

## Transformative Moments: Short Stories from the Biodynamic Psychotherapy Room

With Dr Elya Steinberg

### What Makes Biodynamic Massage Psychotherapeutic?

Your client walks in and you notice, with curiosity, what's going in their body:

Shoulders are curved/hunched/bent inwards. Is it to protect the center/chest/heart? Or are they crumpling inwards because they bear a heavy Atlas-like burden on their back?

Perhaps the arms bend in a 'holding' position. You may ask yourself what happened in this person's life that made them keep it all in so forcefully. Did somebody try to take away something important from this person?

Maybe the arms are being over-extended so you may ask yourself what was so far away that this person had to over-extend herself in order to reach out to it but never managed to reach?

Or maybe the reason for this posture is an unimaginable one, one from the infinite possibilities of human subjective experience? The reason is waiting to be discovered.

Gerda Boyesen, the founder of Biodynamic Psychology, used to say that the therapist needs to be like Sherlock Holmes and observe the details, be curious about the parts of the puzzle that the person and the situation are made of and ask yourself questions. I call this puzzle the web of phenomena.

Using biodynamic methods (for instance vegetotherapy and deep draining) we enable the experience and the truth from within the person to emerge without interpretations or judgment. We are open to the infinite possibilities of the subjective experience and let it emerge.

I think our job as biodynamic therapists is to track the phenomenology in the web of phenomena.

### Labels

While we notice what's happening with our clients' bodies, traditionally, in biodynamic psychotherapy, we do not label them according to their structure as one does in other similar methods in body psychotherapy and psychology. We actually do not label people at all because labels may create a fixation in our attitudes as therapists and will unconsciously hold back the client's dynamic

process. Furthermore, it may function as a defense mechanism like intellectualisation and rationalisation on our side (the therapists), which will not be helpful for us.

We describe the clients' dynamic state of consistency and permeability without explanation, interpretation or the desire to change them. We may invite them to explore the many possibilities of the subjective experience as an individual unique subject. We may encourage them to explore how to fulfil their potential with respect to the forces that are slowing this process down. But we don't label people. When we apply it to body reading, we take care to explore and describe the body's posture and then we follow the dynamic changes that occur.

### An Environment for Change

Creating a safe, non-judgmental environment and a secure atmosphere is an important aspect of biodynamic work, as it is for any therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, in evaluating research in the field of psychotherapy, for example, relationships that work and evidence based responsiveness, we check out what works and what does not work. In psychotherapy, the research clearly shows that: confrontations (style, not content); frequent interpretations; negative processes (e.g., hostile, blaming, pejorative, rejecting); assumptions; therapist-centricity and ostrich behavior when early ruptures occur do not work. So one had better avoid these.

We invite a person to sense his/her own body. For example, during the Biodynamic experiential training we invite participants to be in their own direct experience and from there to explore the different theories and develop their own wisdom based on their own real experiences. This is possible within the framework of Biodynamic psychotherapy because we work within the framework of natural universal laws. Then, the participants' own truth emerges and re-emerges spontaneously from within themselves as living phenomena, where just one thing is always constant, and that is change.

Because the only thing that is always constant is change, biodynamic psychotherapy works systematically with assessing changing, dynamic phenomena. We assess the movie of life, the life force in motion rather than static pictures. Every moment afresh via direct experience.

Inspired by a Vipassana meditation course, I looked at the question: What does it mean to learn through direct experience?

In my mind, there are three ways of learning. The first is when one accepts whatever the teacher says as truth. This is usually guided by blindness, fear, or unrealistic hope that everything will be okay.

The second uses the intellect to look for a logical way to understand what is supposed to be, and ask questions about the theory. This is an important method but it is not yet based on owned experience. Theories could be right or wrong for a particular person in a particular situation. Each of the people involved—the client and the therapist—is a book no one has read yet.

The third entails learning from our own direct experience: when knowledge becomes our own personal wisdom; when one learns from the inside-out, this is when one starts to become an embodied biodynamic psychotherapist.

Putting it in perspective:

The first way of learning is like a person who enters a restaurant because he sees that other people are enjoying it, he enters from blindness, believing that if other people enjoy the food then he will too. Then he moves to the second stage. He gets the menu, studies it, asks the waiter for recommendations, and chooses based on his intellectual ideas and conceptual understanding.

And when his food is served, in the third stage, he has the direct experience of the food in this restaurant. Now he knows if the food is good or not.

Direct experience then is not a single state of being. It's a complex interweave as we move through stages of experience, the constant dynamic change that makes us who we are, moment by moment.

In biodynamic psychotherapy, it's this knowing that guides our work. Over the following 3 weeks, I will continue to share thoughts and ideas related to biodynamic massage and biodynamic psychotherapy. I offer my concepts and clinical applications in hopes of stimulating both interest in this process and collegial interactions with you.

Please email your thoughts to [Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com](mailto:Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com) for posting on the SPT Magazine blog and SPT Magazine's Facebook page. If your post is accepted, she will also request a jpeg file headshot and brief bio to accompany your post.

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For those readers wanting proper citations for references and name dropping made in my blog:

### **Research in psychotherapy**

Norcross, J.C (Ed). (2010). Evidence based therapy relationships.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/file.PostFileLoader.html?id=54b8f680d685ccc55f8b4684&assetKey=AS%3A273673120878601%401442260164528>.

Norcross, J.C. (Ed.). (2011). *Psychotherapy relationships that work: Evidence-based responsiveness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

### **Meditation**

Vipassana Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. [www.dipa.dhamma.org](http://www.dipa.dhamma.org)