

# SKILLED FRIENDS ON THE THRESHOLD

## The transformation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century soul work From Psychotherapy to Psycho-Development

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*'The purpose of 21<sup>st</sup> century psychology is not the restoration of psycho-pathology back to psycho-normalcy – but the transformation of life challenges into opportunities for spiritual development'*

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Psychology is one of the newest sciences. Sigmund Freud, widely considered the founder of modern psychology, published his first founding book 'the interpretation of dreams' in 1899. In it the idea of the *unconscious* was first established. Most later theories of psychology stem from or in opposition to Freud's foundation. That development continues 120 years later. Alongside modern physics and sociology - psychology has been one of the most creative, prolific and consequential developments of the 20th century, which is practically unimaginable without it. At least 50 different schools of thoughts in psychology are acknowledged internationally and over 1,000 different psychotherapeutic approaches and techniques acknowledged today (Wikipedia). That number was 500 20 years ago. The list is growing. I have dedicated most of my adult life to the creation and teaching of yet another theory of psychology: Psychosophy, and to yet another approach to psychotherapy: Psychophonetics. The list will keep growing.

But as we start the 3<sup>rd</sup> decade of this no-so-new century now, 120 years after its foundation, it is time for psychotherapy to start and psycho-theraputize itself. Soul work, exploration, healing, transformation and development of the human psyche will never stop or be completed. Enormous creative, intellectual and practical energy has been pouring into this field effecting, one way or another, every human being on the planet. We people will never stop evolving psychologically and being deeply interested in the process. But is the name *therapy* still the proper context and purpose for this central field of human inquiry? It is my wish in this short article to challenge the assumption that the major purpose and occupation of modern psychology should be therapy. I suggest and to predict that the focus, the thinking, the research and the application of the new approaches to psychology and to psychotherapy of this century – will go way beyond therapy: it will focus more and more on development. The field of **Psycho-therapy** is going to be progressively replaced by the field of **Psycho-development**.

Modern Psychology started by medical doctors, and its establishment as a respected field of scientific inquiry required its affiliation with medical sciences. But that could have been an epistemological error from which modern psychology is still recovering from. It is possible to conceive of a healthy body. We all know what it feels like when our body is fit and healthy and when it is not. The creation and formation of the human body is completed. From the age of 20 onwards – the body does not evolve further, only deteriorates progressively. We humans possess exactly the same physical body that we had 10,000 years ago. During this period our psychological nature, behaviour, interaction – changed drastically and it continues to change. It shows no sign of stopping its evolution. Could it be that while a certain stage of perfection was reached regarding the human physical body – no stage of perfection was achieved regarding the human psyche. Its very nature is to keep evolving. So who can state with certainty what is the optimal state of health of an ever-evolving being? What was optimal yesterday could be regressive today and degenerative tomorrow. When we are faced with a physical health crisis – the obvious goal of helpers is to restore to the body its pre-existent optimal state of health. But could it be that the approach to a mental health crisis should be drastically different: there is no optimal state of psychological health to return to, if the whole psychological structure is in

a constant state of change and development. A common definition of *therapy* is ‘*The attempted remediation of a health problem*’; A common definition of Psychotherapy is: ‘*a form of treatment aimed at relieving emotional distress and mental health problems*’ or ‘*the treatment of mental disorder by psychological rather than medical means*’. It is all pathology based, aiming at the restoration of normalcy.

But who exactly wish to be normal these days? Have you ever seen a Facebook profile in which the owner declares to be normal? Have you ever submitted a CV for a job interview in which you claimed to be normal, and prove it with testimonials? I don’t think so. We all try to be special, to be anything but normal, to show the world how unique and distinguished individuals we are. It is universally normal today to be special.

After 28 years of being a psychotherapist in six countries, 20 of them as a member of integrative medical clinics in Australia and South Africa, I would like to offer a practical definition of mental health for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: ***The healthy human soul is the evolving human soul; the sick human soul is the stagnating human soul.*** Just as much as it is the nature of healthy animals to move – it is the nature of the healthy human soul to change and evolve.

And that conception of human mental health has drastic implications to the role and the task of mental health, soul workers and to their desired training.

Could it be that an ever evolving human soul is in a constant state of ‘pregnancy’ and ‘birthing’ of the next level of its evolution, and that most of the soul crisis and distress are the symptoms and the expressions of the need to change, to grow, to unfold, to evolve? If that is the case – the role of the ‘therapist’ or the soul-worker is not that of a fixer of a problem, but that of the *midwife* in the birthing process of the next level of soul development?

That possibility changes drastically the conception and the professional self-image of soul workers: we are not the fixers of pathology back to normalcy. We are the midwife of the next level of people’s soul development.

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But development goes through thresholds and crises. As we transform from embryo to a born baby – we have to drastically change our breathing and our relationship to the outer world and to gravity. This is the crisis sometimes called ‘The Blue Baby’. Nature takes place during most of this transition, but all the way to the dawn of human history – a woman at birth requires a helper, a midwife, a doula, an obstetrician in modern hospitals. It is an ancient tradition. I would like to put forward the idea that the future of soul-workers, now under the names of coaches, counsellors, psychotherapist, clinical psychologist and psychiatrists – will in time be transformed into the role of ‘soul-midwives’, skilled professional friends on the threshold of personal development and transformation.

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Soul development is our human nature. For this we are here on Earth. Two fundamental drives motivate human life: one) to survive, like any other animal; two) to evolve, like no other animal. Taking the drive to evolve out of the equation of understanding human reality, both individual and social – would be like taking our noses out of our faces. We would certainly not look the same. You don’t have to be a historian to observe the major factor of constant evolution in personal, family and social development of humanity.

In the far past conscious development was called initiation. Specially selected individuals were chosen by the elders for the process of leadership training that required personal transformation. To be a spiritual, political, social or military leader in ancient Egypt or Greece – required initiation. That standard started to deteriorate during the collapse of Rome, but it still lived in many ways through the middle ages. But with the accelerated evolution of individuation what once was an external process led by others – became an internal process. From the renaissance onwards everyone is a

candidate for initiation, and from the 60's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – everyone requested the right to become one's own leader and one's own initiator. What was once leadership training for the select few – became today the evolving standard and growing self-expectation of personal development. It is no longer a matter of leading other people. To lead a good, healthy, satisfying, fruitful and socially beneficial life on all levels – we have to go through conscious personal development. What was once controlled by traditions, given social structure and religion – is now controlled by individuals, for good or bad. We have to be our own leaders. That does not happen by time alone or by nature, and certainly not by tradition. Initiation now requires personal initiative. It is a constant process of crossing personal thresholds and a threshold, before being crossed, feels like a crisis. Me as I am – I cannot do it. We as we are – we cannot do it. We have to change in order to do it. And while we create the conflicts together – the resolution can only be individual. Personal development becomes a social duty. We have to grow individually in order to survive at all.

In front of these thresholds we need a skilled friend, just like a woman about to give birth needs a midwife. The midwife does not give the woman a child, just helps her to deliver it. The skilled friend does not give the evolving person the next step of one's development, not its direction nor its meaning. This potential is all inside and the evolving person is 'pregnant' with it, ready to give birth to one's own next step of personal development. WE, soul workers are not therapists. The evolving person is not more sick than a pregnant woman is sick when giving birth. But the process can be painful. We all experienced crises which we had to go through alone and crises in which we had a helping friend. The difference is huge. But being a loving friend is not enough – skills are required.

At any given point in time the human being as he/she is - is a part of a greater self. That is our nature. And at a certain moment that greater self is seeking entry into the existing, existential person, and a change is required. The existing patterns of thinking, emotionality, reactivity, defences, survival habits, comfort, desires and ambitions – cannot accommodate the next level of one's development. It is a crisis. Contradicting forces are at work here: here is a motivation to change and there is resistance and fear of change; there is a drive to become more human – and there is a temptation to become less human; there is an interest in doing something new – and there is a temptation of regressing to old patterns; there is a drive for progression and a contradicting drive for conservatism. A choice is required, and no one else can make that choice.

The task of the skilled friend, the midwife on the threshold, is not to make for the evolving person the choice, but to show that person a greater diversity of options for choice. The task of the skilled helper is not only to express empathy to the evolving person – but to enable them to develop empathy with themselves, with their deeper options, empathy with their greater self that is seeking entry through this crisis, through this threshold.

Resistance to evolve will always be there. It has to be. It is the essence of leadership training called personal development: you as you are cannot make this step. In overcoming that resistance – you will become the person you are destined to be, your own higher potential. The skilled helper cannot take the challenge of crossing the personal threshold away from you, but he/she can encourage you to cross it. In response to the threshold one has major three options: you can choose fight the resistance, and it will only get stronger; you can choose to retreat and give up and let go of the challenge – and you diminish yourself and regress into your previous state of development, and become sick in a variety of ways; or you can choose to confront the resistance, to use it like a mirror, to learn from it and to discover the change that you have to go through in order to be able to cross that threshold. That third was IS personal development. In order to know about this third option and to act on it – a skilled friend is often needed. It could be a helpful parent, a helpful teacher, mentor, friend or partner. But it has to be someone who can really listen to you and hear not only the *problem* on the threshold, but also the *opportunity* of it.

A whole range of skills are required here, and there are different languages, theories and techniques regarding these skills. But in essence it is the skill of empathy both to the existing person *and* to the

potential person that is evolving. In order to be able to offer this help to others – the helper must be the one that has done it for oneself to at least an initial degree. Self-empathy for one's own spiritual potential, tested through the crossing of personal thresholds - enables real empathy for another person on a threshold, when the moment comes. That is the etiquette of modern initiation. It is now called personal development. I call the teacher/trainer/helper in such moments 'A skilled friend on the threshold'.

I truly believe that as this troublesome century is maturing into its zenith – it will become clearer and clearer that we do not need therapists for crossing personal thresholds, for the process of personal development is not a sickness, it is human evolution on the personal level.

Psychophonetics, alongside other approaches that started in the 60's, 70's and 80's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a method of 'soul-midwifery', of intentional, conscious, skilled friendship on the threshold. Our professional training is a practical preparation for becoming a 'soul midwife', a skilled friend on the threshold.