

Activation: A Process of Spiritual Awakening

Ron Mann, Ph.D.

Individuals experience spiritual awakening in a variety of ways. Historically it is known that an individual, like Buddha, can sit alone and obtain full realization. One can be walking down the "road to Damascus" and be struck by the power of God and realize his or her oneness with Creation. More typically, however, we experience Divine awakening through a process, which includes the involvement of another human being. The focus of this discussion is about the psychological and spiritual dynamics that occur between two individuals when spiritual consciousness is first ignited. As more and more individuals become interested in spiritual practice they seek out psychotherapists who offer spiritually oriented psychotherapy, yoga teachers, and yoga therapists for support and guidance. Given the rapidly growing number of individuals looking for spiritual understanding, the interpersonal dynamics of spiritual development becomes important to understand. The power inherent in the spiritual world makes this discussion important because it is so easy to become confused, conflicted and sidetracked during the initial phase of spiritual awakening. This discussion is intended for both the individual in the throes of a spiritual unfoldment and any individual who might have served to initiate that process in another, whether he or she may be a professional psychotherapist, yoga teacher, yoga therapist or friend. The more we can understand about the nature of consciousness, the easier it is to ride with the powerful currents that are designed to transform our lives.

There are a variety of contexts in which a powerful spiritual dynamic can occur between two people. It can occur between a client and a psychotherapist, between a student and a teacher, and between two individuals apart from any defined healing or teaching relationship. I choose to call this phenomena "Activation." I like this term because unconscious shadow material, attachments, and identification with the little self, as opposed to the soul or higher self, are quickly brought to the surface. There appears to be very little written about this powerful process, although it is commonly experienced in spiritual communities and between individuals who have a desire for spiritual awakening. I suspect that professional therapists, and perhaps, even yoga therapists who are newer to spiritual phenomena and experience are less familiar with this dynamic. Understanding the nature and process of

activation can be helpful for both the individual being activated and the one serving as the channel for the spiritual force.

In this discussion I am choosing to make a distinction between two important interpersonal dynamics, one being psychological in nature and the other spiritual in essence. The former is well understood as the process of "transference." This latter spiritual process is much different than transference phenomena, as classically understood in the psychoanalytic literature. I will refer to this spiritual dynamic that occurs between two individuals as "activation."

Let us begin with a clear understanding of transference. I believe it is important to consider this classical dynamic because many individuals are involved in counseling relationships that also include spiritual functions. More and more, yoga teachers are becoming "yoga therapist" a new brand of professionals who use classical yoga methods in conjunction with psychological processes. Engaging in emotional material opens the door for transference reactions to emerge. Since transference and activation are different functions, but can occur in the same context, it is important to understand them both and know the different interventions that are appropriate for each dynamic.

Transference

There have been volumes of fine literature offered regarding the nature of transference and counter-transference in the therapeutic relationship. This psychological phenomenon typically resides within a professional relationship. The experience is related to a patient and doctor and the feelings that become elicited within that context. Powerful unconscious feelings, longings, and desires become activated due to the love, care, compassion and helpfulness of the therapist. Let us be clear about the precise definition of transference. Ralph Greenson¹, a recognized expert in the field of psychoanalysis defines it as:

Transference is the experiencing of feeling, drives, attitudes, fantasies and defenses toward a person in the present which do not befit that person but are a repetition of reactions originating in regard to significant persons of early childhood, unconsciously displaced onto figures in the present.

This definition rests on four basic propositions: (1) Transference is a variety of object relationship. (2) Transference phenomena repeats a past relationship to an object. (3) The mechanism of displacement is the essential process in transference reactions. (4) Transference is a regressive phenomenon. For a psychic phenomenon to be considered transference, all four of these elements must be present.

A transference reaction....is a relationship involving three whole people - a subject, a past object, and a present object. In the analytic situation it usually comprises the patient, some significant person from the past, and the analyst.

The patient may project inner realities that relate to his or her mother and father onto the therapist. The therapist, as well, may project his or her feelings, regarding early parental patterns or unaccepted aspects of his or her own psyche onto the patient. The latter phenomena of counter-transference offers a mirror to the therapist for unresolved issues. These types of projections hold the potential for tremendous psychological growth when an observing ego is present and the feelings can be acknowledged, perceived and explored. The observing perspective allows for the careful investigation of these feelings, which functions to deter "acting out." The acting out is defined as some attempt to live out the feelings and obtain gratification and fulfillment for the various needs and desires, rather than use them as a source for introspection and analysis. The ultimate goal, if the patient has sufficient ego strength, is to accept the early disappointments in life and develop aspects of the self that can provide self-validation, self-acceptance, and self-love. The individual eventually emerges stronger, more integrated, able to forgive his or her parents for their shortcomings, and capable of living in the real world with an ability to be honest, open, loving, and tolerant, given a newfound ability to understand and accept hurt and disappointments.

A case example might help clarify the nature and usefulness of transference. Mary has been seen for four years in once to twice a week psychodynamic psychotherapy. She has a history of severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse. She describes her parents as utterly sadistic and cruel. The years of early trauma led to a multiple personality disorder that was resolved after three years of treatment. The next year of treatment focused upon the immense narcissistic wounds to the self and the intense self-hatred that would be activated upon any felt sense of abandonment and rejection. For example, when Mary began to reduce the

frequency of sessions, due to financial reasons, to every other week treatment, I needed to fill her customary hour with a regularly scheduled patient. Mary had just changed her appointment time and I assumed that the new hour would be quite acceptable to her. The following week she changed her mind and wanted her original time back and I informed her that it was no longer available. She responded with a deep sense of rejection and became very despondent. She took my action as a sign that I had no respect for her, she was worthless, and felt our relationship was severely damaged. My unilateral decision regarding the management of my practice initiated her feelings of abandonment. Since I did not consult with her, she felt she was not worthy of my interest. My unilateral action was experienced as a severe abandonment.

The transference reaction was compounded by a past interaction from a previous session in which Mary had offered some new goals that I felt were rather grandiose and unrealistic, and therefore, I could not promise her that I would help her achieve those particular goals. She experienced my "lack of support" as a rejection of her core. Once again the early patterns of rejection and abandonment from her parents became rekindled by the therapeutic relationship. After weeks of discussion, we were able to sift out the difference between the past and the present and find new ways to deal with the present hurt and disappointment. Her recognition that old, previous wounds had been touched helped to restore the positive working alliance.²

The therapeutic value of transference is that it takes the therapy out of a discussion about past events and brings the deeper psychological material into the present. The patient has the opportunity to relive painful affects with a more sensitive and compassionate figure, the therapist, and find new and more functional ways to deal with deep wounds. Typically, maladaptive defense structures develop as a way to defend against these deeper injuries to the self, such as denial, avoidance, and splitting. These more primitive defense mechanisms do not allow for the direct expression and exploration of the wound, hence the opportunity for a creative and successful resolution to a conflict is lost. The possibility for psychological growth is missed and the more primitive defenses typically create secondary problems of confusion, isolation and hurt due to poor communication. Transference ultimately, when clearly identified and worked through, can be a very powerful force in the healing process.

Activation

The process of activation is inherently a spiritual function in contrast to transference which is psychological in nature. The process of spiritual unfoldment is discussed in detail in my book, *Sacred Healing*.³ The reader is referred to that discussion for a more in depth perspective. However, it is important to explain that the process of spiritual awakening and spiritual unfoldment unleashes a natural process in which aspects of the mind and personality, which encase the soul and create the delusion of separation from the Divine, are magnified and brought into awareness. This is a classical view of the Higher Self or soul found in Sankhya yoga philosophy.⁴ This process is very intense and is the result of the great influx of light or spiritual energy. Since the individual is typically taken by surprise, a level of psychological maturity and emotional detachment helps one to distinguish between the material in the little self or ego⁵ and the soul.

A brief discussion regarding the process of spiritual development is in order. In the spiritual or metaphysical view of the self, the essential Self or soul exists within each of us. The soul has consciousness that continues throughout eternity, and this consciousness is not bound by time and space. Life, as consciousness, began before we were born and continues after the death of the physical body. Consciousness moves through the illusion of time from one incarnation to another, adopting the form of the current physical body. However, the essential nature of the Self, as defined by Sankhya yoga philosophy, is "Sat, Chit, Ananda," or Consciousness or Being, Intelligence or Awareness, and Bliss. Our essential nature is created in this Divine image and the soul is an individualized aspect of the Divine, just as a wave is an individual aspect of the ocean. The soul rises out of the Divine substance, eventually to return to complete union. The soul, being a part of the Divine, contains the Divine essence of love, peace, joy, bliss, light, wisdom, and energy. Ultimately, there is no separation between the soul and omnipresent Spirit.

The mystical view of the Self perceives the apparent reality of the body, mind, and emotions as encasements around the soul. An individual loses his or her direct experience of the soul to the degree that he or she identifies with the outer, transitory aspects of the self. Identification with the mind, body, and emotions comprises the biggest obstacle to self-realization or direct knowledge of the soul. The spiritual process of unfoldment places less emphasis upon the

experiences of the body, mind and emotions, the life-substance of the little self or ego, and encourages the aspirant to seek the deeper sense of self in the soul. Spiritual practices such as yoga meditation provide an opportunity to refine one's ability to discern between the soul and the grosser aspects of consciousness that are expressed through the mind, body and emotions. The ultimate goal of self-realization is to stabilize one's identity with Spirit and not be caught in the more limited aspects of consciousness that identify with the outer senses.

Soul: The individualized expression of Spirit that is by nature ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new joy. The soul is encased in the physical body, the astral body, and the causal body until it reaches full liberation.

Mind: The mental, intellectual aspect of the self. The yogic system actually addresses two qualities of mind: buddhi and manas. Buddhi refers to the discriminative intelligence that is relatively more intuitive in nature, and manas refers to the quality of mind that is in turn more related to sense consciousness.

Body: The physical vehicle for the soul. **Emotions:** The emotional system that relates to the expression of the personality.

This particular cosmology leads to very different methods, techniques and interventions than does a traditional psychological view of existence. Where the psychological perspective would encourage the careful investigation and experience of emotions and thoughts, the spiritual context encourages the individual to maintain a calm and slightly detached position vis a vis emotion, physical sensations, and thought. The process of identifying with the awareness or observer of the phenomena, along with other spiritual practices, ultimately leads to identification with the soul as the essential Self.

The process of activation can hasten the process of spiritual awakening because it quickly highlights those aspects of the little self or ego that inherently contain attachments and unfulfilled desires. Remember, ancient yoga philosophy explains that it is our attachments, desires, and identification with the outer senses that draw us back into worldly consciousness to continue the cycle of death and rebirth.⁶ The spiritual aspirant's highest goal is to maintain conscious awareness of Absolute Spirit while living in the world. "Be in the world, but not of the world," is the challenge.

FOOTNOTES

1. Greenson, Ralph R., *The Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc. 1967. p. 171.
2. Greenson, Ralph R., *The Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc. 1967.
3. Mann, Ronald, *Sacred Healing*. Grass Valley: Blue Dolphin Publishing, Inc. 1997.
4. Yogananda, Paramahansa, *God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, Royal Science of God-Realization. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1995.
5. From a spiritual perspective, ego is the aspect of self that experiences a separation from God. Ego-consciousness is believing that "I" am in total control of "my" life, that "I" am the total creator of "my" existence. The inherent limitation of this notion is that it does not allow for the full, expansive understanding and experience of God-consciousness. This limited ego-identity creates a contracted and reduced field of awareness.
6. Yogananda, Paramahansa, *God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, Royal Science of God-Realization. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1995.
7. Powerful energy force that emanates from the soul and is directed by the will.
8. The kundalini, according to yogic philosophy, is a dormant energy located at the base of the spine. When this force is activated, either as the result of yogic practice or as a spontaneous movement, a current of energy proceeds up the astral spine and opens the corresponding chakras along its path. The higher centers of the spine and brain are typically activated when this energy is drawn up from the base of the spine, often resulting in the experience of unconditional Love, deeper intuitive perceptions, and superconscious transcendental Bliss.
9. The chakras are spinning vortices of conscious or subtle energy. Each chakra corresponds to various physical glands or organs and is imbued with different states of awareness.

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