PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE HEALING PERSON PHENOMENOLOGY OF THERAPEUTIC CHANGE

WHAT THIS COURSE IS ABOUT:

The vast majority of "clinical" or "therapy" courses focus on the client or patient. The concern is with trying to understand who that "other" is and the meanings that person is conveying to us. But if the person of the therapist is an instrument in the therapeutic relationship, as I believe, isn't it important to focus on the motivations, experiences, needs and concerns of that person who is a co-participant in the process? All of this potentially is part of a therapist's countertransference. (I am using this term in its broad sense as feelings that arise in the therapist during the therapy process with a particular client that can prove to be illuminating, disquieting, and useful to the therapist and to the therapy process.) So this course is about us as therapists.

We will be reading and talking about therapists, healers, the healing process, and the healing relationship. Our primary focus will be the person of the therapist. We will begin with the central question of "Why do we want to do this work?" We will reflect on our own needs for wanting to help, and the ways we have both promoted and impeded change in ourselves and in others. We will consider the ways of being with another that are comfortable and uncomfortable to us (and what we can learn from this kind of reflection). And, we will also consider the importance and meaning that the larger context and community have for us in understanding who we are. Said another way, what is it like for us to be in relationship with a particular other person within our culture at this point in history? These are basic questions that will occupy us in this course—and probably throughout our lives.

Of course, exploring the above questions can feel like trying to unravel different threads that are formed into a ball. More different threads-questions are: Why do we "help" others? What does healing, caring mean to us? 12/16/11o we want anything out of it ourselves? If we do, what does this say about who we are? What do we have to give to another? What do we think others want from us? What are our responsibilities as therapists? Can we let ourselves be helped, cared for? How do we feel when others take care of us instead of us taking care of them? Can we take care of ourselves? Do we? Does context and community affect who we are, how we are with others, and the meanings of helping and caring? How? How does context and community "live" in our inner world and body?

These are questions that don't get answered once and for all, certainly not in this quarter. But they are questions that I find important to keep with me as I do this work.

HOW WE WILL PROCEED:

Towards the end of reflecting on our own experiences as students and as therapists, we will read a variety of articles and plays and share our own reflections and feelings about where we are in these questions at this point in our lives in our particular culture and at this moment in history. The intent is to allow all of us to explore what these issues mean in our lives by reading, reflecting (by ourselves, with each other), writing, and talking about our thoughts and personal experiences that are related to these questions—and to do so in an environment that is safe. So in conjunction with this kind of exploration, please treat what we say in here as confidential.

This course will involve a good deal of reading, thoughtful reflection, and discussion of what we have read. It also will emphasize experiential as opposed to more theoretical discussions of phenomenology, therapy, or psychopathology (emphasize experiential, not exclude theoretical). Our emphasis will be on how a particular reading speaks to us personally—what feelings a reading discussion, "exercise" evoke in us, and what we might be able to learn from our experience.

WHAT WE WILL NEED:

Listening to ourselves, hearing and exploring our own feelings can be enormously useful and exciting as well as sometimes uncomfortable. Doing this will require trust and openness on all our parts. Our goal is to provide a safe, respectful place in which we can ask ourselves some personal questions (i.e., explore some of our personal experience, not do therapy) in the context of a quarter that offers other courses in understanding psychopathology, and in the theoretical origins of phenomenology. Hopefully this course will open some questions for you to keep in mind through this quarter and throughout all of your work here—questions about yourselves as individuals, therapists, parts of the community of healers, and the larger community.

It is my belief that who we are as people profoundly affects how we are as therapists with others. This course presents one opportunity to explore and understand more about who we are as we consider sitting with, being with others.

REQUIRED READINGS:

D. Abram, chapter from The Spell of the Sensuous

J. Berger, A Fortunate Man

K. Chernin, The Politics of the Small

L. Gerber, We Must Hear Each Other's Cry

C. Horowitz, interview

R. Katz, Boiling Energy
E. Levinas, Useless Suffering

McCann & Pearlman, Vicarious Traumatization

A. Miller, Intro and chapter from Drama of the Gifted Child (old edition)

A. Pielmeier, Agnes of G-d J. Rogers, A Shining Affliction

B. Sullivan, Psychotherapy Grounded in the Feminine...

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to probable changes in late October)

September 21 Introduction. BRING TO CLASS, Read, discuss Agnes of G-d.

(What is healing? Helping? Countertransference—the therapist's experience. Being heard and not being heard. The process of listening-hearing. Whom do we work for? with? Context and

meaning.

September 28 NOTE: CLASS STARTS AT 2:30! complete Agnes of G-d

October 5 Discuss Drama of the Gifted Child

(Why do we want to do this work? Is there something about our own background that affects why we want to do this work, our

abilities, needs?)

October 12 Discuss chapter from "The Spell of the Sensuous", and "Boiling

Energy, esp chapters 1-6, 11, 14, 17.

(An individual's experience-- how we "understand" it. Healing

exists not in a vacuum but within a context that includes

influences from family, community, historical time frame, social-political forces, and current understanding of malady and healing. The place of the body in healing, in life. Boundaries. If the Kung approach to healing is rooted in their environment and culture, is this true also for Western approaches? If true, what does this mean for you life and for your work? An experience of change/

transformation/healing in us?)

October 19 Sensitivity exercises (EXTENDED CLASS)

October 26 Discuss preface, chapters 2, 4 in "Psychotherapy Grounded in..."

(What is "helpful"? Being vs/and Doing; Countertransference.

"Containers".)

November 2 Discuss "A Fortunate Man"

(Of what value is healing in the world? Being recognized and recognizing. This book can be understood on several levels: the personal, professional and political implications of our work. Context includes community, historical period and culture.

Boundaries and self transformation.

November 9 Discuss "Useless Suffering", We Must Hear... ", Interview C.H.

(That which is beyond us. Why do we do this work? And with whom? Psychotherapy as a calling. Therapist as witness to other

and to self.

November 16 Discuss "A Shining Affliction"

Why do we do this work? Power of the therapist's counter-Transference. Importance of our own therapy. Need for and complications of supervision/consultation. Hearing and not Hearing. The process of listening. Boundaries. What holds us?

November 30

continue discussion of above, and "Politics of the Small" and "Vicarious Trauma"

(Can we let others care for us? Can we care for ourselves? Do we? What holds/sustains us? Hearing/not hearing ourselves.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: (note: this class is graded Pass/Fail

- 1. Active participation in discussion of the readings and of related personal issues. To facilitate this process, mark the passages that are particularly interesting or unexpected, or to which you had a strong reaction. When you come to class be prepared to talk about these. Sometimes we will read these passages aloud and see how members of our group find the same and different meanings in them. NOTE: for the second class discussion on "A Shining Affliction", select two of your favorite quotes to bring in/talk about in class.
- 2. Write a personal reaction paper that is 3 pages long, hard copy, due in class October 26. This paper is to be shared with your classmates. Use the readings and or class discussions as stimuli for your personal reactions in the paper. The paper might include how you felt about the reading, what memories and associations occurred to you about yourself, reactions to class discussions, etc.
- 3. Pick an issue or question that came out of your reading/reflection/class discussion that was especially meaningful to you. Tell me about it and its relevance for you, for your life, and for you as a therapist in training. OR, explore the various responses you have to why you want to do this work, including any changes that have occurred over time. This paper is due on or before Monday, December 5. 5 to 6 pages.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The aim over this course and quarter and year is to grow in self awareness, learn more about yourselves, about others, and about the many kinds of relationships and interactions that form as you sit with an other. Accepting the mystery of the process yet having the discipline to pay attention to the process and your own learning is crucial—as is being patient with yourself as you take the necessary time to grow as a therapist. Time and patience are necessary not only to grow as a therapist, but also to enjoy the process. Don't forget that this is graduate school. You are supposed to be learners, not experts. And our calling with each other is not unlike our calling with clients, to create a safe, respectful place for growing and curiosity to occur.