

Chapter III:

The “Spiritual Psychology” of Meredith Sprunger

Every electron, planet, thought, personality, and spirit reality is a functioning unit in this holistic universe; no entity or being exists or lives in isolation.

(Sprunger, 1992, p. 12)

Introduction: Meredith Sprunger’s Life

The mountains of West Virginia flowed into the Ohio Valley, and the orange–peach sunset was brilliant as I drove into Indiana on U.S. 33, the same highway that bisects Greene County in Virginia. There was a gentle roll to the farmland in Indiana, inert fields that lay dormant in anticipation of the dawn of spring.

As I drove toward Fort Wayne, I thought about Meredith Sprunger’s letter (February, 1996). One of his earliest glimpses of spirituality occurred when he was four years old, when he said to himself: “there is something about life that I do not understand, but I’m going to find out.” He described it as a “compelling urge,” a “deep hunger to know more about life.” Perhaps this was his first peak experience, a first taste of transcendence. “Most people have a sense of the ministry of a Reality above and beyond themselves which is bringing meaning to their lives,” he wrote.

These aspirations of the heart take years to integrate our minds and fashion our lives. Along the way, critical or peak experiences stand out in [my] memory. The death of my mother when I was about nine, and the death of my father a year and a half later, were rugged, reality–probing confrontations. I recall sitting in our front room during the home funeral service of my father looking out our picture window at a herd of cows grazing in the sunshine, and saying to myself, “Now I’m like those cows with no one to care for me but God.”

After that, Sprunger lived with an aunt and uncle. Two years later he recalls hearing Handel's *Messiah* performed by the community chorus. "I was so carried away by the spiritual grandeur of the lyrics and music that I became aware of my own finitude and insignificance." When he got home, he prayed that God would make him a part of something larger than himself.

One of the hurdles of Sprunger's adolescence and early adulthood was the selection of a vocation. He had always been interested in nature, religion, and philosophy, and in "the 'why and wherefore' of things." He struggled with how he could pursue these interests, and chose chemical engineering at Purdue. But after earning the highest grade of his peers in chemistry that semester, he also knew that he would not be happy in engineering. A transfer to the School of Forestry made him more comfortable, but he had embraced only one of his interests. Philosophy and religion still pulled at his attention; perhaps he could enter the ministry after graduation?

A seminary official told Sprunger a liberal arts degree was required to enter the ministry. After much questioning and soul-searching, he decided to transfer to Mission House College, where he majored in philosophy. He earned a B.D. from Mission House Theological Seminary, a M.Th. at Princeton, and a Ph.D. in psychology from Purdue. In 1949, he took two jobs: teaching psychology (Elmhurst College) and serving as a pastor (Highland Avenue United Methodist Church in Chicago). The burden of the two jobs, combined with the daily commute through Chicago, enervated him. He kept going until overcome with exhaustion and depression.

Suddenly my ego invulnerability was shattered. Only those who have experienced the engulfing depth, anguish, and hopelessness of such

depression can know what it is like. It is a psychological–spiritual event that tests the depth of the soul. It will either leave you a wounded and broken individual or a transformed and stronger person more in tune with spiritual reality.

Sprunger called it the “transforming peak experience” of his life. All of his defenses were exposed, and he could either cave in to despair, or give himself “completely to God.” He wrote, “I saw [the latter] as the only option with which I could identify. My life had been dedicated to God before but now I faced the ultimate test. The restructuring of my inner life was slow but sure. I had passed through the tempering fire of testing and knew the spiritual invincibility of being a son of God.”

In 1950, Sprunger moved to Culver, Indiana to become pastor of Grace Church. His spiritual life, he found, had taken on a “new dimension.” He was more interested in “the religion of Jesus rather than the religion about Jesus.” More importantly, he came to the realization that a different approach was needed in Christianity. He wrote outlines for a pair of books, but didn't find time to commit to the project. He felt that he needed once again to contemplate his direction. Many nights were spent “under the stars” in Culver. A new orientation was needed in the Christian church, and he felt that God wanted him “to move in this direction.” He finally committed himself to the project.

Soon after, a prominent judge, Louis Hammerschmidt, gave Sprunger a copy of *The Urantia Book*¹ (1955) and told him, “I'd like to know what you think of this.” The

¹*The Urantia Book* (1955) is a 2,100 page volume which covers a broad spectrum of thought, from cosmology to history, to the life and teachings of Jesus. Sprunger (personal communication, May 3, 1996) elaborated: “Although the book purports to be

table of contents seemed irrelevant, and reading the book seemed like a waste of time. He avoided it. But he knew that in September he was to see the judge again, and he needed to at least have looked at it. He finally picked up the book. While perusing it, he found "Part IV: The Life and Teachings of Jesus." Since he was a minister, he knew he could evaluate this part fairly easily. Sprunger wrote:

I did not find what I expected to find. It confirmed and greatly enhanced the New Testament story. Often I read with tears streaming down my cheeks. When I finished reading the book, I realized that the basic ideas I had decided to write about were here presented much better than I could possibly formulate them. I had the pervasive sense that my whole life had been prepared for this new vision of spiritual reality. The rest of my life has been a postscript and postlude to this climaxing peak experience of my spiritual pilgrimage.

What would it be like to meet this man, who had been through so much?

The sunset had faded by now, and it was dark as I entered Fort Wayne. Sprunger's map directed me to his house with little effort, and I drove up the concrete driveway. The light was on, and as I arrived a smiling man emerged from the front door wearing a gray suit with a white shirt. He was smaller than I expected, with thinning hair combed back on his head. He welcomed me with a friendly handshake, greeted me and directed me inside, where I met his wife, Irene. She was a petite woman, with thick white hair and sparkling eyes; she, too, gave me a warm greeting.

revelatory, it disavows any claim to finality or infallibility (Urantia, 1955, p. 1008) and states that its science and cosmology are not inspired and will soon be in need of revision (p. 1109)." The book is not advertised or sold for profit. The hardcover edition has sold over a quarter million copies (John Hales, personal communication, April 17, 1996).

The living room was spacious, open and uncluttered. Next to the door was a piano with several pictures on it. Directly opposite the door was a built-in bookshelf, and in the far corner was a burgundy-brown corner couch, with an easy chair next to the sofa. A circular coffee table held a pastel blue vase with red silk tulips, and numerous magazines aligned in neat rows. Two lamps illuminated nature prints over the couch.

After showing me around the house, he offered me a seat; I sat in one corner of the couch with Dr. Sprunger in the other. After a momentary silence, he said, "So. Tell me a little bit about yourself." It was then that I realized that these two people had invited me into their home, and yet they had never met me, and knew very little about me. We talked for several hours that night, getting acquainted with each other, sharing our lives and mutual interests.

After breakfast the next morning, we sat down to talk about spiritual psychology. We agreed to break up the conversation into two parts of about an hour each, though it was possible for us to go longer (or shorter) if necessary. The dialogue, like his writing, was intense, philosophical, and deep.

Sprunger's Theory of Spiritual Psychology

How is This Theory Unique?

One of the first topics addressed by Sprunger in our discussions was how his theory could be distinguished from other theories of psychology.

MS: One of the closer approaches to this whole area would be humanistic psychology, the psychology of Maslow and so forth, but each of them stopped just short, I think, of the insight or courage to recognize that

human experience has a spiritual aspect to it as well as other aspects. And psychology in general has been a little slow to have the courage to recognize that spiritual insight, spiritual values, the perception of truth, beauty, and goodness, is a key factor in human experience. And psychology some day will come of age and recognize that this really should be central in self-actualization, growth, creativity, creative activity, and the higher values in human living. So this is a coming area that some day will be very important in the field of psychology.

It's probably good that we started with the basic, physiological, material background of behaviorism, and proceeded up into the more dynamic, and the more difficult things to control with experimentation, but this is the area where the greatest potential in psychology lies. And I think we will eventually recognize that all of the departmental studies in human knowledge are artificial to some degree, and all of these aspects of the human being actually mold together in a unity, although it's convenient for us to study the physiological, the psychological, the social, and so forth, but these are all actually unitary things in human experience and in human living.

Spirit, Mind and Soul: The Endowment of the Human Being

Sprunger mentions three "parts" of the human consciousness: in shorthand, these could be called mind, soul, and Spirit, as shown in Figure 1.

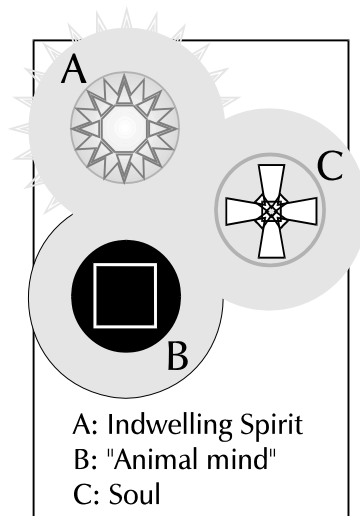


Figure 1: Spirit, mind and soul

During our interview, Sprunger defined these terms, and elaborated on the interactions between them.

MS: Each human being is born with what I call the “animal mind;” it includes both the conscious and subconscious aspects. It’s also my conviction that the human mind is actually indwelt by a fragment, a spark of the Spirit, a fragment of the Spirit of God, and this I would call the superconscious. And as the individual grows and experiences conditions in life, this potential that they have, of maturity in terms of responsibility, following that which is true, and that which is good, I think, begins to take root in their lives. As they begin to make decisions in harmony with truth, beauty, and goodness, there evolves what traditionally religious people have called the soul. And the soul in my judgment is a partially material, partially spiritual kind of entity that continues to grow, and as it grows and

matures, it evolves the capacity of what might be called a “second mind.” And as the individual learns to live more and more in this spirit–soul mind, the second mind, he or she becomes more effective, more creative, more aware of the potentialities of existence, and less and less dependent on the animal urges, the animal needs, the physiological, and more and more involved in what we call the mental, the philosophical, the spiritual, the humanitarian, the creative, and this kind of thing. So what [then] exists dominantly is this soul–spirit type of mind that is actually created by the identities and decisions of the individual as they mature.

Determinants of Behavior: Heredity, Environment, Self–determination

The individual has three basic factors which determine behavior: heredity, experience, and what Sprunger refers to as “self–determination.” Heredity includes all genetic inheritance, while experience refers to the environmental conditions which influence each person. “Self–determination” consists of all the will decisions and actions made by an individual (see Figure 2).

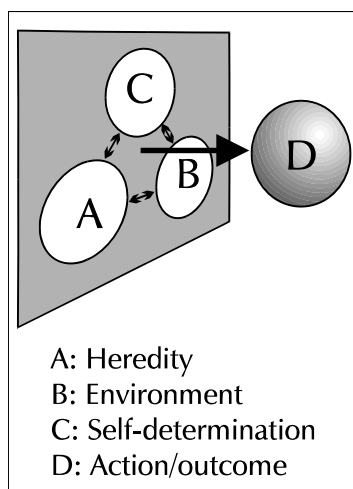


Figure 2: Determinants of behavior

He reflected on the relationship of these determinants during our discussion:

MS: Psychologists in the past have probably overemphasized experience, environment and conditioning. I think psychology has to learn from genetics and biology that the physiological–mental mechanism the individual is born with is probably more important than psychologists have in the past recognized. It needs to be balanced more effectively with experience and learning than psychologists have done. I think both are important in learning and growth. It's my conviction that the basic orientation that people have probably is more a factor of their heredity and their genes than anything else. That's the given, that's where we start.

However, I think all of them can be shifted or altered or augmented, or the opposite, and that's where experience, and the self–determining aspect of human personality enters in. The experiences that

human beings have are basic. We don't really grow much unless somehow experience is involved in this growth factor, this learning factor.

So when an individual, let's say in the inner city, grows up in a horrible environment, that individual can, because of his heredity, or because of his environment, or because of his self-direction, let his environmental conditioning shape him totally, or he can rise above it because he has certain innate hereditary orientations that fight against it, or because he or she makes the self-determination to not let this kind of environment shape him.

And combinations of these three basic factors in human experience and growth can occur. Which one of them becomes dominant is a factor in each individual that's slightly different. As we all know, the same heat that hardens the egg, melts the butter. You know, it's that way in life. Two individuals can go through the same experiences, in whatever environment they're in, and one will react quite differently, quite opposite from the other. Why is this?

Well, there may be hereditary factors involved here, but it's my hunch that self-determination is the key factor. One of these individuals saw certain values that he or she identified with or aspired toward. I don't think it's so important where you are right now, but the direction in which you are facing. The direction in which you are facing, the things that you are trying to actualize, are much more important than what you actually

actualize. And when we forget about this learning potential I think we are losing sight of the most important shaping of potentiality in human experience.

Most people get discouraged when they attempt to do something or try to grow and they keep slipping back into their old modes of behavior. They say, "well you know, I'm just not able, I just can't do this." It's the people who have the stick-to-itiveness that succeed, and if they know this [slipping back] is not unusual, is rather common, is rather normal, they are much more likely to succeed. We have to face in the right direction and keep moving in that direction by little steps, by increments, and particularly by identifications. And by doing this, each individual shapes their destiny. And knowing that if they keep facing in the right direction this will eventually work out is a very basic and important factor in spiritual psychology. Because all of us are not where we would like to be.

It's only by realizing that we are evolutionary beings, we live on an evolutionary planet, and the *modus operandi* of the planet is evolution. This is a methodology which is somehow indigenous with Reality in the universe. And so as we know this, then when we slip and fall, when we make mistakes, we won't be overwhelmed if we know that we can overcome this, or that we can move [forward] if we keep facing in the right direction and never give up. So I guess those three factors of heredity, environment, and self-determination are the basic factors that

determine human destiny. And our will decisions and self-decisions are the most important of the three.

Thus a key component of Sprunger's theory is that the individual has free will, the ability to make choices and decisions. However, this does not mean that the person has unlimited liberty:

MS: It's rather interesting that some behaviorists, Skinner and so forth, don't think very much of the fact that human beings may have free will. I would agree to a large extent with the behaviorists, that the fact that I might want pancakes for dinner, or whatever it may be, may be more a factor of certain chemical-electrical factors in my mechanism than my choice. However, I do think that, in spite of the fact that we are determined by many things, physiologically, chemically, electrically, environmentally and so forth, there resides an area of human potential that transcends, and is not bound to, determinism.

People who know a little bit about, or a lot about [laughs] the things that determine human beings can get overimpressed with determinism. On the other hand, people who don't have this scientific background get overimpressed with their own freedom, thinking they have more than they do. But it's my conviction that, in spite of the determinisms in human experience, we have a degree of self-determinism that transcends the determinism.

CM: So there are factors in our life that are determining factors, and yet, regardless of what those are, we have some range of free will. Is that what you're saying?

MS: That's my conviction and I think that the most knowledgeable and creative students of human nature down through the ages have come to that conclusion. There's a lot of empirical evidence that supports this kind of thing. This is the area which is more important in terms of growth, in terms of destiny, in terms of personality potential... it's the most important thing that we have as human beings. The use of the mind, and the use of what we call the will, is the determinative factor in where we end up, or it's the determinative factor, the factor of destiny, in what we eventually become. And with that, you also have to figure intelligence. The amount of intelligence we use in shaping our will decisions, in shaping our experiences, in shaping our direction, are strong factors in the quality of our will decisions.

A Psychology of Creativity, Health and Livingness

A central point of Sprunger's (1992) theory is the presence of what he called "higher values." These values are at the core of his theory, and he gives credit to Abraham Maslow, Viktor Frankl, Roberto Assagioli, and Carl Jung as forerunners who have emphasized the importance of values and spirituality.

MS: I think probably the most important thing that Abraham Maslow did, was to shift the thinking of psychology from the abnormal, from the problem

person, from majoring in analysis, to taking a look at the most creative, the most healthy, the most dynamic people, and learn from them instead of trying to analyze and analyze and analyze. Psychology during the last half century has been pretty good at analysis and very poor at therapy, by and large.

So I think Maslow and others have shifted the attention for those who are insightful and creative in psychology to look at the great resources in the human mind and human experience and let these shape the personality rather than getting wallowed down in analysis that doesn't go anyplace, except descriptive things that really don't help the individual very much at all.

Maslow himself had one of these transforming experiences. You may recall that he was, I guess, working in the field of sexual adjustment, early in his career, and he was stopped during the war by a train. And as he was sitting there, he said, "all at once I had a vision of these cars going past, in which were hordes of people, bandaged, bleeding, and I came to the realization that my life should be dedicated to finding resources for the peace table, so that all of this would not happen. And you know, when I came to myself I had tears running down my face, and my whole life was changed by this superconscious experience." These kinds of experiences, superconscious experiences, are the things that transform people's lives.

Facts, Meanings, and Values

According to Sprunger (1992), a person has "three basic sources of knowledge" which are "intrarelated in endless complexity" (p. 56); these are facts, meanings, and values. On the physical and intellectual level, science builds our knowledge base through the discovery of *facts*. Clearly, science has helped humanity master the physical world.

But members of humankind are capable of understanding more than facts; they are also able to assign *meaning* to experience and thought. Here, philosophy helps us to understand meaning, and to give it perspective in our lives. But philosophy cannot operate alone; it must also integrate the facts of science in order to be maximally useful.

Meanings and facts are helpful, but not sufficient in themselves to understand the human experience. People are also able to ascribe *values* in their lives. Sprunger (1992) points out that this is the true role of religion, to provide renewed attention to, and

understanding of, higher values for each individual. As with facts and meaning, values cannot operate in a vacuum; they must be integrated twice: first, with the most current knowledge about the physical world and second, with the highest meanings of which the person is capable of understanding (see Figure 3).

As fact, [meaning], and value are more holistically understood, great strides can be made in spiritual growth. In developmental experience we normally proceed from facts, to meanings, and then to values. Accordingly, in the hierarchical emphasis of human culture, science gives way to philosophy and philosophy eventually recognizes the priority of spiritual experience. (p. 59)

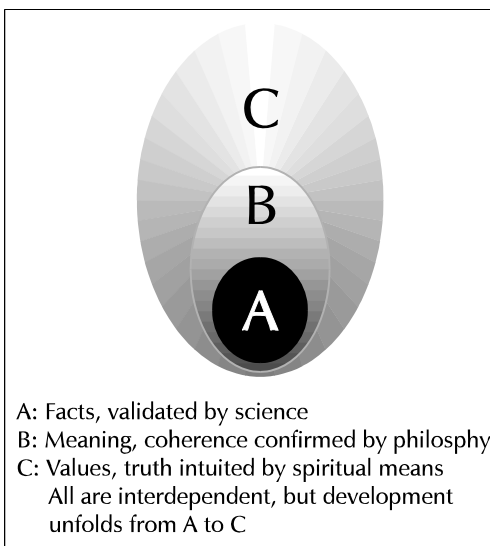


Figure 3: Hierarchy of developmental experience.

Religion, Values and Spiritual Psychology

As mentioned in the introduction, Sprunger uses the terms “values” and “religion” interchangeably. The term “values” is far more palatable to researchers and practitioners of psychology than “religion.” Even so, Sprunger (1992), notes “spiritual psychology

deals primarily with personal spiritual experience” (p. 67). In the course of our conversation, he was invited to develop this theme further:

MS: In some ways I like the term “values” better than “religion” because religion tends to be a semantic word that gets confused because there are so many definitions and so many ideas of what religion is. Each religionist—each individual—has a unique religion. We may have and be able to share beliefs, whatever they may be. But what we call faith is something quite different. Belief can be shared; faith is an individual factor. And no one can really give his faith to another individual; faith can't be “taught,” it has to be “caught,” so to speak. And the faith of each individual is different. So this means that each individual has a different religion, strictly speaking.

A group of people may hold the same beliefs, but each of them has a unique faith, based on the kind of people they are, the kind of experiences they have, the kind of value decisions they make, and this kind of thing. Religion has undergone so many different kinds of value orientations that it almost gets to be useless and I think that may be one of the reasons why psychologists have shied away from religion. It's probably wise because when you talk about religion, what are you talking about? A lot of the atrocities in this world have been carried on in the name of religion....

CM: Why do you think that is?

MS: I think this is because, at each stage in human development, we have different kinds of experiences, and the group psychology tends to shape the individual, or the beliefs of that particular group, and each individual buying into this group belief establishes certain orientations and certain emotional reactions, and certain things that they pursue. And when any particular religion becomes inflexible on any issue, or on any level and something comes in to change it, why they fight it, they die for their convictions. This is why it's important for spiritual psychology to distinguish religious beliefs from, not only faith, but the values that generally are recognized the world over, that are harmonious with things like truth, beauty, goodness, and love, which all of the major religions agree are important.

But when we get hung up on our little prejudices, our limitations, then these values are distorted, and this is why it's so important to have a spiritual psychology that can point these things out and become objective enough to recognize that love and service in the Buddhist is just as good as love and service in the Christian or Hindu or whatever it may be. And this is the value, I think, of science. It can escape the limitations of what we normally speak of as religion. Hopefully, society will eventually get to the place where religionists are mature in their spiritual psychology and in their philosophy so that this kind of thing will be a thing of the past.

So in many ways spiritual psychology is the key to growth in religion. In many ways spiritual psychology is the key to growth in every area of human endeavor, whether it's economics, politics, or whatever. Spiritual psychology is the pursuit of those value orientations that are the highest that we know the world over in all religions, in all cultures.

Spiritual psychology can transcend the prejudices, so to speak, of the various religious orientations, and the various cultural, folkway orientations of society, and point to the kind of growth orientation that humanity needs to move towards. As Maslow said, it's the psychology for the peace table, the psychology for human welfare, the psychology that lays the foundation for the highest development of individuals, for the highest development of society. I think spiritual psychology has the potential of serving in this capacity.

Therefore it is in many ways the most important study of man, to help the individual and society determine what reality is and what values really shape human destiny for good. This is the most important function that any activity could have on this planet.

Need for Discernment

If there is truth, then there must be a way to discern it. Part of Sprunger's (1992) book covers tests for truth. But the process of discernment is one that unfolds as the human being grows and develops. "Truth, itself, is relative and expanding, achieving new expression in every generation and in each person. Nevertheless, human knowledge is

generally dependable. As we make decisions and take action on the basis of our most reliable information we gradually acquire wisdom” (p. 59).

For example, the person must learn to discern between the multitude of voices of the subconscious and the quiet, still Inner Voice of the superconscious. Sprunger was asked how the two can be differentiated:

MS: I think there is an intuitive aspect, a noëtic aspect of human experience of the human mind that can eventually discriminate. At first I don't think it's possible to know whether things coming up in your consciousness take origin in the subconscious or the superconscious. But as you evaluate them, as you experiment in certain directions, I think it becomes more and more clear whether these things are a part of the material, lower-level kinds of motivation, or whether they originate from the superconscious: that which is germane to truth, beauty, and goodness.²

I think that a lot of people, religious people, have maybe a mistaken view of what God-consciousness [the superconscious] might be. I think the fragment of God, or the Spirit of God, or whatever you want to call it, in the mind is something indigenous to the mind itself, and God-consciousness is not something like being in touch with an alter ego or

²Later in this chapter on page 43, a technique for finding one's purpose will include several practical questions to help in the differentiation between the subconscious and the superconscious.

contacting another person. It's something germane to the consciousness itself, and probably can be best discerned by the individual sensing a deep inner peace in spite of the fact that his or her life may be involved in all kinds of problems, frustrations and difficulties, which can even be overwhelming, and yet within, there's a deep inner peace.

Another evidence of what might be called God-consciousness occurs when the individual automatically *resonates* with truth, beauty, goodness, love, and the fruits of the spirit.

And a third sign of God-consciousness is a joy that passes all understanding. It's an inner joy that is indigenous to the warp and woof of the human consciousness. And such individuals, even when they are under stress, even when they are threatened, will have an underlying sense of something else, a deep joy that relieves the tension of the immediate, and the threat of whatever it may be. All of these things are a part of evidence of a higher consciousness, rather than expecting some kind of a voice to speak to you, an alter ego or something like that.

As an individual grows in the discernment between the subconscious and the superconscious, he or she is also able to better discern truth, and vice versa. Note that in the above quote Sprunger says that the person learns by "evaluating" and "experimenting," that is, by being active; the passive approach is not useful.

One of the problems of learning to discern truth is that, as the knowledge accumulated by a culture or society grows, everyone is forced to depend more on others.

Sprunger (1992) writes:

The experience of the centuries is an excellent test of human knowledge and values. Over the years society does acquire wisdom. But along with this wisdom is associated much that is nonessential, illusion, and error. Truths, half-truths, misconceptions, and the literary-cultural forms in which they are communicated are hopelessly confused. And contemporary situations always contain new and unique conditions for which traditional wisdom is not applicable.

Since we cannot become experts in many fields, we must depend upon knowledgeable people of integrity to advise us in almost every area of life. Authority, therefore, is the pragmatic short cut to truth most widely accepted by society. The use of expert opinion becomes so generalized in a complex society that the conventional mind assumes authority to be an adequate criterion of truth. This assumption is obviously fallacious. Even when experts give us the most reliable information available, the perceptive individual will always realize that the judgment given is not true because an authority declared it to be true but because they are referring to sources of validation which other adequately trained persons could confirm.

When this valid social basis for the use of expert opinion is forgotten or placed in a secondary position, authoritarianism results. This

intellectual bigotry cripples growth in all fields of knowledge. The history of all scholarly disciplines demonstrates that often the only way new ideas or discoveries are accepted is when the old experts or authorities die off. It is an ironic paradox of life that authority, while being the most useful short cut to reliable knowledge, when corrupted into authoritarianism is a position farthest removed from an adequate criterion of truth. Dependence on the use of tradition and authority is a common weakness of conservative minds. (pp. 61–62)

Truth: “Living” versus “Dead”

Another problem in discerning truth is somewhat related to the problem of authority. Our culture tends to give credence to the written word. However, when living truth is placed into words, this dynamic dimension is imprisoned in the intellectual–material level of existence. If the words are not reconstituted by the reader into living truth, then the words encapsulate a truth which is dead. Sprunger (1992) spotlights the problem of “living” versus “dead” truth:

Truth is a dynamic, living spiritual reality. It transcends knowledge and other purely material levels of reality. Truth cannot be captured or defined by words but can be known through living experience. Because human beings are spirit indwelt, we can know truth, live the truth, experience the growth of truth in the soul, and enjoy its liberating influence on the mind; but truth cannot be imprisoned in creeds, dogmas, or theology. Truth can be transmitted from person to person through interpersonal communication; but when we attempt to place living truth in impersonal, static forms such as the written or printed word, which is material in nature, it is downstepped to the intellectual level of human knowledge and wisdom. Truth is then [diluted] from living spiritual power into its material intellectual shadow. Only dead truth can be captured in theological concepts. In this way religious experience is reduced to religious philosophy. (pp. 64–65)

He is careful to note that even the writing in his book is dead unless translated by the reader into living, relevant truth. And nowhere does this problem seem more evident

than in religion. Religion becomes an intellectual counterfeit when it is a “second-hand knowledge” of the Indwelling Spirit.

There are two basic types of religious experience. Those religious activities based on fear, emotion, tradition, institution building, and theology are intellectual-humanistic religious functions. Those religious devotions centered in personal experience and fellowship with the Indwelling Spirit of the Universal Father and the actualization of the fruits of the spirit in daily living are spiritual-divine religious expressions. Intellectual religion is dominated by a second-hand knowledge of God, theological beliefs, and institutional service. Spiritual religion is motivated by a first-hand experience of God, living faith, and service to humanity wherever you are and in whatever occupation you may find yourself. The one emphasizes the intellectualization or indoctrination of dead forms of truth which have been downstepped to aspects of human knowledge or wisdom; the other lives by spiritual truth which is spontaneous, dynamic, and creative in its expression in human personality. (pp. 65–66)

Finding One's Place in the Universe: The Need For a Unique Identity

Planetary perspective/cosmology. One of the most unique features of this theory is its concept of the individual's role in the universe of which he or she is a part. Sprunger (1992) clearly writes from a transcendent perspective:

The ground of universe evolution is intelligent purpose and its underlying objective is progress. The basic demand of life is growth, development, and maturation. ...Curiosity, the urge to explore, and the drive for ever-increasing environmental adjustment and adaptation, is innate in evolutionary creatures and evidences the existence within them of an inherent striving for growth and perfection. ...Living experience is designed for educational purposes and the entire universe serves as one vast school for evolving mortals. (p. 21)

During our discussion, he frequently made reference to this perspective, for example, in his description of the process of development:

MS: God has established creative purpose in the laws and evolutionary dynamics of the universe. There is a movement from the simple to the

complex—from the atom to the galaxy, from the amoeba to man.

Development proceeds from the physical through the mental–psychological to the spiritual. Primitive society and youth emphasize physical activities and pleasure. Civilized society and mature adults stress the discipline and development of intellectual capacities, education, and culture. The sages and saints cultivate the spiritual achievements of actualizing truth, beauty, and goodness, fostering brotherhood, and finding God.

Each person is unique. This is a foundational postulate of Sprunger's (1992) theory. We are created by a loving Creator, and each of us is unique. "Since everyone is unique, each person develops a special kind and quality of contribution to society; therefore, the Universal Father's symphony of service is rich in its variety of benefits and ministrations to humanity" (p. 107). In our interview, he added: "I think there is a unique creative plan, orientation, direction, for every individual. And each individual is unique, and can make a unique contribution to our common life."

Each person has an identity. Early in our conversation, Sprunger mentioned that each person works from an identity, and the counselor or psychologist is no exception. Later, when asked to define "identity," he replied:

MS: It's difficult to get synonyms for basic attitudes. Identity as I understand it, is that, in my consciousness, with which I identify. It's that aspect of human experience that we recognize as "us," that we recognize as "who we are," that we identify with.

CM: So the identity is that with which we identify.

MS: Exactly. It's a sense of who we are. It's a sense of our essence. It's a sense of reality, really, for the individual. It's his or her reality. And what we live with, is who we are.

“Identity” fits in with his statement that what we actually accomplish is not as important as the direction in which we are facing. This concept of identity will be one of the keys to understanding growth, using the technique of identification in the next section.

Techniques of Growth: How Do We Get “There” From “Here”?

Theory Must Be Lived

On my return from Fort Wayne, I reflected on our dialogue. It seemed that what we had covered had been all theory, with very little practical application. However, we had talked about the need for practical application at length:

MS: Being theoretical, and thinking about this and saying it, does not carry it out, you see. This task is more than theoretical. It has to get somehow down in the activity of life in the individual and in society, so simply giving the theory is not the end of the matter. It has to be transferred somehow through teaching, through education, through living, to actualize it.

What I'm trying to get away from here is the theoretical, armchair kind of approach to life in saying that “it's right down *there* [he points away] on the road of life that this is carried out.” It is the actual service to

men and women themselves, not just their souls, that must be the end result of our philosophy or theology.

So many people who are academics think that the end of the matter is the theory involved. But the theory is just the beginning, and the educational process, the living process, the actualization process, this is the tough part. This is the part that takes more time. This is the part that really, really makes a difference. So it's good for those of us who are in the field of philosophy and academics and psychology to remind ourselves once in awhile that it's the fathers and mothers out there on the line of life, it's the politicians and the merchants who are having to make the choices and decisions. And as we are involved in these things, this is where it comes to fruition. The theory is just the first step.

CM: So one of your tasks has been to establish the theory, and then each person really has to work that out for themselves.

MS: Each person has to apply it in their unique way, and I think each of us should, in our practical life, seek to live these theories, these values, and as we do so, I think many times our lives will be more influential than our theory. Because as we come in contact with people, they are more influenced by what we are than what we say.

I just made a hospital call on a noble man this week. One of the finest and most balanced persons that I've ever met, who's dying of cancer. And he has a remarkable attitude, cheerful. I said, "Bill, you know,

you're one of the persons that I have admired more in life than almost anyone I can think of." And he said, "Well, you have to just live what you are." And so, I think that the people who influence others a great deal are those who are the doers, who are out there serving. I'm not trying to imply that we who are theoreticians and ministers and so on are not serving. We are. But we need to realize that this needs to go beyond verbalisms and we have to *be* this kind of person in order to really convey the theory that we're trying to share with other people. So what we are is very important.

Making the Theory Practical

As I transcribed, analyzed, and worked with the information gleaned from our discussions, I came to realize that I had learned a great deal after all about applying his theory. There was much practicality interspersed in his wisdom. Perhaps the problem is that there is not a "set formula" for helping a person in spiritual psychology, as each individual will have a different need. Similarly, it would not be possible to train practitioners using "cookie cutter" methods.

For example, we talked about whether specific techniques could precipitate "peak experiences."

MS: Probably not. I used to think 40 years or so ago, that I had two directions to go in, and one possible direction that I considered was to go into the field of clinical psychology that used hypnosis and suggestion in order to create, in the mind of the individual, conditions of a vision of reality that

create a peak-like experience. [Laughs] I don't know if it would have worked or not. But I took a different route.

I've always wondered what would have happened if I had gone down that road and actually attempted to help people create a psychological experience that would transform their lives. I suspect it would have a very limited kind of success because I believe that experience and development of character and personality are so basic in all of this that you really can't create something that is not experientially germane to where you are. So I think it may have had very limited success.

CM: So you don't think you can really "force bloom" a person?

MS: I don't think so, although in a sense, experience does force us to grow, and in that sense I suppose to some degree we can put ourselves in situations or others can put us in situations where we are forced to make basic decisions and go one way or the other. But by and large, I think you are correct. You can't force growth. It has to come from within, really, basically.

Healer's Recognition of Values

What is more important than techniques in spiritual psychology is that the healer begins with a set of values, an identity. For this new field of study, perhaps it will be necessary to develop "meta-techniques" to train the practitioner. It is first necessary for

the healer to understand his or her own identity and values before it is possible to help others.

CM: In this new area of spiritual psychology, how would a psychologist approach his job differently in treating a client?

MS: That's an interesting question; I think the counselor works out of an identity himself, and he works out of an identity recognition of other people. And the psychologist who recognizes that values are basic will probably, after examining and going through all of the other factors in human adjustment, physiological things, the drives, urges, et cetera, try to get the individual to think about some of the more determinative values in their existence, and how they shape his behavior and his emotions, or her emotions. In this way, I think that psychotherapy will be more effective in the long run.

As Carl Jung used to say, "I never treated a person but what I thought the basic problem they had was a value problem, a religious problem." However, a lot of psychologists back away from the term "religion." But religion is basically just a value orientation and psychologists should not be afraid of the term, although I personally like the term "values" somewhat better because there's a lot of distorted meanings regarding religion.

As the healer recognizes that these spiritual values are important, I think he will lead the individual to think about these things, evaluate them,

and see how they dominate or control the rest of his life. Because values do control our lives, whether you're a behaviorist or whether you're a humanistic psychologist.

CM: So there's not just a technique that a psychologist can apply; it has to do with the orientation of the healer, of the counselor or psychologist. They have to have an orientation toward the world of values.

MS: I think that's correct. And you can use all kind of techniques. And probably they will be equally successful, or almost so. It's the content, it's the essence, it's the value of the interrelationship that makes the difference. As various studies have shown, people using different psychological methodologies all get good results. A lot depends on the personality involved and this kind of thing. But I really think it's more a matter of value than mere technology or methodology that's involved here.

Widening One's Viewpoint

One of the practical ways this theory can be lived is simply by changing the point of reference, widening one's viewpoint of life. By taking a more cosmological perspective, it is easier to put one's natural talents and gifts, such as intelligence, in perspective:

MS: The only thing you can really work with is your learning potential, your environment, and with self-direction. Saying, "I just happened to have parents or grandparents who are dumb," or whatever it may be, is not a

very creative kind of way to look at [the differences in intelligence and ability among people].

Furthermore, as a spiritual psychologist I could even say that, “sure, there are some people who have less potential than others,” but it’s my conviction that this is just the first kind of life or experience that human beings have in the universe. There is an ongoing process of life, in that you continue in your learning curve of reality just where you left off here on this particular planet.

So there’s no use to get discouraged because you don’t happen to have an IQ of 160. It really doesn’t make that much difference, because as someone said, intelligent people are a dime a dozen. Character and emotional stability and this kind of thing are, in some ways, more important than high intelligence. So as we evolve our souls, I think this is more important than how much intelligence we may or may not have.

If we keep this in mind, both the people who are very bright, and the people who are not so bright, can moderate. The very bright people can realize “hey, this is not as important as I think it is and I really ought to develop my character, my value potential, my emotional stability, this kind of thing more,” and the individual who is not so bright says, “yeah, I know; I can’t learn higher mathematics and I can’t do a lot of these things on the computer that some of my friends do, but I can develop what positive values I do have so that I have self-acceptance and self-respect in

whatever I do.” Both of them can benefit by that knowledge. It’s sort of a balancing kind of thing in life. Here again you come back to the fact that the key factor is values. It’s not intelligence, it’s not other factors, it’s *values*.

Growth Through Mind Mastery

Decisions of courage. Repeatedly in our talks, Sprunger talked about “mind mastery” and its importance in spiritual psychology. This is an approach which relates to growing from an orientation in the “animal mind” to an awareness of the “second mind” as mentioned earlier.

Mind mastery is also related to the transcendence of the duality of the traditional “nature/nurture” dilemma; it is the process of activation of “self-determination,” or will.

Sprunger (1992) writes of this crucial technique:

The direction and control of our mind, our thinking process, is basic to self-discipline and spiritual growth. Mind mastery is one of the most important of all human accomplishments. By will decision we accept or reject and redirect the thoughts that come to us and thereby influence the content of consciousness and the ultimate quality of our minds. The nature of our consciousness, our thoughts, determine what we become, our quality of being.

Through the constant and repeated discipline of our thoughts, bringing them in harmony with our highest concepts of truth, beauty, and goodness, we eventually condition and shape our feelings through gradual change or through the instant transformation of spiritual insight. Emotional maturity is an accompanying condition or prerequisite of spiritual growth. Significant change, therefore, cannot be accomplished by mere force of will. Growth always requires time and reality foundations. Before we can dominate and redirect the drives and incentives of our lower animal nature we must, through the techniques of will and mind direction, build a solid appreciation and interest in and love for those spiritual values which undergird the higher and more idealistic conduct which we desire. (pp. 69–70)

An understanding of mind mastery is thus a vital part of spiritual psychology. I asked Sprunger to elaborate further on this idea during our talks. In particular, we went into the need for courage and fearlessness, and their development:

MS: The human mind, the personality, grows through experiential contact with problems, frustrations, difficulties, and potentials. In life situations these always involve decisions so that, in a sense, growth is primarily related to creative decisions, decisions of courage, decisions that orient the personality toward that which is good, that which is true, that which is honest, and that which is loving. And these decisions, you see, eventually mold the personality in such a way that it *becomes* these things, and it gradually sloughs off the tendency toward anger, anxiety, fear, this kind of thing. That's what I mean by mind mastery.

It gets to the place where you automatically tend to think, when someone criticizes you, not some kind of defensive reaction, but, "I wonder where he or she is hurting." And your orientation becomes completely different. Rather than ego defensive, it becomes an attitude of concern and love for the individual who is criticizing you or who is putting you down or who is aggressive. And this makes all the difference in the world.

CM: We're able to transcend our own natural response, and place ourselves in the shoes of the other person.

- MS: Absolutely. This, in a sense, is what mind mastery is. It's transcendence from the animal mind.
- CM: So the animal mind seeks comfort and pleasure and absence of pain or absence of conflict, but it's through the mastery of conflict that a person learns this mind-mastery and develops in the superconscious.
- MS: Definitely. The individual soon learns that you really don't escape the necessity of growth in any area by avoidance or denial and after enough experience attempting to do so and you find out it doesn't work, sooner or later you develop the courage to go through problems and difficulties and face them realistically and honestly instead of trying to avoid them or escape them. And it's this kind of courage, this kind of maturity, this kind of responsibility, this kind of fearlessness that develops the really mature personality. [pause]
- CM: Is that fearlessness something that's already there, or is it something... How does someone come to that [point of awareness]?
- MS: Of course, there are various degrees of orientations which we get from the genes that we inherit, but overall, regardless of the advantage or disadvantage that we have inherited, all of us have to face these kinds of things, and learn that fear and anxiety, although on a primitive level are useful for survival, aren't very useful in the higher growth of the individual.

And as one develops this insight, one understands why values are so important in growth and therapy. Once someone realizes that courage is more productive than running, that facing reality is more productive than escaping it, and through experience realizes that fear is something that's negative in his or her experience, one learns to develop courage and have an orientation that can obliterate fear.

If you face the ultimates in life and death, and are not frightened by them, you lose the fear of... "well, this could happen..." or "...if this happens to me, what am I going to do" and so forth. So gradually one learns to be fearless, so to speak. And mature people are people who are so identified with the positive emotions and the positive values in their minds and in life and in the universe that they are no longer dominated by the negative values that come from the animal mind. And they develop sort of an inner surety, an inner confidence, an inner courage, and an inner fearlessness that people who do not have that value orientation just don't have.

Sometimes people get so overwhelmed by, "she's going to leave me" or "he's going to leave me" or whatever it may be that they're afraid of, that they lose all perspective of how important this is. And if we can get individuals to start thinking in terms of larger perspectives of life, and the total value situation, they can begin to get perspective in their lives, and find ways to master their minds in such a way that these immediate

threats are no longer so threatening. By reinforcing the positive emotions, and building this kind of “spiritual conditioning” by repeated thoughts in a direction, individuals begin mastering their own mind.

CM: It sounds like you would help them transcend their current situation by gaining a greater perspective... for one, that you would introduce them to the superconscious by having them transcend the immediate situation and look at a larger picture, if you can.

MS: Definitely. You have to do this though within the frame of reference that is germane to that particular individual. If they are Buddhist, you do it in terms of the kinds of concepts that a Buddhist would recognize or be comfortable with in terms of superconscious values. If the individual were Roman Catholic, you would try to shape things, or put things in terms that would make sense to his or her background, concepts, and experiences.

Mind mastery through thought substitution. One technique of mind mastery mentioned by Sprunger (1992) is thought substitution. He points out that it is not possible to merely repress unwanted thoughts:

Selfish and sensual urges are not suppressed by religious rules or legal prohibitions. Neither can they be banished by will power. Just as a steam boiler generates steam as long as there is a fire in the fire box, so our animal passions are fueled as long as they occupy our consciousness. Negative attention directed toward control or abstinence is almost as effective in generating desire as positive contemplation anticipating fulfillment. As long as there is conscious visualization in the psychological fire box of attention, the steam of desire is being generated. We must find ways to shut down the generating power of need consciousness. In the same way that two objects cannot reside in the same space at the same time, two thoughts cannot occupy the mind at the same moment. Substitutionary thought control is the pathway to determining

motivational direction. It is a rigorous and repetitious discipline but the sure road to mind mastery.

Transcendence of our animal nature is achieved through the constant renewal of our mind until spiritual frames of reference become spontaneous and habitual. We need to faith-visualize, actually "live in" the new insight, attitude, emotion, or spiritually motivated action which we wish to become part of our lives. (pp. 88-9)

Identification

One of the strongest themes in our conversation was the notion of *identification*.

This comes from the idea, presented earlier, that our identity is that with which we identify. When we identify with, and act upon, the "higher values" then we, in time, *become* those values. Identification is one of the ways an individual can attain mind mastery, as shown in Figure 4.

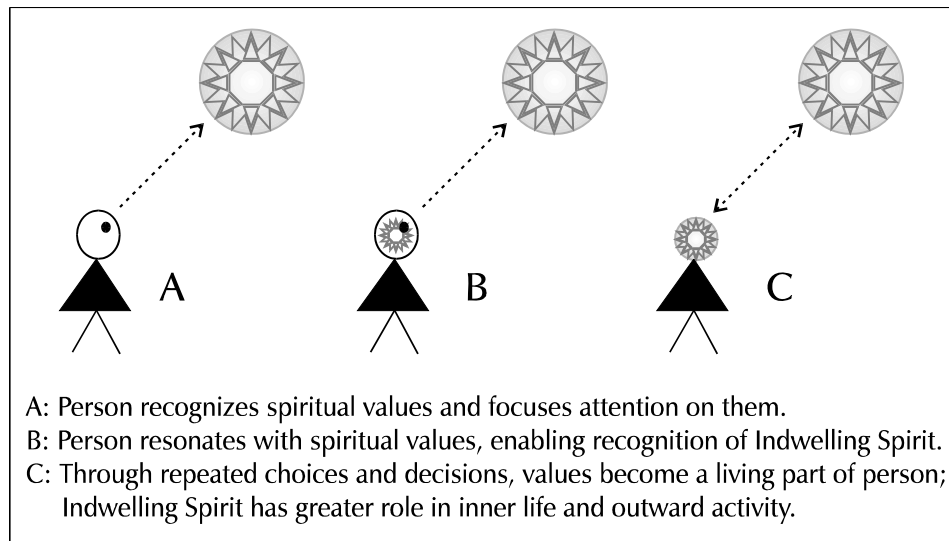


Figure 4: The process of identification.

MS: One of the illustrations of this kind of thing on a very low level, is the work that Russian sports people have developed. I remember reading an

article some time ago, one of the people on the United States weightlifting team challenged their results. He said "you must be using drugs or something to get the results you're getting." And the Russian scientists said, "come on over, and we'll demonstrate." And he did. He hadn't lifted weights for some time, I forgot how long it was. But they put him through the mind-directed kinds of things they use with their athletes. And they told him to "press this weight" and he pressed a good bit more than he anticipated he could lift. This kind of thing is not theoretical, it's empirically demonstrated.

CM: So by changing the way he thought, he changed his ability to lift weights.

MS: Definitely.

CM: And, in the same way, spiritually...

MS: It's the same mechanism, I think, of the mind. Only, when you're dealing with spiritual values and realities, you are dealing with even more potentialities than when you are dealing with the kind of potential that your arm muscle or leg muscle or anything else has. We really don't know what the potentials of the human mind are in terms of the higher spiritual values.

CM: You mentioned that every person is indwelt with a fragment of Spirit. So if we could identify with that fragment, our identity would be changed.

MS: I think this is the way we most effectively change from the ego being in the center of our consciousness and subconscious mind, to something

more basic, a Reality identity, an identity with what religious people have called God, what in psychology we might identify as creative potential, or a higher value. The more we identify with this ultimate source of Reality, and as we recognize it as a loving Reality, one that knows all our weaknesses and foibles, and yet loves us unconditionally, I think that we become transformed individuals.

I think that in the place of the ego something more important happens. We see ourselves as children of Reality, as personalities who are linked with a source of potential that is Ultimate in the universe. And I don't know of any other psychological concept that has more potential for human well-being and human growth than that.

CM: Sounds pretty infinite.

MS: It *is* infinite. And that's why, down through the ages, these people who have found this identity with that which is greater than themselves, have been the most effective people on our planet.

I remember one day in class, the subject came up about "who are the good people?" I said, "well, let's just take a poll here." And I said, "who would you name as some of the greatest people of the world?" I wrote them down on the board; when I got through I had a long list.

And I said "look at that list; what do you see in common with all of them?" With the exception of one or two names, and I think maybe one person, maybe as a joke, said "Hitler" or someone like that [laughs], and

we looked at it, and I pointed out: "All of these individuals have been people who have helped other people, who have brought something significant to humankind, who have identified with something larger than themselves, whose lives were lived for something more important than their own ego." And they agreed. So this is something that is not new at all. But in the rather young science of psychology, we haven't been quite courageous enough to look at this honestly.

CM: As you were talking I found myself thinking about Albert Schweitzer, and Albert Einstein.... So many names come to mind.

MS: And you could go on and on and on. These are the people who have had a superconscious orientation. [pause] These are the people who put values as the dominating aspect of their lives. Who have lived for something larger than themselves.

Finding One's Purpose: The Theorist's Example

A theory is never complete until the theorist works it out in his or her life. He has already mentioned being a "tough but fair" professor, adapting the difficulty to each student. In our conversation, he elaborated on this working out process.

CM: I was wondering if maybe you could tell me how you have worked this theory out in your own life.

MS: This is the kind of thing that we all need to do. I've served as a minister in about half of my professional life, and there you come into direct contact with people all the time, and you try to help, to undergird, to lead, to

share. In my life as a teacher and an author I've attempted to do the things I thought would be most helpful to my fellows.

And I think that's what each of us need to do. We have to make decisions regarding "where do I have a sense of calling? Where am I a natural? Where are my gifts? Where is my creativity most effective? How can this be used for the benefit of the planet on which I live?" Each of us is different in this way, and each of our life plans, as we try to shape them, listening to who we are and listening to the highest guidance that we have, these are the things that cause our life to go in certain paths, and take up certain activities. And this is what I've tried to do to the best of my ability in my own life. [Pause]

So many of my friends in the past have said, "I really don't know what I want to do." Or "I really don't know what I am supposed to do." I guess I have a conviction that these people either are not really serious about this question or they are not serious enough about pursuing it. It's my conviction that when you are really serious saying, "I wonder what I should do," or "what kind of a person am I?" or "How can I do things," and keep thinking about this day after day, week after week, in time, there will be an area, or a direction that will come in your mind, and as you follow that, by trial and error, it will lead you in certain directions. So it's my conviction that every individual can be led if they are serious, and if they're persistent, in a direction that's most creative for their lives.

- CM: So you feel each person can be led, if they're asking for direction.
- MS: That's what I mean by being led, if they seriously ask this question about, "who am I, what are my talents, and how can I best use them," and keep thinking about this day after day, week after week, I think there will be a gradual shaping of an idea, "this is the direction in which I should go." At every major turning point in the road of human life, I think there is sort of an inner direction, saying, "this is the way, among these alternatives." And therefore I think that there's an ideal life plan for every individual.
- CM: So... getting back to the unconscious versus the superconscious. It would seem that it's the superconscious which would lead the person into the higher values that you spoke about earlier. Is that what's doing the leading? Maybe I should ask, where is this direction coming from?
- MS: I think that as you seriously face these reality questions, and as you feel led in one direction or another, you really need to test this. Say, "is this just because something in my subconscious is saying, 'hey, this is a way your ego can get salved' [or] 'Hey, this is a way you can get egocentric or selfish satisfaction?'" Rigorously examine these things, and to the best of your ability, you will know whether you're camouflaging something in your ego, or whether this is the leading of real higher values, which is the superconscious. And I think these are the kinds of questions that we need to ask ourselves so that we're not deceived by our egocentric self-conscious.

CM: It seems to me that you asked those questions at a very early age. In your letter to me, what stands out is the sentence where you said "I recall sitting in our front room during the home funeral service of my father looking out of our picture window at a herd of cows grazing in the sunshine, and saying to myself, 'now I'm like those cows with no one to care for me but God.'"

MS: That's true, I somehow have asked these questions of myself at a very early age. And it really started way back earlier than that. I can remember when I was probably four years old, because my sister wasn't born yet and I am four years older than my sister. I was standing out on the south side of our house in the bright sunshine and I had an overwhelming sense: "there's something about life that I don't understand, but I'm going to find out." Somehow, I've always been gifted or blessed with this kind of philosophical quest, this kind of philosophical groping, this kind of philosophical search for truth, I don't know what else to call it. From the age of four, I have been a searcher.

And I think that through this searching, it has been the shaper and key of my life. At each stage, I have wrestled, often a long time, trying to differentiate among alternatives which of these was the wisest, which was the will of God, which was a superconscious leading, and there's always come a point in my own experience, where I said, "Ah, this is the way, I'm confident."

Role of Suffering in Growth

As discussed, the “animal mind” seeks pleasure and the absence of pain. Courage and fearlessness are needed to develop mind mastery and stamina, and help the person to transcend the animal mind. Another experience that many people have is that of suffering. Many times the circumstances of life present us with great burdens or challenges which cause suffering. In Sprunger's theory (and in his life), suffering can be a catalyst for growth.

CM: You mentioned earlier that experiences have a place, and they're very important. But a person can come out of bad experiences better for it. And you lost your parents at a fairly early age.

MS: Yes, my parents died when I was nine and ten [years of age] I guess. I think that there are certain values that we don't achieve except through suffering. Through solving problems, through living through frustrations, through disappointments, through suffering, if you will. Suffering I think will either make you or break you. And if you let suffering overcome you, you just end up at a lower level.

It's only through courageous facing of suffering and frustration, of reverses, of failure, of whatever, that you really transcend the limitations of life that determine all too many people. And it's only those people who can transcend those experiences of defeat, of pain, of disappointment, of reverses... that develop into the quality of character that can follow the high road, follow the guiding values of their life and contribute to

humankind in the best way. I think that almost all people who develop real helpful personalities are people who have overcome difficulties and suffering.

In one sense, having an easy life is... maybe the worst thing that can happen to you [laughs]. I say that partly with tongue in cheek, but I think there's a very large degree of truth in it.

Only if you make the student work hard and struggle and grope does he grow and learn. I think as a psychology and philosophy professor I had a reputation of being tough but fair. I think the kind of thing that parents and teachers really should strive for, is certain standards that you hold yourself and others to, and you apply them not ruthlessly but with love, and with consideration and understanding for failure and understanding why your students or your children get discouraged and want to give up. And you strive to undergird them and give them lower challenges, and meet them where they are. But I think it's only through struggle, it's only through difficulty, it's only by taking things incrementally with courage that one grows.

CM: So part of the American Dream is not really in agreement with your values. The struggle for getting there is in line with your values, but the "easy life" being equated with the "good life" is not....

MS: Yeah, that's an illusion. The old Horatio Alger stories, you know? Most of these books, as I recall them, were about this guy who had all kinds of

problems, all kinds of difficulties. He had to struggle in order to achieve something. I think that's a better picture of the way growth is achieved rather than the idea of having ease.

And this is why America has been effective. We were pioneers. We were living out in the boondocks and we were clearing land. We had all kinds of suffering and problems. And now that we have a certain amount of wealth and ease, there may be signs that our culture is deteriorating. And that is why the educators, and that is why parents, that is why people in the home... really need to rethink what is happening in America, so that we can get this same rigorous, this same pioneering spirit of courage to face reality as it is, and have the courage to discipline ourselves to do whatever needs to be done in order to grow spiritually, grow in values, grow in the welfare of humanity. This is the hope of America.

CM: So as we rise to the occasion, we grow.

MS: Absolutely.

CM: And if we keep avoiding the occasion....

MS: Not only do you not grow, but you deteriorate in the long run. And one gets concerned about some of the attitudes in America, not having the courage to confront problems, or being "politically correct." All these kinds of things are not really in touch with reality. They follow a certain doctrine, they follow a certain orientation that is not directly tied to this superconscious direction of the human mind. When we get into this kind

of mass psychology we have lost our orientation with the superconscious.

And I think spiritual psychology could be a key discipline to lead both religion and culture toward reality growth. [Pause] At least that's my hope.

Recap of Meredith Sprunger's Theory

Meredith Sprunger has had many challenges in his life, and he has risen to meet them. Whether it was losing both parents in his formative years, his “dark night of the soul” or his struggle for commitment in his life work, each crisis brought forth a courageous effort to find and follow the highest values he could know at the time.

Sprunger's theory is congruent with his life. A person is born with a certain (genetic) *heredity*, and may not be able to control the *environment* in which he or she lives, but there is a third factor, *self-determination*, which is the most important. Sprunger never gets caught in the trap of an illusory “complete freedom”; instead he talks about the balance between determinism and a person's measure of self-determinism. So the person has free will, but is still bound within the parameters of heredity and experience.

Free will is best used to discern, recognize, commit and act upon the highest values of which we are capable at any given time. Our identity is composed of the multitude of identifications we make. That is, “our identity is that with which we identify.” The more we are identified with the indwelling Spirit of God, or divine spirit, or creative Source within us, the greater our freedom to act in resonance with “higher” values of truth, beauty, goodness and love.

The human being is born with an “animal mind” which is not by itself able to transcend its material origins. But we are also endowed with a divine gift: Sprunger calls it a “fragment of the Spirit of God” or “the Indwelling Spirit.” Only by the person’s exercise of self-determination, through identification and choice-action toward the higher values, and the pull of this divine spirit, is the animal nature transcended.

The process of mind mastery, results in the appearance of a “second mind,” a soul. It is a challenging and difficult path. More important than where we are now, is “the direction in which you are facing.”

Sprunger believes that the technique used is not as important as the relationship the healer has with his or her client, and the identity of the healer. Our growth cannot be forced. However, life itself compels us to choose whether we will grow or stagnate.

Each person has a unique faith. Psychology is the study of another person’s faith, the study of the identity of the person. Psychologists themselves work out of an identity which allows them to work with the identity of those who seek healing. By extension, as much as a healer is identified with higher values, he or she can help others do the same.

Some of the techniques used in spiritual psychology are: changing one’s frame of reference, identification, mind mastery and thought substitution. As we grow and mature in our spiritual lives, we are better able to transcend the problems of daily living and look at life from a different point of view. Similarly, our identity is dependent on that with which we identify. As we learn to better focus our awareness on positive emotions and values, we are enabled to better recognize these values, and they become integrated, living parts of our lives. This is a key to mind mastery, the development of a “soul-spirit”

mind. However, we cannot merely repress undesired thoughts. It is far more efficacious to replace unwanted thoughts with those centered on positive values, such as truth, beauty, goodness, love, and creativity.

Sprunger's spiritual psychology is a process of lifelong development and growth. If we are not growing, we are deteriorating. The purpose of life on this planet is connected with our growing, changing, adapting, serving. We are here to learn and to work in relationship with others. Though a person's intelligence and natural abilities may be higher or lower than most, still that person can realize that intelligence is but one factor in life, and the development of character and values is far more important than intelligence.

Life is a process that is much bigger than we can comprehend. It begins on this planet, and continues on realms of which we are scarcely aware. Spiritual psychology offers the possibility of a greater perspective, to allow the human mind more opportunity to transcend its current limitations. But this theory is not an intellectual exercise for academics and philosophers; it is a challenge to each person to live out in the daily life.