

A PERSONAL PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY *Body, Mind, Spirit and Emotion*

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The Nature of Humanity'

My personal practice philosophy is based on ontological assumptions concerning the relationship between mind, body, spirit and emotions. These assumptions help me understand and cope with the meaning and living of life. At this point in time, I feel comfortable with this theory, enjoy its integrity, gain solace from it, argue for it in theoretical discussion, base my personal beliefs on it and derive my view of the professional practice and ethics from it.

The Past

Yet this was not always the case. As a child, a teenager and a young adult. I had many doubts and fears about life. These colored my view of people and the universe. For many years. I was both timid and uncomfortable around other people, fearful of judgements, criticism, taunts, bigotry, and even physical abuse. If I were careful, perhaps I could make my way through life, cautiously moving through the forest, like Hansel and Gretel, leaving a trail so that if I became lost, I could find my way back.

From where did this pessimistic view emerge; when did it evolve; and why did it last so long? Early defining influences include: being torn away from grandparents I adored at two and a half. Feeling total abandonment and lost at age six, receiving constant criticism of my dance technique from a well meaning ballet teacher, feeling inadequate in comparison to an overly perfectionist, controlling and extremely bright mother, adoring and protecting a sweet, but passive dad, and struggling with the competitive feelings associated with a cute, vibrant sister.

On the positive side, the sweetness of girlhood friends stands out, the beginnings of platonic love between women-to-be. With boys, I enjoyed the first blooms of sexuality, the heat traveling through my body, the crushes, romance, and eventually, the sex. My love for nature, for

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being outdoors, for art and drawing, and traveling from Altoona, the small town where I was raised, to play in the waves on the beach at Atlantic City or walk around Times Square in New York City with my parents, are all strong, rich memories. However, a personal practice theory, if I had one to reflect my growing up years, would have been titled: "life is like a sour pickle." A lot was difficult to swallow, but there were some good parts, too. It took a long time to transform belief systems formulated during my childhood, bringing them from dark night into the light.

Is there a time when ontology is not of concern? I remember being deeply thoughtful, even as a child, especially between ages six and nine, about humankind. I made a decision then to suffer for all the people killed in the holocaust. How could I enjoy and prosper when they died? Also, there were the knowings. By puberty, I would know things before they happened. This phenomenon frightened me and after an automobile accident which I predicted. I attempted to shut off knowing. Through this experience, I learned that humans can become insensitive to psychic phenomena, if they choose.

I always knew I would be a psychologist. This feeling was particularly strong in my late teens and early twenties, motivating me to study human nature. My inroads onto the study of human behavior were somewhat diverse: learning from Dostoevsky and Camus, as an English major; teaching self-esteem to inner city junior high students, armed with a master's degree in urban teaching; studying the communications models and strategies, particularly the nonverbal; immersing myself in two 4-year psychotherapy training programs; and exploring through years of supervision my work as a psychologist.

My parents called me a "witch doctor" when I moved in the direction of the human sciences, warning me that I would never make a living. Yet I was intrinsically motivated, almost compelled, to understand human nature and communications behavior. In these areas, I am naturally endowed and capable of making a contribution. Heuristically, I also hoped that the study of human behavior would help me understand how to live my life; that is, how to do it right. The child in me was still perplexed and wanted an answer.

The Present

Currently, my interest in human nature involves understanding the relationship between mind, body, spirit and emotion. In terms of

exploring the human condition, I am traveling a new and beautiful path. Streams that weave into this path represent theoretical positions describing basic elements of humanity that I believe to be fundamentally important. When woven together their separate threads unite in a personal practice theory that are both theoretical and functional, illustrative of social constructionism and contextualism, yet also simplistic and natural.

This practice theory reflects a favorite belief system of mine: “to do a common thing uncommonly well.” The aspects of living included in my practice model mirror the most common elements of humankind. They include: spirituality, the life force, choice, developmental issues, communications, and needs fulfillment. In addition, all are based upon a body, mind, spirit and emotions approach to treatment, healing and living, a holistic approach that can be achieved “uncommonly well.”

Spirituality

The Soul

I believe that each person has a soul, an inner sphere of love, a spiritual center. The soul is flowing energy which represents love, truth, life purpose and positive intent. This aspect of the person is also called the core or higher self. When people are in their higher selves, they are in their truth and they are in pleasure. Their unique gifts are visible: their emotional integrity is at its pinnacle. My purpose as a therapist is to help people know and live from this place in themselves.

When my mother died at a hospital in West Philadelphia, I arrived approximately ten minutes after she passed away. The physician asked if I wanted to spend a few minutes with her. When I went into the room where her body lay, I held her in my arms, a physicality she would not tolerate in life, at least, not from me to her. As I held her, a cloud of energy came out of her body, mostly from her head. It was a multicolored rainbow of stuff. I saw shades of blue and pink float up to the ceiling. The impression left on me was deep and lasting. Most importantly, for me personally, was my presence at the moment when my mother's soul left her body.

The Lower Self

Many people do not know or understand their spiritual natures. The core, soul, or seat of love, as I call it, is surrounded by a murky layer that is filled with negativity. The lower self, intrinsic physiologically to the medulla oblongata, represents the shadow side of human nature. It is capable of negativity and destruction, encapsulating repressed feelings of rage and fear in the body. Jung calls this layer "shadow," Freud names it "id," and Pierrakos titles it "lower self." In biology, this layer of the personality is referred to as "the fight or flight response."

Because the core has no ability to defend itself if threatened, the lower self, with its capability of expressing anger, rage, fear, terror, and destruction, is there for defense. However, parents and society find this layer of the personality reprehensible, punishing its existence when the child first exposes it. Very early children, in this culture, learn to hide their true nature. When the parent raises a hand to a whining child, as if to slap the child, and says in a cruel tone, "I'll give you something to cry about," a lesson is being taught and learned. The lesson is that exposing negative feelings is not safe. Indeed anger and fear, socially unacceptable feelings, must be repressed or suppressed. Parents even teach children to suppress love, if it is directed at someone other than themselves, such as a neighbor, teacher or relative.

When the lower self is repressed, feelings are contracted in the muscles of the body. Over time, they become frozen there, shaping the body in particular ways it was not necessarily or even genetically meant to grow. The child doesn't express anger or fear, hurt or despair, or even joy. In fact, all true feelings, even those which are central to the core, are diminished or extinguished. People cannot repress one feeling without causing a chain effect; therefore, all feelings in the body are affected. Now the light of the core has been dimmed and the lower self pushed down into unconsciousness and oblivion. Therefore, the child has to develop a false self or ego mask from which to live.

The Mask

The mask self is the social facade created to defend the psyche against socially unacceptable lower self feelings. The mask is a defense made up of untruths, such as pride, envy, jealousy, sarcasm, hostility, blame, worry, self-pity, justification and rationalization. Mask behavior

is aimed at fulfilling one's needs and wants through the manipulation of other people. In psychotherapy, the task of the therapist is to help clients recover their true feelings, both negative and positive. Clients must break through this mask layer in order to reclaim and release the lower self. Only then can contact be made with core energy and feelings of pleasure and well-being.

A Higher Purpose

My view of the soul is shaped by a teleological perspective. I assume that when people are able to make contact with their higher self spheres, universal life plans will be revealed. The notion of a life purpose for every individual is one that appeals to me. However, free choice enters into this spectrum of thought since there is no condition or force to make a person choose love, which is the central focus of the core, over other behaviors that are more in keeping with negative goals of the lower self or mask.

Spirituality and Knowing

Spiritual Inquiry

In order to utilize spirituality for epistemic purposes, senses are called upon in addition to the five primary ones: visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and kinesthetic. It is a combination of these sensory modalities and additional factors, such as energetic streamings, that enable me to become aware of forces beyond my self. Exercising inner knowing that is not based on known empirical structures provides confirmation for believers, like myself, in the probable existence of miracles, synchronicity, spirit guides, and reincarnation.

Sometimes in a counseling session I employ these non-traditional ways of knowing. To do so I utilize my five basic senses plus unnamed others. These unnamed others seem to be sensory mechanisms which allow me to see auras and chakras, to experience them kinesthetically, and to channel thoughts and messages which are not exactly mine, in the sense that they move through me, aiding me in knowing about the client or about the appropriate intervention. In addition, I use a three pillow exercise, as an intervention, which enables clients to conduct a self assessment concerning their lower self, higher self, and mask attributes. This assessment creates an atmosphere for change. After identifying

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lower self and mask thought processes, people immediately want to transform them.

Synchronicity

Having always been fascinated by Jung's theory of synchronicity, which explains how "out of depth the psyche, events and awareness of special significance are brought into existence" (Proffoff, 1973, p. 8). I sometimes look forward to the convergence of chance events as a way of knowing. In synchronicity, two or more random events may occur together in time. Although random, they seem to relate and have a deep meaning that cannot be readily explained by deterministic theories or rational principles. Events such as knowing who is calling before the telephone rings, or thinking about meeting a romantic partner and coming across that person shortly thereafter, are examples. A bestselling novel, *The Celestine Prophecy*, recently popularized synchronicity. One character explains: "Something occurs beyond chance to lead us forward in our lives... We feel as though we are attaining what destiny is leading us to become" (Redfield, 1993, p. 120).

In my own life I take synchronicity seriously. The fact that my parked car, which I love, was nearly demolished by a drunken driver two days after I returned from a trip to find my significant other in the middle of an alcoholic binge, forced me to confront his alcoholism. Similarly, synchronicity can be an important way of knowing in the counseling situation, even if the knowledge is uninterpretable when first received. I find that many clients appear in my office rather than in someone else's in response to these forces. There is a reason, although it may be unknown at the time, for us to work together. Synchronicity, like other spiritual forces in the universe, cannot be rationally explained.

Values

In reference to axiology, my values and ethics as a psychologist and as a person preclude any desire to convince anyone else that my view of human nature is the correct one. I do not proselytize. To work with others it is not required that they share my views, nor is spirituality mentioned in the sessions unless clients choose to raise it. However, I work from my spiritual self, because my spiritual self is one of many trusted tools in my tool box. At the beginning of the session, I quietly center myself and view the client's higher self. The mask is always

visible, but I take a few extra seconds to look through the mask at the true beauty of the person before me. Some people seek me out knowing I do this kind of work and with them I share and discuss my spiritual approach, including synchronicity, if it is relevant. With others, I work from this model but share it in psychologically acceptable terms. For instance, instead of lower self, I refer to the fight or flight response; instead of mask, I point to the ego mask or false self; and instead of core, I discuss one's authentic self. My goal is education and transformation, when these are the clients' goals as well, and certainly not conversion.

Energy

The Life Force

I believe in the life force and consider human energy the basic building block of human life. Without energy, there is only death. There are many different names for the life force. The Chinese call it "ch'i," meaning breath, and the Indian culture calls it "prana." Mesmer referred to it as "animal magnetism," Freud called it the "libido," Cayce the "aura" and Reich, "orgone." Movement creates life, consciousness, health and pleasure. Movement creates the energy flow which leads to accomplishment of life purposes. Contraction and blocked energy lead to disfunctionality and neurosis. In response to energetic stasis, Reich (1950) found that a healthy cell could become cancerous and a potentially loving human being fearful, hidden, and unavailable for relationships. Both his clinical and laboratory work with cancer patients found them fearful of movement, since movement stimulates sexual energy, and these people chose sexual repression over sexual expression.

As a child, I was frightened by the possibilities of my own energy. I froze my body, squeezing what life energy I had into a small tight ball within myself. My arms and legs became thin and undercharged. I was afraid to reach out, expecting rejection. There was a period, I believe during adolescence, when I would go to sleep and see or dream about huge circles of energy moving round my head. The circles would start to move so fast that I thought I was dying. In response, I would jump out of bed. Now, I believe those "energy dreams" were the result of too much ungrounded energy in my body, energy remaining situated in my head due to blockages which stopped its flow into lower parts.

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Releasing Blocked Energy

I believe that people are basically good and that the cornerstone of human nature is love. Yet this is not the aspect of themselves that people display. If it were, I and many others would not have been so wounded when we were children. What makes people difficult, destructive, and hurtful to self and others is the mask. Living from the ego mask, rather than the core, ensures that arrogance, self-righteousness, control, manipulation, blame, judgement, criticism, and pride will guide human interactions, both interpersonally and intrapersonally. My goal as a psycho-therapist, therefore, is to help people understand that when they are in the mask, they are separated from their truth and their life purpose. For the mask to be diminished, blocked energy in the body must be freed, released and transformed. Energy released from cells, muscles and organs through various interventions, such as physical exercises, breathing exercises, and cathartic experiences allows people to reclaim their authentic selves.

Energy and Inquiry

Physical Assessment

There are three types of knowing that are important to me: knowing about the client, knowing which intervention is best for specific therapeutic purpose and the exact timing for its use, and knowing about myself in the therapeutic session. One way of knowing about these three components is through energetic diagnosis. When I work with people, I diagnose their energy systems. Observation of physical development, muscular qualities, facial expression, body posture, and auric field, as well as changes in skin color, body temperature, kinesthetic movements, and sympathetic and parasympathetic signals provide the data.

I use a person's energy patterns to form a diagnosis about that person. People have energy which is fragmented, undercharged, overcharged, displaced upwardly, or rigidified (Lowen, 1958); Pierrakos, 1990). Where this energy is blocked and where it flows in the body allows me to hypothesize about particular problems in living, wounds received as a child, and unresolved material from the family of origin with which this particular individual is attempting to cope. I also use an energy diagnosis to form a treatment plan. Knowing that energy needs to flow in the form of a figure eight throughout the body, I can prescribe

certain exercises and breathing regimens to help the flow occur.

Assessing Energetic Function

The model for energy and consciousness (Pierrakos, 1990) exemplifies organic inspiration. It is shaped like a pyramid and includes five levels: body, emotion, mind, will and spirit. The picture it provides of human nature is totally holistic. For health and healing to occur, energy must flow through all these levels. When human energy is blocked at one or more levels, dysfunction results and life purposes, such as fulfillment and well-being are thwarted. Symptoms leading to medical or mental conditions can result and aspects of the personality may reflect disorganization and lack of balance. Therefore, I view mental illness as a distortion or energy imbalance and mental health as a harmonious flow of energy.

Each of the levels of the energy pyramid can be utilized as a way of knowing about clients. When I look for balance and harmony within and between these various levels, I ask if there is too much of one element and not enough of another. Based on my overall experience as a psychotherapist, I make hypotheses about the physical, emotional, mental, will and spiritual status of my client. On the physical level, energy flow in the body is assessed. On the emotional level, awareness of feelings versus repression of feelings or distancing from feelings is observed. The mental level offers a determination of use of reason versus neglect of reason as well as observation of the kinds of belief systems that underlie a person's life choices and coping mechanisms. In reference to will, people may be too controlling and manipulating or too helpless and acquiescent.

Free Choice and Energy

A sense of inner peace and well-being is attained as energetic balance is achieved within the four lower levels of the pyramid. Those in touch with their physical bodies, emotions, mental processes, and assertive abilities, who energize them and allow them to work together, will make excellent choices and decisions for themselves. No longer guided by extremes, all aspects of their personality will be involved in selecting an appropriate outcome. By balance, I am not suggesting that people will use equal amounts of will, reason, emotion and energy for every choice, but that given the choice or decision to be made, all aspects

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of the human energy field will be available for use, with none suppressed, if it is appropriate.

Values and Energy

From the perspective of values, a treatment issue that occurs in psychology has to do with countertransference. It is inappropriate for therapists to project their own feelings onto clients. For this reason, and because I believe projection is a common occurrence, especially when it involves difficult figures in psychotherapists' pasts, I am strongly in favor of supervision, even for seasoned/experienced psychologists.

In this discussion of energy, one way of thwarting the possibility of countertransference is through an analysis of one's own energy flow. It is impossible for psychotherapists who are in their higher selves to subject clients to projection and countertransference. For psychologists to be in their higher selves, however, their energy must be flowing. Only then is the psychotherapist truly centered and present for the other. Therefore, it is almost an ethical obligation for psychotherapists who work with human energy to maintain their own energetic functioning at an optimum level. In addition, because all people are capable of self deception and mask behavior, even experienced energetic psychotherapists should be required to receive supervision.

Developmental Stages and Difficulties

Development and Human Nature

Work with development stages is a primary method utilized by psychologists for assessment and diagnosis. Charts and models for human development are part of psychology's epistemic tradition. However, before looking at developmental stages in terms of their contribution to knowledge, I want to stress the importance of development as a facet of human nature. Human beings evolve. Humans evolve in this lifetime from infant to elder and perhaps on a soul level from lifetime to lifetime. Many spiritual communities, as well as Eastern religions, believe in reincarnation. Some suggest that issues of morality that are unresolved in this lifetime will be carried to the next.

My personal viewpoint concerning development is that each person is on a journey that begins with the original wounds in this life, stemming from conflict in the family of origin. The purpose of the

journey is to heal these wounds. In addition, I believe developmental tasks involve coming to terms with the relationship between mind, body, spirit and emotion, as well as freeing up one's energy field. In working on oneself in this manner, growth as an individual becomes possible. As people grow and change, they make pleasing choices for themselves.

My view on development is closely linked to Maslow's theory of need fulfillment and self-actualization (Maslow, 1978). In this model, people move from the lowest level of security needs, representing issues of survival, through levels of achievement, acknowledgment, and love, to the highest level of self-actualization, reflecting issues of creativity and spirituality. Although Maslow did not mention energy in this theory, it seems that as each lower need is filled, energy is released, leading to the next level of need fulfillment.

Development and Assessment

Although development is basic to human life on the planet, there are many difficulties inherent in the developmental process. I have wondered why some people evolve into healthy, productive adults, making rich and useful contributions to humanity, whereas others become twisted in despair or defeat. Is this the result of genetic heritage and evolution in the Darwinian sense or are there other forces at play?

Although I believe babies are born with a predisposition toward certain personality traits, life here on earth seems capable of affecting these innate factors in a positive or negative direction. Family of origin and nurturing issues play causal roles which have developmental consequences. Physical survival and mental health are threatened if children are not physically held or touched. Unfulfilled needs at certain key times in life can have fatal or deleterious results.

In the view of human nature which I hold, infancy and early childhood are periods in which positive personality attributes as well as character defenses against pain and suffering are established. The character defense forms in response to wounding by adults at certain sensitive ages (Lowen, 1958). With each injection of pain into the psyche, energy is blocked in muscles and organs, effecting subsequent health and the shape of the physical body within genetic and structural parameters.

When I work with clients, I identify their character defenses using the developmental guidelines prescribed by Reich (1950), Lowen (1958) and Pierrakos (1990). This important assessment mechanism is

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used in conjunction with the energy analysis discussed earlier and an initial structured interview. Once I have a sense of the character defenses employed by the client, I am able to devise a tentative treatment plan and some initial hypotheses.

The developmental stages used for assessment follow. The schizoid which develops in relationship to a wound prior to six months of age is characterized by fragmented energy, a weak ego, and a feeling of nonexistence or "not being here." Feelings of abandonment plague the person who develops an oral, energetically under-charged defense in response to a wound between six months and one and a half years of age. Masochistic, energetically overcharged, wounding occurs between two and three years of age and involves intrusive parenting, attachment and independence issues. Parenting that wavers chaotically between seductivity and hostility, when directed at a child age three to five, results in the psychopathic defense and an upward displacement of energy in the body. Finally, the rigid defense is characterized by mechanical and unemotional energetic functioning, resulting from a wound received during the oedipal crisis, ages four to seven. Each of these character defenses is a normal human reaction to undesirable circumstances and each cuts down on the person's vitality and life force.

In describing my own wounding (Wilner, 1995). I wrote a poem which indirectly refers to my oedipal experience. The wound during the oedipal period results in the rigid character defense. It entails rejection from a loved one. In response, the child tends to disconnect from the heart, pelvis, or both. In my case, I would close my heart and respond physically to an admirer or I would deny any physical response and seek to establish a platonic relationship. Although my goal was safety, since I would not have to love anyone with my total being, this splitting of myself resulted in personal pain. The poem titled "Animals" (Wilner, 1992), was written in response to this pain:

Animals

You beat, my heart, you throb.
But do you love?
You silly thing you are red-sky frightened.
Roily coaster pain twists wretched, muscle cells into tortured pretzels.
The doors to the barn close tightly.

No oxygen fresh air brims here.
The animals are dying.
My chest, Noah's ark in reverse.
In twos, plump elephants, wise giraffes, happy zebras drop dead from suffocation.
Closed, abandoned, no energy, dead heart you call this safety!
Take safety, stab it with a knife!
The animals want to live.

The poem shows the effect developmental problems have on a person's body, coping mechanisms and patterns of living. In addition, it illustrates that change is possible and that work in psychotherapy situations can make a difference in reversing developmental trends.

Communications

Communications and the Psychotherapy Practice

Communications behavior is a basic element of human nature. Ontologically, humans are shaped by the communications they use. The word and the gesture create the culture, suggest the context, and permeate the individual. The name of my psychotherapy practice, Humanistic Interactional Associates, portrays the importance human exchange holds in my personal practice theory. I believe psychologists need to be involved with two levels of communications: interpersonal and intrapersonal. My understanding of the way in which humans manipulate internal symbols has helped me devise methods for the banishment of dysfunctional belief systems, images and thought process.

Communications studies sometimes provide results that have implications for interventions in the counseling room. For example, Tannen's (1990) contribution concerning gender differentiation in speech communication is research that has practical application. Some of my clients, both men and women, have read the book and introduced several of the ideas into their lives. In addition, interventions based on communications theory can be devised for work with shy people, ashamed people, egocentric people, and others. For instance, I create games emphasizing eye contact for those who lack it and experiences involving taking turns for those who want all the attention for themselves.

Communications as a Mode of Inquiry

With my knowledge of interpersonal communications, I utilize clients' verbal and nonverbal communications as mechanisms of inquiry. However, because more meaning may be channeled through an eye blink than the corresponding words, I tend to give the nonverbal more power in devising my initial hypotheses. When I utilize communication habits and patterns for diagnosis, I am very careful to take into consideration the person's gender, culture, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class as well as other contextual information. Other aspects of nonverbal communications that have great assessment value include touch, space, dress, gesture, muscular elements, facial expression and vocal tendencies other than speech. Communications behaviors are often culturally determined and therefore differ across individuals. From an ethical viewpoint, it is important that psychologists recognize that differences in communications may be simply that and not necessarily reflective of mental illness.

Conclusion

Human nature is both grand and glorious. When the core is exposed and brought into the light, free from the darkness of the mask and lower self, human life shines. In working with the body, mind, emotions, will and spirit, my own life has been touched. Therefore, I feel tremendous gratitude in relationship to some of the ideas shared in this article. This view of humanity has encouraged healing in my own life. This model of inquiry has helped me create better assessment and treatment devices. This model of values has lifted my spirit and at the same time enabled me to respect the values and life style of each client with whom I have the opportunity to work.

In the present, I want to continue to be a guide on the path to the core self. My purpose as a teacher and psychotherapist is to help people know and claim their higher selves. To accomplish these goals it is necessary for me to show people through demonstration, lecture or psychotherapeutic intervention, methodologies to release blocked energies from the body. When they utilize energetic techniques, at home or in the session, along with other psychological interventions such as cognitive behavioral, client centered, gestalt, psychodynamic, and object relations approached, changes occur and psychotherapeutic goals are met.

With release of lower self energy, time spent in the mask is decreased, and time spent in the core or authentic self is increased.

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