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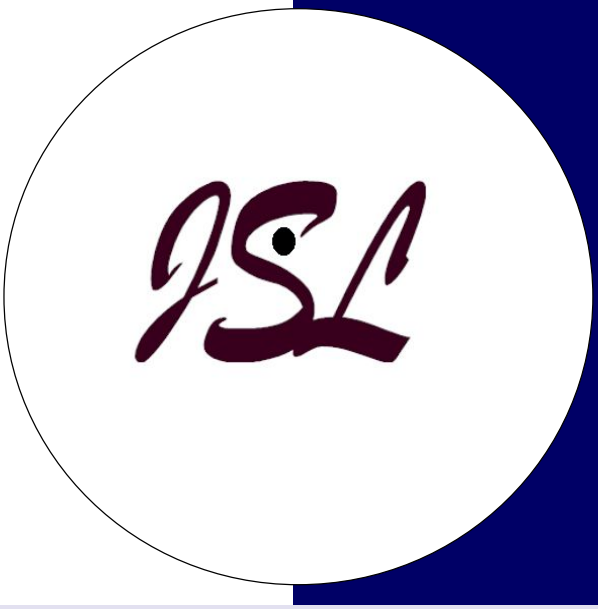

The Journal of Self Leadership

Special Issue: Spirituality and Self Leadership

A peer-reviewed professional journal dedicated to the advancement of the IFS sm model and to Self leadership

JSL

THE JOURNAL OF SELF LEADERSHIP

A peer-reviewed professional journal dedicated to the advancement of the IFS model and to Self leadership

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EDITORIAL POLICY AND MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The Journal of Self Leadership is a professional journal devoted to articles written on the theory and application of Internal Family Systems (IFS) Therapy and topics related to the development of the concept of Self Leadership. The purpose of the journal is to promote and encourage scholarly and scientific writing on IFS and the principles of Self Leadership. In addition, articles will be accepted which detail the model's utility and effectiveness for a variety of presenting problems, populations, and applications in both clinical and non-clinical arenas.

The Journal is intended for professional audiences in both academic and applied settings. In maintaining the highest standards for publication, all submissions are subject to anonymous, juried review by experts in the field. The Journal places a high value on the integration of theory and practice. The editors wish to encourage practitioners working with the IFS model to share their knowledge and insights with colleagues, and will work with potential authors on expressing their thoughts clearly in written form in preparation for peer review. Persons interested in a detailed description of writing formats and tips for preparing articles may request a copy through our e-mail address at JSLJournal@aol.com.

Potential themes and topic areas include, but are not limited to theoretical articles on IFS concepts and its interface with other models and modalities; theories of Self leadership; research, including empirical studies and meta-analyses; clinical applications, including work with various populations and levels of systems, practice issues, techniques, and case studies; and training and supervision.

Manuscripts should be submitted on white, 8-1/2" x 11" bond paper and **also on a 3-1/4" floppy disk (IBM format)**. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced with one-inch margins, on 12-point times-roman font. Pages must be numbered consecutively. Formatting and style, including the use of gender-neutral language, tables and figures, references, etc. should follow the guidelines in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (most recent edition). Articles should be written clearly and concisely, using non-jargon language.

Manuscripts should include an abstract (italicized, of not more than 100 words), describing the article's topic, method (when appropriate), and conclusions or implications. **Three copies** of each manuscript should be submitted with the floppy disk. For the purposes of blind peer review, authors' names should appear on the ***title page only***. Authors should also include a self-addressed, stamped return envelope with the submission. ***E-mail submissions for initial submissions will not be accepted.*** On the cover letter, authors should include their e-mail address to facilitate correspondence.

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SPECIAL EDITION: SPIRITUALITY AND SELF LEADERSHIP

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Say not, "I have found the path of the soul."
Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path..."

Kahlil Gibran (from* The Prophet*)

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Editors' Introduction: Psycho-Spiritual Growth

Gregory J. Johanson, Ph.D.[1] and Ralph S. Cohen, Ph. D.[2]
Co-Editors

Abstract

The co-editors of the Journal of Self Leadership express appreciation for response to the Journal, and solicit input. Articles dealing with spirituality are noted. A systems approach to spirituality as growth in agency-in-communion is outlined. Contributions to Volume Two are referenced in relation to the spirituality model.

INTRODUCTION

On writing the introduction for the third volume of *The Journal of Self Leadership*, the editors would first like to thank those who communicated appreciation and gratitude for the inaugural edition in 2003. The purpose of the *JSL* was and remains "to provide a vehicle for teachers, researchers, and clinicians to come together to share ideas and experiences in employing and advancing the model across a broad spectrum of applications." The enthusiastic response we have received has confirmed that the Internal Family Systems[sm] community welcomes a place to expand and deepen the model by providing a vehicle where contributions from the thought and experience of all interested parties may be aired.

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The editors would like to express special thanks to those who have submitted their work in written form, and worked through the peer-review process to literally make the *JSL* possible. This courage and commitment of time and energy not only results in one being published, but in the entire IFS community being enriched through the wisdom of what has been offered.

We are also aware through those we have seen in trainings, heard at the Internal Family Systems[sm] Annual Conference, and known in various contexts, that many more could and should be submitting their work to the *JSL*. We certainly have sympathy for the busyness of many in the field who have a difficult time making room for writing projects. We would like to make a particular appeal to those who identify themselves as right-brained persons doing creative clinical work, but who are not as comfortable with the more linear logic of professional journal writing. The editorial staff of the *JSL* stands ready to offer assistance at every stage of a proposal from discussing the initial idea to the final form of the manuscript. Finished, polished texts are not a prerequisite for initial submissions.

As it turned out, a number of articles submitted for this special edition of the *JSL* dealt with various aspects of the model related to spirituality. On one level, this is not a surprise, since such contributions were welcomed through our initial Editors' Introduction. On another, it is a curious topic since IFS was originally developed as a psychotherapy model without any reference to a concept of Spirit, had no formal position on the subject, and endorsed no specific spiritual community. In addition, the explosion of interest in therapy and spirituality from the 1960's on, and interest that is inevitably expressed by students during IFS trainings, has given rise to innumerable definitions of spirituality that will never be adjudicated. (For a variety of approaches to this subject cf. Ajaya, 1983; Almaas, 1988; Clinebell, 1995; Emmons, 1999; Fleischman, 1989; Griffith and Griffith, 2002; Hunt, 2003; Kahle and Robbins, 2204; Nelson, 1994; May, 1982; Miller, 2005; Schreurs, 2002; and Schwartz, 1999).

A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY

Among the many possibilities, we will offer in this introduction one way to understand spirituality and therapy that is grounded in systems theory, with which the IFS[sm] model is consistent. This in turn will offer a way of conceptualizing the various contributions to this third edition of the *JSL*.

The IFS model affirms the wide and deep contemporary consensus that the self or person can only be conceived in a systems view as a self-in-relation. That we can only be individuals-in-community is the bedrock contention of all contemporary systems theory (Jantsch, 1980). There is only agency-in-communion. That psychology is inseparable from sociology is the insight that launched both family therapy (Nichols and Schwartz, 1995 and Breunlin, Schwartz, and Mac Kune-Karrer, 1992) and feminist psychology (Jordon, et al. 1991 and Keller, 1986), and was a foundational lesson of cross-cultural counseling (Augsburger, 1986 and McGoldrick, 1998).

Koestler (1976) introduced the key term into systems thought of the "holon." All of reality, material and/or ideal, is composed of holons, namely wholes that are composed of parts, which in turn compose a part of a larger whole. Bateson (1979) adds that living organic systems are not simply wholes composed of parts, but wholes in which all the parts must communicate within the whole, and be organized to process information by a principle that is higher than the parts alone.

IFS reflects these propositions from the philosophy of science in its theory of parts and Self (Schwartz, 1995), its application of the same principles to all levels of the system from the intra-psychic, to the family, to communities and nations, and in its emphasis on the qualities of Self-leadership best suited for guiding all levels of functioning.

On any level the Self provides leadership through valuing each member of the system, and ensuring that every voice is heard, while fairly allocating resources, responsibilities, and influence. Effective Self-leadership facilitates the flow of information between team members, mediates polarizations, negotiates barriers to communication and cooperation, and encourages all members to pursue their personal visions within the context of the overall needs of the larger team.

When Wilber (1995) studies the evolution of holons from the physiosphere (matter), to the biosphere (life), to the noosphere (mind), and theosphere (soul-spirit), he notes a number of tenets that characterize them. One is that holons display a capacity for self-preservation, autopoiesis, assimilation, or agency over time. Another is that they display a capacity for self-adaptation, allopiesis, accommodation, or communion with other wholes. A third tenet (out of twenty, all of which cannot be considered here) is that holons display a capacity for self-transcendence, symmetry breaks, creativity or emergent transformation into new wholes with new forms of agency and communion. Such growth is unprecedented or surprising in that such new creation cannot be determined from a prior knowledge of component parts.

If we weave these tenets together, an approach to spirituality emerges as a multi-leveled quest for self-transcendence and greater meaning through increased development to ever larger and deeper contexts of agency-in-communion.

This position is congruent with a number of scholars such as Torrance who argues, "the human species may be designated *animal quarens* with at least as much right as *animal rationale*." (Torrance, 1994, p.3) More specifically, the quest is in the service of self-transcendence. This translates that humans are animals that quest for the spiritual. The quest is wide-spread and broadly conceived.

> *Religion as process is one source of the spiritual quest. . . . But if the human being is truly animal quarens, a similar latency will be found in the biological, psychological, and linguistic conditions of human life and culture without which society and religion would themselves be inconceivable.* (Torrance, 1994, p.18)

Defining the spiritual quest as self-transcendence or emergent transformation into new wholes with new forms of agency and communion makes it inclusive of normal psychological growth. The quest may manifest with no thought or use of the word spirituality at all, as in our wanting to be more in tune with our body, our mind, our lover, our neighbors, our nation or world. The quest can, of course, become consciously focused on some conception of the Sacred.

In any case, the experiences we have in our quests must be embedded in a religious or non-religious narrative tradition when we think about their meaning, or attempt to share them with others. Steven Crites argues that "'re-collecting' the past is foundational to self-identity and 'pro-jecting' into the future is necessary for self-transcendence." Persons must have the "psychic strength" that

> *includes both a strong sense of self-identity, rooted in the past, and an equally strong power of self-transcendence, directed toward the future. This strength must be concentrated in the present, which is the point of tension between self-identity [solidified agency] and self-transcendence [increased communion.].* (Crites, 1986 quoted in Lester, 1995, p. 196).

Broadening the view of spirituality to include normal growth brings regular IFS therapy within the context of a spiritual practice, for those who choose to allow this possibility. Working with oneself and with one's client to allow more of the essential qualities of Self to be present expands and solidifies agency, at the same time that it fosters states of consciousness similar to those described by seekers from many traditions who meditate.

Bringing to bear in a healing way the essential Self-qualities of self-reflective consciousness, compassion, wisdom, and curiosity on burdened internal parts that are repressed, polarized, or otherwise in the shadows of consciousness likewise expands and solidifies communion. The greater wholeness, integrity and harmony that accompanies this evolution of agency-in-communion in individuals prepares them to better enter into creative and cooperative communion with other holons beyond themselves. The overall process of increased awareness, freedom and care has for Schwartz (1999) and numerous IFS practitioners the subjective quality of a spiritual practice.

While growing towards increased levels of agency-in-communion encompasses many aspects of normal growth, spiritual and transpersonal writers plead for openness to levels beyond the rational and everyday consciousness. Another Wilber tenet is that a telos of larger and deeper contexts functions as an attractor that pulls holons in its direction. He (Wilber, 1995, p.77) notes that all theorists have an ultimate telos or context beyond which they believe growth cannot or should not go. For Freud it was the ego integrated around genital organization. Piaget underscored the equilibration that could only be reached by formal thinking. Marx looked for the classless society that would heal the alienation of labor through shared, mutual care. Language contains a relentless pressure oriented toward un-coerced mutual understanding according to Habermas. Hegel saw history moving toward Absolute Spirit manifesting through individuals in mutual community. The final telos or Omega Point for Teilhard de Chardin was the resurrection of Christ consciousness in all persons.

At the very least, it is important for Wilber that we recognize with such thinkers as Gebser, Habermas, Fowler, Broughton, Selman, Maslow, Bruner, Flavell, Arieti, Cowan, Arlin and Loevinger that there is a stage beyond Piaget's formal operational reason. It has been variously termed dialectical, integrative, creative-synthetic, integral aperspectival, network logic or vision-logic. Vision-logic goes beyond the ability of reason to see and name different perspectives. It is able to integrate perspectives in a larger vision, keep contradictions and paradoxes in play, unify opposites and think non-linearly. It holds global consciousness or identity as a subjective, interior structure, not simply as a rational, debatable belief.

Beyond vision-logic Wilber maps out further stages of growth recognized in both the West and the East: The "psychic" stage represented by Emerson's nature mysticism; the "subtle" seen in Teresa of Avila's deity mysticism; and the "causal" reflected in Meister Eckhart's formless mysticism. (Wilber, 1995, pp. 184-192, 513-514, 278, and Chapter 8 "The Depths of the Divine".) Theoretically, there is no final whole or final context that growth can reach. Gregory of Nyssa affirmed this long ago: "Perfection consists in our never stopping in our growth in good, never circumscribing our perfection by any limitation." (Danielou, 1961, p.52) "Since [the] good has no limit, the participant's desire itself necessarily has no stopping place but stretches out with the limitless." (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978, p. 31).

These maps of higher holonic growth can be viewed as empirical hypotheses. Growth in agency-in-communion should be measurable with the proper psychometrics. We already have many ways of noting a child's developmental progress of identity from me, to we, to many. Increasing communion is a self-transcendent process in that concern for one's ego is de-centered as one moves from egocentric consciousness, to family-centric, to tribal-centric, to nation-centric, to world-centric and beyond. Compassion is a quality of the IFS Self that in biblical Greek translates as being "moved in the guts" by the situation of another. The capacity for compassion can move in measurable ways beyond sensitivity to one's own pain, to that of family members, neighbors, and if growth continues, to strangers and enemies. At some point the pain of tsunami victims across the world may be felt as one's own, and move one to concrete acts of help.

Likewise, Laszlo (1994, p. 93) notes that when a teleological attractor helps a system grow and find a new state of dynamic stability, the new level of agency is revealed through "more effective use of information, greater efficiency in the use of free energies, greater flexibility [relative autonomy], as well as greater structural complexity on a higher level of organization." These four markers of transformation, all of which should be amenable to measurement, are congruent with criteria that spiritual directors have used for noting a person's growth in ability to love.

One implication here for IFS theory is that the essential, non-introjected qualities of Self such as compassion, care and wisdom evolve toward an infinite horizon. When a four-year-old runs to the door, wraps him- or herself around a father's leg, and exclaims, "I love you Daddy!" that act can be considered a perfect expression of the essential Self quality of love. Still, there is a different, deeper, wider, more complex expression of love's perfection when the child communicates it at age 24 or 64. Organic metaphors are appropriate for such development, such as considering a three foot sapling a complete, totally perfect tree, as opposed to a tenth of a tree, though many seasons later it will have a different quality of perfection when it is thirty feet high with stronger branches for birds to nest in, and more leaves to provide greater shade.

A final tenet of Wilber to be considered here is that holons emerge holarchically with each higher holon embracing its junior predecessors and adding its own new and more encompassing pattern or wholeness. Development is through envelopment, with the lower holons setting possibilities of the higher, and the higher setting the probabilities of the lower, demonstrating both upward and downward causation. Thus, nutritional and biochemical holons can profoundly affect one's psychology, as well one's thoughts and feelings affecting one's internal organ functioning.

One implication here for personal and spiritual growth and effectiveness is that lower levels of a nested holarchy of systems must always be valued and well attended. For a therapist to be maximally effective his or her internal family of parts needs to be healed, freed, harmonized, and organized around a common purpose. For NFL teams to have a chance at winning the Super Bowl the team members need to train together, huddle, work out relational and personality issues, and subsume their individual energies to a collective plan.

There is one trap in spiritual growth that IFS is especially good at addressing. It is possible for spiritual seekers or non-seekers to find themselves in deep or high states of consciousness that manifest the essential qualities of Self such as profound calm, present moment awareness, compassion, oneness, and so forth. They might even become adept at returning to or maintaining such states. However, negotiating these higher realms does not mean one has automatically or necessarily healed everything on the personality level of ego states. It is oft noted that persons with enlightened minds can remain quite conflicted and contentious in their relational lives.

One of the strengths and beauty of IFS work is that the essential qualities of the Self are not simply sought for their own sake, but are brought to bear in a healing way on the internal parts of one's ego. This active use of Self for ego integration of the psychological self functions to calm inner voices. This calmness in turn allows for the Self's passive ability to be in a witnessing state of consciousness that can evolve toward what some traditions call the unity consciousness of the No-Self.

The IFS view of the Self thus provides a bridge between eastern and western psychologies. Traditional Eastern thought tends to view ego parts as ephemeral, ultimately unreal, and the cause of suffering. If they can be mindfully viewed simply as clouds that can be noticed and allowed to pass by, persons are eventually enabled to detach and realize the enlightenment of One Taste, or a participative consciousness with no boundaries or separations. Identify with the universe, advises Simon Weil, because anything less means suffering.

Western thought in the world of mental health, however, is normally oriented to healing what looks like debilitating wounds, splits, dissociations, anxieties and polarizations that threaten personal integrity. While recent clinical work (Hayes, Follette, and Linehan, 2004; Segal, Williams, and Teasdale, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; and Kurtz, 1990) has pointed to the importance of mindful awareness for distancing a client from the immediacy of his or her internal processes, simply teaching meditation techniques alone are not thought to be adequate for every case.

IFS theory and practice offers the mediation of a third way that incorporates both passive and active capacities of Self-level consciousness. The IFS Self does have passive self-reflective awareness that allows it to bring bare attention to internal processes without adding to them or subtracting from them, in the manner of the classic eastern Witness. This calm, non-judgmental consciousness is therapeutic in itself, since it becomes obvious that the part that is seen does not encompass the seer. The part observed, no matter how hurt or homicidal, does not include the aspect of consciousness that is observing it, and is thus only a part, not the whole of the person.

However, the Self does not simply manifest passive awareness that can place a part under observation. It manifests a variety of essential qualities such as care, compassion, curiosity and wisdom that allow it to actively relate to and heal the parts that are burdened, thus fostering the integration and stability of the psychological

or ego-based self. The selective use of passive and active qualities of Self-level consciousness provides powerful tools in psycho-spiritual growth toward increased contexts of agency-in-communion.

A possible suggestion for those who use Self qualities for meditation and healing is that if a thought or feeling comes into consciousness, can be noticed and allowed to go by as a cloud in the sky, simply allow that to happen, and allow Self-level consciousness to remain in a spacious open state. If, however, the thought, feeling or sensation repeatedly comes back into consciousness with an insistent or demanding energy that will not simply pass by, then treat it as a sub-personality. Give it the focused attention of the Self, listening gracefully and respectfully to its concerns, and help it with whatever acknowledgment, healing or unburdening it needs. When it becomes unburdened and harmonized with the internal family or team and learns to trust the larger wisdom and care of the Self, it will better allow for the spacious expansiveness of the Self that can lead to the experiences of love, wonder and oneness reported by those who meditate.

THE "SPIRIT" IN VOLUME THREE

In this special issue, "Spirituality and Self Leadership", we have invited authors to share their passions in applying the concepts embodied in the Internal Family Systems[sm] model. In choosing the articles for this edition, we focused on personal practices and accounts of fostering Self leadership to illustrate both agentive (i.e., "active") and communal (i.e., "passive") means of experiencing a state of psycho-spiritual connection with Self.

Several of the articles examine the universality of the concept of Self leadership, as represented by various world religions. Thomas Holmes provides an overview from the perspectives of Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. Gela Altman examines Self leadership as described in the Kabbalah, the Jewish book of mysticism. Karen Horneffer and Paul Ginter describe a technique for deepening one's connection to the Self. Brian Kennedy shares his personal journey in his own evolution as a Self-led person-in-the-world. Finally, Clara Irwin offers a contemporary poem reflecting the compassionate nature of the Self with one's internal system. We hope that you find the current issue of the Journal of Self Leadership enlightening and inspiring!

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IFS[sm] Spirituality and Self

Thomas R. Holmes, Ph.D.[1]

Abstract

In this article spiritual teachings on the nature of the heart are offered as a source of insight into the nature of Internal Family Systems[sm] (IFS) Self. Spiritual practices that can awaken the energy of Self in our everyday life will be introduced as means to promote Self leadership. Insights from IFS will offer ways to bring balance into spiritual life.

One of the beauties of Internal Family Systems[sm] (IFS[sm]) is that it provides a simple yet elegant bridge between spiritual teachings and western psychological frameworks (Cohen and Johanson, 2003). The wisdom and understanding from spiritual traditions has historically been difficult to integrate with psychological models. The systemic perspective of IFS offers a foundation of understanding and experience that can deepen the dialogue between traditional psychological models and spiritual teachings. This article will explore spiritual teachings on the nature of the heart as a source of insights into the nature of Self. Spiritual practices which can awaken the energy of Self in our everyday life will also be introduced as an additional way to promote leadership of Self. In addition, Insights from IFS will be explored as ways of deepening and bringing balance into our spiritual life.

The word heart is often used to describe the core of human experience, the center of our place of being. The nature of the human heart is a central focus of many spiritual teachings and tends to be an area of understanding where universal commonalities between different religious traditions can be found. Qualities often attributed to the heart include compassion, love, patience, kindness, understanding, acceptance, connection, peacefulness as well as the capacity to soothe and heal, the place from which life has meaning, joy, fulfillment and beauty.

The Self, as described in the IFS Model, offers a special perspective and insights into the nature of the core of human experience, into the nature of the human heart.

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According to the IFS Model, Self is a meta-level of the inner system. Above the personality level where all of our various parts reside is a core Self. The Self is characterized by a type of awareness that is both a passive witness and a source of centered action. The qualities of this state of mind are: "calmness, compassion, curiosity, clarity, confidence, creativity, courage and connectedness (Schwartz, 2003)." The proposition in this article is that these qualities of Self are parallel to the spiritual qualities of heart, indeed that they are describing the same inner experience.

In order to focus the discussion of the qualities of Self and heart I will cluster them into three categories; mindful awareness, compassionate connectedness and calm confident clarity.

Mindful Awareness and Self

There is a special kind of awareness associated with a person being in Self. In this state they are able to recognize that while a certain part of themselves may be active, they can relate to the part without the part taking over their consciousness. When in self a person is able see themselves and others with great clarity and non-reactive, non-judgmental ways. In this state they are able to be present with their own inner states or present with the others they are encountering. From this state they can be either a passive witness or an active doer, whichever is called for and in this state people seem to know clearly what they are to do.

This state is very similar to the state of mindfulness as described in the Buddhist traditions. The relationship between mindfulness and IFS is explored more fully in Ginter (2003). In the practice of mindfulness a person brings full awareness to their internal or external experience. In the process of doing this they find that they become calm, centered and more at peace. Practice in many religious traditions can help active this state, but the Buddhist tradition has given these practices the most detailed attention. There are a variety of mindfulness exercises that help create the conditions for Self to arise.

Practices for Mindful Awareness

The most basic of the mindfulness practices is the exercise of closely following the sensations of one's natural breathing. Most often the instruction given is to be aware of the sensation of the breath moving in through the nostrils on the inhalation and out through the nostrils on the exhalation. By doing this one invites Self into the foreground of consciousness. Even if this occurs for only a few breaths the pattern has now been nourished and each time it is invited into consciousness it will arise more easily.

This practice can also take the form of a mindfulness bell practice. With this practice someone rings a bell and those hearing it stop what they are doing and return their attention to their breath for three breaths then go on doing with what they were doing. This can be done at the beginning of a meditation session or throughout the day as a gentle way to water the seeds of awareness. At the beginning of our staff meetings in the Holistic Health Program at the University where I was the director for a number of years, I would ring the bell and invite people to simply be aware of their breath for three to five minutes. This would help us all to start the meeting with more Self energy present in all of us. This acted as a kind of firewall against the tension of the manager parts we often brought into the meeting, the parts that had been engaged in managing all of the tasks associated with University work and would likely continue full steam ahead in the meeting if we didn't use this awareness exercise to return to Self.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1987), one of the foremost Buddhist teachers of mindfulness practices, uses a variation of this practice to help the monks at Plum Village, his central monastic community, to stay centered and aware while interfacing with the business of the everyday world. When they were deciding if a phone would be connected into the community, they devised the practice that when the phone would ring (and the ring was loud enough to be heard throughout the central area), everyone in the community would stop for three mindful breaths, and then either go to answer the phone or continue with what they were doing. This had the beneficial effect of slowing everyone down more as the phone rang more, thus making a natural braking action as more input came in.

A little mindfulness exercise each day gradually strengthens the pattern of compassionate awareness, of Self in our inner system. This is like doing sit ups each day to strengthen our abdominal muscles. A little effort each day gradually results in a significant strengthening of these muscle sets, and of course as there are many variations of physical exercises for different muscle groups, there are many methods of meditation to develop various states of consciousness.

Compassion and Self

One of the main interventions of IFS is to bring the Self into the foreground of consciousness through a process of becoming aware of parts' states of consciousness and then getting enough distance from the parts so the Self is no longer blended with the feelings and perspective of the parts. At some point in this process of differentiation the person has a compassionate curious response to the parts of themselves. It is the cue for the therapist to know that the person is now in the Self. What is unique about this experience is that the therapist is not telling the person to be more compassionate or understanding of their parts, they are simply supporting differentiation from the parts and what arises spontaneously is this compassionate perspective of the Self. The therapeutic process is a powerful technique for awakening compassion in a person, which can greatly support a person's spiritual development. There are, however, also practices and understandings that come from spiritual traditions which were designed to develop compassion, but which simultaneously support Self.

Compassion is a key concept in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions and all share roots in the ancient Hebrew scriptures. The core concept of compassion in Hebrew is *Racham* pronounced raw-kham[1]. This is the quality of compassion or mercy and comes from the root meaning of womb that cherishes, nourishes and gives birth. Mystics would say that racham refers to the womb of God, as the all-pervading love that cherishes creation. In Islam the concepts of *rachman* and *rahim*, mercy and compassion are so central that the beginning of most religious and many none religious meetings begin by invoking the divine mercy and compassion with "*Bismillah-er-Rachman er-Rahim*".

Compassionate love is also one of the central teachings in Christianity.[i] Jesus altered the teachings on the Ten Commandments by placing love as the most important of the commandments, (Mark 12, 29-31). In Corinthians I, 13 it is made very clear that nothing in Christian teaching is more important that love. Here the word used for love is the Greek work agape, which is perhaps best translated as compassionate love. In fact here we find one of the clearest articulations of what is meant by compassionate love in

Christianity. Those familiar with IFS will notice that these qualities describe how one is when one is in one's Self. "Love is patient, Love is kind and envies no one...never selfish, nor quick to take offence... delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face, there is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance."

Though this passage is clearly talking about the nature of Self as defined by IFS, it also illustrates a major problem with many traditional religious teachings. They set up idealized spiritual states that are beyond the ability of ordinary humans to sustain. Thus, they set off internal struggles between the idealizing spiritually ambitious parts and other parts unwilling to be pushed aside by this striving. Whenever we start along the path of "spiritual development" we risk becoming ensnared by our idealizing perfectionistic parts that may want to shut out our more human parts. This struggle can divert us from understanding the true nature of Self as a source of compassion.

One of the great gifts of IFS is that it provides a model for helping compassionate love to arise naturally. Too often in religious traditions one is left with the feeling that one "should" feel certain ways to be a good person, but people are not given methods of awakening these qualities of the heart. Instead people try to will themselves to have these qualities, activating striving perfectionist parts. This leaves little space for the experience of IFS Self which would allow the natural expression of these qualities, while at the same time allowing acceptance of one's humanness of all of one's parts, not just the "holy ones".

In his description of qualities a person has when the Self is leading Schwartz (2003) states "Such a person doesn't need to be forced by moral or legal rules to do the right thing. He or she is naturally compassionate and motivated to improve the human condition in some way because of the awareness that we are all connected." This state of compassion is not something which we *will* ourselves to have, or that we feel out of a sense of guilt. It is something that spontaneously arises when we are in the Self state of consciousness. When this state of mind is not present it is because some part of our ego self has taken over the center of consciousness and is keeping the natural centered state of the Self from coming into the foreground. When these parts of our ego self are moved out of the center of our consciousness compassion naturally arises. This non-forced nature of compassion is important to remember, because when we move into the area of spiritual teachings, we find that the perfectionistic parts of ourselves will try to force us to feel these "holy" feelings so that we will be a "better person". Feeling "compassion" from this psychological place is not the spiritual compassion of the Self or of the heart; it is a part of our ego and will end in our feeling righteous, then exhausted and then guilty. *Trying* to feel these feelings sets off an internal polarization that represses "non-compassionate" parts and brings imbalance to the inner system.

When the compassion comes from Self, it arises naturally. From this place the person does not "need" to be helpful, but they feel a spontaneous wish to understand and comfort. From this place of Self there is not a righteous feeling, nor is their judgment, fear or anger. There is a simple wish to understand and to ease the tension experienced by the part of ourselves or another person that is in distress. This type of experience is expressed beautifully by Walt Whitman in his *Song of Myself*:

> *Apart from the pulling and hauling (of everyday life)*
> *stands what I am,*
> *Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,*
> *Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,*
> *Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,*
> *Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.*

This "complacent, compassionating" captures the essence of these qualities of the Self as experienced in the IFS model.

Buddhism also offers a wealth of teachings on compassionate love. A central concept in Buddhist teachings is *metta* in Pali or *maitri* in Sanskrit. This concept is often translated as lovingkindness. This word has in its root meaning in the ideas of gentleness and friendship. When the Dali Lama says "my religion is kindness" he is referring to this concept. This is parallel to the quality of agape as defined in the 1st Corinthians 13 discussed earlier. It is the wish for someone you care about to be well, to be happy, to be free from suffering; the type of feeling you might have for your best friend. As with compassionate love in the Christian teachings, this concept can throw us into striving towards an idealized way of being. Buddhist teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Pema Chodron, realizing this tendency in the West, emphasize the importance of starting the practice of lovingkindness towards yourself. Thich Nhat Hanh uses the analogy of the oxygen mask in airplanes: passengers are told to put it on yourself, before trying to assist others. Pema Chodron talks about the first step towards developing

true compassion in yourself is to become your own best friend, to be accepting and loving towards all the different parts of yourself. Those familiar with IFS work will notice that this is indeed the stance of the Self. There are Buddhist practices to support this process: one is the lovingkindness meditation.

Practices for Compassionate Love

The lovingkindness meditation is a simple structure for offering the wish for happiness, for freedom from suffering, for a deep joy, and peace. One can add other similar wishes such as feeling safe, free from worry etc. The practice is to offer this to yourself and to other beings in your life and as far out into the realm of beings as you wish. Many Buddhist meditations end with "may all beings be well, may all beings be happy." The practice is usually structured such that one begins directing loving kindness towards a person for whom you spontaneously feel lovingkindness. This might be a child, a close friend or family member or spiritual teacher. It is useful to find someone around whom you are not conflicted in your feelings, someone for whom you naturally feel love easily and wish them peace, joy and happiness etc. Sometimes the practice is started with one's self. I do not recommend this since many of us, especially in the helping professions, don't find that the easiest place to feel the spontaneous state of lovingkindness. It is usually good, however, after a few minutes of sending loving wishes to the first person for whom we easily feel warmth, to follow this image with lovingkindness towards ourselves. I find it good to start with sending these loving wishes to some part of ourselves that we would like to comfort at this time; it could be a vulnerable child part of ourselves, or a wounded healer part. The whole meditation could just focus on our parts if that feels right, ending with a loving wishes for all of our parts and for ourselves as a whole.

The traditional Buddhist practice moves from directing loving kindness to another person, towards whom it is easy to fell loving kindness, to ourselves, then to a loved one, then to a more neutral person, then to someone with whom you have some tension, then to someone you have difficulty with, then out to an ever increasing circle of beings until one reaches all beings. This can be altered in whatever way fits your needs or time frame, but the sequencing seems important to hold on to. It is important to not try and send lovingkindness to someone who activates a part of you, often a protector part, which may feel that sending lovingkindness to this person would put you somehow at risk. In the IFS model the important thing to do is to listen to this part and its concerns rather than trying to override it by having a part of yourself take over that thinks you "should" be able to send lovingkindness to everyone. This is again an instance where the IFS model can help us avoid our idealizing tendencies that can arise with spiritual practice. As with any of the practices of spiritual development, it is important to be aware of the tendency for perfectionistic parts to take over, undermining our capacity to be in Self and to truly nourish this source of compassionate love.

Equanimity and Self

The second quality of the Self is the calm, confident, clear and courageous aspect of the Self that in spirituality refers to qualities of patience, peace and equanimity. Most of us do not think of calm, peace and equanimity to be qualities of love, yet in spiritual teachings these are essential qualities of the nature of true love. The Zen Teacher Thich Nhat Hanh offers as a central practice a meditation on the phrase "calm, ease, smile, release." The gentle half-smile of the Buddha symbolizes the capacity to release oneself from the tensions that grip so much of our daily lives, releasing into Self. In Judaism the practice of the Sabbath is a calming practice. It has much to do with giving room for the "being" qualities of the Self after the all of the "doing" qualities of our parts have had so much space in our everyday lives. A phrase used to welcome the Sabbath is "*Shabbat Shalom*", the Sabbath peace. The quality of peace of Shalom is a central quality of the heart in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Christianity Christ is often referred to as the Prince of Peace and in Islam the daily greeting is as-salaam aleikhum - may peace be with you. In Hebrew the same greeting is shalom-aleichem.

This nature of the peaceful love is clearly expressed in the Buddhist teaching on the brahma vihara, which describes the condition of equanimity, which in Sanskrit is upeksha. *Upe*, refers to over and *ksh* to look. So the word refers to the capacity to see things from a perspective and to understand that given the nature of all of the conditions which lead up to this moment that there is no way they could be different. There is acceptance, non-attachment, non-judgment, letting go of expectations. It is interesting to note that this quality is one of the core conditions for successful therapeutic process and also for the capacity to be present with suffering without burning out. In this state of mind we don't have to do something to make things different; in non-judgment we simply are with this person or condition as it is. And we also accept ourselves as we are with all of our limitations, our failings, and all of our unique qualities and beauty as well. This state is that of

Self in the IFS system. This peacefulness can allow us to be deeply present with our experience of ourselves and others, to really savor "being" and "being with" rather than the common state of "doing," and "getting done," which is a realm in which our parts are often dominant.

These heart qualities are expressed the "complacent, compassionating" of Walt Whitman cited earlier and they can be seen in the image of the Buddhist bodhisatva of compassion Kwan Yin perfectly. Her name means "to looks down upon the suffering of the world from a place of deep peace." A famous pose of hers found in many statues is of a women looking down with Whitman's "side-curved head" in what is termed the "royal ease," a position of deep peacefulness while looking directly at the suffering of the world.

This compassion of Kwan Yin arises out of what the Buddhists call emptiness. This type of emptiness is referring to emptiness of ego or in IFS terms empty of the ego states of our parts. IFS gives a wonderful practical way to experience this type of emptiness in the therapeutic process of systematically separating from the parts which are in the foreground of our consciousness until what spontaneously arises is a compassionate curiosity about the parts of ourselves we were earlier struggling with. IFS therapists have seen this occur thousands of times as they work with clients and help them move through this process of returning to Self. Through the IFS work this type of peaceful compassion is not only a concept but a felt experience. At the same time there are a wide range of spiritual practices designed to awaken the same state of mind.

Practices for Equanimity

I like to begin my workshops on healing the healer with a meditative dance based on a Jewish "Shabbat Shalom." In this instance I am taking the concept of the Sabbath as a practice, which is not limited to the weekly Sabbath. This practice is beautifully presented in Wayne Muller's book "Sabbath"(1999). The practice is valuable to provide a rest from our achievement parts and to aid returning to Self. One way to create Sabbath is to place a frame around some time that will help us to have peaceful "being" qualities rather than "doing" qualities. This practice can be seen as creating conditions for Self to arise and be nourished. We can do this by giving opportunity for rest, for mindfulness or other spiritual practices. To have this kind of time is important for our own restoration. It is important to remember to also let go of the self improvement or perfectionistic saintly parts during this time. The goal is simply during these times to be present with ourselves and others from the place of the heart, of compassion, from the IFS Self.

Specifically, activities to create Sabbath conditions for supporting equanimity are as follows: 1) Give the intention of a space for non-doing using whatever guidelines you want for types of activities and inputs during this time. This might be for a day of Sabbath, an hour or a few minutes to recover your Self; 2) In IFS language, ask the parts of yourselves which need to "do" to help plan this period of time to let the system restore; 3) Have a ritual to mark the boundary of this time. This can be lighting a candle, saying a sacred phrase or reading, etc.; 4) Create conditions which support rest and centering. You can use silence, music, scents, take walks in nature, images etc.; and 5) Mindfulness practices done during this time support the emergence of peaceful presence.

The peace of Sabbath is one practice to support equanimity. Other practices that can support equanimity are practices such as Tonglen, which invites us to be present with our discomfort and our pain and to learn how to tranform that pain and discomfort. When we stop running from our pain, face it and allow it to be transformed through the compassionate heart, then we can find a deep ease in our being. This is similar to IFS therapeutic process, where we encounter the parts of ourselves that have been exiled because they carry pain. These parts are encountered from our center, our Self. From this Self interaction, the parts are able to transform into their natural forms and the system becomes depolarized and a sense of ease arises.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual practices can support Self and Self can support spiritual practice. The IFS framework and process can deepen and bring balance to spiritual life, guiding us toward a non-polarizing spiritual development. Spiritual concepts and practices can offer non- psychotherapeutic ways to support Self in our daily life, complementing the IFS process. This article offers a continuation of the exploration which was begun in the first edition of *The Journal of Self Leadership* and I look forward to the further unfolding of this dialogue in future publications.

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[i] Strongs Lexicon "7356 racham rakh'-am from 7355; compassion (in the plural); by extension, the womb (as cherishing the fetus); by implication, a maiden:-- bowels, compassion, damsel, tender love, (great, tender) mercy, pity, womb."

[ii] The New English Bible- Oxford Press

Tonglen Meditation: A Tool for Deepening IFS[sm] Therapy

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Abstract

Similar to the Internal Family Systems[sm] approach of working with exiled parts, a primary focus of the Buddhist practice of tonglen meditation is to move towards the emotional experiences that we tend to push away. The principles and practices of tonglen offer a means of enriching IFS therapy in several ways (and vice-versa). By considering the two systems together, some interesting questions emerge that contribute to the ongoing exploration of the nature of Self and Self-leadership.

INTRODUCTION

As is true for many people who have spent time with the IFS model, we are often struck by the usefulness of applying this work in a variety of contexts. It is exciting and validating to continually discover fruitful points of intersection between IFS and other philosophies and practices. In recent years, we've been particularly intrigued by the potential marriage that can occur by combining the essence of a Buddhist practice, called tonglen meditation, with the IFS model of psychotherapy. The current article provides an overview of tonglen meditation and a discussion of how aspects of this practice can complement the IFS approach to healing wounded parts. As is true of any marriage, it also raises some compelling issues, including how we conceive of the Self and the nature of Self-leadership.

THE PRACTICE OF TONGLEN MEDITATION

The ancient practice of Tonglen (which literally means *sending and taking*), has been revitalized in recent years by the Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron. It has its roots in the Buddhist teaching called *vipassana* (which is often called mindfulness practice in the West). The essence of tonglen is to become aware of our tendencies to push away things that we don't like and to grasp for things that we do like, and most importantly, to notice that in automatically responding this way we tend to close our hearts and create unnecessary suffering. The practice itself involves using the breath as a means of bringing ourselves more deeply in contact with what is being avoided - by imaging that we are breathing it in as part of our inhalation. The in-breath may represent a range of things including difficult emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, confusion, aversion, resentment), or a more abstract sense of darkness and heaviness. The out-breath, which is equal in length to the in-breath, represents what would be considered the "antidote"- or the opposite quality - of the in-breath. This antidote can be something abstract such as lightness, joy, or peace. It can also be something as concrete as "a good cup of coffee" (Chodron, 2001b).

Upon hearing this initial description, a reasonable person might ask, *"Why in the world would I choose to do this?"* There is something notably counterintuitive about the practice, particularly in comparison to the usual relaxation or visualization technique that involves virtually the opposite instructions of breathing out what we don't want and breathing in what we desire. Certainly the latter practice fits more closely with our societal norms of getting rid of things that don't serve us and acquiring things that will make us healthier and somehow better. It is helpful to understand that the intention behind tonglen is to loosen the grip of habitual patterns of the mind. As Chodron (2001a) explains,

> *The darkness we breathe in is really only a visualization that we create in our minds. It represents the tendency of our hearts and minds to shut down and harden. It isn't something that we could get rid of, for example, by locking it in a box and throwing it over a cliff. It isn't something foreign that we are taking into our system. We're just learning to open. We open on the inbreath by taking the darkness into a vast open heart. We open on the outbreath by sending out spaciousness and light. Either way, in or out, we are opening further and further* (p. 91).

The formal practice of tonglen assumes a background with more basic approaches to sitting meditation, such as focusing attention on the breath while observing thoughts and feelings that arise. One begins the sitting practice of

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tonglen by first "flashing a sense of openness." As the phrase suggests, this step involves briefly contacting a feeling of spaciousness within, by imaging, for example, a wide blue sky. In IFS terms, this step can be viewed as briefly accessing Self. The next stages of tonglen involve breathing in the texture of heaviness, darkness, or stuckness and breathing out the texture of lightness, freshness, or coolness. There are various steps in the formal sitting practice that involve doing this process both abstractly and in relation to one's own life or the lives of others. These stages are followed by doing the practice for all of humanity, with an awareness of our shared suffering and our shared desire for happiness.

The form of tonglen which is perhaps most relevant to the world of psychotherapy is working with a client's own (or one's own) difficult emotions as they arise. Chodron refers to this as "tonglen-on-the-spot." The underlying intent is to greet experiences of pain not only with a willingness to endure them, but also with an openness to use them as opportunities to awaken and soften the heart (Chodron, 1994, p. 7). This is done, quite simply, by allowing oneself to fully feel emotions as they arise. If the emotions are painful, there is a focus on breathing the feeling into the body and exhaling a sense of lightness. As this breathing is done, there is a recognition that other people feel this way too, and an intention that the outbreath might bring relief more universally. When the emotion is positive, it is inhaled in order to fully experience it, and with the exhalation there is an offering that others might know this same feeling.

In doing this practice of staying with the emotions, what often becomes apparent is the amount of mental gymnastics or extreme behaviors used in order to avoid deeply feeling. From an IFS perspective, this avoidance is seen as the efforts of managers and firefighters "to keep vulnerable and needy parts locked in inner closets" (Schwartz, 2003). These efforts can take a multitude of forms from blaming, running away, and telling ourselves stories - to engaging in impulsive behavior such as bingeing on drugs, food, or even work.

We practice tonglen by breathing in the texture of our feelings, for instance, if we overhear a conversation that evokes insecurity and vulnerability. Instead of letting the mind spin some story to move us out of our feelings - or letting our managers intervene *("Oh I'm sure they didn't really mean to exclude me," "Who cares what they think anyhow"*), we let ourselves stay with the emotion and notice what it feels like in our bodies. The value of using the breath to stay present with feelings is that there is often a tendency to move so quickly out of uncomfortable emotional experiences that we don't even really know what these emotions feel like, or what messages they might hold. Tonglen practice invites us to ask ourselves, *"What does sadness feel like?" "What does anger feel like?" "What does it feel like to be vulnerable?"* In IFS terms, by allowing ourselves to stay present with the feelings of our parts, we come to know them more fully, thereby coming into deeper relationship with them.

Pema Chodron describes this process as "abiding" with our experiences, as opposed to "abandoning ourselves" as we attempt to escape what we are feeling. By doing this, not only do we deepen in our capacity to know ourselves, but more profoundly, we deepen in our capacity to know everyone. This is especially true when we are able to drop beneath the details of the "triggering" event and stay present, as fully as possible, with the texture of the feeling in the body. This aspect of tonglen is similar to the recognition in IFS therapy that an intellectual part recounting a story is not healing to the part that has gone through the experience.

Thus, in the spirit of tonglen, we allow ourselves to feel the ego-piercing and uneasy quality of insecurity, knowing that other people feel this too. The content of the overheard conversation may differ, but the emotional consequences are strikingly universal. This process is viewed as the doorway to realizing our connection with all other humans; it serves as the doorway to compassion. In Chodron's (2001a) words, "You can't stand in another person's shoes until you stand completely in your own" (p. 86)

Applying Tonglen to IFS Therapy

A quality shared by tonglen meditation and IFS therapy is the rich and rare invitation to embrace emotional pain, both in the moments that these difficult emotions arise, and when necessary, by revisiting the wounds held by exiled parts. As Schwartz (1997) describes, IFS offers a path of "compassionate resilience" that serves as a middle ground between the two common alternatives offered in our society: to shake off life's blows, or to become overwhelmed by them (p. 43). Similarly, what the practice of tonglen proposes is a path of embracing and opening to life's challenges through repeated acts of genuine courage.

The overview of tonglen meditation presented is not meant as an encouragement to begin formal practice (given that this is best done with the guidance of a teacher). Instead, what is often most appropriate and

useful in working with clients is simply to present the idea behind tonglen meditation as an additional way of encouraging them to move into their emotional experiences and to understand that this can be balanced with a sense of spaciousness. Tonglen offers a middle ground alternative, similar to "compassionate resilience," in which the Self can consciously choose to move toward emotions as opposed to "being overwhelmed by and blending with" them (Schwartz, 2003). It represents the middle ground of choosing to wade into the water, as opposed to finding oneself engulfed by an enormous wave, or vowing to avoid the beach all together.

In some contexts, it is possible and appropriate to integrate certain aspects of tonglen with IFS therapy as a means of increasing the presence of Self-leadership. This can be done in four particular ways. First, tonglen meditation offers a philosophy that sees value in accepting aspects of ourselves that are often devalued in society. As Chodron (1994) points out, "Nobody ever encourages you to allow yourself to feel wounded first and then try to figure out what is the right speech and right action that might follow" (p. 61). This philosophy can offer encouragement to manager and firefighter parts to see that it is safe for exiled parts to be accessed and to be willing to step back - an essential step in order to work effectively with exiles.

Even simply introducing the idea of tonglen may be useful in identifying extreme manager parts that are intent on protecting the system from experiencing the pain of exiles ("*That's not a good idea. We can't feel that type of pain.").* This response can serve as a useful entry point for working with the concerns of manager parts, and for beginning to sense the exiled part that it is protecting.

The encouragement to feel what we feel highlights a central premise that underlies vipassana practice; that much of our suffering arises out of our self-created concepts about our experiences, and our tendency to push away the experience itself. In IFS terms, being overwhelmed by sadness and fear can actually be amplified by the presence of polarized parts – parts that want the exiles to go away. It is not the sadness or fear in and of itself that creates intense pain, it is the sadness or fear *being told that it is not okay to feel such feelings* that is most difficult. This is borne out by a common experience in which clients, contrary to their expectations, find that by more deeply opening up to their feeling, these feelings become less intense.

A fascinating study conducted by Kemeny (Moyers, 1993) supports this notion. In efforts to study the effects of intense feelings on the immune system, immune functioning in actors was measured as they went into emotional states ranging from extreme exhilaration to extreme despair. The study's results showed that experiencing both extremes resulted in higher, more effective levels of immune functioning, compared to neutral emotional states. This, perhaps, is analogous to what people refer to when they say that they had a "good cry." Furthermore, immune functioning does seem to be compromised when individuals experience chronic depression, a state that often involves masking or fighting feelings of sadness or grief.

Pema Chodron tells a story of an Indian saint named Milareppa, which powerfully illustrates the courage and reward inherent in embracing painful emotions:

> *When Milareppa, a renowned saint and teacher, returned to his mountain cave, he was greeted by a group of demons. His first inclination was to "enlighten" them by teaching them great truths. He found, however, that his teachings had no effect on them. At this point, he decided that as long as they seemed intent on staying, that he would make a comfortable home for them – he would, in essence, treat them as honored guests. Upon giving them tea and cookies, all but one of the demons instantly disappeared. Now, being face-to-face with the lone remaining demon, which was particularly fierce with huge teeth, Milareppa felt he had no other choice but to step into the mouth of the demon. At this point, the final demon disappeared.*

Along with encouraging managers and firefighters to step back, a second way that tonglen can be applied to IFS therapy is in working directly with exiled parts. When taken together, the principles of both models offer a useful way of articulating what it means to be in deep relationship with painful aspects of ourselves. For example, the IFS conceptualization of wounded, exiled parts offers a language and imagery that can greatly enrich one's practice of tonglen. The commonly used instructions of breathing in the "texture" of a feeling can take on much more richness and clarity if a person is able to conceive of this texture as a part within them. The tonglen notion of shifting one's awareness from the details of "what happened" to the feelings in the body also offers a way of intimately embracing a part. This may be especially useful when a client is having difficulty exper-

iencing emotion, or is caught in a habitual pattern of relating to a stagnant concept of a part versus knowing and seeing its evolving, changing nature. Deeply experiencing exiled parts also adds a richness to what IFS therapists call witnessing. Given that exiled parts often want to be witnessed prior to letting go of the burdens that they carry, tonglen can be a useful precursor to the unburdening process.

By using both IFS and tonglen principles, feelings of vulnerability can be approached as if weaving together a fabric, with each alternating layer building on the previous one. Parts language offers a way to clearly connect with emotions in a concrete form. Tonglen breathing can deepen the experience of the feelings that are being held by the part. Conceiving of this vulnerability as a part offers a way for this wounded aspect to give voice to what is being experienced, which then can be followed by an invitation to return from words to feelings, and from the head to the body, in order to drop more deeply into the experience of the part.

A third aspect of tonglen meditation that has relevance for IFS work is the emphasis placed on balancing the inbreath and the outbreath. The inhalation can be viewed as offering a deeper experience of the part's feelings and the exhalation can be seen as offering an experience of Self. This balance between the inbreath and outbreath offers a model for how clients can come to a place of equilibrium in relationship to the feelings held by exiled parts. For clients who lean toward over-intellectualizing their experiences, the inbreath becomes particularly useful for bringing them in closer contact with exiled parts. For clients who feel emotionally overwhelmed by a part, the outbreath is helpful for accessing more Self-like qualities. Either way, the equal emphasis on inbreath and outbreath encourages balance in the system.

A fourth application of tonglen to IFS therapy is encouraging a recognition that other people in the world also feel this type of pain. When this awareness arises organically, it offers a deep sense of connection to the commonality of human experience. This, in and of itself, can be deeply healing by moving a person out of their sense of isolation into a more Self-like compassionate stance for their own part as well as for other people. Ironically, this healing comes precisely at the very center of the most painful emotions that seem utterly personal.

Implication of for Self and Self-leadership

What is most intriguing about tonglen meditation is that in arriving at this place of recognizing one's own pain, and the reality that others share such pain, one has achieved the goal of the practice. This goal, in Chodron's (1994) words, is to experience *bodhichitta*, or an awakened heart. An awakened heart is defined as a heart that contains compassion, openness, and clarity because it is softened by pain. What is essential in the understanding of bodhichitta is that this awakened heart is, in fact the "wounded, softened heart" itself (p. 11). It is a state made possible only by working through the deepest of pain.

It is interesting that this description of bodhichitta, in a sense, elevates the importance of wounded and exiled parts of ourselves. From a tonglen perspective, there should be a sense of excitement in having opportunities to encounter such parts because they provide the pathway towards spiritual growth and awakening. There is an amusing account of one of the first teachers of tonglen who chose to have his "tea boy" be a gruff unpleasant individual who would consistently evoke inner material to work with (Chodron, 2001b). Schwartz has aptly used the term "tor-mentor" to describe this phenomenon. From a tonglen perspective, there can be a slice of humor found in having such difficult emotions gifted upon us without even having to pay for them.

On a more serious note, the practice of tonglen does suggest that the path of awakening involves being deeply present with the emotions held by exiled parts. This experience of fully feeling one's own feelings, along with enlarging this experience to include others, can lead one to a state of compassion, clarity, and spaciousness that feels notably Self-like. It is almost as though there is a "magic wardrobe" (to borrow an image from C.S. Lewis) that is placed in the most precious and vulnerable core of exiled parts, which leads directly to Self.

Possibly the description of bodhichitta, or the awakened heart, is also a description of what a Self-led system looks like when the Self is in close relationship with vulnerable parts, and when parts that may have been exiled are no longer in this polarized state. Taking this a step further, the description of bodhichitta suggests that one quality of a Self-led system that has "cultivated an awakened heart" is that the Self is able to easily access a "tenderness tinged with some kind of sadness" (Chodron, 1994, p. 11). Of the eight descriptors that Schwartz (2003) offers in delin-

eating the Self (e.g., compassion, calmness, clarity, curiosity, confidence, courage, creativity, and connectedness), this notion of bodhichitta seems to intersect with the first: Compassion. The nature of bodhichitta offers a depiction of Self that differs from the traditional mindfulness notion of a detached observing witness. Instead, it implies that to what ever degree the Self functions as a conductor for all the parts (Schwartz, 1987), it is a conductor that can be touched by emotion.

It is also interesting to revisit the emphasis on the equal inbreath and outbreath in tonglen meditation and the implication of this practice in describing the Self-led system. The rhythm of the breath in tonglen serves as a metaphor for the underlying Buddhist principles on which the practice is based. In Buddhism, suffering is considered to be caused by "attachments," which can take the form of grasping for what one wants (attachment to desires), pushing away what one doesn't want (attachment to aversion), or holding emotional experiences and opinions with a sense of non-changing permanence and "realness" that ignores the somewhat arbitrary nature of perception (attachment to illusion). There is an encouragement in various forms of meditation to continually peel away more and more layers of the "false ground" upon which we stand, including an attachment to non-attachment that can emerge along the way. The journey invites us to come to an acceptance that there is really "no one place to stand" (e.g., no one right way to feel or think, nor one static state of experience).

The implication of this process, when translated into IFS terms, is that the Self-led system is one that contains a flexibility and fluidity of movement in which both Self and parts are easily accessible with a sense of non-polarization and non-stuckness – as captured in the rhythm of the tonglen breath. This image describes the type of harmonious inner-ecology seen when one is in Self-leadership. As described by Schwartz (1997) there exists a strength in the system like that of a huge willow which bends and gives in the wind, versus a type of resilience that is brittle and rigid (p. 43).

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to consider the various aspects of tonglen meditation that can be integrated into IFS work. Using these two systems in conjunction with each other can offer additional tools for working with managers and firefighters, and for deepening the Self's ability to be present with the emotional experiences of exiled parts. The goal in tonglen meditation, of cultivating an awakened heart, has implications for the value of embracing exiled parts and for the role that these parts can play in fostering compassion for others. The practice of tonglen also emphasizes the key role that fluidity in movement between the Self and parts might play in continuing to understand the nature of the Self-led system.

It is also worth noting that a parallel article could be written for tonglen meditators. The clarity in understanding psycho-spiritual functioning that has been advanced by the IFS model offers a similarly useful contribution that can deepen and enrich the practice of tonglen. Hopefully this dialogue regarding the East-West interface and its relevance to IFS, as encouraged by Cohen & Johanson (2003), will continue in both directions.

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Standing at the Edge of the Abyss: Risk Taking, Transcendence and the Art of Letting Go

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Abstract

What follows is a consideration of the concept of transcendence, the phenomenon of the "abyss," risk taking and the process of "letting go." The traditional concept of transcendence is seen as an orienting or movement towards spirit or the heavens. This article considers an alternative to this more traditional view—that is, transcendence as a movement toward the earth and into emotional pain or vulnerability as a path to transcending our earthly limitations that hinder our spiritual evolution. The phenomenon of the "abyss" is also considered through the Internal Family Systems[sm] theoretical lens as a container for exiled parts constructed by our protective managerial parts. Finally, risk taking and the process of "letting go" are discussed as necessary actions to engage in so that physical and emotional well being can be enhanced, thus limiting the potential emotional, physical and psychological impact of traumatic experiences.

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> *Embarking on the spiritual journey is like getting into a very small boat and setting out on the ocean to search for unknown lands. With wholehearted practice comes inspiration, but sooner or later we will also encounter fear. For all we know, when we get to the horizon, we are going to drop off the edge of the world. Like all explorers, we are drawn to discover what's waiting out there without knowing yet if we have the courage to face it...*
>
> Pema Chodron

It is 6:45 a.m. There is crispness in the air on this mid-September morning. The sky is already well on its way to deep blue. In my mind, and this sky that seems like my mind, there are no clouds, no haze. I can see for miles. I sense the sun just around the upper reaches of the Valley. It's here now and I feel the warmth on my face. The goose bumps on my skin begin to fade as my body moves into that warmth. My eyes are closed and I look through them at the sun and see subdued red. My breathing is absolutely perfect: rhythmic and harmonious. I feel connected to all that surrounds me; light emanates from me. I feel more at peace in this moment than I have ever felt in my entire life and I am standing on a ten-foot-long, three-foot-wide granite rock ledge 1000 feet above the floor of Yosemite Valley in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Above me is 2000 more feet of sheer, vertical granite fading away into that blueness. To my left and to my right for a quarter mile is more vertical rock.

If I toss the bagel in my hand (my breakfast) a mere few feet away from where I stand, it will plummet 1000 feet unobstructed to the base of this wall. Standing here I have no fear. I love it. I swim in it. I drink it. It is life for me at 24 years old. I say to myself, "This is God." "I feel love." It or she is here. Here in my closed eyes, here in my mind and in my heart. Here in the rock behind me, in the trees below that look like toothpicks, in the climbers standing at the base who look like ants. Here in the air I breathe. "Are you there?" I ask. "Are you real?" "Where are you?" Parts of me begin to doubt. But I sense something in what my closed eyes drink in and what my heart is open to. My mind goes to flying. I think about rising above all that limits, above all that constrains, my body, my consciousness. Delicious. Suddenly my mind goes to falling. I could unclip from this carabineer that keeps me safe and tied into the rock and step off this ledge into the great chasm that spreads before me and fall like the bagel unobstructed to my obvious death. I fear. My heart begins to pound. My palms get sweaty. My respiration rate begins to escalate. I hear inside, "Life is precious. There is much to live for." Someone else says, "But what if we fly?" "We can move beyond this earth bound existence." But what would I gain by flying and how could I fly? Or would I die? Maybe I would be set free. I could "let go," un-clip from my constraints and float down into the bliss of this

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great abyss. A clear still voice says, "There is much more climbing to do."

It was 1989 and in that exact moment, standing on that ledge, I felt more powerful, more connected to spirit and my true or authentic self than I ever had to that point in my young life. I was an adventurer and an Outward Bound mountain guide working five to six months out of each year guiding groups of people in the mountains and witnessing their transformative growth experiences in this unique therapeutic setting. The remainder of the year was spent on my own climbing trips, various hitch-hiking adventures, and road trips seeking whatever the mountains, life, and the road had to offer.

Two months prior to standing on that ledge, however, a woman that I worked with in the mountains broke my heart. We had met working for Outward Bound and her love of life and vibrancy had caused my heart to open wide to her energy and soul. Although standing on that ledge, the emptiness and loneliness triggered from that breakup was still pretty raw and very much alive within me, I somehow felt connected to something much larger than my self that at the time I did not have awareness or understanding to describe.

Recently, I became intrigued by the interplay of the different parts of my ego structure that were in operation during that time of my life and began to ask some questions. Why was I so willing to risk my life in such extreme ways? In what way was my risk taking and adventuring essentially the same process as it is for any other person taking any other risk? Why were there parts of me so intrigued by the abyss and falling towards the earth, and paradoxically why were there other parts of me so interested in climbing and flying away from the earth? Was God or love really there with me and in what ways did my risk taking both detract and facilitate transcendence of my pain?

Some might say there was a sensation-seeker running the show, an adrenaline junky addicted to the high of this higher place, numbing my body through the exiling of fear, attempting to transcend some smoldering fire (a result of the broken heart, loneliness or some other shadowy, buried pain) contained within a foggy, hazy, depressive state. Or possibly, I was looking to simply feel alive, hoping to help long asleep parts of me to wake up from their slumber. Or maybe, I was just pushing to the edges of my potential as a human being, rising to the challenge of the limits of my physical, spiritual and emotional selves.

In the words that follow, with the help of the Internal Family Systems theoretical lens and clinical examples, I will attempt to make sense of what was at work for me on that ledge. I will discuss the parts of me and others that engage in risk taking, their motivations, the desire that all of us have to transcend pain or earthly constraints, the processes involved in transcendence and the places or containers where our exiled parts are held as well as the hidden treasures that can be found within these containers when we risk trips into these abysses.

Falling into the Abyss

Sitting in my office recently with Ann, a female client of mine, attempting to help her make sense of why she was not able to "let go" of pursuing her partner who was a serial intimacy avoider, she became aware of a pit in her stomach that she often felt in reaction to this pursue/withdraw pattern they played out between them like a needle stuck on an old turntable in the groove of an LP. I asked her to move her awareness to that place in her body where she experienced the sensation that appeared when her partner moved away from her. As she did that she became aware of something that she referred to as an abyss and almost instantly I witnessed her body begin to get rigid. With her eyes closed, she explained that she was seeing an image of a big dark hole that seemed to go on and on into the dark recesses of her being. Her core body temperature began to rise; her respiration was increasing, as was her heart rate. She appeared to be moving into the initial stages of a panic attack. Gently, quietly, I said to her, "Ann, don't forget to breathe." I quickly scanned my body for escalations as well. I asked her to stay focused on the edges of the abyss, to not move too quickly and to be careful to not be drawn into the center of it. John Welwood (1990) stated, "In facing intense pain, it is often helpful at first to spend some time making a space for it, allowing it just to be there, 'sitting on the edge of it,' and inquiring into it." Still at the edge, we checked with, negotiated, reassured and got permission to continue from the parts of her that were triggered by our initial focusing on the pit in her stomach. They said they feared her getting overwhelmed and lost forever inside this abyss. Her body began to slow down and she was able to "let go" a little more. Her body was less tense and stiff. I then asked her if she could move a little closer to the abyss and maybe even move into it. She described an experience of falling or floating as she moved deeper into her abyss. As she did that some of my own experiences of falling came flooding back into my awareness.

At times while climbing, my physical resources would give out. My forearms would weaken, my fingers or edges of my climbing shoes would begin to slide off the edges or cracks they were purchased on, and I would fear falling. The split seconds before a potential fall were always the same, an initial surge of adrenaline, a panicky, gripped feeling and a message from a protective part of me telling me to hold on tighter, to not let myself go. It was the beginning stages of an ever-escalating fight or flight response. My palms would get sweaty; my mind would get hazy and panicky as would my body. One leg at times would begin to move spasmodically up and down like I was using an old manual sewing machine. My breathing would increase, as would my heart rate. My first instinct at these times would be to hold on tighter. Although it seemed intuitive, the paradox was this, if I stayed anxious and held on tighter it actually would increase the likelihood that I would fall and more likely that I would get hurt if I held on tighter as my body wouldn't be supple or flexible if the fall did happen.

When I have fallen, when there was absolutely no choice but to let go, if I pushed away from the rock with full awareness, although it could be terrifying at times, the results were always the same. During the split second (approximately 1.4 seconds for a 30 foot fall, Stark 2002) that it takes to hit the end of the rope, I would move from extreme fear to extreme terror to extreme peace all in the blinking of an eye. As my body was increasing its speed towards terminal velocity, the wind would be rushing by my ears, all I would hear was whoosh; I would only vaguely be aware of my body rushing past the rock. The panic that moved through my body would be quickly replaced by something that I can only describe as peacefulness. It's a degree of peaceful feeling that I have never experienced anywhere before except in doing my own internally focused experiential psychotherapy or at times with meditation. The best way I have of describing this experience is to say that at the very end of the fall, as the rope stretched tight, it felt like I was being held by the hand of God.

Falling and the Autonomic Nervous System

Fear and arousal are regulated by the limbic system, the part of the brain that is in charge of regulating instinctual survival reactions and emotional expression. The three instinctive reactions the body manifests when this system is activated are fight, flight, or freeze. The limbic brain regulates the autonomic nervous system, which is made up of two major components, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). When the SNS system is activated and prepares for fight or flight, the significant changes in the body that can be experienced are: increased respiration and heart rate, increased blood pressure, sweating, increased or decreased temperature and rapid thought patterns (Rothschild, 2003). The PNS system is engaged when we are experiencing feelings of calmness or peacefulness. As we go about our days, from moment to moment, the PNS and SNS, like a balloon rising and falling on currents of hot and cold air, are engaging and disengaging depending on the external and internal stimulus. There is a constant cycling of these arousal states in response to perceived and actual threats from our environment and in response to the messages coming from the parts of ourselves (managers) designed to protect the vulnerable parts (exiles) of our internal system.

In the example of climbing described above, I would experience a complete arousal cycle when I would fall or fear falling. The arousal cycle worked in this way: 1) My strength began to wane; 2) I would perceive danger; 3) my SNS would get activated as my mind and body prepared for the challenge; 4) the arousal would peak at about the same time the fall would happen or I pulled my self to safety; 5) the arousal would begin to decrease as the PNS re-engaged; and 6) I would be left feeling peaceful and satisfied and even a bit euphoric at the end of the fall or the top of the climb. This cycle of arousal is a normal process and although the climbing example above is extreme, most of us enjoy the euphoric feeling experienced at the end of an arousal cycle.

For someone who has been frozen in fear as a result of trauma, the above cycle is different. Protective parts often prevent or avoid completion of the cycle as he/she has had good reason to distrust the cycle. According to Peter Levine, author of *Waking the Tiger* (1997), "This is because to the trauma survivor arousal has been coupled with the overwhelming experience of being immobilized by fear." He/she has essentially been frozen by fear as a result of past trauma and has consistently and habitually avoided experiences that re-create this cycle. Most likely as a result of attachment trauma and other developmental wounds, my client Ann avoided "letting go" of her partner at all cost for fear of losing whatever little experience she was getting of love and connection. To "let-go" meant to her protective parts a long slow descent into some empty, lonely, scary place inside of her which, if even just thought about or imaged for a fleeting moment, would often trigger the beginning of the arousal cycle which was terrifying for her. Peter Levine further states that in order for the trauma survivor to heal the trauma he or she must

learn to "let go" and trust the nervous system and the arousal cycle and be able to flow with its normal and natural up and down process. Although Ann's process was more about avoiding her abyss triggered by the relational process with her partner, her experience was very similar to my climbing example from above as our body experiences were much the same.

Fear Stories from the Edge

During the arousal cycle as fear is increasing, it's not just sensations in the body that are experienced, there are also stories being played out in the mind by the protective parts of ourselves that help perpetuate the increase of fear in the body. These stories can be as simple as a small doubting voice telling us to be careful or a part projecting onto the movie screen of our mind abysmal failure and carnage in relation to the perceived risky situation.

During original distressing and upsetting experiences from childhood, if we are left to contend with making meaning from these events in isolation prior to the maturing of our neurological systems and without a conscious, aware adult to help us make more coherent sense of these overwhelming experiences, parts of us will begin to develop incoherent fear stories that we will access later in life during challenging risky times. For many of us, how fear was storied or not storied by our original caregivers during original disturbing moments in our youth has a lot to do with how we relate to fear and the arousal cycle today. Through these generational transmissions of fear stories, we have been taught to distrust that feeling of fear that arises in risky situations. Whenever a degree of the arousal cycle is experienced we may back away from it, told by one of the protective parts of ourselves (replaying the childhood and family messages) that we should fear our fear, thus not allowing for completion of the cycle and movement through the fear into the potential for more peaceful feelings.

To be fully human means to feel fear and trembling at least some of the day (Becker 1973), yet we live in a fear negating culture that encourages us to exile our fear. In referring to the cultural stories about fear, Miriam Greenspan stated it this way, "The basic lessons of a fear negating culture: Fear is a "negative emotion" that gets in the way of everything good. Feeling and exhibiting fear bring shame. Only wimps and cowards are afraid." Due to our original painful childhood experiences, and due to the family and cultural stories handed down to us, when we begin to feel fear, we often relate to it in a variety of ways that are problematic and lead to even greater issues. Our protective parts want to control us and our environment so badly, that they can shame, numb, exile, act out in relation to our fear, or become a warrior to or a victim of our fear (Greenspan 2004). Often the fear is not the problem, it is the ways in which we contract away from it and relate to it that creates even more challenges when what may be called for is a "letting go" and/or developing ways to befriend and feel the fear. "The first step in taming the lion of emotions, in transmuting their fierce energy into illumination is to befriend it by letting it be, without judging it as good or bad" Welwood (1983).

When confronted with challenging, threatening situations, one of the most difficult things to do is to let go and feel what we feel. Yet at times that is what is called for when there is absolutely no choice: as when our spouse announces that they are leaving us, or our beloved child goes away to college, or our doctor just announces that you have cancer, or maybe something as simple as a look of disapproval on someone's face emerges as we state our opinion. What do you do then? As in climbing, if you hold on tighter, trying to control the situation in some way, often it is more likely that you will fall or that your fall will be more painful or longer lasting.

As Ann was moving into her abyss, trusting her nervous system, and having the experience of falling, she began to experience a peaceful, calm feeling in her body. Joseph Campbell (1991) wrote, "At the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light." I checked in with her to see how she was doing and she expressed that she was feeling ok, although still feeling some of the effects of the vertigo. She opened her eyes for a few moments to re-orient or ground her self before focusing back inside. Once she was focused back inside, the image of a desert landscape began to emerge as did the image of what she described as a little girl in tattered, ripped, dingy clothing, with dirty matted hair. She described the little girl as looking like her; about the time her father began to spend more time away from home and away from the toxic energy of her mother. She began to cry a mixture of sadness and compassion as the images of the little girl that she once was came flooding back into her awareness.

To Ann the desert represented the experience of being alone without nourishment, knowing that she had no connection in the desert; she was all by herself. She had often talked of an immense sense of loneliness in referencing the experience of her life, especially in relation to her partner. Eventually, as she began to

connect with the girl, a number of stories emerged. Some of these stories were, "I don't deserve love," "there is something wrong with me," "I must do something more or less to get love and connection." She described the little girl as if she were a refugee without a home, like a lost dog wandering the streets for years without anyone to love or care for it. Whenever she began to sense her partner pulling away from her, that sick feeling in her stomach would emerge. It would also come when she anticipated connection. There was a hope that would come for connection from her partner and when it didn't happen, disappointment would set in and she (the part) would be cast back into the abyss and out into the desert without hope for nurturance or nourishment. Although not overwhelmed in this current moment sitting in the office, the tears continued to flow as she befriended, fully felt and witnessed long lost or exiled emotions, stories and sensations. Ann had just moved into and through one of her biggest abysses and we were both witnessing its transformation. Henry Nouwen (1975) stated, "As hard as it is to believe that the dry desolate desert can yield endless varieties of flowers, it is equally hard to imagine that our loneliness is hiding unknown beauty." Moving into her abyss and being present to her sorrow, allowed Ann's compassion to flow. This process also allowed for the digesting of her previously undigested grief.

Abyss as Container

Abysses take many forms. I have heard the abyss referred to by my clients as a void, a nothingness, an emptiness, a black hole, a vacuum. Most of us have many abysses. There are abysses that contain parts of us that carry the traumatic experiences of the past and all their memories, sensations and feelings of isolation, chaos, rejection, abandonment, shame, grief, sadness, and emptiness. There are also abysses that carry fear of annihilation or the experience of nothingness as well as the ultimate fear, death. Sam Keen stated it this way: "Beneath our fear of high places and things that go bump in the night there is a primal fear of what the existentialists call ontological anxiety-the fear of extinction, of the void, of nothingness, of death-that is an abiding climate in the bottom of the psyche." In my experience, when clients have gotten connected to their abysses, when we have made space for the abyss and actually moved into the abyss what they find there is often quite surprising. Keen again stated, "Gradually, a voice, almost a whisper, emerged from the black hole. 'I am small, alone, sad, and helpless. Death is lurking. My only hope is to curl up, be very still, and wait. I am abandoned. Please rescue me.'"

IFS[sm] calls these parts contained in the abyss exiled parts, vulnerable child-like parts of people that hold burdens or extreme emotions or beliefs that are a result of traumas experienced often from childhood (Schwartz, 95). Many possibilities exist to explain what the perceptual experience of the abyss itself might be for people. Viewed through the IFS lens, one possible theory is that the abyss is a construction of our protective managerial parts (managers), something that's not innately built into the human psyche, but constructed and projected into our visual and felt sense awareness to keep us away from material they believe is too much for our character structure to handle. Viewed in this way, the abyss can be treated as a projection of an image by a managerial part, designed to scare us and keep us away from the vulnerable exiled part's traumatic material. Or you can treat the abyss as a "place" in the internal system, created by a manager where the exile is held, essentially a container for pain. In my work with the abyss, I choose to think of the abyss as a "place" in the internal system and help my clients with conscious awareness to move or descend into it. There are times, when after a safe therapeutic container has been established, sensitive traumatic memories or histories are uncovered which require several cautious, thoughtful trips into the abyss. Yet the experience for most of my clients is that it is never as scary as they thought, when with conscious awareness they begin to descend or move into the abyss. When they begin to descend or move into the abyss and witness and connect with the exiled emotions, sensations, memories and beliefs from a calm, clear, aware place, the symbolic representation of the abyss transforms. What was once an abyss, dark cave, or black hole is no longer. Ann's abyss went from a big black hole, to a desert, and eventually when the memories came and sensations and emotions were re-experienced from the consciousness of her current adult self, both the desert and the abyss disappeared from her consciousness and awareness.

Origins of the Abyss

I was a skinny, scared little kid who didn't get enough guidance, attention or love from anyone, often witnessing the physical abuse of my mother and compelled into being her protector from the violence. Much of my early experience in life was that of loneliness and emptiness. I recall trying to get attention and love and being ignored or rebuked and often the only way I had of getting any possibility of love or attention was to be pleasing and caretaking towards my mother. I look back at pictures from that era and I feel so much sadness and compassion for that little guy. My mother was too occupied in her attempts to save herself from a very real potential death at

the hands of her abusive second husband or from saving him from his own alcoholic oblivion to give me what I needed. She was under the control of this abusive man who forced her into submitting to his psychological, emotional, and sexual will.

Because a lot of the original experiences of trauma and all the sensations, emotions, beliefs that accompanied those experiences were too much for my little boy consciousness and neurology to handle and because there wasn't a conscious, aware enough adult to help me make sense of the experiences in a coherent way that could be integrated into a developmentally appropriate "little boy" narrative, I developed stories or narratives about the experience that were incoherent (Daniel Siegel 2003). As a result, parts of me were essentially compelled into developing a safe place for the sensations, memories, beliefs and emotions to be stored. "Whenever we turn away from some aspect of our experience, emotional black holes form in the psyche. Real healing can begin only when we finally learn to be present in the places where we have been absent" Welwood (2003). It wasn't until I started investigating these experiences through expeditions into these abysses, often physically experienced as troubling sensations in the pit of my stomach, tightness in my chest, and visually experienced as a "big black hole," that I began to unpack some of the pain stored in my abysses that were created by the protective parts of myself. I was then eventually able to "see" and "witness" more clearly from a more conscious, aware place (IFS calls this place the "Self") as did my client Ann, that the narratives written from childhood didn't make coherent sense. The narratives that were written during those original points of trauma for that little boy in me were: "I'm not worthy enough to have love," "there is something wrong or flawed about me," "to have love, I must be pleasing and rescuing," "it is my job or lot in life to sacrifice my needs for another in order to get love." These were the stories mixed with the painful emotions and sensations that were re-triggered by the breakup with the Outward Bound woman prior to the climb on El Capitan and although quelled by the bliss of that place and the climbing, were still very active within me standing on that ledge.

Perceived Risk and the Abyss

When we get close to these abysses, as when confronted with a challenging, potentially risky situation, our core defensive mechanisms (in IFS, the managers and fire-fighters) can trigger our ANS, since it is the best way they have of convincing us we could die if we go any further. The problem is, the body sensations triggered by our protective parts in risky situations are exactly the same whether it be risking a fall while rock climbing, risking a fall within an intimate relationship, speaking an unpopular opinion, asking someone new on a date, smiling at a stranger on the street or investigating a troubling sensation or emotion in our bodies. Our nervous systems are designed in such a way that our protective parts use it (benevolently) to trick us into feeling life and death sensations even when there is absolutely no risk of dying. Our protective parts and their connections to our bodies coupled with the story line we are hearing from them can make things so cloudy that it is hard to tell the difference between what is actual and what is just a parts projection of perceived risk.

There are many parts in most of us that constrain us from taking risks in relationships, taking risks professionally, risking being ourselves or risking a journey into the abyss. Most of my life, although I have risked my life many times while climbing in many places around the world, I have avoided risking being wrong, risking being shamed for not being smart enough, attractive enough or competent enough. The list goes on and on, all so very peculiar for a guy who is willing to climb un-roped for hundreds of feet, but not able to traverse the intricate ledges and precipices of an intimate relationship without fearing a fall into my "little abyss of death." This "little abyss of death" for me has always been about the fear that comes from not actualizing my self or the terror of non-being, not daring enough to be myself. The fear might be speaking my authentic experience to someone a part of me perceives as more powerful than me as the potential exists that they may be judging or angry with me or hurt by my words. If they are angry or hurt then they may reject or abandon me. If they reject or abandon me then the possibility exists that I am thrown into my terrifying abyss of loneliness, or shame or emptiness. This reminds me of a quote that I used to read to my Outward Bound students I believe to be apropos here:

You risked your life, but what else have you risked? Have you ever risked disapproval? Have you ever risked a belief? I see nothing particularly courageous in risking one's life. So you lose it, you go to your hero's heaven and everything is milk and honey 'til the end of time, right? You get your reward and suffer no earthly consequences. That's not courage. Real courage is risking something that you have to keep on living with, real courage is risking something that might force you to rethink your thoughts and suffer change and stretch consciousness. Real courage is risking one's clichés.

–Tom Robbins

I know that the same exact body experience I get when frightened while climbing happens when I get scared in relationships. When I am able, with awareness, to tune into the story the same fluttery, out-of-balance feeling in my stomach and tightness in my chest, or lump in my throat says, "Don't go there", "You will die", "You will cease to exist." Many of my protective parts were and continue to be there attempting to keep me safe, attempting to keep me from taking that step into the abysses they fear, or just walking to the edge of the abyss to have a look. When I allow the fear and anxiety stories and sensations of these protective parts to control my life, then I am not even getting close to my edge, and not living life fully. Yet if I can focus inside and work to gain an awareness of what these fears are, spend time hearing what their fears might have to tell me and reassure them from a more conscious aware place, then the risk is somewhat easier to accept. Although difficult but not impossible on our own, if we have a trusted partner or guide on our journeys into the abyss who can offer hope, light and love than our descent into the dark scary place is made just a little easier.

Transcendence and the Abyss

Some years ago as an Outward Bound instructor, sitting on the ground in the desert, in Joshua Tree National Park in California, I was helping a group to prepare for one of the big challenges of the course, which was to hike up one side of a steep desert rock formation in the dark, sleep the night, then rappel down the other side, a 150' vertical rock face, the next morning. One of the participants on this professional development program, an upper level executive and a well-known songwriter musician from the 60's, was so overwhelmed by his fear of sleeping in a high place and rappelling that he refused to cooperate or even entertain the possibility of joining in on the activity. As it turned out, he'd had a recurring nightmare of falling every night of his life for as long as he could remember. It had so profoundly impacted his life that he would literally "freeze" when driving over a bridge or riding the executive elevator with windows on the outside of his company's building. He had been to therapy for years to try to fix the problem, which he stated eventually led to the demise of his marriage. I thought to myself, "did you know you were signing up for the "climbing" Outward Bound course?"

Through much processing and support from the group he was eventually able to reluctantly agree to hike to the top of the mountain but because he was so afraid of getting too close to the edge of the cliff, which was 60 feet away, he had to sleep (a sleepless night) in a small, cramped, claustrophobic, crevice wedged between two rocks and a large Yucca plant. The next morning, although I had my doubts, after much emotional support from me and from the group who helped him by hearing from all his fears, he agreed to walk to the edge of his biggest abyss. But walking is not really what happened. He struggled to the edge with the most rigid tense body I think I had ever seen. He literally had to override his body, as it would not freely cooperate. The group was one large collective of compassion and love as they witnessed this overwhelming display of courage and spoke words of loving encouragement and support, giving him what was not possible for him to give himself in this terrifying but pivotal moment. Vibrating, he eventually arrived at the edge with fear dripping from every pore. Once in his harness and clipped into the rope with no chance to fall, facing the group, he backed the few remaining feet to the biggest fear in his life. What happened next stands out in my mind as one of the biggest displays of courage I have ever witnessed. With the hopeful wide-eyed faces of his group and me watching, he "let go." Although still trembling, he lowered himself backwards over the edge of the cliff into his biggest fear. He was walking his feet backwards, toes pointed up with his body in the shape of an L, dangling 150 feet above the ground.

Within a few split seconds, his experience went from fear to terror to what appeared to be bliss and elation written all over his face. As he moved down the rope towards the ground pushing and bounding away from the rock, he erupted spontaneously into hoots and hollers and exclamations of glee and excitement. His group, at first shocked at what they witnessed, erupted into simultaneous shouts of joy and tears of compassion and love. Not one person had a dry eye. Once on the ground his own tears began to flow and didn't stop for some time as the grief of many years was finally fully experienced. He had walked to the edge with terror and descended into the abyss with ecstatic joy.

Andrew had purposefully taken the climbing course with full knowledge of what he was getting into. He had wanted to descend into his biggest physical fear in life as a way to transcend. He was a person that lived life close to his edges but this was one that had daunted him much of his life and even though his protective parts had almost completely taken over his body, he was able to, with our help, calm them just enough, push through their fears and come out the other side having done something with great courage.

Although very close, if not dipping into ANS freeze, Andrew moved through fear and into terror, and back out again fully conscious of what was happening in his body, fully conscious of the consequences. The courage that manifested itself at the moment he chose to take the OB course, the moment he chose to hike up the mountain, and the moment he backed over that edge into that abyss was not about bravado or deficit, he had nothing to prove to anyone, it was about a conscious choice to live life more fully with less fear. If Andrew, supported by the love of the group, had not spent time listening to and reassuring his fears, and the group had not encouraged him to stay with his fear and yet not be controlled by it, he might still be riding the service elevator, planning his day around avoiding bridges and other high places, and not living his life more fully.

The following day, Lynn, my co-instructor from the course could not find Andrew where she had left him the night before in his solo campsite. After searching for a few moments around the area she had left him the night before, she eventually heard giggling and looked up to find Andrew all smiles, very full of himself, sitting with his feet dangling over the side of a fifteen foot high boulder he had climbed just prior to her arrival. Some time, after this expedition had begun to fade from my memory, I received a letter in the mail. Andrew had sent me a short note with two poems he had written about his experience. His fear of high places had essentially been eliminated and many other emotional and relational areas of his life had also been impacted in very positive ways. He had also begun song writing again, which he had not done for many years.

Andrew had allowed himself, with the help of gravity, to be pulled down into one of his deepest darkest abysses only to find himself sitting happily, feet dangling and smiling into what use to be his living nightmare, having ascended to greater heights than he had imagined. Another example of this phenomenon can be found during white-water season on many rivers in the Northwest. In the springtime when the rivers in the Pacific Northwest are at their highest and most dangerous, many of our adventure community's white-water physical risk takers come out. When kayakers or rafters can't contain the momentum of their boats and are tossed into the torrent, at times they can be taken to the bottom of the river by what are called keeper currents. Keeper currents are the currents in the river that cycle on the vertical plane. They move from the top of the river to the bottom of the river in a constant rotation. The first intuitive response when pulled into this type of current is to fight against it and attempt to swim to the surface, which is exactly opposite of the movement one should make to stay alive. These currents kill many rafters and kayakers each year. What is counter to their protective parts instincts would actually keep them alive here. If instead of struggling to the surface, they were actually able to "let go" and allow themselves to be taken into the abyss it is far more likely that they would survive the encounter with this current as they would be taken to the bottom and within a second or two end up back on the surface.

Like kayakers or rafters caught in keeper currents struggling to get to the surface, there are parts of us that tell us to move away from the abyss, that signal our bodies that there is danger. We attempt to control or transcend the pain, discomfort, or difficulty by ascending, moving away from, to the right or left of. The list of activities, spiritual practices, or substances that can be used as attempts at transcendence are limitless. Andrew had tried to control or transcend his fear through avoidance; for my client Ann it was through attempting to control her partner's withdrawal; for me it was managing and attempting to transcend pain through pleasing and caretaking behaviors in relationships and during my adventuring years, albeit short lived, one very successful way was through seeking blissful states of mind manifested while rock climbing.

As it can for many spiritual practices, this process of moving away from can feel at times like a spiritual awakening or transcendence as it did for me on that ledge in Yosemite and many other times while climbing. This process, sometimes referred to as spiritual bypass (Welwood 2003), is actually the opposite of where salvation or the potential for healing or transcendence exists. Although it can feel like transcendence and the pain does go away for a time, it eventually comes back. The pain of my exiled parts that were contained in my abysses and accompanied me on all my climbs during that time of my life felt like a weight that I could not let go of no matter how high or hard I climbed. Because unlike Andrew, I had mastered my fear of high places, climbing became a Zen-like, flowing, blissful spiritual practice that felt transcendent at times. Once back down on the earth though, the broken-hearted exile that was stored away in its dungeon would eventually resurface as a result of some internal interaction of parts or external interaction with another person. Real transcendence exists at the bottom of the river, or the cave at the base of the mountain, or in those dark abysses we spend much of our time moving away from. Pema Chodron stated, "in the process of discovering bodhicchitta (awakened heart), this journey goes down not up. It's as if the mountain pointed toward the center of the earth instead of reaching into the sky. Instead of transcending the suffering of all creatures,

we move toward the turbulence and doubt." She further states, "At the bottom we discover water, the healing water of bodhicchitta. Right down there in the thick of things, we discover the love that will not die." So to fully rise above, and reach even greater heights we must, with awareness like my client Ann and student Andrew, go below.

The Passion and Joy of Life on the Edge

Looking back at the time that I did all the climbing and adventuring in my twenties, I now realize it is more complex than I originally thought. There were many parts flowing like ghosts in and out of the driver's seat of my consciousness. Although there were times when certain compulsive, fire-fighting parts took over and made me take more risks while climbing than usual, there were always other parts of me there watching, reminding me to breathe, to stay acutely aware and focused, to be careful to make the right, smooth, fluid movements, to do things technically right, and to stay connected to the rock and not take any unnecessary risks. To me in this mind-set, living my life in this way, physical risk-taking was a way of life. It was a mind-set that was hard for others who knew me during that time to fully comprehend. It all felt like life-blood. While climbing, even when it was extreme and a hair-breadth away from annihilation, I wasn't thinking that I wanted to die even when my firefighters were running the show. It was rather just the opposite, as I wanted to live life as fully as possible. There were no suicidal parts running the show that day on that ledge in Yosemite Valley. There was a passion that emanated from deep within my soul when living life this close to the edge. I needed the physical-risk taking life that extreme rock climbing provided and the degree of focused attention that it required to stay close to the edge. The flow state I would experience high up on a cliff or mountain somewhere helped me to feel vibrant and alive. The concentrated, focused, acutely aware flow state I experienced while climbing is described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* in the following way: "Flow helps to integrate the self because in that state of deep concentration consciousness is unusually well ordered. Thoughts, intentions, feelings and all the senses are focused on the same goal. Experience is in harmony. And when the flow episode is over, one feels more "together" than before, not only internally, but also with respect to other people and the world in general." At the time, sedate modern life did not afford me the challenges I felt I needed to experience what I was after.

Risk Taking and the Enhancement of Self

Peter Levine writes about the human body's innate ability to heal and handle trauma. He states that built into our bodies is something that has been there since the beginning; a primitive, reptilian ability to "respond powerfully and fully whenever our survival is threatened." He further states that, "whenever we exercise this natural capacity, we feel exhilarated and alive, powerful, expanded, full of energy and ready to take on any challenge. Being threatened engages our deepest resources and allows us to experience our fullest potential as human beings. In turn, our emotional and physical well-being is enhanced." On one level, when operating from a place of emotional pain, climbing represented a potential for transcendence of the pain through operating as close to the abyss as I could possibly get without falling in or falling off, but what it did for me was keep me feeling alive and exhilarated. The edge between living my life with passion and self destruction was like a razor's edge. Freud in referring to the evolution of our species wrote in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of." I was walking or climbing about as close as one could get to that razor's edge between life and death. Even though climbing didn't heal my burdens, it did, as Peter Levine suggests, keep my emotional and physical well being enhanced.

In our modern, technologically advanced society, we are virtually eliminating challenge and the experiences that potentially enhance our physical and emotional beings. With the click of a computer mouse we can have books, stereos, groceries, and almost anything under the sun delivered to our doors without risking anything; a far cry from primordial human who had to risk life and limb to feed his or her family each day. In the process of making life more comfortable and convenient, we have begun to disconnect from our body's built-in capacity to fully engage in life and feel alive. Peter Levine again, in referring to our innate ability to respond to challenge and threat: "Today our survival depends increasingly on developing our ability to think rather than being able to respond. Consequently, most of us have become separated from our natural, instinctual selves-in particular, the part of us that can proudly, not disparagingly be called animal." He further states, "it is no coincidence that people who are more in touch with their natural selves tend to fare better when it comes to trauma." In other words, to more fully engage in life's potentially

traumatizing challenges, our bodies and minds need risk and challenge in order to stay vibrant and healthy.

Yet our society has cushioned us from opportunities to experience risk, so we are drawn to create extreme experiences that will evoke that response in us. Our culture heavily weights the mind over instinct or intuition. We have disconnected from our intuitive bodies, don't listen to what it has to tell us and consequently, set ourselves up for potentially more pain. We listen more attentively to the fear stories told by the protective parts of ourselves and do what they tell us to do or not do. They tell us to not be ourselves, to avoid loneliness, rejection, and pain at all cost. They fear the parts of us that will be triggered if we fail. Many of us allow the protective parts of ourselves to reason, think, and rationalize their way through our lives yet I think on one level, there is a subtle awareness in our collective cultural consciousness of what we need as evidenced by current vacation trends. In the past fifteen years, the adventure travel industry has exploded. You now see high-risk adventure sports and retreats advertised almost everywhere. Bungee jumping, rock climbing, white water kayaking or sea kayaking, river rafting, are all activities contrived, commodified and sold to those of us in need of a challenge and looking for "peak experiences" to enhance our beings.

The Leap of Faith

There were times while climbing when I had no idea whether or not I would be able to hold on long enough, whether my stamina would sustain me, or if the moves would be too hard for me. I would gaze up the rock as it faded away into that deep blue sky, knowing I had to commit to making a move or risk a fall and not knowing what lay ahead, wondering if this would be the place for the final "big fall." This exact edge, this place of uncertainty, is the precise place that we all encounter every time we take a risk, no matter what the risk is. It is also the precise place from which the potential for vibrancy, vitality, and joy can emanate. This is the time and place where our internal systems fully engaged can help us to truly feel enhanced, alive, human, and where we can be truly tested.

However, risking the "big fall" and "letting go" takes a great leap of faith especially as it relates to the fear of grief, sadness, rejection, abandonment or aloneness, as was evidenced by Ann's immense fear of being cast back out into the desert of her loneliness. At these times what is called for is a leap of faith by our clients and their parts, where risking a fall into the abyss won't ultimately result in a long, slow, lonely death. We reassure them that we can keep them safe. But is it so? Can we always assure them that when they take that leap, or step down into the abyss, that they will be ok? Can I know that if I take the risk to move forward up the rock or down into my "little abyss" of despair or loneliness that I won't fall, or that if I do fall that my trusted partner or guide is paying attention and will catch me and that I won't die, and would it truly be a risk if there was a guarantee? Risking a fall into the abyss by walking to the edge, or like my Outward Bound student Andrew, backing into the abyss, requires a choice made by the Self of the individual. Sam Keen wrote, "There is no way to enjoy the comfort of faith or ecstasy of love without making a wholehearted, existential commitment of the self. Faith, love, and flying all depend on a relationship that can be created only by an act of trust that involves taking the risk of falling into the void. Before the fact, all risks are folly." Like Andrew and Ann, the wisdom of the risk did not present itself until they backed over that edge into that abyss and safely returned to earth.

I am not suggesting that we all need to engage in life threatening death defying feats in order to stay vibrant and alive. What I am suggesting though, is that in order for us to live life more fully, and not be as acutely impacted or as susceptible to trauma by life's challenges, perhaps we need to stay connected to the experiences and people that challenge us to feel more fully human. In referring to Abraham Maslow's work, Earnest Becker (1973) stated, "Maslow talks very convincingly about "self actualization" and the ecstasy of "peak experiences" wherein the person comes to see the world in all its awe and splendor and senses his own free inner expansion and the miracle of his being."

What challenges us is different for everyone. For me at that time it was as big as sleeping on a small ledge a few thousand feet up and as small as stating my opinion in a group. For you it might be driving a car, walking down the street, dancing, talking in a group, sharing yourself with another, feeling and expressing grief, sadness, anger, or smiling at someone you don't know. Perhaps all that matters is that with a trusted guide or on your own you seek, learn, know your many edges (physical, relational, spiritual, professional), trust that the arousal cycle will end in a peaceful experience and risk a fall into the abyss that might present itself at that edge. As in the mountains, there are experienced trustworthy guides who can accompany those of us who, all along the continuum of risky endeavors, are stuck in our arousal cycles and are frozen at the edge of our greatest fears.

Risk Taking and the Internal Family System

As a forty-year-old man writing these words, I feel so thankful for what I have learned over the past 20 years of my life. I know now what that sensation in the pit of my stomach is about and although I didn't heal that sensation and the wounds connected to it from climbing, that form of risk taking and spiritual practice had its place in my life. Through my own journeying into my abysses, although there are many more, I have reconnected with some of the lonely, shamed, scared little kids in me who for years were still wandering the desolate deserted streets of my psyche looking for answers, sometimes being nurtured by my reactive, compulsive fire-fighter parts attempts at extreme climbing.

Gazing with narrowed eyes past my computer just now I see the muted images of faces of thousands upon thousands of little kids from my generation, neglected and abused just like me, still wandering the streets or deserts of their adult psyches looking for love and transcendence in whatever activity or substance they can find. Some of them I know, my good friends, still climbing with the same intensity we had in the 1980's. And some of them, climbers I have met in different climbing areas, that were found at the base of a climb only somewhat recognizable, all most likely attempting to transcend their own abysses. These were the ones who, perhaps unable to journey into their abysses or unable to find that delicate line between seeking blissful climbing states and just living life fully on the edges of the abyss, were taken over by the extremes and risked just a little too much in their search for healing, transcendence, love. It fills me with compassion and understanding for all those little kids who have walked into my office looking and sounding like adults, using and needing whatever substance or activity that has come to them to keep those little kids inside of them from overwhelming them with their pain.

As it relates to purpose or motivation, the interplay between Self and parts is so organic and so fluid, like a tide constantly ebbing and flowing, taking many shapes and forms, that it takes an acutely-tuned self awareness to notice the sometimes imperceptible shifts between parts and between parts and Self. There is a fine, often ambiguous line in the interplay between Self, managers, exiles, and firefighters. Our parts are like amorphous ghosts who come and go, sometimes quickly with lightning speed, and sometimes slowly in and out of our consciousness control room, pushing and turning all the different dials and buttons of our different physiological, neurological, cognitive, and emotional systems. What is called for is a fine-tuned nose, eye, ear, and felt sense for the subtle shifts and differences in motivation for the activity or use of substance. To see the interplay and notice the separation in ourselves or in others, I believe we must spend time getting to know our own motivations, when our fire fighting parts do what they do and why. To make this possible, perhaps with a conscious awareness we also need to push the edges and take some risks to learn about our fearful parts, the stories they have about fear, how they impact our bodies and the reactive fire fighters connected to this system of parts. Most importantly, no matter how extreme the activity or behavior is in us, we must always remember that there is at least some Self present, whether it lurks just out of sight, underneath a few layers of character armor, or is buried deep, barely perceptible to the naked eye.

Although it was the protective or parental parts of me that found and pushed me into climbing and the little kid parts that felt momentarily powerful and complete as a result, it was the extreme risk-taking parts that were content and pleased when they were able to use risk-taking to transcend the flames of shame or powerlessness. But one thing was for certain: "I" (Self) was always present. Standing at the edge of Dolt Tower on El Capitan in Yosemite Valley, I know "I" (Self) was there, feeling the sun on my face, fully present in the moment, imaging flying, transcending time and space and form. "I" was there with wisdom, fully aware of the all the dangers, me, my authentic Self, my true Self. Although parts of me would sometimes take over and run the show in an attempt to transcend pain, my Self was always in the background humming and whistling while climbing, watching, waiting, comforting, patiently taking opportunities to gently remind me to breathe, to feel peaceful in my body, to feel the sun on my face, to remind me of how alive I really was, to rejoice and relish in the exquisite, delicious flow state I would experience while climbing.

Love and Adventure

What was at work in the opening scene of this story is a very complex interplay between many systems, parts and Self. I needed the adventurous life and still do. Although I still love climbing, mountaineering and more recently sailing and other forms of risk taking, the adventurous life now is just a little different. With the birth of my son, the edges now are less about risking my life on some extreme climb high on a rock wall somewhere. They are more about professional risk taking, personal relationship risks, like risking speaking my authentic true voice in the face

of adversity or risking feeling things in my body that had been previously buried within me, or allowing myself to surrender within an intimate relationship. The flow state I experienced while climbing helps me access my true or authentic Self today. Climbing taught me the importance of daily spiritual practice in accessing the degree of mindful awareness needed for unconditional presence with my self and others.

At the time, before I had done much of my emotional, spiritual, and psychological explorations, I needed the extreme sensations of risk-taking to quell the intensity of that empty feeling in my body that would surface at stressful times in my life. Above all else, what I was in need of during the times when my pain would surface was love. We need to befriend the emptiness deep inside instead of running from it so that we may reclaim our deepest longing for love (Gerald May). My Self enjoyed and loved climbing and still does, and also loved the parts of me that loved climbing, like a loving, conscious, aware parent who gains satisfaction from watching their child's joy and vibrancy emerge spontaneously. Chris Hedges, in his book, *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning* (2002) stated it this way, "Love alone can fight the impulses that lure us toward self-destruction and allows us to cherish life." I always knew that I was searching for something. Searching for answers. Searching for the source, the earth mother I never had. Searching for her love to keep me safe. But what I didn't know, before I had traveled into my own abysses and befriended my emptiness and loneliness, was that I carried that love in my body and in my soul, built in and anchored to my consciousness ready to keep me safe like the climbing rope tied to my harness. Although often covered up within me, by my warrior like protective parts, the love, God, Rigpa or authentic self that I felt briefly connected to while on that ledge that September morning in Yosemite Valley was omni-present in every step, every hitch hiking adventure, every commercial fishing boat, every road trip, every mountain, and every move on the miles and miles of rock face I have climbed; even when 1000 feet up roped in, even 600 feet up un-roped, was there. She/He reminded me to breathe, to feel the sun, to experience life in whatever form my parts would pull or push me into, patiently doing his/her best to keep me alive and safe, allowing me to live and to truly be me.

Sometime later in my treatment of Ann, the little girl experienced from Ann what she had always wanted to experience from her partner and other people. She looked into the eyes of the little girl and the little girl looked into her eyes, and they resonated in that intimate place like a parent and child or two lovers gazing into each other's eyes with complete adoration and genuine acceptance. Ann later described the experience as the same experience she'd had with a lover in her early twenties. She had also found her earth mother, and it was inside of her. After several more adventures into her abysses, Ann eventually found the courage to stop the pursuit of her partner. The resultant shifts in her internal system and concurrent behavioral shifts led to far reaching positive changes in multiple areas of her life.

I also eventually discovered through help from trusted partners on my internal and external adventures, reading, journaling, mentoring, experiential therapies including IFS and my spiritual practices that all I need do to find the love that heals, like my client Ann, is to move into my abysses and find the source that abides deep down there. But finding the wounded vulnerable parts of my self and re-connecting with them still doesn't take away the need I have for adventure. I don't think any degree of witnessing or re-connecting with these parts of my self will ever take this away. I will always be a climber, a sailor, an adventurer, a seeker, a spiritual practitioner of fear, an investigator of the fine line between perceived and actual risk, between life and self destruction, and an explorer of the abyss. Perhaps we all need adventure and risk-taking so that we may live life more fully, that we may continue to grow, that we may reach our greatest potential as human beings, and be prepared with less fear to seek the hidden treasures of love that exist deep down in all the abysses we fear.

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Soul in Kabbalah and the Higher Self in Internal Family Systems: A Comparison

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Abstract

Kabbalah, the ancient Jewish mystical wisdom, and its concept of the Soul are correlated to Internal Family Systems and the notion of the higher Self. This paper courses through the history of Kabbalah and Hasidism to the elements of free will and the paradox of healing to show the correspondence between the essential tenet of IFS and the Kabbalistic view of the Soul. Both in its contextual interpretation and its spiritual dimension, the IFS model can be likened to the Kabbalistic theosophy of the Soul which proffers that we are all sparks of the divine flame imbued with responsibility to expand awareness of one's Self and of the world around us.

Introduction

"Fear is a part wanting to be understood and welcomed into your life", I said to my client, a Hasidic Rabbi sitting across from me, dressed in the traditional black and white of his ancestors, white beard neatly folded under concealing the fact that it had not been trimmed for many years. His response to my comment came swiftly but thoughtfully: "Yes, that was written about by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov in the 18th century".

At this point, it was as if my client had opened a door for me, revealing an association between a new therapeutic treatment model and an ancient theosophy: the correlation between the heart of Internal Family Systems (IFS), a doctrine I had long embraced and employed daily in my work with clients, and a whole 'new' world of ancient Jewish mystical wisdom called Kabbalah. Thus, in spring of 2003, with the help, dedication, and wisdom of my Rabbi client as mentor, I began a journey that took me to an exploration of the essence and nature of Kabbalah.

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In this work I attempt to examine the Kabbalistic view of the Soul and how it correlates to IFS' concept of the higher Self: a higher power that is a unique and universal expression within each of us. Richard Schwartz describes the Self, the centerpiece of the IFS model, both as an active, compassionate inner leader and as an expansive state of mind experiencing no boundaries. Thus the "Self is both an individual and a state of consciousness, in the same way that quantum physics has demonstrated that light is both a particle and a wave…likewise, the Self can at one time be in its expansive, wavelike state when a person is meditating and then shift to being an individual with boundaries (a particle)…It is the same Self but in different states" (Schwartz, 1995).

I have written this paper with the hope that those who read it will be as curious as I have been about the connection between the present day evolving and organic concept of the Self as a pivotal component in IFS and the Kabbalah's view of the Soul as the entity that leads the seeker to a connection with the Divine. For me this journey into the ancient wisdom of Kabbalah led to an inner place of glorious peace and self-awareness. If this work provides clarity in defining and/or sustaining the reader's personal relationship with the Divine, then that will be the reader's gift as it was a gift to me.

An exploration of Jewish mysticism, the ancient mystical wisdom that explains the timeless laws of how spiritual energy moves through the cosmos, must begin with an understanding of Hasidism, its most fervent following.

Hasidism

Hasidism, the movement of Jewish revival that swept through Eastern Europe in the mid 18th century, took the esoteric, mystical concepts of the Kabbalah, applied them to everyday life, thus rendering them emotionally and psychologically accessible. Hasidism affirmed Kabbalah's deeply optimistic view that however broken and fragmented things may seem, all of life is in fact evolving toward a state of wholeness and that we have an active role and responsibility in furthering this evolutionary healing process. As Estelle Frankel says in her book *Sacred Therapy*: "Each of us, taught the Hasidic

Masters, has the power to become a holy fixer and healer. This sacred work of the soul is to be accomplished in two ways: through acts of lovingkindness and through healing our own individual souls. These two expressions of healing are deeply related, for it is not possible to perfect one's own soul without also becoming committed to the work of healing the planet, and since every individual is a microcosm of the world, every act of healing the soul is of great, if not cosmic, significance" (Frankel, 2003).

The emergence of Hasidism as an interpretive expression of Kabbalah goes back to a man by the name of Israel Ben Eliezer or the Ba'al Shem Tov (the bearer of the good name) 1699-1760, the charismatic founder and first leader of Hasidism in Eastern Europe. Through oral traditions handed down by his pupils as well as through the legendary tales about his life and behavior, he became Hasidism's first teacher and its exemplary sage. He was adept in both herbal medicines and shamanistic healing techniques. Stories abound of his clairvoyant and healing powers, including his ability to heal souls through story telling, prayer, and the mystical power of love. He brought about a spiritual revolution among the masses of downtrodden Eastern European Jews by emphasizing the importance of love, joy, simple faith and mystical devotion in serving the Divine. His teachings were filled with ecstatic expressions of song, dance and wonderful allegorical tales. The Besht, as he came to be known, brought into the world a new spirit, and that spirit attracted, through word of mouth alone, a major part of the Jewish population within twenty years. His contribution was that he opened new sources of creativity and gave rise to a new people. His teaching was the beginning of a long series of events, a long series of moments of inspiration. In the words of the great Jewish theologian and philosopher Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, "there has been no one like him during the last thousand years" (Heschel, 1996).

History of Kabbalah

'Kabbalah' is the traditional and most commonly used term for the esoteric teachings of Judaism and for Jewish mysticism, especially the forms it assumed in the Middle Ages from the 12th century onward. The oldest and most mysterious Kabbalah text is Sefer Yetzirah, The Book of Creation. Attributed to the Patriarch Abraham and dating to the 18th century BCE, this 1300 word treatise influenced most of the world's great religions. Sefer Yetzirah is cited both in the Book of Mormon and in the Koran as the Book of Abraham (Kaplan, 1997).

The Hebrew word Kabbalah means "receiving" or "that which has been received." On the one hand, Kabbalah refers to tradition, to ancient wisdom received and treasured from the past. On the other hand, if one is truly receptive, wisdom can appear spontaneously, in an unprecedented way, taking a person by surprise. The Jewish mystical tradition combines both of these elements. Its vocabulary teems with new-ancient words. Many of its formulations derive from traditional sources--the bible and rabbinic literature--but often incorporate an acknowledgement of the present and future. For example "the world that is coming," a traditional phrase often understood as a distant future messianic era, turns into "the world that is constantly coming," constantly flowing, a timeless dimension of reality here and now (Matt, 1995).

Although Kabbalah emerged within Judaism and has deeply affected Jewish thought and religious observance, its influence extends far beyond these constraints. The Italian Renaissance humanist Pico Della Mirandola immersed himself in Latin translations of Kabbalah, believing it to be the original divine revelation. Kabbalah, he said, would enable Europeans to comprehend Pythagoras, Plato and the secrets of the Catholic faith. His writings drew heavily on the Kabbalah and laid the foundation for Christian Kabbalistic literature. In the 17th century, Knorr von Rosenroth assembled translations of many important texts in *Kabbalah Unveiled*. Sir Isaac Newton, the man most responsible for the scientific revolution and the Age of Enlightenment, was also a serious student of Kabbalah. UCLA professor Brian Copenhaver in his article "Jewish Theologies of Space in the Scientific Revolution" says that one need not make a Kabbalist of Newton in order to believe that kabbalistic theologies of space were significant items in the mental furniture of his age (Berg, 2001). In the 20th century, elements of Kabbalah were found in the fiction and poetry of Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges, in the thought of Walter Benjamin, and in Jacques Derida's *Deconstruction* (Matt, 1995).

Kabbalah: The Four Worlds and the Levels of the Soul

Kabbalists developed a complex set of ideas concerning the structure of reality, its relationship to consciousness and the life of the soul. This multidimensional theory describing reality has come to be called the doctrine of "The Four Worlds," in the sense of different realms. These are not distinct physical worlds, but rather, interdependent realities that exist simultaneously. Some Kabbalists describe the worlds as concentric, each housed within another. In ascending order of spirituality, these

realms are known as Action, Formation, Creation, and Emanation (Feldman, 1999).

The world in which we live, with all that it embraces, is the 'world of action'. The lower part of 'the world of action' is known as the 'world of physical nature', where natural law prevails. Above this world of physical nature, still part of the 'world of action' is the world of 'spiritual action'. Man is the common element in these two domains of action. As a part of the physical system of the universe, man is subordinate to the physical, chemical, and biological laws of nature. Every aspect of human existence is therefore comprised of both matter and spirit. In this world, the spiritual is subordinate to the material, in keeping with the fact that the laws of nature determine the form of all things and serve as focal points for all processes. The world of action, however, is only one world in a general system of four fundamental dimensions of being, each with its own cosmos of varying essences (Steinsaltz, 1980). The Four Worlds of Action, Formation, Creation, and Emanation can be seen as corresponding loosely to physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of our being (Frankel, 2003).

The Four Worlds also express the progression of divine unfolding from infinite being to finite reality. They depict creation as a downward chain of spiritual domains, from the most exalted, hidden realm to the physical plane in which we live. However, since all creation is continually being brought into existence anew, the Four Worlds are simultaneously existing aspects of reality, operating holographically, as each contains within it all the other levels of reality. So too each of the Four Worlds, like the four basic elements − earth, air, fire, and water - exist within each aspect of creation in different degrees (Dosick, 1997).

The Kabbalah delineated not four but five distinct soul types: five dimensions of awareness based on the Four Worlds. This notion appears in the writings of the famous 18th century Italian Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lussato, who identified souls according to the world in which they are most rooted. The soul is that which leads us on our inner journey to the Divine, for our soul corresponds to these Four Worlds of existence.

The human soul, at any of its levels, is a manifestation in varying degrees of the Divine force. Though the Soul of man shares this commonality of the Divine, all souls are unique. No two souls coincide in their actions, their functions and their paths. No one soul can take the place of another, and even the greatest of the great cannot fill the special role, the particular place, of another that may be the smallest of the small. From this notion, one derives a profound respect for human life (Steinsaltz, 1980).

The Soul and Creation

The soul in Jewish mysticism is one of the more essential aspects of creation itself. Just as the physical universe could not exist without energy, the spiritual dimension is based upon 'soul matter.' The Kabbalistic viewpoint is that we could not have a universe without the spiritual realm, and thus one could say that one of the key pillars upon which creation rests is the soul.

Kabbalah describes the soul as a kind of spiritual magnetic field, not unlike the premise in Western science that the physical universe is held together by electromagnetic forces. It is hypothesized that the same gravity that keeps the solar system operating also binds the protons, neutrons, and electrons of atoms. Physicists continue to search for a universal formula by which to describe electromagnetic theory. Similarly, spiritualists wrestling with esoteric metaphysics attempt to define the integrating force of matter. The mysteries of electromagnetic forces are to science what the soul and its inherent divinity are to Western theology. We cannot taste, smell, see, hear or touch the soul, but everything we sense, and even our senses themselves are functional only because of the soul (Cooper, 1997).

In the language of metaphysics, the principal action of the soul, its paramount importance lies precisely in the world of living creatures and in its contact with matter. Through complex relationships between the soul and the world of material substance, the soul is able to achieve far higher levels than it can in its abstract state of separate essence. At its most primary level, the soul animates existence in terms of life force, movement, and propagation of the species. On a higher level, the soul acts as the source from which man thinks, imagines, dreams, and contemplates. In Kabbalistic spiritual thought the divine spark that is the soul thus vitalizes the human body with the essence of the life of all living creatures, though in a manner far more complex and potent than in other forms of life. In spite of the added complexity of mind and emotion, this level of the soul is called the "animal soul" in the sense that it is parallel to the souls of other living creatures and it functions, thinks and is aware of itself as being concentrated in the vessel of the body. At a higher level, above the primal soul, there exists, in every human being, a divine soul. This connection of the divine soul exists hidden and veiled as a spark of higher perception and superior aspiration (Steinsaltz, 2003). The language of the soul lives at the edges of thought; it is symbolic,

metaphoric, and poetic, always hidden and elusive. The intangibility of the soul is irrelevant since another part of us is touched and this is sufficient (Cooper, 1997).

In a recent article Richard Schwartz elucidates the concept of Soul: "All the esoteric traditions within the major religions - Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam - emphasize the same core belief: we are sparks of the eternal flame, manifestations of the absolute ground of being" (Schwartz, 2004).

Emergence of Self from the Concept of Soul

Just as the soul in Kabbalistic interpretation gives life to the body, so too does the body imbue the soul with physicality. In this manner, the soul has access to all the body's physical capabilities, channels of perception and connections with both material and immaterial worlds. The contact and mutual attraction between the body and soul creates a contingency, a unique situation, generating the human Self, which represents a merging of body and soul. Self is an orchestration of our awareness, an integration of consciousness holding everything together, making us whole and able to be called by a single name − our name. Self integrates and unifies our physical body, our thoughts and our actions. The essence of spirituality is a return to the Self, a re-direction of vision of the one who asks the question, a discovery that what is sought is, and has always been, right here all along. To become aware that we are part of the Self of the universe gives our lives ultimate meaning and purpose (Steinsaltz, 1980).

This concept is closely associated with the belief in IFS that the essence of the person is peace and joy, and from that place, an individual exudes amazing healing qualities and a sense of spiritual connectedness to a higher Self. The Self is that inner leader present in every human being just waiting to come forth to elucidate the way with its compassionate wisdom. It is that quiet core of clarity and connectedness allowing for the oneness with the universe and harmonious in relationships both outside and within.

Ten Emanations or Sefirot

In Kabbalistic thought as we traverse the Four Worlds and the five levels of the soul on our journey to reach the Divine, the Divine is working to bridge the gap between the infinite and the finite by reaching to us. The mystics teach us that between the infinite and the finite are ten emanations or steps that are called Sefirot. The word Sefirot may simply come from the Hebrew word meaning 'numbers', because we count the number of steps to the Divine, but it may also come from the Hebrew word meaning 'sapphire' because the mystics visualized the Divine's radiant light as the illuminated brightness of a precious gem (Kushner, 1991).

The importance of learning to balance polarities in the pursuit of wholeness is reflected in the Kabbalah's doctrine of the ten Sefirot, the Divine attributes with which divinity continually creates and interacts with creation. The ten Sefirot can be understood as a ladder of ascent by which humankind can increasingly identify with the creator. By learning to emulate the Sefirot, we come to embody the divine attributes of wholeness. The Sefirot are arranged as paired energies − one primarily feminine and the other primarily masculine − that stand in balanced relationship with one another, with a middle integrating point (Dosick, 1997). In IFS we deal with opposing, polarized forces by bringing them together through the trusted "Self" of a third party, with the intention of generating understanding and the eventual resolution of long standing discordance. This is only achieved if both ends of the polarized continuum come together at the same time and achieve a balanced relationship with one another.

The Kabbalists saw these Sefirot in a structured order and form, which they called the Tree of Life. Because each Sefirah is an archetype or a model, every one represents a wide spectrum of categories. The names of the ten Sefirot are: Crown, Wisdom, Understanding, Loving-Kindness, Strength, Beauty, Triumph, Empathy, Foundation, and Sovereignty. By internalizing the Sefirot, we can arrive at a greater and deeper understanding of ourselves, our nature, needs, desires, imperfections and our paths to healing. The Sefirot can act as guideposts in our journey to enrich and ennoble our own existence. Much like the Hindu concept of Chakras, the Sefirot are energy centers. Each Sefirah corresponds to a place on the body, to an aspect of our being, whether physical, emotional, mental or spiritual, and to a particular life-purpose. When an energy center is fully developed and fully realized, and when the energy is flowing pure and without obstruction, then the corresponding place in the body is healthy and well (Frankel, 2003).

Just as they do in the higher world, the ten Sefirot exist in the human soul; and from their mutual inter-relationships are derived and manifested all the broad span of thoughts, feelings and experiences of man. The first three Sefirot assert the aspects of pure consciousness: Crown, Wisdom, and Understanding. Following these initial Sefirot of basic consciousness are the three Sefirot of the higher emotions: Loving-Kindness, Strength, and Beauty. From these levels, we proceed to the three Sefirot that act directly on the actual world of experience: Triumph, Empathy, and Foundation. Finally, the Sefirah of

Malchut, Sovereignty, is the transition from Soul to outer existence, to thought and to deed. Sovereignty is the ultimate step in the approach to the Divine (Dosick, 1997).

By contemplating the Sefirot, one explores the emotional and psychological texture of the Divine's personal qualities, such as love, fear and compassion. Kabbalists employ the Sefirot not merely as abstract concepts or divine metaphors but as tools for meditation. Each serves as a focus of visualization, disclosing depths of archetypal personality within the Divine and the seeker. Yet, contemplation and meditation are themselves means to an even greater end. In the words of Moses Cordovero (1522-1570), "the essence of the divine image is action." The following is an example of how Cordovero suggested embodying Hesed, Grace: "Desire the well-being of your fellow creature, eyeing his good fortune benevolently. Let his honor be as precious to you as your own, for you and your fellow are one and the same. This is why we are commanded: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Desire what is right for your fellow; never denigrate him or wish for his disgrace, suffering or ruin. Feel as bad for such suffering as if it were your own. Similarly, rejoice over another's good fortune as if you were basking in it. It is impossible to conduct yourself according to these qualities constantly," Cordovero conceded, "Accustom yourself to them little by little. The essential quality to attain, the key to them all, is humility" (Steinsaltz, 1980).

The Sefirot, not unlike the C's that define the Self in IFS, function as an ethical training course, a systematic way of translating spiritual ideals into concrete action. Yet, at the same time, the Sefirot constitute a mystical path, a ladder of ascent back to the One. The mystical and the ethical reinforce one another, through a rhythm of self-exploration and awareness of our contextual existence in the world. One may experience spiritual and psychological wholeness by imitating and integrating the Sefirotic attributes. Unexplored shadows of our psyche must be encountered and attended to, not evaded (Matt, 1996). The concept of attending to our psyche correlates with the concept of 'parts' in IFS, particularly exiled burdened young parts, that need to be cared for, loved, and allowed to be unburdened.

Awareness of the Soul

Jewish mysticism teaches that no matter how ill or spiritually disconnected we have become, within each of us there is a pure and wholesome essence capable of calling us back to our center. This essence is our Soul and is always our direct connection with the divine. When we attune ourselves to its calling, the Soul provides us with the exact guidance we need for our evolution.

We find an analogous philosophy encircling the Internal Family Systems model: we embark on the healing journey with our clients specifically to awaken in them the inner restorative power of their Souls. We know that when we reach the inner guide that lies within each individual, we can bring awareness, spaciousness and leadership to a person's daily life and relationships. The qualities of the individual's core, his Soul, which we attempt to tap are also the qualities incontrovertibly attributed to the Divine: calmness, curiosity, clarity, compassion, confidence, creativity, courage and connectedness.

Free Will

Throughout the ages, theologians have debated whether human beings have the ability to choose freely. Jewish mystical belief is based upon a foundation of free choice for humankind. We have human consciousness. We are told that acts of lovingkindness will bring a higher level of consciousness to everyone in the world. We have the choice to effectuate these acts of kindness or ignore them. We are informed that an unkind word can set things in motion that may cause great harm and pain to others. We have the choice of what to say. Nothing is inconsequential. Every encounter with another being is a point of contact upon which the universe pivots. When we enter into this frame of mind, reality as we see it becomes a vast opportunity to experience the interconnectedness of all creation. From this perspective, we come to the realization that every part is integral in the unfolding of our lives.

Kabbalistic free will and Internal Family Systems (IFS) process go hand in hand. If we are caught in the illusion of separation, in the belief that Self and other are distinct, then we do not experience the interactive process. If, however, we comprehend the paradigm of free will and process then we can experience the interconnection of all things. We become co-partners in a cosmic process, imbued with the full freedom of choice to change the universe. This is a fundamental tenet of IFS.

The kabbalistic viewpoint is that awareness is a holistic continuum. Once we believe all parts are complete replicas of the whole then everything in the universe, by definition, is integrally connected. Each time we do something that raises consciousness we lift sparks of holiness to new levels, simultaneously healing the Soul and mending the world. In Kabbalistic thought, as in IFS belief, these two paradigms are mutually interdependent.

Paradox of Healing

Jewish mysticism teaches us how to walk a middle path that finds balance in the many contradictions of our lives. In order to avoid either/or solutions to complicated problems, Jewish thought finds that contradictory notions can and do co-exist within a larger truth. The fact that so many Hebrew words combine opposite meanings suggests that the Hebrew language itself is based on a worldview that sees all opposites and polarities as deeply connected to a unified source. Hebrew words seem to follow the principle of physics where, as Neils Bohr has suggested, a great truth is one whose opposite is also true.

Dialectical reasoning lies at the core of Jewish thought and paradox is one of the fundamental features of Kabbalistic doctrine. Everything in this world, according to Kabbalah, is essentially revealed through its opposite manifestation. In therapy, we find that the ability to recognize and appreciate the complexity and paradoxical nature of life and of people is, in fact, one of the crucial components of psychological wholeness. The ability and the capacity to integrate good and bad feelings about others and ourselves are at the heart of emotional maturation.

An important component of many Jewish spiritual practices involves creating harmony and balance between opposing energies. To heal the soul, we must be able to integrate and contain the opposing forces that exist inside us within a larger, unified field of being. Taoist philosophers wrote about the interplay of opposites in the process of change. They viewed polarities as mutually defining expressions of the same whole, recognizing that those who divide life into discrete dichotomies - self vs. other, pleasure vs. pain, good vs. bad - end up separated from their own experience and desperate to cast out problems in the pursuit of pleasure (Matt, 1996). Jewish mysticism and its spiritual practices enable us to live as citizens of both the upper and lower worlds. In this lower world, where multiplicity and polarity are the rule, we heal into wholeness by making ourselves into vessels that can contain opposites. In the upper worlds, healing is about opening ourselves to the experience of unification by tapping into the realm in which duality ceases to exist, as when the Self in IFS operates synergistically to bring divine energy to our experiences. Having experienced unity we are better able to tolerate paradox because we will have found the whole that connects the many disparate parts. By attaining wholeness and integration we are more able to embrace and apply the insights we gain from the experience of unity to our actual lives (Flemons, 2004).

The Self and the Soul

The Internal Family Systems model (IFS) has evolved over the past twenty years to adopt a more holistic interpretation of the individual, recognizing that the larger context of family, community, and the world is fundamental to its philosophy. The exploration of the Self in the IFS model, which began with the recognition and honoring of the parts and later led to the uncovering of the core essence of the individual, the Self, is now developing into a view of the higher Self in the context of the larger universe. Acknowledging the contextual significance of the Self, in turn, allows the prospect of a single element of connectivity: a higher power resident in the core of the Self. However intangibly and individually that spirituality may manifest, the evolved IFS model allows spirituality as a component of the Self. Both in its contextual interpretation and its spiritual dimension, the IFS model can be likened to the Kabbalistic theosophy of the Soul which proffers that we are all sparks of the divine flame imbued with responsibility to expand awareness of one's Self and of the world around us. The contextual significance of the Self is clear: if we make no effort to raise our own consciousness and that of the world, we abdicate our humanity (Cooper, 1997).

Yet this correlation between the concept of Self in IFS and Soul in Kabbalah is only the beginning of a long ladder that will enable humanity to bring that divine presence to their midst and act according to that belief. It behooves all of us, as co-creators of this expanding reality, to think beyond dualism. Only when we transform multiplicity to unity will the reconfigured vessel of creation, made up of all the broken pieces of our lives and our world, be able to hold the light of the Divine.

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The Lesson

Clara C. Irwin, LCSW[1]

I tried to catch you a thousand different ways.
When you were a boat,
I was an ocean.
When you were a breeze,
I was a window.
When you were a dreamer,
I was a star.

I turned myself inside out to save you.
When you were the moon,
I was the night.
When you were a rainbow,
I was the sky.
When you were the rain,
I was the earth.

One day I learned I couldn't do anything.
When you were sad,
I couldn't make you happy.
When you were confused,
I couldn't give you clarity.
When you were lost,
I couldn't show you the way.

In time I learned all I could do was love you.
Whatever you were,
Wherever you were,
All I could do was love you.
When you went away,
And when you came home,
All I could do was love you.

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THE INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

The Internal Family Systems Association was formed to promote the model of therapy developed in the 1980's by Richard C. Schwartz, Ph.D., known as Internal Family Systems[sm].

All persons interested in the IFS[SM] model benefit from the activities of the Internal Family Systems Association. The IFSA promotes greater access to information about the model and public awareness of this form of therapy.

Benefits of Membership

- Automatically receive the Self-to-Self newsletter, both on-line and hard copy
- Listing in the on-line Membership Directory
- Participation in regional support groups
- Networking opportunities with other IFS therapists via: IFSA listserv, teleconferences, and newsletter

Journal of Self Leadership Internal Family Systems Association Mission Statement

Our mission is to empower human systems at all levels. We promote the leadership of each individual's core Self, understanding that in addition to a Self each person has a system of internal subpersonalities or parts. We are committed to help Selves lead parts more effectively, thereby advancing personal, interpersonal, and global well-being through enhanced acceptance, balance and healing.

Internal Family Systems Association Vision Statement

The Internal Family Systems Model[SM] will be internationally recognized as an efficient and effective method of problem-solving and personal development.

For More Information…please contact us at:

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