

WolfWork:

A Practical Method for Integrating Spiritual Awareness and Behavioral Change

by

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with Jackie Parker

Introduction

How I came to developing WolfWork.

At nineteen I was driving down a crowded New York City street when an old man stepped in front of my car and I hit him. He fell to the ground.

My first thought was for myself. *Oh, no, I'm in trouble. My insurance is*

going to go up. What can I do to get out of this? People gathered around the man who immediately stood up and tried to keep walking. Someone called the police. They soon arrived and questioned me. But everyone around agreed. The man was inebriated. He was taken to the hospital. He had jumped in front of my car. There was no way I could have avoided hitting him. I was blameless. The man himself just wanted to go home. No charges were filed. Later it hit me. I almost killed a man and all I had thought of was myself. What was wrong with me that I had so little compassion?

Very soon after I started therapy knowing that something big was lacking in me. And then the world of psychology opened itself and I became fascinated by the nature of the human psyche. What were we? How could we know ourselves? What did it mean to be human? By the time I finished college I was determined to become a therapist.

A young explorer of the self, haunted by the great question, who am I? I suspected there had to be more than the physical, and I set out in search of what that might be. It was the 60's and the culture was exploding with opportunities for young Westerners to experiment.

I read and was encouraged by *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjof Capra who explained spiritual/mystical concepts in the language of Western science, exploring physics and spirituality as two approaches to the same

idea. I also read about meditation practices and different spiritual paths and soon became an avid student of spirituality, steeping myself in Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish teachings. At the same time, I continued to study Western psychological perspectives as I prepared to become a therapist.

Beneath it all I was a mess—confused, anxious, depressed and rocked by the sudden failure of my marriage. Working as a clinical psychology intern at a private psychiatric teaching hospital, I was not sure if a career as a therapist was even right for me. I knew so little about the self. How could I possibly guide others? I decided to experiment and signed myself up as a guinea pig in my own laboratory by beginning Jungian psychoanalysis, trying out psychedelics, and dabbling in martial arts and meditation. I hoped psychotherapy would help me feel better and I needed to know if it worked. If it didn't my career as a therapist was doomed. I couldn't help others without feeling like a charlatan.

For three years, several times a week, I worked with a brilliant Jungian analyst, Dr. Nathan Schwartz, who helped me begin to discover the hidden impact of my past: being a first-generation holocaust survivor, born into an immigrant family and having a rage-a-holic father. I began to understand what the discovery of unconscious influences from the past really meant on a life—on my life.

My therapist introduced me to the power and wonder of working with archetypes, dreams and the connection with a higher self. Through this I came to recognize that there was a force within me, a different way of intuitive knowing, which I began to attend to and follow when it came to making important decisions. But the hole in my heart from my broken marriage remained.

Then came an experience with psychedelics which was transformative. In the woods of Northern Minnesota on ancient Indian grounds I took a dose of mescaline and entered into what I can only describe as the garden of Eden. I was overwhelmed with awe, experiencing the richness and magical aliveness of nature, yet at the same time I was terrified. of the plants, of the insects on the ground. They seemed to threaten my very existence. I was even afraid of a passing butterfly. The truth was I was afraid of being alive.

When I emerged I knew I needed a teacher. Probably a spiritual teacher. Having read all the Don Juan books I thought of looking for Carlos Castenda in Mexico. Or perhaps I should seek out an Orthodox rabbi, become an Orthodox Jew and study the Kabbalah. This path was closer to my roots, but it did not feel like my path. People I shared my psychedelic experience with either didn't believe me, were in awe that I had such an

amazing encounter, or said, “It doesn’t mean anything. You were stoned on a drug.”

And then I met someone at a party who seemed to understand. He’d just returned from Chile where he’d been a student of Oscar Ichazo, the founder of Arica, a mystical school of ancient and modern Western and Eastern practices whose goal was spiritual awareness, consciousness development, and higher understanding. “Why don’t you take a weekend Arica workshop,” he suggested. “There are classes right here in New York. I have a feeling that your questions will be resolved.”

I signed up and was introduced to Arica. For two days we did breathing, meditation, and slow movement body exercises. By the end of the weekend, I felt calm and centered, better than I ever remembered feeling. I thought about how much these exercises would benefit the men I was working with. Months before I had started a new job creating and directing the first therapeutic drug program at Rikers Island, the infamous New York City prison. The atmosphere on the ward was charged with violence; fights broke out all the time. The inmates were always tense with fear and rage, struggling to communicate with the therapists, as the therapists struggled to communicate with them. I offered the Arica instructors a job teaching at Rikers, and they welcomed the challenge, designing a three-month program

of basic breathing, meditation and slow movement body exercises. I decided to do the program right along with the inmates and see what might emerge.

Within a week, the environment in the prison had shifted, levels of tension visibly decreased. There were fewer fights. The inmates even started communicating better in therapy.

I felt similar changes occurring within myself. I was becoming more at ease, better able to express some of what I was going through and discovering in my own therapy. As the program came to an end, I wanted more of it. It felt like an opening was occurring, one that I hadn't been able to achieve anywhere else.

But I was living a bifurcated existence. On the one hand, I was the product of Western psychology. I had completed all my academic requirements for a doctoral degree in psychology, been supervised by several Freudian and post-Freudian analysts, studied with behavioral and cognitive therapists and had undergone a three-year Jungian analysis. On the other, I was experiencing alternative approaches to healing and states of consciousness which had only been addressed in graduate school as fads or symptoms of psychotic experience. I knew I was not psychotic; I was curious and excited to be experiencing and exploring realms Western psychology had not yet identified.

To call myself a therapist I needed to be able to understand the psyche from both the Western psychological point of view and the Eastern spiritual, point of view. Without the integration of these two realms as a foundation, given my own experiences, I felt unprepared to present myself as a therapist guiding others on their path.

I found myself at a crossroads. I could continue to work on my doctorate-in-progress or keep my job in the prisons, stay with my therapist and go further down the metaphysical path. If I left my academic work unfinished, where would I end up? Would I be sabotaging all I had worked for? My family and career-oriented friends thought I would be making a terrible mistake if I chose to leave the academic path.

Several weeks later, still undecided, I dreamt I was riding on a train, stopping at various stations, knowing that I would have to get off, but not knowing where. The train pulled into a station. The sign on the wall read Arica School. In the dream I stood up and got off. When I awoke, I knew my decision was made.

I left my job and my doctoral work and dedicated myself to learning as much as I could through Arica, enrolling in a 40-day program which included four to six hours of daily meditation, a sugar-free, alcohol-free, marijuana-free, vegetarian diet, chi gung, Tai Chi and other practices, several

of which I continue to work with today.

The weekend following the 40-day training I consumed some of the same batch of psilocybin I had taken two months earlier and once again found myself in the aliveness of nature. This time I felt one with all that I was seeing, completely unafraid, even blissful—experiencing a state of Kensho or Satori, words used by Buddhists to describe an ecstatic experience of unity. I was no longer afraid of death and I was no longer afraid of life.

For the next seven years I continued my studies through Arica, working at various jobs to support myself, engaging in ever-deepening practices that helped me to expand my understanding of the full spectrum of the human dimension.

There were long meditations which, over time, led me to experience fewer disturbing thoughts, sometimes becoming free of any thought at all, in blissful Satori. Achieving these states is a goal of meditation, a means of experiencing more advanced states of consciousness. I could hardly believe it, at times. This was happening with me! the confused, depressed explorer of the self was learning to transcend his thoughts.

There was another invaluable teaching from the Arica school which

would play a key role in my developing awareness, and later, in my work with my clients: the practice of witnessing.

Through learning to witness or to become aware of emotions and thoughts rather than being swept up in them, I developed the ability to step out and “see” a situation rather than react in automatic ways. Learning to witness our own actions gives us the ability to understand when those actions aren’t serving us and gradually change the habitual behavior patterns we’ve been repeating since childhood. The detachment we get from witnessing makes it possible to trace difficult feelings to their source, which is also the purpose of Western psychotherapy, with one important difference. Psychology looks to heal the wounds formed in childhood. We therapists help our clients to uncover the patterns that result from these wounds, trace their origins, and try to change them so unconscious remnants from the past no longer control and determine our actions and thoughts as adults. When operating from a witnessing state of consciousness something new is added: we learn that we are not the part of us that is suffering. There is something greater to us than that. We are the one that witnesses. Or, as Eckhart Tolle calls it, we are *the Aware Presence*.

Once we are able to see our actions and experiences from the perspective of the one who witnesses, we don’t identify with the part of

ourselves that suffers and with the actions that keep us stuck—an enormous shift. And as we learn to witness, we are able let go of the defensiveness and retaliatory anger we carry into our current relationships and see them for what they are—remnants from the past.

When we're in relationships witnessing shifts the way we relate as a couple, how we express ourselves when we are facing a conflict. We develop the ability to change from blaming, fighting or withdrawing to developing greater awareness and control of our emotions and thoughts, bringing empathy, compassion and enjoyment to our relationship and its inevitable challenges. At its height, witnessing can take us to a level of awareness where we are able to discover a different sense of unity with our partner and with all that is, no longer limited by a personal self.

During this time of learning and change I suddenly realized why I hadn't been able to let go the pain of my failed marriage. The emptiness I was feeling was an old emptiness. The pain, an old pain. It was what I carried from childhood. This insight freed me to let go and move on in my life.

Witnessing now became a conscious practice for me, as natural as breathing. It allowed me to be freer of disturbing thoughts and live with a greater sense of calm and equanimity. Buddhists call this Empty Mind, a natural way to connect to the source of wisdom and strength within. But how could I justify using this

revered Eastern practice in the process of Western psychotherapy? The two did not yet seem to fit.

Then I was introduced to Oscar Ichazo's teaching on Levels of Consciousness, a map of the stages of adult psychological development. The great Western teachers Freud, Jung, Erikson, Gilligan, and Maslow explore stages of psychological growth and emotional development. But it ends there. Ichazo goes beyond the psychological to include stages of awareness and spiritual growth. These were the dimensions of the psyche left out of Western teaching that I had been experiencing through meditation and psychedelics and yearning to understand.

I now saw that consciously embracing the growth of our inner awareness was the next stage in our development as adult human beings—the way for us to evolve. We are psychological *and* spiritual beings. Our lives must encompass both. This was the missing piece—teaching I needed in order to understand my own psyche and, as such, the human psyche.

I had found the bridge between Western and Eastern approaches to the psyche I had been searching for. It involved a radical change—a paradigm shift—in the Western understanding of human development, in the way we perceive and understand what and who we are.

At last, I felt able to return to my work as a therapist, guiding others on the path to aliveness, growth, and transformation. I found a graduate school, the Humanistic Psychology Institute which changed its name to The Saybrook Institute whose training included stages of psychological, emotional and spiritual development. I applied and was accepted. For the second time I enrolled in a doctoral program. The two paths of my life were now one.

At the age of forty I completed my doctorate and began working with people to integrate spiritual awareness with behavioral change. My practice as an adult developmental psychologist was psychologically based and spiritually oriented. My clients flourished and I began to teach these practices and to create programs to train other therapists. My purpose was to share consciousness-changing practices with therapists, clients, and all those seeking a deeper awareness of how to grow.

Whenever an individual is unhappy, no matter how dire the current situation, I see an opportunity for growth and transformation. The key is to look at your stage of development—psychological and spiritual. It isn't necessary to diagnose or even try and resurrect or fix what is broken. The goal is growth and aliveness in your life! Crisis is the perfect place for a person to begin the journey to evolve.