

THE PARALLEL PATHS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SPIRITUALITY: CONVERGENCES, DIVERGENCES, TRANSFORMATION

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The shift from the classical model to the relational perspective has created a gradual warming trend in the chilly relationship between psychoanalysis and religion/spirituality. The author views both disciplines as parallel paths of transformation, in which limiting ways of being begin to fall away and more expansive ways come into existence, reviewing those points of convergence that facilitate healing; a sense of safety and calm; and opportunities for self-reflection, self-compassion, and surrender to something transcendent. Exploration of the convergences and divergences along the analytic path illuminates how the space between the interpenetrating realms of psychoanalysis and spirituality became one of thirdness and transformation for both. When the analysand feels healed, that her sense of aliveness and authenticity was created and discovered within the intersubjective space of the dyad, psychoanalysis can be experienced as a sacred journey.

“God is not in you ... nor in me, but between us

God is known in relationship ...
through our healing, binding and raising up of each other.”
—Rabbi H. Schulweis

Religion, once relegated to the realm of illusion, is with much caution being reanimated by some as a narrative that has informed and even enriched psychoanalysis (Hoffman, 2004). Consider, for a moment, the central tenet of theologian and philosopher Martin Buber (1970): that only in those intimate relational encounters where we recognize the other’s uniqueness and touch the other’s essence can we discover our own and experience a momentary glimpse of the “eternal you” that lies at the heart of such relating. Buber’s philosophy conceives of human life as grounded in

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relation. The self comes to be known as a partner in dialogue through the recognition of the other's subjectivity. While it is deeply resonant with the relational psychoanalytic approach based on mutuality, historically the psychoanalytic community has been dismissive toward religion and spirituality.¹

This tentative relational rapprochement helps me to breathe out a sigh of relief and breathe in a sense of daring to push the analytic envelope, to illuminate some points of convergence between the interpenetrating realms of psychoanalytic life and spiritual life. I want to create a legitimate space between the two discourses that will help transcend their separateness, an expanded space in which we can think more deeply about spiritual life without dismissing or idealizing it, a space recognized as a dimension of human subjectivity with considerable potential to facilitate the work of transformation, where limiting ways of being begin to fall away and more expansive ways come into being. While a compressed narrative cannot adequately convey the lived experience of a relationship with all the affects, implicit nonverbal communications, and enactments that fill the space between the analytic couple, I hope this paper evokes for the reader a sense of psychoanalysis as a spiritual journey: a journey of two souls traveling on not so different paths.

Introducing Ellen

Ellen didn't have her head in the clouds searching for bliss. She was struggling to stay grounded, holding on to her tenuous sense of self by a thread. She experienced unrelenting anxiety at work, feeling that there was nothing worthy about her. She moved through life with the threat of abandonment as a constant presence. Certain that she would be found "not good enough," she felt compelled to prove herself at every turn in order to stave off that abandonment. Just beneath the surface of a self-protective rough edge there was a well of sadness and emptiness. She seemed lost. Indeed, she was. She had little sense of her own needs or desires. If her views conflicted with those of the needed other, she would question and relinquish her perceptions. Staying connected was the *sine qua non*.

Aware of Ellen's exquisite attunement to her surround and her search for any hint of disapproval that could threaten valued ties, I was initially tentative with her, concerned about jarring her precariously maintained sense of self. Listening deeply, I heard her unspoken need to be responded to and mirrored, her need to have her emotional states held in calm reflection. Initially, I served as a container (Bion, 1970) for her affects, holding those experiences that were too raw, contextualizing them, helping her make sense of them. She was deeply touched by my capacity to remember the fragments of her narrative. It offered both a sense of continuity and a feeling that she was worthy of being heard. Like a frightened cat hiding under the bed, only as she developed a sense of safety and trust did she come out to play. And through our play I became a trusted other, "a godlike presence," "an anchor" that patients often crave (Hoffman, 1998). Our relationship offered the sense of sanctuary that she needed as

¹ I differentiate between religion in general and spirituality mainly in the latter's focus on experience rather than theology and its universality, its lack of identification with a particular doctrine. I will discuss this later on in terms of meeting in mutual recognition of each other, a journey of healing, transcendence, and *becoming* that expands our capacity to be more open to all of life.

she took her first steps on the painstaking journey of healing, something that would keep her from falling apart. I'm reminded that the word "religion" is derived from the Latin *religio*, to bind together (Jones, 1991).

Frequently, however, Ellen needed something more. Something to hold on to when she was alone, when I was not there to help soothe her overwhelming anxiety. Something to hold on to in her mind until she could sense herself in mine (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002). What I couldn't have known then was that I needed something more as well.

Creating a Space for the Sacred

Struggling to be a voice for rationalism and scientific discovery, Freud viewed religion through a narrow lens, focusing on its obsessive, defensive, and regressive underpinnings as well as its illusory nature, obscuring its potential to further development. While I do not dismiss Freud's concerns, I don't view religion as inherently good or bad but, as with all of life, as something that can be expressed in healthy or perverse ways (Ghent, 1989). There is always the potential for both. We are all too familiar with religion being used to sow the seeds of separation and to justify violence, but we also know that it can weave connections, nurture understanding and peace. We've seen religion intimidate, diminish, and break the spirit and also inspire, elevate, and heal. It has been used to force submission to authority and ... to evoke experiences of "surrender" representing liberation and transcendence as articulated by Ghent (1994). There is such a hunger to find meaning in life, for comfort and compassion and for healing and restoration, that I can't throw out the progressive baby with the regressive bathwater. I can't dismiss the ways sacred experience can facilitate the process of transformation when old, more constricted ways of being are beginning to dissolve and new, more expansive ways are beginning to crystallize experiences that speak to growth rather than regression.

Although Freud's was a strong voice within classical psychoanalysis, Loewald (1978) and Winnicott (1971) articulated the view that rationality alone impoverished existence. They valued, even privileged, illusion and paradox. States often associated with sacred experience offer a liberating sense of spaciousness in which to explore and deepen different dimensions of self. I see the fluid permeability of these expanded states allowing for greater psychological complexity and creative pathways for healing as the confines of what we call the "self" become more elastic and we become more receptive to experiencing life with all its mystery and ambiguity.

Fromm (1950), Winnicott (1967), and Jung (1938), among others, appreciated the more adaptive functions of religion that serve as a sacred canopy under which we struggle to find meaning and purpose in life. Additionally, Kohut's (1984) concept of the self object and recognition of the adaptive capacity to create substitute self objects via visual imagery further expanded the analytic view to include the inner experience of God and self-transcendence, helping us to see religion as more than an illusion. Ghent, too, posited a deep-rooted universal human need for transcendence, to surrender to something beyond ourselves, to some larger unit of which we are a part (Ghent, 1989). And in their discussion of a dimension of being that I read as spiri-

tual, Stolorow and Atwood (1992) illuminate the immateriality of human experience, our anguish in the face of impermanence, the transitoriness of all things, our longings for connection to others and for being known and understood at the level of our deepest affects.²

Toward Defining the Indefinable

Those who believe in a deity acknowledge God to be ineffable, beyond all words. Although I use the terms “God” and “the sacred” interchangeably, I see the latter as more evocative of this expansive, wordless state of being. In an attempt to use language for that which can only be experienced, I offer some meanings that have been attributed to God: that which is felt to be holy; an indivisible Oneness; an omnipotent force imbued with the power of creation; our infinite potential; the force of freedom, healing, and transformation that lies at the heart of all creation.

In a wonderful exegesis of the *Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil*³, Aron (2005) speaks of God’s moral universe as the Third, which represents the commitment to mutuality, reciprocity, the intersubjectivity that cannot exist without mourning and surrender to a higher symbolic law. This idea of mutuality is further developed in Judaic thought through the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people, who are partners in the continuous unfolding of creation, working to perfect a broken world, impacting each other.

A Relationship to the Sacred and the Spiritual Life

While this paper addresses sacred experience, the human need for an object of devotion (Fromm, 1950) does not require a belief in a deity, which is the cornerstone of “organized religion.” Because it is based on specific doctrine, shared memory, history, values, and a sense of mutual commitment, organized religion often tends to fall short of becoming a bridge to the more universal aspirations of spirituality. Something gets lost in translation! In the spiritual realm, the cultivation of compassion, the quest for unity, direct personal experiences of connection to the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part occupies more of a foreground space. As Safran (2003) explains, one reason for Buddhism’s appeal to psychoanalysts is that it’s a “religion of no-religion,” even though it is concerned with religious values of humility, compassion, the cessation of suffering.

In what has been called personal religion or spirituality, where one may be unencumbered by a belief in a particular deity or theology, the area of concern is the experience of the individual in relation to whatever he or she considers sacred (James, 1902). Here the relationship may or may not be to a deity but to one’s spiritual life, that dimension of being constituted by the personal, passionate bond one establishes with what is sacred, those awe-inspiring, compelling encounters that somehow alter

² For further reading on contemporary thought on spirituality and religion in psychoanalysis, I direct the reader to *Soul on the Couch*, C. Spezzano and G. Gargiulo (1997), and *Psychoanalysis and Buddhism*, J. Safran (2003).

³ Although my references are mainly about Judaism, the path with which I am most familiar, my thinking is intended to apply to religion in general.

or transform one's sense of self (Jones, 1991). As in organized religion, these direct revelations may arise within the silent spaces of contemplation, meditation, prayer; from a sense of connection or wonder. They may arise spontaneously in nature, aesthetic experiences of art, music, literature; in evocative rituals that mark what is significant in life; in intimate communion with another that feels so open, honest, and safe that it must be called "sacred."

Perhaps with different emphases, both personal and organized religion aspire to help us better understand the nature of reality, reminding us that our lives mirror the cycles of nature; ebbing and flowing, waxing and waning, destruction and creation, death and rebirth. We learn to see our individual lives as part of a larger cosmic history; to view our difficulties as unavoidable stepping stones along the path of growth and awareness. Just as the moon's light arises out of the darkness, the light of our own growth often arises after we retreat into the "dark night of the soul." We begin to understand the pattern of rupture and repair, to understand that the parts of us that have died carry the seeds of future possibilities. Integrating these profound truths into our familiar ways of being, we begin to transcend our illusory, limiting views of self.

Like Aron (2005), who cites the religious obligation in Judaism for human self-creativity, rebirth, and transformation, comparative religion historian Karen Armstrong (1993) suggests the very nature of humanity demands that we transcend ourselves and our familiar perceptions, that this principle indicates the presence of what has been called the divine. Transpersonal psychology has discovered a surprising unanimity as to the basic architecture of the "higher" spiritual stages of human development: transcendent consciousness and a mystical oneness with all existence (Wilbur, 1998). That this cuts across cultures may again point to a universal need or longing for the more expanded consciousness associated with sacred experience, to Ghent's (1990) hunch of the universal need for surrender. Transcendence, transformation, the process of "becoming" are not only associated with but are themselves sacred experiences. One of the Hebrew names of God, YHWH, is translated as "I will be who I will be." The notion of human beings made in the image of God suggests that we too have a capacity for evolution for which the limits are not yet set (Fromm, 1950). God becomes symbolic of all we are and are yet to be.

Attachment, Nonattachment, and Self States

While sacred experience speaks to the concerns of the larger world beyond the self, it is also deeply personal, where one's relationship to the sacred may be experienced as an attachment relationship, a secure base from which to explore the painful aspects of one's life (Bowlby, 1988). More than proximity to a protective other, developmental research (Fonagy et al., 2002; Lachmann & Beebe, 1992) has linked secure attachment to those interactions between caregiver and infant that promote self-reflective awareness; the caregiver who perceives the infant as an intentional being, with feelings and desires, whose sensitive mirroring lets the infant know that affects can be shared, who facilitates self-regulation. In the realm of the sacred, God can be experienced as such a caregiver, the One who urges us to be our most authentic selves. The notion that each of us is unique in God's eyes speaks to the recognition of intentionality; of one's per-

sonal idiom (Bollas, 1987), the self's nuclear program of action (Kohut, 1984). The notion of being made in God's image reminds us that there are no affects that are beyond God's grasp. Nothing is left out! Sacred experience is not only about bliss but about shattering, shame, rage, envy, the not-me parts we project onto others. The sacred invites one into the silent spaces of self-reflection to bring awareness and compassion to the shadow parts, for coming to know oneself at the deepest levels of being. When this transitional space is suffused with a sense of abiding trust, we can allow ourselves to just be; we can weave in and out of conventional reality, connect to images, affects, memories, and body sensations, hear our interior voices.

Paradoxically, Epstein (1995), in the Buddhist language of nonattachment, suggests that the practice of meditation, in its attempt to break the identification between thought and thinker, returns one to a state of consciousness that bears an important resemblance to the feeling of an optimally attentive parent who tries to end the self-generated suffering. In the language of religion, it may feel like a transcendent other who whispers, "Let your fear fall away. I am with you always. Even if you can't see my light, it's there, just beyond the dark."

And, in the language of self states, the sacred is often experienced as a calming, soothing, idealized self object relationship (Kohut, 1977), a powerful Other with whom one can momentarily merge, lifting one beyond the limitations of the self. This transient merging with fantasied omnipotence, with something transcendent, something great and enduring, beyond words and images, can serve as a unifying experience from which a capacity for self-soothing may accrue, a dimension of experience that contributes to the firming of the self (Lachmann & Beebe, 1992). More paradox: This illusory "solid" sense of self is loosened when the sacred is experienced in its more immanent dimension, a dwelling place for the ineffable, the ground of being (Tillich, 1951). Here, consciousness is felt to be expansive, timeless, and deeply connected to all that is. Perceptions of separateness begin to fall away. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner (1990) speaks of the "Holy One of Being" as both transcendent and imminent, inside and outside. Echoing Winnicott, he assumes something within, a latent corresponding interior voice ready to hear that from without, a voice that is both created and found.

Resonating with Aron (2005), R. David Cooper (1997, p. 69) writes of "Be-ing," "God-ing," "a mutually interactive verb that entails an interdependency between two subjects, each being the object for the other." This speaks of our relationships to the multiple aspects of self, to others, to the divine; a way of being based on compassion, integrity, respect for all humanity (Fromm, 1950; Loewald, 1980).

Some Thoughts on Transformation

Paradox is inherent in sacred experience. We see ourselves as unique beings "in the eyes of God," yet we are reminded that we share a basic humanity that renders us more alike than different. We are made in God's image yet we are but dust and ashes. God is enduring and eternal, yet God's creations are ever-evolving, with a capacity to be inspired (from the Latin *inspirare*, to take in breath, spirit) and transformed. Perhaps another way to think about sacred experience is to imagine entering into a transformative space in which consciousness and a more enlivened spirit can be breathed

into existence. Let me say, more specifically, what I mean.

As I witness patients' struggles to rework and reorganize earlier experiences in the destabilizing process of transformation, the analogy of the caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly often comes to mind. As I come to appreciate the exquisite unfolding of nature, I find it fascinating to learn that within the growing caterpillar's body are small clusters of cells called imaginal buds, which embody the blueprint of the butterfly. As the buds grow and link together, the caterpillar's immune system experiences them as foreign, tries to destroy them, then breaks down and begins to disintegrate (Thompson, 2000). Something also breaks down in the human psyche before a more evolved self can be born; and something potent, transcendent, is needed to hold us in this process.

In the language of psychoanalysis, Bollas (1987) discusses the transformational object emphasizing the foundational relational matrix of the mother-infant dyad and describes one of the primary functions of the maternal milieu. The mother helps to integrate the infant's being and is experienced as a process of transformation; a soothing presence, a container that can hold overwhelming affects, helping to bind and integrate new experiences. The sacred is often felt to be a transforming other; drawn from the memory traces of foundational experiences, what Gentile (1998) suggests may be a universal deep structure that organizes meaning and experiences and comes alive in a facilitating intersubjective relationship. Resonating with Bollas, Winnicott (1965) imbues the mother-infant relationship with a sense of sacredness that becomes the basis of our sense of, and capacity for, connection; as does Erikson (1982), for whom the maternal-infant interaction forms the basis for our sense of self. "The power of the sacred may be, in part, that it carries the potential of recapturing the psyche's moment of creation, and with it the promise of present and future moments of re-creation" (Jones, 1991, p. 121), the potential to breathe something new into existence.

Analogous to the butterfly's metamorphosis, Kushner (1990), in the language of Jewish spirituality, speaks of transformation in terms of the "Nothingness." This nothingness is not a nihilistic state but one of receptivity, of being open, able to hear what springs up from within. A fertile spaciousness, close to what other traditions call "emptiness," the liminal, in-between state, at the edge of the womb of becoming, from which new dimensions of being can emerge (Frankel, 2003). "Nothingness" is also a translation of one of the Hebrew names of God corresponding to the highest level of spiritual and psychological development.

Jewish mystics see the cycle of the holy days as doors through which we can enter this state where ego is temporarily diminished and we become "as Nothing," returning to our source, part of the great rhythm of going out and returning. In the myth of the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites are transformed from slaves into a free people, but there is a caveat: Consciousness cannot be transformed until one is willing to face the possibility of annihilation. Often, the waters part only after we've jumped in! What ultimately drowns in the Red Sea is not Pharaoh but an aspect of ego (Kushner, 1990) as we let ourselves die to the only sense of self we've known, to a self that has not yet become. Though these sacred stories are told through the particularity of Jewish myth, I see them as universal, reflecting the power of the One to hold us, to

bind us, as we face the fear of disintegration that accompanies transformation.

An Intersection Between Theory and Mythology: Of Spirit and Sparks

The ancient Hebrew literary form known as Midrash, which seeks to fill in the spaces between the words of Scripture, is analogous to the psychotherapeutic experience, which likewise seeks to join the fragments of one's life into a greater unity of meaning.

—Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

I came to understand much of Ellen's experience through the lenses of pathological accommodation (Brandchaft, 1994) and Ghent's (1990) thoughts on the fundamental need for the expansion and liberation of the self, the dismantling of the false self, the frozen or buried parts of ourselves that long to be reached or known. Winnicott describes the development of the false self as the sequelae of the baby's reaction to extreme impingement: "The individual then develops as an extension of the shell rather than the core" (1950–55, p. 221). I'm reminded here of the Jewish mystical tradition's Creation myth, which strikes me as a wonderful metaphor for Ellen's journey.

The myth teaches that scattered in this physical world of multiplicity, in every being, are shells in which divine sparks of holiness are trapped. The task of humankind is to repair the fragmented state of the universe by releasing the holy sparks from their shells. This is accomplished through the creation of "sacred moments"; higher levels of awareness, acts of loving-kindness, being in harmony with the universe. The medium through which the sparks are released is consciousness itself (Cooper, 1997).

I hear the myth echoing the "muted sacramental current that runs through Winnicott's work ... the sanctity of individual personality, reverence for the vital spark" (Eigen, 1998, p. 17); that beyond the fragmented pieces of one's psychological universe there is a whole, an expression of the inborn longing for wholeness that lies both at the heart of psychoanalytic work and religious/spiritual healing rituals and practices. While psychological wholeness may not be fully attainable, the Creation myth encourages us to remain engaged in the process of integrating all aspects of our nature into our fluid, ever-evolving psychological organizations.

I think of the intimate etymological connection between healing, making whole and holy (Ghent, 1990) and how they are embodied in the Jewish practice of Teshuva, literally "return" to the infinite Source, or more broadly "atonement," which I read as "at-one-ment." The practice asks us to tell ourselves the truth about ourselves, to recognize our imperfections, where we have "sinned." I find myself hesitating to use the word *sin* because of its close connection to excessive preaching about morality. But it is very much a part of religious discourse, so I use it in the sense of "missing the mark," or as Aron (2005) reminds us, where intersubjectivity is lost and we treat each other as objects. Recognizing this, we make apologies from the heart in the service of repairing the ruptures in our relationships to others, to God and all of nature, to the spirit; our deepest, most authentic selves. At the same time, we hold close our vision

of who we want to be; of wholeness, becoming more alive, present, and authentic. Yet being able to fully reveal and accept ourselves, to surrender our defensive structures, requires the presence of an “other” who can be successfully used (Winnicott, 1969). This other is one whom we no longer fear, with whom we experience a sense of being loved, a “something or someone who so totally transcends our experience, whose presence is so total and affirming that we will take a chance on surrendering” (Ghent, 1990, p. 112). A holy journey, indeed.

Ellen’s Journey

Ellen, a 33-year-old married woman, began psychoanalytic psychotherapy with me to deal with her severe anxiety. She felt her current difficulties at work were rooted in the profound sense of disconnection she experienced in childhood. She described her family life as emotionally impoverished. “We were the Jewish version of the film *Ordinary People*.” Deprived of the needed and longed-for gleam of joy in her parents’ eyes, Ellen came to feel that there was nothing special or worthy about her. She had a memory of herself as a young child, sick with fever and vomiting: “I cleaned everything up by myself in the middle of the night. I didn’t feel I had the right to disturb my parents.” She felt her mother couldn’t deal with any more mess or pain, either physically or emotionally. Her mother had lost two infants; one a stillborn, before Ellen’s birth; the other, born when Ellen was about six, who died within a few days. Neither loss was spoken of, nor was there anyone or anything to help Ellen understand or process the family trauma. Only recently has she been able to touch that grief. “I was six, I knew my mother was going to have a baby, this was my loss too. But they never said a word to me about it.” Her mother, needing to keep her own emotions at bay, had little capacity to inquire about or respond to her daughter’s. Because Ellen’s primary affects went unrecognized, she was unable to find herself in the mind of her mother. She could neither reflect upon nor understand her own feelings. But she knew one thing: She could not bring her parents any further disappointment.

Her mother dealt with her grief by surrounding herself with friends and activities at the “country-club” synagogue, which became the centerpiece of her life. “This wasn’t about finding spiritual comfort, it was about keeping busy, climbing the social ladder, and my sister and I paid the price for her acceptance.” Ellen’s older sister was a source of comfort in her early years, but gradually became a source of embarrassment in their adolescence and anger in adulthood. “When I think of her, how dysfunctional she is, I think of what I might have become if I hadn’t done so much work on myself. It makes me very grateful for my life, and very sad for hers.” Her father, a quiet, passive man, was largely absent, working to support his wife’s dream of an upwardly mobile lifestyle. “He was less judgmental and warmer than my mother, more like his mother, who I loved and who loved me. She raised my father and his two brothers, one who was physically ill and the other mentally retarded, without much help. I wish I knew what his childhood was like, but he won’t talk about the past, it’s sealed off.”

This was the intersubjective context in which Ellen’s maturational process unfolded. “I got bigger and bigger, physically, not emotionally.” With few opportunities for or experiences of mutual regulation, Ellen’s attempts at self-regulation manifested in com-

pulsive eating to fill herself. But she remained empty, unable to understand or manage her internal states. Like the infants who died before they could live, Ellen, too, felt dead inside, holding on to a tenuous sense of herself by a thread. Recurring dream images were of a little girl holding on to a balloon that anchored her to the earth, but whose string could be cut by the slightest infraction. Just as the infants disappeared into the earth, Ellen felt she could disappear into thin air, forever cut off from her parents' emotional orbit. The only way to remain in their psychological universe and preserve those vitally needed connections was to be whatever they needed her to be, to surrender her sense of subjectivity to theirs. She internalized the affects of her parents, particularly those of her mother, experiencing them as a core part of herself. Her innermost reality remained unknown.

Having mastered the art of accommodation, she transferred these skills to all her relationships, especially those at work. There she became self-sufficient, responsible, and competent. Her sense of cohesion was derived from feeling needed, though overburdened. Work became a source of efficacy. She was, however, deeply wounded when she felt insufficiently recognized or was criticized, certain that she would be fired. The pattern of accommodation was repeated again with her severely narcissistic husband, through whose eyes she came to see herself, eyes that told her she was "not good enough." Fearful of losing her connection to him, she again surrendered her own subjectivity.

Transference

In the early years of our relationship, Ellen maintained an idealizing self-object transference (Kohut, 1977) with strong mirroring needs. Through facial mirroring, she began to experience with me that longed-for gleam of recognition, sensing that I felt pleasure in working with her. In contrast to her loud and pressured speech, my generally softer voice and slower vocal rhythms helped to regulate her anxious affect. These nonverbal aspects of self and interactive regulation (Beebe & Lachmann, 1992) strengthened our attachment. Ellen experienced me as a soothing presence who could contain her affects and help her make sense of her experience. I tried to create an environment in which she could be "in bits and pieces without falling apart" (Epstein, 1995). Using a meditative approach; tracking the moment-to-moment shifts, and observing how her thoughts, feelings, images, and sensations shifted in both her mind and body helped her to cultivate a more reflective, less reactive mind—a calm, abiding center of compassion and self-acceptance that facilitated a greater capacity for self-observation (Cope, 1999).

Rather than deny or push feelings away, she was learning to focus on both the content and the process of her mind and her bodily sensations. Gradually she came to see her anxieties and perceptions as fluid states of mind rather than facts of life written in stone. She was beginning to feel more subjectively whole, her internal world less fragmented. But when she was alone, without the sense of calm she found in my presence, the inevitable upsurge of anxiety made self-reflection overwhelming.

The Emergence of Spirituality

Ellen needed something more. Like a child coming to rest in a sustained maternal

embrace, with space just to be, she needed to feel held and supported before she could call into question her previously not-to-be-questioned reality. She needed a connection to something transcendent. Yet, when she expressed a desire to be part of a spiritual community, I was taken by surprise. For Ellen, God was a distant, empty concept reflecting the relationship to her parents, something she was supposed to believe in but didn't. Although her experience of the synagogue was viewed with disdain, she felt a sense of connection and an inner opening at a "spiritual, ethically oriented" church in the city that she attended as a single adult. After she married, moved to the suburbs, and had a family of her own, the spiritual connection withered and her isolation resurfaced. Our relationship evoked twinship (Kohut, 1977) needs, a longing for friendships with like-minded others. She asked if I knew of any temples in the area that she might visit, hoping that they (or she) had changed sufficiently that she might have a more positive experience. She didn't. She was angry and disappointed about how Judaism was filled with dogma but empty of a sense of how we feel, and find, God in our lives.

"All of the services were so formal, distant. I don't speak that language, and I don't mean Hebrew. It doesn't touch me. I can't feel the words. They praise God, but I don't hear them talk of what God is in our lives, the way we treat each other. Where's the compassion and love? Why don't they talk about how underneath the fancy clothes we're all the same? We all hurt, we all love, we all get knocked down and try to get up again. I know that Jews have been getting back up on their feet forever, but I don't hear about what inspires them to go on. Something is missing."

For a moment, Ellen was speaking from her heart. It felt like her spirit was breaking out of its cell. But then she pulled back; the prison doors clanged shut. Was she aware that she had just come to a screeching halt? I pushed the doors open. We explored how her authentic expression gave rise to a fear, even a conviction that she had offended me, and the deeper fear that it could destroy the tie between us, leaving her utterly alone. Bringing her fears into awareness, she was able to reclaim and elaborate on her experience. She was tired of feeling that her string was about to be cut. She wanted something to hold on to, to feel part of something bigger than herself. Although she still didn't think she'd find it in a synagogue, she wanted to know if, and how, Judaism nourished the spirituality she sensed in me.

A Brief Detour Along the Analyst's Journey

The relational stance toward personal disclosure paved the way for an intersubjective engagement that I felt would be important to our relationship. Although my Jewish identity was embedded in the context of my family, for whom Judaism was a core part of their being, I let Ellen know that there had been something missing for me, too; that I couldn't relate to the patriarchal, authoritarian, restrictive, insular aspects of our traditions; that the name *Israel* means "one who struggles with God!" I shared that I struggled mightily, destroying and creating, trying to make meaning of this 4,000-year-old heritage that was written in my bones, until I found the other, more hidden, feminine face of God, which came to be inscribed upon my heart. This Lawgiver could laugh, cry, and mourn with us, sing, pray, and rejoice with us (Aron, 2004);

this loving in-dwelling Presence could nurture the best in us, hold us in a womb of compassion, recognize us in all our multiplicity, and teach us to recognize the fullness of others.

What Ellen didn't know was that her misgivings about Judaism reawakened my concerns about my adult children's fragile connection to our heritage. When a dream told me that our tradition, linking generation to generation, might be lost to my (yet unborn) grandchildren, I felt I had to find something to keep that link alive. I didn't know what or how, but I somehow knew it was there to be found. My hard-won area of faith (Eigen, 1993) helped me to stay with "not knowing." It kept me open to new experience; to wander, lose my way, and wander again along the parallel paths of psychoanalysis and spirituality until I found a part of my voice that had been trapped in its shell and I could release some holy sparks of my own. I created an evolving family Passover Haggadah (the Exodus text), which made the ancient teachings feel fresh and alive and gave me, my children, and, now, my grandchildren the personal sense of liberation that lies at the heart of the holiday—the freedom to celebrate in ways that feel authentic, meaningful, and joyful. It became a link that reconnected us all to our rightful legacy, our heritage.

Returning to Ellen

Ellen's experience was very different. Her relationship to a Jewish God reflected the deep structure of her internalized relationships; it echoed the distant, unresponsive relationship to her parents, whose religious ties were described as superficial. Echoing in my mind were Ellen's earlier words: "underneath all the fancy clothes..." her mother's desire to be part of a community "where the women could dress in their best and brag about their children's accomplishments." The synagogue became the site where her mother's dreams could be realized. It became the centerpiece of her mother's life, not Ellen. Of course she felt an antipathy toward Judaism!

I wondered how I fit into this pattern. Ellen was able to tell me "when I first met you (at the clinic) I thought, 'Great, just what I need, another one of those well-put-together suburban Jewish women.' I figured you'd be more interested in your own needs, in your own agenda, that you wouldn't be able to understand what I needed. But that changed a long time ago. I don't feel at all that way about you now ... except maybe at some level I can't believe that anyone will understand what I really want." What did she want? Reminiscent of the restaurant scene in the film *When Harry Met Sally*, in which a patron overhears Sally practicing the sounds of orgasmic ecstasy and says to the waitress, "I'll have whatever she's having!" Ellen wanted whatever I had that helped me to feel calm and centered. She wanted to feel a sense of wonder and mystery, to be able to tolerate uncertainty and not have to know how things would unfold. She wanted to feel a sense of connection to, and comfort with, herself and the world; to feel part of something bigger than herself, part of something ancient, timeless. She wanted what she sensed in me, what Pizer (2005) calls a "nonanalytic Third," a personal, intimate, and substantially abiding relationship to a body of experience outside of analysis, a relationship that I believe brought a different dimension to the analysis and infused the space between us with fresh air and a broader perspective.

As Ellen struggled to tease apart the complex layers of these issues, she continued to attend services at different temples, although each one left her cold. Was this an accommodation to me? A real desire to try to move beyond her rage toward her mother and connect with her own tradition? Or both? As we worked to disentangle the knots, Ellen began to weave another strand into the tapestry of her spiritual journey. She wanted to find a spiritual home like the church she attended in the city. At the end of a session, she felt free enough to ask me, in a literal “hand-on-the-doorknob” moment, if I knew of any. I did. As much as I have come to love and embrace my own faith, the universal teachings of other traditions inspired my own spiritual awakening and continue to inform me, so I mentioned one I had heard a lot about, one that I was thinking of visiting as well.

Seeking and Finding

Months later she told me that she had gone to some services at the church. Only when she felt confident that I was supportive of her attempts to contact, develop, and sustain her own desires did she whisper, “I felt like I’d finally come home.” She couldn’t put her finger on what made her feel this way, but she felt a familiar heart-opening within. She loved the music, the homilies, and the presence of like-minded others, a sense of communion with those who were on similar journeys. The focus on caring for one another spoke to her soul. She didn’t speak about belief, doctrine, or theology, just her strong, subjective feeling that this warm and welcoming community was where she wanted, needed to be. It drew her in.

The emotional and spiritual “homecoming” was a heady experience, and for a brief time created a split in the transference. I became aware of this when she didn’t show up for a session. I called to inquire. She explained that she was immersed in her work and “totally lost track of time.” But Ellen never *forgot* a session. Embarrassed and apologetic, she wanted to meet for whatever time (10 to 15 minutes) remained. A few minutes into this mini session, I, without much reflection, offered to extend the session for 15 minutes. Ellen wept, deeply affected by my offer, unable to remember anyone being so considerate of her needs, especially after she “screwed up.” As we explored her *forgetting*, we came to understand her experience of the church. “It’s a place where I feel really peaceful and loved. I feel like one of God’s children, I feel God’s face smiling at mine. All my issues are still there, but not in my face. It’s different here ... I know how much you care about me, I can feel it, but here I have to work to feel at peace.”

I believe that because Ellen had been able to see herself reflected in the “gleam” of my eye, she was able to find her own face mirrored in the smiling face of God (Beebe, 2000; Winnicott, 1965; Kohut, 1977) and experience God as a powerful presence that could lift her beyond herself. I didn’t question this transitional experience, although it alerted me to the possibility of a “spiritual bypass.” She had not yet come to experience the other face of God that can illuminate our deepest vulnerabilities and pain. That was reserved for me.

But I did express my dilemma: We were in the uncharted territory of religion, and I was unsure of how to navigate the terrain. If I probed too deeply, would I be im-

pinging, imposing my values on her? If I didn't explore deeply enough, was I communicating a fear that our differences could destroy our connection? Ellen appreciated both my having shared some of my own journey and my being mindful of the process between us, which she experienced as intimate encounters through which she was getting to know herself and me. Elaboration of these issues continued to be a focus of our work for some time, as was the meaning my enactment held for her. Privately, I wondered what it meant for me. Did I mention the church to preserve my cherished self-image of being open-minded? Did I rush to extend the session because I felt competitive with the church, playing Our Lady of the Bountiful Breasts, Mother Earth, to upstage Father God? And what was inducing the competition? Was I dimly aware of Ellen's unconscious test to prove that I was one of those "suburban Jewish women" who couldn't recognize her needs? What I learned from Ellen was that this enactment signaled a turning point in her treatment. She was beginning to believe that I was someone who wouldn't withdraw or retaliate and who could, at least in this instance, give her just what she needed even before she knew she needed it. "This is the only place I can really be myself. I don't have to be perfect, I can 'mess up,' but my string won't be cut!"

Gradually the split healed. Rather than dilute the transference, her relationship to the sacred seemed to add another dimension to it. "Now I feel like I have the parents and siblings I always needed, a family that makes me feel not only accepted but cherished." Like a child coming home from school, excited to tell her mother what she'd learned, Ellen shared some of the spiritual teachings that moved her. I was struck by how similar they were to the teachings of Judaism. She felt blessed that she had the best of both worlds. Not! I wanted her to give Judaism another chance. I passed her test, so maybe Judaism could, too. But had I passed my own test? Was I as open-minded as I liked to think I was?

A Leap of Faith

About a year later, with the issue of religion oscillating between foreground and background, Ellen announced her desire to be baptized. Though I shouldn't have been stunned, her announcement struck like a punch in the gut. It sent me reeling with doubt as to my professional competency and left me with more than a twinge of guilt. I could see the epitaph on my gravestone: "SHE LOST ONE OF THE FOLD." It also felt like a slap in the face. I was working to build bridges and open doors—who was she to slam them shut? The least she could do was explore her rage at her mother and the Jewish community into whose arms her mother fled. Maybe then she'd be able to embrace Jud ... Whoa.

I needed to acknowledge and tend to my own narcissistic wounds; to feel my own anger, hurt, and disappointment before I could remember Ellen's fear that I could be yet another Jewish woman more interested in her own agenda than Ellen's. Clearly, re-connecting to Judaism was not Ellen's need. It was mine. Just as I became the transference mother to Ellen, I saw that only the careful monitoring of my own countertransference kept her from becoming my "child." Centering myself, I respectfully offered my own listening perspective (Fosshage, 1995). "I know how im-

portant it is for you to have found a spiritual home. Yet I feel a deep sadness that so much of the beauty and meaning of Judaism will be lost to you and your family. It feels to me like you're fighting for your emotional life and you have to reject all of your parents' ways to win. I know it feels like the synagogue's open arms left an empty space between yours, with no mommy to fill them, to hold you. It took her away from you ... Will the church now take you away from your family? How will it affect the relationship with them, with us?"

"I don't see this as rejecting anything," Ellen told me. "My parents and my being Jewish will always be a part of me. And you know that my relationship to both my parents has been better than it's ever been, even with them knowing that I've been involved with the church. I've also had a few dreams of my grandmother, who was very religious, spiritual. She was giving me her blessing, she was happy for me that I found God. Most important, my relationship to me is better! This is not about doing something to them, it's about doing something for me, finding what I need for me and acting on it. I'm tired of being on the fringes; I want to be a full part of what's important to me. It's probably the first time in my life I can hear my own spirit, and I'm listening to it. Trusting and acting on my own feelings is the hardest thing I've ever had to do. But I'm finally getting it; even the people I love, my parents, my husband, you ... don't have the answers for me. I have to do this alone, with God. I spend a lot of time just being quiet, praying for the courage to be honest with myself, to have the strength to do what I need to do for myself."

Deeply felt encounters like this penetrate us both. Gradually, I come to know in my bones that Ellen's journey is less about finding a religion and more about finding a path that would lead her "home," to God, to her self. It's less about her holding a particular religion and more about what she holds sacred. For her, there is no doctrine that she has to adhere to—what she's creating is a fluid, dynamic relationship to her spiritual life and growth; an inner voice that whispers, "It doesn't have to be this way," a hand that holds her as she tries to find her way through the darkness. Without trying, I feel myself letting go of my theories and expectations. I surrender to the moment that feels honest and alive. I yield to the space of thirdness (Ogden, 1989), the space between us that allows me to contain Ellen's experience without feeling that my own subjectivity is destroyed. It allows her to use me and not lose me; to know the answer to her unasked question, "Will you still love me even as I move away from you?" is "Yes!" Like spokes on a wheel, we move in different directions but remain connected to the center, to the One who connects us all. In different language, Benjamin (2005, p. 199) asks, "How far do the strings that tie you to the One stretch?" equating the elasticity of tension with thirdness. Another dimension of thirdness, another way to think of the One whose spark burns in the center of our being. However muted its embers had once been, Ellen's divine spark flickers and glows, reigniting my own. In different ways, for different reasons, Ellen and I have been on parallel paths. She was looking for God to keep her balloon string intact; I was looking for something to keep my heritage from slipping away. We were both looking for something to hold onto. Confronting the feelings and lingering doubts hanging in the air between us clears away my own ambivalence, rekindling my appreciation for Judaism's enduring values

and teachings. Accepting Ellen's diminished connection to Judaism, paradoxically, deepens my own.

Being with me as I struggle to hold and metabolize my own feelings, Ellen sees that powerful emotions do not have to be destructive, that someone she loves can be disappointed in her choices without it being a prelude to abandonment. Her self-experience, long characterized by pathological accommodation, continues to shift toward more authenticity. The facilitative intersubjective context, the intimacy of our relationship, the sense of love and respect she feels from me and my belief in who she could become (Loewald, 1980) contribute significantly to her evolving sense of self. She *is* fighting for her life, but maybe it is more proactive than reactive. For Ellen, psychological and spiritual growth are seamlessly intertwined. Her growing sense of authenticity and aliveness within the analytic relationship transforms the deadness she felt in the relationship with her parents. It also facilitates a relationship to the sacred and transforms it (Rizzuto, 1979) from a remote abstraction to a tender bond; a loving, compassionate, empowering Other and very much a part of her. Her God feels less like an omnipotent parent standing in relation to an accommodating child and more like a co-creator of her evolving reality. Identifying with the teachings and spirit of Jesus, "the quintessential modeler of loving relationship" (Hoffman, 2004, p. 799), his humility, sensitivity, and compassion, she keeps close to her heart one of his teachings that seems to speak directly to her: "Even the least among you can be as I am." This allows her to feel good enough by being who she is and gives her a sense of hope in her own very human capacity to grow. She is reclaiming her own authentic power. "I don't feel stuck with the life my parents programmed for me, I'm finally beginning to design a life of my own."

Bearing the Unbearable

The life Ellen is designing is mainly in the realm of work, where she feels her spirit has been most trapped. By both choice and "necessity," she has long been the primary breadwinner in her family, comprising her husband and two adolescent sons. While work has been her primary focus, mine is to move the matrix of her family relationships more into the foreground, as I see familiar patterns unfold to the detriment of her children's development. Ellen wants to be the empathic, responsive mother that she never had. Trying to compensate for her husband's narcissism and poor parenting, Ellen's efforts have morphed into indulgence and overidentification with her sons, rendering her unable to guide or discipline them appropriately—unwittingly replicating her experience of having a parent who doesn't understand what her child needs.

It's been hard for Ellen to stay with this. Only when she felt the profound pain and disappointment around her older son's drug use and psychological instability did the extent of her "pathological accommodation" come into focus. Ellen has come to realize that in order to keep the tie to her husband intact, she had once again surrendered her own subjectivity. Seeing herself through his eyes, which told her she was "not good enough," she tried to keep "peace" in the family by submitting to his demands. Recognizing that this has been not only at the expense of her own development but of her children's, it became her "dark night of the soul" and the catalyst to change her way

of being in relation to her family and to her self.

While acknowledging the initial attraction of her husband's "charm and brilliance," she has clearly come to recognize his emotional immaturity, his inability to deal with the stress of family life or to contribute his fair share of parenting or financial responsibilities. She has characterized him as being manipulative, humiliating, mean-spirited, and lacking in integrity, softening the harsh reality to include the side of him that tries "to be a buddy to the boys, a good father in his own way."

Now that she is "seeing with new eyes," Ellen is dealing with her husband with compassionate resolve and strength, steeling herself not to acquiesce to his demands. She does not want him to leave, but she is willing to let that happen if it must; she knows she can no longer silence her voice for the sake of peace or connection. And, as she sets limits and demands more responsibility from him, he begins to step up to the plate, to the degree that he can. Doing similarly with her sons, she begins to feel a greater sense of respect from them and *for herself*. She is learning to become the mother both she and her sons need.

In the work arena she has become more competent, more connected to colleagues and more responsive to their need to be acknowledged and affirmed. Atypical in the corporate culture, it earns her a great deal of respect, and she gradually moves up the corporate ladder in ways that exceed her expectations. In return for feeling so "blessed," she feels compelled to give something back to God and gives more and more of her time and energy to her job at what I perceive to be considerable personal cost. Continued exploration illuminates once again the organizing pattern that she has to be good, almost selfless, to preserve her valued connections, this time to God. As I wonder aloud about this, a quick burst of anger arises in Ellen and the prison doors clang shut again. But now she pries them open, albeit tentatively, realizing how hard it is for her to experience anger. "You should know how important it is for me to give back because I want to, not because someone wants me to. It makes me feel empowered, it gives meaning to my life. I wish you could've been happy for me!" I tell her I am very happy that she's been able to experience something transcendent that allows her to feel alive, intense, passionate, and empowered (Ghent, 1989). Yet these feelings may represent both an accommodation and the powerful feelings of her more authentic self-structure as it begins to emerge, not only from work, but from active stillness. I think of the hours she has spent alone in her car, driving to work, both listening to her spiritual gurus on tape and engulfed in a web of silence, feeling "drawn down out of the world ... towards a sense of self she knew she had at bottom" (Eigen, 1993, p. 2).

Surrendering my more limited perspective allows Ellen to expand her own. In a way that does not feel accommodating to me, she acknowledges that "Maybe there is a part of me that's proving myself to God." A dream reflects this. "I was working for a mass murderer and I did whatever he wanted so he wouldn't kill me. I was so afraid that I never tried to stop him, get help, or escape. I hate how I can't make a move unless I know I'll be 100 percent safe."

Everyone Ellen loves or needs feels like a mass murderer who can kill her spirit, including her God and her analyst. Yet she too is a murderer, victimizer as well as victim. She fears not only her anger but her sense of aliveness, that acting from her own

core can destroy these vital ties. Every step toward self-delineation is accompanied by terror and annihilation. "The challenge to existing ways of organizing experience ... constitutes a painful, and not infrequently cataclysmic, psychological event (Brandchaft, unpublished manuscript, p. 73)." Changing, giving voice to her own feelings, owning her own sense of assertiveness and aggression feels positively murderous. "It feels like I'm killing everyone I love, like I'm betraying my whole existence, like I'm the one cutting my own balloon string. But I know there's no turning back...."

The relational matrix in which Ellen's sense of self was embedded feels like it's disintegrating. She's going through a metamorphosis. The only sense of self she knows is dying. She's mourning what has been lost, what was never had. But mourning is also a passageway. The fertile silence of our relationship and her spiritual perspective create a space in which it is safe to enter the Nothingness of limitless possibility and no guarantees, to let go of the old self. "I feel like I'm watching myself in labor giving birth to a new self, and the pain is excruciating.... I don't understand this process but I have faith in it, in myself...." Exhausted, yet trusting the process of transformation, she shares: "I'm beginning to think that faith is God's gift to us, not our gift to God. It's something to hold onto, something that helps you do what you never thought was possible. I don't know if I could bear to go through this without you and God in my life. Without you, the feelings would just be too raw."

Like the new moon that returns to the night sky with a sliver of light, Ellen emerges from the darkness with a barely perceptible sense of possibility, part of the pattern of retreat and renewal. The willingness to rest in the state of temporary Nothingness gives way to a more spacious quality of mind in which creative solutions to seemingly hopeless difficulties emerge (Milner, 1950). Because she can now imagine herself being held in the mind of an other, she can stay with her feelings long enough to reflect on them, to cultivate the self-compassion that helps her to stay in the moment. She feels "found," more whole.

Ellen's increased capacity for reflection and mentalization has helped her to create a palette of alternate perspectives. Becoming aware of the roots of her accommodative behavior illuminates and begins to diminish the power of her organizing principles and projections. Disappointment is no longer the psychic equivalent (Fonagy et al., 2002) of despair. "I got a great review at work, except my boss said that sometimes I'm 'too enthusiastic,' I try too hard to convince. Normally I'd focus on the humiliation of being seen as overbearing. I'd feel sick about letting my boss down and see this as his reason to fire me. But now I see the little girl who always felt so unworthy, who needed people to recognize her value. I see how I sell my idea, how I come off as pushy, or worse, desperate.... Seeing my strengths and my limitations, how I equate disappointment with abandonment, is like seeing the world with new eyes."

Kushner reminds us of another convergence between the parallel paths of psychoanalysis and spiritual search: "For both there is a looking back into one's own eyes in such a way that one looks out through them again as if with new eyes" (1990, p. 139). Ellen "sees" that she can *do*, not only be *done* to. As she owns her subjectivity, recognizes the separate subjectivity of others, and is able to alter her responses, the dynamics between self and other change, heightening her sense of agency and empowerment. This is the dawning of intersubjectivity (Stolorow, Brandchaft & Atwood, 1992; Benjamin, 1988).

Destinations Unknown

Ellen's spiritual work is not about passive yearnings for bliss. In fact, it's anything but. She is actively engaged in co-constructing her interpersonal and subjective worlds. She isn't waiting for an omnipotent God to take care of her, but pushes herself to take that next right step by creating a mantra in which she tells herself, "Just take the next right action, you too are supported by the Universe." I hear this is as spiritual language for intersubjective phenomenon. As Ellen becomes more aware of her authentic desires, she's developing an increased capacity to give voice to them, which, in turn, facilitates her ability to draw nourishment from her daily surround. While her sense of "authentic power" still feels somewhat frightening, it is no longer destructive. Now she feels she has the right to ask for what she needs, that those needs and desires can be met, that people, even God, can be disappointed in her and not leave her.

As Ellen continues her journey, her powerful and enduring connection to me and to her spirituality links her to worlds lost and found, holding her as she steps forward to destinations unknown. Most recently, life has taken her to a place that she's anticipated, wanted, and absolutely dreaded. Her company has been restructured and she is losing her job of more than 20 years. The balloon string that she's been holding on to so tightly is being cut. She's losing her emotional home and mourning the loss. But she's also moving forward in clear and agentive ways. I'm in awe of the changes she's making in her life. All of this stands in contrast to her earlier inability to make a move unless she knew she'd be 100 percent safe. In a recent session she shared: "Something inside me has changed. It feels like every day I have the opportunity to be different than I've been. I keep imagining myself as the person I want to be, trying to make that happen." She's like a butterfly, spreading her wings, starting to soar. Yet she also feels grounded, that she has a sense of place in the physical world, that she's deeply connected to the Universe. Ellen barely noticed trees before and now hugs them, embracing their sense of solidity. She senses that just as their frozen branches will blossom after the spring thaw, so will she. She trusts that her analyst and her God will continue to support her as she continues to do what she "never thought was possible," experiencing all the hope and dread (Mitchell, 1993) that accompanies this sacred work.

Many of the fragments of Ellen's internal world are mending. As her spirit is being freed from its cell (Brandchaft, 1994), she's discovering "a silent wellspring of creative and authentic living, a source of goodness not entirely unlike the human soul made in the image of God" (Hoffman, 2004, p. 793). Ellen works at integrating the wisdom of both the spiritual and psychoanalytic traditions to help her hold on to her sense of self as she struggles with the pain and mess of life. She is reminded by both traditions that often the most cherished gifts come from the darkest depths; that life itself emerges from messy fluids; that the graceful lotus grows in mud; that Christ "survives" human destruction; that the Holy Ark is said to hold both the whole tablets of the Ten Commandments and the shattered pieces of the original set broken by Moses. "I'm still cleaning up messes, but I'm no longer the little girl who feels she has to clean up her own vomit." Ellen is now connected to a network of others whose help she doesn't hesitate to enlist. In the process she's discovering her own gifts as they emerge from the mess.

Conclusion

For Ellen, the creation of “a new self” was born from the union and differentiation of two parallel paths: psyche and spirit, and the space between them, which have helped her to feel valued, loved, connected, and authentic. I trust I have illuminated the value of the interpenetration of the two dimensions: both the development of Ellen’s self, within the intersubjective context of the dyad, and the power of Ellen’s spirituality, which occurred separately from, but in relation to, the dyad.

Although Ellen’s relationship to the sacred and her spiritual practice were invaluable in helping her sustain her efforts to heal a shattered, fragmented psychological universe, I am mindful of the dangers of generalizing or idealizing this realm of experience. But I do advocate welcoming this significant dimension of human experience into the analytic conversation to provide another window into the world of patients’ object relations and into their newly emerging capacities. Does this relationship foster regression or growth? Is it a repetition of earlier traumas or is it transformative? Does it keep them in the dark or is it enlightening? Does it imprison their spirits or does it help them to live fully, vitally, authentically?

I feel a deep sense of gratitude working with Ellen. Our relationship confirms my sense that analysis can be a sacred journey for both analysand and analyst; a journey of transformation mirroring the ancient rhythms of destruction and creation in which limiting ways of being fall away and more expansive ways come into being. It is holy space, one in which something beyond either of us has come to be, a space pregnant with possibility.

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