

## Methods of Coping from the Religions of the World: The Bar Mitzvah, Karma, and Spiritual Healing

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Long before there was a discipline of psychology, people were applying systems of belief and practice from the religions of the world to understand and come to terms with the most profoundly disturbing aspects of life. In response to questions about birth, death, accident, illness, suffering, and the meaning of life more generally, they drew on a variety of religious methods of coping that were developed and refined by the world's religions. Surprisingly, although psychologists often share many of the goals of organized religious systems, they have largely ignored the wisdom of age-old religious traditions. Writers have suggested many explanations for the neglect of the religious dimension by psychologists, including the emotional sensitivity of religious issues; competitiveness between organized religion and the field of psychology, which could be viewed as a "pseudoreligion" with its own beliefs, values, and practices; and lower levels of religiousness among psychologists than the general public (i.e., the "religiosity gap") and their associated underestimation of the importance of religion (1, 2).

Whatever the explanation for the oversight, there are several good reasons why psychologists should take a closer look at religious coping resources. First, religious coping is commonplace. In fact, some groups, such as the elderly and African-Americans, cite religion as the most frequently used resource for coping with major life stressors (e.g., 3, 4, 5). Second, religious coping can be effective. Methods of religious coping have been associated with a variety of positive outcomes, including better physical health, better mental health, and enhanced spiritual well-being; moreover, people have obtained such benefits when facing various critical life situations, including organ transplantation, serious medical illness, the loss of loved ones, natural disasters, and terrorism (e.g., 6, 7, 8). Third, individuals may profit by adding the special characteristics of religious coping to their

copying repertoire. In several comparative studies, measures of religious coping have been found to predict adjustment to life crises beyond the effects of traditional secular coping measures (see 9 for review). What is this "something special" of religion? Religious methods of coping may be particularly well-suited to the problem of human insufficiency. On this point, the first author (9) has written:

Try as we might to maximize significance through our own insights and experiences or through those of others, we remain human, finite, and limited. At any time we may be pushed beyond our immediate resources, exposing our basic vulnerability to ourselves and the world. To this most basic of existential crises, religion holds out solutions. The solutions may come in the form of spiritual support when other forms of social support are lacking, explanations when no other explanations seem convincing, a sense of ultimate control through the sacred when life seems out of control, or new objects of significance when old ones are no longer compelling. In any case, religion complements nonreligious coping, with its emphasis on personal control, by offering responses to the limits of personal powers. (p. 310)

We believe that psychologists have something to learn about, indeed *learn from*, the religions of the world. In fact, we lack an important factor when we try to understand and facilitate adaptive processes and people without an appreciation for the religious dimension. Fortunately, several psychologists, have begun to explore the resources of religious traditions. Much of this work has focused on mainline Christians in the United States. It is important to note, however, that the population of the United States is becoming increasingly pluralistic religiously (10). To work with heterogeneous communities, psychologists will need to better understand the resources of diverse religious groups. In this chapter, we follow our own advice by focusing on three relatively unstudied methods of religious coping from three relatively unstudied religions of the world: (1) the Bar Mitzvah among Jews, (2) Karma among Hindus, and (3) healing among Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians. As a prelude, we offer a definition of religion and a framework for the analysis of these religious coping methods.

### Defining Religion and Religious Coping

#### *Religion as a Process*

Among psychologists, the term religion often is associated with thoughts of church, cult, dogma, and ritual (11). Religion, however, is more than a static set of beliefs, practices, and institutions. It is a process, as Pargament (9) has put it, "a search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (p. 34). There are two important assumptions in this definition.

The first assumption is consistent with recent developments in motivation theory that stress the goal-directed character of human behavior (e.g., 12, 13, 14, 15). We assume that people seek significance. Objects of significance may be material, physical, psychological, social, or spiritual. They may be socially valued (e.g., loving relationships) or condemned (e.g., alcohol addiction). Certainly, individuals define significance differently. However significance is defined, we assume that virtually everyone tries to find things that matter to them (discovery), hold on to them (conservation), and let go and rediscover new things of value when necessary (transformation). It also is useful to think about the search for significance in terms of pathways and destinations—that is, means and ends.

What makes a search for significance religious? Our second assumption is that the defining quality of religion comes from peoples' involvement of the sacred in the search for significance. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the sacred refers to the holy, those things "set apart" from the ordinary, worthy of veneration and reverence. The sacred includes ideas of the divine, the transcendent, and God (16). However, the sacred goes beyond concepts of higher powers by including objects sanctified by virtue of their association with, or representation of, the holy (17). Sacred objects can take several forms: time and space (Sabbath, cathedrals), events and transitions (births, funerals), materials (water, wine), cultural products (music, literature), people (saints, clergy), practices (prayer, confession), psychological attributes (self, meaning), social attributes (patriotism, compassion), and roles (marriage, work).

We call a person religious when he or she takes a pathway that somehow is connected to the sacred or seeks a sacred life destination (9). The sacred can be a part of the thoughts (e.g., religious beliefs, dogma), behaviors (e.g., practices, rituals), relationships (e.g., with fellow congregations, with clergy), and emotions (e.g., awe, fear) that, to a greater or lesser extent, define the individual's life path. These paths can lead to many ends. Psychologists and social scientists from Freud to Durkheim have articulated a number of goals or functions of religion, including the promotion of life meaning, emotional comfort, impulse control, intimacy and social solidarity, physical health, a sense of control, and a better world. It is important to note, however, that the sacred can also be an end in itself. Indeed, the search for the sacred represents the core function of religion and the essence of spirituality. "It is the ultimate Thou whom the religious person seeks most of all," psychologist Paul Johnson (18, p. 70) wrote. Furthermore, seemingly secular ends can take on a spiritual character by virtue of their association with the sacred. To seek justice, to make the world a better place, to love one another are, for many, profoundly religious goals.

There are myriad religious paths and religious destinations. Indeed, part of the staying power of the world's great religious traditions may lie in the fact that adherents experience a variety of ways of being religious. Even beneath some of the same religious roofs, individuals with different temperaments, strengths, needs, and goals conceivably can find places to stay.

Part of the durability of religion also may lie in its ability to respond to the to the greatest life challenges.

### Religious Coping

For many people religion is a way of life, an overarching orientation that directs their thoughts, feelings, actions, relationships, and values in everyday living as well as more stressful moments. In short, religion is more than a way of coping. Religion does, however, offer specific methods to help people understand and come to terms with life stressors. Religious coping methods are designed to conserve or transform significance in the face of difficult life situations.

Psychologists have long noted the connection between religion and times of stress. However, they have tended to view religion in limited, stereotyped, and negative terms. Religion has been called a defense, avoidant, passive, irrational, and a form of escapism and denial (e.g., 19, 20). A closer look at the roles of religion in stressful periods, though, reveals a more complex picture. It is true that religion can serve defensive roles. Examples of religiously based denial, passivity, and avoidance are found easily. However, religion takes on other guises in coping as well—assertive as well as defensive, active as well as passive (see Table 13.1 for illustrations).

For example, Pargament and his colleagues (21, 22) distinguished among four religious approaches to achieving a sense of control in coping. The first type, deferring, reflects the form of religion that is so often criticized by social scientists. This style of religious coping places the responsibility for problem solving on God. Solutions are believed to emerge through the active efforts of God alone and, as a result, the individual responds to stressors with a passive coping stance. In sharp contrast, the second type, self-directing religious coping, assumes that God gives the individual the skills and resources to solve problems. The responsibility for problem solving then rests on the individual's shoulders alone. In the third type, pleading, the individual asks God to intercede in the situation on his or her behalf. Here, the individual attempts to achieve control indirectly through petitions to God. Finally, collaborative religious coping assumes that God and the individual share the responsibility for problem solving. This fourth type of coping is experienced as a partnership in which both God and the individual work actively together to resolve crises. Thus, religious coping methods run the gamut from passive to active strategies.

Researchers have begun to examine other religious coping methods in more detail, including spiritual support (23), congregational support (24), purification and confession (25), and religious appraisals (26). Different forms of religious coping appear to have different implications for adjustment to critical life events (see 6). For example, with respect to the control-oriented forms of religious coping, collaborative and self-directing approaches have been associated with higher levels of mental health (21, 27, 28). In contrast, the deferring and pleading approaches have been tied to

Table 13.1 Illustrative Methods of Religious Coping

<i>Deferring Religious Coping:</i> Passively waiting for God to control the situation.	<i>Self-Directing Religious Coping:</i> Seeking control through individual initiative rather than help from God.
<i>Pleading Religious Coping:</i> Seeking control indirectly through petitions to God for help.	<i>Collaborative Religious Coping:</i> Seeking control through a partnership with God in problem-solving.
<i>Benevolent Religious Reappraisal:</i> Redefining the stressor through religion as benevolent and potentially beneficial.	<i>Punishing God Reappraisal:</i> Redefining the stressor as a punishment from God for the individual's sins.
<i>Demonic Reappraisal:</i> Redefining the stressor as the act of the Devil.	<i>Reappraisal of God's Powers:</i> Redefining God's powers to influence the stressful situation.
<i>Seeking Spiritual Support:</i> Searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care.	<i>Spiritual Discontent:</i> Expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with God.
<i>Seeking Congregational Support:</i> Searching for comfort and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy.	<i>Interpersonal Religious Discontent:</i> Expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with congregation members and clergy.
<i>Religious Purification:</i> Searching for spiritual cleansing through religious actions.	<i>Religious Forgoing:</i> Looking to religion for help in letting go of anger, hurt, and fear associated with an offense.
<i>Rites of Passage:</i> Participating in rituals to facilitate the transition from one phase of life to another.	<i>Religious Conversion:</i> Shifting from a life oriented around self-centered concerns to a life oriented toward the transcendent.

lower levels of mental health. Interestingly, however, some researchers have found that the value of the collaborative, deferring, and self-directing approaches may also depend on the controllability of the situation. In one study of adult church members, higher levels of collaborative and deferring and lower levels of self-directing religious coping were associated with less depression in uncontrollable situations (29); the reverse held true for controllable situations.

Many religious coping methods are consensual in nature. They are designed to help people maintain or hold on to an object of significance in stressful situations, be it a sense of control, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or emotional comfort. However, through the mechanisms of religion, people also can replace old objects of significance with new ones. Rites of passage assist people in the transition from one phase of life to another.

Through forgiveness, individuals replace anger and bitterness with tolerance and compassion (30). Religious conversion fosters a transformation from a life oriented around self-centered concerns to a life oriented around transcendent values (31).

In sum, short-hand descriptions of religion as a defense, a passive form of coping, or a form of denial underestimate the complexity of religious life. Researchers are beginning to learn about the rich variety of religious coping methods. Although much of this initial work has focused on mainline Christian groups, there are many other important religious traditions and they too represent potentially rich resources for coping. In the remainder of this chapter we consider three of these relatively neglected forms of religious coping.

#### Coming of Age: The Bar Mitzvah as a Rite of Passage

Our movement through the life span is not simply linear. It is marked by sharp changes—births, coming of age, marriages, deaths—periods of rapid qualitative shift from one phase of life to another. The religions of the world have long provided their adherents with rites of passage that announce these radical transitions and shepherd people through them. There are many types of rites of passage, but they share a common function and structure: they are designed to mark and facilitate the transition through these “hinges of time” (32, p. 164). Rites of passage have a dual nature: they are both conservational and transformational, encouraging continuity and change (9). Cushioned by the reassurance of an on-going relationship with the sacred, and by an on-going membership in a community, the individual is nurtured through a major change in role status and identity.

Although births, marriages, and funerals continue to be embedded in religious rites of passage (e.g., baptism, church wedding, church funeral) in Western culture, the period of transition from childhood to adulthood—the coming of age—no longer is generally shrouded in religious sacrament (e.g., initiation, puberty rites). This is a noteworthy omission given that adolescence is a time of dramatic change involving psychological, sexual, and cognitive maturation, with new expectations and the need for a clear identity. An important exception to this rule is the Bar Mitzvah. Even though only a small percentage of the world's population is Jewish, the Bar Mitzvah remains a central rite of passage for even secularized Jews.

#### Describing the Bar Mitzvah

The words “Bar Mitzvah” mean “son of the commandments,” and indicate that the 13-year-old boy is now obligated to follow Jewish laws. For girls, this transition is called a Bat Mitzvah. Typically, girls celebrate it at the age of 13, although according to Jewish law, girls become Bat Mitzvah at 12.

We will focus on the Bar Mitzvah here, because it has traditionally received more attention, particularly within Orthodox Judaism.

Two commandments are particularly noteworthy for the Bar Mitzvah boy. If he is observant, he begins to put on *tefillin*, two small black boxes with straps attached to them, before his prayers on weekday mornings. Wearing the *tefillin* symbolizes the covenant between God and Israel, God's presence, and reminds the individual of God's commandments (33). The Bar Mitzvah is also the occasion of the boy's first *aliyah* (meaning “going up”), in which he makes a physical and spiritual ascension to the altar to recite a blessing over the Torah before it is read. Reserved for transitions in the life cycle and special life events, the *aliyah* is one of the greatest honors to be accorded the synagogue member.

In the United States, the Bar Mitzvah has come to be associated with a more elaborate religious ceremony and celebration (some have called it a major industry). Here the boy is expected to stand in front of family, friends, and teachers at the synagogue and read the entire Torah portion for the week or chant the *Haf Torah*, a smaller selection from the prophetic books of the Bible. This is no easy task. The *Haf Torah* is written in Hebrew and must be sung according to prescribed musical notes. It takes time and effort to prepare for the ritual. It is common for the Bar Mitzvah boy to begin his lessons several months prior to the ceremony.

Far from a simple religious ritual, the Bar Mitzvah demonstrates the boy's learning, poise, and readiness to take on adult responsibilities. The ritual provides the boy with the opportunity to conquer his doubts, stand up in front of others, and show off his newfound power. As one rabbi put it, this is a “process of doing rather than sitting back and worry. . . . In this experience [the Bar Mitzvah boy] is pushed through to producing, to taking command of the situation” (34, p. 120).

In some ways, the Bar Mitzvah is as much a rite of passage for the family as it is for the boy. Not only must the Bar Mitzvah boy show that he can begin to assume the mantle of adulthood, but also the family must show that it can begin to “let go” of their child and support his emerging autonomy. And together, the boy and his family also must reaffirm their commitments to each other, to God, and to the Jewish people. Thus, the Bar Mitzvah boy and family make this passage together.

Unfortunately, neither the Bar Mitzvah nor its impact on the young man and his family have received much empirical scrutiny. A few observational studies, however, have been conducted. Judith Davis (35) presents a rich account of three families' passage through this rite. Following the conceptual framework of anthropologist van Gennep (36), she divides the Bar Mitzvah into three phases: preparation, ceremony, and aftermath.

**Preparation** The year before the Bar Mitzvah ceremony is a peculiar “never-never land.” No longer a child but not yet an adult, the boy has entered a period of clouded identity, embodied by the paradoxical adult/child title of “Bar Mitzvah boy.” In this time, a “sacred space” is created

around the family to sustain it through the transition (35). As the boy begins to rehearse his *Hafforah* and the family starts planning for the ceremony and celebration, they take on a special status in their own eyes and in the eyes of the community.

One of the most important tasks of the preparation phase, Davis notes, is the prevention of conflicts that threaten to defile the sacred occasion and disrupt the family order. For instance, one divorced family, in which parents shared custody of their son, went to great lengths to ensure that the tensions between the parents did not spoil the event. While planning for the Bar Mitzvah, both sides agreed to set aside other potentially divisive issues, such as finances and visitation. "It was as if everyone had implicitly agreed to use the time for consolidating and nurturing the system's strengths before tackling the next set of difficult issues" (35) p. 181). Although money was limited, all sides agreed to share the expense of a hospitality suite where the extended families could come together to meet and relax in between the weekend's ceremonies and events. The hospitality suite became a metaphor that expressed the family's desire to wrap the Bar Mitzvah in sacred time and place.

*Ceremony* As the Bar Mitzvah ceremony comes nearer, pressures mount on the boy and his family. Friends and family ask the boy whether he "knows his *Hafforah*," and the family wonders whether the celebration will go smoothly. The ceremony itself provides the culminating moment. Here the escalating tensions come to a head and are resolved as the individual and family make a symbolic leap from one status to another. The Bar Mitzvah boy, now center-stage, reveals to family and friends his social poise, intellectual mastery, and commitment to his faith. The immediate family sits close to the stage or on it as a sign that they support him and that they too are going through a passage. The prayers, sermons, and benedictions of the service acknowledge that something momentous is taking place, and the congregation as a whole murmurs its approval.

Toward the end of the ceremony, or at the celebrations that follow over the weekend, the boy is given further opportunities to remind himself and others that he is ready to assume the adult role. A speech on the altar or a toast at the celebration provides additional evidence that the boy is maturing into a man. At the same time, the messages themselves reassure the audience that, even as he becomes more independent, he remains connected to family and religion. Listen to one Bar Mitzvah toast from a boy who had immigrated from the former Soviet Union:

I want to thank you all for coming to my Bar Mitzvah. Especially I want to thank [my mother]. If not for her, I would never have had this Bar Mitzvah and this wonderful party. If not for her, I would never have come to America. If not for her, I would never have been born. (35, p. 192)

Relatives also may give speeches. Some are melancholy, reflecting a mixture of pride in the accomplishments of the Bar Mitzvah boy, sadness in

the loss of his childhood, and deep appreciation of the continuity between this occasion, generations past, and generations to come.

Barely choking back the tears, Ken presented his son with his deceased father's *tallis* [prayer shawl] and *tefillin* and with his prayer book in which four or five generations of Bar Mitzvahs had been recorded. As he handed over each item, Ken talked about what his father would have wished for his grandson had he been alive on this day. "What I think he would say is that you should . . . live your life to the fullest . . . and always do what you think is right. . . . And what my father gave me above all else was a feeling that I was always loved. That I was always good and the world was a safe place. And if I could give you anything, it would be that." (35, p. 182)

Through their tears, applause, and shouts of Mazel Tov (congratulations), the congregation welcomes the child into the adult community and congratulates the family for its role in this transformation.

*Aftermath* After the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, the young man reenters the everyday world with a new status. Childhood behind him, he is expected to take on greater responsibilities in the family and, in turn, receive treatment from others befitting his new position. Although the young man has become more autonomous, he is expected to remain connected to the larger Jewish community by participating in the synagogue, passing on his heritage to his children, and living a life of ethics and compassion. Here is how one young man put it: "It's a lot of bull if you [are Bar Mitzvahed] and then you go out and do nothing for Judaism for the rest of your life" (34, p. 126).

The twin threads of continuity and change run through this rite of passage. In each phase of the Bar Mitzvah, individuals and families are sustained as they undergo a transformation of significance. Davis (35) captures the essence of this multilevel paradoxical process in her summary:

It is both a ritual of transition and ritual of continuity. In the context of the family, it is a ritual of elevation (i.e., transition), and in the context of the larger system, a ritual of consecration (i.e., continuity). It helps the child's movement away from the nuclear family at the same time that it binds him closer to that family through its larger past; it is a vehicle for separating the parents from the child while simultaneously moving them closer to each other and to their own parents; it celebrates the child's movement while mourning his loss; it strengthens boundaries while making them more flexible. (p. 201)

In short, the Bar Mitzvah illustrates a rite of passage that encourages, celebrates, and cushions the shock of the youth's coming of age.

### Conclusions

How effective is the Bar Mitzvah? As noted, this rite of passage has received very little empirical attention. In one exception to this rule, children who

receive a Jewish education, confirmation, and Bar/Bat Mitzvah have been shown to be more likely to participate in Jewish life as adults and less likely to marry someone outside the faith (e.g., 37). However, many questions remain about the short-term and long-term effects of the Bar Mitzvah. Critics have noted that, at least for some, the Bar Mitzvah has become an expensive consultant-dominated industry that disconnects people from the underlying psychological, social, and spiritual power of the ritual itself (38).

The descriptions and narrative accounts presented previously, however, suggest that this rite of passage may be at least partly successful in attaining its dual goals: facilitating the transition of the celebrant and his family to a new status, and cementing the individual's commitment to his family and the Jewish community. Furthermore, without rituals of this kind, some writers have suggested that we are vulnerable to a "flattening of time" (cf. 39); that is, a feeling that there is no difference between past and present and between present and future. Without rites of passage, we may lose the special, transcendent character of particular life moments. Likewise, perhaps, the difficulties experienced by many adolescents (e.g., alcohol use, drug use, violence, suicidality) are, in part, a result of our culture's failure to provide children with rites of passage that facilitate the coming of age, encouraging them to change within a cushion of community and culture.

#### Karma: Cosmic Meaning and Control in Coping

Hinduism, one of the world's most ancient religions, is practiced by more than 750 million people worldwide. Furthermore, over 16 million people in the world practice Sikhism, greater than 8 million observe Jainism, and more than 3 million people adhere to Buddhism (40). After the passing of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 which relaxed the restrictions imposed on Asian immigration by earlier laws, the number of Asian immigrants to the United States belonging to each of these four religious groups has been growing at a steady rate (41). Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism stand apart from Hinduism in explicitly rejecting the scriptural authority of the Vedas. The Vedas form the core of the sacred literature in Hinduism and include the hymns, rituals, and sacrifices performed by Hindus. However, all four religious groups accept the doctrine of karma as one of the basic tenets of their religion (42).

Karmic doctrine is widely and deeply diffused in the Indian culture (43, 44, 45), and applies especially to people dealing with major stressors. The term "karma" also has made its way into popular Western culture (e.g., good and bad karma). Few, however, know what it means or how it is applied in its religious context. The doctrine of karma embodies a causal explanation for events that defy human understanding and provides a method of gaining control over the future by focusing on present actions. In this sec-

tion, we elucidate karma as a common way of coping throughout the world. Toward this end, we consider theological writings and evidence, a modest amount of empirical research on Hindus, and interviews of a small American Hindu group who use karma for coping.

#### The Doctrine of Karma

In the Upanishads the doctrine of karma appears in clearly recognizable, albeit esoteric form (46, 47). The following is a quote from the *Mundaka Upanishad* in the Vedas:

Brahman willed that it should be so, and brought forth out of himself the material cause of the universe; From this came the primal energy, and from the primal energy mind, from mind the subtle elements, From the subtle elements the many worlds, and from the acts performed by beings in the many worlds, The chain of cause and effect—the reward and punishment of works. . . . Living in the abyss of ignorance, the deluded think themselves best. Attached to works, they know not God. Words lead them only to heaven, whence, to their sorrow, their rewards quickly exhausted, they are flung back to earth. . . . But, wise, self-controlled, and tranquil souls who are contented in spirit, and who practice austerity and meditation in solitude and silence, are freed from all impurity, and attain by the path of liberation to the immortal, the truly existing, the changeless self. (48, pp. 43–44)

According to the doctrine of karma, moral life is not chaos; people are reflections of their past deeds and, furthermore, present actions will shape their future (49). Karma has a multifaceted character, with different philosophers highlighting different aspects. There are however, several key elements of karma theory.

First, the law unifies time by connecting current events with the past and future. Within the physical universe, every effect must have a cause; the karmic law extends this notion to the moral realm. It implies that the individual's present condition is the result of the cumulation of past personal actions, and that the future can be shaped by righteous deeds in the present life. There appears to be no equivalent to the doctrine of karma in Western religions.

Second, although karma may seem to be a deterministic doctrine, there is a place for free will. Though the results of past actions have to be experienced in the present life (called *prārabdha karma*), an individual can develop tendencies and dispositions to act in a righteous manner (42, 50). Furthermore, a portion of the results of past actions is still suspended (known as *sañcīta karma*). A person also can invoke the grace of God to prevent or mitigate the effects of bad actions. Finally, by performing actions without selfish motive (referred to as *niskāma karma*), an individual is freed of karmic effects (51, 52).

Third, some actions may produce immediate effects, while others may produce delayed reactions. In fact, one lifetime may be insufficient to reap the fruits of all actions. As a result, the theory of reincarnation of the same soul in different bodies forms another crucial aspect of the doctrine (44). The nature and circumstances of an individual's soul are said to depend on past deeds. For example, having previously performed many good actions, that person would be born in benevolent circumstances and vice versa (53).

Finally, the doctrine of karma alludes to the ultimate purpose of humankind—liberation from the misery and suffering that accompanies the rebirth cycle. When this liberation is achieved, the individual can realize the ultimate goal of eternal bliss in which the soul becomes one with the immortal, Supreme *Brahman* (48). This state can be attained when the person has exhausted accumulated karma through the accumulation of good deeds and freed him or herself from ignorance, desire, and self-interest. Thus, karma offers a preliminary route to spiritual liberation (47).

#### *Karma as a Conservational Method of Coping*

In our coping framework, karma represents a conservational method of coping that serves several functions.

*Conservation of Comfort* The theory of karma provides a sense of comfort and hope that, ultimately, the cycle of life and death can be broken and *moksha* or spiritual liberation can be achieved. The doctrine also is comforting to the sufferer of ill fortune. Although sins in past lifetimes are responsible for present situations, these sins are committed by remote selves that are "differently constituted" from the individual's current identity (54). As a result, the person is spared the intense onus of blame. It cannot be known why an individual has a particular karmic destiny. However, an individual's present circumstances can be traced to the past, and that past has to be accepted. Thus, the stoic acceptance of personal destiny may help people cope with the most difficult life situations. One Hindu father, interviewed for this chapter by Nalini Tarakeswar, had experienced tremendous pain when his daughter was very ill. He shared a remark his daughter made that was most comforting to him: "Dad, my *saisara* (cycle of birth, death, and rebirth due to actions or karma) will determine when I will die. You might try a lot within your capacity, your skills, and your resources to save my life. But, if I am destined to die, you cannot hold me back."

*Conservation of Meaning and Faith in a Just World* As a theory of causation, the doctrine of karma provides convincing explanations for human misfortune (44, 55). Another Hindu, interviewed for this chapter, described how karma helped him understand the tragic loss of his brother. He said "my brother was killed when I was 11 years old. All the villagers asked us to place a complaint with the police. My mother told me that it is our fate. It

is not within our control. We have committed sins in our past." In locating the cause of the loss in a distant past, karma provided the family with a compelling and benevolent explanation for a seemingly nonsensical event.

The karmic principle of moral order within a law-abiding universe also reinforces an individual's faith in a just world. Because the future can be reshaped by present behavior, whatever the present circumstances, the ultimate goal of liberation from the chain of life and death is available to all. This appeared to provide one Hindu interviewee with a sense of ultimate fairness and accompanying peace of mind. He stated, "Knowing that I cannot escape the results of my actions, I know that doing good deeds will help me. If I see good things happen to bad people, I know that s/he will not be able to escape from the consequences of bad actions. I can rest peacefully." It is important to note that karma does not function independently of other causal attributions. Other explanations of negative events are common in India, such as the malice of some other person, an angry deity, or other immediate agencies (54). In his work in central India, Babb (55) also found a healthy appreciation among villagers for the role of practical effort in avoiding pain and suffering. Karmic explanations of misfortune, he argued, functioned as explanations of a last resort, when the negative event could not be explained by a lack of ability or a lack of practical effort.

*Conservation of a Benevolent View of God* The belief that misfortunes reflect past personal deeds conserves the view of God as the benefactor of human beings. In a study of patients who had recovered from psychoses, Narayan et al. (45) found that 51% indicated that God was not responsible for their illness. A statement by another Hindu captures the essence of this karmic function: "Surely all the bad things that happen to people is because they must have done some bad things in the past. God is not a cruel person. He has to punish bad actions and teach us a lesson." For another interviewee, the role of God in the doctrine of karma was to mitigate bad deeds and encourage good behavior on earth. She claimed, "The best thing is to become a devotee of God. Though we have suffered from a lot of misfortunes in the past 15 years, our children have done well for themselves. That is because our faith in God kept us from choosing the wrong path, and our children have had the benefit of our good karma."

*Conservation of a Sense of Control* The karma theory conserves the believer's sense of control. The locus of control is both internal and external. According to this doctrine, the individual's personal destiny is shaped by his or her response to difficult situations. Thus, the locus of control for the future is internal. With respect to the present and past, however, the locus of control has a mixed character. As noted earlier, the individual has some capacity to mitigate the effects of past actions. Thus, there is some opportunity for personal control over immediate events. The individual's present status also can be attributed to actions committed by a self from the past. However, the past self that is responsible for current conditions may have

been a very different kind of self, a self "external" to the present self. In any event, the theory of karma provides the individual with the knowledge that life operates according to an underlying set of orderly principles and the assurance that control can be found in life, through external or internal focus.

#### *Outcomes of Belief in Karma*

Unfortunately, the relationship between belief in karma and mental and physical health has received scant empirical attention. Given the functions of karma, we might expect to find it related to at least two different outcomes: First, by providing benevolent explanations of misfortunes and a sense of control, individuals' beliefs in karma may lead to positive mental health. Consistent with this view, Dalal and Pande (56) found that psychological recovery among permanently and temporarily disabled Hindu patients was positively correlated with causal attributions to karma ( $r = .37$ ). In this vein, one Hindu interviewee described how belief in the theory provided him with "peace of mind": "Since good actions will definitely lead to good outcomes in one of our many lives on earth, I have the moral confidence to withstand suffering and feel mentally prepared to try my best while being ready for the worst. I do not feel scared to take responsibility."

Second, karma permits both active and passive interpretations. Whether beliefs in karma lead to helplessness or hopefulness may depend on the ways in which it is understood. In a study comparing Tibetan with native Hindu priests residing in Himachal Pradesh in north India, Fazel and Young (57) reported that the Tibetans displayed greater life satisfaction than the Hindus. The difference between the two groups was explained by their varying interpretations of karma. The Hindus viewed karma as rigidly unalterable, while the Buddhists adopted a more flexible perspective. Other researchers also have found Hindus to be particularly concerned about the constraints that karma placed on their freedom of action. Buddhists, on the other hand, reportedly speculate more about karmic "prospects" than about karmic "retrospects" (58).

Finally, consistent with the passive view of karma, some sociologists argue that beliefs in the doctrine have helped perpetuate the caste system in India (59, 60). Though there are several castes and subcastes, four are important: *Brahmin* (religious scholars), *Kshatriya* (warrior class), *Vaishya* (business class), and *Sudra* (the class which supports the other three by doing the lower jobs—cleaning toilets, picking up garbage, becoming paid servants in the houses of the above three castes, etc.) (53, 61). Omprakash (60) conducted extensive interviews with 60 members of the lower caste and concluded that belief in the karmic doctrine promotes an acceptance of their exploitation and, in turn, other lower caste-affirming negative attributes (low self-esteem, low need for achievement).

#### *Conclusions*

The doctrine of karma offers its believers a resource to comprehend and assume a sense of control of challenging situations. In extending the principle of cause and effect to the cosmic realm, the law provides individuals with a unique way to understand and experience life's tragic moments. Available research suggests that, though they recognize that the effects of past deeds have to be experienced, individuals remain hopeful that righteous actions in the present life may mitigate harmful effects and, more important, lead to a better future. Some researchers, however, assert that beliefs in karma may encourage passive acceptance of current misfortunes and perpetuate the social oppression of the lower castes. Many questions obviously remain about karma and its part in coping. Studies especially are needed to address the potential costs and benefits to doctrinal adherents for coping with the vicissitudes of life.

#### *From Cure to Healing: Coping with Illness and Disease Among Pentecostal-Charismatics*

The rise of allopathic medicine in the twentieth century has been both a blessing and a challenge. Vaccinations and pharmaceuticals have given humans unprecedented protection from many once-lethal diseases; biomedicine has allowed feats with transplants, human reproduction, and surgical procedures not dreamed possible in an earlier era; and medical technology has enabled precise diagnoses (often without promise of a cure) of problems that would astound their predecessors. Fear seems to be spreading, however, that the search for cures often leaves patients both uncured and unhealed. The hegemony of allopathic medicine is being increasingly challenged by the rise of alternative or complementary medical practices, many of which are more interested in healing the total person than in partial remedies. While acknowledging the vast contributions of allopathic medicine, the adherents of alternative medical practices point to the increase of chronic diseases with no known cure as signals of the limitations of a medical system in which the human spirit has been exorcised from the physical body.

The best-publicized proponents of a return of the spirit to medicine are the New Age gurus, whose books line the shelves of large bookstores, who appear on television talk shows, and whose faces grace the covers of national magazines. Their popularity, however, is eclipsed by another major stream of alternative healing whose history is as old as Christianity, with tenets about a unity of mind, body, and spirit that have much in common with the healing beliefs and practices of other premodern civilizations which inspire much New Age thought. Though rooted in different traditions, both New Age and Christian healing practitioners share a suspicion



of post-Enlightenment empiricism, materialism, rationalism, and scientism; the former roots its medical philosophy in Eastern thought, while the latter centers its philosophy in an often literal interpretation of the Christian New Testament.

The Christian perspective on healing is exemplified principally in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, commonly dated to the Azusa Street Revival (1906–1909) led by William Seymour in Los Angeles and to Charles Parham's Zion City Revival (1906) outside Chicago. Together, the participants of these two revivals launched the Pentecostal denominations and independent charismatic churches that promote a religious experience known as Spirit-baptism (62). Citing biblical examples (e.g., John the Baptist's proclamation that he "baptized with water" but one was coming after him who would "baptize with the Spirit" [Luke 3:16], Pentecostal-Charismatic believers expect a second transforming experience to complement being baptized in water. Although different groups may emphasize different outward signs of Spirit-baptism, they agree that it will be accompanied by paranormal experiences, including glossolalia (speaking in tongues), healing, demonic deliverance, and miracles.

Through extensive missionary activity, the Pentecostal-Charismatic worldview spread throughout the United States and to other continents during the twentieth century (63, 64, 65). One in four Christians worldwide are thought to be part of this movement, crossing denominational as well as geographical boundaries (66, 67). It is estimated that some 12% of all Americans are Spirit-baptized, with a majority found in classical Pentecostal churches, newer independent Charismatic sects, as well as Roman Catholicism and all Protestant denominations (68).

The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement is about a distinctive Christian worldview (rather than a particular denomination, set of doctrines, or precisely defined ritual practices). This worldview blends premodern miracles, modern technology, and post modern mysticism in which the natural merges with the supernatural (69). In the words of the late John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard, a newly emerging denomination contributing to the reinvention of American Protestantism, Christianity is "supernaturally natural" (70, 71). Believers expect to experience as "normal" events, the Spirit of God through healing, miracles, prophecy, deliverance, and other paranormal happenings. Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians almost universally believe in healing. The vast majority know someone who has been healed through prayer, and many have personally experienced such divine healing. Testimonies about healing are given in most Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, prayer for healing is a regular part of church rituals, and healing testimonies and prayer are featured on Pentecostal-Charismatic television, all working together to maintain what sociologist Peter Berger has termed a "plausibility structure" to support the belief in divine healing.

Although Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians believe in and expect cures to take place, it should be emphasized that the normative focus is on holistic healing—spirit (soul), mind, and body. As with many other alternative

healing systems, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians seek more than a mechanistic solution to physical problems; they seek to make sense of affliction and instill a sense of ultimate hope (72, 73, 74). This search for meaning and hope in the face of illness, disability, and disease offers a unique window to view the Pentecostal-Charismatic. Divine healing, we believe, is a transformational coping form, wherein people adopt the goal of a closer relationship with God. In the next sections, we provide an actual account of this transformative process which includes a cure, a shaken worldview, and finally, a terminal illness and death. Although we see one person's struggle with illness in "Karen's Story," this transformational process is a widely applicable form of coping for Pentecostal-Charismatics.

#### *Karen's Story*

Some years ago, while working on a major research project on the Assemblies of God, the largest white Pentecostal denomination with over 2 million members in the United States and 20 million worldwide, I (Margaret Poloma) was introduced to Karen by an usher at the local assembly. Karen was a new visitor to the church who had a story—a narrative in postmodern terminology—a testimony, to tell in charismatic parlance. As Karen began to share her testimony, I quickly connected her story with a news article appearing in the local paper a few months earlier. This 40-year-old woman was "allergic" to the modern world, with allergies so severe that, even with the best of medical treatment, she was unable to live normally. In a desperate search for a cure, her husband sent her to a hospital in Dallas known for treating cases of severe allergic reactions. As Karen continued sharing her narrative, she introduced me to Ann, a Messianic Jew and charismatic Christian with professed gifts of both healing and prophecy, who often visited the Dallas hospital in search of people who sought prayer for healing. With Karen's permission, Ann had prayed with Karen. Karen said she "knew" immediately that she had been healed and quickly embraced the charismatic faith modeled by Ann.

Neither Karen nor her husband were Christian believers (both claimed to be agnostic at the time of the healing), and Karen's husband, a former Protestant minister, understandably refused to accept that his wife had actually been cured. He instructed Karen to return home only when there was solid evidence that she no longer suffered from the severe allergic reactions making it impossible to live in their new home. Karen used her husband's skepticism to remain with Ann in Dallas for a few weeks, and she became more familiar with her new Christian charismatic faith. I met Karen a week after she returned home. Karen's cure, later followed by a diagnosis of terminal cancer and finally her death, can be described in three stages, each of which has significance for understanding healing as a transformational coping strategy.

*Stage 1: Searching for a Cure* As already noted, Karen was an agnostic when Ann appeared in her hospital room, prayed with her, and proclaimed her

cured. For those like Karen who are not part of the Pentecostal-Charismatic community, the experience of such a cure can set them on a totally new pathway. Karen was unfamiliar with her new journey, and she welcomed the extra time with Ann to get grounded in her new faith before returning home. Once she returned home, she immediately sought support for her new beliefs, in a Pentecostal church.

The first stage of Karen's healing process emphasized curing rather than the possibility of a deeper healing through pain and affliction. She found the plausibility structure and hope she was seeking in a new group that taught a more extreme form of "faith healing," inspired by the teachings of Tulsa evangelist Kenneth Hagin's Word-Faith movement. Pentecostal-Charismatic critics commonly refer to this stream of the charismatic movement as "name-it-and-claim-it," reflecting the belief that once one asks for something in Jesus' name, the person already has received it. The failure to have the gift (whether it be health, money, or some other desired resource) materialize supposedly is due to a lack of faith (75, 76, 77).

While many come seeking healing gifts (e.g., physical cure, new job, repair of broken relationships), mainstream Pentecostal-Charismatic theology admonishes converts to seek the Giver rather than the gifts—to seek the Baptizer rather than the baptism. Sooner or later, however, a prayer seems unanswered, a prophecy fails, or a sick person dies. The believer is then thrust into a second stage, being forced to struggle with a shaken worldview. In Karen's case, the onset of this second stage came about through her development of terminal cancer.

*Stage Two: A Shaken Worldview* Nearly two years after I first met her, I received a phone call from Karen's husband. Karen had developed an incurable form of lymphatic cancer. When I expressed my concern, her husband, who had embraced Karen's faith after her return from Dallas, responded: "Oh, we are not worried. Karen is already healed. Ann prayed with her over the telephone and prophesied that God was healing her. We all believe that Karen is healed." Being less certain of the outcome than Karen's husband, I once again entered Karen's life. She shared with me the letter she had obtained from her physician about her first healing (which enabled her to appear and share her testimony on Christian television some months earlier), as well as lab reports and a letter with the dismal prognosis regarding her current medical condition.

Karen had decided to decline the prescribed chemotherapy and radiation, not because she rejected modern medicine, but because the best the physicians could promise was that the treatment might prolong her life by six months or so. While continuing to profess being healed, Karen also spoke realistically about issues relating to the "quality of life and death." She insisted that declining the treatment would increase the quality of her time remaining. I listened to her carefully and made a resolution to visit her regularly. Karen was very clear on one issue: if she were in fact dying, she wanted to die at home. Within a couple of short months, Karen's de-

teriorating physical and then mental condition made it impossible for her to believe that she would receive the physical cure she once expected.

It was during this time that Karen's shaken faith caused her to abandon the more extreme Word-Faith perspective in favor of the more moderate position adhered to by the larger Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. At one point, Karen struggled with doubts about God's love for her and began to question what she had done to deserve this "punishment from God." In line with Word-Faith teaching, Karen initially affirmed the Pentecostal-Charismatic belief that the demonic is the source of illness. When a cure was not forthcoming, however, Karen faced the dilemma of choosing between believing in a God who did not have power over Satan or in a God who was deliberately allowing Satan to kill her. The shaking of Karen's worldview opened up the opportunity for a transformation into a deeper relationship with God. This is the goal of spiritual healing within the Pentecostal-Charismatic community.

*Stage Three: From Cure to Healing* At this point, a friend gave Karen a copy of Hannah Hurnard's (78) devotional allegory *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, which served as a model for further transformation. Hurnard's book described the inner change of an allegorical character ("Much Afraid") from paralyzing fear to glorious confidence as she climbed a treacherous mountain with the Shepherd (Jesus) as her guide. At the end of the allegory, the Shepherd gave Much Afraid a new name, Grace and Glory, to symbolize the transformation that had taken place during the climb. As Karen read, reflected on, and talked about the allegory, she experienced fresh assurance about God's faithful love that empowered her to abandon herself to the mystery of life and death confronting her. Similar to the biblical character in the Book of Job, Karen's fear was replaced with an abandonment to a perceived divine will only dimly understood—a surrender that moved her from seeking a cure to preparing for the "final healing" (as Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians often refer to death).

I continued to visit Karen as the cancer metastasized to her brain, took away her speech, and eventually left her paralyzed. Although no longer able to communicate in words, she seemed to have a new sense of peace. Within four months after my initial visit, Karen died. Her funeral was held in the local charismatic Episcopal church which she attended infrequently, where healing was believed and practiced but in a more moderate form than in the Word-Faith groups that Karen had originally favored. In these last months before she had died, Karen was able to redefine healing from being a cure to a final transformation of union with God.

### *Discussion and Conclusions*

Despite the fervent belief in miraculous healing, curing is not the heart of Pentecostal-Charismatic faith. Most believers, even those in the forefront of the healing movement, are reluctant to explain why a particular cure does

not take place. In the words of a Presbyterian minister who has prayed for thousands of persons who have received healings during his 40 years of an active healing ministry, "I have not been called to explain; I have been called to proclaim that Jesus heals today" (79). This worldview, which commonly makes a distinction between "curing" and "healing," allows persons to believe in and have hope for being cured; but even when such a cure is not forthcoming, they can point to other ways in which they have been healed by God.

Healing in the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition appears to be a form of transformational coping. In response to poor health, the individual experiences a fundamental shift in the meanings of health and healing. The coping functions of healing receive additional support from two survey projects—a random sample of residents of Akron, Ohio (77) and a Gallup Poll (80)—in which those who reported miraculous healings were significantly more likely to be in poorer physical health. While there is no evidence from either of these surveys that religiosity actually promotes better physical health, there is evidence that it does promote a sense of spiritual well-being (see 81) and, perhaps, a sense of hope (82). What we have described here is the process by which transformational coping takes place in light of the Pentecostal-Charismatic worldview. Karen's story of her transformation from curing to healing provides an illustration of a process that is repeated time and again within the lives of many Pentecostal-Charismatic believers.

### Final Thoughts

Over thousands of years, the religions of the world have evolved a variety of mechanisms designed to help people come to terms with the most fundamental problems of living. Are these mechanisms effective? At this time, empirical research on the short-and long-term effects of these and other religious coping methods is limited. Researchers are, however, finding that methods of religious coping are significant predictors of psychological, social, and spiritual well-being (9). Even if we were to disregard this initial evidence, however, the sheer staying power of the world's religions and their religious coping methods suggests that we take them seriously. In fact, psychologists may have something not only to *learn about* but also to *gain from* the solutions religions offer to life's most baffling, intractable problems.

In this chapter, we have taken a closer look at three relatively unexplored methods of religious coping—the Bar Mitzvah, karma, and spiritual healing. Each of these methods, we believe, is noteworthy for psychological theory and practice. The doctrine of karma and the practice of spiritual healing represent ingenious solutions to the problems raised by seemingly unfathomable, uncontrollable situations. Psychology in the United States, with its focus on the here-and-now and the extension of human control,

should take note of these very different approaches. For example, we can learn from the notion in karma theory that there is a great cosmic causal order. We can learn how healing sometimes comes from a surrender of control to a higher power and a transformation from a focus on survival and cure to a greater transcendent value. Additionally, American psychology and society more generally should take note of religious rites of passage, as illustrated by the Bar Mitzvah, designed to facilitate the transition of people through critical "hinges of time."

It is unfortunate that psychology as a discipline has generally overlooked the resources of religious traditions, because the worlds of psychology and religion share an interest in understanding and enhancing the human condition. Moreover, the two disciplines have something to offer each other in the pursuit of common goals. Ultimately, with greater interaction and better understanding, we may be able to move toward a closer integration of psychological and religious thought and practice in our efforts to facilitate adaptive coping processes. Promising examples of collaborative, integrative "psychoreligious" programs and interventions already have been implemented (see 83, 84, 85, 86, 87). The time appears right for psychological and religious communities to begin learning more about and from each other. By pooling our resources, we may be able to unleash the power of the coping process and, in turn, enhance the psychological, social, and spiritual well-being of people.

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