

SPECIAL SECTION

Kornfeld

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 46

of our suffering. This doesn't mean getting caught in our personal histories, as many people fear, but learning how to address them so that we can actually free ourselves from the big and painful "blocks" of our past. Such healing work is often best done in a therapeutic relationship with another person.

3. Meditation and spiritual practice can easily be used to suppress and avoid feeling or to escape from difficult areas of our lives. Our sorrows are hard to touch. Many people resist the personal and psychological roots of their suffering; there is so much pain in truly experiencing our bodies, our personal histories, our limitations. It can even be harder than facing the universal suffering that surfaces in sitting. We fear the personal and its sorrow because we have not learned how it can serve as our practice and open our hearts.

We need to look at our whole life and ask ourselves, "Where am I awake, and what am I avoiding? Do I use my practice to hide? In what areas am I conscious, and where am I fearful, caught, or unfree?"

4. There are many areas of growth (grief and other unfinished business, communication and maturing of relationships, sexuality and intimacy, career and work issues, certain fears and phobias, early wounds, and more) where good Western therapy is on the whole much quicker and more successful than meditation. These crucial aspects of our being can't just be written off as "personality stuff." Freud said he wanted to help

people to love and work. If we can't love well and give meaningful work to the Earth, then what is our spiritual practice for? Meditation can help in these areas. But if, after sitting for a while, you discover that you still have work to do, find a good therapist or some other way to effectively address these issues.

Of course, there are many mediocre therapists and many limited kinds of

unnecessary suffering. One can, at times, find the deepest realizations of selflessness and non-attachment through some of the methods of transpersonal psychology.

5. Does this mean we should trade meditation for psychotherapy? Not at all. Therapy isn't the solution either. Consciousness is! And consciousness grows in spirals. If you seek freedom, the most

important thing I can tell you is that spiritual practice always develops in cycles. There are inner times when silence is necessary, followed by outer times for living and integrating the silent realizations, as well as times to get help from a deep and therapeutic relationship with another person. These are equally important phases of practice. It is not a question of first developing a self and then letting go of it. Both go on all the time. Any period of practice may include samadhi and stillness, followed by new levels of experiencing wounds and family history, followed by great letting go, followed by experiences of the void, followed by more personal problems. It is possible to



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therapy. Just as in meditation, you should look for the best. Beyond the traditional psychotherapies of the '40s and '50s, many new therapies have been developed with a strong spiritual basis, such as psychosynthesis, Reichian breath work, sand play, and a whole array of transpersonal psychologies. The best therapy, like the best meditation practice, uses awareness to heal the heart, and is concerned not so much with our stories, as with fear and attachment and their release, and with bringing mindfulness to areas of delusion, grasping, and

work with all of these levels in the context of a spiritual practice. What is required is the courage to face the totality of what arises. Only then can we find the deep healing we seek — for ourselves and for our planet.

In short, we have to expand our notion of practice to include all of life. Like the Zen ox-herding pictures, the spiritual journey takes us deep into the forest and leads us back to the marketplace again and again, until we are able to find compassion and the sure heart's release in every realm. □