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FROM HORSE(WO)MAN TO CENTAUR

Healing the Split between Body, Mind and Soul Evolution in Identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

I would like to quote from a letter that I received a few months after a two-week intensive therapy programme with a woman whom I will call Barbara. One of my trainees in Germany had referred her to me.

"Every day I do my exercises on the wall (grounding and growing feet as a preparation of Reich's orgasm reflex). I even get up earlier for that purpose. After all kinds of helpful rituals such as stamping, massaging my feet, grounding in a free standing posture, I usually succeed, at least for a few minutes, to feel my feet and lower legs and to experience a grounded flow of

energy through my whole body. At the end I stand with my knees slightly bent, the muscles vibrate and I check through all my body and ask what organs and muscles would like to get relieved. I then send the negative energy down through my kidneys into the earth, pull earth energy up through my kidneys and send it to all those places in my body that badly need it.

...I now understand that I can only take it in small doses to perceive how numb my body is. It upsets me so easily. Soul and mind stand there full of action, the body wants to join in, all three get going, and then the body loses its mouth. It often can't speak and has forgotten to feel itself. It feels like a dry sponge. Its neediness shocks mind and soul and it costs them a lot of effort to stay with the body. Sometimes horror just paralyses them; sometimes they just run off.

I bought Mantak Chia's book and practice the microcosmic orbit and the building of a protective shield around me.

I am amazed how well these exercises serve me. The body joyfully sucks in the tiniest drop of attention and affection and expresses his gratitude through hours full of bliss. It feels as if the body acknowledges every drop of attention with ten liters of bliss. But every time before I can receive the gift of feeling I have to pass through the desert of numbness.

Today I had a strange experience. I awoke feeling grumpy. The body felt heavy like lead. I was supposed to get my menstruation, an event where I usually mutate into a snivelling sissy. There was not the slightest chance to get feet or arms while I was doing my exercise against the wall. How frustrating. I had been so proud about my successes so far. Full of despair I went into the bathroom, darkened everything down, lit a candle and put my feet into warm water. At least I got two warm feet scaffolds (before they had been ice cold) but no contact to the rest of the body. Although my upper and lower legs vibrated, I didn't have any feeling in my legs. Down there were two warm feet scaffolds, in between nothing and up there a completely desperate residue of a body. I cried so deeply, I felt so unhappy. And suddenly something astonishing happened. All three seemed to come together in this sadness, all three felt addressed. Suddenly all the channels were open, and I could feel a very sad and very anxious body.

This letter stands for many of the experiences that I have accompanied during the last four years. Most of the men and women I have worked with are part of a spiritual community in the North-East of Scotland, called the Findhorn Foundation. The Foundation is an educational centre that helps people to find deeper meaning in their lives. I have been a member of this Centre for four years, from 1987 - 91, basically developing the programmes and training workshop facilitators. In 1991 I started to work again as a Bioenergetic Analyst doing individual sessions. An important reason for this shift in my work was the observation that many of the spiritually highly evolved people actually were not in their bodies. As I started to work with them, it became clear that many had left their bodies in young age in an attempt to cope with sexual abuse.

I started to focus on this issue, and I have been working with hundreds of people during the last four years within the Community and a growing stream of people coming from all over the world. The Community provides conditions that allow me to move right into the depth of the core issues and to change the basic makeup of a person. Most community members have already done a lot of work in coping with the implications of their life traumas before they came to the Foundation. They are at a choice point that usually takes years in therapies to reach. They are highly motivated and able to work on themselves, and they have a support

network that the therapist usually needs to provide. These conditions enabled me to work with a broad spectrum of people and to explore and develop some principles and techniques of how to heal the split between body, mind and soul. I would like to share those with you. Some are part of the traditional repertoire of Bioenergetic Analysis, some go beyond.

2. THE SPLIT BETWEEN BODY, MIND AND SOUL

2.1 The Centaur

Before I talk about treatment, let's define the problem. To start with, let me remind us of the basic Bioenergetic model.

Healthy Humans are unified body mind entities, symbolically expressed in the figure of the Centaur. Healthy Humans act from the bottom of their heart, consider the rational demands of a situation, give emotionally appropriate responses, feel well and balanced. We can also say that such people are connected to the universe and grounded in their body, their sexuality and their relationship to the earth. Such people are self-actualising people (to use Maslows term), e.g. they find meaning in their life and fulfil their life's purpose.

2.2 The body mind split as a result of sexual abuse

Cultural and social conditions in our upbringing as children usually prevent us from developing this harmonious way of being. There are many factors that contribute to blocks or splits in our personalities that have been widely explored in Bioenergetic literature. I would like to focus on one theme that has been prevalent during the last years: sexual abuse.

I am not sure how familiar you are with the implications of it. To understand the treatment, it is important to be aware of a few key factors.

Abuse is an attack on our emotional and physical integrity, abandonment or even an assassination of the soul. Abuse can range from an energetically felt invasion into the physical and emotional space through physical touch, molestation and penetration up to torturous and sadistic mistreatment. In a few of my cases people were actually not the victims of abuse themselves but had picked up the abuse of one of their parents during World War II, or they had witnessed abuse happening to their siblings. The abusers range from parental figures to relatives to neighbours, peers or strangers. The victims are mostly women but I have also worked with a good proportion of men who have been victims of male physical penetration. It is important to be aware of this spectrum when people come for treatment with an abuse issue.

If somebody gets personally attacked, either continuously or during a traumatizing event, the soul copes through withdrawal, freezing or splitting. The body mind entity, the centaur, gets split into a horse(wo)man: the mind, and the horse: the body. The body becomes the object of shame, especially if it experienced pleasure during the abusive situation. The mind takes over as a base of identity often riding the body into the ground out of shame, guilt and punishment. The mind may not recognise this self-destructive behaviour especially if it is supported by culturally accepted patterns such as smoking, alcohol or medical drug abuse, workaholics and sex or relationship addiction in an attempt to avoid feeling pain and loneliness.

Life may become a desert as the body remembers the attacks - even if the mind doesn't - and shies away from human contact. One way to cope with this situation of loneliness is to develop the spiritual side, especially because in most incidents of sexual abuse the soul has left the body and is able to move into other realms of existence. Another reason is that often the infant organism energetically takes on the energetic pattern of the abuser, for example his body tensions, emotions and thought forms. In psychology we call this mechanism 'identification with the aggressor'. This psychological process has an energetic base. One of the symptoms may be an overwhelming sense of guilt that's out of proportion to the deeds that the person has done. In the work it often becomes clear that the 'victim' has taken on the guilt feelings of the abuser. Developing the spiritual side in this context is an attempt to redeem this guilt.

Another possible outcome is 'sex addiction' as a replay of the original situation. If we look at sexual abuse from an energetic point of view, we see that the infant organism gets over stimulated. The energy of sexual arousal that can be held by a fully developed adult organism overwhelms the organism of an infant or three year old child. As a result, it develops a fragile ego. This internal structure is called a 'borderline' structure in the psychoanalytic literature. The sensation of over stimulation gets stored in the memory of the infants/child's body. Because the experience has been very intense and highly exciting, the body will look for that pleasure again and will want to replay the over stimulation. In course of time, the body can get addicted to this way of discharge of excess energy. The mind as a moral entity usually does not approve of this type of behaviour, sentences the body for seeking pleasure and rejects or punishes the body. This may be truer for women than men, as men can more easily justify this behaviour as being successful with the other gender. But it's only a question of time until men experience similar kinds of frustration or pain at being used as a sex object if sex addiction is the coping mechanism.

3. PROCEDURES AND TECHNIQUES OF INTEGRATION

There are several steps that are important in clearing up this situation and to start healing the split. We'll have to mature body and ego functions and establish boundaries that got invaded during the abuse. Before the client lets us do that, we often have to prepare the body as a base of identity through purifying it from the stigma of the abuse. We need to separate the energy system of the victim from that of the abuser, and often we need to negotiate with the mind and the soul to accept the body in its own rights as a base of identity.

Let me start with what's probably familiar to you from the traditional tools in Bioenergetic Analysis

3.1 Maturing body functions and establishing boundaries

In cases of traumatic events, the infant development gets arrested at the developmental stage where the trauma occurred. Resulting deficiencies can affect the general energy level, the body functions or the psychological structure. An important part of the work is to rebuild what didn't develop properly. This re-education or post maturation process requires daily practice to increase the general energy level, to strengthen the body, learn self-assertion and boundaries in social interaction and rebuild and reframe thought forms and perceptions about reality. The aim is to empower people to find their own inner rhythm again, to take charge of their life and to create a satisfactory reality.

There is a broad range of techniques available to do this work, techniques for containment, early grounding, developing clear boundaries on a body level and in social contact, and techniques to build up and strengthen the core. I am not sure how familiar you are with those. I published material about it in a book called: 'Psychoanalyse und Bioenergetische Analyse' in 1983 (source: NIBA, Postfach 1422, 32588 Vlotho, Germany). The key elements got published in 'Energy and Character' under the title: 'Developmental Aspects in Bioenergetic Analysis' some eight years ago. For the purpose of this presentation, I would like to outline some basic principles.

3.1.1 Separation and individuation as a frame for infant development

Infant development, according to Margaret Mahlers' work about the 'Psychological Birth of the Human Infant' proceeds along two lines:

1. Separation as the emergence of the child out of the symbiotic bond
2. Individuation as the maturation of autonomous ego functions such as recognition, perception, memory or the ability to examine reality adequately.

This process takes place during the first three years and requires that the infant differentiates its body scheme from that of the mother, practices its ego and motor functions and establishes an object constancy and individuality. The first aspect focuses on social, the second one on biological processes. Both are interrelated and can be used for compensating frustrations in the other area. Maturation can be influenced by social conditions in two ways:

1. The deprivation of vital needs can slow down the development of specific body zones or lead to a chronic contraction of those zones (for example the joints in the schizoid Character or the shoulder girdle in the oral character or the long musculature in the rigid one)
2. Certain body functions can prematurely develop to compensate for social stress. One example would be premature standing as an attempt to overcome the separation from the mother or to escape an unpleasant symbiotic relationship with her. The premature standing competes with the need for locomotion and exploration of the environment, and can affect the ability to move freely in space or the coordination between legs, arms and head.

As I said, in case of traumas the infant development gets arrested at the developmental stage where the trauma occurred. The inhibition or retardation in the maturation of a body function impacts the maturation of the ego functions. To stay with the above example: Premature standing leads to an uncertainty in the legs that expresses itself in tensions in the ankles, stiffness of the knees as an attempt to keep the body erect and stiffness in the long muscles (depending on the developmental stage in which the traumatic events occurred). Consequently, the contact with the ground could not get adequately built up. Because bodily and psychic functions correspond with each other, it means the Self is 'standing' on insecure ground.

When we understand such maturation processes we can use this knowledge to help our clients to develop those impeded functions. We can provide a therapeutic environment that will encourage the client to take the space that has been invaded into his own possession. We can summarise this process into four steps:

1. In contact with the material objects (the wall) s/he can form her/his own body scheme. This means, s/he needs resistance in order to feel her/himself, a principle we also use in containment exercises. Mahler describes the bumping against objects in the practising sub phase as a necessity to strengthen the body boundaries that are necessary for step two.

2. In a second step s/he can use this experience in separating her/himself from the therapist as a home base as well as learning how to defend her/his own ego against her/him. There is a broad range of techniques of how to do that.

In contact with the therapists body the client can establish the early bonding with the mother. If the therapist allows the client to grasp for her/him with her/his feet and at the same time to push her/him away s/he can learn to explore the world and feel supported at the same time. The therapist can use the playing function of the legs (kicking) to establish the client's right to care for space around her/him, and to learn to regulate how close s/he allows others to come into her/his space. On a symbolic level such an act expresses 'no', a separation from the other person.

3. In acquiring the ability to crawl, the infant can then move towards the mother as well as away from her, i.e. the child can influence the distance that it will have with the mother and in this way learns to regulate the distance that it needs to protect its ego boundaries. Within the therapeutic process this means that the therapist lets the client explore and choose the distance that's appropriate for her/him in any given moment. Another option is to let the client push the therapist around the room with both sitting back to back. This allows the client to experience the permission to say 'no' within a playful contact.

4. Finally, the child can experience that it can rise from a safe ground (the mother as symbolic figure for earth) and stand at its full height. The ability to stand up straight signifies an important change in perspective from the horizontal to the vertical dimension that serves as a strong impulse for the maturation of the ego functions (exploration and understanding of the environment). The ability to move through space, to take possession of objects, and to examine the distance from the mother in an 'equal' position increases the ability to examine reality enormously. With this comes an enthusiasm for the body that helps the child to overcome short separations from the mother.

3.1.2 Space, time and movement as frame of building up a body identity

Separation and individuation take place within a time-space continuum. Both dimensions are so important for the therapeutic process that I will outline some aspects in these areas.

In experiencing reliability and continuity, time gets structured into the body as experience of rhythm, pulsation, tension and relaxation, being awake and tired, hungry and satisfied, in short as experience of vital functions. The experience of space requires boundaries that the child acquires in an ongoing process of differentiation, passing from a state of boundless symbiosis, through an intermediate stage of a neutral inward/outward space to a separation of the inner from the outer world.

Movement is the link between time and space. It includes space through direction, time through tempo. Movement lies at the bottom of the vital processes of life (pulsation, expansion - contraction, tension - relaxation). In reaching out, in exploring the environment by crawling and walking the child makes the environment its own and establishes in that way

its own inner space in a process of ongoing differentiation of the ego functions. In claiming their own space, their own territory, humans define their relationship to others.

Space has to do with three dimensions:

1. The capacity to experience one's body space: bones, muscles and skin
2. The ability to acknowledge and defend one's aura or electromagnetic field. In cases of abuse, this field has been invaded and needs to get re-established
3. The ability to socially interact, to regulate closeness and distance. The German word for this is 'tact', the same word that's used for rhythm.

Time has to do with the ability to oversee our own process, to place ourselves into a larger context, to work for rewards that lie in the future or to plan long-term projects. Such a long term project is, for example, the ability to stay in therapy or to follow through with home work. Abused clients often experienced deep frustrations, insecurities and threats around reliability, safety and continuity. In order to build up qualities of perseverance, stamina or trust in their own future, the therapist needs to create a safe, clear and reliable environment or setting.

If a body doesn't feel safe within the time-space continuum, mobility and motility will be affected. Symptoms may be a lack of coordination between arms, torso and legs in the temper tantrum or an inhibition to move freely in all directions.

The most effective way that I have come across to build up and integrate those functions is Reich's Orgasm reflex. The Orgasm reflex is a movement that's common to all the cultures I have studied. It is the basic movement in African or Indonesian Dance, the Spinal Cord Breathing in the Chinese Healing Tao, the basic position in T'ai chi. It is the movement of the Centaur, the unified expression of life in a free body, pulsating in the rhythm of inbreath and outbreath, expansion and contraction, love and fear, being with myself and being with others - a rhythm that embraces all aspects of our existence. The flow and balance between inward and outward movement, inner and outer reality determine the quality of our being. From that point of view, characters are nothing else but fixed postures of this movement. An important element that considerably speeds up the process of healing the split is to teach the body that natural pulsation again. It helps the body to breathe properly, to build up the inner core, to coordinate the functions and to reintegrate body and mind. I will introduce you to that movement in my workshop associated with this clinical presentation.

Learning and understanding this movement and anchoring it in their daily life are the daily practice and routine of my clients. It brings up feelings and memories that need to get worked through but it also helps them to stay grounded and centred so that they can integrate the feelings and build up inner strength. The challenge in working with sexually abused people is to get to the stage where they have the self-discipline to do the movement daily. Daily practice is a key factor for success. It provides the continuity to habituate the natural pulsation.

I may have to face a whole range of other problems before this can be done. One challenge may be that the client does all the exercises but nobody is at home. In many cases all three parts (body, mind and soul) have developed a separate identity as was the case with Barbara, the woman whose letter I read in the beginning. That makes the body work much less

effective or even impossible when the body work actually deepens the split. The challenge is how to integrate the parts, or at least make them willing to cooperate.

To meet this challenge, I have been developing techniques that reach beyond the traditional approach of Bioenergetic Analysis. They follow certain principles but you as the therapist need to adjust them to the circumstances of the client. I can only outline the principles here, point your awareness to the issues involved and leave it to your own exploration and practice of how to apply the principles to concrete cases. Let me say in general that you as the therapist should not use any techniques that you haven't explored profoundly and found yourself capable of doing.

3.2 Cooperation between Body, Mind and Soul

3.2.1 Negotiating among the parts

I will use Barbara as my case example because the work with her embraces the most important elements of this type of work.

Barbara, 39 years old, came to me for a two-week intensive therapy programme through one of my trainees in Germany. She was full of anger and hate towards her father who had sexually abused her during her puberty, and towards her depressive mother who hadn't protected her against the father. She had undergone a Client Centred therapy for five years with the aim of increasing her ability to engage in close relationships. The incest was not treated in that therapy. In a letter she wrote to me:

"At the moment, I am feeling miserable. I desperately search for my identity. And I want to come home into my body. Everyday I have to watch how the old Barbara disintegrates into many pieces. There is so much pain in me that I just get numb. Who am I?"

I met a very slim but well proportioned woman who looked like an 18 year old adolescent. She had been anorectic during her puberty trying to prevent the development of a female body. She told me that they (her mind, body and soul) had decided to trust me as the mind had failed to run Barbara's life in any satisfactory way. Her mind, her body and soul had developed a separate identity. Her soul had left the body, the mind was running the show, and the body was more vegetating than living.

I started to negotiate with all three of them in an attempt to create a new inner balance among these three parts and help them to integrate. I told the mind that had morally sentenced the body that the body functions according to the principles of pleasure and displeasure and can't be made responsible for the sexual abuse. We negotiated that the soul and heart would take over the mind's role and lead the "team", and that the mind would support the soul through its sharp perception in creating safe situations with others, especially men. We also agreed, that both: the mind and the soul would nurture the body and support its development. The soul agreed to return into the body and to fill it with life again after we had purified the body.

A successful negotiation is a key factor in establishing a commitment of the client to her/himself in doing the daily work that's necessary to heal the split, and in establishing a new balance among the parts that is a prerequisite to allow the body to mature.

It actually isn't as easy as it sounds. It's like a peacemaking process between hostile camps that takes some stamina and expertise in having the parts dialogue with each other. The therapist is the negotiator who understands the different perspectives and languages of the parts, acknowledges their gifts and contributions in coping with an impossible situation and serves as a mediator between them.

There are some elements in the process that can promote or hinder successful negotiations and cooperation between body, mind and soul. The most important ones have to do with the body.

3.2.2 Purifying the body and the energy system

The body carries the stigma of the abuse and is often made responsible for it especially if there was pleasure involved which, by the way, is the hardest part to look at and admit. The fragile ego feels often threatened with being overwhelmed by the neediness of the body or its striving for pleasure. The body therefore is seen as dirty, unreliable or hostile and needs to be punished or at least kept in chains, especially if anorexia or bulimia is involved as one of the coping mechanisms. Actually, all of the about 15 or 16 clients with eating disorders I have worked with had an oral abuse in early infancy in their background story. Oral abuse means that the baby was forced to suck the penis, and then got invaded and overwhelmed by the erection. In some cases the movement of the aroused penis and the sperm nearly suffocated the infant.

One part of the negotiations aims to absolve the body of all guilt. The first thing I do is to check if the body has taken on the energetic pattern of the abuser. I ask my client to go into the body of the abuser, if possible, and experience his muscular tensions, thoughts and feelings. This may sound impossible for you, and it may surprise you that nearly all of my clients are able to do that, often to their own surprise. It's not so surprising anymore if you remember that part of the survival tool kit is a highly developed sensitivity to the energy of the abuser, and weak body boundaries. Most of the people with a background of abuse oriented themselves through an intuitive knowing when they were in danger. They have been able to 'read' the moods and intentions of the adults, and we can use this ability in the therapeutic process.

I ask my clients to imagine a figure 8 and to move the two circles into a comfortable distance from each other. This procedure indicates to me if the inner differentiation has reached a point where the client can see the 'other' as an entity separate from her/him. If the two circles stay attached or even move into each other, the following procedure is not appropriate. The client needs to build up more of her/his inner structure before the following very powerful advanced techniques will benefit her/him.

If the clients can separate the two circles of the figure 8, I ask them to create clear boundaries around the circles and to place the abuser and themselves each into one of them. I ask them to give the whole pattern (body tensions, feelings, thoughts) a shape and to give that shape back to the circle of the abuser. If it works, they experience a substantial relief in themselves but also a loss of identity as the structure of the abuser has become an integral part of their own energy system. Taking out this structure is like a severe operation and leaves the client feeling physically exhausted and in need of a time of recovery after such a session.

The underlying principle of this work is that I can't take anything out of the energy structure of the person without replacing it. The substitute is a symbol of a pure good energy.

Depending on the situation, this symbol may come from an inner good figure (a parent or an inner guide) or the abuser himself.

In case of a malignant abuse I use the inner guide who takes over the protective function of the superego without the criticising aspect of it. It's a parental figure who loves the client unconditionally and supports him out of this spirit.

If the abuser has been the father, there is often a love connection between the father and the daughter. In these cases, the father crossed the boundaries out of love. The outcome of that type of abuse differs from the implications of sadistic torture. In these cases I ask the client to ask the father for a gift of the pure intention of the love he wasn't able to give out of his own human limitations. I ask the client to let this gift enter her body and to fill it. This is usually a deeply emotional moment as the client receives from the 'inner' (introjected) father the love she has striven for all her life. It frees her from the thought form that she has to pay with sex for the love she wants. I then ask her to give him a gift of her understanding as giving and taking needs to stay in balance. I explain to her that the old pattern still holds a lot of power, and that she needs to repeat the integration of the symbol into her body every day for the next weeks. In this way she makes sure that the new information gets strong enough to replace the old pattern.

I then check what's left in her own energy system as a result of the trauma, and usually choose a symbolic bath to purify the body from all guilt. Having done this, mind and soul are usually then willing to accept the body as an equal part in the negotiations.

3.2.3 Uniting body and soul

The next step is to ask the soul to return into the body. I do this in a symbolic way. I ask the soul to take on shape and to enter the body, and then I make sure that its energy is filling all parts of it. This can take considerable time because very often the whole body or parts of it have gone numb.

Barbara for example had several abdominal operations removing cysts and separating the womb and the intestines that had grown together. At 35, she had an ectopic pregnancy. The belly was a wounded area, and it took some time and effort to bring some vibration and sensation back into this part. The other problem was that she couldn't get any sense of her feet and lower legs. It took a few more months to connect the feet with the body.

The next step is agreements about how to nurture and rebuild the body. In case of eating disorders, this involves very concrete steps about how to deal with food. On an inner level, I use the "inner smile", a technique that stems from Mantak Chia's Healing Tao and aims at bringing relaxation, warmth and a strengthening energy into all parts of the body.

3.3 The use of symbols and body images as a tool in the therapeutic process

At different parts in the text I referred to the use of symbols and body images. From a developmental point of view, body images are an important bridge in building up a body identity. If the body gets severely invaded, people leave their body as a survival mechanism. One expression of it is an escape into fantasy, an escape into the world of the mind. Fantasy products are not related to the reality of the body while body images or body symbols capture

the essence of a bodily function or a bodily expression. Using them helps the person to get in touch with the body as a base of identity.

I use symbols and body images on the level of the body, the mind and the spirit.

1. On a body level, I ask the person to give shape to parts of the body to help them to get in touch with them. For many women it is difficult to bring energy into the pelvic area. They often picture the pelvis as a black cave. In such a case I ask them to take a (symbolic) torch and to start to explore this cave so that we can find the story that's hidden in the dark. I use (imaginative) pipes to help the energy move through blocked joints. I ask body pains and aches to take shape so that we can explore the gift of them and substitute the pains through a more mature expression of their meaning. Common examples are headaches. Their gift is often the permission to withdraw. I interpret the mechanism in a positive way and affirm the client's right to have space, or to choose their own timing for communication or sex. On the body level I show them techniques that strengthen their 'no' and give them an assertive, nurturing inner guide that supports the inner (psychic) structure in its right of self-assertion...

2. The inner guide or the round table of inner guides is a highly successful technique on the mental level to build up inner strength and a sense of identity that embraces body as well as ego functions in an integrated way. Inner guides replace the critical, judgmental 'superego'. They are a kind of inner parent that supports the client in an unconditionally loving way and teaches them how to love themselves. Those inner guides are linked to the core of positive human values that replace the confused programmes and values that our culture passes on to us.

3. In the beginning of the session I ask the client to let her/his higher self take shape. The higher self is a bridge between the soul and the mind, an expression of the true self or the core of each person. Working with the higher self of the client encourages her/him to take responsibility for his/her own healing process. Our own inner core has the information of how we may best proceed in healing the split between body, mind and soul. In asking the higher self to take shape I express my willingness as a therapist to explore together with the client his/her own unique way of healing and to offer my knowledge and expertise as a service to his core. In cooperation with the higher self I receive the necessary information about how to guide the therapeutic process, or how to apply the basic principles that I have outlined above.

3.4 Making peace with one's life story

The building up of this integrated identity may take several years depending on the severity of the distortions. We need to have certain strength before we can really look at our life story and release and integrate the feelings, pains and limitations that we had to face as a result of it. If we go deep enough and work long enough, we reach a point that I call a 'choice point'.

Barbara had reached such a point in her life when she came to see me. I told her that she could choose to keep attached to her parents through anger and hate, or use the energy that was bound in these feelings to strengthen her own inner core and build up her boundaries and her own life. I helped her to see clearly the damage that had happened to her life through these events but also to see that her inner goodness, beauty and light and not her "badness" had drawn these events to her. She understood that she had the choice to stay miserable or to turn

those weaknesses and deficiencies into inner strength, using her experience to help others to cope with similar situations. She chose the latter.

So we went onto a journey together into the memory bank of her body to see clearly the situation as it was and understand the predicament and role of each participant in that event. The child interprets the happenings according to its mental capacities and emotional dependency of the time of the events. As adults, especially after some years of therapy, we become more able to accept our limitations as human beings. In as much as we develop understanding and compassion for our own limitations can we accept that parents are not perfect, either, especially if the abuse happened out of love and not sadism. At that point we can make peace with our life story and use the intensity or our feelings to build up our own life. Barbara chose that step into freedom, and saw herself in an inner image as a round, full woman. After some struggle she was able to let that image fill her body.

When she left after two weeks, she felt that the abuse was healed but she was also aware that it would take many more months to rebuild the structure on all levels. She had agreed to do the work, and has worked since then many hours daily. Her letter gives testimony to the work that still needs to be done. What's important though is that she has all her energy available to do the restructuring work, and when I visited her therapist for supervision, she felt alive, had explored a new relationship and made new friends.

4. CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

Let me finish with some cultural implications. The people I have been working with during the last four years come from many cultures, and I can often see how their life story is interwoven with a long chain of the same family history and cultural patterns. In changing their own life programmes they interrupt that chain of abusive or oppressive behaviour and can start a chain of mutual respect, joy and fulfilment in their interactions with friends, life partners and children. I personally believe that we in the West have the economic conditions and freedom to change victim situations with all their implications, into psychological strength. This is a privilege that includes the soul obligation to make our own lives so fulfilled that we can share our riches out of abundance with those who are in need. I hope that my presentation contributes to this goal.