

A Practical Spiritual Path: Connecting the Personal, the Professional and the Societal¹

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Abstract

The meaning of spirituality is introduced followed by an exploration of the significance of worldviews. The holistic interconnected worldview shows how relational qualities shape our participation and co-creates the world. In this interconnected world a practical spiritual path connects the personal, the professional and the societal. I suggest living a practical spiritual life is a development of Rogers' 'way of being' where there is an intention, moment by moment, to live the relational qualities of Rogers' conditions, which are growth enhancing in all aspects of life. A personal experience provides an illustration. The role of congruence and heart coherence facilitates the ability to develop relational qualities that enhance all life. The intensification of global challenges facing the world provides a strong invitation to person-centred psychotherapists to embrace Rogers' way of being in all aspects of their lives as a practical spiritual path. By extending our circle of identity to include all, we become part of the evolutionary opportunity.

Key Words: Practical spiritual path; interconnected worldview; relational qualities; participation; heart coherence; global challenges; circle of identity, evolutionary opportunity.

In his later years, Carl Rogers emphasised his approach as 'a philosophy of life and relationships' (1980, p. 38) and as a 'way of being' (ibid, p. ix) rather than simply a psychotherapy. He also became more open in acknowledging the significance of spirituality despite his long-term unease with religion from his upbringing and his difficulty to resolve 'tension between the "human" and the "scientific"' (van Kalmthout, 2004, p. 197). Rogers seemed to be suggesting that his philosophy of life and way of being gave access to a dimension that was spiritual. Since then others have explored the spirituality within person-centred therapy (Thorne, 2012; van Kalmthout, 2004, 2008; Leijssen, 2008, Moore and Purton, 2006). This paper develops Rogers' 'way of being' as a means of living life – moment by moment, which becomes 'a practical spiritual path' that connects the personal, the professional and the societal.

The interconnected world provides an expanded frame for my inquiry where all types of knowledge are valid as 'the arena is everything' (Braud, 1994, p. 31). My inquiry is like a story where I express my ideas, illustrated by my personal experiences and supported by the existing literature. There is growing support for story-telling as an inquiry methodology (Heron, 1998; Ellis

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and Brochner, 2001; Wilkins, 2000; Wyatt, 2004) as it provides a container for the depth and breadth of human experience. Validity now includes seeking and expressing authentic personal truth rather than only logical evidence-based facts. Perhaps Rogers' writing about 'what is most personal' as having the ability to illuminate what is most universal (1961, p. 26) supports the legitimacy of authentic personal truth. I use 'we' sometimes in my narrative to portray and emphasise the interconnectedness and the inherent wholeness of the world.

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is one of those words that both evoke strong responses in people and it's meaning is hard to articulate. In the past spirituality was intricately entwined with religion, sometimes used interchangeably. It encompassed an acceptance of a metaphysical or supernatural reality, the authority of a divine being and a requirement of faith. More recently other understandings have arisen, which emphasise a marked separation between spirituality and religion as people look to spirituality to live a meaningful life and to make sense of the world. As Danah Zohar, an organisational consultant, philosopher and author and Ian Marshall say

'Human beings are essentially spiritual creatures because we are driven by the need to ask "fundamental" or "ultimate" questions ... We are defined, by a specifically human longing to find meaning and value in what we do and experience. ... We have a longing for something towards which we can aspire, for something that takes us beyond ourselves and the present moment, for something that gives us and our actions a sense of worth.' (Zohar and Marshall, 2000, p. 4)

Different understandings include a secular spirituality, which emphasises humanist qualities and values – compassion and concern for others, love, patience, tolerance, responsibility, generosity. These go beyond a purely materialistic way of life yet do not require either a belief in or the authority of a divine being or a supernatural reality. Martin van Kalmthout suggest Rogers' 'way of being' could provide a 'modern system of meaning' to fill the emptiness religion has left (2004, 2008). Others define spirituality as a search for the sacred – the transcendent or transpersonal, which is beyond the self and the ordinary, whether this is God, the divine or a natural creative force flowing through the universe. Mia Leijssen describes the sacred as 'a quality of experiencing life. It has to do with value, depth, wonder, reverence, touching the soul of the life force.' (2008, p. 220). For others spirituality is the interconnectedness of the universe within the universal or cosmic field (Baring, 2002).

The fundamental difference between religion and spirituality is related to external and inner authority. Religion is mostly a set of externally prescribed rules presented by holy texts and priests, often passed on through families and communities. It was this external authority that led Rogers to reject religion. Spirituality has a more personal, undisclosed dimension that guides, so people find and realise their life's purpose. It arises from a connection with a deep inner aspect of the self beyond the ego that can access wisdom to evaluate values, thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Such growth, by opening

to newness, accesses the creativity or 'living energy' of the world. Rogers' provides a glimpse of this when he says 'I find I am at my best when I let the flow of my experience carry me, in a direction which appears to be forward, towards goals of which I am but dimly aware.' (1961, p. 27). This also speaks of Rogers' formative tendency (1980), a fundamental part of his philosophy. 'We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all organic life – a tendency to become all the complexity of which life is capable. ... a potent creative tendency' (p. 134). Opening to potential now replaces a prescriptive external authority that can enable 'our ability to transcend ourselves, to create new and more spiritual directions in human evolution.' (ibid).

The significance of worldviews

Underpinning any philosophy or theory about life is the way we see, know and make sense of the world – our worldview. This comprehensive perspective addresses such questions as

- Ontology – What is the nature of reality and the nature of being?
- Epistemology – What is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and what can be known?
- Methodology – How do we learn about the world and gain knowledge?
- Axiology – What knowledge is of value and gives meaning?

(Heron, 1998, p. 236)

My worldview is of an interconnected holistic world in contrast to the conventional Western worldview, which is largely shaped by the Newtonian-Cartesian worldview. This describes a mechanical and materialistic world devoid of purpose, life or spirituality. Understanding comes from taking it apart, like a machine, as the parts behave like billiard balls in a predictable, controllable and quantifiable way. The knowledge valued is rational, empirical and objective achieved through analysis and logical positivism (Capra, 1983).

The assumptions and values of this worldview have been strongly challenged by many different sources including quantum, systems and complexity theories; neuroscience, consciousness studies; post-modern critical theory, feminist and cultural studies; and psychotherapy, ecopsychology and deep ecology. The emerging interconnected worldview has a remarkable similarity and resonance to the interconnected wholeness of Eastern philosophy and spirituality where all phenomena are manifestations of unity, oneness, a cosmic whole, where everything is interrelated, interdependent and inseparable. This is the 'interbeing' that Thich Nhat Hanh refers to (2003).

This interconnected, holistic world is full of interrelated entities rather than separate material objects. David Bohm, a quantum physicist and philosopher, reveals the world 'as an *undivided whole*'. He sees the atomistic world as 'a simplification and an abstraction, valid only in some limited context.' (1980, p. 11). Interrelatedness becomes central. Mae-Wan Ho, a geneticist & biophysicist, says 'Instead of solid objects with simple locations in space and time, one finds delocalised, mutually entangled quantum entities evolving like organisms' (1998).

The reductionism and linear causality of the Newtonian-Cartesian world is thus strongly challenged. X no longer predictably causes Y. Instead we have the co-creativity of mutual causality where the dichotomy between self and world disappears (Macy, 1991) and is replaced with complex feedback loops and bifurcation points. There is no longer one reality that can be determined and controlled but rather multiple realities each offering a perspective of the enfolded whole that evolves through our participation (Bohm, 1980; Bortolt, 1996). Skolimowski describes 'All life is participation.... The deeper and more multifarious the forms of our participation, the deeper and richer the universe in which we live.' (1994, p. 181-182). This characteristic of the interconnected world – mutual causality – means the relational quality or presence of our participation becomes highly significant. Our participation and the relational qualities that shape it, now becomes central. The way we live and our way of being co-create the world.

Spirituality as a Practical Path

A spiritual path is usually seen as an inner path where we discover the nature of who we are – our being, and pay attention to how the quality of our values, motives and intentions shape our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The nature of the path involves transcending the limited ego, to realise potential and to be transformed.

Within an interconnected world a spiritual path becomes a practical spiritual path. Buddhism has always recognised this interconnectedness and emphasises the practical nature of a spiritual path and its extent – the applicability through every aspect of our life. Jack Kornfield, an acclaimed Buddhist teacher tells us 'an honest courageous look into our real-life situations, our family of origin, our place in society around us' is needed, so that spiritual practice extends to 'right relationships, right livelihood, right speech, and the ethical dimensions of a spiritual life' (1994, p. 310).

The mutual causality and the central role of participation within an interconnected world means the inner world is intricately entwined with the external world, similar to Mae-Wan Ho's entangled quantum entities. This means the personal, the professional and the societal are now profoundly interrelated. Vimala Thakar, an Indian spiritual leader and social activist affirms 'we cannot separate the individual and the society. We each contain the society ... we are expressions of the collective.' (2006).

A practical spiritual path concerns living moment by moment with an awareness of how the qualitative nature of our participation – our presence and engagement – profoundly influences all aspects of our lives and our external world through the co-creativity of the universe. It becomes a journey through life, with knowledge of my ethical responsibility for the state of the world (however small), which inspires my deepest motivations to live with integrity in the whole of my life – within my relationships, work and community.

The PCA and a practical spiritual path

As PC psychotherapists we know Rogers therapeutic conditions (1957) describe the relational qualities of a facilitative climate that is growth

enhancing. People access 'vast resources for self understanding ... if only a climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided'. This enables 'an underlying flow of movement towards constructive fulfilment of inherent possibilities' (1978, p. 7).

When the relational qualities from Rogers' conditions are present – openness and authenticity, warm acceptance and sensitive understanding, and when received, 'the other' feels seen and understood and a deeper relating becomes possible. It enables a deeper inquiry into a client's problems and the mystery of their existence (van Kalmthout, 2008). The realness and openness of such a meeting touches something profound – the sacred. It facilitates healing and growth. It is this sort of relating and participation that Rogers suggests gives access to the spiritual dimension. 'At these moments it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger' (Rogers, 1990, p. 137). Presence (Rogers, 1990; Schmid 2001), tenderness (Thorne, 2012), relational depth (Mearns and Cooper, 2005), encounter (Schmid, 2001) and love (Patterson 1997) – have all been used to convey this depth of meeting.

Living a practical spiritual life is attending to the significance of mutual causality and the relational qualities of our participation – the entanglement between our inner world and the outer world. This suggests we need to learn to live the conditions in all aspects of our life. Rogers knew he was presenting a 'way of being' rather than only a therapeutic technique or clinical hypotheses. He wrote about its application in education, interpersonally, with management and administration, within families and in international conflict situations (1978, 1980). A 'way of being' based on his conditions and a belief in the formative tendency involves having the intention of extending our authenticity, prizing and empathy that we have for a client out into every meeting and relationship. What would it mean to live in this way? It would be wholeheartedly living a life founded on person-centred values rather than just providing it during the therapeutic hour. It changes a job into a spiritual path. This is 'walking your talk'. It becomes practical as it informs how we relate, how we respond and how we act in the world. A practical spiritual path requires a shift in how we relate to each other and participate in the whole of life, day by day, thought by thought, action by action in every arena of our lives – with friends and family, at work, with our communities, our country, the EU and the whole world.

An illustration

This experience of mine illustrates the kind of moment by moment attending that is involved when attempting to live a practical spiritual path. It highlights the significance of the relational qualities of participation, the co-creativity of the interconnected world and living our person-centred qualities and values in all aspects of our life.

I was in Brighton about to run a workshop. I had been up until 02.00 preparing, I felt excited about the day but also tired and stressed. As I struggled out of the door with all my bags and computer, the taxi driver was

busy at the boot of the car; I impatiently pushed my suitcase towards him. It fell over. He was irritated by my seeming 'rudeness' and lack of consideration for him. As I went to get in, my door was locked and I had to ask him twice to open it. I thought him very inconsiderate. As our journey started I reflected on what had happened and how quickly the difficulty developed between us. I didn't like how I'd behaved. My first attempt to talk about the difficulty lifted the atmosphere a little but as I reflected further, I realised each of us hadn't really shifted. We had spoken in order to prove ourselves 'right' and the other 'wrong'. I decided to try again. This time I told him more about my situation, how I felt stressed, tired and was struggling. I felt vulnerable and wanted him to look after me by taking my bags and felt cross when he didn't. I told him I had been unreasonable. In hearing more from me he said he'd been in his own world, he wasn't aware of me, he just thought I was difficult, so was difficult back. He generously said that he wished he had seen and helped me. I said I wished I had been straightforward and just asked him for what I needed. We were both touched by each other's openness and honesty. When we got to the venue, he carried my bag to the door, and we looked warmly into each other's eyes, knowing we had seen the worst and the best in each other. We shook hands warmly making eye contact and thanked each other.

The qualitative nature of participation

Developing awareness of how qualities shape our participation enables us to understand how our inner world co-creates our experiences and the world. These relational abilities allow us to recognise the qualitative nature of our communication and behaviour and its effect. Before getting into the taxi I was stressed and tired. I was preoccupied with myself and was only aware of the taxi driver with regards making my life easier or worse. I was impatient, irritable and dismissive of him when he ignored me. When sitting in the taxi I was able to slow down and see how my tiredness and stress meant I was trapped in my self-centred 'restrictive self', unable to even realise I wanted help, let alone access my ability to ask for help. I blamed him as he was ignoring me, which justified me dismissing him. I saw how my relational qualities – tiredness, stress, impatience, neediness and self-centredness co-created the situation where the taxi driver thinking me difficult, ignored me. Each of us dismissed the other, feeling they had been rude.

In reflecting, I was able to see how I had behaved without any concern for him. I began to be able to see his experience alongside my own. My relational qualities had begun to shift to include reflexivity, openness, care and interest, and willingness to see my responsibility. When this deepened, after my first attempt to talk to him, there was a palpable shift as he responded wholeheartedly to my more authentic shift. We started to relate differently to each other, as if with Rogers' conditions. There was an unexpected depth as when the wholeness of the conditions is present (Wyatt, 2000; Schmid, 2001; Mearns and Cooper, 2005). Mearns and Cooper describe such relational depth as 'a co-transparency, a co-acceptance, a co-understanding, a co-receiving of each other – a flowing backwards and forwards ... through the channel that connects' (2005, p. 46). The qualitative shift of our participation co-created mutually enhancing relating that seemed to have 'a multiplier effect' (Wyatt, 2013, p. 106) so we both ended up with smiles on our faces

and a joy in our hearts from the sense of communion. We shifted from each seeing the other as 'wrong' to being more fully present and able to recognise, understand and value each other.

Congruence, maturity and 'living with heart'

During this experience of mine I shifted from incongruence towards being congruent. When I was in the taxi I was able to slow down and reflect, which enabled me to physically come into myself, to my felt sense (Gendlin, 1981) and know the discrepancy between how I had behaved and the fact I was just about to facilitate a person-centred workshop. I felt sad and gently accepting of myself for what had happened. This process seemed to enable me to connect up and out of my restricted self-concept where I expect my needs not to be seen and to be dismissed, and find a more 'whole-self'. I began to understand my responsibility and recognise these familiar underlying patterns of mine. A 'whole-self' is like a whole-person conceptualisation of congruence (Seeman, 2001; Ellingham, 2001; Wyatt, 2001). Congruence is when our experiencing, awareness and behaviour are aligned with one another (Rogers, 1986). A whole-person version is when congruence is extended to include 'all levels of processing and functioning within a person' this includes 'the physiological (neuro-bio-chemical), [the] diffuse and undifferentiated sensations, the emotional-cognitive processing and ... [the] behavioural and communication processes' (Wyatt, 2001, p. 230).

Rogers' talked about how 'the optimal helping relationship is the kind of relationship created by a person who is psychologically mature' (1961, p. 56), who is taking a step towards becoming more congruent and being 'fully functioning'. Intending to live a practical spiritual path and taking Rogers' 'way of being' into all aspects of our life, moment by moment, is a huge undertaking. I think the role of the heart plays an important part here.

All major religions and wisdom traditions have linked the heart with spirituality (Klotz, 2001; Helminski, 2000; Kornfield, 1994). The heart is recognised as the source of virtue, wisdom, compassion and gives us access to our soul or 'higher self'. In the bible the heart is mentioned 743 times in relation to thoughts, wisdom, 'right action', love and strength. It is both responsible for 'bad' and 'good' behaviour illustrated by this quote from Luke 'The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks.' (Luke 6: 4-5). Neil Douglas Klotz, a spirituality and psychology scholar, sees the heart as the expansive centre that has generative power (2001).

Living a practical spiritual path involves opening our heart. This facilitates widening circles of awareness and compassion that can extend outward to include the whole earth. Others, and I call this 'living with heart' and it is what Jack Kornfield, calls 'a path with heart'. He says 'When the heart is undivided, whatever we encounter is our practice. There is no difference between sitting in meditation in dedicated silence or acting in every realm.' (1994, p. 289).

This view of the heart is now supported by recent neuro-cardiological research (Lacey and Lacey, 1970; Armour, 1991; Childre and Martin, 1999; McCraty, 2010). It shows the heart as a conductor or 'global coordinator' (McCraty, 2010, p. 14) communicating with the brain and the body in four interconnected ways, which orchestrates the different interrelated systems of the body, influencing every cell in the body. These are

- Neurologically – 60% of heart cells are neurones, which acts via the afferent nerves of the autonomic nervous system affecting the functioning of all parts of the body, profoundly influencing the functioning of the higher brain centres, to a degree that functionally it has been termed the 'heart-brain' (Armour, 1991, McCraty, 2001).
- Biochemically – as a major endocrine gland, many hormones and neurotransmitters are released affecting the functioning of the brain, every organ in the body and our emotions (Cantin and Ganest, 1986; Armour, 1991).
- Biophysically – through pressure and sound waves (McCarty et al, 1999).
- Energetically – it creates the most powerful electromagnetic field in the body, which is magnetically 5000 times stronger and electrically 60 times stronger than the brain (Song et al, 1998; McCraty, 2003).

It has been shown that when our physiological systems are coordinated and working well together, our heart rhythm is more ordered, like a sine wave. This heart coherence is 'associated with increased order, efficiency and harmony in the functioning of our body's systems' (McCraty, 2010, p. 12) from the greater synchronisation between the two branches of the autonomic nervous system and a shift to increased parasympathetic activity. We feel good with this heart-brain-body synchronisation and the harmony between the physiological, emotional and cognitive systems. We become more resilient, more able to tolerate stress, our immune system improves, we have better regenerative ability, our emotions are more balanced, cognitive abilities improve with increased concentration, our perception widens as we are able to see the big picture and deepen our understanding of contexts and our ability to be creative, access intuition, inner guidance and wisdom is enhanced (Childre and Martin, 2001; McCraty, 2001; McCraty 2003; McCraty, 2010).

Research at the Institute of Heartmath has shown that experiencing a sense of appreciation, empathy and care towards others and self creates a state of heart coherence (McCraty, 2010); as does heart-based meditation. When in heart coherence we are likely to feel a sense of wellbeing, peace, unity, greater connection with our intuition, higher self and a feeling of connectedness with God or unity with others or nature depending on our belief system (Childre and McCraty, 2001). Doc Childre, founder of the Institute for HeartMath and Rollin McCraty, the Director of research, suggest heart coherence 'creates an *internal environment* that is conducive to fostering spiritual experience ... [and] being able to live "more from heart", in alignment with their deepest core values, or with greater connection with spirit.' (ibid p. 17)

The spiritual and wisdom traditions and neurocardiology are both providing evidence for the expansive, generative and wise nature of the heart. There appears to be a marked similarity between a whole-person conceptualisation of congruence (Seeman, 2001; Ellingham, 2001; Wyatt, 2001), which includes 'all levels of processing and functioning within a person' (Wyatt, 2001, p. 230) and heart coherence, which involves 'increased synchronisation and harmony between the cognitive, emotional and physiological systems' (McCraty, 2001, p. 17). The positive emotions that bring about heart coherence are remarkably similar to the relational qualities of Rogers' conditions. This suggests that heart coherence facilitates these relational qualities. The heart then becomes a place of balance, integration and integrity. Heart coherence is like being heart-centred – bringing my thoughts, my feelings, my perceptions and my experiences to my heart, because from this place I can be open, have a broader perspective and be closer to Rogers' organismic functioning (1980).

Returning to my illustration, when I took time in the taxi to reflect on what had happened; gently seeing my responsibility, my gentle acceptance of myself yet also wanting to make amends, were authentic positive feelings. I moved closer to heart coherence, which became like a feedback loop facilitating more authentic and wiser, compassionate behaviour and these in turn brought more heart coherence. I was able to soften the limitation of my restricted 'self concept' (Mearns and Thorne, 1988) shaped by my personal history, the culture within which I grew up and the decisions I made about who I am, who others are, and the nature of the world. It enabled me to break free from this 'experiencing and perceptual net' through which I had perceived, experienced and communicated when I was stressed. As I accessed a more whole-self I felt concern for how my behaviour had affected another and felt the incongruity of my values from my behaviour. For a while I was able to connect up more the different aspects of myself – both 'configurations of self (Mearns, 2000) and different dimensions of my life and stepped closer to an integrated coherence between my values, vision, thoughts, feelings and behaviour in all aspects of my life.

The state of the world

Today we face 'a cultural turning point' (Lipton and Bhaerman, 2009). The old Newtonian-Cartesian worldview has led to unimagined technological and material advances, and at the same time intensifying crises including the grave financial instability which threatens economic collapse, increasing distrust in our political systems, an explosion of ecological concerns and an emotional impoverishment from the 'decades of individualism and consumerism which have eroded away our social bonds' (Gerhardt, 2010, p. 12). Desmond Tutu, in describing the extent of the crisis, says there is 'a radical brokenness in all existence' (Tutu, in Wheatley, 2002). In learning how to be rational, logical and take things apart in order to understand them, the result has been a materialistic fragmented world with an overemphasis on the quantitative. Ken Wilber, a philosopher and spiritual teacher talks of a 'flattening' when scientific materialism shapes our world. When only the lens of a materialistic science is used – the depth dimension of the world is lost (2001). The outcome is the primacy of technological and materialistic goal-orientated growth dominated societies immersed in consumerism fuelled by

the tyranny of debt. There is a disconnect from moral concerns and value-based decision-making as art, aesthetics and ethical responsibility is relegated and excluded from science, business and government policy' (ibid). This stands in stark contrast with the new emerging interconnected worldview, which illuminates intrinsic wholeness, caring, ethical participation and wise cooperative decision-making. Within each paradigm the nature of relating is starkly different (Wyatt, 2010). Contrast the qualities above, with fragmentation, mechanism, control and determinism – the qualities often associated with the Newtonian-Cartesian world (Capra, 1983; De Quincy, 2002). The relational qualities determine the sort of world we live in.

In Western society an imbalance has developed between the individual and the collective. Einstein spoke of humans' being 'prisoners of their own egotism' as 'egotistical drives of the individual are constantly being emphasised to the detriment of diminishing 'social drives' (1949). Since Einstein said this over sixty years ago, in part the situation has worsened. There is more competitive individualism as people have become more ego-bound, driven by consumerism, anaesthetised by addictions and alienated from society. Bill Plotkin, a depth psychologist and facilitator of societal change believes the majority of humans 'in the developed world' have not reached maturity and he speaks of the 'societal symptoms of patho-adolescent' (2008, p. 7). During healthy development, our 'circle of identity' normally increases. This defines the people who are essential to our survival and for whom we can extend our care and concern towards. With our immature society we are seldom able to extend our 'circle of identity' beyond our immediate circle of our family and a few friends.

Conclusion: The significance of a practical spiritual path

Given the state of the world there is a real need for us to take up this invitation of 'living with heart' and for our participation to be shaped by the relational qualities of Rogers' conditions open to a potent creative tendency, rather than prescriptive external authorities. Rogers' philosophy of life has always challenged the authoritative power-base of society; this is the nature of his 'quiet revolution' (1978, p. 290) that makes it a political philosophy (Rogers, 1978; Proctor, 2002). Rogers in describing a 'person of tomorrow' observed trends developing that made him hopeful. These trends included a desire for openness, authenticity, caring, wholeness and intimacy; skepticism towards science and technology; the materialistic and authoritative power-based society being challenged; and a yearning for the spiritual (1980, p. 350-352). James Hillman and Michael Ventura voiced a different view in their book 'We've had a 100 years of psychotherapy and the world's getting worse' (1992).

I see an intensification of multiple global crises, I also believe these very same crises are evolutionary opportunities, as Rogers did (1980). Choosing to live a practical spiritual path entails understanding the co-creativity of the interconnected world. Who we are and how we behave – our participation – creates the world we live in. By 'living with heart' we can hold the intention of living the relational qualities of Rogers' conditions in all aspects of our live, moment by moment. And be gentle and learn from failing, so gradually

developing this capacity. This continues Rogers' work and strengthens his 'way of being'. The work encompasses the personal, the professional and the societal. Individually we can set our intention to live a practical spiritual path. We can commit to developing our maturity, our congruence and step towards our whole-self and heart coherence. Our restricted self-concept softens as awareness grows and our 'perceptual and experiencing net' widens. As we learn to extend our ability to live the relational qualities of Rogers' conditions – from only with our clients, students and supervisees, out to our immediate circle of family and friends and then further outwards to the wider world – we'll find our circles of identity widening. As our consciousness expands in this way, we experience the interconnected nature of the world and we become relationally responsive and feel an ethical responsibility that we can extend to all people and all of the earth.

This facilitates how we are collectively. Being able to welcome, value and learn from different opinions by suspending assumptions and certainties, and becoming curious, enables a freedom to understand and respectfully accept difference. The surety of judgement that maintains the dualism of 'right' and 'wrong' is left behind. This openness to multiple perspectives enriches the ability to work together. Each person's contribution is valued as difference opens a channel to creativity. This is living the relational qualities of Rogers' conditions with openness to the living energy of the evolutionary flow – collectively. Working collectively is enriched if it involves relating at depth, with its mutually enhancing 'multiplier effect' which is creative and generative (Wyatt, 2013). I believe heart coherence facilitates this happening. Research will be needed to test this hypothesis. New thinking and wise collective intelligence can emerge from these collaborative conversations (Briskin, 2009; Isaacs, 1999; Wyatt, 2013). Working collectively in this way expands our consciousness (Bohm, 1994) and steps towards addressing Einstein much quoted message 'No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. (Quoted in Plotkin, 2008, p. 9).

As person-centred therapists I believe there is an important role for us to play in facilitating the 'cultural turning point'. I sometimes fear we are too preoccupied with gaining professional standing within the psychology and psychotherapy professions and have lost sight of the inherent political nature of the person-centred approach. That we are no longer actively playing our part, beyond our work with our clients, in strengthening those trends Rogers observed for a 'person for tomorrow'. Perhaps embracing a practical spiritual path could enable us to expand our consciousness and widen our circles of identity. We then are able to find the best ways forward for all, within our community and our society and so extend the part we play collectively in turning the current crises into evolutionary opportunities.

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