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## **Spirituality Transformative Psychotherapy: Repairing Spiritual Damage and Facilitating Extreme Well-being (review)**

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# Book Review

## Spirituality Transformative Psychotherapy: Repairing Spiritual Damage and Facilitating Extreme Well-being

Steven Vazquez

229 pages

Rowman & Littlefield

Spirituality is personal and is an individualized journey. For some, it is connected to religious beliefs and practices (i.e., Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism). For others, spirituality is not and may be about personal learning, insight, and transformation. Still others may view spirituality as a part one's cultural heritage and ethnic background. While some people believe in God or a Higher Being, others do not. When hurt and trauma occur, the situation often becomes more complex because peoples' beliefs and values are challenged and brought into question. Some may "fall away" from their beliefs or "upbringing" and feel that they have been let down or not protected. People often discover that their previous world views and understanding of life has been shattered or somehow altered.

As a result, many may not know where to go or what to do; thus, people respond by suppressing or forcing themselves to move on so they can separate themselves from the hurt and pain experienced (i.e., emotional, mental, physical). While some may find a way to do so, others never really process or work through it and are left with some form of repressed or buried hurt. Personal issues not adequately addressed have a tendency to resurface or manifest in people's lives and often in unexpected ways. When this happens, people may seek counseling or some form of external support to help them work through these; yet, some people need an alternative approach to help them access and process what they think, feel, and experience. *Spirituality Transformative Psychotherapy: Repairing Spiritual Damage and Facilitating Extreme Well-being* is a book written to help counselors, psychotherapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and allied helping professionals learn and use such an approach. The approach introduced and explained is a method referred to as Emotional Transformative Therapy (ETT). Interspersed throughout are a number of case studies and real life examples to help illustrate personal and spiritual transformations experienced by those who underwent ETT.

Emotional Transformative Therapy is an approach that can be used and integrated into the therapeutic relationship and is not tied to one specific set of beliefs or religious paradigm. Understanding this is key for counselors and allied helping professionals because most all will work with people of varying faiths and beliefs, many of which are likely to differ from those held by the professional. Similarly, many may encounter people who do not identify or associate themselves with a specific religion or spiritual paradigm. In fact, the author, explains how the face of spirituality and religion has

changed in this country. For example, he cites how the number of Americans who refer to themselves as having no religion or as spiritual has increased in recent years. Related are the number of people who do not consider themselves Christians which has been a predominant value and practice throughout our country for decades. Since many of these individuals are not likely to seek support or answers through a church or religious community, other healing options need to be available. Thus, ETT is an approach that can help these individuals as well as those who do identify and practice religion as an essential part of life.

Counseling professionals using the ETT approach are encouraged to adapt to the client's personal and spiritual orientation. While some people may actively seek specific outcomes such as "connecting" with God or "recapturing a lost feeling" once experienced, others may simply want to experience "peace" or "to live in the moment". Related is the notion that ETT may help people process and work through their pain and personal blockages in a short amount of time compared to therapy alone. Along the way, ETT often promotes spiritual experiences and outcomes as a by-product. A part of this process includes an evaluation of a person's religious and spiritual beliefs. Exploring a person's individual beliefs helps the individual gain clarity of whether they hold positive or negative ones, if their beliefs and values provide support or distress, and if issues of trauma or tragedy disrupt one's philosophical outlook. It can also help uncover a person's beliefs, conflicts in values and beliefs, and views about death and dying or any near death experiences, just to name a few. Having an in-depth understanding of religious and spiritual values can help counseling professionals assess and determine if ETT might be of help to the people they serve.

Counseling professionals unfamiliar with ETT may find it helpful to read Chapter 2. This chapter explains ETT and how it works. The author defines ETT as "an innovative form of psychotherapy that consistently facilitates cessation of current emotional distress within a few minutes" (p. 24). Emotional Transformative Therapy helps resolve emotional memory issues that cause emotional distress. It has been shown to change peoples' brain scans, brain chemistry, and relationship with the distressing event. Emotional Transformative Therapy is used in conjunction with a person's attachment pattern to help with emotional regulation patterns and selection of individually-tailored responses used throughout therapy. Although, ETT appears to work relatively quickly, it does

not mean people bypass or skip over their unpleasant emotions; these still must be discussed and addressed. The difference is they do so for short amounts of time (rather than long periods of time) while also utilizing one or more of the techniques described. Emotional Transformative Therapy techniques covered throughout are a part of visual brain stimulation and include: Multidimensional Eye Movement (MDEM), Spectral Resonance Technique (SRT), Peripheral Eye Stimulation (PES) and Neuro Theralight. Following, content is covered about attachment-based processes and the role of understanding these in relation to the use of ETT.

Beyond its association with the resolution and enhancement of spirituality previously mentioned, ETT has been found to be effective in treating people experiencing physical pain, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, addiction issues, obsessive compulsive disorder, dissociative disorders, learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury (TBI), cancer, couple conflicts, various physical conditions, and complex trauma” (pp. 25 – 26). Being aware of the numerous conditions ETT has been effective with is helpful as the next chapter discusses forgiveness and the facilitation of forgiveness as a part of ETT. Further, people experiencing hurt, trauma, addiction, as well as psychological, emotional, or physical conditions may find forgiveness relevant and of value.

Chapter 3 opens with a case study of how ETT helped a woman forgive who previously reported her bitterness and resentment as “deeply entrenched” (p. 43). Such an example encourages the reader to immediately consider the potential connection of forgiveness and ETT. Following, the author reminds us that forgiveness is a value and practice important to most all religions (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism), to key spiritual and religious leaders (i.e., Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr.) and to people pursuing spiritual practices. Once the foundation is laid, the reader is educated about the importance of forgiveness. More specifically, the author lists consequences experienced when forgiveness is lacking and is not chosen (i.e., resentment toward the offender, inability to trust others, unresolved issues that interfere with one’s relationships or with God) (p. 45). Many of these consequences are well-known and substantiated throughout the professional literature on forgiveness. Related is the notion of self-forgiveness or the inability to forgive oneself. Counseling professionals utilizing ETT need to be aware that people may desire to work on one or the other or both as a part of the healing process. The chapter proceeds to discuss what forgiveness is and what it is not, reasons people do not forgive, beneficial outcomes of being able to forgive, and the importance of allowing oneself to be forgiven. Each of these topics are essential for professionals to understand when doing forgiveness work. For many, the idea and willingness to forgive is hard and seems daunting, perhaps even unbearable depending on the degree of hurt, betrayal, or the perceived offense. The more professionals understand forgiveness and its role and relationship to ETT, the better prepared they will be in addressing it as a part of the counseling relationship.

Samadhi is a part of ETT and is introduced in Chapter 4. Samadhi is known of and experienced in a number of religions and spiritual practices (i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism). Christianity, although not understood as precisely the same, is described as hav-

ing a similar process to Samadhi (p. 59). Because of these variations, exact definitions or understandings may differ, but in general Samadhi is described as, “a state of deep meditative contemplation which leads to higher consciousness” (Dictionary.com, 2017). When people are in a Samadhi state they are able to experience “pure consciousness” or a form of “inner silence” (p. 60) where all things cease to be a distraction and a person feels at one with the universe. Samadhi can be a bit uncertain for people who experience it as the author explains that two people can have a similar experience but perceive or describe it very differently.

The chapter goes on to explain that the ETT process can lead to spontaneous transcendent experiences. Professionals unfamiliar with Samadhi may find it helpful to view it as such an experience and to understand that transcendent experiences can occur regardless of a person’s personal beliefs. Additionally, information is given about the purpose of the ETT Samadhi process. While some outcomes may be specific and purposefully targeted, others are not. Of particular interest is the fact that Samadhi can “disrupt and transform dysfunctional thinking patterns; remove fear, grief, and lack of meaning; promote love, joy, and peace; and facilitate a direct connection or experience with the divine” (p. 63). Professionals utilizing ETT may want to be aware and learn about potential obstacles and risks of Samadhi and steps to be taken to help people integrate and understand their spiritual transformation. Being able to provide support is essential as some people may have spiritual awakenings or experiences they do not fully understand.

Samadhi has been traditionally understood as a state achieved through meditation; however, in Chapter 5, the author explores other techniques that can be used and infused to achieve this state. One technique discussed includes the use of biofeedback (i.e., brainwave biofeedback and neurofeedback). Following, hypnosis is discussed as a means to experience Samadhi. In this case, hypnosis is not believed to lead or cause Samadhi, but it may be a venue that accidentally leads to it. Next, specific forms of meditation are introduced. These include Kirtan Kriya, mindfulness meditation, and transcendental meditation (pp. 89 -90). The author goes on to compare ETT Samadhi to prayer. Counseling professionals wanting to know more about these techniques as they relate to ETT and spiritual transformation are encouraged to review this chapter.

Chapter 6 explores and explains the possibility of people hearing voices as a part of ETT. Professionals using ETT are encouraged to read this chapter and to better understand how some people report and experience hearing audible voices or spiritual messages during or after this process and that many of them are described as positive, supportive, loving, or even divine. Examples described by people include hearing the voices of “angels, deceased loved ones, spiritual leaders and gurus – Jesus” (p. 123). Understanding the potential for this phenomena is important especially given the fact that in the United States “hearing voices” has often been viewed as something related to psychopathology or the presence of psychiatric symptoms. On the other hand, the author reminds the reader how audible voices have been a part of history, reported by various religious saints (i.e., Joan of Arc, Saint Teresa), and are valued by other cultures as a positive experience. Another key component of hearing audible voices in relation to ETT is the ability to work with people who experience them and to help

them understand their meaning. Related is the notion that people experiencing them are likely to view them differently and may be influenced by their personal or religious orientation. Furthermore, the author points out that both religious and nonreligious people may report such experiences.

Chapters 7 and 8 discuss ETT as an approach used to assist people with cancer and to resolve spiritual differences in couples. Chapter 7 begins with reminding the reader of the interest and potential for exploration of personal and spiritual beliefs following the diagnosis and presence of cancer. Part of this is because cancer causes many to question the meaning of life along with several existential issues (i.e., What happens after I die?). Of interest is that the author introduces the notion that cancer is related to psychological and social issues. Knowing about this is important since this is the realm of what counseling professionals do – they explore psychological issues and how they affect a person holistically. Related is the idea that many people do not live life according to their “true purpose” or authentic self. When people are disconnected from this aspect of themselves, it may point to a tendency to not be in touch with one’s emotions or deep desires.

Additionally, ETT is an approach that can be used to help people cope with cancer. For instance, it may be used to help “neutralize symptoms of chemotherapy treatment, eliminate physical pain,” improve emotional coping, assist in accessing unresolved emotions, address spiritual growth following cancer and concerns about death and dying” (p. 133-147). While some of these issues are not easy to explore, the author points out that people who access and process their fears and concerns actually “increase their chances for survival” (p. 147).

Chapter 8 was enlightening as it discussed the realities of two people relating to one another who have different spiritual or religious views. While some people are able to accept their partner’s differing beliefs, others are not. This difference can become a source of dissonance and conflict. In these instances, ETT may be of help. Also of relevance is the way relationships may change because one person has undergone ETT and experienced some sort of spiritual transformation causing the other person discomfort and distress. When this happens, the counseling professional may need to work with both parties to help them try to understand and integrate these changes. While many couples are able to make the transition and grow from it, the author points out there is the rare occasion that the changes experienced are too great or the other person will not adapt.

Chapter 9 is the final chapter. The focus of this chapter is on spiritual awakenings and experiences that may happen as a part of ETT. Being aware of those discussed previously and in this chapter can enlighten counseling professionals to some of the personal experiences people may report. Many of these are considered controversial because of one’s beliefs and values. Part of this controversy may be because they are not fully understood, are an untapped experience available to humans, and vary from person-to-person. In this chapter, the author clarifies that some of the spiritual awakening experiences involve speaking in tongues (AKA: Glossolalia), prophecy or a sense of future sight (i.e., precognition), communication with deceased friends and loved ones, acquisition of spiritual wisdom, and telepathy. The author stresses

the importance of professionals helping people who experience such events to process, understand, and integrate them as these may be new and foreign situations. Because of that, they can be unnerving until people are able to do so.

Collectively, the book covered many interesting concepts that may be of interest to counseling and allied helping professionals. Professionals interested in undertaking ETT are encouraged to learn more about it and the various techniques. As the book was reviewed, the reviewer researched information about ETT and found the author has a website that indicates there are trainings one can participate in to help them learn about this approach. Additionally, there is a list of professionals who have gone through some of the ETT trainings. Much of the information covered in the book was new to the reviewer, but the ideas and possibilities were insightful, interesting, and found to be of much value. It is felt that as more is learned about ETT, professionals wanting to use this technique will find it useful as well.

## References

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