Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

"This Is What Real Spirituality Is All About": A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Spirituality Outside Institutional Religion

Pninit Russo-Netzer

"This Is What Real Spirituality Is All About": A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Spirituality Outside Institutional Religion

Pninit Russo-Netzer
University of Haifa

Processes of personal and individual spiritual change outside institutional religion lack common moral guidelines and authority as well as accepted systems of beliefs and truths. Despite the existence of studies on processes of spiritual change outside religious doctrines (Fuller, 2001; Kraus, 2014; Streib, Hood, Keller, Csöff, & Silver, 2011), the issues of veracity, genuineness, and validity in such contexts remain unaddressed. This study used a qualitative-phenomenological approach to explore how individuals who experience spiritual change outside institutional religion construe such issues during their spiritual journey. In-depth interviews with 27 Israeli adults (13 men and 14 women) undergoing such change revealed a pervasive concern with realness and major touchstones they developed as criteria to identify what they perceive as real spirituality: others-oriented touchstones (dogmatic vs. open, unmediated, and autonomic conduct; and seclusion vs. coping with real-life complexities) and self-oriented touchstones (bodily experience that provides a sense of ultimacy and attentiveness to signs).

Keywords: spirituality, authenticity, qualitative methodology, boundary work

Spiritual development, change and transformation can be identified both within and outside the boundaries of institutional religious practice and tradition (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). Within religions, such processes are maintained and facilitated by religious rituals; shared activities, beliefs, and traditions; and recognized and esteemed spiritual agents (e.g., Pargament & Mahoney, 2009). In such contexts, individuals can often rely on clear structures (e.g., ideologies, practices, coping resources, symbols and context) and established spiritual agents (e.g., pastors, priests, rabbis and imams) to foster a sense of coherence and security (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Kinnvall, 2004; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Both of these contribute to an individual's sense of control, life purpose, and security, and to positive psychological outcomes and well-being (Emmons, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2005; Park, 2007; Silberman, 2005) as well as coping in challenging and stressful times (Park, 2013; Park, Edmondson, & Hale-Smith, 2013). Furthermore, religion provides a coherent and organized view of life and a set of values, standards, and guidelines for living life in a meaningful and worthy way (Krok, 2014; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003), all of which promote a sense of control, certainty, and efficacy (Park, 2005).

By offering an agreed-upon system of beliefs and worldviews that involve guiding global moral meaning systems from birth to death and beyond, as well as knowledgeable authorities, religions provide clear guidelines as to what is true and valid as well as how to distinguish it from what is fake and false. In contrast, processes of personal and individual spiritual change outside institutional religion lack common moral guidelines and authority as well as accepted and agreed upon systems of beliefs and truths. Without such a clear, structured meaning system, individuals may be left without the predictable, understandable, and certain stability which grants a sense of overarching purpose and direction to life (Park et al., 2013). Despite the existence of studies on processes of spiritual change outside religious doctrines (Davidman & Greil, 2007; Fuller, 2001; Kraus, 2014; Streib, Hood, Keller, Csöff, & Silver, 2011), the issues of veracity, genuineness, and validity in such contexts remain unaddressed. It is particularly unclear how individuals construe these processes (Heelas, 1996; York, 2001). This study sought to explore how individuals who experience spiritual change outside institutional religion construe issues of veracity, genuineness, and validity during their spiritual journey.

The issue of truth and veracity, and the extent to which individuals believe in and look for so-called objective and clear truths, is closely linked to cultural processes related to postmodernity. The introduction of postmodernism presented a significant shift toward epistemological pluralism (Hoffman & Kurzenberger, 2008), which questioned the modern assumption of unity and knowable ultimate truths (Hoffman, Stewart, Warren, & Meek, 2009). The anomic postmodern condition brought with it uncertainties, fragmentation, and the collapse of metanarratives (Bauman, 1998; Wood, 2007). In the face of fragmentation and loss of community and tradition (Shafranske & Sperry, 2005), individuals are faced with the challenge of personally searching for and constructing their own life meaning without the clear guidance of traditions and modern structures. In this context, traditional forms of authority have been displaced by alternative forms, including a turn to radical ideologies (Bauman, 1992); a surrender to the promises of the consumer "pleasure machine" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2010); a search for self-fulfillment through psychotherapy (Illouz, 2008);

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Pninit Russo-Netzer, Department of Counseling and Human Development, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, Haifa 31905, Israel. E-mail: pninit.russonetzer@gmail.com

and an uninstitutionalized spiritual search for meaning (Fuller, 2001; Roof, 1993, 1999), which is the focus of this study.

The phenomenon of individualized spirituality outside the boundaries of institutional religion is becoming increasingly commonplace in Western societies (see Fuller, 2001; Roof, 1993, 1999; Streib et al., 2011). For example, the Value Social Survey data has led to reports that since 1998, the number of Americans who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious has risen from 9% to 14%. Among young people (Ages 18 to 29), the proportion is even higher (Chaves, 2011). In addition, the majority of an international sample, roughly 64% of 6,725 youths from eight countries (Australia, Cameroon, Canada, India, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States), reported that their spiritual development unfolded without the assistance of explicitly religious practices (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen, & Roehlkepartain, 2012).

In Israel, which has undergone a discernible transition from a collectivist-hegemonic ethos to an individualistic and globalized one, along with cultural and ideological fragmentations with regard to identity and belonging, the search for alternative arenas for spiritual meaning has gone beyond traditional religious frameworks (Beit-Hallahmi, 1992). The last two decades have seen a rapid proliferation of various alternative spirituality ideologies and practices that gradually penetrated mainstream culture (Ruah-Midbar & Zaidman, 2013; Werczberger & Huss, 2014).

This form of "believing without belonging" (Davie, 1994) often constitutes an alternative to institutionalized religiosity in the form of individualized spiritual searches for ultimate meanings (e.g., Roof, 1999), which are often referred to as *alternative spiritualities*. These involve open and authentic searches for self-realization and the sacred (Davie, 1994). However, the self-accountability and freedom that characterizes this context, coupled with what has been described as the "consumer supermarket," or the commodification or commercialization of spirituality and its appropriation (Heelas, 1996; Heelas, Lash, & Morris, 1996; York, 2001), may have ramifications for how individuals construct their spiritual processes and identities. In the absence of a sanctified authority to relate and attend to, the anti-institutional posture of spiritual-but-not-religious is often characterized by the rejection of hegemonic religious authority (Heelas, 1996; Roof, 1993, 1999; Tucker, 2002). Furthermore, the emphasis on "self-spirituality" (Heelas, 1996) and "epistemological individualism" (Partridge, 1999) sanctifies the individual's right to seek experience and ascertain truth (Redden, 2016).

Hence, in a context of relativism and eclecticism, in which there are no clear and structured guidelines, fundamental uncertainties concerning what is right and wrong, meaningful and meaningless, real and unreal, and good and bad emerge all the more forcefully. The typically pragmatic attitude ascribed to alternative spiritualities involves "picking out" what is "true for me" (Sutcliffe, 2000, pp. 28–32) or "tinkering" (Wuthnow, 2007), which reflects a postmodern stance that "there are no universal truths and that all ideas are equally valid" (Tucker, 2002, p. 49).

The present study sought to explore, from a phenomenological perspective, how individuals undergoing spiritual change outside institutional religion experience and address such uncertainties. Are they interested in what is truthful or real? If yes, how do they discern what is truthful in their self-led spiritual experience and how do they choose among a myriad of alternatives?

Method

This study adopted the phenomenological prism because of its focus on exploring the meaning of phenomena in human experience (Giorgi, 1997) from the perspectives of the individuals themselves (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Phenomenology is essentially a qualitative inquiry into humans' "lived experience" (van Manen, 1990), which involves the intentional consciousness of life (Dilthey, 1985). Lived experience refers to experience as lived through people's actions, relations, and situations of human beings. Phenomenology thus attempts to identify the internal meaning structures or essences of lived experience through a study of its particulars (van Manen, 1990). This study, conducted with a sample of adults who chose to participate and share their experiences on their own volition, involved several steps to respect the autonomy, privacy, and anonymity of the participants, as indicated in the Procedure and Data Analysis sections.

Participants

Participants were recruited using a variety of methods to obtain as broad and diverse a perspective of the phenomenon as possible, such as advertisements in various areas (i.e., ads hung in places such as college and university campuses across the country, community centers, and locations where potential interviewees might be, such as workshops and festivals) and advertisements and invitations on Internet forums (such as those on social media and various virtual communities and forums that address spirituality, in a broadly defined way). In addition, participants were recruited via the snowball technique (i.e., in which one participant recommends other potential interviewees; Babbie, 1995). The open, broad invitation read, "For an in-depth study, we are searching for individuals who have undergone, or are currently undergoing, spiritual change in their lives."

The sample size in the present study was determined using the saturation principle, as is customary in qualitative studies: Data were collected and analyzed until no new themes emerged (Padgett, 1998). The sample was composed of the first 27 people who responded to this invitation and met the criterion of having experienced spiritual change outside their institutionalized religion. In this specific case, this meant they did not describe themselves as participating in an organized traditional Jewish community. Three respondents to the invitation who described spiritual change within their institutional religion were excluded from the study.

The final sample included 13 men and 14 women who came from a variety of spiritual orientations, including transcendental meditation, new Kabbalah, Buddhism, and Shamanism. Despite their reports on a current preferred and perhaps dominant orientation or practice, all of the participants described a quest that incorporated several spiritual orientations that together formed their current worldview. In their actual practice, they mixed aspects from different spiritual frameworks. Nevertheless, the in-depth analyses of their interviews indicated that for all the participants, the process of change was experienced as fundamental and resulted in the creation of a new postmodern committed spiritual identity that included several coexisting dialectics (see Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2014). Moreover, they experienced the process of spiritual change as work on the self, which is comprised of two complementary processes: uncovering and cleansing the

self—the spiritual-psychological facet; and expanding and rising above the self—the spiritual-transpersonal facet (Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2016).

The participants were all Israeli Jews and came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (51.9% were Ashkenazi, i.e., of European American descent; 33.3% were Mizrahi, i.e., of Asian-African descent; and 14.8% were of mixed descent). Ages ranged between 25 and 66 years ($M = 45.3$, $SD = 10.9$). Participants' levels of education ranged from high-school graduates (28%) and graduates of technical schools with a professional diploma (28%) to college graduates (44%). Their marital status was also diverse: 14 participants were married, six were divorced, six were single, and one was widowed. At the time they were interviewed, participants reported different lengths of their change process, ranging roughly from 5 years or less (four participants), 5 to 10 years (10 participants), 10 to 15 years (10 participants), and over 15 years (three participants).

Procedure

In-depth, face-to-face, semistructured interviews were employed, lasting between 1.5 and 3.5 hr ($M = 141$ min, $SD = 39.82$ min). The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. Prior to each interview, the participants signed an informed consent form, which specified the purpose of the research, its procedures, and the voluntary nature of participation, as well as the right to stop participating in the research at any time.

All of the interviews began with a general, open-ended question inviting the participants to speak about the spiritual aspect in their lives, allowing them to share spontaneously and describe their personal and subjective experience as freely as possible in their own words. This question was,

> I am interested in the personal experiences of people who have undergone, or are currently undergoing, a change in their lives which they define as spiritual. Could you please tell me how you experience the spiritual aspect of your life?

Participants were asked additional open-ended probing questions to encourage them, whenever necessary, to elaborate, clarify meanings, reveal unexplored issues, or provide further details and examples in order to attain an in-depth understanding of their subjective experiences (van Manen, 1990). All of the interviews were conducted in the participants' homes at a time convenient for them so that they would be in a familiar environment (Creswell, 2007) that provided the conditions needed to freely and spontaneously develop their story in their own way, pace, and language.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using a phenomenological approach in order to obtain a more profound understanding of the process of spiritual change participants underwent. First, the interviews were all read independently several times to obtain an overall impression of the participants' experiences, until reaching a sense of immersion.

Next, "meaning units" (Giorgi, 1975) the participants had expressed were identified, using an "open coding" process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These meaning units were then used to create descriptive categories of basic themes and thus construct an initial framework for further analysis.

The various categories and basic themes then were reexamined and compared for possible connections across individual meaning expressions as well as between participants. At this stage, the different general and unique themes were grouped across the interviews into clusters of similar issues that fell into two main categories.

Although presented here as a linear process, in practice it was more cyclical, with each stage building upon its predecessor, for each case separately and across all cases. As such, it involved a dynamic and repeated back-and-forth between the parts (i.e., texts and quotations) and the whole (i.e., the entire transcript) as well as between units of meaning and general themes (e.g., van Manen, 1990).

There are various criteria of quality in qualitative research, including validity, rigor, trustworthiness, fairness, authenticity, and credibility (Morrow, 2005). Qualitative research relies on the researcher as the instrument for analysis (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In the phenomenological approach, exploring the participants' essential experience beyond the researcher's subjective preconceptions is a process known as *epoche* or bracketing. This process is used to increase the rigor of the research (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The method of writing a reflexive research diary (Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004) was employed throughout the process in order to record the researcher's reflections and interpretations (van Manen, 1990) as a main way of bracketing (Giorgi, 1975; Husserl, 1960). In addition, triangulation of the interpretations was facilitated by an ongoing process of critical discussion of the data with independent colleagues; reflections and insights were conducted and then documented (van Manen, 1990). Finally, all of the interpretations were grounded in direct and rich excerpts from the interviews (Stiles, 1993).

Results

Thorough analysis of the interviews clearly demonstrates that participants were preoccupied by the need to identify real, genuine, and true spirituality (*Amiti* in Hebrew, meaning both true and real), and to distinguish it from the fake or the false. This was evident in various places throughout the interviews with all of the participants, which suggested that this was an underlying common fundamental theme in participants' experiences. Participants specifically underscored the multiplicity of options available in the spiritual marketplace of ideas, teachers, and workshops, which also involves, in their experiences, a great deal of "junk," "frauds," and "charlatans." This demonstrates the participants' need to identify that which is real and discern it from substitutes. For example, Gideon (all names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants) articulated his experience:

> When you head out on the spiritual path, when you start searching, you enter a giant supermarket of potential charlatans and frauds. Yes, just like that. Just as anything else, the spiritual realm is flooded with junk and in order to identify quality, you need to work harder. It is always a question of whether a person is willing to settle for the junk or strives to explore deeper and farther. When it comes to matters of the spirit it is harder since there is junk in different guises and you need a guideline. You need to find a way to identify and distinguish them. [Gideon, male, 51]

Boaz, a 63-year-old male, expressed a similar sentiment, highlighting the need to identify and choose that which is "true" from myriad options and alternatives:

> You see, from my experience, 90% of the people within the New Age world are a fraud. It's because we are all so thirsty to find relief for our misery and there are people who exploit that. I have tried everything in my spiritual journey. . . . There are so many alternatives out there, so many workshops. . . . Unfortunately there are charlatans, it's like in the Wild West movies when you see people who travel to sell water that if you drink it you will live for another 20 years. It's exactly the same thing here, I'm afraid.

In the face of so many choices and alternatives, the participants emphasized that external appearance or image only obscures the authentic and internal intention. It is thus unreliable and even deceptive, as illustrated in the following example offered by Roey, a 44-year-old male:

> When you get to know the real spiritual way, which is so vibrant and so exciting, you cannot settle for the fake anymore. You just know that this is the real deal, and it demands its price, its commitment, practice and devotion, but it is real and it has no substitute. There is no substitute for the truth. I cannot replace it with something that distances me from this truth, even if it may be more comfortable. It's like the difference between watching TV and real life when we are watching a show on TV we are absorbed in it; some people live like that all the time. But for me, real spiritual development means to leave the show and see the TV set itself, the device which enables us to experience the show.

Such distinction between real spirituality and its external appearances was also reflected in the participants' emphasis on that which does not require mediation but internal intention:

> Take someone religious, for example, he can wear fringes on the corners of his upper garment [in accordance with Jewish ritual] and phylacteries, he can obey the religious commandments [mitzvah], but if he doesn't do it with the full intention of the heart—then he is basically doing nothing. It is all mechanical [automatic]. To me, it is something that is very internal, not something that is right or wrong to do. It is the intention to really turn inward and look for meaning, to develop your soul. This is what being spiritual really means. You can say that this is what makes spirituality authentic, real. [Amit, male, 51]

Similarly, Dror, a 49-year-old male, asserted that real spirituality is internal and does not require any mediation, which he and other participants perceived as external:

> The real thing is formless, nameless, it does not need any mediation, it just is. Anyone can reach it, it's a part of being human, you do not need any rituals or Reiki or what have you for it.

The internal and somewhat elusive feature of real spirituality, as perceived by the participants, implies the complex challenge involved in identifying it and the efforts it demands to go beyond mere superficial or external appearances and characteristics. This is reflected in the gap the participants recognized between customary or popular perceptions of spirituality and what they consider real spirituality, as illustrated in the following example:

> Whoever is really spiritual is very earthy. I mean, contrary to everything I used to think before I became spiritual myself and unlike what

it may be popular to think about spiritual people, they are not hippies who move from one practice to the next, do drugs, chant and dance in India or wear white all day and smile This is sometimes how spirituality is perceived, but now I know it's something entirely different. This is not real spirituality. I am suspicious when I see a person who gets dressed in white and looks enlightened, it seems fake, inauthentic it deters me, I cannot connect to it. Real spirituality is here, it's in being a human being, no need to put on a show or play. You can just be who you are. [Mira, female, 57]

Participants' Touchstones for Identifying Real Spirituality

How did the participants discern what is true and real? The phenomenological analysis revealed four major touchstones that the participants developed as criteria to identify what they perceive as real (or true) spirituality. The first two categories constitute the theme of others-oriented touchstones: First, dogmatic versus open, unmediated, and autonomic conduct; Second, seclusion versus coping with real life complexities. The participants adopted these touchstones to discern how truthful and accurate other people are and how real the spirituality that they represent or teach is, as opposed to being fake and false in their conduct and teaching. Two additional categories constitute the self-oriented touchstones: (c) bodily experience which provides a sense of ultimacy (deep truth), and (d) attentiveness to signs.

Others-oriented touchstones.

Dogmatic versus open, unmediated and autonomic conduct. The articulated need to identify and distinguish real spirituality from various alternatives led the participants to develop personal criteria which enable them to navigate their way through the multiplicity and variety of practices, workshops, and methods. The participants testified that they evaluated teachings that they were exposed to using several guidelines: whether it was presented as dogmatic authority, that is, immutable dogma, or as something that allows exploration and is open to questioning:

> Trying to give explanations or provide mediation to it is *not* the real thing, because no one actually knows; and anyone who tries to explain that the spiritual operates in one way or the other just tries to promote or publicize him or herself, to sound reasonable in the eyes of people who may understand less than him. But they do not really aim to further the awareness or understanding of those who understand less than them, because you can only allow people to explore, to experiment. The commercialization of the different methods emphasize that they are not the real thing, but just a disguise. [Dror, male, 49]

The participants emphasized that being open to questions and doubt, and even welcoming criticism, is a sign of authenticity, which implies that those seeking real spirituality must adopt an uncompromising attitude, demonstrate autonomy, and invest energy and effort. The following is an example of this:

> My experience from learning all sorts of spiritual teachings taught me that those who I consider as gems rather than dirt or charlatans are the ones that encourage questioning. They encourage you to keep asking questions, to explore, to enquire, not to take anything for granted. . . . I think that the criterion is whether your questions are welcomed or blocked when you ask. If they are blocked, it is a sign that there is something to be suspicious of. And you can block questions in various ways. You can say. "It is accepted and customary in our tradition" or

"Don't explore the beyond," which is in fact a way of shutting mouths or for example, "It worked for so many years so that's the proof." You know, all of those responses that are meant to oppress or block the question. I do not accept that. So this is a very important guideline for me. To question, to doubt, to even criticize the very thing I specialized in. [Gideon, male, 51]

Tali articulated a similar description of this touchstone, emphasizing the difference between dogmatic holding on to knowledge as opposed to letting go:

In one of the courses I took I felt very uncomfortable with the teacher I wanted to understand things in-depth, to the source, but somehow I had the feeling that she was holding on to it, she was not willing to let go of it, to enable others to ask, to understand, to explore. I couldn't understand why she was not willing to let go. [Tali, female, 53]

Aharon described his skepticism toward the various methods and workshops he was exposed to through his process of spiritual change, and asserted the importance of a humble attitude rather than arrogance or an air of expertise:

I went to all sorts of workshops, festivals and each time I was amazed to listen to people whom I felt are not entirely genuine, or pure, or whole, and it took me a lot of time to understand that there is no such thing as someone who knows everything and can teach me everything. . . . In different spiritual workshops that I attended, when I asked why things are as they are they couldn't give me a satisfactory response. To say, "because I know that it's like that," it's not . . . I would say to a person, see if that's right for you. Try. It's a possibility, some kind of perspective . . . It is very clear to me now that people experience something that they feel they want to pass forward, and they are not perfect, they do not have to know everything. They shouldn't presume to know everything, to be some kind of an enlightened guru who knows everything. [Aharon, male, 66]

The participants' accounts highlight the importance of self-reliance as a guideline for validating their experiences. This illuminates one's personal responsibility, as illustrated in the following excerpt from Yaron, a 26-year-old male:

It is first and foremost a process that is yours, because only you can make a change, and at some point you realize that you are doing it alone. Some people may show an approach, give you some tools, show you the door, but only you can open it and go through it and this is where real spirituality lies.

Seclusion versus coping with real-life complexities. The participants also emphasized that the essence of real or true spirituality is reflected when it is not disconnected from ordinary everyday experiences in the real world:

The way I see it, being spiritual, *really being spiritual*, is measured in the here and now, in the way you act in your everyday life and in this world, the real world, with the people around you. It's not as easy as it sounds when you live in the Western world, I live in Tel Aviv, with all that it entails, there are many opportunities and temptations that would not exist if I isolated myself and meditated in a cave or sat in peace and serenity up in the Himalaya mountains, for example, but running away is not the real deal. The challenge is to be connected, this is where real spirituality lies, this is also where healing takes place. If everyone secluded themselves, what would happen to mankind? [Shay, male, 34]

Gideon also distinguished between an idealization of spirituality which is associated with asceticism and seclusion, and the reality of daily life:

Let's see you be spiritual in the bank and in the central bus station; this is the challenge. This is where real spirituality counts, and this is much harder. . . . It's not like something that you achieve and it's like a pink cloud made out of feathers and you just float in the heavens. It is something that you work on all the time. All of the spiritual insights are really measured in how you implement them in real life. Because life in the real world, and especially here in Israel, is full of nonspiritual things, allegedly nonspiritual and the question is how you deal with it. To be really spiritual is to connect, rather than separate, real life and spirituality. [Gideon, male, 51]

Alon pointed out that spirituality cannot be separated from other human dimensions such as the physical and psychological:

I think that people who practice spiritual practices can sometimes become addicted to it in the sense of wanting to stay in this state of high, of spiritual experiences it's very magical of course and sometimes can be ecstatic, but it's not real because you cannot leave your psychological issues, your physical life behind and go to live in some kind of monastery in the East, practice meditation and be happy. It doesn't work that way. We cannot ignore what surrounds us and the other parts of us, such as needs and our mental and emotional structures so only when spirituality is exposed to real life, can you say it is real. [Alon, male, 35]

To sum up, the first theme highlights two main categories, reflecting the participants' efforts to discern whether something (i.e., spiritual practice) or someone (i.e., spiritual teacher) embodies and reflects spirituality that is real: openness to questions and inquiry rather than being dogmatic, and involvement in the challenges of daily life rather than being secluded or detached. The participants appeared to rely on themselves to examine and validate these criteria.

Two main self-oriented touchstones, which support and complement these other-oriented touchstones, were also found.

Self-oriented touchstones.

Inner knowledge, feelings, and bodily sensations that provide a sense of ultimacy. The participants described their attentiveness to bodily experience and sensations when they encountered a certain spiritual practice or teacher during their spiritual development. Such sensations were experienced as revealing a quality of ultimacy or deep truth which is direct and unmediated. Amit, for example, describe these sensations as a rule of thumb for him:

With time I have developed some kind of inner sense. . . . You try and you check, and look for whatever it is that gives you a tingling sensation in the stomach, a sense that it is true it comes from within. Anything that feels like narrowing or constriction and burdensome you know is not true, and anything that allows an expansion, a sense of openness, is the truth. This is really a rule of thumb for me. But if you are not connected to your heart, you do not know what to believe or not to believe anymore. [Amit, male, 51]

Nathan, a 40-year-old male, also referred to the importance of being connected as his own guiding criterion:

There is a powerful sentence that someone once said to me that stayed with me and serves as the compass that directs my way. It says that truths connect. When you are in a place of truth, then things connect.

When they are not, then it is probably some kind of an illusion. When I heard it, I felt a connection to it. Because if a person tells me something that is real, he or she will know how to find that connection with me.

Yogev described bodily experience as one which he identified with an inner knowing of what is right or real:

You feel it in your gut. We all feel the answer in our gut. Some call it intuition; I call it, "the knowledge of the heart." Often we are afraid to go there and to listen and afterward we regret we didn't and say, "I knew it, I felt it was true or false." If you are open-hearted you get an answer. In here [points to his stomach] you know it is the right answer. [Yogev, male, 53]

Dorit, a 52-year-old female, emphasized that finding the right place is associated with a strong emotional experience rather than a rational or logical decision:

It's a feeling that I have arrived home this is the feeling, that you are home. And it's not a kind of informative knowledge but something else it's an inner experience that you feel from within, in your whole being. It is something which is internal and infinite.

Attentiveness to signs. Another type of self-oriented touchstone described by the participants was their sense of being guided through events they interpreted as signs conveying messages and direction. For example, Rachel said,

It's like someone is paging you, transmitting a message it's like receiving a text message from the universe that I need to read or listen to. You get guidance when you are ready, and it reveals itself in the form of a sign. Sometimes it's someone that you meet or something to read that somehow made its way into your hands and you say, "Wow, there's nothing random in the world."

Ziva referred to her inner sense of guidance, which was validated via signs or messages, as a stronger source of direction than logic or rational thought:

I am very attentive to signs, messages sometimes you need to get a lot of bumps, hardships in this place in order to learn to listen to it I know that if I feel that something is not right or true for me I will not stay even if it doesn't have any rational explanation. And it always proves itself in retrospect. When I follow my inner sense that something isn't right, even when I do not know how to explain it to myself, I usually get a sign or a message which validates that it is true. I do not need proof or logical explanations. This is what you call faith. [Ziva, female, 44]

Some participants described unique experiences which embodied for them a sense of being guided on a path which is true and right for them. Such experiences involved signs that led to sudden realization and deep understanding. For example, Alon described an experience that he interpreted as a sign for his personal development:

I remember I reached a situation where I couldn't deal with my helplessness anymore, I felt stuck. I remember myself walking on the beach and screaming to God, crying and cursing, "Why do I need all of this, what are you trying to teach me?" and then for one Minute I stood in silence, I waited for an answer. And I do not know what arrived first, the words or physical sensation of some kind of expansion, but it sunk in . . . this realization. At that moment, I fell on my knees and felt shivers all over my body. I was grateful to God, to the

world, to whoever confronted me with this sense of helplessness, this realization. I felt that I was given a sign, of what is right. Ever since this experience, when I encounter this sense of helplessness in the process, I know that it is a sign, here is my mentor, my teacher is here. In the places where we do not know to stop ourselves, the universe stops us. [Alon, male, 35]

A similar experience of being guided to trust one's inner conviction as a source of truth was also described by Roey:

I remember it like it was yesterday. It's raining outside, a storm. I am driving in my car, turning into one of the intersections and a young bird crashes into my front windowpane! Just like that. I'm shocked, I do not know what to do. I see this little chick quivering on my windowpane. I stop, take it by the hand and see there is nothing that can be done, and put it aside. But I know, I know there is something there for me. This is some kind of sign for me. I do not know what yet, but there is something. And I remember this very vividly, this was a moment when I told myself that I need to trust, that I know what is right for me in this process. I realized that I needed to do something. It was something internal within me that knew and understood the forces of the universe, that there is some kind of personal guidance, that it exists and I decided to follow this inner conviction and not some external norms or truths that would tell me, logically, what I should do with my life. For me that experience was like a rebirth, it's like that chick that sacrificed itself so I could be reborn . . . reborn from an egoistic person who only wants for himself, to a person that seeks to take responsibility and influence others, from a place of darkness to a place of light I had some kind of faith that was inherent within me that if you are doing the right thing, even if there is a lot of uncertainty, things will work out I knew deep within that if I will go on my path, things will start rolling and they did it showed me that once you are synchronized with your inner essence, then it also works out in the corporeal sense. [Roey, male, 44]

In sum, alongside other-oriented touchstones, the participants also reported two central types of self-oriented touchstones they developed in the process to identify what they considered to be real and authentic: sensations that provide a sense of ultimacy (deep truth), and attentiveness to signs that validate their experiences and guide them throughout their process.

Discussion

This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the manner in which individuals outside the boundaries of organized religion make sense of their experience of spiritual processes and spiritual teachings. The themes emerging from the analysis of the interviews elucidate the importance and meanings the participants ascribe to real spirituality and the way they discern it. In this sense, the findings illuminate a possible way of coping with the postmodern challenges of pluralism, freedom, and choice by utilizing these very same qualities to navigate their journey, and arrive at that which is real and true for them.

However, at the same time, they did not demonstrate an eclectic and idiosyncratic "pick-and-mix" (Hamilton, 2000), drifting, or the pragmatic "take-it-or-leave-it" experimental approach (Rindfleish, 2005) of what comes effortlessly (i.e., "if it works, good; if not, move on;" Sutcliffe, 2000, p. 32). Rather, the participants' lived experiences indicated that they were committed to investing efforts in an uncompromising search for the true and genuine.

The importance the participants ascribed to discerning and selecting that which is true and real is reflected in their use of strong

descriptors, such as "fake," "junk," or "bluff," as part of their efforts of demarcation. The firm and even devaluing language the participants used may underscore the symbolic value categorization through which they attempted to create the boundaries of what "real" means and distinguished it from other inappropriate elements that did not align with its nature and essence, as they perceived it. The attribution of selected qualities to real or true spirituality compared with what is not considered as such appears to reflect a process through which the individuals are defining self-constituted boundaries between what they find as desirable and acceptable and that which is not. In other words, the participants employed boundary work, that is, drawing a symbolic boundary between real and false spirituality, as essential to their experience in the spiritual field.

The term *boundary work* refers to "the process by which individuals define their identity in opposition to that of others by drawing symbolic boundaries" (Lamont & Fournier, 1992, p. 233). More specifically, *identity work* refers to the "work of individuals to create, present and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348). In accordance with this, and given its internal, subjective, and idiosyncratic nature, the participants' efforts to draw and maintain such symbolic boundaries appeared to serve their need of self-definition as demanding and committed, distinguishing themselves from the traditional or popular view of spiritual drifters. "Junk" may unconsciously reflect something commonplace, easily accessible and superficial, whereas "real" may symbolize a more subtle and profound nature, which is harder to access.

Drawing symbolic boundaries between the realms of the inauthentic and the authentic, the participants attempted to form touchstones that enabled them to discern what should be included in, and excluded from, the realm of the real. Such practices and touchstones, in turn, shaped their experiences, the way they understood themselves and their spiritual quests.

Personal Touchstones as Stable Anchors for Self-Definition

Religion is central to the meaning systems of individuals across cultures, as it fills a significant role in satisfying universal human needs for coherence, mastery and control, certainty, identity, belongingness, purpose, structure, existential concerns, and behavioral guidance (Pargament, 2002; Park, 2005, 2013; Park et al., 2013). Essentially, religions offer an ultimate value base, which provides its followers with a broad context for truth, meaning, and value: "If God's will is the ultimate criterion of right and wrong, then everyday issues can be decided by appealing to God's laws and commandments . . . empirically, religious systems have often served as anchors for moral systems" (Baumeister, 1991, p. 196).

Outside such a context, disconnected from sustaining frameworks, individuals are challenged to construct personal belief frameworks and address fundamental existential issues on their own. The lack of organized and structured traditional frameworks with obligating norms or authority, coupled with the large variety of methods, teachers, and practices of the" spiritual supermarket" (Lyon, 2000), leave issues of validity and confirmation of what is right or true to the individuals own judgments. The self is thus considered an authority as well as the constructor and creator of norms or standards (Heelas, 1996; Roof, 1993, 1999). This is

reflected in the participants' apparent efforts to perhaps compensate for external and formal authority or an indicator to suggest what is of quality or value in their process through their own self-constructed guidelines.

The participants referred to both self- and other-oriented touchstones. Specifically, the interviews highlight the centrality of experience in decision making as well as the centrality of walking the talk in real life as touchstone for authenticity and ultimacy. This is reflected in two main complementing characteristics of real spirituality: a grounded, real-life spirituality, and one that is flexible enough to allow exploration and inquiry, rather than rigidity, and that encourages openness and pluralism.

The importance that the participants accorded to these characteristics of real spirituality was also reflected in the way they referred to spiritual teachers. Spiritual teachers are expected to exemplify ordinary day-to-day spirituality, in which spiritual changes in their self are manifested in actual practice, along with openness and humbleness to allow questions and exploration.

The importance of spiritual models and/or teachers as exemplars of spiritual development and change is evident in all spiritual and religious traditions (Oman & Thoresen, 2003). Such spiritual modeling is facilitated by social learning, socialization, and observational learning (Oman, 2013).

Yet, in what appears to be a dialectic relationship, the participants in the present study appeared to use the assistance of spiritual mentors and teachers to learn and develop, while making sure that such assistance did not redirect them from what they sensed as internally true and real. Thus, their engagement appeared to be constantly guided by their inner reflection and observation for validation purposes.

The importance of openness, respect for the individual, and independence of the practice, theory, facilitator (the teacher), and way of being in the world is also reflected in attentiveness to guiding signs and bodily sensations that are perceived as sources of ultimacy. According to Pargament, Lomax, McGee, and Fang (2014), *ultimacy* refers to experiences of deep truth or what has been described as embodying the "absolutely true, absolutely real," which thus provides "tremendous authority and legitimacy" (Lomax & Pargament, 2011, p. 82). Likewise, when the participants referred to validating experiences such as bodily sensation and signs, they were described as a source of truth and legitimacy, thus empowering their confidence in their experiences as a source of absolute knowledge (cf. Jung, 1952). Essentially, bodily sensations and guiding signs reflect two complementary forms of experiential, unmediated, and authentic knowing. Both entail a deep, continuous, and mindful self-reflectiveness, which is actively chosen and operates as a source of legitimacy, accuracy, and justification.

This sense of ultimacy and authentic knowing might be what supports a seemingly dialectic in the participants' experiences. On the one hand, they expressed a firm, modern belief in an objective, rather than relativistic, real, and true spirituality that can be identified. On the other hand, they employed self-oriented, subjective touchstones to discern such truth, which rely on postmodern openness and liberty to devise one's own truths.

The enactment of one's internal value base to guide and judge what is right and wrong, true or false, corresponds with Aristotle's (350 BCE/2000) notion of eudaimonia, described as "meaningful living conditioned upon self-truth" (Norton, 1976, p. xi). This is

reflected in "actively and explicitly striving for what is truly worthwhile and is of inherent or intrinsic human worth . . . eudaimonic pursuits are voluntary, and are expressions of the self rather than products of external control" (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008, p. 145).

Indeed, the participants appeared to rely on their own autonomy and intrinsic values as guides to a deeper, more authentic truth which requires an alignment between all levels of being (i.e., experience and interpretation of the body's signals, other people's behavior, everyday life, and the surrounding world through signs). This may explain the value the participants ascribed to the authentic and inherent practice of spirituality as a way of life that requires continuous effort, reflection, and maintenance, rather than instantly gratifying experiences, perceived by them as false and detached from the essence of true spirituality. In other words, authenticity and genuineness appeared to be linked, for the participants, to an unmediated experience rather than to a cognitive understanding.

Paradoxically, spirituality, an elusive mysterious sphere, becomes real and true only when it materializes in everyday living, in signs and in bodily experiences of ultimacy. These provide an anchor of truth to the variety of spiritual processes that participants underwent. This connection between the spiritual and the material perhaps provided participants with a sense of control in an uncertain situation in which they had no control. This is especially relevant in a postmodern society, in which a multiplicity of choices and relativism prevail, and thus make finding the authentic, essential truth more difficult than ever.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Given that the present study was conducted within the specific sociocultural context of Israeli secular Jews, an exploration of other populations as well as cultures appears to constitute an important direction for future research. Such exploration may suggest cross-cultural as well as individual differences in the manner in which people experience, articulate, and discern the meanings of what they consider true spirituality as well as the touchstones or criteria they use to identify its expressions.

Furthermore, although unintentional, the participants in this study revealed the existence of a committed spiritual identity (Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2014). It is thus certainly possible that it is a characterizer of this specific group that is not applicable to all of the individuals who experience spiritual change, and that there are individuals for whom processes of spiritual change are not linked to an intense search for spirituality that is genuine and real. For example, some individuals may look for intense experiences as an end in itself or may not invest in deciphering true spirituality provided something appears beneficial for them. In this sense, it may be interesting to explore whether less committed spiritual drifters are as concerned with validation issues, and if so, how they discern and maintain such efforts in their journeys.

Another direction recommended for future research is exploring the activation and maintenance of boundary work to discern authenticity and ultimacy in the realm of nonreligious spiritual experiences using larger samples and various methods of investigation. Such methods may include longitudinal examination of individually constructed practices and processes to further understand the way in which they develop and change in time.

For example, they may enable to explore whether there are differences between novice and more experienced spiritual seekers in the practices they forge to explore validity, and quantitative methods to learn about possible personal and social outcomes and associations.

References

Aristotle. (2000). *The Nicomachean ethics* (R. Crisp, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511802058

Babbie, E. R. (1995). *The practice of social research* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Bauman, Z. (1992). Philosophy as the mirror of time. *History of the Human Sciences, 5,* 57–63. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/095269519200500305

Bauman, Z. (1998). What prospects of morality in times of uncertainty? *Theory, Culture & Society, 15,* 11–22. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026327698015001002

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Meanings of life*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Beit-Hallahmi, B. (1992). *Despair and deliverance: Private salvation in contemporary Israel*. Tel Aviv, Israel: SUNY Press.

Benson, P. L., Roehlkepartain, E. C., & Rude, S. P. (2003). Spiritual development in childhood and adolescence: Toward a field of inquiry. *Applied Developmental Science, 7,* 205–213. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_12

Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., Syvertsen, A. K., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2012). Is youth spiritual development a universal developmental process? An international exploration. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 7,* 453–470. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.732102

Chaves, M. (2011). Religious trends in America. *Social Work & Christianity, 38,* 119–132.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davidman, L., & Greil, A. L. (2007). Characters in search of a script: The exit narratives of formerly ultra-Orthodox Jews. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 46,* 201–216. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2007.00351.x

Davie, G. (1994). *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without belonging*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Dilthey, W. (1985). *Poetry and experience: Selected works* (Vol. 5). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Emmons, R. A. (2005). Striving for the sacred: Personal goals, life meaning, and religion. *Journal of Social Issues, 61,* 731–745. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00429.x

Fuller, R. (2001). *Spiritual marketplace: Baby boomers and the remaking of American religion*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Giorgi, A. (1975). An application of phenomenological method in psychology. *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology, 2,* 82–103. http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/dspp197529

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 28,* 235–260. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156916297X00103

Gur-Ze'ev, I. (2010). Diaspora, philosophy, and counter-education in the face of post-colonial reality. *Policy Futures in Education, 8,* 358–380. http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.3.358

Hamilton, M. (2000). An analysis of the festival for Mind-Body-Spirit, London. In S. Sutcliffe & M. Bowman (Eds.), *Beyond new age: Exploring alternative spirituality* (pp. 188–200). Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Haslam, S. A., Reicher, S., & Platow, M. (Eds.). (2011). *The new psychology of leadership: Identity, influence, and power*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Heelas, P. (1996). *The new age movement: The celebration of the self and the sacralization of modernity*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Heelas, P., Lash, S., & Morris, P. (1996). *Detraditionalization: Critical reflections on authority and identity*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Hoffman, L., & Kurzenberger, M. (2008). The miraculous in mental illness. In J. Harold Ellens (Ed.), *Miracles: God, science, and psychology in the paranormal* (pp. 65–93). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Hoffman, L., Stewart, S., Warren, D., & Meek, L. (2009). Toward a sustainable myth of self: An existential response to the postmodern condition. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 49,* 135–173. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022167808324880

Husserl, E. (1960). *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*. The Hague, the Netherlands: M. Nijhoff. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-4952-7

Illouz, E. (2008). *Saving the modern soul: Therapy, emotions, and the culture of self-help*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Jung, C. G. (1952). Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle. In *Collected Works* (Vol. 8). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security. *Political Psychology, 25,* 741–767. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00396.x

Kraus, R. (2014). Transforming spirituality in artistic leisure: How the spiritual meaning of belly dance changes over time. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 53,* 459–478. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12136

Krok, D. (2014). Religious meaning system, religious coping, and eudaimonistic well-being-direct and indirect relations. *Roczniki Psychologiczne/Annals of Psychology, 17,* 665–682.

Lamont, M., & Fournier, M. (1992). *Cultivating differences: Symbolic boundaries and the making of inequality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lomax, J. W., & Pargament, K. I. (2011). Seeking "sacred moments" in psychotherapy and in life. *Psyche en Geloof, 22,* 79–90.

Lyon, D. (2000). *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in postmodern times*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Cole, B., Jewell, T., Magyar, G. M., Tarakeshwar, N., . . . Phillips, R. (2005). A higher purpose: The sanctification of strivings in a community sample. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 15,* 239–262. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr1503_4

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophical and practical guide*. London, UK: Falmer Press.

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52,* 250–260. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250

Norton, D. L. (1976). *Personal destinies: A philosophy of ethical individualism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Oman, D. (2013). Spiritual modeling and the social learning of spirituality and religion. In K. I. Pargament, J. J. Exline, & J. W. Jones (Eds.), *APA handbook of psychology, religion, and spirituality: Context, theory, and research* (Vol. 1, pp. 187–204). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14045-010

Oman, D., & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). Without spirituality does critical health psychology risk fostering cultural iatrogenesis? *Journal of Health Psychology, 8,* 223–229. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1359105303008002664

Padgett, D. (1998). *Qualitative methods in social work research: Challenges and rewards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pargament, K. I. (2002). Is religion nothing but . . .? Explaining religion versus explaining religion away. *Psychological Inquiry, 13,* 239–244. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1303_06

Pargament, K. I., Lomax, J. W., McGee, J. S., & Fang, Q. (2014). With one foot in the water and one on shore: The challenge of research on spirituality and psychotherapy. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice, 1,* 266–268. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/scp0000046

Pargament, K. I., & Mahoney, A. (2009). Spirituality: The search for the sacred. In S. J. Lopez (Ed.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 611–620). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Park, C. L. (2005). Religion and meaning. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality* (pp. 295–314). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Park, C. L. (2007). Religiousness/spirituality and health: A meaning systems perspective. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 30,* 319–328. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10865-007-9111-x

Park, C. L. (2013). Religion and meaning. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality* (pp. 357–378). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Park, C. L., Edmondson, D., & Hale-Smith, A. (2013). Why religion? Meaning as motivation. In K. I. Pargament (Ed.), *APA handbook of psychology, religion and spirituality* (Vol. 1, pp. 157–171). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14045-008

Partridge, C. H. (1999). Truth, authority, and epistemological individualism in new age thought. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 14,* 77–95. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13537909908580853

Redden, G. (2016). Revisiting the spiritual supermarket: Does the commodification of spirituality necessarily devalue it? *Culture and Religion, 17,* 231–249. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2016.1183690

Rindfleish, J. (2005). Consuming the self: New age spirituality as "social product" in consumer society. *Consumption Markets & Culture, 8,* 343–360. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10253860500241930

Roof, W. C. (1993). *A generation of seekers: The spiritual journeys of the baby boom generation*. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.

Roof, W. C. (1999). *Spiritual marketplace baby boomers and the remaking of American religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ruah-Midbar, M., & Zaidman, N. (2013). "Everything starts within": New age values, images and language in Israeli advertising. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 28,* 421–436. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2013.831652

Russo-Netzer, P., & Mayseless, O. (2014). Spiritual identity outside of institutional religion: A phenomenological exploration. *Identity, 14,* 19–42.

Russo-Netzer, P., & Mayseless, O. (2016). Spiritual change outside institutional religion as inner work on the self: Deep within and beyond. *Journal of Adult Development, 24,* 1–14.

Ryan, R. M., Huta, V., & Deci, E. (2008). Living well: A self-determination theory perspective on eudaimonia. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9,* 139–170. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-006-9023-4

Shafranske, E. P., & Sperry, L. (Eds.). (2005). Addressing the spiritual dimension in psychotherapy: Introduction and overview. *Spiritually oriented psychotherapy* (pp. 11–29). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/10886-001

Silberman, I. (2005). Religion as a meaning system: Implications for the new millennium. *Journal of Social Issues, 61,* 641–663. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00425.x

Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology, 92,* 1336–1371. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/228668

Spilka, B., Hood, R. W., Jr., Hunsberger, B., & Gorsuch, R. (2003). *The psychology of religion: An empirical approach* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. B. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17,* 1372–1380. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732307307031

Stiles, W. B. (1993). Quality control in qualitative research. *Clinical Psychology Review, 13,* 593–618. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0272-7358(93)90048-Q

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Streib, H., Hood, R. W., Keller, B., Csöff, R.-M., & Silver, C. F. (2011). *Deconversion: Qualitative and quantitative results from cross-cultural research in Germany and the United States of America*. Gottingham, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Sutcliffe, S. (2000). "Wandering stars:" Seekers and gurus in the modern world. In S. Sutcliffe & M. Bowman (Eds.), *Beyond new age: Exploring alternative spirituality* (pp. 17–36). Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Tucker, J. (2002). New age religion and the cult of the self. *Society, 39,* 46–51. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF02717528

Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, 11,* 80–96. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1473325010368316

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario, Canada: SUNY Press.

Wall, C., Glenn, S., Mitchinson, S., & Poole, H. (2004). Using a reflective diary to develop bracketing skills during a phenomenological investigation. *Nurse Researcher, 11,* 20–29. http://dx.doi.org/10.7748/nr2004.07.11.4.20.c6212

Werczberger, R., & Huss, B. (2014). New age culture in Israel. *Israel Studies Review, 29,* 1–16. http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/isr.2014.290202

Wood, R. (2007). The absolutely true metanarrative or a partially true micronarrative? The place of Roman Catholicism in southern literature. *Religion and the Arts, 11,* 503–508. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156852907X244629

Wuthnow, R. (2007). *After the baby boomers: How twenty- and thirty-somethings are shaping the future of American religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9781400831227

York, M. (2001). *New spirituality, self, and belonging: How new agers and neo-pagans talk about themselves*. Washington, DC: Association for the Sociology of Religion.

Ysseldyk, R., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2010). Religiosity as identity: Toward an understanding of religion from a social identity perspective. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14,* 60–71. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1088868309349693