

## BOOKS

**ANCIENT RELIGIOUS WISDOM, SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS.** By Paul Marcus. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003, 212 pp.

In *Ancient Religious Wisdom, Spirituality and Psychoanalysis*, Paul Marcus has produced a terrific primer on psychoanalysis and religion. Marcus believes that there is a “spiritual malaise” (p. 2) that haunts psychoanalysis. Patients thirst for a meaning in their lives that the secular humanism of psychoanalysis, clearing away one’s neurotic difficulties does not address. He feels that this can be remedied by looking to the wisdom literatures of the world’s seven main religions and one secular philosophy, Stoicism.

He uses a major text of each to point out its salient features and how they can be of benefit to us and our patients. Each chapter is twenty to thirty pages in length, some of which have appeared previously as independent articles, so there is some overlap in the conclusions he draws from each.

The first chapter covers Hinduism, for which he discusses the Bhagavad Gita. The *Gita* is part of a larger Indian national epic poem written between 200 BCE to 200 CE. It recounts the doubts of a great general on the eve of a final major battle regarding the meaning of life. He speaks to his charioteer, who is Krishna, an incarnation of God. Krishna serves as his guru/teacher of wisdom.

Through *Jnana*, right thinking; *karma*, right action; and bhakti; love and devotion, one can attain “Moksha,” a lasting peace of mind and freedom from worldly attachments. In a sense, the Bhagavad Gita recounts the psychodynamic transformation of Arjuna at the hands of his guide/analyst Krishna.

Marcus feels that these insights speak to the universal longing of the “finite” in humanity for the “Infinite.” He thinks we should consider the Gita’s claim that fundamentally the mind has a “spiritual cast.” Wellness, Marcus argues, must include a “mystical participation in the world.”

His chapter on Buddhism may be more familiar, touching as it does on concepts that have permeated our thinking in terms of medita-

tion for stress reduction, relaxation, and self-improvement. The Basic Rule of Buddhism is that all suffering comes from desire. Through meditation one cultivates a mental set that is at one with the universe, beyond want, lack, and desire. Marcus feels that this perspective is an antidote to the rampant epidemic of self-absorption, excessive narcissism, and consumer enslavement that he believes characterize our times.

For Confucianism, Marcus looks at the Analects, sayings of Confucius amassed by his students. His philosophy concerned achieving a harmonious balance in oneself and society. One is guided by “Ren,” or good-hearted concern for others, and “Li,” a formalized set of rules of conduct. The attention to the balance in the relations of parent and child, siblings, friends, the ruler and his subject, and man with nature, guides one’s life. The ensuing appreciation of the balance and harmony in life allows one to see the “sacred” in what might otherwise seem ordinary and mundane.

For Taoism, Marcus turns to the parables of Chuang Tzu, a third century BCE teacher. Based on the Tao-Te-Ching, Chuang was attuned to the paradoxes of life, and believed in cultivating a perspective that could encompass the reality of opposites, all being part of a larger entity. The largest entity, “Everything,” is called the “Tao.”

The Tao is not something that its practitioners feel one can describe. In fact, the first line of the Tao-Te-Ching reads, “The Tao that can be spoken is not the true Tao” (Mitchell, 1991, p. 1). The Tao seeks to cultivate “wu-wei,” or calmness of mind.

Chuang’s parables were one of the first things studied and written about by Martin Buber (1910). It probably contributed to his later appreciation of and popularization of the Hasidic Masters and their frequently “Chuang Tzu-esque” stories (Herman, 1996).

The chapters on the monotheistic religions pose a special problem for Marcus. Following Rizzuto (1979), analysts have come to appreciate the imaginary realm where “transitional objects,” like God, can be cultivated, laid aside, and returned to in time of need. We have come to appreciate the process of religious belief, while remaining agnostic, at best, about the reality of metaphysical/supernatural beings like God. In fact, analysts and therapists unhappy with this dichotomy are generating work that seeks to reintegrate the objects of belief back into therapy, as objects with an objective reality (Meissner, 1990, 2005; Richards & Bergin, 2004; Spero, 1992, 2008; Sperry & Shafranske, 2005).

In Judaism, Marcus picks the one text almost devoid of God, a clear example of “wisdom literature”: “Ecclesiastes.” Taken by traditionalists to be the wise King Solomon, Ecclesiastes reflects the influence of Greek wisdom literature of the third and fourth centuries BCE.

Ecclesiastes has tried it all—power, sex, wealth—and realizes that it all is “vanity of vanities.” A brooding, philosophic, “resignation without despair,” in the excellent term Marcus uses for it, takes hold. “There is a season to every purpose under heaven,” says Ecclesiastes. Marcus finds that the concept of “resignation without despair” is exactly the attitude for analysts faced with the inevitable losses and adversities in life.

For Christianity, Marcus turns to St. Augustine, specifically the first century CE thinker’s *Confessions*. Examining these masterful models of self-examination, Marcus helps us to understand how something like God’s love and grace can add meaning and comfort to one’s life.

Islam is perhaps at first the toughest sell because of its belief in an intense and literal surrender to God’s will as articulated in the Koran and shariah, Islamic law. He reminds us that despite our association of “jihadist” with terrorism and holy war against the infidel, what Mohammed really preached was that the Holy War of armed conflict must be replaced by the Greater Holy War to master the self.

Perhaps Marcus’s greatest affinity is to the work of Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius. The latter’s emphasis on (1) personal integration and autonomy, (2) living in the present, (3) resignation/indifference in the face of that which one cannot control, and (4) responsibility to the Other would seem to summarize all that Marcus finds so valuable in the wisdom traditions.

Marcus does not have a lot to say about how specifically analytic technique might be altered, with a few notable exceptions. For one, Marcus believes that turning toward the Other in care and concern is “therapeutic in its own right,” beyond its moral and ethical imperative (p. 186). Influenced by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (Marcus, 2006, 2007), Marcus argues that it should be woven into the fabric of every analysis as an important counterbalance to self-absorbed narcissism, which defines Marcus’s sense of the problem of our times.

It is bracing to see Marcus come down so strongly for what may be in essence a new paradigm for psychoanalysis: not just to clear away the entangled underbrush of the psyche, to relieve pain and bring a modicum of happiness, but to integrate what in Judaism is called “Tikkun Olam,” caring for others as a way to bring the messiah and world peace, and in Christianity would be known as charity—in short, the other-orientedness of all the religions at their core. At their best.

Many of us have studied and embraced the wisdom traditions that “speak” to our own needs and incorporated these into treatment. In fact, we may be especially adept conveyors of such “wisdom.” As patients work through intrapsychic conflict, they are better able to hear

and use these “nuggets of wisdom” whose power is enhanced and made more meaningful and alive by its intimate connection to the worked-through transference.

This should not surprise us, since “wisdom” has traditionally been handed down in oral transmission from highly invested transferential objects such as teacher/shaman/guru/rabbi/priest/iman to student. The amalgam formed by the intersection of duress, the transference, and wisdom creates powerful internalized structures upon which the individual can call.

This is also seen, for instance, in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), where fear for one’s life or well-being leads to submitting one’s will to a “Higher Power” under the guidance of and support from one’s sponsor. It is impressive to observe the benefits that result from this internalized structure and the wisdom that AA and its “bible,” the Blue Book, pass on to adherents, and which they use to navigate through life’s challenges great and small.

Marcus knows that we live in analytic times like the biblical Tower of Babel, where different schools espouse different models of the underlying structure of the psyche, what constitutes the good life and health, and how therapy/analysis helps one get there. Although Marcus is a self-described Freudian, which probably means a mix of ego psychology, object relations, and self psychology with a dash of the Relational school and French psychoanalysis, his writing is completely free of any polemic. He does not have an underlying agenda of allegiance to a school. He believes that psychoanalysis has something vital to say and to teach about the human condition and that what is needed is a moral vision. And he is not letting institutional bias of any kind get in the way of his message.

Marcus is articulating a broader definition of who we, as analysts and therapists are, what we do, and how we participate in the much larger attempt of humankind to understand our world, weather its storms, rise above its limitations, and unite, somehow, with that which is timeless, true, and good—be it called God, the Tao, destiny, fate, or psychoanalysis. We become conduits of the great project of the spiritual: the imparting of wisdom gleaned from the diverse traditions of the world over the millennium.

These prescriptions for living have provided its adherents with a protective emotional canopy from the cumulative psychic trauma which loss, adversity, and mortality deal us. Marcus believes that there is no need for us to isolate ourselves from the collective wisdom of mankind. We should embrace and use all that is at our disposal to help our patients.

Ultimately, Marcus is only making manifest that which was latent in psychoanalytic treatment from the start—that we are a modern version of the age-old oral tradition of the passing on of wisdom to help others cope with life's uncertainties and appreciate its profundities. Old, finely aged wine, poured from new bottles.

*Ancient Religious Wisdom, Spirituality and Psychoanalysis* is a challenging book. The chapters are crammed full of information. Each is best read separately and mulled over. I have used various chapters in study groups on psychoanalysis and spirituality where they are always received enthusiastically and serve as terrific stimuli for rich discussion of the issues Marcus raises.

There is much more that psychoanalysis and its various schools have to discuss and resolve in our understanding of, and relationship to, things spiritual. If Marcus is right, we are on the verge of a great rapprochement between religion and spirituality, and psychoanalysis. These two great engines of personal and societal transformation may be at a point in time where their similarities and mutual benefit are eclipsing the sense of competitive, xenophobic foreignness and disparagement. If so, we should all be the better for it. Marcus has provided an invaluable, nondoctrinaire guide to the endeavor.

He deserves praise for a remarkable job of digesting and presenting eight challenging bodies of knowledge and translating their wisdom into a language that psychoanalysts can understand, appreciate, and use.

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**FALSE SELF: THE LIFE OF MASUD KHAN.** By Linda Hopkins. New York: Other Press, 2006, 551 pp.

Linda Hopkins's biography of the brilliant, mad, "third rail of psychoanalysis" (Rudnytsky, 2005, p. 1385), Masud Khan, is a *tour de force*. She is the Curator Extraordinaire of the deeply sacred, brilliant, and transgressive space(s) of Khan's life. She has an acutely judicious, nuanced grasp of both Masud the "spectacular," "oozing gifts" in the words of one of his contemporaries (p. 375), and elements of his uncontained madness, his signature "Madness 'X,'" as Winnicott might say. Khan may have been one litmus test in extremis of Winnicott's paradoxical: "We are poor indeed if we are only sane." He played fast and loose with what others might call "external realities." To his friend Robert Stoller he stated: "My realities are psychic realities," and often quoted Oscar Wilde's observation that "nothing that actually occurs is of the smallest importance" (p. 165). Many who knew him were willing to "play" with him, engage him in this arena of communication. "Playing" for Khan "was the only antidote to all the fatalities of everyday existence" (p. 121).

Moreover, he had a facility for inhabiting the transitionality of the literary playspace, for example, Shakespeare, Joyce, Dostoyevsky, and others. Solely psychic reality, plus literary "reality" (what might be called the Coleridgean imaginative dream space of Kubla Khan), plus the rigors of psychoanalysis yielded, at the best of times, clinical brilliance, at the worst of times, toxic alcoholically fueled imaginative space transformed into symbolic equation. He *was* Prince Myshkin, a "Jesus"-like figure, and he *was* the "murderous" Rogozhin of *The Idiot*—both parts of the same self—during the summer of 1979 (see chap. 34). As he claimed, "that vast make-believe which is literature somehow to me feels more authentic than the living presence of most people" (p. 321).