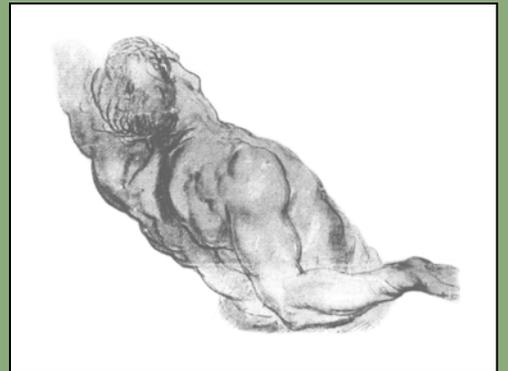


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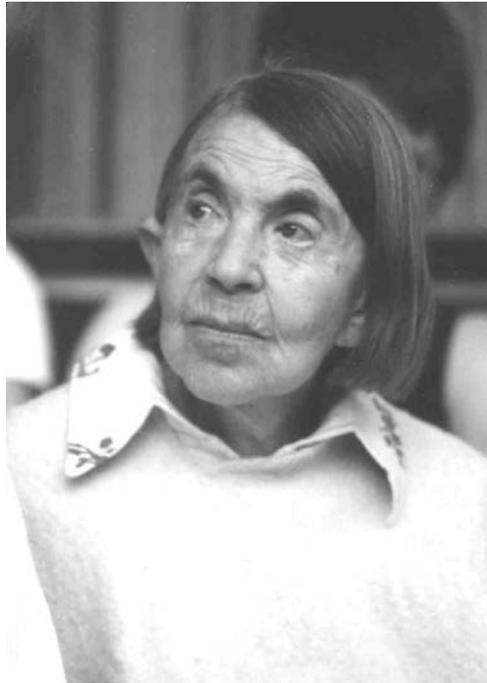


Volume 3 Number 1 2004

The Official Publication of
THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION FOR
BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Charlotte Selver

Born April 4, 1901 – Ruhrort, Germany
Emigrated to United States - 1938
Died August 22, 2003 – Muir Beach, California

“Becoming more and more able to be there in situations, whether easy or difficult; to be more there with our mind, with our hearts, with our sensitivities, with our strengths - this is very, very important.”

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USABP Mission Statement

The USABP believes that integration of the body and mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end, its mission is to develop and advance the art, science, and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical, and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity.
(revised October 1999)

Experiencing: A Memoir

Marjorie L. Rand, PhD

Abstract

The author describes her journey through dance and gestalt and how she discovered Sensory Awareness without knowing what it was. She describes how SA has been her introduction to the concept of meditation. She cites the importance of SA in body psychotherapy and how she uses it in her own IBP practice.

Keywords

Gestalt Therapy – Authentic Movement – Body Psychotherapy

“It doesn’t matter what you do if approached through your whole being, devoting yourself to something, coming more to unity, to what you are actually communicating with, a person, a task or a situation”. Charlotte Selver, (Waking Up-Becoming Respons-Able Green Gulch Farm Study Group May 2, 1988)

A BRIEF HISTORY

In my former pre-therapy life, I was a dancer, and in some ways, I still am. After my first round of college in the 60’s I got married and had children. I still danced several times a week. Through the dance world I took a class from a dance therapist and discovered dance/movement therapy. I felt I had found my niche and began to study it intensely. I certainly was highly influenced by Authentic Movement, the work of Mary Whitehouse, to which Marcia Leventhal, Susan Lovell and Joanne Segel introduced me. I was also influenced by Continuum, the work of Emilie Conrad. This very non-structured approach to movement appealed to me, and although I didn’t know it at the time, had many similarities to Sensory Awareness (SA). Through my studies in dance therapy I happened to take some classes in what I didn’t know then, was SA. Several of Charlotte Selver’s students who lived in Los Angeles were giving classes and sessions in this work. Those who primarily influenced me in those days were Ellen Jacobs (Barbara Colburn) and Ginger Clark.

In the 70’s I trained in Gestalt therapy and again found the influence of Charlotte Selver in Perls’ Awareness Continuum. Throughout the 70’s and 80’s, I took workshops with Charlotte (and at that time, also her husband Charles Brooks) mostly at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, I also spent time at Zen Center San Francisco, Tassajara and Zen Center Los Angeles sitting zazen. During this time I discovered the work of Magda Proskauer (Breath Awareness) and Marion Rosen (whose teacher was influenced by Elsa Gindler, who was also Charlotte’s teacher).

During my graduate studies, I developed my own work called Gestalt Movement Therapy and began to give workshops. SA always was and still is an integral part of my work. In the 80’s I joined in partnership with Jack Rosenberg and helped develop Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP). Jack also studied SA and so it is a prominent feature of the IBP method.

EXPERIENCING SENSORY AWARENESS

The classes in SA were a new world for me, and I consider them to have introduced me to the concept of meditation. Never knowing what to expect, I would perhaps lie on the floor with a smooth stone on my forehead EXPERIENCING. Just EXPERIENCING. Having been a performer and a “doer” all my life, learning how to simply experience changed me forever. I learned how one’s perception could be altered by attention to “what is.” The experience is quite psychedelic in nature. It definitely changed my relationship to reality.

I remember one workshop in particular, when Charlotte had us standing on the deck at Esalen for what felt like more than an hour, EXPERIENCING STANDING!! At the end I was consumed with fear. I felt so far away from the ground. Charlotte simply said to me, “If you were in your feet instead of your head, you wouldn’t be afraid.”

Words of wisdom which again influenced me forever

Anyone who knows me and my work knows that I am primarily interested in bringing awareness and energy DOWN TO THE FEET-GROUNDING. We teach what we have to learn!

By the time I met Charlotte, she was already in her 70’s and Charles Brooks, her husband helped lead the workshops. She was hard of hearing and she carried a wooden box and held a horn to her ear, although she did use more modern forms of hearing aids later. But I will always carry the memory of that box and horn. She spoke only when necessary. This minimalist style was characteristic of Charlotte and made everything that came from her so much more valuable. I believe I remember almost every word I heard her say, and they were all gems. Another inimitable comment from Charlotte on the same subject was, “Usually the head is the point of disturbance. It’s good that we can think. Thinking is one of our major occupations, but what we call thinking should not eliminate everything else.”

Another aspect of SA and also Authentic Movement (AM) is the element of witnessing and being witnessed. A person can do any process on their own, but the relational aspect of working in a dyad or a group and being observed, makes the experience more real and adds dimension which may not have been discovered otherwise.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SENSORY AWARENESS IN BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY (BP)

Although Charlotte never claimed SA to be psychotherapy, only PURE AWARENESS for awareness' sake, I do not see how BP can be practiced without it. To me, awareness has to be the first step in any process. Without awareness, there can be no change. Arnie Bieser coined the term "The Paradoxical Theory of Change" -you must first acknowledge what IS before it can change. Often awareness alone produces change. Fritz Perls said, "Awareness in and of itself is curative."

I begin every session with simply experiencing, the breath as it is, sensations, thoughts, feelings, memories, anything which comes to awareness as it is, without judgment or interpretation. The insight that can come from simply observing one's experience in the moment is profound. A client referred another potential client to me who came for two sessions and never returned. She told my client "How can you work with her? She doesn't DO anything?" I believe this non-doing, less-is-more style is empowering to the client. We simply guide the client on the path to self discovery. Unfinished movement sequences complete, blocks dissolve, energy flows, breath happens without our having to do something. I believe our grounded and witnessing presence with the client is all that is necessary. This way of being is not easy to accomplish. It has taken most of my almost thirty years of experience as a therapist for me to get here. Without SA I don't know if I ever would have gotten here.

HOW I USE SA IN THE CONTEXT OF A BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY SESSION

You can practice SA alone or with another person, either as therapist or client. If you are with another person, you may report your awareness to that person, and perhaps be guided to deepen the awareness or move it. If you are alone, it is good to write your experience in a journal after the session. A session does not have to have any content material, although it may and often does. However, increased awareness and noticing the degree of presence in your own body is the only aim of the session. Often thoughts, feelings, memories or sensations may claim your attention. When that happens just allow them to be there and follow where they lead, always bringing your attention back to your body. Using SA to bring awareness often brings feelings and they can be worked with at the time they arise in the session. This can be done for as long as forty-five minutes, or as short as the amount of time you have. You can do as much or little of this as you like. You may want to spend the whole session sensing into only one place. That is fine.

Feel yourself lying (or sitting or standing). Feel your feet beneath you. Notice your connection to the ground. What is the quality of your relationship with the earth? Now follow your breath as it enters you and notice where it goes. Perhaps you can feel your breath in the space inside your head. Now notice the quality of the space. What happens when you allow breath to enter? Is it possible to sense the sinus cavities in your skull? Perhaps your awareness wants to go into your soft palette at the back of your throat. It may or may not be possible to go there. What happens in that space? Notice what is happening in the rest of your body now. Where does your breath want to go? Explore following your breath and see where it takes you. Continuing to allow the breath to come and go at its own pace and rhythm. Can you feel the space inside your body? Where does your awareness go? What places in your body seem to be out of your awareness? Notice if there is any part of your body that may want to move. If there is, go to that place and allow it to do what it wants to do. Or maybe the movement you feel is internal. Just monitor that. What do you notice? Can you feel what connects your head to your feet? Where do you feel that? Can you feel your whole body now? Be with yourself and listen for any message that might come to you from your body.

In a body psychotherapy session, I would focus on whatever comes into the client's awareness and after every verbal exchange, I would ask the client what they are feeling in their body, and let that awareness take us to the next issue. For example, the following is an excerpt from a session.

The client is a 32 year old woman whose mother is in the process of dying of cancer. She has been doing Integrative Body Psychotherapy for one and a half years.

CLIENT: I feel that I need to make a big change in my life.

THERAPIST: Where do you feel that in your body?

CLIENT: I always feel it in my gut.

THERAPIST: Can you describe the feeling in your gut?

CLIENT: Yes, it feels empty, like it's hollow.

THERAPIST: Just allow yourself to experience the hollowness and see what happens.

CLIENT: Now I feel something in my throat.

THERAPIST: OK be with that for now.

CLIENT: I feel tears in my throat.

THERAPIST: Stay with that awareness.

CLIENT: I don't want to cry.

THERAPIST: Just watch the not wanting to cry-where do you feel it?

CLIENT: My throat is tight.

THERAPIST: Go into the tightness.

CLIENT: (starts to cry)

THERAPIST: What do you feel now?

CLIENT: My throat is looser.

THERAPIST: And your gut?

CLIENT: I feel energy swirling around in there now.

This excerpt reflects the power of working with awareness and sensation to create change without dealing with content.

I can honestly say that SA has been the single most important influence in my work and in my life. Charlotte will certainly live on within me and within those who knew her.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Biography

Marjorie L. Rand, PhD specializes in Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP) and Pre and Perinatal Psychology. She is in private practice in Manhattan Beach and Brentwood, California. She is International Coordinator of IBP Institutes where she trains and supervises therapists in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Israel. She is the co-author of *Body, Self and Soul: Sustaining Integration* and has contributed a chapter to *Getting In Touch, A Guide To The New Body Psychotherapies*, Quest, Wheaton, Ill., 1997. She is currently co-authoring a book on the somatic side of vicarious trauma (in press, W.W. Norton) with Babette Rothschild. She has also published many articles on Somatic Psychology and Pre and Perinatal Psychology. Dr. Rand is on the Conference Committee and was a member of the former Ethics, Training Standards, and Advisory Committees of the United States Association of Body Psychotherapy. She is also a Diplomate of The American Psychotherapy Association. She can be reached at www.drRANDbodymindtherapy.com.

USA BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL

The Official Publication of
United States Association for Body Psychotherapy
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