

Souldrama®: A Six Stage Model for Spiritual Growth

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Souldrama® was developed by Connie Miller, NCC, PAT in 1997 and trademarked in 1999 a therapeutic tool created for use as an adjunct to psychodrama and designed to move clients from co-dependency to co-creativity. Her article, "The Technique of Souldrama® and its Applications", was published in the International Journal of Action Methods, Winter 2000. She has presented her Souldrama workshops nationally and internationally including at the ASGPP conferences every year since 1998. Additionally, she is responsible for bringing the technique of Souldrama to the American Counseling Association Learning Institutes and has brought action techniques including the process of Souldrama to the National Board of Certified Counselors as well as to the field of addictions. Connie has run trainings in Souldrama for the past six years in Mexico and in England and presently runs her own training group in NJ. www.souldrama.com

Energy follows action. Adding action to repertoire of clinical skills can be a natural step. Our need to talk, interact and simply be with each other is part of our development as a species. Group psychotherapy is the most viable method for initiating, improving and evaluating connections. Adding action techniques is a dramatic way to alter the process of the group. It focuses on the consciousness of the members on their interactions, which in turn channels and enhances the energy within the group.

The major contribution action methods bring to the interactive group psychotherapy process is consciousness. Elevating participation in the group to include sensory modalities other than just verbalization allows participants to be more present, more aware and as a consequence more conscious.

Consciousness is no small matter. It enhances our interactions by making them intentional. When action is added to the group it dissolves passivity. Acting on thoughts and feelings gives greater visibility to our inner world and greater energy to our worlds. Action also helps clarify our thoughts and feeling. When

we act, we see our intentions more clearly than when we use only words or only reflect on our thought and feelings.

Recent publications indicate that there is a spiritual movement in the field of psychology today that cannot be ignored. More schools are now modifying their curriculum to include spiritual matters in therapy and more research is being done on integrating spiritual aspects in counseling. (Dossey,) Awareness of mystical experiences is becoming more common and as various holistic healing practices become more accepted the trend is to integrate psychology more with spirituality.

The ego, developed early in childhood can obstruct or distort ones relationship to the divine. The ego can manifest a far richer consciousness in everyday life than thought possible if brought into alignment with soul. *Souldrama*, which I developed as an adjunct to psychodrama in the treatment of codependency, is an action-oriented method that includes both psychodramatic and narrative techniques.

In twelve-step programs, people heal partly through the telling and sharing of their own stories. It is through the sharing of the trauma and pain and the subsequent healing that people form common bonds that unite them. Then, to get beyond that connection of pain, they need to go further by sharing their soulful moments, their hopes, and their dreams. This requires re-establishing a relationship with their creativity and, through their higher awareness, connecting with others on a spiritual level. After a certain point in therapy, vision seems to be more powerful in the recovery process than the clearing away the baggage from past scars. A client without vision cannot move forward toward complete recovery. Many clients lose enthusiasm for life, the will to live it joyfully and creatively, and the passion for interests and projects. Many have lost the ability to appreciate the positives in life and, more importantly, have lost a commitment to action.

To support clients in identifying their vision and moving forward in achieving their life's purpose, we need new, creative psychodramatic tools. Moreno states that the major challenge for humanity is that of living creatively. Spontaneity refers to the spirit of opening to the creative possibilities in a situation. Much of Moreno's work may be understood as being methods and ideas for promoting spontaneity in the service of creativity. (Blatner 1988)

Theory of Souldrama

When the future client, at a very early age, begins to respond to the parents “control drama” or energy and learns to read that energy non-verbally assuming a response in order to “get love”, which allows them to feel safe in a dysfunctional and/or addictive family system, their response becomes either one of or a mixture of the following: victim, aggressor or one who is passive-aggressive.

When love and attention are inconsistent, the child becomes addicted to that inconsistency. Love, to this client, means being addicted to that inconsistency or for waiting for the feelings of love that come from outside oneself; that is *addicted to the potential of love*. The addiction becomes one of potential because one never can find the perfect other and the sense of self is unstable. They learn that in order to “be loved” or to exist, they must first “do” something, in order to “get” love. Their energy comes from an addiction to outside problems as opposed to energy drawn from within created from “being” that is, by living a life full of purpose. This is often why an addiction is called a spiritual calling, but one that goes to the wrong address. Separation from the family system is difficult because if one is worried for their own safety and security, they cannot complete this necessary stage. If one is always focused on what one needs to survive in a family, one cannot focus on one’s own personal development; spontaneity, creativity and openness, the attributes of the spiritual self, are stifled.

A client from a dysfunctional family system views their higher power as being outside, not within, themselves and they have developed distorted internalized object relationships with the spiritual beings in their lives. Childhood emotions have often been transferred onto present-day relationships. Many of these relationships have become contaminated with residuals of childhood traumas and misunderstandings. When one learns to look outside themselves for love and validation, one distances from one’s spiritual nature creating a gap or emptiness within oneself. Often as client matures, childish attitudes toward their Higher Power remain and their relationship to God is one that remains outside of them being one that is superficial and inconsistent. The client continues to see God as a parent, which in turn tends to evoke a passive and helpless role. According to many of my clients, closeness to God was felt only when a problem existed and they needed to ask for help or forgiveness. The client feels they must “do” something in order to get God’s love, which they see as being inconsistently outside of themselves as opposed to within. If the client is not “rescued” by God they would assume either a helpless / victim, aggressive or passive aggressive stance which later results in feelings of shame, guilt, feelings of abandonment and further betrayal. Instead of moving forward, they engage in self-sabotaging

behavior further compounding their problems. Their energy comes from problems and not from the joy in life. Spirituality is a state of “being” not “getting” and it is important for the client to develop a relationship with that higher self. Spiritual work has to do with reconnecting with spirit, to the divine within.

Blatner (1998) defines spirituality as the activity of deepening our connectedness with the “Greater Wholeness of Being”. He urges the need for creativity and imagery within the therapy process so humans can see themselves as co-creators and not victims of omnipotent strength. When God is seen as being inside and not outside of oneself a greater sense of co-creative responsibility exists.

In his presentation, [“Why Process Thought is Relevant: A Psychiatrist’s Perspective” at The Center for Process Studies, Claremont, California] (August 9, 1998) Blatner states that one of the most important functions of process thought is that it offers core conceptual tools to aid in the “conscious transformation of consciousness itself” promoting a mature state of mind and a sense of co-creative responsibility toward ones higher power. The process view of God as Caring Organism can lure but not force healthy relationships reframing the relationship of the individual to the Greater Wholeness as one of responsibility and actively aligning, participating with, taking inspiration, but not passive reliance. (Blatner, 1998)

In his keynote presentation, [“Re-storying the Soul”, (April 11, 1999) at the annual meeting of the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama], Blatner urges the participants to re-discover the story lines in their lives, and to elaborate that storytelling in order to enrich and develop the soul - ego connection, which is an important element in spiritual development and psychological healing and resiliency. Helping people to re-tell their stories in order to re-construct them in a more positive fashion can lead one to thinking more hopefully about oneself and one’s life. Storytelling is one of the ways to develop a relationship with the soul. It also is socially bonding and cathartic and acts in the group process in that dynamic Yalom called as universalization. “Soul”, Blatner says “does not think in terms of prose and facts but rather in images and stories”. Soul is not a thing but a quality or dimension of experiencing life within ourselves. The challenge of healing, therefore, is to align these two roles of ego and soul.

Souldrama addresses this element of spirituality and desire. This spiritual development process takes the group through the stages of spirituality. Through Souldrama work the ego and soul are able to align, which enables a person to recognize and move on to their higher purpose; therefore, creating the life they want. By doing this the soul becomes a co-creator in a person's life and this is the soul's mission: co-creation.

Souldrama was originally created as a therapeutic tool to be used in conjunction with psychodrama for the treatment of co-dependency. By helping clients align their ego and soul, Souldrama guides those who feel stuck with traditional talk therapy to move forward and onto their lives purpose. Through therapeutic process clients use action methods to move from co-dependency to co-creativity.

Souldrama recognizes that the soul makes no mistakes. This concept- as well as spirituality- is becoming a more integrated and appreciated part of our daily lives. Souldrama encourages this need and takes the group on a journey into the soul that lives within each of us. Tapping into the souls source of knowledge and power helps the group enhance and access the spiritual intelligence within each of them. New methods are needed now to connect to our spiritual intelligence and wisdom, and to discover how to use energy in a group setting.

References

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