

*Integrating Spirituality in Counseling: A Manual for Using the Experiential Focusing Method*

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We all search for meaning Hinterkopf tells us in the prologue to *Integrating Spirituality*. Her search led her to Victor Frankel, the Peace Corps, an Apache reservation, and, finally, to Gendlin's Experiential Focusing Method and the discovery of the "still, small voice inside." Through Focusing, she became more aware of her creative process, gained "life energy," and connected more deeply to "the transcendent dimension." With *Integrating Spirituality*, Hinterkopf shares the fruits of her journey and of 25 years of practicing and teaching Focusing.

*Integrating Spirituality* is a statement on the nature of spirituality and its place in psychotherapy, and is a manual for using Focusing. Spirituality, according to Hinterkopf, does not have to do with beliefs or allegiances or character or conduct, but with a certain psychological process: "Spirituality or the spiritual experience [is] a subtle bodily feeling with vague meanings that brings new, clearer meanings involving a transcendent growth process." Focusing's stock in trade is the transmutation of vague feelings into clear ideas and enlivening energy (indeed, Hinterkopf's definition of spirituality is based on the Focusing concept of felt sense). Few minor modifications are needed to make Focusing a means for promoting spiritual growth.

The bulk of the book is a concise, readable manual on doing Focusing with "spiritual process." Hinterkopf's exposition is thorough, clear, and contains a number of guides, examples, and exercises for working on spiritual issues. For counselors who accept Hinterkopf's ideas on spirituality, and who find value in Focusing, *Integrating Spirituality* is an excellent resource.

Hinterkopf writes in the classic, didactic tradition of psychotherapy in which counselors work from a definite picture of human life-- a psychology-- and assist clients in reaching goals defined by the picture. Like others in this tradition, she cannot but propose a metaphysics of personality that is at odds with the views of self and world held by many to whom her theory refers. Hinterkopf claims that "psychological growth and spiritual growth are synonymous," and that "spirituality is part of the basic human experience." She defines spirituality so broadly that those who deny any part of it will be annoyed to hear that it is an intrinsic part of their experience and those who adhere to a particular tradition will be dismayed that the definition does not include any of the particulars that gives their spirituality meaning. In practice, though, this may matter little. Skeptics will avoid her sort of therapy, and "believers" will be pleased to find themselves with a counselor who at least tries to help them along their path.

Hinterkopf wants her process-based definition of spirituality to serve as a basis for work with spiritual and religious experiences that any counselor can use with any client. She succeeds, provided that counselors accept the sufficiency of a model (including Focusing, a simplistic model of spiritual development, and "spiritual wellness") that addresses only the "processing" of spiritual experience.

The results of using Focusing to promote spiritual growth, as one tells from the book's counseling excerpts and anecdotes, are rather unoriginal descriptions of experiences that always end positively: "Like I have a feeling of opening up to greater joy, to--um--more possibilities--um--anything that is to come." Not one of the clients says anything complicated, paradoxical, intellectual, original, or ironic about their spiritual experiences. Am I expecting too much? Maybe Hinterkopf's clients had nothing original to say? I doubt it. Focusing is partly responsible.

Focusing offers only a few, simplistic ideas for understanding experience. For example, the concepts of Focusing and the Inner Critic support a distinction between "abusive" and "life-affirming" religious experiences that support a view of spiritual development as marked almost entirely by positive feelings. Its anti-intellectual approach denies thinking any role in spiritual development. (Hinterkopf asks whether an intervention makes "a felt difference or merely a mental difference.") Further, Focusing requires the therapist to orchestrate and direct a process by personifying feelings and restating the client's words. Hinterkopf's Focusing approach to spiritual development cannot but systematically influence the content and meaning of clients' experiences.

Any method of working with spiritual issues that does not allow clients to bring all their experiences and resources-- intellect, imagination, emotions-- to bear on their spiritual development; that does not take content as seriously as it takes process; that does not take guilt, shame, self-criticism, fear, judgment, and other "negative" feelings as seriously as it takes ease, light, joy, and compassion; and that does not address behaviors, cannot be a basis for a general approach to facilitating spiritual growth.

*Reviewed by:*  
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