

# THE SEARCH FOR HEALING

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A healing technique is a vehicle for connecting with another person in a certain way that promotes the movement toward wholeness. Each of us has technique – perhaps several – that has to do, in some way, with out personality. In my own case, for example, imagery is a powerful technique. I tend to think in images. Other people choose other techniques according to their personal preferences. But the essence of their work remains the same.

A technique is a way of expressing something. The technique is not the healing; it is a vehicle for the healing. We have to ask, beyond all these techniques, what is it that truly fosters the healing process. I think it is the way we stand in relationship to each other that is most important.

When you're working with someone in a healing relationship, something that's never been there before – a wholeness – will start to emerge. The relationship has to be spacious enough, flexible enough, so that this emerging wholeness isn't closed down or interpreted in too hurried a fashion.

I like the archetype of the Wounded Healer, which symbolizes that two people in a healing relationship are peers, both wounded and both with healing capacity. Just by being here, in these bodies, we are wounded, we are incomplete, if you will. But we also have the capacity for wholeness as part of our birthright. It comes out of our human nature. If you and I are participating in the healing process together, it is my woundedness that allows me to connect to you in your woundedness. I know what suffering is. I also know that you may feel separated from other people by your suffering. You may feel lost, frightened, trapped. My woundedness allows me to find you and be with you in a way that is nonjudgmental. You are not the sick one or the weak one. We are here together, both capable of suffering, both capable of healing.

My very presence facilitates something. I sit with you, and you don't have to be alone in this small, dark, fearful place in yourself. You sense that you can trust me. I, too, am wounded, so I can understand. I know how to find you and be there with you, not to "fix" anything – because nothing may be broken – but simply to be there with you in that place where you thought you could only be alone. If we do that,

something happens. The woundedness in each of us connects us in trust. My woundedness evokes your healer, and your woundedness evokes my healer. Then the two healers can collaborate together. My presence with you allows things to change, to evolve toward wholeness.

In a true healing relationship, both heal and both are healed. When only one person is seen as the healer, the relationship might be said to be a curing relationship but not a healing one. Often the person who identifies himself as the curer or fixer-type healer is vulnerable to burnout. The curing relationship is not always healthy for the client. While benefiting in some ways by the relationship, the client may also be diminished because it is a dependent relationship. There is not much room for strength or growth in the kind of curing relationship that we're taught in professional schools. We can fix the fixable, but we don't evoke healing, and we don't participate in the healing that may arise naturally. The fixing relationship assumes that healing is not natural. Healing *is* natural. We need to find a way to remind each other of this.

I don't believe that one person heals another. I believe that what we do is invite the other person into a healing relationship. We heal together. Even defining a person as a healer seems to assume some sort of fixing or repairing. A better definition would be inviting someone to participate in life with us, to participate in that movement toward wholeness that underlies all life.

Years ago, I was invited to a seminar given by Carl Rogers. I had never read his work, but I knew that the seminar, attended by a group of therapists, was about "unconditional positive regard". At the time, I was highly skeptical about this idea, but I attended the seminar anyway. I left it transformed.

Roger's theories arose out of his practice, and his practice was intuitive and natural to him. In the seminar, he tried to analyse what he was doing for us as he did it. He wanted to give a demonstration of unconditional positive regard in a therapeutic session. One of the therapists volunteered to serve as the subject. As Rogers turned to the volunteer and was about to start the session, he suddenly pulled himself up, turned back to us, and said, "I realise there's something I do before I start a session. I let myself know that I am enough. Not perfect. Perfect wouldn't be enough. But that I am human, and that is enough. There is nothing this man can say or do or feel that I can't feel in myself. I can be with him. I am enough."

I was stunned by this. It felt as if some old wound in me, some fear of not being good enough, had come to an end. I knew, inside myself that what he had said was absolutely true: I am not perfect, but I am enough.

Knowing that, at some deep level, allows healing to happen.

I don't self-criticise my work with clients. I simply do what I do and trust what will happen. At the end of a series of sessions, I try to get feedback from my clients. I need to know what is working for people and what isn't. One of the first times I did this was with a powerful woman lawyer. During the last session, I said to her very formally, "I thought it would be good for us to review what has happened here."

"That would be wonderful," she said.

"Grand," I said. "I'd like to ask you, did you get what you came for?"

She replied, "Absolutely not."

I was flabbergasted. I asked what she meant.

She said, "Rachel, when I came here I didn't know that what I got even existed."

It seems to me that's an important dimension of healing. When the wholeness emerges, it is a surprise. It is beyond the mind's conception. Our minds want to fix everything. The wholeness is so much more than that. The healing relationship needs to be unstructured enough to allow that wholeness to emerge. Being present and waiting – almost like waiting for a birth – is an important part of this; so is the concept of not deciding ahead of time what will be needed.

When I was originally trained in pediatrics, the method was simple and straightforward: You walked in, made a diagnosis, decided what was needed, and provided it. The focus was on what *you* as the physician thought, perceived, and decided – a very lonely business. That's the standard medical disease model.

Since then, I've discovered that basically I don't know what's needed. But if I listen to the client, to the essential self of the other person – the soul, if you like – I find that at the deepest level of the unconscious mind, the client knows what's needed. If I can be present at that moment, without having any expectations of what the client is supposed to do, how he or she is supposed to change in order to be "better," what happens is magical. By that I mean it has a deep sense of integrity about it, much more than any diagnosis I could make on my own or any therapeutic strategy I might devise.

Aldous Huxley writes in *The Perennial Philosophy* that all religions share certain commonalities which, if they were understood, might define the nature of God. I like to think of these universal beliefs as the footprints of God. If we examine all the healing systems, we could in the same way find commonalities that might help us come closer to the footprints of healing.

There seem to be certain universal conditions that encourage the movement toward wholeness on a physical level, others on an emotional level, still others

on a mental level, and lastly some on a spiritual level. These are probably the same for every human being everywhere and derive from our common human nature, our basic human needs. There are also other more personal conditions of healing that come out of our own unique natures. We need to study the universal conditions as well as the personal conditions that encourage our own healing.

One of these universal conditions seems to be that healing is facilitated when more than one person is concerned. There's a kind of critical mass of consciousness that promotes the healing process. The person who feels isolated and separated is vulnerable. For the person who is connected in a caring and concerned relationship, healing is facilitated. Just knowing that one's well-being matters to somebody else seems to make healing easier, more accessible, more possible.

Personal conditions of healing can be quite varied. Some people get well because they have work to do. Others get well because they feel they've been released from their work and the pressures and expectations of other people. Some people need music; others need to enjoy nature. Many different things remind us of our healing capacity and evoke it.

The study of healing systems may show us that certain kinds of relationships promote healing. I think there's also a certain attitude toward one's self that can promote healing.

Living in one piece is important for healing – in other words, knowing what your deepest values are and living by them, so that there is a coherence between who you are and how you live. If you believe one way but live another, that can be more damaging than any external stress. When you become separated from your own sense of values, it is very hard to heal.

You may have lived by another person's values all your life and not have known it. It may be that you adopted those values when you were very young. But they're still not your own. That is an enormous drain on vitality. In illness, sometimes, people go back to their original values, even though they've never lived by them before. And, in that process, their healing is facilitated.

I don't have any great theories about my clients, or strategies. I simply meet with them and be there with them. I am often asked what happens in my sessions with clients. To tell the truth, I can't answer that. I don't know ahead of time what I'm going to do in a session. I have no plan. But I know that something will happen, and it's not random. I sit with this other person and together we connect to the edge of what we're weaving together, and we weave it a little further along. The energy is always there – I trust that. It's always there, but it's in the relationship, not in me.

I once had an experience that illustrates what I'm trying to say. A psychiatric resident from a nearby hospital told me he wanted to learn how to work with people with cancer. I said he could sit in on some of my sessions. Of course, only some of my clients were willing to have him there. He would sit in the corner, making profuse notes.

After the first session, he said to me, "That was an incredible session. Look, I have the whole thing here." He laid on the floor three pieces of paper covered with notes and lines, like an algorithm in which he had traced the choice points and the entire path of the session. He asked me, "Is this right?"

I replied, "I have absolutely no idea. I don't think I could have created that outline. In fact, I know I couldn't have."

"Well," he asked, "what were you doing? How did you know to go this way or that?"

I said, "I was just following the energy."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I can't tell you," I answered. "I just went in the natural direction of the energy and I could feel it. It's almost like there's a knot of energy in the room and we just keep talking together and working and dancing and singing until that knot begins to loosen, and we are free."

From my point of view, that's all there is to it. I used to be ashamed of not being able to provide a cognitive framework or justification for my interventions. I don't feel that way anymore.

Healing is natural. It's not magical; it's not mystical. It doesn't require some esoteric intervention. It's your birthright, and mine. Everybody has the capacity for healing. We do it with each other all the time and we don't even know it.

Healing is the very ground of being. Everything is moving toward wholeness. And that's all healing is, that movement. Our task is not to make something happen but to uncover what is already happening in us and in others, and to recognise and foster those conditions that nurture it. That's all.

We can do that with ritual or prayer, or with many different approaches or techniques. We can simply sit and be together and think about our true nature. No one technique is inherently any better than another. It's simply a matter of learning to trust the natural healing process in all of us and moving freely with it.

I, for one, am rather taken aback with talk of certain people being 'healers'. In my opinion, this just separates people from the naturalness of their own

healing. And that's the magical thing, that ordinariness, because the ordinary is the most extraordinary thing of all.