

Spiritual Practices and Adult Transformative Learning

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Abstract

Spiritual practices, such as meditation and prayer, as well as transformative learning apply reflection to help make sense of our lives. When something in life takes an unexpected turn, it promotes reflection and reflection plays a pivotal role in adult learning. Adult learners reflect in various ways; when something arrests our attention such as a disorienting dilemma, we may find ourselves reflecting on consciousness and unconscious thoughts and beliefs. A disorienting dilemma is when a person's current understanding of the world; described as a frame of reference or habits of the mind is found to be invalid, inauthentic, or inconsistent in a new reality, situation, or experience (Mezirow, 1991). In those critical moments of life, it becomes increasingly important to make sense of contradictions and uncertainties. Dirkx (1997) pointed out that, "ambiguity, contradiction, and paradox invite expressions of soul" (p. 82). When faced with a jarring experience in life, we may find ourselves questioning what we believe at the deepest level of who we are. The path forward after a life-altering experience includes reflecting upon thoughts, attitudes, and actions to make sense of the new reality. The human soul, often referred to as the mind, will, and emotion, appears to have an innate need to make meaning and find congruence; spiritual practices can help us do that. As an adult educator and counsellor, I believe there is a role for spiritual practices such as reflection for living a meaningful life that may even contribute to transformative learning.

Keywords: Spirituality, adult development, psychological development, adult psychological development, spiritual development, consciousness development, transformative learning, spiritual practices, and transformative learning.

Perspectives on Adult Development

During middle adulthood, adults experience ongoing mental, spiritual, and psychological development (Fowler, 1981; Merriam, et al., 2007; Schaie, 1983) that may lead some adults to a natural place of change impacting self-concept and other areas of life. By adult psychological development, I am referring to thoughts, feelings, and actions that inform our understanding of self and way of being in the world. Until adulthood and often into mid-adulthood, an individual's self-concept is largely influenced by genetics (nature) and environmental (nurture) factors. During middle adulthood, an individual has an opportunity to re-evaluate external influences and re-interpret their lived experiences by examining the meaning structures that inform their choices, actions and interpretation and understanding of self (Mezirow, 1991). In conducting a review of adult psychological development, I have attempted to apply a holistic approach by also considering how adults develop greater conscious awareness and how adults develop spiritually during midlife. The following section will summarize select literature on the topic of adult psychological development, including consciousness and spiritual development.

Psychological Development

There are a few ways to conceptualize adult development. For instance, Merriam et. al (2007) pointed out that "psychological models of development have been used to explore faith development (Fowler 1981), moral development (Kohlberg, 1976), identity development (Erikson, 1968; Loevinger, 1976), and intellectual development (Perry, 1999)" (p. 299), and more recently transformation (Illeris, 2013) as well as self-development (Gould, 1978; Kegan, 1994, 2009). Kjellström and Stålnep (2017)

suggest that adult development theories provide a framework to better understand the challenges and social problems of our time.

Adult development theories provide an explanation of why people have qualitatively different ways of thinking, talking, and acting. People's stations in life have a profound influence on what they notice and are aware of and how they act in the world. These different ways can be ordered by stages of development, through which some people have the potential to evolve. (p. 274)

Furthermore, Erikson's (1978) adult development eight-stage theory offers a lens to view adult development as a balance between the needs of self with the needs of society. Explaining Erikson's theory Merriam et al. (2007) posited that as adults develop, the individual is faced with a choice between opposites, one positive and one negative. Before moving to the next stage of adult development, it is necessary to choose more positives than negatives. For instance, in middle adulthood, resolving the tension between generativity and self-absorption allows individuals to care for others. In the "generativity vs. stagnation" (Slater, 2003) stage, generativity involves finding meaningful life work that contributes to society and the development of others and may consist of activities such as teaching, mentoring, or volunteering. Stagnation, on the other hand, may be experienced if the adult does not find meaningful life work in which case the individual may become disconnected from others and/or have little interest in self-development. Also, according to Erikson's theory, in older adulthood, resolution between integrity versus despair provides the capacity for wisdom.

Haynes (2009) pointed out that adult development is not restricted to biological, cognitive, or social/emotional development, rather it is important to consider all aspects of the human psyche for holistic human development. "Holistic thought is concerned with bridging the divide between the egotic self and the true self; [it] is also spiritually attuned and oriented. Holism is an inclusive, meaning-centered, experience-focused paradigm that emphasizes the intrinsic connectedness in life" (Haynes, 2009, p. 55). Adult spiritual development is explained further in the sub-section below, however, initial context follows. Sinnott (2002a), suggested that "developing individuals express their belief that spirituality plays a key role in their development, yet developmental psychologists have given comparatively little attention to this factor. [Furthermore], the concept of spirituality is seldom considered separately from that of religion" (p. 199). Weaver et al. (2006) conducted an extensive search of academic databases for articles published between 1965–2000 on the topic of spirituality and religion. They found that while there was a growing interest in spirituality, there was a declining interest in religion. "Spirituality has come to be seen as more open, inclusive, and more important than religion, at least as traditionally defined" (King, 2011, p. 20). Yet overall, spiritual development has received less academic attention than other types of development. Given that spiritual development has received less scholarly attention than biological, cognitive, or emotional development, topics such as meditation-reflection, non-religious spirituality, and the concept of the soul are important to promote a balanced developmental perspective (Haynes, 2009). For scholarly investigation of the spirit and holistic human development research to become viable, according to Haynes it has some catching up to do.

The various perspectives above provide insight into the ways adults develop. Erikson's (1978) theories focused on identity development by examining the self in relation to others (Slater, 2003). Haynes (2009) emphasized the need for a holistic approach to adult development, one that is inclusive, meaning centered, and experience focused. Sinnott (2002c) pointed out that some individuals find spirituality plays a role in self-development. Developmental stage theories have a long history; however, according to Kjellström and Stålnep (2017), adult developmental meaning making stage theories arose only within the last 40 years. Furthermore, Kjellström and Stålnep posit, "adult development is a subfield within developmental psychology that traces development beyond adolescence and into adulthood" (p. 267). Although adult development meaning making has found a place in developmental psychology more recently, adult spiritual development is not widely accepted because it is difficult to operationalize and test. It appears that a concrete positivist paradigm remains the preferred way of conceptualizing adult development. However, by overlooking adult spiritual development, are we perhaps missing an important

link between adult development and consciousness development? Building further upon this notion, next I will summarize key findings around consciousness development and spiritual development.

Consciousness Development

An important part of adult psychological development is consciousness development, or evolution of consciousness. Consciousness assists in meaning making as well as shaping and interpreting lived experiences. Developing greater levels of consciousness is necessary in adulthood to solve the complex problems that face our world so that we may sustain our planet and promote survival of the human race. It has been suggested by radical thinkers such as Einstein that it is not possible to solve problems by applying the same type of thinking that created the problems in the first place. Developing consciousness in adulthood allows us to look more deeply into ourselves and the world around us. To move from our current state to a future state, a new order of thinking becomes necessary.

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice there is little we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds. (R.D. Laing, 1970 as cited by Mezirow, 1991, p. 19)

Robert Kegan, an American psychologist and professor in Adult Learning and Professional Development at Harvard Graduate School of Education, pointed out how increasing levels of consciousness become possible as the individual develops. Each developmental stage of consciousness is a triumph over the limitations of the distortions of a prior meaning system, and the development stages are also a limitation to future developments (Kegan, 1994). Kegan's theory of identity development is a constructive-developmental theory that focuses on how people construct meaning from their lived experiences. It was first introduced in 1982 in Kegan's book *The Evolving Self*. The theory was revised in 1994 in his book *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Kegan's theory is about "the evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind" (Kegan, 1994, p. 9). Progression through the orders of consciousness may represent transformation in the way adults think and make sense of their lives. The five orders of consciousness are as follows:

Table 1

The Five Orders of Consciousness

Order of Consciousness	Characteristic	Perception
First Order: Impulsive	The child-like mind perceives and responds by emotion	Social relating is egocentric
Second Order: Imperial	The instrumental mind, motivated primarily by one's desires	Focus is on self and what the self wants
Third Order: Interpersonal	The socialized mind, defined by the group	Seeks reciprocal, mutually rewarding relationships and meeting other people's expectations
Fourth Order: Institutional	The self-authoring mind, self-directed	Self-authoring your own identity. For instance, establish own set of values and ideologies and becoming own person

Table 1 Continued

The Five Orders of Consciousness

Order of Consciousness	Characteristic	Perception
Fifth Order: Inter-individual	The self-transforming mind, generally occurring after the age of 40	Interpret self and surrounding systems. Adults can see beyond themselves and others and understand how all people and systems are interconnected

Adapted from *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Kegan, 1994, p. 29.

It is important to note that Kegan's fifth order of consciousness development is more likely to occur after the age of 40, which may suggest that increased levels of consciousness may be attainable in midlife and beyond. One way that adults could potentially expand consciousness and attain Kegan's fifth order of consciousness leading to greater awareness of self and surrounding systems is the use of spiritual practices such as contemplation and reflection. To that end, I will take a closer look at adult spiritual development in the following sub-section.

Spiritual Development

From a holistic perspective of adult development, consideration of spiritual development should not be excluded. "Anything that moves the individual towards a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective, the validity of which has been established through rational discourse, aids an adult's development" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7). When considering spirituality, the word *soul* often appears and is sometimes used synonymously with the word *spirit*.

Soul has to do with authenticity, connection between heart and mind, mind, and emotion, the dark as well as the light. Learning is not simply a preparation for life. It is life, the experience of living. Coming to know ourselves in the world and how we make sense of the other within this world are critical aspects of learning. (Dirkx, 1997, p. 83)

Furthermore, Dirkx (2012) links spirituality to deep meaning and purpose that may "align with particular faith-based expressions" (p. 357). Spirituality is not synonymous with religion even though "the concept of spirituality is seldom considered separately from that of religion." (Sinnott, 2002, p. 199, part I). When I use of the word "spirituality," I am not referring to organized religion or religious practices or traditions, but rather to individual practices used to cultivate and nurture self-awareness, self-understanding, and interpretation of existential reality. "Spirituality is about an individual's personal experience with the sacred, which can be experienced anywhere. Religion, on the other hand, is about an organized community of faith, with an official creed, and codes of regulatory behavior" (Tisdell, 2008, p. 28).

Spirituality often relates to the human mind, psyche, and consciousness, and by nature these concepts are abstract. No one has ever seen a human mind, psyche, or consciousness, yet we have all seen and experienced the outcome of these essences, which allow humans to reason, contemplate, and reflect. Spirituality, which may be cultivated by applying spiritual practices, has been applied by many as a useful construct for understanding the self, contributing to self-consciousness, social consciousness, rationality, and ethical conduct. The concept of spiritual development is important because unless the human spirit is cultivated and nurtured, it does not necessarily flourish. Like other learned skills, the skill of spirituality can be learned with intentionality, achievable through spiritual practices. Spiritual practices are personal practices applied to connect with a purpose and power greater than oneself; for instance, contemplation, reflection, meditation, prayer, and reading sacred text (Dirkx, 1997; English, 2001; Groen, 2018).

Spiritual development is, in some ways, similar to cognitive development (Cartwright, 2001); “even among adults, there is tremendous variability in levels of cognitive functioning and spiritual understanding” (p. 216). If adults have varying degrees of cognitive functioning, then it stands to reason that adults also have varying degrees of spiritual functioning. Some adults may not have the capacity for spiritual understanding, for instance in the case of severe mental or cognitive impairment, still others who are capable may view spirituality as being of little importance. Regardless of the individual’s capacity for spiritual development or interest in spiritual development, for spirituality to develop it must be intentionally learned and cultivated. Intentionality is essential because the busyness of life is often not supportive of spiritual development and is perhaps one of the reasons why spiritual development has become a secondary priority. To nurture spiritual development, an intentional sacred space may be created in our lives for the spirit’s presence to dwell and make itself known (Tisdell, 2008). The cares, concerns, and struggles of life often crowd out the sacred dwelling space of the spirit leaving the spirit at times abandoned, unattended, undernourished, and undeveloped.

Although not without controversy, James Fowler (1981) provided a basic model to conceptualize spiritual development in *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Fowler’s work outlined six stages of faith. His model was influenced by the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. Fowler proposed six stages of faith as outlined below, and he suggested that not everyone moves beyond stage three or four, and those who do often revert to earlier stages. Note, the listed ages are not prescriptive rather they suggest the age when the individual is able to view the world in a certain way.

Table 2

<i>Stages of Faith</i>	
State/Age	Stage Characteristics
1 (age 2–5)	<p>Intuitive-projective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • world viewed through imagination and wonder • self-centered (“me”) • “sin” is punishment/reward for specific acts • awakening to world beyond brings self-doubt
2 (age 6–12)	<p>Mythic-literal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value being part of group, yield easily to its authority • faith relies on stories, rules, and values of family and church • concrete thinking; e.g. sin is specific act, not inherent nature • do not feel accountable before God • world becomes more linear, orderly, and predictable
3 (age 12–14)	<p>Synthetic-conventional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faith perceived with mind as important as heart faith • thinking in abstract terms about God and world • become creatures of choice and exercise will • synthetic in bringing together inherited values, beliefs and self-reflection, but conventional in that beliefs derived from others, not yet owned • want to know who God is and what God requires

Table 2 Continued

<i>Stages of Faith</i>	
State/Age	Stage Characteristics
4 (age 15–18)	<p>Individuative-reflective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-authorization emerges, choosing one’s beliefs and commitments • faith of mind and heart at odds with each other • doubt may be necessary part of journey toward personal faith • “our faith” becomes “my faith”
5 (age 30 and beyond)	<p>Conjunctive faith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • awareness of need to hold polarities, contradictions, and paradoxes together • “living faith while holding doubt” • may go through “dark night of the soul” • beyond propositional truth to “second naiveté” (post-critical thought) • open to other traditions while holding to own faith
6 (comes in later years to a few)	<p>Universalizing faith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • see corruption of old regime and rejoice in the new • beyond self, see through eyes of persons, motives and faiths other than our own • invest in ultimate values that give life meaning and worth • emptied of self (Gelassenheit), even to death

Stages of Faith (Fowler, 1981, pp. 1–2)

Fowler studied hundreds of individuals to understand the different modes of meaning making across the lifespan (Cartwright, 2001). “Fowler (1981) suggested that individual faith development reflects a ‘meaning making’ process in which individuals seek to understand their own lives and the values and commitments that guide them” (Cartwright, 2001, p. 216). According to Fowler, faith development is the way in which individuals come to understand themselves, the other, and the world around them. Critics question if it is possible to reduce faith development to six clearly defined stages that apply to all people everywhere. What about individuals who live in a different cultural context other than America or who would not identify as a United Methodist Christian (Fowler was a minister in the United Methodist Church)? Is it plausible that faith development is universal and that all cultures (collectivist and individualist) would assign the same meaning to the values, images of power, and master stories that are inherent in Fowler’s stages of faith? Despite the controversy that cultural context is taken for granted in Fowlers model, Fowler offers one way to conceptualize stages of faith development.

Fowler’s research is now dated, but more recently, Fenwick and English (2004) proposed eight dimensions of spirituality that may also be useful in defining the meaning making process in terms of how spirituality helps the individual make sense of their life. The eight dimensions of the Fenwick & English model may promote greater clarity of self-concept through critical reflect on each of the dimensions. The eight dimensions are as follows:

1. Life and death (the meaning of life on earth or beyond)
2. Soul and self (the nature of spirit)
3. Cosmology (the nature of the spiritual universe, including higher powers)
4. Knowledge (the nature of truth)
5. The “Way” (the nature of the spiritual journey or search)
6. Focus (the purposes of spiritual seeking)

7. Practices of spirituality and the role of others
8. Responses (action and application arising from spiritual pursuits)

Lastly, Jankowski (2002) indicated that “spirituality involves finding meaning in adherence to a set of larger beliefs, the exercise of faith as a way of knowing, and an experience of connection with [a higher power] and others” (p. 69). “Spirituality is about being aware and honoring the wholeness and interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of a higher power. It is about seeking a sense of purpose and ultimately making meaning in our lives” (Groen, 2018, p. 121).

In summary, spiritual development and spirituality has received less academic attention than other types of development; however, to gain a holistic perspective of adult development, it is necessary to also consider adult spiritual development. Dirkx (1997) pointed out that soul is central to learning for life and that spirituality is about deep meaning and purpose. To that end English and Fenwick’s as well as Fowler’s constructs may be of value in the meaning making process. Acknowledging and nurturing the soul through spirituality is like other competencies and is a learned skill through the application of spiritual practices. Perhaps spirituality and spiritual practices is a skill that can contribute to consciousness building, as identified in Kegan’s (1994) orders of consciousness, and inform self-concept. Next, I will explore what specifically is being transformed in adult transformative learning.

What is being transformed

When an individual experiences a disorienting dilemma, it has the potential to bring evolution or revolution to one’s meaning structures and increase one’s conscious awareness. We use our meaning structures to make meaning and they consist of our thoughts and beliefs, passions and values, actions and contributions. Our meaning structures are made up of our ontology and epistemology. Ontology encompasses how we view reality and how we expect reality to operate in which our meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1991) may play a role. Our epistemology forms our meaning perspectives and how we come to know or arrive at understanding. It is these meaning structures that may experience a transformation.

A transformative learning experience needs to be distinguished from a non-transformative learning experience. Kegan (2009) proposed the question in relation to transformative learning: “What form transforms?” In response, Illeris (2014) suggested that it is the individual’s self-concept or identity that is being transformed. An adult’s self-concept is shaped and re-shaped within the context of meaning structures represented by epistemology and ontology. The individual’s epistemology is a type of meaning scheme used to interpret experiences and construe meaning through observation or participation. Mezirow (1991) pointed out that meaning schemes made up of our beliefs, knowledge, values, judgement, and feelings are used to interpret our experiences and guide our actions. Ontology on the other hand is one’s expectation of how things exist or occur a type of meaning perspective which Mezirow (1991) referred to a “habitual set of expectations that constitutes an orienting frame of reference that we use in projecting our symbolic models and that serves as a (usually tacit) belief system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience” (p. 42).

Portraiture of Transformative Learning

Perhaps a transformative experience can best be demonstrated using an allegory that illustrates a revolutionary transformation of self-concept. Reflecting on my life experiences as I contemplate what transformative learning may look like, I have scripted the following allegory.

Once upon a time not unlike the 21st century, in a land not so different from the world today, there lived Folly and Wisdom. Both Folly and Wisdom wanted to live a happy and meaningful life, and both would make several choices that would impact the outcome of that shared goal.

Focusing primarily on his own happiness, Folly was easily distracted by temporary and short-lived promises of power, wealth, and pleasure. Folly carefully studied the successful leaders of the Kapo concentration camp where Folly, himself a prisoner, was determined to rise to the top. Each time he brutally abused, oppressed, and exploited fellow prisoners, he would gain special rewards from the guards such as extra food and cigarettes, which satisfied his desire to consume. He learned to slander and tell

malicious tales about prisoners that would bring about their death but would reward Folly with special recognition from the guards. Folly thought to himself, “Nothing will stand in my way of climbing to the top and gaining more and more power each day and consuming more and more each day.” The more power, wealth, and pleasure Folly secured for himself, the greater his appetite grew for yet more.

Wisdom was careful in action, thought, and deed. Wisdom, not much interested in power, wealth, pleasure or consuming for the sake of consuming, gladly gave his time to make the world a better place. He carefully nurtured his relationships and regarded fellow humans as equal and free agents and took the time to listen to and understand their unique perspectives. Others had come to know Wisdom as a person of compassion, grace, and integrity who wanted to do the right thing by conducting himself morally and ethically in all his dealings and relationships even when no one was watching.

One day, seeking a disguise that would permit him to ruthlessly indulge in all his indiscretions without consequence, Folly crafted a clever plan to change his appearance. He would find a way to fit in with the most popular, the most beautiful, and the wealthiest people. He would use his clever disguise to gain friends and secure even more power, wealth, and pleasure for himself. On that day, in his disguise, Folly met another cleverly disguised individual who was even more ruthless in his pursuit of power, wealth, and pleasure. But Folly did not know that he was in the presence of The Fierce Consumer. Before long, Folly found himself used as a tool by The Fierce Consumer who was restrained by nothing in his endless pursuit of consumption. The Fierce Consumer said malicious and slanderous things about Folly that led Folly to lose his popular, beautiful, and wealthy friends and nearly cost Folly his life.

For the first time, Folly paused and pondered his choices. He began to question his pursuit of power, wealth, and pleasure, and at that very moment Wisdom walked by. Admiring the meaningful and happy life of Wisdom, Folly stopped the man and began to ask questions. Before long, Folly and Wisdom became friends. When their eyes met, Wisdom instantly recognized himself. Wisdom was looking at a younger version of himself. As Wisdom extended his hand of forgiveness (a spiritual construct) to Folly, their chance meeting that day saved Folly’s life. Applying reflection and meditation (a spiritual practice), Folly questioned the social and cultural norms that had guided his life till now. He began to recognize dehumanizing ideologies within his social, political, and economic surroundings upon which he had become dependent and accept without question and that had, until now, left him merely exploited and oppressed. That day, Folly learned what it meant to move from being merely an egocentric consumer to also being a mindful contributor within society. To envision what it means to consider society in addition to self, Folly found his spiritual practices such as meditation and reflection useful for evaluating and re-evaluating his personal values and the guiding principles that govern his life.

Is the single moment of transformation identifiable? I have invested a considerable amount of time contemplating this question to understand this intangible and abstract phenomenon. The way that I conceptualize the moment of transformation is when new life is breathed into one’s mind or consciousness. Ancient Greek philosophy identifies a word which I think helps to conceptualize transformation. The word is *Pneuma* (πνεῦμα) which literally translates to *breath*, and in some instances, I have seen it referred to as *breath of life* which also refers to *spirit* in the religious context. I think Michelangelo provided a visual depiction of the concept of *pneuma* in his famous work *Creation of Adam*, which adorns the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The picture displays Adam’s lifeless hand and body infused with life, breath, and consciousness by the powerful extended hand of God. At that very moment when their fingers meet, a spark of new life is released into Adam’s limp hand and his mind, spirit, and body come alive. It is at that single moment that Adam’s identity as a human being is formed, his purpose and potential for being in the world is birthed, and the actions he must take to sustain life and the world become a life-long mission.

Perhaps the reason why the exact moment of a transformation seems nebulous is because the work of transformation is ongoing and never entirely completed. As outlined throughout this essay, adult development is ongoing, self-concept is continually evolving because of interpretation and reinterpretation of lived experiences and the transformation of meaning structures in which spiritual practices may also play a role.

Spiritual Practices and Transformative Learning Summary

The phenomena of spiritual practices and transformative learning share some attributes in common, for instance, both make use of reflection to help make sense of our lives. Reflection may support consciousness development (Kegan, 1994), support greater understanding of self (Fower, 1981; Fenwick & English, 2004), and help us connect with our deepest values (Dirkx, 1997). As demonstrated in the allegory above, spiritual practices may also be useful for understanding relationship with self and others and may help inform our relationship to society. Transformative learning also increases understanding of self and relationship with others by informing meaning structures, attitudes, and behaviors (Mezirow, 1991).

In my own adult learning journey, I apply spiritual practices when there is a gap in my understanding that stands in the way of my ability to make sense of my life. True of my own life experience, transformative learning may occur when there is a misalignment or incongruence between my expectations and reality and is sometimes initiated by a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). When I have an experience, I struggle to make sense of, I apply critical reflection, spiritual practices, and transformative learning to reflect on my meaning structures and interpret or re-interpret my experiences. Additionally, both spiritual practices and transformative learning may contribute to a new paradigm or a new way of viewing things and may even result in creating new or reformed/transformed meaning structures culminating in a different lifestyle or altered actions.

Transformative learning begins with critical reflection and rational discourse (Mezirow, 1991). Both spiritual practices and transformative learning may apply reflection to interpret and re-interpret lived experiences, resulting in a new paradigm or new or transformed meaning structures and potentially result in different actions. “Mezirow (1998) posited that adult learning occurs in four ways—elaborating existing frames of reference, learning frames of reference, transforming points of view, and transforming habits of mind—and named critical reflection as a component of all four” (Brown, 2004, p. 85). For a learning experience to be considered transformative, its impact must be observable by others, for instance, a notable behavioral change (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). An added benefit of applying spiritual practices to reflect is that it facilitates psychological decentering by adopting a comparative frame of mind to call into question culturally informed meaning structures and consider other perspectives. When we begin to notice what we had previously failed to notice, consciousness may be expanded thereby promoting adult psychological development and may even result in transformative learning. As outlined in this essay, psychological development, consciousness development, and spiritual development all play an important role in holistic adult development by assisting the individual with establishing “a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7). With expanded meaning structures we may be more equipped to understand ourselves, others, and solve the complex social problems in our world today.

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Citation: Covey, C. (2021). Spiritual practices and adult transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 8(2), 33–43.