

Psychotherapy (a path to healing the human soul)

Sigmund Freud referred to psychotherapy as 'The Talking Cure.' A term that all Traditions of Psychotherapy use today. However, in the last fifty years we have seen new schools of thought emerge from within traditional Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytical psychotherapy. These contemporary traditions have placed a far greater importance on including not only the mind, but also the body within the psychotherapeutic enquiry and have sought to understand the connection between body, mind and spirit.

Some of the contemporary schools of psychotherapy that have emerged in the last fifty years belong to a Tradition which we call the 'Psycho Spiritual College of Psychotherapies.' This group of training organizations include the Transpersonal School which was founded by a group of influential thinkers including Abraham Maslow and Stanislav Grof. In transpersonal psychotherapy, the psychotherapist works within a psychotherapeutic framework that affirms and explores four dimensions of the client – the emotional, the physical, the intellectual and the spiritual. Other Psycho spiritual schools of psychotherapy have been greatly influenced by the Transpersonal School and have sought to understand human beings not only on an emotional or intellectual level but on a physical and spiritual level as well. I trained within the Psycho Spiritual College of Psychotherapy. My training was within the Buddhist and Contemporary Jungian School of Psychotherapy.

In this article I hope to give you a sense of the psychotherapy that I practice and the importance of the inclusion of the body, mind and spirit in both contemporary and classical approaches to psychotherapy.

Within the Buddhist and Contemporary Jungian school of psychotherapy we have the concept of 'Brilliant Sanity.' A term coined by the rather colorful Tibetan Buddhist Teacher 'Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche' to describe the inherent natural qualities of the mind which we often refer to as our own 'innate wisdom', 'natural wakeful awareness' or what Buddhists refer to as 'Buddha nature.'

We often use the analogy of the mind being like a vast open sky, or a vast open space into which experiences arise - thoughts, emotions, images, perceptions and sensations. The open sky does not reject anything that comes into it - beautiful white clouds, murky grey ones, doves, vultures, hot air balloons, noisy aircraft, pollution. Likewise our minds have the capacity to accommodate any experience that arises within it. The mind has a huge capacity for 'spaciousness.' We consider the 'minds spaciousness' to be an important aspect of brilliant sanity,

Another aspect of Brilliant Sanity is 'clarity' Clarity is the wisdom of the spacious mind. Clarity is the state of mind that simply experiences whatever arises within the mind without distortion. It is the quality of mind that simply experiences thought, sound, touch, taste, **seeing.** Of course clarity or wisdom is inseparable from spaciousness - the vast open mind is imbued with wisdom. Or another way of expressing it is 'that within a mind that is clear of thoughts there is the optimal potential for clarity and wisdom.' This is why in the clinical setting, psychotherapists from within the Psycho Spiritual Tradition help their patients to develop ways to enable their minds to return to a sense of quiet and stillness.

A quiet mind, a still mind is a mind clear of thoughts within which brilliant sanity or innate wisdom arises.

Many Psycho Spiritual Psychotherapists identify with the Eastern idea of 'monkey mind.' The busy mind is often likened to a monkey in a tree going from branch to branch, tree to tree. Likewise our minds are busy with thoughts, caught up in storylines or emotions. In Psycho spiritual psychotherapy we work with our patients to bring the monkey mind to stillness so that the patient can experience a mind free of thoughts, storylines and emotions within the clinical setting. This enables the client to experience the spaciousness of the mind from which clarity and wisdom can arise. .

Although 'brilliant sanity' was originally a term that only referred to the mind, these days we use the term to also refer to the inherent wisdom of the body. Our bodies are great memory stores and hold a vast amount of information about our psycho emotional process in terms of our psycho emotional history and our everyday life experiences, our challenges, fears, suffering, our joys, our sorrows, our feelings.

I think that the Monotheistic Religious Traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have excluded the idea of the body having wisdom and only given credence to the wisdom of the mind. The body has more often than not ,been given a negative orientation amongst Jews, Christians and Muslims which in my view has fractured our relationship with our bodies and totally negated the idea of the body having its own innate wisdom, brilliant sanity!

To help our minds access the 'wisdom' of our bodies we often use techniques In psychotherapy such as 'Mindful Awareness **Techniques**,' 'Body Scans,' or 'Deep Relaxation **Methods**.' Some of these techniques come from the Eastern Religious Traditions such as the Vedic and Hindu Traditions, Jainism and Buddhism. There are many psychologists and psychotherapists who have translated some of these ancient meditation and spiritual practices such as Jon Kabatt Zinn. Kabatt Zinn is one of the pioneers of 'Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction' which a lot of psycho-spiritual psychotherapists use to help patients cope with stress, anxiety, pain and illness.

Kabatt Zinn's work has been highly influential within the field of psycho spiritual psychotherapy. He has brought Buddhist meditation practice and its insights into the field of psychology . By teaching patients mindfulness (the psychological process of bringing one's minds attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment) we can enable our patients to access the 'wisdom of the mind' and the 'wisdom of the body as processed by the mind.' Mindfulness when practiced within the clinical setting can help many patients deal with the impact and transform their relationship to different psychological issues and conditions. Mindfulness helps patients see themselves and their psychological process more clearly and is a most effective aid in psychotherapy.

One of the most powerful tools that I use in working with patients is a 'Body Scan' which I have developed from Zen Meditation practices. . When I do the scan with patients, I

simply teach them how to let their minds be present with different parts of the body. As we go down the body from the forehead to the feet, patients begin to become consciously aware of some of the holding in the body – tired eyes, painful muscles in the jaw, tight neck, tension in the shoulders, pain in the lower back, tightness in the chest or abdominal area, bloating in the stomach, tiredness in the muscles in the hips, pain in the leg muscles etc.

Once patients learn to be more fully present with the body in the clinical setting then we can more deeply enquire into why the pain, tension or holding is there in that particular part of the body. It is often in this process of deep psychological enquiry that the body's memory store gets accessed and the conscious mind begins to access the 'brilliant sanity' of the body.

Like most psychotherapists I work with a range of psychological issues and conditions, including existential crises, bi-polar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, issues around sexuality and gender, shock, trauma, depression and anxiety disorders and other issues. The psychotherapeutic journey may be a long term one for some patients especially when they have a history of mental illness.

I have found that by including the body in the psychotherapeutic enquiry the patient and I get a lot more information about what happens when particular behaviours, reactions and responses get triggered and much more information about the history of that response, reaction, behaviour. When we can touch into the wisdom or brilliant sanity of the body then we get so much more information to work with than just relying on the wisdom of the mind alone.

There is also a recognition in psycho-spiritual psychotherapy that the clinical relationship between the psychotherapist and patient must be grounded in compassion. It is vital that the patient feels that the psychotherapist can meet whatever issues arise for the client within the clinical setting and that the psychotherapist will meet the client's issues with compassion, empathy and acceptance. Again compassion, empathy and acceptance are vital aspects of 'brilliant sanity.' Many patients come to psychotherapy with feelings of isolation, loneliness or not being able to form relationships with others in the world. If psychotherapists can offer a compassionate and safe holding space within the clinical setting then patients can begin to feel understood, accepted, less alone with their issues in the world. This, in turn can then help them transform their lives outside the clinical setting

For some patients 'brilliant sanity' may be obscured by psychological conditions, by experiences of shock and trauma. However we hold the view that that the psychotherapeutic journey is about accessing the patients' brilliant sanity on a body/mind consciousness level so that their lives can be lived with greater wellbeing, clarity, wisdom and happiness.

A client who I will refer to as Maisie began to work with me just over 8 years ago. Maisie had a clinical diagnosis of bi-polar disorder and had been in and out of hospitals over a period of 9 years. Maisie's condition was controlled through the taking of lithium.

Maisie functioned very well professionally but was very lonely and felt very isolated in her personal life. When she got tired she was prone to outbursts of anger and this behaviour had a very negative impact on her friendships and family relationships,

As we began to work together I noticed how much Maisie couldn't stop talking in the initial sessions. Gradually, I encouraged Maisie to turn her mind's attention to her physical body. As we included focusing on the body in clinical sessions Maisie began to feel an overwhelming sense of tiredness and exhaustion in sessions. Maisie held most of her exhaustion in her neck and shoulders. When we focused on this part of Maisie's body she would begin to first of all feel pain and tension in her neck and shoulders, then gradually as she made friends with the physical holding she would begin to yawn and tiredness would come.

As Maisie and I continued to work together, we would include not only the mind enquiry in our sessions but also our enquiry into the physical holding in the body. Maisie's mind became more calm and peaceful in sessions and as we deepened into the holding in the body Maisie began to relax the muscles in her neck and shoulders. It became very clear in sessions that Maisie was feeling the physical exhaustion in her body for the first time in years. Gradually as Maisie allowed herself to feel into this exhaustion she realized how much the bi-polar disorder had impacted on her physically. She realized how much physical effort she put into holding things together in her daily life. Maisie was a perfectionist and in the sessions she began to realize the negative impact of this controlling behaviour on her body. Session by session Maisie began to access the brilliant sanity in her body – memories would be triggered, emotions released as a result of focusing on her physical body, going into the physical holding, allowing the exhaustion.

Maisie's mind became clearer and the sessions were no longer filled with conversation. Maisie began to feel happier and her harsh judging mind began to soften on both herself and on others. Maisie began to learn that every time she felt overwhelming tiredness outside of the psychotherapy sessions that she needed to take care of this by resting or getting some sleep otherwise she would become very moody and her psychological condition worsened.

During the first year of us working together Maisie began to make contact with old friends again and even made two new ones, she also re-established contact with her family. Maisie joined a theatre group where she met her future husband.

We still continue to work together and we access the brilliant sanity in the body, which off course gives us a pathway to the brilliant sanity in the mind. Maisie has let go of her existential anger about being impacted by bi-polar disorder. She has also begun to feel some deeper sense of connection to a Universalist understanding of God. Maisie has fought an unfair dismissal case and won it successfully because she was discriminated against by her previous employer due to her having bi-polar disorder.

Five years ago Maisie gave birth to her first child free of the drug Lithium. Her second child was born two years ago. Maisie continues to be in therapy with me and continues to access the wisdom of the body in sessions which enables us to access the innate wisdom in the body/mind consciousness.

Psychotherapy is a way of helping patients talk about their suffering and seeing the impact of that suffering in their lives. However I believe that one of the most effective ways of helping patients transform their suffering is through psychotherapy that offers a body/mind approach. If patients begin to find ways of accessing the wisdom of the body as well as the wisdom of the mind then they can begin to live their lives with far greater wisdom, clarity and awareness. This enables the patient to live their lives with optimal well being.

Whatever our spiritual practice, or beliefs, or views, my sense is that the Mystics of most of the World's Religious Traditions had a sense of what this 'Brilliant Sanity' was about. They might not have labeled it as brilliant sanity but may have referred to it as 'God consciousness' or the flow of the ultimate dimension -'Universal Wisdom through the relative dimension of our lives.'

Many of the Mystics went through prolonged periods of physical suffering and by living through these periods of illness came to a deepening understanding of themselves and their relationship to God. The Neurologist Oliver Sacks in his book 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat' argues how he felt that the 12th Century Mystic Hildegard of Bingen suffered from severe migraine. It was this suffering with migraine that he believes led to Hildegard's visions. Perhaps Hildegard had a deepening sense of the wisdom of the body as well as the wisdom of the mind which enabled her to articulate so beautifully the wisdom of God in her visions.

If we can live our lives with greater depth awareness on a body/mind consciousness level then wisdom flows within us and I think that this wisdom brings about greater alignment with the wisdom of the Universe and/or greater alignment with God. I believe that psychotherapy can help us in this journey.