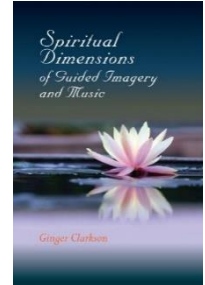


BOOK REVIEW

Spiritual dimensions of Guided Imagery and Music (Clarkson)

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Title: Spiritual dimensions of Guided Imagery and Music **Author:** Ginger Clarkson **Publication year:** 2017 **Publisher:** Barcelona Publishers
Pages: 192 **ISBN:** 9781945411281

REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

Marilyn F Clark has been working with the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) since 1975. She studied with Dr Helen Bonny and Dr Sierra Stearns. GIM has been central to Clark's career focus. She has administered training programs, trained persons to become facilitators, has had a private practice utilising GIM, and written articles and book chapters about it. She has taught music therapy students at Temple University and Appalachian State University. Following in her interest in women's self-care, she has also co-authored with Judith Waldman a book entitled *Stand, Flow, Shine: Caring for the Woman Within*. [marilynclark01@gmail.com]

Publication history:

Submitted 31 Aug 2018

Accepted 30 Oct 2018

First published 24 Nov 2019

Ginger Clarkson, music therapist, Vipassana meditation teacher, and intrepid spiritual experience seeker, has compiled her explorations into a book combining adaptations of Guided Imagery and Music with a variety of spiritual and healing approaches. Clarkson has had the unique opportunity throughout her adult life to sample, study, practise, and teach a wide variety of therapy and healing techniques as well as spiritually oriented approaches. These include Gestalt dream therapy, facilitated communication with autistic persons, mindfulness meditation, chakra energy healing, kundalini experiences, and shamanism. The breadth of spiritual interests as well as the variety of persons seeking treatment with Clarkson are a testament to her interesting and varied career; one full of service, personal challenge and spiritual unfoldment.

OVERVIEW OF BOOK

Clarkson weaves many stories throughout the book and begins in the *Preface* with the story of Helen Bonny's mystical experience during a violin performance which set the course for Bonny's life work. She developed the method variously called Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) or the Bonny Method, and that method now has international recognition. Clarkson's strong conviction is that GIM can provide a spiritual path. Clarkson states, "The case studies in this book point to specific adaptations of GIM and particular music programs that may support or enhance expansive states of consciousness" (p. 7).

Each chapter begins with Clarkson's self-reflections. She candidly shares stories from her own personal and spiritual journey, including both challenges and successes. This sharing is followed by an explanation of the method, approach, or practice that is being highlighted as catalyst or support to

the client's GIM therapy. In Chapters 2 and 3 the reader will meet Sabal, a man whose early wounding led to narcissistic inflation and the misplaced sense of the sacred. With a highly adapted form of GIM, Clarkson describes her work with Jerry, an autistic, non-verbal man with whom Clarkson develops a poignant relationship.

Clarkson's chapters on mindfulness practices, Gestalt dream therapy, and subtle energy healing exemplify ways that these practices can be employed with the GIM process. She shares the stories of three clients and describes how these approaches are shown through preliminary relaxation, facilitation, and interpretation. Each process requires training and practice with supervision or feedback. Use of a pendulum to evaluate and clear energetic centres in the body is called chelation. Clarkson's conclusions are helpful to consider: "My pioneering experiments with chelations in the realm of GIM are intended to inspire further research about the marriage of the refined vibrations of classical music with the subtle energy of the auric field" (pp. 85-86).

Having studied art therapist Joan Kellogg's work and been mentored by Carol Bush and Carol Cox, early students of Kellogg, Clarkson is well prepared to appreciate mandalas created by her clients. The story of Marina, a young woman in search of a meaningful life, is inspiring, and the use of the drawn mandala and the mandala card test accentuated her journey.

The journey of spiritual discovery includes grief and loss, and explores how healing can occur for persons who are bereft. A lovely poem early in Chapter 8 that was evoked by her own loss and grief is testament to Clarkson's open heart. In a chapter in which the GIM methodology is the primary therapeutic intervention used, Angel's struggle with grief and the healing of relationships is recounted.

The phenomenon of kundalini has been observed, experienced, researched, and written about for centuries. Clarkson shares her own partial kundalini openings extensively in *GIM and Kundalini Awakening*. Charlie's story covers his experience of kundalini awakening with GIM as a catalyst.

The last chapter is the beginning of new work for Clarkson. She is in a rigorous Buddhist chaplaincy training programme and intends this to be her primary focus for the next period in her fascinating career. In this chapter, there are two very touching stories, Mario and Rose, persons on the threshold of dying. This deep work, supported by classical music, enabled both to accept that death was near.

REFLECTIONS OF THE REVIEWER

General

Clarkson's book is a compendium of anecdotal examples of spiritual dimensions of life as evidenced by her extensive personal reflections; case material that supports her premises regarding transcendent experiences and subjective interpretations. She is an explorer and discoverer. She is enthusiastic and curious. In some areas she surveys the field; in others she delves more deeply. She is one who offers other ways of looking; she is not a traditional researcher nor does she seek to verify others' frameworks through repeated trials. She samples, studies and applies methods, combining them with the basic GIM patterns of relaxation, imaging with music and reflecting on the experience.

As a reviewer of this book, I am disappointed that most of the book consists of reprints from published articles. I would like to have seen a forward where her extensive personal reflections would provide a meaningful introduction to the chapters that follow. I found her description of her shamanic experience in the *Epilogue* to be out of place in this book. She is also profuse with her acknowledgments within the chapters, but this tends to distract from the flow. She could add these to the acknowledgements in the front of the book.

As I read through the book, I found Clarkson's chapter GIM at the Threshold of Dying to be compelling. While the detailed background and training information did not hold my attention, I gleaned that this arena is where Clarkson's calling now resides. I know that Clarkson's wealth of experience, her ability to hold a quiet and peaceful space, and her knowledge of music will bring to many persons an opportunity for a meaningful dying, not only for the one making the passage, but also for family and friends gathered as witnesses.

I appreciate the inclusion of a discography. She has listed music used traditionally in GIM settings as well as New Age, minimalist, and world music. She describes music so that the reader can imagine what it might sound like. From her discography the reader can create a soundtrack.

Adapted and blended formats of Guided Imagery and Music

How far can an approach be adapted and still be recognised? Clarkson's account of her work with Jerry, an autistic, non-verbal adult, brings this question into relief for both methods employed: GIM and Facilitated Communication. Their transcribed conversations include his purported past lives with Clarkson, his deep knowledge of classical music, and so on. I found that authoritative organisations (American Psychological Association, 2003; American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2018) note that Facilitated Communication has no positive evidence-based findings and is prone to the facilitator's direction. However, on the internet, I saw pictures and videos of very loving, dedicated helpers and autistic adults with smiles making connections with others. While Clarkson did not make a career of working with autism or researching it with scientific method, she has experienced something amazing, deep, and important in her work with Jerry. I imagine readers will feel Clarkson's compassion and caring for this non-verbal man.

Practitioners have different approaches and, for some, particularly psychotherapists, using inductions that involve healing touch and chakra opening could be outside of their ethics. For others, these practices might upset their religious belief as practised in their tradition. She is sharing explorations into dimensions of mind, body and spirit that are not easy to talk about. They are not validated through research replication and remain in the New Age realm. I am heartened that she clearly states at the end of Chapter 6, *Enhancing Spiritual Openings with Subtle Energy Healing*, that more research needs to be done.

Clarkson reports using both the drawn mandala and the mandala card test (known as MARI card test) in her sessions. From Joan Kellogg's third edition of *Mandala: Path of Beauty* (Kellogg, 1987, p. 135), she states: "Each and every mandala is a product of a specific individual in a specific setting at a specific time. As a consequence, it is a unique, never-to-be-repeated phenomenon" (p. 135). I

wonder if the same guideline could be used with MARI cards. As an assessment tool, they have yet to be widely tested. While many GIM therapists use MARI cards, care should be taken in interpreting what the cards *mean*.

GIM modality

Meditation and mindfulness have been consistent practices for Clarkson for many years. She is well grounded in these practices. She is a meditation teacher and has applied mindfulness perspectives in every facet of her work: personal spiritual practice, individual therapy, workshops and trainings. A vast amount of mindfulness research has proven the very positive outcomes for individuals in so many different settings: hyperactive children, prison inmates, yoga students, juveniles, business executives, and so on. Both mindfulness and Gestalt techniques of staying present in the moment, experiencing whole-being responses to stimuli (e.g., music, internal imagery, emotions, and body sensations) greatly enhance the facilitation of GIM. Clarkson draws our attention to these experiences through the transcripts from case material that include her interventions.

As a GIM practitioner, I know that the GIM experience itself is an adequate opener to spiritual dimensions when the client is ready. I am always fascinated by how spiritual dimensions are revealed and experienced through GIM. Although the title, *Spiritual Dimensions of Guided Imagery and Music*, points the reader in that direction, this is not a consistent focus of the book. Rather it is more accurate to say that the book is about combining a variety of approaches with GIM. One chapter that did not convey to me a spiritual dimension is, ironically, titled *Gestalt Dream Work and GIM – Partners for Spiritual Practice*. It is a good example of the therapeutic power of Gestalt-style interventions in GIM, especially as interpreted through the lens that incorporates shadow/anima elements into consciousness. Many GIM practitioners incorporate Gestalt techniques into the elements of GIM. This chapter is an excellent example of that incorporation.

CONCLUSION

Since the 1990's, the span of Clarkson's career as a GIM facilitator and teacher, spirituality has been clearly differentiated from religion. The two co-exist but are not the same. Spirituality is no longer solely connected with religious traditions, creeds, beliefs and faith. Spirituality is now understood as an experience of transcendence and can be sought in many ways both within and without religious traditions. Often personal, direct experience is emphasised. These experiences come about through non-ordinary states of consciousness as experienced in GIM, meditation, spontaneous mystical states, vision quests, attuning to healing energies, and psychedelic experiences in both indigenous peoples' sacred rituals and contemporary research settings. Not all of these experiences are validated with scientific evidence but can be personally deeply meaningful, and sometimes life-changing, for the individuals who seek spiritual awakening. In the last quarter of the last century, these topics would have been swept into the category of New Age and often vilified as such. Clarkson has sought these experiences out and, as a spiritual explorer, offers us her findings.

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