

In Milwaukee Buzz



Morningstar keeps Milwaukee in the New Age



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Sure, Jim Morningstar thought about moving to California. As a clinical psychologist with a passion for spiritual psychology -- which means to live with purpose and inspire others to do the same -- it seemed like Morningstar and the West Coast were as imminent as socks and sandals.

But Morningstar stayed in Milwaukee, and in 1981, opened the School of Spiritual Psychology, 4200 W. Good Hope Rd., a private, non-sectarian school offering courses and workshops designed "to balance participants' intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual resources, leading to the realization of the whole person and the development of professional leadership."

Morningstar, who is internationally renowned for his breakthroughs with breathwork and bioenergetics techniques, has authored three books and was interviewed by Mike Wallace. He is an under-the-radar guy with what some may call "over-the-top" ideas.

Decide for yourself.

OnMilwaukee.com: How long have you been involved with Transformations? Are you the founder?

Jim Morningstar: I began offering Transformations programs in 1980, but 1983 has been cited as our beginning when we purchased the site of our current main location in Milwaukee.

OMC: Is Transformations solely in Milwaukee -- or are there schools elsewhere? Is Transformations similar to other institutions in the world?

JM: Our main headquarters is in Milwaukee. We have branch offices for holistic counseling in some areas outside the city and do have breathwork trainers and affiliations with programs around the world. One of our affiliations is with Akamai University in Hawaii, through which we offer non-accredited Masters and Doctorate-level degree programs. I am aware of other places offering components of what we do, but none that offer the breadth of our services.

OMC: How is spiritual psychology different from "regular" psychology?

JM: The goal of the true spiritual psychologist is to live with purpose and to join with and inspire others to do the same.

In a true, classical sense, the term "spiritual psychology" is redundant. The study of the psyche -- the personification of the human soul -- must be spiritual, that is, "concerned with the animating principle of life." Since our Western scientific heritage (and "regular" psychology) has assigned the mind and body to the realm of the measurable and the spirit to the domain of faith, there has been a split in our understanding and approach to these essential aspects of the human phenomenon.

The advent of holism as a philosophical tenet in the latter part of 20th century heralded a fundamental shift in consciousness, from linear or causal thinking toward systemic awareness. We can no longer operate with a mechanical model if we are to understand the inter-dimensional realities that allow us so much freedom and expansion of our capabilities. It is critical that we have a psychology that not only admits the existence of the human spirit, but also takes it fully into

account in knowing and predicting human behavior. Just as important is for us to have spirituality that incorporates the discoveries we have made about the mind/body connection and how the mind and body mirror and manifest our spiritual intentions. To keep the two realms separate is to keep us split and severely limited in our understanding and treatment of the whole human being.

OMC: How would you describe "New Age" and would you describe yourself as such? Why has the term received a bad rap?

JM: Each generation brings in a "new age" of sorts, but the changing values during the 1970s heralded a paradigm shift in world view that got the label "New Age" astrologically associated with the Age of Aquarius. As often happens when a great departure from a former system -- as in adolescence -- the swing is radical and in the beginning can be ungrounded. For example, if accumulation of material wealth was a former value, then anything and everything that is non-material may be embraced and assumed to be of value. Hence the bad rap for those claiming a non-integrated "new reality." These experiments over time, however, have been part of a genuine integrated valuable advances in world consciousness.

It has been my life work to investigate conscious growth personally and professionally. I examine and experiment with what is being presented by others from ancient traditions and new discoveries. I then retain for our school those skills and practices which provide the most lasting, grounded results. This takes fitting the appropriate techniques to the student or client at the right time to facilitate her or his empowerment.

OMC: Where did you grow up? Where did you study? Where do you live now?

JM: I was born in Arkansas, grew up in Wisconsin, lived and studied in Paris, New York, Washington, D.C. and have traveled and learned around the world throughout my life. My main residence, however, has been Milwaukee since 1972.

OMC: What did you think of the movie "What the Bleep Do We Know?" Do you have any thoughts on "spiritual cinema" in general?

JM: The movie "What the Bleep Do We Know?" has put in popular form some of the paradigm shift to which I alluded as having started in the 1970s. I applaud spiritual cinema for helping to bring expanded awareness to more people.

OMC: Does studying at your school benefit one's professional life -- or mostly their personal life?

JM: Personal and professional are very interrelated aspects of a holistic perspective. It is common that students make career shifts based on greater clarity and sense of personal purpose as well as confidence in achieving their life goals. We are not a trade school, but we do teach very practical skills in communication, systems intervention, leadership, relationship building and goals completion in our curriculum.

OMC: Why have practices like breathwork become more mainstream and accepted in the past few years?

JM: Breathwork is one of the techniques we pioneered and helped develop into a recognized professional skill.

OMC: How many students do you have? What types of people come to your school?

JM: We teach a relatively small group of students. About 20 enter the first year of our three-year certificate program each year. Another 50 or so come from individual classes or trainings throughout the year. Many more clients come through our counseling center. We have a great cross-section of students. I love diversity and age range (17-70). It turns out that the common factor is more of a readiness for conscious and emotional growth rather than any class differences.

OMC: What is the difference between spiritual and religious? Would an atheist or agnostic feel comfortable in this kind of program?

JM: Spiritual for me signifies coming from the undefined spirit or animating force of life. Religious signifies a particular body of teaching or dogma about the origins of existence and / or living according to a proscribed moral standard. Some of our most "spiritual" -- in my definition not religious -- students and clients have been atheist or agnostic. That is, they have a profound respect for the individual point of view and the sacredness of life itself. Many students come for personal healing (from religious or other abuse) and are at a transition point in their lives. They are looking for an environment to foster self-knowledge, forgiveness and the joy of finding a path to their true heart's desire, rather than someone else's formula for a happy life. They are the people who do well here. Our school program fosters intense inner exploration over a 6 1/2-month period, called the First Year Personal Integration Program. Not everyone is willing to take on this level of challenge, but those who are have been almost universally grateful and permanently changed.

OMC: Is Milwaukee a good place for you and your school? It sounds like an institution that might fare better on the West Coast.

JM: I was interviewed by Mike Wallace on national television in 1981 as a spokesperson for breathwork. On the show was also a conservative psychiatrist from New York City who was adamantly opposed to such non-traditional techniques. At the end of this show Mike summarized by looking at the psychiatrist and saying "There you have it, the view from the East Coast" then looking at me and saying "and the view from the West Coast." Having lived in NYC for three years, I know natives there saw everything on the other side of the Hudson River as "the West." So I took it with a grain of salt (and also as a compliment). I actually thought of moving to California several times, but could not leave. I feel like my mission is here. There is a very strong spiritual presence in nature and community that is rooted deeply in our Heartland. The fact that we are going into our 27th year of the school and the state licensed (insurance billable) counseling center attests to this.

OMC: Anything else you want to say to Milwaukee?

JM: This year we are initiating a Partners in Health outreach program to network with other alternative practitioners and agencies to help make these options even more visible and available to the greater Milwaukee community.