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## **Focalizing Stage Two Addictions Recovery: The Spiritual Core**

Dr. Michael Picucci

In Switzerland, Carl Jung told a young American man suffering with alcoholism that as far as medicine and psychiatry were concerned, there was no hope for him. That was in 1931, and this still remains true in 2010. The single alternative left was a religious or spiritual experience -- what Jung referred to as "a genuine conversion." Jung had heard of such experiences helping alcoholics get sober, but admitted that such cases were "comparatively rare."

In 1934, William D. Silkworth, a prominent physician specializing in alcoholism and drug addiction had a similar slant on the problem. He proclaimed that only a message of "depth and weight" could hold the interest of the addicted person. "In nearly all cases, their ideals must be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to re-create their lives." Silkworth further stated that, "Unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery." Anyone presently familiar with addictions knows that it was out of these messages that the entire Twelve-Step recovery movement was born. Addressing the relief from out-of-control obsessive desires (alcohol, drugs and other addictions) and the need to create substantive lives, the Twelve Steps have helped millions of people throughout the world. It is also clear that while this movement continues its profound and rapid growth, at its core are controversy and mutations of the experience. A 1994 issue of Common Boundary magazine states, "On the eve of the 60th birthday of Alcoholics Anonymous critics are charging that the Twelve Steps are outdated and irrelevant. Others claim they're the doorway to new forms of spirituality and social action.

Far from *outdated and irrelevant* I would say the Twelve Steps are *dated*. For many they are a *doorway to new forms of spirituality and social action*, but they need to be built upon with all that had been learned in the last seventy-six years. We need to acknowledge the limitations of these steps. Building on my own experience, I am hoping to create a larger view of addictions recovery. I want to build on AA's original intent to be inclusive and transforming, while

integrating with newer, more expanded wisdom on spirituality, diversity and psychology. In doing so, I continue to proclaim our societal needs for the Twelve Steps with nothing less than my respect and loyalty, as the program continues to support so many in a profound, meaningful way.

The purpose of this article is to explain the sense of spirituality that one must bring to the staged model of addictions recovery, as illustrated in the Tree Diagram at the end of this article. My extensive work in this integrative model is fleshed out in my book *The Journey Toward Complete Recovery: Reclaiming Your Emotional, Spiritual & Sexual Wholeness*. The National Institutes on Health (NIH/NIDA) and The National Association of Addiction Professionals honored the study for *Outstanding Leadership in Research* in the year 2000. At the awards banquet a NIH senior researcher congratulated me, along with a caveat: *Don't get your hopes up too high. As valid as this research is, it might take a minimum of twenty years before it could reach mainstream acceptance.* I was disappointed in hearing that then, but now, ten years later, I understand what I was being prepared for.

To have the capacity for however one defines God, love, or the great, or universal spirit, one must come out of their self-sustaining, ego-driven fear and isolation or conditioned thinking. (Attachment to outmoded, self-harming conditioning is an addiction in itself; all the same healing techniques apply.) One must also admit that they cannot successfully confront their addiction without the help of others. In so doing, the ego, one's conditioned thinking and its enforcing armor begin to relax, allowing the opportunity for a spiritual conversation. This is the threshold to Stage One recovery. If the person is earnest in their desire for help, and if empathetic help is available, this spiritual, energetic and experiential conversion will begin to take place. The words *energetic* and *experiential* are important because this conversion is beyond words, and can take place without any reference to God or spirituality. It does so in groups like AA for Agnostics all the time. It is done through the compassion and understanding of others who allow a person to be just as they are -- even when that includes not believing in God or spirituality. The experience is felt as an *opening*, however slight, to the energy flow within the person and how they're connecting with the energy in those sharing their recovery process.

When a recovering person has sufficient time adjusting to a life that is not ruled by their primary addiction, a second stage of the process begins. The timing for this emergence varies for each individual. This *Stage Two* requires a deeper, spiritual experience of the *sense of self* that is created as part of the

process. It is this phase that empowers a deeper realization of self through a merger of Analytic Theory, Humanistic, Transpersonal, Existential, and Somatic Psychologies. Often called the *remembering and resolution* stage, this is a time when one awakens their unconscious, with the help and support of others, to dissolve existing barriers to fuller self-expression and joy. Similar to addressing the primary addiction, there is often great resistance to this deeper self-discovery. Again, it will be the reaching out for help, and letting go of the self-sustaining ego that will allow one to lean into this work. Similarly, the empathetic nature of one's help will significantly impact the process. At this point in the process, many will wonder: *Why should I spend time and energy probing my depths? I want to just get on with my life.* That is understandable, as it takes courage to confront one's own barriers of getting needs met, to gradually move further into the remembering and resolution. Once one makes this movement, they will be able to open to new energy and information. AA's founder, Bill Wilson, wrote, "Sobriety is only a bare beginning; it is only the first gift of the first awakening. If more gifts are to be received, our awakening must go on." Taking the leap into this kind of work has its rewards, as attested to by many of my clients; some of their remarks follow:

*I discovered Stage Two work after my recovery from crystal meth addiction and sexual compulsion. Focalizing in Stage Two was especially effective in healing the traumas and blocks that kept me from living the life I desired. These techniques were graceful, occurring naturally with ease.*

*Having previously been in therapy, as well as successfully working on my sobriety for over a decade, I thought that I was fairly self-aware, able to work out problems on my own. I had little idea then of the life-changing journey I was about to embark on in Focalizing Stage Two.*

*Today my life has changed beyond what I thought was possible.*

Of the thousands of highly motivated women and men that I have worked with in addictions recovery, they have all expressed the same longings. They want to connect more meaningfully with others. They want consistent loving relationships, and a sustainable loving, sexual relationship. They want to feel less awkward in their presentation of *self*. They want to have a sense of purpose to separate from obsessive drives. They want to know who they are. Stage Two was developed to begin the process of fulfilling these deep, inner desires.

In my own recovery and struggles to define God, I eventually distilled a

technique of personal observation and experience. From this refinement of many years of searching, I was left with two concepts that I continue to juggle with through all the work I presently do. The first is love; the feeling of kindness, compassion and understanding toward others. Many ancient philosophical and religious writings espouse that “God is love,” but it took my own rigorous study to breathe life into those words. The second is that an experience of transcendent energy, spirit or force inspires the disentanglement of my unconscious. As I learned to bring compassion and understanding into my own repressed traumas, conflicts, defenses and secrets, I experienced a deeper well within from which I am able to share an energetic connection.

At one point in my search, M. Scott Peck became my hero when he wrote in *The Road Less Traveled*, “If you desire wisdom greater than your own, you can find it inside you. The interface between God and man is at least in part the interface between our unconscious and our conscious. To put it plainly, our unconscious is God.”

Although I have used the word God in my own discoveries, it is important to remember when working with recovering people, that word must often be abandoned for another more practical and meaningful to the individual. For many, having experienced childhoods that were inconsistent, abusive or neglectful, there is a deep sense of having been deserted or betrayed by the concept of God. Assisting people in discovering this deeper *sense of self* can be best accomplished with words and phrases that describe a feeling. Ones that I have used with a high degree of success are: energy, spirit, the Great Spirit, the universal spirit, connection with self and others, or letting go of willfulness and ego.

These realizations are the spiritual grounding for the self awareness that is required to do this work. Eva Pierrakos, founder of the Pathwork, said, “If you make your commitment to yourself to fully accept everything you now are and to proceed to get to know yourself where you do not yet know yourself, you will find it is the most exciting, significant, and meaningful journey into your own depth. You will have all the help you can possibly need, for no one can undertake this journey alone. The help will be given to you; it will come to you.”

The abstract concept of Serendipity, a motivating goal in the staged model of recovery, is rooted in these ideas. Webster’s defines serendipity as “the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for.” Carl Jung referred to this phenomenon as synchronicity, while M. Scott Peck called it “being touched by

*grace.*” Eva Pierrakos takes it further. “When your spiritual center begins to manifest, your ego consciousness integrates with it and you begin to be *lived through*, as it were, by the spirit.”

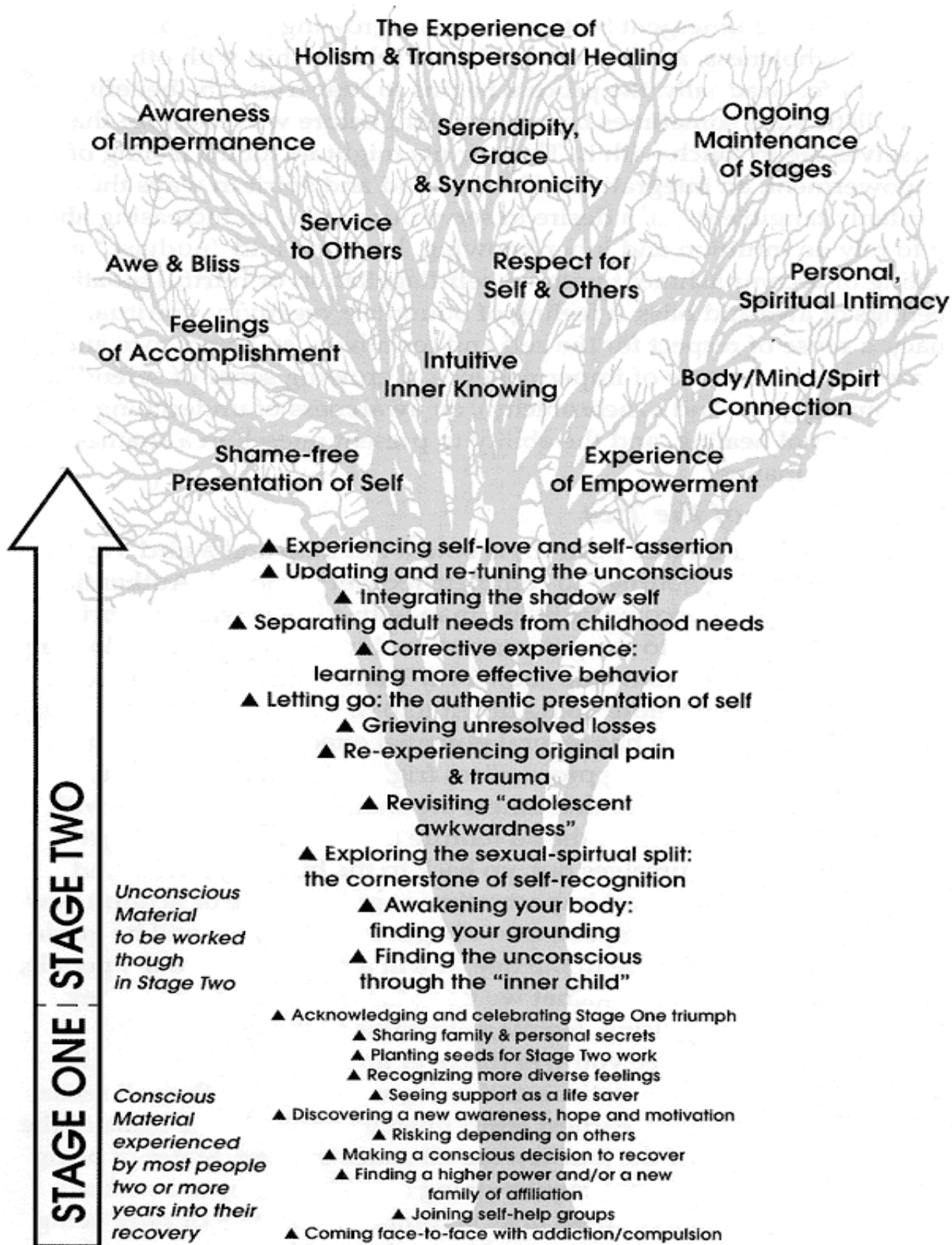
However one describes serendipity, people in recovery who have reached out of their self-sustaining ego for empathetic help report these occurrences regularly. They will often say “miracles happen,” or “there is no such thing as coincidence.” Simply stated, the minimum spirituality that a person must bring to the staged model of addictions recovery is the willingness to be open and reach out for help. It is in this humility that the determined, willful ego of the addicted person begins to relax and integrate with their energetic, core center. Focalizing and other somatic healing practices bring grace to the Stage Two recovery process by gently introducing our central nervous systems and neurobiology to the experience of wholeness. Another of my clients remarked:

*We started out using Focalizing techniques to calm the physical trauma to my central nervous system. The effect was subtle, but clear. I soon began to easily take positive actions that I had previously been too paralyzed to even think of.*

As recovery continues, this willingness, humility or surrender will become elusive at times, particularly in Stage Two. When deeper issues, traumas and conflicts get exposed, one must then integrate the determined aspects of the ego defenses with the deeper desire for connection, and continue to open up for help and clarification. This continued reaching out for the wisdom and experience of others will provide necessary spiritual support for working through this staged model. It will deepen one’s sense of self, slowly evaporating the invisible shame that ensconces it, and making it possible to share this deeper self with others.

*Through Focalizing and other visualization techniques, I find myself able to finally let go of the mental debris that prevented me from building a more solid foundation. I am now able to make positive, transformative changes to become more of my authentic self.*

What truly inspires me to continue this journey is another quote from M. Scott Peck. “I think of addiction as the sacred disease...Very probably, God created alcoholism in order to create AA, and thereby spearhead the community movement which is going to be the salvation not only of alcoholics and addicts, but of us all.”



*Tree Diagram of The Staged Model of Recovery*

Note: Although the Above Tree Diagram is a linear presentation it is in fact non-linear, fluid and organic. Particularly in Stage Two, where whatever needs to be healed next presents itself in a natural process of resolution.

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