

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY

I would like to take a few minutes to place the process called psychotherapy in a historical perspective. It has been accomplished through ritual, religion, drama, and storytelling since the earliest times of which we have any knowledge. Psychotherapy, viewed as the journey of a soul, is simply a continuation of a mythic, dramaturgical tradition from which we should always feel free to seek inspiration. This is the journey of the author of the ODYSSEY, Cervantes in DON QUIXOTE, Dante in THE DIVINE COMEDY, Milton in PARADISE LOST, to name only a few of the best known. . By daring to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise and began the human journey. We are HOMOSAPIENS. What makes us human is knowing, what John Pierrakos calls consciousness.

So, I would suggest that if you really want to understand this sacred process in which we are involved, read literature first, then psychology. Read Joseph Campbell, Liz Greene ,(THE ASTROLOGY OF FATE), James Hillman, Robert Johnson. Read Carl Jung and the Jungians. I see therapy as a continuation of the mythic tradition of self-transformation described by these authors. We must look for the common threads, our greatest longings from childhood. Hopefully, as we become more conscious, fate becomes less blind. We can see our lives and those of our clients, in a broader perspective. We can see our life task and their life tasks. As Christopher Bollas has suggested in FORCE OF DESTINY, we are able to follow our destiny rather than merely be ruled by our fate

I don't see life as proceeding in a straight line or even a circle. I see the journey as a spiral. With each turn around, we are deeper and higher, but we often deal with the same basic issues again and again at these different levels. The issues that we will look at in childhood will always come up in different ways for the rest of our lives. I know for myself that I rarely know what is going on while it is happening. It is usually only in retrospect that I can make sense of my life.

Each of our journeys is totally unique, and we as therapists must look in awe and respect at the persons who honor us by allowing us to accompany them. For it is an honor, and we are only companions. I like to think of us as midwives, facilitators, always remembering that it is the patient who is doing the labor, not us.

A poem, Khalil Gibran's THE PROPHET on "Self Knowledge" conveys this beautifully:

FIONS lecture

My work is a deep, powerful therapeutic process seeking to integrate the mind, body, emotions, will and spirit in the service of the love and pleasure that are the essence of life. When negative energy in the form of fear, anger, hatred, etc., is stored in the body's tissues, physical and mental health may be threatened. Work with the body facilitates the release of emotional blocks, defensive postures, and destructive belief systems, so that the enormous energies of the body can flow more freely, creating greater life fulfillment for the individual. Individuals and groups can be helped to transform obstacles which block contact with the core, the source of all healing, wisdom, joy and creativity. The therapist provides a supportive environment in which the client can access deep inner processes, reach catharsis or containment, and release blocked

energy in the body. Although aware of the client's character defenses, acting out behaviors, and destructive life patterns, the therapist focusses on the core of the person: his/her spiritual capacity, ability to love, and life task.

The therapeutic work of this process is based on the principle elucidated by Wilhelm Reich: that we are a psychosomatic unity which has within it the capacity to love and heal, and that we have an inner impetus toward creative evolution. In order to evolve, we must deeply transform the negative aspects of our personality, releasing their energy into growth and creativity. The creative potential of our life force is tremendous - - virtually unlimited. The physical body is the vehicle through which we express our emotions, thoughts and spiritual selves. By working with the body to help confront the defensive reactions of our emotions, we open up the way to our healing and our evolution.

We can envision ourselves as made up of layers of energy. At our center is the pulsating, moving energy of life. This is our life force which, following the laws of physics (and of biological development) seeks to expand and grow. When in touch with this part of us, we feel love for ourselves and for our fellow creatures. Our core is our connection to our spiritual nature and to the universe. The next layer (called simply the secondary layer by Reich) is the lower self, which contains our wounds and the dark or shadow side of our nature. Our life force is blocked when we are not allowed to express who we really are, especially our emotional pain or negative emotions. This energy, stagnating, produces a layer of defenses which become the physical and characterological armoring. On top of this we position a social mask, designed to protect ourselves and others from our lower self. Both the armoring and social mask are roughly equivalent to Winnicott's "false self." But, this mask or false self unfortunately also dampens the vibrancy and buoyancy of the life center, the core.

The goal of therapy, then, is to unblock our defenses, move the stuck energy to create a healthy flow and thereby transform the negative, distorted emotions which cover our core impulses. This is done by :

1. Penetrating the mask, the false self
2. Working with the physical body -- the body armoring
3. Transforming the negative emotions of the dark side and allowing the primal wounds to be exposed and expressed
4. Supporting the core to be experienced as loving, joyful, and connected to all of life and to the cosmos.
5. Helping the person organically to discover a deep understanding of his/her task and purpose in life.

In the course of therapy it becomes clear to people that they can use their positive will, the will of the heart, to live in the present and to be aware that they have choice in each moment to create their own lives.

A TYPICAL SESSION?

The most important aspect of the therapy session is the therapist himself. Intimate relationships were the loci in which the original wounds developed or were inflicted: only in an intimate relationship can they be healed. The therapist must continue to develop his/her deepest capacities for intimacy throughout life. As we touch someone's body, we are making contact with all levels of their being: mind, will, emotions and soul. We must be prepared to deeply know ourselves and our clients and to be deeply known by them as they work with us. Without any sort of verbal "sharing" from us, they will know what they need to know and take what they need for their healing if we make ourselves available for a relationship with them within the safe boundaries of the therapy. And, we will grow as well. I feel that we must hold each session, no matter how banal it might

seem in the moment in the context of two souls meeting to accomplish their mutual tasks; both will be changed if we simply do our work.

There is, of course, no such thing as a typical session, but perhaps I can give you some idea of what a session might look like. Both client and therapist are dressed in clothing that allows freedom of movement. At the beginning of the session, they might pause for a moment of mutual meditation, deep breathing or eye contact while holding hands in order to connect and align their energies. The client usually begins by stating his/her goal for the session or simply a topic or incident. Making use of the many techniques for working with the body, knowledge about the personality, a strongly developed intuition, and skills in energy and aura reading, the therapist attempts to facilitate the client's process. Character defenses (coping mechanisms from childhood that are overused or inappropriate in adulthood) are treated by charging segments of the body where energy is absent or discharging segments of the body where energy is blocked. Repressed emotions, memories and belief systems are retrieved by freeing muscular and organ contractions. The therapist may place the client in stress positions, initiate grounding exercises, introduce deep breathing, or work with the body on the couch or roller. The therapist may use her hands to assist this process by working on the client's physical/energetic blocks. When touch is involved in the session, it may be hard or soft depending on the type of resistance in the musculature and the character defense of the client. Touch must be approached with caution and respect for the meaning it holds for the client. For many people defenses must be built and structures erected. Emotions need to be contained and channeled rather than expressed.

In addition, the therapist works with destructive aspects of the personality by helping the person penetrate the ego-mask, the idealized self-image or the false self in order to meet and release the frozen negativity hidden beneath it. By bringing this suppressed material to consciousness, a vast amount of energy is released, and the client connects with a full and vibrant life force.

THEORY: HOW IT WORKS

Energy and consciousness are the two dimensions of the life force which operate at all levels of the personal reality. Consciousness shapes and directs our energy. It is limitless, especially when expressed through our spiritual aspect, through love. The deep physical work expands the energy field and thereby the consciousness. Just as energy and matter are interchangeable, or perhaps the same thing, so energy and consciousness form a unity.

When negative or painful experiences occur, we create energy blocks in order to survive. But, these safety maneuvers block the movement of energy from the core of our being into creative expression in the world. The more pain a child experiences, the more extreme are the measures to protect the integrity of the self and to diminish or block the pain. The modes of protecting ourselves become patterns of holding the physical energy. This creates blocks in the physical body. For example unconscious fear can be kept at bay by held breath and raised shoulders. If this happens enough times, a person develops permanent holding patterns which are present in the body and can be seen and worked with by the therapist. These blocks tell the therapist where and how to proceed.

An important aspect of the therapeutic process is working with the shadow or dark side, called the lower self, that portion of the energy that has been blocked or distorted. In order for wholeness to be regained, the lower self energy needs to be explored, expressed and thereby transformed. This is particularly terrifying to character structures with little or no boundaries. However, negativity and distortions can be transformed into creative and positive energy. When we turn on the light, the monsters in our closets generally turn out to be merely outmoded clothing, but it takes courage to shine the light.

The model of energy and consciousness which is the foundation for this therapy stresses the relationship between the five levels of existence: the physical body, the

feelings and emotions, the mind and thoughts, the will and the spirit or soul. Unification and integration of the whole entity is the goal.

The therapeutic work is based on three principles:

1. The person is a psychosomatic-spiritual unity;
2. The source of healing and the capacity to love is within the self.
3. All of existence forms a unity that moves toward a creative evolution. In the human entity, this evolution consists of the deep transformation of negative aspects of the personality into a creative whole.

Energy is a living force that emanates from each level of consciousness. It is characterized by pulsation, motility, rhythm, abundance, flexibility and malleability. Energy flow allows instantaneous knowledge of the truth in the now. Human consciousness uses energy to sculpt the shape of the body and determine the basic form of existence. The physical body is the laboratory of life and the vehicle through which emotions, thoughts, and the spiritual self are expressed. Therefore, if a person is to become whole, the false self, which is expressed by the body and which represents the reaction to the wounds of early life must be penetrated; and the lower self, often the layer of repressed cruelty, must be released, if the core is to be activated and its creative potential unleashed.

