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Be Systemic and Mindful: An Integrative Process of Homeopathy and Psychotherapy for Self-Fulfillment

By Dr. Kenneth Silvestri ***Thu, May 29, 2014***

Having practiced as a therapist for thirty years, Dr. Silvestri gives a detailed example of how he works as a systemic therapist and how, for the past fifteen years, he has integrated this approach with classical homeopathy.

We are, like every snow flake, unique. With that said, it is difficult to conceive of healing models fitting all needs in a cookie cutter fashion. However the word “systemic,” which I feel most comfortable with in describing my approach, brings with it a caveat that “the word is not the territory.” This means that you cannot assume that all will be very neat and orderly as proclaimed by advocates of certain healing methods. There are unforeseen obstacles in all systems. Yet describing the process of life as systemic is the closest we will get to knowing how nature works. Systemic thinking is recognizing our part-to-whole interconnections and is the cornerstone of holistic forms of healing. However, the real trick to having wisdom in this process is to understand how we are connected and to make needed adjustments in a multitude of ways.

What follows is an example of how I work as a systemic therapist having had a private practice for the past thirty years and integrating it with classical homeopathy over the last fifteen years. Although I don’t expect you to replicate my process, I share it in order for you to take what may be useful whether as a therapist, homeopath, or just an

inquiring mind. I have done this many times, learning from others relevant to my individual temperament and style. In the end we are all connected and interacting in this planetary journey

My theoretical foundation and perspective on life was most shaped when I was studying family cultural anthropology at Columbia University in the 1970's. Studying with the likes of Paul Byers, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, it was becoming immersed in ecological thinking. Sometimes called communication theory, cybernetics or systemic; it all followed the premise of looking at the world with a stereoscopic lens and seeing how the parts connect, adjust and are maintained simultaneously. This was accomplished by always seeing things in "context" and knowing that you are a vital part of that context. I was further influenced by studying with renowned homeopaths Luc DeShepper, David Little and Jane Cicchetti, all of whom expound a systemic, all-encompassing framework to facilitate healing. I also think it important to mention that I have practiced the martial art of Aikido during all of this time with Sensei Greg O'Connor, which places systemic thinking in the realm of being actively experienced.

Psychotherapy and homeopathy can work together to heighten the healing process. Psychology, in its systemic essence, offers a process where one can recognize how problems and grievances are interconnected to past and present contexts. Resolution is the understanding of this pattern and being empowered to change for the better. Homeopathy is the second-most used healing method in the world according to the World Health Organization. It is based on the principle of "like cures like." Homeopathy's safe, non toxic and regulated remedies stimulate one's immune system to follow its natural direction to heal the mind and body from recognized trauma. The correct remedy, be it homeopathic or a psychological intervention, is the "simillimum" which is determined by its match with the gestalt of the presenting symptoms. The patterns described in this article all have a role in the selection of a "simillimum," the homeopathic goal of "like curing like."

Traditional deductive psychological advice is wrought with human resistance and maintaining business as usual. Homeopathy, although having a long history of clinical successes, has been plagued with the difficult process of determining the “simillimum.” A true integration of psychology and homeopathy offer complementary means to recognize the pattern of suffering and consequently strengthen and maintain the immune system’s ability to balance the body and mind.

The process I use is circular. It has five main parts, each one being a segue to a systemic process toward self fulfillment. We all benefit from what I call a **Widening of Your Lens**. I have for years used the exercise of asking what it is that one (or I) is not getting in life. Viewing it from a present focused lens, feeling it, and hearing and/or touching its sensations allows for revealing the depth of its meaning. Then I widen that lens to see it in a peripheral manner. Describing this larger context puts the grievance in a new perspective. I then follow by quickly narrowing the lens once again to its original view which inevitably allows for any adjustments to the original concern. This forms a core and basis from which to set goals for meaningful changes as well as identifying psychotherapeutic and/or homeopathic remedies.

A case in point was Jo in her mid-forties, who in her initial intake session shared a grievance that whatever she does seems to eventually be wrong. Her narrative when she initially described this concern, was a pattern of low self esteem emanating from how her parents would never acknowledge her successes. Her demeanor went from levity to sadness, alternating from one to the other at various times. She also shared that she was overly sensitive and argumentive with friends and had repetitive dreams with this theme, as well as ones of disappointing love relationships. When she widened her lens, she listed her many personal and professional achievements. I asked her to complete the sentence “If I could, I would be a _____, and I would be different because_____." Immediately from this wider perspective, she described aspirations that were within her reach and how she would like to be motivated to set goals and pursue what she prior thought would be unattainable. Jo continued to change her focus from

what could have been to **being mindfully in the present.** This was no easy task at first since she constantly brought up the past and how she should have dealt with these feelings of low confidence. Her facial expression demonstrated a deep sense of hopelessness and was accompanied by a sensation of having a blockage in her throat when she expressed herself. The temperament that she presented was one of an alternating extroverted and introverted thinking person with a sense of suppressed anxiety and grief regarding her upbringing. These patterns began to point to the needed simillimum of the remedy Ignatia amara which she started to take at this time (see end of this article for potency and dosage).

We continued to meet in bi-weekly sessions and started with focusing on the theme of being mindful. This was initially accomplished through the construction of her Genogram , a trans generational, psychological family tree to understand her past and confirm the selected remedy (see the Genogram description at the end of this article). This exercise is like a hypnotic induction, allowing for family of origin narratives that bring out many descriptive sensations over different developmental stages. The relationship issues in her family of origin placed her in a jealous triangle with her mother and father. She had little nurturing and encouragement to succeed in life. Jo developed a communication style where she became very sensitive to reproaches and had a very low tolerance to being admonished. These patterns are congruent to the provings of Ignatia. We discussed how these feelings and the sensation of deep grief from this background need not be condoned or minimized.However she could not change the past. In the present is where solutions will occur. This led us to strengthening her communication skills, addressing the paradoxes in her life, looking at how to avoid double binds, and focusing on her embracing her unique temperament and wishes for the future.

Ignatia has been used in homeopathy acutely for many cases of immediate grief. I have learned through the years that it is a much more penetrating remedy and works well with long standing deeply suppressed disappointments, a sense of hopelessness and alternating expressions of gaiety and sadness, all of which was present in Jo’s

description of her situation. It also matched her nervous/thinking temperament and physical attributes.

The next area of change for Jo was to **create a supportive environment**, one that encompassed her work, social and home contexts. She started assessing and making changes to have her apartment feel better. She painted her rooms, bought plants and set up a kitchen which represented a healthier life style. We continued to monitor the results of these changes especially in lieu of the action of the remedy. She reported a feeling of balance in regard to being less obsessive over things that now also seemed less important. According to her narrative in subsequent sessions, there was less arguing with her family and friends and there was an alleviation of many of her original presenting symptoms. I noticed less sighing and mood changes in her follow-up sessions. The potency and frequency of the remedy was adjusted, slowing it down appropriately as improvement was documented.

Feeling that she was now ready, Jo began to explore **new possibilities**, some of which were; taking a sculpture class, joining a qigong group and getting involved with a local community center dealing with helping youth. Her skills as an organizer and artist began to receive positive feedback and this helped her confidence to become stronger. She took some further risks and initiated new social connections. Her life became more fulfilling, yet at times she would still doubt herself when certain instances or interactions would remind her of past pain. This is where she learned to recognize how to **make adjustments**.

Like any system, Jo's new life had to be maintained from within. At times she had to take a step back, knowing that it would not be the end all, especially if she continued to move forward. Jo developed a good sense of assessing her situation and where she was heading. She challenged any old habits of self reproach and continued to look at ways she could adapt, communicate, and try new possibilities. Most of all she did this with perspective, staying in the present and setting attainable goals for herself.

Now this all sounds very nice, though in truth Jo had to go through some profound changes in this process. Anyone can start this process of turning your communication up a notch by asking yourself how you communicate. What is the style of your communication? Is it passive, assertive or aggressive? Describing how you communicate allows you to understand and respect your temperament and visualize your interpersonal relations. When you **widen your lens** and view your communication style from a larger framework you open the door to being more vulnerable, less controlling, but also more human and in touch with the sensations that may have hindered your development. In Systemic Therapy, one looks to identify the homeostatic force that maintains the system especially when it is harmful.

Jo realized that in her grievance of self reproach, her communication style followed suit. Recognizing that this pattern was not helpful was her first clue to change. When we truly communicate, we synchronize and entrain our inner vibrations physically and emotionally. This is the synergy of connecting with nature itself. However old habits die hard and individuals and institutions need support, structure and encouragement to freely collaborate. Jo had to struggle with this past style until she developed the wisdom of viewing her actions systemically. The qigong exercises, according to her, brought a new awareness to her mind and body. This manifested in a new world view that was very different than what prevailed for her in the past and was congruent and supported by the action of the remedy.

The Greek word “Gaia” eloquently describes nature as being more than the sum of its parts. If this is not recognized we fall prey to believing the whole is equal to the sum of the parts. This is the basis of allopathic medicine, traditional psychotherapy, and such misleading theories as “trickle down economics.” Gaia is a paradox of sorts and an excellent example of quantum physics whereby you can have two opposing views that can both be correct, a vital part of a healthy eco-system and Systemic Therapies. It is a leap of faith asking us to believe in what seems to be a contradiction. For example,

someone special in your life tells you how much they care about you, yet on another occasion, they may say “I need my space” and ignore you. You can feel bad about yourself and get deeply stuck in an unenviable no-win situation or you can grow from hearing how others have dealt with similar hurts, create perspective and work through this situation. This person cares about me and needs space at times; I can understand that and not take it personally or put myself down. What relief and avoidance of unnecessary stress results from seeing things systemically or from a wider perspective. For Jo it was as she said, “…a whole new way to experience my world.”

Knowing where we stand in that gap between what we think nature is and how nature works is the place to set our goals to get closer to nature’s intent. Closing that gap, by finding alternatives to ongoing injurious patterns, is our proactive “ahimsa” (the Sanskrit word for non-violence) framework. With this as our guide we can now explore our actions and behavior in synchrony to nature’s intent. Jo felt that she had no choice but to feel she was a failure. Her actions were continuously framed in no-win outcomes. Staying in the present, being mindful, and seeing how this was all connected to her past, gave her new insights and strengths to deal with conflict and the everyday paradoxes. According to the Tao Te Ching, respecting nature is the greatest integrity one can achieve. Our culture and more specifically our health industry still lean towards being in opposition to nature’s message. For Jo and so many others dealing with barriers to self fulfillment the quest for health depends on being mindful to transcend any myopic cultural pressures.

The main tenet of being mindful, or to be in the present is to have a “beginner’s mind,” to pause and focus while viewing the world as a part-to-whole interconnected process. The consequence of not recognizing our mutual interdependence with nature and others can and has lead to stress and “fight or flight” patterns, all of which have been linked to compromised immune systems and other health threats. Research, has shown the effects of not recognizing our ecological reality and its consequent negative effects on our immune system. This is referred to as a Nocebo effect and can be as powerful

as any Placebo effect. Conversely, with positive thoughts and supportive resources such as homeopathy and psychotherapy, your immune system improves.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, urges us “to be fully alive” and to “look at living beings with the eyes of compassion.” Mindfulness has entered the mainstream and is discussed in just about every segment of our society. In a NY Times article, “Mindful Eating as a Food for Thought” (February 8, 2012), Jeff Gordinier describes how mindfulness principles can even enhance our eating experiences. All of this has one prerequisite; start at the beginning. To be mindful you need a “beginners mind,” or as Shunryu Suzuki asserts in his classic Zen Mind, Beginners Mind, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.” Through being at the beginning we have the opportunity to form an attitude that emphasizes strong confidence in our original nature. This is not an intellectual understanding. True understanding is the actual practice, and as Suzuki believed, “if you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself.”

I am convinced after all my years as a psychotherapist and homeopath that most presenting symptoms are a consequence of being at odds with nature. When you are out of sync with nature you become vulnerable to the inevitable paradoxes of life which can turn into stifling double binds. When we lose sight of being part of nature we make assumptions and blame others for our problems. Then, it is only a matter of time that we fall prey to feeling rejected and judged which completes the vicious cycle and forces unhealthy symptoms. The reality is that we have choices. We can dwell in the past, be negative and lose touch with the present moment or be positive and cherish the subtleties of a given situation. It is here that the integration of psychology and homeopathy can play an important part in facilitating healthy resolutions. Homeopaths should consider acquiring counseling skills and /or collaborating with psychotherapists that have a systemic outlook. Conversely, psychotherapists will benefit from forming a relationship with homeopaths. The why of being mindful is obvious, the how is one step more rigorous. In the end nature’s sun still shines and offers us enormous opportunity to

enjoy its pleasures. Jo finished her therapy sessions and is currently using her remedy on an "as needed basis."She developed a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of her temperament and sensations that could challenge her well being and health. Most of all she is now in touch with her desires and intent in a healthy manner.

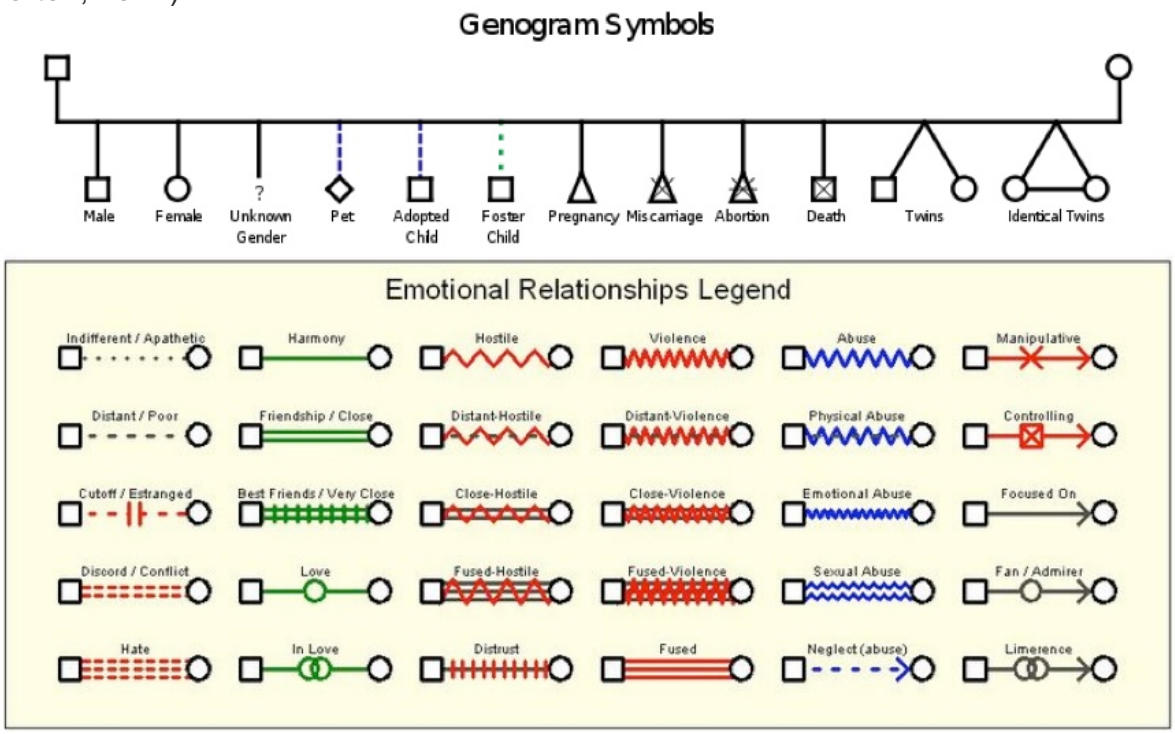
What follows is the definition of Systemic Therapy from a previous article that I wrote:

In the 1960's, as it should be today, cause-effect thinking was challenged by the view of seeing nature as more complex and an interacting system; a system that is a collection of items or entities (persons, institutions, societies, atoms, etc.) so arranged that a change in the relationship of one part will produce some change in all the relationships of the other parts of that system. Applied to a family (or an institution,) if one member is disturbed (i.e. out of appropriate relationship or harmony with the others) a linear approach involves treating the identified patient (or institution.) A holistic or systems view requires the treatment and involvement of all other members of the family to restore a total balance, health or harmony. This includes inquiry methods that look for "correction" through a multitude of ways to achieve balance. (Example: a metabolic disease such as cancer can be treated by focusing on a metabolic-correcting diet as well as treating the affected organ; a particular school problem can be adjusted by viewing the ethos and its relationship to family and community.) However, an awareness of this process is a prerequisite for understanding the potential changes and balances. (*The Joy and Wisdom of Systemic Thinking: Teaching and Understanding the Aesthetic,* September 2007, vol. 26. #1 issue of The Journal of Systemic Therapies.)

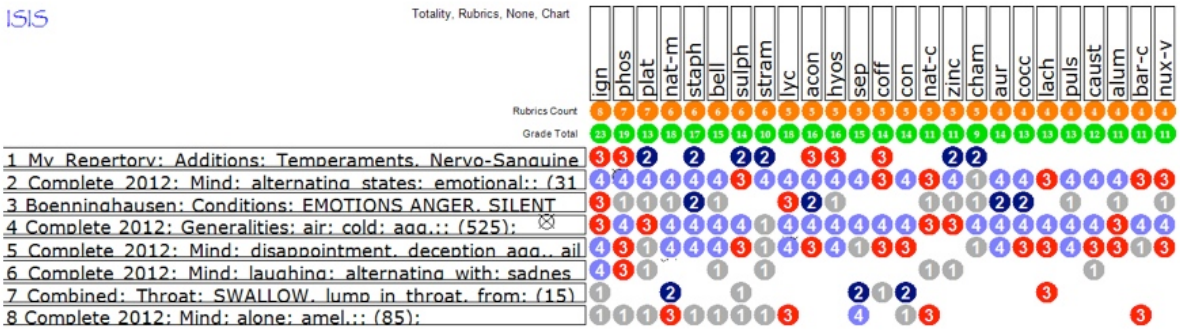
Monica McGoldrick, who developed the Genogram, writes that "I believe that we should do the Genograms of our heroes, our governmental leaders, and the theorists whose teachings we follow to better understand their strengths and limitations, just as we would benefit from examining the Genograms of the authors of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), who have described the supposed

characteristics of mental illness."

A Genogram is created with simple symbols representing gender, with various lines to illustrate family relationships. Figure 1 illustrates basic Genogram symbols with various types of individuals. From "The Genogram Journey" by Monica McGoldrick (New York: Norton, 2011)



Ignatia amara was suggested in a 4 oz medicinal solution in the 6C potency, succussing (hitting) the bottle 8 times to activate the remedy and then diluting one teaspoon into 4 oz of water and ingesting one teaspoon. Process was repeated twice a day. After ten days the same protocol was followed with a 12C potency, once a day. After three weeks I determined to use a LM#1 potency, (same protocol) once every four days, adjusted to once every three days after three doses. This frequency was continued for two months, after which the frequency was adjusted to once a week, followed by an LM#3 potency once every two weeks for two months. Currently being used on as needed basis.



For further information regarding the above see my chapter “Integrating Psychotherapy and Homeopathy: A Means of Determining the Needs of the Vital Force” in *Homeopathy and Mental Health* (Homeolinks: Netherlands, 2010, Edited by Christopher Johannes and Harry van der Zee). Also see “Exploring Psychology and Forgiveness in Homeopathic Treatment” in *The American Homeopath, 2012.*

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Through integration of homeopathy and psychotherapy – as well as his overall systemic approach to healing – Dr. Silvestri has assisted many in finding resolution of the emotional and/or physical challenges they presented to him. To learn more about Dr. Silvestri's practice go to www.drkennethsilvestri.com For direct inquiries he can be reached at drkennethsilvestri@gmail.com