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## COUNSELING WITH SOUL TALK

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The recent tragic events in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 have dramatically and inalterably altered all of our lives. There is great need for those of us in family practice, indeed, *all* physicians, to be available to our patients for at least basic counseling to help our patients deal with the serious emotional repercussions of 9-11.

Like most primary care physicians, patient counseling has been an important part of what I do since my first day of medical practice. In August of 2000, I retired from traditional family practice to focus on spirituality in medicine. I counsel patients who are depressed, anxious, grieving, or in other forms of distress. I have been amazed at how easy it is to incorporate my personal spirituality in this counseling without infringing on patients' belief systems, and with very positive responses.

My spirituality is best summarized by a trilogy, "Conversations With God," (CWG) by Neale Donald Walsch. This trilogy stresses Spirituality, as expressed through each individual's relationship with God. As such, it is beautifully all-inclusive and complements many religious belief systems. The work, in essence, represents a communication between Walsch and God in a question/answer format.

Book One also discusses many aspects of human interpersonal relationships. I'll share several quotes here – a small taste from a very rich feast of spiritual awarenesses:

One of the most common problems I find in patients is guilt. A beautiful discussion concerning this occurs when the author inquires as to why he seems so often to choose negative feelings (of self) leading to guilt. God's exquisite response, : "What can you expect? You were told from your earliest days that you're 'bad.' *Feeling guilty is a learned response.* You've been told to feel guilty about yourself for things you did before you could even do anything." (p. 119)\*

Then, as a wonderful prologue to "relationships 101," God points out that, "It is *only* through your relationship with other people, places, and events that you can even exist (as a knowable quantity, as an identifiable *something*) in the universe." (p.121) God goes on in wonderful detail, describing human love relationships: "Most people enter into relationships with an eye toward what they can get out of them, rather

than what they can put into them. (p.122). This last quote is echoed in the J.F. Kennedy's, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

Continuing several pages later, God states, "Your first relationship, therefore, must be with yourself." (p.126).

The point here is to realize oneself as a miraculous creation of God and appreciate the love that this gift truly represents. This transcends ego. It admits that God didn't *have* to create "me." But He *did* - out of love. And the gift of life is the most precious jewel humanity could receive.

I shall share further concepts from CWG later, since they have helped so many of my patients. I believe that any other system appealing to the physician or therapist could also be used, and I offer this paper simply as a model, encouraging modifications as the reader deems appropriate.

My counseling includes two basic components:

1. Identification of a problem; then
2. Having the patient change his or her perception of that problem.

Identifying the problem is the most important and basic component. Here we get down to the bare facts of what is the patient's truth concerning the problem. It is the patient's problem; not his wife's or mother's or son's, or anyone else's. So we start with the concept that "I" (the patient) have a problem. Here are a few examples:

A married couple, Sam and Ginny, came in because of a disagreement. Ginny had gone abroad with a group of people as part of her job. On two separate occasions two men had become inebriated and made inappropriate "passes" toward her. Each time she turned them down and stated that she didn't in any way want to engage in activity that would encourage this happening again. When Ginny returned home she told Sam about these incidents. He stated that he didn't want her to have anything to do with the entire group. Ginny needed to continue to work with many of the non-offenders in the group, so Sam's wishes impacted and limited her job relationships. We identified his truth as fear based on jealousy. Once this was "on the table," we could then observe that Ginny had been tested while abroad and had passed the test with flying colors. This indicated that he could trust her and that there was no need for jealousy based on this experience.

Barry, who had never been married and was now 32 years old, came to me because he didn't know how to deal with Laura, his partner. They had been together for six years. She was in corporate sales. By her nature, Laura always had a quick answer for virtually anything they discussed. This made Barry wonder about her integrity. He even became suspicious enough of some of her actions that he tapped their home phone. He thereby overheard a conversation between Laura and another woman, suggesting that Laura might try to seduce her boss on a particular occasion. He came to me to ask how to confront her with the facts that he had tapped the phone and had overheard the

incriminating conversation. My first question to him was: “What kind of emotion are you feeling concerning this?”

“Fear of losing her.”

“What would it mean to you if you lost her?”

“She is very important in my life. I want to love her, but in order to do that I must feel I can trust her. I’m not confident of that at this point.”

Gary then told Laura that he had a problem involving her; that he wanted to love her and believe her; and that to do so he needed to feel that he could trust her. He explained that he felt she had done several things causing him to question that trust. Maintaining his focus that this was his problem and he needed to do something about it, Gary revealed that he had tapped the phone and had heard a particular conversation. While she was angry with what he had done, she could accept the explanation that he had a problem and only he could do something about it.

Another example of identifying a problem:

Donna to her husband: “I know you don’t love me. We don’t talk, and all you want to do is watch TV.”

Donna truly stating *her* problem: “I feel that you prefer watching TV rather than talking or sharing some of your time with me. I feel a need to share some other-than-TV time with you. I’m frustrated because that isn’t happening!.

### **Guiding philosophy**

After patients identify their truth about their problems, I ask them whether they have a belief system. Do they believe in a Supreme Being or Creator (God to most of us)? Almost everyone does. I ask them whether their God is loving, and if so is His love unconditional or conditional? (God is not a “He” to me, but I use this term because of my tradition ) Most believe that God loves unconditionally. I then share some concepts from “Conversations With God” that are not religious, but spiritual. These concepts have not been offensive to any patient, no matter what their religion or belief system. I then say, “If the concepts don’t fit with your belief system, feel free to discard them.

My God is the Creator of everything everywhere. He knows everything. He is present everywhere, and He needs nothing. So this leaves us with the question of why He created any of us. My answer is so that He can experience humanity through each of us individually. What is your answer?

Imagine you, the reader, deciding that you want to know as much as you possibly can about some aspect of life that fascinates you. You attend different universities and finally feel that you really know your subject thoroughly. If you then sit in an office and don’t use or share that knowledge, you are not experiencing it. God, being all-knowing, chooses to experience His all-knowing through each of us. So He creates each of us with a unique “contract.” He wants us to co-create with Him, using His creative power.

The tools of creation He gives us are the gifts of thought, word, and action. The most powerful of these is thought, for without that the other two cannot be initiated. He also gives us the precious gift of free will, which allows us to have the equally-precious gift of choices. Each choice we make will lead to some path, and each path will have its own consequences. Some of those we will “like” and some we won’t. But He will love us no matter which choice or path we take. This is what unconditional love means. And he won’t force us to go down any particular path. This is what free will means.

“Your thought is the parent which gives birth to all things.” (p 52)

Our basic makeup will be of three parts: soul or spirit, mind, and body. The soul will be the closest to God in the ethereal sense, at the highest energy level. Its chief human function is to provide opportunities for our choices, or paths. If one can ascribe relative importance to the three parts, the soul is the most important part of us. It is an actual small piece of God, much like the finger on a hand, each of our souls being a different finger, but all an integral part of the hand, which is God. The quest of the soul is to evolve, through love. Each soul chooses which body it will inhabit prior to the birth of that body, and it knows in advance the type of existence it “wants” to experience in this lifetime (music, teaching, experiencing patience, healing, illness, or other challenges.). When this human life ends the soul will then be free to choose, if indicated, another life experience. .

The mind is the decision-maker as to which of the doors of opportunity provided by the soul it will enter. The soul is blessed with the Knowledge of God, but the mind is limited by our five physical senses. This mind cannot compare, in perception, to the higher knowledge of the soul. We think in terms of words, which fail miserably when we try to describe the depth of a feeling, such as deep love, extreme anguish or anger, etc. Our souls communicate with us, then, through feelings or intuitions at a much deeper level than our minds.

God is with us at *all* times. (That’s the good news or, if you like, the bad news.). An existence without having God as an actual part of you at all times would be impossible, for without His being with you every instant of your existence, you couldn’t exist. Because of God’s unconditional love, He loves you, no matter what you have done, are doing, or will ever do. He gives you, through your soul, choices or possible paths that you may take every day, and each path has its own consequences. But He loves you, no matter what.

The most important thing for each of us to realize is that each of us individually has a separate “contract” with God - to experience life in our own unique, individual way. This isn’t spiritually controlled by parents, community, government, spouse, religion, or any other earthly influence, except to the degree that each chooses to have them do so.

In fact, when I intuit (have a “gut feeling”) that something “isn’t right,” this might well be my soul communicating with me that perhaps choosing a different path or decision would better serve my spiritual evolution at this time. So my soul (which is the closest part of me to God, at the highest energy level) communicates with me through feelings,

which are more accurate than thoughts, because thoughts are limited to words and the five senses. Inner knowing goes much deeper, to the Source.

Once more, if it is true that God created me to allow Him to experience life through me, then this “contract” is the most important thing in my human existence. My deepest prayer is, “Thank you for this wonderful gift of life and experience. I realize that you didn’t have to create me, but you did, because You are Love.” I am here to allow the Love of God to be expressed through me in the way I choose to have that occur.

Important in this concept is that the only person over whom I have true control is *myself*. Each of us has an individual “contract” with God. Your honest interpretation of any situation can be very different from mine. I can share with you my feelings concerning any aspect of life, but, as is so neatly stated in “Conversations With God,” “mine is not the only way; mine is but another way.” And I can change my perception of any event or condition at any time I choose.

The death of Osama might be perceived as a tremendous loss to his close loyal followers, or as a tremendous gain by those he has oppressed. My feeling about not being able to lie comfortably on a bed of nails is not shared by those mystics who do it. Similarly with walking barefoot across a bed of hot coals. So I actually define for myself whether a glass is half full or half empty. I can see my existence as one of suffering or one of joy.

### **Clinical applications of the guiding philosophy**

Using the above as a basis to have the patient look at Self as independent from others in the spiritual sense, I can then help her or him to conclude that: 1. I have a problem. 2. Only I can do anything about it. There may be others who are involved, but I own the problem and the solution. 3. My God, who electively created me, is actually a functioning part of me and will help me see the solution to this problem.

There are many readers who may be thinking that this is “blue sky and apple pie.” We all know people who have truly endured much suffering, and a natural question is, “Why would God allow such things to happen?” It looks to some as though God has caused events such as 9/11. How could this be a part of God’s world?

God, in giving us free will, allows humans to create from either of two motivations: love or fear. She doesn’t direct or command us to use love. When we choose fear, He allows us to go along that path, knowing that we will discover that the natural consequences are not what we “like.” What looks “bad” to any of us may not be “bad” from the soul’s standpoint. There may be painful experiences of human existence that are necessary for the soul’s evolution, and it is the soul (not the mind or body) which takes precedence for evolution in the human experience. “...judge not, and neither condemn, for you know not why a thing occurs, nor to what end.”(p. 38)

An old story tells that a grandmother daily did embroidery in her rocking chair as her young grandson sat and played, watching her from the floor. As the child grew slightly older and able to talk, he asked grandma why she spent so much time playing with that

round white cloth with disorganized strings hanging from it. Whereupon Grandma turned it over for the child to see its beauty from above. We are all as the child but will be allowed to see the beauty in the entire human experience some day.

If the evolution of happenings on earth seems very negative, that doesn't mean God is absent or causing punishment.

We may be uncomfortable, still wanting to know the *why* of the problem and the eventual solution. Most of us can't accept that we don't need to know, but sometimes it's okay to just recognize that God, for Her own reasons, elects to not let us know all the facts.

Grasping the essence of this understanding of our cosmos, my patient can then have a better love for herSelf and feel more comfortable approaching anyone else she feels might be involved with her problem and share her truth with them – in love, not criticizing or vying for power and control, just stating her truth.

In many instances, simply allowing the patient to own the truth of the problem solves it. In looking at it as “my problem,” then understanding that “I am here to experience life, with God, in my way,” allows him to see that whether he considers the experience with the problem to be “good’ or “bad,” it is an experience he has chosen. He can choose to continue to experience or not experience it in this way. In any case, he can communicate his truth (in love, never with the intention of causing hurt or injury) concerning this experience to anyone else involved. Another quote from CWG is appropriate here: “One day, if you have a great deal of courage, you will experience a world where making love is considered better than making war. On that day will you rejoice.” (p.109)

In other cases I invite both parties for a session to state their truths about the problem to each other with my guidance and clarification. My most valuable contribution is to objectively consider each one's truth without judgment, taking that truth down to bare bones, and then voicing that truth so that each may hear it. I don't dictate their truths to them. Many times, I say, “What I am hearing or understanding you to be saying is...” This provides assurance to all of us that I am not misstating their truth.

We can then look at possible paths each can follow. Usually that involves each having a new understanding of the other's truth, starting with “Thank you for telling me your truth. Now I can better understand how you feel, even if I don't agree.” If my patients identify at all with the principles I've described, they might get the feeling that a love relationship exists in one of its most enjoyable forms when each encourages the other to follow his or her individual spiritual path with the least resistance (i.e., the most encouragement). “...the purpose of relationship is not to have another who might complete you; but to have another with whom you might share your completeness.” (p. 123) I can encourage that by John's knowing Sue, he is or being given the opportunity to allow and encourage Sue's evolutionary path, not to hinder or attempt to control it.

While there are many other rich variations and nuances to this work, what I have shared represents the basis of my counseling using Spirituality. I wish to emphasize that I do not “push” this on people if it is in any way dissonant with their belief systems. It almost always provides a well-accepted supplement for their belief systems. I cannot express to you the joy I have experienced in sharing this with so many patients. The love they return to me in follow-up visits is many-fold greater than what I have shared with them.

### **From clients of Dr. Bell**

1. Approaching counseling from a spiritual perspective has been very helpful in dealing with our individual, as well as marital issues. The idea that God is in everything and that we are separate souls finding our own truth, helps us to appreciate our differences and realize that we are here for a reason. It also helps us to search within ourselves and accept responsibility for our own issues. With this method of counseling we understand that instead of just thinking our way through our issues, we can think and feel our way through by listening to our souls. This has helped us to communicate with each other even when we are unsure or uneasy about what we are feeling. It has also helped us to learn about the value of a spiritual approach to life by listening to someone whose life reflects spiritual truth. Examining our spiritual lives in counseling is more productive than just dealing with issues in counseling. The idea that our soul speaks to us through our feelings helps us to appreciate that there are no right or wrong feelings. This has helped to alleviate the judgement that has occurred in our relationship in the past. It has also made us appreciate the choice that we are making to take our separate journeys together.

David and Patty

### **2. Dear Dr. Bell,**

I thank you for your time and help. Your counseling, using spirituality, has helped me very much. Through your guidance I have been able to realize what my purpose here on earth is. After realizing my purpose, you guided me to seeing that my feelings are caused by me and not by other people. Through this discovery I have been working on changing the way I view and react to the people I love. You have helped me see that the choices my children and husband have made are their choices and not choices that I have caused or that I am responsible for. I know now that I need to guide and love my children and husband but I don't have to agree with everything they do.

Example: Before, when my son or daughters would make a choice to try something I had been teaching them for years not to do, I would be mad at them for not choosing as I felt they should. I would try talking them out of it, discipline them out of doing it or blame myself for not being a good mom. Last week my son was having trouble. I was not sure if he was drinking too much, doing drugs or gambling. Before talking with Dr. Bell, I would have sat him down and said, “What are you doing? You had money a month ago and now you don't. Where did the money go? What are you using it on?” After he would have told me, I would have started telling him what he should do to get out of the mess. Because of Dr. Bell's counseling, I called my son and said, “Son, could you help me? I am very worried about you and would appreciate knowing what

problems you are having, rather than me dreaming things up.” He proceeded to tell me he had lost a bet one month ago and was trying to pay it off. Instead of yelling at him for betting, I thought to myself, “Hopefully he has learned another life lesson the hard way,’ rather than blaming myself for his choice or how to change him to my way of thinking.

I am now looking at his behavior as a choice that he made. I try to remember that I have hopefully done my best to raise my children and now their choices are their choices. I am always here to guide and help but they are not going to be me and do things as I would. They have a different goal here on earth than I and they must find it for themselves.

Anne E

\* All quotes in this article are from CWG volume I.

Walsch, Neale Donald/ Riccio, Frank, Conversations With God, Book 1, New York: Putnam 1997.

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