From the beginning of Transpersonal Psychology’s emergence as a field for serious study, edited compilations of essays regarding transpersonal, holistic, and integral perspectives on psychology have been important additions to books by individual authors such as Wilber, Ram Dass, Grof, Vaughn, Walsh, Washburn and others. The Sacred Mirror: Nondual Wisdom and Psychotherapy, edited by John Prendergast, Peter Fenner, and Sheila Krystal is one of those books. This book gives an excellent overview of this emerging field of inquiry. Each chapter is an important teaching in itself giving the reader many ways to consider the possibilities in the nondual approach to psychotherapy. Each writer in this volume has an important contribution to make toward the potential of bringing forth nondual wisdom in working with clients from a multitude of perspectives. These perspectives, which integrate the nondual approach, range from using a Jungian approach, to working with EMDR protocols.

Starting with Peter Fenner, the founder of the Center for Timeless Wisdom, who is an inspiration and leader in bringing nondual approaches to psychotherapy, the twelve authors and thirteen chapters cover ways of both defining and working with a nondual approach. He, along with many of the authors in this volume, have also produced a series of annual conferences on this important field. In the opening chapter of this book, Peter Fenner defines nondual wisdom and its place in psychology and psychotherapy. He begins by saying that a nondual approach to therapy focuses on “awakening an experience of the unconditioned mind for therapist and client and the ongoing cultivation of this experience” (p. 28). Fenner goes on to say that “The nondual approach to therapy directs people to the experience of the unconditioned mind as a way of transcending suffering and healing the psychological wounds of the past” (p. 29).

The authors write of the importance of awareness, presence and being which are the most often listed subjects in the index, giving us a sense of the importance of these qualities in the ever deepening process of bringing nondual awareness to psychotherapy. Those qualities along with the practice of inquiry and mirroring form the backbone of this approach. Inquiry has always been an important part of both psychotherapy practice and spiritual practice. From Jim Bugental’s here and now inquiry to Ramana Maharshi’s radical inquiry the importance of these processes are central to the process of transformation and growth. Stephan Bodian’s chapter “Deconstructing the Self: The Uses of Inquiry in Psychotherapy and Spiritual Practice”, is extremely useful in gaining an understanding of the range of inquiry processes from the conventional analytic and existential-humanistic to the uses of inquiry in the nondual wisdom traditions. The process of mirroring becomes the inspiration for the title of the book when John Prendergast in his chapter “Being Together” says that “Unlike various descriptions of psychological mirroring that
focus on the importance of therapists accurately and empathically reflecting back their clients’ thought, feelings and sensations, sacred mirroring involves Being mirroring itself” (p. 94), and he goes on to say “When we, as therapists, deepen into Being, we begin to spontaneously take on the function of a sacred mirror” (p. 95).

The authors also speak to the concerns that can arise in the approach of nondual wisdom and psychotherapy. Spiritual bypass, inflation and splitting are the most common pitfalls that can trap a client in the hard work of psychospiritual transformation. Many of the authors in this book also speak to the dangers of the nondual approach becoming another technique or school among many approaches to this work. The nondual approach is not a technique but a holding environment or space which is increasingly held by the therapist and the client through presence, mindfulness and inquiry. In the chapter “Double Vision” John Welwood speaks to this potential for non-dual dogma by saying that “…in regarding the play of duality as only unreal, this one-sided transcendentalism verges on nihilism—negating the experience of relative experience altogether. In the name of nonduality, it creates its own form of dualism by setting up a divide between absolute truth and relative human experience” (p. 143).

Defining a nondual approach to psychotherapy is difficult in that any definition becomes somewhat limited and dualistic and potentially separate from the ground of being or the formless form. It is important to remember as Sheila Krystal says in her chapter “A Nondual Approach to EMDR: Psychotherapy as Satsang” that “A nondual approach to therapy promotes no method, no theory and indeed no mind. Therapists rest in empty awareness without holding any model, diagnosis, goal, or technique in mind” (p. 117). The key word here seems to be in the holding as in holding onto and not that one would disregard developmental levels and psychological states of consciousness. It is the ever present awareness of all that arises that the therapist rests in. Brian Wittine in his chapter “Jungian Analysis and Nondual Wisdom” speaks to this need to be with all parts of the psyche when he says, “a nondual understanding means holding and containing all parts of ourselves, both conscious and unconscious, not just our lofty spiritual insights and feelings” (p. 287); he goes on to say that “psychospiritual splitting might be resolved through an approach in inner work that honors both transcendence and individuation” (p. 288). The seeming paradox in holding both a model and an approach of no model is bridged in the ever present ground of being where one can be with that which is limited as one is with that which is limitless, a, dual nondual or as Zen teachings hold, a Gateless Gate. As John Welwood says, “We need a more comprehensive view that recognizes the nonduality of transcendent and immanent, absolute and relative, emptiness and form” (p. 150). Adyashanti, a profound spiritual teacher, puts it best in his deeply moving interview with John Prendergast and Shiela Kystal when he says, “It’s back to a deep honesty and integrity with what is” (p. 61).

An important aspect of this book is in the variety of topics covered by the authors and the depth within which they are approached. The Sacred Mirror is also a very useful text in clinical training programs and could be used in a range of undergraduate and graduate classes. Also helpful to the reader are the well thought out case examples that illustrate the practical applications of this approach. All of the authors are psychotherapists or teachers and bring a wealth of experience to their work and writings.
Whether they call it an approach, a wisdom, a therapy or an understanding, each of the authors in this book have found a unique way to describe their understanding and experience of nondual wisdom and psychotherapy. Like a many faceted diamond, each expression shines forth to illuminate an important aspect of this approach. It is the whole jewel however that can inspire the readers into their own inquiry and understanding, born of their own spiritual and psychological development and philosophy into this nondual approach. Practitioners, teachers, and students have the potential to become richer and wiser in the process.

The Authors

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Peter Fenner, Ph.D., holds the position of senior lecturer in Asian spiritual traditions at Deakin University in Australia. His writings include The Edge of Certainty: Dilemmas on the Buddhist Path, Essential Wisdom Teaching, Reasoning into Reality, and The Ontology of the Middle Way. His root guru was the Tibetan lama Thubten Yeshe, and he was ordained as a monk in the Buddhist tradition in 1977. He returned his ordination after nine years to explore Western psychological traditions of self development. He is the founder of the Center for Timeless Wisdom.

Sheila Krystal, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist specializing in integrating the spiritual dimension and psychotherapy through meditation, hatha yoga, Jungian Dreamwork, Reichian body therapy, and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. She has pioneered in developing the transpersonal uses of EMDR, and has also published on mid-life crisis and the use of meditation in 12-step programs. She has studied with Yesudian and Haich, Indra Devi, Sharma, Satya Sai Baba, H. W. L. Poonja, Jean Dunn, and Adyashanti.

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