

Marlise Meilan

# Rest and its Centrality to Psychotherapy

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**Editor's Note:** In this article Marlise Meilan develops the crucial aspect of rest for life, psychotherapeutic process and relationships. In so doing she touches on Hakomi themes of resting in the principles, waiting and trusting organic unfolding, the personhood of the therapist and more. The article is drawn from her Master's Thesis in Contemplative Psychology at Naropa University (The Usefulness of Rest), which provides a fuller treatment of the subject.

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper rest is viewed as a crucial element in both the wellbeing of an individual and the health of the psychotherapeutic relationship. Psychotherapists need to value and model rest as a skill to be learned and honed, and as an aspect of the client's inherent wisdom, or *Brilliant Sanity*. Eastern and Western approaches to rest as a required balance for effective action are explored. How rest can be observed and cultivated in the psychotherapeutic process is outlined, with particular emphasis on the fusion of relaxation, meditation, and psychotherapeutic approaches in the method of Restorative Processing.

## Introduction

*In bullfighting there is an interesting parallel to the pause as a place of refuge and renewal. It is believed that in the midst of a fight, a bull can find his own particular area of safety in the arena. There he can reclaim his strength and power. This place and inner state are called his querencia. As long as the bull remains enraged and reactive, the matador is in charge. Yet when he finds querencia, he gathers his strength and loses his fear. From the matador's perspective, at this point the bull is truly dangerous, for he has tapped into his power. (T. Brach, 2003, p. 64)*

This article is about rest—rest for the client and rest during the psychotherapy process—and it is written with the contemplative-oriented therapist in mind. With a view toward the interrelated nature of the heart, mind and body, relaxation and its role in whole mind-body health will be explored. The concepts of Body-Mind Synchronization, Pausing, Focusing, Non-Doing, Brilliant Sanity, Islands of Clarity, and the Buddhist meditation technique of Calm Abiding will be addressed. Finally, Restorative Processing, a method integrating each of these concepts and techniques, will be introduced. In this way, the meaning of “resting in the present moment” within oneself as a person, as both client and clinician, in and out of the psychotherapeutic context, will be honed.

For me, turning inwards has continuously been of tremendous importance in the process of recovery from events of great magnitude, whether perceived as positive or negative experiences. There is a natural rhythm that calls to me, that I sense I must abide within in order to maintain psychological and physical integrity as a person, as a therapist, and in my experiences as a client. This process is played out through paying attention to the outside world and taking that inward. This allows me to both better understand my perceptions and to find their effect within me. I can then formulate a response and move outward again, expressing and engaging, playfully interacting with my inner and outer worlds.

And if this process sounds like movement, that is because *it is*. Sometimes it is a slow movement inwards, with a quick gesture out; or a fast moving world, a still and quiet pause, then considered and meaningful embodiment. It is that moment of clarity and stillness, that pause, that I will look at, wonder about, and touch lightly with curiosity here. For the purpose of this paper, I will call that pause—and the process of accessing it, being in it, then moving from it—rest.

Like me, my massage school clients are on an intensified personal journey presenting with a broad range of clinical and developmental lifespan concerns. Body image concerns, emotional holding in the body, the effects of physical or sexual abuse, substance misuse, eating

disorders—I have seen all of these issues come surging towards the surface of my clients’ psyches.

### **Stress: The Need for Rest**

Stress comes in many forms. It can be good and beneficial or not so good and taxing to the body. In the form of pressure, stress has some usefulness: goals may be attained through an improvement in motivation and mental focus. In this way, stress can positively be referred to as ‘ustress’ (C. Woolfenden, n.d.). Over time, excessive pressure accumulates and can lead to stress and distress.

Somatic psychotherapists Cedar Barstow and Christine Caldwell discuss the impact of stress on the body. Barstow (2007, p. 205) states:

Recent brain and energy research offers very specific data about the impact of stress on the brain. When stressed, blood flows away from the brain and into our extremities, in preparation for “fight or flight” which leaves us less able to be connected and creatively respond to challenging situations.

Caldwell (personal communication, February 5, 2008) describes the very important division between the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the nervous system: the sympathetic branch is the one which “gears you up, excites you, gets you ready to be really intense and dramatic and defend yourself when you need to defend yourself” and the parasympathetic branch is for “rest, letting go, and recuperation.”

In Somatic Psychotherapy, the goal is to attain balanced tone in both branches of the nervous system so that one is neither overly sympathetically nor parasympathetically dominant. Western technologically based cultures, Caldwell states, are much more sympathetically dominant. That means that we, in modern western society, spend our days overly sympathetically dominant and thereby lacking sufficient time for our bodies to repair themselves and gain parasympathetic tone. Stress related illness, “really most chronic illnesses” (Caldwell, personal communication, February 5, 2008), stem from that lack of balance and tone. “So why,” Caldwell asks, “would the body have an entire division for the nervous system devoted to rest and recuperation if it didn’t really, really need it?”

As a culture we need to begin to find, hold onto, value and understand the purpose of the parasympathetic branch. Convention has it that people in our society overwork and then either collapse or vegetate through television, eating, sleeping, drinking alcohol, or misusing drugs. Instead of slowly coming down and relaxing after daily stress, we enact physically harmful patterns of overexcitement followed by crash and catatonia. Caldwell emphasizes exercise as one way to achieve tone and balance in the

nervous system. Through exercise we can mentally and emotionally relax while the body remains active and then, upon completion, transition to parasympathetic dominance.

Clinical neuroscientist and psychiatrist Daniel Amen (2005, pp. 170-175) gives several recommendations for soothing the brain after stress. He suggests that we recognize that too much stress can make us sick and hurt our brains. “It is okay,” he says, “to say no and to renegotiate your commitments.” He implores us to get enough sleep, to exercise regularly, to pray and/or meditate, and to practice self-hypnosis to calm the brain. He also makes recommendations for becoming “your own biofeedback machine,” avoiding substances that stress the brain (i.e., caffeine, nicotine, “uppers”), considering “stress-busting” supplements (i.e., B vitamins, St. John’s wort, 5-HTP, SAME, L-theanine, or valerian), seeing a psychotherapist (as a “life consultant”), and to “get more laughter into your life.”

### **Relaxation: Letting Go**

*I have so often asked myself whether the days on which we are compelled to be idle aren’t the very ones we spend in the deepest activity? Whether our actions themselves, when they come later, are not merely the last afferring of a great movement that takes place in us on inactive days. (M. R. Rilke as cited in R. Kehl, 2001, p. 170)*

The mind and body are capable of coping with periods of effort so long as these are interspersed with periods of rest and relaxation. As we can see from Caldwell’s description of the nervous system (i.e., the contraction and release movements of the heart, digestive system, and lungs), the body oscillates. The body needs to accomplish both of those movements: working, and relaxing or letting go of effort.

Caldwell calls on the Ayurvedic “Law of Least Effort” which states that in life there are many things that require an expenditure of effort and there are also things that can only be accomplished through not efforting, or letting go of effort. She uses the example of having to let go of thinking, tension and alertness in the body in order to fall asleep. “. . . We have to understand that actually resting or letting go accomplishes things. It is not that it is doing nothing but that it actually accomplishes things” (Caldwell, personal communication, February 5, 2008). Metabolic waste and toxins accumulate during consciousness. Cellular repair, for instance, is one of the documented functions of rest (Savage & West, 2007, p. 1051). The body accomplishes physical repair work when it rests. Without respite, irritation, unhappiness, stress, and vulnerability to disease arise.

“Relaxation” is a term used to broadly describe numerous techniques that assist in reducing stress, eliminating physical tension, and promoting calm and tranquil mind-states. People use many different methods of relaxation for anger management, anxiety, cardiovascular health,

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depression, general wellbeing, headache, high blood pressure, immune system support, insomnia, pain management, and the reduction of the incidence and severity of stress-related diseases and disorders. Progressive relaxation, cue-controlled relaxation, breathing exercises, guided imagery/visualization, and biofeedback are all widely used by healthcare providers.

Rediscovering the state of relaxation, rather than learning a new activity, is the goal of relaxation techniques. H. Benson (as cited by Lazar et al., 2000, p. 1582) describes the “relaxation response,” a stress-reduction mechanism in the body that short-circuits the “fight-or-flight” response and leads to measurable reductions of oxygen consumption, heart and respiratory rate, blood pressure, blood cortisol levels, and muscle tension in the body. Additionally, through deep relaxation serotonin levels in the brain increase, leading to feelings of calm and wellbeing, and electroencephalogram (EEG) studies of brain wave patterns mark a noticeable change in alpha and theta rhythms—indicating a state of harmony—through deep relaxation and meditation (Blakemore & Jennett, 2001, ¶ 1).

### ***Body-Mind Synchronization: Losing Oneself Without Feeling Lost***

Generally, relaxation techniques that engender synchronization between the mind and body are held to have greater effectiveness in the reduction of stress and the increase of relaxation (Blakemore & Jennett, 2001, ¶ 1). Epstein (1999, p. 31) provides an account of his experience of Body-Mind Synchronization while juggling,

As I finally became able to keep three balls in the air, I noticed suddenly how quiet my mind had become. My everyday thoughts had vanished, and the tension in my shoulders was gone. I was momentarily undefended and curiously at peace. I wasn't trying to relax, and I wasn't trying not to relax. Everything was floating. I was no longer centered in my thinking mind.

Sitting still instead of habitually acting out or mentally obsessing, one may also let go of thinking or doing and become intimate with what is happening in the body, heart and mind. D. W. Winnicott (as cited by M. Epstein, 1999, p. 36) discusses the “mystic's withdrawal into a personal inner world” where “the loss of contact with the world of shared reality (is) counterbalanced by a gain in terms of feeling real.”

Winnicott wrote of experiences of letting go as “unintegration.” Epstein (1999, p. 37) relates his experience while juggling to that of unintegration—what I am here calling Body-Mind Synchronization—namely, the state in which the body and mind are conjointly focused and so the self can unwind because the usual need for control is suspended. This can be done through meditation or any of the aforementioned relaxation techniques, as well as many other practices including: yoga, tai-chi, some martial arts,

playing musical instruments, riding horses, making art, or any number of practices involving the use of the mind and body toward the one end of focusing on one task or state of being.

## Cultivating Clarity

*Sanity is always present even within psychosis. Moments of insight, common sense, or compassion continually interrupt mental turbulence. These experiences, however brief, are like awakening from a dream. They are 'Islands of Clarity' that must be recognized as the seeds of recovery. (E. Podvoll, 2003)*

Marya is a woman in her mid-thirties who presents, in general, with a high level of emotional maturation and an extensive history of personal processing. To greater and lesser extents, most of her concerns center around issues of childhood sexual abuse and her residual low level of positive self-esteem. This is a short excerpt from one of our sessions in which she is able to access clarity and joy amidst emotional pain and desolation:

**Therapist:** So much pain. [Marya nods, still crying, and looks down with her eyes mostly closed] Marya, is there some place in you that is untouched by the abuse? . . . Some place that wasn't destroyed?

**Marya:** Mm . . . (pause) mm-hm . . .

**T:** Mm-hmm? Where in your body do you feel that untouched place? [Marya places her hands over her heart] . . . It's in your chest. . . [Marya nods] . . . It's in your heart. . .

**M:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**T:** Just stay with that. . . Stay with that feeling and see what comes up. [Marya sits silent for some time with her hands over her heart, her body turned inwards. One corner of her mouth tremulously turns upwards, then the other wavers.] Mm . . . a smile. . . [Marya nods and some tears fall while she's smiling. She begins to laugh a little.] Mm. You're laughing . . . [I'm smiling.] You're happy. . .

Marya goes on to describe the happiness she feels in her heart, the sense of wonder and joy and the innocence of her girlhood prior to the abuse. I am delighted and amazed at her ability to access, describe, and feel the playful mischievousness of her youth.

### ***Islands of Clarity***

Epstein (1999, p. 169) relates how Tibetan “inner scientists” (i.e., meditators) maintain that “the clear light nature of mind” shines through our everyday consciousness only very occasionally during such events as “sneezing, fainting, going to sleep, ending a dream, having an orgasm, or dying.” These relieving moments, or “Islands of Clarity,” are habitually ignored because surrendering to them threatens psychological defenses which protect a solid,

separate sense of self. They break through into consciousness, however, “when we encounter some unfathomable mystery in ourselves or those we love,” or in meditation “when some burdensome mind-state suddenly falls away” (J. Welwood, 2000, pp. 80-81).

Welwood (2000, p. 83) views psychopathology, then, as the rejection of this open, spacious clarity or clear light nature due to the perceived threat to the sense of self. A psychotherapist can assist a client in increasing awareness of these open spaces and help the client to learn to relax fully into them.

Whenever we allow ourselves to experience some difficult feeling, or whenever an old identity starts to loosen up, the larger space of being that this feeling or identity had been obscuring starts to be revealed. This is a challenging moment, because it can often feel as though we are falling through space. If we resist space at this point, the falling becomes terrifying, and we may try to abort the experience, “pulling ourselves together” by contracting and tensing. This prevents us from freeing ourselves from the old fixation that was starting to dissolve. . . . Yet if we can learn to relax into the expansiveness that is opening up, then we may begin to discover *space as support*: The ground of our being actually holds us up. We may feel extremely light at the same time, as though we are floating on a bed of clouds. Once we have made this discovery, the shedding of old identities becomes far less frightening. (Welwood, 2000, p. 84)

Resting and relaxing into this spacious clarity and lightness helps clients to discover that this is who they really are. It also plays a crucial role in creativity: when concentration and absorption states are balanced with play and rest, creative discoveries and spiritual realizations arise which allow the mind to move beyond conventional reference points (Caldwell, personal communication, 2008; Welwood, 2000).

Buddhadasa (as cited by Brach, 2003, p. 69) calls interludes of natural or purposeful pausing “temporary nirvana.” By not exclusively pursuing positive experiences, nor resisting negative ones, freedom is possible in any given moment. Without these interludes, Buddhadasa (as cited by Brach, 2003, p. 69) writes:

. . . living things would either die or become insane. Instead, we survive because there are natural periods of coolness, of wholeness, and ease. In fact, they last longer than the fires of our grasping and fear. It is this that sustains us.

## **Pausing**

A pause is a suspension of activity, a time of temporary disengagement when we are no longer moving toward any goal. . . . The pause can occur in the midst of almost any activity and can last for an instant, for hours, or for seasons of our life. We may take a

pause from our ongoing responsibilities by sitting down to meditate. We may pause in the midst of meditation to let go of thoughts and reawaken our attention to the breath. We may pause by stepping out of daily life to go on a retreat or to spend time in nature or to take a sabbatical. We may pause in a conversation, letting go of what we’re about to say, in order to genuinely listen and be with the other person. We may pause when we feel suddenly moved or delighted or saddened, allowing the feelings to play through our heart. In a pause we simply discontinue whatever we are doing—thinking, talking, walking, writing, planning, worrying, eating—and become wholeheartedly present, attentive, and often, physically still. You might try it now: Stop reading and sit here, doing “no thing,” and simply notice what you are experiencing. (Brach, 2003, p. 51)

We can encourage and cultivate moments of spacious clarity through Pausing. Brach (2003, p. 60) describes an image of Siddhartha the Buddha seated under the Bodhi tree as a mythic symbol of the potency within Pausing. Siddhartha, she points out, was totally available to all of life’s experiences because he was neither running towards nor away from positive or negative experiences.

We, too, can become available to—and engaged with—the changing stream of life. Inclusion of the unfaced, unfelt parts of our psyche, such as the wants and fears that are driving us (Brach, 2003, p. 52), can be attained through pausing to relate to direct experience. In this way we cease living for a future time or place and instead become aware of how we are limited by feelings that something is missing or wrong.

Pausing into stillness can awaken us to Islands of Clarity and the truth of who we are. Pausing is limited by nature as we return to thought and action, but that return is flavored by increased present-moment awareness and an increased capacity for decision-making (Brach, 2003, p. 51). Thought and action are often required for thriving and surviving.

In the midst of a pause we are giving room and attention to the life that is always streaming through us, the life that is habitually overlooked. It is in this rest under the bodhi tree that we realize the natural freedom of our heart and awareness. Like the Buddha, rather than running away, we need only commit ourselves to arriving, here and now, with wholehearted presence (Brach, 2003, p. 70).

## ***Focusing: Pausing During Psychotherapy to Focus on the Inner Experience***

One way to pause and thereby potentially increase the possibility of realizing an Island of Clarity during the psychotherapy session is through Gendlin’s method of Focusing (E. Gendlin, 1981, p. 4). Through Focusing, we purposefully stop mental busyness and take a few minutes to simply pause and notice, describe and dialogue with our

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inner experience. In the third “movement,” or step, of Focusing we ask ourselves, “Is it okay to just be with this right now?” (A. W. Cornell, 1990, p. 35). It is important during this process to just “be with”—and not try to impose the ego’s agenda on—the inner part of the self that we Focus on. Instead, a deep breath is taken as the body deeply settles, and we consciously remember that this process is one of just sensing internally, being open to whatever arises, and “keeping it (the felt sense) company” (Cornell, 1990, p. 35).

In the following clinical example, one of my young male clients is telling me about the dissolution of a meaningful, long-term but strife-ridden relationship. Despite his meticulous grooming and physical beauty, Xavier has poor self-regard. He is in his early twenties, highly insightful into his own psychological processes, and possesses ready accessibility to his inherent wisdom with a predisposition toward metaphorical and mystical thinking.

Xavier displays multiple symptoms of bulimia and is often very troubled in his personal relationships. His family wildly wields control in his life through the micromanagement of Xavier’s finances. Due to his fiscal reliance on a family trust, Xavier’s behavior is subject to approval by his grandparents who frequently revoke support whenever he does not meet their expectations. Xavier describes a fiery relationship with his father, whom he has apparently been manipulated into playing the emotional caretaker for since he was very young. In his early life, Xavier’s parents divorced due to betrayals on both parts and Xavier has since been forced into a colluding triangle, hiding his father’s secret relationships from his mother and the rest of their family.

Xavier is torn between a need for personal space in order to care for himself during periods of overwhelming chaos, and a conflicting desire to both please his leaving partner (one last time) as well as avoid feeling regret. This example illustrates how through Focusing, Xavier is able to access and stay with a deeply-rooted fear and the core belief it stems from:

**Xavier:** I want to appreciate the time with her but it’s just totally out of line with my values, my morality...but I felt so desperate...

**Therapist:** So when you feel like something is out of line with your morality, how do you know that? Where in your body do you sense that “out of line with my morality” feeling?

**X:** Right here [placing a hand on his abdomen]...

**T:** Right there, in your stomach, in your gut...

**X:** Yeah, in my stomach and my heart...

**T:** Okay, so when you stay with that feeling in your stomach, in your heart, what comes up?

**X:** It just feels twisted... just totally wrong... and there’s this pain, too, in my throat...

**T:** What’s happening in your throat?

**X:** It just feels constricted and tight, like pain...

**T:** Do you have a sense of what the pain in your throat is about?

**X:** Yeah... [starts to cry] It just hurts so much because I worry that she’s going to leave me...

**T:** There’s a fear there, a fear of being left, of being abandoned...

**X:** Yeah, and that *I’m going to be alone forever*...

Continually judging, rejecting and turning away from experiences that cause discomfort, pain or anxiety creates pressure, stress and an inward divide from the totality of who and what we are. Focusing with a client may begin with just minute-long pauses. Over time, a client may learn to remain present with waves of intense sensations and emotions. Eventually, though, pausing to Focus may lead to real relief: interludes of temporary nirvana or Islands of Clarity that allow one to come home to oneself in an intimate and honest way.

Over time, Xavier has responded very positively to Focusing. Although fear and anxiety, as well as impulsive thinking and reactive behavior, still frequently surface for Xavier in the midst of relational challenges, he now naturally sources his felt sense of these experiences in his body with few cues from me. For longer and longer periods of time he has demonstrated an ability to tolerate the intensity of this felt sense and he has thereby also accessed the peace that follows more regularly. As he has gained the ability to stay with his experiences and find inner tranquility, he has also made enormous developmental and relational strides such as moving out of his father’s home for the first time, getting his first job, and verbally setting boundaries in his significant relationships.

## Resting the Mind in Meditation

*“Relaxing my mind into its own deeper nature...I could reach beyond my personality into something more open”  
(Epstein, 1999, p. 171-172).*

## Calm Abiding

Not getting caught up in thoughts, feelings, and sensations is much easier when the mind is calm. The Buddhist technique of *Calm Abiding* (*shamata* in Sanskrit, *shinay* in Tibetan) is one of “simply allowing the mind to rest calmly as it is” (Y. Mingyur, 2007, p. 138). Mingyur (2007, p. 139) describes resting the mind in “objectless shinay meditation” as simply letting go and relaxing as if you have just finished a long day of work. In this type of meditation, one neither blocks nor follows the various thoughts, emotions or sensations that arise. Aware and present with what is happening in the here-and-now, one is not fixated on anything nor lost in aimless fantasies, memories or daydreams.

## ***Brilliant Sanity***

The natural clarity of this state is what is termed “Brilliant Sanity” in *Contemplative Psychotherapy*. Brilliant Sanity is always present, always open and clear even when thoughts and emotions obscure it. Clarity, emptiness, and compassion are contained within that state even though it may seem very ordinary (Mingyur, 2007, p. 139-140). Mingyur (2007, pp. 140) states:

Objectless shinay practice is the most basic approach to resting the mind. You don't have to watch your thoughts or emotions...nor do you have to try to block them. All you need to do is rest within the awareness of your mind going about its business with a kind of childlike innocence, a sense of “Wow! Look how many thoughts, sensations, and emotions are passing through my awareness right now!”

Mingyur (2007, p. 140) gives simple instructions: sit with a straight spine, keeping the body balanced and relaxed, and allow your mind to “relax in a state of bare awareness of the present.” He tells us that for some this practice is very difficult, for others it is very easy, and this is based on temperament more than competency. The purpose of this type of meditation is to slowly and gradually break the habit of losing touch with what is happening in the present moment and to instead remain open to all the possibilities in the state of present awareness.

Upon following after thoughts, one is not to criticize or condemn oneself, but recognize one's intention to meditate and allow that to bring you back to the present moment again and again. Practicing in this way, moment by moment, Mingyur (2007, p. 141) states, “you'll find yourself gradually becoming free of mental and emotional limitations that are the source of fatigue, disappointment, anger, and despair, and discover within yourself an unlimited source of clarity, wisdom, diligence, peace, and compassion.”

## ***The Meditation Relaxation Response***

Benson (Lazar et al., 2000) reports that meditation also induces the “relaxation response,” a variety of biochemical and physical changes in the body. It acts as an overall balancer of the body, helping the body understand how to alternate between relaxing and high-energy states (Caldwell, personal communication, February 5, 2008).

Caldwell describes how sitting with a calm, relaxed, straight back engages the postural muscles along the spine and when those muscles engage while the rest of the body is relaxed, one's attentional capacity is sharpened. She uses the metaphor of attention, itself, as a muscle, and of the meditator and therapist as “attentional athletes.” It is also easier to achieve a state of responsive, creative awareness, to be objective in emotionally or morally difficult situations, and to be more fully aware in any situation through the

wider, more flexible attention span that is stabilized through meditation.

Kabat-Zinn (1990, p. 72) discusses how some of his clients discover meditation to be exhilarating. For some it doesn't seem like work but rather “an effortless relaxing into the stillness of being, accepting each moment as it unfolds.” There are moments of wholeness, he states, that are accessible to everyone, all the time. Returning to your breathing for any length of time is a return to wholeness, an affirmation of one's intrinsic mental and physical balance, untouched by the passing state of either the mind or the body in any moment. “Sitting becomes a relaxation into stillness and peace beneath the surface agitations of your mind. It's as easy as seeing and letting go, seeing and letting go, seeing and letting go” (J. Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 72).

Kabat-Zinn, Chapman & Salmon (1997, as cited by T. McCall, 2007, p. 139) found that people need different ways to approach self-awareness and self-knowing. Whereas some find the mind to be a more accessible route, others need to enter via the body. Kabat-Zinn, et al. (1997, pp. 101-109) found that patients whose anxiety manifested mainly as somatic symptoms preferred the less body-oriented meditation, and that hatha yoga was preferable to mindfulness meditation for those with mainly mental symptoms such as constant worry.

Fully living our lives involves the willingness to accept and lean into whatever arises in our experience with the knowledge of, or faith in, its workability (J. Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 142). This willingness to work with ourselves with awareness means easing ourselves again and again back into the present moment and all that it has to offer. It means that we *rest* in that awareness and draw on its energies, its qualities of clarity, openness and compassion in our everyday lives, just as they are.

Zen teacher and author, Charlotte Joko Beck (as cited by Brach, 2003, p. 53) teaches about the capacity to “return to that which we have spent a lifetime hiding from, to rest in the bodily experience of the present moment—even if it is a feeling of being humiliated, of failing, of abandonment, of unfairness.” As we have seen, through Body-Mind Synchronization, Pausing, Focusing, and meditation, we can develop the capacity to stop hiding, to stop running away from our experience. Then we can begin to trust in our intelligent and naturally wise heart, body and mind; and in our ability to be available to whatever arises.

## ***The Role of Meditation in Psychotherapy***

*At the moment of the existential encounter between therapist and client, the client's whole world is present. All of the client's significant past relationships, all of that person's most basic hopes and fears are there and are focused on the therapist. If we can make it possible for our clients to become aware that their worlds are coming to rest in us, and if we*

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*can be there, fully there, to receive their awareness and respond to it, the relationship cannot help but become therapeutic. (Kahn, 1997, p. 177)*

In order for growth to occur and for change to take place, the therapist needs to be present to the client, and the client needs to maintain a focus on the here-and-now. Often clients come to therapy presenting with a story about some unhappiness or crisis in their lives. Instead of delving into the past, the therapeutic session can be used to explore what is happening from moment to moment in relation to the presenting issue.

Some of the most powerful and effective psychotherapists are those who can invite and allow others to have their direct experiences without elaboration or fabrication. The therapist can generously model authentic presence that is natural and spontaneous and that supports the client's inner investigations through their ability to rest in the here-and-now. This capacity for presence in the midst of mental distractions can be cultivated and sustained through meditation training and practice.

"Whether it is revealed in lovemaking, meditation, or psychotherapy, this unstructured and unintegrated state of mind is the foundation of all that is healing" (Epstein, 1999, p. 170). Meditation and psychotherapy both contain within them the possibility of uncovering how we use thinking as a coping mechanism in a chaotic and unpredictable environment and how we identify with this thinking mind rather than the open spaciousness of Islands of Clarity. Focusing on the present moment can have a tremendous healing effect for the client (Corey, 2001, as cited by T. Hawkes, 2007, ¶ 5), and the concerns that a client presents with may be resolved through the state of increased awareness and relaxation brought about through meditation (Chandler & Holden, 1992, as cited by T. Hawkes, 2007, ¶ 5).

Boorstein (2000, as cited by Hawkes, 2007, ¶ 5) shows, through four of his own case studies, that vipassana mindfulness meditation lowered or dissolved his clients' psychological defenses and consequently exposed what lay beneath (i.e., Brilliant Sanity or Islands of Clarity). Hawkes (2007, ¶ 5) states:

Being able to relax is then the first step to feeling what is happening, and in feeling without judgment there is a possibility for insights to arise. Once there is an insight into what to do, there is of course often a need to act, but from this relaxed space it becomes easier to gather the courage necessary to take action which could otherwise be blocked by an excess of anxiety over outcomes (Perls, 1973; Kelly 1996).

The meditative experience within a therapeutic setting gives the client an opportunity to gain a larger, more objective perspective en route to resolving a particular issue (Hawkes, 2007, ¶ 5). A regular meditation practice may be very

helpful for clients searching for meaning in their lives, as well as increasing clients' parasympathetic tone.

## Restful Psychotherapy

*"Replacing an anxious 'having to know everything' with an attitude of curiosity and attention to what is happening, can bring more ease and healing receptiveness for both you and your clients"*  
(C. Barstow, 2007, p. 210).

## Silence, Noninterference and Not Striving: Resting in Non-Doing

By being present and not interfering, a therapist creates a "holding environment" (Epstein, 1999, p. 38) that nourishes the client's psychic life. Journeying into stillness and silence, our minds begin to attune to a "new realm of experience that can produce surprise in each moment" (D. J. Siegel, 2007, p. 72). Siegel (2007, p. 73) proposes that it is through stillness that deep settling and stabilizing strength occurs in the mind that allows one to become aware of the mind's subtle functions and fine structures. Mental activity has a "cloudlike vaporous quality," Siegel says, one which is possible to witness when stillness peels away the superficial solidity and permanence of chattering thoughts and feelings.

Through silence and waiting, the client may begin to understand that the clinician will not hurry them or solve their problems. This holding environment gives the client permission to engage in self-directed thought, pacing and processing. The therapist's avoidance of silence may lead to unskillful speech, not listening fully to the client, missing nonverbal cues, and the interruption of the client's organic process (Moursund & Kenny, 2002, p. 89). Conversely, overuse may lead to the client experiencing anxiety, confusion, or subjective abandonment.

Telling the client everything that we know may be confusing and anxiety inducing, activating the client's defenses. Rather than teaching the client to depend on the clinician for direction and ideas, remaining quiet invites and allows the client to go deeper. "Take a deep breath. Study the situation. Wait to see what unfolds" (Kottler, 2000, as cited by Moursund & Kenny, 2002, p. 89). In this way, saying nothing is accomplishing something.

The skillful therapist need not *do* very much in the psychotherapy session. Instead, the client's inner wisdom can be trusted and the client thereby empowered to grow and change of his or her own accord (G. Johanson & R. Kurtz, 1991, p. 100). Akin to the Ayurvedic Law of Least Effort, "Non-Doing" is available to both clinician and client.

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It is a rare gift to find someone who can help by not being too helpful, who can facilitate without getting in the way, who can be involved without mixing up his own needs with ours, and who can be a midwife for transformation without taking credit away from the mother and child. (Johanson & Kurtz, 1991, p. 100-101).

The therapist's efficacy stems from their own ability to rest in Brilliant Sanity and through not trying to make anything special happen. Letting go of personal and therapeutic agendas and not interfering with the client's process achieves quickly what controlling forcefulness does not (Johanson & Kurtz, 1991, pp. 83-85).

... You not only have to enter the symptom, but you also have to step out of the symptom and rest away from it, very much like labor and delivery. In the sessions it's a lot like labor and delivery where there are contractions, where you enter a state that may be painful or intense, and then there is a release from that contraction where you need to just release and relax away from it. (Caldwell, personal communication, February 5, 2008)

In the natural ebb and flow of the therapy session, there are organic moments in which to pause; moments when the therapist can introduce a deep breath or a small break to silently contemplate. Both the client and clinician can cease working or efforting and allow their bodies to relax and attention to drift. If the therapist remains grounded, the oscillation between actively working and relaxing with a client occurs. In contrast, a codependent or neurotic need to help results in over-effort and burnout (Caldwell, personal communication, February 5, 2008). Rest is as much of an accomplishment in psychotherapy as "the work" is.

One of the great satisfactions of this work... comes at the moment students realize that when they enter the consulting room, they don't need to don a therapist mask, a therapist voice, a therapist posture, and a therapist vocabulary. They can discard those accoutrements because they have much, much more than that to give their clients. (M. Kahn, 1997, p. 163)

### ***Self-care: Relaxing the Caretaker Role***

Resting in the knowledge of our own boundaries and limitations allows us to remain powerful and centered. It allows us to realize our own *querencia* in the arena of the greed, ignorance, and aggression that create so much suffering in our world. From this place of clarity and power, we can act with more effectiveness and confidence.

An exhausted single parent of a little boy, Pete often physically collapses upon entering the room for an individual psychotherapy session. Lying on the floor, covered with a blanket, bolstered by pillows, breathing heavily and with great distress, he tells of me of his immense love of, and intense desire to spend more time with, his son. Pete works two jobs while attending BCMT

full-time. In one position, he is an attentive and capable server at a local restaurant, and in the other he is a facilitator for peer counseling and drama therapy groups at a nearby high school. In short, nearly all of his many roles entail helping others. Here he tells me about the difficulties he is having in arranging child-care for his son with his parents:

**Pete:** They say they can't handle it because he is being bad . . . and I'm like, "Well if you guys actually set a boundary and hold a boundary, then he wouldn't throw a fit with you all the time." Then it becomes . . . well, I guess we're all a family of over-extenders. We always want to help, but we don't take very good care of ourselves. So, it makes sense that I didn't really learn how to take care of myself...

My clients are training to become helping professionals. As a helping professional, taking a break from working, moving outward, and extending to others is crucial. One needs to rest and attend to one's own needs and feelings. Cozolino (2004, p. 181) addresses what he labels "pathological caretaking." Pathological caretakers only extend outwards—they avoid feeling within because to feel themselves would be to feel pain, to feel "bad."

Often, for their own reasons, the parents of caretakers were preoccupied with their own dilemmas and thereby were unavailable to reflect the child's worth back to them as the child's sense-of-self developed. The experience of a pathological caretaker's childhood was one in which the child was not given a chance to relax. Instead he or she remained on guard, mobilized to respond to the parents' needs and thereby prevented from "floating away into her own experience" (Epstein, 1999, p. 38). This led the child to develop a self-identity as the one who assists or takes care of others, namely the parent(s).

These children grow up knowing themselves only as the person who makes others feel good and unaware of their own feelings, needs, and desires (L. Cozolino, 2004, p. 181). Resting, in this case, also means arresting: the caretaker stops defining themselves only by their ability to regulate others and begins a journey of self-discovery, developing an awareness and vocabulary for their own inner experiences. Rest is an important component of self-care because it means that the caretaker must both value their own wellbeing and move inwards in order to know what one's own wellbeing looks and feels like in an experiential way. One must come back into the living of the life within one's own body and in this way achieve mind-body synchronization.

Helping professions often appeal to pathological caretakers as a natural match for their skills and inclinations. However, as Barstow (2007, p. 203) notes, these helping professionals:

... tend to focus their energies and attention toward service and care of others to the detriment of their own

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care. So committed to service and healing, they frequently forget that when they are “burned out,” their clients won’t be getting the level of professional care that the caregivers are capable of offering.

Barstow (2007, p. 205) lists the results of a lack of self-care as: impaired judgment, dulled alertness and attention, reduced warmth and generosity, increased defensiveness, more easily triggered annoyance, frustration or anger, over confidence, murky boundaries, lack of compassion or over-compassion, decreased sensitivity to transferences, illness or burn-out, and resentment. The antidote to this lack of self-care is rest: time for renewal, play, exercise, and kindness towards oneself.

“When we overextend ourselves, ignoring our own needs, we may end up being more of a problem than a help... Sometimes letting go is hard because we *have* been helpful. We are reluctant to give up this satisfying role” (Wegela, 1996, pp. 217-219). It is important to reconnect with a sense one’s own intentions, health and goodness when one finds oneself caught up in codependent or neurotic caretaking. This is, as we have seen, possible through meditation and other self-care methods. Additionally, meditation assists one in recognizing and preventing burnout symptoms sooner rather than later (Wegela, 1996, p. 218).

Barstow (2007, p. 204) suggests the following experiment: “Turn your awareness inside and notice your experience when you imagine hearing the words: ‘It’s okay to take care of yourself.’” Realizing our worthiness of love and care, and enjoying and being nourished by the world *as it is* gives our work, as helping professionals, integrity (Johanson & Kurtz, 1991, p. 97).

... land your attention in all these simple environmental elements that are quite wonderful and quite doing just fine... really see that that is out there too, not just the people who need help, but also these ducks that are quite happily feeding in the pond and the trees that are growing and the sky that is getting dark and those things. It’s important to balance out... with a deep perception of those things, because otherwise you get locked into, or sucked into, only seeing what needs help.” (C. Caldwell, personal communication, February 5, 2008)

### ***Restorative Processing: A Unique Method for Rest***

After many years of yoga practice and teaching, I have found deep physical and emotional healing in postures that allow the body and mind to soften and release. Understanding the usefulness of rest in my own life, I sought a way to assist clients in fostering restful Islands of Clarity and uncovering their Brilliant Sanity. What I have developed is a way of combining restorative yoga positions, breathing exercises, visualizations, meditation and psychotherapy techniques into a one and one half hour session for both individuals and groups. The result is a

method that is restful both for the participant and the Restorative Processing Practitioner (RPP).

Each session varies as I organically pull from a collection of visualizations and meditations that I have compiled from a vast variety of sources, including my own imagination. There is also a structure, made up of certain yoga postures and breathing exercises, that continues from session to session.

A recent group started with several very excited students loudly entering the room. One man asked, “Can we just have a talk session today? I really don’t want to do the whole ‘focus on one issue’ thing. I think that would just be too intense right now.” I looked at the two new members and Jane, with her legs up the wall. I turned back to the man, Alex.

“Alex,” I said, “I want to honor your request to have a talk session...” He had a look of satisfaction and what I interpreted as superiority. “. . . And I also wonder what your intention for coming to this session, *a Restorative Processing session*, might be.” “Well,” he said, “I know I need to relax, but I just think I might be able to relax more if I can talk with my friends here.”

“Ah, so you would like to relax and you would also like some time to connect . . . . How would it be if we set aside some time at the end of the session today specifically for communicating with each other with the awareness of how that might be different from how we usually communicate when we have not just finished the Restorative Processing exercises?” He agreed, and in turn I offered to start the session differently so as not to trigger too much “intensity” for him.

I led the group through the series of yoga postures, interspersed and intertwined with breathing and relaxation exercises, meditations, and visualizations. After approximately forty-five minutes, the participants laid silently in the final reclining pose for twenty minutes. With twenty-five minutes left in the session, I offered a space for the group members to express themselves. There was silence for what seemed like a long time.

Quietly, from the fringe of the sleepy-eyed and soft-faced group of cross-legged people with blankets strewn around them, “Thank you,” was voiced. A soft chorus of gratitude echoed through the room. Then one of the women from the previously noisy group of four said to one of the newcomers, “You look so peaceful over there. So happy...” Alex agreed, “Like a Buddha.” The new member, a man named Tim, smiled with his eyes glowing in the direction of the two who had spoken to him. Calmly, peacefully, a conversation ensued in which the members spoke freely and openly with one another, attempting contact—in my perception—in a genuine and heartfelt way. Alex, I noticed, looked happy.

## Conclusion

*Bodhisattvas are, in the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, individuals who strive to develop wisdom and compassion in order to help all other living beings to also do so, thus bringing an end to everyone's endless re-birth into suffering. Bodhisattvas make a vow to let go of the harmful and delusional ways of relating, which come with attachment and aggression and ignorance. (L. Casalino, 2008, p. 355)*

In this paper, we explored rest with a view toward holistic mind, heart and body health with an integration of both Western psychological and Eastern contemplative perspectives, culminating in an exploration of the method of Restorative Processing. It is my hope that you, as the reader, have come to understand that rest isn't hard to accomplish. Resting fully is a matter of intention, motivation, cognitive understanding and practice. These elements together engender a deep, somatic level of understanding and knowledge. Not only is it not difficult, rest is an important and enjoyable aspect of the process of gaining greater self-awareness. It holds, with the blossoming of its process, a potential for the fruitful discovery of wisdom, confidence, nourishment, fulfillment and deep, inner peace.

As a result of implementing a stable resting component of our lives, and thereby achieving tone in our central nervous systems, we become better able to act—more efficient in our *doing*—in clear and kind ways. Resting in *being* balances out the culturally-imposed imperative to do, do, do. By consciously choosing to rest, we are choosing sanity, wholeness, and wellbeing. When we are able to recognize that we are inherently sane, whole, and well, we are increasingly able to maintain happy and healthy intrapersonal, personal, and professional relationships.

Not just relaxation, but the entire process of rest, could be further researched with regards to specific clinical issues. What impact, for instance, would a deep experience of conjoint rest have for a couple in conflict? How would those who struggle with substance misuse and addiction benefit from a period of intensive rest? If people with attachment or mood disorders had the opportunity to rest deeply for a length of time on a regular basis, what changes would they see in their symptoms and relationships? I would like to encourage a deep self-study on the topic of rest for every helping professional so that they could then whole-heartedly and whole-mindedly educate, encourage and empower others in the practice of rest.

Also, empirical evidence as to Restorative Processing's efficacy in relieving the suffering of psychological difficulties could be **investigated**. While numerous studies have determined the effectiveness of yoga and relaxation with behavioral and stress-related concerns, Restorative Processing—as an integration of multiple techniques—could be **explored** as a beneficial method for working (or

rather, resting) with many people in various ways. One premise that I am proposing in this paper is that Restorative Processing might be particularly helpful in assisting “caretakers” transform into “caregivers” who are able to give from an abundance of energy and wellbeing, rather than enlarging a personal deficit when they extend to others. This may in fact be one way to effectively transition from codependent or compulsive caretaking to an embarkation on the path of the bodhisattva, without the implication that one must be Buddhist to do so.

I have witnessed the healing effects of enhancing one's relationship to nature. Due to these experiences, it is my hope to establish a center deep in the heart of a forest or near a sea where anyone could come to experience Restorative Processing on a daily basis for an extended period of time, much as one might choose to attend a meditation or yoga retreat. When it exists, this center will offer specific programs to assist caregivers and helping professionals of all kinds—including those who staff the center itself—in cultivating the balanced life that is necessary in order to give from a healthy body, full heart, and clear mind.

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*Who can wait quietly  
while the mud settles?  
Who can remain still  
until the moment of action?  
(Lao Tzu, 15)*

*When trust is insufficient,  
there will be no trust in return.  
(Lao Tzu, 17)*

*Governing a large country  
is like frying a small fish.  
You spoil it with too much poking.  
(Lao Tzu, 60)*

*(Lao Tzu quoted in  
Johanson & Kurtz, Grace Unfolding, 1991)*