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Journal of Humanistic Psychology published online 28 March 2014
DOI: 10.1177/0022167814525261
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What is This?
Person-Centered Spiritual Maturation: A Multidimensional Model

Jared D. Kass

Abstract
Person-centered spiritual maturation has conceptual and historical roots in my work with Carl Rogers, as a staff member of the Person-Centered Approach Project. It is a person-specific process of psychospiritual development that can be mentored in communities where belief systems and cultural identities are diverse. It enables individuals to deepen engagement with contemplative practices from spiritual traditions that hold personal salience, while building inclusive, respectful communities. This multidimensional model emerges from three decades mentoring person-centered spiritual maturation with university students in the service of their growth as professionals and socially responsible citizens. Growth includes (a) behavioral self-regulation through mindfulness; (b) cognitive understanding of humanity’s chain of pain that supports social justice; (c) social–emotional development that repairs broken attachment templates and promotes compassionate attunement to self and others; (d) contemplative practice that strengthens secure existential attachment and taps the human capacity for unconditional altruistic love; and (e) formation of a resilient worldview, confidence in life and self, that helps people confront life’s existential, interpersonal, and intergroup tensions with sufficient internal composure to derive maturational growth. This model provides a cohesive multidimensional explanation of person-centered spiritual maturation that highlights its prosocial value, integrates relevant neuroscience, and offers researchers a conceptual framework for future investigations.

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Keywords
resilient worldview, prosocial behavior, health-promoting behavior, self-regulation, community, mindfulness, meditation, contemplative practice, spirituality, chain of pain, secure existential attachment

Person-centered spiritual maturation has conceptual and historical roots in my work with Dr. Carl Rogers, as a staff member of the Person-Centered Approach Project (C. R. Rogers, 1980; C. R. Rogers et al., 1978). It refers to a process of psychospiritual development that is person-specific, and that can be undertaken in communities which include diverse cultural identities and belief systems (Kass, 2007b; Kass & Lennox, 2005). It enables individuals to deepen engagement with contemplative practices from spiritual traditions that hold personal salience, while building communities that embody principles of inclusion, social justice, and dignity for all people and cultures. Thus, person-centered spiritual maturation has prosocial implications for a society that is fragmented across fault lines of religion and cultural identity.

Since Rogers’s initial formulations, person-centered theory has received valuable critiques and contributions from other psychotherapeutic perspectives. These include (a) multicultural and feminist theory (Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002; Brown & Ballou, 1992; Sue & Sue, 1981), (b) psychodynamic attachment theory and the neuroscience of empathic attunement (Porges, 2011; Schore, 2001), (c) trauma and peace psychology (Herman, 1997; Kelman, 1997; Mattson, 2003; Solomon & Siegel, 2003; van der Kolk, 1994), and (d) contemplative psychology (Germer & Siegel, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kass, 1991a; Newberg & D’Aquili, 1998; Pargament, Maton, & Hess, 1992; Rama, Ballantine, & Ajaya, 1976). The multidimensional model of person-centered spiritual maturation presented in this article incorporates these critiques and contributions, offering constructive additions to ongoing refinements in person-centered theory (Bozarth, 1998; Cain & Seeman, 2002; Cooper, O’Hara, Schmid, & Wyatt, 2007; Joseph & Worsley, 2005; Tudor & Worrall, 2006) and reformulations of humanistic psychology’s role in social transformation (Proctor, Cooper, Sanders, & Malcolm, 2006; Serlin, 2011). By locating person-centered spiritual maturation at the relational interface between self, life’s existential insecurities, human micro systems, and socio-cultural macro systems, this model highlights rigid social stratification (power, privilege, and oppression) as a destructive force that magnifies humanity’s chain of pain (Kass, 2007b). In addition, this model highlights the role of spiritual growth within the context of diverse community as an antidote to these destructive forces. Thus, the ability to be in community with the other, managing life’s existential, interpersonal, and intergroup tensions with
resilience and empathic attunement to others is a central feature of person-centered spiritual maturation (Hoshmand & Kass, 2003).

**Background**

From 1975 to 1981, I was fortunate to work closely with Dr. Carl Rogers, as a staff member of the Person-Centered Approach Project (C. R. Rogers et al., 1978). Our staff tested the possibility that communities can benefit from the same nourishing interpersonal conditions as individuals and small groups (C. R. Rogers, 1980). Many of Rogers’s original formulations were affirmed (Kirschenbaum, 2007). As we modeled empathic understanding, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (with each other and community members), a significant degree of community behavior mirrored and amplified these nourishing conditions, creating a holding environment for honest self-expression, inevitable conflicts, restorative dialogue, and enhanced levels of interpersonal and intrapsychic attunement (C. R. Rogers, 1980). Robust community, we also learned, benefited from nonverbal communication and awareness. Natalie Rogers, Maria Bowen, and I incorporated the expressive arts and meditation, discovering ways that sensorimotor awareness, movement and dance, music, singing, personal artwork, and contemplative silence provided regenerative energy to person-centered communities (Kass, 1985; N. Rogers, 1984, 1993).

This creative, multimodal ambiance helped introduce a spiritual component into these communities, and into Rogers’s conceptual understanding of the self-actualizing tendency. In *A Way of Being*, he quoted a written narrative by a community member:

I found it to be a profound spiritual experience. I felt the oneness of experience in the community. We breathed together, felt together, even spoke for one another. I felt the power of the “life force” that infuses each of us—whatever that is. I felt its presence without the usual barricades of “me-ness” or “you-ness”—it was like a meditative experience when I feel myself as a center of consciousness, very much a part of the broader, universal consciousness. And yet with that extraordinary sense of oneness, the separateness of each person present has never been more clearly preserved. (C. R. Rogers, 1980, pp. 196-197).

Rogers was a bold intellectual who had learned to embrace quantitative and qualitative forms of inquiry. His incorporation of such impressively cogent, subjective, first-person reports into an evolving conceptual model of growth characterized his courageous stance toward the limiting aspects of empirical science. As our community-building project developed, Rogers grew...
increasingly interested in “spiritual experience [as an] internal [source of] meaning” (C. R. Rogers, personal communication, June 13, 1980). Gradually, he expanded his understanding of the self-actualizing tendency to include “a formative tendency . . . within the universe” through which “a creative, not a disintegrative, process is at work,” and through which “the human organism has been moving toward the more complete development of awareness” (C. R. Rogers, 1980, pp. 124-128). Seven years later, as he continued to contemplate the self-transcendent dimension of human experience, he poignantly referred to his initial formulation of the self-actualizing tendency (C. R. Rogers, 1959): “In regard to the self-actualizing tendency, I hope you have re-read my definition of it in Koch. It finds a place—small though it may be—for the tendency toward transcendence” (C. R. Rogers, personal communication, January 5, 1987).

In the latter years of the Person-Centered Approach project, I became interested in spiritual experience as a phenomenological outgrowth of participation in person-centered communities that incorporate the arts and contemplative practice. I joined the Lesley University Graduate School faculty, initiating a research program (mixed quantitative and qualitative methods) on spirituality as a resource for psychological resilience and prosocial behavior. As part of my research program, with Rogers’s support and mentoring, I began collaborative work at Harvard Medical School as a Visiting Lecturer, joining Dr. Herbert Benson’s Section on Behavioral Medicine at Beth Israel and New England Deaconess Hospitals (1985-1991).

We received grant support from Laurance Rockefeller to develop and validate two research instruments: an Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes, measuring a resilient worldview (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Caudill, et al., 1991); and an Index of Core Spiritual Experience (INSPIRIT), quantifying contemplative experience phenomenologically (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991). Our research was conducted in Benson’s cognitive-behavioral outpatient programs (treating cardiovascular and other stress-related illnesses) in which patients learned to identify behavioral symptoms of stress and triggering cognitive distortions, while practicing elicitation of the relaxation response and mindfulness through psychoeducation, hatha yoga, and clinically standardized meditation (Benson, 1975; Benson, Rosner, Marzetta, & Klemchuk, 1974; Borysenko, 1989).

We found positive correlations between meditation, a resilient worldview, and reduced frequency of stress-related medical symptoms. Interestingly, belief in God was not correlated with improvement. But patients who reported contemplative spiritual experiences showed significant improvement. These results suggested that personally experienced spirituality contributes to well-being more decisively than religious beliefs not
rooted in personal experience (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991). These findings were consistent with Allport’s important distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967; Bergin, Masters, & Richards, 1987).

Equally interesting, patients who benefited from their spirituality scored high on the INSPIRIT at the outset of the intervention. There were no significant shifts on the INSPIRIT during the 10-week programs (Kass, 1995; Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991). This result suggested that brief behavioral medicine interventions with a meditative component can help patients increase inner calm and use preexisting spiritual resources. However, development of robust spiritual resources requires a longer period of contemplative practice and engagement.

Consequently, I shifted my research focus to this developmental period, studying person-centered spiritual maturation as a prevention-oriented resource for resilience. As health-risk behaviors and lack of community on the university campus became emblematic of higher education’s failure to provide preventive social, emotional, and spiritual development (Astin, 1993; Boyer, 1990; Chickering, 1993; Parks, 1986; Walsh, 2002), I created a curriculum to mentor students from diverse backgrounds in person-centered spiritual growth and community (Kass, 1991b, 1998a, 2001). However, it quickly became evident that maturational growth was limited when the curriculum focused too strictly on meditation practice. Many students carried complex layers of self-defeating behavior and distorted narratives about self and cultural others, inherited from their families, cultural identity groups, religious upbringing, and histories of marginalization or privilege (Hoshmand & Kass, 2003). Spiritual growth required complex facilitation that is responsive to these diverse elements of self.

These recognitions deepened when I joined a social justice initiative, the Boston Clergy and Religious Leaders Group for Interfaith Dialogue (Hoshmand & Kass, 2003). As our steering committee worked to build mutual understanding and respect among religious groups with traumatic histories of religious and racial conflict, it was clear that shared moments of tranquil meditation were simply the first step in a challenging process that required courageous dialogue, psychological self-inquiry, disciplined self-regulation of reactive emotions, intentional empathic attunement to others, and transcendence of ego-centered narratives and behavior. To progress, we needed to cultivate agape: unconditional altruistic love for the other that transcends hatred and differences. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s eloquent explanation of this elevated form of spiritual love (King, 1958/1986) crystallized for me the foundational role of empathic understanding and positive regard in a culturally inclusive, person-centered community.
As an outgrowth of these formative projects, this article presents a systematic model of person-centered spiritual maturation. The model incorporates theistic, transpersonal, and secular humanist belief systems, supporting development of an existential worldview congruent with each individual’s life experiences, personal beliefs, and self-identified cultural identities.

**Multidimensional Model of Spiritual Maturation**

Using Rogers’s holistic lens, spiritual maturation can be conceptualized as an expression of “the formative tendency” through which “the human organism [moves] toward the more complete development of awareness . . . toward increased order and interrelated complexity . . . in the direction of wholeness, integration, and a unified life” (C. R. Rogers, 1980, pp. 124-128). Research in the psychology of religion and spirituality has identified five dimensions of self—behavioral, cognitive, social–emotional, contemplative, and an integrative (resilient worldview-building) function—in which this maturational process can be observed (Kass & Lennox, 2005). Although growth in each dimension has been studied independently, the process is synergistic. Consequently, person-centered spiritual maturation can be defined as a multidimensional learning process that catalyzes interactive development in behavioral, cognitive, social–emotional, contemplative, and integrative worldview-building dimensions of self (Kass, 2007b). This person-specific learning produces an observable shift in self-structure (C. R. Rogers, 1959): a reduction in rigid psychological barriers that alienate individuals from self, others, and life; and emergence of a permeable self-structure that connects individuals to self, others, and life. This shift in self-structure can be observed in behaviors that demonstrate compassionate attunement with self and others. In addition, this shift expresses itself attitudinally as secure existential attachment: the perceived experience of being “at one” with self, others, and life (Kass, 2007b). The following discussion describes synergistic growth in each of the five dimensions.

**Behavioral Dimension: Self-Regulation Skills That Promote Individual and Social Well-Being Through Mindfulness**

Cultivating prosocial behavior and reducing destructive tendencies are figur al goals in every spiritual tradition. From the person-centered perspective, this learning process does not begin with imposed behavioral prescriptions. Rather, it begins when individuals perceive problems in the self-regulatory capacities of self or society. Whether such dysregulation undermines well-being (or produces injustice) at the individual, micro-, or macro-system
levels, individuals begin to seek methods to understand and solve these issues more effectively.

When mentors respond to requests for behavioral change and insight by establishing relational trust and credibility, these concerns become an embarkation point for collaborative inquiry and gradual recognition of the emotional reactivity (fear, anger, pain, and perceived needs for dominance, control, or self-soothing) at the root of destructive behavior. This recognition is the first step toward mindfulness, a learned behavior that interrupts reactivity. Taught by each spiritual tradition through various forms of reflective contemplation, mindfulness promotes active awareness of current experience, the ability to tolerate emotional agitation through self-observation, and a gradual increase in the capacity to respond to agitating events with internal composure (Armstrong, 2011; Germer, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney, 1985; Kass & Trantham, 2014; Siegel, 2007). Regarding self, the traditions teach mindfulness as a behavioral antidote for agitated emotions; unhealthy substance use, food intake, or sexual behavior; and compulsive materialism (in the service of self-aggrandizement or self-soothing). Regarding others, the traditions teach mindfulness as a behavioral antidote for hostile reactivity, escalation of anger to violence, compulsive striving for control and dominance over others, and as a foundation for spiritually informed social justice activism and cultures of peace (Heschel, 1996; Sharma, 2011; Smith, 1991; Spretnak, 1991).

The value of mindfulness and meditation has become increasingly evident in prevention psychology, where overly simplistic approaches to behavioral self-regulation (e.g., “Just Say No”) have demonstrated limited efficacy (CSR, Inc., 1995; Leshner, 1995; Tobler & Stratton, 1995). Destructive behaviors are triggered by deeply ingrained fight–flight–freeze responses of the autonomic nervous system. These protective mechanisms have prolonged adaptive value; their activation is difficult to override (Sarafino, 2008). Meditation elicits a relaxation response (Benson, 1975): counterconditioning to the stress response that reduces autonomic nervous system hyperarousal and promotes inner calm through mediation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis. Deep breathing, supported by mental concentration techniques, is a foundational method because it increases heart-rate variability, a biomarker for homeostasis of the autonomic nervous system and amelioration of psychophysiological disorders (Gevirtz, 2011), through mediating effects of the parasympathetic ventral vagal complex (Porges, 2007). In addition, the practice of mindfulness during meditation produces neurological changes (reductions in amygdala activity and density, increases in left hemisphere prefrontal cortex activity and insula density, and hemispheric synchrony) associated with accurate stress appraisal, awareness of sensations and
thoughts, and improvements in cognitive attention (Creswell, Baldwin, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2007; Davidson et al., 2003; Holzel et al., 2010; Holzel et al., 2011; Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004). Techniques that produce deep relaxation and mindfulness are taught within each tradition as complementary methods (Goleman, 1988), because their combination fosters nonattachment to destructive emotions and thoughts (Coffey, Hartman, & Fredrickson, 2010).

**Cognitive Dimension: Development of Intellectual Processes That Shape Narratives About Self, Others, and Life/God**

Despite the stress-mediating effect of meditation as a behavioral practice, a cognitive dimension of learning is also necessary. A simplistic focus on “reducing reactivity to stress” dilutes the traumatic sociocultural realities of human experience. For millennia, humanity has been enmeshed in a *chain of pain*: a self-replicating pattern of violence, conflict, domination, subordination, and internalized oppression that perpetuates destructive behaviors toward self and others (Kass, 2007b). This chain of pain is a persistent trigger of the stress response (Kelman, 1997). Furthermore, the particular fight–flight–freeze behaviors exhibited by individuals (or groups) are shaped by the degree of disempowerment and trauma they experience through society’s pyramid of power (Kass, 1991b, 1995). People with socially sanctioned power tend to use it explicitly to reduce their stress, even at the expense of others. Disempowered people often resort to self-destructive behaviors that soothe stress. But many people have multiple facets of identity that include power and powerlessness. They use their power against the weak, while engaged in self-destructive activities (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Miller, 1976; Pinderhughes, 1989).

The relentless impact of social hierarchies on humanity’s chain of pain produces distorted narratives about self, others, and life/God (Kass, 2007b). These narratives (personal, familial, cultural, and religious) tend to be self-protective, tribal, mistrustful, rigidly hierarchical, and violent (Marsella, 2009), and distort perceptions among people who differ by religion, race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and physical capability (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998; Spretnak, 1982; Sue & Sue, 1981). As immature narratives infect religious texts, the mature spirituality at the core of each tradition is often subsumed by reactive attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate humanity’s chain of pain (Allport, 1950; Fowler, 1996; Kass, 2007b).

Thus, critical analysis and deconstruction of inherited narratives are key aspects of spiritual maturation (Clinebell, 1984; Fowler, 1996; Kass, 1995;
As reflective capacities mature, perceived locus of control for the chain of pain shifts from God to humans; perceptions of individual efficacy and social responsibility increase; a *universalizing faith* (in which the *other* is not categorically perceived as different or dangerous) emerges (Fowler, 1981; Kass & Lennox, 2005; Oser & Gmunder, 1991).

**Social–Emotional Dimension: Development of Secure Attachment Templates That Shape Relationships With Self, Others, and Life/God**

Despite the liberating effects of critical analysis, social–emotional growth is crucial. The chain of pain damages relational networks. It undermines secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1985; Bowlby, 1969), reduces its trauma-buffering effects, and reinforces insecure attachment templates that perpetuate destructive behavior (Schore, 2003; Solomon & Siegel, 2003). In vivo experiences of trustworthy relationship and unconditional altruistic love are necessary for the human psyche to release neural and somatic residues of trauma that produce rigid, highly defended, intellectualized self-structures resistant to emotional contact and repair (Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009; Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006; Rothschild, 2000). Consequently, the spiritual traditions emphasize the value of community. When spiritual communities become a regenerative resource for resilience and restoration of secure attachment templates (rather than a force for conformity to social norms and insular prejudice), they can play a crucial role in the maturational process (Pargament, 1997).

However, the spiritual traditions do not limit restoration of secure attachment to the interpersonal domain. Unconditional love and trustworthy relationship can be experienced in the transpersonal domain: in relationship with the “spirit of life”/God (Pargament, 1997). Viktor Frankl’s description of the sustaining alliance that he developed with life, while imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, provides a poignant example. The relational attachment he experienced during brief moments of solitude, in which he asked what *life* expected of him in the midst of this horror, became a vital source of resilient coping and internal coherence (Frankl, 1959; Kass, 1996a, 1996b). Thus, ontological meaning derived from this relational domain can be relevant to secular humanists as well as to people with formal religious beliefs.

Internal representations of God offer diagnostic insight into attachment templates that govern relationships with others and life (Hegy, 2007; Rizzuto, 1979). These images may compensate positively for relational deficits; more often, they reflect primary childhood attachment templates (McDonald,
Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005). For example, as a result of relationally impaired parenting (often complicated by cultural marginalization and traumatic life events), God may be represented as conditionally loving, judgmental, gender-dissonant or racially dissonant, punitive, or absent (Clinebell, 1984; Doehring, 1993; Spretnak, 1982). These images reflect insecure attachment that shapes subsequent relational templates and self-concept (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2005). But images of God need not remain static. As individuals mature, their images can change, reflecting emergent meaning-making (Fowler, 1996; Rizzuto, 1979). For example, childhood representations of God as trustworthy external protector may be rejected after traumatic life events. But if their emotional impact is healed (e.g., through spiritually integrative counseling [Jordan, 1986; Koenig & Pritchett, 1998; Pargament, 2007]), a more nuanced representation of God may emerge as a core dimension of self or inner guiding spirit that is actively present in the midst of suffering. Through this maturational process, the “spirit of life”/God can become a source of secure attachment for confronting humanity’s chain of pain, rather than a punitive cause (Kass, 2007a; Pargament, 1997).

**Contemplative Dimension: Building a Foundational Self-Structure for Secure Attachment With Self, Others, and Life/God**

While social–emotional healing can provide substantive repair to attachment templates, the spiritual traditions cultivate contemplative learning that builds a structural foundation for this reparative process. Meditation, in addition to its role in stress-regulation, can facilitate a transformation in awareness and self-concept. It generates an *internal perceptual orientation* where discursive and conceptual modes of thought are discovered to be surface phenomena of consciousness (Goleman, 1988; Kass, 1991a). In the interior geography of awareness (often compared to an ocean agitated at the surface but tranquil in its depths), contemplatives report experiences that deepen progressively: inner calm, intuitive inspiration, empty quiescence, and an ego-transcending state in which self, others, and life are discovered to be one indissoluble whole (A. M. Green & Green, 1977; Kass, 1995; Schuon, 1984). Few individuals fully achieve this unitive state, but temporary experiences of unity and numinous inspiration fill the literature on mysticism (R. Hood, 1995; R. Hood Jr., Hall, Watson, & Biderman, 1979). These reports describe a transformation in self-perception: rather than being existentially independent, the individual ego transcends isolative boundaries, experiencing itself securely attached to an inclusive ground of being (Kass, 2007b; Pargament, 1997;
Stace, 1960; Tillich, 1952). When this experience is consolidated through sustained meditative practice, a foundational shift in self-structure occurs, through which this anchored awareness is incorporated into daily living (Merton, 1998). Such secure existential attachment amplifies the meaning of integrity in Erikson’s model of human development, and explains the foundational role of contemplative experience in spiritual maps of human maturation (Erikson, 1963; Kass, 2007b; Kass & Lennox, 2005).

Contemplative experience, as noted, can be understood through theistic, transpersonal, and secular humanist worldviews. Since William James published his pioneering study on religious experience, their transformative but essentially subjective nature has remained a contentious issue (James, 1902/1986; Wulff, 1997): Spiritual experiences are not universal; they are shaped by culture-specific concepts and images (Katz, 1978; Proudfoot, 1985); they can be distorted by cults or rigid fundamentalism (Deikman, 1994; Pargament, 1997); they can be triggered by organic dysfunction (Persinger, 1987); they can be irrational defense mechanisms (Ellis, 1986; R. May & Yalom, 1989); they can be distorted by the emotional agitation of traumatic violence ( Ehrenkranz & Coppola, 2000). However, human meaning-making develops at the interface of subjective and objective experience. Postmodern constructivism does not preclude the possibility that the phenomenal world and human consciousness emerge from a substrate of unitive being (Spretnak, 1991). Unitive spiritual experiences may not be caused by psychological distortions; rather, they may occur when distorted, conditioned forms of perception have been transcended (Easwaran, 2007; Holzel et al., 2011; G. May, 1988; Schuon, 1984).

Neuroscientific studies of meditation support this perspective. They suggest that unitive experience is a natural phenomenon and innate human capacity (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Newberg & D’Aquili, 1998). Three explanatory models have emerged: (a) deafferentiation of the left superior parietal lobe, associated with diminished body, spatial, and temporal awareness (D’Aquili & Newberg, 1999; Taylor, 2009); (b) high-amplitude gamma hemispheric synchrony, associated with heightened attention during a non-referential state of loving-kindness and compassion (Lutz et al., 2004); (c) reduced activity in the default mode network, associated with diminished self-thoughts (Holzel et al., 2011; Pagnoni, Cekic, & Guo, 2008). This third model is intriguing for two reasons. First, during deep “delta” sleep (a restorative cycle), the frontal cortex decouples from the default mode network (Horovitz et al., 2009), suggesting a restful dissolution of self-awareness. Second, in traditional yoga texts, deep sleep is described as the quiescent state of consciousness preceding unitive awareness (Prabhavananda, 1947). In an early example of neurophenomenology (Varela & Shear, 1999), a yogi...
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at the Menninger Foundation demonstrated the ability to generate delta rhythms while mindfully awake, subsequently describing the unitive awareness of this interior perceptual state (E. E. Green, Green, & Walters, 1971; Rama et al., 1976).

In their pioneering research on biofeedback, autogenic training, and meditation at the Menninger Foundation, Elmer and Alyce Green developed a neuroscience model of meditative experience, measuring electrical activity in the cortex, and using similar data from sleep research to refine their findings (A. M. Green & Green, 1977). Beta activity (13-26 cycles per second; cps) is predominant during waking consciousness, in which an externally focused perceptual orientation maintains environmental scanning, vigilant high arousal, and varying levels of anxiety. When meditators quiet the mind by closing their eyes, drawing their attention inward, and focusing attention on the breath, alpha activity (8-12 cps) becomes dominant, associated with relaxed peaceful calm and the ability to “witness” intrusive thoughts and emotions nonreactively. More extensive meditative practice increases theta activity (4-8 cps): a slow rhythm associated with Stage I sleep, in which hypnagogic imagery is often generated. In meditators, this state of deep reverie provides access to an integrative neurological process that increases creative insight, intuition, and problem solving, consistent with Jung’s model of the image-producing, archetypal unconscious (A. M. Green, 1984; E. E. Green, 1984; Hannah, 1981). This neurological process is now understood more fully as an integration of subcortical, right hemisphere, and left hemisphere processes (Siegel, 2007). Although intentional meditative elicitation of the delta state by a highly advanced yogi has only been documented once (E. E. Green et al., 1971), meditative elicitation of alpha–theta states has been replicated frequently (Cahn & Polich, 2006).

In summary, neuroscientific evidence does not prove the objective reality of the spiritual experiences associated with meditation, deep reverie, and contemplative prayer (Vaughan, 2002). However, it offers insight into the change in self-structure that emerges from sustained practice. This change is often described as “loss” of ego. But this description does not seem congruent with self-reports from advanced contemplatives whose ego functions remained robust following enlightenment experiences (Bodhi, 2005; Iqbal, 1991; Teresa-of-Avila, 1979; Yogananda, 1969). Their descriptions suggest an expansion of self-structure beyond isolative ego boundaries. In this expansion, the ego discovers its most essential identity: inherent connection to a transpersonal substrate of being. Through this shift in perceptions and self-structure, the individual experiences secure existential attachment and the associated ability to love neighbor as self (Kass, 2007b). This prosocial behavior, the spiritual traditions explain, is congruent with the unconditional
altruistic love at the structural core of being (Dalai-Lama, 2011; Heschel, 1951; Merton, 1996).

**Integrative Dimension: Formation of a Resilient Worldview Characterized by Confidence in Life and Self**

During person-centered spiritual development, there is an ongoing process of integration. Growth in the behavioral, cognitive, social–emotional, and contemplative dimensions of self takes place interactively and synergistically. Through this integration, individuals develop a resilient worldview that enables them to confront life’s existential, interpersonal, and intergroup tensions with internal composure and the ability to derive maturational growth (Kass & Trantham, 2014).

This resilient worldview can be characterized as confidence in life and self (Kass, 1998b). In response to daily frustrations and stress, confidence in life and self helps individuals maintain inner calm; make constructive, empowering decisions; develop cognitive flexibility that embraces change; and maintain secure attachments in the midst of relational tension. In response to life’s existential calamities and humanity’s chain of pain, confidence in life and self helps individuals develop and discern life purpose and meaning; balance empowering action with calm acceptance; and maintain secure existential attachment and the capacity for unconditional altruistic love. Thus, confidence in life and self becomes a functional expression of person-centered spiritual maturation.

Research in neuroscience and positive psychology provide additional insights into the dynamics and significance of a resilient worldview. Neurologically, this integrative process takes place in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. In this prefrontal region, subcortical, right hemisphere, and left hemisphere processes are synthesized into coherent narratives about self, others, and life (Kass & Trantham, 2014; Schore, 2012; Siegel, 2007). From the functional perspective of positive psychology, a resilient worldview has significant health-promoting and prosocial effects (Fredrickson, 1998). During heightened stress, resilient attitudes promote cardiovascular recovery from autonomic mobilization (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Individuals maintain a greater degree of life satisfaction; continue to experience love for, and support from, others; remain mindfully attentive to what is new and different in their daily experience; maintain their capacity for self-affirmation and joy; and remain confident that their lives have meaning and purpose (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Waugh, wager, Fredrickson, Noll, & Taylor,
Positivity broadens thought–action repertoires, reduces negativity, and creates an upward spiral of well-being (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). The prosocial values of resilient attitudes are equally evident (Diener, 2000; Fredrickson, 1998). They reduce own-race bias in face recognition (Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005), promote self-other overlap (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006), and strengthen nonmaterialist strategies for happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Frederickson has also shown resilient attitudes to be durable over time when reinforced by loving-kindness meditation (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010). Her research in positive psychology supports growing evidence that spiritual development has a beneficial effect on resilience (Southwick, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2005).

In closing, this integrative dimension, by synthesizing growth in behavioral, cognitive, social–emotional, and contemplative dimensions of self, produces a resilient worldview, confidence in life and self. This health-promoting, prosocial worldview is an observable expression of person-centered spiritual maturation.

Conclusions

Early in his career, Carl Rogers withdrew from religious training at Union Theological Seminary to study psychology at Teacher’s College, Columbia University (Kirschenbaum, 2007; C. R. Rogers, 1959). This shift was catalyzed by participation in the World Student Christian Federation Meeting in Beijing, China, in 1922. During this 6-month journey, Rogers’s diary reveals his pointed observations of oppressive social conditions among Asian workers, the negative effects of Western cultural imperialism, and hypocrisy in religious organizations (Cornelius-White, 2012). These life-altering realizations foreshadowed a person-centered philosophy that challenged the external locus of evaluation and conditions of worth imposed by destructive hierarchical structures in family and society. However, as Rogers left ministerial studies, the foundational spirituality that would inform his future scientific and professional work was not abandoned. He brought with him a profound respect for critical self-inquiry, honest dialogue with the other, social justice, and the human capacity to mature. His disciplined curiosity and robust optimism nurtured an appreciation for life as a dynamic, evolving process, and subsequently produced his theory of a formative, self-actualizing tendency (C. R. Rogers, 1980). Rogers’s recognition of the human capacity for ever-expanding awareness, congruence, and integrative growth is the foundation of person-centered spiritual maturation. This article is a respectful outgrowth of his seminal work.
As we have seen, person-centered spiritual maturation is a multidimensional learning process that can contribute to the well-being of individuals and society. It offers a shared, holding environment for people with theistic, transpersonal, and secular humanist worldviews. It facilitates person-specific growth that can help individuals navigate life’s existential, interpersonal, and intergroup tensions through growth in five dimensions: improved behavioral self-regulation through mindfulness; cognitive understanding of humanity’s chain of pain that promotes pro-justice narratives about self, others, and life; social–emotional growth that repairs broken attachment templates and promotes compassionate attunement to self and others; contemplative skills that build a structural foundation for secure existential attachment and that tap the human capacity for unconditional altruistic love; and development of a resilient worldview, confidence in life and self, that enables individuals to confront life’s problems with internal composure and the ability to derive maturational growth.

This person-specific maturational process can be mentored in communities where belief systems and cultural backgrounds are diverse. In such communities, inevitable interpersonal tensions and unexpected life events can become catalysts for learning. Accordingly, such mentoring intentionally includes a nondirective element. At the same time, this mentoring can provide structured self-inquiry assignments about behavioral, cognitive, social–emotional, contemplative, and worldview-constructing dimensions of self. Thus, through complementary nondirective and directive methods, person-centered spiritual maturation can be mentored intentionally to promote individual and social well-being. Applied research is being conducted to assess the efficacy of a mentoring curriculum, with promising initial results (Kass, 2012).

In conclusion, this conceptual model provides a cohesive multidimensional explanation of person-centered spiritual maturation, highlighting the prosocial value of this developmental process for individuals and a culturally diverse society, integrating relevant neuroscience, and offering researchers an appropriately complex conceptual framework for future investigations.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
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