

Being With – A Meditational Approach to Psychotherapy

There are more ways to meditate than there are hot dinners and there are nearly as many hot dinners as there are ways of doing psychotherapy. To me everything is meditation. Sitting here writing this article is meditational. Thich Nhat Hahn once said “ There are two ways to wash the dishes. The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes.” The same is true about doing therapy and applies to both therapist/counsellor and client. There is a way of being with a client that is *being* with them and there is a way of being with a client that is more about doing than being.. A meditational approach involves awareness of therapy as a process in which you are noticing your experience without fully identifying with it. - a sort of watching yourself being there. This approach also acknowledges that the psychotherapist and the client are one and that what the client presents is also about the psychotherapist. In this way you will make your practice of psychotherapy a meditation itself. That's what I am going to write about here.. how to make therapy meditational.

Coming into this world we take form. The ‘we’ that takes form is best described as consciousness. Consciousness, as Nisargadatta says, is “love in action”.

You could picture this process like this:

The Source (adapted from The Polarity Process by Franklyn Sills)



Energies move, pulsate towards form



Energies ‘step down’ into form



Processes of birth, attachment and separation
influence the formation of energy



Processes of thought, feeling and action
become crystallised into set patterns - parental introjects and child fixations occur.

It is through thinking, feeling and doing that we put love into action. The form in which we put love into action is in part influenced through our experience. For many of us the pure expression of love in action is limited. This limiting process we call script decisions. The day to day acting out of this limiting process we call games and rackets.

I think of psychotherapy as a way of dissolving obstacles to the realisation of who we are. It is then that the pure bliss *that* we are becomes directly expressible. In this way my practice of psychotherapy is close to Gestalt Therapy with its concentration on learning to live a process (Yontef) .. developing contact ..handling intensity ..learning to be with. It involves a concentration on integrating Parent ego states' (introjected thoughts, feelings and behaviours) and Child ego states' (regressive thoughts, feelings and behaviours) material into Adult (here and now) functioning through expressive awareness.

My focus here is on the meditative use of the psychotherapist's experience in the process. As psychotherapists we learn to focus on the experience of the client, to diagnose the problems of the client, to define the process as 'about' the client. Here I want to emphasise how the experience of the psychotherapist can be utilised for the growth and development of both.

The meditative use of the psychotherapist's experience involves these four principles:

- 1. I notice physical experience**
- 2. I accept all my experience**
- 3. What I notice I intensify**
- 4. I notice the oneness in all experience**

Here is an example of how way I have put these principles into practice. "Sam" doesn't actually exist but everything I describe here I have experienced and done as a psychotherapist.

I sit in my office opposite a young man called Sam. We've worked together for a few months. He has a pattern of being unhappy at work, getting into fights with his supervisors, and losing his job. He starts to tell me the story of an unavailable, unresponsive father and how he has no feelings about this.

I notice physical experience

I notice and discover what is happening in my body. I maintain a sense of physical awareness of what is occurring outside my body. I focus on what I can see, taste, hear, smell, and touch, and at the same time I stay connected to what I am physically experiencing on the inside. This is called being grounded and links me to whatever is here, to what some people call the I Am. While Sam talks I feel a tension in my shoulders, a stiffening sensation in my arms and feel hot.

I accept all my experience

Being with my client I think and feel and *all* that I think and feel is relevant to this moment with this person. I observe my experience and draw on it. Sam tells me more about his father. He says that his father was away most of the time and that when he was at home he seemed to be always working in his study. Sam says he feels nothing about this. I feel bored. I lose interest and I start to think about what I will do this evening when I stop work. Then I think maybe I am being the father now retreating to his study and that Sam is pushing me there and I want to go there. I am sure Sam knows I am bored and I notice that I don't want him to register what is happening with me in case he gets angry.

What I notice I intensify

There is an old saying in Transactional Analysis.. I don't know where it comes from but it's "what you stroke is what you get". That's another way of saying that what I concentrate on will intensify. I say to Sam "I am finding it hard to stay engaged with you".. He pauses. Then he attacks me. He accuses me of "therapy speak". That I am not really with him .. interested in him. I just want my fee and I sit with him to get my fee. I get angry now .. in reality I feel hurt I feel hurt .. and we fight. In concentrating on the difficulty of staying engaged with Sam what we intensify is staying engaged in a way that is difficult for both of us.

I notice the oneness in all experience

In any experience lies oneness. As I sit with my client there is no separation. *We* are thinking, feeling, acting and he is expressing me (he is me) as I am expressing him (I am him). Noticing this means I accept the part of me I experience as difficult to engage. As I accept this part of myself that I see in Sam I can heal my self. I can make my self whole. My experience with Sam reminds me of my own experiences with my father and my reluctance to accept and fully acknowledge his unavailability. What Sam is dealing with I am dealing with .. we are truly in this together.

Conclusion

If you use these four principles you can make psychotherapy a meditation. It will be your meditation and you will discover who you are as you discover who you are with.

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