



# The process of psychotherapy

## healing and soul retrieval

an approach overview

Patricia June Vickers Ph.D.  
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# The Foundation: Body Mind Soul

We are all influenced by not only the environment we grew up in, but also by the teachers that have brought enlightenment along the way.

Enlightenment is more than understanding and awareness, it is a temporary state of being that opens our mind and heart to exist if only for a moment, beyond suffering and craving. The teachers who have assisted me to experience enlightenment come from Christian, Buddhist and First Nations land-based ceremony.

I have come to understand that because humans experience life from the mind, the body and the soul, the approach to helping them to heal is not limited to one of these realms of human existence. We have the internal reality and the external reality. The body, mind and soul operate in both internal and external realities--simultaneously!

The approach that I've adapted continues to develop as clients inform me with their story and their courageous work. The clients I've worked with, mainly First Nations, exist in an environment that also needs to be considered when delivering the helping services. There is responsibility to the individual, the tribe and the community. Finding one's responsibility to a community as a professional includes both personal and professional commitment. In community, the personal and the professional rest within ancestral principles that have the potential to assist with resolving conflict, ritual and ceremony that assist with healing and who and how to approach a community member for assistance.

Ancestral principles are not only a powerful, sustaining resource for First Nations people, ancestral principles founded on respect for self and all living beings are support and guidance for all who engage with them.

# Initial Engagement

Although a therapist can be prepared for the session or the group, it is always the other who provides the starting point. The client or group will direct the facilitator(s) as to whether or not the beginning will commence from the internal or the external, from emotion, thought (mind) or body (sensations). Once the relationship is initiated by the one seeking the healing, the journey is then determined by the practice of presence by the therapist. Direction can be an opening as small as a pinhole or as broad as a park gateway.

With the right conditions of safety that include confidentiality and non-



judgement in place, when the relationship is initially established between the client and the therapist, the foundation for initial engagement is set.

The opening into working with a client, whether individual or group requires basic information to assist with self-awareness and support for self-inquiry. The foundational information for engagement includes knowledge of emotions, physiological activation, the nature of the conditioned mind and teachings of purification and restoring spiritual balance.

# BODY

The foundation for working with the body comes from Somatic Experiencing<sup>1</sup> having completed the first three levels of training that study the central nervous system and the nature of activation from traumatic events. Also, studies of the brain<sup>2</sup> and the assuring possibility of redirecting the anxiety ridden thought process to be a scientific reality.

When one becomes aware of their body sense, which also relates to human instinct (fight, flight, freeze), and intuition. Intuition requires no previous knowledge of a person, situation or thing yet it can direct one to make a decision toward acquiring knowledge in a way that does not compromise one's safety.

Trauma, neglect and abuse impact the ability for an individual to be aware of their body knowledge. Depending on the degree of trauma, the individual through dissociation, has become, over time, less in tune with the intelligence of the body.

Bringing a person back to body awareness and body intelligence is a part of the overall healing or recovery plan. Bringing a person back means that the therapist assists the client in self-inquiry, identifying the activation process through body sensations and finding the language that best describes the activation and deactivation process.

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<sup>1</sup> See, <http://www.traumahealing.com/somatic-experiencing/> (visited on September 9, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Norman Doidge, *The brain that changes itself: stories of personal triumph from the frontiers of brain science* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).

# MIND

The mind has been described as an uncontrollable force that can be likened to a band of wild horses or a monkey swinging from branch to branch. The functioning of thought is a physical reality that occurs in the brain, sparking the nervous system and emotions. Throughout the age of human existence there are many varied activities developed over thousands of years to calm the mind, to slow the rapid firing and to ground the senses as they relay messages to the brain.

Meditation through stillness in the Sweat Lodge and Vision Quest Fast ceremonies as well as seated, walking and lying are all postures in the training of the mind to stillness. But meditation is not simply a formal practice for individuals with Zafu and Zabuton cushions. Meditation is the emptying process, the stillness and the quietness that the hunter needs as he prepares to take a life, the silence while rocking a baby, washing dishes, gardening, fishing, swimming, dancing and sitting on a rock or park bench.

Through personal observation, without judgement, without commentary, one is able to follow the workings, the self-defeating pathways of thought. To follow every twist and turn of the mind requires patience and courage to speak the truth.

As one acquires the ability to observe the mind in stillness, they are able to redirect thought. To let go of the conditioned mind and accept the expansive space that is available at any turn.

# SOUL

In Tsimshian, Nisga'a and Gitksan societies the heart is the centre of the soul. All thought passes through the heart. When the heart is purified, the mind will follow as though joined at the hip to the leader.

At The Meadows Treatment Center in Wickenburg, Arizona, I was taught there are seven primary emotions: pain, joy, guilt, shame, fear, loneliness and anger. Emotions are guides, they simply alert one to the need to pay attention. The emotions will direct one to self-defeating beliefs that were established in childhood through conditioning. And the good news is that beliefs can be changed!

It is said that soul work, the emotions, identity, interest, effort, despair and hope, craving and envy and aloneness and the will to power is a life long journey. We cannot undo conditioning, but through the power of the heart, through acts of courage one is able to let go of the behaviours that bring harm to self and another.

As with the mind and the body, self-inquiry is the beginning of learning to let go of the distortions that prevent the ability to love self, and the other.

## THE PROCESS OF EXPANSION

It is said by leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela that love is the greatest force available to mankind. Learning to love self and another is a process of creating stillness and space, a process of quietness, courage, the ability to speak the truth and assertion without harm.

Whether working with a group or with an individual, the process of expansion is approached through the mind (thoughts), body (sensations), or soul (condition of the heart). The process of awareness through inquiry, through dialogue, through words and action without words, expressing the present reality or the impact of memory as thought. As one learns to revisit memory and at the same time be present in the here and now, they create space that is vital in finding acceptance and compassion.

As one inquires internally and expresses the internal reality externally, the internal reality and the external reality become congruent. Stillness internally creates stillness externally. Creating space internally, creates space externally. Awareness of body, mind, soul without judgement creates opportunities of expansion, not of the individual but of the space that surrounds the individual and in such space there is room for great goodness.

The ancestors have taught that our thoughts can cause goodness or harm, we are to be conscious of our thoughts and our emotions for they can impact the development of the unborn child. When a traumatic event happens, the

elders have said that a person loses a part of self at the physical place where the trauma occurred. Whether the traumatic event was physical, spiritual, mental, emotional or sexual, soul retrieval work, healing, and psychotherapy can be united to assist the individual to unite body, mind and soul to a place of congruency internally and externally.