

## The Embodied Experience: working with Energy in the Therapeutic Setting. Part 1

*“... purely talk-based forms of psychotherapy, although not without value, are simply not able to engage effectively with the realm in which patterns of emotional distress are encoded - the area of the interface of the psyche and the soma, the body's energy field.”*

Dr. Phil Mollon PhD: Psychoanalytic Energy Psychotherapy, Karnac 2008

The first experience I had in a talk-therapy setting that made any sense to me beyond all the analytic theorising and interpretation was an out-of-the-blue embodied one. At some point mid-way during the 75 min session (psychosynthesis training sessions were often that long in the early eighties) I felt my body flip over as if I were tilted upside down in the womb and wanting to get out. The overwhelming pre-verbal feeling was “I have no right to be here”. It was a satori moment – as everything cleared into the awareness of my hitherto struggles - to ‘be here’ and incarnate (transpersonal) – and to come into relationship with others (interpersonal). That was over thirty years ago and I was in the early days of training in Psychosynthesis in Stockwell - a time before the training groups were even numbered!

From this and subsequent embodied experiences I learnt to listen to what was happening in my body and with my energy, and to trust in that as much as in clever words and interpretations. I had spent a few years of misery previously with a renowned and erudite psychoanalyst and I'd ended up feeling that my experiences were being taken away from me. Obviously, that was an important re-enactment of my own birth trauma. As an artist, I also trusted the images that emerged from my (wise) unconscious and often accompanied body-feelings. Image work is integral to and still informs the way I work with embodied and psychoenergetic awareness.

It was in the early 90's, when training to be a supervisor, that I first heard the term ‘sensate monitoring’ – which described a way in which our bodies and energy system can register counter-transference and how useful a tool this was. That and Gendlin's ‘felt sense’ were legitimising another language for me - and one that was equally important. 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 that this was important information about the client that was being communicated. 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 an emptiness in my belly - I realised that this was being transferred as important in-formation. I split the word here as it describes how something energetic and hidden is coming into form and manifesting – this is the in-formation.

We now know (from evidence based research and MRI scans) that thought, emotion and intention are immensely powerful and impact on the psychoenergetic field and on us. Our body - with it's complex nervous system, energy centres (chakras) and its connecting 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), our brow (the Ajna chakra, our ‘third eye’ of perception and understanding which we may tap

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when an insight or clarity emerges) or even in the palms of our hands or the soles of our feet that can start tingling or change temperature. (cold feet, clammy palms etc).

In a therapy or supervision group a congruent 'felt sense' and energy can often be picked up by a few people simultaneously and this congruency can be extremely useful feedback for the person or supervisee concerned – and for the group experiencing it. This experience of congruency – as an 'intelligence' in the field - has been shown to strengthen belief and trust in the mysterious unknown and connection to the transpersonal realms or Universal Source.

Being able to work with embodied energetic awareness and bring it into talk therapy is an important and useful skill. Trusting the energy field and the information it holds and communicates is part of that resource. Recently there has been much more evidenced research into energy psychotherapy and energy psychology – effective tools that we can incorporate into our talk-therapy practices – and I shall say more about these later in Part 2.

In the psychotherapy world, we are at last wising up to the fact – that talking and intellectually knowing is sometimes just not enough and that there is another deeply effective and insightful energetic source of information that we and our bodies can access and use. Using our precious mind, processing and thinking and making sense of it all with words and interpretations may come later – but in the here and now the connections and realisations happen without that – experienced as embodied psychoenergetic awareness.

### **Assagioli and Energy**

I recently visited Casa Assagioli in Florence and was able to spend a few hours looking through Roberto's many handwritten notes on a variety of topics – these notelets are affectionately known as "Assagiolini" and his collected writings have been and lovingly archived by Piero Ferrucci and others in the team.

The dynamics of energy was investigated on many levels: within the personality (e.g.: sub-personalities – are 'clusters of energy') and the ways that energy can be evoked and used creatively, physically, transformatively and universally. He wrote about the importance of movement, flow and prana within the body and what happens if this is blocked: entropy, and the way that energy can be used or misused. Ahead of his time Assagioli explored psychodynamic movement and physical exercise, yoga, and dance; (had Gabrielle Roth been around at the time he would, I'm sure, explored Five Rhythms!); he read widely and studied the laws of physics governing energy and the psychodynamics of energy and energy fields; how energy manifests through Will and Love.

Under the heading Universal Energy I came across his handwritten "Energy is Life", "All is Energy" – and later "God is Energy". In 1972 he attended a convention called "The Understanding and Use of Energy". I shall say more about these links and the benefits of integrating energy psychotherapy with embodied awareness into our work later (Part 2).