

# BIOENERGETIC ANALYSIS

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BIOENERGETIC ANALYSIS AND  
MY VOYAGE TO SELF-DISCOVERY:  
RECOVERING MY MENSCH OR  
WHERE OH WHERE IS SANCHO PANZA?

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*This song is for my grandfather Samuel:*

*Zila Bila Babushka  
vos se le me detchka  
zo ma la pa bahitsa  
oh le yuna retchka  
va ka vila ohmaya  
iz ya la na chala  
ev u detna modraya  
ne chi-iz na chala*

*My journey has led me to be able to sing this song for you. It was sung for me by my mother's father, my grandfather Samuel on the day I became 13 years old, the day that is, that I became Bar Mitzvah. When I allow his song -- my song to move through me, I am at my best as a Bioenergetic therapist. The rest of my talk fills in the details.*

This talk this morning is about my journey to find a self, my courage to stand by what I believe. I have had three careers or personas on this journey; in all three I have been a wounded traveler. In the first I was a wounded patient; then I became a wounded healer; in the third, which to tell the truth was the first and will be the last, I am a wounded person. **The interweaving of these three careers or personas tells the story of my search for wholeness. It also tells you a lot about my belief and practice of Bioenergetic Analysis.**

Recently I spoke with a younger colleague about what combination of narcissism, courage and madness propel a person to volunteer to

stand before you, as I do today. My colleague said she could never do it, for if she were less than perfect the shame and pain she would suffer would be awful. I do not know why I am here, because I struggle with very similar feelings. I am probably here for the same reason that I did some mountain climbing as a young man: I have a terror of heights and of falling, and the high, when one has had the courage to face for 50 minutes one's fear of humiliation (of death) is almost worth it.

The conference theme is an interesting one in this respect. As I understand it, the road we travel is the road we travel. No one in this room, my colleague included, has traveled a more legitimate road than anyone else. So, I believe I practice Bioenergetic Analysis in order to help myself and my patients to be able to do the equivalent of standing up before you -- feeling that I can be wounded by your disapproval, and still finding the courage to offer my own truth, my own story -- even if it were not the exact theme of the conference. Of course the failing of a story of a personal journey is that it does not tell you directly what to do -- it teaches by analogy, by modeling, by reflection. But if the reflection comes from close enough to my core, it may contain more truth than a straightforward lesson.

I would like to share some of my understanding of my life as a patient, a therapist and as a person. I have learned the most, by far, about what it is to be a person from my wife. From my children I have learned that it is okay to be afraid of the dark, the thunder and the lightning. The sweet permission to be real! It is this meaning of the Yiddish word -- mensch -- to be a human being -- to which I refer in the title of my talk, "recovering my mensch." While "mensch" also refers to a really fine, even noble human being, I was thinking more of a down-to-earth-all-too-human-being like Sancho Panza, the squire of Don Quixote. I believe that Sancho Panza, like me, is afraid of the dark, and I took comfort in having him with me in the title of my talk.

Singing Samuel's song is about coming home to myself. This is where every voyage to self-discovery must end. I have always longed for a safe harbor -- a place in the world where I would belong, feel good enough, not be ashamed of myself -- and yet somehow, I have not been willing to fit neatly into any actual harbor. The problem is that the inner mix of who I am does not blend easily. I am a Jew who married a German Lutheran. I am also left-handed. We are, by the way, we lefties, the best people. I am Bob Lewis. But I am also Bob Levitas.

Levitas is the name I was born with. It identifies me clearly as from the tribe of the Levites. When I was a boy, my father changed our name from Levitas to Lewis. It was a family facelift, as though someone had airbrushed a blemish out of our history. But we also lost our roots. Lewis is a comfortable name in the U.S. One moves easily with it in the larger society, but it has no crunch, no ethnic odor or taste to it. In English we call it a white bread name. I have traveled with a mixture of deep shame and fierce pride on my journey, and so it is with Bob Levitas the Jew and Bob Lewis the white bread. I am also both a psychiatrist and faculty member of the very mainstream Mount Sinai Medical School and, additionally, the practitioner of a form of therapy which must be practiced behind thick walls so that it does not frighten the society in which I live.

For many years it was simpler for me. I left the medical school faculty, and read only Reich's and Lowen's books. I believed they had all the answers. This was tremendously comforting, but also isolating. I believed that everyone who did not put Bioenergetics first, was afraid of it, or otherwise in error. We knew best. Slowly this changed for me. A pediatrician friend, for instance, could disagree with Reich or Lowen's statements about young children, and still be a person of worth to me. Recently I have returned to the medical school where I trained for 4 years to be a psychiatrist. I do not directly present my Bioenergetic work at the conferences, partly for the same reason that I have not changed my name back to Levitas -- I am a coward. Or to put it more kindly, I am not looking for too many fights at this point in my life. It is easier to remain Bob Lewis and it is easier not to have to wade through the misunderstanding, fear and politics of my non-Bioenergetic colleagues. It is certainly easier not to have to deal with my own doubts, lack of certainty, and lack of faith that psychosomatic unity and duality, as delineated by Reich, is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God!

Before I go further, I have a secret to tell you about doing Bioenergetic therapy. I have learned to ask for help! I go to meetings at Mount Sinai (where some of my colleagues do actually know that I practice Bioenergetics) to learn some of the many things I still have to learn about being a competent therapist. In the past I had concentrated on Bioenergetics for so long and so exclusively; I now found that I wanted to broaden my skills. I think one of the unrealistic burdens I

have carried, after having been in therapy with the men who founded Bioenergetics, was the belief that Bioenergetic Analysis was such a powerful form of therapy that I should be able to help just about anyone with it. For many years now I have not had a Bioenergetic peer group in New York, so it is at Mt. Sinai that I am just now learning that I can ask for help. When a patient is too difficult for me, for any number of reasons, I will call upon a colleague for supervision/consultation who is highly skilled, for instance, in an area that I am not. It feels wonderful to be able to say "this is too much for me to be able to handle alone."

Over the 28 years I've been practicing Bioenergetic Analysis, I have become increasingly comfortable with it. But we (Bioenergetics and I) have a complex relationship (in some ways like me and Bob Levitas). Just when I have stopped looking over my shoulder to see if I am being watched, society seems to be peering over my shoulder more than ever. The therapist who rents the extra office from me doesn't know what I do (I spent thousands of dollars to soundproof my secret psychosomatic sounds) because there are many more non-Bioenergetic therapists like him whom I can rent to who will not get me in trouble with the co-op board, because no one screams loudly in their office.

What is more mainstream, to be Bob Levitas the Jew, or Bob Lewis, the Bioenergetic therapist? Certainly no one will deny me liability insurance or refuse to defend me because I am Jewish, but the insurance company may refuse if they hear that I touch my patient's bodies during therapy. So I carry enough toxic shame from my early years to be uncomfortable about where I fit in, where I belong in the larger society as a Bioenergetic therapist. I am a little ashamed that I am not stronger than this, but I also feel that it is human both to be afraid of the dark and to be affected by society's judgements. I believe many of you share with me a lack of serenity about where you truly belong in the scheme of things, but I also believe that most of you are much clearer than I about what your name is!

Al Lowen's retirement marks the coming to an end of an era. This is a poignant time for me, as I imagine it is for many of you. For about forty years Al has stood at the head of the Bioenergetic community -- a community, a family, which helped me heal from a very frozen and broken place to a place where the life flowed back through my remaining wounds. Those of you who have experienced me as a

therapist know that I kind of bumble along, often less than admirably, but more often than not, very present. The life flowing through my wounds is what permits me to be present, to make contact.

So, although, I don't fit in neatly, I still do belong! My "white bread" name does not embrace my Jewishness, but I am still Jewish. I do not know what the words to my grandfather's song mean, but the song dwells comfortably within me, at some Russian place in my soul.

I am deeply grateful to Al and to Bioenergetics for giving me a place to mend my brokenness, so that I could have a life and continue on my journey with more wholeness. On that journey I have taken from my Bioenergetic family and I have given back. I have both adored Al and felt disappointed by him. I have fought with Al and I believe I have disappointed him. Not a very neat fit, but I am still here. When my first therapist, Bill Walling, suddenly died while I was still in treatment with him, it was Al who phoned to tell me. He knew how shattered I would be, and he was strong and warm and tender with me, as I trembled close to my core on the other end of the phone. I will never forget that he did this for me, and how beautifully he did it. Having said this, I do forget when I am pained and angry that Al cannot be, for all the times and all the seasons of my life, the perfect and wonderful father that he was for me when I lost Bill Walling.

So my Bioenergetic family gave me a faith and hope which I desperately needed. It still brings tears to my eyes when I see a family of any faith, sitting around a table, breaking their bread, saying a prayer to their God. I do not know what my family of origin had faith in. My mother practiced Yoga in the late 1940's and 1950's. She had all of us -- my father, sister, and me, standing on our heads -- Yoga fashion (an interesting metaphor and a literal description of my childhood) -- until my father came to his senses and left us for good. Years later, I became interested in the abnormal use of the head. I called it cephalic shock.

A 45-50 minute talk can only be about the highlights of a life journey, so let me go back to Bob as a 14-year-old adolescent, when in the midst of a wonderful, passionately intense summer, I suddenly burst into anguished racking sobs in front of a warm, caring male counselor and several of my peers. Although I sensed that my grief was triggered by the warmth and sensitivity of the male counselor, I was completely bewildered by the intensity of this disavowed feeling and terribly humiliated to be so out of control in front of my peers. Within minutes

I was able to swallow down and choke back the feelings, tighten my jaw and neck muscles, and suppress my breathing. Although I think I did cry at my grandfather's funeral several years later, this first adolescent cry for help was not heard again for 20 years, when my therapist, Bill, died. I remember that adolescent summer as one of the most exciting times of my then young life, and perhaps you can feel with me now the tremendous energy that I was using all the time to keep my deep pain under control. When you are 14 years old, you are close to the peak of your biological vitality. I had enough vitality to carry on for another 10 years feeling fairly good about myself and about life, but the chronic, unconscious muscle spasm in my throat was cutting me off from my past, my deeper feelings, and with them, my truer self. But without your true self life is not worth that much.

After about ten years, my batteries ran down. I had tried to sustain myself with the illusion that if I studied hard and became a psychiatrist somehow I would get the warmth and love I needed. But I could not fool my true self which was buried in my body; it was not getting enough oxygen or daylight. Without oxygen the fire burns down and things get darker. My energy was low, as was my feeling of worth. Following a bad case of influenza, I had an intractable sore throat. The strangled cry for help had surfaced, and the conflict burned and raged in my throat. So I went into Bioenergetic therapy with Bill Walling. I was too frightened of my feelings to cry until seven years later, while I was still in therapy with him, Bill died. But the path of healing had to involve my body directly. I seem never to have had a choice about this, since my needs and conflicts expressed themselves so physically. Many years later I understood that I had no words or concepts for the burning in my throat. It was my life impulse strangled in the tissues of my throat.

Bill Walling saved me, probably colluded with me, betrayed me, and freed me in his last act. Finally he taught me, in his dying, not to confuse outer frame and reputation with inner worth. Although wounded himself, he had meant the world to me and taken me so far. But he was not a star. His name was not known wide and far, like Jung or Perls or Rogers. At the time I swore never to forget that the heart was a truer guide to what was most precious in life. I do forget sometimes, but I want to honor his memory by telling you that he brought me through the valley of the shadow of my death.

I found my commitment to Bioenergetic Analysis during the therapy with Bill, as I slowly, and with deep gratitude, noticed that I was feeling more hope than despair. I came to know that my life was going to be all right. I found my calling. I would do for others what Bill had done for me. There were also things that happened with Bill that I regretted, that I learned from, and yet that at times I may have done to my own patients

I use the word collusion to describe the way Bill and I avoided silence over the years. We talked and did body work. I remember half a dozen times when the talking and activity somehow stopped or threatened to stop, and the instant terror I felt about falling into the abyss of silence. Years later I recognized both Reich's "core contraction" and Winnicott's "unthinkable anxieties": falling forever, falling to pieces, as waiting for me in this abyss. I know I was much too terrified to bring the silence up to Bill, and he may also have been afraid. I don't know if he realized what was going on for me. If he did, he may have told himself that I was not ready to face the silence. This may have been the case, but we never tried a walk into the quiet darkness to look for the pieces of my true or private self. I'll come back to this, but first a word about betrayal.

Bill and his wife attended my wedding. This felt natural since he had been mom and dad to me. But then he and his wife befriended my father and his second wife. I felt Bill had been seduced by my father's money, and felt something had gone terribly wrong. When I found the courage to confront Bill, I did not feel him able to acknowledge how unfair his actions felt to me. I have never gone to any of my patient's weddings, but I know some patients have felt that I betrayed their trust in me. When that happens, I try, as Virginia Wink suggests, to acknowledge that I may have made a mistake and say, "I'm sorry I hurt you." If I feel as defensive as Bill did about my father, I do not do a very good job of it.

When Bill died my love and grief for the man, and all the wonderful things he had done for me, were admixed with a sense of having been given my freedom. Bill had had polio, and walked with a brace which supported a withered leg. I felt like a son who had been unable to make him whole. He had promised, perhaps too explicitly, to never let anything harm me and I, in turn, felt deeply that Bill needed whatever manhood and vitality I had grown into during my years with him. In

sum, I owed him my life, and do not know how I ever would have left therapy and had a life with my own legs under me while he was still alive.

At Bill's death I made note of one other fact that profoundly affected my professional focus as a Bioenergetic therapist. After years of therapy, my grief for Bill was admixed with too much shock -- the shock of an abandoned infant who cannot survive and conserves what energy it has by freezing down close to the core. I felt deeply that it was this abandoned infant in me that had been so terrified of the silence, and that terror was still so big a part of me. I developed an abiding interest in early terrors for which there are no words.

I began my second therapy several years later with Al Lowen. We worked for about two years. Something interesting had happened to the energy and life -- the truer self, if you will -- that had terrified me as it threatened to break through into the cold, the silence, the lack of form and intent, during my first therapy. This time, with Al, my deeper self had a voice of its own. I could sense it within Bob the cooperative client who leaned back over the stool and forward in the grounding position. But the voice was still not clear enough and/or I was still too terrified to let Al know. Over the stool, this secret self wished that I could just lie there in my oral collapse and not do anything, just luxuriate in my apnea, slow down and face the part of me that was most dead in my chest, and maybe even come to life a bit as a result. But I "breathed" on top of this half dead, low energy, despicable part of me, convinced that Al had no patience for such lack of energy.

In the grounding position, the dynamic shifted slightly, but I still managed to feel left out and not seen. From the waist down, my body had a higher charge and energy than the upper body with which I was more identified. So for some minutes, as I stayed in the grounding position, Al sat seemingly fascinated perhaps, I thought, even enraptured with the energy and vibrations that emanated from my pelvis and legs. The mostly dead child in my chest, who has never been enough, felt deeply envious of my strong lower body which did not have to do anything more than release its tension and energy to hold the attention of my therapist. So this child (or secret self) in me, that was apparently so deeply ashamed of how broken and scarcely alive I felt, this child thought it saw a gleam in Al's eye as he sat in silence with a sexual, vibrating part of me of which I felt deeply jealous. Needless to

say, this was a replay of the way I had experienced my mother's interest in my sexuality. Unfortunately, none of this came up explicitly in my therapy with Al. It was some time after I stopped seeing him that the voice of my secret broken self became loud and clear enough for me to consciously grasp and then tell its story out loud.

The story of my sessions with Al illustrates what is for me a fundamental principle about Bioenergetic therapy. Let me refer to Wilhelm Reich's dialectic diagram (see Figure 1) to make it even more graphic. My experience in close to ten years of therapy with the three

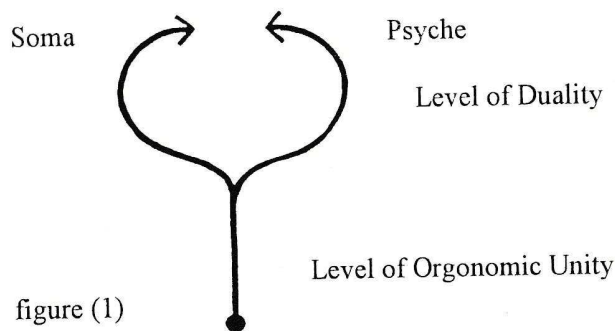


figure (1)

founders of the Bioenergetic Institute was that my psyche never stopped watching the interaction between my therapist and my body. My process, in other words, never reached the deep organismic level where dichotomy ceases, and there is only core, unitary pulsation. My conscious understanding of Bioenergetics, during my sessions with Al, was that he was guiding me toward this deep energetic place. I now believe that the body work had unconscious significance to my hidden psyche. Different parts of my body, with their corresponding pieces of psyche, were in envious competition for the attention of my therapist.

The principles here are:

- (A) Reich's dialectic diagram gives the outline of an incredibly rich field of interaction between psyche and soma. Both the therapist and the patient have a psyche and a soma, and each of these four entities interacts with each other in one room. **The diagram says it all: Unless you are at the level of organismic unity there is psychic significance, unconscious and/or conscious, to every somatic event.**

- (B) Very few of us spend much time at the posited place of organismic unity (as Reich said, the equation is a simultaneous unity and dichotomy).
- (C) Our best chance of approaching this experience of oneness is to include our internal experience, our hidden self in the process. In my case, had I been able to come out of the closet with my envy, deep energy release would have brought me to a point of deeper unity.
- (D) We need to model for our patients being in touch with our shame, envy, and excitement. We also need to be as curious about **their hidden relationship to us** as we are about their hidden energy and body feeling.
- (E) On a paradoxical note, I work often with patients on issues for which they have no words or concepts and not much psychic activity, on the road toward losing their minds and finding peace of mind. I am not certain where in Reich's dialectic such work belongs, but I believe the psyche of such a patient has just about stopped watching what I am doing. We call this basic trust. (I don't think I was ever trusting enough to really let my therapists do the driving.)

But let me tell you why I believe it is so good for one's organismic unity to tell your therapist what is really going on for you during the session. I apologize to those of you who heard this story at the Whistler Conference of 1989, but it bears repeating. As I have told you, with Bill Walling and Al Lowen I had not had the self-possession/courage to bring important pieces of myself into the room. I had two strikes against me, as we say in baseball. I took my last swing in my third therapy with John Pierrakos, and I hit a home run. As many of you know, John was particularly interested in energy and chakras, but I was determined not to lose myself in his therapeutic belief and system. So while he was pounding on one of my chakras (the chest, I believe), I said, "I don't know if you are interested in what's going on for me, but while you are working with my chakra I'm thinking, "What a stupid shit you are, and that I would like to tear your head off!" My heart was

pounding much louder than he had been pounding my chakra. He stopped and seemed genuinely interested in what I had said, even though it had interrupted his work. I cannot convey the intensity of joy and aliveness, the inner light of integrity which came over me as I left that session, and which stayed with me for several weeks. The energy that was released when I dared to be seen, and was seen, was magnificent -- like daring to dance freely as an adolescent or singing my song. I am deeply grateful to John Pierrakos for staying with me while I did what I needed to do.

I want to say a little more about how I dealt with my rage as a patient and my understanding of this issue as a Bioenergetic therapist. The vignette about my session with John Pierrakos is a feel good story. But let's look at how I misused or failed to use Bioenergetic therapy to better serve me. During the ten years, until my home run with John Pierrakos, **I never expressed and felt anger or negativity directly at my therapist.** The truth is, I expressed my anger/rage at my wife Barbara when she interrupted me, or otherwise momentarily shattered my illusion that she and I were in symbiotic harmony. The worst of this, aside from Barbara having to live with it, was that my outbursts did not disturb me because, after all, I was in Bioenergetic therapy in which I smashed the bed regularly and had my check stubs to prove it.

Occasionally John Pierrakos would directly encourage my expressing negatively at him. But such expression was of no value to me unless it came spontaneously; it was most valuable if I saw my therapist tolerating the negativity even though it made him uncomfortable. While hitting the bed with a tennis racket or my fists may have helped me to better deal with my rage, it really did not serve me that well over the years. In part, this is because, like many of you, I have no serious anger at pillows or mattresses. But, you correctly point out, my rage is really at my family of origin, not at my therapists. While this is true, I now believe, although I do not always manage to practice what I preach, that it is often **crucial** to my Bioenergetic patient's integration of their destructiveness, that they express it in my face (as we say) and that I am able to tolerate it. All this is much easier, of course, when my patients are not almost totally experiencing me as, for instance, just like their father, and if their hatred is not delivered in a completely justified and blaming fashion. But then, I just admitted that, as a patient I really wanted to see if my therapist could handle my firepower. Furthermore,

whether or not I can blame it back on the patient as projective identification, I very often have been behaving more like that patient's father than I want to admit.

These questions of where and how and to whom aggression should be expressed in Bioenergetic therapy, are for me part of a more general Bioenergetic dilemma created by the richness of two psyches and two somas alive and interacting in one room. For the first five (I hope it wasn't more) years that I was a Bioenergetic therapist, I had many of my patients take off most of their clothes, kick or hit the bed, use the Bioenergetic stool and, of course, ground themselves. I often did the grounding along with them. In addition to the real benefits my patients and I got from the Bioenergetic work, my hidden agenda was to keep us all busy. Additionally, I kept myself so preoccupied mentally with what mix of character structures my patients were, that I was pretty much able to avoid being too frightened by their live presence in the room with me. You could say that the same problem I had as a person, and a patient, was now haunting me as a Bioenergetic therapist. I now had the Bioenergetic therapeutic armamentarium to misuse in order to avoid the depth of my contact with myself and my patients.

Slowly, as I faced enough terror of falling apart and falling forever, my head relaxed enough so that it moved as I breathed. It had become, if not one with, at least part of the rest of my body. I no longer needed to get out of my head, because instead of just thinking, I could use my eyes and ears to sense my patients and grasp what was right in front of my nose. Even before I had fully grasped the concept of cephalic shock, I learned to trust that my hands were smarter than my brains. Often, at the end of a session the patient walked out, and moments later I realized what I had missed, as my hand went to my brow like this (demonstrate). My hand was trying to treat the shock in my head; the shock which had prevented me from seeing and smelling the patient's problem which had been right in my face. Also, having learned how smart hands were, my brain was smart enough to watch very carefully where my patients spontaneously touched themselves. Their hands told me deeply personal stories.

As I became more aware of myself in the room with my patients, I noticed that some of them, especially those with histories of abuse, were so deeply ashamed and mortified at partially disrobing their abused bodies to me, that they split off even more deeply from this experience

of their bodies being violated in the present. This complex reality had to be integrated somehow with the Bioenergetic reality that being seen and accepted and understood in the undisguised truth of their bodies was often essential for both patient and therapist. Several of my colleagues, I can no longer remember their names, became indignant when they heard the rumor that I no longer routinely had all my patients take off most of their clothes.

To repeat the therapeutic principle here: The Bioenergetic approach is so rich, so complex, that its practitioners must learn to tolerate a rich amount of uncertainty, whether it regards sexuality, grief or rage. **How certain can any of us be what the impact and meaning of anything we do in a session will be for the patient?** For instance, there is always the chance that I have gotten a patient and myself moving in a session, in order to avoid the powerful feelings which his words have evoked in me. The only valid reason for not being a good listener is that there is a better way to deepen where the patient is. A recovering alcoholic patient, for instance, whose mother had died of tuberculosis when he was an infant, regularly evoked such awful feelings of grief in me with his words, that I was usually suspicious of the body work we did, even though it seemed essential. The young man actually told me that I had given him two essential things in his therapy with me: (a) I had accepted who he was and forgiven him his badness. (b) I had also given him the occasional metaphoric kick in the pants that he also needed.

Like many of us, I brought into my practice of Bioenergetic Analysis a searching and groping after the parts of my own being that I sensed were still broken and buried. I was not finished with them and they were not finished with me. It was, for instance, my own movement toward unity of body and mind, that led me to introduce the clinical construct of cephalic shock into Bioenergetics. About 20 or 25 years ago Bob Hilton was leading a group of us in a series of dyadic exercises constructed so as to deliver the experience of characterological trauma. As part of the schizoid dyad, the directions were, while sitting back to back, to rest our head back against our partner's head. I discovered that while I physically could put my head back, I could not rest it, could not follow the directions and do what everyone else seemed to be doing. I could not trust my head to anyone. I seemed to be holding on for dear life.

What I came to discover over the next 15 years or so was that I needed to really get into and experience my head as a part of my body, before I could experience peace of mind. Getting out of my head in order to feel more deeply connected to myself had never worked that well for me or for many of my patients. The whole damn thing was connected at the neck and you have to work with the equipment you've been given -- arms, pelvis, etc. and a head! But as you know, words only go so far, so if you don't get the sense of how I work, try to catch one of my afternoon demonstrations. Having said this, let me note that I never just work with a person's head. Deep work with the head and neck sets up an anatomic, energetic resonance in the thoracic diaphragm. This not only improves the head/heart connection, but via the interlacing muscle fibers of the diaphragm and the iliopsoas muscle, just may set up a subtle quiver in the pelvis; thus the necessity of being aware of one's sexual countertransference issues, a topic I spoke about two years ago at the Corfu conference. So, generally speaking, **I try to get the head in the way -- in the right way -- on the highway that heads down to the heart and, via the diaphragm, into the pelvis.**

When I read *The Basic Fault* by Balint, and many of Winnicott's essays, I saw described with clarity the dreadful nonverbal abyss, the silence filled with "unthinkable anxieties," which I had never faced in my therapies.<sup>1</sup> So or more than 20 years I have written articles which attempt to integrate this developmental and relational frame with our energetic and bodily approach. Since the mid-70's, as I continue my search for wholeness, whether my patient is standing, sitting talking in a chair or lying silently on a bed, I am more than a little fascinated by what is happening in the room and in both our bodies, for which words and images can only be an approximation.

The spirit of our theme at this conference is about learning from direct experience. So, I will tell you that I have learned more about what a fairly healthy family is from my wife's family, than from all the therapy I have done and the therapy books I have read. My in-laws were far from perfect, and if I were to do it over again, I would still read many of the therapy books. But the books could not teach me the feeling of how important my wife was to her parents as they aged. She had been important to them in all the seasons of their life. My words cannot convey the sound, natural way in which she was important to them; you had to be there, to sense the little and big ways they genuinely respected



each other, remembered the details and rituals by which we mark a person's life, the way they saw her fairly clearly for who she was. When my own mother was failing with Alzheimer's my love was tarnished with bitterness that I was taking care of her at the end, as I had at the beginning. When my wife's father was failing with Alzheimer's, she gave back with love and gratitude for what she had received most of her life.

Being with her family, but mostly being with her, I have slowly learned to accept myself with less shame, to have more of a sense of what it is to love another person from my heart. I might have done a faster, more thorough job of this if I had gone into therapy with a woman a long time ago. But it didn't work out that way. When I am able to help the patients who come feeling deeply damaged, inferior, bad, and shameful, I think it is because I feel less shame and more genuine affection for myself.

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#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Balint, Michael. 1968. *The Basic Fault*. London: Tavistock Publications.