

## Transformative Moments: Short Stories from the Biodynamic Psychotherapy Room With Dr Elya Steinberg

### Dance, Mothers, and Good Enough Touch

When a good enough mother plays with her baby, a complex reciprocal 'dance' unfolds, consisting of touch, observation, movements, the quality of movements, the words and prosody, the pace, and the nature of the words and sounds.

Messages are transmitted from one body to the other, from one autonomous nervous system to the other, from brain to brain, transcending the boundaries of the spoken word.

The central message of a good enough mother communicating with her baby is that everything is fine, one can learn to cope with life and the world, and everything implied by a life that's worth living. It is the final summing up of achievements.

They transmit to each other non-verbal and verbal messages, whose content is 'I want you in my life, it's fun being with you, I'm soothed by your presence, I want to know you'. They are generally bi-directional messages, composed of countless particles of information and energy. The mother needs feedback from the baby, response that he wants her no less than she wants the baby in her life.

There are other messages of course, but for the moment I'll address these only, so as to simplify the discussion; from my clinical experience, I consider those messages vital for the infant's future good-quality life as an adult. They are extremely fundamental messages, and if they are not transmitted during the individual's growth process, their absence becomes a major cause of human suffering, and that individual's neurodevelopment will be less than the best.

A good enough mother does not usually think about her acts while she's performing them. Most of the time she does not think or reflect consciously about Donald Winnicott, or if – as she changes her child's nappy – it complies with the criteria of a 'good enough mother' according to Winnicott and Ed Tronick. She functions in partial awareness as she performs those actions, and out of the need to make their time together enjoyable. It is that need which dictates the mother's quality of touch and the messages projected within it. It is the directionality and intention which determine the quality of their reciprocal touch, and their feedback concerning touch.

Good enough touch, without dependence on words, projects the message, 'I want you in my life, I want you to love being, and this life is worth living'. Generally, this is a subcortical message, transcending any specific verbal understanding. It has a

general intention. Mother and baby are not specifically aware how exactly their bodies are projecting information to each other.

In the learning process of biodynamic massage and touch, the therapist is meant to develop stronger awareness of these subcortical processes. They will then be able, *inter alia*, to provide a corrective experience for clients raised in a setting and familial system that failed to supply those fundamental needs.

In the reality of life, tending a baby correctly is equivalent to tending the infant's mind correctly. Mental and physical experiences are identical, interdependent and unmediated, and do not depend on words. Focusing on words only, without professionally addressing all the non-verbal messages, can therefore lead to a limited psychotherapeutic process.

### **The Math of the Psychotherapeutic Process**

The sum total of the mental and physical experiences and interactions enable mental growth and development of the best kind (or less than the best) for a human baby.

They are not interdependent, like a linear function with variables in which a cluster of X variables of a physical experience creates an outcome Y – that is mental experience. They depend on each other in the process of joint existence, in which we do not know for sure which is the cause and which the effect; who adapts himself to whom; what sets off what if the pleasure of the physical experience enables reciprocal physiological regulation and intrapersonal adaptation processes, or if psychological processes enable reciprocal mental regulation, and reciprocal emotional adaptation processes. It is a complex, integrated and unending process of flows and interactions, miniscule in size, that creates microstructures which construct macro structures of interpersonal relations, and the sum total of physiological and mental structures in a system of intrapersonal relations, most of which are unconscious.

Their existence resembles the physical reality of a snowflake. The microscopic existence of a shape, infinitely repeated, generating macroscopic pictures of the shape. Within the authentic reality of mother and baby, there is no true distinction between the physiological, mental, and spiritual structures, and there doesn't have to be. A mother who is too verbally aware might damage the quality of the relationship, and the ability of the actors involved to be here and now within the flow of the interactions.

### **Re-Learning how to Dance**

And so a vital element in the process of training a biodynamic psychotherapist is personal learning—to be within the dance, within the process, and not to think about it, like mindful meditation. The place and significance of thinking within the

learning process can follow later. The initial focus must be on dismantling previous conditionings and learning so the student-therapist can be within the direct experience and sense it as far as possible without the input of previous learning. As part of the total experiences, we provide a corrective experience, according to the repetitive therapeutic relationship.

It is of course a relevant question to ask whether it's truly possible to abandon previous conditionings, a complex question that cannot be overestimated. But by the same token, the situation of 'being without previous conditioning' may not be possible in its full meaning, but we are guided by the aspiration for this. The debate on this matter is extensive, and conducted to a great extent in philosophical and neurological terms; I will not enter into it here, but simply emphasize the aspiration.

As I mentioned previously, there's a resemblance to the process of meditation. If you think about how you are meditating, you are not actually meditating. In order to meditate, one must be totally within the direct experience of here and now, in mindful meditation.

Over the next few 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 Readers Wanting References for My Name Dropping:**

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