

## Religious Clients

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How many times have you encountered a client who states that they are "religious"? In talking with colleagues and students alike, usually this statement either precludes doing any of the traditional imagery stuff we all learn or the practitioner scrambles around trying to find a way that they can introduce this process without offending the client.

I find that imagery is as natural to those folks who are "offended" by imagery as it is for any other. In fact, I submit that it might be even MORE comfortable for them.

Take the case of "Jane," a client who was referred to me by a local church. Jane stated that she was very unhappy in her life and "nothing seems to be working." She stated that she knew she was very depressed but would not take medication and was losing hope that anything could work for her. She wondered if I could help her.

Because of my familiarity with the church she attended, I had to make the assumption that I could not use the words "imagery" or "guided imagery" with her. Instead, I asked a simple question: Do you pray? She looked at me, rather startled, and said, of course she did. I then said how would it be if you could really "notice" God and have a conversation with him in a comfortable place that is safe and outside?

She was very enthusiastic about this. I then asked if she closed her eyes when she prayed. She stated that she did most of the time. I asked her to close her eyes, take a deep breath, and tell me when she noticed a beautiful place that was safe and outside.

There was a long pause. She described a lovely beach. I then said, now, take few moments and allow God to be there with you and tell me when you notice him. She began to cry and again there was a long pause. She stated that God was there and with her and she was quite surprised to see that he took the shape of a very old, wise man. We then started a dialogue with God and she took great comfort in this. At the end of the "prayer", she stated she was at peace and was delighted that she could now "see" her prayers. She was so excited about the process that she called her husband to report that she had "seen" God!

Sometimes we just need to change our words to match those of the client. I believe that nearly everyone will try imagery if we honor their wording and their belief system. When you get "religious" folks in your office, listen carefully to their words and introduce imagery by using whatever words for it that they will accept. After all, isn't prayer imagery?

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