

## Tapping into Source: Psychosynthesis and Emotional Freedom Techniques

(published 2018 in Expressions of Energy Psychotherapy EPN edited by J.Barrett )

Psychosynthesis is a transpersonal philosophy and an approach to life founded during the last century by the Italian doctor and psychoanalyst Roberto Assagioli. Initially his concept was called Bio-psychosynthesis (bios – meaning body) and the psychotherapeutic aspect of it was just one strand of the quest towards self-realisation. As a doctor in the Bergholzi Hospital in Switzerland, where C.G. Jung also had worked, Assagioli noticed that within even his most mentally and personality-damaged patients, there seemed to be an unconscious pull from the core of their being towards growth and wholeness which Assagioli named the self or 'I'; a concept resonating with Jung's idea of self.

He believed that the inner self is connected to something greater or universal, which transcends the ordinary every day and personal. A client may work with a Psychosynthesis or an EFT practitioner without acknowledging or 'believing' in a spiritual or higher dimension, yet research shows the effect of working with these therapies does seem to strengthen a belief in spiritual or transpersonal realms (Mason 2012). These days many therapists acknowledge, rather than pathologise, a client's spirituality, understanding this can help *re-source* them and aid their process of healing and recovery. In psychosynthesis energy is seen as the life force, life itself, (Assagioli 1970) and the word 'source' is used to describe the wellspring ('god') from where life or energy originates. I offer this explanation, as the term is not used in mainstream psychotherapy. It is used also in energy psychology to describe *source* from where energy or vitality flows.

I had a hugely significant experience resonating beyond analytical interpretation during a psychosynthesis training session over thirty years ago. It was an out-of-the-blue psycho-energetic experience in which I felt my body flip over as if tilted upside down in the womb and I knew I wanted to get out. The overwhelming feeling-sense was "I have no right to be here", and in that *satori* moment my hitherto struggles 'to be here', to incarnate, clarified into profound awareness.

From this and subsequent embodied experiences, I learned to take notice of what my body and energy system was telling me.

After years of interest and study of various body-mind therapies, a training in Energy Medicine (2005) introduced me to a wealth of energy psychology approaches that were being used with astonishing effect. I decided to focus on Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) because I was impressed by the research and it was the most user friendly of the techniques, although I have trained in a variety of other Energy Psychology modalities, such as PEP (Mollon, 2008). I integrate other energy

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modalities such as chakra awareness, muscle testing, breath-work, movement and sound, and with creative psychosynthesis perspectives and techniques.

I teach psychotherapists to bring EFT into their talk-therapy, and provide mentoring and supervision. To me it is important they find their way of transforming techniques into an art. This is the way of the artist such as a painter who can shape recognisable forms into abstracts of colour or a professional musician who can then 'let go' into free form improvisation – but the rudiments are there to hold and return to.

### **Emotional Freedom Technique**

EFT is simple, effective and produces significantly successful results with PTSD and chronic trauma-response symptoms. The trauma-memory does not have to be described or re-entered, just named or titled, avoiding a potential for re-traumatisation.

As we understand it, tapping the acupressure points temporarily normalises and deactivates the trauma memory (right frontal cortex) – by sending signals to the amygdala and other parts of the brain to reduce arousal. The debilitating and fear-based responses are neutralized and the energy rebalanced whilst a new “juxtaposition” experience is created. This has parallels with when we ask clients to describe a traumatic scene, say from childhood, and then ask them to visualize or replay it *as it could have been, or what their child could have said or done differently*. This, combined with a verbal ‘reframing’, (for example an affirmation of a choice), helps install intention or will, and sends a message for that to manifest within the body-mind. Affirming and accepting statements are repeated, spoken or sometimes just held in thought, as the acupressure points are tapped, helping build the client’s sense of self and agency.

Working with EFT creates what I call an ‘energetic loop’ where images and metaphor surface and resonate between client and therapist, creating an experience of connection to something greater ‘in the field’.

Tapping is done alongside the client (the therapist demonstrates by tapping on themselves) – and enables the client to familiarise the process so as to use it outside sessions to self-regulate and self-soothe or to continue the therapeutic work. The client is not – as some have critiqued - ‘being done to’ – as we, therapist and client, are in this energy field together – and the process is one of respectful (rather than ego-directed) collaboration. The ‘work’ and language is co-created.

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Although EFT is one of the better-known forms of energy psychology and enthusiasts tell us that “anyone can use it”, I believe that a tool is as effective as the consciousness and skill of the person using it. Psychological awareness is essential to fully exploit its potential.

### **Case Example.**

A client of mine, whom I’ll call Claire, had struggled with her habit of buying a bottle of wine on her way home, which she then felt compelled to drink - even if she didn’t feel like it. Originally she thought that the habit was work-stress related – but it continued even when she was not working. Through EFT tapping, a body feeling of dread surfaced and she realised it had to do with “arriving home”. This made no logical sense with her current situation of a happy family home. As we tapped, a schoolgirl memory surfaced of how she feared returning home to find her parents fighting, so she would treat herself at the corner sweet shop before returning. She had not remembered this before and realised how the habit of a ‘sweet reward’ had been replaced by a bottle of wine. After sessions of talk therapy and ‘trying to understand’, a short round of meridian tapping and muscle testing brought this swiftly into embodied awareness. Some months later she had broken the habit.

### **Isn’t talk therapy enough? Why bring in energy psychology?**

Mostly talk therapy *is* enough and telling the story, having it witnessed, exploring meaning and purpose, plus the relational holding and dynamics between therapist and client, effects change and healing.

However there are times when “just talking” does not seem to shift the problem and it remains stuck, as if embedded. Psychological disturbance, such as depression, trauma or phobias, can be viewed as a disruption within our energy system. Understanding the roots and origins of the problem and speaking about it is of course important, but does not always clear the disturbance, and in some cases, can re-traumatise or lead to dissociation.

I bring EFT into my practice and supervision whenever appropriate and obviously there are clients where this way of working is not what they want. However EFT can facilitate a cognitive or energetic shift that, in my experience, may otherwise have taken years of talk therapy and interpretation to achieve. Mason (2012) Marzillier (2014)

### **Energy awareness ‘in the field’**

It was in the early 90’s that I first heard the term ‘sensate monitoring’ to describe the way in which our bodies and energy system can register counter-transference

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and how useful a tool this was. That and Gendlin's 'felt sense' legitimised this other language for me. When my thinking got scrambled, foggy or confused in a session with a particular client and not with others that day, I was able to use that to *in-form* me what was being communicated about the client. The energy of their emotions and/or thoughts was entering 'the field' and my body was receiving it. If, for example, there was a cold, shut down-ness in my heart, or emptiness in my belly, I realised that this was being transferred as important *in-formation*. I split the word as it describes how something energetic and hidden is coming into form.

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We know from evidence-based research that thought, emotion and intention impact on us in the psychoenergetic field. Our body with its complex nervous system, energy centres (chakras) and its meridians (conduits or pathways for *prana* or *chi*) – acts like a huge receptor or transmitter for energy. We can receive energetically transmitted information in different parts of our body, such as our guts (gut feeling, feeling gutted) our heart, (heavy or light hearted), or in the palms of our hands or the soles of our feet that can start tingling or change temperature (cold feet, clammy palms).

In a therapy or supervision group a 'felt sense' is often picked up by a few people simultaneously and this congruence can be extremely useful feedback for the person or supervisee concerned, and for the group experiencing it. This congruency, an 'intelligence' held in the field, may strengthen belief and trust in connection to the transpersonal realms or source.

### **Psychosynthesis and Energy**

Energy psychology techniques work beautifully with Psychosynthesis and tapping can be used alongside many of its tools: with imagery, metaphor, intentional re-visioning and re-scripting, working with sub-personalities, gestalt and dialogue.

Assagioli was interested in all facets of energy. Browsing through the library archives in his home outside Florence I came across some typed notes written in 1970.

*“Energy is Life”* and *“All is Energy”*. He stated the importance of bringing energy awareness, *“psychoenergetics”*, into all fields, especially psychology, *which* he said was *“different and wider than psychodynamics.”* He wrote:

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*“... we’ll try to build the psychology as psychoenergetics, of which psychosynthesis will be one of the chief expressions.”*

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