

THE SACRED PATH OF THE THERAPIST

**Modern Healing, Ancient Wisdom,
and Client Transformation**



IRENE R. SIEGEL

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

Our life journeys are our stories—they offer fodder for conversation, for connection. They become staple for books waiting to be written. Some travelers share their tales as memoirs, others mirror a fictionalized character after their truth and create a picture of themselves through the lens of another. Others bring their experiences forward into a more professional sense, especially if that was part of their story to start.

But, to impact others interested in our journey, the traveler turned writer must extend the experience beyond the places they went, the people they interacted with, the basic sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations they recall. The experiences recounted, be it—a spiritual trip to study with a master shaman in Peru, completing a doctoral degree in Transpersonal Psychology, witnessing the birth of a thought that extends into a spiritual interweave of psychology and shamanism— must form core moments of conception, create an understanding, an awareness that becomes life altering for author and reader.

Irene Siegel does all that and more as she shares her journey into the jungles of Peru, the hallways of academic institutions and her own curiosity that culminated in not only dramatic changes in her clinical practice but also the creation of her newest book, entitled, *The Sacred Path of the Therapist: Modern Healing, Ancient Wisdom, and Client Transformation*.

The book “addresses the subject of spiritual resonance within the psychotherapeutic process, and the integration of psychotherapy and awakening of spiritual consciousness based on my own experience as a psychotherapist, the reporting of my research participants, and the synthesis of my clients’ experiences over the years. The journey of healing unfolds in sacred space and is transformational for both therapist and client” (pg. 10).

Siegel’s goal is to lead readers down “a path, through knowledge and experience, that will awaken a process in you” (pg.11).

She approaches a difficult task with simple, clear, detailed text. She imparts information about alternative ways of knowing, ways of tracking information and energy flow, ways of holding resonance in a shared field based on connection to the divine source, while sharing how to weave all this into a therapy session (pg. 10).

Words, she says, are not all that adequate in situations like these—bridging “the egoic process of reading and intellectually understanding the information, a left brain linear process, with a right brain process based on a nonlinear emotional experience of expanded awarenesses.”

Siegel is aware of the need to both cognitively understand and bodily absorb the material—bring it in, be with it, let it be with you, let it be you. To counter this gap, she offers guided meditations along with journaling experiences throughout the book. And, a huge must have in my opinion, readers can access audio versions of several of her meditations, for free, from her website (see page 11 for website address).

How it Began

The book is derived from Siegel’s doctoral research project, seasoned by over 40 years working as a psychotherapist and shaman. When Siegel started graduate school (she received her doctorate in 2011 from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology), she noticed that she was having spiritual experiences in client settings—spiritual awakening seemed to be a natural outgrowth for many of her clients. She wondered if a therapist’s consciousness could be a catalyst for their client’s transformation within a field of higher, or soul, awareness (pg. xiii). Her questions became an exploratory study to determine if other therapists shared her experiences and what they were seeing with their own client base.

The participants in the study already shared a respect for “the silent spaces in the psychotherapy session where sacredness emerges, boundaries diffuse, ego identification diminishes and resonance between therapist and client expands within a sea of shared energy and consciousness as they become centered and focused

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within" (pg. xiii). It is a biased study. But, it had to be. How can you study commonalities if the participants don't already think alike? How can you study the divine and its presence in a clinical setting if you are an atheist? If you do not believe in a presence or power greater than oneself?

For this approach, for this vantage to come to clinical life, therapists who are immersed in their own theological work, who are meditating, present and witnessing themselves in relationship with the Divine, will undoubtedly see a resonant impact with clients if they are attuned and attached. Attunement in this instance, per Siegel, is used to describe the interrelational resonance between two or more people, which is considered an important element of effective psychotherapy and spiritual resonance as well (pg. 20).

A Look Inside

There are eight chapters, an epilogue, glossary, references, index, acknowledgements and a preface. Siegel's intended audience appears to be therapists, especially those interested in more spiritual aspects of the divine and its presence in therapy. She offers step by step meditations

to help guide therapists "toward greater inner awareness and activation of spiritual resonance perceived through alternative ways of knowing" (pg. 38). As well, readers most likely will have an academic foundation, the font is small, the pages filled with print (an occasional black and white chart or sketch), the content is supported and cited, the content is complex, instructive. She introduces/explains Ken Wilber's transpersonal developmental model, various models of transpersonal psychotherapy, energy psychology, transference, countertransference and more to create the foundation for her clinical approach. She brings in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR) and its significance in this work.

She also makes some assumptions that one can hope to occur, but in busy lives and clinical practices, it is not always likely. First, she assumes the reader will journal and will do the experientials created to cultivate one's skills of mindful awareness, meditation, inner focusing, and coming within. There's an exercise to develop divine attunement (pg. 39), which I personally appreciated and want to repeat. There are 'Reader Reflections' and written guidelines to process and use the information. She invites readers to set "Growth Goals".

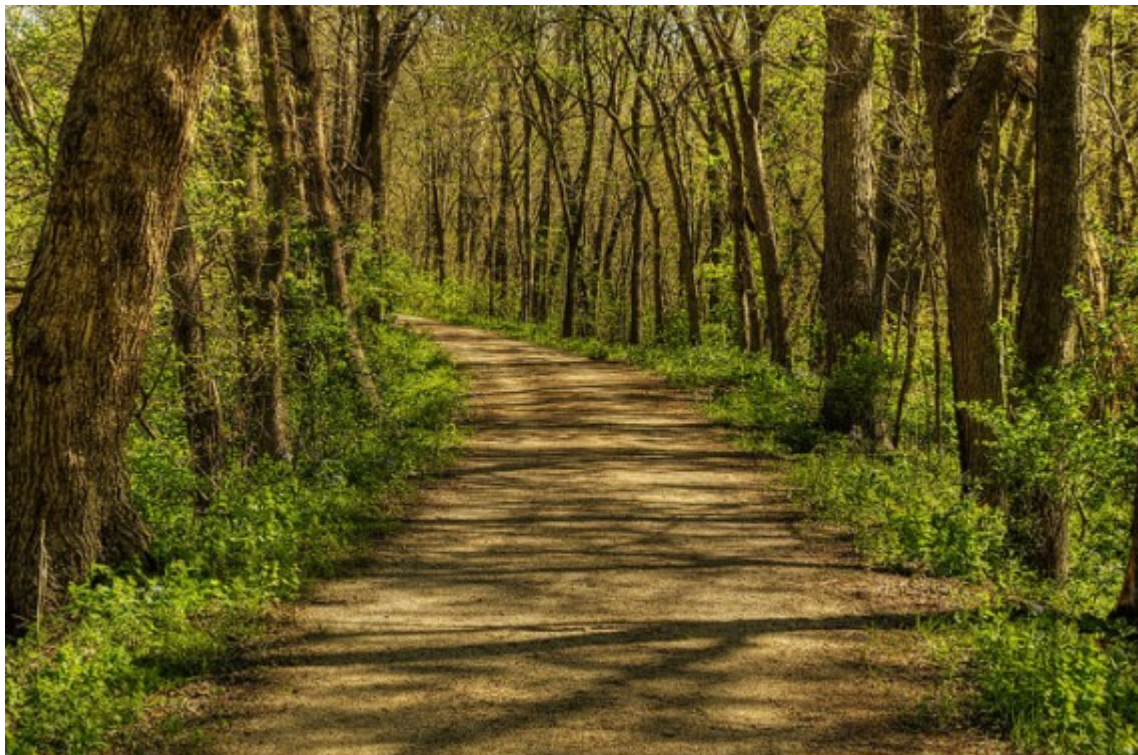


Image from <https://blog.creative-capital.org/2015/05/strategic-marketing-for-artists-part-three-choosing-a-path-and-taking-action/>

There are clinical experientials—vignettes of therapists going through their own spiritual processes.

This is not a sit down and simply read experience. Nor is this the type of book you skip around from chapter to chapter—the material builds on itself. This is an opportunity to expand your experience of self, other, body, mind, spirit, to be with a “whole” including all that is beyond and outside of yourself as being all of you and how this expanse can positively impact your clients, and your own life.

“We are not a body with a spirit but a spirit with a body . . . our soul is our essence” (pg. 92).

Siegel is clear that spiritual resonance is not a therapeutic model by itself but rather it becomes part of the fabric of one’s therapeutic approach and is applicable without sacrificing the standard protocols of one’s trained methodology (pg. 84)—any process can benefit as clients learn how to focus their attention inward, as they integrate breath work, imagery, meditation and body movement to shift their experience, to move from an egoic need to analyze to simply notice their somatic and intuitive experience. She looks at this as a blend of psychotherapy with a higher range of consciousness.

Her conversation about energy medicine and psychotherapy that starts on page 79 felt pertinent to all therapists, not just in terms of energy though it is because of the energy field we all share that it occurs. She talks about boundaries, which I perceived as emotional as well as physical and spiritual—“you can be compassionate and empathic without taking on someone else’s energy. Once you do that, you are ultimately of no use to them and it is only draining and detrimental to you. You will create a codependent relationship where your client feeds on you, and you are drained and exhausted.” How many therapists, especially when first starting out, lose their boundaries, give away themselves, their time, their presence?

The book “addresses the subject of spiritual resonance within the psychotherapeutic process, and the integration of psychotherapy and awakening of spiritual consciousness based on my own experience as a psychotherapist, the reporting of my research participants, and the synthesis of my clients’ experiences over the years. The journey of healing unfolds in sacred space and is transformational for both therapist and client.”

Furthermore, the information in the entire chapter on the human energy field felt applicable beyond the confines of this book. Even when talking about entering sacred space, Siegel’s point extends beyond spirituality. She writes that:

“In order to work within these expanded ranges of consciousness and perceive the subtle bodies, the therapist must enter sacred space, the deep internal communion between oneself and a divine cosmic force. Then the client can learn to do the same. Whether one calls this force God, Spirit, higher self, superconsciousness, or soul is not relevant. It is the experience beyond the word that is important . . . the body is a good doorway in” (pg. 100).

I think that grounding, centering, focusing, noticing what is happening within oneself to

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distinguish what is yours and what belongs to the client is essential before, during, after the session. I've studied many methodologies, trained, practiced, experienced many ways of being with myself and my clients. For me, entering a sacred space before each session allows me to be present, to witness, to embrace, to embody, to listen, to sense into, to be with my client and not lost in my head or, even, lost in my body.

Epilogue

Siegel writes that, "As consciousness awakens, clients find great meaning and purpose in life. The therapist does the same" (pg. 171). She notes that, "Spiritual awareness is embodied, and cosmic consciousness is reflected in the sacred

journey on the path of transformation, bridging psychotherapy with science and the spiritual wisdom of ancient healing traditions" (pg. 179).

She is strong in her belief and she competently supports this faith with data, theory, clinical vignettes, and opinion. I felt the content was fascinating to consider. The experientials offered me ways to explore, to sense into and connect with the divine, to let this bodily container sealed with skin to dissolve so that I was no longer stuck in a reality filled with a past, present, future, with wounds, pains, sorrows, overwhelm, with ecstasy even. For moments, I simply was, and connecting with this empty space of fullness will impact not only my work but also my life.



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Curious? Want to read a bit of the book?

Excerpted from *The Sacred Path of the Therapist: Modern Healing, Ancient Wisdom, and Client Transformation* © 2017 by Irene Siegel Used with the permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company. The following is from the chapter "Mindfulness, Attunement, and Spiritual Resonance."

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