

## **SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND CAPACITIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Hart, T. (2005). *Spiritual Experiences and Capacities of Children and Youth*. *Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Sage. 163-178.

There is a growing body of evidence that children have spiritual capacities and experiences—moments, both little and large, that shape their lives in enduring ways. These varied experiences reveal a rich and significant spiritual life that has gone largely unrecognized in the annals of child development and yet may provide one of the most fundamental sources of human motivation. The evidence of these experiences and innate capacities challenges conventional views of childhood spiritual life and therefore has significant implications for the care and nurture of young people both within and outside of religious contexts.

Yet it has often been difficult for adults to recognize this spiritual life. Traditionally, developmental theory has been largely dismissive of the idea that children have genuine spiritual experiences and capacities (e.g., Goldman, 1964; Wilber, 1996). Children have generally been seen as developmentally immature, without sufficient intellectual growth to manifest anything that might be understood as meaningfully reflective and/or spiritual. For example, even contemporary transpersonal theorists like Wilber (1996) describe children's modes of thinking and being as merely “instinctual, impulsive, libidinous, id-ish, animal, apelike” (p. 2). Assumptions about children's capacities have frequently remained guided by Piaget's (1968) “stage” model of cognitive development, in which young children are viewed as largely incapable of meaningful reflection. Tied to this understanding of cognition, there is a prevalent

presupposition that genuine spirituality requires adult abstract thinking and language ability as exhibited in the higher stages of adolescence and adulthood (for a discussion see, e.g., Dillon, 2000). Many researchers have therefore concluded that children, especially preadolescents, do not, and cannot, have a genuine spiritual life.

In addition, until recently research on childhood spirituality has typically equated spirituality with “God talk”—how children think and talk about God or other religious concepts (e.g., Coles, 1992; Heller, 1986; Tamminen, 1991). Through the imposition of such cognitive and religious standards, children's spiritual expressions often go unrecognized or are interpreted as merely immature religiosity. However, children's spirituality may exist apart from adult rational and linguistic conceptions and from knowledge about a religion. Although children may not be able to articulate a moment of wonder or conceptualize a religious concept, their *presence*—their mode of being and knowing in the world—may be distinctly spiritual. As Gordon Allport (1955) suggested, “The religion of childhood may be of a very special order” (p. 101).

Some theorists have recognized children’s more immediate, intuitive knowing as an innate source for character and spiritual growth (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967; Richter, 1887; Steiner, 1909/1965). Rather than focusing on religious knowledge, adherence, or thinking and language capacity, William James (1936) emphasized the significance of *personal religion* as opposed to *institutional religion*. For James, institutional religion implies approaches to spiritual growth formed around doctrines, various practices or rituals, and standards of behavior. Spirituality—what James called personal religion—is the very direct and intimate experience of divinity. That divinity is the incomprehensible life force that remains so difficult to pin down, but to which we try to point with words like *God* or *spirit*. These experiences may emerge as a sense of

interconnection or compassion, a revelatory insight, a quest for meaning, a sacred other, and so forth. These phenomena emerge as ways of being-in-the-world, intuitive epistemic styles and types of immediate awareness or perception that may take place within or outside the context of religion (see, e.g., Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000). The original seed of religion—the “word in the heart from which all scriptures come,” as the Quaker William Penn (cited in Huxley, 1945) wrote—is the spiritual. Spiritual moments are direct, personal, and often have the effect, if only for a moment, of waking us up and expanding our understanding of who we are and what our place is in the universe. They can serve as benchmarks and catalysts for spiritual growth.

In addition to the evidence of particular types of experiences in adults (e.g., Bucke, 1969; James, 1936; Maslow, 1971; Underhill, 1911/1961), there is a growing body of evidence documenting spiritual experiences and capacities in childhood (Armstrong, 1985; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 1998; Hoffman, 1992; Piechowski, 2001; Robinson, 1978, 1983). For this chapter I have drawn from these existing case studies with children and recollected childhood accounts, as well as autobiographical documents of historic figures, along with my own long-term qualitative study (see Hart, 2003), and have interwoven these with insights from various faith traditions. Beyond documented cases and autobiographical accounts, in my direct qualitative study more than 150 cases were collected through contacts with individuals and families over a span of 5 years. Participants were purposefully sampled and included adults who recalled childhood experiences, young people who described spiritual encounters, and families. The notion of spiritual experience or awareness was left generally open-ended and was informed by extensive previous literature on religious, mystical, psychospiritual and transpersonal experience for adults, recent research on children, and autobiographical accounts. Participants were mainly, but not exclusively, North American and encompassed a wide range of cultural diversity and faith

traditions as well as those with no religious affiliation. Several different means were employed to open intentional conversation, including focus groups, participant observation (e.g., during summer camp), and formal interviews with families, adults, or youth. Frequently, an initial contact would be serendipitous (a conversation on an airplane or a call from a parent) or a referral (“You should talk to so-and-so . . .”), and this would be followed up with an in-depth semistructured interview or a less structured visit to a family. The organizing principle of this varied approach was to gather credible narrative accounts of the spiritual life and capacities of childhood and to understand those in the context of daily life and development.

Supplementing narrative approaches, evidence is drawn from a survey of recalled childhood spiritual experiences in order to assess the frequency and variety of the phenomena (Nelson & Hart, 2003). In this study a series of questions was derived from the phenomenological descriptions of case accounts gathered in previous qualitative inquiry and then posed to approximately 450 undergraduate students at the State University of West Georgia in an anonymous survey. Students were enrolled in one of several different sections of an introductory psychology class, a core requirement of the university, taught by different instructors. All university majors were represented in the sample; students had had no previous organized exposure to the material. Excerpts of the results are reported here to provide some preliminary idea of just how common these experiences might be. If a rare few prodigious children have spiritual capacities or experiences, then this might imply significance along the lines of research on gifted education or child prodigies. However, if a larger percentage of children have spiritual experiences and capacities, a fundamental revision in how we view children may be required. These results, though very preliminary, suggest both a surprisingly widespread occurrence and the need for further, more wide scale research.

The data are organized around four general types of experiences and capacities: wonder, wondering, relational spirituality, and wisdom. These categories were induced from the extensive case material examined, and clarified, in part through various spiritual traditions and writers. The experiences of awe and wonder, wisdom, love or compassion, and metaphysical pondering are frequently described as outcomes or processes inherent in a spiritual life. For example, love or compassion—what I have included as relational spirituality—is commonly described across the faith traditions. Likewise, the pursuit of wisdom is a common principle in spiritual texts and among spiritual leaders. These general themes appeared repeatedly in the case material.

These ways of being-in-the world may help provide a multifaceted definition of spiritual life, demonstrating the diverse ways in which spirituality manifests. They also appear to represent general nonexclusive spiritual styles or temperaments. For example, one child's way of being may be especially empathic or compassionate, whereas another may be more philosophical—asking big questions of life and meaning. It is important to note that these are broad and general categories and that children express their spirituality in very individualized ways—a kind of personal “signature” tied to one's personality as Nye has suggested (Hay & Nye, 1998).

This evidence may shed light on the diverse ways in which children pursue their spiritual drives and may help us recognize the innate spiritual capacities in our own life. It is also significant that the innate spiritual tendencies of children coexist with immaturity, selfishness, and naïveté. These are developmental capacities and formative moments whose full potential and meaning may unfold through the course of a life.

In what follows, I will very briefly outline four domains and will do so especially by including a few examples that are intended to provide some concrete sense of the spirituality of children and youth.

## **WONDER**

Childhood is a time of wonder and awe as the world grabs attention through fresh eyes and ears. Wonder includes a constellation of experiences that can involve feelings of awe, connection, joy, insight, and a deep sense of reverence and love. Surprisingly, the reports of wonder from contemporary children are often indistinguishable from those of the great mystics of the world for whom wondrous moments provided a touchstone and a beacon for the spiritual life that was to come.

Mechanism, materialism, and modernism tend to “desacralize” the world, leaving it as inert matter for our manipulation. Wonder keeps the sacred in view and recognizes it alive in our midst. Karen remembers a powerful moment in her own secret place: “I was 15, sitting in silence in my ‘special spot’ outside, a short walk from my family’s house. I was just sort of tuning in to nature, the little birds and insects here and there. Then suddenly I had this experience of everything being connected. Both in the sense of just part of the same, but then, what was most amazing to me was there was also a sense of everything being equal—the majestic mountain, the blade of grass, and me.”

As it was for Karen, it appears that time in nature is the most common catalyst for moments of wonder (Laski, 1968). Children sometimes have a “special spot” that seems to provide a kind of spiritual nourishment.

Wonder comes in all shapes and sizes, ranging from awesome spiritual epiphanies to a small moment of being overwhelmed by the color or fragrance of a flower, for example. But these special moments, especially the “larger” ones, share particular qualities that help define them. As William James (1902/1936) recognized more than 100 years ago, they are *ineffable*—words fail to convey their depth and meaning. Like so many others, Black Elk said he was just speechless in trying to convey his own childhood spiritual visions: “As I lay there thinking of my vision, I could see it all and feel the meaning with a part of me like a strange power glowing in my body; but when the part of me that talks would try to make words for the meaning, it would be like a fog and get away from me” (Neihardt, 1972, pp. 40-41).

These moments are also *timeless*. A few hours in the surf may feel like a few seconds when we are absorbed in the “eternal now,” as theologian Paul Tillich (1957) called it. The ability to be lost in the moment—absorption—is a capacity that is natural for children and seems to provide a gateway for opening perception toward a mystical encounter. Indeed, absorption appears significantly correlated with ecstasy and states of flow (Irwin, 1985; Nelson, 1989; Nelson & Hart, 2003). Yet in a fast-paced, modernist culture we are often discouraging of contemplative absorption that may appear as daydreaming or idleness (see Hart, 2004).

However novel these moments seem, there is often a sense of their being both *absolutely true* and *strangely familiar*. Plato called this depth of knowing “anamnesis,” the soul’s remembrance of truth. A moment of such communion can announce our spiritual homecoming and serves as a reminder of our spiritual address. Fifteen-year-old Jane said, “I’m having the hardest time finding the right words. Sometimes I feel like what I experience isn’t really another reality at all, it’s just a bigger view of this one. A few months back I had this experience while taking a walk where I felt so connected to everyone and everything—I could see, feel, and hear

the web between us. It dissolves all fear. It felt so totally fresh and like coming home at the same time.”

Wonder is also nonrational or transrational; it involves a *direct knowing*. Debbie’s account at 11 years old described this shift: “I was outside lying back on my swing set by myself; I was looking at the sky, just watching. I don’t know how it happened, but all of a sudden it all opened up to me. I don’t know how to say it, but I was frozen right there and felt like everything was perfect and connected. I can’t say I was thinking anything; it’s like there was no room even to think. The feelings were so much bigger than thinking. My thinking stopped and was blank. At the same time, it literally felt like my chest could just burst open and fly into a million pieces. I felt like I could explode and be the sun and the clouds.” Saint John of the Cross described this mystical knowing that is beyond our intellect’s ability to pin it down as “infinite incomprehension” (Underhill, 1911/1961).

Wonder may sometimes involve an awareness of a *sacred other*. For example, Catherine of Siena had her most formative revelation of Jesus when she was 6 years old (Vineis, 1934/1960). Hildegard von Bingen “saw so great a brightness that my soul trembled” at age 3 (Bowie & Davies, 1990, p. 20). Ramakrishna had a profound spiritual opening at 6 years old. Sometime following this he was taking food as an offering to the Divine Mother. The custom was to place it on an altar as he said prayers. This day he stopped as he was approaching the altar and noticed a cat nearby. Much to his surprise he reported that he clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything, even the cat. Instead of leaving the food on the altar, he gave it to the cat. The heart of his vision was that divinity is immanent—it is here and now in all things, even the cat (Nikhilananda, 1970).



During such moments, perception of the distinction between subject and object or self and other blurs. While the spiritual has sometimes been portrayed as separate and transcendent—beyond our reach or not of this world—what children tell us is that the other world is often perceived as right here and right now. This profound sense of immanence often comes with a sense of perfection, understanding, appreciation, and love. For many, a “reverence” and “appreciation” toward life arise naturally out of wonder and form a moral backdrop, as has been documented among adults (e.g., James, 1902/1936; Bucke, 1969; Maslow, 1971). Albert Schweitzer called this reverence the most profound attitude that we can have as human beings (Pierhal, 1957). A sense of gratitude, which has been described as a fundamental virtue (Emmons & McCullough, 2004), and even a spontaneous desire toward devotion, may emerge, as it did for Saint Catherine and Ramakrishna. Childhood moments of wonder are not merely passing reveries but may be translated into a moral benchmark.

Wonder and awe describe not only a spiritual *experience* but also a spiritual *attitude*. In Zen Buddhism, this attitude or way of seeing is called *Beginner's Mind*. It means being open to the world, appreciating and meeting it with fresh eyes—just watching it (and ourselves) with lessened preset expectations or categories. In what may be a similar vein, the Bible tells us that one enters the Kingdom of Heaven by becoming like a child: “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:2). The same hint is offered in Taoism, whose founder's name, Lao-Tze, means “old child.” I think it is safe to conclude that this does not mean childish, but instead childlike—full of wonder and openness, seeing in a more immediate, open, and less categorical fashion.

Beyond the reverence and joy, at times the divine can create a demand. A moment of ecstasy, unity, or a sacred other can be overwhelming and difficult to integrate. For example, in

Atwater's (1999) research on children's near-death experiences, over half dealt with serious bouts of depression. A staggering 21% attempted suicide (this number compares with 4% in adult near-death experiencers in her research). Such overwhelming experiences can be difficult to reconcile with one's daily life. But confusion, guilt, shame, lack of understanding, and family and religious members who felt threatened were the greatest source of difficulty. As one person learned, "I found it was O.K. to listen to talks about Jesus [in church] but not to be talked to by Jesus" (Hollander, 1980, p. 27).

There has been a long tradition of suspicion of ecstasy and mystical encounters. Documents like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, better known as *The Witches' Hammer*, written in 1486 by two Catholic monks from Germany, insist that mystical experiences, moments of ecstasy, visions, and the like are the mark of satanic influence (Liestner, 1996). Such attitudes have helped institutionalize misunderstanding, repression, and persecution of those having spiritual experiences. Contemporary psychiatry also tends to dismiss such moments as mere fantasy or, worse, as a sign not of divinity but of pathology. Recently, the primary diagnostic manual for psychiatric disorders has added a category, "Spiritual Emergency," to describe crises of meaning and experiences that have a spiritual flavor (American Psychological Association, 2000). Children's experiences reflect natural emergence and not necessarily an emergency, but we are beginning to recognize that the spiritual is central to our well-being, not a marker of our pathology.

In our study of recalled childhood experiences, nearly 80% of young adults said they sometimes feel a sense of awe and wonderment inspired by the immediate world around them and of those, 85% reported that their first occurrence was before the age of 18, with 12% indicating their first occurrence prior to 6 years old, 27% between 6 and 12, and 46% between 12

and less than 18 years old. In addition, 39% indicated that they had had a moment of unitive connection (“Have you ever had an experience in which you perceived that all was really connected together as one?”), and of those, 70% said it occurred at least once in childhood or youth (Nelson & Hart, 2003). As indicated previously, this study is preliminary.

Although moments of wonder appear to reflect powerful ways of knowing that in turn may shape a worldview and orientation toward life, there remains a lack of psychological theory appreciating the significance and nature of wonder in children. For example, Piaget (1968) recognized that children have an intuitive capacity but he did not see much value in it. Fowler’s (1981) “intuitive-projective” stage of faith recognizes that the child is continually encountering novelty and has a rich fantasy life, but this does not really address the transformative nature of wonder that children are describing. Washburn (1995) recognizes children’s openness to the “dynamic ground” but presumes this openness must close off as the ego develops, and his map does not account for its developmental significance. Increasing evidence suggests, however, that wonder is of developmental significance for children and that children’s capacity for wonder may be engendered owing to several factors, including their lack of rigid egoic structure, which permits an intimacy of contact—a crossing or blurring of subject and object [–] the natural capacity for absorption, their intuitive style of knowing, the perception of novelty all mixed with the mystery of life.

Literature on peak experiences (e.g., Bucke, 1901/1969; James, 1902/1936; Maslow, 1971), ecstasy (e.g., Laski, 1968; Underhill, 1911/1961), and absorption (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Nelson, 1989) articulates the significance of “wonder” in adults and its important impact on spiritual growth. The present research suggests that childhood wonder can also shape a worldview and even the course of one’s life. While I have offered somewhat dramatic examples

of discrete moments, it may be the everyday way of being and knowing that describes childhood wonder best. And the greatest significance is not in how small or large an experience is, but in how those moments are integrated and expressed in one's life. For example, how does a flash of interconnection translate into character and compassion? In addition, how might the presence of children help remind us, as adults, to find wonder in the midst of our lives (see Hart, 2003)?

## **WONDERING**

Children can be natural philosophers. Much to our amazement, they often ponder *big questions*. They ask about life and meaning, knowing and knowledge, truth and justice, reality and death. These questions are what philosophy and religion have attempted to address.

“Why am I here?” 7-year-old John asked his father at the grocery store. “We’re getting food for dinner. You said you wanted to come,” his father reminded him. “No! No! Why are we *here*; you know, alive?” John said. “Huh? You mean why are we on Earth?” his father asked, a little stunned. “Yeah!” John said with some exasperation in his voice, as if it was the most obvious question he could ask. His father quickly gathered himself together and began to wind up an answer in his mind. But before he offered it, he had the good sense to ask John instead, “Why do *you* think we’re here?” “I don’t know yet; I’m working on it,” John replied. Fair enough.

For many, the spiritual quest is focused and explored through pondering, puzzling over, and playing with such questions. For individuals like Gandhi, who was described as hungering for truth even as a child, entertaining the big questions is a way to enter a dialogue with mystery, with the spiritual (Erikson, 1969). Emmons (1999) and Fowler (1981) recognize that “striving

for the sacred” is integral to human personality and motivation. However, children’s striving through questioning and pondering has been underappreciated.

Piaget’s (1968) model of development maps cognition through progressive developmental stages—from the very body-based knowing of an infant to increasing abstraction. He believed that a child lacks the ability to reason and reflect with any degree of sophistication. There is increasing evidence, though, that he was both right and also quite wrong or, at least, incomplete. It does appear that children do go through cognitive development in stages. But these stages are general and broad, and represent merely a rough sketch. When we look a little closer, we can find grand exceptions to Piaget’s model. Even young children have shown a capacity for thoughtful consideration of the “big questions” (metaphysics), inquiring about proof and the source of knowledge (epistemology), reasoning through problems (logic), questioning values (ethics), and reflecting on their own identity in the world. As previously indicated, the style of children’s thinking may be more intuitive than sequentially analytic and therefore may have been missed by conventional standards of adult rational thought. Young people (as well as adults) may grasp a key insight or a broad understanding that captures the heart of an issue, but they may not be able to explain it in adult logic and language. Of course, this is true of other styles of thinking as well, such as a predominantly visual-spatial learner (Silverman, 2002) whose descriptions may be unfathomable to a less visual thinker.

Children’s openness, vulnerability, and tolerance for mystery enable them to entertain perplexing and paradoxical questions. Matthews (1980) has said that children may be especially good at philosophy because they have “fresh eyes and ears for perplexity and incongruity . . . and a [high] degree of candor and spontaneity” (p. 85). Especially important to the consideration of spirituality, they often naturally ponder what Tillich (1957) called *ultimate concerns*: “Why

are we here?” “What is life about?” Or, as my youngest daughter asked the other day, “Where did the first people come from?” Unfortunately, children may find prohibitions against their natural questioning in favor of predetermined answers and ideologies, and this can be a source of great frustration and suffering. Jim, 14, looked back on his earlier school career:

I couldn't get my teachers to take my questions and ideas seriously. I thought this was what school was going to be about. There was such a big deal about going off to first grade, but I kept waiting for us to talk about life—you know, why we're all here? What's this world's about? The nature of the universe. Things like that. When I'd ask or say my ideas just to sort of get things going, there would be dead silence, and then the teacher would move on to spelling or something. I thought, “OK, I guess we're getting the basic stuff this year, and then we'll get into the good stuff in second grade. I can wait that long if I have to.” Well, second grade came and went and it wasn't any better—maybe worse—since we didn't even get to play as much. By fourth grade I remember thinking, “I must be an alien. These people don't understand. I'm not a social zero; I have friends. But no one, especially not the teachers, are talking about this.” School seems not to be very interested in my questions or any questions really; it is all about the answers. We're only supposed to give them the right answer.

The depth of children's concerns and questions can surprise us. Jesse was about to turn 9 years old. It was the night before his birthday, and his dad was saying good night and giving him a kiss on the head. Jesse started to cry. “What's wrong?” his father asked. Jesse couldn't control himself; he was sobbing heavily as his father looked on helplessly with no idea what was happening. Was it about a present that he was afraid he might not get? Did he get in trouble at

school? His father had no idea. Finally, Jesse was able to calm down enough to explain: “My birthday means I’m another year closer to death, and it means you are, too. I know that there’s such a thing as reincarnation, but I don’t want things to change.” His dad didn’t have an answer. They held each other while they both cried. Children certainly do think about toys and getting in trouble at school, but they also ponder deeply the mysteries of being human—like death and love—and therefore their questions and concerns deserve our deepest respect and reverence.

Children’s questions and comments reveal that they do not take for granted the same things that adults do. One mother described a moment when she and her daughter were sitting on their couch in front of the television: “I was laughing at something on TV, and my 8-year-old was scared by it and she said, ‘You know, Mommy, I don’t know yet what’s real and what’s not real.’ ” This reflects a powerful self-awareness and poses a bedrock philosophical question about proof and evidence: How does one know what is real? What are the requirements to determine validity?

This question of evidence extends to all sorts of questions. Ten-year-old Tim reports: “I sometimes think about if there is one God. . . . Different people believe in different gods. Which God is real? . . . I just can’t figure that out” (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 97). After pondering the idea that Jesus was the only perfect person, as had been explained to her in church, 9-year-old Kathy offered a flurry of questions. “This is so weird,” she said. “I can’t understand how he could be the only one. What about all the other people around the world who don’t believe in Jesus? What do they think about him being the only perfect one? What do they believe in? And why shouldn’t they be able to go to heaven too?” She then dug deeper still: “How do you even know there is a God?”

Conceptual play and “philosophical whimsy,” as Matthews (1980) names it, free us to imagine a world of endless possibilities. For example, Jung (1965), describing his own childhood, wrote: “Often, when I was alone, I sat down on this stone, and began an imaginary game that went something like this: I am sitting on the top of this stone and it is underneath. But the stone could also say ‘I’ and think: ‘I am lying here on this slope and he is sitting on top of me.’ The question then arose: ‘Am I the one who is sitting on top of the stone, or am I the stone on which *he* is sitting?’ ” (p. 20).

Children’s natural radical questioning is very much akin to a long history of spiritual practice designed to help free the mind to see more clearly and immediately. For example, Merton (1948/1978) referred to unraveling questions as a “dark knowing,” by which he meant that the result of the questioning process was mainly an “unknowing”—taking down rather than adding to. The Buddhist Madhyamika method intentionally deconstructs core concepts, even of Buddhism (Fenner, 1991). The approach called negative theology in Christianity systematically suspends core beliefs, even the basic tenants of Christianity, as a way of arriving at the profoundest knowing. Postmodern deconstruction is designed to render transparent the underpinnings of our beliefs and the structures of power and knowledge by questioning the origins of our assumptions. The 20th-century Indian sage Ramana Maharshi (1982) had momentous epiphanies as a teenager that opened him to his own spiritual identity. The center of his own quest and the heart of his spiritual teaching was a very direct question: “Who am I?” He understood that if this question is asked honestly and fully, it leads deeper and deeper, through layers of identity, roles, and attachments. Remarkably, because of their curiosity, candor, and freshness, children often find and ask these deep questions quite naturally.



As physicist David Bohm (1981) explains, “Questioning is . . . not an end in itself, nor is its main purpose to give rise to answers. Rather, what is essential here is the whole flowing movement of life, which can be harmonious only when there is ceaseless questioning” (p. 25). If you are around young children, you may be familiar with ceaseless questioning—Why? Why? Why?—or perhaps with children who pose difficult questions that defy easy answers. At 6, Julian asked, “What are heaven and hell? And what about the devil? Is it real?” He not only ponders how to get his little brother to leave him alone, but also earnestly puzzles over infinity, zero, God, and death. Such wondering may focus priorities in one’s life and serve as a kind of trailhead in the search for meaning.

## **WISDOM**

The spiritual traditions from around the world are also referred to as the wisdom traditions. In a spiritual life, wisdom seems to be something both to strive for and to use to reach toward the goal. We might reasonably assume that wisdom comes only with a great deal of experience, reserved for elders or for a rare few. However, in spite of their naïveté in the ways of the world, children often show a remarkable capacity for cutting to the heart of a matter, for accessing profound insight and wise guidance.

While the meaning of wisdom is difficult to pin down, we can take a moment to circle it for this discussion. Aquinas suggested that wisdom involves looking at things from a greater height. It involves *gnome*, or the ability to see through things (Gilby, 1967). Ralph Waldo Emerson captures a further dimension of wisdom in describing it as a blend of the perception of what is true with the moral sentiment of what is right (Sealts, 1992, p. 257). The courageous and very risky acts of persons like Gandhi, Jesus of Nazareth, and Martin Luther King, imply that

wise action moves beyond self-interest. We would not say that their actions were “smart,” but they were deeply wise. And finally, wisdom is distinguished from bare intellect especially by its integration of the heart.

Donna described an opening to insight that took place when she was 8 years old:

I was in church thinking about praying. Suddenly, in a flash, I understood that I should be praying for love and wisdom. I suddenly “got” that this was the way to use prayer. This was never suggested to me or even really talked about; but this insight came to be my regular way of praying. Whenever I prayed, I prayed for love and wisdom. This sounds simple, but it provided an incredible focus for me. This was my special secret. Even up until this moment, I have never told anyone about it. Up until my late 20s, I continued this style of prayer. Around the time of my marriage, it changed somewhat. I started to pray to have my heart opened . . . this seems like a different version of the same theme. I think that at some point I was expecting transcendence or something from my prayers, and it wasn’t until later that I realized that what I was getting were small glimpses, a direction, an insight or attitude about handling situations. I didn’t have the maturity to realize until later that wisdom involves acting on what we know—walking it out in the world. I had to take those glimpses and live them in order to learn from them.

Wisdom is not just about what we know, but especially about how we live, how we embody knowledge and compassion in our life and, as Emerson said, blend a sense of what is true with what is right. While this is often the daily challenge played out over the course of our life, some children seem to have mastered it surprisingly well.

As an 11-year old, Mattie Stepanek seemed to have a remarkable embodied wisdom. His clarity and single-minded mission to "spread peace in the world" were impressive to those who met him. Mattie died in 2004 from multiple sclerosis and, for many years, had been precariously poised between life and death. Mattie had three wishes for his life, all of which were accomplished before his death: (1) to get his book of poetry published, (2) to meet his hero, Jimmy Carter, and (3) to be on Oprah Winfrey's show so that he could "spread peace." Television interviewer Larry King asked Mattie about his meeting with Carter, and Mattie described it in a lively and funny way and said they had a wonderful one-on-one conversation. Jimmy was his hero because he is a "humble peacemaker." Mattie said he liked to stay in touch with Carter to "make sure that Jimmy stays on track" with his peace work. Carter once remarked that Mattie was the wisest person he had ever met.

In response to the 9/11 tragedy, Mattie wrote three poems. The first he wrote when the World Trade Center Towers were falling, and he was "very, very sad and scared." The poem expresses this sadness, almost despair, about what is happening to people and their suffering, without in any way getting stuck in the "good" here and the "evil" there. In the third poem, he called on all people to "STOP" and stay still. Just "BE" before making any move in reaction to what just happened.

While intelligence is usually associated with an ability to identify or articulate complex patterns of thought, wisdom often emerges as an elegantly simple proposition. This is not simplicity born of ignorance, but a simplicity that is tuned into what is essential in life. It cuts through the cloud of complexity. Children can go right to the heart of an issue. They often recognize pain, injustice, and phoniness very quickly.

Meacham (1990) proposes that wisdom, normally associated with experience and maturity, is in reach of the child and may actually decrease with age. He views wisdom in terms of one's knowledge that one doesn't know and suggests that balancing knowing and doubting or, said differently, knowing without excessive confidence or cautiousness, may capture the simple essence of wisdom.

Wisdom does not come from amassing bits of information; it is not a thing that's accumulated, not an *entity*. Instead, it is an *activity* of knowing, perhaps most simply named as a shift in a state of consciousness or awareness. In some moments children find remarkable insight as they access this contemplative knowing that complements the rational and sensory (see Hart, 2000, 2004).

Although such knowing often arrives spontaneously, children sometimes find their own unique ways to open the contemplative mind. (See Hart, 2003, 2004, for an exploration of ways in which children spontaneously open this contemplative mind and also the means to cultivate this in secular and religious contexts.)

In our survey of young adults who were asked "Have you ever had the experience of receiving guidance from some source that is not part of our usual physical world?" 61% answered affirmatively and 85% of those indicated that this occurred before the age of 18. Asked the question "Have you ever found yourself knowing and/or saying something that seemed to come through you, rather than from you, expressing a wisdom you don't feel you usually have?" 54% said they had and of those, 80% indicated that this occurred in childhood and or youth (Nelson & Hart, 2003).

As a teenager, George left home to try to find a person who would inspire and serve as his spiritual guide. He came away from each visit with a different preacher more disappointed

and discouraged. Finally, sitting in silence one day, he began to hear a deep inner source, what he called the “Inner Light.” This was George Fox, who founded the Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers, in the 17th century (Liestner, 1996). In recognition of the inner light, Quaker worship services are dominated by silence, so that worshippers may listen for their own inner voice or inner wisdom that is beyond shrewdness and calculation.

The great Native American Black Elk had visions that would shape his life at 5 and 9 years old. In his most formative vision, he was led by a horse and an eagle through a rainbow doorway into a teepee where there were six old men sitting in a row. The old men said, “Your grandfathers from all over the world have called you here to teach you.” Each offered a medicine—a power—that would shape his life (Neihardt, 1972, p. 21).

When unacknowledged, childhood wisdom can lead to a sense of alienation. One participant in Edward Hoffman’s (1992) study found little support or appreciation for this way of knowing:

In simple terms, these meditative experiences led me to feel as a child that the grown-ups around me were out of touch with something and were deceiving themselves—and me—with unfounded opinions. As a result I often felt the need to retreat to a private reality among the woods and in nature. (pp. 96-97)

## **BETWEEN YOU AND ME**

“Spirit is not in the I but between the I and you. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe,” wrote Buber (1923/1970, p. 89). Spirituality is often lived out at the intersection of our lives—at the meeting *between you and me*. It is the quality of these

human encounters that is the basis of a *relational* spirituality. This is typically recognized as love or compassion in the wisdom traditions and begins as an experience of empathy. Young people have the capacity to know the other quite directly, and in so doing they often sense pain, anger, or joy, for example, very quickly. Sometimes they may be overwhelmed or confused by the feelings of another person; in other moments that deep connection leads to surprising understanding.

Jeff remembers a moment of deep recognition as he was turning 10:

More than anything I wanted a wristwatch for my birthday, and I kept letting my mother know. I had never had one before, and I thought this would be the greatest thing I could get. But we were very poor. My birthday came and my mother gave me an unwrapped box. I opened it and saw my new watch. But in the next moment, I looked into my mother's eyes and I saw this incredibly deep pain. In that instant I saw that she was someone's child, she was someone's mother, and she would become an old woman. I knew that my mother was feeling pain and a sense of desperation. I had no way to talk about it then, but I knew who she was and what she felt, although I'm sure she had no idea of what I saw. I knew that somehow I was different after that moment. I went out to play and lost the watch before I returned for dinner.

At the age of 22, a dozen years later, I had been reading Martin Buber on the "I-thou" experience. It was then that I had an image for understanding what I had felt with my mother on my 10th birthday. I decided that I should telephone her. I asked her if she remembered that day and that gift. She did. I told her about the pain that I knew she was

in. She was amazed because it seemed exactly right to her. She wondered how I could have known and understood it so clearly.

The word *understanding* means literally “standing among or under.” Children appear to have an epistemic capacity that is naturally interconnective, less self-separate. This may be related to the lack of refined ego identity. This rather direct and, we could say, “open-hearted” way of knowing is not limited to human relationships. Young people can feel that concern and care for a dead squirrel along the roadway, a dying tree, or nature as a whole. On the way to school just yesterday my daughter asked, “Dad, will you go back and make sure that turtle [that was in the middle of the road] gets across OK.” And my 13-year-old friend wrote that her biggest fear is that we will continue to harm the earth and even destroy it. With similar care and intimacy, Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock (who explored genetics through working with corn plants) described a less detached empiricism, one in which she gained “a feeling for the organism” that required “the openness to let it come to you” (quoted in Keller, 1983, p. 198). In this epistemic style, the other is no longer separate but becomes part of our world and ourselves in a profoundly intimate way.

This empathy and “openness to let it come to you” can be a spiritual knowing especially because it awakens our interconnection, compassion, and love. Because of the profound importance of this kind of meeting, empathy has been described as the basis of moral development (Hoffman, 1990) and even the trait that makes us most human (Azar, 1997). We realize our humanity and our divinity through the quality of our meetings. And when we really meet others, feel into their world and understand them, it becomes much more difficult to perpetrate violence against them. This is the root of a living relational morality:

What I wanted I took—until about age 11, as I was about to take some nice marbles, I had a flash of insight into what the girl would feel like when she found them missing. The thought of her distress cured me of stealing, not the knowledge that what I was doing was wrong. (Robinson, 1983, p. 138)

While modern conceptions generally locate “knowing” in the head, sacred traditions identify the most essential knowing with the heart. For example, the Chinese word *hsin* is often translated as “mind” but includes both mind and heart. Heart knowing is recognized as the eye of the Tao in Chinese philosophy. Plato called it the eye of the soul (Smith, 1993). And the power of the heart is identified as “south” on the Native American medicine wheel (Storm, 1972). Seeing through the eye of the heart is a capacity present even at very tender ages.

Early in their new preschool program a 3-year-old boy, who was having trouble fitting in, bit Chessie, also 3, on the arm. She was naturally upset and was then very vigilant about the boy’s whereabouts for the rest of the day. The next day, when he was sneaking up behind her and was just about to pounce, she spun around, pointed her finger at him, and shouted, “No!” like a parent. He stopped dead in his tracks and then moved away, leaving her alone for the remainder of the day.

The next day, he again tried to sneak up on her. Once again, Chessie spun around just as he was about to strike. He stood up straight and froze. She then stepped up and gave him a big hug. From that day on he never sneaked up on her. She made sure he wasn’t left out during games or other activities and made certain that he had someone to sit next to during a video or story. As her teacher said, “She seemed to know exactly what this boy needed and took care of him while still setting limits.”



Traditionally, developmental theorists have told us that children are self-centered and incapable of real empathy or compassion; they have not developed cognitively sufficiently to really put themselves in someone else's shoes. Indeed, children can be enormously selfish and self-centered. However, there has been some important recognition of the moral concerns and natural compassion of children (e.g., Coles, 1986; Damon, 1990). Children's openness and intuitive capacity allow them to experience a kind of direct empathic interconnection with the world—*deep empathy*—and their compassion can arise very naturally (Hart, 2000). The capacities for separateness and connection, selfishness and compassion exist simultaneously.

As with any faculty, young people may have varying proficiency—some are remarkably empathic, others seem only slightly so. However, from our initial survey results it appears that there is the possibility that the general phenomenon may be quite common. In answer to the question "Do you ever feel that at times you know people's thoughts/feelings unusually accurately without being told or shown in any direct, physical way?" 70% in our survey indicated they had; 31% indicated that the first occurrence was before 12 years old, and 48% said their first recalled occurrence was between 12 and 17 years old (Nelson & Hart, 2003).

Such direct knowing and intensity of feeling can be overwhelming. Self–other boundaries vary a great deal from one individual to the next. Individuals who are highly empathic often have a flexible or highly permeable boundary—a fundamental and primary way of knowing the world—that can be a great gift as well as a source of confusion and suffering. Seventeen-year-old Sarah tells about a surprisingly typical circumstance of being a kind of psychic sponge, seemingly absorbing others' emotions: "I'm an empath, and I hate school. I walk around and people walk in and out of classes, and I get everything from them—their anger, frustration, even

happiness or joy. But it's no fun. I'm not a big fan of crowds . . . but I'm working on turning the empathy on and off.”

Many teenagers and adults use compensatory measures such as drugs and alcohol to numb their sensitivity or, alternatively, develop a hostile or withdrawn personality in order to create a pseudoboundary. At times their empathic sensitivity has been a source of confusion because they have not learned to shut out empathic perceptions or to distinguish between what feelings are theirs and which belong to someone else, or they fail to interpret information in a helpful way (Hart, 2003).

Relational spirituality is about communion—a profound sense of interconnection with the cosmos; connection—a sense of intimacy with someone or something; community—a sense of belonging to a group; and compassion—the drive to help others. It is about the way one knows and meets the world. The spirit is brought to life in a genuine and open meeting, just as children can remind us to do, and Buber (1923/1970) tells us that ultimately, “all real living *is* meeting” (p. 11).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The pleasure principle, instinctual drives toward survival and procreation, and early object relations certainly shape motivation and behavior; however, another coexistent source of motivation may be of a very different order. Childhood spiritual awareness and experience may serve as touchstones and catalysts for psychospiritual development. Recognition of empathic interconnection or *interbeing* (Hanh, 1995) may help shape a morality emphasizing interdependence or care. Entertaining big questions about meaning, suffering, and so forth may help shape character by validating such ultimate concerns amid a media deluge that seems to

emphasize sexuality, materiality, consumerism, and celebrity. Experiences of accessing wisdom may activate a lifelong capacity for listening for that still small voice, reflection and contemplation. Moments of wonder, peace, perfection, joy, or of seeing the Golden World, as Eliade (1964) called it, may provide a sense of perspective, hope, or optimism.

The evidence of the innate spiritual capacities of children and youth and its significance for development raises questions for the care and nurture of the spiritual life of young people. How do we draw out and work with the organic spiritual character, capacities, and compassion within the child, and when do we offer our view of the “good life” from the outside in? What is the right balance in this dialectic? In light of the diet of materialism, violence, and so forth offered by the mass media, the value in reinforcing and offering “spiritual” perspectives seems clear. But how do we avoid squelching and overwhelming children’s world presence—their way of being and knowing in the world—with an adultcentric worldview? When are our messages and expectations imperialistic toward children and when are they liberating? What is the relationship between religion and childhood spirituality? What kinds of religious participation enhance and help actualize psychospiritual development and what activities actually thwart development? These questions and this relationship are not simple ones. Childhood spirituality tends toward the immanent and existential, and is diverse and direct. It may or may not match our adult worldview or religious concepts (e.g., original sin) and may not be articulated but is deeply felt nonetheless. If there is a single general idea that could be said about how to enhance or inhibit childhood spiritual life, perhaps it is that the foremost concern is respect for the child’s innate spiritual capacities. As Black Elk said, “Grown men may learn from very little children, for the hearts of little children are pure, and, therefore, the Great Spirit may show to them many things which older people miss” (Brown, 1953, pp. 74-75). It is the assumptions and the agenda we hold that

may be the most significant factor in determining whether religious, educational, parenting, and psychiatric efforts harm or heal. Our assumptions shape our perceptions. Do we assume, for example, that the child is immoral or amoral and incapable of meaning and spiritual experience, or is the child a spiritual being with spiritual capacities? First and foremost, and before we try to mold who they are from the outside in, can we try to understand and appreciate who the child is from the inside out? This kind of inquiry of the inner life continues to be best served with subtle human sciences research approaches—such as narrative accounts, phenomenological description, the use of art or other expressive means, and participant observation where appropriate. Data derived from such approaches could be followed with survey or similar means of inquiry. In addition, as the vast majority of research on children’s spirituality is from North America and Europe, cross-cultural studies that might help us reveal unexpected presuppositions and see alternative approaches to development and education would be very welcome.

What we can begin to understand is that children already have a spiritual life; they have access to wisdom and wonder, struggle with questions of meaning and morality, and have a deep sense of compassion. Elsewhere I have attempted to highlight in more detail those qualities and conditions that tend to thwart and those that may enhance childhood spirituality (Hart, 2003).

Perhaps most important at this stage in our understanding of the spiritual life of young people, can we be as willing to let what we learn from children change *our* theology and theory as we are willing to change children by the imposition of our theology and theory on them?

## REFERENCES

- Allport, G. (1955). *The individual and his religion*. New York: Macmillan.
- American Psychological Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Armstrong, T. (1985). *The radiant child*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House.
- Atwater, P. M. H. (1999). *Children of the new millennium: Children's near-death experiences and the evolution of humankind*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Azar, B. (1997). Defining the trait that makes us most human. *APA Monitor*, 28(11), 1-15.
- Bohm, D. (1981). Insight, knowledge, science, and human values. In D. Sloan (Ed.), *Toward the recovery of wholeness* (pp. 8-30). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bowie, F., & Davies, O. (Eds.). (1990). *Hildegard of Bingen* (R. Carver, Trans.). New York: Crossroad.
- Brown, J. E. (Ed.). (1953). *The sacred pipe: Black Elk's account of the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York: Charles Scribner & Sons. (Original work published 1923)
- Bucke, R. M. (1969). *Cosmic consciousness: A study in the evolution of the human mind*. New York: Dutton. (Original work published 1901)
- Coles, R. (1986). *The moral life of children*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Coles, R. (1992). *The spiritual life of children*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. C. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. C., & Csikszentmihalyi, I. S. (Eds.). (1988). *Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Damon, W. (1990). *The moral child: Nurturing children's natural moral growth*. New York: Free Press.
- Dillon, J. J. (2000). The spiritual child: Appreciating children's transformative effects on adults. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 13(4), 4-18.

- Eliade, M. (1964). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Emmons, R. A. (1999). *The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality*. New York: Guilford.
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (Eds.). (2004). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1969). *Gandhi's truth: On the origins of militant nonviolence*. New York: Norton.
- Fenner, P. (1991). *The ontology of the middle way*. Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer.
- Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Gilby, T. (Trans.). (1967). *St. Thomas Aquinas: Philosophical texts*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goldman, R. (1964). *Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence*. London: Routledge Kegan & Paul.
- Hanh, T. N. (1995). *The heart of understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Hart, T. (2000). Deep empathy. In T. Hart, P. L. Nelson, & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 253-270). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hart, T. (2003). *The secret spiritual world of children*. Makawao, HI: Inner Ocean.
- Hart, T. (2004). Opening the contemplative mind in the classroom. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2, 28-46.
- Hart, T., Nelson, P., & Puhakka, K. (Eds.). (2000). *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hay, D., & Morisy, A. (1978). Reports of ecstatic, paranormal or religious experience in Great Britain and the United States: A comparison of trends. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 17, 255-268.
- Hay, D., & Nye, R. (1998). *The spirit of the child*. London: Fount/Harper Collins.
- Heller, D. (1986). *The children's God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Hoffman, E. (1992). *Visions of innocence: Spiritual and inspirational experiences of childhood*. Boston: Shambhala
- Hoffman, M. L. (1990). Empathy and justice motivation. *Motivation and Emotion*, 14(2), 151-172.
- Hollander, A. (1980). *How to help your child have a spiritual life: A parent's guide to inner development*. New York: A & W.
- Huxley, A. (1945). *The perennial philosophy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Irwin, H. J. (1985). Parapsychological phenomena and the absorption domain. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 79, 1-11.
- James, W. (1936). *The varieties of religious experience*. New York: Modern Library. (Original work published 1902)
- Jung, C. G. (1965). *Memories, dreams, reflections*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Keller, E. F. (1983). *A feeling for the organism: The life and work of Barbara McClintock*. New York: Freeman.
- Laski, M. (1968). *Ecstasy: A study of some secular and religious experiences*. London: Cressent Press.
- Liester, M. B. (1996). Inner voices: Distinguishing transcendent and pathological characteristics. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 28(1), 1.
- Lilley, I. M. (1967). *Friedrich Froebel: A selection from his writings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Maharshi, R. (1982). *Who am I?* Tiruvannamalai, India: Sri Ramanasramam.
- Maslow, A. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: Penguin.
- Matthews, G. B. (1980). *Philosophy and the young child*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Meacham, J. A. (1990). The loss of wisdom. In R. J. Sternberg, ed., *Wisdom: Its nature, origins, and development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 181-211
- Merton, T. (1978). *What is contemplation?* Springfield, IL: Templegate. (Original work published 1948)

- Neihardt, J. G. (1972). *Black Elk speaks: Being the life story of a holy man of the Oglala Sioux*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Nelson, P. L. (1989). Personality factors in the frequency of reported spontaneous praternatural experiences. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 21(2), 193-209.
- Nelson, P. L., & Hart, T. (2003). *A survey of recalled childhood spiritual and non-ordinary experiences: Age, rate and psychological factors associated with their occurrence*. Retrieved January 13, 2004, from <http://www.childspirit.net/survey%20of%20childhood%20experiences.pdf>
- Nikhilananda, S. (Trans.). (1970). *The gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Abridged ed.). New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center.
- Piaget, J. (1968). *Six psychological studies*. New York: Random House.
- Piechowski, M. (2001). Childhood spirituality. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 33(1), 1-15.
- Pierhal, J. (1957). *Albert Schweitzer: The story of his life*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Richter, J. P. (1887). *The doctrine of education for English readers* (B. Wood, Trans.). London: Swan Sonnenschein.
- Robinson, E. (1978). *Living the questions: Studies in the childhood of religious experience*. Oxford, UK: Manchester College, Religious Experience Research Unit.
- Robinson, E. (1983). *The original vision: A study of the religious experience of childhood*. New York: Seabury Press. (Original work published 1977)
- Robinson, J. M. (1977). *The Nag Hammadi Library*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Sealts, M. M. (1992). *Emerson on the scholar*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Silverman, L. (2002). *Upside-down brilliance: The visual-spatial learner*. Glendale, CO: DeLeon.
- Smith, H. (1993). Educating the intellect: On opening the eye of the heart. In B. Darling-Smith (Ed.), *Can virtue be taught?* (pp. 17-31). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Steiner, R. (1965). *Education of the children in light of anthroposophy*. London: Rudolf Steiner Press. (Original work published 1909)



Storm, H. (1972). *Seven arrows*. New York: Ballantine.

Tamminen, K. (1991). *Religious development in childhood and youth: An empirical study*. Helsinki, Finland: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Tillich, P. (1957). *Dynamics of faith*. New York: Harper & Row.

Underhill, E. (1961). *Mysticism*. New York: Dutton. (Original work published 1911)

Vineis, R. (1960). *The life of St. Catherine of Siena* (G. Lamb, Trans.). New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons. (Original work published 1934)

Washburn, M. (1995). *The ego and the dynamic ground: A transpersonal theory of human development* (2nd ed.). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Wilber, K. (1996). *The atman project: A transpersonal view of human development*. Wheaton, IL: Quest.