

## Book Review

### *Miracle Moments: The nature of the mind's power in relationships and psychotherapy*

**Antonio Montiero dos Santos**

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This is fundamentally a book on a spiritual approach to psychotherapy and will be of particular interest to those who have a transpersonal bent. The book consists of two sections. In the first section, Santos reports on a series of interviews with famous therapists: Carl Rogers, Eugene Gendlin, Erving Polster, Virginia Satir, John Grinder, Robert Nemiroff, and Robert Stein. The rest of the book consists of Santos' explication of his views of the nature of psychopathology and of therapy. His core idea about therapy is that change occurs through the occurrence of "miracle moments"—moments of fundamental and deep meeting.

Santos' key idea is that growth and change comes about through the individual's accessing his or her inner self. By inner self, Santos is not referring to a western conception of an inner self, such as the concept of self that is often criticized by intellectuals as Euro-American and individualistic. To the contrary, his view of the inner self is a sense of connection with all other living beings and the universe, as in Eastern thought. He simply uses the term "inner self" as a term for soul, spirit, God, or inner wisdom. Santos argues that it is the ego that gets in the way of accessing this inner wisdom, which really goes beyond the individual self to unite the individual with all the universe. It is precisely the ego as an individual, separate self, acting to enhance and protect itself, that gets in the way of accessing this inner wisdom.

Therapy is the process of transcending ego illusions to access inner wisdom. This occurs primarily through a relationship with a therapist who him or herself has transcended the ego: "Healing happens when psychotherapists abandon their protective shield and help clients to abandon their masks, their facades, and their misperceptions about the world. As they lose the desire for separateness, they are healed, recovering the spark of oneness. Living deep within the mind, this spark is the ultimate nourishment that makes life meaningful" (p. 265). This involves overcoming the resistances and deceptions thrown up by the ego. In order to do this, the therapist and the client must meet in "miracle moments," moments when the masks or facades of both drop and there is genuine meeting. Miracle moments are moment-by-moment meetings characterized by flow, spontaneity, intuition, and creativity. They cannot be made to happen by the ego. Rather, they are something that happens as one learns to trust. They include relating to the client as an utterly unique individual, rather than seeing the client through the lens of a theory or a diagnosis.

The primary source or inspiration for Santos' ideas is *A Course in Miracles*, a book with which I was not familiar until reading this book. However, it forms the backbone of the

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book. Santos says, “*A Course in Miracles* gives us the framework to incorporate a constant watch over the ego so that inner peace and wisdom can flow. The work with the *Course* is unlike any other spiritual path one can come across” (p. 295). Santos also blends in ideas from other religious traditions and from his knowledge of conventional psychotherapeutic thought, including the work of Rogers and Freud.

In the first part of the book, Santos reports on interviews he conducted with a number of famous therapists. Of particular relevance to person-centered therapists are his interviews with Carl Rogers and Eugene Gendlin. I found these interviews interesting in their own right. However, after reading the first part I had anticipated a systematic analysis of the ideas expressed by these theorists. Instead, in the second part of the book Santos presents his vision of psychotherapy primarily based in *A Course in Miracles*. He incorporates ideas from the interviews when relevant, but there is no systematic carry-over from the first part of the book into the second part.

I want to address the following: How does *Miracle Moments* relate to person-centered practice? Are miracle moments necessary for change?

First, how does this book relate to person-centered practice? It depends on how one defines person-centered practice. One view holds that one is person-centered if one believes in the therapeutic conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, and congruence, and in clients’ capacities for growth and self-actualization. Defined this way, person-centered practice can include the use of techniques and procedures, such as those used in Natalie Rogers’ Expressive Arts Therapy and in experiential therapy. Santos’ approach is person-centered in this sense. He certainly believes in self-actualization (remember: the self as something spiritual). He also prizes the importance of the therapeutic conditions. In particular, his view of therapy resembles some of the later views of Carl Rogers on therapy as a meeting of persons and the value of trusting deep, inner intuitions.

However, if one adheres to a more traditional, nondirective approach to person-centered therapy, then Santos’ ideas do not fit so well. Santos is considerably more directive than a traditional nondirective therapist would be. This directivity can include transpersonal moments, such as when Santos “sees” a shape behind his client, mentions it, and the client begins to talk about the death of her boyfriend, which she had previously not mentioned. He may ask clients to close their eyes and use guided imagery. He also reports using confrontation to break through denial.

Santos asserts that miracle moments are essential to therapeutic change. This is a difficult claim to evaluate. If by “change” he means the kind of (trans)personal revolution that he believes is the core nature of therapeutic change, he may or may not be correct. However, if he is talking about the more mundane kinds of changes that some clients get out of therapy, such as getting over depression, coming to make an important personal decision, overcoming anxiety, or whatever, then I do not believe he is correct. There is a lot of research on what could be called “significant moments” in therapy. A major research paradigm, the “events” paradigm, initiated by Laura Rice, Leslie Greenberg, Robert Elliott, and Alvin Mahrer, is based on the idea that research should focus on significant in-session events. Although there is evidence showing that significant change events can and do relate to therapeutic outcome, there is no evidence that they are necessary. It is one thing to say that significant moments may increase the likelihood of change, it is another to say they are required.

In conclusion, this is an interesting and thought-provoking book. The first section of interviews with famous therapists is illuminating. The rest of the book, which consists of Santos' elaboration of his transpersonal view of change, will be nourishing to those with a spiritual bent and probably controversial to those who do not share such a perspective.

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