Transpersonal Transformative Experiences: Spiritual and Secular

Stanley Krippner

ABSTRACT

Transpersonal experiences transcend one's usual self-identity, and may transform a person's life. In this study, 25 online interviews were conducted with Filipinos who responded positively when asked if they had ever had a "life-changing experience." The Casto Spirituality Scoring System was used to determine which of these could be considered "spiritual" in nature and which could be considered "secular." The results provide a means of determining which reported transpersonal transformative experiences would fall into each category. From this perspective, "transpersonal" and "spiritual" are not synonyms, as someone can report a transpersonal experience that has little or no spiritual content.

Key Words: Castro Spirituality Scoring System, Secular, Spirituality, Transformation, Transpersonal Psychology, Transpersonal Studies, Transpersonal Transformative Experiences

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Introduction

Transpersonal studies investigate reports of individual and group behaviors and cognitive-affective experiences in which one's socially constructed personal identity is transcended or transformed. Transpersonal psychology is the branch of transpersonal studies that focuses on the scientific understanding of the related stages of development and the shifts in consciousness that accompany this change, as well as the relevant paths of personal and group practice. The data elicited by transpersonal psychologists have been applied to counseling, psychotherapy, education, and personal growth.

The word "transpersonal" was first introduced into human discourse by William James in a 1905 lecture. In 1942, Carl Jung used the German term überpersonlich, which his English language translators rendered as "transpersonal." In 1949, the term was used by the American psychologist Gardner Murphy and in 1967 (in varying contexts) by Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, and Stanislav Grof. Transpersonal experiences can be defined as those reported human activities in which an individual's self-identity appears to have been transcended, extending beyond its ordinary limits to encompass wider, broader, or deeper aspects of life, and the cosmos. Although past writers have emphasized spiritual transformation, the case can be made that secular changes can also be considered transpersonal. Hence, there can be secular transpersonal experiences (Krippner, 2015) as well as spiritual transformative experiences (Kason, 2008). Either can lead to long-lasting changes in the experiencer's life, and either can be what Rhea White (1997) called "life potentiating" or "life depotentiating."

Transpersonal psychology began with an emphasis on exceptional human experiences, but this was always accompanied by an interest in how this scientifically peripheral data might change accepted notions of the human person.

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Hartelius (2016) has pointed out how the transpersonal vision has typically embraced a transformative approach to the whole person, not just as an individual, but in intimate relationship with a diverse, interconnected, and evolving world. Transpersonal experiences are those that expose possible limitations of conventional ideas about the mind and individual, and point toward the need for a larger concept of who we are.

Because it is a whole person psychology, evidence from behavioral, cognitive, and neuroscientific approaches remains crucial; because these schools of thought omit aspects of human capacity that are less compatible with their methods and philosophies, transpersonal psychology maintains greater emphasis on those experiences that may be marginalized in more conventional approaches to psychology, yet carry power to shape destiny. Individuals who carry exceptional capacities, whether intuitive or mystical or charismatic, repeatedly change the course of human history. Other abilities may guide the path of someone’s life or change it in an instant: flashes of insight, moments of flow, of deep absorption, gut instinct, spiritual and mystical encounters, tastes of profound connection with the world, or empathic bonds that open something far deeper than words.

Yet transpersonal psychology is not merely a psychology that studies a broader range of human aspects or experiences within a conventional academic frame. Psychology holds an implicit assumption that the human person is best explained by understanding such things as the properties and actions of neurons and hormones that make up the nervous system. While these data are of great value, a transpersonal approach is also interested in understanding the person as a system—that is, as a whole that may have emergent properties that go beyond those of its parts. In this spirit it has interest in systems theories and process philosophies.

Transpersonal psychology is also interested in understanding the person as a living system that can be described and defined, but that is also capable of turning limitations into handholds that open a way beyond those constraints. For example, tell a small child that he or she cannot do something, and rather than foreclosing options, it may open in their minds the possibility that they can do that thing. Systems typically follow rules; living systems leverage their existing limitations into new capacities. With this perspective that anticipates the presence of novel human potentials, a transpersonal approach can not only consider data from cognitive-behavioral and neuroscience research in a different light, but can offer a perspective from which to ask novel research questions that may contribute to these fields.

Transpersonal psychology has paid special attention to the concepts of spirituality and religiosity, the latter referring to an organized system of beliefs about what is considered “sacred” and the rituals, rules of conduct, and other elements of a belief system subscribed to by a group. Spirituality is also concerned with the “sacred,” but focuses on a personal connection with some “sacred” agency believed to be worthy of reverence and devotion, whether it be a deity (or deities), Nature, humankind, or a “cause.” In any event, the focus is upon something higher, broader, or deeper than the individual, something that transcends ordinary experience and provides meaning and a means of transformation. Both terms differ from “secular,” usually defined as a behavior or perspective not bound by religious rules or by overtly spiritual practices and concepts (Krippner, 2015).

**Transpersonal Transformative Experiences (TTEs)**

"Transformation" is defined by the American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology as a “change in appearance, form, function or structure” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 953). Transformation can be sudden or gradual, dramatic or ordinary. If a transformation of identity takes place without reference to a deity, a “higher power,” or a “deeper” aspect of the psyche (such as an archetype) it could be considered to be a “secular transformative experience.” A “secular transformative experience” also can lead to a shift of identity that incorporates broader or wider aspects of consensual reality such as Nature or a social group. Both “spiritual transformative experiences” and “secular transformative experiences” involve the transcendence of one’s socially constructed identity, hence are transpersonal in nature. (Of course, the case can be made that this new, expanded identity is also the result of social construction or reconstruction.)

Harris L. Friedman and Glenn Hartelius (2013), in The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology, observed that transpersonal psychology has pioneered many marginalized areas of psychology that are now...
parts of mainstream theory and practice. These include the phenomenology of consciousness, the spiritual content of Eastern thought and indigenous traditions, and the legitimization of qualitative research methods in the study of human behavior and experience. These definitions reflect an attempt to continue the disciplined inquiry articulated by many other researchers and practitioners in this dynamic field of study.

The development of satisfactory measures of transpersonal experiences is a major requirement if empirical work is to proceed in transpersonal psychology (Friedman, 1983). A number of such measures are available for researchers covering a variety of transpersonal and spiritual constructs (Friedman & MacDonald, 2002; Friedman & Hartelius, 2013). One of my students at Saybrook University, Kira Lynn Casto, attempted to identify spiritual content in dreams. Her scoring system provided a definition of “spiritual” that can be utilized when spiritual transformative experiences are differentiated from secular transformative experiences.

The Casto Spirituality Scoring System (CSSS)
The Casto Spirituality Scoring System (CSSS) was derived from the Hall-Van de Castle Content Analysis of Dreams and the Hood Mysticism Scale. It consists of six categories. Each of these CSSS categories were described in terms that produced high reliability when different scorers’ results were compared (Casto, Krippner, & Tartz, 1999).

Spiritual Objects are used in the dream, to open and connect the experiencer to something of significance felt to be beyond one’s full understanding and/or individual existence and that is associated with a sense of reverence. The other categories are Spiritual Characters (e.g., people, talking animals, “aliens,” or similar entities), Spiritual Settings (places and times), Spiritual Activities (external events and actions), Spiritual Emotions (moods and feelings), and Spiritual Experiences (internal reactions to events). Therefore, the adjective “spiritual” is used in the CSSS to describe something of profound significance to the dreamer, something felt to be beyond the dreamer’s full understanding, something felt to be beyond the dreamer’s individual existence, and something eliciting the dreamer’s respect and awe. That “something” can be an object, a character, a setting, an activity, an emotion, or an experience.

The Casto Spirituality Scoring System (CSSS) can be used both qualitatively and quantitatively. It can be utilized not only for identification purposes, but to assist in completing a dream report that inadvertently left out such items as Spiritual Settings or Spiritual Emotions.

Spiritual dreams can play a vital role in counseling, psychotherapy, and self-help (Krippner, Faith, & Suzuki, 2000).

Applications of the CSSS
Robert Tartz, co-author of the original report on the CSSS, once worked with a client in his late 20s. The client reported a dream in which everything was bright and new. Suddenly, he changed into an old man and life’s freshness seemed to have faded. The only certainty that the future held was death. The dreamer experienced fear and thought that if he meditated enough, he would become eternal. He began to meditate and the myth of Gilgamesh came to mind. He then realized that his attempt was futile because, like Gilgamesh, he would eventually die. But, like Gilgamesh, he resolved to make himself useful to society and to live in the present moment. Then he woke up.

This dream played a significant role in the therapeutic process. The dream’s main theme was the realization of death accompanied by fear. Another theme was the dreamer’s attempt to prevent his demise through spiritual practices, an attempt that proved futile. Finally, the dream encouraged the dreamer to take an active role in his life in contrast to his usual passivity. The client followed up this insight by reframing his personal relationships in a more positive manner. He also became a more active member of society, participating in organizations committed to positive social change. He did not stop meditating, but realized that meditation is not goal-oriented; it is a spiritual practice that is done for its own sake.

Another application was a cross-cultural research study. After reviewing over 3,000 dream reports from seven countries, two colleagues and I tallied the number of dreams containing one or more spiritual element on the CSSS (Krippner, Faith, & Suzuki, 2000). The results identified Brazilian dream reports as having the most dreams with spiritual content (30% of female dreams; 45% of male dreams) and England having the least (2% of dreams for most genders). Dream reports from the United States had the second highest percentage of dreams with spiritual content, followed by Russia, Japan, Ukraine, and Argentina.

For example, a Ukrainian female reported this dream: “My friends and I walked near the...
technical school, and then we went on a road somewhere and found ourselves by the cemetery. It was late and dark. When I turned my face to the cemetery, spirits began to rise from their graves. They moved towards us. We were afraid so we kneeled and worshipped. Then a bright beam appeared around us. I don't remember what happened then." This dream report was scored for Spiritual Characters, Settings, Activities, Emotions, and Experiences.

An Interview Study of TTEs

In 2014, a Filipino student, Rannie Rex Gerozaga, conducted interviews with 25 people who responded affirmatively to the question, "Have you ever had a life-changing experience?" Each participant gave informed consent and was assured that his or her identity would be disguised and kept confidential. Some interviews were conducted in person and some on the Internet. Because the interviewees' sense of identity was transformed, these would qualify as transpersonal transformational experiences. Gerozaga described his procedure as follows:

"I discovered 25 stories of people who believed that their lives had changed for the better as a result of one or more personal experience. I forwarded these stories to Dr. Krippner after these men and women gave me written permission to write and share their stories. They hoped that their stories could inspire other people going through difficult times in life. Some of the participants in this study were interviewed personally, specifically those who hail from my home town in Mindanao. Others were interviewed over the phone or in Facebook. This was especially true for those who hailed from Luzon, because I live in Mindanao. That is why it took me some time to finish writing the said stories."

Of these 25 cases, 11 appear to have been spiritual transformative experiences and 14 appear to have been secular transformative experiences. Some contained both spiritual and secular elements, but the category selected reflected the predominant theme, as identified by the CSSS. Statements containing less than three spiritual references were categorized as secular, unless there was an overpowering spiritual theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Male</td>
<td>What compelled me to change my mind? It was the love from my mom. I felt it in my heart.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Male</td>
<td>My life changed after I dreamed that half of a heart was mine, and half belonged to Jesus. I told God, &quot;I want you to come into my life and save me.&quot;</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Female</td>
<td>My boyfriend proved he really was in love with me and it turned my life around.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Female</td>
<td>I dreamed that my dead family was in a better place.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Male</td>
<td>My girlfriend told me that we were meant to be together; it changed my life.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Female</td>
<td>During those dark days, I found solace in the hands of my dad.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Female</td>
<td>Getting an abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy was the best thing I ever did.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Female</td>
<td>The love of my family helped me get through the challenge.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Female</td>
<td>I went to church three times a week and it was life changing.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Female</td>
<td>I went to a church, confessed my sins, and promised to do no more abortions.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Female</td>
<td>I realized there’s too much good in the world to live as half a person.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Male</td>
<td>Getting caught by the police was the best thing that ever happened to me.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Female</td>
<td>I got caught by the soldiers and it was the best thing that ever happened to me.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Male</td>
<td>On the night of my grandfather’s funeral I resolved that I wanted to live as fully as he did.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Male</td>
<td>When the Filipino soldiers murdered my parents I decided to join the Muslim rebels.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Male</td>
<td>Amy Winehouse’s death had a powerful transforming impact on me and I have not used drugs or alcohol since.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Female</td>
<td>One night I made a promise to myself that if I could get out of jail, I would change my life for the better.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Male</td>
<td>We applied Biblical principles and saved our marriage; we offered each other mercy while we were trying to change.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Female</td>
<td>I murdered the people who had killed my family and still have many years here in the jail but it’s okay because I have forgiven them and believe that my family is waiting for me in the next life.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Male</td>
<td>Seeing my lolo [grandfather] lying in the coffin...made me think that he must have done good things...when he was alive.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Male</td>
<td>I had a near-death experience after I was shot when I attempted a robbery. Now I want to be a role model for change for the youngsters in our community.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Female</td>
<td>I nearly died but was transformed by that experience.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Male</td>
<td>I made a vow to never look back on the past but to move on.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Male</td>
<td>One day I just said to myself, “Wow! Being a father is a more fulfilling job than being in the field and risking your life.</td>
<td>secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Female</td>
<td>My life changed when I realized that I had [lived in pain] long enough.</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
happened immediately while other changes took place over a longer time period. Hence, the terms "spiritual" and "secular" were given operational definitions – three or more scores on the CSSS categories. In some cases, a category received more than one score.

Another way to operationalize "spiritual" and "secular" would have been to utilize the scale developed by Taylor and Kilrea (Taylor, 2017). However, this would have necessitated having the participants complete a questionnaire, an option that was not feasible given the nature of the interviews.

A summary of the results appears in Table 1. The following transcripts utilize the CSSS but omit the Spiritual Experience category because that information appears in Table 1.

It is notable that three participants described their TTE as "the best thing that ever happened to me" and many others inferred as much. All TTEs involving organized religion or religious institutions were classified as spiritual transformative experiences because religion, by its nature, involves many of the components of the CSSS. Some TTEs were spiritual in nature not because they were associated with religion but because they mentioned life-after-death, a sacred vow, or an experience suggesting a spiritual realm (e.g., an out-of-body or near-death experience). Some TTEs were both spiritual and religious. If a TTE was neither spiritual nor religious it was considered a secular transformative experience.

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Examples of Transpersonal Transformative Experiences
These edited and slightly abridged examples from Gerozaga's survey illustrate the richness of the stories he obtained. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their identity. Other potentially identifying information has been altered as well. Gerozaga translated a few of the stories from native languages into English.

1. Jaycee's Story (secular), age 36
I was abandoned by my father at an early age and my mother kept food on the table by selling her body. She could have run off with one of her boyfriends but did not want to abandon me like her husband did. When my mother grew too old to sell her body, she begged for money on the street. This didn't produce much of anything because most of the people on the streets were as poor as we were. So she picked up plastic bottles, glass containers, and tin cans, and then sold them in a junk shop. She gave me the only love I ever knew and would often go hungry so that I could eat. I didn't get much schooling but was able to get a series of construction jobs. That really helped our family income a lot. My mother died suddenly from a heart attack and I started to drink heavily. When a drinking buddy of mine died of alcoholism, I thought that I would probably die the same way. So why prolong the misery? I bought a gun but could not pull the trigger. What compelled me to change my mind? It was the love from my mom. I felt it in my heart. I knew I could never betray her love for me by taking my own life. Now I have stopped drinking and got a steady job. Without feeling that heart connection with my mom, I would be dead by now.

Scored for Spiritual Emotions (I felt it in my heart; feeling that heart connection with my mom); Spiritual Activities (I have stopped drinking and got a steady job).

2. Eduardo's Story (spiritual), age 38
I am 38 years of age and this is my story. Ever since I knew the difference between right and wrong, my life was one big struggle. The world around me was confusing and I felt very much alone. The pain was so bad that I could not get close to another person. I started to take illegal drugs and watch pornography. Little by little I went into my own private hell. I tried religion but it didn't work for me. No matter what I tried, nothing made me feel better. I kept making bad decisions and was in terrible pain. I cried out to myself, "Why is there a hole in me that can't be filled? No matter what I put in there, I have a feeling of emptiness." Then it struck me that I was that empty hole. That very night I had a dream of a small circle suddenly being completed. Then the circle became a heart and it started beating. I woke up and I realized that half of the heart was mine and the other half belonged to Jesus. I just couldn't believe it. The next day I threw out all my drugs and booze and porn. I apologized to all the people I had insulted or hurt. The demons that controlled my mind are gone. I think my lifelong habit of smoking cigarettes is next. Today I am going to celebrate my birthday with family members, relatives, friends, and neighbors. And I know that wherever I go, Jesus is always there with me.

Scored for Spiritual Object (heart), Spiritual Characters (Jesus), Spiritual Activities (the circle became a heart and started beating), Spiritual Emotions (emptiness).

3. Katarina's Story (secular), age 25
I will always look back on my experience in life I learned as a lesson in the toughest way. When I was 18 years old, I suffered physical and emotional abuse. My mother separated from my father and married again. Things went well the first year, until my stepfather lost his job as a laborer. Then, things changed dramatically. He came home drunk every night and would fight with my mom. My mom is a very gentle person; she never fought back until my stepfather started hitting her. There was one time she fell unconscious when he hit her in her stomach. Being 18, I knew that there was something wrong in our family. One night when my stepfather got home and was really drunk, he went into my room and started groping me all over. I was about to shout but he covered my mouth with his hand. He started raping me and I was just crying because of the unbearable pain. My mom turned a blind eye when she had learned about what had happened to me and I could not accept it. In an attempt to prevent that nightmare from happening again I left the house and went with my friend. My friend was working as a guest relations officer in a bar and said I could work as a waitress there, but I wanted to earn more so I could continue my studies. Then I engaged in a high-paying job, prostitution. At the age of 18 I started to be a sex
worker and one of the worst things that had ever happened to me was my use of cocaine. I had to get high to be a sex worker so that I felt numb. It was hell, but I was getting paid well and was able to continue my studies. I then became a mistress of a politician; I ruined his family because I wanted to earn more and he deprived his family to give money to me. Then I met this 43 year old man, who was rich and had his past marriage annulled before he met me. He told me that he liked me and that he was falling in love with me. I didn't believe him at first because he was not the only one to tell me this, a lot of my customers did. But he proved that he was really in love with me and it turned my life around. I told him my story from being raped by my stepfather, to puffing drugs and being a mistress. He just didn't see it that way; he said what's important is the present and the future. I started getting back on the right track of my life. I see things differently and now have a positive outlook in life and feel lighter and free. I have been longing for this kind of love. We are now married. Life is truly full of surprises; you'll never know what's in store for you no matter how dark your days are right now.

Scored for Spiritual Emotions (he was really in love with me).

4. Margarita's Story (spiritual), age 45
On November 8, 2013 Typhoon Haiyan hit our country. One day before it happened, one of my children was celebrating his seventh birthday and we invited relatives and friends. I never thought it would be the last time I would see them. The next day it started to rain hard and there was a strong wind. A neighbor's tiny hut blew away because of the wind. At noontime, huge waves came from the ocean, battering us. All I could see was darkness. There was frantic screaming and I passed out. The next morning I found myself on the highway. I could barely walk and I was surrounded by hundreds of lifeless bodies. Two more days passed and I realized that I was the only one in my family who had survived. My husband, my three daughters and four sons were killed by the typhoon. I began to question, “If there is really a God, where was He during the typhoon? I have never killed anyone, nor has anyone in my family. We are devoted Christians. So why us?” I was going insane. I thought of killing people so they would realize how painful it is to have lost your whole family. I locked myself in the house. I stopped going to church. Reading comics was my only escape. I planned to commit suicide the next day on the bridge. That night I had a fever and there was no medicine. I was chilled to the bone and fell asleep. I dreamed that I was in a place like Heaven where there was a well and not far from it was an oak tree. Under the tree I saw eight people and as I went nearer I realized it was my family. They were all smiling and wearing white clothes. I hugged them very tight. My husband said, “Ma, please take care of yourself. We’re now in a safe and better place. It’s painful how we’ve left you too soon but we’ll see each other again. We just left a little earlier. It wasn’t yet your time during the typhoon.” I woke up and found myself crying. I decided to become a domestic helper. I still do not know the logic of life. But what my husband told me that night in my dream has sustained me. I started going back to church again and renewed my Christian faith.

Scored for Spiritual Objects (oak tree), Spiritual Characters (family members), Spiritual Settings (a safe and better place), Spiritual Activities (they were all smiling and wearing white clothes; going back to church, etc.), Spiritual Emotions (crying).

5. Thomas' Story (secular), age 65
I killed my wife because she was cheating on me with my neighbor. I actually killed them both. Since you cannot be imprisoned here if you catch your husband or wife cheating on you I did not go to jail. I worked hard for my family, I provided my wife with every need she asked. Why did it happen to me? I became a woman hater. I thought that every woman was filthy and that they're just using men to provide for their material desires and nothing more and they can only be used in bed. Well, I had sex with many girls at that time, older than me or younger than me as long as we both agreed to have sex. I even had sex with a teenager, a teacher, and a married woman. In other words, my life was in pretty bad shape. I was hungry but couldn't be fed by the foods I ate daily. I was thirsty but couldn't be quenched with the water I drank. I met a girl while I was having a vacation in Cebu Island. We started dating and I told her about my past, that I killed my wife and the man with whom she had an affair. I told her that I had been with a lot of girls and I am yearning for a pure love after all these years. She just smiled back at me, although I initially thought she was scared. She told me that if we were meant to be together forever, then things would fall exactly into place. That made sense to me and changed my life. Now, we have just celebrated our
tenth year wedding anniversary. I’m happy that I chose a different path in my life, a life forever with her.

Scored for Spiritual Activities (she told me....)

6. Darlene’s Story (secular), age 28
I don’t know what’s special with the story of my life. I kind of find it special in my own way although people may think that it is boring or just normal. At the age of 15, I was diagnosed with stage-two brain cancer. Everybody was shocked in my family. I knew I was going to die if I couldn’t get through it. Some of our neighbors had said it was the result of what my dad had done in the past, being a retired army general, who had performed summary executions to alleged criminals in our society, although I don’t know whether it’s true or not. They said that it was the karma that was at work and I was the unfortunate one who was punished. In the society that I live in, we always think this way. I started to believe the rumors that my dad had really butchered people in the past during his service and that getting this kind of disease is because he killed those people and that I was going to die, just in a different way.

In other words, I started to put the blame on my father. I disliked my father. Because of him, I choose a different path in my life, a life forever with him. I didn’t let my love for him get cold because my relatives would never welcome him into my family. We were just enjoying the moment of being together. Every day our love grew more tender. We went to church together every Sunday, we ate together in his house, watched movies together, and so on. We always thought to avoid premarital sex, but did it anyways. I never worried about it until a year later we realized I was five weeks pregnant. There were two options. I could elope and leave my family, or I could have an abortion. When I was six weeks pregnant, my boyfriend seemed to get colder around me. He didn’t seem to care for me at all. One shocking day I saw him with another girl. I confronted them right then and there, and they confirmed that they were dating. I then knew I had to resort to aborting the child in me. I initially thought it was the worst decision I have ever made. I killed my child. But then I began to look at the bright side of my situation. I realized that when I aborted my child I saved myself from my family who would surely disown me. I was able to finish my college degree. I later on met a man who I married with and lastly, I saved myself from spending the rest of my life with someone who didn’t even deserve an ounce of my love. So, I guess it wasn’t a bad decision after all. In fact, it was the best decision I have ever made. Now I’m married, and have three children. I am content and happy with the life I have now.

Scored for Spiritual Activities (I saved myself), Spiritual Emotions (I am content and happy).

8. Cindy’s Story (secular), age 31
I had lost contact with my family after typhoon Haiyan hit our town. I assumed that they may have been some of those who died. My world started falling apart. All these years they were my life; all these years I had been working hard for them. They meant everything to me. After the typhoon, there was no communication for 24 hours, seven days a week, and our old home had no electricity. It was as if you were living back in the 1800s. It was dark and gloomy. The bad weather never left our area after the typhoon. One day, I thought that I have had enough. My friends and colleagues started to notice that there was something wrong with me. They saw me laughing and talking to myself. One of them bravely suggested that I see a psychiatrist and I ignored
his suggestion. It got to the point that I came home from work without taking a bath and grooming myself. It happened more and more until I was fired from my job. One of my relatives forced me to enter a mental hospital where I was given medicine to help my condition, but back then I thought that there was nothing wrong with me. One day, it was raining hard early in the morning, when the relative who had put me into the hospital came to visit me and told me that there was a possibility that my parents were still alive. I didn't know anything about it but tears were flowing from my eyes. I knew I had to get out soon. The next day my relative had confirmed that my parents were alive and that they were under the care of Social Welfare located near our town. It was a miracle. Four months in the mental hospital and I was starting to function well again mentally, physically, and emotionally. In the fifth month I was allowed to live in the outside environment again and finally met my father and mother outside. My deep love for them has helped me overcome life’s challenges. Most Haiyan survivors had lost a family member, relative, or friend. It was all so unexpected. We may have lost our house, car, and careers, but all of them can be replaced. But the lives of our loved ones are irreplaceable. That’s why Haiyan survivors are more appreciative about the value of life and about moving on for a better life.

Scored for Spiritual Emotions (tears were flowing from my eyes; my deep love for them), Spiritual Activities (it was a miracle).

9. Alodia’s Story (spiritual), age 48
Twenty years ago, I had to make a decision to alleviate the financial situation my family was facing. I sold my left kidney to a cancer patient for 150,000 pesos. This helped my family. I started a small business, and my two children continued going to school. Life was getting better, until my husband got into a vehicle accident where he had his right leg amputated. This made him a disabled person. I was the one working for the entire family, taking care of two children, managing the business which wasn’t doing well at the time, and my husband had to continue his medication. It was the toughest part of my life. I had nothing to turn to. One of my friends asked me to be a methamphetamine dealer. I really didn’t want to be in that business because I knew the hefty punishment if I got caught. But the situation was pushing me to the point that I had to be a dealer to earn a living and bring food to the table. My husband was aware of it, but he didn’t want me doing it. I had no choice. I was nabbed by the police when they pretended to be a buyer. I went to jail and my life started to fill with “what ifs.” What if I didn’t do this? What if I’ll be sentenced for a lifetime? What will happen to my family? Inside the jail I was able to recognize my weakness and started rectifying my mistakes. I could count with my ten fingers the times I went to church. Inside the correctional facility I went to church three times a week. It was quite a life changing thing. I started reading the bible. I was often visited by my family and my husband started to work in a computer shop. This way he was able to send my children to school. I stayed in the facility for about eight years and never got involved with violence while I was there. I was granted parole shortly after. It was an early Christmas gift to me and to my family: an opportunity never to be wasted. I am now a free person and I volunteer for Kids Foundation here in the Philippines. I also work as a marriage counselor. You can only live once and the life you are going to live is your message to the world, so let’s make it wonderful and inspirational.

Scored for 3 Spiritual Activities (I started rectifying my mistakes; I went to church; I started reading the Bible).

10. Josie’s Story (spiritual), age 68
I was once an abortionist in our town. At the age of 19 I performed my first abortion on a teen who was 15 at that time. I never studied about abortion. In fact, I just heard from the old folks in town what herbs or plants are needed to do the diabolical thing. I used mahogany seeds because they taste bitter and are said to be very effective in removing the child from the mother’s womb. Sometimes I used four acetaminophen tablets. A mom is supposed to take the four tablets all at once using soft drinks, but I usually used an eight ounce Coca-Cola because of its high acidity. Whenever I did the abortions I always succeeded in removing the baby and if not I had to rigidly massage the mother’s womb for a few days until blood would start flowing from the female’s vagina. It was my profession when I was single but now I am married. Because of my job I was able to feed my mother and father and send my siblings to school. If there is one thing I am kind of sad about, it was that my sister, who I was helping to go to school got pregnant during her last year in high school and she was about 15 or 16 years old. When I got married with my live-in partner,
abortion was still my job. I was the answer to those teens who didn’t want to be a mom, or mistress of politicians. I was very excited because of my married life. We were planning to have five children. Then things got weird. In the first year of our marriage I wasn’t able to get pregnant, but that was normal. On the second and third year of our marriage we consulted an obstetrician and gynecologist but to no avail. I had a healthy uterus and they said that I was capable of having a child but they didn’t see what was wrong with me, so some of the doctors we consulted said that the sperm count of my husband was okay. I was devastated. I was afraid that my husband would leave me because I couldn’t give him a child. I started to think of what could be wrong with me. I didn’t do drugs or smoke, and I ate vegetables frequently. One night when I was sleeping, I dreamed that I was surrounded by very cute little babies in a park. I woke up and I was worried. I thought that maybe the babies in my dream were the unborn babies that I killed. On that very morning I went to the church. I confessed my sins and made a promise that from that day onwards, I would never ever kill a child, even if it would mean that I will no longer be capable of bearing a child because I knew that was my karma. I tried living a simple life. I started working in a grocery store. More than a year after I stopped I got pregnant, and no more than four months later the doctor confirmed it was twins, one boy and one girl. I realized that every child is special and that they deserve to live. Now I am a mother of two and I am proud to say that I was able to come out from the dark part of my life to the light.

Scored for 3 Spiritual Activities (I went to the church; confessed my sins; I made a promise).

11. Sheila’s Story (secular), age 27
I was raped by my father. At the age of nine my innocent and blossoming life was ruined by a drug addicted father. I was torn apart. I was repeatedly abused over the span of five years. I have lived the worst life that anyone could imagine. I kept silent, knowing that my mother is obsessed with my father and she wouldn’t believe me. What I am afraid of is to be disowned by my family. I was raped in my own home, where I thought I was safe. Afterwards, I was too afraid to sleep during the day or night. I wanted to find somewhere else to live, but I didn’t have the funds. I never confided in anyone. I was completely distraught, and a month later I had decided that I wanted to disappear, so I stopped eating and became anorexic. In the years that followed I drank heavily to block out the trauma. I wouldn’t eat all day; I would come home and hide whiskey in a mug of coffee. Then I would go to my room. It would knock me out-- I didn’t want to be there. At 16 I hit the lowest weight of my year and was admitted to the hospital. I was an ‘alcoholic anorexic’ for five years, and at the university I used sex to detach. I was promiscuous and held drunken sex parties in my room. I was very detached from my body and manipulated others with sex. I loved controlling men. I was more a persona than a person. Then, I met this man of my age who was studying mechanical engineering. We dated, and before we graduated college we got engaged a year later we were married. I told him everything about my past. He wasn’t into graphic details of my past, but he embraced me for what I am and what I had gone through during the years. I did regret keeping silent for so many years. Not telling is a big mistake. It doesn’t matter who you tell, but just tell one person to get it out. Keeping quiet has led to a lot of my problems. I think if I had dealt with it sooner my life might have been different. Secrets don’t get easier. They get worse at some point in your recovery from the rape trauma. I was raped but I am a survivor. I played that role in my head for five years. I hated myself; I hated everyone who was celebrating life; I hated my family, I hated the rapist, I hated men and I hated everything about me. I had no self-respect and didn’t really care if I lived or died. But being a victim means handing over your power. During the rape everything was completely out of control. I never want to be out of control again. Today I am a bit of a control freak; for example, I could never even work for someone else. I am not saying that it is quick or easy to get a positive frame of mind, but it’s a fact that I was raped. I’ve had to get over it. There’s too much good in the world to live as a half person.

Scored for Spiritual Activities (I had to get over it).

12. Leon’s Story (secular), age 29
I am a pedophile and went through treatment many years ago. I know that I will never be completely cured from this problem. I never asked to be this way and I never will. I didn’t make a choice to be this way. There were many times in my past when I wished the thoughts and fantasies would go away. It seemed like that was all I could think about, and only that. It was very nerve-
racking. I engaged myself in evil doings. I raped several children ages 8 to 12 years. I also had sex with teenagers, children of my neighbors, giving them a few pesos as payment. Of course I tried hard to conceal my doings. I was never aware that I was under surveillance by the police in my area. The officials in our community had been receiving complaints about sexual harassment from an unknown person and I was very complacent that I covered up my crimes with those children. I eventually got caught, got sentenced to probation, and got help. My wife almost lost her sanity when she learned about this. She and my whole family disowned me. Getting caught by the police was the best thing that ever happened to me. One of the soldiers was taken to their headquarters. It was the best thing operations, I got caught by the soldiers and was given the chance to make some changes in my life). I finally learned to accept the way I am and then forgive myself. There were so many shades; you have to accept it, deal with it, and do something with it. I have now accepted that it cannot be cured and that I will always suffer to some degree from these thoughts and fantasies. However, I also know that I will not act on them. I just wish that society would someday be capable of seeing those like me as humans who do have feelings, and that some of us can be helped. In other words, I have learned to accept the way I am and then forgive what has happened in the past. I finally learned to deal with the urges. Now I am a free person. I once stumbled along my journey in life, and I do not live a perfect life but a guided one. Life comes in many shades; you have to accept it, deal with it, and do something with it.

Scored for Spiritual Activities (It was my chance to make some changes in my life).

13. Rosa's Story (secular), age 63
For fifteen years I held the position of commanding general of one of the militant revolutionary groups in the Philippines. I've murdered those who got in our way, including members of the Filipino armed forces. I grew up believing that communism would be an ideal government for our country. My parents were members of the militant group and were the ones who encouraged me to join. My toys were guns and bullets. I attended the country's best university where I studied political science but my parents told me never to reveal my true identity. I graduated magna cum laude and then I returned to the mountains where I engaged in many battles with the government forces. But life often takes some twists to surprise you. In one of our operations, I got caught by the soldiers and was taken to their headquarters. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. One of the soldiers was a general. He interrogated me but never tortured me. He started to visit me and brought me food. I told him it was his way to get some information from me, but he replied that he really wanted to visit me. On one occasion he brought me flowers. Gradually, my heart softened for the very first time. After three years in the prison, I was able to enter the government program where rebels are given the chance to be free again on the condition they would never go back to their old life. I grabbed the opportunity and when I got out, the general and I were married. I sent my parents a letter and told them everything and they never replied. My husband and I decided to live in Japan because we knew the rebels could always find us if we remained in the Philippines. We lived in Japan for 32 years and had three children. In December of 2013 we decided to return to the Philippines, but now we're using different names. We now live on one of the beautiful islands in the country where we see the sun rising when we wake up. Life has been good for our family.

Scored for Spiritual Settings (one of the beautiful islands), Emotions (my heart softened for the very first time).

14. Eufemia's Story (spiritual), age 24
I firmly believe that you don't need to necessarily encounter a heavy event in your life for you to change for the better. My story is simple but it could inspire you and perhaps change your life for the better. I used to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol; I could consume twenty cigarettes a day. Not a day passed without getting drunk before going back home, especially here in my country where alcohol is very cheap and accessible even to minors. I thought this was a typical life of a teenager. It is very common for people among my age. I had an accident where I was driving a motorcycle; I got minor wounds and tore my pants apart. I really thought I broke my leg because of the sudden prick I felt on my right leg. These unhealthy habits lasted for a few years. I wanted to go to church less often. I was dead tired during the day and very alive during the evening. My grandfather used to drive a motorcycle when he was 90 years old. I wondered how he did that, could still plow the rice field and do other farm related things. In fact he was a prostate cancer survivor and one thing I always noticed about him was that every time before he would go to sleep he always read the Bible. I've been noticing that since I was young and would go to his house for a sleepover. But last year he died peacefully, he was...
93. He didn’t do any drugs, he wasn’t an alcoholic person or a smoker, and he was a frequent Bible reader and church goer. My cousins, aunts, uncles and some distant relatives came back to pay homage to our deceased loved one. He was greatly loved by everyone apart from the fact that he was once a municipal councilor in our town back in 1975. A night before he was laid to his final resting place, we had a jolly conversation with those people. I began to realize that I wanted to see them again in the future to bond and reconnect. I want to live as long as my grandfather and that very night I made a promise to stop smoking, to go to church more often, and lessen my alcohol consumption. I am happy that I kept that promise. I go to church every Sunday with my sister and I do not do drugs or smoke and was accepted into the community of Singles for Christ. Like I said, there’s not really an unusual happening that led me to change my life for the better. I just want to be good in life so that my life will be good to me.

Scored for Spiritual Characters (My grandfather...always read the Bible), Spiritual Activities (I go to church every Sunday, etc.), Spiritual Emotions (I wanted to see them again in the future).

15. Arjel’s Story (secular), age 40
I am not originally Muslim; in fact I was once Catholic, but all of that changed due to a horrible event in my life. Me and my family used to live a normal life in a rural area in Mindanao. My mama and papa were both government employees and we went to church every Sunday. My sister was a third year student in a university and I was in my final year of high school. One summer night we had just finished eating our dinner. Suddenly, two gunmen in uniforms entered our house and grabbed my father and pulled him outside of the house. The other gunman took my sister by the hair and dragged her into another room while pointing his gun at me. It was a nightmare. I saw that they were wearing a logo of the Armed Forces of the Philippines on their uniforms. I didn’t know why they were treating us this way because soldiers are supposed to protect us. I shouted, “Why are you doing this to us? We are law abiding people.” One of them answered, “Your parents are members of the New People’s Army, a terrorist group. We have reports that they are working for the rebels in this area.” My sister was shouting for help and I realized that she was being raped by the gunman. My parents were outside, kneeling, crying and begging to be released. One gunman said, “Admit it and everything will be over.” Out of fear, my father admitted it. The gunman smiled and then shot both of them through their heads. I saw everything and then was kicked in the stomach and lost consciousness. When I woke up I was in a hospital. I was told my parents were dead and that my sister had been stabbed to death. There was an investigation, but nothing ever came of it. I left town with a promise that I would rectify the problems that were so wrong in our community. I joined the Moro National Liberation Front and am fighting to put an end to these abuses of power.

Scored for Spiritual Activities (I left town with a promise, etc.).

16. Marlance’s Story (spiritual), age 28
I never knew what love was. Rage and hatred filled my heart. I dabbled in other religions and witchcraft searching for the truth. But something was missing. I used to be into evil and cultish things. I was finding my satisfaction in alcohol, drugs, and women. My brother had been harassing me for weeks to come to a Singles for Christ meeting but I always dodged him. My friend also told me I should come to a meeting. Finally I went and I noticed something different among those students. They had something that I didn’t have. I thought to myself that these people are real and I like what they have. After the meeting, a speaker gave me an analogy about a septic tank filled with years of waste. He said your hearts can become like that over time until you’re standing in years of garbage. But Jesus loves us and will wade through the muck to reach us. The speaker said that I could pray and surrender my life to Christ and He would forever change me. I remember saying to God, “If this is real, I want you to come into my life and change me.” I felt new instantly. It was the first time in my life I felt someone loved and cared for me. I have peace and joy because He has come into my broken places and brought healing. Amy Winehouse’s death had a powerful transforming impact on me and I have not used drugs or alcohol since she died of alcohol poisoning. She was a talented singer. She was rich and famous. But what good did it do her? God is teaching me how to become a man. My friends are helping me move away from secular things, and I’m spending more time resting and reading the Bible. Many people I used to be like are broken and empty. I want to introduce them to Jesus and tell them the incredible hope I have in him. Now I
Noime’s Story (secular), age 34
This will be my first time to narrate the story of my life and how it has been changing for the better. I am a single mom, my children have different fathers, and I have a living partner who is a Muslim. A month ago we separated because of an unforeseen event that changed my life forever. I used to be a drug pusher. I sold drugs to students, parents, government officials, and civilians in our town. Money was abundantly flowing, and I became a user and a pusher of what I sold (shabu). The presence of money in my life has never helped the financial status of my family. My children have had tough times eating foods that growing kids should have. It’s my mom who is looking after them instead of me. I was a slave of money. Getting drunk and high every night was a real definition of life to me back then. Until one day this event took place. I didn’t have any idea that I was already one of the threats in the community that I live in. I was a menace that was ruining the life of every person who availed my product. Huge numbers of police and Philippine drug enforcement agents raided our house and confiscated everything inside that was used for making illegal drugs. I was apprehended. People saw me on the local news; I was the talk of the town. I was put into jail; the first week was total hell. I cried almost 24 hours, seven days a week. I was locked alone in a four corner room that was dark and cold. Then I realized I was no longer a free person. I never allowed my mom to visit and see me in jail for I knew I would break down in tears. Even my two children were never allowed to see me. I felt so sorry for myself and I made a promise that if there was ever one day to get out of jail legally, I would never hesitate to do that and would rectify my life for the better. I was able to post a bail for my case but it cost us an arm and a leg. What compelled me to make this promise? The love of my mom for me and my love for my children, who have been endlessly bullied at school after I was apprehended because of illegal drugs. Now I’m in the recovering stage of my life. Although it is inevitable to be occasionally insulted by people and be laughed at when I walk in the streets of my town, I just don’t mind them because I’m now a better person and I do hope that my life story will touch other people’s lives, especially the lives of youth. If you’re ever engaged in the things I used to do, please think again. It is a hell that you’ll never want to get yourself into.

Spiritual Emotions (the love of my mom for me, and my love for my children), Spiritual Activities (I’m in the recovering stage of my life).

18. Lezerlie’s Story (spiritual), age 25
My wife and I were married at an early age because she got pregnant. We knew nothing about birth control or how to prevent pregnancies. We moved in with her parents until we could afford to rent a place of our own. I worked very hard while she stayed at home and took care of our baby. I felt cheated. I had been robbed of my youth. I began to flirt with other women and before too long I was having sex with half a dozen of them. This was lots of fun, but it took me away from my wife and baby. My wife found out about my conduct and complained to the priest who had married us. He insisted on seeing me and laid down the law. I rejected his advice because I felt that he had no right to tell me what to do. The stress got really bad, and my wife began to have fainting spells. She was diagnosed with dengue fever and almost died. I prayed night and day for God to save her life. I read the Bible over her bed, and she was very touched by my devotion. Then I decided it was time for me to grow up. What was done was done. We read the Bible together, and came across the passage of how only someone without sin is permitted to condemn a sinner. So my wife forgave me, and I have remained faithful to her. We applied Biblical principles and saved our marriage. We offered each other mercy while we were trying to change, and we succeeded.

Scored for 3 Spiritual Activities (I prayed night and day; I read the Bible; we applied Biblical principles).

19. Leonora’s Story (spiritual, age 52)
I used to live a life that was simple but full of love from everyone. My husband and I were married for 15 years. We had three children; the eldest was 14, the middle was 10, and the youngest was 3. We lived in a small town in the countryside. We may not have had much money, which could have
enabled us to live in a big house with a swimming pool, or to travel abroad. Ours was a family filled with simplicity and love among each other. We had a small farm, which we cultivated for our living and to send our children to school. It helped us eat three meals a day. What else could I ask for? Nothing. But things changed. In the middle of the year, there was some sort of unexplained epidemic that slowly ravaged our town. It claimed the lives of the elderly and of children throughout the town. There was no doctor because we lived very far from the city. But I never thought that I would be blamed by the townsfolk for the epidemic that was slowly killing the inhabitants of the town. I was being labeled as a witch and claimed to be practicing witchcraft that caused this epidemic. Things got even worse when I was nabbed by the local officials and forced to answer all the allegations being thrown at me. I am a devoted Catholic woman and I do not practice or possess any knowledge of witchcraft. Lastly, I don’t know any reason personally as to why I should do that. I explained my side to them, and they let me go free, but I knew that they were up to something. I knew that I was right. One night while we were sleeping, three officials from the town’s office got into our house and diabolically stabbed everyone inside including me. I thought I was going to die, but I didn’t. I was able to jump out of the window and God spared my life and I only got some minor wounds in my arms. I wanted to fight back but I couldn’t. I felt so helpless. Afterwards they burned the house and killed my family. I cursed everyone in the town and I was certain that I would avenge my family who were victims of useless hearsay. For months I lived alone in the mountains, waiting for a perfect time to avenge my family. On Christmas, the town was having a small functional dinner. Since the hall was made out of bamboo and light materials, I decided to burn everyone alive. I stole one gallon of gasoline from a nearby barn. As it got later in the evening everyone became drunk. At 1 AM, my plan came to realization. I burned the hall down and everyone inside it. No one survived except for the women and children who went home early. The town officials, the murderers of my family, the people who spread the witch rumors about me, and the people I hated and cursed were all inside. I couldn’t live my life shouldering the burden and getting up every morning dealing with the fact that I would be forever alone. I might have turned into a demon but deep inside I think I was able to give justice to my loved ones. I didn’t go away after that. I was just watching the fire slowly eating these people. After that I was put into jail and got sentenced to lifetime imprisonment. I never regretted anything after that because I did it out of the love for my family. I still have quite a few more years here in jail but it is okay since there is no one waiting for me on the outside. But I highly believe that my family is waiting for me in the next life.

Scored for 2 Spiritual Activities (God spared my life; I think I was able to give justice to my loved ones); Spiritual Settings (my family is waiting for me in the next life).

20. J.T.’s Story (secular, age 29)
When I was a teenager, I indulged in a lot of excessive behavior – sex, drugs, and alcohol. The only member of my family I was close to was my lolo [grandfather]. One day he died suddenly from a heart attack. I was stunned and was sad. Hundreds of people came to his funeral. I had no idea that he had affected so many people’s lives for the better. Seeing my lolo lying in the coffin, while being visited by so many people during his wake, made me think that he must have done good things, worthwhile things, when he was alive. Suddenly I felt scared of dying young because I might get a disease from all these unhealthy habits instead of enjoying life to the fullest like my lolo did. Now I want to travel to other countries. I want to inspire other people and that is the main reason why I decided to make my life inspiring to others. Of course, changing your life means turning away from the old things that you used to do and, believe me, it’s not easy. There were times when my mind said to stop doing these things, but my body did them anyway. It was a process and now I have a life worth showing to others.

Scored for Spiritual Activities (he must have done good things), Spiritual Emotions (feeling scared).

21. Santos’ Story (spiritual), age 57
For many years I was one of those unscrupulous inhabitants in our city. I used to rob houses, rape women, and get high, then pick-pocket people. If hell were real I would definitely be going there. I was an irresponsible father of two children and a bad husband to my wife. Without my wife’s knowledge, I have fathered three children, all with different women. One night I was dead drunk and high. I was on my way home when I decided to stop at a near-by convenience store. I wanted
22. *Marife's Story (secular), age 35*

I never thought my life would become so unusual as a result of an extraordinary experience two decades ago. My family and I were heading for a summer vacation in the countryside. We were riding in our car with our two kids and my husband was driving. We were only 10 kilometers away from our destination when an old woman made a sudden crossover on the highway and my husband immediately swerved the car, preventing us from running over the woman, causing us to falling off a 500 meter cliff. All I can remember is that we were all shouting for help inside the car and the two kids crying out. I then lost consciousness. According to the townspeople in the area we were immediately rushed to the nearest hospital. They thought that nobody would survive the wreck. My husband has sustained fractures in his left leg, my two children had broken ribs but we had survived. However, my story was a little different. I was in a coma for 18 months. My family sold almost everything we had and were on the verge of giving up. The doctors advised the family that they could resort to removing the life support and accept the fact that I would be gone forever. They even discussed this with my parents and in-laws, saying that they had to remove the life support to no longer prolong my agony. But a day before the removal of my life support I woke up. I was very thirsty and the first thing that I saw was my family surrounding me. I couldn’t move my legs and arms that much but I couldn’t stop crying because they were all there around me. A few days later I was discharged from the hospital. Since then my life has changed to a whole new level. I’ve been giving talks to women in the correctional facilities, sharing the beauty of life with those people who’ve become hopeless in their life, and also with those who are terminally ill. I am also a volunteer at the department of social welfare and development where we help people who are being victimized by human trafficking and the like. I nearly died but was transformed by that experience.

Scored for Spiritual Activities (a day before the removal of my life support I woke up; I’ve been giving talks...to those who are terminally ill).

23. *Manuel's Story (spiritual), age 59*

I cannot remember how many people of all ages were victimized by me. I started robbing at the age of fifteen. I had to do it or I would die from starvation. I remember my first victim was a student going to school early in the morning and the second was a government employee heading home from work. I could no longer remember who the next victims were. As time passed by everything was getting worse. Women, sex, drugs, and money; these meant the world to me. I even got myself involved in the notorious gangs of the country. We stole cars, robbed houses of the rich, and robbed banks. Because of these robberies, I got my own house and car but I knew all along...
these were all temporary. One day, our gang was planning to rob the Bank of the Philippine islands. We pretended we were customers. A few minutes after we got inside we started firing into the ceiling. People were terrified; customers and employees started hiding under tables. One of the robbers shot an escaping man. I was shocked as I might have been in that position. I might have been really wicked through the years but I never killed anyone or watched someone die in front of me. The next few minutes were more horrifying. We hurried to go to our getaway vehicle bringing two million pesos with us. The bank immediately reported this robbery right after we escaped. The policemen were after us. We were concerned and we didn’t have a choice but to fire at them. We exchanged bullets; two of our men were shot fatally. More policemen were coming. I was shot twice in my right leg. Due to bleeding I passed out and when I woke up I was lying in a hospital bed handcuffed and guarded by two policemen. I had to get composed because the next thing I realized was that I was being amputated. That very day my life changed. Things would never be the same again. The doctor had to do this because the bone in my leg was severely damaged and it caused severe bleeding. I got discharged out of the hospital five days later and was jailed. I started to blame God. I even promised to take revenge on those who did this to me. I cursed the world. But it did not do anything good for me. I started to get depressed. Then one day I asked myself "What if I do something strange from this day, what if I do things that I used to not do?" The first thing I did was go to the chapel inside the prison. Then I listened to the homily, then the next thing, I found myself reading the Bible which was the first time I did it. Seven months later I was baptized and welcomed in the Christian world. I served my sentence for twenty years. The day I was released from prison I made a vow to never look back on the past but to move on. Now I’m a pastor in my town’s chapel and am married with three children. I never thought I would reach this point in my life, the robbery incident; the shooting and amputation were the instruments of my turning point to a harmonious life. Indeed, life can always surprise you.

Scored for 2 Spiritual Activities (I made a vow; I’m a pastor); Spiritual Settings (my town’s chapel), Spiritual Emotions (life will always surprise you).

24. Marcos’ story (secular), age 70

I used to be a soldier in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. I was mainly assigned in the jungles and mountainous areas of Mindanao fording hunting for rebels. I had to do this to protect the Philippine government and the Filipino citizens. Because of this, killing rebels was at first very traumatic for me. I couldn’t even sleep at night but as time went by killing them was just a normal thing that I had to do to fulfill my duty as a soldier of my country. I rarely saw my family when I was working. I only got to see them twice a year or every six months. I never witnessed my two children growing up. And their feelings toward me were somewhat jaded. I bet they were kind of hesitant to call me papa back them. One year I was able to spend Christmas season and New Year’s with my family, and then two days later I had to leave them again for my work. It was very chaotic at that time when I came back to my duty. Rebels were on the rampage. We had to stop them from getting into towns and act like ordinary inhabitants, then it would be very difficult to identify them. One Thursday night it was pouring rain the whole day. Our camp was attacked by about 50 armed men. We were truly outnumbered by them. Many of our men were killed; some jumped into the river to save themselves but some of us stayed and fought. I was shot on my right leg by a sniper. I felt the excruciating pain as the bullet got into the bone. I hid myself under banana leaves. Then there was a moment of silence. They got into our camp and carted away all of our ammunition, food, and batteries. I just continued hiding. I knew that my chances of getting killed were high. It would be either be killed by them or killed due to bleeding. Either way, death awaited me. But maybe it wasn’t my time. Half an hour later, reinforcements arrived. But the rebels were very fast in escaping into the jungle. One of my comrades found me unconscious and they immediately brought me to the nearest hospital. I was flown to one of the hospitals in Manila because my left leg had to be amputated due to the serious damage to the bone and the internal bleeding. Upon hearing this, I was devastated. I thought I should have died in the battle. When the wound healed, I started practicing to walk with the help of a walking device and I was advised to take a one year leave from the service. I felt helpless and useless. I should be working to help my family meet their daily expenses. Slowly, my frustration changed into something better, something that I look forward to as I wake up each day. Now I get to see
my children every day. I am able to spend time with them after school. I read them a story every night before they go to bed. I spend quality time with my loving wife. And one day I just said to myself, “Wow! Being a father is a more fulfilling job than being in the field and risking your life.” I wanted to spend more time with my family so I filed for early retirement. Luckily, I got an office job. Although the salary isn’t high, I’m no longer risking my life. I guess being a father and providing for your family is one of the noblest and most fulfilling jobs in the world. Every Wednesday, I volunteer to work in a nearby orphanage and on Saturdays I help those fellow soldiers who have suffered the same thing that happened to me when I was in the field. Now my life is better, more organized, and I feel lighter. I no longer have to kill rebels and I’m so happy.

Scored for Spiritual Emotions (my frustration changed into something better, etc.); Spiritual Activities (being a father...is one of the noblest and most fulfilling jobs in the world).

25. Sophie’s Story (spiritual), age 40

I started using drugs in my 20s. I was dating a guy who was addicted and though I didn’t like the drugs he did, I was head over heels for him. In my mind if I just gave him enough love I would be able to cure him. Yes I thought I was the answer to addiction, they say love conquers all. After a few years I realized he wasn’t going to quit so I did the old, if you can’t beat him join him stunt, and join him I did. I was shooting up cocaine within a few months of trying drugs, and believing that love would conquer all, my love of cocaine cost me everything else in my life. I did other drugs, pills, meth; but cocaine was all I thought about. Not the four beautiful girls that loved and needed their mom, not even about the guy I thought I loved so much, I was out trading everything in my world for that next shot. I did realize at one point that life was spiraling out of control, but I had no way of stopping the train wreck I knew was ahead. In 2001 everything blew up. I was with someone trying to score dope and a man got killed. I was arrested and charged with capital murder. I sat in jail fighting for my life for 2 years while the courts sought the death penalty. I cried, I screamed, I prayed, I begged. I longed for my children, and my dad. I prayed to die yet continued breathing. On the day of my trial I wasn’t sentenced to death, instead I was given 10 years. Prison was the strangest life I had ever imagined, it was such a different world. I wasn’t allowed to even write to my kids. Rather than see any of this as trouble of my own making, I got angry. I was mad at the state, it’s my choices that have determined my path and if I don’t change I’m going to die in jail, or by my own hands. But I know I really have changed. What I have been through is a part of me now. Over the years I’ve gained wisdom, met amazing people, lost amazing people. Now I want to help people, but first I’ve got to help myself the judge, the prosecutor, God, and anyone that stepped into the world I was stuck in. As the years went by my heart hardened, my emotions died. It was 7 years before I was released, and in those years my sister committed suicide, my children grew up and learned to hate me, my dad and mom grew old, and life had gone on without me. I thought those years there had cured my drug problem, no, it was waiting for me. I had a hard time trying to adjust to life. I found courage in a pill bottle and within a couple of years I was back in jail on a new charge. I served out that sentence, then got high and went back again. I have only been out of jail a month now. Yes, I did drugs since my release but then realized that I don’t want to be that person anymore. I also know. I created my house of pain, but I’m definitely ready to move out. My life changed when I realized that I had lived there long enough. Please pray for me and the strength for me to change.

Scored for Spiritual Characters (God), 2 Spiritual Activities (praying; please pray for me), Spiritual Emotions (got angry); Spiritual Settings (my house of pain).

Conclusions

Many centuries ago, the Greek philosopher Epictetus wrote, “It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that’s important” (N.P. White, 1983, p. 11). Events might shape one’s life, but the meanings that an individual attaches to those events will be even more influential. This differentiation needs to be kept in mind when seemingly contrasting TTEs are reported. An abortion is an event; one’s reaction to an abortion is an experience. Hence, having an abortion for the sake of family planning and ceasing providing abortion services are events; but the reactions to those events are experiences. In this study, similar events led to very different experiences. It was those experiences that became TTEs. The same can be said for joining the Filipino rebels and dropping out of the group. What seems to be contradictory from one perspective can display congruence at another level.
These narratives can be considered “personal myths,” as described by Feinstein and Krippner (2008). From a psychological perspective a “myth” can be described as a narrative (e.g., a statement, a story) that provides explanatory meaning to an existential life situation, a meaning that has behavioral consequences. People live most of their lives within these myths, even though they can be contradictory (reflecting ambivalent feelings or conflicting situations) and limited by external mythologies (as often is the case with refugees, war victims, or the destitute recipients to whom Mother Teresa devoted her life, living out her TTE). Even in these extreme cases, a modicum of meaning can promote survival, whether short-term or long-term.

Transpersonal transformative experiences (TTEs) cannot be completely reported in their richness and fullness. But when put into narrative form, they can assist identification when they occur, using (among other procedures) the definitions and/or instrument described in this paper. Once identified, they can be studied by means of phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnouautobiography, multiple case studies, and other methods. The Casto Spirituality Scoring System can be used not only for identification purposes, but to assist in completing a report that inadvertently left out such items as Spiritual Settings or Spiritual Emotions. At this point, they can be changed if they are found to be dysfunctional. For example, Feinstein and Krippner’s six-stage process (2006) is one procedure that can be used as a self-help tool or as a therapeutic or counseling guide.

TTEs can play a vital role in counseling, psychotherapy, and self-help. Whether they last a few minutes or extend over several years, whether they are experienced by one person or a group of people, whether they are spiritual or secular, their recognition and awareness of their importance can be a major contribution of transpersonal psychology. For example, the question of ethics and morality need to be raised when someone experiences a TTE; as we have seen, some TTEs are life-affirming, while others are life-denying. An understanding of the phenomenology of terrorism is a key issue that transpersonal psychology is well-equipped to explore. Therefore, transpersonal psychology can do more to alleviate suffering today than at any time in its history.

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References