

Consciousness that Transcends Spacetime: its Significance for the Therapeutic Process

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Introduction

Psychoanalytical therapy is tied to a metapsychology that has shown little interest in developments in science over the last 50 years. This is regrettable since, in consequence, certain crucial experiences that patients bring to the consulting room are not often given the attention and meaning they deserve.

I want to describe a new frame of reference that has become available to us, which holds profound implications for humankind. Ironically, psychoanalysis has given us some valuable signposts and yet the study of the signposts seems to have become more important than taking the journey to new places.

In the first part of the paper, I will set out some theoretical principles that should help to throw light on the discussion of clinical cases that follow.

Where is Mind?

The assumption we usually make is that mind is located somewhere behind the eyes and between the ears. This is not just because the brain resides there, but also because input from the special sense organs enters through apertures in the skull. Even if we question whether mind is actually inside the head, we do generally house it within the body. It is an awareness that begins when the baby puts its finger first in its own mouth and then its mother's mouth, registering the difference between the one-sided and two-sided sensations. Later, looking in a mirror, especially a whole length one, the child is amazed to see himself from the outside, and to be able to experience himself as subject and object at the same time.

All this supports the common-sense notion that there is a subjective, inner world within, experienced as me, and an objective reality out there, which comprises everything and everyone else. The external world is assumed to exist independently but consciousness, as the indispensable function of mind, is needed to illuminate it, like a torch shining in the dark. So, we all go about like torches, or to put it physiologically, as organisms able to translate the vibrations which variously impact on our special sense organs as light, sound, smell, taste and touch. Integrating these sensations enables us to build up a picture of a solid and enduring external world.

This is the Newtonian worldview, where mathematical laws apply with exactitude to the relationships of objects within the physical universe. It is also a world in which cause precedes effect and time is the axis down which one follows the other. The second law of thermodynamics tells us that the clock is steadily winding down. All processes, large and small, must eventually submit to the arrow of time. It can only fly in the one direction – towards the heat death of the Universe, calculated to occur in about one hundred billion years time¹.

I need not labour this realist point of view, in which we are nothing but players on the stage of life, seemingly arriving out of nowhere and going nowhere except into death. While we are here, we can witness the miracle of

existence but there is nothing real beyond the substance of the physical universe, of which our brains are a part.

In such a world, where does mind fit in? The giants of the early Renaissance took the dualist position. Rene Descartes saw the mind as existing independently of geometrical categories and as evidence of the workings of God. He is reputed to have said 'without the soul there is no consciousness'. Isaac Newton, too, was a deeply religious man, whose researches were profoundly shaped by mystical reverie. But during the 'Age of Enlightenment' that followed, Newton's discoveries were taken to mean that we live in a mechanical universe, one in which God, if he had any part to play, was consigned to winding up the universe like a giant clock².

The current materialist scientific position is to dispose of the Divine altogether. Consciousness is seen as a by-product of evolution, serving the needs of the selfish gene and nothing but a remarkable epiphenomenon of the brain. The findings of positron emission tomography, in which specific areas of the brain light up when different thoughts and emotions are experienced, are taken to substantiate this view.

But this does not mean that the brain generates mind. PET scan findings can be equally well be interpreted as correlation effects. Further, no one as yet has been able to explain how something non-material like mind can be created by something of itself material. While most neuroscientists hold that the best thing is to keep chipping away at brain function, there remains an unavoidable problem. The 'objective' world out there can only be known the agency of the mind, through the lens of subjectivity. Reality can never be a thing apart from the measuring instrument. More than that, the advent of quantum theory in the twentieth century has shed new light on this conundrum, for it would now appear that the seemingly solid and real objective world is actually created by our consciousness. The world is not as it is, it is as we are! The whole thing is determined by the collapse of the wave function, about which I'll be saying more.

Freud and Jung

Sigmund Freud's great discovery was to realize how much of perceptual reality is shaped by the content of our projections, and to be able to trace their source. He showed that mind is busy constructing a world out of impulses, fears and desires, even though it may consciously know surprisingly little about them. While Freud was unaware of the implications of quantum theory, he intuited what the new physics was later to reveal – there is no such thing as reality that stands apart from the observer.

At the same time, Freud's early work, 'Project for a scientific psychology'³ reveals that he aimed to make psychoanalysis a science and, not surprisingly, his aspirations were entirely in line with the prevailing Newtonian paradigm. (Freud considered religion to be a neurosis and analysed mystical experiences reductively as a regression to the oceanic stage of infant narcissism.) As a result, psychoanalysis has been left with a concept of mind that has shied away from the discoveries of post-Newtonian science. Yet the very language of psychoanalysis suggests we are dealing all the time with energies having more substance to them than mere metaphors. For instance, we speak of anger that has been split off and projected. Such talk is basic to the lexicon of object-relations theory. But what kind of substance is this anger that can apparently be evacuated from one person's psyche and lodged somewhere else? How does it in some mysterious way get

out from inside, across space and into another body/mind? How is it possible to bypass cognition such that the disowned feeling is experienced as arising, de novo, within the other?

Unlike Freud, Carl Jung postulated a Self that was unconfined by the personal, in line with his sense of the deep connectedness between all things. Throughout his life, Jung sought to accommodate supernatural and extrasensory phenomena and was intrigued by the psychophysical implications of quantum theory^{4,5}. Now that quantum theory is beginning to make a wider impact, Jung's ideas, having been relegated to the back shelf by much of the psychotherapy community, are coinciding with advances in consciousness studies.

Delimiting Mind

Analytical psychotherapy makes certain assumptions about the nature of consciousness and its substrata, providing a rich framework of meaning but also seriously limiting the field of exploration. In summary:

1. Mind has a conscious aspect, the waking state, characterised by a rich fantasy life, capacity for reflection and insight, ego-adaptive behaviour and creativity. But no less important is the unconscious aspect of mind, revealed in dreams and through the analysis of its defensive operations. In both cases, the search for meaning is confined to the narrative of this one life, from birth to the present, extending, of course, to all the intimate and social relationships that have been formed and lived.
2. Mind is the property of the individual, each person being regarded as (more or less) in possession of his or her own mind. Thoughts and feelings are communicated by means of verbal or non-verbal signals, coupled with the necessary capacity for empathic identification by the receiver.
3. It is, however, recognised that one mind can affect another in strange ways, especially with regard to unconscious processes. Object-relations theory describes this by way of concretised metaphors, projection, introjection, splitting and so on.
4. The focus of work is on the analysis of unconscious projections through the interpretation of the transference. Attempts by the patient to extend the relationship to the extra-transferential arena are viewed with suspicion and are fended off or dealt with by further interpretation of the transference.
5. Key existential questions like 'why are we here?' 'What is it all for?' 'Is there any ultimate purpose?' 'Is there a God?' 'Is there more than this one life?' have to be addressed as defences against the pain of psychic reality, re-framed in terms of problematical personal histories or taken as irreducible existential concerns, ultimately outside the scope of the therapy.

For the therapist to participate in such discussion, there would be a significant impact on the transference, since any shared speculation about these ultimate

questions would be revealing of the therapist's inner world. Yet the therapeutic situation is extraordinarily intimate and where the therapist is open to such questions, they frequently arise. More than that, when the therapist is comfortable with such intimacy, strange coincidences can occur, going way beyond what would be regarded as normal by consensus reality. Let me start with one such instance ⁶.

Transcending space

I had been supervising a trainee psychiatrist with her first psychotherapy patient, a young woman named Gillian. Gillian longed for closeness but was deeply mistrustful of intimacy. The therapist was naturally intuitive and open with her patient and helped her overcome her fears. With the support of the therapist, Gillian decided to trace her birth mother, whom she had never known. She followed up various leads only to discover that her mother had died a year or two earlier. It was a bitter blow but she took it well.

A couple of weeks later, my trainee attended for supervision. She seemed flustered and somewhat embarrassed. She said, 'I want to tell you something, you'll probably think its stupid of me'. She went on to say that on the previous Sunday, which she had been spending at home with her family, she had suddenly experienced a terrible sadness. It came on inexplicably at three in the afternoon and she could not shake it off. Then at about six o'clock the feeling vanished as quickly as it had come.

On Monday, she saw her patient Gillian who told her that since the last session, she had found out that her mother had been buried in a London cemetery and that on Sunday she had gone there to try to find her. For hours she had searched in vain but at three pm. she had found the grave and had spent the next three hours there, crying for the mother she had never known.

Non-local consciousness

What are we to make of this? We could just call it coincidence, which pre-supposes that events are random and their concurrence takes place by chance. In the Western world, we view a good deal of life in this way. In China, on the other hand, it has been a fundamental principle of Daoism for 2,500 years that all events everywhere are understood to be interconnected, down to the smallest detail – that we are all of us participants in this ocean of the unseen, which moves us every bit as much as we like to think we move it. We may maintain the illusion of separateness but ultimately, the observer and the observed are one ⁷.

Daoism holds that the more we set aside the strident imperatives of the ego, the more sensitive we become to the interconnectedness of all things. States of reverie, reflection and meditation, when the noisy mind is stilled, re-awaken our capacity to attune to the whole. A different order of consciousness becomes available. At its most perfect, it is known in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions as samadhi, a state of oneness in which space and time dissolve such that words cannot describe.

Probably few psychotherapists regard themselves as mystics. But maintaining free-floating attention, and the avoidance of memory and desire, as Wilfred Bion advised ⁸, brings us to the threshold of this unitive state of consciousness. There is a reversal of the usual figure/ground constellation for instead of the ego being to the fore, primary attention is being given to the ground of being, which is something sensed rather than cognised.

Let us consider the case study again. Could the close rapport between patient and therapist have brought into play an unusual sensitivity of the non-local kind, an instance of the so-called paranormal known as telepathy?

In the West, the scientific community has had such a vested interest in upholding material realism that parapsychological research had to struggle for decades to overcome the prejudice. However, experiments by J. B. Rhine at Duke University in the 30's paved the way for what is now a vast body of evidence for the occurrence of extra-sensory perception, using the random controlled trials beloved by statisticians. Clairvoyance, clairsentience, telepathy, precognition, remote viewing, psychokinesis and healing have all been subjected to experimental validation.⁹

Looked at from the Newtonian perspective, these findings are profoundly counter-intuitive but there are new scientific paradigms to which we can turn, starting with the discoveries of Albert Einstein.

Surpassing the Newtonian worldview

In 1905 Einstein formulated the Special Theory of Relativity. This theory was founded on two postulates, first that all motion is relative and second, that the speed of light is always recorded as being the same.

The theory says that if I as the observer were to watch you accelerate towards the speed of light, your clock would slow down relative to mine. Further, the length of your spaceship would progressively contract, while its mass would be increasing, until finally, since mass and energy are exchangeable ($E = mc^2$), if you went on to attain the speed of light, your mass would become infinite.

In 1917, Einstein went on to publish his General Theory of Relativity. He proposed that stars and planets, having mass, bent the very substance of spacetime. Newton's famous apple falls to earth not on account of a mysterious force called gravity but because it rolls into the local space-time 'well' created by the earth. Space tells matter how to move, while matter tells space how to curve. This is a far cry from the world of our sense perceptions, of stars and planets suspended motionless in infinite space.

Einstein was now in a position to consider what it would be like to be a ray of light passing from the sun to the earth. At the speed of light, length in the direction of travel shrinks to zero, as does time also. Therefore, from the point of view of the light ray, it goes no distance in zero time. Without time and distance, the concept of speed is meaningless. It is only from our position as observers that light from the sun takes around 8 minutes to travel the 93 million miles to the earth.

In other words, it is the very act of our observing this light ray travelling from the sun to earth that draws it out into the dimensions we know as space and time. Space and time are not things in themselves but are created by the observer¹.

We now have reason to believe we are living in a multidimensional universe. String theory suggests that our four-dimensional spacetime unfolded out of a plurality of other dimensions, most of which don't occupy spacetime like ours, yet are interpenetrating our world. Sub-atomic particles constantly flit between universes. In particular, the 11th dimension is thought to be infinitely long but existing only about one trillionth of a millimetre distant from every point in our spacetime. Within it are thought to exist an infinite number of parallel universes.

If we take off our Newtonian glasses, we can look at mind in a new light. The brain, having mass, is anchored in local spacetime but the mind, having no mass, has no such limitations. And since quantum physics deals with events in which properties of mass are negligible, it makes good sense to go there for the next clue.

Mind and the quantum domain

In 1965 a landmark experiment in the non-local nature of consciousness was carried out ¹⁰ when research on two pairs of identical twins showed that eye closure in one (stimulating alpha rhythm) instantly induced alpha rhythm in the brain of the other. Fourteen years later, research under conditions of sensory shielding was to demonstrate that the electroencephalograms of two people who were empathically attuned showed synchronisation, no matter that they were now placed in different buildings. An evoked potential in the first EEG, caused by a flash of light, instantaneously produced a transferred potential interrupting the alpha rhythm of the second EEG ¹¹.

As yet, there was no explanation for such extraordinary findings, but in 1982 physicists found that particles such as electrons can communicate instantaneously with each other regardless of the distance, be they one metre or a million miles apart, provided the particles shared at the outset what is called quantum entanglement. And instantaneous means just that - there is no transmission time taken; the communication takes place outside of spacetime.

For identical twins, coming from the same fertilised ovum, quantum entanglement is indeed how life begins. Indeed, the experiment on sensory shielding suggests that empathic attunement between two people is sufficient to generate quantum entanglement. In 1992, further research on brain wave correlations showed that these effects also take place instantaneously, just as with electrons ¹². So we can fairly say that in the fields of both particle physics and consciousness research, the conventional rules of space and time have been superseded.

The quantum paradigm

Pivotal to quantum theory is the Wheeler delayed-choice experiment, which shows that light behaves both as wave and particle, depending entirely on the mindset of the experimenter. There is simply no fixed objective state, as Newtonian physics pre-supposed.

This uncertainty characterises quantum mechanics. An electron does not 'hop' from one orbit to another around the nucleus like a spinning billiard ball as was once thought. Instead, it exists in the virtual state as a probability wave spread throughout all of space. The electron only manifests in its space-time location when a conscious observer makes the measurement. This is known as the collapse of the wave. And there is only a statistical probability that the electron will appear where you expect it to be. It may just materialise hundreds, thousands or even millions of miles away. When it does so, it materialises in zero time.

Such fundamental non-locality reveals the breathtaking interconnectedness of the cosmos. The physicist David Bohm coined the term 'Hologverse' in which, he said, 'the entire universe has to be thought of as an unbroken whole' ¹³. In it, space and time are manifestations of what Bohm calls the 'explicate' order, no more than one special case within a generality of implicate orders that enfold. More extraordinary still, while the human mind, as

we know it, requires to be enfolded in physical reality, at the same time it appears to enfold and contain the totality, just like a hologram. This is known as a tangled hierarchy.

When consciousness collapses the wave function, mind and matter arise simultaneously, like two sides of one coin. According to the quantum physicist Amit Goswami, in doing so, the brain-mind combines Newtonian and quantum properties¹⁴. Its classical Newtonian function generates the subjective world of sense perception that obeys the law of cause and effect, gives us linear time and provides us with memories, a personal history and a stable identity. However, this is contingent on the wave function collapsing in line with the maximum probability according to all the countless collapses that have previously taken place. The physical world has structural stability because the probability wave has been generated by millions of individual consciousnesses pooled together over time. Yet since the wave contains, in potentium, all that was, is and ever shall be, there is in theory no limit to what is possible. For instance, we know that healing by remote intention, or prayer, does really work, as shown in a replicated random controlled trial on recovery in intensive care units^{15,16}.

We now have a paradigm that addresses the old problem of mind/body dualism. It is not a case of either/or but both/and. Our universe started with the quantum entanglement we call the Big Bang, since when everything (and everyone) is connected to everything else. Millisecond by millisecond, consciousness repeatedly collapses the wave, breaking the entanglement and precipitating a physical reality composed of time, space, and objects with mass. But the mind itself, unbounded by sense perception, travels freely beyond spacetime. While some people have exceptional powers of extrasensory perception, everyone can become more sensitive to this function when the signal to noise ratio is amplified by stilling the constant flow of thoughts.

Implications for psychotherapy

I'll now discuss some implications for clinical work, and look at how the therapeutic arena enlarges when transpersonal aspects of consciousness are included:

Energy depletion

Psychotherapists know well how some sessions can leave you exhausted. From the quantum point of view this is not surprising. The empathic rapport sought by the therapist provides exactly the right conditions for quantum entanglement. Where there is an energy imbalance, the wave repeatedly collapses in favour of the patient's needs. The therapist soon gets depleted, just like a battery going flat. The phenomenon is well known in Qigong circles. The more depleted a person's subtle energy or qi, the more they tend to latch onto someone with stronger qi⁷. Just as water flows downhill, the gradient of the qi will always flow from high to low unless special precautions are taken. Otherwise the depressed patient goes off with a spring in his step leaving the therapist slumped in his chair!

At first sight, managing this would seem to be difficult to reconcile with the empathic receptiveness needed for the therapeutic interaction. However, at the level of subtle energies the solution is straightforward. As soon as the therapist becomes aware of what is going on, he needs to draw down qi from the universal energy field and compassionately re-direct it, through himself as

a conduit, to the patient. The universal energy field is limitless, unlike one's own personal supply.

Toxic projections

Here, the therapist has to deal with something more damaging than energy depletion, which is the impact of negative projections, frequently intensified by the transference. Psychotherapists are trained to maximise their sensitivity to their patients, to take on board these projections, contain them, analyse them and then, hopefully, find a way to return them to the patient in a form that will assist with integration of the psyche. But few psychotherapists know about the need for psychic protection. Without understanding this, they put themselves at risk.

From the quantum point of view, remember that there is no inside and outside - these are simply constructs of spacetime. Projections don't actually travel anywhere, for everything is already everywhere. And so the minds of therapist and patient share the wave function until collapse of the wave. Where there is a pathological need to split off and project, the wave will predominantly collapse in favour of the patient's defensive need, resulting in the unwary therapist becoming a ready vessel for negative affects.

In healing and spiritualist circles, the need for psychic protection is well known. Failure to attend to this can cause anxiety and depression, as well as all kinds of somatic reactions: headaches, weakness, heart, chest, abdominal and pelvic symptoms. To avoid falling ill, healers invoke protection and there are many ways to do this: asking for divine or angelic assistance or bringing down white light, for instance. All thought forms are regarded as having real, though subtle, substance, and while even the most toxic projections can be viewed with understanding and compassion, it is not helpful to 'contain' them at the expense of one's own health. They need gently deflecting away to a safe place. One approach is to regard everything in the universe as having its part to play in the totality, and so the negative thought form is sent, with love, to 'its rightful place in the universe', wherever that may be.

Higher state of consciousness

In analytical treatments, the therapeusis takes place in ordinary waking consciousness and any heightened or unusual state of awareness tends to be treated with suspicion. While pathology does always need to be considered, from the transpersonal perspective there is another crucial possibility – that a profound oneness with the cosmos is taking place. When this happens, it is not something to be tackled reductively but honoured as the breakthrough to a raised level of consciousness¹⁷.

In the esoteric tradition, opening to oneness is the work of the upper chakras. It is essential that the patient is securely 'earthed' through the function of the lower chakras; otherwise there is the danger of a psychotic reaction¹⁸. But from the soul perspective, we knew the loving embrace of the universe long before we were ever held in our mother's arms. Once born, we re-discover in human form what we already knew, before our minds became embodied¹⁹. This is the guiding function of the archetypes. Jung was prompted to write 'Life is a touchstone for the truth of the spirit'²⁰. Experiencing the whole is to know forever something greater than the sum of the parts. Like returning from the near-death experience, the parts never look quite the same again.

The group matrix

As a group analyst, I have been intrigued by the way group processes take place within a transpersonal matrix, which at times behaves like a quantum field ²¹. I am convinced that the group as a whole acquires an energetic identity, a morphic field, to use Rupert Sheldrake's term ²², to which everyone in the group gives, and from which everyone takes. The field maintains its energetic presence between group meetings and not surprisingly becomes a highly charged transference object.

Every group has its own distinctive character, but all groups that are well managed have one thing in common; the wisdom of the group proves greater than the sum of the individuals in it. Therapeutic groups instinctively take the form of the mandala, a circle representing the archetype of wholeness. There can never be neutrality to this archetype. People are either afraid of the negative pole, fearing to be swallowed up and to lose their individuality, or desirous of merging with, and being nourished by the *mysterium tremendum*, as Jung called it.

We are all endlessly oscillating between particle and wave, so to speak, and the matrix of the group allows us to explore the richness of this figure/ground reversal – at one moment having the group to the fore, and in the next, retrieving one's individual sense of self. The group is a microcosm of the cosmic totality. Out of the quantum entanglement comes, with each collapse of the wave, an endless series of rebirths. As Buddhism teaches, this arises in a ceaseless, moment-by-moment, renewal of consciousness.

The transience of death

Joan came to see me after the death of her husband Ted, having nursed him through a long and debilitating illness. They had been together some forty years and her loss left her stricken with grief. Each new day was a living nightmare. She continually felt Ted's presence around the house but it only brought her pain. Yes, it was possible that life after death continued on in some way, but how could that help her now?

I asked Joan if she would like to try to make contact with Ted in a way that might help bring her peace of mind. At my suggestion she shut her eyes, relaxed, and I encouraged her to 'find' Ted wherever he might be. After a couple of minutes, a faint smile played on her lips and I asked Joan what she could see. She replied that she could see Ted in his cricket whites playing cricket and looking very fit and happy. Then a look of deep sadness passed over her face. I asked whether she would like to speak with Ted and she nodded. So I suggested she now walk up to him and see what might happen. After a moment, Joan said that she was standing next to him and he had put his arm around her. What was he saying? He was saying 'Don't worry, everything is going to be all right.' I asked Joan to look around her. Was there anyone else present? Then she could see her deceased sister and parents smiling and waving to her ¹⁹.

This simple example, which is capable of interpretation at many levels, illustrates how one's perspective changes when a larger frame of reference is experienced. There are beginnings and endings, but they are felt to be part of a journey in which this existence is but one short stop. It is not a question of denying loss, but integrating it into the greater flow of life ¹⁸.

Soul awareness

Carol's story had been one of terrible abuse and hardship and for many

years she had taken refuge in alcohol. During the first interview, I encouraged her to look inside herself and tell me what she found there.

What Carol saw was 'her heart beating so hard it could burst'. What did she want to do with it? She put it to rest in a silk lined coffin, saying 'only death will bring it peace'. But then after a moment the heart transformed into a little whirligig of energy. It would not be trapped but flew about the room. So she released it and watched it fly away.

Images of the soul are incapable of death. After all, the soul is our personal quotient of eternal and infinite consciousness. But Carol was not ready or able to harness her soul for her own benefit. She did not take up the offer of therapy, which would have meant abstaining from alcohol.

Nearly four years later Carol came to see me again, in the meantime having faced up to her drinking. This time, she went inside herself, into a dark cave, where she found a treasure chest. I asked if she could pick up the treasure chest and see if there was any way out. She put it under her arm and soon found an archway and went through. Now she found herself in a sandy desert, by a pool of water and some trees. She sat by the water, resting peacefully and said with a sigh, 'This is for me!' (All her life she has rushed around trying to please others). Did she want a drink? She drank deeply of the cool fresh water. Now where did she need to go? She immediately found herself back home, still holding the treasure chest, studded with jewels and very beautiful. She placed it on the floor in the middle of the room. Following this session, therapy was offered and accepted.

Working with the Higher Self

I saw a young man who had suffered great distress as a teenager. At the time, he had been encouraged to seek guidance from a priest, with disastrous results. The priest was untrained in psychotherapy but took it on himself to convince Roger, as I will call the patient, that his problems all stemmed from the fact that his parents had never loved him. This wasn't true - the priest was massively projecting his own problem onto Roger. But the young man was vulnerable and started to believe his mentor. Soon he became deeply alienated from his parents, which only worsened his isolation and depression.

After a period of psychotherapy, the effects of the abuse by this priest had largely been overcome. But at follow up a year later, Roger reported that he could still feel something wrong, for there was a persisting sensation of physical discomfort. He explained, 'it's as if a big splint has entered the right side of my neck and gone down through my chest'.

I asked Roger what this splint, if it could speak, would say. The answer came straight back, 'Anger!' It occurred to me that Roger's anger with the priest may have acted like a splint to keep him functioning, but rather than going down this track, I asked him instead what he should do about it. He said despairingly 'I don't know - 'It's part of me'. I suggested he try closing his eyes and allowing himself to float upwards, away from his body. Then he was simply to observe himself sitting down there in the chair with his problem. I repeated the question and without a second's hesitation, he said emphatically, 'I need to pull it out!' With encouragement this is what he visualised himself doing, drawing it out inch-by-inch. It left a raw wound in its track. How was he going to dispose of it? Roger answered, 'I want to put it in the garden, and let it weather away naturally, like wood'. We concluded by spending time envisaging cleansing and anointing the wound until Roger was satisfied with

the result.

When we dis-identify with the problem and are able to set aside the hurts of the ego, a solution often presents itself. The 'collapse of the wave' from the perspective of the Higher Self enabled Roger to create and experience a different reality, one in which there was room for the healing of an old wound to take place.

Malevolent energies

Janet, now in her mid-twenties, had been depressed for many years. Her problem went back to a boyfriend in her teens who had left her feeling badly abused. Soon afterwards she developed gynaecological symptoms, for which now, she was told, she might require a hysterectomy. Along with her current physical symptoms, she experienced difficulty in allowing closeness and intimacy, though she very much wanted this.

I asked her to go within and scan her body and tell me what she found there. Right away she described 'a nasty dark red thing' attached to her womb. I invited it to speak and it explained, through Janet, that it had been there since Janet was seventeen. It was belligerent and boastful, saying it had made her ill and wasn't finished yet - probably it would end up giving her cancer. Janet suddenly exclaimed out loud 'It's a demon!' I asked her if she wanted to work on freeing herself, which she was very keen to do. I suggested she visualise angels enclosing the demon in a bubble of light. At once it cried out in fear 'stop, I'm going to burn'. So I exhorted it to go deeper and deeper into the darkness within itself. Could it see anything? After a little while it said with astonishment that it could see a light! A moment later it experienced being flooded with the light and far from burning, it cried out in wonder saying 'this feels so good, I feel so warm and nice! Then it went on to say with great remorse, 'what have I done? I have caused such pain and misery!'

This transformation of energy, or of psychic structure, if you like, is characteristic of spirit release therapy^{23,24}. We can see the demon as being just that, an extraneous entity that attached when Janet was especially vulnerable or we could consider it psychoanalytically as a split-off condensation of pathological object relations. From the clinical standpoint, the task is to decide when to work for integration and when to go for removal. In this case, the energetic complex was treated as a spirit attachment and released into the light.

Other places, other times

Peter, aged 27, came to see me complaining of an acute and unaccountable fear of water. A good swimmer, with no evident neurotic traits, he had been travelling on a small ferry when he developed a panic attack, with sweating, racing pulse and breathlessness.

Peter had been looking over the side of the boat at the time and the thought came to him that if he were to fall overboard, he would be swept away and would drown. No one would ever know what had happened to him.

Going into Peter's personal history, there was no obvious psychodynamic trigger for this acute anxiety. So I invited him to go back to the moment when the panic began, by closing his eyes and picturing himself right there, this time letting himself imagine that he was falling into the water. Peter's body immediately began jerking and thrashing about. I said to him 'What's happening?' and he cried out, 'I can't get free, 'I'm drowning'. I then asked him to go back in time to just before this moment. He said despairingly,

'We've been rammed and water's coming in the boat'. Why can't you get free? 'I'm chained to the boat!' I asked him what sort of boat this was and he said 'it's a trireme' (a warship used in ancient Greece).

I then took Peter forward again to the moment of drowning. His struggling movements became weaker and then he went limp. What was happening now? 'I'm leaving my body, I'm rising up through the water and I'm going higher, up into the sky'. What can you see? 'There's a bright light, I want to go there'. Before you leave, look back on this life you just lived and tell me about yourself and how old you are'. 'I'm 27' he said, and then the story emerged of a young man who had been captured in war and had spent the last two years as a slave oarsman on a Greek trireme. During a naval battle with the Persians, the ship had gone down taking all the slaves with it. The young man's wife and children would never know what had become of him.

By creating an affect bridge, as it is called, I had facilitated the entry into what is commonly known as a 'past life'²⁵. The therapeutic effect can be immediate and lasting. The process can be understood in different ways; as an actual 'other life' once lived, as cryptomnesia (the historical facts having been absorbed previously and now enacted as a psychodrama) or as the collapse of the wave containing this event, to which Peter had been particularly susceptible. Since the quantum field is transpersonal, it is impossible to say whether the experience really belonged to Peter as an individual, or whether he gained access to a collective memory bank. Perhaps this doesn't really matter, so long as he got the help he was looking for.

The vibration of love

Rosemary came to see me several years after her teenage daughter Tessa was involved in an accident that left her severely brain damaged and in a vegetative state. Rosemary felt deeply responsible for the accident and she could not escape the torment of her guilt and grief, which visited her nightly. She was like a wire tightened to breaking point. Now she could not bring herself to look at her once lovely daughter, who had developed severe contractures. 'I cannot bear seeing what Tessa has turned into,' she raged, after a rare visit to the nursing home.

I had been struck by a comment she made, that she dreaded going to see Tessa because as soon as she went near the room, Tessa who normally lay silent and motionless would start to make loud moaning noises. I wondered aloud if Tessa could somehow sense her mother's presence. At first Rosemary denied the possibility but then she broke down in tears.

How could we help Rosemary go back and face her daughter? Without this there could be no healing. I advised her when going into the room immediately to fix her gaze on Tessa's eyes, making sure not to look at her body while she approached her. We took plenty of time to rehearse this. When mother came for her next appointment, she told me she had gone right close up to Tessa, making sure to look only in her eyes. Tessa then stopped moaning. Rosemary found herself cradling her daughter and telling her that she loved her and would be coming again. One year later, Tessa was beginning to communicate with the help of a clock alphabet, was trying to crawl and was being assessed for surgery for treatment of her contractures.

Research by Valerie Hunt into the human bio-energy field, or aura, at UCLA, has confirmed that we are highly sensitive to changes in the auric field²⁶. It behoves us as therapists to be mindful that the energy fields of the therapist and the patient are communicating even before the session begins.

An apt synchronicity

I'll finish these clinical examples with an event that could have passed for coincidence, yet which I felt to be more. Synchronicity is always in the eye of the beholder, and this, at any rate, is how I saw it.

First, I should underline that the term 'consciousness' as I have used it in this paper, means far more than that we are sentient beings. I have attempted to colour in a picture of staggering connectedness between all that is, a life force permeating the universe, which we come most close to in the impulse of love. Yet the workings of the universe go way beyond our human limitations. We can sense the whole, but only dimly. It is like taking a very small piece of a holographic plate - the entire picture is there, but the image is too faint to make out much detail.

It was a warm summer afternoon. My patient, a young woman, had begun telling me apprehensively about her sexual problems. She longed to be able to surrender to her own desire for the man she loved, but for certain reasons, it seemed that she could never overcome her inhibitions.

At that moment, a bee flew through the open window and landed on the near corner of the small table that was placed right next to my patient and me. This was a queen bee, and she was not alone, for she was mating with the victorious drone. Oblivious of their surroundings, the bees made love – there is no other word for it – for the remaining 20 minutes of the session. Their delicate, sensual and rhythmic coupling had my patient and me lost for words. Nature was giving the two of us a master class on how the energy of the cosmos, the yin and yang, is intended to flow. To discover it in full, we humans have to learn how to let go of our egos, with their histories of woe and fears for the future, and to venture into a universe in which, ultimately, 'All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well'²⁷.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there can be no conclusion! I have wanted to show that beginnings and endings are no more than punctuations in spacetime. They simply mark physical birth and death, while framing the multitude of intensely meaningful events that come between.

To escape into spirituality as a defence against the challenges of life would be as futile as plunging into carnal pursuits in order to evade the spiritual self. The Daoist view is that we stand poised between heaven and earth, with our feet on the ground and our heads in the sky. The view from up there is not to be missed, for the trials and tribulations of life can be seen to be part of a greater whole. Our brief stay in this world of sense perception provides a classroom for the soul and the lessons learned go with us elsewhere, as studies of the Near Death Experience suggest²⁸. Although it may be a shocking thing to say, from the point of view of soul there is no such thing as a bad experience; the greater the hardship, the more profound the spiritual challenge.

Psychotherapy aims to alleviate distress with insight and compassion and is a vocation of the highest calling. But we must never succumb to the hubris of thinking that we have the measure of life in its infinite ramifications. We are midwives to the task of helping people discover what it is in them to become. To know when to address a problem reductively and when to turn towards the greater whole is of the essence. And if we find, sometimes unexpectedly, that we are engaged in spiritual midwifery, let us not hesitate to give every assistance to the birth of the spiritual self.

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