VIRGINIA SATIR: AN INTEGRATED, HUMANISTIC APPROACH*

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ABSTRACT: This article traces professional and personal influences that helped Virginia Satir to shape her worldview. She was an integrative humanist who included body, mind, emotional, and spiritual processes to transform systems ranging from the molecular to the cosmic. Her theories and techniques offered a wellspring of hope and possibility to individuals as well as large assemblies. The presentation of a case with young, abused children demonstrates her use of self (through physical touch) by sensitively reframing the cycle of violence as an opportunity for safe, cooperative contact.

KEY WORDS: Virginia Satir; humanism; family therapy; individual therapy; spirituality; systems transformation.

Virginia Satir’s model of family therapy begins with the utmost value and respect for the uniqueness and miracle of each individual. She often commented that although we have many similar parts, there are no two people exactly alike. Each fingerprint, iris, and voice tone is unique. She often began her workshops or community meetings with a meditation to “center” each individual through appreciation of distinct experiences and attributes (Banmen & Banmen, 1991). Satir’s belief was that the elevation of internal and external consciousness is a necessary ingredient for developing healthy individuals, families, and communities. Knowing contact with our internal self facilitates “I-Thou” connections with one another. Satir demonstrated through her life and

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work that contact with the self and the other was a sacred, spiritual event. In this vein, the following meditation will poetically portray this goal in her clinical and training approach to the field of family therapy.

**Connectedness with Self and Others**
Allow yourself to become
Intimately connected
With all your parts.
So free, to have options
And to use those options
Freely and creatively.
To know that whatever
Was in the past,
Was the best that we could do,
Because it represented the best we knew.
It represented the best in our consciousness.
As we move toward knowing more,
Being more conscious,
We also then become
More connected with ourselves.
And in connecting with ourselves,
We can form connections with others (Satir, Banmen, Gomori, & Gerber, 1991, p. 300).

Virginia Satir created a magical atmosphere in her training groups. Her celebration of the individual fostered a feeling of empowerment and intimacy. For instance, all of her training experiences in the Soviet Union began with a simple, but powerful demonstration of how she made contact. A volunteer from the audience would stand beside her holding hands. Satir then spoke of centering herself “by leaving previous thoughts and concerns on a shelf, bringing [her] full attention to this moment, and aligning herself with energy from the heavens, the earth, and life on this plane.” Next, she spoke of her attitude toward the person she was about to meet. She spoke of him or her as unique in all the world...She spoke of a sense of awe about their being, commenting with humor, ‘I am speaking of the person’s essence, not necessarily about their behavior!’ Then she turned toward the person and looked into his or her eyes. With eminence and warmth in her voice, Virginia offered a simple greeting: ‘Hello, Natasha’ (or whomever)” (Dodson, 2000, pp. 108–109).

Laura Dodson reported that this simple demonstration of making contact always resulted in an intense round of applause, often a standing ovation. What happened that made for such a magical moment?