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Original Article

# Transactional Analysis Theory and Spirituality

Vildan Saruhan<sup>1</sup>

Istanbul Aydın University

## Abstract

A great deal of importance has recently been given to studies dealing with the spiritual aspect of psychological theories and approaches; the aim has been to shed light on the spiritual aspect of humanity through these conducted researches and compilations. The current study aims to explain the perspective of transactional analysis on spirituality in terms of the theory of interpersonal relations and the extent of spirituality on the understanding of transactional analysis. Mainly the views of Berne and the researchers following in his footsteps have been taken into consideration. The experience of self-transcendence has been referenced by elaborating on the concept of autonomy, which occurs in spirituality through transactional analysis. By forming a framework over the transactional analysis view on spirituality, a perspective is offered towards transactional analysis patterns and spirituality along the axis of transaction and ego states. Family prisms, which are especially effective in the process of working with families in the understanding of transactional analysis, are clarified along the axis of spirituality. In addition, brief and summary information is presented about the pilgrim model, which guides transactional analysts regarding the spiritual elements a client brings during the consultation process. This study aims to show that the understanding of transactional analysis is a theory of relations and that therapists do not exclude spirituality from the counseling process but reference spirituality, particularly when focusing on ego states, intimacy, and autonomy, although not on all the concepts discussed along the understanding axis. For this purpose, the study aims to give the point of view on spirituality in transactional analysis theory by compiling the research that has been performed.

## Keywords

Transactional analysis • Autonomy • Intimacy • Self-transcendence • Spirituality

## Transaksiyonel Analiz Teorisi ve Maneviyat

### Öz

Son yıllarda psikoloji kuram ve yaklaşımlarının maneviyat ögesi ile birlikte ele alındığı çalışmalara büyük ölçüde önem verilmiş, gerçekleştirilen araştırma ve derlemelerle insanın manevi yönüne ışık tutulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu çalışmada, kişiler arası ilişkiler teorisi olarak Transaksiyonel Analiz'in maneviyata bakış açısı ve maneviyatın Transaksiyonel Analiz içinde ne ölçüde yer bulduğu açıklanmak istenmiştir. Temelde Berne ve onu takip eden araştırmacıların görüşlerine yer verilmiştir. Transaksiyonel Analiz'in maneviyatı içine yerleştirdiği "otonomi" kavramı üzerinde durularak kendini aşma deneyimine değinilmiştir. Transaksiyonel Analiz penceresinden insan gelişimi ve maneviyata yönelik bir çerçeve oluşturularak transaksion ve ego durumları ekseninde Transaksiyonel Analiz yapılarına ve maneviyata yönelik bir bakış açısı sunulmuştur. Transaksiyonel analiz içerisinde özellikle ailelerle çalışma sürecinde etkili olan aile prizmaları maneviyat ekseninde açıklanmıştır. Ayrıca, danışma sürecinde danışanın getirdiği manevi unsurlarla ilgili olarak Transaksiyonel Analistlere yol gösteren Pilgrim Modele ilişkin kısa ve özet bilgiler sunulmuştur. Bu çalışmada Transaksiyonel Analiz teorisi ve terapistlerinin aslında maneviyatı danışma sürecinin dışında tutmadıkları, ele alınan tüm kavramlarda olmasa da özellikle ego durumları, yakınlık ve otonomi odağında maneviyata değindikleri gösterilmek istenmiştir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, gerçekleştirilen araştırmalara yer verilerek derleme yoluyla Transaksiyonel Analiz teorisinden maneviyata bir pencere açılması amaçlanmıştır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Transaksiyonel analiz • Otonomi • Yakınlık • Kendini aşma • Maneviyat.

1 Correspondence to: Vildan Saruhan, Department of Educational Sciences, Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Istanbul Aydın University, Istanbul, Turkey. vildansaruhan@aydin.edu.tr

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## **The Basic Philosophy of Transactional Analysis**

The theory of transactional analysis, which deals with fields of psychology such as communication, development, psychopathology, and personality, reflects a humanistic approach that addresses people positively (Akkoyun, 2001). Many applications have been developed by those in Berne's inner circle, and researchers have continued to research this approach, which is based on Eric Berne's intuitions regarding human nature and behavior (Kandathil & Kandathil, 1997). The main interest of transactional analysis is to inspect the systems that accompany behavioral patterns (Berne, 1988). In other words, it discusses ego states, which are referred to as a coherent discussion of emotions, thoughts, and patterns. Ego states are the ways formed by individuals' self-experiences and world experiences at any time (Stewart, 1996). Each person shows three ego states: parent, adult, and child. In the ego state called parental behavior, individuals tend to behave similarly to how one of their parents acts, thinks, feels, talks, and reacts. The parent ego-state becomes active particularly when an individual raises children. Even individuals who do not behave in this ego state have behaviors that are affected by the so-called parent effect (Berne, 1988). In particular, disruptions in early relationships cause ongoing effects in the parent and child ego states and the relationships between them. The aim of therapeutic relationship is to understand and reorganize this effect and ensure the formation of an integrated adult ego state (Sandle, 2019). The adult ego state refers to the ego state in which individuals observe their environment objectively and evaluate opportunities by learning from past experiences (Berne, 1988). This ego state refers to individuals who observe, perceive, and consider data properly and who come up with unbiased solutions (Solomon, 2003). The child ego state is the ego state in which individuals feel the little child they had been within themselves, how they had once felt, thought, acted, talked, and responded. The child ego state cannot be described as immature and childish. Understanding the child ego state as an important and everlasting part of the individual is vital (Berne, 1988).

In brief, individuals can act, think, and feel like one of their parents or another parental figure without criticizing them. One can be understood to be in the parental ego state when behaving as such. Sometimes individuals can revert to the behaviors, thoughts, and feeling they used to have back when they were a child. One can be understood to be in the child ego state when behaving like this. Individuals who can use and access resources when interacting with their environment, thinking and feeling as an adult, can be understood to be in the Adult ego state (Stewart, 1996).

The purpose of transactional analysis is to activate and enhance the adult ego state. This is performed through educational contracts, which include techniques such as: addressing changes in the individual's self and/or others, adding questions about individual interactions in the process, and insight. Applications adapted from gestalt

therapies such as changing activities, dream studies, and learning through reflection are used in the process of transactional analysis for specific purposes (James & Jongeward, 1971).

Parents unconsciously teach their children how to behave, perceive, and feel. Getting rid of this is not easy because this is an effect with deep roots and requires biological and psychological therapy early in life. Getting rid of these effects is only possible by activating the individual's autonomy (capacity for awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy) and having the ability to judge which parts of the parental disciplines are acceptable. The purpose of transactional analysis is to gain autonomy, which occurs by releasing or recovering the three capacities of awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy (Berne, 1968).

### **Autonomy, Intimacy, Self-Transcendence, and Spirituality**

Autonomy implies freedom of insight, which represents being purified of the poor behaviors, compulsions, and images that prevent free decisions and inhibit inner voices. For this reason, autonomy refers to being able to be aware of these images and to make decisions in specific situations. When an autonomous person experiences transcendental intimacy, it actually enters the spiritual realm. The inner value of the other is accepted through deep thought and intimacy (Kandathil & Kandathil, 1997). Psychological intimacy is located between the spiritual concepts known as self-transcendence and self-harm. This is not a paradoxical situation. Individuals have the possibility of giving themselves to others and sustaining themselves when they have experienced self-transcendence. Psychological intimacy is momentary unification of people around a common task, the fusion of emotions, and interlocking of individuals (Berne, 1968).

In psycho-social development theory, individuals overcome the intimacy step through productivity. Developmental progress is achieved through wisdom (Erikson, 1993). The self-transcendent process of intimacy surpasses the individual's personal needs. Individuals begin to examine others' attitudes and others' needs become important to them even though others' needs differ from their own. These differences are not a source of disturbance but become subject to overthinking (Kandathil & Kandathil, 1997).

Kandathil and Kandathil (1997) stated in their study that Berne's notion of intimacy was not simply a part of autonomy but an integral part. When autonomy and intimacy combine in an individual, one transcends and escalates to a new level of experience. Spirituality is what is meant by this level. Love of mankind is both the seed that spirituality grows in and the fruit of spirituality. While autonomy offers the experience for self-transcendence, it also offers intimacy to those who have already



transcended and are on this path. For many people, being spiritual is a personal characteristic. Hence it is perceived as a rational experience of interrelationships and the transcendent. Transcendence is an experience beyond the boundaries of the transcendental and material universe, it contains everything that revives and gives ultimate meaning to life (Wilson, 2012).

### **Transactional Analysis, Religion, and Spirituality**

Studying the dialogue between religion and psychology in various terms is difficult (Nelson, 2009). Empirical research has shown significant connections to exist among religion, spirituality, and health. Yet the reason for these connections is unclear. In general, religion and spirituality are measured by global markers (i.e., self-assessing devoutness and spirituality, the frequency of participating in church) that do not specify how or why religion and spirituality affect health. Dimensions such as intimacy with God, religious or spiritual tendencies, religious and spiritual support, and religious and spiritual struggles are psychosocial structures in a sense and have roots in religious and spiritual world views as well as in psychological theory (Hill & Pargament, 2008).

Most of the research on the effect of religion has focused on the criteria of psychological, social, and physical health. Yet the most popular aspect in religious individuals and societies is religious rather than psychosocial health. To have belief, to feel a part of religious life, to have an ultimate sense of purpose in life, and to acknowledge God are very important criteria in the religious world. This does not mean that psychological, social, and physical well-being is unimportant. Rather, it implies that spiritual, psychological, social, and physical well-being, which must be understood in the framework of an ultimate criterion, can coexist (Pargament, 2002).

Spirituality refers to transcendental experiences where integrity and divinity are experienced beyond a human's normal limits (James, 1981). It is more of a concept about living and experience and is often expressed in words such as self-transcendence and self-realization. All these meanings are due to the use of the term spirituality. Yet the experience of self-transcendence is the common denominator of all meanings and is seen as the basis of spirituality (Kandathil & Kandathil, 1997).

Although studies are found that integrate transactional analysis with religion, they have deficiencies based on a model of easy to use where all psychotherapists can use it independent of their religious beliefs. Because almost everyone is affected by religion, the therapist's cautious entry into this area is important (Milnes, 2017). Sandle (2019) stated that transactional analysis is supported by spirituality. In an ever-changing world, he emphasized the experience of spirituality as a dynamic experience of balance in a functional definition of physical, emotional, and relational

self-balance. When self-balance is experienced, the individual's consciousness grows and feels stronger.

With basis on the pioneering work of the transactional analyst Muriel James regarding the human spirit and Eric Berne's humanistic views on the essence of the problem of mankind and self, Mellacqua (2016) critically examined the contribution of transactional analysis to religion and non-religious spirituality. In his study, he stated that a need exists for understanding devoutness and religious psychopathology and that spirituality and a need to understand the complex interfaces of spirituality are needed to develop transactional analysis. These factors are very important, both because of the existential dilemmas as well as the difficulties the clinician faces in practice when considering a person's religious and spiritual experiences. Because both devoutness and spirituality are extraordinarily rich parts of the human experience and social life, defining these concepts is difficult.

Berne's systematic views in his writings on God are scarce, which to some extent can be seen as an exclusion of God, but he is considered to have been unable to cover religious topics adequately due to his sudden death. However, Berne indicated in various points of his work readers' attention to religious and spiritual subjects. He included certain parts of transcendence and existential aspects of human life including the self (or essence of being) in the theory of transactional analysis. In fact, Berne symbolically loaded the issue of the self (or essence of mankind) onto philosophers, metaphysicians, and theologians; by doing so he designated the ideas of the self and the spiritual (Mellacqua, 2016).

### **Transactional Analysis Patterns and Spiritual Processes**

Transactional analyst Muriel James (1981) emphasized the spiritual aspect of human life. He stated that people had mostly been defined through the terms of body, mind, and spirit, but that the concept of spirit became ignored in the Western world with the discovery of modern psychology. With the influence of Eastern thought on the Western world, this perspective has changed, and the new focus has been on a holistic approach. Based on the pioneering work of Muriel James in transactional analysis, Mellacqua (2016) stated spirituality to be both within the subjective domain of mankind as well as to have exceeded it. He predicted the existence of a transcendent reality/dimension general defined as spiritual or spirituality, both within and without the individual. This experience is beyond the structures of the body, including the brain and structures related to psychology such as ego and the self.

The inner self includes the mental/spiritual self and is part of the whole of the personal self. Because this is common for all people, it is also universal. The inner self is the center of one's existence, whether or not one is conscious open to its power.



When the inner self remains closed for a long time, courage and power are required to reactivate it because the boundaries of the inner essence have solidified and become impermeable, just as in the boundaries of the ego states. Statements from clients such as “I wish I was dead” or “I wish I was free” show the life-enhancing impulse has been hindered. However, the mental side of one’s personality can be active despite painful feelings and serious psychological problems. When faced with death or loss of freedom, many people are found still able to experience spiritual power (James, 1981).

Under healthy conditions, allowing the soul to enter into the subconscious, unconscious, conscious and unconscious levels of the mind enables one to experience spirituality through the psychological, relational, and physical states of ego in the stages described under psychosocial spiritual development. In a broader sense, this process is one in which spirituality can vary in different ways, such as God, nature, universe, and others (Mellacqua, 2016).

Pursuing an ultimate sense of purpose through spiritual, religious, and sexual expectations with a cultural process contributes to the context in which children are born and raised. Spirituality affects the milestones and transitions of life through celebrations in religious practices (e.g., marriages, funerals). Spirituality can be seen in daily life in the forms of fasting, lighting candles, chanting, and praying individually or collectively. It can bring together or alienate different generations or family members. As individuals improve themselves and construct relationships with each other around spirituality and reality, they experience the dynamics of transactional analysis (Massey & Dun, 1999).

References to spirituality and rituals in the family can appear formally or informally in conversations or routines, or can be addressed through issues limited to special cases. Transactions can be experienced personally in the family and supportive of life, as well as punitively for justifying shame or limiting/restricting guilt (Erskine et al., 1994). Transactions can also indicate reflective internalizations and habits. In developing relationships and creating families, couples create traditional ways of interacting with religion and spirituality. As much as these are important to couples, they may also cause couples to develop ways of interfering with their families, changing previous routines or creating other options (Massey & Dun, 1999). On a more experiential axis, spirituality refers to the individual choice of making an intimate connection to their spiritual relation, which describes their desires, possibilities, and the sacred. Understanding the nature of the object and of the object’s relation both to the transcendental and the sacred becomes more difficult when defining the elements that makeup spirituality (Mellacqua, 2016).

Ego states are used to refer to the phenomenological manifestations of psychic organs (exteropsychic, neopsychic, and archepsychic) that function to organize

internal and external stimuli. These energies, described as psychic organs, refer to the mind as the pre-development mind, the external mind, and the current mind (Erskine, 1988). In other words, they indicate the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of the mind. These psychic patterns are structural regulators, and ego states are the phenomenological signs of the activities in these spiritual patterns (Akkoyun, 2001).

People remember and become aware of spiritual and religious experiences through ego states. In their extero psychic ego-state, people selectively interiorize models around the ideas, values, emotions, and behaviors offered by others, their reflections and definitions. Their own comments are kept in the archetypal ego state. Some people continue to trust either or both of these ego states in identifying themselves through repetitive habits and traditions (Massey & Dun, 1999).

According to Massey and Dun (1999), who discovered spiritual and religious processes through the prisms of family systems, individuals and families differ in terms of expressing spiritual processes and openness to communication. For some, spiritual experiences and endeavors are related to religious dedication and devotion. For those who think spirituality is a resource for welfare, this aspect is churches. For some, it is an aspect of avoidance, escape, denial, and rejection. Seeking spirituality, transcendence, or life's ultimate purpose in professional work and accepting or allowing religious processes does not require incorporating others' experiences or possibilities. Berne and his transactional analyst colleagues gave little importance to spirituality in human development and therapy. Yet, spirituality, religion, and pursuit of purpose are quite important for many people in various cultures. Prisms, where social influences and unique identities merge in the evolution of spirituality and religious expression, are also useful for families.

### **Spirituality and Clinical Applications**

Although some therapists are found who are interested in the emotional, behavioral, social, and cognitive aspects of life, this is not the case for all therapists. Many therapists know the spiritual dimension of life and give it importance. Therapists can only expect the client to reveal this dimension; the therapist cannot initiate a direct discussion and therefore may give the impression that spirituality is not part of the process. Likewise, unless the therapist does do this, the client may not bring the spiritual dimension into the process either. By behaving this way, clients may give the impression that spirituality is not a part of their life (Trautmann, 2003).

In the consultation process for transactional analysis, therapists should proceed according to Berne's suggestions and limitations as well as those of the transactional analysis theorists and practitioners that followed. Simultaneously, each therapist utilizes the fact that the client is searching for change and growth; the therapist



recognizes the perspective and reality of this search (Clark, 1991). For many people, spiritual and religious processes are phenomenological and sociocultural facts. Multiple dimensions, including adapting and the spiritual dynamics in meeting a client, require professionals to be knowledgeable, competent, and responsive to clients' various personal and cultural frameworks. Because spirituality is very personal and not seen as the subject of therapy, spiritual issues need to be addressed with great respect. While a socially oriented theory cannot explain the spiritual experiences and practices completely, individuals who are spiritually engaged are affected by the dynamics that occur in the structures of transactional analysis. Considering the dynamics and processes that are both socio-psychological and spiritual, one can say this situation sheds more light on the full human experience potential (Massey & Dun, 1999).

### **The Pilgrim Model**

Milnes (2017) discussed the Ancient Greek concept of knowing by combining the word *logic*, which means knowing through logic and science, with the word *myth*, which means knowing through religious stories. He then presented the Pilgrim model, which is based on transactional analysis. He stated that this model could be used when working with people of all beliefs and that the model could provide a function for further developing religious/spiritual transactional analysis.

Milnes (2017) designed a model in which classical consultative analysis could be used to identify and demonstrate to clients their spiritual journeys, whether or not they are religious. The Pilgrim model represents an individualized journey that most people travel to advance on the path of meaning and knowledge. In this model, the concepts of ego states are used to describe a person's faith in the child, adult, and parent ego states. The Pilgrim model serves as an analytical tool to help people from any belief tradition use both the structural ego states and functional ego states in order to analyze the sacred journey based on the individual's development. It can also provide an inclusive framework about the intersections between model, religion, and transactional analysis.

Through religious narratives, the practice of knowing and acknowledging through logic can be applied to people from all religious traditions. The Pilgrim model guides transactional analysts and other aid professionals while intervening with religious and even non-religious clients. It encourages experts to help clients discover the spiritual pathways for understanding and knowing when providing psychological counseling. The model promotes therapist-client dialogue with regard to the spiritual/mental journey. The model is a tool that helps practitioners consider religious and spiritual issues in their processes with a client. Guiding the client appropriately is recommended in order to be able to talk about their religious background. This process



requires care and sensitivity. The therapy process focuses on helping the consultant understand the client's mental development rather than eliminate the client's beliefs (Milnes, 2017)

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

This study addresses the various studies that have been conducted with regard to spirituality in transactional analysis, the interpersonal relationship theory developed by Berne. Studies in this field in the literature show that processes exist that touch upon humans' spiritual aspect in therapy processes, and a need exists in this field to study these processes. Using humans' religious and spiritual elements in psychotherapy processes requires professionalism. The therapist must be competent regarding the spiritual or religious elements the client brings. Lawrance (1983) reported most misunderstandings between psychotherapy and clients' religions stem from semantic differences. He also emphasized that these semantic differences can create resistance in the client. Therefore, therapists' awareness of their own competence when a client brings religious or spiritual processes into the counseling process is important.

In the transactional analysis studies involving spirituality, therapists need to know the basic principles of transactional analysis in terms of professional competence and need to create a certain denominator in which understanding can integrate with spirituality. This denominator includes both the sensitivity to be taken into consideration in the spiritual-oriented psychological counseling processes and the combination to some extent of theoretical knowledge and application skills. Nowadays with the increase in research, humans' spiritual aspect cannot be ignored. With the increase in research on spirituality, the emphasis on spirituality in therapy processes has become an important focus for researchers. When a client comes to counseling, including religion and spirituality while taking a detailed history can be functional if the client is bringing a fundamental issue to the process or if spirituality is a resource that can support and strengthen the client's process. Therefore, spirituality can be the source of the client's problem or a source of support that is important in the client's life. In both cases, having the client incorporate spirituality in line with the therapist's competence and skill set will be important, as opposed to ignoring it. Experts with a certain amount of knowledge about the moral elements a client may bring to the consultation process using transactional analysis is considered able to encourage clients and provide a more therapeutic environment for interrelating. Because religion is an element affecting everyone's life, having therapists who are confident in this area is important (Milnes, 2017).

This research has tried to present thoughts about spirituality and transcendence with a particular emphasis on the concepts of transactional analysis. That no local



research is found to have dealt with transactional analysis understanding or the spiritual processes of human beings and that no research exists in this framework in Turkey are shortcoming. The basic philosophy and spiritual processes of the understanding of transactional analysis are considered to be assimilated within each other and can be used more effectively and accurately in the consultation process. This study has only explained the view of transactional analysis over spirituality and the relationship between some fundamental concepts of transactional analysis and spirituality. Interventions have been introduced at a minimum. This is a limitation of the research. In subsequent studies, how spirituality can be used in transactional analysis can be supported by case studies.

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