



The Meeting from Heart to Heart: The Essence of Transformative Experiences

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Abstract

*What can be said about that which, at rock-bottom, is most fundamental in a contact that transforms us? Whether in psychotherapy, in a long-term relationship or in a spontaneous moment shared suddenly and unexpectedly with a stranger? What is more primary than theory and technique, rules or guidelines, in meeting the other and seeking a contact that fosters a shifting in boundaries that brings with it the possibility of being receptive to a more direct experiencing of life and others simply as they are? Even when this brings with it, inevitably, a more direct confrontation with and acknowledgment of pain and frustration, and the disappointments and difficulties that are inherent in this change. Even when this means bearing what seems utterly unbearable. Perhaps the answer, as simple as it is difficult to grasp or allow in its simplicity, is love. Drawing from the process of a long-term therapy, the novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, by Muriel Marbery (2008), the work of Martin Buber as well as of philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin, this article seeks to articulate the centrality of love in the moments of our life that transform.*

This paper looks at that which is most fundamental in contact, that which changes us, not only in therapy, or a long-term relationship or in a quest to deepen our own personal or professional development, but also during the most ordinary moments of everyday life. This is something that is more primary than theory and technique, more primary than well-intentioned rules and guidelines about what is helpful to say or not to say, to do or not to do, in meeting the other in a way that nourishes and transforms. This is present in those meetings that illuminate and foster a breaking open or dissolving of boundaries that were previously immutable, sometimes dramatically, sometimes almost soundlessly. It brings with it the possibility of being receptive to a more direct experiencing of life and others simply as they are, even when this inevitably includes a more direct confrontation with the pain and frustration and with the difficulties and

disappointments that are inherent in such a change or even when this means bearing what seems utterly unbearable. This thing, as simple as it is difficult to grasp or allow in its simplicity, is love.

These are questions I have long contemplated, developing my intuitive sense of an answer concerning what is actually happening, coming long before the words to say speak this answer. Drawing from the process of a long-term psychotherapy, the novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, by Muriel Marbery (2008), the article “Teaching therapists to be with their clients” by Diane Shainberg (1983) and the work of philosopher Martin Buber and philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin, I have tried to make a start in this article by articulating the centrality of love in the transformative moments of our life. My aim here is to make a contribution to

bringing love out of the closet, or at least to take a step or two in that direction. The purpose of this paper is to name and explicitly acknowledge love as an essential element not only of intimate, romantic or personal relationships, but also of the helping relationships we enter into with each other, including those of a professional nature, such as psychotherapy.

During the time that a vague sense of this article first began to coalesce into an idea of some substance, a poem by Marge Piercy (1982) entitled "The Seven of Pentacles" resurfaced for me and I was drawn in particular to these lines:

Weave real connections, create real nodes,
build real houses.

Live a life you can endure: Make love that is
loving.

Keep tangling and interweaving and taking
more in,
a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside
but to us

interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows
and lairs (no page number available).

As I re-read Piercy's lines, I felt the pulse of their vibrancy, celebrating the dynamic web of tangled, crisscrossing interconnectedness that is life at its most elemental. I also recognized that the lines give expression to a dynamic for which I had just begun to seek my own words. This search arose from my wish to write something about the common element that is present in all moments of relating, regardless of the nature of the relationship, which give rise to transformation.

Piercy (1982) implores us, indeed, commands us, to agency. Within the poem, she speaks in the imperative: "keep tangling and interweaving" (Piercy, 1982, no page number available); she entreats us to make real connections in living out our own lives. After all, this is what we are truly here (in this life, on this earth with each other) to do. The thicket and bramble are not a forest or undergrowth separate from us; instead, they are us, a dynamic expression of our entering into and being in relationships with all and everything that constitutes the warp and woof of our collective, co-constituted existence.

"Make love that is loving" (Piercy, 1982, no page number available) the poet writes. The poet entreats us to let love flow as a living force, streaming like the sap that courses through the limbs and stems of the shrubs and trees and bramble. Let it feed our embracing, supporting and seeking one another, nourish our dancing and singing together, and keep the embers of our relationships alive as we wrestle, do battle with and also hurt each other. We need to see and sustain the contact, weave real connections, and

take more and more in. This is what we have 'in our hands'; we are connected and also have something to say and do about both the quality of that connection and its further development. This power to enter into relationship is our salvation as we encounter life's trials, falter and suffer in our confusion, and become paralyzed by our uncertainty and fear. Our interconnectedness does not only help us to bear the pain, but it is also the very soil that provides us with the nutrients that make transformation, emotional, psychological and spiritual, possible. Thus, in our contact with one another, and here I am speaking about genuine meeting, the I-Thou moments of which Buber (1958) speaks, we also find the conditions that foster the healing of our wounds and the germination of new possibilities in our hearts, minds and spirits. This in turn helps us to gather strength, courage and whatever else is necessary to take the next faltering steps on our journey, even when we have been beaten to the ground by rejection, brutality, discouragement, loss, or terror. These changes, this transformation, are nothing less than the manifestation of the further development and maturation of who we are, of our very being. I would like to recount the following experience:

This evening I must push myself especially hard to take a walk, but once outside the unexpected warmth feels welcoming. In less than 10 minutes I am treading the familiar dirt road that snakes its way between the clustered farmhouses and fields that are bordered, on the far side, by the autobahn. As I pass a barn that fronts onto the road, the farmer ... a friendly man in his 60s ... emerges from within, carrying a pail half-filled with fresh milk. In the eight years since I have been taking this walk, we have had perhaps a dozen moments of contact that were more than an exchanged smile, nod or "How are you?" He knows that I am an American, a widow and a psychologist and I know that he has two sons, one of whom works the farm with him and will take it over, the other living in France. The farm has been in the family for generations. This is the extent of our knowledge of each other. In terms of subject matter, our contact has been made up of the simplest, most ordinary of exchanges.

Now the farmer pauses and, while emptying the milk into another pail for the cats gathering at his feet, he looks at me, nods, smiles and asks how I've been. And as I reply, the moment opens up and stretches itself out until its boundaries seem to disappear. We talk about the disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the warming weather. I have to ask him to explain one or two words of his dialect-peppered Dutch, and we start talking about

language. When I mention the economic crisis and learn that he isn't much affected by it, we muse about the difference in the nature of the lives we lead. Suddenly, the distance between the farm and my home feels much more than the 1½ kilometres I have just walked. After perhaps 8 or 9 minutes we nod, wish each other a good evening, and I resume my journey.

And as I walk away from the encounter, I notice that the openness of these moments of contact remain with me to some extent, while at the same time I have a sense of re-entering the world of thinking about things and counting time. The meeting has touched me in a way that also brought me more energy. The words "I feel more at home in and a part of the living world" occur to me as I turn towards home. And at the same time, I realize that this moment of contact we have just shared is an example of exactly what I am trying to write about. For, as ordinary as the conversation was, the meeting we have just shared is not one I would characterize as ordinary. It was a moment of real meeting between two persons, each with the whole of one's being encountering the other. And so I find myself saying, it was also a moment in which love was alive and present.

I do not presume to understand the depth of Buber's (1958) *I and Thou*. However, the moments of true meeting of which he speaks have been occupying me for quite some time. These are moments of deep encounter and authentic contact, of true being-with, or, as Buber (1958) would say, of 'real living'. They are also moments in which, in the words of the Dutch Zen master Ton Lathouwers, a meeting from heart to heart takes place (personal communication, 2007). An encounter of this depth brings with it a particular quality of "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1981, p. 10), for which I have developed a kind of inward antenna. The term 'felt sense' originated with Eugene Gendlin (1964), who used it to refer to the experiential "direct referent" (p. 9), the vague and murky, but nevertheless distinct and precise, bodily felt experiencing of a particular issue or situation in one's life. A felt sense always includes far more than that for which we have yet found words or could ever fully articulate.

Moments of real meeting are neither self-evident nor forced. Instead, they emerge or take form. They are moments in which there is more present than just the two people encountering each other. Spirit also enters into and gives form to these moments. The use of the term spirit might suggest that these moments are always big events, on a grand, dramatic scale, and

thus rare. However, although I would argue that each contact of real meeting is both profound and transformative these contacts are also the stuff of everyday life, arising within and out of the most ordinary, even banal circumstances. Suddenly, often for only a few seconds, a real encounter overcomes us and our normal awareness of time, surroundings and our usual goal-directedness falls away. We become present in a way that engages us fully, seen by and revealed to the other as he or she is seen by and revealed to us. We are unfathomable to each other as a quantity of knowledge or as a collection of life experiences, instead we meet heart-to-heart, we experience and receive each other in those seconds of mutual opening. We know that we see and have been seen, know and have been known, receive and have been received by the other. As the Little Prince tells the fox in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's (1971) classic tale, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye" (p. 87).

Love is the only word we possess that can begin to capture the quality and nature of this meeting. This word has become over-romanticized and diluted through its usage, so that we speak of love for a Big Mac or a Porsche as well as for someone we desire to possess. The love of which I speak goes deeper than emotion, than ecstasy or feeling the rush of 'being in love'. Instead, this love is nothing less than a core aspect of human being; of being human together. Buber (1958) speaks of it as "the metaphysical factor of love to which feelings of love are mere accompaniments" (p. 46).

It is true that naming love has its dangers. I am reminded of something else that Buber (1958) says, about the dilemma of using the word God: "Many ... wish to reject the word God as a legitimate usage, because it is so misused. It is indeed the most heavily laden of all ... words ... For that very reason it is the most imperishable and most indispensable" (p. 75). I would say that the same is true of love. Trying to capture the meaning of love adequately in words is like trying to capture flowing water in a bucket; as soon as you have captured it, it is no longer flowing water. However, even if words are inadequate to the task, they are what we have to communicate with each other. We therefore need to use the word love because it speaks of something for which there are no other words.

I have found that definitions of love that bring insight are hard to come by. Personally, I find Harry Stack Sullivan's (1953) well-known contribution bloodless. He says, "When the satisfaction or the security of another person becomes as significant to one as one's own satisfaction or security, then the state of love exists. Under no other circumstances is a state of love present, regardless of the popular usage of the term"

(Sullivan, 1953, pp. 42-43). I agree with what he says, as far as it goes, for he describes a fundamental condition of love. However, as a definition it feels insufficient, although I am hard-pressed to articulate what it lacks; the word 'juice' comes as close as anything I have found up to now. At the other end of the spectrum is Leo Buscaglia, also known as 'Dr. Love' in the 1970s and early 1980s in the USA. He was an educator who, among other things, taught a course entitled Love 101 for many years at the University of Southern California, always to an auditorium overflowing with students. In one of his published talks, Dr. Buscaglia (1982) says, "Everybody wants a definition. Isn't that interesting? 'Dr. Buscaglia, will you define love?' and I say, 'Noooo! But if you follow me around I'll try to live it'" (p. 131).

Despite the difficulty of defining love, the power of unconditional mutual contact with an other is so fundamental that in the everyday rhythms and demands of modern life it is largely taken for granted. At the same time, examples that touch upon or underscore the healing and transformative energy within even a moment of genuine contact with another are woven through fiction, both prose and poetry, as well as through psychological and philosophical literature.

The setting for the novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, by Muriel Barbery (2008), is number 7 Rue de Grenelle, a luxury apartment house on the Left Bank in Paris. Renée is the building's concierge. A homely, middle-aged widow, she has done her work for years responsibly, honestly and efficiently. The building's wealthy tenants see in her their own stereotype of a concierge, a kind of indentured servant and, with few exceptions, have rarely shown any interest in her personally, never considering her as a woman with a life and interests beyond her work. They do not see her as someone with feelings or opinions, let alone refinement and intelligence. In fact, Renée has also deliberately reinforced this deceit, in her appearance as well as in her reticence, allowing their misperceptions to function as a protective cloak hiding the rich details of her inner life, which is far from stereotypical. In addition to a wide-ranging intellectual intelligence, curiosity and passion for culture, Renée possesses a well-developed emotional and psychological sensitivity to the subtlety and nuance of interpersonal communication.

Paloma, an extraordinarily gifted and perceptive 12 year old also lives at number 7 Rue de Grenelle with her family. Paloma's parents are rich, highly educated and influential. Her father is a member of parliament. Already disillusioned with life, Paloma despairs that there is but one conceivable future for her - ending up in the bourgeois 'goldfish bowl' existence that,

through her observations, seems the only possible outcome of growing up. Determined to reject that superficial, vacuous, money and power oriented adulthood, Paloma has come to the drastic decision that she will end her life on her thirteenth birthday. She will do this by first setting fire to the family apartment, after making sure no one is around, and then taking an overdose of the tranquillizers that she has been stealing and hoarding from her mother's pillbox. As a challenge for the remaining time, Paloma has set herself the task of noting down as many profound thoughts as she can think of in her journal.

Mid-way through the novel a soft-spoken, elegant Japanese man, Kakuro Ozu, buys an apartment in the building. His arrival creates quite a stir because he is so different from all the other residents. Everyone is curious about him and there is rivalry among the residents to have contact with him. Meanwhile, his disinterest in status or self-importance and his attention for authentic meeting are evident. In their first encounter, Renée, the concierge, is occupied with impressing Kakuro with her ineptness when her mask slips, and she makes a literary reference to Tolstoy, which the new tenant clearly recognizes. For a moment, she is caught in real contact with him as the proverbial deer caught in the headlights. Her composure is shattered and leaves her in a panic that her feint has been seen through.

Paloma, the 12 year old, first meets Kakuro when the lift they share becomes stuck between floors. As Paloma writes of the encounter afterwards it is clear that it has sparked something new and unexpected in her. From the start, Kakuro is clearly genuinely interested in her and in becoming acquainted with her as a fellow human being. He sees her, her intelligence and perceptiveness, and meets her as she is. Kakuro then confides in Paloma his suspicions that Renée is not what she appears to be, and Paloma realizes that she has been having the same doubts herself, wondering if the concierge is really as dull and unremarkable as she seems. When Paloma takes leave of Kakuro, the boundaries of her world have shifted. Later, she writes:

So here is my profound thought for the day: this is the first time I have met someone who seeks out people and who sees beyond. That may seem trivial but I think it is profound all the same. We never look beyond our assumptions and what's worse, we have given up trying to meet others; we just meet ourselves. We don't recognize each other because other people have become our permanent mirrors. If we actually realized this, if we were to become aware of the fact that we are only ever looking at ourselves in the other

person, that we are alone in the wilderness, we would go crazy. As for me, I implore fate to give me the chance to see beyond myself and truly meet someone (Barbery, 2008, pp. 140-141).

Allow me to share a personal story:

It is a lovely Sunday in Enschede, a city in the eastern part of the Netherlands that I call home. I am taking my customary walk, as I notice the Turkish family, members from three or four generations, slowly making their way towards me. I am unable to understand their chattering, even when they come closer. But, their nearing presence draws my attention away from my ruminations about my life and the process of working through the grief of my husband's death a year and a half ago. I notice the four or five young adults with their small children, a teenager or two, the middle aged couple, and then my eyes rest for a moment on the tiny elderly woman, clearly the matriarch of this clan, who - like the figurehead of a ship - leads the way, setting the steady, if slow, pace for her clustered kinfolk.

As the group reaches me and begins to pass by, we glance up at each other, nod and smile, and I return my gaze to the path before me. Then I notice something stirring out of the corner of my eye, look up again, and see that the tiny old woman is breaking out of her family group and coming directly towards me. I stand still, realizing that I am her destination. She reaches me, looks into my eyes, smiling warmly and, before I know what is happening, has reached up, taken me in her arms and hugged me. Then she steps back, looking me in eyes again, smiling, as I stand there stunned. She nods once more, seeming satisfied, and walks back to her equally stunned family. We all look at each other, nod briefly again and go our separate ways.

As I continue on, I can hardly believe or begin to understand what has just happened. I feel shaken, confused as well as touched. After a while of trying to figure it all out, I realize that it is time to head home. My step is lighter. I feel blessed. I feel seen. I feel loved.

Most of us would agree that the things that are most fundamental to humanity are often the very things most difficult to express adequately. De Saint-Exupéry's (1971) words come once again to mind; what we would agree is essential - the importance of respect and love for our fellow human being, the recognition of both our autonomy and our inter-

dependence, the rightness of helping one another in times of need, the Golden Rule – forms the fabric of our daily lives. Yet, we generally spend much more time thinking about what we want and the concrete materials, tools and techniques needed to reach our goals, rather than about what we value and believe in the most.

I believe that this is not so different to what occurs in psychotherapy, perhaps even more for therapist than for client. A practitioner's focus is centered on the concepts, theory and techniques that form the frame of his or her work and allow him or her to listen to and make sense of a client's story and to figure out what to do with the client. This focus flows out of the therapist's wish and determination to help the client develop and heal, and bring constructive changes into his or her life. The soil in which this wish and determination must take root is the therapeutic relationship, which is itself grounded in the attitude, but also the very being, of the therapist.

Within the therapeutic space, concepts too frequently eclipse contact; we lose sight of love as the basis for forming and informing our relationship with another. Love is no less important in a helping profession such as psychotherapy. In fact, there it is, if anything, more important, indeed it is necessary. The basic attitude of unconditional positive regard - of meeting the other respectfully, openly, non-judgmentally - was once a specific province of Client-Centered therapy, but it has long been accepted by different schools of psychotherapy as a necessary ingredient of any therapeutic relationship. I suspect that this is so self-evident that it rarely stands out in a therapist's field of vision, at least for very long. Instead, it quickly loses out to new developments in the more conceptual and technical aspects of the profession.

In my own work as a psychotherapist, as well as in my work as a supervisor, I have found that giving specific attention to the therapeutic relationship - the person-to-person, heart-to-heart meeting of two human beings - is often something of which one needs to be reminded. During a conference on focusing-oriented psychotherapies in 2009, Eugene Gendlin commented that although the concepts that we have are very precious, they are only concepts. The way in which we are in touch with the universe is much more direct than that.

In the article entitled "Teaching therapists how to be with their clients" from the book *Awakening the Heart*, psychotherapist Diane Shainberg (1983) writes of her supervision of psychologists and social workers in clinical training. The article tells a simple, eloquent story of an experienced psychotherapist encouraging and nourishing the development of inexperienced therapists by reminding each of them that any healing

taking place in therapy occurs as a result of the genuine meeting between therapist and client and the mutuality of their quest:

There is an illusion that once one knows what "it" means, then some form of *doing* the technique can be practiced on the patient who will then be *helped* The work of the supervisor is to show that the work is ongoing, that there is no "way," that one never knows for sure the experience of the other, and that it is in the mutual participation of discovering the essential quality of the patient that the healing takes place. ... It is this new event of mutuality, of ways of seeing and being together that create a new sense of inner strength in both participants. ... It has been my experience ... that many therapists drown their empathy or appreciation of the client's struggle by worrying that they are not doing enough for the patient, or that they are doing the wrong things. (Shainberg, 1983, pp. 163-164, emphasis in original)

Shainberg's (1983) way of supervision dynamically parallels the process she is inviting her supervisees to enter into with their clients; a process that focuses neither on the client's problems nor on theoretical explanations or therapeutic techniques. Within the genuinely unconditional, nonjudgmental space of their encounter with Shainberg (1983) the supervisees turn their glance inward and describe what they are experiencing in relating to their clients, including their discomfort, anxiety, judgments and sense of inadequacy. Through opening to her, they open also to themselves, and thus supervisor and supervisee move together, deeper into vulnerable waters. The process of self-exploration and self-discovery ultimately yields an expansion of self-awareness that brings clarity regarding the next step the therapist must take. To echo Shainberg's (1983) own words which were quoted above, it is in her mutual participation with the therapist before her of discovering the essential quality of that therapist's discomfort with his or her client that the healing, the genuine contact and deepening insight, takes place.

Since reading Shainberg's (1983) article in the mid-1980s I have periodically returned to the article. Each re-reading helps me reconnect with what is essential in my work as a psychotherapist and my contact with the people I work with as clients. I am continuously reminded by her that the transformative experiences in supervision, as well as those in therapy and elsewhere, arise in a moment of contact that is nothing less than a meeting from heart to heart. Allow me to share my experience:

Anne (not her real name, of course) has been

in psychotherapy with me for more than 17 years, working by phone since my immigration to the Netherlands ten years ago. The progress of our work has been slow, but steady, the positive developments in Anne's life undeniable.

The process of therapy has included a deep exploration and questioning of many of her basic beliefs, and the assumptions that have made it so hard for her to feel much sense of satisfaction about her accomplishments and choices. Anne's clinical depression has long been left behind and she has learned and perfected many of the life-skills missing in her early life. At a more fundamental level, she has come to acknowledge and accept the imperfection of things as an aspect of life in general, albeit reluctantly. Anne's life as a maturing woman has developed firm roots and yielded her many successes through the years, including a greatly improved relationship with her partner.

Despite all of her progress, Anne has continued to struggle with the disillusionment that has accompanied a gradually increasing awareness that the fantasy she consciously created as a child - that she would find the perfect partner, the perfect place and the perfect job - is not going to come true. Not wanting to let go of her idealism, she has nevertheless become aware that such fantasies also have their shadow side. And in the last period of our work together, Anne has begun to see how this relentless search for the perfect life might also bear some, if not most, of the responsibility for the well-fed fear that has dominated her life, that there is something fundamentally "wrong" with her. It has also become increasingly clearer that her expectation of psychotherapy was that it, sooner or later, would "cure" her and show her the way to make the fantasy come true.

Being confronted with an alternative possibility, that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with her, was hard for Anne to accept, or even want to accept in the beginning. The idea that her life - with its ups and downs, problems and solutions, arguments and reconciliations - is simply "life as it is" was also a big letdown.

As this theme became more and more central in our therapy, Anne and I spent an increasing amount of our time working, often at a predominantly cognitive level, on building and strengthening her sense of self-confidence.

This approach meant I was much more active and directive than is usual as a focusing-oriented psychotherapist, although my basic attitude remained consistent. We worked through the issues and situations Anne brought up, more and more frequently arriving at a point where it was obvious to both of us that she had actually dealt with the issue or situation, in all of its aspects, in both a reasonable and well-balanced way. It was my growing experience and opinion that our therapy had run its course and that I truly had no more to offer her, except to help her acknowledge this as true and work together on a rounding off of the treatment. Yet, Anne did not want to talk much about this and certainly wasn't ready to consider termination.

Not knowing how to effectively navigate this situation brought up anxiety about my own professional competence. Colleagues varied in opinion, but a number questioned the professionalism of allowing this dependency to continue. I felt torn between the fundamental attitude of my therapeutic roots and my fears of not following the rules.

At a serious juncture in this internal wrestling, during which I had become nearly obsessed with the question of the wisdom of continuing this therapy, a friend and therapist reminded me of Diane Shainberg's (1983) clear and cogent chapter. As I re-read it carefully, I felt a deep sense of release and relief. For, in that moment, I felt called back to reconnect with the bare bones of how to be with my client. My fears of breaking one of the rules of doing good therapy fell away as I returned to focusing on the relationship and the experiential process of first being - and then working - together. I let go of forcing an end to the therapy, while the subject of Anne's successes and the question of her need for further treatment continued to be threads in our dialogue. We reconnected.

And then one day, as we were talking again about the tenacity of her fear that there is something wrong with her, Anne mused aloud that she had always taken it for granted that she would be in therapy for the rest of her life. But now, instead, she had begun to wonder if that really would be necessary or even helpful. Perhaps devoting so much time and attention to concentrating on what's wrong and how to fix it might actually be contributing to giving the negative side of life so much power, and keeping her from turning her attention to more constructive endeavors.

Anne suggested that perhaps we could try to talk every other week, instead of weekly. I was shocked, and told her so ... that a new horizon seemed to have opened up for her. She laughed and we laughed together. And thus began the new leg of our journey together, a journey that we both know and also now both acknowledge will have its end. An end that will find its form, as it should, in a way congruent with the way we have worked together for so many years, in the meeting from heart to heart.

Buber (1963) writes: "Where there is no sharing there is no reality" (p. 63). Sharing in this deepest sense was what had been missing for some time with my client. My performance anxiety had eclipsed the contact and distracted me from meeting her in the here and now. I had been trying to convince, direct or, in the end, overrule her, instead of seeking to understand her. Concerns about doing what was right preoccupied me, until the friendly reminder to re-read Diane Shainberg's (1983) article. This led me to recognize the folly of my efforts and to see that I was, in Shainberg's (1983) words once again, "drown(ing) my empathy and appreciation of my client's struggle in my worries that I was doing enough ... or doing the wrong things" (p. 164). I found my way back to my client by being reminded to seek her as one person to another person, as one human being valuing and wanting to know another. The return to the "moment-to-moment awareness of what (was) actually taking place" (Shainberg, 1983, p. 174), made such a heart to heart meeting possible once again. I am convinced that it was this being "together (again,) engaged in sharing in the moment, beyond words, time, roles," (Shainberg, 1983, p. 172), that brought with it the possibility for Anne to take a new step. We found the room and the way to speak about what had happened and then to move beyond this.

At number 7 Rue de Grenelle, Kakuro Ozu becomes a catalyst for, among other things, the development of a relationship between the precocious child Paloma and the jaded concierge Renée. Seeking refuge from the noise and superficiality of her family, Paloma gratefully enters the world of Renée's home, or lodge, where the suspicions about Renée's intelligence, passion and sensitivity are confirmed. One day Paloma is at the lodge when the world closes in around Renée, and the concierge finds herself transported back to the past, reliving the story of her poverty-stricken childhood, of her lovely sister who seemed to be destined to escape that fate, and of the tragedy of the sister's return home, in the pouring rain, disgraced and pregnant, dying only hours after giving birth to her stillborn baby. Suddenly, Renée is shocked back into the present and becomes aware that she has been speaking aloud:

Quite abruptly I realize I am sitting in my kitchen, in Paris, in this other world where I have made my invisible little niche, a world with which I have been careful never to mix, and I am weeping great warm tears, while a little girl with an incredibly warm gaze is holding my hand, gently caressing my knuckles. And I also realize that I have said it all, told her everything: Lisette, my mother, the rain, beauty profaned and, at the end of it all, the iron hand of destiny giving stillborn infants to mothers who die from wanting to be reborn. I am weeping plump, hot, long, good tears, sobbing tears, and while I am troubled, I am also incomprehensibly happy to see the transfiguration of Paloma's sad, severe gaze into a well of warmth where I can soften my sobs.

"My God," I say, regaining my composure somewhat, "my God, Paloma, how silly I am!"

"Madame Michel," she replies, "you know, you are giving me hope again".

"Hope?" I say, snuffling pathetically.

"Yes," she says, "it seems it might be possible to change one's fate after all".

We sit there for countless minutes holding hands, not speaking. I have become friends with a lovely twelve year old soul to whom I feel very grateful, and however incongruous this connection may be – asymmetrical in age, condition and circumstances – nothing can taint my emotion.

When Solange Josse comes to the lodge to fetch her daughter, Paloma and I look at each other with the complicity of indestructible friendship, and say goodbye with the certainty we shall meet again soon. I close the door behind them, and sit down in the armchair by the television, with my hand on my chest. And I find myself speaking out loud: "Maybe this, then, is what life is all about". (Barbery, 2008, pp. 284-285)

I often find myself returning to Carl Roger's view of human nature, attributed in part to his reflection on a childhood observation of potatoes kept in the family cellar that sprout and reach toward the feeble light of the one small window (Kirschenbaum, 1979). Rogers saw in this image the striving of life to grow, even in the direst of circumstances. He believed that the disturbed patients with whom he worked were also doing their best, despite their disturbance, or the destructiveness or neglect they had experienced, to reach towards the light and fulfill their potential to become more than they were, more than their

suffering.

In the present age, the extreme idealization of science as the source of all truth and the only true path of deliverance from pain and suffering, whether already revealed or as yet undiscovered, continues to dominate our lives. The shadow side of this religion of science remains largely unexamined. I am not suggesting that we could or would want to do without much of what science and technology have brought us, nor I am not suggesting that we would be better off without these things. My concern is the critical eye we often lack when considering what such a narrow field of vision actually tells us about reality, and especially how we then either deprecate or turn away from so much of the world and our experiencing of it, simply because they do not lend themselves to being examined in this way. Ontological truths are so often invisible to the eye. There is no way to quantitatively measure or manufacture an 'I-Thou' moment. However, our experiencing of such a moment is at the very least uplifting and at the most profound astonishing and transforming.

As therapists, we are suspicious, if not outright terrified, of using such an unscientific word as love to describe an aspect of what we do. We settle for less, for the words or phrases that dance around the edges, such as Carl Rogers' "unconditional positive regard" (Kirschenbaum, 1979, p. 199). Speaking of love in relation to therapy, to change, to healing is certainly fraught with all sorts of difficulties. Yet we are creatures of language, of the Word, and so it seems that we must dare to name it for what it is and acknowledge its role as an essential ingredient of the soil in which one can take root and become more than one's history, one's struggles or one's pain. Through meeting each other from heart to heart we make transformation possible. In this sense, perhaps it is not too much to say that, after all, all we need is love.

I would like to end with the last stanza of the poem with which I began this paper, "The Seven of Pentacles" by Marge Piercy (1982):

Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen:
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.
This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always,
for every gardener knows that after the digging, after
the planting,
after the long season of tending and growth,
the harvest comes (no page number available).

Referencing Format

Sikkema, M. (2012). The meeting from heart to heart: The essence of transformative experiences. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 12 (Special Edition, July: Evidence-Based Approaches and Practises in Phenomenology), 9 pp. doi: 10.2989/IPJP.2012.12.1.8.1116

About the Author



Mical Sikkema completed her education and training in rehabilitation counseling and as an existential psychotherapist in Seattle WA, USA before moving to the Netherlands. Since 2003, she has worked primarily for the Dutch agency InteraktContour as a member of a team of psychologists providing consultation to staff working with physically and neurologically disabled clients. She also maintains a small private psychotherapy practice.

Her approach to therapy and supervision has been strongly influenced by Eugene Gendlin's Focusing Process. As a Certified Focusing professional, her special areas of interest include training psychotherapists, psychotherapists-in-training and other helping professionals and working with clients on issues relating to creativity and creative blocks.

Mical writes, "My work, and indeed my life, is grounded in an ongoing, if sometimes somewhat fanatical process of inquiry into what makes it possible to meet life 'as it is/comes,' whatever it brings, and find an authentic way through. Thus, how can we allow the fullness of whatever we experience, given the paradoxical and uncertain nature of how our experience takes form."

Her publications have addressed issues such as the implications of focusing for psychotherapy and for research, understanding embodied experience, and a phenomenological perspective on the DSM-IV.

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