Accessing the unconscious can be a truly magical and transformative process towards wholeness.

Differences between Eastern and Western psyches: The idea that Eastern and Western psyches are different seems credible, especially when one considers how the former is introvert-oriented, and the latter sits at the opposing ‘extrovert’ pole, and how this reflects with the differences in philosophical orientations. In India, the unconscious, the sensitive intuitive faculties and the physical body are valued and integrated as part of the established spiritual-psychic framework, which makes assimilation of psychic experiences much easier. Such a framework also provides a greater capacity for the strength required to hold the ‘created tension’ when opposites compete for dominance. Whereas the Western person has a conditioning focused on externalising awareness (through left-brain intellect and will) and only experiences that are backed by evidence are considered valid, which could infer a difference within the ‘internal wiring’. Jung also suggested that the West’s reduced exposure to an established spiritual framework could explain why there is less reverence for the body or psychic unconscious compared to the East. Consequently, the Western psychic framework is less prepared for what emerges from psychic practices within yoga. With the ‘thinking tendency’, and less awareness of the intuitive faculties, processing these experiences can become arduous and potentially destabilising for mental processing and for staying present.

Is there any current evidence for this theory? I was invited to take part in research being carried out by Danny Hinton, a doctoral researcher based at Aston University. The research focus is to look at how ethnic minorities perform in cognitive ability selection tests. There is evidence to suggest that performance is negatively affected as different cultures offer variance to meanings of words, thus affecting the ability to choose the correct answer. I am convinced that failing my 11+ grammar school exam, as did both of my sisters and all my Asian primary school friends, was as a result of us all struggling with verbal reasoning as we just ‘didn’t get it’. Yet, we all went on to pursue left-brain-dominant degrees and careers in science and engineering. So, even though we were all educated in British schools, was our inherent Indian wiring a contributing factor? I shall have to wait and see what Danny’s research concludes.

Recognising a Western approach to yoga as aseasoned yoga teacher, trainer and therapist who has been trained within the Western education system whilst having my spiritual yoga roots well planted in my Indian ancestry, I am continually amazed to see how yoga is developing. I can understand how Jung’s theory of the collective psyche’s need to continually redress balance applies here. With the West’s preoccupation and deference towards the ‘thinking self’, it has been to the detriment of its psychic soul and physical body – on both a personal and collective level. Therefore, it is totally understandable how, for the last 50 years and within thousands of classes, yoga’s practice has centred primarily on posture and meditation practice. Its rising popularity might be explained as an answer to feeding increasing spiritual hunger and poverty. Maybe the time is coming to consider further developing this now established framework, to recognise the existence of the rich unconscious. Through my own therapy process and my psychotherapy client work, I observe how accessing the unconscious can be a truly magical and transformative process towards wholeness. Yet I also appreciate how one needs to be prepared, guided and supported through such enquiry. Without engaging conscious awareness or understanding, it can be counter-productive and unwise. That’s why in India, a Guru is sought at times of spiritual development.

This draws me to my shared enquiry with you the reader. I invited you on an exploration of the rich, colourful and complex world of Carl Jung through his perspectives of the psyche and his considerations regarding this alien spiritual framework called yoga. I hope you have felt stimulated to find out more, even to explore any adverse reactions you may have felt whilst reading this article. Each sensation is a call for attention and possible action. In light of Jung’s suggestion, ‘In the course of the centuries the West will produce its own yoga’, as far as I am concerned the discussion has only just begun and I hope to continue this through my doctoral research. I look forward to receiving readers’ thoughts and reflections on this matter.

Biography
An ex-electrical engineer, Lina is an integrative humanistic-Jungian counsellor, international lecturer, mindfulness-meditation and workshop facilitator and Director of Praxis School of Yoga, in Nottingham. Her inclusive spiritual approach is informed by a humanistic-Jungian-yogic matrix. Her current doctoral research is on therapist self-care and vicarious trauma.

References

Rosemary Laoulach writes about the value of silence and transcendence in the therapeutic process

"Man who has lost his silence has not merely lost one human quality, but his whole structure has been changed." Many years ago during my training as a counsellor, I worked in a counselling centre where I saw clients over a period of 12 weeks. One woman still stands out. She was depressed and in a lot of pain as she spoke of her past and present experiences of abuse as well as some challenging relationship issues. My initial sessions included her revealing some of these painful experiences and we spoke about her depression and some strategies which could help, applying cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). As the weeks continued, however, I found that a lot of the sessions became about silence, transcendence and therapy.
The quality of silence and listening in the counselling room is in danger of being eroded.

Silence. Her depression was a natural response to the abuse and human cruelty she had experienced. I began not to be able to find words of comfort to help fix, console or challenge rational thinking. All I could do was to hold her in the silence. This was an intuitive response and not one which was part of my training in CBT. The pain I felt intuitively needed more than CBT, it needed a human presence. After the many tears, we would just sit in the silence.

In the last session she said that the counselling was useful, that my training was obvious, and she especially felt that I had listened. I believe during those months the client felt silence. Her depression was a natural response to the pain I felt or challenge rational thinking; all I could do was to hold the silence.

In the last session she said that the counselling was useful, one which was part of my training in CBT. The pain I felt or challenge rational thinking; all I could do was to hold the silence.

When reflecting on this experience I was really going my own way as a beginning counsellor and following my own ‘human and instinctual response’. My training however did not prepare me for this intervention. It was both an honour and privilege to work with this woman, to hear and be with her in those painful places which she had trusted me with. This experience also had a humanising and expanding influence on me. After many years I know now that I am in good company as I have discovered many who have written and advocate the use of silence and ‘presence’ within the counselling and therapeutic context. From this story, two things emerge: firstly the crucial role of silence in therapy and the inner healing process, and secondly the connection of silence to religious wisdom traditions, and therefore of therapy, in some degree, to those traditions.

The understanding and interpretation of silence largely depends on cultural and theoretical perspectives. Sociological perspectives can inform our understanding of silence. This includes, within the context of repression, having no voice or being silenced as a result of a situation involving a power struggle eg the silencing of children and women. There is the silencing of groups past and present who have no effective political voice, eg African Americans, and refugees. The word ‘silence’ could be understood as a pause, a space for reflection within the mind or cognitive capacities. Or, it could be the by-product of a deep question raised and a space created to ponder.

Socrates asked open-ended questions in order for the people of ancient Athens to ponder and think for themselves, allowing a space for introspection. Is there a chemical reaction produced when silence is present? Dr Svirsky, professor of hearing at New York University, discovered silence embedded in our speech when examining speech waves. He states that when we make sounds, it is often the silent falls built into those sounds that enable them to function as signals of communication rather than noise.

Whilst science might be able to explain silence as ‘waves in our speech or spaces of lower energy’; where does silence come from? What could its purpose be for humans? Is it innate or do we develop it? For the purpose of this article I would like to place silence and presence (that is the therapist’s or counsellor’s ‘presence’) within a larger spiritual context, emerging from what is sometimes named the ineffable or transcendence.

Susan Sontag, in The Aesthetics of Solitude, discusses silence in art. Art can be an expression or metaphor of spirituality, a platform where the artist goes beyond him/herself and even the artwork, to another place: one of silence. Poetry and music express an experience which is itself essentially ineffable. Sontag describes silence as a tool which allows the clear non-interfering vision to be present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present. Her critique of modern times with its technology, telecommunications (leading to a lack of secrecy) and the present.

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have been conducted to suggest that the practice of Mindfulness offers training courses, and studies engaged with what is truly present and advocating a phenomenological approach to therapy. A therapist who is open to the unknown and not always sure of his/her approach, may be far more successful than the therapist who is almost always certain. ‘Not knowing’ is an important part of psychoanalytic methodology. Freud informally wrote that he did not know where a sentence would end up when he began it. Bion (also a therapist) continues to argue that, ‘The fundamental reality is “infinity”, the unknown, the situation for which there is no language, not even that borrowed from the artist or religious’  Bion suggests that, it is in this spiritual context that both the client’s and therapist’s work are being transformed, ultimately in a place of radical openness where he places in the realm of faith. Eigen presents a challenge for us to go deeper, and to risk not knowing, in order to really know. “I don’t know” is a gateway to dimensions we are hungry for. To go deeper into not knowing who or where we are and still deeper.6

Eigen’s therapy is essentially a spiritual experience, a place where the client and therapist are working within a larger context. He understood that this process not only sought to transform the client, but also the therapist. It was as though they were both on a journey on the sea through a storm, the murky and still waters held ultimately within the greater connection to a larger, more encompassing sense of mystery. ‘Therapy may involve skill, but it is also a form of prayer.’6

Scientific method has made positive and beneficial progress in technology, explaining our solar system and the many workings of nature, and the social sciences have provided an understanding of patterns in human behaviour. However, I would argue scientific method has failed to adequately explain our human essence/soul, or provide an adequate framework for existential meaning and values. It ignores the experiences of the contemplative and spiritual, which have been a part of the fabric of human experience since the beginning of humankind. The scientific pedagogy, plus the framework of capitalism, which essentially focuses on profit and productivity, places silence in an awkward position. Within this context, silence today is perceived as unpragmatic, and essentially useless and unprofitable.

What may have recaptured the importance of silence is the recent emergence of Mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn’s inspiring work has spread and particularly grown in England, where courses based on meditation and mindfulness exercises are introduced to students in secondary schools and adults in various settings.7 What is interesting is that although officially Mindfulness states that it is not religious, it clearly has in its practice obvious links to contemplative practices, particularly Buddhism. The Oxford Centre for Mindfulness offers training courses, and studies have been conducted to suggest that the practice of Mindfulness over a period of time has real benefits in reducing depression, anxiety and stress. Science has rescued an old religious practice and now made it socially acceptable in a culture which is predominately scientific in its view of the world and suspicious of religion. It is in this context I would suggest that silence may have been redeemed from its ‘uselessness’.

Martin Heidegger, the philosopher, argues that silence is not only communicative, but a place of thinking.8 Heidegger also links the importance of listening to understanding, maintaining that only those who truly understand first, are able to hear and listen. When relating to others authentically, he suggests we need to be fully present with ourselves, our inner being or essence, what he calls the Dasein. Heidegger’s ideas of inner communication are not only important for interpersonal skills, but also in listening within therapy and counselling.

In conclusion then, we can see from what I have shown that silence cannot be underestimated in the therapeutic process, and more training on the use of silence in therapy is needed. Furthermore, the integrality of meditation and mindfulness to religious traditions, and the scientific credibility of such practices for therapy is linked to this whole question of silence, and any future development and silence training would need to accommodate this fact.

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