

Brian O'Donnell has been at the cutting edge of the human potential movement for almost 20 years now, and in the last 10 years he's been engaged in exploring the interface between the psychological and the spiritual.

The Crazy Wisdom Interview this issue touches on O'Donnell's extensive exposure to leading thinkers in the area of personal growth, as well as his interests in spiritual growth, prayer, sexuality and working with the gay and lesbian population. O'Donnell spends a good deal of time these days traveling around the country teaching, but we caught up with him one brisk Friday morning in early November.

Bill Zirinsky: Brian, you are a psychotherapist working in Ann Arbor. Is that right?

Brian O'Donnell: Yes.

BZ: And you've been practicing now here for about twenty years?

O'Donnell: Twenty years. . . twenty-one years, actually.

BZ: I have often noted to other people, and said to you, that among the people I know in Ann Arbor who are therapists, that you have done workshops in, and have learned about as many different modalities as really anyone I know in this community. What is the focus of your practice now? What are your prime modalities in working with people?

O'Donnell: I have a general practice, although the majority of people that come to see me are people that want to do long-term characterological change work. I also have a fair number of people that are interested in the spiritual quest.

BZ: So are you using a particular modality these days—gestalt work or bioenergetic work—or are you kind of doing something that combines all the different things that you have learned over the years?

O'Donnell: I do utilize a combination of all the different trainings. I think what I have been exploring in the last couple years is integrating the transpersonal perspective that I've been studying for twenty years with the more traditional psychodynamic/object relations analytic model, which I find is a wonderful combination to really meet people wherever they may be on the spectrum of their consciousness.

The psychodynamic object relations model really is an elegant model of understanding early childhood development and the wounds that arise from traumas that happen in the early development of the infant and the child. The transpersonal perspective really provides a comprehensive understanding of development beyond the ego. . . beyond the consolidation of the ego which is the normal understanding of people's perception of developmental psychology. Freudian psychology is the development of the ego. Transpersonal psychology—

that's where it begins to take off—is the development beyond the ego.

BZ: What does it mean to work with somebody from a transpersonal perspective?

O'Donnell: That means that I have an appreciation of what their soul's journey is—that they're here and on their way back home to God.

BZ: So you're trying to help the person to understand, not just their psychological issues, but their spiritual issues in life?

O'Donnell: If they're interested. Many of the people I work with have no conception that I have a transpersonal orientation.

BZ: Because they're not necessarily interested. .

O'Donnell: They're not interested in it and it wouldn't be helpful to them. Their work is really focused on the more object relations end of the spectrum—healing childhood wounds.

BZ: What does that mean—their soul's journey back home?

O'Donnell: Well, I believe that we're all on a soul's journey to return to the divine. It's the story of the prodigal son or daughter. We all leave home, so to speak, and come in and enter the world of duality, enter the world of this earth's sphere, to learn lessons, to heal where we are split off from God, the divine. At a certain point, we feel a call to go back home, to reconnect or unify with our deepest nature. I believe psychology and spirituality, especially when they're blended, can provide a powerful tool, a powerful vehicle for the journey home.

BZ: The call back home—does that mean we're ready to die?

O'Donnell: Not necessarily in the physical sense, but in the psychological sense. I feel like the spiritual journey, as well as the psychological journey, if it's done in any depth, requires that a person know how to die. . . to die to whatever concept of themselves they hold dear. Because to be living truly in spirit means to be changing moment to moment. To be living in divine mystery means we have to let go of who we think we are. We have to learn how to die.

BZ: You were born Roman Catholic?

O'Donnell: Yes.

BZ: And what part did that play in your transpersonal work?

O'Donnell: It's an interesting question. I was raised in a devout Catholic home and both my parents and my older brothers and sisters—I'm the youngest of eight—had a reverence for the spiritual life. I feel like that

instilled in me an appreciation and a hunger for dimensions beyond everyday reality. It also hindered me in the sense that there was a lot of external morality, which carried with it a heavy weight of shame. But there was also an emphasis by both my parents and the church on appreciating mystery—the divine mystery, and making space for that in our everyday lives. We started every meal with a prayer. There was an emphasis on going to church and receiving sacraments which are external signs of internal mysteries.

BZ: Do you think that the greater interest in transpersonal psychology and one's own transpersonal work is because people have the sense that there are mysteries in living that are not or cannot be fully uncovered or understood or appreciated from a strictly ego or psychological point of view?

O'Donnell: Yes, I think that's well put. I think the mind, the external mind, the everyday mind is very limited. It has its function and its capacity. But in my spiritual understanding, its job is really a servant to the greater mind. Its job is really to open or prepare the way for the deeper mind—divine intelligence. It's very limited, and all too often we make the external mind the master and not the servant. I feel like, at a certain point in people's development, there's an awakening that there is more than this external mind, that we feel a call to a deeper heart. It's not just mind; it's heart. It's the world of the realm of feeling, the realm of heart, the realm of communion with all of life.

BZ: Have you noticed an increase in the interest in spiritual development over the last ten years? Not necessarily only in your own practice. I have seen a very noticeable increase in the number of counselors and therapists in Ann Arbor who are doing personal growth work which has a spiritual component. The kind of books that we have at Crazy Wisdom that people are reading really speak to people's interest in larger questions and spiritual meanings.

O'Donnell: I think that's true. I think that's true not only with what we call the New Age movement, but it's also true in the fundamentalist movement. I feel like there is a call in the world at large for a deeper meaning, for a more fundamental understanding. Partly, that's a result of the accelerated changes that are happening in our culture—the political changes, the changes in information processing, economic shifts, computers, the changes with sex roles. But it's also a product of fragmentation—the breakdown of the family, the breakdown of structures of traditional meaning. I also believe there's an acceleration of consciousness happening in the world—all of which brings people to ask deeper questions or to search for a spiritual source.

BZ: Over the years, Brian, you've done a lot of experimentation and you've tried and done workshops in and been trained in many different methods. You have kept abreast of all the major trends and ideas that have come out of the human potential movement over the last twenty years. I remember, years ago, you did some work with Arica, which was Oscar Ichazo's institute. You've done Native American work, work with Richard Moss, bioenergetic training, been to international transpersonal conferences... You read deeply and widely in the related areas of the human potential movement.

O'Donnell: Werner Erhard.

BZ: You did some work with Werner Erhard. You did a number of years of training in Core Energetics. And now, I know that for a number of years you've been involved in something called the Pathwork. Before you tell us about the Pathwork, can you tell us about the modalities that you've been trained in over the years that have been particularly meaningful; the work which you've *most* incorporated into how you view working with people?

O'Donnell: Well, I feel like everything that I've studied has been helpful to me. I feel like they've all served to help awaken this call in me. They've spoken to a dimension of experience that has been perhaps crippled in me. Each of these teachers and voices has educated and matured me. For instance, I feel like Werner Erhard is an excellent teacher about the right use of will.

I also think each of these teachings has its dark side. So, for instance, with Werner, I feel like the will aspect wasn't balanced with heart. I feel like bioenergetics was useful for me and it helped me learn to live in my body again, to learn to live with my feelings. But it wasn't enough because it didn't incorporate the soul, which is where Core Energetics and the Pathwork has helped me integrate that aspect of my life. Each of them has served as a stepping stone.

I feel like one of the dangers of the human potential movement is that they have not understood the spectrum of consciousness. Briefly, what I mean by the spectrum of consciousness is the idea, first developed by Ken Wilber, that in the human journey there are evolutionary steps that first involve the formation of a healthy ego to later steps that involve releasing identification with the ego and merging with the Divine. I think that they have created casualties, as well as served a tremendous function. I feel like people were not met in their totality and certain people's early childhood wounds were not addressed. In fact, people try to transcend them too quickly and people try to superimpose a belief system—for instance, the EST belief system—on top of a damaged psyche, creating further damage. So I don't feel like there was an understanding or an articulation of early childhood

development, and what they did offer was very powerful, incisive, and useful for people at a certain point in development. Some people were really served by it—they could take the next step in their development. Other people misused it and further damaged themselves.

BZ: When you're talking about "they", what are you referring to?

O'Donnell: You mean in terms of "they damaged"?

BZ: Yes.

O'Donnell: Well, I feel like myself and other people who have taken these programs were reaching for a certain outcome. It became a part of their idealized image, and there was enough truth in these teachings that they were compelling and had some force in their lives. But the force diminished because people weren't going to the roots of their problems. They were taking something from the outside and trying to will themselves into another level of development, into a certain level of insight.

BZ: It sounds like you're saying that you think that many of programs that you did in the late 70's or the 80's were of limited value.

O'Donnell: For a sizable portion of people, I think they had limited value. But I think for some people, they had long-standing value—for people that were truly ready for it. When they offer wide-scale programs for people, these programs can't address the particular needs of the individuals and where they are in their developmental journey. For some people who are broken, they try to use this as a Band-Aid or as a way to rise above—and I'm putting myself here—early childhood deficits. It was exhilarating for awhile, but until the early childhood deficits are met, the remedies, so to speak, can't really be integrated fully. They can't be sustained. So I'm much more comprehensive, for instance, when I work with somebody now. I'm much more flexible than I would have been fifteen years ago. Not everybody has to fit into a certain kind of understanding. I try to, as much as possible, respect the spectrum of consciousness and where somebody is in terms of what they need. Not everybody who comes into my office gets a transpersonal perspective.

BZ: Do you do bodywork of one sort or another with clients anymore?

O'Donnell: Occasionally. I don't think it's an area that I'm particularly gifted in. But I do feel that I always have an understanding of where the body is in relationship to the psychological dilemma and how the dilemma is manifested in the body. Periodically, I'll work to bring consciousness to the dilemma as it's manifested in the body.

BZ: There came a time in your career where you moved into Core Energetics and then into the Pathwork. Can you talk about what Core Energetics is and what the Pathwork is?

O'Donnell: Core Energetics is the form of working on the personality—the psychology of the person—that incorporates not only the productions of the mind, but also includes working with the body and how the dilemmas and the conflicts of the personality are not only manifest in our relationships and what our mind thinks, but also in how our body is structured, in how our body moves through life. As I said earlier, that's also included in bioenergetics. But what Core Energetics also includes is an understanding of the soul's journey—that we take on this body to learn particular lessons; we take on this particular psychology to learn evolutionary lessons on our journey home.

I began studying Core Energetics at the same time as I joined the Pathwork because I was seeking something beyond just understanding the personality in relationship to the body and mind. I was seeking a larger vision. And the Pathwork. . . I guess it depends on what day you ask me what the Pathwork is. But today . . .

BZ: Today is Friday, November 1st. What's the Pathwork . . .?

O'Donnell: The Pathwork today? To me, it is a path of Remembering. It's a path which sees how fragmented we all are. It seeks to reunify the fragmented aspects of ourselves—particularly, the discarded aspects of our humanity that we turn away from because we're afraid of them. I think the particular gift of the Pathwork is the teachings around working with the lower self and the dark side of us, the more base aspects of ourselves—our cruelty, our envy, our spite, our negativity. We see that as an alchemical process. The Pathwork believes that we take the lead of our baser aspects and turn it into the gold of our divine nature.

BZ: Who was Eva Pierrakos?

O'Donnell: Eva Pierrakos was the channel through which these teachings emerged. She started channeling these teachings in the late 50s and she died in 1979.

BZ: What does that really mean—channeling, being a channel for these teachings? Did they come from her?

O'Donnell: That's always a question that people ask and I don't know ultimately what the truth is, and I don't even know if it matters. What she did is that she made herself an instrument to powerful wisdom that was beyond what she knew in her everyday mind. The personality or the entity that came through Eva refers to himself as "The Guide" and he says it really doesn't matter who he is—what really matters is that we pay attention to his teachings.

BZ: Was she an American-born woman?

O'Donnell: No, she was Austrian. She was a dancer. She was a sensualist by nature. Spirituality was not her inclination. In fact, she described herself as a very superficial person until she had a profound experience while she was in a nightclub, I think in the late 40's or early 50's in Europe, and she had, what she called, a "Christed" experience.

BZ: A what experience?

O'Donnell: "Christed" experience.

BZ: Christed?

O'Donnell: Yes. She had an experience of Jesus Christ and she was a Jewish woman. It was very startling to her. Her channeling started with automatic writing and eventually moved into just directly speaking, making herself available to The Guide who spoke to her. She eventually channeled 258 lectures about all aspects of spiritual and human development. It's really a highly articulated, highly demanding roadmap for spiritual and self development.

BZ: And John Pierrakos, who was he?

O'Donnell: John Pierrakos was one of the developers of bioenergetics and he met Eva in the early 70s, I believe. There was a marriage not only of their personalities, they became husband and wife... there was a marriage of their understandings about personality. He brought the energetic aspects to The Guide teachings, so there was a marriage of the conceptual and the energetic.

BZ: You are a teacher of the Pathwork?

O'Donnell: Yes.

BZ: You serve on an international board of the Path?

O'Donnell: I teach in the Pathwork programs here in Michigan and in California, Pennsylvania and New York, and will be teaching in South America. I also serve on the international governing body.

BZ: Are a lot of people interested in the Pathwork around the country? Are we talking about a number in the thousands of people?

O'Donnell: Yes, we could say thousands. The Pathwork, for many years, was a very well-kept secret. But we as a community decided maybe five years ago, maybe a little longer, that it was time for the word to get out. So we decided to publish the lectures in book form and, as a result of publishing these lectures on

themes, as you know from your bookstore, word has gotten out and we're getting tremendous response, not only in this country, but all over the world, to these teachings. There are not enough teachers at this point to deliver to as many people as want to study the teachings.

I want to talk about a specific aspect of the Pathwork that I've been studying lately. It's called by some the path within the Path. It's the teachings that have to do with sexuality. This is what I find most exciting in my life right now, what I feel most passionate about. There's a particular teacher of the Pathwork named Sage Walker, in Toronto, who's making it her life's work to articulate and bring forward these teachings about sexuality. Why it's so exciting to me is because sexuality is a powerful lens through which to understand our soul's journey. Sexuality brings to the fore, in a very concentrated way, all the teachings of the Pathwork. Sexuality is where the rubber meets the road. It's the aspect of our work that spiritualizes the body and materializes the spirit.

A vital aspect of these teachings is to understand the symbolic nature of our sexual expression. The Pathwork Guide says that because our sexual energy is so powerful, whether expressed or repressed, it magnetizes to it all attitudes and feelings, no matter how apparently insignificant, that exist in the human personality. So, if you look at the lens of sexuality and what it attracts to it, if we study sexuality, if we look at our actual sexual lives, it will tell us everything we need to know about our psychology and it will tell us everything we need to know to get back to God.

Our sexuality reveals where we are immature and wounded. It also reveals our highest possibilities. The aim of the Pathwork is to find the reality of God as immediate presence. To work with sexuality with such a focus, as the Pathwork offers, has the potential to accelerate our self-development and purification.

A major part of this work is to bring out what is hidden and that's working with sexual fantasies, working with sexual autobiography because what is hidden can't be transformed and so we have to bring it to the light of consciousness. These deeper aspects, these baser aspects of ourselves are neither indulged, nor are they repressed. That's really the trick of working with sexuality. It's not either to indulge them or to repress them, but to use them as spiritual practice.

BZ: Interesting. You've been very involved in the last couple years in the formation of an organization in Ann Arbor called. . .

O'Donnell: COLAGE.

BZ: . . . COLAGE, which is an organization designed, as I understand it, to provide services for older gay and lesbians. Obviously, many older gay and lesbians have had to deal with a tremendous amount of oppression throughout most of their lives. How is that going, that organization?

O'Donnell: It's moving slowly. It's a volunteer group. There doesn't seem to be as much interest as I would hope in the gay community amongst the younger people. I think aging is a difficult aspect for younger gay men and lesbians to look at. So many people like to look the other way.

We have a dedicated group of people that are really working to create this organization. COLAGE stands for Coalition of Older Lesbian and Gay Endeavors. We want to provide a range of services, from driving people to their doctors, to providing workshops, to providing friendly visitor programs and consultation to nursing homes and senior agencies about the needs and rights of gay and lesbian seniors. It's a difficult thing to get off the ground because we all are working full-time doing other things.

The main idea is to expand the tent of the gay community to include elder gays and lesbians and to provide a sense of family where there may not be a sense of family because, as you know, many gay and lesbians do not have children. So we need to be the family for them as they age.

The benefits of younger gay and lesbians working with older gay and lesbians is they get a sense of the history of their family, of what it was like to be a gay or lesbian in Ann Arbor in 1930. It's a powerful teaching to them about what their pioneering elders had to go through to create the world in which they're living today. It's an opportunity to serve for both constituencies.

BZ: Younger gay and lesbians in Ann Arbor would not have much understanding, really, of how different the world was. . .

O'Donnell: Yeah, it's true.

BZ: Twenty, thirty, forty . . .

O'Donnell: Even ten years ago.

BZ: Do you specialize in working with the gay population?

O'Donnell: No. About half my client population is gay and lesbian.

BZ: Are there other therapists in town who specialize, or, like you, have a significant part of their client population being gay and lesbian.

O'Donnell: Yes, I think it's a growing population of therapists that are targeting the gay and lesbian.

BZ: When you started twenty years ago, were you one of the only ones who was working with young people to frame their coming out in a positive way?

O'Donnell: I think when I started in Ann Arbor twenty-one years ago, there were only a handful of therapists that were working, that were out, or were framing a practice in an affirmative way.

BZ: Nowadays, when you have a young person come in who's eighteen or twenty or twenty-one, who's a young gay man, does that tend to be something that is much easier for them to accept?

O'Donnell: Yes.

BZ: So sometimes they may be coming in just for therapy. . .

O'Donnell: They're not coming in necessarily to deal with coming out issues. They're coming in to deal with relationship issues, or depression, or anxiety like everybody else does.

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BZ: Who were some of the teachers who have been an influence on you in recent years in terms of analytical work and object relations?

O'Donnell: The person that I find the most helpful is a man named Steven Johnson because he combines bioenergetic theories of development with analytic and object relations theories of development in a really elegant blend.

BZ: Has he written anything that we might have in the store?

O'Donnell: He's written four books I know of: Characterological Transformation, Humanizing the Narcissistic Style, Symbiotic Character and Character Styles.

BZ: Another author that you've spoken highly of a number of times is Richard Moss. For a few years, we even had a small section at the store for his books based on his importance as writer in the area of transpersonal psychology. What was his contribution to your thinking?

O'Donnell: He's still an ongoing contributor to my development. He has a fine appreciation for psychology. He is a western-trained physician who had an awakening experience. I believe he writes very eloquently about states of consciousness, those realms beyond the ego. Since he's a western-trained scientist, he can integrate the scientific and the mystical realities. He's also a poet—he writes poetically.

BZ: Nice combination.

O'Donnell: It's a very nice combination, to bring all those voices together. And he's still writing, he's still forming. Every time a book comes out, I eat it like candy.

BZ: You liked Robert Augustus Masters, or one of his two books.

O'Donnell: Yes, The Way of the Lover. It's an exquisite book about meeting the fire of transformation, about dying to our everyday self. He's also a poet and he writes about the transformational journey in an exquisite way. He has a fierceness to him that I found in Werner Erhard, that can cut through the dross and the illusions that we carry. They both carry a sword, a fiery sword. I know they don't speak to everybody because some people find that fiery sword burns them. They find it obnoxious, or they find it too harsh. But I thrive on it. I like the fierceness.

BZ: What has been your favorite book of the last year in the area of spirituality and psychology?

O'Donnell: The book that comes to mind that I've read in the last year and that I'm still reading is called The Second Miracle by Richard Moss.

BZ: Okay, what else?

O'Donnell: Healing the Split by John Nelson, where he integrates transpersonal psychology with western medical understandings of the psychotic process. Again, another western scientist, a western psychiatrist understanding the western mystical and eastern mystical traditions and bringing them together.

BZ: Have you read Hands of Light or any of the works of Barbara Brennan—energy healing work?

O'Donnell: I have not read her complete works. I've read some of her work. I studied with Barbara when she was developing the material in New York because she was, and maybe she would still define herself as, a Pathworker. When she was organizing materials, she would teach us—those people who were studying Pathwork in those days—what she was developing. So I had firsthand experience with her teachings, but I haven't read her books. There's also another teacher that comes out of the Pathwork that I find a wonderful teacher and his name is Emmanuel. The woman that channels Emmanuel, Pat Rodegast, is a Pathwork helper.

BZ: I didn't know that about Emmanuel.

Several years ago, you were involved in trying to create television or media programs for the mainstream that would expose people to the ideas of the human potential movement. As you look at it now, do you think that the mainstream culture has become increasingly exposed to alternative ideas or that it is still very much kind of out there, sort of on the fringe?

O'Donnell: No. When I look at Bill Moyers and the series he does for PBS, I see that he's bringing together these ideas and these teachers that we had envisioned ten, twelve years ago. The series that he did on healing, the series that he did with Joseph Campbell, the series he did with Huston Smith are exactly what we had envisioned—to bring these people who are articulating these ideas and integrating with western and eastern ideas, religious traditions, spiritual and mystical traditions, is happening.

It's also happening in Hollywood. I feel like many of the movies that are coming out—even many years ago, from the movie Resurrection, which was about ten years ago, to movies that are being put out today—are incorporating the mystical ideas, the perennial philosophy.

BZ: Who else have you studied with, Brian, over the years?

O'Donnell: I studied with Jean Houston.

BZ: Interesting. I thought that what happened in the mass media around Hilary Clinton and Jean Houston this past Summer was so ridiculous and so sad. It said so much about how our culture reduces. I think she's a fascinating and brilliant woman.

O'Donnell: Yes, she's a genius. She's also a choreographer of energies. She's an excellent storyteller—that's not the right word, "excellent"—she's spellbinding. Her gift is to tell stories and to transmit her ideas through stories. One of the things I love about her is that her father was a joke writer for Bob Hope.

BZ: Who else?

O'Donnell: I also had the opportunity to spend a little time with Elizabeth Kubler Ross.

BZ: I didn't know that.

O'Donnell: I found her one of the most compelling, present people that I've ever had the experience to be with. I've also spent time with Ram Dass.

BZ: Oh, yes! You know I forgot that you had spent time with Ram Dass over the years.

O'Donnell: Yes. He has been one of my teachers ever since I began my journey and I felt like he became a friend at a certain point on my journey. It was wonderful to meet somebody and realize that it wasn't

just words, that my experience of him was that he embodied what he taught, that he was very human and that he also had access to larger dimensions of reality.

BZ: We used to get to see him in Ann Arbor, occasionally, when he was involved with the Seva Foundation, which he probably still is, but which is now no longer located in Chelsea.

O'Donnell: Right. People didn't know that he was in town a lot.

BZ: But he was?

O'Donnell: Yeah. He would come through for board meetings and to meet with Larry Brilliant. He was also involved in the television project. He became a partner with us in this project.

BZ: Human Horizons?

O'Donnell: Human Horizons, yes.

BZ: So, in a sense, Human Horizons really was ahead of its time in terms of trying to bring these ideas to a broader audience.

O'Donnell: Yes.

BZ: You did some interesting Native American work years ago.

O'Donnell: I studied the Kadoshka teachings about spirituality and the integration of spirituality and sexuality.

BZ: Yeah. Sexuality and spirituality has been something you, in a sense, have been working with for a long time. I see a book on your shelf here called The Sexual Relations of Mankind.

O'Donnell: That was the topic of my dissertation.

BZ: I see.

O'Donnell: And it's also been the main focus of my work on myself. I feel like I've been wounded sexually, and so part of my healing journey is to reclaim the full capacity of my sexuality and then merge it with the wonderful gift of my spirituality. Essentially, they're the same force. That's what I'm learning. But, they've been very bifurcated in my experience.

BZ: In another generation, I think you might very well have become a priest or monk

O'Donnell: Yes. Well, I feel like I am a priest, in the best sense of the word—that my work is about speaking to people about the possibilities of the spiritual life. Yes.

BZ: I've often been struck with how much you integrate daily spiritual practice—prayer and meditation—into your rather modern existence. You know, between your practice and flying away to do teachings and enjoying movies and American culture

and sports, you also find time to pray and to meditate and to write in a journal.

O'Donnell: I do think prayer and meditation are healing forces. But the prayer and meditation that I practice is very different than, I think, conventional prayer. The Path teaches a very specific form of prayer and meditation. Another word I use for prayer and meditation is conscious creation.

BZ: Conscious creation?

O'Donnell: Conscious creation, because my belief and the Path belief is that we're constantly creating, mostly unconsciously, our life experience. Prayer is that aspect of our lives, our spiritual practice that allows us to consciously create our experiences, our life, our circumstances, the occurrences of our life.

Path prayer and meditation is a very active form of self examination using the conscious mind to explore the unconscious—to make it conscious. Then, at a certain point in prayer, we need to let go to the larger mind and then become receptive to the larger mind. There's a kind of nice rhythm between the active and the receptive. At certain points, the conscious mind needs to be active and issue a certain kind of request for help.

Most of my prayer is really around where I'm out of alignment with purpose—my divine purpose. That's often indicated to me by suffering—where am I in suffering? I rarely pray in the form of petition prayer. It's not a form of prayer that I do much. I do a little, but mostly I pray to heal where I'm violating God's will.

BZ: How do you know when you're violating God's will?

O'Donnell: Because there's suffering.

BZ: Your own?

O'Donnell: My own and other people's. If, people are suffering as a result of me, if I hurt somebody, I know I must be violating God's will. My prayer is very noisy. It's hard for me to meditate and pray in groups because I go into a lot of feeling. I cry a lot, I rage a lot, I tremble a lot with fear. I dance with delight. It's a very dynamic form of prayer and meditation.

BZ: You don't just sit at the edge of your bed like Timmy?

O'Donnell: Timmy?

BZ: In Lassie.

O'Donnell: (Chuckle) I'm both Timmy and Lassie. I try to allow for the expression of the animal and the angelic in my prayer. Actually, when I start my prayer, I usually take about ten or fifteen minutes of calming and stilling myself. But that's only a preliminary phase of my prayer life. Then I go into the more active forms

of self searching. . . it's like giving myself a session. My prayer life is like giving myself a session.

BZ: So if you're raging, are you stomping around the house?

O'Donnell: Yes, I could be stomping around the house or sobbing or on my back on the floor.

BZ: And consciously creating the prayer as you go?

O'Donnell: Yes, and also, at the same time, being led, being receptive to what spirit tells me I need to move into. It's usually those aspects of my being that are tight, that are held, that don't want to let the life force move through them.

BZ: How do you bring some balance to your rather serious sense of purpose and work?

O'Donnell: I love to watch MTV and Regis and Kathie Lee! I'm addicted to magazines of all kinds, from trashy to esoteric. I'm passionate about athletics and try to spend time each day playing or working out.

BZ: You're still a relatively young man and you've really developed a lot of experience and wisdom in your practice and in your work. Do you see yourself continuing to work with people and work as a therapist over the next twenty years?

O'Donnell: I hope so. I hope I'm always working with people. I don't see myself retiring. I see my life being a combination of teaching and working with people, one-on-one or in groups.

BZ: You received a social work graduate degree here at the University of Michigan?

O'Donnell: Yes.

BZ: And then, later?

O'Donnell: A Ph.D. in transpersonal psychology at Columbia Pacific University in California.

BZ: What was your dissertation on?

O'Donnell: My dissertation was called "Eros and the Search for Transcendence". It is an exploration of people who are on an intended spiritual path and their experience of their sexuality during their spiritual journey.

BZ: Interesting.

O'Donnell: Yeah.

BZ: Thank you, Brian.

O'Donnell: Thank you, Bill. It was a pleasure.