

SECTION II:
BODYMIND HEALING
PSYCHOTHERAPY:
THEORY AND CLINICAL
APPLICATIONS

*My philosophy is that psychological issues and bodily disease
are “divina afflictios” (divine afflictions)
giving us opportunities for psychospiritual growth, soul-making
and finding the source of healing.*

– Michael Mayer

CHAPTER 5: BODYMIND HEALING PSYCHOTHERAPY: THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF SHAPE-SHIFTING

*The history of science is rich in the example of the fruitfulness
of bringing two sets of techniques,
two sets of ideas,
developed in separate contexts for the pursuit of new truth,
into touch with one another.*

— Robert Oppenheimer
Science and the Common Understanding

The Marriage of Psychotherapeutic and Energetic Approaches to Bodymind Healing

What is “*Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy*?” In order to help a patient face the challenges of everyday life, a therapist must be able to weave together psychological theories and healing methods that fit the unique person and moment. Practicing the art of psychotherapy also requires transcending methodologies in order to meet a person in that place of raw humanness where contact is made with the deep source of one’s being. In this spirit, Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy draws from traditional forms of psychotherapy, energy psychology, bodymind and symbolic process approaches to healing, hypnosis, psychoneuroimmunological research, and ancient sacred wisdom traditions.

The last chapter explored how the streams of Qigong and imaginal processes can merge into a bodymind healing Qigong to enhance each tradition’s healing effects.¹ In this chapter we will see how Bodymind Healing Qigong (BMHQ) stands as a center-post within the terrain of an integrative Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy (BMHP). We will broaden the imaginal/somatic dialectic to include transmuting as well as transcending methods, and then show how a wider range of depth psychotherapeutic methods enhances this energy psychotherapy that uses Qigong.

The Most Profound Qigong is Following Your True Life’s Path

*People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life.
I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking.
I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive,
so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane
will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality,
so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.*

— Joseph Campbell

A fundamental thesis of this book is that the most profound Qigong, the deepest way to activate the energy of life, is to follow your true life's path, unencumbered by distorted psychological issues. These issues, a natural part of the school of human life, make us notice them when they encumber the flowing river of life in our bodies, minds, and relationships with others. It is these issues that send us on healing journeys for psychospiritual growth, soul-making, and finding the source of healing. Qigong, in its narrowly defined sense of using movements synchronized with breath, is just one way of restoring balance and energy to our out-of-balance lives.

As discussed earlier, some of the origins of psychotherapeutic healing can be found in traditions of energy psychology. In the introduction to this book we saw that the earliest use of the Greek term "*psyche*," meant "soul." Hillman (1975, 1976) differentiates this term from the word, "*pneuma*" or spirit, which has a more transcendent meaning. One classical idea about the psyche was that it was considered to be composed of the energies of the elements of the universe such as fire, earth, air, and water (Rudhyar, 1970; Hillman, 1975, p. 127).

The earliest energy psychology in the West was created to bring the energies of the unique human soul back into balance; this was done through storytelling and the use of other symbolic process (also called imaginal) methods to help change one's way of being and way of seeing the world (Neumann, 1954, 1956; Campbell, 1978; Eliade, 1958, 1964; Edinger, 1985; Rudhyar, 1970; Jung, I-XX; Houston, 1992; Hillman, 1975; Kingsley, 1999; Schure, 1977; Steiner, 1973; Mayer, 1984, 1993). I call this imaginal, somatically based, energetic path, a "trance-forming" of one's life stance." (Mayer, 2004).

The Center-Post of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy: The Transcending/Transmuting Dialectic

*“Call the world if you please the veil of soul-making.
Then you will know the purpose of the world.
Can't you see how necessary it is
to have a world of pains and troubles
to school the intelligence and make it soul.”*

— John Keats

In the last chapter I delineated Bodymind Healing Qigong symbolic process methods that were transcendent-oriented, and I explained how these methods can activate a healing energy that helps us to rise above life's problems and take a bath in, what may be experienced as, "the source of life's energy." I hope you had an experience like this with *Microcosmic Orbit Breath*, imagining you were a candle, holding an energy ball, directing energy with intention, or with rocking and visualizing healing energy in the *Tai Chi Ruler* exercise.

Here, and in the chapters that follow, I will begin to introduce "transmuting traditions," and show how they can be blended with "transcending traditions" for an integrative mind-body healing psychotherapy. Transcending and transmuting dimensions refer respectively to whether healing methods are used to rise above, or work through a life issue.

Chapter 2 gave an overview of the critique of psychotherapy traditions that incorporate meditation and do not use various depth psychotherapy tools, including those of symbolic process. The critique stated that by using spiritually transcendent methods, the transmutation of psychological complexes will not occur, but will be bypassed and then reappear the next time an associated trigger touches off the complex. It is the viewpoint of BMHP that dichotomizing between transcendent and transmuting needs of the patient in psychotherapy is a function of the Western dualistic mind. Such dichotomization does not do justice to the holistic spirit of healing in the deepest sense of the “perennial philosophy” (Huxley, 1970); nor, as we will see, does it meet the healing needs of an integrative depth psychotherapy.

In his book on psychotherapy and alchemy, Dr. Edinger (1985), the well-respected Jungian analyst, discussed how there is both a time for rising above in the alchemical container of psychotherapy, and a time for descent into the dark places that need to be traveled. The time for rising up to the top of the alchemical container is called *sublimatio*. In the last chapter we saw some methods for rising up in the container of life to feel our unity with the water of life (exemplified by the story of *The Stream and the Sands*). Metaphors, in general, move us to connect with the wider whole of which we are a part; and, as well, they can have both transcendent and transmuting dimensions. There is also a need in depth psychotherapy to transmute the base substances of the psyche. This requires a descent into the *negredo*, the “dark stuff,” where the base matter, the “lead,” of the psyche is submitted to various alchemical operations and “turned to gold.”

Greek mythology can be seen as a coded language, using images of the gods/goddesses and their stories as pathways for describing how to heal the psyche (Hillman, 1975; Kerenyi, 1979; Barring & Cashford, 1991; Mayer, 1994). In this sense, we can look at: the gods/goddesses of the earth as symbolizing practical ways of dealing with life, divinities of the sky as symbolizing transcendent pathways, and the underworld divinities as transmuting transformative paths. And so it is in psychotherapy — there are times for practical interventions, times for transcending, and times for transmuting.

Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy's Full-Spectrum Approach to the Image/Body Energy Dialectic

When I was training master's level students in a psychotherapy program in the 1980s, I taught a course called *Symbolic Process Approaches to Psychotherapy* for five years. In that class, and in the last chapter, I discussed how I borrowed from Carl Jung's idea of a spectrum of instinctual and symbolic processes. From this I showed how symbolic processes modalities could be integrated with body-oriented practices such as a Taoist breathing method and Qigong movements. In that course, which later became one of the foundations of BMHP, I delineated four dimensions of the spectrum of symbolic process work:

1. *Directive or non-directive dimensions*: Refers to whether the therapist or the patient comes up with the images.
2. *General or ideographic dimensions*: Refers to whether the method is unique to the individual.

3. *Transcending or transmuting dimensions*: Refers to whether the symbols are used to rise above or work through a life issue.
4. *Body-oriented or image-focused*: Refers to the somatic or imaginal orientation of a healing method.

We can think of the components of these four dimensions of the spectrum of symbolic process methods, not as fixed opposites, but rather more like a Taoist *yin-yang* symbol — with a black dot of *yin* in the white *yang* half circle, and the white *yang* dot in the black *yin* half circle. A portion of each quality resides in its opposite end of the spectrum. This metaphor can help us realize that these are fluid rather than fixed separate categories. For example, using this kind of Chinese non-dualistic thinking, we can see that (1) a directive, therapist-guided symbolic process method often constellates a patient's own spontaneously arising, non-directive imagery, (2) a general archetypal theme can transform an individual's life issue, and an individual's personal imagery may become an archetypal teaching story for others, (3) a transcending tradition (such as a breathing method) may evoke the transmuting of psychological issues; and the transmuting of a longstanding pattern may help one to breathe a relaxed sigh of relief, which can lead to a transcendent state, and (4) body-oriented traditions evoke images, and imaginal traditions evoke affective states in the body.

As we keep in mind the Taoist *yin* and *yang* symbol, various types of symbolic process traditions will now be delineated, serving as a heuristic device to be used in a non-categorical way.

The Full Spectrum of the Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy Symbolic Process Methods:

Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy (BMHP) contains a full-spectrum approach to the continuum of mind-body uses of different symbolic process modalities combined with certain body-based energy practices. The full-spectrum symbolic process approach looks like this:

1. *Fairy tales, myths, and teaching stories from the world's ancient sacred wisdom traditions.* (Directive, transcendent, general/archetypal and imaginally oriented.)

*In the last chapter I showed how age-old fairy tales like *The Ugly Duckling* or *The Body Who Cried Wolf* have the power to change consciousness and create an energetic shift. We saw how the teaching stories from the world's sacred wisdom traditions, such as the story of *The Stream of the Sands*, are another example of a directive symbolic therapeutic method of psychospiritual healing. The use of myths in psychotherapy to heal was explored in-depth in my book, *Trials of the Heart: Healing the Wounds of Intimacy* (Mayer, 1984) and is beyond the scope of this book.*

2. *Transpersonal Hypnosis.* (Directive, ideographic, transmuting, imaginal.)

I used this term, "transpersonal hypnosis," in my symbolic process classes in the early 1980s to describe a therapist-directed, storytelling method I developed that was meant to add to the field of hypnosis an emphasis on connecting patients with the wider whole of which they are a part. This method draws on the elements of nature to facilitate healing

and has both imaginal and somatic components. Some of the somatic healing components involve focusing on the breath and constellating bodymind blockages related to life issues by using the River of Life practice. Transpersonal hypnosis² uses Gendlin's body-oriented Focusing method (Gendlin, 1978) to transmute these bodymind blocks by creating a felt shift as healing meanings emerge from the body's felt sense.

BMHP's method of transpersonal hypnosis is illustrated in Chapter 9 regarding its use in psychotherapy for addictions, and in Chapter 19 for working with writer's block and encumbrances to the creative process. In Chapter 19 we will see specifically how transpersonal hypnosis uses symbols of the elements of nature to connect us to the healing power of the wider whole of which we are a part. After all, the very definition of "symbol" derived from the word "sym-bolon," which referred to a stick that was divided in half to symbolize and serve as a token receipt of the sale (Edinger, 1972). Just as these sticks were reminders of a greater unity, symbols today help reconnect us with the wider whole of which we are a part.

3. *Bodymind Healing Qigong Methods.* (Directive, general, transcending, body-oriented with imagery.)

In the last chapter I introduced various Bodymind Healing Qigong methods, and showed how they could help to enhance transcendent imaginal traditions. In the following chapters we will see how many of the practices of BMHQ can enhance behavioral health treatment and depth psychotherapy. Breathing methods, postures, acupuncture self-touch, and Tai Chi and Qigong movements, when appropriate, can be incorporated to aid the treatment of anxiety (Chapter 6), chronic pain (Chapter 7), trauma (Chapter 8), hypertension (Chapter 11), etc.

4. *Activating the River of Your Life.* (Directive + non-directive, general + ideographic, transcending + transmuting, imaginal oriented with use of the body.)

This method will be introduced later in this chapter, and is one of the core methods of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy. Using a combined directive and non-directive method, the therapist directs the patient to the river of his or her breath and suggests the visualization of a river in the body. But then, unique images arise non-directively from the patient's unconscious as he or she focuses on body blocks that are in the way of the river's flow. This method combines Taoist Microcosmic Orbit Breath, visualization, and Gendlin's Focusing. It combines transcending and transmuting, directive and non-directive, body and mind.

5. *The Mythic Journey Process.* (Directive + non-directive, ideographic + general, transmuting, imaginal + incorporating the body.)

This method is a combined directive and non-directive method whereby people can create their own stories using imagery and body-oriented tools in order to create a transformation in their life myth and life stance. The Mythic Journey Process helps people

create a waking dream as they tap into the creative source of the inner “waking dream-weaver” from where healing images arise. I developed this process in the early 1980s to be a body-oriented, active imagination process. (See Chapter 20.)

6. *Dreams.* (Non-directive, ideographic, transmuting, imaginal.)

Finally, dreams are one of the most important parts of symbolic process work. They give us a glimpse into a non-directive approach created by “the master of symbolic process” — our unconscious mind. As used here, “non-directive” is not really accurate because, in fact, we get a glimpse of direction from a transpersonal source. Once we begin to enter into a hermeneutic (Warnke, 1987) with “the genie” in dreams; we may find ourselves in a state of inspired awe, as we question what is meant by the images.³ Dream interpretation is a significant element of depth psychotherapy and of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy. As in the Aesclepian temples, dreams give a sense of when therapy is coming to a close, as you will see in the next chapter with the case of “The Waitress with the Dream of the Flower Tattoo.” Most importantly, dream images contain transformative energy potential and, in accordance with the thesis of this book, they allow us to “shape-shift” into other ways of being when we “gestalt” the dream, i.e. become its characters. There will be some examples of how dreams play a part in BMHP in the next chapter on anxiety/panic.

Shape-Shifting, Metaphors, and Psychological Transformation

One of the deepest symbolic process methods stemming from cross-cultural mythologies and ancient initiatory paths is shape-shifting. This archetypal concept lies at the roots of the earliest “psychotherapy” and uses transfiguring metaphors to describe the process of psychological transformation. Oftentimes the process of transfiguration was expressed in terms of a change from a human form to an animal form. In fairy tales, like *Beauty and the Beast* or the *Frog Prince*, the characters were transformed from a human being into another form as a punishment for some transgression; then a loved one came to the rescue to shape-shift the human being back to his human form. In Chinese folklore the Monkey King learns to shape-shift into seventy-two different forms, learns to fly, does battle with demons, and even challenges the Gods as he learns lessons about his arrogance (Shepard, 2005). Greek mythology is filled with rich metaphors of such shape-shifting — as when Circe turned intruders on her island into swine, Athena transformed Arachne into a spider for challenging her as a weaver, and Artemis transformed Acteon into a stag for spying on her in her bath. In European legends human beings shape-shift into werewolves and vampires. “Almost every culture around the world has some type of shape-shifting myth” (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/shapeshifting). As I have pointed out throughout this book and I have discussed extensively elsewhere (Mayer, 1993), those who see myths with a psychological eye understand that these stories hold keys to using the imagination to aid the process of psychological transformation. In particular, in Chapter 2 we saw how modern research on state-specific states of consciousness shows that when a person imagines entering into such states, healing can emerge; and I have discussed how somatic practices (that were practiced in

the Dionysian theater at the temple of Aesclepius, amongst Native Americans, and in Qigong practice) can aid in healing the psyche.

Found in the *Upanishads*, one of the clearest statements ever made about the “psychology of shape-shifting” alludes to this deeper purpose of the use of metaphor. It reads, “By seeing all beings in yourself, and yourself in all beings, enlightenment is found.” Not only do the Hindu gods and goddesses shape-shift into animals and other aspects of nature as part of their evolution, so do we in our self-healing process, as we become the elements of our wider nature.

Nature not only represents different aspects of the Self, but we *are* nature. When we are out-of-balance with those elements of our primordial Selves, images and metaphors from nature restore our connection to the “Way of things.”

Metaphors are a particular use of symbol that creates a likeness between our lives and the wider whole of which we are a part. Metaphors from nature have long been used to help facilitate the healing of the psyche, and have been used in psychotherapy (Asch, 1955; Mayer, 1977; Wallas, 1985) and in clinical hypnosis (Achterberg, 1985). This process is inherent in the deepest layers of our psyches as they manifest in our dreams. Take the example of a modern psychotherapy patient who, during a time of a stressful job relocation, dreams of his healthy bonsai tree that survived its transplanting into a bigger pot. Realizing the likeness between his life and the bonsai tree, he gets a sense of power to cope with the transplantation going on in his life.

Metaphors give wisdom and healing; but in creating a likeness between our narrow Selves and the wilder whole of which we are a part, much more happens. A fundamental part of the suffering of civilized men and women comes from being out of touch with nature, our nature — and, as when we are actually out in nature, an experiential journey takes place as we “re-member” our connection with the elements of our wider nature.

Psychotherapy without nature is a psychotherapy that attempts to resolve the suffering of civilized women and men within the civilized office. Metaphors help to bridge the gap between civilized people and the world of nature, thereby calling on the wider sphere of nature’s healing powers to help us. Later, in Chapter 19, in the case example of a patient with writer’s block, and in Chapter 9 on healing addictions, we will see the clinical application of how the elements of nature, imagined and experienced in vivo, can be used to facilitate a transformative healing of blocked life energy.

“Shape-shifting” is one way to harness the power of metaphor in order to make psychotherapy a deeper, more transformative process. In the West, as in the East, it has been known that shape-shifting is a fundamental part of the path to self-knowledge. In Greek mythology,

Proteus, the old man of the sea, changed his form from a lion to a snake, and from a leopard to a tree. When Menelaus needed information from him to find his way home, Menelaus disguised himself as a seal and waited with the rest of Proteus’s flock until Proteus returned to his true form, and then he got the information he needed.

Similarly, each of us moves through various forms in our everyday lives; sometimes we feel powerful like a lion, or as if we are slithering around like a snake, or grounded like a tree. After going through our ups and downs and surfing in the waves of our emotional nature, eventually we

may find our true form⁴ and our way home. BMHP proposes that body movements and postures, as well as metaphors representing nature, can help the lost soul find its way home.

This power that symbolic processes have as tools for depth psychotherapy comes from the fact that symbols, metaphors, and images precede language and therefore exist at a more primordial level of the psyche. For example, in the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition, Hebrew letters symbolize primordial sounds, each of which has its own inherent meaning (Suares, 1973, 1976). And an image of an object invokes a deeper primordial healing realm than does the reified term that represents that object. For example, when someone tells you that you are as strong as a tree, you may say, “thanks,” and the message may not go very deep. But if you take a moment to “shape-shift” into the tree, to feel and imagine your roots descending into the earth, you may experience how you are rooted in your family relationships and in connection to your own religious/spiritual path. You may come to see that it is from these roots that you draw your strength, thereby deepening the personal meaning and healing power of the tree.

It is in this light that images like the tree or the river are used in BMHP. When we create a likeness between ourselves and an object in nature, we may shape-shift into that object, imbibing its needed quality for our healing. Next we will see how the river in the *River of Life* practice functions as a shape-shifting metaphor for healing the psyche.

The River of Life: Healing with the Transcending/Transmuting Dialectic

The *River of Life* (ROL) is a key method used in BMHP to activate both transcending and transmuting dimensions; and it will be an essential treatment method used in most of the following clinical chapters. Its imagery and breathing methods are oriented to activate the transcendent energy of life and induce a felt experience of the glow of our natural being. But the *River of Life* exercise also contains a transmuting dimension as it directs the river of one’s life energy to come up against bodymind blockages, then helps a person to focus on those blocks, and finally uses appropriate aspects of the ten-leveled methods of BMHP (explicated next in this chapter) to transmute those blocks. The “river” in this process is not an intellectual symbol, but rather it evokes the essence of “riverness” as an archetypal force, with all of its inherent power to cleanse, take us on a journey, etc. So, in the ROL practice we “shape-shift” into assuming the attributes of various aspects of a river.

As a metaphor, the river provides many psychotherapeutically useful elements, such as:

- ◆ A metaphor for the soul’s journey through life.
- ◆ A felt experience of Qi down the front, central meridian (Conception Vessel, *Ren Channel*, also called the *Jen Mei* or *Jen Mo*).
- ◆ A way to activate blocks in the body and psyche, and bring them to the surface where the underlying issues can be brought to light and undergo a process of transmutation.
- ◆ A tool to dissolve blocks in the bodymind, and restore flow to frozen, stagnant, fixated bodymind issues and bring forth new healing psychological meanings.

Throughout this book, and in the case illustrations, we will see each of these different attributes of the river emphasized at different times depending upon the clinical need. For example, in Chapter 20, in the *Mythic Journey Process*, the ROL's ability to constellate the soulful experience of a person's life journey is emphasized. In Chapter 8, in the case of a man suffering from the long-lasting effects of unremembered sexual trauma, the ROL helps to bring those hidden memories to the surface and, in conjunction with other aspects of BMHP, helps facilitate a process of transmutation. The metaphor of, and the experience of, the inner river gives us a powerful tool that integrates psychological and energetic healing powers.

In the last chapter, I outlined *Microcosmic Orbit Breath* and the practice of focusing on the energy up the back (Governing Vessel, *Du Channel*, also called the *Tu Mei* or *Tu Mo*) and down the front of the body (Conception Vessel, *Ren*). In BMHP, the use of the metaphor of the river adds to the healing effects of *Microcosmic Orbit Breathing*.

A river is a powerful hypnotherapeutic image that can constellate the river of one's life experience. By combining the image of the river with a breathing method that activates the primordial central energy channel (Conception and Governing Vessels) of the bodymind, the practitioner is further induced into the experience of the river's "psyche/somatic realness." The tradition of BMHP proposes that adding this central channel breathing method (*Microcosmic/Macrocosmic Orbit Breathing*) to the process of imagining a river helps us to further "re-member" the river within us.⁵

Interestingly, I recently learned from my colleague Hana Matt, who teaches World Religions at various universities, that in the mystical Jewish tradition the linking of the long exhalation with saying various divine names was used to produce psychological change. Avraham Abulafia, a famous Kabbalist who lived in Spain (1240-1290), used a method that is somewhat similar to the *River of Life* practice that I developed. The experiences that Rabbi Abulafia had were so powerful that he thought he could convert the Pope to Judaism, and he set off to Rome to prove his point. About one of the processes that Abulafia taught:

The human being is tied in knots of world, time and persona... and if one unties the knots in oneself, one may cleave to God.... This process is accomplished with the help of repeating the Divine Name on the long deep out-breath. One must link and exchange a name of the unwanted behavior with a Divine Name. The extended slow deep breathing renews one and loosens the tied pattern. And then the use of the Divine Name re-ties the loosened state. By this loosening and re-tying you will strip off your binding constraints ...and dress yourself in a new form.

— Avraham Abulafia
Otsar Eden Gamuz
(As cited in Idel, 1988, p. 135)

In another of Abulafia's writings, called *Hayyei Ha-Olam Ha-Ba*, he said that this repetition of the Divine Name with breathing in a slow deep rhythm is a way to attain spiritual energy and help to "Enter the Spiritual Stream." In addition to using the image of the stream, which is central to BMHP's approach, Abulafia's imagery is also striking when he says that as you draw

down the Divine Supernal Force with your breath that “Your two nostrils are the chariots which force the female aspect of God (*Shekhinah*) to dwell in you ... and eighteen long breaths give you vitality of the soul (*Hai*).” Another Rabbi, Rami Shapiro, in his book, *Minyan*, says that this repetition of the Divine Name used by the Kabbalists helps one to get rid of unwanted thoughts and behaviors, as your breath slows and deepens. This practice in Kabbalah is called *Gurushin*, meaning “dispelling,” and in the Bible this method of quieting the mind and stepping back from unwanted patterns is called *Hagah* (Shapiro, 1997).

In light of one of the essential themes of this book regarding the importance of tapping into the ancient roots of psychotherapy, it is interesting that “repetition” of eye movements in EMDR while substituting more truthful or constructive cognitions with unwanted thoughts, and repeating tapping movements or sounds in energy psychology, have similarities to these age-old Kabbalistic practices. Likewise in Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy’s practices, to dispel unwanted psychological patterns we link the image of the *River of Life* with the long out-breath, while substituting truthful or constructive cognitions, repeating Qigong movements, or adding the use of other Western and Eastern transformative methods.

Whether you use the methods of EMDR, energy psychology, or Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy, if you find these practices of exchanging names and repeating movements, sounds, songs, words, or touch to activate altered states to be so empowering and transforming that you want to let the world know about it, take care not to get inflated from your experience. When Rabbi Abulafia went to Pope Nicholas III, the pope ordered him to be burned at the stake; fortunately for Rabbi Abulafia because the pope succumbed to a stroke, he was instead just jailed for a short time (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Abulafia).

In the *River of Life* practice below, and the way the practice is developed in the following chapters, there are some similarities to the above Kabbalistic practices; yet we will see how in Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy’s ten levels there are many other principles for, and ways of, “untying the knots,” or melting the ice blocks, in order to, “... strip off your binding constraints ... and dress yourself in a new form.”

And, if you think that blending breath with healing words or images is just an esoteric method for pre-modern times listen to what Dr. Herbert Benson, M.D. Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Chief of Behavioral Medicine at New England Deaconess Hospital says,

Over the course of time your brain develops certain physical conduits that determine how you habitually think, act, and feel. These conduits are your “wiring.” Your wiring can become so fixed as to make changing your behavior nearly impossible. When you try to change a deep-seated habit, your best intentions are not enough. Change is not merely a matter of will. Habitual thoughts, feelings and behaviors become hard-wired into your brain, and you cannot change them until you change the wiring. You have to make a physiological change in the brain’s old wiring before you can successfully imprint new wiring. Many studies have shown that periods of deep breathing and repeating the Divine Name on the exhale, bring this about. It makes the brain and nervous system more pliable. This is called “neural plasticity.” This deep breathing and repeating the Divine Name releases the hold that the old wiring has on your brain and nervous system and allows you to imprint new neural pathways. This enables you

to alter the way you think and act, and you create new and additional connections that can, with repetition, come to dominate the old connections, helping to solidify the new thoughts and behaviors. This practice causes the two hemispheres of your brain to begin to exchange information more freely causing them to function in sync with each other. Then your mind tends to operate more creatively, you process information more effectively and you are capable of understanding things in different ways. This is called “cognitive receptivity.” Because you are more receptive to new information and new ways of thinking about old situations, you are open to alternative ways of handling situations. This allows you to make lasting changes in your mind and behavior. It allows for a more successful re-imprinting of the mind. It rewires the brain with the new behaviors that you want.

— Dr. Herbert Benson

The Maximum Mind (as paraphrased by Hana Matt from Benson, 1975, 1975b, 1984)

The *River of Life* practice, outlined below, contains a blend of guided imagery, hypnotherapy, a Qigong breathing method, and Gendlin’s (1978) Focusing. As mentioned earlier, this method combines a directive, transcendent imagery practice with a non-directive, transmuting “focusing” process on the crux of our blocked life issue. The transmuting dimension is further enhanced by combining the *River of Life* exercise with elements of modern psychotherapy, as is explained in the section following this exercise.

The River of Life Practice

Step 1: Breath: Microcosmic Orbit and the River of Your Life:

As your breath comes in, imagine it rising up your back. It rises all the way to the sky. Then as you exhale, feel the breath going down the front of your body. Notice how your exhalation gets longer and longer and deeper and deeper the longer you are aware of your breath. Don’t try to force your breath deeper. Then imagine that this out-breath is a river that is traveling down the front of your body. The longer and deeper your breath is, the longer and deeper is your inner river. Focus on the pause at the end of your exhalation, as it brings you to an inner peaceful pool slightly below your belly. After that pause by your inner peaceful pool, the river continues to flow down to the ocean beneath your feet. Then the breath rises again for another cycle up your back.

Step 2: Using the Breath to Constellate Bodymind Blockages:

Your life has been a journey down a river that came from the mountains; and it will eventually reach the sea. Right now on your life’s journey there may be some issue that is constricting or blocking the flow of the river of your life. On the next downward cycle of your breathing, notice where the river doesn’t flow smoothly in your body and allow an image to arise that represents a block in that place on the river of your life energy. Maybe the encumbrance feels like a boulder or an ice block.

Step 3: Transmuting Body Blocks:

As you sense any block in the river of energy, “focus” (Gendlin, 1978) on that body sense and allow a word, image, or phrase to emerge from it as you ask the question, “What is this all about?” Don’t try to think of an answer; allow a response to rise to the surface as if something stuck was being shaken loose from the bottom of a riverbed. Then “resonate” that word, image, or phrase back to the body sense to see if it gets the crux of what that block is about. Once you hit the bulls-eye of meaning, you will often notice a “felt shift” occur ... perhaps a sighing breath may release a sign as you find what that block is all about.

The above method, the *River of Life*, is a key practice of BMHP. These three steps are just the beginning of the process. In many of the subsequent chapters we will see how to build upon this practice in different ways to fit different circumstances. Once the patient’s issue is constellated, then the next transmuting elements of BMHP may be applied. Some of these transmuting methods are: cognitive-behavioral therapy, various psychodynamic approaches, energy psychology methods, self-soothing, and various transmuting symbolic process approaches to psychotherapy. (The application of many of these methods are illustrated in Chapter 6.) In its broadest scope, BMHP weaves together transcending and transmuting dimensions to create an integral healing approach for psychotherapy and behavioral healthcare.

The Ten Psychoenergetic Holographic Dimensions of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy

In addition to Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy’s imaginal and somatic approaches, it also contains an integrative psychotherapeutic approach to heal the psyche, by bringing back into balance, imbalanced elements of the psyche.

In the following chapters, we will see how BMHP includes Western forms of psychotherapy including psychodynamic psychotherapies, self psychology, cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy, and energy psychology. BMHP also includes ancient sacred wisdom traditions including Qigong, in the broadest sense of the word. From the perspective of the wider purpose of this book, we can see the limitation in thinking of Qigong as just a physical exercise to create energy in the body. There are other ways to “cultivate our life energy,” i.e. by working on all psychospiritual facets of ourselves. A person’s life stance at a given moment, and the energy that expresses that life stance, does not change through the medium of the body alone. Instead, as proposed in BMHP, healing is best-done by integrating the following methodologies and traditions which address the aforementioned facets of ourselves — body, mind, and spirit. These various, integrative dimensions are outlined below.

The Ten Psychoenergetic Holographic Dimensions of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy

1. Taoist Breathing Techniques and Hypnosis (Most often using the *River of Life* practice)
2. Self-soothing
3. Focusing on Felt Meaning
4. Psychodynamics
5. Cognitive Restructuring (plus using a body-oriented SUDS scale)
6. Energy Psychology Methods, including Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR)
7. The Belly Massage of Chi Nei Tsang (Chia, 1990)
8. Acupuncture: Phenomenological Approach, and Acu-yoga (Gach, 1981)
9. Practices from Bodymind Healing Qigong⁶
10. Symbolic Process Approaches to Healing

Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy is “psychoenergetic” in that it combines elements of modern psychotherapy and hypnosis with ancient Taoist energy healing methods. The dimensions of this method are “holographic” in that each part actually contains the whole. In order for any one dimension to function properly, the others must be present. In practice, the clinician or individual using this approach moves from one part of the hologram to the other, as needed. While one dimension is being focused upon, the other parts of the whole need to be present. For example, even though Taoist breathing techniques and hypnosis enable us to relax, the underlying psychodynamic patterns that create our tension may not be transformed. Thus, we need to have the psychodynamic dimension present.

Another example — if we merely understand how our fear of having our vulnerability exposed is a psychodynamic issue stemming from our family of origin, but we don't feel a felt shift in our body through a body-oriented technique like Gendlin's Focusing, the insight may not develop deep roots, and may be short lived.⁷ Also, crucial to psychological healing is the need to cognitively restructure our old thought forms, such as “I can't trust being vulnerable with anyone,” into new thought forms, such as “I choose to be in a world where I can be vulnerable with at least some people.” BMHP adds to cognitive therapy a bodily dimension (as do other therapists like, Shapiro, 1995) by using a subjective units of distress scale (SUDS) to make sure the cognition is congruent with the “real self.” As well, having patients check-in with their bodies serves to ground new beliefs. The energetic dimension catalyzes the whole mix.

It should also be noted that many aspects of current energy psychologies are included within the above structure. Meridian tapping is part of Qigong, and part of Bodymind Healing Qigong. However, tapping fits into a larger framework of self-touch methods, because in Qigong tapping is looked at as a yang method that increases energy, and in psychotherapy there are times

when relaxing yin methods are more appropriate. Therefore self-touch methods from acupuncture, such as the “circle, stop, feel method” are used to open the energy of meridians along with psychotherapeutic methods. Although at certain times, specific acu-points are chosen by the therapist, BMHP favors a phenomenological orientation where the patient touches him or herself, trusting how the natural, primordial expression of movement and self-touch arises from the unconscious (see Chapter 16). Many energy psychologies use cognitive therapies as their underlying tools; and, as mentioned in the example above, just as Shapiro’s EMDR (1995) uses a body-based SUDS scale to determine the felt effect of a change in belief, so too does BMHP. The Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) has some excellent bodily and verbal healing methods that are used and adapted to BMHP. For example, as a person says, “Even though I _____, I can still love and accept myself,” BMHP adds touching the heart (Conception Vessel-17) for self-soothing purposes, and touching the belly (*Tan Tien*) to help further ground in the body the new cognition. The verbal “self-soothing” dimension of such new healing beliefs are central to EFT and psychodynamic theories (Kohut, 1977), and BMHP’s self-touch methods can easily be integrated with their treatment protocols. Likewise, the hypnotherapeutic idea of “anchoring” is used in BMHP to ground the state of consciousness and new belief that has been activated, so that patients can carry this new body awareness into their everyday lives.

Qigong and Tai Chi: A Soulful Practice for Bodymind Healing

*You could not find the ends of the soul though you traveled every way,
so deep is its Logos.*

— Heraclitus

Finally, although Qigong is usually associated with a transcendent spiritual path; I suggest adding a “soul-oriented” practice of Qigong and Tai Chi to expand the somatic dimensions of psychotherapeutic healing. Esoteric psychology says that our souls consist of our unique constellation of the elements such as fire, earth, air, and water (Rudhyar, 1979; Hillman, 1975, p. 127). Qigong can aid in the cultivation of, and healing of, the elements of our soulful selves. As discussed in Volume I, Qigong and Tai Chi can help to ground us (earth), activate our energy (fire), help us to flow with life (water), and help us activate our transcendent states (air). But now here, in Volume II, we can more clearly see some of the elements that would specifically comprise a “soul-oriented” (Hillman, 1975; Moore, 1992) Qigong and Tai Chi. From a behavioral healthcare perspective, while one is practicing Tai Chi and Qigong, instead of solely focusing on transcendent, spiritual aspects induced by these practices, one can focus on the memories, emotions, and images that arise, making it into a “soulful practice.” For example, when we are practicing Standing Meditation, oftentimes, particularly after we have been practicing for a good amount of time, shaking will spontaneously arise in an area of the body that has been blocked. Instead of just appreciating the process of release, we can ask ourselves, “Which of my life issues am I now releasing?” Then, as the body is shaking, we can appreciate the issue that is being released; and we can practice cognitive restructuring, as we say our truthful or constructive new belief.

For example, a perfectionistic person might say while his or her leg is shaking, “I’m letting go of my life-long stance of being self-judgmental and fearing rejection.” When the shaking stops, the person might say, “I can feel the solidity of my new stance.”

Another facet of a soul-oriented Tai Chi relates to a proposition put forth in the last chapter on the ancient roots of modern energy psychology. There I spoke of how a major theme of cross-cultural ancient sacred wisdom traditions is how to shape-shift from one state of consciousness to another with conscious choice. Modern hypnotherapeutic traditions speak of this as an “anchor,” that facilitates the movement from one state-specific state of consciousness to another.

In Volume I and now in Volume II, I have been showing how Tai Chi is much more than a physical practice, it is an initiatory tradition that has a wide variety of transformative effects. For example, I suggest that Tai Chi is a good practice for learning how to smoothly shape-shift from one state-specific state to another. A basic theme of Tai Chi training is to shift from a state of oneness with the universe (*wuji*) to moving into the world of opposites (Tai Chi). In this training the initiate practices alone, and with others (*Tai Chi Joining Hands* practice), to try to maintain a state of relaxation (*wuji*) as the oppositional forces of life push on him or her. When under stress, different specific body postures and principles become anchors to bring the initiate, back to the state of equilibrium and back into harmony with the universe. Every individual stance, and the transitions between those stances, can be such anchors. Depending upon the particular form of Tai Chi, there are between 24 to 108 stances, more or less. For example, the initiate slowly transitions from *White Crane Spreads Wings*, symbolizing a transcendent bird-like state, to *Brush Knee Forward*, one of the most assertive yang movements in the Tai Chi set.⁸

Though usually the initiate isn’t explicitly told that Tai Chi is a specific training for joining his or her transcendent and assertive selves, this shape-shifting is implicitly embedded in the transition from one posture to the next. With the conscious awareness that the movements involve shape-shifting from one stance to another, a research hypothesis to be explored would be that this awareness may lead to an increased ability to access such chosen psychological states, i.e. that the practice would further generalize to everyday life.⁹ As we will see in subsequent chapters, various Tai Chi postures can function to anchor, signal, and evoke desired state-specific states of consciousness (see Chapter 16). Similar to classical conditioning where Pavlov’s famous bell was paired with food, and eventually the bell alone produced a salivary response, here various elements of Tai Chi positions may become associated with activating desired state-specific states.

In Tai Chi practice there are many types of “anchors” that become a signal (bell) to change from one state to another. In addition to each specific posture being an anchor for state-specific states, the act of shifting weight can anchor a felt experience of filling or emptying the Self. And rocking back and forth slowly from one posture to another simultaneously signals the bodymind to enter into a relaxed smooth flow and at the same time activates energy. (As noted in Chapter 4 the unique attribute of the “Tai Chi alphabet” is that the space between the letters is as important as the letters themselves.) Most importantly, the breath alone may become a signal to change from one state to another. In Tai Chi training it is said that eventually just the breath, the intention, or the associated sinking of Qi is enough to recreate the desired state.¹⁰

From the outline of the ten levels of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy above, we can see that Bodymind Healing Qigong movements are one dimension of this approach, and are part of

a wider system. In my attempt to make the essence of this tradition accessible to modern psychotherapy, I extracted certain elements of the tradition — such as the use of particular styles of breathing, the awareness of sinking of the Qi on the exhalation, the visualization of animal postures, and the awareness of one's life stance — to make this tradition more accessible to Western psychotherapy.

From this wider psychotherapeutic perspective we can see that the practice of Qigong methods can be used to constellate, work with, and focus upon the body blockages that reflect the encumbrances to the soul's journey. We just saw this outlined in the *River of Life* practice. In the chapters that follow, we will see many examples of this method and other Qigong methods combined with psychotherapeutic processes used to transmute psychological issues and create "soul." Most specifically, in the chapter on the *Mythic Journey Process*, we will see not only how the breathing methods of these oriental traditions facilitate the journey into our mythological inner worlds; but we will see how other somatic attributes of the internal martial arts traditions help to anchor the felt shifts created in telling our stories. These methods bring out a soulful dimension to the psychotherapeutic process.

Adding to psychotherapy, the internal martial arts traditions enhance patients' abilities to go through their "underworld journeys."¹¹ In the following chapters we'll hear the stories of those who have met and engaged in the process of transforming their demons. For example, we'll hear about a case of a woman who had a passive-aggressive style of withdrawal under stress, and for whom the combination of internal martial arts training, animal forms of Qigong, and the *Mythic Journey Process* helped her to shape-shift into a healthier way of being (Chapter 20). And we'll hear about a man with no internal martial arts training who was cut off from his instinctual self and had lost the ability to banter, and how verbal martial arts and affect modulation skills helped him to better defend himself verbally (Chapter 18). The combination of internal martial arts and psychotherapy are an ideal mix to repair and cultivate the vital, primordial Self.

Summary of Applications of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy in Psychotherapy and Behavioral Healthcare

The following chapters illustrate the various facets of Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy in action. In these chapters, BMHP will be applied to issues including chronic pain, writer's block, addictions, insomnia, trauma, hypertension, workaholism, carpal tunnel syndrome, etc. We will see how Qigong (in the broadest sense of the word) can be integrated with psychotherapy and behavioral healthcare. Obviously, the clinical examples given in these chapters are not proof of the efficacy of BMHP, they are meant, instead, to serve illustrative purposes. Further research is needed to determine with which individuals, and at which times, these methods are most efficacious. Furthermore, BMHP is not meant to be a stand-alone methodology, but rather its intention is to take its stance and join hands with other healing methods in the vibrant mandala of integrative healthcare. To begin to illustrate the breadth and depth of BMHP, the next chapter shows how BMHP is applied to anxiety disorders, specifically with the case of a young woman with a panic disorder.