

### ***On the Path toward Awakening: The Role of Therapy in Buddhism***

I have felt inspired to respond to Barbara Fleming's "invitation to the reader" (May/June 2010 issue of the Dzogchen Newsletter) to write about therapy and Buddhism and about the question of their complementarity. My intention is to share the helpful therapies that have been supporting my growth, an on-going process. I do not claim to be an expert on either therapy or Buddhism, nor do I claim to have mastered all my issues in life. However, I also feel that I have made meaningful progress, thanks to having gained valuable treasures on the way. So I hope and trust that if I was moved to respond to the invitation, it will hopefully help someone. It is already helping me to go deeper into my own conscious growth process.

Let me begin with offering my understanding of terms used. Therapy, understood here as short for psychotherapy, or psychotherapies, typically comes from the Western world. "The word psychotherapy comes from the ancient Greek words, *psychē*, meaning breath, spirit, or soul; and *therapeia* or *therapeuein*, to nurse or cure." (Wikipedia). There is a hypothesis that psychotherapy sprang in Western Europe mostly as a result of the split between material consciousness and spiritual consciousness, through the emergence and subsequent domination of science over religion. As religious practice became more and more marginalized from one's life in modernized Western societies, no longer could one turn to a Higher Source for a sense of meaning and purpose in life, nor for guidance or protection.

I will use therapy and psychology as synonyms, as well as psycho-analysis, particularly according to Swiss psycho-analyst Carl G. Jung, with the premise that all share the broad aim of providing therapeutic healing to the human psyche, especially to help people improve their ability to cope with difficulties in their lives and relationships – Jungian psycho-analysis is the modality I am the most familiar with, of all the ones mentioned.

There are a couple of meaningful distinctions though, between Jungian psycho-analysis and mainstream Western psychotherapy. First, Carl G. Jung, unlike most Western therapists, was fascinated by ancient Eastern spiritual philosophies; and much in his teachings constituted a bridge of understanding between Eastern wisdom, Western spirituality, and his own insights into the human psyche and its process of evolution. Jungian analysis grew out of a more wholistic understanding of the total psyche beyond the ego personality, which has tended to be the dominant focus in mainstream therapy. The term "ego" was first coined by Austrian psycho-analyst Sigmund Freud, renowned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and can be defined as the ordinary, day-to-day, function-driven consciousness, or lower mind. The second distinction lies in the underlying goal of psycho-analysis according to Jung, which is to facilitate the individual's uncovering and fulfillment of his/her full potential, or true Nature. This goal brings Jungian psycho-analysis closer to that of Buddhism.

It is meaningful to also note Sigmund Freud's discovery of the superego, i.e., the part in our psyche that pretends to be our true Nature by playing the critical and moralizing role with endless "shoulds", but that can never be satisfied with feeling that anyone is good enough, including ourselves, no matter what we do or don't do. The superego's secret mission is to keep us identified with it and its limited judgments of good and bad in the dual, relative reality. The superego particularly judges against the "id" part of the psyche, or more instinctual drive in human nature. I am finding that, while an unconscious superego can be a tyrannical inner judge, once made conscious, it can be turned into an ally to find balance between striving toward improvement and remaining static; and the superego's grasp can be tempered in our minds with a more accepting, compassionate, and even appreciative, Buddha-like consciousness.

A word on Buddhist psychology, which I only discovered more recently through Mark Epstein's book "Going to Pieces without Falling Apart": Epstein seems to have combined the best of therapy with Buddhist wisdom, including meditation. He wrote: "Like meditation, psychotherapy has the potential to reveal how much of our thinking is an artificial construction designed to help us cope with an

unpredictable world. And like meditation, therapy can show us how much we identify with our thinking minds... . What therapy can offer is a window into that liberating state of mind that comes from the absence of identification.” (Epstein).

Buddhism springs from the Eastern World, and the broad purpose of Buddhism as I understand it, is for all beings to awaken to true Buddha Nature. It is possible that people born and raised in a well grounded understanding and practice of Buddhism, especially Dzogchen, might never need to use any therapy on their path. I can only write from my current perspective, as having been born and raised in France and living in New York City. I will introduce the therapies I have been practicing, using bits of my life journey, to illustrate how I have encountered and used them in the context of my spiritual path.

The combination of opening to Dzogchen wisdom and Dharma practice, along with therapy, has been helping me to move forward on the path. Buddhism holds the premise that “ignorance” is the ultimate human issue. Similarly, therapy, especially psycho-analysis, recognizes the unconscious, or subconscious mind, as an essential part of the psyche that is to become conscious in order to become whole. Both Buddhism and therapy have ways to push our ego selves into ever more conscious awareness of our perceived realities with radical authenticity. “We gotta get in to get out...” are great lyrics from an old Genesis song I used to listen to as a teenager.

I find the combination of therapy with Buddhism particularly meaningful, as there seem to be limits to relying on therapy alone, especially mainstream therapy, given that its primary focus seems to be on the individual’s ego and its perceived issues -- except for Jungian analysis, psychosynthesis, transpersonal psychology and Buddhist psychology. The risk is ego-centeredness, i.e., remaining identified with the ego mind and its perceived world of forms; believing that “me and my loved ones” are at the center of the world; while neither caring for the rest of the world, nor opening to the greater picture of life beyond forms, nor recognizing the lasting treasures of the Inner Life. Additionally, Buddhism teaches us that one of the essential ingredients to finding our way on the path to awakening, is through the heart-centered practice of seva, or selfless service -- an ingredient missing in most Western therapies’ recipes I have encountered so far, except for Jung’s hint on the Self’s social function, as introduced later here.

The therapies and related concepts below have been instrumental in opening me to tap into my subconscious mind to receive feedback and guidance regarding my blind spots, sometimes with the help of a professional, sometimes on my own. They have also been serving me to process emotions and unhook from “stories” in a healthy way, especially when combined with Buddhist wisdom and practice.

I feel that there is also a potential danger in relying on spiritual practice alone, and that is the risk of denying my emotional intelligence as a legitimate part of my whole being. Thanks to the combination of my spiritual practice with the use of therapies, I have been learning that, by acknowledging the emotions without identifying with them, I can let them be and go by without letting them rule my life. I can then let emotions serve their higher purpose of giving me feedback on my life choices, beliefs and perceptions.

The Dzogchen View of the Natural Great Perfection serves as the essential guiding anchor and purpose in my consciousness and life. I have found the essential Buddhist Dharma precepts of daily commitment to taking refuge in the three Jewels; practicing meditative present-moment awareness; non-identification with anything impermanent; cultivating acceptance, compassion and joy for others’ happiness, as well as equanimity toward all; as having been profoundly meaningful and healing. The Buddhist sense of reverence for and sacredness of all life also allow for a harmonious tuning into naturally benevolent connections with the life around me – when I take time to slow down. And I find meditation to be the most therapeutic process of all. However, I occasionally stumble back into feeling hooked by a “story”, with all its related negative emotions and limited belief patterns, and this is when therapeutic processes can come into play.

Most of the therapies presented here were introduced to me by professional therapists in the various modalities, and some through classes and seminars. You might like to begin by seeking the help of a therapist in one or the other practices presented below, before trying them out.

While Buddhism did not enter my life meaningfully until I heard Lama Surya Das teach in November 2009, I have been on an interfaith spiritual path beginning with Taoism, since age 20, (many years ago), thanks to having experienced the healing power of Chinese acupuncture while in France.

### ***Dreamwork***

Just before that, at age 18, I had a psychology class in high school in France, that was to have a life changing impact. My philosophy teacher one day announced we were going to focus on the psychology of dreams, and he asked for a volunteer to share a recent dream, especially if it was a recurring dream. It so happened that the night before, I had just had my recurring nightmare from since childhood. I was hoping my teacher could help me, so I volunteered. He wrote keywords from my dream story and drew columns under each of them. Once I finished telling the dream, he asked me questions for clarification, such as on colors, and asked me to think of free associations of related thoughts and emotions from the keywords. He wrote more keywords in the appropriate columns. He began to guess some of my answers and it became clear that he knew what my dream was about before I had any clue.

He finally announced that this recurring dream was the “re-living” of my birth, and added that I must have had a very difficult birth. I said I did not know, so he suggested that I ask my mother. When I asked her that evening, “was my birth difficult?” she replied with great astonishment: “How do you know?!” She then shared with me the story of my challenging birth into this world. Fortunately, the dream, and the true life story, end with a very happy celebration to welcome me into the world. I never had that same nightmare again after that day. This learning experience made me very eager to learn more about dreams and dreamwork; which has become an essential part of my healing and growth ever since then.

### ***Discovering Carl G. Jung’s Teachings***

I then found myself at 23 in a temporary sublet in New York City, after having been offered a job there. The apartment had many fascinating books, and two in particular drew my attention: the first one was entitled “The I Ching or Book of Changes” (Wilhelm/Baynes), with a foreword by Carl G. Jung. I was drawn to that book, from my earlier enthusiasm for ancient Taoist wisdom. Simply reading Jung’s foreword opened my psyche’s horizon. Jung’s “Man and His Symbols,” rich with images of sacred, symbolic art from around the world, was the other great find on the sublet’s shelves.

The discoveries I made about the key concepts of individuation; the archetypes such as the Shadow, Inner Lover (Animus/Anima) and Higher Self; as well as dreamwork; the collective unconscious; and the four psychological functions; all had a profound impact on my ability to better understand my identity, life, and relationships (Jung). “Know ThySelf” seems to be a precondition toward spiritual evolution.

### ***The Tree in the Acorn, The Self, and The Process of Individuation***

The term “individuation” deserves special attention, particularly because it might be misunderstood as mere separation from others in the human developmental process. Carl Jung first coined this term, and he understood it as “self-realization,” “wholeness,” “inner totality,” “completion,” i.e., the maximization of one’s full potential Self. The Self, sometimes also called the Higher Self, is not the ego. Jung understood that “the ego must submit to the Self in order to fulfill the process of individuation.” (Jung). Jungian analyst Carol Pearson, also stated that a healthy ego is necessary to better serve and submit to the Higher Self. (Pearson)

There is an interesting paradox contained in the concept of individuation as understood by Jung: it is a process by which one's psyche naturally unfolds and grows in a unique way, following natural inner impulses, toward becoming whole and self-realized. This process, when unfolding toward completion, makes an individual appear unique and differentiated from others; and yet, that individual's Higher Self becomes more deeply connected with and concerned for others, and he finds that connections with others come from within. Jung discovered that the Higher Self's social function was to "unite separate individuals who belong together." (Jung).

Jung referred to Buddha and Christ as symbols of the archetypal Self (Jung). Looking at the Buddha's life, he exemplified the self-realized Self by first choosing to differentiate himself from his family and various spiritual teachers on the path, and ultimately reaching a universal level of consciousness as he surrendered his ego to his own Buddha Nature, or true Self. He was deeply committed to help all beings reach enlightenment, and recognized the value of the Sangha.

Jung used the metaphor of the acorn, as well as of the pine seed, to bring light to the archetype of the Higher Self and the process of individuation. He recognized that the seed already contains the whole future tree in it. "Like the tree, we should give in to this almost imperceptible, yet powerfully dominating impulse - an impulse that comes from the urge toward unique, creative, self-realization... . The guiding hints come, not from the ego, but from the totality of the psyche, the Self" (Jung).

Once fully grown, a tree may stand unique among other trees and yet, it also contributes naturally and fully to the life of the whole forest. The process of individuation is not unlike sacred initiation rites in so-called indigenous groups, such as the walk-about in Aboriginal groups in Australia. There, the teenager must first separate himself from his group in order to become a fully grown man, at which time he can return. The process of individuation comes with both gifts and challenges, the latter being related to loss and even having to face one's death consciously, such as through illness.

In this view, we can realize that challenges are our teachers. They are heart-opening stepping stones for us to choose to uncover who we really are, i.e., not the body, not the emotions, not the mind. As yoga nidra meditation teacher Adrienne Jamiel puts it, "we are unchanging awareness, noticing perceptions arising, unfolding, and dissolving." This realization, which I have occasionally used as a repeated affirmation, has had healing effects on me when used in a meditative state, the deeper state where the ego mind cannot try as easily to find a rationale for contradicting deeper truth (Murphy).

Jung's view on the process of individuation was not linear, but rather like "an ascending spiral, which grows upward while simultaneously returning again and again to the same point" (Jung). Moreover, Jungian analyst Carol Pearson stated that time could best be understood as being more like an onion rather than linear, with its many layers of simultaneous parallel realities, and through which we can cut across to reach its center at once (Pearson). This perspective on time has helped me to better understand why it is said that solutions already co-exist with the problems, awaiting our recognition (*A Course in Miracles*). It has helped me to realize that I need but to turn within to the deepest layer of reality within myself, through meditation in particular, to allow for the Timeless and Absolute Reality of Union beyond Duality of All That Is, to reveal Itself as Perfection. We can then realize that there is no death, only the death of the ego, which is not the truth of who we really are (*A Course in Miracles*).

While I have experienced glimpses of this awareness, I find myself navigating between various layers of consciousness in any given moment, particularly between identifying with ego mind and with my Higher Nature. This is where on-going, spiritual practice, combined with emotional gym, helps me to feel like I am making progress on my spiralling path.

Jung invited us to take time to feel the presence of natural inner impulses toward our unique individuation, just like the acorn takes its time to grow into the full tree. He also suggested to imitate the tree when obstacles appear in its growth, through replacing resistance with non-judgmental adjustment. This way of approaching change by consciously allowing it to unfold, is related to the Feminine type of consciousness. It is not meant to totally replace the more pro-active Masculine type of consciousness. Both types of consciousness are inherent in both women and men, and both are meant to complement and balance each other out. When lucky enough to find that balance, it feels like my heart is open and I am receptive to aligned action. It means accepting to slow down and “being here while getting there” as Lama Surya Das puts it (Lama Surya Das).

Jung’s understanding of the Self archetype as already inherent in the acorn or human mind, seems compatible with the Dzogchen View of the Natural Great Perfection, although the Dzogchen View may extend to life beyond forms and beyond a single lifespan. One can imagine that the archetype of the complete Self could extend to not only a seed or the human mind, but also to all life across time, space, and forms, like a cosmic blueprint inherent in all life.

### ***Shadow Work***

Perhaps the most life-changing aspect of Jungian psycho-analysis that has helped me to grow, is the understanding of and working with the Shadow Self. The Shadow is an archetype that is part of our whole psyche, and is comprised of traits in an individual which are repressed in the subconscious mind as socially unacceptable or useless -- often related to primal instincts. When unconscious, Shadow traits express themselves in distorted ways. As long as we remain unconscious of them, we only perceive them through projections onto others, and thus perceive them as challenging. Once befriended, these traits turn into their higher aspects (Jung)\*.

Understanding that all life is one is very helpful when first faced with an apparently challenging person. This understanding implies that my view in that moment is limited within the relative, dual reality; and that I am meant to uncover a new perspective – by emptying my lower mind of judgment and allowing Buddha Consciousness to fill my inner space. From that inner space, it becomes possible to allow for a shift in perception, which usually leads to acceptance\*.

Jung’s findings on the Shadow helped me to uncover unconscious patterns of projections onto others, and to withdraw and integrate them. Thanks to understanding about Shadow work, I have learned to transform many challenging relationships into harmonious ones, while developing uncovered qualities. And thanks to Buddhist wisdom, adding the intention of unconditional acceptance and compassion, both toward myself and others, has usually allowed me to go deeper into emotional healing and wholeness.

Despite my current understanding of the Shadow, I still occasionally fall into the trap of Shadow projection, and I accept it is an opportunity to uncover a yet-unknown part of myself. Thankfully, I can now usually recognize, withdraw and integrate my Shadows sooner and more efficiently. Shadow work keeps me humble and more alive, makes me more and more complete, and helps me to connect more deeply with others.

### ***Inner Child Work***

I discovered Inner Child work as first presented by author John Bradshaw, and later from the Jungian perspective. At first sight, a spiritually-minded individual like myself could assume that focusing on one’s Inner Child may run the risk of becoming overly self-centered and regressing backward into an

unnecessary indulgence into the past. And perhaps the risk is there? However, I learned via Jungian wisdom that the Inner Child is an archetype that is not of the ego, but a sacred and essential part of the Higher Self, and which, when consciously recognized and healed, holds qualities of self-renewal through innocence, as well as creativity through childlike playfulness. So I felt it worth my while to do the inner work – primarily through visualizations and active imagination of dialoguing with It. Inner child work helped me to feel more nurtured emotionally from within, as well as to tap into playfulness, creativity and a sense of freshness and innocence – Beginner’ Mind. Inner Child work also helps me to prevent It from running my life without realizing it.

### ***Gestalt Therapy***

When I subsequently entered and fell out of a significant intimate relationship, I was lucky to have been advised to see a great Gestalt therapist, Dr. Barrett, Director of the Gestalt Institute in NYC at the time (early 90ies). Gestalt therapy, as developed by Fritz Perls, is a powerful, experiential therapy grounded in awareness of the now moment, and takes into consideration the body-mind-emotions in the person. The individual is invited to take full responsibility for him-herself, his/her actions, emotions and thoughts. Dreams are regarded as containing important messages from the unconscious, and treated as films, whereby the dreamer is empowered to view him-herself as the film director, and also as the one playing the roles of all the characters in the dream. The dreamer is invited to write alternative scenarios to the endings of their inner films, if so desired. I found Gestalt therapy to be very empowering in feeling able to move forward.

Just before that time, in 1990, I learned to meditate, beginning with transcendental meditation, using a mantra. This opened up the doorway to my Inner life even more than dreamwork alone had. I have been enjoying meditation ever since, including various forms.

### ***Pain Awareness Work***

Meditation and dreamwork contributed to my complete healing from burnout in the early 90ies. I had been an A type personality and activist until then, with a mission to save the world by working in education on global poverty and environmental issues.

The healing crisis taught me that deep down, I had yet to uncover who I really was, how to live my life and even be in relationships. It was an opportunity to discover and nurture my truer identity and relationships, and to learn about balance from within. I included body-mind practices such as yoga, Chi Gong, and foot reflexology. At that time, I also stumbled upon an important little book, called “The Brilliant Function of Pain” by Milton Ward, a meditation teacher. Ward views pain as an essential guidance tool for growth, through mindful awareness of it (Ward). Eckhart Tolle also put it very articulately in his book “Practicing the Power of Now”: “sustained conscious attention severs the link between the pain-body and your thought processes; and brings about the process of transmutation. It is as if the pain becomes fuel for the flame of your consciousness, which then burns more brightly as a result.” (Tolle).

### ***Perception Shifting Work through A Course in Miracles***

At that time, I was also introduced to *A Course in Miracles*, a contemporary, Christian-based book on inner peace and healing, which is not only a sacred scripture, but also feels like a great therapeutic tool, thanks to its daily practical lessons. It defines miracles as inner shifts of our perceptions of reality. I have found this powerful book to be very compatible with Buddhist teachings and Shadow work. The Course acknowledges both the Absolute Reality of Perfect Union of All That Is, and the relative, dual reality of

apparent separation of the ego. The Course states that, as long as we function as ego consciousness, forgiveness work is the central tool for the ego to grow. It teaches that there are two fundamental states of being or feeling, i.e., love, or fear. Every choice we make is based on either one of them. Fear is the illusory tool of the ego to keep us stuck. Love is the true state of being that leads to peaceful union. One of the most significant teachings in it, is the invitation to “make no decision by myself and let “Him” (Christ - or Buddha consciousness) lead the way.” I have been using this practice in surrendering my ego to the Higher Consciousness daily. I have since then found a parallel to it with the commitment to taking refuge in the Buddha and Dharma; and I am now grateful to be able to add the commitment to taking refuge in the Sangha, thanks to Buddhism.

### ***Creative Expression Offerings for Healing & Self-Realization***

After I healed from burnout, I felt guided through a series of dreams and synchronicities to sing again (which was how I learned to speak English). I had stopped singing ever since arriving in the U.S. At that time, I was particularly drawn to learn to sing improvisationally.

Spontaneous creative expression through music-making and movement has been the most life-transforming practice of all, not only for emotional healing and wellness, but also toward self-realization.

According to author James Redfield, there are two main aspects of healing: the first aspect is related to physical and emotional wellness, and focuses on addressing the related symptoms. The second aspect of healing has to do with finding and fulfilling our life’s purpose (Redfield).

I discovered what Joseph Campbell meant by “follow your bliss” and “the main purpose of life is to feel fully alive” through authentic, improvisational, musical expression. A secondary, yet meaningful creative outlet for me has also been creative movement.

I then found that these two modes of creative expression could also be used, simultaneously or not, for emotional healing. Creative arts therapy, also called creative expressive therapy, represents one of the fields in contemporary psychotherapy that is growing in popularity – using various art media. Vocal toning in particular, is one of my favorite exercises. It is the natural expression of any authentic vocal sound on the outbreath, aimed at releasing how we feel in the moment, whether physically and/or emotionally. It is a powerful therapy.

Authentic creative expression, through music and movement, is a modality which brings me closer to the goal of self-realization, as it allows me to tap into natural inner joy, beauty, creativity, peace, and a sense of being fully alive. At its best, spontaneous creative expression naturally empties my rational mind, opens my heart, makes me feel fully alive and lets me enter into a flow of grace where only *now* exists, and I serve as a vessel, like a flute through which the Life Force reveals Itself as music, and/or dance. There seems to be no more need to strive toward “getting there.” While immersed in this heart-centered practice of improvisational expression, being in the now becomes the total reality that makes me feel complete.

Carl G. Jung's Red Book, published in 2009, shows his own individuation process, using visual art as his medium, not only for healing but also toward self-realization. It is richly illustrated with his beautiful, symbolic paintings and hand-written in a soulful, calligraphic style.

After peak, creative experiences, there are still the daily chores to go back to...and accepting them. This is where Buddhism keeps me grounded and content, by reminding me that enjoying the journey as the destination is first an attitude, to be applied even in the seemingly more “ordinary” moments.

Since discovering the power of creative self-expression, I have made a commitment to turn all my “creations” into sacred offerings back to the Higher, Universal Consciousness, where I believe the gifts originated from. According to Native American Wisdom, it is said that when one gets sick, it is because one has forgotten to sing and/or dance (Hammerschlag). The Native American expressions of dance and song are intended as calls to Spirit, to Soul, in the form of sacred offerings to Spirit, to their souls. And it is said that their Souls, Spirit, need the people to make these calls to them, to re-enliven their inner connection, which is also the connection to the Life Force.

Before finding that out, I did not have much regard for my desire to sing or play music, because I assumed it was a superficial desire of my ego. So the discovery of the spiritual meaning of sincere, creative expression as one of the ways to heal, connect to, honor and thank the Higher Universal Consciousness, or Buddha Consciousness, has had a big impact on my life. It’s all in the intention. And in turn, I have found that the world around me seems to welcome this creative expressive work, according to accounts from those present, of feeling empowered by the energy generated from the music expressed. And from that inner place, opportunities have then arisen as invitations, including to teach others to open to their own creative expression, and to make offerings of original sacred chants for group chanting.

And if I need to clear out my emotional and/or physical self, I can use creative expression as therapy, particularly vocal toning, and sometimes dancing for clearing. It is particularly wonderful to use this practice with a trusted creative partner, who can serve as witness and even possibly imitate you for support. And I usually offer these clearing expressions to the Higher Consciousness too. I was very interested to find out recently from Drew McGlathery, a long time Dharma student of Lama Surya Das and Sangha fellow, that there is a Buddhist practice of mandala offerings, whereby the Dharma student can keep making offerings of everything he has and/or does to the Buddha, including challenges. As Drew pointed out, “ultimately, we hold onto nothing for ourselves, continually offering up everything to the Buddha, outer/inner/secret, beyond all limitations and concepts, eventually realizing our inseparability from Buddha.”

### ***Jung’s Four Psychological Functions***

According to Jung, the psyche operates, using four main psychological functions, i.e., the thinking, intuitive, feeling and (physical) sensing functions (Jung). Jung’s disciple Robert Johnson stated that we usually have one very strong function, two medium strong ones, and one very weak function. If we take time to consciously strengthen our weakest function, it becomes the doorway to ecstasy, and for this reason is also called, the “God connection.” (Johnson). You could call it the Buddha connection.

When I first tested my own functions’ levels, I found that I had two very strong functions, i.e., thinking and intuitive, and two very weak ones, i.e., feeling and (physical) sensing. So my discovery of creative expression through improvisational music making and dancing has been serving as an essential vehicle for the authentic expression of my emotions and feelings, as well as for my ability to be more present in my physical body. I can feel that these two functions are the “God, or Buddha connections” for me. Not only are they a tremendous source of joy, and even ecstasy; but they also open me up to an expanded awareness that “who-in-me is making the music or dancing,” is my whole being, connected with the flowing Life Force. Having developed and integrated my two weakest functions into my life has brought me a sense of balance and wholeness, as well as greater joy.

### ***Core Energetics***

Like Gestalt, core energetics is grounded in the now moment and invites us to turn within to scan our body-emotions-mind state. The exercise I was invited to do the most, was to beat cushions to release

unprocessed, past upset and anger. While this was my least favorite practice, I must admit that beating cushions has seemed to be both very efficient and useful for releasing angry energy out safely, which is otherwise potentially harmful to health.

### *EMDR*

I learned EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) techniques through both visual and sound aids. Both types of EMDR begin with an invitation to give our full attention to feeling the dominant emotion and/or physical sensation of the moment, like a gardener preparing to uproot a big, unwanted weed with all its roots from the ground. With one of my EMDR therapists, there was a specific protocol for using the visual type of exercises. I found that not all therapists who used EMDR had such a specific process. While the protocol worked well for me and was more efficient than when doing EMDR with other therapists, I have since then found new resources (Grayson), that showed me I could adapt and simplify my EMDR process and still reap its benefits. The visual aid consists of the index finger moving laterally in front of my eyes, which are supposed to follow its movement, while feeling the negative perception. EMDR through sound is done with the use of a CD (Yourell), which incorporates waves of sounds alternating bi-laterally between each ear at a regular pace. The latter, when heard in a meditative state, has opened my psyche to tap into my unconscious mind for deeper information. EMDR has been the most powerful tool to help me heal past traumas, by deprogramming my brain -- a sense of emptiness ensues from the exercises -- and then allowing me to reprogram it, if so desired.

### *Closing*

Nowadays, whenever I feel a need to process emotions related to a story which makes me feel trapped, I choose to unhook by entering into a healing ritual, which represents the integration of my spiritual practice with a combination of therapies for emotional processing work.

The choice of therapeutic activities may vary. I let my heart and emotional intelligence guide me – I have found the combination of visual EMDR with vocal toning effective. Whatever they are, I choose to frame them into a sacred healing ritual, as an offering to Higher Consciousness, or Buddha. I begin with creating sacred space, such as by lighting a candle; saying a prayer for protection and guidance; surrendering my ego to Higher Consciousness; and setting a clear intention of healing. I include a purification practice, such as by burning incense and/or entering into a shower. Then I begin the therapeutic exercises until I feel empty and at peace. As a closing, I give thanks to Higher Consciousness, Buddha.

If time allows, I may do some reprogramming, either through authentic, positive affirmations or chanting/japa practice. I usually set the length of time for the healing ritual ahead of time, although I remain flexible to follow my natural, inner impulse. If I have more time after the healing ritual, I enter into a meditation, followed by a conscious resting period. There are times when more than one healing session is required to process a particular “story,” depending on how emotionally charged it may feel. Infinite patience, the willingness to let go and change, choosing non-identification to perceptions, as well as trusting our process, are key.

As Lama Surya Das wrote: “When you become clear, everything becomes clear.” (Lama Surya Das). I trust there are as many creative ways to combine the use of therapy with Buddhist wisdom and practice, as there are individuals on the path. Whatever ways you choose, Buddhism recommends on-going commitment and disciplined practice to help ensure transformation. Let me leave you with Lama Surya Das’ closing question of self-inquiry, to participants at the last MetaWisdom Dialogues call – after the

acorn-in-the-tree metaphor had been introduced: "The oak tree lies within the acorn like your highest, best (or Buddha) Self within your mind. Where is the acorn, or tree at, within you now?"

I offer this article to the Buddha. May all beings benefit, and may all enjoy the journey as the destination.

Note:

\*This idea is further developed in 1) my article "On the Path to Wholeness: The Role of Shadow Work", written for the One Spirit Reflections Journal -- available upon request in pdf form - to appear in a forthcoming issue as short version in the hard copy of the Journal, and in its complete version as of Fall 2010 on their website, [www.onespiritinterfaith.org](http://www.onespiritinterfaith.org). 2) my little book: Balance from Inside Out. Brooklyn, NY: Self-published, 1996 -- available upon request in pdf form.

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