

How does Spirituality Inform my Practice?

Sue Taylor

How does spirituality inform my practice?

What is spirituality to me?

Being, not doing, heart not intellect,

bodymind not body and mind,

no separation, connectedness,

the big picture.

No dualistic thinking, none of this

evidence based, so-called scientific thinking.

The search for meaning, purpose, identity,

true essence of being.

So here I am, a middle-aged therapist,

who's learnt just a little something along the way

through tough times and facing death,

a decade's journey with secondary cancer,

relationship, children angst.

Tibetan Buddhism gave me some tools

for living, a beginning understanding of the mind,

the experience of meditation,

the profound value of stillness, the power of visualisation.

And with other people's support

the constant challenge to stand up to the judgement,

blind belief, money and power

of those trapped in the biomedical view of the world

who claimed all knowledge of cancer the disease,

neglecting the rest of who I was.

So who I am totally affects how it is

that I work with people.

Walking beside them through their pain,

the endless ebb and flow of self and other,

total vigilance about what's mine and what's theirs,

open heart, open mind, being with,

an ordinary soul the same as,

watching for tell-tale signs of inner strength,

wholeness, the courage to face the darkness.

And some of the practical bits

like visualising the colour, shape, size

of the depression, the grief,

and where in relation to the body.

Finding evidence of spirit, hidden as it may be

The spirit that has been there lifelong ...

And what does that look like?

Can it be nurtured to have more power over the pain?

And how to be still, using relaxation, meditation

if this seems right.

And maybe to ask: 'If you had six months to live

how would you lead your life,

and what stops you from leading that life right now?'

Taking the meta view, untangling yourself from

the minutiae

of everyday dramas to look and see:

Are you leading the authentic life?

Are you being true to yourself?

Are you following your passion?

What are your spiritual beliefs?

What meaning does this experience of pain

have for you?

If there was anything to learn from these experiences,

what would it be?

And in the end to know that I know nothing,

that I can help no one but myself

and even then, well, I can only do my best

to respond to what arises, using my intuition

and my intellect, a measure of wisdom and compassion

to find a path through this extraordinary life.

This was one of four brief plenary addresses on the theme of spirituality presented to the 23rd Australian and New Zealand Family Therapy Conference, Hobart, 2002. Mark Furlong's paper in this issue was part of the same plenary.

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