



Cultivating Sacred Moments in Psychotherapy

Kenneth I. Pargament
Department of Psychology
Bowling Green State University
kpargam@bgsu.edu

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Hidden Ingredients

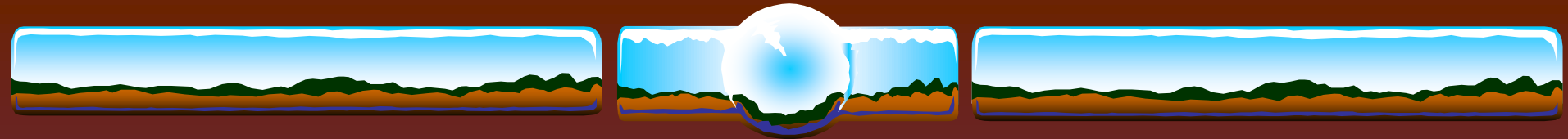


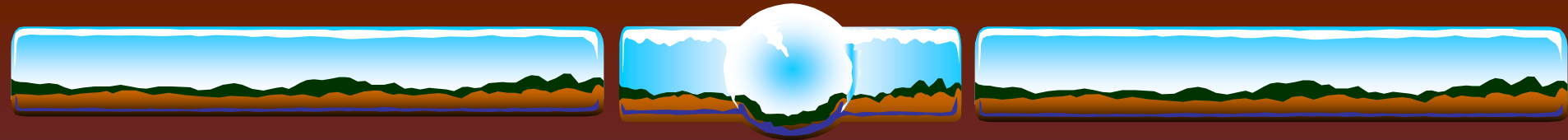


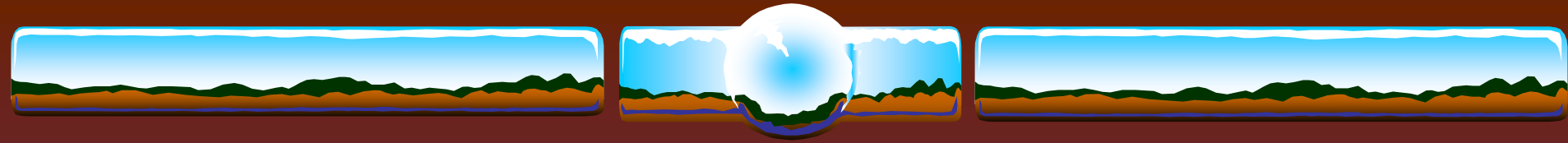
The Special Challenges of Studying Spirituality

Spirituality is elusive not because it is separate from life but because it is interwoven into life (Donald Capps)

How can we locate and make more explicit spirituality in everyday experience?







The header features three horizontal panels. The left and right panels show a landscape with green hills and a blue sky. The middle panel shows a globe with a blue sky and green hills, positioned over a blue line representing water.

Perceiving the Sacred in People

“God has a deep raspy voice – God is a jazz singer. She is plush, warm, and rosy – God is a grandmother. He has the patient rock of an old man in a porch rocker; He hums and laughs, he marvels at the sky. God coos at babies – she is a new mother. He is the steady, gentle hand of a nurse, the cool reassurance of a person pursuing his life’s work, and the free spirit of a young man wandering only to live and love life” (McCarthy, 2006).



Perceiving Sacredness in Nature

(words of a Swedish atheist)

“Whatever happens in the world for me or others, nature is still there, it keeps going. That is a feeling of security when everything else is chaos. The leaves fall off, new ones appear, somewhere there is a pulse that keeps going. . . It is a spiritual feeling if we can use this word without connecting it to God, this is what I feel in nature” (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 134).



Perceiving the Sacred in Virtues

“Where is God? God is found in the incredible resiliency of the human soul, in our willingness to love though we understand how vulnerable love makes us, in our determination to go on affirming the value of life even when events in the world would seem to teach us that life is cheap (Kushner, 1989, p. 178)”



Perceiving the Sacred in Caring Relationships

“The things that make me feel as if I could touch the face of God are times when I am overwhelmed by love and friendship. The last time I went to a family reunion, I was touched by the level of love and caring everyone shared with me. . . I would say that love is the one thing that can take a person to another level in life. . . because the source behind love . . . is God (Rosenberg, 2002, p. 6).



Frederick Buechner

“Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and in the pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch and taste your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace”
(Buechner, 1987, p. 87)

Spirituality is a Way of Seeing





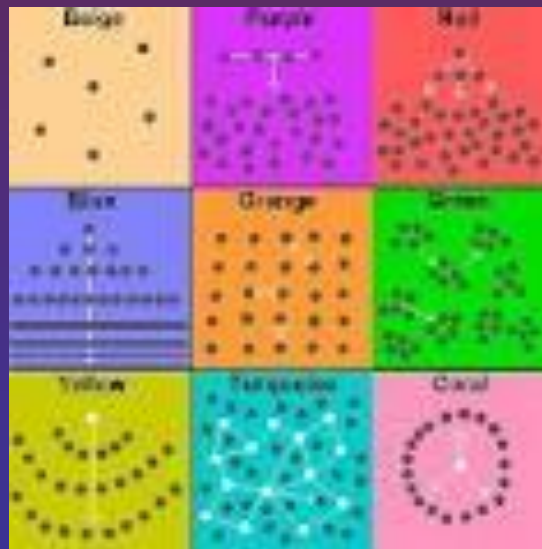
Perceptions of Sacredness: Results of a National Survey

- ❖ “I see evidence of God in nature and creation” (78%)
- ❖ “I experience something more sacred in life than simply material existence” (76%)
- ❖ “I see God’s presence in all of life” (75%)
- ❖ “I sense that my spirit is part of God’s spirit” (68%)
- ❖ “I see my life as a sacred journey” (55%)



When People See the Sacred

❖ The sacred becomes an organizing, magnetic force





When People See the Sacred

- ❖ The sacred becomes an organizing force
- ❖ **The sacred becomes a precious object**





“God and the Bod”

(Mahoney et al., 2005)

- ❖ 175 college students
- ❖ Measures
 - ❖ Degree to which they perceived their bodies to be sacred (“temples of a spirit”)
 - ❖ Health Practices
- ❖ Sanctification of the body was linked with:
 - ❖ Less alcohol and drug use
 - ❖ Better eating habits
 - ❖ More exercise
 - ❖ Avoidance of overworking
 - ❖ Enough sleep



When People See the Sacred

- ❖ The sacred becomes an organizing force
- ❖ The sacred becomes a precious object
- ❖ **The sacred becomes a resource**





Spiritual Care at End-of-Life

(Balboni et al., 2007, 2012, 2013)

- ❖ Patients who receive SC by medical team at end-of-life show:
 - ❖ Greater quality of life
 - ❖ Greater likelihood of receiving hospice care
 - ❖ Less likelihood of receiving aggressive medical care



When People See the Sacred

- ❖ The sacred becomes an organizing force
- ❖ The sacred becomes a precious object
- ❖ The sacred becomes a resource
- ❖ **The sacred becomes a source of spiritual emotion**



Emotions of Joy

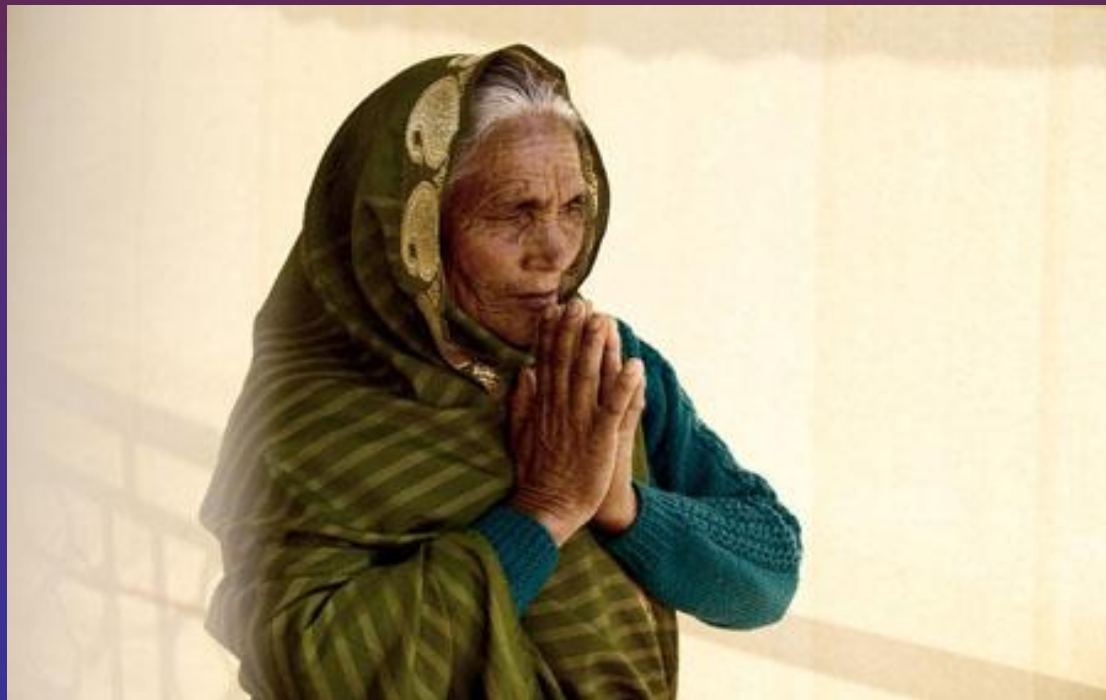


Emotions of Awe





Emotions of Gratitude





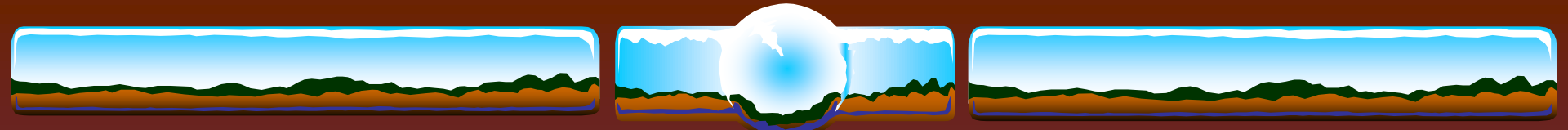
Emotions of Love and Compassion





Implications for Psychotherapy





“Good morning, if it is a good morning, which I rather doubt”
(A. A. Milne)



Grumpy Cat





Helper Therapy Principle (Riessman, 1965)





Holocaust Survivors Tell their Story

- ❖ Holocaust survivors share stories with listeners
- ❖ Survivors experience declines in physiological measures of stress
- ❖ Listeners experience increases in physiological measures of stress
- ❖ The burden of helping





Signs of Burnout

- ❖ Fatigue
- ❖ Cynicism
- ❖ Apathy
- ❖ Irritability
- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Disillusionment
- ❖ Sleep Disturbance





Signs of Provider Distress

- ❖ 45.8% of physicians report at least one symptom of burnout; highest rate among those involved in frontline care (Shanafelt, 2012)
- ❖ Physicians have twice the risk of suicide of general population
- ❖ “Each year, it would take the equivalent of 1 to 2 average-sized graduating classes of medical school to replace the number of physicians who kill themselves” (Miller & McGowen, 2000).



Resources for Care Providers

- ❖ Social support
- ❖ Coping skills
- ❖ Balanced life
- ❖ Exercise
- ❖ Humor
- ❖ Work as vocation



Work as Sacred

- God is present in my work.
- My job is a reflection of God's will.
- My job is consistent with my spiritual or religious identity.
- I experience God through my job.
- My job reflects my image of what God wants for me.
- My job is influenced by God's actions in my life.
- My job represents God's presence in my life.



The Benefits of a Vocation

- ❖ Greater job satisfaction
- ❖ Greater job commitment
- ❖ Less intention to quit





A Downside of Sanctifying Work

- ❖ When work is perceived as sacred, tensions and conflicts can become intolerable because they represent a threat to what is precious.



Sacred Vocation

(Karff, Amick, & Cole)

- ❖ Medicine as a vocation
- ❖ What it means to be a healer of body, mind and spirit
- ❖ When harm has been done to others
- ❖ Barriers to the vocation of medicine and ways to cope
- ❖ Renewing one's commitment to healing as a sacred vocation



Sacred Vocation

(Karff, Amick, & Cole)

- ❖ Increases in empathy with patients
- ❖ Decreases in stress and frustration with others
- ❖ Increases in the sense of sacredness of medicine

It's Good to be a Do-Gooder



The header consists of three horizontal panels. The left and right panels show a landscape with green hills and brown ground under a blue sky. The middle panel features a white globe with blue oceans and green continents, centered over the landscape.

Take Home Point

*We are healed by the spiritual character
of the helping relationship.*



What Accounts for Change in Counseling?

- ❖ Types of treatment account for only 10% of the variance in counseling outcomes (Wampold, 2001)
- ❖ Dodo Bird Effect – “Everybody has won and all must have prizes” (Lewis Carroll)
- ❖ 50% of the variance in counseling outcomes can be attributed to the client-therapist alliance (Horvath, 2001)



The Spiritual Dimension of the Counseling Relationship

- ❖ “I feel there is a mystical quality to the therapeutic process. In that I am referring to a third force. There’s the client, the therapist, and something else present. It’s almost palpable when, what appears to be all of a sudden, the client ‘gets it’ – the ‘aha’ experience. It is important to pay attention to all of the subtleties present” (O’Grady & Richards, 2010, p. 61).



The Spiritual Dimension of the Counseling Relationship

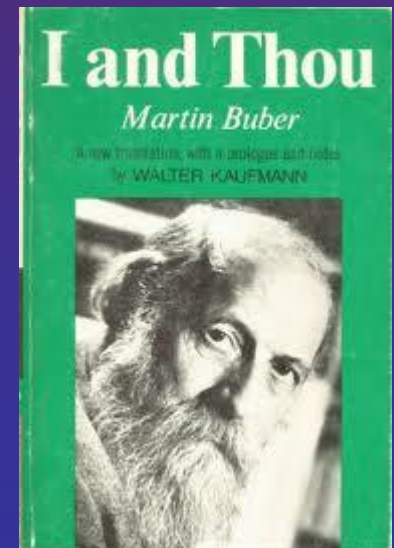
- ❖ “Kairos is a moment of opportunity, when events demand action or are propitious for action” (Stern, 2004, p. 7).





The Spiritual Dimension of the Counseling Relationship

“Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his Thou. He is able to do that when he enters this relation with his whole being. It is solely by virtue of his power to relate that man is able to live in the spirit. . . The relation to a human being is the proper metaphor for the relation to God – as genuine address here is accorded a genuine answer” (Buber, 1970).





Defining Qualities of Sacred Moments

- ❖ Transcendence
- ❖ Ultimacy
- ❖ Boundlessness
- ❖ Connectedness
- ❖ Generative of spiritual emotions
- ❖ Transformational



Quantum Change in Men

- ❖ Wealth
- ❖ Adventure
- ❖ Achievement
- ❖ Pleasure
- ❖ Respect
- ❖ Spirituality
- ❖ Personal peace
- ❖ Family
- ❖ God's will
- ❖ Honesty



Quantum Change in Women

- ❖ Family
- ❖ Independence
- ❖ Career
- ❖ Fitting in
- ❖ Attractiveness
- ❖ Growth
- ❖ Self-esteem
- ❖ Spirituality
- ❖ Happiness
- ❖ Generosity



Hypotheses

- ❖ Sacred moments will be commonly reported by providers
- ❖ Sacred moments will be linked with positive outcomes for the client, the provider, and the counseling relationship, as reported by providers



The Sample

- ❖ 58 mental health providers
- ❖ 43% psychiatrists; 21% psychologists; 15% social workers; 21% other counselors
- ❖ 67% married
- ❖ 67% female
- ❖ Mn Age 47
- ❖ 65% Caucasian; 15% Asian-American; 10% African-American
- ❖ Religiously and spiritually diverse



Providers Attributing Sacred Qualities to their Important Moment

- ❖ Transcendence – 46% “This moment felt set apart from everyday life.”
- ❖ Ultimacy – 65% “I felt that I was a part of something really real.”
- ❖ Boundlessness – 9% “I felt that time had stopped.”
- ❖ Interconnectedness – 61% “I felt a deep sense of connectedness with the patient.”
- ❖ Spiritual emotions – 57% “I felt deep gratitude.”



Sacred Moments vs. Important (Non-Sacred) Moments

- ❖ In comparison to Important (Non-Sacred) Moments, Sacred Moments perceived with significantly more:
 - ❖ Transcendence
 - ❖ Ultimacy
 - ❖ Boundlessness
 - ❖ Connectedness
 - ❖ Spiritual emotions



Consequences of Sacred Moments

- ❖ Gains perceived in patients (e.g., healing, growth, transformation, insight) $r = .63$
- ❖ Strengthened relationship with patients (e.g., trust, honesty, openness, cooperation) $r = .45$
- ❖ Reports of personal growth, transformation $r = .65$
- ❖ Greater sense of meaning in work $r = .40$
- ❖ Greater sense of spiritual well-being $r = .48$
- ❖ No relationship with Maslach burnout



Consequences of Sacred Moments for Clients (N = 519)

- ❖ Gains in treatment (e.g., healing, growth, transformation, insight) $r = .72$
- ❖ Stronger working alliance with provider $r = .58$
- ❖ Reports of personal growth, transformation $r = .72$
- ❖ Reports of greater self-efficacy $r = .57$
- ❖ Reports of improved mental health $r = .63$
- ❖ Greater sense of spiritual well-being $r = .35$
- ❖ Reports of less depression $r = -.10$
- ❖ No relationship with reported psychoticism



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- ❖ Reports of improved mental health $r = .63$
- ❖ Greater sense of spiritual well-being $r = .35$
- ❖ Reports of less depression $r = -.10$
- ❖ No relationship with reported psychoticism



Caregivers Attributing Sacred Qualities to their Important Moment

- ❖ Transcendence – 95% “This moment felt set apart from everyday life.”
- ❖ Ultimacy – 89% “I felt that I was a part of something really real.”
- ❖ Boundlessness – 71% “I felt that time had stopped.”
- ❖ Interconnectedness – 92% “I felt a deep sense of connectedness with the patient.”
- ❖ Spiritual emotions – 87% “I felt deep gratitude.”



Sacred Moment in Caregiving

(Wong, 2018)

- ❖ “I was sitting with my mom, holding her hand, on a Saturday morning while she was sleeping. She woke up after a bit and asked me how long I was there and what was I doing. I told her I was checking on her and making sure she was ok. She smiled, pointed her finger at me and said "just remember I will always love you." I told her I will always love you too. She closed her eyes and fell back asleep. I had to get out of the room ASAP as I started to sob hysterically.”



Sacred Moments in Caregiving

(Wong, 2018)

- ❖ Experience of sacred moments in caregiving tied to:
 - ❖ More personal growth
 - ❖ Greater relationship satisfaction
 - ❖ Greater satisfaction with caregiving
 - ❖ Less felt burden in caregiving
 - ❖ Fewer depressive symptoms



Sacred Moments in Response to Spiritual Struggles

(Wilt et al., 2018)

- ❖ 2890 adults reporting spiritual struggles
- ❖ Six-month longitudinal study
- ❖ Sacred moments tied to:
 - ❖ Greater spiritual growth
 - ❖ Positive effects of spiritual struggles
 - ❖ Greater struggle resolution



Conclusions

- ❖ Sacred moments are not uncommon
- ❖ Sacred moments are part of healing
- ❖ Sacred moments may be vital not only to clients but to ourselves as healers



Key Question

- ❖ How do we cultivate sacred moments in healing relationships?





How Not to Foster Sacred Moments

- ❖ Never look at your client
- ❖ Treat your client as an object
- ❖ At all costs, keep your distance from your client
- ❖ Never disclose your vulnerability to your client
- ❖ Create a Sacred Moments manual





How Not to Respond to Sacred Moments

“Well, you’ve healed enough that you don’t need that anymore” (response of therapist to bereaved mother’s report of a visitation by spirit of dead child; Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002, p. 77).



How to Cultivate Sacred Moments in Counseling

- ❖ Be interested and humble
- ❖ Share some of your humanness
- ❖ Be open to the possibility that any moment may become a sacred moment
- ❖ Affirm your patient's spiritual yearnings



“Fireflies” by Alice

Remember when you were a child in the summertime at night. There were tiny little yellow lights going off and on continuously. I always thought they were flies carrying little lanterns so they could see their way in the darkness. Sometimes the fireflies blend in with the stars.

Remember when you feel in the darkness. Look around, there’s always a flicker of light to give you a glimmer of hope.

Think back when you were a child and remember the fly carried his lantern. He found his way. You will too.”

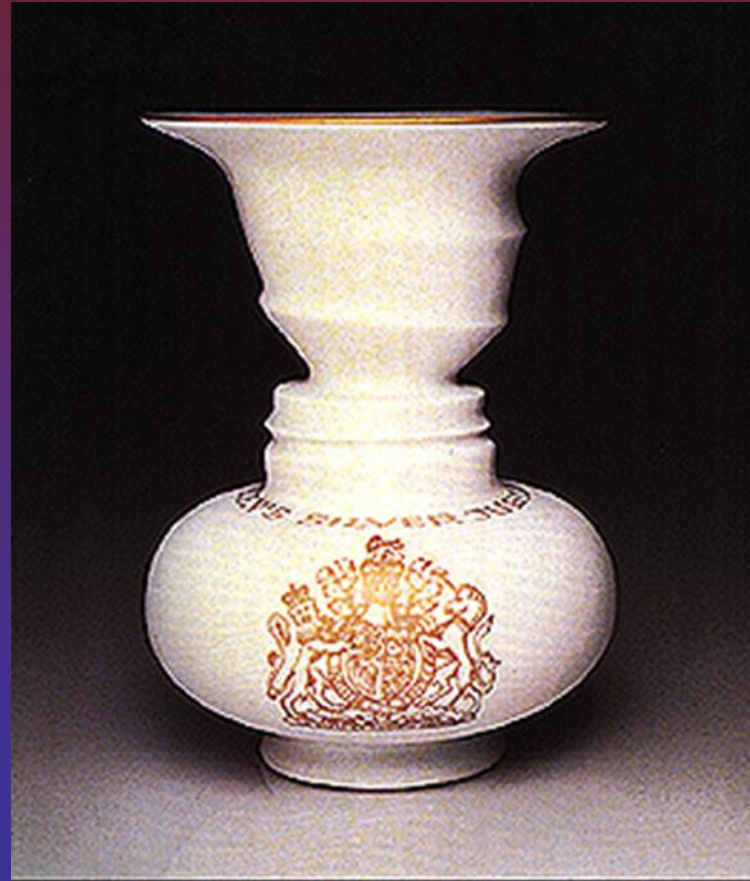
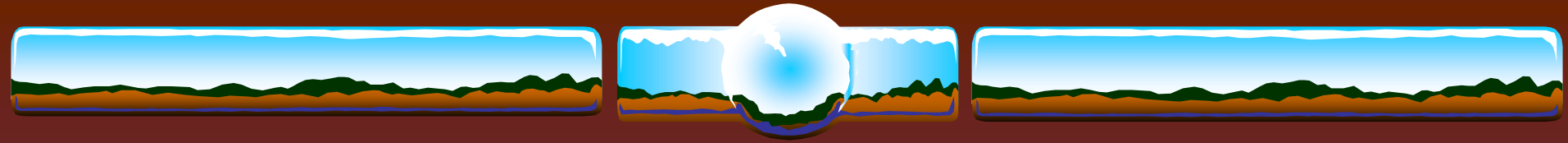




Affirming a Sacred Moment

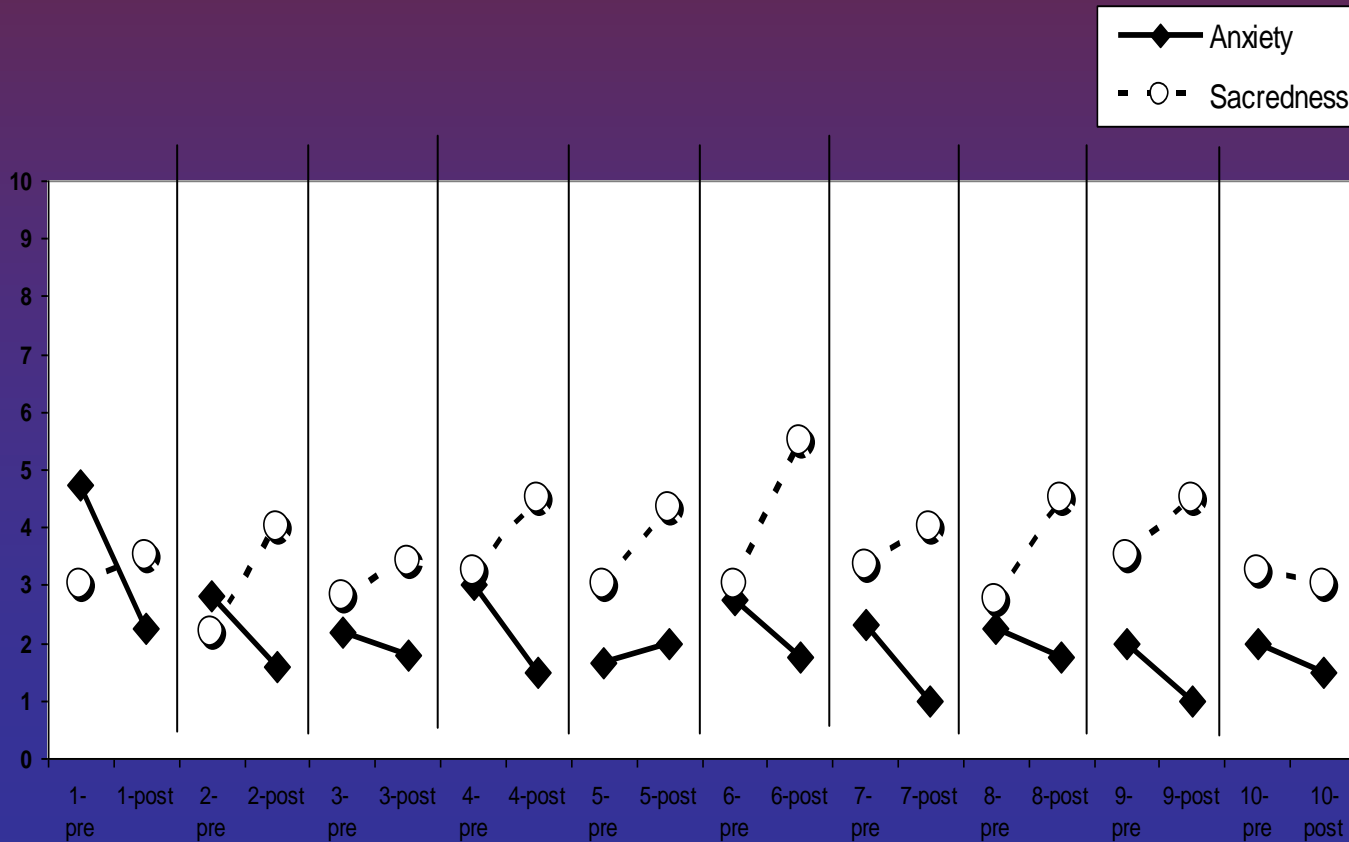
(Lomax 2011)

- Patient: I have never told anyone about this until now. Those moments will always be special to me.
- *Therapist: They should be. It's a very beautiful love story.*
- Patient: It's also surprising to me. Does this routinely happen?
- *Therapist: The sort of love that you had with your mentor is hardly routine.*
- Patient: But do other people have experiences like this with people who have died?
- *Therapist: Only if they are extremely lucky (p. 2)*



Group Means, Self-rated Anxiety and Perceiving Sacredness before/after Sessions

Figure 1. Mean of Self-Rated Anxiety and Perception of Sacredness Before and After Each Group Session (Group 2 only)





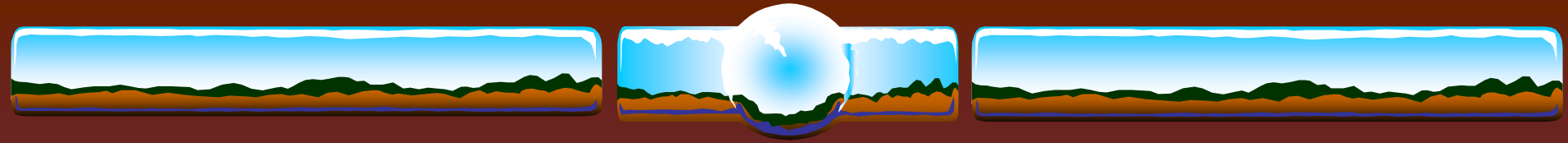






Cultivating Sacred Moments





Hadassah Hospital

Never Let Eeyore Have the Last Word

