

## **Synergy '99**

**Synergy '99 - a one-day conference addressing the interface between psychotherapy and spirituality. ULU, Malet Street, London WCI**

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The Medicine Wheel - Full Circle

Synergy '99 brought together a unique mix of therapists whose understanding of imagination, symbolism, metaphor and myth is drawn from direct experience of the power of these tools in both their working and spiritual lives. The aim of the conference was to provide an opportunity for delegates to explore this interface in an experiential way with workshops that aimed to be both practical and participatory. Concurrent workshops took place in the morning and afternoon sessions - each one giving a 'taster' of a practice or ritual for delegates to experience. Then this practice was related to models for personal growth and development and/or spiritual initiation.

The workshops were run by:

FELICITY WOMBWELL - artist, psychotherapist and shamanic consultant - journeying with clay or pencil and creating a space where change can occur and looking for resonance indicating connection between personal symbolism and imagery.

PHILIP CARR GOMM (SMN) - Druid, psychotherapist trained in psychosynthesis - using the ancient myth of Taliesin, individuals looked for the parts of the story which resonated for them and tried to find meaning for their own process of individuation.

NICHOLAS SPICER (SMN) - Jungian and training analyst - visualisation as an essential tool in magical, spiritual and psychotherapeutic traditions. In particular he was looking for a model for subjective reality which is the hallmark of meaning for the individual and, being likely to be unrepeatable, evades the laws of physical science.

LEO RUTHERFORD - psychologist and shaman - using the medicine wheel as a metaphor for psychotherapy and relating the power of the four Elements to Jung's four basic types. His view is that psychotherapy and spirituality are separated only by language and that it is possible to work with them both in a seamless way.

CHRIS & VIVIANNE CROWLEY (SMN) - psychologists trained in transpersonal counselling; both are active in fostering the development of Wiccan spirituality in Europe - using visualisation and pagan path-working to call in the four Elements, then relating the elements to Jungian types in the process of individuation.

RUFUS HARRINGTON - cognitive psychotherapist and counselling psychologist; teacher in both Wiccan and Hermetic magical traditions - demonstrating practices of ceremonial magic and of Hermetic tradition, he then attempted to superimpose a model of the Kabbalistic Three-World philosophy on case studies using techniques of cognitive behavioural psychotherapy.

The day ended with a relaxed and fruitful plenary session.

An outcome of the day was a clear demonstration of the synergy between these alternative/Earth religions and psychotherapy. The flights of imagination in the Old/New religions need a grounding of the individual through self-awareness. Conversely, the

transforming power of one's own personal symbolism and its connections with the eternal archetypes is a powerful tool in psychotherapy. It was mentioned in the discussion session that a reason for coming to therapy could be a desire for initiation as well as for psychotherapeutic intervention - thus demanding that psychotherapists become spiritual counsellors. This idea was supported by Nicholas Spicer who said "it is impossible to train psychotherapists - they need a foot in both worlds." and by Vivianne Crowley's idea: what is the real difference between self-help affirmations used in Mind-Body medicine and a Wiccan ritual?

But what is the significance of the day for Network members? Although some members were invited to the conference, very few attended. I had gone, in part, in the hope of finding a way forward for the Psychotherapy & Spirituality working group within the Network which had reached an impasse - to my mind because of the vastly different approach of psychiatrists and psychotherapists. In the discussion session it was mentioned that 'science' and 'psychiatry' had been bandied around like dirty words during the day. The great abyss remained between objective reality typified by science and subjective truth or meaning. If science really is the religion of our age - did the World begin with a Bang or a Breath? - how can we value those subjective experiences which give meaning and numinous power to our lives?

Perhaps this conference has more to offer the Network in process than in content. I was impressed by the group dynamics during the day. In an unhurried plenary session we sat in a circle with delegates and workshop leaders interspersed. A brief introduction to the session by Laura Spicer - who organised the conference - led to a seemingly effortless interchange of ideas between participants - perhaps because each individual was seen as a 'reliable knower' of their own experiences of the day. This reminds me of my plea to Max Payne (personal correspondence Jan. 1998) 'that we develop a forum for dialogue which allows for the emergence of the 'female' perspective which I think is desperately needed in Network activities. After all, the emergence of the new paradigm in spirituality, science, medicine and health to which the Network has so energetically contributed requires this consciousness of wholeness'. (see also Joan Walton's review of "The Feminine Face of God" Dec. 1998: 'it counters the usual hierarchical models of spiritual development often employed within the patriarchal traditions'.)

Although this conference can stand alone in its aims and achievements, I can't help thinking that it embodies the very essence that is so often missing from Network activities and is essential in all spiritual and healing work - i.e. a recognition of the importance of subjective experience, which needs a different methodology from that of the physical sciences.

*Hilary Mifflin was a science communicator for a major Swiss industrial company, working on risk/benefit analyses and dialogue models. She is now a herbalist/aromatherapist interested in Mind/Body medicine, psychology and the healing process.'*