

## **Twelve Principles of Transpersonal Therapy/Drama Therapy/ Transpersonal Life Coaching**

The following twelve principles underlie the ideal practice of Transpersonal Drama Therapy in all of its many forms.

### **1. Assuming health rather than pathology.**

As Transpersonal Drama Therapists, we assume the innate health and wholeness of our clients, rather than focus on pathology. Whatever our clients' problems and challenges, we view them in the context of a larger identity that is whole, balanced and pure, both individually and in the greater consciousness of humanity. The transpersonal drama therapist supports the individual's transcendence from all identification, lifting the individual from his or her own world view to one in which *"the individual would presumably identify with both everything and nothing"* (Walsh and Vaughn, 1991).

### **2. Shifting the identity from a limited sense of self to the essential Self.**

We aspire to help our clients shift their identity from a limited sense of self—e.g., from an identification as wounded, a victim, an addict, worthless, inept or other negative qualities, to an identification with the essential Self, higher Self, authentic core Self, or soul. We do not deny human experience, and in fact help people honor these experiences. However, while the trauma and abuses our clients have experienced may be terrible, we help them understand that this is not who they are, but rather what has happened to them. If they can come to identify with who they are in their essential soul self, the source of their innate strength, they can heal more quickly.

When our clients learn to identify with their soul's essence, they begin to overcome a personal sense of limitation and low self-esteem and work through their limited self images from early and later conditioning. As they go more deeply into the traumas and challenges of their lives, an identification with soul or "best self" qualities – compassion, beauty, love, intuition, humor, wisdom, joy, empathy, spontaneity, creativity, peace, and many others – serve as sources of strength. From this perspective, and relying on essential soul qualities, the individual is far less defended and blocked in examining painful experiences and aspects of the limited or conditioned self.

Using the methods of ancient esoteric and contemporary spiritual traditions, clients learn the tools taught in other cultures, such as meditation and breath work, to access and identify with this essential Self. A variety of theater and meditation exercises, described throughout this book, help people access this part of themselves.

### **3. Embodying/Roleplaying the therapeutic issues.**

By using action methods embodying the emotional issues through movement and enactment, clients are able to recall memories by using feedback from the body and senses. Kinesthetic, proprioceptive, visual, auditory and touch senses are used as tools to reveal more information. Transpersonal Drama Therapy works with the clients' body in relation to his/her heart, mind and soul. In this way, clients go beyond mental machinations, enabling them to discover important, new material in their transformational process.

Using different forms of role-playing, developed in psychodrama, very powerful ways of embodying challenging relationships are possible: with oneself, (different inner roles or parts of oneself in conflict), with significant others, with choices one is facing, with struggles in one's life, i.e, an addiction, a trauma, financial crises, job dissatisfaction or loss, grief, physical and mental illnesses, (See Sam Case Example). By using one's whole body, all of one's senses, physicalizing one's own presenting current life challenge as a character, playing a role, can be a very effective way of facing the challenge directly, beyond the mind and linear thinking about the issue. Becoming the 'monster' challenge, feeling its feelings in one's whole body, all of one's senses, creating its sounds/language and movements, interviewing the monster by oneself or by group members all serve to elucidate the issues at a deeper cellular level, where healing and transformation can make a difference.

The Transpersonal dimension of this includes helping clients connect to their higher wisdom self after becoming and playing out the challenges. When they embody/roleplay that inner wisdom self and offer advice to the challenged one, from the mountain top perspective, from a state of light and clarity, it is astounding what can be revealed. If someone was just asked to tell us about the wisdom perspective about an issue, they often cannot do it. However, becoming that being from a quiet place of their light filled being, they are most often able to see much more clearly and offer inspired counsel to their challenged self.

### **4. Making the unconscious conscious through symbolic/ metaphorical approaches**

In order for healing to happen at the deepest levels, it is important to bring unconscious content to consciousness, through approaches that draw on the right brain, which access our intuitive, creative, symbolic sensory experiences, bypassing the linguistic/left brain thought process. This is important at all ages, but essential when one is trying to access early prenatal and perinatal memories, impressions and feelings. Very often life patterns can be traced back to life in the womb, the birth process and one's early precognitive babyhood. There has now been significant, undeniable research results that give testimony to the evidence that even very young fetuses are affected emotionally by the state of the mother and the father through the mother, as well as by other environmental and physical factors in gestation. All of these experiences are in our muscle memories as well as in our unconscious and can be accessed for healing.

Working with peoples' dreams is a very effective way to uncover what is in the unconscious. In fact, dreams have been called a gateway to the unconscious. Perhaps they are such powerful vehicles for transformation because dream images are created out of the imaginal realm in one's own psyche. It is hard to deny one's own imagery. The images aren't from a parent, spouse, teacher or therapist, but from themselves. When dreams are shared in a group, enacted and processed, insights and energy shifts toward healing happen easily and transformational learning and healing is very possible. Dreams are understood through their symbols and metaphors. Clients can be helped to understand their own dream language, especially as they enact the images and watch others dramatizing parts of their dream. It is possible to help people remember a very early dream and a recent dream and as different as they may appear to be, the parallels about their source of strength as well as ongoing life challenges can be seen.

The goal is always to place any limitation or life challenge in the context of who that person is in their essential self. Other transpersonal ways of working with the unconscious include working with different meditative breathing practices. Out of each practice, people can be directed to create a spontaneous character. These characters become symbolic representatives of inner guides in different ways. People are uncovering "shadow" characters, in Jungian terms, characters that are hidden, sometimes as supportive elements and sometimes as shut down or destructive elements in our psyches. This is all rich material for learning. Clients/students can also create mandalas, masks, improvised songs, stories, poetry, dances, which can culminate in creating personal myths. These are other forms of working with symbols and metaphors, all of which can be used as vehicles for making the unconscious conscious, toward a deeper healing outcome.

### **5. Working with archetypes.**

The Transpersonal Drama Therapist holds an inner concentration on and identification with four archetypal roles, including healer, artist, educator and shaman or spiritual guide. The therapist is first and foremost a *healer* in leading the client back through the dense and dark matter of human experience to an identification with his or her soul. The therapist is an *artist* in using the arts to help the client access the imaginal realm and find symbolic expression, particularly for experiences so sublime – or so traumatic – that they defy words. He or she is an *educator* in teaching the techniques needed to maintain awareness of the essential Self, such as meditation, breath work, sound and light practices, visualizations, and in using Transpersonal Drama Therapy as the vehicle to educate the body, mind, heart and spirit. Finally, the transpersonal drama therapist is a *shaman or spiritual guide* in working in the twilight worlds between the conscious and unconscious, matter and spirit. The shaman part of us, as therapists, is able to see the client in his or her essential core self by using the tools of meditation and the intuitive arts. Eventually, it is possible, to sit with a client, attune to his or her breath and experience him or her are on many levels simultaneously. This, of course, requires training and practice.

Additionally, we help our clients draw on archetypal motifs in world mythology, such as gods and goddesses, heroes, masters, saints and prophets, as well as on the archetypal elements in nature, such as earth, water, fire and air, animal totems, oceans, forests, and mountaintops, to help them work through their current issues and negative memories and find meaning in their life experiences. We also work with archetypal human themes such as finding love, overcoming great adversity, returning from grief, and rising from the ashes of devastating experiences. When people can recognize and identify with the archetypal symbols in their psyches, we can help them use these symbols to find healing and transformation.

## **6. Embracing love while holding all emotions as sacred.**

As transpersonal drama therapists, we embrace the totality of the heart's experience. It is said that all emotions – even fear, anger, rage and frustration – have love as their base and can be used as guides back to our essential Selves. By holding all emotions as sacred, we honor all facets of emotional life as a natural part of the human life journey. In so doing, we can come to love ourselves and others authentically, thus overcoming loneliness and alienation. In our therapeutic work, we teach clients to honor their own emotions as well. We work with them in a way that feels sacred, rather than succumbing to programmed emotions such as shame and guilt. In this manner, healing can take place in a more fluid manner as clients come into their own authenticity. Holding the thought that emotions are sacred, the transpersonal drama therapist works to facilitate the client's return to love, albeit through a hall of distorted mirrors.

In truth, there is no split between the godly and ungodly, the holy and the profane: It is important to honor whatever feelings we experience as sacred. Jelaluddin Rumi, a Sufi poet from the middle ages, captured this sentiment beautifully and profoundly in his poem, *The Guest House* (see box).

## **7. Creating a sacred space.**

For healing to progress, it is important to enter a sacred space where we can reconnect to our soul essence, which is never tarnished by life experience. Beauty in the therapeutic environment helps to transmute the ugliness of emotional trauma. The atmosphere can become like a beautiful rose holding the client in her warm embrace and lovely fragrance. Whether working with an individual client, a therapy group, an educational group, or an audience attending a transformational theater performance, the transpersonal drama therapist creates a sacred atmosphere to inspire people to connect with their essential selves and to allow for the possibility that the client will take a meaningful step in his or her own transformational growth and healing process. Physical beauty in the healing environment – flowers, soft colors, beautiful fabrics, and works of art also helps people to feel better and to open to deep, dark places that need to be healed.

Creating simple warm-up exercises that awaken the body, mind, heart and soul help participants to build trust and develop a readiness to be present with themselves and the group. In the therapeutic, educational and theatrical settings, the transpersonal

drama therapist strives to create a *temenos*, or sacred container to hold the truth of the client's emotions and experiences. Through the therapist's compassionate, nonjudgmental witnessing, the *temenos* provides a sense of emotional safety that allows the client's deepest Self to surface, including suppressed and hidden aspects of the psyche, and to engage in the therapeutic process.

### **8. Fostering an experience of interconnectedness and unity.**

The Transpersonal Drama Therapist works to create experiences of the unity, connection, and interdependence of all living things, including human beings, animals, plants and the environment. It also relates to a holistic healing approach, working with the body, mind, heart and soul connection. Much of the work of healing concerns entering the consciousness of those with whom we are in conflict and working toward embracing their emotional experiences and points of view. We thus create exercises in nature that are designed to receive the healing power of Mother Earth and set up improvisations, meditations and creative exercises that relate a person's own experience (including challenges and future possibilities) to the experience of the earth and its cycles of birth, death and rebirth and the seasons. We also create experiences that allow one individual to see into the soul of another individual, gaining insight into old wounds and conflicts and come to resolution with the ones who wounded us, whether living or dead.

Transpersonal drama therapists also work with communities to help them experience the unity of different religions, races, and ethnic backgrounds as part of a larger system. Realizing that we are part of a larger, interconnected ecological system helps overcome the distinctions and differences that divide people and helps overcome our essential aloneness. We embrace and become part of a global culture and family. As we identify with larger socio-political concerns and issues, we realize that we exist together in an interdependent world.

### **9. Seeking mastery through self-discipline.**

The development of personal capacity to manifest our greatest potential depends on conscious thought and action. Discipline and focus lead toward the realization of the Self. Many great teachers and masters have taught us that mastery lies in stilling the mind and directing it toward what we desire. Whatever we think about, we will attract. If we're feeling and thinking positively, we will attract that, if we can master the discipline of becoming mindful of our thoughts.

The lesson in this principle is that, although we work in the transpersonal realm and frequently process the contents of the unbridled imagination, the work of transpersonal drama therapists—and their clients—must ultimately be grounded in the quest for personal mastery through self-discipline. This may involve compliance with recommended practices, stretching beyond our emotional comfort zone, and other forms of inner work. Mastery of our inner and outer lives ultimately produces harmony, health, balance, and the achievement of our life's goals.

### **10. Achieving balance.**

The essence of the 'Message' of today in many spiritual traditions is balance: balance of receptive and expressive energies, *yin* and *yang*, activity and repose, inner masculine and feminine, (anima, animus), spirit and matter, transcendence and immanence. As noted, mastery, self-discipline, and balance all work together to facilitate the client's evolution. Accordingly, the transpersonal drama therapist nurtures experiences of balance in the therapeutic situation that can then be generalized to other aspects of the client's life.

### **11. Identifying and achieving our life purpose.**

Beyond working to heal family of origin challenges, we also want to help identify for ourselves our life purpose and help our clients to do the same. We want to guide our clients to use their unique gifts to serve the larger humanity, each in his/her own way. An ancient teaching says that our purpose is like the horizon, and the closer we get to it, the further it recedes. Our interests are clues to what our purpose is. By accessing a relationship to the numinous, or sacred, we can come to better understand and manifest our unique life purpose.

### **12. Creating one's life as a work of art.**

The culmination of this work is when we apply our learning creatively in our everyday life and integrate the arts and beauty into our daily lives, in speech, thought and action. This allows for symbolic communication that transcends thinking and words.

Then our lives can become beautiful, shining works of art. Inspiration is drawn from the light within and interconnectedness to our higher source, which is reflected in family, community and the world around us. This is our ultimate goal for ourselves, as transpersonal drama therapists, and for the people we serve in our work.