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**Discovering Our Health:
Rethinking Mind, Consciousness, and Thought**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the emergence, in the field of psychotherapy, of a new level of therapeutic understanding, deeply consonant with the world view of the wisdom traditions that affirm the spiritual nature of the human personality and the spiritual basis of authentic mental health. It proposes a re-conceptualization of the nature of mind, thought, and consciousness from a Bahá'í-inspired perspective of reality, which also draws on other wisdom traditions, and may provide a generic foundation to transcend existing disciplinary and ethnocentric biases in psychology and psychiatry. This integrative psycho-spiritual approach to health and healing represents a significant step beyond the existing cognitive behavioral and constructivist paradigms that emphasize reconstruction of the self-created system of thought as a precondition for overcoming debilitating or dysfunctional cognitive modes. The perspective articulated here offers a systematic analysis of the dynamics of optimal consciousness and health, of the microdynamics of our moment-to-moment exercise of free will, and of the role of faith in discovering the power of love to transform our often painful experience of life. A psychotherapeutically significant differentiation is drawn between working primarily with clients' personal realities and socially-constructed identities; and helping clients tap into their own creative, essentially spiritual nature, which allows them to understand and embrace life, to operate with a calmer awareness of interdependence, and a faith in the ultimate wisdom of life from moment to moment.

Discovering Our Health: Rethinking the Nature of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness

Introduction

Psychology has recently experienced a surge of new interest in the nature of health. With the immense multiplication of therapeutic approaches, there has been a growing recognition that, while case formulation is heavily influenced by the clinician's theoretical perspective, diagnosis itself points to depth processes underlying cognitive, somatic, emotional, and behavioral functioning. In search for a deeper unitive dimension of health, in the last decade or so, psychologists have become increasingly aware of the link between spirituality and successful healing (Adams, 1996; Ivey, 1993; Larson, 1994; Levin, 1994; Miller, 1999; Westgate, 1996).

Advances in psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) have forced researchers to admit the influence of mind on the body (Bryson, 1999). Further, positive psychology has begun to question the progressive turning of psychology into "victimology", where human beings are perceived as passive recipients of stimuli, governed by "drives, tissue needs, instincts and conflicts from childhood" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.6). Instead, positive psychology has defined as its empirical focus the study of subjective experiences of well-being, contentment, hope; of individual traits such as courage, forgiveness, future mindedness, wisdom; and of collective environments which cultivate civic virtues. All of these developments point to a significant shift in emphasis, in both psychology and psychiatry, beyond personal-historical determinism, and toward appreciation of uniquely human phenomena such as freedom, choice and responsibility (Szasz, 1974), as well as to a

need to rethink our normative understanding of optimal human consciousness, and of the nature and dynamics of health

However, what we have come to consider "normal" human consciousness and behavior, and how psychiatry defines, and works with pathology, has been defined by the way that psychologists and psychiatrists have conceptualized the nature of "mind". As Penn (2003) recently noted, since such works as Auguste Comte's *Cour de Philosophie Positive* (1830-1842) where he argued the inherent immaturity of metaphysical discourse, metaphysics has largely been abandoned in Western scientific endeavors, and the working theory of mind has been essentially materialistic. Freud, who is widely understood to be one of the principle founders of modern psychiatry, saw the psyche as "the by-product of biological processes, inextricably linked to the body in functional ways, and thus wholly contingent upon the body for its functioning and existence." (Penn, 2003, p. 22) The end result of this conceptualization of mind has been a psychology which "led to the eclipse of that special type of hope that can be experienced only by human beings; for in the absence of a theory of mind that allows the possibility of transcending the influences of natural and social processes, an individual's present and future must be seen as an inevitable result of the past" (Penn, 2003, p. 22).

This paper introduces a health psychology paradigm which relies on a reconceptualization of mind that include the notion of the human spirit, and of spirit as the ultimate organizing principle of life, and of human development (Mustakova-Possardt, 2003; Penn, 2003). The need for such a reconceptualizing of mind has been long suggested by Carl Jung in psychodynamic theory, by Rollo May in humanistic, and by Maslow in transpersonal psychology. The same argument has been raised by major

thinkers in theology (Paul Tillich), physics (Fritjof Capra), and philosophy (Soren Kierkegaard).

This proposed reconceptualization of mind is based on the recognition, brought forth by critical psychology, that it is impossible to practice valueless psychology; that cultural and historical values and assumptions about “the good life” always underlie psychological discourse, and, therefore, have to become more openly acknowledged and re-examined (Prilleltensky, 1997). While in its beginning as a science in the late 19th century, psychology adopted assumptions about reality, such as naturalism, ethical relativism, ethical hedonism, and positivism, that conflicted with religious views of the world (Richards & Bergin, 1997), recent research (Richards, Rector & Tjeltveit, 1999) shows a growing convergence between secular therapeutic values and religious and spiritual understanding of health. There is a growing recognition that we have to consider more seriously what wisdom traditions teach about a psycho-spiritual understanding of human mind and consciousness.

Weisskopf's (1959) ontological approach to the study of values suggests that the ultimate values which religion embraces

open up alternatives; the dimension of actuality is left behind and the realm of potentiality is entered, creating the possibility of choice and the necessity of decision based on guiding values... Values, then, are a concomitant of freedom. What is the ground of values and what determines their content? On the level of concrete actuality-historical conditions, society and culture...The ultimate ground of values, however, is rooted in the ultimate ground of being... that dimension in which all antinomies are united and harmonized... Even those who reject

metaphysical arguments can learn from history that all cultures derived their ultimate values from a basic concept or symbol which stood for the ground of being, such as God, nature, the universe, etc. Wherever the awareness of this relation between the ground of being and values was lost, values began to disintegrate. (p. 109)

How, then, can psychology and psychiatry avail themselves of both the generative orientation to potentiality in the spiritual psychology paradigms that are emerging, without compromising critical procedural analysis, which is the best accomplishment of modernity; and toward a scientific understanding of the macro- and microdynamics of mind, without becoming locked into the finality of form? This paper proposes that an understanding of human mind as an emanation of the Universal Mind, realized through the intermediary reflections of pure potentiality embodied in the great founders of the world's religious and philosophical systems, allows us to understand more optimally both the macrodynamics of development, and the microdynamics of mental health. It proposes a re-thinking of mind, thought, and consciousness as higher order constructs rather than material realities, and illustrates the heuristic value of such an approach through the work of Health Realization, a new health psychology paradigm, which has explored, in the last two decades, the implications of such a rethinking of mind, thought, and consciousness for interventions.

From formless life force to form

In the 1970s, theosopher Sydney Banks (1998) proposed that human experience can be more deeply understood if we look beyond the world of form, in terms of which psychology has been conceptualizing it so far, and toward the changing relationship

between formless life force and form. Such an approach brings forth the controversial debate between mind and matter. However, it transcends materialistic monism, dualism, or parallelism (DeQuincey, 2000), and proposes a spiritual monism that embraces mind, consciousness, and thought as a unity, expressed and evidenced in dimensions of being, personal realities, and moment-to-moment awareness. Such a view of life as a dynamic, on-going relationship between the formless life force and form is consistent with current understanding in quantum physics and neurophysiology (Talbot, 1991).

The current post-Newtonian paradigmatic shift in the physical sciences (quantum physics, field and chaos theory, holography) suggests a view of reality as an on-going dance between the immanent and explicate that unfolds in the eternal now of each new present moment (Talbot, 1991). It suggests that consciousness pervades all realities (Wilber, 1985, 2000), and is the creative principle of all existence; that “consciousness is not personal but transpersonal, not mental but transmental” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993, p. 14). Therefore, an exhaustive and adequate study of individual mind needs to place it in the larger context of its relation to transpersonal consciousness.

Transpersonal psychology has recognized what ancient wisdom traditions and holographic theory describe as an implicit essential reality that is unknowable, non-dualistic and self-organizing, and from which reality as we know it in space and time arises. Yet, there is a need to differentiate more clearly between mind and consciousness, which are used somewhat interchangeably in the transpersonal literature, and to operationalize further the understanding of consciousness and of the relationship between consciousness and thought. This paper proposes distinguishing between mind, consciousness, and thought in the following way.

The immanent principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought operate in unity to create the individual human mind. These principles can be understood as both a pure potentiality, and as an expression of that potentiality in the world of form. From such a perspective, Mind, at the formless level, can be considered the universal life force - the source of life - referred to in history by many different names including Self, divine ground, spirit, absolute, universal intelligence, and so forth. On the level of form, this life force is continuously manifested in, and flows through, "personal mind," the individual minds of living things. This on-going formation of personal minds can be conceptualized as occurring through the twin processes of Thought and Consciousness, understood as higher order constructs.

Thought can be understood as the creative agent, the capacity to give form to formless life energy; it is the link between the source and the form our experience is taking in the moment. On the level of form, thought manifests itself as our personal moment-to-moment thinking. Consciousness can be conceptualized as the neutral energy of Mind that allows us to be aware - to be cognizant of the moment in both a sensate and a knowing way; the pure light of awareness referred to in every mystical tradition. In the new physics (Wilber, 1985), light occupies a special place. While its inner nature has proven impossible to know directly, it is clear that it stands outside of, and in that sense is more fundamental than, time, space, and matter. In the same way, a number of mystical traditions consider the light of consciousness to be what has always been there, and what underlies every process in the present moment (Russell, 1999). On the level of form, Consciousness manifests itself as the personal capacity to experience life through the senses and through intuitive, direct ways of knowing (Hart, Puhakka, & Nelson,

1999). Seen in this way, thought and consciousness are the two sides of the same process of experiencing life: "*Consciousness* allows the recognition of form, form being the expression of *Thought*." (Banks, 1998, p. 39) Such differentiation of the role of thought and the role of consciousness breaks down and operationalizes what is otherwise rather globally referred to as consciousness in the transpersonal literature. It also suggests a dialectic between thought and consciousness.

This treatment of consciousness and thought is clearly very different than prevailing understanding. While transpersonal psychology has moved away from the purely constructivist focus on consciousness as content (**The Humanistic Psychologist*, 1996, 24, 2), and has defined consciousness as a structural universal (Wade, 1996), the understanding of thought proposed here is more generic than is typically associated with the concept in conventional cognitive psychology.

Generally, thought has been used to refer to cognitive processes such as perceiving, thinking, remembering, evaluating, planning, and organizing, as well as to the contents of thought (Frager & Fadiman, 1998). However, some interesting possibilities emerge when thought is considered to be a neutral psychological force or power that gives form to life. To understand thought as a generic creative agent does not suggest that matter does not exist separately from thought, as is a standard accusation against idealism (DeQuincey, 2000). Rather, it suggests that our only way to know matter, or anything at all, is via thought; that human reality is essentially psychological. An understanding of thought as a generic creative power, which is at work throughout life, including under coma, embraces different ways of giving form (e.g. perception, apperception, insight, and so forth), and compels psychology to focus on the essential creative nature of the human

experience, and on the fact that different forms of thought create a qualitatively different moment-to-moment experience of life.

Understood as higher order constructs, Mind, Thought, and Consciousness allow us to conceptualize the infinite macro and micro-fluctuations in the quality of our experience as fluctuations in the quality of the relationship between form and formless energy. Such an understanding embraces what psychology has so far seen as its domain - the study of relatively permanent individual configurations of personal mind, and their potential for adjustment/maladjustment. In addition, however, it opens the door to a study of the moment-to-moment fluidity and flexibility of any human configurations, which is at the heart of human resiliency and potential. For example, there is empirical evidence throughout the history of human civilization that the more the individual mirror of consciousness is turned toward the source of all form, i.e. Mind, the purer that consciousness is in the moment because it is less contaminated by conditioned personal form (Huxley, 1974).

Such a redefining of mind as the focus of psychology makes it easier to see that whether we are studying the individual or collective unconscious, social conditioning and socialization, individual thinking and beliefs, perception and apperception, behavior, or the phenomenology of human experience in the here-and-now, we are studying various levels and sub-levels of manifest form, none of which are as permanent as we experience them to be. Until now, competing schools of psychological thought have proposed different levels of form as defining of the human experience. However, understanding *the fact of* Thought and Consciousness as the basic principles through which the human experience is generated in the moment gives psychology an important over-arching view

of the role of form and content, and opens the door to a more foundational Aristotelian causal analysis (Aristotle, 1991; Diessner, 2002). It also bridges in a coherent theoretical way the long-perceived gap between the psychology of wisdom traditions and Western psychology. It allows us to articulate a structural understanding of the micro-dynamics of mental health and spirituality, which has recently been extensively explored (Miller, 1999).

The nature of healthy functioning

Mental health is the innate capacity of every human being to return into alignment with Mind from a clear mind, and to manifest fresh understanding and creative responsiveness in the moment. What does that mean?

Cognitive psychologists have begun to recognize that the term thought may refer to two qualitatively different processes: thoughts as content and neurophysiological reflexes, and thought as an "unbroken field" of thinking in the here and now (Bohm, 1994). As Lewis (2000) puts it,

thought often interferes in the ability to think fully... because for reasons of evolutionary significance, thought has evolved in such a way that it... forms neurophysiological reflexes... Through repetition, emotional intensity, and defensiveness, these reflexes have become hard-wired in consciousness to such an extent that they respond independently of our conscious choice... so that much of our thought is no more than reflex, though it appears to be volitional. (pp. 274-5)

Bohm's understanding, which recalls Buddhist psychology and samadhi meditation, points to the fact that while the capacity of such representational thoughts to induce feelings of necessity to act is evolutionarily significant in life-threatening

situations, the ability to be present to our thoughts but not to be impelled by them has the power of dissipating the momentum of our reflexes and helps cultivate full awareness and openness to transcendent insight.

Along similar lines, cognitive psychologist Claxton (1994, 1997) has discovered that some of the mind's most important potentials have been systematically ignored. According to Claxton, we are capable of slow ways of knowing, which he calls 'Tortoise Mind', contrasting them to 'Hare Brain', and terming them the undermind. These capacities - insight, intuition, wisdom - are central to many of life's ill-defined problems. In contrast, education and psychology generally emphasize the 'Hare Brain', or what Claxton calls 'd-mode' activity - conscious, deliberate, purposeful thinking. How does all of this relate to mental health?

In moments of mental health, people's thinking is characterized by a balanced movement back and forth between a spontaneous epistemological reliance on intuition and insight, and a periodical resorting to analysis wherever necessary, without getting stuck in the analytical mode. Hence, in moments of mental health, people exhibit a different epistemology, which has recently begun to attract attention as 'the knowing of the heart' manifested in various healing practices (Katz, Biesele & Denise, 1997). Characteristic of this epistemology is that the heart leads the way, while the mind is a faithful and well-disciplined servant; in contrast to the typical Western mindframe in which we associate intelligence with effortful linear analytical thinking noticeably dissociated from intuition, and in service to ego, personal views and opinions.

Drawing on significant work in cognitive psychology (Bohm, 1994; Claxton, 1997; Donaldson, 1992; Sternberg, 1990; Sternberg & Davidson, 1995), Lewis (2000)

suggests that "an increase of the prevalence of qualities of the heart leads naturally into the development of a wider range of qualities of the mind." (p. 273) While the conversation has begun in many circles about the need for an epistemological shift to more holistic ways of knowing and being as described above, a reconceptualization of mind, consciousness, and thought allows us to recognize this epistemology as our default mode in the moment, our innate mental health. It helps understand that in every moment when individual mind is spontaneously or intentionally aligned with Mind, and focused away from its intensely personal memory-based world, innate mental health bubbles up, and is characterized by a natural and effortless flow of thought, experienced as 'no thought', or 'clear mind' (Bailey, 1990; Carlson & Bailey, 1997; Mills, 1995; Mills & Spittle, 2001). This quality of thinking is accompanied by the experience of peace, contentment, larger perspective on immediate reality, detachment, and a general generous, loving, and deeply moral view of life, described in transpersonal psychology as 'fifth order morality' (Flier, 1995), and in developmental psychology as 'habitual morality' (Colby & Damon, 1992).

This innate moment-to-moment capacity allows ordinary people, as well people with varying degrees of dysfunctionality, to tap into transcendent intelligence in daily life in a surprisingly effortless and natural way. It accounts for the full range of spontaneous changes of heart which we have all experienced and witnessed, from the lucid moments of our schizophrenic clients, to the ordinary but sudden spontaneous generosity of otherwise unyielding people.

Spontaneous expressions of health

Creativity studies and studies of "peak experiences" have attempted to describe some of the manifestations of the spontaneous clearing of personal mind. For example, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described creative activity as flow. Central to the experience of flow is the fact that the individual mind is so drawn into its activity in the present moment that it is momentarily free of painful personal memories. With that, ordinary, disempowered, and typically reactive and defensive consciousness is transformed, and a person experiences a state of 'clear mind', which is typically empowered and creative, and is accompanied by a very positive affective mode. This state of mind has also been associated with peak performance across all areas of human activity (Carlson & Bailey, 1997).

While most people have in their lives specific activities that draw them out of their personal worlds, and 'help them feel good', or, in other words, allow their innate health to bubble up (for example, walking in nature, sports, sex, listening to music, and so forth), the psychology of this phenomenon has been poorly understood. However, studies of very healthy ordinary people in the last two decades, which were spawned by the articulation of the principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought, found a wide range of expressions of innate mental health in ordinary living (G. Pransky, 1998). Some of the most taken for granted instances of innate mental health are what we call common sense. Below is one such example of a spontaneous, unassisted return to common sense and health in a 16-year-old, reported by him a few years later (Mustakova-Possardt, confidential papers, 2001):

[That] year something happened The only way I can describe it is that my mind shattered. I realized at age 16 that I could only be found within myself. What

people said made no difference, only how I felt about it. My feelings of depression, suicidal ideation, and worthlessness were all based on my perceptions of what others told me. Essentially it was I who caused the pain not them. Though it was others that sought to hurt me it was my own false beliefs that caused the pain. My strongest illusion was that people make me sad, or angry, or happy. Most of my pain was from my emotions. I realized all emotion is reaction and everything within my mind is my creation. So I can choose my emotion just as I can choose every other action I take.

While spontaneous changes of heart can be powerful, spiritual traditions have always recognized that, there is a need to cultivate the capacity for the intentional clearing of personal mind. That understanding is at the heart of all spiritual practices, such as daily prayer and meditation, and the cultivation of faith.

The role of faith in cultivating health

The role of faith in health and healing has recently been extensively explored (Miller, 1999). From the perspective of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought, faith is a recognition of personal mind as an emanation of Mind, hence of the need to trust that life force and keep re-aligning oneself with it.

Understood this way, faith is central to all spiritual practice. As Huxley (1974) points out in studying the perennial philosophy across wisdom traditions, faith "in the moral and spiritual reliability of the universe, is the beginning of charity or love knowledge in relations to God." (p. 270) Even in what is considered the most agnostic of spiritual traditions, Buddhism, faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the *Sangha* is the

first of five cardinal virtues, and the prerequisite for the other four, which are vigor, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom (Conze, 1959).

Hence, spiritual practices cultivate the wise use of free will from a place of faith. Even though in Western academic circles faith has for a long time been dismissed as an 'unscientific' approach to life, only suitable for intellectually helpless people, it is now becoming clearer that we all live by some form of faith (Fowler, 1981; Smith, 1979), even if that is just faith in reason alone.

Hence, the wise use of free will can be understood as the wise use of our capacity to create form via moment-to-moment thinking, that is, the wise use of the psycho-spiritual power of Thought. Such a conscious choice means being willing to resist the inclination to slip into an ever-faster-paced obsessive analytical thinking as a way of life, which creates the illusion of control, and to realize the limitations of analytical thought (the God of Reason), and the potential strengths, in many life circumstances, of intuition and insight. Relinquishing efforts at control paradoxically allows the personal mind to quiet in the midst of dilemmas, and to experience insight. This requires faith.

With the growing interest in human resiliency, even the news media have begun to explore our capacity for noncontingent happiness, related to spirituality, publishing articles on the "anthropology of happiness" ("An anthropology", Dec.22, 2001). At the same time, current psychology is still very hesitant to acknowledge the undercurrent ontological assumptions of the above epistemology, which points to Thought as a spiritual power, an expression of the spiritual nature of human beings. As the Baha'i wisdom tradition sums it up, "[t]he reality of man is his thought.... Every deed of life is a

thought expressing itself in action; it is the actual mirror of the man within" (Abdu'l-Baha, 1912/1995, p. 17).

Hence, conscious or unconscious faith in the meaningfulness of the universe allows people to loosen up their personal grip on controlling every moment, relying on predominantly personal memory-based knowledge, and to strive to align their personal minds with a greater meaning. In the process, people access higher quality thinking in the moment, which is more impersonal and all-embracing, operating from a greater perspective, hence encompassing the paradoxes of living (Mills & Spittle, 2001; G. Pransky, 1998). The accompanying affective experience is one of increasingly deeper calm, contentment, and acceptance of life, as well as a warm, generous and loving feeling for fellow human beings. This micro-dynamic of the process of detachment in the ordinary life moment, central to all spiritual traditions, points to the human capacity for, and access to, innate mental health in the moment.

The role of mindfulness in cultivating health

These long forgotten realities that have been neglected by Western psychology have been recently rediscovered by researchers (Burke, 1996; Kennedy, 1996; Leifer, 1996). Among various strands of contemporary efforts to induce an intentional clearing of personal mind, the most significant seems to be mindfulness work, which stemmed out of the Buddhist tradition of *vipassana* meditation (Goldstein, 1976). It focuses on psychological activity in the ordinary life moment, for the purpose of helping people overcome stress and anxiety (Kabat-Zin, 1992, 1995), combat aging and narrow mindsets (Langer, 1989), cultivate happiness (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998), or peace in daily life (Thich Nhat Hahn, 1991). Based on a consistent understanding in perennial philosophy

(Huxley, 1974), mindfulness work points to the source of feelings and emotions in moment-to-moment thinking. While it also sees as important to recognize negative emotions, and the particular thoughts that generate them, it teaches that every time a negative thought and emotion are given too much life of their own, they 'plant seeds'; that is, they create patterns of experiencing reality, which Hindu thought refers to as 'karma' (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991).

Mindfulness practice cultivates the capacity to identify and let go of individual thoughts and negative emotions, based on memory and future projections, as part of a general cultivation of present-mindedness. However, though it cultivates the "inner witness" through formal and informal meditation practices, mindfulness work still focuses predominantly on the content of personal thinking in the moment, and on dealing with that content.

In contrast, the approach to health which has emerged out of the understanding of the three principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought, and has become known as Health Realization, has found that as people begin to understand *the fact of* Thought and Consciousness as the way in which we create life from formless Mind moment to moment, they experience awe and reverence for the gifts of thought and consciousness. As these are no longer taken for granted, they are used more consciously and responsibly. The very act of directing attention to the way form is created brings about a dramatic change of heart amounting to increasingly deeper detachment from one's own personal thinking. With this ontological and epistemological shift, people live in increasingly deepening mental health and psycho-spiritual integration (Mills & Spittle, 2001). Banks

(1998) describes this process of discovering and reclaiming our innate mental health in the following way:

Mental health lies within the consciousness of all human beings, but it is shrouded and held prisoner by our own erroneous thoughts. This is why we must look past our contaminated thoughts to find the purity and wisdom that lies inside our own consciousness. When the wise tell us to look *within*, they are directing us beyond intellectual analysis of personal thought, to a higher order of knowledge called wisdom (Banks 1998, pp.39-41).

Among the greatest gifts given to us are the power of free thought and free will, which gives us the stamp of individuality, enabling us to see life as we wish.

These same gifts can also be the greatest weaknesses of humanity. We often lack the strength to change our minds, so we get stuck in the negative thoughts and behaviors of our past. When you start to see the power of *Thought* and its relationship to your way of observing life, you will better understand yourself and the world you live in. *Thought* is the missing link between mental sickness and mental health... *Thought* can be used in an *infinite* number of ways... Your thoughts are like the artist's brush. They create a *personal* picture of the reality you live in (Banks 1998, 50-56).

Significance for helping practice

In the last two decades, Health Realization has generated a range of psycho-educational interventions in most domains of human activity. It has been applied to work with crime-ridden projects across the country, and other community development efforts (Mills & Spittle, 2001; J. Pransky, 1998), to individual and family therapy and counseling

(Bailey, 1990; Carlson & Bailey, 1997; G. Pransky, 1998;), to organizational development and education (Sedgeman, 2001), and to cross-cultural community development (Mustakova-Possardt et al., work in progress). It is currently most consistently researched by the Sydney Banks Institute for Innate Health at the Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center of West Virginia University.

The view of the micro-dynamic of human life as an on-going moment-to-moment re-calibrating, dependent solely on a deeper level of understanding of the nature of thought, has proved to be empowering and accessible to people from all walks of life, for many of whom therapy is an inaccessible middle-class activity. For example, the current author has been working for the past two years with a large, mostly undocumented and marginalized Hispanic immigrant community in rural Georgia, in which violence, spousal and child abuse, depression, alcoholism, and a deep general sense of disempowerment are common. Group psycho-educational interventions have helped this population begin to reclaim its power to create a happier life and a more positive community environment.

Health Realization interventions help people begin to see that as we become engaged in living, our thinking tends to speed up and become caught in fearful personal memory-based analysis, associations, and projection. While mostly unaware, we become thrown off balance and we lose perspective, till we can eventually regain our center, and a more grounded view of immediate circumstances. This cycle repeats itself every next moment, and may create dysfunctional patterns, until it is understood. As people learn to return increasingly consciously to their default mode of mental health, they find it immensely helpful and hopeful to identify the spontaneous returns to mental health in their daily lives, and to realize their innate capacity for mental health in every next

moment, regardless of past experiences. They begin to recognize the common denominator in their spontaneous moments of health - the fact that they occur every time their minds are not over-ridden by excessive over-reliance on sped-up personal analytical thinking.

As people awaken to the fact of thought and consciousness as neutral powers and spiritual gifts which we put to use from moment to moment in a wide range of ways, thus creating the personal reality we live in at any particular moment, an interesting shift seems to happen across developmental levels of consciousness. The more people look beyond personal beliefs, concepts, and memory, that is, beyond thought content in the moment, and toward the source of all thought in Mind, their individual minds quiet down and clear, and the quality of their thinking improves, bringing a fresh view of life in the moment and a sense of lightness and relief. Orienting understanding to the processes that precede psychological content profoundly changes the way people understand and work with content/form.

In essence, Health Realization cultivates in people thought recognition, which is somewhat similar to Buddhist practices of cultivating the inner Witness. It is an emphasis on the meta-cognitive capacity, the consciousness of consciousness. However, while Buddhist psychology emphasizes present-mindedness to the full stream of awareness as a goal in itself, which, as meditators know, can become a rather strenuous and effortful exercise, Health Realization emphasizes direct perception of the creative nature of thought.

As people recognize that they are the creators of their reality from moment to moment, reality seems to be so frightening, and to elicit such strong fight/flight reactions.

Rather than investing significant psychological energy into trying to substitute one form of psychological reality with another, they become struck with awe, wonder and humility as they see themselves exercising, albeit imperfectly, a tremendous spiritual power, the power to co-create life via thought and consciousness. They see other people co-creating their realities as well. They begin to perceive the interdependent dance of life, and they become struck with the mystery of its significances. They realize that the very journey of life is about learning, as we stumble along, much like little toddlers, to exercise our psycho-spiritual powers of thought and consciousness more gracefully. They become forgiving of themselves and of others, and access deeper resources of understanding and love.

As people awaken to the significant moment-to-moment fluctuations in the quality of their own exercise of the power of thought, they become liberated from the prison of the past, the prison of form. They realize that emotions do not have a life of their own, and have only as much power as we give them via thought. They also realize that regardless of what form their thinking took in past years, or even a moment ago, they need not be attached to that form and keep defending it in the present. The choice open to them is to use the power of thought differently in the next moment, since each next moment is a new creation, a new opportunity.

People learn that there are two ways to use the human mind. In a sense, they intuit what is explicitly articulated in the Baha'i Writings, namely that mind, in the words of Penn (2002), is not a thing but a relational property, a link between the soul and the body. Hence the spiritual powers of the mind can be subject to bodily desires, centered upon the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. In that case, mind is used reactively; that is,

the power of thought is used in its least conscious form, conditioning. We think according to habitual and highly personal patterns, generally conditioned from childhood, and the affective correlates of that are unstable and widely ranging emotional reactions, such as anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, irritation, impatience, boredom - all of them **derivatives of fear and insecurity**. On the other hand, the spiritual powers of the mind can be used to develop meta-cognition, or consciousness of our conditioning, and of our moment-to-moment half-conscious choices, and to keep re-aligning ourselves with the wisdom of life. The affective correlates of this use of mind are contentment, generosity, humor, compassion, gratitude, inspiration - all **derivatives of love**.

As people focus on *the fact of* Thought rather than the thought content that shapes their experience at that moment, they experience an immediate bubbling up of their innate mental health and resilience regardless of circumstances, and regain their creative, responsive, and insightful thinking, accompanied by a deeply satisfying non-contingent affective state which can vary from quiet contentment to feelings of gratitude, awe, joy, exhilaration with life. Even people who do not identify themselves as religious, or particularly spiritual, experience a general sense of 'all is right with the world' in their moments of mental health. Below are some personal accounts, which Mills & Spittle (2001) have drawn from twenty years of working with crime-ridden projects across the U.S., and with people with all forms of addictions:

[O]nce I began to understand the role of *Thought* and discovered how deeper feelings guide us toward mental health, I became a different person. I saw my family with new eyes, with much more understanding and compassion. My family, friends and colleagues noticed a change in me, telling me that I was

calmer and easier to be around, not so critical and judgmental. A whole new world opened up for me.

Even as I remained skeptical and confused, I began to change. I noticed that I was feeling quieter inside and taking things more in stride. The idea that *Thought* is the most basic building block of reality at every moment in our lives was foreign to me, given all my prior training. As with most people, I experienced life as coming at me from the outside in. My emotions, my behavior, the quality of my thinking, my stress and my inner life all seemed like understandable reactions to my past and current situation. The role of *Thought* in this process was invisible as any kind of independent variable. As my mind quieted down, some of my insecure thoughts, expectations and habits of judgment seemed less important to me. (Mills & Spittle, 2001, pp. 20-23)

The last twenty years of work with populations across a wide range of cultures, lifestyles, income and educational levels, documented in the literature (Mills & Spittle, 2001; Pransky, J., 1998), have shown that this understanding has made possible remarkable and lasting transformations in contexts as different as substance abuse treatment and prevention programs, community colleges, youth programs, public schools, job training programs, state and county family service agencies, public housing authorities, corporate settings, upper middle class families, and hardcore, poverty- and crime-stricken neighborhoods. Below are some examples:

A homeless man with a history of violence becomes a level-headed advocate for the rights of the homeless and a positive influence on government policy. A shy, insecure construction worker becomes a well-respected management consultant

who helps corporations create healthy, productive workplaces. Former gang members become role models for good in their community. An executive with a \$500-a-day cocaine habit overcomes his self-defeating tendencies and gets his life back on track. Hardened inner-city cops learn to bypass their conditioned patterns of thought so they can command respect and work constructively with neighborhood residents. (Mills & Spittle, 2001)

Health Realization practitioners have observed the steady occurrence, across populations, of a liberating shift in clients' understanding. There has been remarkable success in the relatively short-term treatment, without later remission, of depression, schizophrenia, panic attacks, addictions, PTSD, sexual offences, migraine headaches, allergies, etc. (Bailey 1990; G. Pransky, 1992, 1998), as well as in work with prison populations, and single mothers living on federal aid in urban projects across the country (J. Pransky, 1998). A most recent one-year follow-up study of the effect of training in Health Realization, on the life and work of helping professionals, reported that people experienced

More calm and comfort in life; more lightheartedness; fewer and less intense emotional reactions; less stress; higher quality relationships. They attributed changes to realizing 1) their own power of creation of their life experience through *Thought*; 2) a source of "health" within; 3) a clear, calm mind as the pathway to their health; 4) using feelings as guides to monitor their health; 5) their choice to see an inside, nonpersonal vs. outside, personal world; 6) their ability to transcend their habitual patterns via higher levels of understanding. (J. Pransky, 1999, p. 4)

The same study reported a 57% reported decrease in arguments with children, a 49% decrease in fights with spouse/partners, 40% stress-level reduction, and an 18% improvement of quality of life/perceived well-being.

Such detailed studies of the effect of Health Realization work, based on a reconceptualization of mind, consciousness, and thought, are still relatively few. There is a clear need for further research. An interesting question is whether the proposed three-principle dynamic can be identified as underlying the full range of instances of human resiliency recorded in the resiliency literature (Benard, 1991; Lifton, 1993; Maston, 1994; McLaughlin, 1994; Pines, 1984; Rutter, 1984; Schorr, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1989, 1992).

In conclusion, further study and dialogue in the field are necessary in order to establish to what extent the proposed reconceptualization of mind, consciousness, and thought has generic explanatory and integrative power in the study of the human experience.

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