

**Exemplarity as commitment to the self:  
Insights from spiritual healers**

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**Abstract**

*Purpose:* Moral exemplarity is a desirable but complex achievement. The paper discusses the meaning of moral exemplarity and examines how the self, as a psychological and spiritual centre within a Jungian perspective, contributes to fostering moral commitment.

*Methodology/Approach:* A narrative study was conducted amongst ten spiritual healers in New Zealand and France. Stories were collected and analysed interpretively to uncover meaningful patterns about spiritual healers' moral stance and apprehension of the self.

*Findings:* Spiritual healers demonstrated a deep commitment to the self which clearly sustained a commitment to serve or help others. Commitment to the self was articulated around five core values: self-work, self-reflection, humility, self-integrity and love.

*Implications/Value:* The paper highlights the moral value of inner work. The self, in its archetypal sense, carries as potential an 'innate morality' that resonates in the heart and nurtures integrity and authenticity. To commit to the self requires undertaking a long and painful exploration of the psyche, and integrating unconscious material into ego-consciousness. The participating spiritual healers, who had committed to their self and were well advanced on their psychological exploration journey, displayed moral qualities akin to exemplarity.

*Category:* Research Paper

*Keywords:* Self, Integrity, Inner work, Healing, Psyche, Jung

## Introduction

The theme of this issue is fascinating: who could argue against moral exemplars and moral saints? Who, but a wicked soul, would declare that they are not inspired by people who go beyond their duty and do extraordinary things out of love, care or moral commitment? Who, but a corrupted soul, would not feel a hint of shame at their own moral weakness when they are called to sacrifice their self-interest for a noble cause? And yet...

Yet, there is something unsettling about moral exemplars and moral saints. That is why we call them 'exemplars' and 'saints': we believe that they are not 'normal human beings', they cannot be just like anybody else. Normal human beings are flawed, they make mistakes and struggle with 'doing the right thing' in all aspects of their lives. After all, who's to say what the 'right thing to do' is? Life is hard and demanding as it is, and we can only do our best: some are capable of more than others, and we call them 'saints' and 'heroes', praising them for renewing our faith in humanity. But we know, deep down, that we do not carry the potential for sainthood in our heart, in our mind, in our being. They are special people, we are not. And yet...

Yet, interviews with such heroes and exemplars demonstrate they do not perceive themselves as being in any way special. They may even be embarrassed by our insistence that what they did was out of the ordinary. The answer to the perennial question 'Why did you do it?' is often disarmingly simple: 'Because I had to, because I could do something, because I couldn't not act'. No incredible background stories; no fairy godmother that gave the hero the power to save the innocents and bring world peace; no clear evidence of God's manifestation: all we are left with is what appears to be a fairly normal human being, who has done something rather extraordinary according to our average moral standards.

Exemplars possibly display character traits, such as humility and discretion, which make them unaware of their extraordinary ability to commit to high moral ideals. Perhaps these traits are an integral part of moral exemplarity, whereby good deeds are pursued for their intrinsic value rather than for the sake of egotistical glory. By all means, the apparent discrepancy between moral heroes' self-perception and observers' perception of them supports the need to investigate the nature and dynamics of the self of such exemplars, with a view to understanding how moral exemplars define themselves, why they define themselves in that way, and how their self-knowledge motivate them to act as they do.

In their seminal study on extraordinary moral commitment, Anne Colby and William Damon (1992) point out that the sense of self is crucial to enact one's values. In other words: many are called to hold on strongly to their moral values, but few successfully face life's hardships and challenges without betraying these values out of fear, greed, or self-preservation. Those few who act with courage and integrity even when times get tough, even when their lives are at risk, are exemplary in that their values are so closely integrated to their sense of self that to not follow them would be to act out of character, in an Aristotelian sense whereby character is virtue. Indeed they say: 'I just would not have been myself if I had done otherwise.' This is

probably why their own achievements do not seem so extraordinary or exemplary to them: rather, it is part of who they are, or who they have allowed themselves to be.

The centrality of the self in moral behaviour is not a new idea in moral psychology. Gil G. Noam and Thomas E. Wren (1993) for instance ponder on the conceptualisation and constitution of a moral self, offering an overview of explorations into the definition of a moral self, and the ethical implications of the interplay between individual self and external environment. Most of the contributors to Noam and Wren's opus follow a cognitive-developmental paradigm informed by Piaget and Kohlberg, although the discussion is critical and allows for a broader, more encompassing and feeling-oriented perspective on morality than the traditionally rational, justice-based view of the early moral development literature. The self, however, remains overwhelmingly perceived as a psycho-social construct: at best, the self is defined through Freud's Ego-Superego-Id lens, or Erikson's developmental stages in early life. The morality of the self, therefore, derives from the construction of identity within a social context: we learn who we are in relation to others who people our environment, which leads to necessary rules and obligations to govern our behaviour. This perspective of the self does not leave much room for non-cognitive dimensions, such as the need for spiritual discovery.

I shall therefore turn to Carl Gustav Jung's works to explore further the role of the self as a foundation for moral integrity and, subsequently, for moral exemplarity. Amongst psychologists, Jung has best captured the spiritual and moral nature of the self (Stein, 2006). For him, the lifelong journey towards uncovering one's potential, which he called 'individuation', is a moral quest at least as much as a psychological task (Jung, 1971, par.757-762). In the following discussion, I will start with reviewing the importance of the self in moral development, before examining how the self contributes to the experience of moral exemplarity. The final part of the paper introduces a study which explores the role of the self in moral commitment in the experiences of spiritual healers. I also discuss the extent to which these spiritual healers can be considered exemplary.

## **Knowing oneself: Individuation and moral integrity**

Knowing ourselves involves becoming fully aware of all that we are. This implies confronting all aspects of our personality, that is, not merely championing what we like about ourselves, or those qualities that make us look good in the eyes of others, but also bringing to the surface of consciousness what, in us, is ugly. For Jung, the persona is the mask we wear in public, how we present ourselves to the world; it is the interface between our conscious ego (what I think I am) and the external world. Because we usually want to make a good impression, the persona generally emphasizes all our bright and attractive qualities, hiding the ugly. Yet, each one of us also possesses an ugly side, often more profound than we care to admit. Jung understood that life is psychic energy regulated by a compensatory principle: our praiseworthy heroism is always accompanied by an equally powerful ability to hurt others. Jung pictured: 'as the conscious mind can put the question, "Why is there this frightful

conflict between good and evil?,” so the unconscious can reply, “Look closer! Each needs the other. The best, just because it is the best, holds the seed of evil, and there is nothing so bad but good can come of it.” (1966, par.289)

It is our conscious choice to focus on helping rather than destroying others which is heroic, but we must acknowledge our inherent ambivalence. In this respect, moral heroism is perhaps ever relative, which does not mean we should not aspire to behave as such. This is why ‘the ethical problem is a passionate question’ for the ‘moral man’: it involves not only reason but also emotions and instincts, whose roots are found in ‘the depths of his nature’ (Jung, 1966, par.289). Jung’s view here differs from Immanuel Kant’s in so far as Kant maintains the primacy of reason as the source of moral knowledge and motivation to act, whereas Jung gives credit to emotions and instincts as well as reason for our moral deeds. In fairness, Kant hoped that emotions and inclinations could, in time, become aligned with duty so that doing the right thing would make one feel good as well. He nonetheless distrusted the potential inconsistency of emotions with regards to directing moral conduct. Jung, on the other hand, appreciated that reason, emotions and instincts all have a constructive and a shadow side; he thus calls for caution when it comes to following imperious principles or urges, whether they originate from the rational mind or a gut feeling.

To some extent, Jung’s psychological view of morality is more complex than Kant’s because it is not categorical. Rather, it demands that we constantly look for answers in ‘the depths of our nature’. History provides many examples of leaders who were once considered national heroes for their embodiment of certain values, then turned tyrants (e.g. Robespierre, Lenin, Fidel Castro). Leaving aside the specifics of the politics, we could venture that the very same psychic qualities that led them to liberation also led them to abuse. Trouble would have started because their self lacked conscious integration, therefore their psyche fell prey to the excesses of archetypal inflation.

For Jung, following Freud, the psyche contains not only the conscious mind but also a substantial unconscious layer. Archetypes are primordial images or patterns that exist in the unconscious and collective layer of the psyche. Through his clinical work, Jung identified patterns of symbolic or mythical images (archetypes) that were evoked by a wide range of patients who had little in common (Jung, 1963). Archetypes go back to the early days of human development, and therefore can be described as ‘predispositions or potentialities for experiencing and responding to the world’ which we owe to our ancestors (Hall and Nordby, 1973, p.39). They represent archaic and meaningful things such as death and rebirth, the earth mother, the demon, the wise old man, the hero, the trickster, the persona (epitomising conformity and approval), or the shadow (representing the repressed and hidden) (see Hall and Nordby, *ibid*, p.41-53). They live in the collective unconscious, but manifest themselves in a somewhat personal way according to the sensitivity, personality and history of each individual person (Jung, 1966). Archetypes have a strong influence on our behaviour even when we are not aware we have fallen under their spell. We need them, but we must strengthen our conscious ego to be able to work with them instead of being dominated by them (see Figure 1).

Ultimately, the conscious integration of the many archetypes that inhabit our psyche releases the necessary psychological energy that leads us to uncover our full potential, to be who we are meant to be. Who we are meant to be is only partly a matter of conscious choices: we are gifted with qualities, abilities and talents that are what they are, but we can choose how we work with and develop them. As archetypal psychologist James Hillman (1996) would argue, Fate knows what she wants out of us, but as conscious individuals we have a say in how we respond to what she throws at, or expects from us. In this context, our first moral duty is to engage in inner work (Johnson, 1986), and bring to consciousness those unconscious patterns that influence us the most. Doing so, our conscious choices will be more responsible towards both the self and society. In Jung's view, if we fail to consciously integrate the shadow (or any archetype that surfaces for that matter), we will suffer from a psychological imbalance which will manifest inwardly (e.g. depression, neurosis, psychosis, or an inflated sense of self-aggrandizement), outwardly (e.g. through projection of repressed qualities onto other people, obsession or compulsion), or any mix of both (Jung, 1969a). Imbalance in the psyche, in turn, has serious moral implications for personal and professional behaviour (Rozuel, 2010).

In his famous epic journey, Dante had to descend further down the levels of Inferno before he could ascend back to the Heavens; more often than not, he felt the urge to turn away and return to the seemingly safe outside world. But going through hell made him a different man – a man who understands better the darkness that lies in people's heart, including in his own heart. Perhaps such understanding does not make him a moral hero; nevertheless, it nurtures a greater potential for moral goodness through enlightened and conscious choices. When we truly know our capacity for evil, we can start to fully appreciate the significance of choosing the moral action. This is the first and most essential dimension of moral agency: to face our nature and choose to act in accordance with the caring heart; or, to rephrase, to act with moral integrity whilst we know, sense and feel our violent desires. Furthermore, to engage in inner work to uncover our darkness enables humanity as a whole to own and control its brutality and thirst for destruction. Jungian writer Robert A. Johnson sums up our responsibility as individuals:

Any repair of our fractured world must start with individuals who have the insight and courage to own their own shadow. Nothing "out there" will help if the interior projecting mechanism of humankind is operating strongly. The tendency to see one's shadow "out there" in one's neighbor or in another race or culture [that is, to project one's repressed side onto an external subject] is the most dangerous aspect of the modern psyche. [...] It is not the monsters of the world who make such chaos but the collective shadow to which every one of us has contributed. (1993, p.27)

Jung concurs: 'it is absolutely indispensable [that a man should be individuated] because, through his contamination with others, he falls into situations and commits actions which bring him into disharmony with himself [...]. Accordingly a man can neither be at one with himself nor accept responsibility for himself. He feels himself to be in a degrading, unfree, unethical condition.' (1966, par.373) As noble as it sounds, the task is terrifying. In his foreword to Erich Neumann's 1969 book *Depth psychology and a new ethic*, Jung warned that

the psychological integration of the shadow ‘makes the highest demands on an individual’s morality, for the “acceptance of evil” means nothing less than that his whole moral existence is put in question’ (1990, p.14). Jung (1969b, par.13-19) indeed believed that one of our greatest moral tasks was to identify and integrate the archetypal shadow into our consciousness. The shadow is the primary source of inner darkness, although not the only one. All archetypes carry the potential for excess and ego-inflation, which is why our most enduring task is to integrate them consciously rather than let them overflow our consciousness. The shadow occupies a special place in the psyche for it is the recipient of all that we reject or repress, all that we censor consciously or unconsciously. There is dark stuff and there is gold in the shadow, but it is stored away for we cannot bear to let others see it (Johnson, 1993). In contrast, we polish our persona, the social mask which gives us an identity, but risks locking us in a one-dimensional personality (Jung, 1966; Rozuel, 2011).

The archetypal self is the centre and, paradoxically, the entirety of the psyche, but we are mostly unaware of its potential up until we have done enough inner work to glimpse at our ‘true being’ (Stein, 2006, p.10). The self<sup>1</sup> stands for who we are and all that we are. It relates to the rest of humankind through time and space, yet finds a deeply personal expression in our individual life (Jung, 1966). As with all archetypes, indeed all psychological entities, the self is not as such moral; rather, it fosters qualities of moral exemplarity that can be activated with the help of a well developed ego-consciousness. Jung wrote: ‘The specific virtues and vices of humanity are contained in the collective psyche like everything else. One man arrogates collective virtue to himself as his personal merit, another takes collective vice as his personal guilt. Both are as illusory as the megalomania and the inferiority, because [...they] are simply the moral pair of opposites contained in the collective psyche’ (1966, par.237). In other words, moral knowledge originates from the self, but being a self does not automatically make us moral agents, let alone moral exemplars. As Christina Becker (2004) clearly outlines, it is through becoming conscious of the self (what Jung calls the ‘individuation process’) that we develop a moral sense and learn to work through and with our conscience (see Figure 1).

***[Insert Figure 1 here]***

Individuation is the ‘destination’, that is the purpose of inner work and the purpose of our existence. Through the process of becoming an individual, which extends far beyond the cognitive developmental stages of personality formation, we learn to ‘[embrace] our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness’ (Jung, 1966, par.266). This uniqueness, according to Becker (2004), is contained in the heart, which itself carries the highest moral values and virtues. Drawing from various spiritual traditions, especially Taoism, she argues that the heart is ‘the gateway to the spiritual or divine dimension of life, and contains knowledge of truth that goes beyond personal interests. [...] Viewed from the perspective of individuation, the Heart articulates the innate path of the Self, the unfolding of one’s life path and growth.’ (*ibid*, p.83, 85) Becker thus connects heart with self as the source of an ethical

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<sup>1</sup> The archetypal self is akin to the higher or greater Self in many spiritual traditions, although Jung usually did not bother with a capital letter, distinguishing instead the self from the ego by placing one at the centre of the timeless unconscious and the other at the centre of the limited and time-bound consciousness.

stance that is grounded in the relational (ethics as ‘Eros’ – see Beebe, 1992, notably p.18 and 81), and applies care and compassion with integrity and authenticity. On the latter, she explains further: ‘integrity functions as the glue that binds our character into an integrated whole. It is protected against outside influences – a sacred place, integral and central to who we are as individuals’ (Becker, 2004, p.77). As for authenticity, it adds a dimension of trustworthiness, in that what is authentic is what is genuine and real, not deceitful or pretentious (*ibid*, p.78). Individuation enables us to uncover our ‘innate morality’ – not one which is dictated by external norms and mores, but one that reflects the deep qualities of a heart aware of both its shadow and its gold (*ibid*, p.91). This innate morality is what Jung referred to as the *vox Dei*, the voice of God, which manifests through an ethical conscience truer to the self than the socially-bounded moral conscience (Jung, 1970; Robinson, 2005; Rozuel, 2010). Of course, we must handle the *vox Dei* with care because, just like anything archetypal, it can prove to be a Lucifer in disguise (Jung, 1954). This is why, for Jung, we must actively and consciously individuate, so that we risk less falling prey to the psyche’s games. Individuated people do not necessarily become moral exemplars. What Jung suggests, however, is that the enhanced awareness of the dynamics of evil’s attraction and repulsion brought forth by inner work would strengthen the conscious ego’s ability to resist bad temptation by choice rather than by chance.

Jungian analyst John Beebe (1992) also believes integrity is core to Jung’s ethical vision. Noting how integrity is both the most important quality we seek in ourselves and others, and a rather ‘elusive reality around which so much of everyone’s fantasy and anxiety is organised’ (1992, p.5), Beebe suggests that it is easier to recognise integrity than to define it, and easier to understand the value of integrity when integrity is threatened. Integrity is paradoxical. Having reviewed the characters of Cicero and Benjamin Franklin, two men who wrote on integrity from their own experiences, Beebe (*ibid*, p.10) points out that ‘[i]ntegrity involves our dealings with others, and ambition to win their respect is part of its archetypal constellation; integrity is a self-consistency that is effective interpersonally.’ In other words, integrity implies that we also recognise the self’s aspirations for others’ approval, albeit we would have to act in the ‘right way to win that approval’ (*ibid*). To act with integrity means caring for both the self and others; doing so activates inner moral constraints which we must confront consciously and constantly.

Doubts, worries, anxieties and shame, those feelings that emerge as we struggle to make the ‘right decision’ are, in effect, healthy because they imply that we remain conscious instead of yielding to the persona or another dominant archetype (Beebe, 1992, p.40). The painful but redeeming process of acknowledging our shadow and embracing all that we are as we are activates and sums up at once what integrity means. It also highlights how integrity and exemplarity are not and should not be synonymous with purity and perfection:

Enduring both our humiliation at being less than we thought and our sense of floundering in the absence of an ideal orientation forces upon us a rudimentary feeling for the integrity of what remains. It is this integrity which supplies a core of self-esteem that gives us courage for a new attempt to merge with the ideal and restore self-respect. The acceptance by the self of its

own failures to achieve its ideals is the only way that it can earn the empathy required for a human attitude toward the shadow. (*ibid*, p.65)

To summarise, the self possesses an intuitive moral knowledge (the *vox Dei*) which we can access through an appreciation of the heart, that is, through engaging with integrity and authenticity in inner work to unveil our true nature. To engage with integrity and authenticity in inner work means that we ensure that we do not deceive ourselves in any way (in either direction, that is, that we do not identify with excessive self-righteousness nor indiscriminate wickedness), and that we remain faithful to what we find within us, even when we are disappointed in ourselves, and even when the aspirations of our newly discovered self clash with existing social norms. I suggest that those who successfully do so are moral exemplars, and that moral exemplarity cannot be sustained without this inner work.

### **Moral exemplarity, others and the self**

The above section has established that the self is core to what we might call our moral enlightenment, a humbling but necessary experience through which we learn to acknowledge our hidden flaws and qualities for what they are. This, I propose, is the stepping stone for true moral exemplarity. The latter demands a strong sense of integrity, consistency and ultimately courage to act and to be. Becker summarises the Jungian position on ethical development as follows:

The ethical dimension of Jung's vision of individuation is that we must assume conscious responsibility for our psychological growth toward wholeness, think with our hearts and feel with our heads, and learn to live with the ambiguity of the in-between space between collective moral precepts and our own subjective experience of our actions. [...] The journey [...] necessarily involves an encounter with the Other, and the nature of the ethical discourse involves consciously entering a dialogue with this Other. (2004, pp.164-165)

When Jung refers to the 'Other', he means both the external other (in the spirit of Martin Buber's I-Thou dialectic relation to another person or subject) and the internal other in the form of an archetype that is not familiar (as yet) to ego-consciousness. This clarifies how individuation is all but an individualistic endeavour; rather, it offers a way to discover oneself through a greater acceptance of otherness. When we face our shadow and discover parts of us we hoped did not exist, we confront otherness in us. Instead of rejecting it or repressing it (which only means that we will project it into an external 'other', thereby nurturing prejudices and stigma), we must accept this other as it is, consciously. Only then do we re-establish wholeness whilst respecting the integrity of both self and other (Becker, 2004, p.98).

It is important to stress that individuation, and the subsequent moral commitment it fosters, does not always offer much comfort, even though we are morally called to follow through. Jung sternly explained:

When a man can say of his states and actions, "As I am, so I act," he can be at one with himself, even though it be difficult, and he can accept responsibility for himself even though



he struggle against it. [ ...Thus] there is no cure and no improving of the world that does not begin with the individual himself. To put the matter drastically: the man who is pauper or parasite will never solve the social question. (1966, par.373)<sup>2</sup>

Moral exemplars stand in opposition to the ‘paupers and parasites’ who have failed to commit to their inner work, thereby overseeing the ethical qualities that lie in the self and jettisoning their heart. Yet, there is no escaping the fact that to be morally committed to the self is hard work. Moral responsibility is an exacting thing to accept at times, but moral exemplars are asked to always be aware and appreciative of their moral responsibility towards their self and towards others. This, in itself, is already a major task. But Jung suggests more than that: he claims that no lasting social or moral change can happen if the majority of people do not wrestle with the unconscious. Unconscious people allow evil deeds to occur out of a lack of responsibility, integrity, authenticity and care. By not taking responsibility for ourselves, we fail to act responsibly towards others.

I noted earlier how Becker, here citing James Q. Wilson, stresses that morality is embedded in the ‘strong human need for attachment. In other words, morality is based on the values of Eros and the feminine’ (2004, p.31). Morality indeed possesses instinctual and intuitive roots that trigger care and compassion towards others. Moral behaviour is not merely located in the (rational) mind, but involves the entire body: it is as much a gut reaction as it is a reasoned position. Formal rules and codes emerge only out of the need for an explicitly organised society, but the rules and codes intrinsically reflect this ‘innate morality’ that lies in the self and resonates with the heart. Innate morality transcends formal rules and codes as it instigates moral imagination. Quoting fellow Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels, Beebe (1992, p.57) asserts that historical figures such as Vaclav Havel or John Milton, who embodied with exemplarity the moral values of their time, possessed the ability to use moral imagination accordingly so as to ‘use original [innate] morality; [equally] original morality guarantees the depth and authenticity of moral imagination.’ When conservative or traditional norms and mores fail to provide guidance and compassion for humanity, imagination is a good means to explore the issue and return to the innate morality of the self which sustains wholeness (Rozuel, 2012). It enables the dissident or the rebel to act with loyalty not towards the external authority, but towards the authority of his or her self with its inherent consciousness of the humanity of the other (Terestchenko, 2007). Moral imagination is an important quality to possess, but it also needs to be backed up by inner work that involves integration of the shadow and other archetypes by the conscious ego, in order to avoid the pitfalls of inflation or idealistic projection (see Rozuel, 2012). Thus, moral imagination works best when practiced by an individuated person, unrestricted by collective norms.

The idea of a strong, caring, intuitive self that questions social rules when they do not feel right is evident in studies of moral commitment, as well as in harrowing accounts of survival in the most hopeless circumstances. Let’s turn first to the former. For the purpose of their

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<sup>2</sup> By ‘pauper and parasite’, I take that Jung does not refer to the socio-economic status of the individual, but to the richness of their consciousness. Thus, a pauper is someone who has a very limited access to the unconscious material, and a parasite would refer to one who does not engage with the self as they could. Both lack essential resources to make a difference in society, unless they attend to their psyche.

study into moral commitment, Anne Colby and William Damon (1992, p.29) defined exemplarity through five characteristics:

1. A sustained commitment to moral ideals or principles that include a generalized respect for humanity; or a sustained evidence of moral virtue.
2. A disposition to act in accord with one's moral ideals or principles, implying also a consistency between one's actions and intentions and between the means and ends of one's actions.
3. A willingness to risk one's self-interest for the sake of one's moral values.
4. A tendency to be inspiring to others and thereby to move them to moral action.
5. A sense of realistic humility about one's own importance relative to the world at large, implying a relative lack of concern for one's ego.

Colby and Damon went on selecting and interviewing, with help from a range of nominators, twenty-three men and women whose values, religious affiliation, occupation, age-range, education, political beliefs and area of contribution are varied. For all their differences, though, Colby and Damon believe that the moral exemplars they interviewed demonstrated courage, integrity and humility, qualities they perceive as essential. It is interesting to note that Colby and Damon's curiosity was that of developmental psychologists: they 'wish[ed] to know how personal integrity may be maintained over years of trial and temptation' (*ibid*, p.4). They also acknowledged the mystery and wondrousness of moral commitment: there is something exceptional in dedicating one's life to the good, especially when this commitment requires great personal sacrifices in whatever form (e.g. material, physical, emotional, psychological). Yet, moral heroism is not necessarily dramatic, nor should it be romanticised; rather, there are 'possibilities of growth [leading to moral excellence] inherent in everyone' (*ibid*, p.4). Colby and Damon conclude that we all possess *potential* for sustained moral commitment, but not everyone manifests it concretely. The question thus becomes 'how' rather than 'whether': instead of asking *whether* moral exemplarity or moral sainthood is possible, we ponder on *how* we can become morally better people, and *how* we can sustain moral commitment in the face of life's challenges.

From their perspective, there must be a unity of self with moral values leading to moral excellence. This uniting takes place over time, and is function of intrapersonal characteristics that will affect the extent to which moral concerns are included in one's sense of who they are (*ibid*). The fact that '[t]he exemplars' moral identities become tightly integrated, almost fused, with their self-identities' is what, for the authors, enables their interviewees to see their moral choices not 'as an exercise in self-sacrifice', but rather as 'a means of attaining their personal [goals], and vice versa' (*ibid*, p.304; 300). Moral commitment thereby becomes habitual, 'spontaneous and nonreflective' (*ibid*, p.308). In Jungian terms, this refers to consciously acting from the self, thereby naturally activating the innate morality through the heart. However, it is likely that Jung would beware of the 'nonreflectiveness' noted by Colby and Damon, preferring actions to be consciously spontaneous.

Looking at Colby and Damon's definition of moral exemplarity, we notice important similarities with the implicit ethical stance derived from the pursuit of individuation. Characteristics 1 and 2, for instance, express the idea of psychological integrity leading to moral integrity: acting from the self, whilst maintaining consciousness of the shadow, enables one to behave consistently with regards to moral values. The discovery of the collective dimension of the self supports characteristics 3 and 5: the intricacy of self and other, both as psychic wholeness and as cosmic order, necessarily relativizes the short-term interests of the ego. To be true to the self may require that we go against the desires of the ego or the claims of the persona, yet it would be the moral thing to do. This also echoes Jung's warnings that inner work is hard and painful as well as rewarding. It can feel like a death, and it leaves us so scared that not everyone takes up the challenge. Yet, intimately and collectively, the rewards are there.

The possible difference between Colby and Damon's characteristics and a Jungian view of moral exemplars is the authors' suggestion that moral exemplars are potential moral leaders who 'move others to moral action'. We could reasonably expect a moral exemplar to inspire others to develop a good character, in the vein of Aristotle's insistence that a virtuous person should surround herself with virtuous friends so that their virtuousness be mutually reinforced (Aristotle, 1992). However, moral exemplarity stands on its own and does not demand actual followers to be appreciated and valuable. Indeed, moral leadership is not a condition but a possible consequence of moral exemplarity. The same goes for individuation (Jung, 1970). In fact, people can only embark on the individuation journey of their own accord, since individuation implies individuals that have dissociated from the herd. What can be recommended is to encourage and support personal ventures into individuation, for they are the premise for a greater social and moral change.

Moral integrity or heroism is also an underlying theme in many accounts from survivors of concentration camps, of which Primo Levi and Viktor E. Frankl are but two examples. In such a brutal, soul-destroying, dehumanising context, neither author claims, from their first-hand experience, that moral exemplarity was the norm. This is one world where survival seems to take precedence over claims for moral greatness, perhaps rightly so. Yet, both authors relate stories, rare but true, of individuals who have maintained a dignified humanity and loving care in these abject circumstances which denied them the status of 'human being'. For Frankl, this exemplarity reflects 'a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind' which cannot be taken away. Those men 'who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.' (2006, p.65-66)

In his reflective piece on the lessons learnt from the concentration and extermination camps, Levi (1989, p.73) contrasts the behaviour of the few brave individuals who had the means and/or the will to resist, one way or another, to the ways of the Lager, with the feeling of shame and guilt found, to differing degrees, amongst survivors. Levi suggests that the terrible experience of the camps that forced thousands of men to live like animals because they were

treated as such (if not worse) meant that the human ability to feel free and the master of one's destiny was annihilated. Yet, upon recovering their freedom, therefore their humanity, many felt ashamed – not, says Levi, that they ought to feel ashamed at their behaviour, though there may have been lost opportunities to fulfil a 'duty of solidarity' (*ibid*, p.76). But, stresses Levi, no one can really critically assess 'from the outside' decisions made inside the camps, to the extent that the vast majority of the survivors were the ones who adapted their moral code to this extreme and arbitrary context. For Levi, the worst men survived whilst the morally best ones died; others, such as himself, were just sufficiently lucky or cunning to avoid being swallowed up and drained down into the depths of despair (*ibid*, p.81-82). Here, Levi's conclusion somewhat differs from that of Frankl's, demonstrating that each experience is personal. Levi cannot seem to find any transcendent meaning in his experience, not even the duty to testify except, perhaps, on behalf of those who could have said more but died before they had the chance; whereas Frankl argues that life is not about what we want but rather about what is asked of us, to which we must respond by being responsible (2006, p.109).

Both, however, stress the significance of one's moral responsibility, whichever side one finds oneself on. Levi's final paragraph warns that all Germans involved in the camps were responsible individually, but that this should not detract from the broader responsibility of the many who, for a while at least unscrupulously, followed a leader that embraced destruction and evil (1989, p.200). Jung (1970) concurred when he denounced, in his essay *The undiscovered self*, the risks of de-individualisation: when a person follows the crowd, they implicitly hand over their moral responsibility to the leader of the pack. To prevent this from happening yet again, Jung stated that it is crucial to encourage people to stand as individuals (that is to be grounded in the self) rather than to fade in an undifferentiated collective out of fear, cowardice, personal interests or convenience. Not all individuals will achieve the stage of individuation propitious to a moral exemplarity that would resist in extremely demeaning circumstances; but we could reasonably expect that more people would question the dominating discourse and, tapping into the innate morality of the self, would act so that they respect the humanity of the other in all circumstances.

As for Frankl, '[f]rom all this we may learn that there are two races of men in this world, but only these two – the "race" of the decent man and the "race" of the indecent man. Both are found everywhere; they penetrate into all groups of society.' (2006, p.87; 86) Indeed, moral decency (if not exemplarity) is a personal, individual quality independent from any other characteristics but the quality of the self. Consciousness of the self brings to the fore the all-important moral autonomy which enables an individual to stand in dignity and humanity against forces that tempt towards evil. The self triggers what Parker J. Palmer calls 'the courage to live divided no more', which transforms the notion of punishment itself. Citing the case of Rosa Parks to illustrate the exemplary figures at the forefront of the civil rights movement in the USA, Palmer reflects that courage springs from a consciousness of the intrinsic value of the self. People who take the courageous step to defend moral values 'when they know they will be punished for it [...] have come to understand that *no punishment anyone might inflict on them could possibly be worse than the punishment they inflict on themselves by conspiring in their own diminishment.*' (2000, p.34)

The remainder of the discussion introduces stories of people who, through their own search for the self, have uncovered moral qualities and an ethos of commitment to humanity that seems exemplary. They have come to realise that they cannot live divided, and so have chosen to follow their self, and accord heart and mind to create a life that truly has meaning for them. The spiritual healers interviewed for the study display several of Colby and Damon's characteristics of exemplarity: a sustained commitment to helping others through an appreciation of a shared humanity and spiritual nature; an understanding of the need to apply to oneself the principles that guide their actions towards others (that is, maintaining consistency between principles and actions); the realisation that the ego's ambitions can be treacherous and that life experiences are about learning (hence developing a 'sense of realistic humility'). Since the purpose of this paper is to explore the relationships between the self and moral exemplarity, I suggest that because of their implicit need to develop self-consciousness and self-knowledge for and through their practice, spiritual healers offer a useful case for reflection and analysis.

## **Stories of spiritual healers**

By our Western standards, spiritual healers are not typical people: their occupation is far from what we would call normal, although most spiritual healers do not feel they are as 'special' as we think they are. By 'special', I acknowledge some readers will imply 'deluded' whilst others will read 'enlightened' or 'awakened'. My purpose here is not to convince readers either way, but to encourage them to reflect open-mindedly on the personal experiences of people engaged wholeheartedly on a path that has deep meaning for them. Even though none of the healers I interviewed argued they were moral exemplars, I propose that they are closer to making morally consistent choices than people who have not committed to self-reflection. Their understanding of their own weaknesses as well as their abilities, combined with a faith in the process of self-knowledge and a belief in the value of love and the interconnectedness of all living things, equip them with moral resources that nurture moral and spiritual commitment. It also, often, provides lessons in humility and humanity.

The study adopted Colby and Damon's template for researching the lives of extraordinarily committed people. The approach is narrative, with a view to capturing stories that are meaningful to the interviewee, and can shed light onto their character development and life choices. The healers I interviewed for the present study are not gurus, nor do they dress the part or live in a New Age recluse community. They are very human, and lead a fairly ordinary life. What's extraordinary is their choice to commit to an occupation that is frowned upon (at best) by mainstream culture and values. Doing so, they implicitly subject themselves to scrutiny and rejection. To survive, they have no other choice but to rely on their own sense of self, the strength of their most intimate beliefs. They must have faith. Thus, they have made the choice to live according to what they feel is their inner truth, in spite of the social stigma that they must bear. They have chosen to fully engage with the call of their greater, inner self (or God, for some of them) and to learn and act accordingly. This small step, albeit life-changing, is what makes them remarkable and, I argue, exemplary. Self-knowledge is the

foundation of wisdom; at least it was for Socrates and the Delphic Oracle. But the path to self-knowledge can be a bumpy road, full of dark corners, falls and temptations. Spiritual healers, just like any occupational group, must confront their professional shadow.

Spiritual healing remains a controversial activity in our modern, rational society because of the excesses of some New Age practices, as well as the dangers of religious extremism and exalted sectarianism. These have led to a general and indiscriminate condemnation of alternative approaches to health, healing and well-being. When they are not strictly condemned, holistic approaches must break through a thick wall of scepticism to gain acceptance from a medical community that demands that all be explained and proven within its elected paradigm. Given the elected paradigm rejects the wholeness of the human body and the interplay of mind, spirit and soul, holistic approaches such as spiritual healing are labelled as ineffective pseudo-science for credulous people at best, or as dangerous indoctrination for desperate medical patients at worst. However, the traditions which spiritual healing comes from have existed for centuries, and we are merely rediscovering the importance of the soul and the psyche for a healthy body. Amongst the most significant traditions, Taoism, Chinese medicine (which has never ceased to exist in the East at least), alchemy and the principle of Kundalini (heart energy) are most often cited. Mixed with religious faith and/or complex notions that currently redefine cosmology (from quantum vacuum to biomorphic resonance), these ancient principles form the foundations of spiritual healing as a field and as a practice (see Laszlo and Curriuan, 2008).

Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig's discussion of the psychotherapist's shadow is equally relevant to discuss the shadow of spiritual healers. Both aim to heal suffering and engage honestly and openly with the spiritual world (be it defined as God, the unconscious or the A-field). There is an element of care, of established practice, and of faith. Guggenbühl-Craig (1968) explains that in the shadow of the psychotherapist as healer, we can spot the quack (shadow of the medical man) and the false prophet (shadow of the man of faith or man of God). It is easy to apply these two dark figures to spiritual healers; in fact, traditional doctors are often quick to label spiritual healers both 'quacks' and 'false prophets', which also suggests a mutual shadow projection between modern medicine and holistic medicine. What concerns us here is that to display those virtues of integrity and authenticity so essential for moral exemplarity, spiritual healers must be aware of and ready to confront their shadow, including the unconscious presence of the quack and the false prophet.

The danger is summed up as follows for psychotherapists, but in this context I believe the term 'psychotherapists' is interchangeable with 'spiritual healers': '[Psychotherapists] work with [...] areas in which the transcendental makes itself felt. Hence we are expected to know more about first and last things than ordinary mortals. If we are weak we end up believing that we are better informed about matters of life and death than our fellow men.' (Guggenbühl-Craig, 1968, p.250) Unsurprisingly, this suggests that spiritual healers must undertake the constant and painful task of respecting the voice of the self without over-identifying with its archetypal dimension, however tempting it is to feel 'special'. They must equally resist the temptation to convert others, instead respecting divergence of opinion as otherness without

compromising their own sense of truth – a delicate balancing act. As I will discuss below, the healers I interviewed all had an understanding and some experience of the shadow.

Over eight months in late 2011 until March 2012, I collected the life stories of spiritual healers in New Zealand and France. For most of the participants, spiritual healing was their primary occupation, although some worked in parallel in less esoteric activities for both financial and personal reasons. The healing activities include tarot reading and guidance, astrology readings, reiki, energy healing, crystal healing, chakras balancing, flower essences healing, reflexology, shiatsu, kinesiology and manual lymphatic drainage. Usually, healers use a combination of techniques they have learnt and practiced over the years.

*[Insert Table 1 here]*

The profile of the participants was varied: the youngest participant was in his late-twenties, whilst most of the healers were in their fifties or early sixties. Two participants were men, the other eight were women. The participants were recruited through personal contact and recommendations (snowballing). Table 1 introduces the participants' profiles. For confidentiality reasons, the names of the participants have been changed. The sampling strategy did not aim to be statistically representative, but rather purported to collect a variety of case studies (Yin, 1994) that could inform the dynamics of personal commitment and moral engagement. The study was narrative and involved two encounters with each participant, during which I asked them to tell their stories with a view to compiling 'assisted autobiographies' (Colby and Damon, 1992; King and Horrocks, 2010). The recorded interviews, whose average length was 80 minutes for each encounter, were later fully transcribed then analysed adopting an interpretive approach, which involves searching for 'meaningful connections' that participants use to make sense of the world (Willis, 2007). The conceptual framework that informed the research has been introduced in the previous sections of the paper.

## **Spiritual healing as exemplary commitment to the self and to others**

Each story is unique and generalisations must be handled carefully. For instance, when prompted to talk about when they became interested or involved in spiritual healing, four participants could recall having visions or extra-sensorial experiences from an early age (most did not think much about it though), whilst the others turned to the subject out of curiosity, through reading, or because they had unanswered questions. Regarding their approach to the spiritual or 'esoteric' aspect of healing, three participants work from a more rational paradigm (that is, they rely on science to make sense of their experiences and develop their practice) whilst the others, to various degrees, operate from a place of faith, intuition and sensation built over years of self-observation, and strengthened by extensive readings.

Interestingly, only a couple of participants stated that their families had some interest or predisposition for spiritual healing. For some, their parents were religious (either earnestly or superficially), for others, their parents were atheists or sceptics. Notwithstanding their

family's beliefs, several of the participants went through a period of complete rejection of God and/or religion, before re-exploring their faith through their spiritual experiences. This suggests that the participants have not uncritically accepted a worldview; rather, they have developed over time a rather personal perspective on life, itself informed by the many readings they have come across, both spiritually and scientifically-oriented. In fact, the participants seemed to have come to a point of balance between faith and critical enquiry, accepting there are few certainties, and trusting both intuition and reason. In other words, they outlined that science cannot claim to have all of the answers, and that when science cannot explain a phenomenon, a leap of faith is required, providing this faith is not blind and categorical. Independent self-reflection effectively queries and sustains both faith in science and faith in a spiritual or ethereal reality.

Some significant patterns emerged from the stories, especially with regards to the notion of commitment. In brief, the study participants exemplified the idea of commitment to self and commitment to serving others, also implying that one follows the other and vice versa. Commitment to self is expressed in different ways: the call to follow one's own path (akin to vocation); an appreciation of the need to heal oneself in order to be able to help others; and a deep sense of love that is non-judgemental. From this commitment to self springs a commitment to serve or help others in various ways: through healing, guiding, enabling, listening, channelling or teaching. The important value in the commitment to serve others is that of exchange or transmission. The healers I interviewed were adamant that they are not miracle workers, but simply enablers: that is, through their knowledge and their abilities, they can assist people to heal themselves, but they do not have 'powers' or 'magical recipes' that can suddenly heal all ills. Also, they can only go so far if the person gets stuck or refuses to open up more to their own unconscious, or explore their soul in greater depths. Thus, the idea of mutual appreciation and exchange plays an important role in the relationship.

Five moral themes emerged from the exploration of the commitment to self related by the healers. Each theme expresses both a characteristic of commitment to the self and a moral process that, ultimately, evokes moral exemplarity. Figure 2 summarises each theme, and I will discuss and illustrate them with quotes from the study participants.

*[Insert Figure 2 here]*

### **Theme 1: Self-work**

Self-work refers to the necessity to become aware of and heal one's own wounds. All of the participants acknowledged that they had had to wrestle with their own wounds as an essential part of spiritual growth and self-discovery. This, in fact, is true for everyone; as Vicky stated: *'We have all these wounds that we carry and nobody is exempt from that.'* Healing oneself is the essential groundwork for developing one's practice with integrity, authenticity and empathy, all the while maintaining a moral stance of non-judgement. It also sustains more authentic healing and teaching when the healers have tried on themselves the various techniques and intuitive tools they use in their practice with clients. For Alison, trying all the



techniques she's learnt on herself first helped her master this knowledge, and also create something new, which further reflects her self, her quest and her individuality. This, in turn, she says, is the best she can offer her clients. For Michelle, healers have a moral obligation to work on themselves:

*'When you have a chink in the armour like [smoking or alcohol], in comes an energy which can really draw you down the wrong path. It can be absolutely dangerous. [...] It's got to be an ethical thing. You've got to have a strong sense of right and wrong, and you've got to have a big ability to be very honest with yourself about why you're doing things.'* – Michelle

To engage in self-work is tricky for various reasons: first, one must become aware and fully integrate one's need for healing and care. This awareness often triggered the early interest in spirituality amongst the study participants: for Paul, it was about healing an unhappy childhood added to an early awareness of death and the intense suffering attached to the experience of living; for Vicky, it was about finding answers to her traumatic encounter with the idea of non-existence; for Michelle, it was about overcoming repressed emotions following an abortion in her teens; for Christina, it was about helping through her husband's illness. The background stories are varied, and the age at which each healer directly confronted their wounds and trauma ranges from the early twenties to middle-age. However, the significance of bringing one's story to consciousness was noted by all participants. The archetypal dynamic of the wounded healer, noted by Jung with regards to the relationship between analyst and analysand, is present here too. The more a healer understands his or her own wounds, the more he or she can help others find their own healing path – providing, of course, this understanding is done consciously to avoid inflation or projection.

The second characteristic of self-work is that it is never-ending, and one should not expect that they will ever be fully healed as such.

*'I think along with [healing yourself as a healer] is a recognition that you never completely heal yourself, so, and this is one of the things that I have to acknowledge, I have to acknowledge to the people I'm offering to help that I am not fully healed myself. But I think what's important is that you're acknowledging that in yourself and you're still trying. And so, therefore, I'm not prepared to be anybody's guru.'* – Julia

Julia's emotional wounds from early life, as well as subsequent health problems that led to a near-death experience, still affect her to this day; however, as she explained, there lies an opportunity to learn and control the ego's inflationary tendencies (i.e. not becoming a guru). All of the healers readily admitted they were still learning about themselves, and did not perceive this as a weakness, but rather as a normal part of life. In their view, self-work nurtures the all important exchange that takes place during a consultation or a healing session.

*'[...] it's also at once a self-therapy, because it equally constructs us. I've often felt this during a consultation, I've discussed this with people who also do consultations. I've felt this during a consultation and after a consultation, we can exchange and discuss, there's a degree of self-therapy, that is, the other is me – but you have to imagine it's like the symbol of the infinite: you are in the first circle, I am in my circle and the symbolism of the line between us...how to say...your personality, your intimacy, your soul is totally respected but there is an exchange,*

*there are no armours, no barriers, no walls that prevent us from...no, there is an exchange [...] we are in the vibration of the soul...' – Paul*

Self-work is also important to cope with the wounds of the person who comes for a consultation. Be it during a tarot reading, an energy cleansing session, a deep tissue massage or a crystal healing treatment, deep emotions tend to surface, and both practitioner and client can become overwhelmed. Other risks exist: misguidance because of projection, untimely intervention (for instance, wanting to stop a client from crying because they seem in pain, whereas crying actually helps cleansing repressed wounds), or again, ego inflation. All of the healers were aware of the sensitivity required when working with energies that can bring to consciousness deep-seated issues that have never been confronted but are the roots of current problems in the person's life. They identified this as a moral space: accepting others as they are, holding back the judgement of ego-consciousness and meeting the person where they can be met – no more, no less. Although all the healers were dedicated to helping others, or at least those who sought help by coming to see them, they also acknowledged that some people will shut down fairly quickly, in which case they soon have to let them go for they cannot work with people who are so closed off that they refuse to take responsibility for their own inner work. The following quotes illustrate these two points: first, Vicky draws parallel between tarot reading and psychotherapy, arguing that both practices purport to create a safe, non-judgemental space for the client to explore his or her self. This, in turn, puts great responsibility on the healer's shoulders to maintain the integrity of that space:

*'A lot of stuff can come up [during a reading], you have to be prepared for that and have to hold that space with somebody. I guess it's the same if you were to train at the institute of psycho-synthesis and that psychotherapy thing to hold that space for somebody and stop them rushing in, hug them and stop them crying, but to allow them to feel the emotion, see what comes up. It comes with a huge responsibility, I think that's where a lot of people go wrong, not realising how much responsibility they carry. How incredibly wounded people are, and what may arise from that and how you deal with the ramifications, and what ramifications you're creating, and the power of what you can say and the impact that can have in terms of holding that neutral space. When you're doing energy work, it's about always coming from that neutral place and not putting yourself into it, not casting judgement, being open and remembering that anything you say, particularly when people are so open and vulnerable themselves, open to impressions; something thrown away could stick with them for years.'* – Vicky

Achieving this 'neutral place' requires much introspection and preparatory work to cope with the other and allow otherness to stand with integrity. However, as Paul and Alison respectively explain below, the client must allow the other in themselves to surface as well. This requires some holding back from the healer (Michelle states: *'You have to work at everybody else's pace, not at your own pace.'*), but also a frank and honest involvement from the part of the client.

*'I never wanted to make a career [out of energy healing], that doesn't interest me. [...] There's some work to be done, you have your domain, I have mine; when there's a consultation, there's like a link that comes out of the physical encounter, but then, to each our domain, you see. I don't want any dependency or inter-dependency. [...] I cannot stand when a client puts themselves in a situation of dependency [towards me], when they call me for*

*trivial matters every other day. I for one stop immediately, I'm not interested. Of course, this does limit the number of clients, obviously. Some people do it, good for them, but for me, I'm not interested. What I'm interested in, actually, is that the client digs within themselves, if they wish so, if they have the strength, if they have the intuition to do so, use the information gathered from the consultation and then work on these, and then, whenever ready, either they come back or get in touch. [...] Just a small thing, not ten thousands, but one small thing may be enough for a person to bounce back in a different direction, and the evolution means that the person grows through, perhaps, a new element that they would have felt, sensed and made conscious by themselves.'* – Paul

*'I like the notion of being a trainer, not a therapist but a trainer, because, then, you give tools and you enable the person to become autonomous. [...] It's good to help people because we get results, some illnesses can be cured and all, but it's even better to enable them to unfold by themselves their illness, or to untangle the problems they have all by themselves through understanding. At that point, you don't risk becoming the one who carries [them]. [...] If a person comes here hoping that they will be carried, and that is not right, I don't keep them. [...] I just plant my little seed, that is, the consciousness to observe the mind [i.e. the various structures of ego-consciousness] and I know that ultimately it will bear fruits.'* – Alison

The above quotes stress the fact that we are all inherently responsible for our psychological, spiritual and, therefore, moral development. Echoing Jung's belief in the transformative value of individuation, the study participants stated that each individual soul has to face up to the task of living and making sense of that incarnated life. To do so, one must learn to self-reflect.

## **Theme 2: Self-reflection**

All of the healers expressed a belief that life, at least the life of the soul, is not limited to the present incarnation. We exist as soul incarnated, and the experiences we go through in this life are lessons, opportunities to learn about who we are, where we come from, what we have lost and need to find again. Living thus calls for reflection on the nature of the self. The healers differed slightly in their analysis of the meaning of incarnation, but they all believed the soul transcends time and develops beyond conscious life. For Paul, incarnation starts with a struggle to find back what has been lost at birth, that is, the original connection to the universal energy of love and life. For Alison, it's about overcoming the barriers and obstacles of the mind to reconnect with the highest vibrations of the integral self. For Christina, life asks us to be happy, but also learn to accept to not be happy because the soul has hard things to learn.

Michelle, a clairvoyant and clairaudient energy healer, very openly talked about the mistakes she made and how she was called to learn through various incidents along the way. She particularly suffered from not having a teacher or mentor to help her learn about the energies she had been aware of since childhood, and even more after a healing session that cured her of a recurring physical pain. She nevertheless believes that such occurrences are there to make people aware of the many traps and pitfalls that can corrupt the good intentions of ego-consciousness:

*'It wasn't easy falling in those holes. If you've got too much ego, you've got to learn the lesson, to be more humble. If you are listening too much and haven't got it down, you have to*

*learn a lesson. If you can't tell the difference between high information and low information, you are going to learn a lesson about how to tell the difference. Otherwise, you're not going to be of any use to the world. I had to learn all that. [...] When things happen, like I see people in the middle of some awful thing, and you don't want to say it, so you don't and they'll look back and say "Thank goodness because I'm a different person as a result. And from this time on, I will never forget this, I'll be a better person." No fine mariner was made on a calm sea, so you do need these ups and downs so that you can relate to people. For example, my husband died, so I know about death and grieving, and how you can cure yourself of it. So that's quite good to have experienced that. And I know about food, how challenging weight loss can be, cravings, carbohydrate and sugar because that's something in my life I've had to get the hang of.'* – Michelle

Katia, who works with tarot decks and astrological charts, also perceives the moral challenge attached to the practice, and explains how this helps her apprehend her work differently:

*'I'm a lone operator and I'm not God, and I'm not a guru. There are huge dangers around practicing alone that I try and be aware of as much as I can. [...] That's why I love astrology so much, as a system of thought and metaphysical stuff. I just love it because it forces you to be tolerant. It forces you to think everyone has a place in existence. You can't help if you're born a Capricorn or a Sagittarian or whatever, this is who you are, this is the way you work your strengths and weaknesses out. [...] That's why I do what I do, because I think that I'm helping people make more choices, be more conscious of the choices that they've got, to open it up for them so that they can make better choices.'* – Katia

Self-reflection is thus essential for healers, but also is a task for each and every one of us. Since we have incarnated in this present life, it is our responsibility to reflect on why we are here, and to try and make the best possible choices in accordance with our soul. Healers, having learnt (sometimes the hard way) how to approach this spiritual quest, offer guidance and support in this respect.

### **Theme 3: Humility**

Humility emerged as an important virtue in the context of self-knowledge and spiritual discovery. It addresses two issues: first, the relativity of one's existence when contrasted with the cosmos, which somewhat relates to the previous theme of self-reflection. In Katia's words, *'the self is very small because the cosmos is very infinite. We're a finite little piece of the infinite'*. For Paul, Alison or Peter, we are to some extent co-creators of our existence, but we are also influenced by circumstances, if not a cosmic plan, that escapes our control. Free will plays a part, through our conscious choices when at crossroads, but these are also unconsciously influenced by underlying forces.

*'You're born with a certain poker hand. You're born with a gender into a historical term, into a particular family, into whatever historical conditions you're born into, and to a location. That's your poker hand; your fate, if you like. Then, there are all sorts of choices that you make along the way, and a lot are very unconscious when you're little, that shape things and determine things, those first five years [of life]. We know that and we know it's a vessel [for future achievements].'* – Katia

This is why, for many healers, it is morally important to work on ego-consciousness and live from the soul: so that one can make the best choices in life, fulfil one's potential and live happily. Spiritual healing practices, thus, offer ways to undertake such inner journey. Paul, like many of the other participants, does not argue against ego-consciousness; rather, he explains that in spite of appearances, ego-consciousness is not all that we are. Therefore, to live at the level of the ego is extremely limited, and potentially destructive for the integrity of the other. The 'I' must learn humility to leave space for the individuated self:

*'Free will I think is the key to incarnation. [...] Beings who are born on Earth are engaged in a fight to survive and to find something again [from which they were cut off before birth], the meaning of one's life, one's path, what one will do; that's when free will comes into play, because the person will say "oh, I want to be a fireman, a nurse, a business leader, the president" and so on. So the 'I' manifests itself very quickly, affirming 'I am different from you'. [...] The 'I' is the strength of the ego, but the ego is merely the springboard to reach the self, that is, step by step throughout our life path, and through multiple lives (that's my philosophy), we will connect with the self. [...] The 'I' is essential for the individual's development in all of its aspects, but it also carries with it all the drawbacks we know, that is, differentiation from the other, in which case we are no longer in the self.'* – Paul

The second dimension of humility lies in the tension between ego-inflation and proper self-esteem. As one discovers one's ability to heal through their hands, through their intuitive insights, with the guidance of their senses and their guts, it is easy to start believing that one is special. All of the healers were aware of this risk (which Peter called the 'Superman syndrome'), although they approached the problematic differently: Christina's and Erin's religious faith means that they implicitly acknowledge that the healing energy comes from above, that they are but an intermediary, and cannot do good work if they do not tune in with the energy of God. Alison, Natasha, Vicky or Paul, on the other hand, came to the realisation that the energy they feel, sense and work with during a consultation comes from another, third source through a mix of observation, reading and intuition. Julia and Michelle both explained that the risk of ego-inflation associated with the discovery of one's healing abilities was somewhat related to a pre-existing low self-esteem issue attached to early life wounds.

*'In the very early days I was very impressed with [my intuitive healing abilities] and I was so pleased that there was something special about me. What I realised was that I should have addressed my, you could say, my low self-esteem, but I couldn't see that. Then, that makes another hole that you fall in. You have a humbling experience that makes you look silly, and that makes you realise that won't happen again. Or an experience that pulls you up and makes you realise "that's not how I want to work."'* – Michelle

Humility is therefore a virtue to nurture, but it should be balanced with a just recognition of one's value as an individual. Erin established her reflexology practice short of ten years ago, after which she separated from her husband. Upon reflection, she felt she had spent most of her life as a 'sheep', following the herd without affirming herself. Through a series of seemingly trivial encounters, she became aware of her talent for reflexology and undertook training. Establishing herself as an independent worker, following years as a housewife, has enabled her to confront her low self-esteem (revealing the wounds), and therefore to appreciate herself more as she gives others healing and a space to be listened to.

This also relates to the financial exchange taking place after a session. Most healers, at some point or another, struggled with the question of charging for their services – both whether to charge at all, and how much. The main objections to the recurring argument that ‘spiritual healing should be free’ are twofold: first, healers explained that in the world we live in, one must earn a living one way or another, so for the services they provide (which does require training, preparation and presence), they believe they can ask for a reasonable monetary compensation. Quite a few mentioned that they try to be accommodating if they perceive that the client needs healing but cannot afford it, working with their intuition to make a decision case by case. Second, several healers stated that, from their experiences, charging a price in exchange for the healing session gives more value to the healing for the clients. In other words, it is as if the clients were more receptive to the healing because they pay for it.

*‘It happens that I say “No, you don’t pay this time”. Well, then the felt experience is not the same. The felt experience of the client. Either they don’t feel anything or it is lessened. It also seems as if the more expensive it is, the more people feel things. [...] We have to pay in order to tell ourselves that we lay down an act.’ – Erin*

*‘Early on, you have real trouble because you don’t want to charge for this healing. It’s coming through love, you really love the person and you want to help them. Then to turn around and say “now pay me”, it’s a contrasting feeling. But at the same time, I knew that if I stayed doing my proper job, when I was school teaching [...] I had no energy left to develop my healing capacity so I can be more of an empowerment helper. I knew that I had to stop teaching so I had more energy and focus for the healing side, but I needed to earn a living so I knew that I actually had to charge for that and I knew that if I didn’t, I wouldn’t be able to do it. I had to decide: “Does God want me, and does the inside of me feel right about not doing it at all? Or doing it and making a charge that feels like a fair charge?” And so I knew that I wanted to do it, so making a charge was right. Then I was sending a message: “Help me, I don’t know what to charge. What should I charge this person?” Then I heard the lovely words back again: “It’s not so much what you need to charge the person, but what do they need to pay so that they get the full benefit of this healing?” Sometimes if you do things for free, a person doesn’t necessarily value them. If you give them for free, it’s different from what you’ve worked hard for and finally, you get it, then you appreciate it. So what does this person need to pay to have the full benefit of the healing? And so, that was very helpful.’ – Michelle*

Consequently, humility must be carefully balanced with self-esteem, something that can only be done consciously when working through the layers of the unconscious.

#### **Theme 4: Self-integrity**

As was alluded to in previous sections, intuition plays a central role in spiritual healing. Intuition is often expressed through physical sensations: a tingling, a feeling in the guts, a sense of warmth in the chest, or just an insight springing imperiously into the mind. Intuition offers important guidance to healers; in fact, all of the participants work intuitively to a greater or lesser extent. Those involved in more structured types of activity, such as reflexology, manual lymphatic drainage, shiatsu or astrology, still must refer to their intuition to sense how the body responds, or to interpret a pattern in a birth-chart. Nonetheless, healers ground their intuition in extensive practice. Not all of the healers I interviewed have

mediumistic or extra-sensorial abilities. Although they do possess natural healing abilities (evident in their choice of activity and the established clientele they work with), most have trained and all have had to work hard to develop and master their craft. One cannot blindly trust one's intuition, but must have identified the wounds that can disturb or disrupt the communication between self, soul and ego-consciousness. Some healers, such as Michelle or Katia, confessed to having struggled with fine-tuning their intuition at first. Extensive reading and practice provided the necessary framework within which they could start trusting their intuition.

Faith also plays an important role in maintaining the integrity of the self-ego connection. Even though doubts or questions have their place in self-discovery, they should not override the value of intuitive knowledge.

*'Faith [is] actually about trusting yourself. In terms of the intuitive you. Sometimes that intuition is inexplicable and beyond reason, but it feels more right than not going with it, so you just go with it. For me, it's not about having faith in something external, it's about having faith in yourself, that you are being true to who you are [...]. It's a sensation that I feel in my gut, the solar plexus area. I think it moves as well, I feel it in different areas. I'd describe it as a physical sensation but it's probably not that physical, it's just that you have this feeling that there's something in your physical body being activated to give you this direction. I think people operate at different levels of that, in terms of they will work more strongly with different areas, it's about learning where the most power is for you and operating in that sense.'* – Vicky

The mix of fine-tuned intuition and conscious practice supports an independence of spirit that characterises spiritual healers. They understand that their work puts them at the edge of society, and they occasionally suffer from being ostracised as 'witches' or 'freaks' by some ill-informed people, but they feel and sense that their insights and abilities are important to further spiritual, moral and social development. Therefore, they feel they cannot but remain independent from the collective with regards to approaches to healing and to the unity of body, spirit and soul. They choose to embrace their individuality to best serve others and respect themselves. They do not do so for the sake of personal glory, for they seem aware (through experience and self-reflection) that personal glory has its shadow side, which would contradict the very essence of their practice.

### **Theme 5: Love**

The ultimate purpose of spiritual healing is to bring forth more good in whichever form that addresses the client's needs: greater consciousness, understanding and cleansing of old patterns, empowerment with regards to decision-making, clarity of mind, appreciation of one's self and one's potential. Katia views herself as *'a midwife that's attempting to move things for better, for healing purposes...[by] facilitating the shifting of energy.'* The idea of 'shifting energies' epitomises both how the healer acts as an intermediary between a higher source and the client, and also how spiritual healing consists in a rebalancing of some sort.

Love is the most essential, central virtue from which spiritual healers operate. Healers must put themselves in resonance with the vibration of love (in the sense of God's love or

transcendental love) in order to assist the client's healing. Michelle, Vicky, Paul or Natasha mentioned empowerment to describe the effects of love: healing is about empowering people so that the clients realise they have, in themselves, the ability to heal their wounds and find their own path. This is perhaps why several healers, when comes the time, feel the need to share their knowledge and teach classes (that is the case for Katia, Julia, Alison and Paul). Christina, Erin, Natasha and Peter talked about loving the other in his or her integrity, especially when working on the body. Not all bodies are healthy and beautiful, but the intention, the consciousness of the healer must be attuned to love. One must want to help the other. Being within that loving consciousness allows true exchange to take place, nurtures self-work and stimulates intuition. Christina's strong faith in the living as divine makes her apprehend her work on the body as part of her philosophy of life. Prayer and walks in nature are important for her, not just for their spiritual benefits but also because both help increase the energetic vibrations of the body. It helps her reconnect with what she refers to as a vibration of life and love.

*'I would say we have a great responsibility [in telling higher from lower energies]. These two energies exist, and the more we will be synchronised with all that I defend, like many others – music, breathing, positive thinking, being on a path towards respect and love for the other – that will fight off evil. Someone who does the contrary will attract evil and will not be able to shine through goodness. [...] This is logical, it's human, you can feel it within yourself. If you don't feel it, that means you're not on the right path.'* – Christina

*'Love...you must love, even when it's hard, when it's complicated...even when within yourself you hear things that say "yes, but he doesn't deserve it, he's a jerk, he's a jerk with his children, he doesn't care about his wife" or "she doesn't pay attention to her kids" – even then you must love, that's the ingredient, that's the only thing that help people, only this can help people [...] that's the key, that's the only thing that enables...it's not easy, hey, some days it's even very difficult but you must do it, you must get there. [...] Also, ensure that all that you can gather in terms of growing consciousness be physically manifested in your life.'* – Peter

*'I've done all the jobs that I've done because I loved people.[...] I love people, whoever they are, whether they are green, yellow, red, with spots or stripes or whatever. I love people, I love to reach out to people. Then, I love to help people [...], to help them become who they are potentially. That's why I've chosen [my work]: to enable people to find in themselves the resources to bring out the good in them, to understand they're sitting on a treasure and don't realise it. I've always been interested in this [...]. It's as if my goal was to give back to each their confidence, their dignity, all that society or education, or institutions or the familial environment have destroyed in them.'* – Natasha

The love mentioned by the healers reflects the archetypal Eros, an appreciation of the divine and transcendent in the context of an encounter and a relationship with the other. This love is profound, personalised but not individual. It is, rather, an implicit part of spiritual consciousness. It is grounded in the heart, in the self and in God or the cosmos. It is also what enables healers to tell good from bad energies, and to sustain a commitment to the good.



## Conclusion

Jung valued more than anything the ideal of being an individual, at once grounded in the self and deeply committed to others. The spiritual healers I interviewed all displayed an earnest commitment to living as an individual in accordance with their heart, their soul, their self. This commitment transpires not only through their healing practices, but also through their general attitudes, values and philosophy of life. They have turned inwards to find answers, but have been conscious enough to not fall prey to the dangers of the unconscious. They have made mistakes, but they have made a commitment to learn from them with honesty and integrity. They trust both intuition and disciplined practice. They live in harmony with themselves, and therefore are able to assist others who struggle with their own wounds and search for meaningfulness. In Jungian terms, I argue that the study participants portray people who are advanced on the path to individuation.

Is this enough to make them moral exemplars? I would suggest it is, because they have made some difficult choices to commit to their inner truth, and this inner truth involves a commitment to help others – to help individuals, but indirectly to help society as a whole as well. Of course, these ten individuals are not necessarily representative of the community of spiritual healers. In particular, I have not spoken with patients or clients of the participants to assess their own perception of the healers. There are, undeniably, quacks and false prophets, just as there are genuinely gifted healers. I can only conclude, from my sample, that these ten people seem rather extraordinary in their own right. On account of the sometimes very personal, intimate, painful stories which the participants shared with me during our encounters, I would conclude that these healers are neither quacks or false prophets, nor falsely modest would-be gurus. They very openly discussed their wounds and their own limitations, but also reflected confidently upon what they had learnt over the years about themselves, other people and the external reality. Such attitude does not seem to demonstrate a desire to ‘show off’ or manipulate; rather, it would suggest that the participating healers felt sufficiently strong in their self-identity to accept to show their vulnerability. In that respect, I believe they count as ‘good examples’ from which we can learn a thing or two.

Returning to Colby and Damon’s definition of moral exemplarity, I venture that these spiritual healers demonstrate a deep respect for humanity and the living; live in accordance with their spiritual values on an everyday basis; have taken risks to follow their heart and soul; and display clear humility regarding their role in the healing process, acknowledging they are not the source but a mere channel through which the healing energy operates. Being a channel or conduit is not insignificant, however; rather, it often is the spark that many people need to discover in themselves untapped potential. Again, recognising that one is a mere enabler as opposed to a know-it-all guru potentially prevents exploitation and manipulation, and requires a strong control of the ego’s self-serving aspirations. Whether one agrees with their beliefs or not, their honest and authentic commitment is inspiring. The participants had clearly confronted, in themselves and through their encounters with fellow practitioners, the shadow aspect of the healer. This enables them to curb the inflationary tendencies of the ego

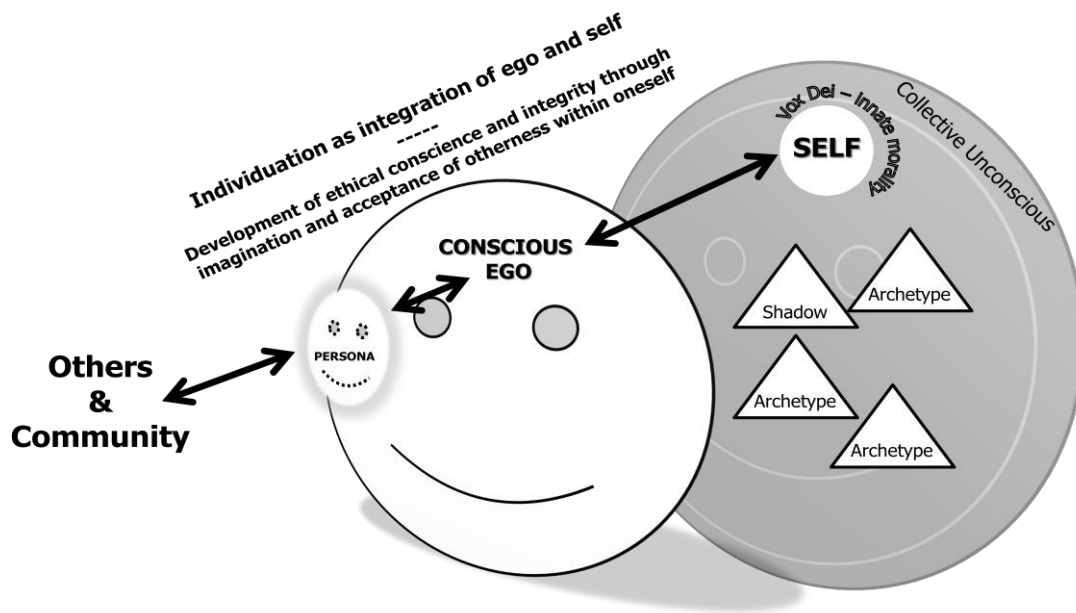
and maintain integrity. Perhaps the most striking aspect of their commitment is their wise acceptance of life as both transitory and precious: they know that life is hard, and that it takes courage to live. This is why life must be lived with love, so that we cease to be afraid of the natural cycle of life-death-life, and instead appreciate fully where we are at in this very moment.

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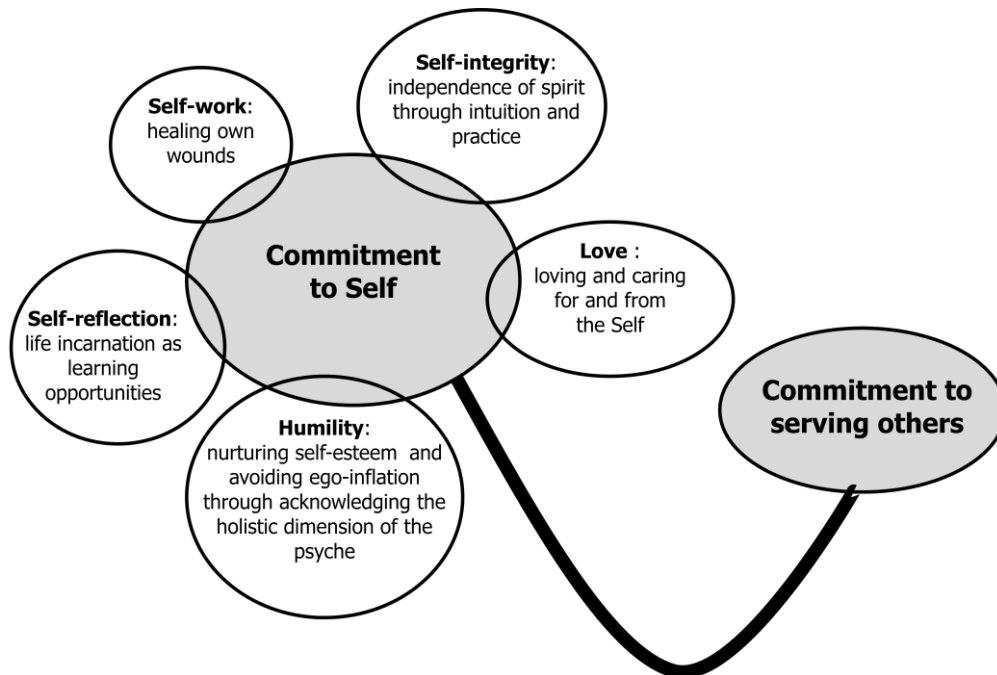
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**Figure 1. Individuation and the Jungian psyche** (adapted from Rozuel, 2010 and 2012)



**Figure 2. Moral exemplarity as commitment to self**



**Table 1. Profile of the study participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Location</b>
Alison	Early 50s	Energy healing, mediumistic guidance, family constellation therapy, group session training; formerly computer analyst and manager of a family-run bakery	FR
Christina	Early 70s	Manual lymphatic drainage, reiki, dietetic guidance; formerly housewife, sales assistant and dietician in health shop	FR
Erin	Early 60s	Reflexology, aromatherapy, reiki; formerly housewife and dedicated volunteer in various community associations	FR
Julia	Early 60s	Crystal healing, tarot reading, past-life regressions, teaching (crystal healing and tarot), crystals sale (shop and fairs); formerly school teacher	NZ
Katia	Early 60s	Tarot reading, astrology reading and guidance, teaching (tarot and astrology); formerly held many various jobs such as mail delivery and astrology columnist, aside from her involvement in feminist activism	NZ
Michelle	Mid 50s	Energy healing, kinesiology, occasionally massage; sales assistant in a crystals shop; formerly held various jobs such as school teacher and sales representative	NZ
Natasha	Early 50s	Shiatsu, reflexology, aromatherapy, various techniques of holistic massage and Chinese medicine, nutritional guidance; formerly business executive, coach and lecturer	FR
Paul	Mid 40s	Energy healing, spiritual/mediumistic guidance; also business manager in ventures non-related to healing	FR
Peter	Late 20s	Reiki, kinesiology, nutripuncture; also works part-time in various jobs such as musician, school assistant, sales assistant, waiter, cleaner, seasonal worker	NZ
Vicky	Mid 30s	Tarot reading, flower essences healing; also works full-time as strategist for an advertising firm	NZ