

***Spiritual Identity and Transformation***  
**Third Annual Canadian Conference  
on Spirituality and Social Work**

June 1-3, 2004  
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

**Abstracts of Presentations & Workshops**

**Wednesday, June 2, 2004 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM**

**“Connecting to Inner Guidance and Transforming Professional Self-Concept”**

Liora Birnbaum, The College of Judea and Samaria,  
Ariel, Israel

Perhaps the most significant clinical application of mindfulness meditation is the capacity to adopt an "observing self" that pays careful attention to one's thoughts and feelings at a given moment (Marlatt and Kriseller, 1999). Creative focusing while meditating can help us connect to our inner guidance (or guides). Tuning in to inner guidance is presented as a developmental process. As an additional source of knowledge about the self, it allows for better self-containment and a sense of security and trust in universal guidance. This enables connection to a deeper level of the self where we are able to have extraordinary experiences. This paper describes a workshop conducted with two groups of social work students: first year students not enrolled yet in field work, and third year students approaching the end of their practicum training. Students' experiences included bodily sensations, various interactions with a guiding figure, verbal messages or advice, and significant images. Comparisons of the two groups raise the possibility that ongoing use of this technique may facilitate the evolution of a different professional self-concept.

**“Listening for Meaning: The Intersection of Spirituality, Culture, and Worldview”**

Janet Clark, PhD, McMaster University, Divinity College, ON

Accompanying the unprecedented attentiveness to spiritual assessment in social work practice is the subtle danger that spirituality will become compartmentalized as a distinct item for clinical analysis rather than an interwoven aspect of a person's worldview or cultural frame of reference. Although an array of spiritual assessment instruments have been offered in the literature in recent years (e.g. Frame, 2000; Hall & Edwards, 1996; Richards & Bergin, 1997), this paper argues for a more holistic approach in which practitioners are deeply attuned to the meanings, and the source of meanings, that people use to interpret experience and make sense of the world. The argument is supported by the findings from the author's research which addressed a fundamental question lying at the heart of spiritually sensitive practice: How do practitioners go about understanding the worldview or frame of reference of the Other? A novel aspect of the study was the use of an in-depth method of reflective inquiry (Schon, 1983, 1995) to access and analyze the "experienced knowledge" (Hunt, 1987, 1992) of a purposive sample of frontline practitioners, and then comparing this knowledge to the formal knowledge of the profession. What emerged in the analysis was not so much a skill set of assessment techniques but rather such things as a learner's stance, epistemological humility, inductive interpretation, dialogical understanding, and vigilant self-reflexivity. The overarching theme was "creating space" for the mutual exploration of meaning and the negotiation of shared understanding. Among the numerous pedagogical implications arising from the study are ways of cultivating these capacities in professional education for practice.

**“Allying with the Medicine Wheel: Social Work Practice with Aboriginal People”**

Laura Verniest, BSW, MSW student, Carleton University, ON

This paper looks at the role of social work practice for Aboriginal people, using an Aboriginal perspective, as it considers spirituality central to healing. The Medicine Wheel is used as an analytic tool used to analyze various roles of social work practice, illustrate the client's location, and form action plans for social work practice. A structural, ally/anti-oppression perspective complements the Aboriginal perspective. Spirituality is an important

part of the Medicine Wheel. The incorporation of spirituality along with the physical, emotional, and mental aspects of the Medicine Wheel guides the social worker to holistic, balanced practice. The recommendation made is that respectful social work practice tailored to the treatment of the client's belief systems encourages healthy identity development. This article postulates that social workers who use an Aboriginal perspective, Medicine Wheel approach, ally/anti-oppressive stance can help their Aboriginal clients enter into their own healing journey on a micro level, while educating them on structural issues using a structural analysis. Through increased awareness of structural oppression, clients that appreciate an ally/anti-oppression movement may enter into a shared collective healing journey and may aspire to the possibility of allying with others.

### **“Meditation: Its Therapeutic Use In The Treatment of Alcohol and Substance Dependence”**

Victor Montgomery, MSW, PhD student, University of Toronto

This article discusses and encourages the use of meditation by social workers and other therapists as a treatment option for patients seeking relief from alcohol and chemical addictions. Used alone, or as an adjunctive treatment, meditation has demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing alcohol and drug use by creating a personal environment where the desire to use alcohol and drugs is reduced and the coping skills to defeat the urges to use are increased. Meditation is easy to learn and teach, supports the strengths perspective, client empowerment, and is without contraindications for most clients. Its cost to implement is small and positive impact on clients measurable.

### **“Profound Connections Between Person and Place: Exploring Location, Spirituality, and Social Work”**

Michael Kim Zapf, PhD, University of Calgary, AB

Rural social work has a long tradition of exploring spiritual connections between persons and the places they inhabit. Recent efforts in the mainstream literature to incorporate spirituality into the knowledge foundation of the urban-based profession have often presented spirituality as either an additional aspect of the individual client to be assessed, or just another resource for use in clinical practice. A rural perspective, with particular attention to the worldview offered by traditional knowledge systems, suggests a very different understanding of spirituality that does not separate person from place. Spiritual identity in the rural context is inseparable from a sense of place. When the environment is understood as a conscious entity, a partner, then spiritual transformation must occur with the environment, not in it.

### **“Chanting - A Way to Spirituality” WORKSHOP**

Iris Bertrand, MSW student, Laurentian University, ON

The world is naturally musical. Music such as chanting, is a language that has universal elements in it. It is a way of reconnecting with the cycles of nature and life. It is a powerful instrument that connects many cultures around the world. The connection is in the spirit which lies in the mystical tradition of chanting, despite differences in practices and philosophies. Today chanting is used to awaken the consciousness, tune our being, heal our body, lift our spirit, mourn the dead, and enhance celebrations. Chanting can consist of tones, humming or words repeated over and over again. Chanting often has main inspirational, sacred phrases in them. Breathing is an important part of chanting. Breath and soul are believed by many to be closely connected as life's mystery lies in the breath. We begin and end chanting with the breath, just like we begin and end life. Chanting offers people a way of connecting and transforming their lives physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This is an experiential workshop. Participants will explore their breathing, and the sound that lies within themselves and how that can be life changing and empowering through chanting.

**“Integrating Spirituality into Jewish Family Service  
Agencies Through the Use of Healing Circles” WORKSHOP**

Tracey Lipsig, MSW, Jewish Family & Community Services, Chicago, USA

Marjorie Sokoll, BSW, MEd, Jewish Family & Community Services, Boston, USA

Social Workers deal with psychic pain – their own and that of their clients. As professionals we often feel depleted of resources which could revitalize us. Human service professionals are as much in need of stress reduction, self-care, and healing as those who receive our care. Two Jewish Family Service Agencies in the United States (Boston and Chicago) use Healing Circles to foster an atmosphere of spirituality and support within the workplace. Spirituality, faith, and prayer, can be used quite effectively with some modifications in the workplace to promote personal growth and prevent burnout. We will also discuss ways in which to integrate healing techniques and spiritual concepts with our work with clients. Particular attention will be paid to the rich spiritual resources within the Jewish tradition, which speak with wisdom to the human condition of brokenness and the journey toward spiritual wholeness.