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Dr. Kenneth Silvestri is interviewed by Katja Schütt

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Dr. Kenneth Silvestri (Ed.D, CCH, RS Hom (NA) is a classical homeopath who studied with Dr. Luc De Schepper, David Little and Jane Cicchetti. He holds doctoral degrees from Columbia Univ. in Anthropology and Psychology. He has published more than seventy professional articles and monographs, several chapters for books on mental health/homeopathy as well as selected poems. He has conducted numerous workshops on mindfulness, family therapy, alternative education, communication skills, forgiveness and homeopathy. Dr. Silvestri has been in private practice as a psychotherapist since 1980, and uses an integration of homeopathy and psychotherapy, as well as his systemic approach to healing. He is also an active practitioner of Qigong and a black belt student of Aikido. www.drkennethsilvestri.com



Dr. Kenneth Silvestri

Katja: Welcome to Hpathy, Ken! It is a great pleasure for me to interview you for our Hpathy Ezine on psychotherapy and homeopathy. We look forward to you sharing your knowledge and wisdom with us.

You have the fascinating background of psychology, psychotherapy and anthropology as a backbone of your therapeutic practice. How did you come to integrate homeopathy?

Ken: Thank you Katja for the opportunity to talk with you and be a part of the continuing conversation with Homeopathy 4 Everyone. I grew up in Paterson, New Jersey, USA, in a red brick industrial working class factory town where I was taught in P.S. tensies (as they called and numbered the public schools), that the whole equaled the sum of the parts. However, when I began studying Anthropology and Eastern Philosophy, I saw how the whole actually is more than the sum of its parts. Eventually, I came in through the back door to psychotherapy. My training in Cultural Anthropology gave me a systemic lens, one that is holistic and focuses on context not just content, the latter of which characterizes medical allopathy and is unfortunately also dominant in the psychotherapy field. I had the opportunity to study with anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, Paul Byers and Gregory Bateson, all of whom advocated this approach of understanding human interaction.

The current predominant lobbying efforts on behalf of psychologists in my area is for them to be able to prescribe psychotropic medication. Need I say more? The collaboration of homeopathy and psychotherapy will only work if both approaches adhere to what I believe is the original basis for

both disciplines: a systemic or epistemological approach, which is one that sees the part- to- whole connections and interrelationships with nature, rather than one that fragments and avoids collaboration.

As to how I came to integrate Homeopathy, it is a natural fit with psychotherapy. Dr. Luc De Shepper was my family Homeopath. I watched him with fascination as he guided us through many issues. Being the empathic educator that he is, he told me that psychotherapists have the potential to be the best homeopaths. He felt this was due to their training in connecting and gently probing to determine the basis, as well as the maintaining factors, of ailments. I eventually studied with Dr. Luc, going up to Boston one weekend a month for three years to take his homeopathic certification course. What immediately became apparent was that the homeopathic interview could be enhanced when it followed the pattern of an initial all encompassing family psychological assessment. Furthermore, I realized that my understanding of how each discipline functioned provided enormous potential for them to complement each other. I continued my homeopathic studies with David Little for another three years and also worked with Jane Cicchetti, both of whom utilized a psychological framework in their teachings.

Katja: Hahnemann called the changed state of the mind the “chief ingredient” of all diseases and the often most important aspect for the remedy choice, and mentioned that without its consideration it was impossible to truly cure the patient by means of homeopathy. How do homeopathy and psychotherapy work together to understand the patient’s state of mind?

Ken: Each discipline looks for the gap between what is occurring and where optimal health could be. Hahnemann was adamant that a person’s emotional state tipped the scale in determining the appropriate remedy and in most cases needs to be addressed initially to uncover injurious physical symptoms. Psychotherapy and homeopathy can work together to heighten the healing process. Psychology, when it is in its systemic essence, offers a process where one can recognize how emotional 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. However, 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.

Katja: Does psychotherapy operate on the principle of “Similars” in some way?

Ken: Yes, again in its ecological and systemic manifestation. Hahnemann, for instance, used what was called mind cure inductions that matched presenting symptoms. Constantine Herring was converted to Homeopathy when listening to an opera that elicited grief feelings that were prevalent for him at that time. The Law of Similars is part of our human homeostatic process. It helps us

maintain a balance. Identifying what produces unhealthy patterns is not always easy. There needs to be a gentle dialogue that primes the patient's narrative, which in most cases is below the surface of their presenting issues. Boenninghausen's inquiry method to finding the simillimum for example, was a rigorous journey into the psyche with "who, what, where and what" questions that allowed one to determine needed remedies. This gives credence to the interconnections about presenting symptoms in his concordance approach, which most homeopaths do not understand. Psychologists like Jung, Whitmont (who was also a homeopath), Rogers, Maslow and Ellis to mention a few, were all involved in using the Law of Similars in one form or another.

When psychotherapy is used in a holistic manner, seeing the wider interconnected facets of one's life, it can help individuals put things in perspective. I have often used poems and stories that describe similar patterns of pain, (such as the ones found in Jack Canfield's "Chicken Soup For The Soul" or John Fox's "Poetic Therapy"), to help patients gain insight from similar narratives in order to understand their emotions. What I have seen in my years of practice is how Homeopathy creates a clearing of the field and readiness to recognize the emotional similarities that arise in psychotherapy sessions. Passively waiting for the correct remedy to cure all aspects of one's problems will not fulfill the healing goal. Many other facets of life style and thought changes need to complement the process. When homeopaths share cases and report that they gave x remedy and life was happy ever after, they are doing a disservice to the power of Homeopathy to affect changes. Psychotherapy becomes the way to assist the healing process and can assist in determining other needed interventions and second homeopathic prescriptions.

Katja: Hahnemann speaks of the disturbed vital force as the root cause of symptoms and ailments. What is at the core of this disturbance according to your psychotherapeutic approach?

Ken: We all have a core grievance that brings us pain, or is located in the gap between where we are and where we would like to be. A favorite quote of mine by anthropologist Gregory Bateson, states that "The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think." This describes how we are prone to create dysfunctions when we do not respect our true nature. In my practice I look for the etiology or "Not Well Since" factors through one's narrative of family background, culture, ethnicity, race, class, gender, dreams and behaviors which form the basis of one's presenting problems. Seeing the part to whole connections to someone's articulated grievance provides a significant contextual view of how a therapeutic plan and consequent matching of remedies can help one get unstuck and make a difference. It also relates to Jungian archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. In simple terms the core grievance is what causes the autonomic nervous system to be stuck and not balance itself and hence challenges our immune system, disturbing the vital force.

Katja: A deep interpersonal communication between patient and therapist plays a major role in starting the healing process and is an intrinsic aspect of the homeopathic healing art. What are the

underlying implications of being "connected"?

Ken: Great question. I have written about this as have other homeopaths such as Brian Kaplan, David Little, Jane Cicchetti, Larry Mallerba, Bernardo Merizalde and Luc De Schepper, to mention a few. The unprejudiced observer can be empathic when there is gentle probing and qualifying questions posed to a patient. Once connected, there is a biological synchrony, a "good vibration" feeling, that creates a phase-lock with our body rhythms. A participant observer in Anthropology has to take into account his or her role in the data collection. Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson filmed themselves observing human interaction to underscore the importance of this context. Obviously, our probing should not be with leading questions. However, what we observe, dialogue and record will inevitably reflect our role in the data collection to some degree. The goal is to get as close as possible to describing how the patient perceives, senses and interacts with their world. Using the rigor from knowledge of our *materia medica* and understanding of human temperaments is key. You don't have to have a degree in psychotherapy to have good communication skills, but using the resources of empathy and an understanding of human development goes a long way to unleashing the power of our remedies.

Katja: The systemic approach is central to your work. How does it support understanding patients and their problems?

Ken: There is a difference between an allopathic approach that emphasizes content and a systemic one that works from the part to whole interconnections based on context, as I previously mentioned. The former leads to fragmentation, while the latter entails unity. It is here in context, where we evolve and can understand and resolve problems. The danger of using a narrow framework based on content alone misses this opportunity. The DDT issue, for example, that brought about the book, "Silent Spring," was due to a very cause and effect approach; we need bugless cabbages therefore spray a toxic chemical. When DDT went up the biological chain to human mother's milk and many species of animals became extinct, the "Don't mess with mother nature alarm went off" and the need for a systemic solution. Turns out that planting marigolds (*Calendula*) would have done the trick, making both the insects and cabbages happy. Patients and their problems need to be recognized in their interconnected reality. It is here, in a systemic environment and perspective that their symptoms will be best discovered and understood. One has only to pay attention to today's pharmaceutical ads (that list a multitude of negative side effects), or to grasp the inequities of wealth distribution, environmental dangers and socio/political unrest in our world, to understand how not thinking systemically is threatening our very existence.

I use a framework that includes widening one's lens for perspective, celebrating communication to articulate legacy, creating a supportive environment and exploring possibilities to enhance personal growth, while recognizing your fallibility to make adjustments. Within this context one uncovers the descriptions of temperament and narratives that lead to appropriate remedies and therapeutic directions. I contributed a chapter to the book "Homeopathy and Mental Health Care" edited by Christopher Johannes and Harry vander Zee, that further describes this process. A wonderful film by

Nora Bateson, "An Ecology Of Mind" (available through www.bullfrogfilm.com) is an excellent portrayal of systemic thinking.

Katja: Are there systemic tools that can help homeopaths find their patient's simillimum?

Ken: First of all, learning to have an ecological lens and simultaneously seeing part- to-whole connections is a priority. The Greeks used the term Gaia to describe the earth, as an entity that is more than the sum of its parts, unlike what our western educational systems teach. When one's temperament and communication style is understood and respected in this manner, it will open the floodgates to in-depth narratives of how each of us uniquely deals with our conscious and subconscious levels. Stepping out of the box of everyday language, using poetry, qigong and other artistic modes provides a sustaining view of the whole person. The conscious level for example processes stimuli at about 30 per second, while the sub conscious (which records everything you have ever interacted with), processes at 30 million stimuli per second...a ratio of one million to one. You have to go easy and gently into that domain to bring up archetypal and collective parts of someone's story. I begin all my sessions constructing a Genogram, (a multigenerational psychological tree) that not only breaks the ice in an interview but forms an almost trance-like induction that illuminates the context of the patient's life. It respects, gender, class, culture, diversity, race, etc. and how someone was "baked" so to speak, through communication patterns. Rubrics and therapeutic plans fly out of one's legacy in this manner.

Katja: Could you share an example of a genogram with us and how it may support homeopathic case anamnesis and treatment?

Ken: Well, a Genogram allows for mapping and learning from one's past. Monica McGoldrick's book, "The Genogram Journey", covers numerous famous families to underscore the power of family history, and brings up many patterns of how we learn to learn. The energy of legacy and ethnicity, with its examples of interpersonal interaction, cultural constraints and consequent achievements are all part of our trans-generational heritage. Repetitive incidences, personality labels and similarities demonstrate the power of how our species evolve. In homeopathic terms, temperament and Miasms are readily found in rituals and family secrets, which are put into perspective through the individual's Genogram journey. The gift of the Genogram for homeopaths and psychotherapists too, is how the unique, extraordinary and striking facets of one's legacy are brought to the surface, and with it, a deep understanding of where one comes from and is in the present. The future then has many more possibilities than you can beforehand imagine. (For Genogram symbols see: http://stanfield.pbworks.com/f/explaining_genograms.pdf)

Katja: Could you observe long-term implications of homeopathic treatment with regard to changing "patterns" in a genogram?

Ken: Oh, yes. Whenever I work with someone, I have their repertory chart and Genogram as well as my own Genogram to keep me honest and aware of any transferences. Adding information and tracking differences to a patient's Genogram not only helps with consequent choice of remedies but also therapeutic directions and possible needed resources. I have now a good sampling of patients who have made a difference in the dysfunctional or presenting problems originally seen in their first Genogram assessment. The use of a constitutional remedy seems to clear the field (miasms) and with other mind/body skills, adjustments are better maintained. There definitely is, from a qualitative perspective, a quicker recognition of anomalies and issues that need to be addressed and changed when using homeopathy. This entails less psychotherapy sessions and a sense of getting "unstuck" quicker. I would love to get funding to do an official comparison study of those with similar issues (by gender, developmental stages, presenting problems, and diagnosis) with and without Homeopathy, however short of qualitative ethnographical narratives of which I have many, the uniqueness of individuals and the multifaceted properties of remedies would make that difficult but not impossible. What I do know is that the integration of Homeopathy and psychotherapy produces better desired outcomes.

Katja: Considering the systemic interactions in families and broader systems, can these connections be a hindrance to cure, or is homeopathic treatment able to transcend systemic and environmental impacts?

Ken: There are always barriers to a "cure" be they lifestyle, social, environmental and/or family pressures. However, with this holistic map in the forefront, strategies can be developed that identify injurious problems and enhance continuing growth and healing. Being in the present is where resolutions occur. Constant mitigating of unhealthy issues is true non-violence. There is suffering and entropy in our world as described by the Buddha. Finding balance as it is said in Aikido, (the martial art I practice), is a thousand year technique but worth the try. The quick fix remedy is not going to help us evolve. Creating readiness and balance is a wonderful benchmark, but not supporting it in an in-depth manner does not do justice to our patients. Homeopathy can help transcend barriers because when the vital force is free to heal, then one is ready to make an impact, as each action is like being in a hologram and effects all other interactions. A truly joyful process!

Katja: Psychotherapy as a therapeutic method wasn't yet established at Hahnemann's time, yet he already gave several recommendations for psychic and psychotherapeutic interventions in the Organon. Meanwhile, several therapeutic approaches to psychotherapy have developed, each of them claiming to be helpful in some way. What is necessary to make psychotherapy successful in your opinion?

Ken: Hahnemann and many of the early homeopaths, because of Homeopathy's inherent systemic nature, provided counseling to their patients. Life style, diet, etc can be found in the Organon and

other writings by Hahnemann. The homeopathic psychiatric hospitals here in the USA had windows without bars and colorful gardens compared to their allopathic counterparts, which in many cases had the same physical architecture but had jail-like settings. Even to this day such hospitals are characterized by bureaucratic and big pharma pressures that are placed above the people in need of assistance. Hahnemann himself, advocated for humane treatment of patients, which was therapeutic in itself. What is needed for today's homeopaths and psychotherapists, no matter what their approach may be, is more empathy, less ego and a systemic epistemology. Also with the integration of these two disciplines, we need to make connections to our medica's description of remedies, especially matching patient profiles with presenting temperaments and therapeutic interventions.

Katja: There are several methods and approaches in psychotherapy to reconstruct the patient's inner world of perceptions, emotions, thoughts and behavior, and to activate their resources to facilitate solutions to conflicts and problems. Is psychotherapy not necessarily limited in its endeavors without removing (miasmatic) blockages by means of homeopathy?

Ken: The more I integrate homeopathy and psychotherapy in my practice, the more I see the need and benefits of a collaborative approach between them. I have seen where some homeopaths have dismissed miasmatic theory by not being systemic or expanded it haphazardly. If one works with patients in a more in-depth manner, you realize that you cannot overlook the effect of miasms. Homeopathy can assist psychotherapy when used in a collaborative approach and bring even more understanding of how our species works, taking healing to a much higher level and reducing barriers to health. Again, I do not believe all homeopaths have to become licensed psychotherapists, however, practitioners in both disciplines will benefit from being trained in specific aspects that each has to offer. That interface will benefit those coming for assistance and healing.

Katja: Do you integrate C.G. Jung's insights of the collective unconscious and archetypes into your work?

Ken: Yes, very much so. I have recently written and described cases about how I use temperaments and archetypes in homeopathic assessments, (June issue of Homeopathy 4 Everyone; and in the September issue of Links, 2015). Each remedy's profile can be related to Jungian insights and the many characteristics of the four major temperaments. The layered manifestations of archetypes are a portal to understanding the modalities and sensations that will bring up the needed remedy. They are the grist for qualifying and exploring the makeup of those we work with as well as needed clues to therapeutic interventions. I have found that using a patient's temperament attributes at the beginning of case taking (rather than at the end for differentiation of determining a remedy), creates more connection to and contextual information about the source of one's core complaints.

Katja: Many problems arise around midlife when striving for one's true self in the process of individuation. What can you recommend for those struggling to find their way and especially parents when rearing their children?

Ken: The individual developmental life cycle has many characteristics as does the family life cycle. In mapping one's Genogram these facets are of utmost importance in assessing the whole individual, especially in time and space. It is here that psychotherapists and homeopaths can educate those we work with. We constantly strive to find our "self." Raising children is an awesome task needing parents to stay mindful, focusing simultaneously on their own development as well as that of their children. The message is clear: stay mindful by being in the present, since one cannot change the past; learn from the past but make decisions that are from your present situation; strive to mitigate the ever present injurious patterns we face every day.

A good resource is to practice breathing coherently at different times during your day: six seconds inhalation and six seconds exhalation (see Steve Elliot's website on Coherent Breathing and read *The Healing Power of the Breath* by Richard Brown and Patricia Gerbarg). Coherent Breathing activates the Vagus Nerves, (nerves of compassion) and consequently stimulates the parasympathetic part of our nervous system. I have found this breathing technique enhances decision making and even the effectiveness of homeopathic remedies (I suggest doing this when taking a remedy). Well chosen remedies, that reflect family dynamics, help sustain a healthy balance and lifestyle needs, and with some psychotherapeutic help can facilitate resolution of everyday problems.

Katja: Forgiveness plays a major role in your concept of healing. Why is it so important?

Ken: Forgiveness is a very useful resource. Living constantly in a "Fight or Flight" mode, which lowers your immune system, makes you vulnerable to illness. Forgiveness is a mindful process where you stay in the present, and make resolutions that allow you to be in the parasympathetic or "calm" part of your nervous system, as opposed to reliving the pain. This does not mean condoning or minimizing past hurts, but being able to make appropriate changes for yourself. For Homeopathy it offers another collaborative context to determine remedies. It also clears the field to understand a patient's innate temperament and offers a place for articulation of the sensations, modalities, and other related symptoms that are of concern. Forgiveness enables the value of homeopathic remedies to reach another level of strengthening the immune system and sustaining a mind/body process that prevents recurrence of injurious symptoms and miasmatic patterns. It is a sequel to determining a patient's constitutional needs. I have written about this in a more detailed manner with case studies, many of which are included on my website (www.drkennethsilvestri.com).

Katja: What makes Aikido so attractive to you?

Ken: Aikido is a non-competitive, but powerful martial art based on peace and harmony. It was developed by Morihei Ueshiba, a renaissance man not unlike Samuel Hahnemann. It incorporates qigong and mindfulness with effective self defense and conflict resolution techniques. It has allowed me to collaborate and connect in non-verbal ways that have helped me in my own self development personally, and professionally as a homeopath and psychotherapist. I have used what I've learned in Aikido in many incidences of conflict, whether dealing with the arrogance and narrow mindedness of some of the skeptics of homeopathy or the many issues of getting through each day. Aikido teaches us to be centered and to step off the line of attack, that there is no sense in pushing back hard, and to take one's aggressive energy and neutralize it. In the end Aikido has the potential to enlighten those who depend on force, cruelty and competitiveness.

Katja: Thanks so much for this fascinating interview. I'm sure our readers could gain a glimpse of the advantage of combining homeopathy and psychotherapy in practice and feel inspired to explore psychotherapy more deeply.

Ken: You are certainly welcome and I invite any inquiries or dialogue about my services and the above. I can be contacted at drkennethsilvestri@gmail.com Namaste and be well!!

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