

The Intelligent Wisdom of Soma and Psyche
With Bette Freedson

Wishing Yourself Well: The Power of Embodied Intention

Have you ever wondered what empowers a wish?

Might wishing a friend "Good luck" actually help her reach a goal or fulfill a dream?

Do perfunctory phrases like, "I wish you well," or simple statements like "Farewell" contain more than casual courtesy?

What if you felt the power of wishing yourself well?

The concept's not foreign, well at least not in fantasies and fairy tales. Consider Cinderella and the Disney animators. Through our hopeful princess and her animal friends, they incorporate vision, voice and motion to make the power of wishing a creative sense experience. I can still hear Cinderella singing:

"A dream is a wish your heart makes
When you're fast asleep.

In dreams you will lose your heartache
Whatever you wish for you keep.

Have faith in your dreams and someday
your rainbow will come smiling through

No matter how your heart is grieving
if you keep on believing
the dream you wish will come true."

But, is mind/body/spirit unity scientific or is it just a fairy tale?

Regardless of perspective, there is power in the gestalt. And while steps must be taken and choices made for wishes and dreams to come true, the heart's call and the body's *felt* sense of the intention are also powerful forces.

When the heart listens to what the mind intends, the brain's "magic" knows how to respond.

When somatic sensation connects to intention, awake, asleep or in trance, new resources, choices and experiences can be elicited and utilized. In a therapeutic setting, somatically embodied intention, deeply sensed, can feel like conjuring clinical magic.

This is where my client Nola comes in.

A month from graduation and excited about studying neuroscience in college, Nola disclosed that anxiety about life changes had resulted in self-injurious behaviors (SIBs).

Although aware of the maladaptive nature of this behavior and despite a strong *wish* to refrain from self-harm, Nola said that when stress overcharges her system, she's unable to make a better choice. Under high stress, Nola dissociates from her desire for safety and becomes trapped in a negative ego state within which injuring herself seems the only choice for relief.

When dealing with SIB's, psychotherapists often think safety and "replacement strategies." Nola, her mom and I agreed that a more restrictive setting was not needed, however, more effective coping choices definitely were. Before introducing alternatives I knew it was necessary to enable a context in which Nola could access new strategies while under stress.

Having had positive experiences with hypnosis in previous sessions, Nola was a good candidate for using trance along with somatic sensing to absorb and anchor new coping tools. Our goal was to give Nola the empowerment to wish herself well when she needed to make a healthy choice. With this intent, the session proceeded.

After a couple easy breaths, comfortably in trance, Nola was invited to imagine a situation that might arouse discomfort. While noticing her emotions and body sensations, Nola was willing to put the part of her that wished to refrain from SIBs next to her, for support. Now Nola was able to experience both her anxiety and her wish for safety at the same time.

Next I invited Nola to ask the wise part where it resided in her body. Nola's hand went immediately to her heart and she said, "It's here and I am telling myself that I am going to be okay." Nola went on. "When I say to myself, 'I am okay,' my heart stops racing and my stomach releases its tight feeling."

Keeping her hand on her heart, Nola was invited to go back in time before the anxiety sensations began. "When you feel racing and tightness begin, allow the wise part to tell you, 'I am going to be okay.'" In her hypnotic time warp, Nola reported feeling both the beginning and the lessening of the anxiety as she applied her new self-talk.

Back to the present, Nola re-incorporated her wise part, and identified her heart as a somatic portal for connecting with her intention for safety. Doing this, Nola said, reminded her to use self-talk replacements, and her breath. At session end, Nola reported, "I feel peaceful; it's all going to be fine."

Nola's first hurdle following this experience was the senior prom. To prepare, she imagined connecting her heart beat to the music's beat while dancing. As she felt the music in her body, Nola was reminded of her wish to be safe and peaceful, and have fun.

Continuing to practice, Nola reported catching anxiety on the uptick, taking a gentle breath, using the reference experience of our session and applying self-talk replacements. So far, no self-harm reported.

Whether your orientation to the power of embodied intention is science, spirit or story, a short version can also have good results. Try this with your clients or even with yourself.

Next time you wish for something really good, click your heels together three times, close your eyes, and imagine you're already there. Enjoy a felt sense of success with the magic words, "Bibbity Bobbity Boo!" And if this slipper fits, live happily ever after.

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