EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Compassionate Care and Feeding of Spiritually Transformative Experiences in Brazil: A 130-Year-Old Tradition

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**KEY WORDS:** Spiritism; Spiritist; disobsession; medical intuition; spiritually transformative experience

The origin and workings of Spiritist Centers and Spiritist Psychiatric Hospitals in Brazil are described. These non-government organizations nurture spiritual evolution and effect physical and emotional healing in people of all ages, acknowledging spiritually transformative experiences (STEs) as a normal part of life. There are 50 Spiritist Psychiatric Hospitals and approximately 13,000 Spiritist Centers in Brazil. It is estimated that 20% of the population visit these organizations, as needed. The practices at these institutions include: laying-on of hands, prayer, blessed water, fraternal assistance, organized charitable giving to others, consultation with medical intuitives, and ‘disobsession’ (the process of separating from negatively-motivated spirits). Trained volunteers donate their time to perform these practices, knowing that doing so contributes both to others’ and to their own

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spiritual growth. Treatments are free of charge to those who receive them, and training to learn how to perform the practices as well as ongoing supervision are donated by highly trained volunteer teachers.

Spiritist treatment within the hospitals must be authorized by the patient and/or the patient’s family, as it is an elective addition to mainstream practices such as psychotherapy, exercise, pharmaceuticals, or nutritional supplements. The small amount of research that was completed before 2011 on the effectiveness of Spiritist treatments is documented in the book *Spiritism and Mental Health* (Bragdon, 2011).

Spiritism rests on belief in reincarnation through many lifetimes that leads one to greater wisdom and compassion. Although cause and effect—karma—can play an important role in determining the roots of illness or imbalances, illness or difficult circumstances are an opportunity to find greater balance as a whole person; they are not perceived as punishment. Spiritists consider it valuable to train what psychic sensitivities one may have in order to further the ability to personally experience connection with the Divine and to assist others in their spiritual growth. Study and discussion of Spiritist books is a cornerstone of personal evolution as they assist individuals to answer existential and spiritual questions and build supportive relationships. Creator/God is perceived as all-knowing, all-powerful, and loving. Jesus Christ is considered an ideal model of how to live one’s life. Spiritism is a way of life or a path of “practical Christianity” welcoming people of all cultures and religions. Spiritism has no priesthood, no religious symbols, no rituals, and no hierarchy. It appears to address needs not adequately addressed by conventional religious institutions.

The first person to publish scholarly texts about Spiritism in English was the anthropologist and self-described skeptic, David J. Hess (1991, 1994). My books about Spiritism (Bragdon, 2002, 2004, 2011, 2012) add the perspective of a transpersonal psychologist who was invited to fully participate in Spiritist activities over 11 years. I was thus able to keenly understand the psychology and spirituality that Brazilian Spiritism is built upon.

Spiritist Centers and psychiatric hospitals offer an excellent model of effective integrative mental health care. As the international community attempts to embrace an integrative model of care, Brazilian Spiritists are well prepared to offer guidance because they developed and practiced this model since the 1880s in Spiritist community centers and since the 1930s in Spiritist hospitals. Because little standard research on outcomes has been done in Brazil, more research on the effectiveness of Spiritist healing practices is called for.
References