

The Importance of Safety for the Practice of Spiritual Care

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To be who I am,
to live what I was meant to live,
to want to sound like no one else,
to yield the blossoms dictated to my heart,
this is what I want.

—*On Solitude*, Rainer Maria Rilke

INTRODUCTION

In a recently published research paper mapping current practices in clinical pastoral education (CPE) programs, CPE educators were asked which didactic topics were most important. Safety was not listed.¹ In fact, the word “safety” does not appear at all in the paper. While some may contend that safety is an implicit aspect of chaplaincy, my goal in this paper is to make the case that the topic of safety should be an explicit area of focus in the practice of spiritual care.

It is my claim that one of the most important things that a chaplain can do for patients in a hospital is to support their sense of safety and that chaplains can only contribute to a patient’s sense of safety to the extent that they themselves feel safe. From this state of safety, the chaplain’s presence can foster a co-regulating effect through which their own emotional state helps to ease the patient’s distress, which, as I will show below, supports their capacity for healing. Simply put, when chaplains feel safe, they can help others feel safe and thus cultivate a healing environment, supporting patients’ spiritual and emotional well-being.

Fortunately, the distinct role that chaplains fill positions them to support patients’ feeling safe. As members of the interdisciplinary team, chaplains “support patients, visitors, and staff . . . experienc[ing] spiritual, emotional, existential or moral distress or who want support and compassionate caring to promote resilience and health.”² Importantly, chaplains *do not* diagnose, prescribe, administer medications, or prepare patients for discharge. Thus, chaplains are experienced by patients as being agenda-free. This stance positions chaplains uniquely to help patients regain a sense of safety.³

To make my case, I draw on the work of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Stephen Porges. Then, focusing on a particular kind of safety—*ontological safety*—I

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draw on the work of Edward Wimberly to propose that this can be achieved by reauthoring our personal mythologies. In the third section, I propose that acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) provides a useful framework for reauthoring our personal mythologies to support the cultivation of ontological safety. Finally, I offer my own personal mythology to serve as a model of ontological safety.

While my claims in this paper regarding the importance of safety are placed in the context of chaplaincy, I believe they can be of benefit to people in any professional setting, as well as in their private lives. Taking this broader perspective, “spiritual care” can be understood both as a synonym for chaplaincy and as a way of being in the world that is grounded in spirituality and is oriented towards caring for others. Therefore, my intended audience for this paper is twofold: (1) chaplains and those who share an interest in the work of chaplaincy, and (2) anyone who seeks to cultivate a spiritual life dedicated to caring for others.

ABRAHAM MASLOW, CARL ROGERS, AND STEPHEN PORGES

Abraham Maslow and Ontological Safety

Possibly the most influential case for the importance of safety for the well-being of humans—at least in the United States—was made in 1943 by Abraham Maslow (1908–1970). In his original hierarchy of needs, Maslow identified “safety needs” as among the most basic of human needs, just after “physiological needs” (oxygen, water, food, etc.). In his original presentation of the theory,⁴ Maslow claimed that safety is achieved by “the peaceful, smoothly running, ‘good’ society [that] ordinarily makes its members feel safe from wild animals, extremes of temperature, criminals, assault and murder, tyranny, etc.,” and “the tendency to have some religion or world-philosophy that organizes the universe and the men [*sic*] in it into some sort of satisfactorily coherent, meaningful whole.”⁵

In its original form, Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs reached its pinnacle in the need for ‘self-actualization.’ By this, Maslow was referring to a person’s “desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.”⁶

Interestingly, following a near-fatal heart attack towards the end of his life, Maslow updated his hierarchy. Nicole Gruel has suggested that, “in facing death, [Maslow’s] attitude towards life changed, prompting a revision and expansion of his earlier thought on self-actualization.”⁷ The result was that he replaced “self-actualization” with “self-transcendence” as the ultimate human need.

For Maslow, self-transcendence has two aspects: “a kind of unitive consciousness” and serving “a cause beyond the self.”⁸ These may be understood as two sides of the same coin, with the cultivation of “a kind of unitive consciousness” —

i.e., a feeling of connection with all that is beyond “the self” — facilitating the ability to recognize causes beyond the self.

Additionally, according to Gruel, Maslow believed that “the desire to transcend one’s nature was as much an aspect of human nature as lower needs and the denial of this ultimate need might be as harmful as the denial of one’s lower needs.” After all, “It was a threat to his very survival through a [near-death experience] that prompted an enhanced sense of awareness.”⁹ Thus, Maslow believed that self-transcendence can be achieved at any stage along the hierarchy of needs.

This later development in Maslow’s thinking invites us to reconsider his understanding of ‘safety needs’ and leads me to propose that those needs can be divided into two types: basic and ontological. Our basic safety needs include, to quote Maslow again, “the peaceful, smoothly running, ‘good’ society [that] ordinarily makes its members feel safe from wild animals, extremes of temperature, criminals, assault and murder, tyranny, etc.” In other words, the need for an orderly society is basic to our continued physical existence and psychological well-being and is a necessary condition for self-actualization.

To achieve self-transcendence, one needs to achieve ontological safety. Returning to Maslow’s words again, ontological safety relies on “the tendency to have some religion or world-philosophy that organizes the universe and the men in it into some sort of satisfactorily coherent, meaningful whole.”¹⁰ In other words, when the universe and our own lives make sense, we feel ontologically safe, and then we can self-transcend and are able to direct our attention toward others and devote ourselves to their service.

Furthermore, parallel to Maslow’s claim that self-transcendence is achievable regardless of whether, or to what extent, one has fulfilled other needs in the hierarchy, it is my claim that ontological safety can be felt whether one’s basic safety needs have been met or not. For example, one may have a terminal illness—which, by definition, threatens one’s sense of basic safety—and yet feel ontologically safe because of some insight, understanding, or worldview that makes sense of things in some way.

It is my experience that feeling ontologically safe yields the ability to be with things as they are. When we feel ontologically safe, our mind is quiet and uncluttered, our body restful and free of anxiety. When we feel ontologically safe, we can intentionally come into contact, through awareness, with any aspect of our embodied experience or the world around us. When we feel ontologically safe, we can be present to the full range of feelings that may be rising within us and yet be at ease. When we feel ontologically safe, we know and accept the truth that the body will age and die, that we will have to say goodbye to loved ones and, ultimately, to this life. Feeling ontologically safe, we accept the joy and sadness of life, and we are attuned to a sense of peace.

Carl Rogers and Unconditional Positive Regard

Around the same time that Maslow was developing his theories, Carl Rogers (1902 – 1987) was also making important contributions to the field of psychology and beyond. Rogers claimed that, to be effective, a therapist must possess an attitude of ‘unconditional positive regard’ towards others and stated that such regard provides “a safety-creating climate.”¹¹

As a way of providing for a safety-creating climate, unconditional positive regard allows us, once again, to distinguish between basic and ontological safety. Simply put, an attitude of positive regard will no doubt contribute to a person’s feeling of basic safety, but *unconditional* positive regard comes from a deeper place within the self and is a fundamental orientation towards others. Because of the role of chaplains as agenda-free members of interdisciplinary teams, they are uniquely able to relate to patients with unconditional positive regard. In this way, they can contribute to a safety-creating climate in which healing is likely to take place.

Stephen Porges and Polyvagal Theory

The relationship between feeling safe and healing has been well established by scientific research. In the decades since Maslow and Rogers introduced their pioneering developmental and psychological theories, scientific research has demonstrated that feeling safe has significant implications for the full range of human experiences. Stephen Porges’s (1945–) polyvagal theory has provided important evidence for the evolutionary, physiological, and neurological underpinnings of our ability to feel safe and of its impact on human flourishing. Summarizing his findings from three decades of research, Porges writes:

- Feeling safe is necessary for living a good life and bonding with others.
- Feeling safe can support therapeutic interventions in both mental and physical health by putting the body into a state that is primed for healing.
- Feeling safe supports our ability to learn, relax, rehabilitate, and be productive. This can inform how we design institutions such as schools, hospitals, clinics, drug-treatment centers, work environments, and prisons.¹²

Porges has also written that “when we feel safe, our bodies transform in a way that optimizes us for social connectedness, health, growth, and restoration.”¹³ Given these findings, one of the most important functions of a chaplain—and of people in general—is to cultivate an environment of greater safety for patients.

Having established that feeling safe is beneficial for patients in hospitals, it is my claim that there is a direct relationship between the extent to which chaplains feel safe—in both the basic and ontological senses—and the extent to which they can induce feelings of safety in others through co-regulation.¹⁴

EDWARD WIMBERLY

Reauthoring Our Personal Mythologies

Turning specifically to ontological safety, the chaplain's arrival at this state will require, to return to Maslow's words, "some religion or world-philosophy that organizes the universe and the men in it into some sort of satisfactorily coherent, meaningful whole."¹⁵ Without such a philosophical, religious, spiritual, or theological perspective that makes sense of their world, chaplains remain highly susceptible to the emotional toll of the work and will be unable to support patients to experience a sense of ontological safety.

For a spiritual worldview to support feeling ontologically safe, it must make sense in the context of our own lives. While we may learn from, be informed by, and integrate the wisdom of those who have come before us, in the end, we need to be the authors of our own life narratives. Edward P. Wimberly (1943–) has written compellingly on this topic for an audience of religious caregivers. It is Wimberly's view that we are all guided by a personal mythology, which entails "the beliefs and convictions that people have about themselves, their relationships with others, their roles in life, and their ministry."¹⁶ Crucially, Wimberly claims that we can *reauthor* the myths that determine our beliefs and convictions. In his words, "Reauthoring recognizes that change in convictions and beliefs is possible . . . we play an active part in developing the myths that inform our lives. We have the capacity to interpret events and give them meaning and significance."¹⁷

The reauthoring of our personal mythology to cultivate ontological safety serves another important function for chaplains and for humans in general. Recall that Rogers claimed that "a safety-creating climate" is established by having an unconditional positive regard for others. Just as I have claimed that one can only cultivate a safe environment to the extent that one feels safe oneself, so, too, one can only regard others unconditionally positively if one regards oneself unconditionally positively. In other words, one can only love one's neighbor to the extent that one loves oneself. Absent a sense of self that leads to unconditional positive regard and love of ourselves, we cannot feel ontologically safe, which means that we will be unable to feel the same towards others nor contribute to an ontologically safe climate for them.

To cultivate ontological safety, it is essential to explore and understand one's own personal mythology. By reflecting on the stories that shape our sense of self, we can establish a deeper inner coherence, which fosters resilience and peace in the face of life's uncertainties.

Before turning to my own personal mythology, I first want to propose an effective framework for establishing the necessary conditions for reauthoring our personal mythologies.

THE ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT) FRAMEWORK

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is a mindfulness-based behavioral form of psychotherapy. Although I am not a psychotherapist, I am able to apply ACT's conceptual model and array of evidence-based techniques to the work of reauthoring our personal narratives and arriving at a state of ontological safety. A complete treatment of the relationship between ACT and ontological safety, as well as specific applications for the practice of spiritual care, would require its own paper. For now, I will briefly summarize the key points.

ACT is comprised of six facets: (1) self as context, (2) contact with the present moment, (3) acceptance, (4) values, (5) committed action, and (6) cognitive defusion. The first three facets are functions of mindfulness. *Self as context* can be seen as primary as it establishes a "sense of self as the context in which private events such as thoughts, feelings, memories, and sensations occur."¹⁸ This awareness is supported by remaining in *contact with the present moment* and being attentive to "what is in the environment and in private experience."¹⁹ From this vantage point, one can maintain a posture of *acceptance*, which "involves taking a stance of non-judgmental awareness and actively embracing the experience of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensation as they occur."²⁰ These three facets of ACT contribute to the conditions that facilitate reauthoring one's personal mythology by allowing for an open and disentangled consideration of one's life journey.

Through this process of reflection, one begins to observe patterns of behavior and recurrent themes. This leads to the *values* facet of ACT, which is defined as "chosen qualities of purposive action."²¹ Here, we can refer to them as *spiritual values* and note that they become apparent through the process of mindful reflection on one's own life. One's values have always been operating in one's life, and ACT facilitates their clear identification and affirmation. Once one's values have been clarified, the next facet of ACT is *committed action*, which refers to "goals in specific areas along one's valued path."²² It is my view that, from a spiritual perspective, we might say that committed action in the form of values-based goal setting is the calling that one hears once one's personal mythology has been reauthored. Finally, we turn to *cognitive defusion*, which is the fourth mindful aspect of ACT. With regard to reauthoring one's personal mythologies, *cognitive defusion* ensures that one avoids "fusion with the conceptualized self,"²³ which is to say, becoming inflexible in one's attachment to one's personal mythology. Rather, ontological safety means feeling safe enough to hold one's story lightly and be able to make changes and updates as one's life journey unfolds. When one is in this state of psychological and spiritual flexibility, then one has arrived in a state of ontological safety.

MY PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY

I learn best when someone models something for me. Because I expect that the same may hold true for others, I now turn to my own personal mythology, in the hope that it may be instructive for others. To be clear, the specific content of the stories that I will share matters less than the act of sharing them, which is intended to demonstrate that ontological safety emerges through the construction and expression of one's personal mythology. Consistent with the ACT framework, I have selected certain stories through a process of mindful reflection, each of which has yielded a particular spiritual value. Taken together, they have given rise to a calling. My personal mythology is divided into three stages—openings, awakenings, and arrivals—to capture what has felt for me like a progressive journey of unfolding.

Openings

My earliest memory is of being walked into my paternal grandfather's bedroom while he is lying in his deathbed. I am a month or so shy of my eighth birthday. The room smells musty. I stop at the foot of the bed, which seems vast to me. Looking towards my grandfather, he seems small and shallow, lying in the center of the bed, far from where I am standing. His upper body is raised slightly on pillows, and his head and neck are against the headboard. I am ushered along the side of the bed towards him, and I notice that his sunken face looks different from anyone I've seen before. I don't understand what is happening, but I can feel that it is serious and sad. I stand there, silently.

That memory has come to mind countless times in the forty years since it occurred, waiting for me to understand its meaning. Recently, I have come to appreciate that standing at the side of my grandfather's deathbed at that young age created a spiritual opening for me.

When I think about that opening, I recall a teaching from the Torah, the foundational sacred text of the Jewish tradition into which I was born. In the third book of the Torah—Vayikra/Leviticus—there is a story about Aaron, the high priest of the Israelites. In the story, two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, are engulfed in flames at the altar in the tabernacle and die tragically. Confronted with this unimaginable loss, the Torah tells us that Aaron was silent (Lev. 10:3). Then, as now, there are no words in the presence of tragedy. Five verses later, for the first and only time in the Torah, the text reads, "And YHWH spoke to Aaron, saying . . ." (Lev. 10:8).

I think this story is illuminating. Trauma can have different effects on people, and one of them is spiritual. After facing the traumatic loss of the death of his two sons, Aaron's ears are opened to hear the voice of YHWH. Like Aaron's experience, albeit under very different circumstances, I believe that the traumatic experience of my seven-year-old-self standing at the bedside of my dying grandfather was a moment of spiritual opening. In the Torah story, Aaron opened to the voice of YHWH speaking to him, which makes sense given the ancient Near Eastern context in which it was written.

For me, the opening was constituted of mystery, feelings, and silence. Standing there, doing nothing, I opened to *awareness*.

Looking back on that experience at the bedside of my dying grandfather, I believe that I gained a second important insight. For as long as I can remember, I have rejected tribalism and embraced universalism, which I understand to mean, simply, that I do not value or treat different kinds of people differently. It seems to be among the most obvious of truths that I am related to all human beings²⁴ and that I therefore have a responsibility to care for them.

As it turns out, my grandfather was not Jewish. When I was younger—and when it was less commonplace than it is today for Jews to marry gentiles—there was some discomfort and shame about this fact, and I recall that our family would talk about it in hushed tones and incomplete sentences. To me, he was my grandfather, plain and simple, and I believe that his presence in my family planted the knowledge that all people are members of my family—whether they are Jewish or not—deep inside my heart and in my sense of what is right.

Returning to ACT, I think of these two openings that I received from my grandfather while he lay in his deathbed—awareness and universalism—as two of my spiritual values. I also think of them as intertwined. The truth of universalism is a function of simply being aware. Look around. Pay attention. We are all human beings. Our faces and skin colors and bodies may differ from person to person, but we are all so similar; we all come from the same ancestors; and we are all sharing this common—sometimes joyful and sometimes painful—experience called life.

Awakenings

About five years after my grandfather died, when I was thirteen, I had my bar mitzvah, the Jewish coming-of-age ceremony. I clearly recall standing at the front of the synagogue sanctuary, facing an open Torah scroll, with the congregation seated before me. The section of the Torah that I chanted was the story of Noah and the ark, the first verse of which has reverberated in my mind ever since: “These are the generations of Noah; Noah was a man of simple justice in his generation; Noah walked especially closely with God” (Gen. 6:9, my translation).²⁵

I have long thought of that verse as my north star, guiding me to embody a set of qualities. Noah is described as “a man of simple justice.” To me, simple justice means this: the obligation to share of the things that you have an unjustifiable and undeserved abundance of with those who have an unjustifiable and undeserved scarcity of the same things. For example, having great wealth is unjustified and undeserved. Rather, it’s fortunate. And ‘simple justice’ calls on the wealthy to share of their abundance with those who have been less fortunate. This is a third spiritual value.

It would be another twenty-five years until my next awakening experience. In the spring of 2014, I was working on my doctoral dissertation, which is a study of the

intersection of sociology and theology through the prism of American religious identity construction, with a focus on the theology of Irving Greenberg (1933–). Greenberg’s theology centers on the claim that all human beings are endowed with three fundamental dignities: uniqueness, infinite value, and equality.²⁶

One Sunday morning, while writing, I posed a question to myself: “How would I live my life if I *really* believed that all people are endowed with these dignities?” That introspection was a moment of profound awakening and enshrined the dignities, and a life dedicated to affirming them in others, as spiritual values in my life. It has since become clear to me that living into an affirmation of these three dignities is also a reliable way of cultivating Rogers’s unconditional positive regard.

Arrivals

To me, an essential spiritual truth is that it is possible to arrive, spiritually, in this life. This perspective contrasts with those spiritual paths that claim that there is only the journey and no destination and others that defer arrival until after death. The two traditions that I have been formed by—Judaism and Buddhism—take different approaches.

In Judaism, the spiritual paradigm is that of the patriarch Jacob. One night before he is forced to confront his brother, Esau, and his past wrongdoings, he learns that his name will be changed from Jacob to Yisrael. Explaining the meaning of this new name, the Torah states, “because you have struggled with God and with people” (Gen. 32:29). This verse is the source of the oft-made claim that to be Jewish is to struggle, or to wrestle with God. However, the verse does not stop there; rather, it concludes by stating “and you have prevailed.” Jacob was ready to face his brother and his past because he had prevailed over his struggles. In short, he had arrived.

It is similar in Buddhism. The teachings of Buddha present a clear prescription for overcoming suffering, not as a fantasy or a myth but as an achievable state of mind. From the perspective of Buddhism, too, it is possible to arrive.

In a wonderful merging of these two formative traditions in my life, I was first exposed to Buddhism when the influential Jewish-Buddhist teacher Sylvia Boorstein (1936–) gave a talk at the rabbinical school I was attending. I recall her suggestions that we take three breaths before answering the phone and that we direct compassionate thoughts to those who may be suffering when we hear an ambulance. Her teachings seemed simple—especially compared to the study of Talmud and Jewish law (*halacha*) that I was engaged in all day—and yet they stayed with me and I took up meditation, although my practice waned soon after I was ordained.

About a decade ago, I reconnected with Buddhism, and I have made it an object of study and practice ever since. During this period, I have had the good fortune to reconnect with Sylvia and, while speaking with her on her eighty-fifth birthday, I asked her to reflect on her life’s work. She said, “I have spent my life helping people to

habituate their minds to a more compassionate response.” I have come to understand this statement as an encapsulation of Buddhism’s purpose: to respond to suffering with compassion. Through the study and practice of Buddhism, my mind has changed—this is sometimes referred to as “a change of lineage”—and compassionate action has become my purpose also. In other words, it is another spiritual value.

In this place of arrival, I sense that existence is necessary, that this is all here so that God—which I understand to be the mysterious Source of Life and Abiding Presence—can experience existence *through* each of us. In other words, each person—and each animal, and each living entity in the universe—is a medium through which God can experience life. This view, then, leads me to conclude that contact with the experience of being alive is of the utmost importance. The mysterious Source of my own life is yearning to experience life through me (and everyone/thing else), and I can serve my Creator by coming into ever closer contact with the experience of being alive.

Returning to my North Star—Noah—contact with the experience of being alive is what it means to “walk especially closely with God.” When I am in contact—through the sensorium—with the experience of being alive, I walk especially closely with God. This is the mature expression of the spiritual value of awareness. In this way, when I see, God sees; when I hear, God hears; when I taste, God tastes; when I smell, God smells; when I touch, God touches. And when I am present to the suffering of others and offer them care, God is caring for God.²⁷

Finally, why does God need to experience life? Because otherwise, God is alone. And lonely. We exist—*all* exists—because of God’s loneliness. And suffering exists because creation came from that state of divine suffering.

In the presence of suffering, I devote myself to the cultivation of continuous contact with the experience of being alive to respond to God’s loneliness. I am here to accompany God.

The Call

Through the narration of my personal mythology and the identification of my spiritual values—awareness/contact with the experience of being alive, universalism, simple justice, honoring the three dignities, and compassionate action—I hear the call. For me, that means living a life and pursuing a career that aligns with these values. Specifically, the value of *simple justice* calls me to pursue a career in chaplaincy because that is a setting where I can share my ontological safety with those who feel unsafe.

To return to the beginning, I believe that I have dedicated myself to a career in spiritual care because of my earliest memory of standing at my grandfather’s bedside as he was dying. I have been rushing towards hospitals ever since, and maybe that’s because, in some way, I am constantly returning to that room to try and do something, even if that means standing there silently. As I conclude my personal mythology, I feel

grateful for the lessons from my grandfather, Lionel Leslie Kleinberg (1927–1984). May his memory be a blessing.

CONCLUSION

It has been my goal in this paper to make a case for the importance of safety—in particular, ontological safety—for the practice of spiritual care and for life. It is my hope that the claims I have made will inspire others to consider whether and how to make the topic of safety—both basic and ontological—an explicit area of focus. Furthermore, I have tried to make a case for authoring—or *reauthoring*—our personal mythologies, clarifying our spiritual values, and hearing the call. In the case of chaplaincy, I believe that there are opportunities to study the impact of safety in the context of patient encounters and that this would be a fruitful area of future exploration.

By explicitly fostering both basic and ontological safety, chaplains—and all humans—can contribute to cultivating healing environments and providing spiritual support for others, often just by *being safe* in the presence of those who feel otherwise. When we are grounded in our own sense of safety, we can transmit that feeling to others and help them regain their own sense of safety amid their own struggles. Simply put, an explicit focus on safety is an essential quality for a life and career dedicated to spiritual care.

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NOTES

¹ Casey Clevenger et al., "Education for Professional Chaplaincy in the US: Mapping Current Practice in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 27, no. 4 (2021): 222–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2020.1723191>.

² This definition comes from George Handzo, “The Role and Importance of Chaplains on Interprofessional Care Teams,” presentation at Stanford Health Care, October 24, 2024.

³ Note: The presence of a chaplain may increase feelings of insecurity for those with a history of religious trauma.

⁴ Abraham H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370–96, <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm#r13>.

⁵ Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” 378–79.

⁶ Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” 382.

⁷ Nicole Gruel, “The Plateau Experience: An Exploration of Its Origins, Characteristics, and Potential,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 47, no. 1 (2015): 44, <https://www.atpweb.org/jtparchive/trps-47-15-01-44.pdf>.

⁸ Henry J. Venter, “Maslow’s Self-Transcendence: How It Can Enrich Organization Culture and Leadership,” *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* 2, no. 7 (2012): 67, https://www.ijbhtnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_7_December_2012/7.pdf.

⁹ Gruel, “The Plateau Experience,” 49.

¹⁰ Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” 378–79.

¹¹ Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 283–84.

¹² Stephen W. Porges and Seth Porges, *Our Polyvagal World: How Safety and Trauma Change Us* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2023), 180.

¹³ Porges and Porges, *Our Polyvagal World*, 178.

¹⁴ The idea of co-regulation is also supported by the polyvagal theory. As Porges and Porges write, “Whether we feel safe or unsafe, our bodies telegraph these feelings to those around us,” and “We often mirror the feelings and states of those around us. Likewise, those around us mirror whatever feelings and states we project.” Porges and Porges, *Our Polyvagal World*, 179.

¹⁵ Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” 378–79.

¹⁶ Edward P. Wimberly, *Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019, originally published in 1997), 6.

¹⁷ Wimberly, *Recalling Our Own Stories*, 103.

¹⁸ Steven C. Hayes et al., “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?,” in *A Practical Guide to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*, ed. Steven C. Hayes and Kirk D. Strosahl (New York: Springer, 2004), 9.

¹⁹ Hayes et al., “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?,” 10.

²⁰ Hayes et al., “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?,” 7.

²¹ Hayes et al., “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?,” 10.

²² Hayes et al., “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?,” 11.

²³ Hayes et al., “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?,” 8.

²⁴ I am inspired by the Lakota phrase, *Mitakuye Oyasin*, which declares that “all are related.”

²⁵ Author’s translation of the Hebrew term מִתְּ (untranslated definite object particle), which can imply a close association beyond what is expressed by אִתְּ (with); see Francis Brown et al., *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000).

²⁶ Darren Kleinberg, *Hybrid Judaism: Irving Greenberg, Encounter, and the Changing Nature of American Jewish Identity* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 114–24.

²⁷ I imagine this to be akin to Maslow's "unitive consciousness" as it contains the two qualities of "unitive consciousness" and a commitment to "serving a cause beyond the self." See endnote 8.