

PRIMAL

Supporting Growth and Healing Through Deep Feeling Process

SUMMER NEWSLETTER • JULY 2008

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Primal Paths Beyond Talk Therapy

Sevenoaks Pathwork Center, Madison, VA

August 4 – August 10

By Denise Kline

The International Primal Association's 2008 Convention is shaping up with a variety of new presentations. With Primal Paths, we envision the coming together of divergent modalities through people who join deeply and warmly to pursue this emotional work. Like the Impressionist salons of Europe, each artist creates a different picture with common themes and unique styles. Primal educators and practitioners of all sorts "blossom round the table like petals on a flower" (in the words of a Doug Cotler song).

Plan on the keynote address being on Tuesday, August 5, after lunch. Roger Tolle, International Trager trainer, body-

worker, "Mentastics" and movement therapist will present "Freeing Your Voice, Opening the Heart," which will include brief hands-on exercises and an introduction to the flowing world of Trager movement. During the afternoons, he will offer Trager sessions with their rippling energies and overall sense of well-being, as well as a workshop later in the week featuring "Mentastics" experiences toward "Living Your Fullness."

We are also very pleased to have several international members giving workshops this year, many with attention to the nuances of practicing primal therapy: Clare Gill and Julia Mitchell of Ireland will discuss supervision issues for therapists; Mary Dell of Ontario will present her first Con-



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Next deadline: Sep. 30, 2008



vention workshop on "Saying Goodbyes," the theme of her upcoming book; and Anne DeNada of Quebec returns with massage and other healing modalities.

New convention features that have been very well-received include a Bonding and Body Psychotherapy track, with therapists from the metropolitan Washington, DC and New York areas where these organizations have been based. Lee Aiken began working with Dr. Dan Casriel 30 years ago and is a certified New Identity Process therapist and health educator, concentrating on "health enhancing stress reduction through emotional release." Her topic will be "Nutrition for Health and Happiness." Also, by popular request, a peer group around food issues will be formed and supported by the extraordinarily healthy and tasty food from the spiritually-based Sevenoaks kitchen.

The Human Awareness Institute, represented by Ben Farris last year, will be offering a longer program this year designed to develop greater intimacy. Nonviolent Communication will return via Robert Wentworth who will focus on the "living energy of needs." Pathworks leaders Julia Jenson and Bland Tyree, who are at home

at Sevenoaks Pathworks Center, will introduce diverse emotional release methods in their workshop.

Alex Macmillan, last year's keynoter, confirmed his intention to return with Bioenergetic massage and release techniques to relieve emotional and physical blocks. Kathy Scheg will offer core Energetics on Friday afternoon; Esta Powell will teach us about Sub-personalities; Dr. Alice Rose will present her new spiritual insights related to primal, and Dr. Joseph Sanders, former Ethics Officer of the American Psychological Association, will address measurable effects of the primal process on post-traumatic stress in veterans. In addition, we are looking forward to workshops on Psychodrama, Re-Evaluation Co-counseling, Jungian sandplay, Enneagrams and Holotropic Breathwork.

Our own president emeritus Barbara Bryan returns to the water this year for a May's Landing-style pool party in the appealing Sevenoaks pond. Tubing in the Rapidan River is also an option, as well as a possible "field trip" to Avalon Folk Music Festival, which is the naturist home of Walter Loeb, one of our favorite massage therapists. There are also nearby estates of Presi-





dents Washington, Jefferson and Madison. For more information on this year's convention location, see: www.sevenoakspathwork.org.

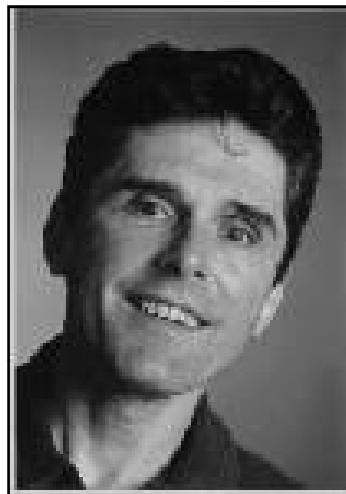
In addition we will not omit the ever-popular men's, women's and peer groups, mat tracks, Cabaret, and dancing with Gene Long, Contact Improv and all. Bill Whitesell will wrap up by facilitating a peer priming finale on Sunday.

For those with concerns about the longer drive, you are invited to stop over either way without charge at Sandy Weymouth's beautiful newly-enlarged Woods Place in Rising Sun, MD near I-95 (call 410-287-3103), or at Denise Kline's humble home in Hagerstown, MD near I-81. Also you can stay over at Avalon in Paw Paw, WV for fees ranging from camping to Lodge rates. They have a pool, Jacuzzi, tennis, and hiking.

Car pools will form and pick-ups may be arranged from trains, buses, or planes, particularly in Wilmington, DE, the metropolitan DC-VA-MD area, and Charlottesville, VA airport. Leonard Rosenbaum, (202)393-2885, is temporarily acting as Transportation Coordinator but would greatly appreciate volunteers to assist (and possibly to coordinate in the future.)

Last, but by no means least, a really big thank you to Diane Kohl for stepping up to coordinate the volunteer kitchen staff. Please, everyone, remember to give Diane and her regular helpers a hand in cleaning up so that everyone can enjoy more of the IPA Convention. I am looking forward to seeing you all, as you make the International Primal Association the thriving source of deep emotional processing that we are.

Key Note Speaker ROGER TOLLE



Roger Tolle has been presenting and teaching the TRAGER® Approach throughout the world since 1987. For many years he had a busy private practice in New York City. When not on the road teaching, he now lives and maintains a part-time practice in Charlottesville, VA. He has a B. A. in Theater/Movement, and brings to his teaching and his practice a fluidity, playfulness and elegance from 15 years of professional dancing, as well as an authenticity, clarity and simplicity from daily Mentastics movement meditations.

IPA Legacy

Daniel Miller made many important contributions to the IPA during his lifetime, and he also remembered the organization generously in his will. On June 30, after nearly two years of processing, the IPA received \$335,000 from the settlement of Daniel's estate. Thank you so much, Daniel!

Welcome New Members!

Joyce Meyers
New York, NY, USA

Clare Turner
Silver Spring MD, USA

Peter Vaino
Ottawa, ON, Canada

Maria Williams
Arlington, VA USA

Primal Groups

Barbara Bryan
Farmington Hills, Michigan
Thursdays from 7:00 - 9:30 pm
Some primal experience required
babryan@twmi.rr.com
248-478-5559

Bill Whitesell
McLean, Virginia
No charge to participate
wmwhitesell@yahoo.com
703-734-1405

Esko and Marja Rintala
Helsinki, Finland
Weekend groups Friday evening through Saturday.
esko.rintala@pp.inet.fi
358-9-611184

Newcomer at the Spring Retreat

By Joyce Z. Meyers

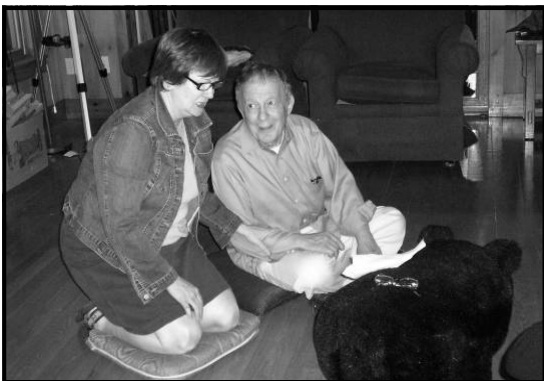
Photography by JJ Jackson

I attended the IPA Spring Retreat in May, having had virtually no experience with the organization or the structure of this type of event. I met Bob Holmes at a past life and regression conference last October when he came to a workshop I was giving on art therapy and anger release. Afterwards, he began sharing with me about IPA and I was intrigued.



Campfire and pond await finer weather

As a therapist, I help my clients open up to, release, and detoxify the anger they carry within, as well as set boundaries with those, alive or deceased, who violated those boundaries emotionally or physically. However, what my clients need I also require, and for the past number of years I have had very few resources to help in that regard. So, a stranger to the IPA, I jumped in with both feet as an experiment. I was shocked, and deeply impressed, to encounter such a well run, effective, nonhierarchical, loving and honest grass roots movement.



Kim holding on to Mickey as she lets it out

It didn't matter whether you were a professional or lay person in the field. One minute you'd be conducting a workshop and the next minute you'd be lying on a mat in someone's arms crying your heart out. There were so many aspects to the experience that were powerful: meeting every morning with the women's group, the daily peer group, the

mat sessions, the wonderful workshops that were spontaneously presented. All tears, crying, screams, tantrums, laughter, grief, and silliness was honored. Imagine that kind of allowance, to be who you truly are without having to wear a mask.



Warren and Don ate it all up

I came home feeling fully refreshed. To be accepted as you are is to bloom. To be accepted as we are is our birthright. That birthright gets taken away quite early in life. Our work is to reclaim every aspect of ourselves that had to be hidden away in a closet of shame. From shame to acceptance to breathing fully and freely and dancing in the light of our true selves—that is heaven on earth.



Marie, Leonard, Bob and Kim leaving soon

I felt like I was part of a tribe, a community, with so many diverse backgrounds and experiences coming together in love and support of one another. Each individual became a highly valued member of the community. There was a place for each of us to be respected, supported and held. We all pulled together with the tasks at hand, whether it be preparing for meals, cleaning up afterward, cleaning up after ourselves, offering rides homes. It felt like a functional family, a rarity on this planet.

At one point, I had ventured into the men's group by accident and what I saw reached into my heart: all the men were lying on the floor in a puppy pile. I thought, "My God, if more men could learn how to be this vulnerable with one another what a great world we could have."



Harriet agog for the camera



Harriet, Alex, Joyce and Peter into the woods



Don and Alex share their cuddle with us



J.J. knockin' 'em dead at Cabaret



Arthur and Mickey in a smiling tete-a-tete

IPA Calendar

Summer Convention 2008

Monday, August 4–
Sunday, August 9

Sevenoaks Pathwork Center
Madison, VA USA
www.sevenoakspathwork.org/

To register contact:

Bill Whitesell, IPA Treasurer
703-734-1405
treasurer@primals.org
811 Whann Ave
McLean, VA 22101, USA

IPA Annual Meeting

Thursday, August 7, 7 pm
Sevenoaks Pathwork Center
Madison, VA USA

Officer and committee reports,
election of Officers and Direc-
tors, community discussion.

Slate of Officers

Four Officers and three Direc-
tors will be elected at the an-
nual meeting. Three Directors
(Barbara Bryan, Esta Powell,
Larry Schumer) will be com-
pleting the second year of their
two-year terms.

The Board of Directors, as
nominating committee, pre-
sents the following slate for the
Officers. Additional nomina-
tions for these positions can be
made at the meeting.

President—Bob Holmes
Vice President—Denise Kline
Secretary—Warren Davis
Treasurer—Bill Whitesell

Directors will be nominated at
the meeting.

Member News

Primal Intensives at the Primal Integration Center of Michigan

June 21 - 22, 2008 (\$160)

July 18 - 19, 2008 (\$160)

September 12-13, 2008 (\$160)

Led by Barbara Bryan and staff.

Food, lodging, and possible

pick-up at the airport are

included in the fees.

Phone: 248-478-5559

Email: babryan@twmi.rr.com

Website: www.primalcenter.com

Primal Psychodrama Weekends in Columbus, OH Led by Esta Powell

August 29 - 31, 2008

December 5 - 7, 2008

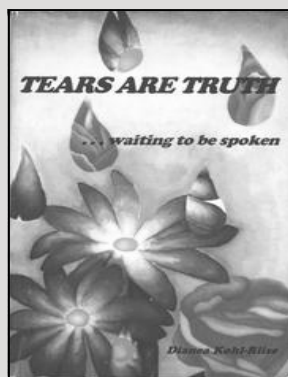
Cost \$175, breakfast and dorm style accommodations included. Group size limited to eight participants.

For more information visit:

www.primalmatters.com

or call 614-893-3527.

Diane Kohl's New Book



TEARS ARE TRUST...
waiting to be felt as the sequel to
TEARS ARE TRUTH...
waiting to be spoken.

For more information visit:

www.makealove.com

dianeako@yahoo.com

How NVC Complements Primal

By Gene Long

I recently attended a course on Non-Violent Communication (NVC). It was focused on spiritual principles, which I define differently from many other people. Spirituality, to me, means any deep aspect of being human that is universal. Thus, seeking how to deal with feelings, or seeking meaning in life, or seeking how to love your neighbor, are all spiritual aspirations.

Spirituality is about questions – how do I handle my anger, how do I find my purpose, how can I be happy in life. Religion is about one particular set of answers that a group has agreed upon. Spirituality is universal, addressing what all humans seek, and a religion is limited, providing answers for a particular set of believers.

So is Primal of a spiritual or universal nature? I believe it is. Every culture, every person, is born with a natural need to express what they feel, whether that be pain or joy, whether it be a desire for meaning, for protection, for love and connection, or a desire to express beauty. We all have primordial needs, and we all seek ways to meet those needs. Primal advocates the physical and verbal expression of needs that tend to be suppressed in our society.

The course in NVC that I took also focused on universal human needs, and the spiritual approach offered a unique twist I hadn't heard before. The word "need" tends to carry a feeling of deficiency with it, focusing on not getting what we need. In this course, the idea of human need was transformed into the idea of life force, of an energy that has come to us through the evolutionary process. The universal needs of the human being are simply the way that the life

force has expressed itself in the human life form. All human activities, all our hopes, desires, and fears, all the angers and sadnesses we have, all derive from the satisfaction or lack of satisfaction of universal human needs, which come straight from this life force.

Primal is about the expression of the feelings that arise from our universal needs, and I am free to express those feelings in any way I can, without fear of judgment, so as to get to the feelings trapped underneath. The expression of the feelings and judgments frees the stories we have from the unconscious mind,

and brings them up to where we can see them clearly and express them.

However, I find primaling useful for reasons other than mere release of emotions. Once I have opened up the feelings and expressed them, and I know what is inside of me, I ask myself, is this what I want

to believe or feel? Is this the attitude I want to have? If I discover anger at my mother during a primal session, and yell out, "I hate you! You're a bitch!" I can do so because no one will judge me for doing so – in fact, I will be praised purely because I am getting the negative judgments out. But once I have gotten them out, I then want to ask myself, are these things true? Is this how I want to live, hating my mother?

NVC adds a piece to the process. As in Buddhism, the primary emphasis is to separate observation from evaluation – to be able to distinguish what is actually real from our story about what happened to us. Primal focuses on the story, because that is where the feelings can become trapped, and by expressing our story, we can release the feelings from being trapped inside of us.

For me, there is another step to take

“Primal is about the expression of the feelings that arise from our universal needs...”

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Primal Therapy Saved My Life

By Bob Holmes

Thirty-three years is a long time to be alive. At least, it seems that way to me. Before then, I was trying to step forward into life, trying to find my way in the world. I was twenty-four, having already failed at my reluctant, first career in an industry built on fear. It was a defeat punctuated by my being quietly let go from the job – in spite of my clinging – and my subsequent plunge into depression. I was faced with the age-old question, “Who are you?” and had no answer. I knew I was dying on the inside.

After ten weeks of incessant TV-watching and other forms of pain management, I decided that it was time to get into therapy. I knew that it was pointless to try to find another job that would also be doomed to fail or be an empty and dismal exercise should I manage to make it work. Since I had read *The Primal Scream* a few months before, the knot in my stomach had slightly diminished. So I interviewed with the therapist of a friend who was doing primal work, and in January of 1975 I began the long journey to find myself.

The therapist, Joyce Jones, had suggested I start with a three-week intensive. It was an opportune time, as Joyce and her husband were putting the finishing touches to a therapy center in the country. It was well-equipped with sleeping accommodations, primal rooms, large group room, music system, video camera, body temperature pool, massage room, sauna – even a room designed to look like a typical, middle-class living room to help one recall and feel what living at home used to be like. Dining, kitchen and lounge facilities were housed in a nearby building. It all felt somehow inviting, scary and safe at the same time. Surely I could do some good work here and begin to heal my life?

My fourth day into the intensive was the watershed. The life-long emotional dam broke and I experienced my first primal release. I could never experience the world quite the same again. For

one thing, I now had hope for myself and the future. For another, I simply felt *different* ... better. I was beginning to feel a good measure of self-esteem. After the initial week had passed, my horrible dandruff – a daily problem that couldn't be eradicated no matter what shampoo I used – disappeared and never came back. During the second week, a primal release resulted in a unitive, spiritual experience which left me in a state of euphoria for two days.

Throughout the intensive I spent time in the pool, took many saunas, and for the first time experienced massage. It was new and wonderful for me to accept handing my body over to another's caring ministrations. A special happening was something called the “May's Landing Pool Party,” although it would be decades before I would come to know why such a beautiful, primal experience in the water was called by that name.

During the intensive, all aspects – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual – were being affected in a positive way, supporting my hope that I could indeed become a healthier person and find my Self. I began to feel more authentic, more alive. I found ways of helping myself to connect to my feelings, especially through listening to emotionally evocative music. And the depression was gone, never to return. Moreover, with the help of my therapist, I had begun to investigate new career goals. When the three weeks were over I felt like a new person.

Group work and other intensives followed over the ensuing weeks and months, but by then it was just a matter of doing my primal work. I had been snatched from the brink of despair and given a new life, at least that's the way it seemed. The truth is, I had made the decision to heal and taken action to bring it about. Nevertheless, what happened in that January of 1975 had decidedly turned my life around. I had been saved – by Primal Therapy.

Ode to a Little Boy

By Pete Vaino

Oh little straw-haired boy of two
Tell me how it was that you grew.
With all around you nothing
but madness
And every day brimming
with sadness.

When life looked its darkest
You did not quit or give in-
Your hope was given a real test
And in Sweden your new life
did begin.

Moving from the blackness of Hell
Across the sea worked out quite well.
Light and bright was everywhere seen;
Behind was the sadness of where
you'd been.

Life became normal and lots of fun,
As you walk, play and run in the sun.

Years go by and you reach the age of
seven,
When Mom and Dad decided to start
anew
In a place far, far away that to your
ears was heaven.
And there your years were many, not
just a few.

Everything was rosy, and happily the
years went by,
But every now and then you became
sad and wanted to cry.

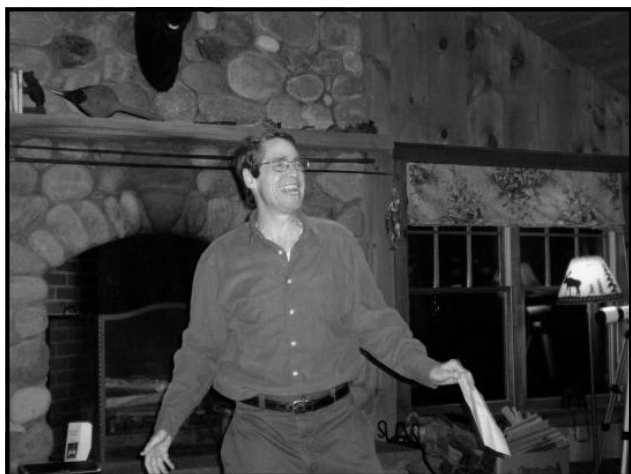
A few years went by and it became a
bit more.
At first just a sadness and then a flow
of tears,
Holy cow! This hasn't happened for
years!
Feelings of the boy of two are
streaming to the fore.

Sixty five years of ignoring and
avoiding feeling
Have finally caught up with this
white-haired guy.
He's starting to live more and FEEL
as time goes by,
Thanks to some ladies* gentle, kind
and caring.

* (the ladies: Anne D., Lisa C., Karen K. and Barbara B.)

Primal Junkies / Primal Graduates

By William Whitesell



Bill being serious at the Spring Retreat Cabaret

Are we stuck in a dysfunctional paradigm? Addicted to primal? Hooked on displaying emotions? Are we junkies, always looking for our next deep-feeling fix? Do we wallow around in our old emotions, unwilling to make the clean break needed to have a good life?

In my opinion, these questions reflect pervasive social conditioning against the expression of feelings. Our dominant culture teaches us that some emotions are okay (joy, happiness, love) but others are bad (anger, fear, grief). It insists that growing up means learning to suppress the "negative" feelings. If we nevertheless have emotional "breakdowns," we are counseled to control our "illness" by taking the appropriate drug.

In my view, these teachings are social myths spawned by the effort of conventional institutions to protect themselves from having to cope with the processing of emotions. Indeed, other goals do need to be set aside temporarily in order to create a safe environment for the discharge of emotional distress. In situations where the expression of feelings is not a recognized priority, it is often safer to put them on hold.

However, the protective ideologies go too far, overgeneralizing the times and situations when it is best to keep emotions in check. With the training that begins in childhood, we tend to internalize these norms of mainstream culture. Even those of us who now participate in a healthier subculture may experience a resurgence of suspicion at times about the value of expressing feelings.

Doubts may arise when we wonder whether emotional processing is really working for us. Lacking full contextual memories, we may think our primals are unconnected. We may suspect we're stuck at a level of secondary, covering emotions, not at the deepest levels of genuine unmet needs. Our expression of feelings may even seem at times to be shallow venting exercises, dramatizations.

Such negative judgments about our feeling work could reflect resistance to an emerging new level of pain. They might alternatively indicate a need for adjusting how we work. One

style of practicing may have become all too comfortable for us. We may return to it often, enjoying the freedom to have our feelings in that way, but it may not be where the true action is. It may not be the frontier of our inner journey.

A remedy could be to try working in a way that brings up different emotions than usual. For instance, perhaps we return again and again to a sense of outrage at injustices that have been inflicted on us. Over and over again, we may shout and scream, kick and thrash. There may seem no end to our anger. New experiences may keep feeding our sense of being victimized. But the rage and sense of unfairness may protect us from other feelings — fear of our vulnerability and sadness over our unmet needs. If we release some fear and go to a deeper level, we may discover early hurts. We may relive the verbal oppressions of a parent for whom we were never good enough. We may access the tears of our broken heart. And when we have mourned to the depths our unmet needs, we may discover room in our hearts for something else. We may be able to take in love. A new openness and hopefulness may replace the old aggressor/victim polarities and help us build better lives.

For another example, we may shed oceans of tears as we sink into perceptions of personal helplessness and profound losses. There may seem no end to our grief. But the tears and the attitude of helplessness may protect us from experiencing other emotions — fear and anger. We may be terrified of the prospect of taking power for ourselves. In the past, if we had tried to do so, we might have risked being crushed or abandoned. From a place of current safety, however, we may be able to access the fear and release enough of it. We may experience and express our natural empowerment. We may feel it affirmed by ourselves and others. And we may develop confidence that we can remain connected with others even while realizing our full power.

In sum, feeling stuck in primal may mean lacking ready access to some types of emotions. If raging comes easy, sadness may be underneath. If sobs come easy, a powerful anger may be hidden within. For me, fear often blocks the path from tantrums to tears. And getting to the bottom of fears is a challenge.

Even if we do have ready access to a full range of feelings, we may still wonder at times if we're making enough progress. We may think a cognitive approach might work better for us. After all, important insights can be gained by trying to identify links between the present and our unmet needs in the past. In my case, for instance, I found it useful to consider whether I was implicitly looking for opportunities to return to old power struggles, especially the ones that I had lost. My mother did keep a tight control over when I got fed as a baby; the experts had convinced her that I should be on a regular four-hour schedule. And in early adulthood, I found myself falling in love with one powerful woman after another, each time seeking to persuade her with great urgency to meet my

physical needs. Perhaps I was in part trying to replay that early power struggle with my mother, hoping finally to win it.

However, replaying the past at the level of an act-out doesn't heal the pain, and insights don't remove deep-seated emotional drives. In my experience, there is no substitute for going directly back to the old power struggles themselves, reliving them fully as the child, and releasing the emotions they aroused. Again and again.

Is this an addiction to the past? To emotional processing? Have I given cognitive approaches enough of a chance? Maybe I could just *choose* to be happy. After all, haven't studies shown that emotions can be aroused by mistaken understandings? And in those studies, the feelings reportedly disappear when the interpretation is corrected. Generalizing from such results, couldn't I make a sea-change of my mind-set and get finished with the past once and for all?

At times, spirituality seems to counsel as much. If I could just view the world through the appropriate paradigm, wouldn't I get rid of all the unpleasant feelings? With the higher wisdom of spiritual detachment, wouldn't I become free of the pain? Could I secure an abiding inner peace by adopting the equanimity of an old soul?

To me, these are pretentious postures that merely add spiritual caché to the "power of positive thinking." In my view, such spiritual attitudes may boost our self-esteem and protect us from feeling pain, but they dissociate us from our true nature as human beings. While they keep our conscious minds on the "good" feelings, our bodies suffer as we block access to the more complete reality of our experiences and emotions.

Perhaps cognitive alternatives are not the issue. Primal must in any case acquit itself on its own terms. Does it work? And if it does, why keep doing it, year after year? Can't we clear our old traumas and be healed? Shouldn't we be cured by now? Can't we graduate from primal and move on? Surely, it is possible to structure our lives in a way that contradicts the distress of the past. Our jobs may empower us. Our relationships may nurture us. We may achieve self-actualization through our social roles. At that point, shouldn't we just hang our primal diploma on the wall? Why return to the mat?

In my view, self-actualization is inherently incomplete if limited to the social roles of the dominant culture. If we try to fulfill ourselves entirely through such roles, we are likely to lose connection to our most sensitive feelings. Eventually, we



The other side of the Spring Retreat pond

may dry up inside.

I think of a continuum along which we may find our emotional nature. At one extreme is the position of being numbed out. No feelings known. A rock. Moving along the continuum in the other direction, we come to milestones of access to emotions of different types. Eventually, we may reach a position where the full range of human feeling is available to us. Emotional intrusions and flooding may divert us for a while from the path. They may even make us want to turn back. But if we keep going forward, we may reach a point where we can recognize all our emotions as they occur and still have the ability to choose consciously when and how to express them. All the old traumas have then lost their charge. We can live fully in the present.

A primal graduate may stop there. I believe, however, that the continuum goes farther. In my view, living wholly in the present is not a complete realization of our emotional potential. We are beings with personal histories. Our lives are not just factual stories to be viewed with the dissociation of a detached attitude. Our best thinking in complex social situations is not an ideal of pure mathematical rationality. It needs to be continuously informed by subtle emotional cues derived from our past circumstances.

In my opinion, the integrated, whole self has ready access, not only to current feelings and to information from our personal histories, but also to emotions from our past. At the far end of the continuum, opposite to numbness, we have not become empty vessels cleared of all emotions from early in our lives. We have removed heavy clumps of the old stored charges that have blocked awareness, but we have not become impassive files of information devoid of emotional coloring. The sensitivities of the infant self remain palpable within us. We are aware of our primal energies, enlivened with our "baby power." Our early emotions consciously resonate with our current feelings, enriching our experiences and giving depth to our presence. Returning to the mat not only helps heal the old traumas, the triggers, and the heavy charges, it also helps lubricate the lively flow and conscious interplay of our past and present emotions. It can give us the wisdom of our fully-realized humanity.



Geese on the pond at the Spring Retreat

Catharsis in Psychology and Beyond

By Esta Powell

This is an excerpt from the article “Catharsis in Psychology and Beyond: A Historic Overview”. For the full version of the article and [the list of references](#) please visit: <http://www.primalmatters.com/reading%20list.htm>

Breuer and Freud

Catharsis was a popular concept in scientific circles in Germany in the 1890s, and there were numerous articles published on the subject. Freud and Breuer officially brought ‘cathartic therapy’ as a therapeutic method into modern psychology (Brill, 1995), using hypnosis to recover repressed memories of negative traumatic events. The Breuer and Freud theory that symptoms are caused by repressed emotions is based on the observation that: “each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect” (Freud, 1893). In his later work, Freud was not completely satisfied with the results of catharsis; he rejected hypnosis and the cathartic component of therapy to focus more on the generation of insight and other aspects of psychoanalysis.

The hydraulic model of emotions and venting theory

The hydraulic model of emotions uses the analogy of a fluid flowing through a system. Emotional distress, if not expressed, gets blocked and can create pressure in the system; therefore ‘venting’ emotions should decrease tension, and, consequently, the negative psychological symptoms. The greater the expression of negative emotions, the greater the relief should be (American Psychological Association, 2007).

Scheff (2001) shared similar views that emotional expression is a natural human necessity and discussed this issue from the evolutionary point of view. He claimed that emotion is not a cultural phenomenon, but is a natural body reaction and a way of dealing with hurtful experiences: “... emotional expressions such as crying are biological necessities. Crying itself is instinctual: the baby comes out of the womb with the ability to cry. This ability is unlearned. What is learned is the ability to suppress crying.”

Scheff argued that suppressing emotions exerts a significant negative impact on individuals and societies. As part of the socialization process, parents often use punishment to teach children how to control emotional reactions and suppress the instinctual need for discharge. Scheff stated that most people “accumulate massive amounts of repressed emotion, bodily tension which is always present but usually not recognized.” He concluded that suppressed emotions interfere with thought and perception, with a person’s ability to respond to others and to cooperate, and with the ability to tolerate strong emotions in others.

Although many mental health professionals support

the hydraulic model, some recent researchers have challenged this traditionally accepted view that ‘venting’ negative emotions reduces them and have argued that the release of emotion by itself, without a cognitive change, is not enough to produce a positive outcome in psychotherapy (Bohart, 1980; Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 1999; Nichols, 1985; Rachman, 2001).

Catharsis-based treatment approaches

Freud introduced catharsis into psychology over 100 years ago, and today many contemporary modalities consider it a significant curative aspect of their therapeutic approaches. In this section, I will overview how some of these modalities – Psychodrama, Primal Therapy, and Emotion-Focused Therapy – use catharsis.

Use of catharsis in Psychodrama

With the growth of behaviorism, the role of catharsis as a beneficial psychological technique was underestimated until Moreno introduced Psychodrama in the 1930s. Moreno used the concept of catharsis as Aristotle and Freud had suggested it and developed it into a new psychotherapeutic modality. Reenacting scenes from one’s past, or one’s dreams or fantasies, helps the client bring unconscious conflicts into consciousness, leading to catharsis and eventual relief and positive change (Moreno, 1946).

According to Moreno, catharsis helps to reunite the separated (unconscious) parts of the psyche with the conscious self. Although the unconscious is expressed in many ways – in delusions, forgetting, and dreams, for instance – such expression is too mild to allow for release. It is rather an indication that a problem exists. Therefore, catharsis was used in psychodrama to uncover deep and long-standing negative emotions and successfully neutralize the negative impact of the related traumatic experiences.

Use of catharsis in Primal Therapy

In the early 1970s, Janov (2007) elaborated on Freud’s ideas and claimed that if infants and children are not able to process painful experiences fully – by crying, sobbing, and screaming, for example, in a supported environment – their consciousness ‘splits,’ and pain gets suppressed to the unconscious only to reappear in neurotic symptoms and disorders in later life. Painful experiences become ‘stored’ and need to be ‘released’ in therapy by reliving and discharging suppressed feelings. Janov asserted that cathartic emotional processing of painful early life experiences and connecting them with the memory of the original event could fully free clients from neurotic symptoms. He argued that cognitive remembering of suppressed traumatic experiences is not enough for healing to occur.

As it was practiced in the early years, Primal Therapy seemed to be focused on emotional discharge without appro-

appropriate safety and distancing. Therefore, it appeared to be damaging for some clients, especially for those with mental illness, personality disorders, or other more severe conditions, where clients' ego strength was not sufficient to process strong feelings. This could lead to disintegration if the client was already experiencing confusion between present and past realities. Therefore, Primal therapy was perceived as dangerous and rejected by the majority of mental health professionals.

Use of catharsis in Emotion-Focused Therapy

Greenberg (2002) contended that emotional arousal and subsequent processing within a supportive therapeutic relationship are the core elements for positive change in therapy. He emphasized the cognitive aspect of catharsis and the need to understand and make sense of emotions. Greenberg argued that awareness, healthy emotional expression, and cognitive integration of emotions combined to produce positive change. It appears that Emotion-Focused Therapy appropriately addressed the cognitive component of catharsis and safety issues. Emotion-Focused Therapy developed techniques to help clients recognize and validate their strong feelings, and coached and supported clients to express hurtful emotions safely and to find meaning in their experiences.

Emotion-Focused Therapy employs the empty chair technique, introduced by Gestalt Therapy, for clarification of inner conflicts, as well as for finishing unresolved relationship issues from the past. Greenberg, Warwar, and Malcolm (2008) demonstrated that Emotion-Focused Therapy using the empty chair technique was more effective than Psychoeducation in facilitating forgiveness and 'letting go' of painful emotional experiences with their significant others. The empty chair technique can be a useful tool to facilitate catharsis, as well as to help clients to create distance from their overwhelming emotions, for example by asking them to sit in a third chair and assume the role of an observer or mediator.

Controversy about the effectiveness of catharsis in psychotherapy

Traditionally, catharsis has been perceived as a healing experience. Nichols (1974) evaluated the impact of catharsis on the positive outcome of brief psychotherapy and validated the hypothesis that catharsis leads to therapeutic improvement of behavioral target complaints and personal satisfaction. Pascual-Leone and Greenberg (2007) presented some evidence that processing emotions in therapy is a significant step towards positive change. Watson and Bedard (2006) found that clients with major depression who showed higher levels of emotional processing, had better outcomes.

Nonetheless, other researchers are challenging traditional views about the value of catharsis in therapy. Bushman (2002) claimed that 'venting anger' does not help to

reduce anger and should not be used in therapy. Jemmer (2006) argued that traumatic experience, if repeatedly relived in catharsis, can be relearned and become harmful. Bohart (1980) demonstrated that expression of anger does not produce relief or anger reduction.

Some of the conclusions about the ineffectiveness of 'venting anger' seem to be generalized to all cathartic experiences (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999). The question is, how reasonable is this generalization and can the research on the ineffectiveness of 'venting anger' be applied to cathartic techniques in general?

This question brings back the issue of whether the catharsis includes both emotional and cognitive aspects. Scheff (2001) made an extremely important point that effectiveness of catharsis in therapy strongly depends on balancing the past distress with a feeling of safety and support in the present, that is, achieving optimum 'distancing' from the traumatic event by a client's being an 'observer' as well as participant. Scheff argued that in cases of major repressed traumatic events, verbal recall alone is not sufficient for a permanent positive therapeutic change. The repeated somatic-emotional discharge of grief, fear, and anger with appropriate distancing and support are necessary components for success.

“... emotional arousal and processing within a supportive therapeutic relationship are the core elements for positive change in therapy.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the effective use of catharsis in psychotherapy should not be confused with isolated emotional discharge techniques, such as venting anger. Catharsis refers to the re-experiencing (partially or fully) of significant traumatic events, that were not adequately emotionally processed and were repressed, causing emotional, physical, or relationship problems in the person's life.

During the process of therapy, a client remembers and relives these significant personal events, experiences strong emotional reactions, as well as appropriate cognitive processing and integration. The effectiveness of cathartic techniques should be evaluated within the context of all the components of a therapeutic process, such as a safe and trusting relationship between client and therapist, and the use of techniques for building a client's ego strength, creating a safe and supportive environment in the client's present life (making behavioral changes), and finding meaning in past experiences.

The existing scientific evidence about catharsis resulting in a positive therapeutic change is controversial because of a lack of careful definition and agreement as to what constitutes catharsis. Even though some research demonstrated that aggressive behavior, 'venting anger,' actually increased arousal levels and didn't produce desired positive change, its relevance to the phenomenon of catharsis is very limited if it exists at all. Catharsis is far more complex, involving the experiencing of repressed emotional traumas within a safe and supportive environment. It includes appropriate cognitive processing and insight as well as emotional discharge.

How NVC Complements Primal

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– to return to an adult state of mind and reaffirm my values and beliefs. For example, suppose I get in touch with being humiliated, and I start crying and saying, "I'm no good. I'm worthless." It is good to discover I have those feelings, and to express them in front of safe people. But then I need to reaffirm what I actually believe to be true, namely that I am a wonderful, valuable, capable human being, deserving of love and respect. If I yell, "I hate you, Mom!" then, afterwards, I need to ask myself, do I want to live my life with hatred in my heart towards my mother? Most people would agree that carrying resentment and hatred around on a daily basis is not a healthy thing. In that case, I might do some affirmations about the divinity of all people, including my mother, or recognize her humanness and weaknesses and failings, and seek

to have compassion for her, just as I would want someone to have compassion for my failures.

Without this return to our core values, we could walk out of a primal session still carrying the negative emotions we came in to let go of.

NVC approaches all of this by focusing on our core needs as human beings, which are all life-affirming values – the need for love, for connection, for respect, etc. In NVC, the negative voices are expressed much for the same reason as in Primal – we want to become aware of what is in there and release its energy so we are not carrying it. But then the process leads us to focus on our core needs or values, to regroup us in the glory of being human, and set us on a firm footing for returning to the world.

IPA ROSES to . . .

- Barbara Bryan as she recovers from surgery – with all our love.
- Bob Holmes for stepping up once again to coordinate the Spring Retreat and handling all of the difficulties of a new location with his usual finesse.
- Sandy Weymouth, who schlepped the IPA trailer with our mats and other paraphernalia from Maryland to the Spring Retreat and stopped off in Manhattan to chauffeur seven carless New Yorkers. After being ejected from the Taconic State Parkway because of that pesky trailer, he whipped out his laptop and map-quested a new route through rural upstate New York, keeping his good humor and delivering his vital cargo intact.
- Other contributors to a successful Spring Retreat: Bill Whitesell for registration and Harriet Geller for printing and mailing the flyer and creating the programs.
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