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## **The Diamond Approach and Christian Ministry**

**Gord Alton**

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**I**n my spiritual direction training (1997-1999), the focus of ministry was the client's relationship with God. This involved inviting clients to explore their beliefs, prayer life, and different life experiences with the purpose of noticing how God's spirit was guiding and shaping their life. In my pastoral counselling training (2001-2006), the focus of ministry was different. Here, the focus was on helping clients experience healing and greater wholeness through psychological insight and techniques. Beyond the practice of some theological reflection and an occasional prayer within my sessions, there was little emphasis on the dynamics of God's spirit within the counselling session or in my client's life. As a result, I was operating with two very different models of spiritual care, and they did not inform each other very much.

With the Diamond Approach, I found an extensive sacred psychology that made it possible to integrate my counselling training and experience into my spiritual direction ministry. Now, as I helped my clients explore their God relationship and the various experiences arising from the depths of their soul, I began to use insights and practices that echo my pastoral counselling training. This allowed my clients to work at the blockages within them that kept God's spirit from flowing freely within their life experience.

The Diamond Approach was developed by A. H. Almaas in the 1980s as "a contemporary spiritual path integrating the teachings and practices of the ancient wisdom traditions with modern depth psychology" (Wikipedia, retrieved August 2014). While there are certain resonances with Eckhart Tolle's writings that have become popular in the last 15 years, I have found the Diamond Approach far more extensive and grounded in psychology. This is evident by Almaas' extensive writing with more than fifteen books published explaining different aspects of the Diamond Approach.

Almaas called this spiritual path the Diamond Approach is because this "approach to inner work, to truth, (is) characterized by the precision, clarity and objectivity of diamond consciousness" (Olson, retrieved August 2014). Diamond consciousness is a form of consciousness that allows us to experience reality and Essence through many different lens or faces like a diamond, or as one integrated whole (Almaas, retrieved August 2014). Davis, a senior Diamond teacher, claims that the precision of this Diamond perception has the preciseness of laser surgery, able to cut through hard materials without being destroyed (1999, p. 17).

In Toronto, I have been a student of the Diamond Approach School since 2006. This school, along with many other such Diamond Approach Schools around the world, is actually a school where people work at their personal spiritual formation. It is not a school where one learns new spiritual counselling techniques. However, as I slowly internalize these Diamond Approach teachings into my personal life, I am now able to help others discover and internalize for themselves these same insights.

In this article I will explore five themes of the Diamond Approach that have been foundational for my spiritual direction and pastoral ministry, and briefly show how they shape my ministry. They include the following:

- a. Soul as an Organ of Experience
- b. Psychology of Essence
- c. The Theory of Holes
- d. Transforming the Ego
- e. The Inner Critic

## **A. Soul as an Organ of Experience**

The Diamond Approach is based on a new metapsychology that brings together the religious and philosophical teachings of soul with the psychological “knowledge of the self, with its ego and its subsystems, or its overt behavior” (Almaas, 2004, p. 11). In the Diamond Approach, the soul is the human’s organ of experience. And so, when we do spiritual work, we are working on all the dynamics within our soul that include the thoughts and images of the mind, the feelings within the heart, the drives of the will, and all the sensations within the physical body including our five senses.

When we experience the soul in this way, we actually experience our soul as “a sensitive field, a field of consciousness or awareness, where all experiences arise and pass away” (Almaas, 2004, p. 22). Our soul can experience anything arising within this field of awareness. Normally, we think of ourselves as the experiencer of our experiences, but when we recognize the soul, it becomes clear that our soul is both the experiencer, which creates that sense of “I”, and the field of consciousness that contains the experiences (Almaas, 2004, p. 23). Our soul is both the subject and object of our experience, both the “I” and the “AM”, what the “I” is experiencing, and there is no duality.

There is a difference between ordinary self-awareness and direct knowing of this field of consciousness. We experience this direct knowing as a presence, a sense of being, “independent of and more fundamental than all the content of consciousness and all characteristics of subjective experience” (Almaas, 2004, p. 32). In these moments of being or presence, we are in touch with the depths of our soul.

This direct knowledge of the soul is often not accessible (Almaas, 2004, p. 18). The reason for this lack of knowledge is because we have become identified with our self or personality, an extensive ego structure that began forming in our childhood years and now essentially determines our experience of ourselves and how we interact with the world. Because of this identification, our experience within our soul is reduced so much that we only experience ourselves as our personality structure. We lose awareness of the soul's deeper spiritual ground, so much so, "that we cannot envision what it would be like to recognize ourselves as soul" (Almaas, 2004, p. 19).

This means that there are two types of experiences within the human soul, one that is shaped by our personality structure, and one that is not. How would we experience ourselves differently if we could experience the depths of our soul free from the ego structures of our past? We would experience what the Diamond Approach calls our True Nature or Essence, what the Christian tradition would describe as humanity's Divine nature or God. When we experience our soul free of any ego structures, we would experience reality as it really is, including the dynamics of Essence or God. We would experience the dynamics of Essence without any distortion, without any ego management or tampering. However, experiencing our True Nature is rare for most of these experiences go through the distortion, deadening, and managing filters of our ego structures before we finally experience them in real life. Our ego functions like heavy dense clouds on a sunny day that actually keep us from experiencing, to any depth, the life-giving qualities from Essence manifesting with our soul.

## **B. Psychology of Being or Essence**

When we experience life without the veils of ego, we see that all of existence possesses a true nature---its common essential ground (Almaas, 2002, p. 31). I suspect this is what Paul Tillich was trying to describe when he referred to God as the "Ground of Being." To distinguish the experiences of True Nature from ego functioning, the Diamond Approach highlights five common characteristics of Being.

- i. Awareness (Almaas, 2002, p. 32). When we experience Being, we will always be in a place of awareness just as heat always is connected to fire. Awareness and True Nature always go together. "Awareness, in this sense, is not awareness of presence; it is the presence" (Almaas, 2002, p. 33). In contrast, the common experience of self-awareness occurs when we, the subject, are aware of something else, an object. With the experience of Being, this subject/object dualism disappears and we find ourselves in a field of presence where we are aware of ourselves and our experience at the same time. When Christianity uses the term "presence of God" or "I AM", it is referring to this experiential aspect of Being. Furthermore, the Christian themes of

- light and darkness also resonate. To be a “people of light” means that we are a “people of awareness.”
- ii. Oneness/Unity (Almaas, 2002, p. 33). This field of a presence is pervasive, infinite, and includes everything within. There is an oneness to this field, an indivisible unity. This does not mean we do not notice discrete objects but rather we are also aware of the connectedness of everything. Within the Christian tradition, experiences of transcendence, intimacy, and oneness capture this teaching of the Diamond Approach.
  - iii. Dynamism/Change/Transformation (Almaas, 2002, pp. 34-35). Our experience of life, both inner and outer, is more like a movie than a snapshot. The experience within our soul is in constant flow, constantly changing and undergoing transformation. When this flow of change stops, we notice nothing; this happens in meditation sometimes when the activity in our soul becomes totally still. Since the dynamics of Being are free and open, there is an inherent quality within this experience of presence to reveal the qualities of Essence such as compassion, love, truth, strength, will, etc. Therefore, when the dynamics of Essence are free to function without the distorting influences of our ego structures, they tend to transform our experience and perception toward greater clarity, knowledge, openness, truth, and freedom. In the Christian tradition, this aspect of Being is picked up by the themes of salvation, transformation, sanctification, reconciliation, and new creation.
  - iv. Openness/Spaciousness (Almaas, 2002, pp. 35-36). Reality is always changing because its true nature is completely open, open to an infinite number of possibilities. What makes this freedom possible is that reality, including our soul, is very spacious. Almaas, in his book, *Void: Inner Spaciousness and Ego Structure* (1986), develops the idea that one core quality of True Nature is inner spaciousness, a field free of any ego structure. As people do the spiritual work of transforming these ego structures, these structures dissolve and people experience more inner spaciousness in their soul. Due to this increased spaciousness, they become less reactive, impulsive, and compulsive and thus more free to follow other longings and desires rising from the depths or True Nature of their soul. The closest Christian teaching that resonates with this notion of spaciousness is inner freedom and yet the experience of Divine grace, which is the essence of the Christian faith, can only arise from this place of inner spaciousness where no ego activity is happening. Divine grace, in whatever form it takes, is not the result of human works or ego strivings but a gift from God’s spirit that emerges from this spaciousness.
  - v. Knowingness (Almaas, 2002, pp. 36-38). When we experience Being, we sense awareness, oneness, dynamism, openness, but there is one final characteristic of Being, namely knowingness. In the experience of Presence, we find ourselves being able to know or describe what we are experiencing. For example, Almaas notes that

most people do not know such a thing as the presence of Value. However, if they pay attention to this experience of Presence when it arises, they will recognize, ‘Oh, yah, this feels like value. I feel worthy. I have worth” (Almaas, 2002, p. 37). Through this trait of knowingness, the Diamond Approach has discovered many core qualities of Essence including compassion, love, truth, strength, power, will, joy, curiosity, vulnerability, trust, etc. These core qualities of Essence echo the spiritual fruits that the Christian tradition teaches such as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5: 22).

These five characteristics of Being provide a very helpful guide for pastors and spiritual directors in helping people notice when they are experiencing God. It is interesting to note how the dynamics of ego are often in opposition to these qualities of being: lack of awareness, disconnection/separateness, structured/static, closed/contracted/compulsive, and confusion/not knowing. This framework is an excellent tool as people work at spiritual discernment and nurturing experiences of the Divine. But the Diamond Approach is not just about spiritual discernment and helping people have sacred experiences. It is an authentic path of spiritual transformation. To understand how this spiritual transformation happens, we must understand how the soul developed these ego structures that keep us from experiencing our True or Divine Nature.

### **C. The Theory of Holes.**

Within the Christian tradition, we really do not have a psychology that explains humanity’s fall from God’s grace. Within the Mennonite Christian tradition, of which I am part, there is the belief that humans are born in an unfallen state and by teenage years struggle with a divided nature. There is no psychological explanation as to how this divided nature arose. We have been taught that it is a theological fact. However without a psychology of humanity’s fall, I believe it is impossible to develop an accurate psychology of Christian salvation or transformation. It is here again that I have found the Diamond Approach helpful.

Almaas developed the theory of holes to describe what happens to our soul as children. When we were born, our souls were spacious and open. The qualities of Essence arose as needed in response to our childhood environment. When we were hungry, the Presence of Strength emerged through our determined cry for food. When our needs were apparent and overlooked, like a wet diaper, the Presence of Compassion arose through our tears of sadness. When our tummies were satisfied, the Presence of Merging Love materialized and we became settled and one with our environment which was mommy. Of course, we were too young to perceive or understand these experiences and thus they were not integrated into our soul in a mature way, but we still experienced Essence.

Our earliest experience of a holding environment is a mix of support and non-support. “Support allows the unfolding and development of the soul in a way that is open to Essence. Nonsupport, in the form of abandonment or punishment, constricts the soul’s flow and arrests its development ” (Davis, 1999, p. 96). When our soul contracts from physical and emotional pain, or the risk or fear of such pain, it blocks the flow of the essential quality into our experience. As a result, we experience the opposite to the original divine quality. For example, “if Essential Compassion is blocked, the hole may feel like emptiness in one’s heart and a lack of kindness either towards self or others. The hole of Essential Strength can result in a feeling of weakness, lack of capacity, or an absence of vigor and passion” (Davis, 1999, p. 96). When the quality of trust and inner support is impeded, we experience anxiety. When value is barred, we experience unworthiness. Whenever a quality of essence is blocked, we experience the pain of its absence.

“These holes in our soul are painful, so painful that we develop ways of removing them from awareness in order to function in our lives” (Davis, 1999, p. 97). As children, we learned to suppress this pain through living in our heads for thinking about our emotional pain is less painful than feeling it in our bodies. Our soul and body remain in a more contracted state for we discover unconsciously as children that this was less painful than being in an expanded state. We did everything we could to please our parents or childhood caregivers so that we avoided this pain and got some of our important needs met. Since we were not able to experience the qualities of Essence within our soul, we developed the belief that they must be found in the external world. If we found it hard to experience Divine Compassion internally, we sought out people who could give us the compassion we needed. If we struggled with internal weakness, we sought out external sources for this inner strength that was missing. We took on roles in our family (the caregiver, the strong one, the comic, etc.) and became performers through being smart, athletic, artistic, or pretty to get our essential needs met due to these holes in our soul. This “seeking outside ourselves” dynamic is the primary cause behind the many object relations we have within our soul.

Furthermore, we developed false versions of these essential qualities to compensate for the holes in our soul. We developed mental and behaviour strategies that created a false version of each essential quality that was lacking whether it be compassion, strength, joy, etc. “These compensations mimic the qualities of Essence, but they are ultimately rooted in a defensive avoidance. For instance, out of touch with Essential Will, you may develop a stubborn or wilful exterior in order to avoid the anxiety of feeling no support or confidence” (Davis, 1999, p. 97). Davis says that “much of the personality structure serves to (1) defend against painful experiences and (2) compensate for lost qualities of Being” (Davis, 1999, p. 97).

Within the Diamond Approach, the complex ego structure that makes up our personality, is the primary barrier to our experience of Essence or God. Since this Theory of Holes helps us understand how humanity's fall from grace psychologically happened, we now have a framework in which to understand what it means to restore one's relationship to God, and work at the process of spiritual transformation.

#### **D. Transforming the Ego.**

Spiritual healing involves the transformation of our complex ego structure. This resonates with the Christian teaching that we must die to our self (or ego) in order for us to live. Based on this framework, it is tempting to judge the ego as bad. However, "while seeing ego as a source of suffering, and a false substitute for your True Nature, the Diamond Approach also recognizes the wisdom in the ego" (Davis, 1999, p. 98). It is important to realize that our soul, in its essential wisdom, naturally created our ego structure in response to the many pains and wounds we experienced in our childhood nurturing environment that did not support well the development of our True Nature. Seen in this way, "it is not the ego per se that is problematic, but the identification with it" (Davis, 1999, p. 98). When we identify with our ego, we actually believe we are our ego. As a result, we live in a cage of experience that is predetermined by our personality structure. Because of this identification, we cannot imagine that we can experience anything beyond what we are currently experiencing in life.

Because our ego developed is "an attempt to replace or compensate for the loss of Essence, there is a close correspondence between ego and Essence. The qualities of the (ego) shell imitate Essence. By exploring a particular experience of the ego shell, the issues underlying it are revealed, and the quality of Essence that had been lost is recovered" (Davis, 1999, p. 98). Due to this close relationship between ego and Essence, the spiritual work of Diamond Approach involves exploring closely our ego structures while at the same time, watching carefully for signs of Essential qualities breaking into that experience.

This transformation process tends to follow three broad steps. In the first step, you explore and become more deeply aware of one aspect of your ego structure, possibly "a pattern of compulsive emotions, behaviors, or thoughts. This may be felt as a continuing hurt, difficulty, wound, compulsion, or inauthenticity in your life. The second step explores these issues more deeply, often with the use of awareness and mindfulness practices, body work, and the guidance and support of a teacher. The ego-shell begins to soften or dissolve. Here, you contact the emptiness or deficiency that lies at the root of the emotional issues or compulsive behavior" (Davis, 1999, p. 99). This deficiency is a hole in our soul, a blockage of one of the qualities of Essence. As a result, this deficiency will be experienced as emotional pain caused by this blocked essential quality. However, if the person can experience this deficiency deep enough, "it leads to the experience of space. Space indicates



the melting and deconstruction of some part of the personality structure. If you stay with the experience of space, the third step occurs, the manifestation of Essence” (Davis, 1999, p. 99). Other essential qualities will arise from the depths of our soul to minister to this pain -- maybe the presence of compassion, strength, love, value, or an insight of truth. This interaction leads to more melting or deconstruction of our personality structure.

### **E. The Inner Critic.**

As previously noted, when we become identified with our personality structure, we actually are living within a cage of life experience that is predetermined by our ego. As we wake up to this realization and begin to have experiences of our True Nature that take us beyond this cage, we will experience powerful thoughts, voices, and feelings that demand that we get back into our safe cage. These powerful dynamics have many names including the inner critic, superego, judge, bully, etc. One does not get far on the spiritual journey until one learns to understand and defend against the inner critic.

Byron Brown, a Diamond Approach teacher, claims that the “judge’s voice guides your life consciously and unconsciously through opinions, advice, warnings, suggestions, beliefs, evaluations, and admonitions about all aspects of your behavior and inner life” (1998, p. 24). The goal of the inner critic is to keep us within our ego cage of conditioning that we have inherited from our childhood. It achieves this goal in two different ways. First, your judge “keeps you away from what it considers to be dangerous or unmanageable parts of yourself” (Brown, 1998, p. 25), like sadness, anger, anxiety, depression, all the painful emotions caused by holes of blocked essence in our soul. Second, the judge “directs you toward whatever ideals it feels will make you an acceptable, successful person” (Brown, 1998, p. 25). In other words, our inner critic pushes us to become a performer for others, to meet external standards with the hope that we will be acceptable to them.

When we do spiritual work, we are constantly exploring the ego structures around the painful deficiencies in our soul, the very interior places that our inner critic is trying to avoid. Furthermore, as we experience more fully the different qualities of our Divine Nature, we find ourselves experiencing life outside our safe ego cage. Again, our superego, based on our past conditioning, believes that any experience beyond our ego cage is dangerous and painful. And so our inner critic functions like a political party whip, scolding us often quite severely to get us back inside our safe ego prison. For us to travel any distance on the spiritual path of transformation, we must learn to recognize the inner critic, and explore and work with it like any other ego component within our personality structure. It, too, like all other parts of our ego structure, played an important role of survival during our childhood.

Within the Christian tradition, this inner critic dynamic resonates quite strongly with Paul's teaching in the Bible of the law as an inner disciplinarian. He writes, "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Gal 3: 23-26).

One could say much more about all these five teachings and many others within the Diamond Approach. However, it is really through my personal work as a student at the Toronto Diamond School for the past eight years that these teachings have taken on experiential reality for me.

### Implications for Spiritual Direction.

The remainder of this article will focus on how I practice one-on-one ministry as a Christian spiritual director within this Diamond Approach framework. I highlight some of the key implications using a case study of one of my directees who I shall name Robert (not his real name).

- i. *Watching for the qualities of Essence (the Spirit of God).* The focus of each spiritual direction session is watching for how the qualities of Essence are ministering to my client. I often begin each session by inviting the directee to listen to a scripture contemplatively, listening for a word or theme that catches their attention. The text is chosen based from reviewing my notes from previous sessions noting a theme that may be present or sometimes my directees email me ahead a short summary of what they are processing currently. Upon hearing the text, the directee is invited to sit in silence for a few moments with whatever caught their attention, and wonder why God caused them to notice this. I end this silence with a prayer where I invite God to reveal to us how God is guiding, moulding and shaping the directee's soul/life so that we, during this hour of spiritual direction, can support this transforming work of God's Spirit. This prayer reminds both of us that the focus of our time together is not fixing any problem in one's life but rather on noticing where God's spirit (the qualities of Essence) is moving in their life, and then joining and supporting that healing movement.
- ii. *Focusing on the client's experience in the session.* Through observing my client's experience, I notice the dynamics of the client's soul on display. This case study is based on an actual spiritual direction session. When my directee Robert heard the story of Jesus healing the leper (Luke 5: 12-15), he was touched by Jesus' words, "I do choose" when the leper asked Jesus, "if you choose, you can made me clean." As we explored how these words of Jesus touched him emotionally, Robert expressed how it was such a rare experience for him to experience such unconditional

acceptance. He indicated that he feels he constantly has to perform for others before he can ever feel such acceptance, and that rarely comes. Robert has described his experience of the ego blockage around the quality of Divine Value as understood in the Diamond Approach.

- iii. *Encouraging clients to stay connected to their bodies.* Throughout my sessions, I often encourage clients to breathe into their experience, to allow themselves to feel it more deeply. Many people spend most of their time living from their heads and are not in intimate contact with their experience or bodies, and so they need encouragement to be in touch with their bodily experience. As people breathe more fully into their experience, the dynamics of their experience deepen. In this case study, I encouraged Robert to breathe more deeply into his longing for acceptance. As he did so, he became aware of a voice or thought that said “you don’t know me. If you knew me, you would know why I am unacceptable.” In sharing this, Robert just revealed an ego structure to me, the voice of the inner critic that is keeping him from connecting with his experience of value or acceptance.
- iv. *Sharing helpful interpretations:* As my clients share their ongoing experience with me in session, I often provide interpretations to help people hold their experiences without judgment. For example, some people find it very hard to cry for they have been taught that tears are wrong. Within the Diamond Approach, tears are signs of Divine Compassion breaking into one’s experience, a loving kindness that allows us to be with our painful experience in a more caring, tender way. As a result, when tears arise, I encourage my clients to breathe into their sadness so that it can deepen. Seeing sadness in this way helps client realize that their tears are divine tears that facilitate their healing. Anger is another emotion that most people struggle to experience directly. Within the Diamond Approach, anger is seen as Divine Strength, albeit in a distorted way. The way to purify this anger is to be fully present to it. When I see anger arise, I encourage my clients to breathe into this anger, to really be with it without judgment so that they can understand the truth of their anger. In the case study of Robert, as soon as I labelled this voice as his inner critic, this insight reminded him of all the teachings I had shared with him in previous sessions around the inner critic. An “aha” moment happened for Robert.
- v. *Ego structures require exploring our client’s history:* Since these ego blockages to Essence are historical in nature, often in childhood, I encourage my clients to explore the roots of their ego structures. What was one of your earliest experiences of this issue? In this case example, Robert remembered how his older brother constantly called him names and embarrassed him, especially when he had friends over. In making this connection, Robert realized that his inner critic voice, in this case, was his older brother. This dance between the present issue and its historical past plays itself out many times in my spiritual direction sessions.

- vi. *Working with the Inner Critic:* I find in my spiritual direction ministry that I am helping clients defend and break the power of their inner critic. In the case study, Robert needed to find a way to regain his power from his older brother in the memory stored in his mind. In doing so, this object relation would break, and he would no longer feel weak or unworthy in the presence of colleagues who he feared may critique him. As his spiritual director, my task is to help Robert connect with the Divine strength/anger he needs to stand up to his brother in his memory. In asking questions like “how do you feel toward your brother?” or “What do you want to say to your brother?” I am inviting my client to connect with Essential Strength and Truth that is buried in the depths of his unconscious. Whenever Robert expressed even a hint of anger or unhappiness with his brother, I slowed him down, and had him breathe into it so that it would deepen. I gave him suggestions of things he could say and encouraged him to say them to his brother so that he could connect more intensely with his anger at him. Sometimes, I uttered the defenses out loud to him to encourage him to connect deeply with Divine Strength. People find this inner critic very hard work, and rightly so, for they are touching the edges of a significant hole or deficiency within their soul. It feels very scary to them.
- vii. *The emergence of Essence:* When people are able to stay long enough with their fears or distress created by the hole in their soul, the qualities of Essence break in and begin to minister to their soul. In the case study, Robert, after working with his inner critic for a few minutes, saw a vortex in his mind with his brother in the middle of it. As he watched it, his brother got smaller and smaller but at the same time, he experienced himself getting bigger and bigger. This bigness was not just an image in his mind but something he felt within his whole body. In realizing this was happening, I encouraged him to breathe in this bigness so that he could really feel it. From a Diamond Approach perspective, this bigness is a sign that Robert is experiencing Essential Strength, but it was far more than that. He now felt totally valued inside. He was no longer in touch with the hole or deficiency of Value but rather was now experiencing Value directly and fully. The inner critic voice was gone. Because this experience felt so good to him, Robert expressed a desire to stay in this space and so I encouraged him to do so, to stay there as long as he wanted and really experience it. There was silence for three or four minutes.
- viii. *Integrating the experience of Essence.* Often, after an experience of Essence, directees have a need to talk about their experience so that they can understand better what happened and integrate this Divine experience into their sense of being. In the case study, Robert expressed the wish of taking this experience home with him for this sense of value and acceptance was a rare experience for him. I reminded him that this Value was actually an experience of his True Nature, an experience of his Divine nature rising to the surface from his depths. I noted that his superego wants him to believe that these experiences of the Sacred are rare, and that they are not him.

Robert noted that he did not realize until today how pervasive his inner critic was and how vigilant he needs to be in watching for the dynamics of the Inner Critic so he can defend against it.

- ix. *Homework: Taking the experience into the world.* Often, my spiritual direction sessions end with some form of homework so that clients can integrate their spiritual work even further into their everyday life. In this case, building on Robert's desire to be more vigilant in defending against his inner critic, I shared different ways one can defend against the Inner Critic. I encouraged him to experiment with these defending strategies to see which ones worked against his inner critic by giving him more power and increased freedom over his superego. My hope in suggesting such homework to Robert is that he will develop practices in the world that will help him experience Value even more in his life.

Through the case study, I have shown how the sacred psychology of the Diamond Approach brings new insights and practices to the ministry of spiritual direction.

## Summary

Through the lens of the Diamond Approach, the experience of our soul has two types of experiences within it, one shaped by the ego structures of our personality, the other arising from the spacious Divine nature of our soul where there are no ego structures. Since both fallen ego-based experiences and true Divine experiences are recognizable within the soul, we can begin to psychologically understand the dynamics of both types of experiences. Due to this insight, the Diamond Approach has discerned how essential or divine experiences have six core features that are not found in ego-based experiences. Drawing on the insights from various schools of psychology, the Diamond Approach developed the Theory of Holes which explains why ego structures naturally arise within the human soul during the developmental years of the child. Based on these psychological teachings of ego structures and spiritual teachings of True Nature, the Diamond Approach developed a framework of ministry that transforms the ego structures of our personality so that we are able to live from our True Nature more and more in the world. The common dynamic of the Inner Critic constantly interferes with our desires to live from our Divine Nature.

Much, much more could be said about the Diamond Approach and its relevance to Christian ministry. My goal is to introduce the key concepts of the Diamond Approach into the Christian context so that ministering people can begin to interact with this sacred framework.

(Gord is a pastor of Mannheim Mennonite Church and has a private spiritual direction practice. If you wish to learn more about his spiritual direction ministry, please check out his website [innerjourney.webplus.net](http://innerjourney.webplus.net). He does one-on-one spiritual direction, facilitates a spiritual work group, and writes a monthly blog.)

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