

REFLECTIONS ON PSYCHOTHERAPY, FOCUSING, AND MEDITATION

John Welwood
San Francisco, California

As Eastern psychologies and meditative practices take root in the West, questions about the relationship between psychotherapy and meditation have increasing importance for psychotherapists, educators, their clients and students, and others.

FOCUSING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

In my work as a therapist, and in recent years as an instructor in an approach to personal change called "focusing" (Gendlin, 1978), the similarities and differences between meditation and psychotherapy have emerged with increasing clarity. The following discussion, based on the relationship between focusing and meditation, may also have implications for many other therapeutic approaches as well. Focusing is a sequence of basic steps which allow a person's sense of a problematic situation to change—quite concretely, and often rather strikingly. It developed out of research at the University of Chicago into the **critical factors accounting for change in psychotherapy**. One body of research suggested that successful therapy could be predicted from rating short tape segments of clients' first two therapy sessions (Walker, Rablen, & Rogers, 1959; Tomlinson & Hart, 1962; Gendlin *et al.*, 1968). An **Experiencing Scale** (Klein, Mathieu, Gendlin & Kiesler, 1970) was developed to measure how successful clients talk about and work with their own experience. While successful clients generally scored higher on the Experiencing Scale at the beginning and end of therapy, unsuccessful clients scored low at the beginning of therapy and did not significantly improve on the scale during the course of therapy. This research thus indicated that the psychotherapy did not help clients who did not already show evidence of this "experiencing" ability.

*the
importance
of
"experiencing"
ability*

The crucial quality that the Experiencing Scale measures is a way of attending to what is unclear in one's felt experience, gently questioning it, and allowing oneself to sense its meaning, as one holds it in one's body. In the research mentioned above, it was neither the therapists' orientation or techniques, nor the clients' particular psychodynamics, but rather this special way certain clients related to their own experiencing that was the crucial factor in effective therapy. Gendlin developed the focusing steps to teach clients explicitly how to engage in this core process of change.

the
'felt sense'

The core of focusing is paying attention to an as yet unclear *felt sense* underlying all one's thoughts, emotions, and familiar feelings about a particular problem. Such a felt sense is a way of holding and "knowing" many aspects of a situation all at once—subverbally, holistically, intuitively. It is concretely *felt*—in the body, as a *sense*—not yet cognitively clear and distinct.

For instance, to illustrate from a case example, underneath a certain client's anger, which is accompanied by a familiar round of thoughts and emotional responses, is a wider sense of all that his anger means to him, as he feels it in the present. He feels this wider sense in his body, though it is at first quite fuzzy. As he "feels out" where his anger "gets to him" right now, in what way it "hooks him," it begins to open up, no longer holding him in such a tight grip. At the same time, many new pieces of information unfold from it (Welwood, 1978, 1979a, 1981). As the anger releases its hold and he discovers himself in a new way, he may also be able to find new courses of action that are more in alignment with his being as a whole.

locating
the
felt sense
in the
body

Focusing begins with locating a felt sense in the body. For instance, I ask him, "Where in your body do you feel this anger?" "It's sitting in my gut," he now says. I then ask him to feel out the quality of this bodily sensation, and he responds: "It's weighing me down, eating me out from the inside." The next step is for him to let his attention rest on this felt sense, which, though felt concretely, is still cognitively unclear. This resting with the unknown, waiting, and letting something emerge from it is one of the most important and difficult phases in focusing, which often takes patience and practice.

As he sits with his anger in this way, he is going underneath the familiar feelings and thoughts associated with anger to contact its *fresh* quality in *this* situation. He spends some time sighing and shifting around in his chair, but he is beginning to get in touch with a new edge of the anger—where it gets him right

now: “It’s *so* frustrating living with her.” Pause. “And disappointing . . . she let me down really bad this time.” Another pregnant pause. “I’ve invested so much in her . . . for so many years I’ve wanted so badly to really communicate with her.” There is a vitality to his words and tone of voice that tells me he is moving further into new territory here. “But you know, it’s not really her I’m angry at . . . I’m angry and disappointed in myself. That’s what’s got me right now.” Another sigh, and a deep breath. I give him plenty of space to let that sink in, to let him feel out the ramifications of this new edge of the felt sense. “Things used to be so good between us, and now we don’t even listen to each other.” His voice is shaky, alerting me that he is still exploring new ground. His next words really crack it open: “And you know, I’m just now realizing I haven’t let her know how much I care about her in a long time. That’s what’s so heavy in my gut—I’ve sat on my love for the past six months. No wonder she is giving me such a hard time.” A really deep breath this time, his head is nodding, and he sits up straight. He is no longer hunched over the feeling in his stomach, which has now unfolded some of its many meanings and released its hold. He actually smiles at this point, and talks about how much he really does care for her.

In finding the crux of his anger, the client has experienced a *felt shift*. Instead of “getting into” the anger, he has in effect dived underneath it to feel out where it had him hooked. In so doing, he no longer identifies with the anger but with a wider body/mind awareness which has a perspective on the anger. And by feeling out his anger in this way, he also discovers the (felt) meaning of the anger—in this case, how it expressed his blocked caring. Later in this session we focus further on what is blocking his love and what he can do about that. Having released the contraction of anger in his stomach, he leaves not only with a fresh sense of his aliveness and how he has tied himself in knots, but also with a new resolve to relate to his wife in a different way than before.

This is a common kind of unfolding that can result from using focusing in psychotherapy. **Bringing the clear light of one’s receptive, questioning attention to a bodily, subverbal felt sense often leads to a felt shift and turns up surprising information that allows one to move forward in new ways.** Gendlin (1964) argues that this is the essential element necessary for change in psychotherapy, often referred to as “working through.” Focusing does not center so much on a problem itself, but rather on *how the problem is held*. And though focusing is effective for solving problems—for it brings to light new information previously overlooked—it can also provide a

*a
felt
shift*

*how
the
problem
is held*

glimpse of how we live in a wider way that is radically free from entanglement in problems. Insofar as it can release a person from preoccupation with personal problems, focusing can also serve as a bridge to meditation.

FOCUSING AND MEDITATION: SIMILARITIES

When I first discovered it in the mid-sixties, focusing initially seemed to me the closest Western process to what writers such as D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts were describing in their books on Zen. The diffuse feeling of a felt sense seemed akin to what Zen referred to as “emptiness,” while a felt shift seemed reminiscent of the famous “satori.” In those days, before I actually started meditating, I used to speculate that psychotherapy might be a Western equivalent of meditation and other Eastern disciplines. Today I see psychotherapy and meditation more as stages in a developmental progression.

*mindfulness
meditation*

But before going further, I should mention that I am specifically referring to mindfulness meditation here, which is quite different from other practices also commonly included under the generic term “meditation.” To describe this practice in the briefest terms, the meditator directs his attention to his breath while simply noticing whatever thoughts and feelings may arise, without getting caught up in them. This kind of meditation is practice at being with ourselves completely. As we observe our thoughts, which graphically portray what is driving us, we get a very intimate sense of the areas of our life where we are afraid, fixated, or grasping too tightly. At the same time, by releasing our attention from these concerns and coming back to the breath, we may also glimpse how we are already free from their grip. Thus mindfulness is a practice of letting go, dropping our problem-centered focus and returning to simply being here. How this is different from simply “spacing out”—avoiding problems by pretending they do not matter—will become clearer as we look at certain patterns focusing and mindfulness have in common.

*the
“light
touch”*

First of all, in both focusing and meditation it is essential to develop a “light touch”—directly experiencing an obstacle or problem without trying to struggle with it, push it away, or get all caught up in it. The difference between them in this regard is that focusing puts more emphasis on the “touch,” while meditation emphasizes more the “lightness,” and letting be.

Secondly, both are ways of coming to terms with the unknown in our lives, out of which new knowledge and new ways of

being may arise. Neither practice requires any ideology or belief system, but they encourage a person instead to look freshly at his experience. Both are simple ways of contacting something deeper than our familiar thought and feeling patterns.

Focusing and mindfulness thus encourage skepticism toward habitual thoughts and emotions. They can help us let go of our usual ways of talking at ourselves, and face instead our actual experience, before we wrap it up in attitudes, beliefs, and storylines. The emphasis is on an experiential process as it unfolds, rather than on the particular contents that arise (Welwood, 1981). This encourages an awareness of how we are always “larger” than any particular problems and disturbances we may have.

*skepticism
toward
habitual
thoughts
and
emotions*

Both are formal practices of self-inquiry which may at first seem difficult or contrived, but which can nonetheless put us in touch with a natural momentum of growth and change that seems to be available whenever we remove the obstacles to it. Such a formal practice may be necessary for breaking through resistances to feeling present experience more fully.

Focusing and mindfulness also cultivate attention, and are grounded in respecting the body. In focusing one may ask “Where in my body do I connect with this situation?” and then place one’s attention on that part of the body, while waiting receptively for words or images to emerge from the felt sense.

*cultivating
attention*

Mindfulness of body in meditation is somewhat different. As we sit, a subtle sense of bodily processes goes on—breath, temperature, itches, irritations, posture. The posture of sitting is itself a *mudra* expressing our connection with the earth at this point in time and space, which allows us to slow down and develop a deeper receptivity to what is happening. As Chögyam Trungpa (1976) describes this grounded openness:

It is an openness which has a base, a foundation. A quality of expansive awareness develops through mindfulness of body, a sense of being settled and therefore being able to afford to open out . . . (p. 24).

Rinzai Zen has a word—*kufu* (in Japanese; *kung-fu* in Chinese)—for the process of placing a koan to be solved in one’s abdomen or *hara* and waiting for the solution to arise from there. As D. T. Suzuki (1959) describes it: “It is not just thinking with the head. but the state when the whole body is involved in and applied to the solving of a problem” (p. 104n).

Stated thus, *kufu* does not sound so very different from focusing, which also asks questions of a bodily sense. But, as we shall see later, because the orientation of meditation is not releasing personal problems, but rather the breaking-through of basic ego structures, the results are quite different.

*personal
obstacles
as
inspiration*

Another element common to focusing and mindfulness is the discovery that personal obstacles can provide inspiration to proceed further on a journey of self-knowledge. For instance, fear and resistance to focusing on a problem can themselves become the object of focusing. And in meditation, obstacles such as distracting noises, wandering thoughts, and the desire to run away can all be used to wake us up and remind us that we have drifted off elsewhere, so that we can return to the practice of being here again. Learning how to feel these obstacles without becoming caught up in them is also quite important.

*a
core
of
strength
and sanity*

And finally, both focusing and meditation can help us appreciate how we each possess a core of strength and sanity underneath all our problems and unwholesome patterns. I have yet to work with a client's negative emotions, using focusing, that did not finally yield or at least point to more positive, wholesome feelings underneath them, which expressed a more basic openness and sensitivity to life. In meditation, the practice of *being with* parts of ourselves we would rather not look at softens us while also giving us confidence and helping us realize that nothing inside us is as bad as our avoidance or rejection of it. Thus perhaps focusing can provide a somewhat more accessible way for some people to learn certain inner attitudes essential to change that are also central to the more rigorous path of meditation.

FOCUSING AND MEDITATION: DIFFERENCES

But though focusing can serve as a bridge to meditation, it is also important to point out the essential differences between these two approaches.

Expanding Identity and Letting-go of Identity

Psychotherapy in general and focusing in particular are oriented toward expanding a person's sense of who he is, by healing the inner split between a part of him he defines as "I" and a part of him he treats as "other," "it" (see Welwood & Wilber, 1979). The general goal of therapy is to help a person

integrate those parts of himself he treats as alien—what Freud described by saying, “where there was id (it), there shall ego (I) be.” In this way a person comes to value and take fuller responsibility for his own experiencing.

Focusing in particular helps a person expand his sense of himself, first of all by connecting his knowing, judging part with his subverbal felt experience, thereby fostering a creative inner dialogue; and secondly, by helping him discover his basic aliveness, where he is free from the hold of his problems (Welwood, 1979b). Clients learn to trust themselves more fully as they begin to discover an underlying intelligence in their negative or confused feelings.

*expanding
the
sense of
self*

By contrast, instead of expanding the “I,” meditation inquires into who this “I” is. Mindfulness practice often results in the discovery that there is in fact no solid, stable, or even detectable “I” behind one’s thought and feeling process. Even the detached witnessing of thoughts is just another mental perspective, rather than any particular identity (literally, “sameness”). Thus meditation leads a person through questioning the nature of his “I” to discover that: 1) it is not necessary to always try to maintain a consistent I-perspective or identity; and 2) this attempt is a continual source of existential anxiety.

*letting-go
of
the sense
of self*

If psychotherapy deals with the debilitating “neurosis” and tension arising from the split between an inner “I” and “other,” meditation allows us to go a step further and see through the “normal neurosis” of holding ourselves separate from life as a whole and judging everything egocentrically, in terms of how it affirms or negates this “I” (Washburn & Stark, 1979). Meditation points to a larger, perhaps more complete sanity beyond simply developing a strong functional ego in the therapeutic sense. This larger sanity, health, wholeness would include both giving up the tight identification with “I-ness,” along with its grasping and defensive postures, and discovering beyond ego a more expansive being that can never be completely “identified.” As one meditation student described her practice: “I’m not putting a value on my identity, who I am, what I do. I’m letting these things go in order to feel what I really am at that moment” (quoted in Amodeo, 1980).

Clarifying Personal Experience and Serving Others

Psychotherapy and focusing are primarily oriented toward clarifying one’s own experience. Though focusing may help a person discover how his inner states are also ways of being-

a
wider
way of
perceiving
the world

in-the-world, mindfulness goes one step beyond this. Meditation works more specifically on our barriers to letting the world into us more completely. Out of the clear and precise seeing of mindfulness training, which cuts through our tendency to perceive the world through personal biases, a wider way of perceiving the world may develop, technically known as *vipassana*. Vipassana is a more panoramic way of including the surrounding environment as an essential part of our awareness, which helps us orient our actions more toward the needs of the whole situations we are part of than toward how those situations refer back to "I." In the words of one meditation student: "Focusing without meditation . . . was all very "me-oriented"—seeing the world in relation to me. Meditation is more like looking at the whole picture" (quoted in Amodeo, 1980). Developing this wider perception of the world and our intimate interrelatedness with it is the basis for compassionate action and service, which is perhaps the ultimate orientation of meditation and spiritual practice in general.

Articulation and Nonarticulation

unfolding
and
articulating
unconscious
meanings

The therapeutic process involves unfolding and articulating unconscious meanings implicit in a client's feelings and behaviors. Focusing in particular begins with a relatively nonarticulate felt sense, which contains a certain "aboutness" in it that is not as yet clear. Phenomenologists call this aboutness "intentionality," pointing out that our states of consciousness and feeling are consciousness-of, feeling-about, directed toward specific situations. A client's symptoms are a mystery to him when he does not yet know their "aboutness." For example, the client mentioned earlier suffered ostensibly from digestive difficulties, but as he focused on the anger he held in his stomach, he was able to unfold its aboutness—his self-thwarted caring. His fresh discovery and articulation of this aboutness through focusing changed the way his body/mind held this situation, and released him from its stuckness.

While these changes are therapeutically significant, nonetheless when a person experiences a felt shift, he often fails to recognize or fully appreciate the larger aliveness he comes in contact with at that moment. His tendency is to use the new energy arising at this point to further articulate his situation. Perhaps this is connected with the general tendency in modern industrial society to ignore, fear, and fail to appreciate what is inherently formless and nonutilitarian.

Meditation provides us with a way of opening further into this formless energy of our aliveness, without trying to do anything

with it or use it for any personal ends. In continually undermining attachment to all perspectives, including a detached or disidentified perspective, mindfulness helps us simply rest in our aliveness and appreciate it as the basically open, free, and “empty” core of our nature. Welcoming this “most lucid awareness of the nonarticulated at the back of every individual thing” (Izutsu, 1977, p. 127) may have a peculiar transforming effect on a person’s life. And continually opening to this potentially “fertile void” (Van Dusen, 1979)—which is not a consciousness-of anything particular—as the ground of our life may effect deeper transformations than any specific therapy.

*awareness
of
the non-
articulated*

Seeking Release and Letting Be

Whether the emphasis in focusing is on problem-solving or on contacting one’s wider aliveness, the orientation is usually one of seeking release from personal entanglements. The orientation of mindfulness practice, on the other hand, is not finding release but rather *letting be*. This practice of letting be—allowing thoughts and feelings to arise while continually coming back to one’s sense of aliveness through the breath—is also a practice of letting oneself be vulnerable and open to whatever comes along. Although focusing can also put us in touch with this vulnerability, meditation teaches us how to *rest* in that vulnerability. As one meditation student expressed this: “In meditation I am being soft to whatever thought or feeling comes—accepting it rather than trying to label it and either box it away from myself or hold it to me. I feel smoother, much more patient, much less defended” (quoted in Amodeo, 1980). Yet the experience of this basic vulnerability may stir up more anxiety than we would have if we settled for simply finding release from personal problems. At such points of heightened anxiety, it is essential that the meditator face this turbulence straightforwardly and mindfully, without having to make it “feel good.” By not needing to find release from his problems, but instead letting them be in this way, he may find that they provide him with further inspiration to keep practicing, to stretch, and to transform his very nature.

*‘resting’
in
vulnerability*

CONCLUSION

Yet even with demarcating these similarities and differences, the relationship between therapy and meditation still remains a complex issue. One way to approach it is developmentally. The basic developmental task that therapy addresses is developing a stable sense of self and then expanding that to include as many aspects of one’s experiencing as possible, so that one

does not treat any corner of oneself as an alien "it." A person might seek out therapy feeling, "I am in pain, and I want to get rid of it." Through a process such as focusing, he might come to a different perspective: "I am in pain—what can I learn from it?" Still further along, moments of real depth in one's life—whether in therapy, focusing, or daily life—may lead one to feel one's "I-ness" itself as a limitation, to glimpse a deeper way of living, and to awaken to the larger possibility of **self-transcendence**. Here one's attitude may change to: "I am in pain, and it is keeping me from relating more fully to the world and to others." Through meditation one may contact deeper and subtler levels of pain, and in its early stages meditation may still have therapeutic overtones of seeking release from this pain. In the later stages of meditation, however, a person might realize something like: "I am in pain, yet it reminds me how I am open, vulnerable, and, most important, fully alive."

**meditation
practice
and the
therapist**

Another way to consider the relationship between meditation and psychotherapy would be to explore how meditation practice might affect a therapist's approach with his clients. My own practice of mindfulness meditation has had an enormous influence on how I work with clients. Having sat through the subtle, complex twists and turns of my own neurotic patterns of mind, **I find few of my clients' problems alien, shocking, or unfamiliar**. The more I can discriminate between where I am genuine and where I am deceiving myself, the more I can help clients find their way between these two aspects in themselves as well. And the more I can be with my own fear, the more confidently I find that I can approach my clients' problems as well, which I suspect helps them work with themselves more confidently as well. Meditation has also helped remind me not to treat their problems as "solid," nor to try to "fix" them. It has made me realize that the essential core of healing is how we can *be* with ourselves rather than anything we can *do* to change or improve ourselves.

*variations
on a
theme*

Further, meditation practice has allowed me to discover how my clients' problems are usually variations on a single basic theme: that we humans ultimately have a hard time relating to our own energy because we feel defensive about our own basic openness. Many clients say to me, in effect: "I am in pain. What can I do to hurt less?" Before learning to meditate, I often absorbed my clients' pain. But now, instead of either taking on their pain or trying to help them get rid of it, my approach is to help them appreciate their basic vulnerability. For it is this open source at the root of our being which allows us to take the world into ourselves in the first place, thus giving rise to all our pain. It is to avoid this sensitivity in ourselves

that we contract, pulling back from the intensity and power of our own experience. Exploring monsters from the past and difficulties of the present seems to point clients back to the more basic task of loving their openness, allowing themselves to be vulnerable, letting their sensitivity manifest itself more straightforwardly, and thereby becoming stronger, more confident, and more generous with themselves and others.

How I work with this basic issue with clients has been a direct result of my study and practice of meditation. Perhaps a brief case example will help illustrate this. A forty-year-old client, Bill, was tormented by low self-esteem and fear of dealing with the world, with a specific symptom of recurrent migraine headaches. I was most immediately touched and impressed by his sensitivity and vulnerability, which he treated as unacceptable weaknesses. He had spent more than three years previously in therapy, mostly primal therapy and gestalt, acting out and digging into his feelings of oppression by a punishing, critical father. Although we could have delved further into these old feelings, my strongest sense was that he was using these old problems as a distraction from facing his own vulnerability. *Feeling quite warm and positive toward the vulnerable part of him, I chose to tackle his relationship to it head-on.*

*a
case
study*

In the session which marked a turning-point in our work together, he focused on his inability to let himself feel good, getting an image of a poisonous flying saucer-like cloud hovering over his head, which threatened to descend on him. This was connected with the foggy feeling in his head which preceded his migraines. As he continued to focus on this image of the poisonous cloud, he had some powerful realizations: "I need that cloud though, I'd hate to see it go. I'd be too vulnerable without it . . . I'm going to be hurt if I open up and have a good time."

But then he hit a snag: "I hope the time today is up, because I don't want to have to deal with that. That scares me to death. It's such a big issue that I want to go to the bathroom and get out of here real quick. It feels real scary to even talk about. OOh!" But we had come so close to his getting to the heart of this whole issue that I did not want to let him leave on this note, even though the hour was up. So I encouraged him to stay with it for a while longer, asking him what he was afraid would happen if he stayed with his fear a little longer. At this point, he turned an important corner, with surprising results:

- C: The same thing that would happen if I open up to Jeanne [the woman he lived with]. If I tell you this, I'm not going to be able

to bullshit anymore. I'm going to have to act on this. It's like I can enjoy this therapy much more if I keep a few secrets so that I won't have to do anything when I leave here. If I tell you everything, I'm in big trouble. There's a part of me that doesn't want to let this be seen because I might have to take responsibility . . . And I'll be all alone too. There won't be any help around when I start to do it on my own.

T: You won't have any excuses if you get rid of "them" [the critical voices in the cloud].

C: But if I get rid of them, I'll get rid of you too. I wouldn't need to come here anymore. I'd really be alone.

*befriending
vulnerability*

As he thus recognized that protecting his vulnerability was also a way of escaping responsibility and his own basic aloneness, I felt that we had hit bedrock, and that he would not need to keep coming to see me much longer. And indeed he decided to terminate several weeks later, which seemed a positive step, because after many previous years of therapy, I felt he was ready to take on the world on his own. And though I do not always do this by any means, I suggested meditation to him as a way of further appreciating and befriending his vulnerability and aloneness. Eventually he not only tried meditating, but his interest in the world began to pick up; he started taking classes in film and comedy and seemed to be learning how to enjoy life at last, without apology.

*on
teaching
clients to
meditate*

Working with Bill—from the choice to zero in on his vulnerability rather than centering on the content of his problems, to my relief when he finally acknowledged his aloneness, my willingness to terminate after only a short time of working together, and my suggestion that he might find meditation beneficial—vividly brought home to me how my meditation experience has influenced the attitudes and directions I bring to working with clients.

People often ask me whether I teach clients to meditate. I generally do not try to mix these two approaches, partly because my clients do not come to me for meditation, and in most cases do not seem ready for it. Since mindfulness is the most powerful method I know for dissolving the rigidity of ego, introducing it as a purely therapeutic technique would be to risk treating it as a "mental health gimmick," as Harvey Cox (1977) warns against doing. And, as the British psychotherapist Robin Skynner (1976) points out, "the more powerful a technique is, the more dangerous it can be in preventing real change if it is misused" (p. 231). There is also the real possibility that mind-

fulness practice could even reinforce in some clients an unhealthy distance from their felt experience. As a therapist, I am not in a position to monitor or follow up clients' meditation practice, which is a more appropriate task for a meditation teacher. And I find focusing a more effective therapeutic tool for helping a client find the right distance from his felt problems, where he can both stay in touch with them and explore them without becoming overwhelmed by them.

Furthermore, introducing mindfulness into therapy as a practice for transcending ego presents additional difficulties. It is not so hard to help people see beyond their egos—this can happen at many moments of crisis or altered perception. But helping a person live beyond ego in a genuine or lasting way takes an enormous commitment on the part of both a teacher and a student. This kind of commitment seems inappropriate for the therapy relationship, which is usually limited by professional and monetary constraints. A teacher in one of the meditative traditions, moreover, has typically undergone lengthy, intense training and discipline, and has been allowed to teach by one of his teachers, who has carefully tested his realization. Yet few therapists have had such training or testing. Finally, the therapist may run the danger of either confusing the two roles or becoming inflated by a spiritual role that assumes a level of responsibility and authority he may not genuinely possess.

*seeing
beyond
ego and
living
beyond
ego*

Primarily for these reasons, I prefer to maintain a distinction between psychotherapy and meditation in my work with clients, seeing them as contiguous, occasionally overlapping paths that apply to different aspects of our lives. Psychotherapy can certainly serve as a stepping-stone to deeper meditative practices, and meditation may also prove beneficial for those who have come to therapy. (Preliminary pilot research indicates that meditation helps people to focus and that focusing can be useful for people learning to meditate [Weiss, 1978; Amodeo, 1980].) However, it is important not to confuse these two approaches, as Skinner points out:

*a
distinction
between
psychotherapy
and
meditation*

If these two endeavors are in fact quite distinct, then forms of psychotherapy that confuse them could be much more harmful to the possibility of spiritual development than those that do not recognize the existence of the [spiritual] traditions at all. . . . I think the danger lies in a confusion of the different levels that one can feel. One believes that one is following the same sort of path and having the same sort of experiences as one does when following a religious discipline. But this just isn't so (p. 219, 230).

In conclusion, psychotherapy and meditation are valuable, but in different ways. Blurring the essential distinctions between them may lead to mistaking self-integration for self-transcendence. And confusing them could both weaken the effectiveness of therapy to genuinely release problems—by trying to make it achieve something more than it is designed for—and dilute the power of meditation, distorting the reality it can reveal, thereby diminishing its unique potential to open our eyes to a radically fresh vision of who we are and what we are capable of.

REFERENCES

- AMODEO, J. Complementary effects of focusing and meditation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, 1980.
- COX, H. *Turning East: The promise and perils of the new Orientalism*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977.
- GENDLIN, E. T. A theory of personality change. In P. Worchel & D. Byrne (Eds.), *Personality change*. New York: Wiley, 1964.
- GENDLIN, E. T. *Focusing*. New York: Everest House, 1978.
- GENDLIN, E. T., BEEBE, J., CASSENS, J., KLEIN, M., & OBERLANDER, M. Focusing ability in psychotherapy, personality, and creativity. In J. Schlien (Ed.), *Research in psychotherapy*, Vol. III. Washington: Amer. Psychol. Assoc. 1968.
- IZUTSU, T. *Toward a philosophy of Zen Buddhism*. Teheran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977.
- KLEIN, M., MATHIEU, P., GENDLIN, E. T., & KIESLER, D. *The experiencing scale: A research and training manual*. Wisconsin Psychiatric Institute, Univers. of Wisconsin, 1970.
- SKYNNER, R. The relationship of psychotherapy to sacred tradition. In J. Needleman & D. Lewis (Eds.), *On the way to self-knowledge*. New York: Knopf, 1976.
- SUZUKI, D. T. *Zen and Japanese culture*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959.
- TOMLINSON, T. & HART, J. A validation of the process scale. *J. Consulting Psych.*, 1962, 26, 74-78.
- TRUNGPA, C. *Garuda IV: The foundations of mindfulness*. Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1976.
- VAN DUSEN, W. Wu-Wei, no mind, and the fertile void in psychotherapy. In J. Welwood (Ed.), *The meeting of the ways: Explorations in East/West psychology*. New York: Schocken, 1979.
- WALKER, A., RABLEN, R. & ROGERS, C. R. Development of a scale to measure process change in psychotherapy. *J. Clin. Psychol.*, 1959, 16, 79-85.

- WASHBURN, M. & STARK, M. Ego, egocentricity, and self-transcendence: A Western interpretation of Eastern teaching. In J. Welwood (Ed.), *The meeting of the ways: Explorations in East/West psychology*. New York: Schocken, 1979.
- WEISS, J. The effects of meditation on experiential focusing. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 1978.
- WELWOOD, J. The holographic paradigm and the structure of experience. *ReVision*, 1978, 1(3/4), 92-96.
- WELWOOD, J. Self-knowledge as the basis for an integrative psychology. *J. Transpersonal Psychol.*, 1979a, 11, 23-40.
- WELWOOD, J. Befriending emotion: Self-knowledge and transformation. *J. Transpersonal Psychol.*, 1979b, 11, 141-60.
- WELWOOD, J. The unfolding of experience: Psychotherapy and beyond. *J. Humanistic Psychol.*, 1981, in press.
- WELWOOD, J. & WILBER, K. On ego strength and egolessness. In J. Welwood (Ed.), *The meeting of the ways: Explorations in East/West psychology*. New York: Schocken, 1979.

Communications with the author and requests for reprints may be sent to 1767 11th Avenue, San Francisco, California 94122.