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Empowerment: The politics of the helping relationship  
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**Robert Waldl, Vienna**

**It has been a long Way from Mysticism to Dialogue – are we going back again?  
- a critical Comment on Esotericism and Spirituality in Psychotherapy**

The history of treatment of individuals with mental problems is the history of emancipation from religious dominance and prejudice. Dynamic psychiatry, which developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, led to psychoanalysis. It took a few more decades until a taboo was broken when Carl Rogers recorded and studied the intimate dialogues between counselors and clients. What Rogers and his colleagues found culminated in the so-called *necessary and sufficient conditions required for therapeutic change*. This was a revolutionary demystification of the therapeutic situation.

There is an ongoing discussion as to what extent a human desire for spirituality might be fulfilled by a therapeutic process. When our clients talk about spiritual issues we are often facing their most vulnerable sides. Answering them, in the way we personcentered psychotherapists learn to do, opens the way to their self-development, helps them move away from superstition and from feelings of guilt and anxiety. A reaction on an esoteric or spiritual level may offer quick answers, and lead away from painful questions but it stops the dialogue and the therapeutic change. From existential philosophy we know that we human beings have an awareness of ourselves and the adverse world. Only by entering a dialogue with our counterpart, we become human beings. If we psychotherapists work in a mystical and not dialogical way, we are in danger of missing the main challenge with our clients.