

Spiritual Pain as a Resource in Supervision

I believe that spiritual pain and isolation are more useful ways to understand the harms helpers suffer in the work than the prescriptive and individual ideas of burnout. When counsellors are able to work in accord with their ethical stance sustainability becomes possible. But social structures and limited resources, which force counsellors to work in ways that go against their ethics, result in what I call *spiritual pain*. This spiritual pain I'm talking about is the discrepancy between what feels respectful, humane, generative, and contexts which call on us to violate the very beliefs and ethics that brought us to therapy and counselling work.

Care of the community worker is at the center of my work as a Supervisor. When a worker is experiencing spiritual pain there is almost a professional imperative for me to move in and smooth over this discomfort.

Instead of smoothing things over, I see this spiritual pain as a potential resource (Bird, 2006) to the community worker, a knowing-in-the-bones, whose immediacy calls out for an ethical investigation. Here are questions that I might engage to investigate this relationship with spiritual pain:

- What ethic or way of being that you respect about your work have you transgressed? Why is this ethic important to you? How did you act to transgress it?
- Why is this spiritual pain present in this moment, in work with this person, and in this context?
- Given you've acted in ways that aren't in line with what you most respect in your work, what would the absence of this spiritual pain mean?
- How will you invite accountability to the client for your actions, and begin to repair the relationship? How can we shoulder you up in this accountability work?
- How can you hold this experience of spiritual pain close and use it in the future to re-member (Myerhoff, 1982; Madigan, 1997) your relationship with the ethics you hold?
- What does it say about your relationship to ethics that you've brought this forward in our team?
- What do you know about our collective ethics that might have made it easier to bring this forward? How can this transgression be useful for all of us collectively?

from: Reynolds, V. (2011). Resisting burnout with justice-doing. *The international Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. (4) 27-45. (page 30, 31)