

Psychotherapy and Zen practice do not seem separate to me. Social work school gave me the credentials, but the cognitive studies seem to have very little to do with therapy. I can't imagine being a therapist without my years at Providence Zen Center.

When I began training in psychotherapy in 1977, from the first time I entered a room with a client I felt I was conducting a symphony. Beforehand I was fearful of the responsibility, of my effect on the client, but as soon as I shut the door and sat down, it seemed as though the session conducted itself. At the beginning the main theme emerged, with contrapuntal material interwoven with thematic phrases. At the end the theme completed itself with almost no effort on my part.

Today I still experience my work this way. I looked up the word "conduct" in the dictionary, since I do not use this word in the sense of leading or managing. To my satisfaction, I found other meanings: "3. to serve as a medium or channel for conveying; to transmit. 4. To behave oneself." Looking at these two meanings together, one finds an intrinsic sense of being finely tuned, or being like a tuning fork, conducting by listening and observing and loving. All this is done through talking, sharing, testing, and sometimes anger from the client, before there is enough trust for the work to become like dancing.

In order for me to work in this way, the bottom line is trusting what Soen Sa Nim [the respectful form of address for Zen Master Seung Sahn] calls "don't know": the open, not-knowing, non-cognitive mind. After many years of practice I finally noticed that the non-cognitive mind, the mind that is "clear like space", is much more meticulous and complete than the cognitive mind. Certainly one occasionally needs information from the storehouse consciousness, but if trust is there, the material appears in place by itself with no effort or thought of finding it. So, the first aspect of Zen practice used in therapy is that quality of mind that Soen Sa Nim calls "don't know."

Often a client will enter the room with me and say, "What are we going to talk about today?" I respond, "I have no idea." As we sit down in front of the big picture window in my office, I say, "But that is not a negative 'no idea' as opposed to positive. We're talking about no idea, like the blue sky up there with no clouds." Then we proceed to explore how to help the client feel less trapped in the world of dichotomies. When I have made a statement, commonly the client's first question is, "Is that good or bad?" Then the work is to take a look at whatever it is, without concepts or judgments of good and bad.

This not-knowing is often not explored consciously, in words, but it is one of the most important qualities a therapist can offer. The first premise learned in social work school is, "Start where the client is." In order to hear the client's reality and be really open to it, we have to put aside our labels, judgments, and identifications, and just be there, listening openly.

In one of my jobs I work mostly with heroin addicts. Many of them have been in jail, are prostitutes, have done armed robberies, or have shot or stabbed other people and "haven't stayed around to see if they lived or not." My first job with them is to hear what it is like for them ("start where the client is") or do "together action" with them (Soen Sa Nim's words). I take this to mean hearing how it is for them without judgment or labeling. If there is even a flicker of judgment in the therapist's mind, the client picks up on it and shuts down a little, trusts less.

One night I was working intensively with one of my drug clients, a big-chested man who has been in jail, whose brother and sister are in jail, and who hates what he calls "the establishment." We were talking about trust, both leaning forward, speaking very intensely. He said, "You don't think like a straight person." I asked, "What does a straight person think like?" He said, "They're hypocrites and you can't trust them." Then I asked, "How does a junkie think?" And he said, "You can't trust them either."

That was probably the greatest compliment I have received about my work. In his mind, I didn't come across as untrust-

worthy, so he could begin to trust himself, begin to be open. He is one of the most sincere clients I have had.

The second part of trusting "don't know" (or the non-cognitive) mind, is being 100% present. This is really the same thing but stated and written about in many ways, from Baba Ram Dass's **Be Here Now** to Soen Sa Nim's hit or shout of "Wake up!" If one trusts reality as it is, is not full of self-consciousness and self-doubt, is not trying too hard by pulling information from the storehouse consciousness before its time, then it is possible to be 100% present.

Zen retreats are such good training for being a therapist. Stilling one's thoughts while staring at the floor for days at a time is much more difficult than listening to a client for an hour at a time! Having the multi-dimensional stimulation of seeing, hearing, and interacting with a client gives the mind something to focus on, and

sion that I woke myself up enough to say, "Are you tired?" And he said, "Yes!"

It is important to help clients begin to see that our thoughts and feelings are not the totality of our reality. Most people who have not practiced Zen do not really know this. When I first practiced psychotherapy, I empathized very strongly with my clients, sometimes getting tears in my eyes when they told me something sad. I was intensely into their story, giving my energy, and that was frightening to some clients who felt that I was losing control. I found it was important to modulate my energy for each client, while showing them how quickly we change from one feeling or thought to another. In a session when a client becomes conscious that thoughts and feelings are transient, they begin to see that they don't have to buy into any one thought or feeling as their total reality.

If a therapist can model different feelings or energy for a client, very much like hyp-

**"With meditation, clients begin to experience how untrained their mind is, like a dog that pulls its master around on a leash."**

makes being present much easier. The mind also shows me when I am very worried about an unresolved issue in my own life. At these times, thoughts about that issue will cross the sky of my consciousness during a session. Without speaking of it, it is clear that the client can feel the difference and works less intensively.

Another interesting aspect of doing psychotherapy after having practiced Zen, is being able to pick up clients' thoughts and feelings. When clients have anxiety or body tension, I pick it up. I feel it and consciously give it back to them so that I will not take it on as my own. Then I check it out with them verbally and we can work on the symptoms of it or their causes. This happens with any feelings: hopelessness, helplessness, excitement, exhaustion. It is important to be able to feel it without owning it.

One time when I **did** own it was when I was with a boy who was tired. I became so tired that I could barely stay awake and pay attention. It wasn't until the end of the ses-

sion that I woke myself up enough to say, "Are you tired?" And he said, "Yes!"

notic techniques this can help change a client's reality or feeling state very quickly. Today a woman came into her session at a frenetic pace, harried by her long work hours, the care of her child, and her lack of transportation and money. She ventilated about these things for several minutes. Then, as she began to discuss how she could take care of herself, I lowered my voice and spoke more slowly. At the end of the session, she was calm and relaxed. I ventured a remark about her frame of mind at that moment, saying, "This is how you can take care of yourself."

In doing this work with other people, of course, I am forced to take care of myself and try to balance my life, to behave myself, as the dictionary defines the word "conduct". If I am frenetic or my consciousness is split, my clients are the first to notice. I tire easily and cannot really be present for them. If I use my energy at an balanced pace, there is no dichotomy between the client and me, only a smooth flow of energy and connectedness. It is



Photo by Paul Rosselli

such a gift to use every ounce of energy for the other person. There is no room for any thought of "I". It is such a relief! No siphoning off of energy, no split consciousness, only minds dancing!

The more experience I have as a therapist, the more comfortable I have become with teaching my clients to meditate. Often they complain of not being able to sleep or relax. Also, some of the drug clients are preparing for a methadone detoxification, during which they report that their physical symptoms take over. We begin meditation by counting to ten with each inhalation and exhalation. With this, they begin to experience how untrained the mind is, like a dog that pulls its master around on the leash.

As they practice, their mind activity begins to lose its death-grip on their consciousness. They begin to be more familiar and comfortable with themselves, and eventually they feel more in control. Of course, by "in control" I do not mean a clamping-down, but rather control like Suzuki Roshi's "large pasture" for the mind, an acceptance of the mind's activity, complete with the whole panorama of thoughts and feelings.

Now, almost ten years after my first session with a client, I still feel that same sense of conducting a symphony. With continuing practice, the fear has subsided—the fear of "I" getting in the way, of not behaving responsibly, etc. Instead, practice has fostered a trust in letting go of "I", and the more I let go, the more the psychotherapy session conducts itself. And that is "behaving oneself" in the truest sense I know. □

Suzanne Bowman received her Master's degree in social work in 1979 from Boston University. In early 1970's, she worked as an administrator and training program director at Butler Hospital, a mental hospital associated with Brown University. She has been a full-time therapist in private practice for the past several years in Providence, and is a consultant to a drug program in New Bedford, MA.

She met Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1973 when the Providence Zen Center was a few blocks from her house. When it moved to larger quarters in 1974, she sold most of her possessions and moved in with her two young sons. Until 1984 she lived and worked at Providence Zen Center in various capacities: as summer program director, director, head Dharma Teacher, and secretary to the Zen Master, during which time she traveled with him in the United States and abroad.

For eight years she was married to George Bowman, a Master Dharma Teacher in the Kwan Um Zen School. She currently lives in Providence with her younger son and practices with the Dharma Hope Zen Group a few blocks away.

## OUR BELOVED GREAT ZEN MASTER MA BYOK CHO'S DEPARTING DAY

(a funeral poem by Zen Master Seung Sahn, offered in honor of Zen Master Ma Byok Cho, who died this past May at Jong Hye Sa [temple], on Dok Sung Mountain, Korea)

*Mountain becomes water, water becomes mountain, thus heaven and earth are broken; also the sun, moon and stars' brightness fades away. But because of our beloved Great Zen Master "mountain is mountain and water is water"—this truth of "like this" is the principle which saves all beings. Taking one more step, with our Great Zen Master, mountain is blue and water is flowing; thus our Great Zen Master uses "like this" to teach us a correct life and thereby plants a seed in each and every heart and mind.*

*From within our Great Zen Master's wine cup appeared 10,000 Buddhas and from within our Great Zen Master's shout all names and forms disappeared. Out of our beloved Zen Master's great compassion was built a veritable Buddha land: Su Dok Sa, Jong Hye Sa, Kyon Song Am, Hwan Hee Dae [temples], Mang Gong Pagoda, Il Ju Mun [gate], the small hermitages, also the many stairs he made, all of these are the great Master's holy sweat and blood, and within each and every valley of Dok Sung Mountain is left his fragrant incense.*

*Hanan-Gak's Stone Buddha cries "Aigo, Aigo" and sheds tears...*

*Jon Wol Sa's Wooden Monkey sings a song of "La, la, la, la..."*

*So Rim Cho Dang's Big Stone Lion is dancing "Dung-sil, dung-sil..."*

*Gin Son Gak's three Great Zen Masters are laughing "Ha, ha, ha, ha..."*

*Just now, our Great Zen Master Ma, where is he and what is he doing?*

*DOL!*

*Dok Sung Mountain's pine trees are always green; in front of the Buddha the attendant offers incense.*

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May 10, 1986

Sung San Haeng Won Bun Hyang Hapjang