

Seeking Well-Being in the Terrain of Despair: Relational Strengths for Practitioner Formation

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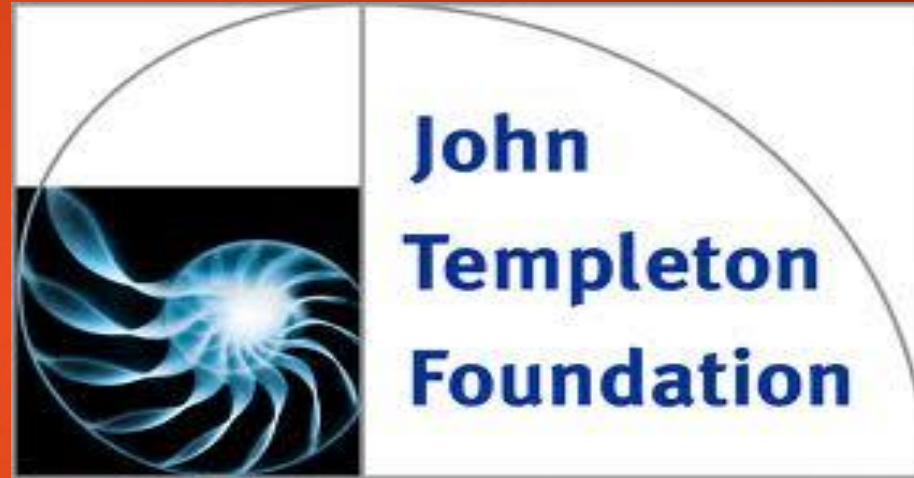
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Gratitude

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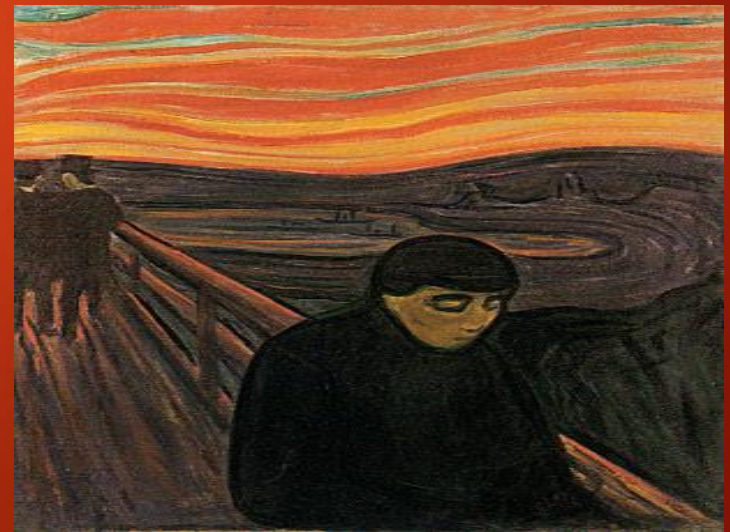




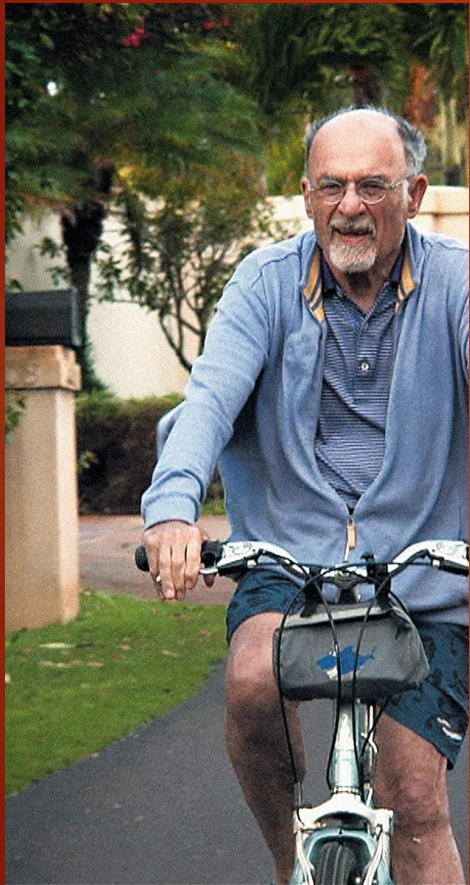
Have you
had a
“red pen
moment”?

A Time of Profound Existential Dysregulation, Angst, and Despair

- ❖ As finite human beings, we struggle with existential anxiety **prior** to specific anxieties and traumas.
- ❖ Trauma is existential and “freezes” meaning-making.
- ❖ Relational security can reactivate meaning-making processes and potentiate healing and growth.



Connecting amidst our Diverse Existential Predicaments



Existential Predicaments (adapted from Yalom)

Death/Loss

Meaning/Absurdity

Freedom/Guilt

Isolation/Engulfment



**Problem of colonization
and existential
experience being
“overdetermined from
without” (Fanon, 1967;
see Vereen, 2017)**

Relational Formation Groups for Leaders & Therapists

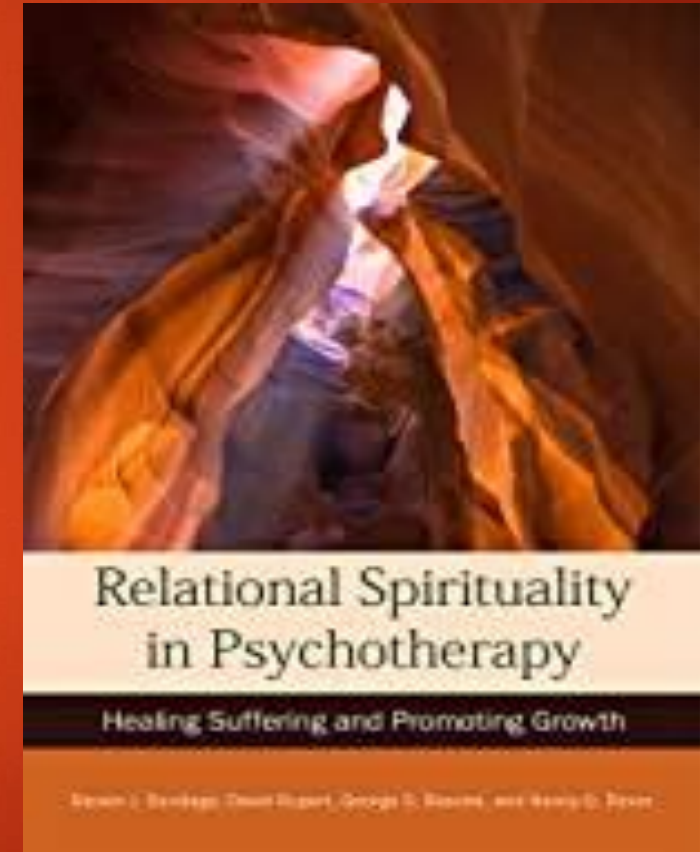
- ❖ Trauma risk for faith leaders (Ruffing ea, 2021). Burnout risk for all helping professions
- ❖ Benefits of groups for authentic connection around vocational stress and meaning-making. Pilot data evidence for burnout, resilience, and well-being effects (Captari ea, 2022)
- ❖ Current project Funded by Peale Foundation
www.pealefoundation.org



Relational Spirituality Model

(Sandage, Rupert, Stavros, & Devor, 2020)

- ❖ *Relational Spirituality* – ways of relating to the sacred or ultimate.
- ❖ Relational dynamics shape human development in ecological contexts.
- ❖ Growth often involves destabilization & re-balancing of dwelling *and* seeking dialectic



Spiritual Dwelling and Seeking

(Wuthnow, 1998; Sandage et al., 2020)

Relational Spirituality Dimension	Supporting Attachment System Function	Key Formation Outcome
Dwelling	Safe Haven	Well-Being
Seeking	Secure Base	Growth

Spiritual Dwelling: Key Dimensions

1. Community
2. Spiritually and Emotionally Regulating Practices
3. Spiritual Awareness or Mindfulness
4. Internalized Commitments



Judith Visker

Dwelling within Secure Attachments is a Key to Well-Being

- ▶ Humans and other mammals need connections to feel safe & to regulate stress and anxiety.
- ▶ Attachment security is one of the best predictors of spiritual and mental health.



Spiritual Seeking: Key Dimensions

1. Exploration of New Spiritual Understanding
2. Openness to Difference/Diversity
3. Tolerating Ambiguity
4. Reflective Growth in Spiritual Complexity

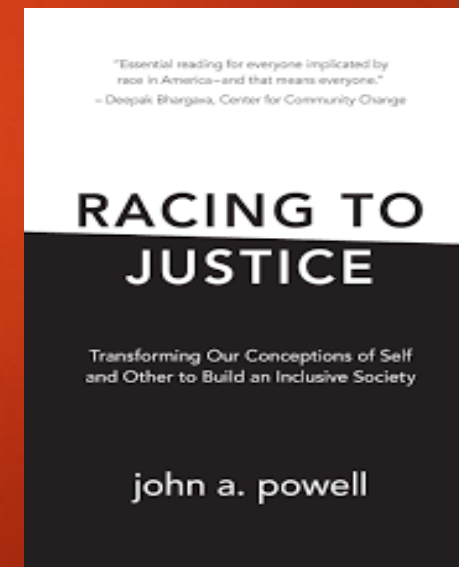


Relational Spirituality involves Ecological and Systemic Dynamics

As John A. Powell (2012) has argued, “if spirituality is to engage suffering and its causes, it must also be concerned with how institutions and structures function in society” (p. 199).



SR communities and individual orientations can promote or work against social justice and well-being for all (Hauge et al., 2021)



Balancing Dwelling and Seeking:

Summary

- ❖ Relational Spirituality involves a developmental and dialectical process of dwelling and seeking.
- ❖ Dwelling and seeking need to be balanced over time to avoid risks of rigidity or chaos (empirical evidence with mental health clients and religious leaders – Jankowski et al., 2021; Jankowski et al., 2022).
- ❖ Healthy and diverse relational ecologies are key to this balancing.

Humility as *Grounded* or *from the Earth*

“The Latin root for humility is humus (earth or ground), and this “grounded” semantic field of humility seems to converge with a capacity to face one’s limitations without excessive shame.”

Wolfeich, Keefe-Perry,
Sandage, & Paine
(2016, pp147-8)



Three Challenges to Healthy Humility and Practitioner Well-Being

(see Jankowski et al., 2021 humility formation study)

Counter-Humility Temptation	Possible Manifestations
Expansive Grandiosity	Overfunctioning Perfectionism Narcissism
Reactivity to Difference and Conflict	Ethnocentrism Shame Resentment
Hiding the Self	Isolation Hyper-Autonomy Addiction



Practice Context Factors That Can Limit Healthy Dwelling and Seeking

1. Work and role overload
2. Perfectionistic and/or competitive ethos
3. Inequity
4. Relational aggression
5. Limited professional growth and training opportunities
6. Limited opportunities for research and/or consultation
7. Lack of openness to input for systemic change
8. Lack of diversity competence and inclusion
9. Avoidance of processing vocational stress and suffering

Possible Pathways for Transforming our Communities of Healers

1. Facilitating Interdisciplinary Collaboration & Learning
2. Preventing Burnout **and** Promoting Well-Being
3. Cultural Humility/Competence and Social Justice in Organizations and Professional Ecologies
4. Multi-Textured Professional Growth Strategies (ie Balancing Dwelling and Seeking)
5. Research (and Accountability) on Practitioner Formation and Well-Being **Over Time**

