

INTRODUCTION

The child never dies...nothing ever dies. The child is there, always is there, wrapped by other experiences...Wrapped by adolescence, then by youth, then by middle age, then by old age...but the child is always there.

You are just like an onion, layers upon layers, but if you peel the onion, soon you will find fresher layers inside. Go on deeper and you find more and more, fresher layers. The same is true about man: if you go deep into him you will always find the innocent child...And to contact that innocent child is therapeutic.

(Osho, *The Wild Geese and the Water*)

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In the Western psychological tradition, from Freud onward, this means that all the unresolved issues of our early childhood play an essential part in the way we behave, feel, and relate today.

In the Eastern spiritual tradition, from Buddha onward, this means that we were already born with the qualities of *being, presence*, individuality that are essential for the search. These qualities are still in us, waiting to be rediscovered and flower into a second birth.

What we would like to offer with this book is a synthesis of these two approaches, based on many years' experience working with people on childhood issues, on our interest in psychology, and on our love for meditation.

The Western approach: healing of the wounds of childhood

The Western psychological approach has brought great understanding and insight into the conditioning process that is at the root of our personality. Starting with Freud and Jung, all the way through Wilhelm Reich, Margaret Mahler, R. D. Laing, and a vast number of other authors and researchers, we now possess valuable information about the effects past wounds have on our present behavior and life.

Each child is born as an already sentient and perceptive being. A small child is entirely dependent on its parents' protection and love.

Parental conditioning has a great impact on each child. From the very beginning, the child needs to have an incredible natural intelligence to be able to adjust its responses to expectations.

In a simple way, "conditioning" means: what the conditions are that I need to fulfill so that I can receive the love and attention I need so badly in order to grow, feel seen, be nourished, appreciated, and welcomed.

Some of these conditions are passed down by parental rules and beliefs. Other conditions, especially those imparted at the earliest stages of childhood, are not overtly expressed by the parents or caretakers. The child is affected by moods, behaviors, and attitudes of which the parents themselves are not necessarily conscious. Some of us might be able to remember stopping ourselves from expressing or doing something just by the look in mother's or father's eyes, or by sensing their disapproval or fear. The rules and beliefs, as well as the energetic exchanges, become internalized later.

They become part of us when we grow up. Our vision of ourselves, of love, and of the world around us is conditioned by them.

For instance, as adults, we might really want to say no to something or someone, but the early impression of the way our “no” was punished or not respected, prevents us from saying it without guilt or self-doubt. Or we feel a true need for closeness, a longing for intimacy, but the early experience of mother’s hostility or rejection has left us with the belief that we are not worth being loved, or that trusting is dangerous.

At each stage of our childhood, the body, the feelings, and later the mind, register these conditionings. Layer by layer, our “ego” solidifies around them, with all its beliefs and fixed responses. What initially was an intelligently developed survival strategy in response to circumstances which we couldn’t change, becomes an automatic way of acting, feeling, and thinking. We end up anticipating and recreating the same patterns again and again. Our personality is born: the “persona,” our social mask.

Our soul carries a true need for an identity as part of its unfolding in the world. If we as children are not seen and mirrored for our true nature, then we learn to identify with what others mirror as our image. At the level of personality, we all carry the mostly unconscious belief that we can only belong, that we only have a place in life and an identity, by having an image of ourselves. An image that we can present to others.

Questioning our personality, our social image, brings up fear. Because underneath this image lies our original pain. It is an accumulation of unresolved feelings that cannot be expressed as part of the image we have of ourselves. We have repressed and hidden them. Most often, we do not even experience them any more. But these feelings persist in influencing and contaminating our adult life.

Even when our personality succeeds and achieves good results, if we have not worked on our original pain, our anger, sadness, and grief, it will just be a mask that hides the wounds of our

childhood. At any moment, this wounded child can burst through our adult behavior and, in its feelings of being rejected and repressed, sabotage our adult life.

In working on this original pain, in helping it to come to our consciousness, to release and to heal, the effort to hold our personality together can relax.

As R. D. Laing says:

Our capacity to think...is pitifully limited: our capacity to even see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of un-learning is necessary for *anyone* before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love.

(1)

Underneath the layers of conditioning there is something else, very palpable and authentic. There is a child born already sentient, perceptive, and present in all its potential, a child with its own individuality.

The Eastern approach: regaining innocence

From the East, came the inspiration to look at the child as a metaphor for our transformation. “Become a child again” is a sentence which weaves itself through most spiritual traditions.

It is an invitation to return to the original source, the innocence of a child. In the restfulness and inspiration of this inner space, actions arise as a response to the present rather than a reaction to the past.

In the world of spirituality, the conditioned child has no real substance: It feels very real to us only because, as long as we don't acknowledge and release the hurts of our childhood, we unconsciously behave like the wounded child we once were.

The child of Buddha and Jesus reflects the potential with which each and every one of us is born.

As babies, we all start off with a pure sense of being. There is no separation from the world, no division of good and bad, no anticipation of what could or should happen. This innocence allows an openness and an availability that has enormous potential.

On the Eastern path, this innocence carries great value. As children we have to lose it in order to learn the ways of the world. In the course of this process, we forget ourselves. However, when we regain it later with awareness, through exploring different spiritual techniques, this innocence leads us back to a space of individuality, self-remembrance. This dimension is not a product of the mind, it is neither conceptual nor analytical. It is a state of being, a sense of presence and spaciousness in which all effort or tension drops. We can still act in and exchange with the outer world. This actually has more truth and substance to it. But, at the deepest core, we remain unattached and disidentified in just being a watcher, the way newborn children are spontaneously.

In the Sufi tradition, as reintroduced and updated with psychological insight by A. H. Almaas and Faisal Muqqadam, the original wholeness and fullness we were born with is called “essence.” In a multicolored and poetic way, they illustrate how different aspects of essence leak out and are lost throughout the stages of child development. They explain that this is mainly because our parents don’t value or recognize these aspects, even in themselves. In this way, original trust is substituted with calculation or hostility, original strength is replaced with effort.

We are left with holes in the texture of our being. We try to fill them up with a self-image through our compensations, hopes, and dreams. On the spiritual path, we are confronted with these holes. Acknowledging them, allowing ourselves to experience the falsity of what we filled them with, and our lack of feeling them opens up the possibility for us to become receptive for essence to flow back in, and for our original fullness to return. As Lao Tzu says:

When man is born, he is tender and weak; at death, he is hard and stiff. When things and plants are alive, they are soft and supple; when they are dead, they are brittle and dry. Therefore

hardness and stiffness are the companions of death, and softness and gentleness are the companions of life. (2)

The synthesis between East and West: Osho

During these last 20-30 years, the age-old division between East and West has begun to dissolve. Maybe it is happening because of the boredom and depression that have infiltrated the wealthy West, or because the East is no longer contented with its fatalism. Or, because there is greater access now to information on both sides. Or it may have been caused by some more mysterious development in human consciousness. Whatever the reason, the separation is no longer clear.

The experiment in therapy and meditation that has grown around the enlightened master Osho, flowered precisely in that new spirit of synthesis between East and West.

From our involvement in this experiment and sitting in meditation with Osho, we received an alive transmission of what the books we had read and the therapies we had participated in had pointed out, and something more which no words could describe.

This experiment originated with the practical insight that the Western mind, with all its conditionings, ambition, compensations, is--a hard nut to crack: it is not so easy to sit and watch while being guarded, tense, fearful, and mistrusting. Behind these defensive strategies, there must be some original pain, rage, or wound that needs to come to the surface, to be acknowledged, expressed, and dissolved. Again and again, the cathartic methods in the active meditations created by Osho, and the emotional release techniques applied in therapy groups which take place in his communes prove to be followed by a sense of lightness and a spaciousness which make disidentification easier. "Sitting and watching" becomes associated with a state of relaxation rather than with renunciation or suppression.

Throughout the years of experimenting with many different therapy methods, there has come, along with the initial expression of raw "negative feelings," a greater understanding of how

conditioning occurs. More refined methods are used to support the process of disidentification from the personality, on a physical, emotional, and mental level. This has developed into what is known today as “Osho Spiritual Therapy.”

Meanwhile, as the practice of meditation has deepened around the Master, “the child” has also become a conscious metaphor for the innocent, unpolluted presence which arises in the moments when we lose our identification with the mind.

In this way, the work in field of child development becomes a living bridge to meditation: as the ground is cleared from the misunderstandings and hurts of our past, a space of love and appreciation of our original nature can support us on our search.

Just before leaving his body, Osho created a “meditative therapy” process called “Born Again.” For seven days, for one hour each day, the participants can “do whatever they could not do as children.” For the second hour, after having experienced their original child energy, the participants sit and watch what comes to their consciousness. This is a direct transformation of the energy released by playing, regressing into a child’s body, and just being like a baby, into silence and watchfulness.

Our experiment:

- ***From conditioning to being***

Regaining connection with the child, which is both our past and future, is the theme of this book. The child of the past needs to be healed in its original pain, and the child of the future needs to reclaim its individuality.

What we offer here is not exclusive or esoteric knowledge. Nor do we claim that we have reached more than a sincere longing and a deep commitment to come back home to ourselves.

We simply love to share our experience in working with people, and in this way, to contribute to the synthesis of therapy and meditation happening all over the world.

Our work contains an invitation to grow up, rather than to grow old and fade away into resignation or respectability. Through the work we do, we reclaim the child in us. We can learn to support ourselves to be there and take responsibility for the child, thus discontinuing the patterns that create separation and pain.

Looking at oneself as “still a child at the core” is a very juicy, rich, and colorful approach. No renunciation of the pleasures of the world is required for this. Just a growing awareness of when our real joy in life is prevented by the compensations and dreams with which we cover our old wounds.

We want to wipe away the dust in our “house” so that more light can enter, enabling us to live a life that is authentic in both being and action.

It is not our intention to present any ideal life style or specific behavior as the door to “real transformation.” What we like to share is the joy that comes with rediscovering our inner sense of being here, responding to whatever comes to us with maturity and openness, and with having the courage to be an individual, whatever the expression of it is.

This sense of being here as an individual is something we all have experienced. When we are in love, or in meditation, or in an outburst of creativity, we have a taste of the fragrance of our inner world.

Those moments in our lives when we experience ourselves in our original nature are what makes life worth living, and move us on the search for more.

On our search for “more,” we are all confronted with our conditioning. And to be able to move forward, we need to free ourselves from the unnecessary weight of the past. In this way, we can live our life in a light, joyful, and authentic way, entering into meditation unburdened.

The Childhood Deconditioning method helps us become aware of the image, ideas, and feelings about ourselves and others that don’t originate from our experience in this moment, but are the result of

conditioning. It will help us to remove those beliefs that prevent us from being present to what life offers us now.

- *We become more real*

In the Childhood Deconditioning work that we do, we focus on the subjective truth of the client. This does not deny the objective truth of their past. For example, if somebody relates the facts of their childhood to us, such as the date they were born, or the year they started kindergarten, we leave these facts simply for what they are: objective recordings of that time.

When we come to the area of subjective truth, we make the choice to emphasize the importance of the client's own emotional reality. This sometimes contradicts what others around him or her felt in that same situation.

This choice is based on a very simple consideration: the material necessary for our own transformation will never be provided by the subjective truth of others. We cannot transform the feelings that others tell us we had, but we can transform our own feelings. In this way, we become more real.

In the "evocation" part of this book, we, as therapists, also expose the subjective truth of our past. If we were to ask our parents about it, we could agree with them on dates and facts, but if they were to share what they experienced within a certain moment in their life with us, it might be very different, even the opposite, from what we ourselves experienced in that moment. So, the parents you meet in the evocation are our parents of the past who we have internalized and, in this way, still carry around inside us. For all of us, it is those internalized parents that we have to let go of. This will make it possible for us to meet our parents for who they are now.

When we go deeply into our subjective truth, we come to an area where the level of collective truth is touched. Within this area, it is no longer our personal parents that we meet, but the archetypes they represent. Deep down, at the core of our connection to our individual parents, lies the connection of

each child to its parents. In the same way that we learn through therapy to let go of our personal internalized parents, we learn through stories and myths on the collective level, to let go of the parental principle. There, lies the understanding that separating from the parents is and has always been a necessary step in the growth of each individual.

When we work with the subjective truth of the client, we do not involve our own subjective truth of our past. It is the art and skill of a good therapist to be able to leave his or her personal story out of the session room while the work is happening. Yet, it can help immensely to understand that at the core of all our experiences, therapists and clients alike, lie collective truths.

- *A relationship based on friendliness*

At the beginning of psychoanalytical thinking, therapists were taught to keep a safe distance from their own issues while being involved with the client. Regrettably, much of this attitude was based on the patriarchal model of the world of that time, in which the parents kept that same safe distance from their children, making sure that they would never expose themselves. At that time, the therapist-client relationship became a copy of the parent-child relationship.

Therapists were also taught to be extremely aware of the transference coming from the client. The client might project on them an authority of the past, be it the ideal father or mother, or also the “bad” father or mother. Therapists would mirror this projection, and keep themselves invisible and aloof.

Our understanding, based on a time in which the patriarchal model of the world is slowly losing its hold, is that the relationship between therapist and client can be one of friendliness.

Therapists do not have to present an ideal image of the unreachable person. They can be there with all their skills and talents, and yet make it clear that their experience has its limitations too, that what is being worked on is between two equals.

This does not eliminate the transference described earlier. It does, however, create a more relaxed context in which the client can be made aware that he or she is projecting the “good” or “bad” parent or

authority of the past on the therapist, and the therapist need not be so extremely wary of fulfilling that projection. The client needs to go through this stage because of his or her narcissistic wounds around being acknowledged and loved, but the therapist can handle this with compassion, humor, and a sense of his or her own limitations. After all, the same might be true for the therapist who tries to fulfill his or her narcissistic needs through the client.

This does not mean, however, that the therapist can invade the client with his or her own unresolved issues. It is important to stay aware of not replacing the patriarchal attitude with a dropping of all boundaries.

By letting the client know that we are human too, and that we are also healing our own wounded child inside, we give the client the full support and acknowledgment of what is happening to him or her. Instead of getting into the old fear that, as a result, the bonding between therapist and client won't function, we can enjoy that this bonding starts off from a realistic point. The client learns, by knowing all this, that the process is all about starting to take care of him or herself.

Of course, the therapist might not like this if there is a latent desire to keep taking care of clients for years. The therapist will let them return to his or her practice again and again, fostering the clients' hope of being presented with solutions, which in fact never come. But if we understand that childhood work is a necessary stage for each person who wants to grow, we can rejoice while it is happening and equally rejoice when it's done.

While leading groups and giving sessions in the Osho communal experiment, we had the opportunity to experience the friendliness mentioned above in its most nourishing form. After working together for the day in the roles of therapists and clients, we would all gather together in the evening and meditate. During the time of the meditations, we all stepped out of our roles, just sitting together as fellow travelers. This experience many times has generated in the clients the trust and relaxation that has made transformation possible. And, for us as therapists, the

understanding that our part in the work is like planting a seed, which then needs a richer soil for it to grow and flower.