

REVIEWS

DR CELIA SIMPSON

THE AUTUMN BOOK review pages reflect a rich colour palette. I am again struck by the creativity and insight of Transactional Analysts – book authors and review authors alike.

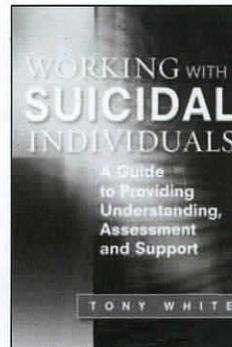
Tony White's Transactional Analysis book *Working with Suicidal Individuals – a Guide to Providing Understanding, Assessment and Support*, was nominated for the 2011 British Medical Association Book Awards. Twelve books were in the psychiatry category (the most of any category), and while his book was not chosen as the winner we congratulate Tony on the high commendation received. Sue Brady's thorough review of his book reflects its depth and insight, as well as the interesting applications of TA. I learnt a great deal from her review, and now prefer the expression 'to suicide' over 'to commit suicide', for reasons she explains. Sue strongly recommends this book for practitioners in a range of fields.

A new Routledge book about sex and intimacy, *Enduring Desire – Your Guide to Lifelong Intimacy*, by Michael Metz and Barry McCarthy, is the subject of our second review. In this book, the authors build on their 'GES' or 'Good Enough Sex' model, and provide couples and therapists with practical exercises and material to support this. The reviewer, Ian Argent, is a specialist psychosexual therapist and trainer. He gives a well-informed critique of the book from a TA perspective, and notes the book's potential usefulness to couples and therapists as well as its limitations.

The final review is of a book by Ken Mellor, who I was delighted to interview for the 'In Conversation' piece in *the Transactional Analyst*, summer issue 2011. Mary Wright has meditated with The Awakening Network for some years and has written an engaging, personal review of Ken's autobiography, *The Urban Mystic*. She ends her review: 'I recommend this book to any therapists interested in the wordless content of the space between therapist and client as well as to anyone wanting to seek out their own truths and the connection between their internal and external experiences.'

Happy reading!

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Working with Suicidal Individuals: A Guide to Providing Understanding, Assessment and Support

By Tony White

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2011

Review by SUE BRADY

TONY WHITE HAS drawn upon his considerable experience of working with those who are suicidal. Using Transactional Analysis theory and vignettes to illustrate his points, he refers to a wide variety of authors and uses their findings to inform and enhance his thinking. This book may be considered essential reading for a variety of professionals, including mental health practitioners and social workers, who work with suicidal or at risk individuals.

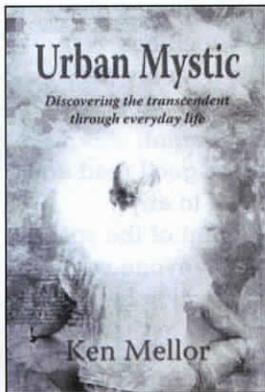
The book is neatly divided into three parts: Understanding Suicide; Assessing Suicide Risk; and Supporting the Suicidal Individual.

Understanding suicide

My interest was engaged immediately by statistics from WHO (2009) indicating that worldwide almost a million people suicide each year, and that it is the world's tenth leading cause of death. I was interested in the discussion of the various factors that lead an individual to contemplate, and complete, suicide.

I appreciated White's discourse on terminology and his claim that 'to commit suicide' is a misnomer. This expression stems from the time when suicide was a criminal offence and therefore it carries within it a negative connotation implying a criminal act. However, I appreciate that for some it will be perceived to be a sin. Also, the word 'commit' may be used in the sense of 'being committed to' a particular course of action.

White defines suicide using vignettes to illustrate his thoughts and to distinguish between what is and what is not suicide. He accounts for the grey area, that ambiguous area between what is a suicide and what is an accident. He also provides an overview of Classical Transactional Analysis to provide the non-TA practitioner



**The Urban Mystic
Discovering the
transcendent through
everyday life**

By Ken Mellor

**Published by Strategic Book
Publishing, New York, 2009**

Review by MARY WRIGHT

IN OCTOBER 2010 Ken and Elizabeth Mellor visited the UK after a five-year gap. I attended a five day Silence Workshop facilitated by them. At the end of the five days I bought a copy of Ken's newly published book, *Urban Mystic*.

I was intrigued that an internationally known psychotherapist had been willing to write a book about his own spiritual journey. I hadn't seen Ken since 2004 and he seemed very different to how I remembered him. What had happened?

The book is an enthralling page-turner, and a gift of a read for anyone interested in how the ordinary lived life can become extraordinary. The story goes along at a cracking pace; colourful characters step into view in full technicolour as the narrative moves energetically between Australia, the US, India and Europe. Doors close and others, sometimes unsought, open, as he searches for enlightenment.

My first meeting with Ken was back in 1998 when I attended one of his meditation workshops. I had learned in my training about his part in the early days of Transactional Analysis and his close connection with Jacqui Schiff and the Cathexis School of TA. I had struggled with the complexity of the Discount Matrix for which Ken Mellor and Eric Sigmund had been awarded an Eric Berne Scientific Award in 1975 and been aware of some un-named shadow hanging over what had happened at Jacqui Schiff's Cathexis School. He had been an elder of the logical TA community who had disappeared for a while and now he seemed to be a quite different person and interested in mysticism.

He was sitting crossed legged on an uncomfortable looking straight backed stacking chair and was managing to seem entirely comfortable and relaxed. He seemed like a wise but distant 'Guru'. I vividly recall, during the meditation practice, Ken whispering the mantra directly into my ear and then running his hand firmly up my spine from bottom to top. I was in unfamiliar territory and I was aware of drawing back,

unwilling to engage fully in what was happening.

Between 1999 and 2004 I continued to attend Ken's workshops whenever he, and later he and Elizabeth, visited the UK because I realised the practice of 'Urban Mysticism' which seemed to be based on TA theory could support my journey of self discovery. I knew I needed to know more to make sense of my vague unease when in his company. So you will understand my eagerness to read *Urban Mystic* and perhaps learn about what had happened to Ken the person.

The Prologue to the book caught my immediate attention as I tried to make sense of the chaos on the page. Ken's description of physical struggle leading gradually to awareness of his lived experience now seems to me to encapsulate the whole story.

The narrative proper begins with a description of the process of spiritual awakening in which Ken suggests that our consciousness goes through four births, each birth makes possible another dimension to that awakening, and each follows a general pattern. Ken uses this model to great effect as a framework for his story, although this pattern made more sense to me when I had reread the book. He writes of growing up in Australia in a financially secure yet emotionally distant family, and of increasing awareness of his own internal life and search for a career which satisfied this part of him. He tells of his struggle to know what to do with a powerful intuitive response to other people which he senses stems from the fact that he is a twin. My husband was a twin so I particularly valued Ken's sharing his insights on what it was like for him to be one of identical twins.

The book is written in forty-four short chapters with plenty of sub-headings which, if you can bear the suspense and don't have time to read the entire 463 pages in one sitting, make it easy to pick up and put down.

Ken's style is easy to read and full of vivid characters from a palmist who lived in a run-down area of Melbourne, to a swami with a long beard and peach

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'What I'd expected I didn't know; yet, what I saw was entirely unexpected. He looked like an Indian garden gnome that you might buy in a garden shop, except that I'd never seen anything like a replica of him on sale.'

'The final chapter is Ken's masterful account in words of his wordless experience of awakening. I was left with feelings of expansiveness and of possibilities and with, joy of joys, my feet still firmly planted on the ground.'

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This unlikely looking character is drawn in ever finer detail as Ken and he impact each other's lives and Ken struggles to find his own way forward.

The story continues to twist and turn as Ken learns to trust his intuition. He takes financial risks in order to fulfil his dream of creating a Community House where people could experience living and meditating together, sharing day-to-day responsibilities and living singly or retaining family units as suited them. He describes both the pluses and minuses of his experience of communal living and shares the reasons why after eight years this experiment ended.

The whole of this book describes how Ken comes to experience the power of meditation to heal his soul and to free his spirit. His dedication to the practice and teaching of meditation, supported over the years by a series of four Enlightened Masters, becomes central to his life and his work. Towards the end of the book he writes very movingly of living through his 'Fourth Birth' as he describes experiencing his own vulnerability and his reliance on others to support him through to safe delivery.

The final chapter is Ken's masterful account in words of his wordless experience of awakening. I was left with feelings of expansiveness and of possibilities and with, joy of joys, my feet still firmly planted on the ground.

This book won't be everyone's cup of tea. However, I do recommend it to readers who trust their intellect and distrust their emotional and sensual response to the world. Ken Mellor's story may give you food for thought.

So many of the incidents described in the book overlap each other in time, and I would have found it helpful to have an appendix indicating the date order of events (although I suspect Ken is expecting me to do that for myself!)

As a practising Transactional Analyst, I was grateful for

Ken's first hand information about his experience of Jacqui Schiff and the Cathexis School, which has removed a long-standing question mark from my head. My experience of Ken when we met in 2010 after a five-year gap was absolutely right. He was different.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Urban Mystic* as a good read and as more than that. I recommend this book to any therapists interested in the wordless content of the space between therapist and client as well as to anyone wanting to seek out their own truths and the connection between their internal and external experiences.

Mary Wright MSc, CTA, had a successful career as a businesswoman. After the death of her husband she re-trained as a counsellor in 1992 and then as a TA psychotherapist. She worked for 13 years as a GP counsellor and since 1996 has run a private practice in South Manchester as a Psychotherapist and Life Coach. She is particularly interested in the place of the body in the work of self-awareness and is a member of the North West Body Psychotherapy Training group based in Kendal, Cumbria.