

A
BREATH
OF...



Samaritan Counseling Center

Beyond Conventional Therapy

There are many ways of providing help and healing for persons who are struggling with issues. Each of these has its benefits and its limitations. Americans are keenly aware of these things. Last year we spent over 38 Billion dollars on alternative forms of treatment. People often seek additional resources with which to supplement or in some cases replace familiar forms of treatment. One might say that these things range from Acupuncture to Zen.

Traditional forms of psychotherapy have been strong on helping people understand “why it is broken” in dealing with life’s hurts but often less helpful in showing us “how to fix it.” For some people the pursuit of the “why is it broken?” question has led them to face with considerable perplexity the reality that theologians have often called “the human condition.”

Each of us ultimately needs to be able to answer the question “what is the meaning of my life?” Traditionally most of the “why” questions have been left to theologians, philosophers, and other religious teachers and leaders. Every religious tradition attempts to help the disciples of that tradition make sense of their lives, to find meaning and purpose, to articulate a personal ethical perspective, and to shape and energize the living of their lives.

In recent time we have seen a coming together of previously rather diverse perspectives on human life. The neuroscientists are beginning to help us see that the brain is designed to love, mystics and theologians from the major religions of the world are finding more and more common ground in articulating an understanding of life, psychology has been impacted by a variety of spiritual practices, and medicine has felt the impact of spiritual perspectives along with a renewed interest in mind-body connections. Seminaries that train Christian clergy have been teaching pastoral psychology for a century;

medical schools that train physicians have added courses in spirituality in a major way in the last 20 years. The widespread interest in Eastern religions and philosophies has motivated many Christian thinkers to reclaim the Christian mystic tradition (something that 20th Century rationalism tried to ignore).

Sigmund Freud taught us that the Id, that raging, lustful, angry, subconscious of Freudian theory had to be beaten into submission and controlled or human beings would be awful and impossible to live with. His theory found a ready audience in people soaked in the terrible beliefs associated with the idea of original sin. Both modern psychology and modern Christianity are calling us away from seeing people in such dire perspectives. Matthew Fox, a Christian theologian, has countered the concept of original sin in his seminal book Original Blessing. Contemporary neuroscientists like Daniel Siegel in concert with Buddhist psychology as articulated by Jack Kornfield are helping us to understand the profound positive resources that every human has. The pioneering work of Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiologist at Harvard medical school, has led to an integration of mind, body, and spiritual perspectives. The work of Andrew Newberg is helping us see how religious beliefs and practices impact the basic functioning of the human brain.

In order to make even some of these rich resources available to people who are seeking to make changes in their lives, we must move beyond the traditional practices of counseling and psychotherapy. That has been happening in one corner of the psychological world at the hands of pastoral counselors.

Successful psychotherapy leads to resolution of problems that hinder peoples’ ability to grow. But there needs to be a step beyond. People who find troubling issues resolved wonder “now what?” Fresh Aire Samaritan Counseling Center is committed to helping people resolve personal problems and explore the “now what” questions. In the hands of the counselors at Fresh Aire, pastoral therapy becomes spiritual direction for those who wonder “now what?”

(Article written by Rev. Dr. Carl Gillett, Pastoral Consultant to Fresh Aire Samaritan Counseling Center)