

Points of View

Thoughts on 'Spirituality'

- from Dr. Chris Lyons, Farway, Wilderswood, Horwich, Bolton, Lancs BL6 7ET, UK

I'd like to respond to Peter Fenwick's request for feedback on the possible use of the word 'spiritual' in Network literature. I see great difficulties with its use simply because the word has so many meanings that without careful definition it would be almost impossible for it not to be misconstrued.

Ken Wilber has identified two of these meanings as being: 1) those realms of consciousness beyond the rational, in other words the mystical levels, and 2) that developmental line within the individual which is of 'ultimate concern' to him/her. I would find both these meanings acceptable for use in connection with the Network's activities, but unfortunately they aren't the only meanings of the word. In common parlance, 'spiritual' is almost synonymous with 'religious', and indeed it could be said that the word is virtually the property of organised religions. (The late Ayatollah Khomeini was invariably described as a spiritual leader.) This is where I see the greatest danger; not so much that the Network will be ignored by orthodox scientists (which it might), but that it will be seen by those whose spirituality is pre-rational (or irrational) as sympathetic to their cause

It seems to me that what is needed to heal our culture is, firstly, that science should widen its embrace and deepen its world-view this, as I see it, is the main goal of the Network, and secondly, if this is not to result in a return to the irrationality of the pre-Enlightenment era, there needs to concurrently develop a trans-rational spirituality which is purely empirical in nature and devoid of doctrine, dogma and myth. The goal of this would be, not to believe in or worship an anthropomorphic creator god, but to deepen one's experience of existence and come to know the transcendental realm as an empirical fact. I have heard little discussion of this distinction between pre and trans-rational spirituality in Network circles, but it seems to me that this is what is now needed if we are to go forward.

For the time being then I would recommend avoiding the word 'spiritual' in Network literature and using instead the term 'transpersonal'. This was coined about thirty years ago by Maslow and Grof to describe a new school of psychology which would take seriously transcendental or mystical experiences. It is not a word with which the general public is familiar, and it doesn't have any sort of poetic ring, but for those very reasons it is, perhaps, far less likely to be misconstrued.

Coming Out

- from Keith Beasley, 4 South View, Nether Heyford, Northampton NN7 3NM, UK

In answer to Peter Fenwick's editorial in Network 66, I unhesitatingly answer 'Yes'. It is time we 'came out' and freely included spirituality in our publicity. I support this view by looking at two different situations:

1. Sustainable Development Local Agenda 21

In its paper 'Opportunities for Change', the Government is asking how development and life in Britain can be made more sustainable. More natural, more fulfilling for all, less wasteful, etc. At a regional conference to discuss rural aspects of the paper, I attended as a representative of 'Sailing with Spirit, Northamptonshire's Holistic Magazine and Network. I

was well received and in good company. Although a gathering of 'orthodox' planners, council officers and volunteers, the ideas of an holistic approach and 'Community Spirit' were well accepted and promoted. 'Spirit', so long as we emphasise that we mean the spirit of nature, of community, of art, etc (and not a religion) is indeed entering general acceptance. It is the role of organisations such as SMN (I suggest) to further promote spirituality and help a wider audience to accept and live it.

2. Integrated Healthcare The Way Forward?

Only when we 'come out' as spiritual beings will we really make quantum leaps in healthcare: HRH The Prince of Wales must be congratulated for his support of complementary medicine and his efforts to integrate them with orthodox medicine (Network 66), however I'm not at all sure his 'Way Forward' is anything other than a detour on the path towards true health for all. In reading his four 'priority areas' my heart sank. No problem with 'improved education & communication' or 'effective delivery mechanism', but what Prince Charles and many others rate as necessary areas for action I suggest are merely symptoms of the real problem. That we seem to need 'scientific research' and 'formal standards' to accept complementary medicine merely reflects the current need that many appear to have for 'proof' of anything 'alternative'. It is a symptom of our lack of faith, of our inability to trust our inner self and divine healing abilities.

It may not even be true. How many members of the public actually read the scientific papers? A very small percentage, I suggest. Most turn to complementary therapy out of frustration with drugs and doctors, following an inner knowing that there is something in it. It is not public that wants or needs the proof. Is not the whole trend in science and medicine towards an acknowledgement that 'we are one', that we each have within us a 'divine spark'. True, scientific research and discussion on effective treatments will help this view to become accepted, but that is surely the purpose of research and debate to identify and make known the whole truth ... not to prove something and define it in a standard. Anybody who's experienced 'healing' knows that it is beyond the words of a proof or standard . . . be the healing Spiritual, Reiki or any other form of non invasive therapy.

Such healing does what it has to. We may one day be able to describe it all scientifically, but do we actually need to? If it works, and many testify that it does, is that not proof enough? Who are we trying to convince? So, by all means let's compare our holistic and spiritual theories and experiences with orthodox medics, but more importantly, let's encourage them to experience the light and wonder of true healing. The way forward is surely to demonstrate that it's not just a matter of mind & body, but of mind, body and ... something else.

Until that something else, the soul, the spiritual aspect of holistic health and healing is acknowledged then Integrated Healthcare is unlikely to embrace the full spread of complementary therapies ... to the detriment of all. If we insist on proof and standards then we condemn ourselves to live within a standard world. Perish the thought!

Transpersonal Doesn't Always Translate

- from John Rowan, 70 Kings Head Hill, North Chingford, London E4 7LY, UK

You ask in the Newsletter whether the SMN should own up to an interest in spirituality. The short answer is yes, but I would urge the use of the word transpersonal instead of spiritual.

The reason is that if we take seriously the idea of the pre/trans fallacy, there is prepersonal spirituality, personal spirituality and transpersonal spirituality. Many people, particularly of a scientific bent, hear the word as referring to all sorts of unworthy things such as superstitions, old wives' tales, centuries of oppression and so forth. If we use the word transpersonal, we are clearly and unambiguously referring to that which includes and yet is more than the personal, not less than it. There is a respectable Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, there is a decent literature on the transpersonal and so forth. As you probably know, the British Psychological Society, usually known as a bastion of scientific orthodoxy, recently admitted to its ranks a Section labelled as Transpersonal.

Using the term transpersonal is no guarantee that people will recognise the differences I have mentioned, as witness the appalling book by Albert Ellis & Raymond Yeager, brashly entitled *Why Some Therapies Don't Work*. Here they commit the pre/trans fallacy over and over again, while being aware that there is such a fallacy and even calling it by name! But I still think that is our best chance.