

## Mind Matters

By Charles Montagu

I was seven years old when my mother started taking me, with my sisters, to museums. I hated going, and as we climbed the steps leading to some venerable institution, my eyelids would droop and my legs would feel as heavy as lead. At such moments, I knew how it felt to be depressed.

On the other hand, when we were taken to the funfair, our energy would be boundless and unstoppable, as we dragged our mother, yawning, from one stall to the next.

For better or worse, our minds and bodies comprise a system of energy that cannot be separated. We could say that our bodies are print-outs of our emotions. How we manage our emotions is crucial, therefore, to our well-being.

The physician often referred to as ‘the father of psychosomatic medicine’, Sir William Osler, said at the beginning of the last century: “The hurt that does not find its expression through tears may cause other organs to weep”.

To a great extent, the way we process loss defines our health. Loss in the present is experienced as hurt. Anger is hurt in the past. Fear is hurt in the future. Dealing with our feelings truthfully when they occur is vital for health, and essential if we are to live fully and freely.

Hurt is nature’s way of *limiting* damage. The healthy time to express hurt is at the moment of our loss. Hurt withheld becomes anger.

Anger, expressed appropriately at the time of the hurt, creates a boundary. This is evident in the animal world. When we suppress anger, it accumulates, depleting our reserves of energy more the longer we hold it in.

Losses incompletely mourned and hurts unforgiven become the anticipation of hurt in the future, which we experience as fear. The first panic attack is often a delayed grief reaction. Soon it becomes the fear *of the fear* that will cause the panic attack.

The fortunate child who grows up in a family where feelings are expressed freely, listened to, and respected, builds a healthy foundation for life and thus is less likely to suffer from stress-related symptoms or addictions than a child brought up in an unhappy home.

Typically, within our allopathic system, when a condition cannot be treated successfully through pharmaceutical or surgical intervention, the patient might be told the condition is *psychological* or *psychosomatic*. The term *psychosomatic* is quite often misunderstood. It does not mean ‘beginning in the mind’ - that would be *psychogenetic* – rather, it means that what we hold in our minds also manifests in our bodies.

We can, literally, be sick with worry or scared stiff. A person can be a pain in the neck, get under our skin or make our blood boil. A situation may be hard for us to

stomach, or a truth difficult to swallow. There are countless sayings in our vernacular that reflect how the mind and body cannot be separated.

Who amongst us has not succumbed to illness at times of chronic stress or fatigue? True healing requires that we engage our minds as well as our bodies, and that we are willing to heal the division between our heads and our hearts.

In our society we are conditioned to an external view of power. We seek worth, approval and security outside of ourselves. We learn to control and manipulate, and when we are unhappy, we blame others. Yet, if we were to trace our troubles back to their source, we would more often than not trace them back to a time when we overrode our instincts or were afraid to be forthright.

Holistically, our health demands that we take responsibility for our lives and our own happiness. This sounds simple, but it requires that we respect ourselves enough to trust our intuition and speak our truth. This can be a challenging idea to a person who, in order to survive fled, like a refugee, from the heart and took up residence in the rational, analytical mind - which seemed a safer place - or who learnt in childhood that the needs and expectations of others were all that mattered.

In the western world we tend to make a god of our intellects, to the detriment of our emotions and spirit. It's the emotional mind that hypnotherapy engages. Ten years ago, I was privileged to be the first hypnotherapist funded by the NHS, and worked with a dedicated team of doctors in Peckham. They spoke to me of their frustration at having, on average, only eight minutes to spend with each patient, allowing no time to make a diagnosis based on factors beyond the physical symptoms their patients presented. In my fortunate position, I have experienced much that illuminates a complex relationship between the mind and body that goes way beyond the boundaries of conventional medicine.

One of my very first clients was a woman in her early forties who had lost so much of her hair that she arrived wearing a wig. She had been sleeping poorly, and was waking up every morning soaked in sweat. As the session began, she told me that her marriage was a nightmare and that her husband was behaving in ways that caused her to want to tear her hair out.

A condition is no less real because it is not solely physical in origin; if any illness ever is. An ulcer may have originated as a result of, and be aggravated by anxiety and tension, but this does not make the ulcer any less real. In the case of my client, the physical aspects of her suffering were very clear.

A sudden illness, whether manifested physically or emotionally, is a wake up call, our discomfort the alarm bell that draws us in, in order that we might tend to ourselves. Looking back, we realise that it was when we denied or ignored the physical or emotional pain in our lives that we suffered the most.

Rationally, a person may not be aware of the cause of a physical or emotional problem. To the conscious mind the seed event might either have been forgotten or, in hindsight, seem trivial. This is where working with the subconscious mind becomes crucial to getting to the heart of a condition, and healing it.

The subconscious mind is a vast storehouse containing every experience we have ever had. It has a far more powerful influence on our actions and reactions than our rational mind, but it does not reason. It associates. For instance, people who are terrified of mice, spiders or flying, know that their fears are not rational.

The greater the physical or emotional content of an experience or idea, the more powerfully the subconscious mind is imprinted by it. Over time, the response might be further conditioned, through repetition, until it becomes a habitual way of thinking, feeling and responding to a situation or stimulus. Our habitual responses, if persisted in long enough will, invariably, lead to organic change.

Though no therapy is ever the panacea for everything or everyone, I have found hypnotherapy to be the quickest and most effective way to reach the subconscious mind. Hypnosis itself is a state of consciousness that enables a person to bypass the critical factor and connect directly to the felt senses. As a therapy, it is a positive adjunct to all other forms and systems of healing.

Understandably, we attempt to eliminate those parts of ourselves that are not functioning for our highest good. However there is no way of escaping a part of ourselves that quite often started out as a necessary defence, or as a way of helping us through a difficult time. In hypnosis we go to the source of our troubles and, at a deep, *cellular* level, transform the remembrance of our past and its legacy through acceptance and understanding.

In age regression, a client can, from a higher perspective, observe how fixed, false and often self-limiting beliefs were instilled through early experiences and reinforced. It is possible in hypnosis, to clearly see how such beliefs were further compounded over time until they became conditioned responses or associations.

I believe that life is therapy, and that therapy should not become our lives. An effective therapist, in my view defines, with a client, clear goals at the outset of therapy by which the efficacy of the therapy can be measured.

Therapy of more than a limited duration distorts the therapeutic process by encouraging psychic dependence on the therapist, and can prove financially exploitative. In the case of an obese person, for instance, the reasons for the problem might be complex. The solution to the problem, however, is simple.

We are all here to learn. We discover the source of most of our problems by looking within ourselves. Our lives are, at any time, the outcome of all the choices we have made - consciously or unconsciously - to date. At best, therapy motivates and empowers us to be more respectful and loving parents to ourselves.

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