyond that, she began to believe that Jesus was there to support to her through all of the hardships in life, instead of protecting her from them.

Overall, this client expressed increased depth and breadth in her spirituality as her relationship with Jesus was able to encompass more of her life, including her sexual abuse, as well as a broader range of human emotions, life events, and experiences. In addition, she communicated more flexibility in her beliefs and practices as she allowed herself to express anger at Jesus as well as feelings of love and devotion. She continued to grow and change in her spiritual and religious life, as she lessened judgment against herself and others and increased her commitment to serve others with compassion. In summary, this brief case example begins to illustrate the process of spiritual integration.

SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT: USING THE FRAMEWORK

Having reviewed the main components of the model for assessing spirituality in a client's life, we now turn in more depth to therapeutic practice and how to incorporate this framework when working with clients. First, it is important to mention that the terms of the model are not necessarily the best ones to use with clients. For example, asking a client, "How are you conserving the sacred in your life?" could be confusing and uninformative. The purpose of the model, and the terminology, is to orient the therapist to the sacred dimension. Translating the framework into a useful way to assess clients is a therapeutic art, one we hope to illustrate.

Next, working within this framework involves a respect for the sacred dimension in a person's life, in all its diversity. More specifically, we maintain a "pluralist" approach as described by Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000). In this view, therapists "recognize the existence of a religious or spiritual absolute reality but allow for multiple interpretations and paths towards it" (p. 167). This approach is also consistent with a constructivist approach whereby a therapist views all belief systems as human constructions, rooted in one's social context. Overall, this approach places value on cultural competence, with spirituality as one aspect of a person's culture. Sue and Sue (2008) recommended the following competencies when working within a cultural framework: (a) therapist awareness of one's own assumptions, values, and biases; (b) understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients; and (c) developing culturally appropriate intervention strategies and techniques.

From a spiritual perspective, this type of cultural competence involves continued self-awareness, consultation, training, and experience in working with spiritually diverse clients. Finally, the assessment of the sacred rests on the foundation of a trusting, open, nonjudgmental therapeutic relationship.

The Therapeutic Relationship: A Sacred Encounter

Griffith and Griffith (2002) described "the practice of wonder—being available to what is not yet known or expected" (p. 1) as a therapeutic stance when assessing the sacred dimension of human living. They further used an image of an anthropologist "meeting another person from an unknown culture" (p. 26). Similarly, Erskine, Moursund, and Trautmann (1999) wrote, "The therapist is interpersonally contactful, available, and committed to understanding the client's world as the client understands and experiences it" (p. 12). So, although we have frameworks, theories, and research to guide us, we cannot presume much of anything when encountering the sacred in someone's life. With our models in the back of our minds, we come to the therapeutic encounter attuned, open, and available. Carl Rogers (1989), the founder of humanistic psychology, advocated for a therapeutic relationship characterized

> by a genuineness and transparency, in which I am my real feelings;
> by a warm acceptance of and prizing of the other person as a separate individual;
> by a sensitive ability to see his world and himself as he sees them. (pp. 37–38)

It is from this foundation of a trusting, strong therapeutic alliance that we approach the assessment of the sacred in a person's life. We prepare the ground and build our foundation in preparation for this sacred encounter.

Discovery of the Sacred and Assessing Patterns of Conservation

When assessing discovery and conservation, we are listening for the images, forms, and words used to describe the sacred dimension in a client's life. We are paying attention to the spiritual story, the sacred narrative of the client's life. We consider such questions as the following: When was the sacred discovered (e.g., childhood, adulthood), or when, as some clients believe, did the sacred discover them? Who is the sacred in this person's life (e.g., God, Jesus, Allah, Inner Self, Divine Consciousness)? How do they experience their connection with the sacred? We are also exploring clients' spiritual pathways (e.g., do they seek spiritual knowledge, experience, relationships, and/or action) as well as methods of spiritual coping (e.g., seeking spiritual support

and connection). From a coping perspective, we listen and explore what beliefs and practices sustain clients when facing losses or difficult life events. On the flip side, what beliefs and practices are a part of celebrations and transitions in life? Overall, we listen carefully and explore the beliefs, images, practices, and experiences that weave together to create the unique tapestry of spiritual discovery and conservation.

For example, I (NMS) worked with a client who was raised as a charismatic Catholic during the 1970s. She described attending mass as a child with singing, dancing, and everyone raising their arms in the air. Although she stated that she did not connect with it at the time, it laid the groundwork for her own spiritual discovery in high school. When she was a freshman in high school, she attended a charismatic retreat for youth. She declared

> I remember we were in a big tent. There were at least a thousand of us. My friends and I were all holding hands, listening to the speaker. And just like that, I was out, and I fell backwards to the ground. Filled with a love so enormous, it couldn't possible fit into my small body, I felt at one with the stars outside, all the people in the tent, with my friends, with the entire universe. It was the Holy Spirit that filled me. I was resting in it. I stayed that way for a long time with my eyes closed, unable to move, lying on the ground. It was complete peace.

In his research on children, Hart (2003, 2006) relays similar examples of spiritual discovery:

> I was 15, sitting in the silence of my "special spot" outside, a short walk from my family's house. I was just sort of tuning into nature, the little birds and insects here and there. Then suddenly I had this experience of everything being connected. Both in the sense of just part of the same, but then, what was most amazing to me was there was also a sense of everything being equal—the majestic mountain, the blade of grass, and me. (p. 165)

Younger children, too, describe profound experiences of the sacred in their lives. Hart (2006) argued that "children's spirituality may exist apart from adult rational and linguistic conceptions" (p. 163). Therefore, language may not adequately capture the depth of children's spiritual experience. In *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt, 1972), a Native American medicine man of the Lakotas discussed his sacred visions and voices of the Grandfathers at ages 5 and 9. For example, he described how, at age 5, two men appeared to him, singing a song and drumming: "Behold, a sacred voice is calling you; all over the sky a sacred voice is calling" ("Early Boyhood," para. 33). In another example, Hart (2003) wrote about how his 6-year-old daughter viewed her "angels": "Yeah, I do *see* them and it's like I can *feel* them and know they're there. It's like they're having a tea party and talking about me. . . . They let me know I am loved" (p. 2).

As mentioned previously, we are frequently listening for the discovery of the sacred in clients' lives. Who or what is the sacred? When did they or do they experience it (in whatever terms and forms they use)? Have there been times of "rediscovery"? Inherent in this, we listen for the images, metaphors, descriptions, and stories about the spiritual dimension of living. We wonder: Who is the sacred to this person (or these persons) before me? Is there a form? Is the sacred formless? Does the sacred have certain attributes, such as those of the natural world (e.g., the sun, Mother Earth)? How large is the client's sense of the sacred? Is the sacred expansive and affirming or constrictive and negating? I (NMS) often ask people, if appropriate given their systems of beliefs, to give descriptors or to draw the sacred (see "Cautions and Caveats" at the end of this chapter). For example, consider the following dialogue:

> *Therapist (T):*   You mentioned that you believed in God [word chosen by client]. I am wondering who God is to you?
>
> *Client (C):*   God is . . . God.
>
> *T:*   Are there other words that come to mind when you think of who God is to you?
>
> *C:*   He is constant, patient, loving, kind, and merciful. Also, He is always there for me, always willing to listen, if I just remember to ask.

We begin to hear the power of God in the client's life revealed (i.e., "God is God"): the constancy, the loving and compassionate form of God in this person's life.

In another assessment example (see "Cautions and Caveats" at the end of this chapter), we heard the following dialogue:

> *T:*   If you were to draw God, what would God look like? [Client draws a big smiley face.]
>
> *T:*   God is a smiling face.
>
> *C:*   Yes, God is not female or male.
>
> *T:*   Are there any words you might use to describe this smiley face God?
>
> *C:*   God is warm, nice, and funny. God is also positive, strong, and true. And patient and constant.
>
> *T:*   Sounds like God is very important to you.
>
> *C:*   God has always been there for me, through everything I have gone through [starts to cry]. Even when I was a kid, with all the fighting, I knew I could count on God to be there, and help me through it.

We begin to hear about forms of spiritual coping, the importance of seeking spiritual support and connection. We also begin to hear about other pathways of conserving the sacred: ways of knowing, relating, experiencing, and acting, and the movement toward spiritual discernment, empowerment, and growth. A 59-year-old man described his experience as follows:

T: When did you first experience the sacred in your life?

C: Well, I don't remember my childhood, but mine was probably in the seminary . . . I went to a seminary high school.

T: What do you remember in high school?

C: Conversations with God where he actually talked to me . . . it was a bestowal of grace.

T: Grace.

C: Yes. Almost like an infusion into my spirit to help me make decisions. . . . It was like instant strength. I could physically feel it.

T: What did it physically feel like?

C: It made me stronger . . . more of a self-fulfilled person. Even now, it comes to me if I pray and ask for it. I have to ask for it though. It doesn't just happen naturally.

T: So when you ask for it, God bestows grace.

C: Absolutely, and this infusion helps me make the right decisions in life, and I stay on the right track. Especially now at my age, I don't want to make a mistake now!

We hear the pathway of spiritual experience, of an affective and personal relationship with the sacred. We also hear the role of wisdom, of spiritual "knowing." And we hear how the experience of the sacred becomes more integrated into day-to-day life. For example, a 37-year-old man with a history of alcoholism discussed the role of the Bible, and particularly the importance of the book of Proverbs in his life:

T: When did you first discover God in your life?

C: I think when I was baptized in church . . . this really changed my thinking.

T: When was this?

C: As an adult, in 2000.

T: What happened?

C: I felt tingling and a clear mind. This also happened after my girl-friend was in a bad car accident. I went to the Basilica and prayed,

and I felt a deep burning sensation. And since then, I read the Proverbs every day. Every day. It's weird how the Proverbs play a role; it is so in everything I do.

T: Can you share an example?

C: They give me wisdom into the basics in life . . . every human need. They are ingrained . . . like I'll catch myself mocking people, I'll think about giving to the poor, I'll think about my actions . . . I just feel love, improvement in life.

Of course, the images of the sacred, the process of sacred discovery, and conservational coping are not always positive. They may reflect narrow, restricted representations of the sacred that are part of a spirituality that lacks wholeness and integration. A 49-year-old survivor of childhood incest by her stepfather drew a picture of an angry man to represent God. She stated the following:

He is a man looking at me, with red hair, red eyes, and a red mouth. The red means he's angry at me for allowing what happened. At the same time, I am angry with Him. It really doesn't make sense, why God doesn't come to children who need Him. (Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005, p. 196)

When asked, "What words would you use to describe who God is to you," she replied, "He is disconnected from me, uncaring, angry, unloving, and punishing" (Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005, p. 196). Despite this image of God, this client wanted a relationship with God. She declared, "I would like to get back trust in God; love and trust and faith." Thus, we start to hear about spiritual struggles: anger, abandonment, a punishing God, as well as the continual seeking and search for the sacred.

Exploring Spiritual Struggles and Transformation

When listening for spiritual struggles, we are listening for interpersonal, intrapsychic, and divine spiritual conflicts. Are there spiritual tensions with family, friends, spouses, and/or spiritual communities? Are there internal doubts, questions, or uncertainties about the sacred, spiritual beliefs, and/or practices? Are there feelings of abandonment, anger, or punishment in one's relationship with the sacred? Is there a sense of spiritual isolation or alienation? Do the struggles reflect a lack of spiritual integration or a strong spirituality that is being tested?

We are also assessing a person's relationship with the struggle itself. Some clients respond strongly to the word *struggle*. We consider the following: Is it okay to struggle, according to one's beliefs and cultural tradition? Is the person stuck in a struggle or does this seem to be part of a transformation

process? Does the person have support while engaging with important questions, uncertainties, and doubts? Are there inspirational religious or spiritual figures from the individual's tradition who can serve as models of courage, strength, and hope (e.g., Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Job, Moses)? How long has the individual been struggling and how is the person coping? Where does the struggle fit within the larger context of the individual's life (e.g., is it compartmentalized, peripheral, central)?

For example, FS was a 39-year-old survivor of early childhood sexual abuse. She stated that she had no religious affiliation but was very spiritual. During the course of our work together (the patient and Nichole), she expressed her struggle in her relationship with God:

C: God doesn't care about me. . . . I'm not important enough. He is not there for me, just the total loss, sadness, and loneliness.

T: Sounds very painful and lonely.

C: [Starts to cry.] It is.

[T Pauses.]

C: I have never been responded to. I can't stand the emptiness. I try to fill the emptiness, but I stay empty.

T: You stay empty.

C: Yeah . . . as a kid, you know, I prayed for the incest to stop. He didn't answer my prayers.

T: God wasn't there for you.

C: No.

In the therapy process, we explored her feelings of abandonment by God, leaving her alone as a young child in a family of abusers. We examined her feelings of anger at God for not protecting her, for not answering her prayers. FS had been feeling this way for a long time, since childhood. We mapped out her spiritual journey, and through this exploration process, we also began to explore times of spiritual connection, times when she did not feel so empty and when others did respond to her. She started to share experiences of transformation; a shifting in the character of God occurred in her life. During this time, she wrote letters to God to express herself. She expressed her anger, her confusion, and her deep sense of isolation. She also wrote about her longing for a connection, with God and with others. She would read these letters in our sessions together and formed a spiritual connection with me (NMS) as her therapist.

Toward the end of our time together, she wrote me a letter:

I know that God brought our paths together, I'm sure for you to help me to trust and care and grow. I don't believe that in all the therapy I have

been through I ever dealt with some of the stuff that is now at the surface. I never in the past had the strength or courage to share and release all I did this time. I learned that I need to let go of the isolation and shame I still feel. As I take steps to heal I have opened up more with others as I gain the internal validation from myself and from God. To face the fear of loss and abandonment from my past, and focus on the joy and growth, I have learned I need to go to the "vertical" (God) and trust. (Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005, p. 200)

This example highlights both the exploration of spiritual struggles, as well as a shift toward spiritual growth and transformation that occurred in this client's life. Other clients have expressed their experiences of spiritual transformation. They have shared their stories about changes in the character and place of the sacred in their lives, changes in how they connect to transcendence, and changes in the breadth and depth of their spirituality.

For example, I (NMS) worked with a client, JB, who had suffered greatly in her life. Due to a car accident and subsequent brain injury, JB experienced great difficulties with depression, anxiety, and PTSD, and she developed bipolar disorder. When she came to see me, she had already participated in therapy for the previous 10 years and was stable on psychotropic medicine. She was seeking growth, connection, and wholeness.

As we explored her history, she relayed a moment of spiritual transformation during a hospitalization for depression. She offered the following:

The sun rose for me this morning . . . the great ball of fire poured its liquid light into my very being. And as the tears fell from my eyes, I realized it was the same sun that had been there all along . . . but it was oh so different this time. It was mine.

JB described her difficult healing process, and the source of support that God became for her in her life. She began to center her life on the sacred and declared, "God is like Mother Nature, formless, everywhere, like the sun, the constant beams, the warmth, all we need." She started to focus her life around her spirituality and her connection with her young son.

For some clients, the experience of spiritual transformation is a moment in time. A client exclaimed with fervor, "I will never forget the day I accepted Jesus Christ into my heart. My life started at that moment and has never been the same." For many, it is a gradual process of seeking, of opening, of discovering new images and new pathways. A 46-year-old survivor of clergy sexual abuse described his experience in the following dialogue:

C: I have incorporated other spiritual traditions into my prayer life. I have found my own path in life.

T: Your own path.

C: Yes, I no longer turn to those in authority. I have learned that I am the one in charge of my life.

T: Sounds freeing?

C: It really is . . . but you know, it has been hard. I am still figuring it out. What works for me.

T: What have you found that does work for you?

C: I have been trying meditation and yoga. That has been really nice. But all that pain is still there.

In this example, we explored the new pathways to the sacred after his experience with clergy sexual abuse. We respected the anger and resentment about those in religious authority and also honored the newfound "inner knowledge" and the spiritual peace that was emerging, albeit in a different form.

Whether new, old, fast, or slow, it is important to fully understand the transformation process in our clients. This becomes particularly important because of the vulnerability that often surrounds these changes and because of the delicacy of the new discoveries. By supporting the process in clients and encouraging the transformation process, clients can move toward psychological and spiritual wholeness and integration. Hart (2003) commented on this: "In addition to a worldview, spirituality is also a process of development . . . it is an ongoing growth process—a process of identity, of finding out more about who we really are" (p. 9). He continued, "The crest of the wave of this process has been called liberation, transformation, enlightenment, and self-realization. It is also recognized as integration and wholeness" (pp. 9–10). As therapists, we help facilitate this growth and development in our clients' lives, as they move toward psychological and spiritual wholeness.

CAUTIONS AND CAVEATS

As discussed previously, we maintain an approach that respects the diversity of the expression of the sacred in a person's life. Given this, some important cautions are warranted in presenting this framework. For example, when discussing some ways to assess the discovery of the sacred in a person's life, we offered examples of drawing and describing the sacred. Both Coles (1990) and Griffith and Griffith (2002) have cautioned against placing images on God for people of certain faith backgrounds (e.g., Orthodox Jews, Muslims). In addition, some faith traditions do not encourage spiritual doubting and "struggle." In fact, this word *struggle* has sometimes raised fears in clients where struggle implies doubting God. We maintain that it is important to assess spiritual struggles, because many people experience them. However,

it is always important to respect diverse beliefs and honor when this exploration may be inappropriate.

In general, we advocate for an approach that respects the sacred dimension as an aspect of diversity. Often this requires our willingness to learn as therapists. Greater openness to the sacred dimension requires an exploration, at times, of new beliefs, ideas, and images. For example, I (NMS) described a client who gave her anxieties to her guru. With this client, I had to learn about the sacred role of the guru in both her culture (Indian), as well as her affiliation (Hindu). I learned about how her teacher assisted people on their paths to enlightenment, and my client's offering reflected a way to rid herself of her ego and to experience her Inner Self. In another example I described earlier, I learned about Ganesh and the role of this deity as a remover of obstacles. In both cases, I needed to expand my own knowledge of my clients, and how they connected with and transformed the sacred in their lives.

We also do not intend to convey that spirituality is important to every person. We recommend a spiritual assessment of all clients, just as we also recommend an assessment of all important areas of life (e.g., family, relationships, health, education, work). However, if spirituality is not important to a client, or does not appear to be at play in a client's concerns, we do not continue with this type of exploration.

Finally, we also do not intend to convey that everything spiritual is all right. Throughout history religion has been used in destructive and harmful ways. However, this approach draws on a person-centered, pluralistic foundation, where the therapist and client together explore what appears to be healthy and unhealthy for them in their lives. And sometimes there are significant value conflicts in the therapy room. For example, I (NMS) worked with a client from a fundamentalist Christian background who came into one of our sessions and declared, "I fear you may be leading me to the devil. And my church agrees." I was shocked, to say the least because that is not what I ever expected to hear from a client. However, after discussing this, it became clear to me that my desire for her to integrate her sexual identity (she was sexually attracted to women) into her whole self was against her belief system. Even though we never spoke directly about this, as we were focusing our therapeutic efforts elsewhere, my values came out through my nonverbal actions, and through what I attended to and what I did not attend to (e.g., I did not directly support her in her efforts to rid herself of her sexuality). In this case, we were able to openly discuss her concerns, and I respected her choices. We agreed to continue, with the explicit agreement that I would honor her decision to not pursue sexual expression in female relationships. However, if she wanted me to be able to help her rid herself completely of her sexuality, I would have had to refer her to someone else. I share this to highlight how values play such an important role in the therapy room, especially when working with

central values such as spirituality. Thus, it becomes even more important to be careful, self-aware, and respectful.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have presented and illustrated a theoretically grounded framework for assessing spirituality in the therapy process. Therapists can help locate a client in his or her search for the sacred, including the processes of discovery, conservation, spiritual struggles, spiritual disengagement, and transformation. From this place, therapists and clients can determine the importance and relevance of including spiritually oriented interventions in therapy.

Overall, this model rests on a pluralistic, person-centered foundation that appreciates the role of culture and the diversity of the sacred in a client's life. This orienting system is rooted within a cognitive context, acknowledging both the stability and flexibility in human thinking. In addition, it emanates from a much larger spiritual context that includes the world's spiritual traditions, both Eastern and Western. We honor the diverse sources of wisdom that guide people and integrate these as we help people on their paths of psychological and spiritual growth, wholeness, and integration.

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