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'Spirit release' is a different kind of therapy

Stafford Betty | Feb. 4, 2008

A new breed of therapist is healing the mentally ill not with talk and drug therapy but by releasing troublesome or malevolent spirits who have attached themselves to their victims. I am not talking about religious healers like Francis McNutt, but secular healers, some of them licensed psychiatrists or psychologists, who have discovered, often by accident, that this new therapy works better than what they learned in medical or graduate school. They tell us that too often drug therapy only masks symptoms, and talk therapy reaches only as deep as the patient?s conscious mind can go. But ?spirit release? usually heals, often permanently. Not only does it heal the client; it heals the attached (or ?possessing?) spirit.

William Baldwin?s Spirit Releasement Therapy: A Technique Manual, published in 1995, was a watershed event for this movement. Dr. Baldwin left a dentistry practice to pursue his passion. His ensuing doctoral dissertation in psychology was the first ever to take seriously spirit release as a legitimate therapy.

The disciples of Dr. Baldwin, who died in 2004, deal with spirits, or ?entities,? as they are often called, in a manner very different from most church-based exorcists and deliverance ministers. Missing is the adversarial command to ?come out in the name of Jesus!? These alternative therapists treat the spirits with respect and compassion. To threaten anyone, living or dead, they say, only provokes an angry reaction, but a gentler, more rational approach is usually enough to coax the spirit out of its host and into the light of the afterworld, where it should have been all along.

Spirits come in several varieties, we are told. Most often they are EBs, or ?earthbound.? These are more attached to the loved ones they?ve left behind than to the light they?ve turned their back on; others are addicted to earth?s vices, such as alcohol or narcotics; still others are simply confused, not even sure they?ve died. But DFEs, or ?dark force entities,? are another matter. Intent on evildoing, they attach themselves to unsuspecting mortals to inflict maximum damage to self-esteem, family relations and every expression of love. Speaking through their victims, they swear profusely. They are belligerent, disruptive, threatening and thoroughly unpleasant. They claim they belong to a satanic intelligence that rules them and punishes them when they fail at their tasks. Yet their loyalty to this negative force can be dislodged; with skillful handling they, too, can be released into the light.

One of the most extraordinary claims made by this new kind of healer is that nearly all of us, at one time or another, have had entities attached to us. How do they know? The same way they know everything else they tell us: Under hypnosis, their clients, and the spirits speaking through them, tell them. Dr. Baldwin said he did not invent EBs and DFEs; they emerged, unsought, out of therapy sessions. Over and over and over. Other healers -- from psychiatrist Shakuntala Modi, who practices in West Virginia, to the less credentialed but gifted husband-and-wife team of Melanie and Patrick Rodriguez, who practice in Montreal -- describe a spiritual world and a method of dealing with it that is the same. One might suspect a conspiracy except for the fact that the movement is so widespread, with practitioners ranging from Hindu babas living in Pune, India, to a Polish healer who describes herself as a ?therapist for ghosts as well as people, both needing the same love and care.?

Most of us have a child or relative or friend whose life is shattered by depression, sexual dysphoria, obsessive

compulsive disorder, eating disorder, chronic fatigue syndrome, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, autism or a host of other ailments. What if you were told that there was a healer who could get to the bottom of the problem and heal it, but that the source of the problem was probably an attached spirit? Would you go for it? Could you open your mind to the possibility that your sister?s untreatable 30-year-long bulimia could be stopped dead in its tracks by identifying the spirit behind the disease, releasing it into the light, and then teaching her how to protect against a future attachment?

All in this movement hope that you would. They see the procedure not as a throwback to medieval times when demoniacs were put to death, but as an advance. William Woolger, an internationally renowned transpersonal psychologist, sees it as ?the next and essential stage in the development of psychology, a kind of return to the source.?

In the meantime, Dr. Modi, the West Virginia psychiatrist, recommends a ?protection prayer? for her patients, to be repeated every night. It begins, ?I pray to God to please cleanse, heal, shield, illuminate and protect me, all my family, friends ...? Dr. Modi is not even certain that spirits are real -- perhaps they are fantastic inventions made up out of her patients? subconscious minds. Nevertheless, they might be exactly what they seem to be, and claim to be. And she, and almost all of her colleagues, strongly suspect they are. In any case, all agree that treating spirits as if they were real is often the key to a startlingly quick recovery. And if the client makes himself permanently uncomfortable company for the pestering spirit through prayer and other spiritual disciplines -- reenter religion -- a permanent recovery.

Many years ago I watched a psychically gifted mother-and-daughter team rid a house of bothersome and sometimes terrifying poltergeist phenomena. Skeptical from the start, I studied the sensitive child?s eyes as they followed ?three spirits? around the house during the procedure. (We called it an exorcism back then.) Like the therapists we?ve looked at here, the mother used persuasion, not threat, when dealing with the spirits, and there was never an appeal to religion. It took over an hour of patient, compassionate urging, and it worked. The daughter watched the spirits finally exit the home. The phenomena ceased from that day forward. And the victim, who had put her beloved home on the market, took it off a few days later.

Since then I have paid attention to the claims of these ?gentle exorcists? -- whether their target was spirits attached to homes or persons. It is impossible not to be impressed.

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