



Book Review

## Holistic Counselling: Through the Shadow to Compassion

Patricia Sherwood (2012). Bunbury, Australia: Sophia Publications.

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by Steve Edwards

This is not a conventional counseling book detailing ICD or DSM diagnostic schemas and cognitive behavioural therapeutic techniques. Instead, it clearly articulates its own original and descriptive, conceptual and diagnostic, expressive and therapeutic language. For example, light figure resources and/or archetypes such as Buddha, Christ, St Teresa or Mandela may be chosen by a client for use in vibrant energetic therapeutic sequences to transform pathologies existing in past life and/or cellular memories in the form of imprints, implants and discarnates (having no material body or form). Although such terms may be new for many conventional counselors, they may find them more descriptive, valuable, relevant and universally applicable than any others they have encountered to date.

The author, Dr Sherwood, is a well-known Australian academic who was one of the founders of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*. In addition to supervising doctoral students at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, Trish, as she is affectionately known, is also Director of Sophia College, supervising over 20 free community counselling services run by students and graduates of Sophia College's holistic counselling programmes in various regions in Australia and internationally. She has hosted many South African academics, professionals and students over the past fifteen years as well as having visited South Africa on National Research Foundation International Science and other Grants hosted by Zululand and Rhodes Universities in 2004, 2007 and 2012.

This second book on holistic counselling, a more in-depth sequel to *Holistic Counselling: A New Vision for Mental Health* (Sherwood, 2007a), is a culminating point in Dr Sherwood's training and counselling practice over the past twenty years. She is also the author of such literary gems as *The Buddha in the Street* (2003), *The Healing Art of Clay Therapy* (2004), *Search for your Self: Pathways to Personal Growth* (2010), *Infertility to Fertility: the Journey of the Psyche* (2007b), *Emotional Literacy: The Heart of the Classroom* (2008) and *Clay Therapy Healing Rwandan Genocide* (2012). These books are typically based on over 20 000 personal or supervised student client cases that Dr Sherwood's has worked with as Sophia College Director or in her own busy clinical practice as a Mental Health accredited Social Worker specializing in trauma and abuse recovery, anxiety disorders and stress management.

In simple terms, the shadow is our other side. It has appeared in various guises, forms, states and stages throughout documented history. For example, as demons from Hades for Homer and Virgil, as a devil that tempted Buddha and Jesus Christ, as Dante's Inferno, and as Freud's destructive sexual and aggressive drives, culminating in human violence, appropriately recognized as basic cause of all illness. The shadow is called by its proper name by Jung, Wilber and other authors. Moreover, it has many other names, such as evil, sorcery and witchcraft, all of which are manifestations of intentionality, a core notion of Buddhism, which is deeply understood by Dr Sherwood and forms one of the underlying frameworks for this book.

In Hindu philosophy, the distinction is made between guru and pandit, or counselor and teacher, and this distinction may be invoked to describe the relatively distinct approaches of Carl Jung and Ken Wilber with regard to the phenomenology and function of the shadow. Encouraged by her ongoing research, teaching and community counselling commitments, Sherwood's text manages to combine many of the oceans and streams, wetness and water molecules of the theoretical and practical approaches of both the guru and the pandit, which makes this book unique indeed. Hopefully, this brief review will provide some taste of this for the reader.

Sherwood (2012, p. 178-179) quoted Jung as follows: "Unfortunately there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual conscious life the blacker and denser it is." Another Jungian (cited in Sherwood, 2012, p. 178-179) quote follows: "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole-ego-personality, for no-one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge."

Wilber's (2000) integral approach involves the integration of what have been described as typically illusory human dualisms, ranging from ego-shadow through self-other and life-death, body-mind and ego-shadow polarities. For Wilber (2000), shadow work thus typically involves "the dark night of the soul" (p. 209) as the self sheds old unwanted painful coils, transcending and including older more limiting structures on the way to a new stage in an ongoing whole making, developmental and evolutionary process. This implies the evolution of consciousness from a confused, shallower, lower, relatively undifferentiated intra-psychic self as well as the involution of higher or deeper levels of consciousness from a pre-existing, greater, spiritual self.

Sherwood's text brings further integral praxis. While the shadow is viewed as representing all that we are unaware of, or dislike about our worst self, its polar opposite and antidote, compassion, is an ideal quality of our greatest self. All holistic and/or integral psychotherapists must struggle to enlighten and transform those shadowy, dark reflected realms in their personal and transpersonal consciousness as well as in the consciousness of their clients. Sherwood's (2012) book provides in-depth insight into this perennial, healing journey from darkness to light, illness to health, fractured states and stages of consciousness to wholeness, health, integrity and compassion, that great "redeemer of the shadow in ourselves and others" (p. 2).

Although similar in structure, this second, holistic counseling text has deeper, broader, individual and community, perennial and universal counselling implications than its predecessor. It comprises a compendium of approaches, methods, techniques and sequences to identify, assess and heal shadow states of pride, jealousy, revenge, hatred, injustice, cruelty and greed, as respectively associated with the regions of the brain, eyes, lungs, heart, kidneys, reproductive and eliminatory organs for which antidotes of humility, empathy, forgiveness, love, justice, creativity and generosity are required. These regions correspond with those of chakra and other energetic healing systems.

Sherwood (2012) described her counselling model as holistic because, among other reasons, it incorporates the inextricable connection between body and mind which was recognized by the Buddha some 2500 years ago with special reference to the role of breath as primary mediator and, as noted by Sherwood, the primary determinant of how we store our experience. Consequently, as was the case in its predecessor (Sherwood, 2007a), breath plays a fundamental role throughout this second holistic counselling text, both with regard to its underlying philosophy as well as its detailed therapeutic intervention sequences.

The first introductory chapter titled "Transforming the Shadow to Compassion" provides an overview of the essential theme of compassion, of phenomenology as the main approach, of Rudolf Steiner's model, which provides the main theoretical underpinning, and of Sherwood's unique form of holistic counselling as the main method. Sherwood (2012) described phenomenology as the "ideal methodology for the exploration of shadow experiences because it is particularly suited for researching the meeting between senses (material world) and soul (the immaterial human experience). It is in this place of the marriage between bodily sensing and soul life, that the holistic model has been developed to uncover human inner experience (p. 12).

Steiner's anthroposophical model of a human being integrates spirit into the body-mind model of the somatic psychotherapies. Nine-fold spirit-soul-body conceptual perspectives and fourfold physical, etheric, astral, "I am/I AM" energetic perspectives are distinguished. For example, the rhythmic, vibrating, dynamics of the etheric and astral create patterns which eventually leave imprints in the physical body, which becomes a map for inner experience, and although memory of such imprints may become fainter, the imprints themselves seem to vibrate as strongly as they did when they first occurred. Thus, in addition to breath, Sherwood (2012) has found that "consciousness can better access the imprints when equipped with non-verbal modes of expression which

include sensing, gesturing, visualizing moving and sounding” (p. 18).

As a document, the book adopts a similar format to the first holistic counselling text. Each chapter begins with an illustration and an accompanying vignette that sets the scene for the rest of the chapter and grounds the detailed therapeutic counselling techniques that follow. Illustrations are typically classical. For example, the illustration for Chapter 1 is Bellini’s sculpture of the rape of Persephone by Hades. The accompanying vignette tells the classical story of Persephone’s abduction to the underworld and her rescue by her mother, Demeter, and Adonis, representative of universal love. Other chapter illustrations include Demeter, Joan of Arc, Isis, Midas, Christ, Adam and Eve with Cane and Able, and the rising phoenix to represent such shadow states as pride, jealousy, revenge, hatred, injustice, cruelty and greed.

In addition to illustrations that introduce chapters, there are other colored illustrations of energetic shadow imprints, implants and discarnates, accompanied by detailed descriptions of intervention sequences for specific shadow states. Non-verbal languages of breathing, sensing, gesturing, visualizing and sounding are used to facilitate the expression and transformation of shadow experiences. For example, a general, typical sequence involves sensing the imprinted shadow, then drawing or sculpting the exact shape of the breath constriction associated with the particular shadow state. This facilitates full experiencing, insight into, release of, and/or liberation from the original organic tensile felt sense and negative energetic vibrations of the shadow state, as well as its full integration into the self and consequent flourishing health and wellbeing.

This is simply one example of a therapeutic sequence, in which the book abounds. Some forty expressive, gestalt therapeutic techniques are identified throughout the book to deal with different manifestations of shadow states. These include finding the perpetrator through gesture, self-forgiveness, past life review, dialogue between shadow and its antidote, calling back missing soul parts and returning other soul parts to the light, curse dissolution, identifying the double, dissolving deals to dark beings occupying the client’s “I” position, realigning the heart with the light, releasing nature spirits, elementals and devas and protecting light workers.

As in the first holistic counselling book, artistic mediums valuable for differential trauma manifestations to physical, etheric, astral, contracted and expanded “I”s, such as architecture, sculpture,

painting, music and poetry, are combined with the therapeutic effects of different colours, working with clay, drama, dance and various other physical activities. The essential expressive process involves a dramatic enter-exit-behold (EEB) sequence. When ready, clients are encouraged to step into the imagined traumatic space, re-experience the breath constriction, gestures and sounds associated with the most recent traumatic experience, step back, describe and gesture the breath block and sound associated with the trauma, then gain perspective on the experience through drawings, movements such as ‘shake it off’, and verbal descriptions of qualities lost in order to replace these with new healing energetic patterns, experiences, qualities, resources, skills, competencies, stories and relationships over time.

A similar sequence is enacted for each successive past traumatic experience until the original imprint, implant or discarnate is removed. Therapeutic creativity is dependent on careful listening, observation and empathic intuiting of the client descriptions of their problems and the solutions needed. A special advantage of the model is its immediate propensity for non-verbal expression as well as pre-testing and post-testing with drawings and or sculptures to leave clear audit trails and an empirical evidence base for future counselling and research.

The holistic model and therapeutic sequences especially require great empathy and clinical skill in client management for clients with severe disorders, in order to provide alternative resources for clients, both psychotic and non-psychotic, who experience encounters with discarnates, or spiritual entities not experienced as part of the psyche. For example, in the case of a psychotic episode this may mean practice in strengthening with alternative resources, before assisting the client to give up maladaptive delusions or hallucinations. If the client has not yet had a psychotic episode, the discarnate, hallucination and/or delusion, typically unconscious or experienced as a foreign part of the self, may be reintegrated into consciousness. This may require even greater care and skill.

Outstanding in its applicability for counselling theory and practice, the text is also written in beautiful, metaphorical language, as for example, the following descriptions of bitterness on the one hand and compassion on the other demonstrate: “When feeling dominates in a person, they are most likely to go to despair and desperation. When the willing attribute dominates in an individual, they are most likely to go to bitterness and revenge. Bitterness is the child of the marriage of despair and hatred who wears the clothes of revenge” (p. 33) ... “Until we have grasped the scientific and spiritual realities of interconnectedness,

the foundation of the building of compassion cannot be laid” (p. 242).

The book has shining integrity in keeping with its holistic approach and philosophy. Aspects of the shadow that appear in some of the client experiences, and typically surface in depth psychotherapy, that could have been more explicitly covered are those generally suppressed, shadowy, opposite gender experiences that Jung refers to as the anima in men and animus in women. These aspects, typically revealed in manly gentleness and womanly assertiveness, if suppressed by a client’s social conventional world, are very valuable general resources to be encouraged in psychotherapy. Although these aspects are relatively neglected, this text is outstanding in its “return to the light” resource sequences, which called to mind the beautiful saying by Marianne Williamson (1992, p. 190) as famously quoted by Nelson Mandela:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

As was its predecessor, this is a resource book for the future. A review such as this can only sketch some aspects of the work. In itself, the book requests and deserves repeated reading and recommendation. Although complete as a living work of art and social

science that stands on its own foundations, the book is also a work in progress. This book was written as an essential resource for student counselors, thus other criticisms of the present text that need to be stated are that there are still too many minor linguistic and referencing errors as well as no detailed index at the back of the book. Although the 40 sequences mentioned are helpful, when further editions of the book appear, the author and editors should include a full cross-referencing index for student usage and general reader friendliness.

Finally, it seems fitting to allow Dr Sherwood (2012) to speak for herself, again in her own inimitable style in summarizing the core theme of this excellent book:

Intentionality is the creator of shadow states and by implication the focal point that can best unravel these states. By dissolving intentions that sustain greed, hatred, cruelty, pride, injustice and revenge in whatever myriad of forms that have been created, the energetic space of this contaminated will energy, bound by unskillful thinking without feeling is cleared. In this new cleared space, the heart can breathe again and compassion can be reborn ... (p. 246).

The book concludes with an apposite quote from Thich Nhat Hanh (cited in Sherwood, 2012, p. 248):

We are here to awaken from our illusion of separateness.

Other valuable information, books and resources may be accessed through the Sophia College website:

[Sophia.college@bigpond.com](mailto:Sophia.college@bigpond.com)

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