

# Spirituality in the Adlerian Forum

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the topic of spirituality within the Adlerian community in spite of the diversity of opinion. Nine Individual Psychologists reflect on the proposition that spirituality is a life task (Mosak & Dreikurs, 2000) and published criticism of this position (Gold & Mansager, 2000). A brief summary of common themes is provided.

Thirty years ago, in the atmosphere of the 1960s' existential *angst*, Mosak and Dreikurs began exploring the ideas of self-discovery and life's meaning and their places in Adlerian theory (Dreikurs & Mosak, 1977a, 1977b; Mosak & Dreikurs, 2000). Their three-article series on these topics did not receive much attention initially. However, given today's rising interest in spirituality within mainline psychology (e.g., Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000), they have been rediscovered as places to resume the discussion of personal and communal meaning from the perspective of Individual Psychology (e.g., Baruth & Manning, 1987; Hawes & Blanchard, 1993; Kawulich & Curlette, 1998; Manaster, 1990; Nystul, 1993; Roberts, Harper, Tuttle-Eagle Bull, & Heideman-Provost, 1998; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991).

Comprehensive critiques of the first and last articles in that series have been published (Mansager & Gold, 2000; Gold & Mansager, 2000). *The Journal of Individual Psychology* also completed a special issue, "Holism, Wellness, Spirituality" (Mansager, 2000), with the intention of invigorating a broader discussion of the place of religion and spirituality within an expanding Adlerian theory. The 2000 conference of the North American Society of Adlerian Psychology featured an open panel discussion of spirituality (Mansager, Gold, Silverman, Kal, Manaster, & Griffith, 2000) with a follow-up discussion the next year (Mansager & Gold, 2001). While these individual instances are limited in themselves, together they indicate that the topic has a vitality that is sustaining itself in the Adlerian forum. The discussion about spirituality is an opportunity for Individual Psychologists to join the broader discussion and contribute to it from their unique perspective. We believe that an initial discussion among colleagues and friends is a place to start. The

discussion among Individual Psychologists not only advances a greater understanding of this important topic within our theoretical realm, but it also brings Adlerian insights to bear on the issues of spirituality and counseling.

From the perspective of Individual Psychology, as represented in the following, the concept of spirituality can embrace beliefs in a personal god (theist), rejection of such an idea (atheist), as well as focus attention on human striving without reference to a god-concept (nontheist). This diversity has emerged as a defining characteristic of the discussion when Individual Psychologists join in. Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964) contended that "God cannot be proven scientifically: He is a gift of faith" (p. 277). Adler thereby suggested parameters in line with current scholarship in the area of spirituality (Schneiders, 1989, 1998) yet often ignored by enthusiasts of various religions. So, while the realm of ultimate concerns is indeed accessible to psychology (Emmons, 1999), it is not territory in which psychologists have the final word (Küng, 1994). Legitimate participation in the study of spirituality must involve psychologists in critical collaboration with other disciplines, including religious educators, theologians, and other scholars of spirituality (Mansager, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Savage, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c).

When Gold and Mansager (2000) critiqued the rationales for considering spirituality as a life task, they determined that Adler made neither direct reference nor casual allusions to a fifth life task. They also suggested that the purpose of positing a fifth task was to provide a forum for discussing Mosak and Dreikurs's (2000) proposed subtasks: the relationship of the individual to God, what the individual does about religion, the place humanity occupies in the universe, immortality, and the meaning of life—within an Adlerian setting. In writing this article, we agreed to a dialogue on the original proposal of spirituality being a life task as well as the critique of this position. This dialogue-in-print offers our personal perspectives. The ensuing comments are presented in alphabetical order by author. After these initial presentations, the summary section includes a brief list of common themes detected throughout the discussion.

### **Spirituality as Living the Mystery of Life**

**Leo Gold.** Mosak and Dreikurs (2000) used several terms to name their fifth life task: the spiritual, the existential, the ontological, the search for meaning, the metaphysical, and the metapsychological. As creatively open-ended as Adler developed his theory to be, none of these terms has anything to do with another task in his theory. Adler indeed referenced "the cosmos," but he did not mean "spiritual" in a nonmaterial sense. Rather he referred to the physical structure of all that is. Humanity within infinity is part of all there is.

Whatever is existent in the universe also determines the structure of humanity. The same field of energy (or whatever it is) exists in the individual and the entirety of the universe. As such, this is one aspect of holism.

Neither is “the existential” a task. Existentialism has to do with humans’ concern with defining themselves within this universe. Social embeddedness is the structure of humanity. Human existence, from conception on, is interdependent. Because survival is an issue for all forms of life and most forms live off of one another, social embeddedness is necessary for survival. Infant humans cannot survive without community.

Humans observe the universe and their lives on earth *not* from an objective but from a subjective position. Their biology and the structure of their senses limit their views. They always need to live the question of life, the mystery that exists with no exact answer.

“Giving meaning to life” is a human undertaking used for understanding the not-understood. Determining what life means for humans in the universe is a constant challenge they face by responding to the tasks of association, sexuality, and occupation. They *do* know that life means to be social. Adlerians understand *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, social interest, itself to be oriented toward survival. To be connected means to survive. An individual’s conjunctive emotions are geared to processes of what is necessary to survive.

“The metaphysical” and “the ontological” refer to things like “universals” and not to a task of life. These are references to how humans try to understand the whole process of becoming—in human terms. Humanity is already a limitation. But the answers people derive in this regard are not real. They must distinguish between wishful thinking and what is there before them. The universe itself changes as time evolves. Thus, there can be no universals. All nature is flowing, and any universal a person imagines can only be a product within a moment of the flow.

“The metapsychological” quite simply is a Freudian term. It is another artificial construct about the psyche that has nothing to do with the universe and *what is*, let alone a life task.

Since primitive times, humans have given mystical qualities to those things that are unknown or mysterious. So I contend that spirituality is one more artificial concept used to describe creative movement in human life, creativity by which a person attempts to come to know the universe. Spirituality is not an identifiable activity, but a conglomerate of activities that define the human condition and the person’s ability to survive in the world.

Nor is the soul “pure spirit.” If the human spirit can be understood as our creative process—that in an individual which urges him or her onward; not just a point in the flow, but the flow itself—then soul can be conceived as a moveable point in the flow, always starting anew from the human sense of the infinite. Creativity allows for new positions, not just new arrangements of old data.

And if there is a spiritual task (better described as positive goal or guiding fiction), it is that of coming to a rational way of living before people destroy their environment and thereby themselves. To do this they will have to overcome their own irrationality in a creative way. The positive use of creativity is the only way humans can truly move to achieve this idealized goal.

Can people move thereby to a more effective way of living, surviving within the human condition? That is the spiritual question. And like all good questions it has no final answer, providing instead the basis for better questions. It is a mystery.

### **Spiritual Development as the Task of Life**

**Brian Griffith.** Adler presumed that the “highest effective goal” for human beings is to survive and thrive (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p. 277). As an acute observer of humanity, Adler wondered how individuals and society could survive given the earthly context in which they find themselves (Mansager & Gold, 2000). He surmised that the survival of humanity is dependent upon its ability to work, to love, and to cooperate with each other. From this vantage point, spirituality is not a necessary task of life because many people survive and thrive without being spiritual or religious. Adler was favorable toward religion only if it facilitated the three tasks of life he identified: work, love, and cooperation (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Adler was fond of saying that all things can be seen from multiple perspectives, “*alles kann auch ganz anders sein.*” Assume, for a moment, that a God, or Higher Power, or Ultimate Life Force, or Creator *does* exist. This singular assumption has huge ramifications in the discussion of life tasks. For, if such a Being exists, then it would be important to discover and live out the purpose for which human beings have been created. If a Higher Power does exist, then spirituality, it would seem, is not a task of life, but rather it is *the* task of life. The task of spirituality defined by Mosak and Dreikurs (2000) then becomes very important.

Those who believe in a Supreme Being or Higher Power regard spiritual development as an important task of life. While opinions on this topic vary considerably, belief in the existence of such a Being is not altogether unreasonable. There seems to be an intelligent design to the universe, a universe that had to be created by something outside of itself. Furthermore, a “God consciousness” exists in most if not all Western people. The complexity and design of the universe in conjunction with the ubiquitous belief in a spiritual realm make it reasonable to assume that such a Being and such a realm do exist. Human beings are tied not only to this poor earth’s crust (cf. Adler, 1931/1992) but also to a larger frame of reference beyond the natural world: to a transcendent domain. If humans are tied to this domain (a consideration

crucial to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the task of spiritual development becomes a necessity.

Conversely, if there is no such thing as God, I contend that Freud (1927/1961) was right: spirituality or religion is nothing more than a safeguarding strategy or coping mechanism to guard against the anxieties and uncertainties of life. On the other hand, if a Creator God does exist, then human beings are compelled to discover and live out the purpose for which they have been created.

Personality theorists have long noted the consistent human drive toward transcendence (Allport, 1950; Goldberg, 1990; James, 1902/1994). Frankl (1966) defined transcendence as that common human characteristic that "always points, and is directed, to something other than itself" (p. 97). Conn (1997) noted that "The fundamental desire of the self is to transcend itself in relationship—to the world, to others, to God" (p. 3). Researchers have identified this characteristic as a distinct personality construct (Piedmont, 1999; Saucier & Goldberg, 1998) with a biological basis (Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1994).

Furthermore, Cloninger, Svrakic, and Przybeck (1993) have constructed a psychobiological model of personality that contains seven factors; four are temperament characteristics that remain fairly stable throughout life, and three are character traits that develop throughout the lifecycle. Character traits include self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence, which represent the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transcendent dimensions of life. "Self-transcendent individuals," according to Cloninger, Przybeck, Svrakic, and Wetzel (1994), "are described consistently as unpretentious, fulfilled, patient, creative, selfless, and spiritual" (p. 27). According to Witmer and Sweeney (1992), spirituality is the core unifying process that guides movement toward transcendence and gives meaning to the major life tasks.

For those who posit a Higher Power, spirituality is a core process that influences and, to some degree, defines the other tasks of work, love, and cooperation. It is not merely a task of life but the central component around which life is organized and from which it derives its meaning.

### **Spirituality as the Fundamental Challenge of Human Life**

**Edmund Kal.** As Mansager points out in the introduction, the issue arose in the form of the question: Is spirituality a life task in the Adlerian sense? This question immediately demands as precise a definition as possible of the terms: *spirituality*, *life task*, and *Adlerian*. Almost just as immediately, I observe that there is no precise universal agreement about these terms within the Adlerian community. Therefore I feel both free and obliged to offer my own definitions.

As to Adlerian, I derive my concept from my close to 40 years of interaction with persons, ideas, and practices purporting themselves to be Adlerian. I see a spectrum which, for the sake of cognitive manageability, I cluster around two poles. One pole perceives Adler as the inspiring discoverer and proponent of a comprehensive and axiomatic view of humans and their existence; orthodox Adlerian is only that, and all of that, which is contained in his writings or, at least, deducible from them without corrupting their original meaning. The other pole considers Adler as an insightful, community-minded healer in the true sense of the word, a giant in his own right, but still only one in a long succession. Some of his ideas culled both from his writings and surveys of practicing psychologists (e.g., Kal, 1972) have had, and probably will continue to have, lasting value, not because Adler espoused them, but because they are congruent with both experience and common sense. And, inasmuch as actions speak louder than words, and seeing that Adler when first separating from Freud called his group the Society for Free Psychoanalytic Research, I venture to assert that the aboriginal Adlerian tenet is a passionate search for truth. Without such a self-renewing orientation, Individual Psychology is doomed to the fate of the dodo or dinosaur (Carlson, 2000). Hence, finding confirmatory or contradictory texts in Adler's writings may be an exciting start, but not decisive.

The concept of life task (*Lebensaufgabe* in Adler's original German) comes closest to having a universally agreed upon meaning among Adlerians, not withstanding the fact that both Adler himself and others use different synonyms at different times when speaking either of the concept in general or of the traditional three tasks in particular. For me, the following generic definition of life task will do: a nonnegotiable challenge, demand, placed on every human being by life itself in this world.

Similarly, one possible listing of the three tasks could be: work, social relationships, and intimate interactions. The fact that he used many different terms, suggests to me that Adler himself never meant his listing of life tasks to be a rigorously coherent, let alone an exhaustive one. More likely it was a list of exemplary cases, neither demanding nor prohibiting further additions, contractions, rearrangements. This way of defining life task will go a long way toward resolving the possible conflict raised by the original question about spirituality's being a life task. Clearly emerging, however, from this reasoning is the thesis that life itself does indeed put some inescapable demands both on individuals and on societies, which must be acknowledged and solved, if for nothing else than just to survive. It is in this final sense that I ask whether spirituality is or is not *such* a task of life.

Spirituality is, of course, the crucial concept and probably the most difficult to define to everybody's satisfaction. Etymologically, spirituality is the objectified quality of being "spiritual," which in turn means relating to or consisting of spirit. But what is "spirit"? The one characteristic on which all

definitions known to me do concur is that "spirit" is *not material*: Spirit has no size, shape, color, weight, has nothing measurable by physical or chemical means. Yet it is neither nothing nor purely imaginary by definition: It is conceived as real, at least potentially so, even by those who then go on to deny the actual existence of anything that is defined as spirit. Furthermore, the term spirit or spiritual has been predicated in at least two, possibly three, senses. People attribute a spiritual, nonmaterial aspect to such very corporeal beings as themselves: They think, they reason, they decide. They speak of totally incorporeal beings, angels, and demons as spirits, pure(ly) spirits. And in further contrast with these two forms of spirit, they can entertain, at least as a "mental construct," a spirit that is not limited nor dependent in its existence, but is itself the source, ground, explanation of all existence. Much of the divergence in opinions about spirituality seems to stem from not sorting out the different meanings of this analogous term.

With these definitions and distinctions in mind, the question boils down to this: Is spirit, or spiritual, in any sense real, or is it merely, even if possibly usefully, a fiction? And does it, in either sense, present a demand, a challenge to every human being simply by his or her living in this world; that is, is dealing with it an unavoidable task of every human life?

As to whether a person's own mental activities are in any sense of the word spiritual (i.e., nonmaterial), or whether they can ultimately be reduced to the movements of atoms or subatomic particles in one's brain, the jury, from a strictly scientific point of view, is still out. But should theorists ever definitively conclude that the latter is the case, then down the drain go the core Adlerian beliefs of a person's own individuality, creative goal-setting, and personal responsibility, and the challenge to shape one's community (*Gemeinschaft*). As to the existence in reality of an ultimate being, the existence itself is hardly in doubt, only its nature. Is it relational, personal, caring, spiritual? On this, too, the jury is still out. More, I submit, it will be out forever. The question is not Does God exist? The question is Does God give a damn? And this I can only believe or not believe. I can never determine it with scientific certainty, very much as I cannot read the mind of my fellow human.

Now it is precisely this *undecidedness* of the spiritual aspect of human nature as well as that of God that presents an ever-present and *unavoidable challenge* to every thinking human being. It is less circumscribed than the traditional three life tasks, and so those who object to spirituality being added to them as a fifth (or nth) one do have a valid point. At the same time, the issue of spirituality confronts one at the very core of one's existence: It forces one to take a stance vis-a-vis the ultimate Other. This stance, whether by cognitive awareness or by nondiscursive intuitive behavior, will automatically color one's approach to all the other life tasks. Thus, spirituality presents itself not as one among the life tasks, but rather as the root of, and in a way the overarching, unifying principle of all the other ones.

It is this distinctiveness, jointly with its relatedness, and especially its absolute fundamentality, that I wish to express when asserting, as I did in my interview with Nystul (1987), that spirituality is not so much a life task as the fundamental challenge to and task of all humans living.

### **Thinking and Working with Others, Rather Than Worrying about Oneself and the Gods, as the Primary Life Task**

**Guy Manaster.** The job of the Individual Psychologist is not the same as that of the theologian. If it can be said that theologians are concerned about “inner tasks” such as the soul’s relationship with God, then psychologists are said to be more concerned with “outer tasks,” such as the individual’s relationship with others. The tasks involved in living are broadly understood within Individual Psychology to be threefold and all pertaining to human survival, to human life; and I contend that all human life is social. Social living embraces the inescapable tasks on which survival is based: persons’ duties and responsibilities to humankind, to one another.

There is no doubt that the individual’s thoughts about himself or herself—and about life in general—are intricately influenced by his or her living self and the world. People’s thoughts about themselves, in fact, are part of their understanding in the world. These thoughts are the basic assumptions, basic principles by which they determine what life is about and what they are about. They make up personal and social goals. It is on these assumptions and understanding that humans function in the world. It is also on these assumptions that they attempt to fulfill the life tasks.

Seen in this way, thoughts about the individual self and the meaning of the person’s life are not among the life tasks per se. By considering issues of self and existence to be life tasks, theorists transform the self into a primary task rather than seeing the primary task as living in and being part of the world. Focusing on the self (rather than on participating in the greater effort of living) seems to be the essence of individualism and contrary to an Adlerian awareness of the necessity for human community and belonging.

While individuals may need to deal with *who* they are and *why* they are and may be factually *unable* to avoid doing so, they nevertheless do it in order to understand how to live with *others*. At times throughout life, especially at moments of crisis and transition, it may very well become necessary to deal with the self and its understanding of life’s meaning and purpose. Yet at those times when people do have a sense of themselves, of their adequacy, of an ethical and moral sense of the world, and of their place in it, then they rarely have to deal with these issues. There is no escaping, however, the need to deal every day with Adler’s original life tasks: issues of friends and community, love and family, and work and contribution (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).



Every day, when people awaken, they face the task of contributing through their work. Their deeds go beyond them, to all others, to their community and to their friends, to those who are nearest and dearest to them. Because of this, they have successfully let their course and their *concern for others* guide their conduct. They therefore need not be overly concerned with the self or their God. And when they do not harbor these latter concerns, their personal tasks can be understood and changed so that they can meet the tasks of life that they face along with all other humans.

### **Spirituality: The Expression of Our Life Tasks**

**Gloria McArter.** When Adler said that to be human is to feel inferior, he was describing something that connects all individuals on the planet. In this connection, humans experience a *oneness*, and it is this unity that exemplifies spirituality. Spirituality, from the Latin *spiritus*, translates as “breath” and is synonymous with movement. The movement of air is an experience, be it the intensity of air currents that form wind or the inhaling and exhaling of air to sustain life. Spirituality, from my perspective, is this experience of movement. It is the moving away from feelings of inferiority and striving toward the ultimate of human values. When all human beings of different cultures and faiths connect in the experience of oneness, there is an inherent spiritual experience. The unifying experience of spirituality becomes part of humanity, and in the sharing of their lives with others, they are all connected as by a web. Those people who help create the web of life are the gifts of the spiritual experience.

For Adler, three major problems or tasks—community, work, and love—comprise the questions of life. When answers to these three questions are found, so are those of life. Individuals’ responses to these problems or tasks reveals the meaning they attribute to life. Spirituality as movement toward the resolution of these problems is not a phenomenon that isolates them from others. Spirituality is as necessary to the three tasks as breath is to life. As a striving force, spirituality is not a part, a task of life. Spirituality is the whole, *more* than the sum of the parts. It is Life. Spirituality is not a life “task” or problem to be solved. It is the experience of finding resolution so unique that one expresses his or her ultimate values. *How* individuals respond, that is, *their movement to the life tasks of community, work, and love, defines their lifestyle.* They express their spirituality through their lifestyle. The specific relationship of lifestyle and spirituality needs further exploration.

The uniqueness of each person’s spirituality, like the uniqueness of lifestyle, is evident in the varied ways it is expressed. Like lifestyle, spirituality is developed from early childhood through adulthood and perhaps beyond the physical life. Spirituality is present in the relationship between a client and a

therapist, between lovers, between friends, between employee and employer. Indeed, spirituality *is* relationship (Buber, 1922/1937). But relationships come in various forms. Do all relationships constitute spirituality? I have no doubt that those that demonstrate respect, equality, dignity, responsibility, consequences, integrity—all qualities supported by the Individual Psychology of Adler—are indeed expressions of healthy spirituality.

Spirituality and religion are more differentiated concepts now than they were in Adler's time. It seems that his view of religion was as a spiritual experience of connection and relationship inherent in each of the three tasks. It is part of reality that, by virtue of existing on this earth, people learn how to connect and relate through work, in association with others, and in intimacy with another. This understanding has parallels with many of the world's sacred scriptures. For example, in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Fremantle & Chogyam, 1975), it is written,

True spirituality also is to be aware that if we are interdependent with everything and everyone else, even our smallest, least significant thought, word, and action have real consequences throughout the universe . . . everything is inextricably interrelated and . . . we come to realize we are responsible . . . in fact for ourselves, everyone and everything else, and the entire universe. (p. 39)

The interdependence, responsibility, and consequences of communal living, work, and love are expressions of the spiritual experience. Spirituality is not a life task; rather, it indicates the interrelatedness of the tasks and the responsibility of those who live them.

Adler (1931/1992) referred to work, community, and love as interdependent tasks calling for interdependent responses. Spirituality connects individuals to tasks, individuals to each other, and tasks to tasks. Spirituality can be understood as becoming (synonymous with participating and contributing to) the process of living on this earth. Adler was clear about one's responsibility to the other and to the planet. Spirituality takes form when people take this action. When I hear individuals describe spirituality as the presence of institutional religious principles and rituals, I respect their meaning and note what is missing. Spirituality can *include* a prescribed set of beliefs and a relationship with a personal god, associated with an organized institution. It *can* be this, and it *is* much more. When people perceive spirituality as transcending the immediate, the obvious, the humanly conscious and recognize it also as a striving of this world for interconnectedness and holism, then they would seem to be in sync with Adler and his views. Even when they might wish that spirituality elevate them to new levels of awareness, they are still responsible to eke out a living while in community and in love with others. Adler (1933/1964) described such love as the highest value for all persons. To love those one associates with in community, to love one's work and its consequences, and to love the experience of loving—these are

spirituality. To know love is to know God. Excluding the religious reference, one could say: To know love is to know the ultimate, the most valuable, however that ultimate value is defined by the individual.

### **Spirituality as Feelings of Terror and Love**

**Robert L. Powers.** Talk about sacred things is difficult because the subject-matter is ineffable, and whatever one says about God is liable to being/ becoming blasphemous, a taking in vain of the "Holy Name." Caligula feared Jews and Nazarenes as atheists because they refused to worship the Latin gods. They had no gods. Think of it by considering that even to refer to God as "the Supreme Being" is to diminish the idea of God and to contrive a phantom (Greek: *eidolon* = idol) who has his place in the world among other beings. The distinction between him and humans is thereby reduced and has chiefly to do with supremacy. This is god on the model of an Olympian, and, as mythology students know, the Olympian gods of the Hellenic myths shared a common ancestry with human beings. As Zorba put it, "God is like me, only bigger, crazier."

In spite of the difficulties entailed, however, psychology rightly wishes to study the place of religious phenomena in individual thought, in cultural form, and in personal and communal activity. Here, psychology's province is to focus (1) on the way individuals think and talk about these matters, in images and opinions of all kinds, and (2) on the foundations of religious attitudes prior to thought and speech, that is on the person's disposition toward projects either of only personal interest and value (chiefly related to self-elevation) or of communal interest and value (chiefly related to solidarity and mutual care) as well.

The Individual Psychologist accomplishes this dual focus by attending to human subjectivity under the heading of creativity and seeing its products as "fictions," more or less useful to perception and understanding, rather than as "illusions," dismissed as pathological and misleading. Individual Psychologists examine two basic feelings, prior to these creations. However much these two basic feelings stand in need of development through social contact, they are not of subjective making, but are fundamental to the capacity for being human. They are inferiority feeling and community feeling. I have sometimes referred to these primal feelings as "apertures to objective reality" (Powers & Griffith, 1996, p. 11) that prevent the individual's enclosure in subjectivity, the conception of which protects Adler's subjectivism from solipsism. In the first, the inferiority feeling, humans are "blessed" (Adler's ironic word) with a spur to striving and progress; in the second, the community feeling, they are "comforted" (my word, but according to Sophia Devries—personal communication, many years ago—Adler characterized this feeling

as, "*Warm und weich, wie ins Federbett gelegen*" [Warm and soft, as lain into a featherbed]), by a sense of participation in the movement of all things toward completeness, whatever that may be and however that may be subjectively or culturally envisioned.

In these two feelings, which are as intertwined as the double helix, are the twin bases of all religious feeling in the presence of That Which Is, Whose Name is, I Am: Terror and Love, the dread of being nothing and the appeal of being one with all things, or something like that. Different individuals state it differently, but it is always the same, *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans* (Otto, 1923). Awe and wonder. Moses with his shoes off, gazing on the burning bush. Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus. "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy will." And so on. It is hard to keep your bearings once you enter this realm of experience.

### Spirituality in Our Daily Lives

**Lee Schnebly.** Once, when I was a student of Oscar Christensen 25 years ago, I asked him if he believed in God. "Yes, I do," he replied, "but I've always felt that the Adlerian method could be a good substitute if I didn't." He explained his belief that spirituality means having a reason for living, other than a job or a collection of material things. Moreover, religion is "a set of rules for living." Rules are important. Similarly, Adlerian teachings can become a set of guiding beliefs that keep people on track.

Chris's response comes to mind now as I thumb through my handy thesaurus where I find spirituality described with words such as devoutness, sanctity, saintliness, holiness, godliness, spiritual-mindedness, virtuousness, and the like. Many people differ in their definitions, whether believers, Adlerians, or believing Adlerians. And for many, the definitions change over the years. I suspect there are legions of people who believe themselves to be spiritual. Some of them fear their god, and others experience no such fear. They see God as an all-loving being who understands behavior and its motivations so clearly that he or she would never be vindictive.

Many more differentiate between spirituality and religiousness. Rejecting the constrictions they feel from religious beliefs, people say, "I feel God's presence on a mountain top much more than I can ever feel him in a church building." Some very spiritual men and women in history have been so vehement in their beliefs that they have fought fiercely, toe to toe, with their opponents, an image certainly different from the pious monk, for example, praying in his candlelit cell. Still, both consider themselves spiritual.

Religious beliefs and spiritual processes are learned initially by watching the family of origin. If they say grace, if they discuss God, if they take the

children to a church or a synagogue, they learn there is such a thing as religion. The manner is really no different than the way they learned to put on clothes, to use good manners, and to speak a language. Indeed, spirituality becomes a certain type of language, expressing things that are most valuable to the person.

Are these different types of spiritual people involved with a life task or are they just involved in the day-to-day activity of going about their lives, what Gold and Mansager (2000) called the process of life? I would say that any given life task generally is not recognized as such by the task-taker. When people decide to marry, for instance, they rarely think, "It's time to legally and spiritually engage myself in this one of the three (or more?) life tasks: the love-sex factor." The vast majority of humanity marry or cohabit because they have fallen in love. Simple as that. They did not realize they had begun the love-sex task way back in their early teens when they began to notice other teens held some attraction for them, even though they didn't understand it. It was a gradual procedure to be sure, but that fact does not exclude sexuality from being an important task of life. People face the tasks and respond to them whether they consciously identify them as such or not. Indeed, the life tasks are our way of learning and abandoning and relearning ways of responding to love, work, and friends. From this perspective (and I think this might have been Adler's point), virtually everything a person does fits into one or more of the life task categories because it is part of the general category of living.

Whether or not people *need* spirituality is a question in itself. My personal answer is that I do; and, figuratively, I have my own language to help me express that. But others may not have a spiritual language nor feel the need for spirituality. I know many productive, apparently well-adjusted and loving people who, if asked, will comfortably share their belief that there is no god. They have reasons (articulated or not) for having come to their conclusion.

If the inquiry is a friendly one, most are perfectly willing to try to put their reasons in words. Some, however, believe in God (as they see him) with a vengeance so strong that they damn to "hell" all those who do not agree with them. For me, these represent two examples near the extremes of a vast continuum. Don't most people—after considering their family's religion and exposure to different theories—find themselves along some midpoint on the continuum? Nor did they recognize this activity as a task. It became part of their collection of privately logical self-explanations—along with other beliefs: that families are wonderful (or terrible), that education is essential (or a waste of time), and that alcohol enhances (or destroys) one's life.

Twenty-five years later, I understand better what Chris was saying. For me, my spirituality and my living day to day from an Adlerian perspective are closer than I imagined as a student.

### **Spirituality, Generativity, and Goodness-of-Fit**

**Mary F. Schneider.** Gold and Mansager (2000) asked whether spirituality is a life task or part of the greater life process. The question encouraged me to wonder how, in a community of shared beliefs, are new ideas circulated, scrutinized, rejected, or rooted?

Individual Psychologists join together a philosophy and a psychology of being. Many of them have experienced an eclectic education and have yearned for and found in Individual Psychology a system that lets them answer, professionally, "The Question." What if I were to live my preferred psychological life? For most the answer was, "Why I'd treasure these Adlerian ideas and I'd act on them." So, they join the community of belief.

The next process that tests their membership status in the community is the goodness-of-fit between the theory and their own cognitive-emotional development. Adler and Jung did not experience goodness-of-fit with Freud. The lack of fit necessitated that they develop new communities of shared meaning. So questions arise about how generativity and evolution occur within the community, that is, how new ideas are put forward.

The community requires a certain amount of elasticity to encourage the development of dynamic constructions from its members. Is there room in the community for debating foundational constructs? How do new ideas find a place within the community of meaning? Through what processes does theory develop in a dynamic system? How does practice continue to inform theory?

The Adlerian community is currently challenged with these questions: whether Adlerian theory is generative, whether younger generations can select key principles to deepen, whether they can open new conversations and develop practices that enhance the theory.

An enduring community of meaning is built on a set of core principles with enough universality to apply to the ever-changing human cultures. And as a community it must demonstrate enough cognitive elasticity to welcome the next generation of creative minds. Authentic disciples understand this task to situate the contribution within the context of the community's beliefs. Mosak and Dreikurs's (2000) argument for spirituality as the fifth life task was generative. It sought a goodness-of-fit within the community. Mosak and Dreikurs offered their ideas while continuing to claim Adlerian affiliation. Theirs was the time-honored and scholarly practice of situating a new idea within the context of ideas that have gone before it. This is a valid avenue open to generative disciples.

Gold and Mansager (2000) challenged the efficacy of Mosak and Dreikurs's argument for a fifth life task with a scholarly and finely crafted debate. This type of scholarship anticipates gatekeeper questions and reminds Individual Psychologists to keep a goodness-of-fit with core Adlerian tenets.

However, the hidden assumption of both the Mosak-Dreikurs and the Gold-Mansager arguments is that the final word rests with Adler. While the "Adler said" criterion is certainly *one* of the major criteria theorists need to engage in as they converse as a community, there are also criteria that welcome generativity. The usefulness of the idea, its efficacy within the community, must be considered, as must the degree to which the idea resonates within the community. The effect of the fifth life task on the Adlerian community must be considered—the effect on clients, and on the domain of psychology. Does the idea of a fifth life task deepen meaning? Does it open areas of research and application? Does it, in any way, harm the theory? Does it offer options to those members or clients who do not resonate with the idea?

Asking my clients about spiritual practices regularly opens the door to sets of beliefs and practices that become major resources in the therapeutic process. The effect of the fifth life task on my clients is stunning. Often expecting to encounter an agnostic system, clients are shocked to find a psychological theory that embraces the spiritual. The majority of my clients are delighted to discover that they can share their spirituality with a therapist. Clients with active spiritual lives frequently discover a solid match between their spiritual beliefs and Adlerian ideas. For clients growing out of abusive family constellations, spiritual practices of acceptance and forgiveness help reduce blame and diminish bitterness. My inclusion of the fifth life task has also opened the door to therapeutic cooperation with clergy in end of life issues and traumatic stress as well as with clients who are situated in 12-step recovery programs.

Faith-based communities offer something of a metaphor for the process. In such communities there is the established tradition of attending to "The Word," as well as to disciples' commentaries on the meaning of The Word (Goldin, 1957). Members fashion life choices from both The Word and the commentaries. Conversely, new life experiences evoke commentary and beg reference to The Word.

The life task vs. life process question and this entire conversation is proof that our Adlerian community is dynamic. Dynamic communities have conversations, carefully crafted, bold conversations about meaning. These conversations honor Adler's words, honor the creativity of Adler's disciples, and honor the lessons learned from practice.

### **The Task of Seeing Earthly Circumstances as the "Higher Power"**

**Norman N Silverman.** Adlerian thought insists upon the creativity and self-determination of every person. How can this be reconciled with the observation that many people appeal to the cosmos as if it were supernatural? By way of example, such belief is especially apparent in the milieu of

substance abuse recovery programs. Twelve-step programs of all sorts demand that the would-be recoverer declare a need for a "Higher Power." If one *can* assent to a literal "Higher Power" without further ado or mental reservation, such reliance may well be a useful fiction. However, it is not a fiction dictated by Individual Psychology or by any sort of scientific rationality.

But what of the nonbelieving substance abuser—or any nonbeliever for that matter? I contend that it may be very helpful to reinterpret the issue of a "Higher Power" so as to refer not to a divine spirit, but to the very conditions of worldly existence. Dealing with this sort of "Higher Power" can, indeed, become a task of life.

The existentialists describe the individual as "thrown" helter-skelter into existence, at random (e.g., Heidegger, 1968). Humans don't choose their parents, their nationality, their centuries, or their languages. They have only limited control over their destinies, although they may have more control than they want to realize. Humans are the inheritors (whether they like it or not) of some 4,000 years of recorded history and hundreds of thousands of years of prehistory. They come into a world that is already participating in the glorious achievements of civilization, of poets, scholars, thinkers, scientists, technicians, and millions of working contributors. Human beings are also the bearers of the painful legacy of Hitlers and Hamans (Haman was a king of Persia who plotted the annihilation of Jews; see Esther 3–9.), fanatical reactionaries and barbarians. Humans do not live alone. The "Higher Power" of humanity, broader society and history as a whole, constantly impinges on them. Their background, their culture, their physique, their place and time of residence, their dependence on the behavior of other people, all can be seen as "Higher Powers." And this is power, for sure: broader, deeper, and higher than the individual. It has enormous control over peoples' lives. Because they can do nothing outside of, or without, dependence on their thrownness, then they do well to accept that thrownness as an inescapable "Higher Power." However, it seems to me that the concept of a God or of "spirituality" is an unnecessary assumption that impedes rational scientific thought.

### Summary

The hope for a "vigorous response" to the reopening of spirituality as a topic for dialogue has been met far beyond expectation (Mansager, 2000). This discussion demonstrates that Adlerians bring a rich philosophy and psychology to the discussion of spirituality. There is much more to be said, of course, and this contribution should serve to carry the discussion further. It is suitable for being critically reviewed itself. But that is not the job of a summary. The rigor with which each co-author herein focused on the topic resists tasteful condensation. And surely trying to draw a consensus is premature.



Even appearing to tally similarities and differences would be offensive to the air of wonder that such a stimulating dialogue brings about. Still, important themes—previously stated and newly emerging—are corroborated in this conversation:

1. Already, the authors show that spirituality can be dealt with effectively within the literary discussion (Griffith, Schnebly) as well as in the practice (Manaster, Schneider) of Individual Psychology.
2. Spirituality can be conceived as an essential survival issue of human living from an evolutionary (Gold), cultural (Powers), philosophical (Kal), or religious (Griffith) perspective.
3. While not all Adlerians need or want either religion or spirituality in their private or professional lives, the concept can be approached from theistic (Griffith, Kal), atheistic (Gold, Silverman), and nontheistic (Manaster, McArter) perspectives.
4. Discussing spirituality has a legitimate place in expanding Individual Psychology from the context of goodness-of-fit within current theory and Adler's own writing (Gold, Powers, Schneider), from Individual Psychology's clinical aspect (Schneider), as well as spirituality's centrality (Griffith, Kal) and utility (Schnebly, Silverman) in many peoples' lives.

These observations are fertile for theoretical and practical development. Perhaps this venue will provide for that. But what most plainly ties this discussion together is Adler's insight that peoples' opinions of themselves and their world, their "biased apperceptions," influence every psychological process. They are all aspects of one's subjectively created lifestyle (cf. Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 2).

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