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The devastating New Age turn within psychotherapy

*(This article is the first in a series of three articles on New Age psychotherapies. The second is **Regression psychotherapies** – the third is **Cathartic psychotherapies**).*

In this article I will investigate the devastating New Age turn within psychotherapy. I will show the difference between spiritual counseling and New Age psychotherapy, central distorting aspects of New Age psychotherapies, and finally some precautions in relation to New Age psychotherapies. In that way the article are divided in four parts:

- 1) The difference between spiritual counseling and New Age psychotherapies
- 2) Central distorting aspects of New Age psychotherapies
- 3) Precautions in relation to New Age psychotherapies (where do they go wrong?)
- 4) Conclusion

1) The difference between spiritual counseling and New Age psychotherapies

Philosophical counseling (true spiritual counseling), claims that our problems are due to a separation of the observer and the observed (see my article **Philosophical counseling as an alternative to psychotherapy**). In its practice it directs itself away from the observed, towards the observer himself. And its questions become of existential, conceptual, ethical, epistemological and metaphysical kind.

Psychotherapy is a branch of psychology, and therefore something scientific, which directs itself towards aspects of the observed, that can be empirical tested. Therefore

it must not contain philosophical and/or religious theories. An example on such a scientific based psychotherapy is Cognitive Therapy, which also has shown to be the most effective kind of psychotherapy.

Today it has become an integrated part of management theories and the self-help industry, that they draw on the New Age movement. New Age is a name of a spiritual movement, which draws on many different religious traditions: Astrology, Shamanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, different techniques of Prophecy – which all are sought integrated with Western psychotherapy. You may say, that psychotherapy, in this combinationform, has become a new religion for the modern Western human being – a religion, which the management theories adds the ideals about being a success. In fact the term New Age is today one and the same as a mixture of spirituality, management theory and psychotherapy. If you go into a bookshop, you can often see, how books about spirituality and management theory today stand on the same shelves (see my articles **Management theory and the self-help industry, Humanistic psychology, self-help, and the danger of reducing religion to psychology, Self-help and The Mythology of Authenticity and Six common traits of New Age that distort spirituality**).

An example: today most people within school, folk high school, continuing education and business community, have met the concept Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). Both in education, as well as at work, you will almost unavoidably be forced to work with NLP-theories, which is a directly offence of the rights for people, who don't advocate the New Age movement.

NLP is a therapeutic method, which picks inspiration from many different directions within psychology: gestalt therapy, hypnosis therapy, body therapy, neurology, shamanism etc. Some NLP-practicians claim, that it is a method, which is based on a scientific way of thinking, and refuse the connection with New Age. But this rejection is paradoxically enough a trait, which is quite typical for the New Age movement, where concepts such as research and science all too often become mixed with spiritual concepts. An example of the lack of ability to understand oneself as philosophy/spirituality/religion, and not science (see my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**)

For example has there within the New Age movement almost gone inflation in the thought distortion *Research has shown that...* A phrase, which often is used to convince the listener about, that the one who speaks can substantiate what he says with concrete empirical proof. But this could be an example of subjective argumentation, a form of unethical manipulation (often based on wishful thinking), because it is extremely vague to claim that "research has shown" anything, unless you can substantiate the assertion with specific details about the claimed research.

Who has carried out this research? Which methods were there used? What exactly did they found out? Have their results been confirmed by others working within the area? (see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions** and my article **The Pseudoscience of New Age and reductionism**).

However there are also NLP-practicians, who fully acknowledge the connection with the new spiritual movements. If you look at the NLP-consultants' web pages on the internet, they often present themselves with a spectrum of educations, including astrologers, clairvoyants, shamans and healers.

Today you can almost draw such "spiritual" educations in an automat, if only you have money enough. They are typical taken in a few weekends, after which you get yourself some homemade title as coach, psychotherapist, therapist, shaman, healer, clairvoyant or spiritual teacher of one or the other kind. There almost seem to be speculated in creating new peculiar titles. But such educations can of course not give the sufficient competence, neither spiritual or educational, and there is no doubt about, that there on the grey, alternative market (including the whole of the circus of management theory and coaching) rules a wild growing, uncontrolled market of quackery and scientific/philosophical/spiritual misguiding.

If we for example take the title psychotherapist, then it is very important to be aware, that this title is not a protected title. Anybody can call himself psychotherapist, and one should therefore be on the alert with people who sign themselves psychotherapist. Competent psychotherapeutic treatment is usually in charge of University-educated psychologists and psychiatrists. For both of these groups of experts it is possible to achieve licence as psychotherapist. But on the so-called grey market there exists, as mentioned, a line of alternative forms of treatment with affinity with mysticism and religiousness, which do not live up to the professional demands, which lie in the authorization arrangements. These people also title themselves as psychotherapists, and it is a deep problem that precisely these people of the grey New Age market practically have patent on personal development pedagogy in almost all areas of life: schools, further and higher education, treatment, business, etc.

I will repeat: Philosophical counseling (true spiritual counseling), claims that our problems are due to a separation of the observer and the observed. In its practice it directs itself away from the observed, towards the observer himself. And its questions become of existential, conceptual, ethical, epistemological and metaphysical kind.

Psychotherapy is a branch of psychology, and therefore something scientific, which directs itself towards aspects of the observed, that can be empirical tested. Therefore it must not contain philosophical and/or religious theories. But this is precisely what

New Age psychotherapies do, and in neglecting the observer, they are misguiding their clients philosophical and spiritual. The observer is the creator of thought distortions. In connection with New Age psychotherapy, and therefore a variety of techniques and therapies within New Age and self-help, there is especially one thought distortion they overlook, namely *Subjective validation*. These therapies can't succeed, nor be understood, without understanding subjective validation.

Subjective validation is active when people will validate a set of statements allegedly about themselves as highly accurate, even if these statements *not* are accurate. New Age psychotherapies are dependent of that subjective validation is active in the client, or else they won't work. It is also therefore it is necessary to eliminate critical thinking in the client. These therapies, and subjective validation, are two sides of the same coin (read more about subjective validation in my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

New Age psychotherapies are for example therapies such as Experiential psychotherapy, Rebirthing, Reparenting, Past life regression, Hypnotherapy, Alien abduction, Recovered memory therapy, Satanic ritual abuse, Primal Therapy, Gestalt therapy, Energy Breathing, Holotropic Breathwork. Also Nonviolent Communication, coaching, NLP and The law of Attraction, must be seen as kinds of New Age psychotherapies (see my articles **Regression psychotherapies, Cathartic psychotherapies, Hypnosis, hypnotherapy and the art of self-deception, Nonviolent Communication is an instrument of psychic terror, The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**).

A common thread is the belief that a person having problems is not likely to be responsible for those problems. This is due to their root in reductionism (see my article **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**). Another thread is the belief that the patient must discover the cause of his or her problem to be helped. These causes are built into the psychotherapy itself, and are therefore pure prejudice. It is causes such as inadequate parents, sexual abuse, satanic rituals, cannibalistic orgies, past lifes, alien abduction, possession by entities, etc.

In the best Sophist way the therapists are planting such causes in their patients minds. They give their patients books to read or videos to watch. They plant them during hypnosis, group sessions, etc., and then these planted causes are "recovered" and offered as validation of their therapeutic techniques and theories (see the thought distortion *Communal reinforcement* in my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

A third thread is the arrogance and incompetence of the therapists. They are very seldom educated psychologists, most often they are hopelessly uneducated. It doesn't

matter if they can show a diploma from one or the other private “New Age” education, which normally consists in a few weekend courses (see my article **Hypnosis, Hypnotherapy and the art of self-deception** for an example).

As shown in a documentary by Ofra Bikel “Divided Memories”, they are oblivious to how they are demonstrating the monstrosity of their pseudoscientific and self-deceptive work. They talk freely about how uninterested they are in the truth and how indifferent they are to the families they help destroy. They are uniform in their dismissal of critics as being in “denial.” Patient after patient is paraded forth by the therapists as evidence of their good work, yet none of the patients seem better for the therapy and many seem hopelessly ill.

The documentary shows the subjectivism and relativism in the New Age environment.

Watch the documentary on the playlist of my [YouTube channel](#)

These therapists often call themselves spiritual counselors. But the karmically talk and experiences of these “experts” and “clients” remove their energy-investments in the actual reality. When focus is displaced backwards or forwards in time, then the collective time has taken over and spiritual seen there therefore happens an escape. None of these people and theories can therefore be said to work spiritual. And when they use the karma idea in that way, it is no longer a spiritual help, it is a collective displacement of the focus backwards in time and therewith out of reality and into the unreality of the collective time (see my article **What is karma?**).

New Age psychotherapies are not just useless, they are harmful. The dangers of for example combining Regression psychotherapies with Cathartic psychotherapies - in the believe this is necessary in a spiritual process of development - are shown in my articles **A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork** and **James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy**.

2) Central aspects of New Age psychotherapies

In the following I will use Margeret Thaler Singer’s and Janja Lalich’s book *Crazy Therapies* as a frame of reference.

The Crazy therapies Singer and Lalich are referring to are the same as New Age psychotherapies. They use the word *crazy* in order to describe some of these

therapies, using the word as it is used in the vernacular, to refer to something as controversial, nonstandard, or “far out,” and sometimes to depict fads or current enthusiasms.

Singer and Lalich have seen three types of results from these crazy therapies, which fall on a continuum of helpful to harmful, including sometimes a combination thereof.

The first outcome is the placebo effect (see the thought distortion *Classical conditioning and placebo effects* in my book **A Dictionary of Thought Distortions**). Here, consumers think they’re being helped. They might feel better even though there is no scientific reason or established clinical practice to support the apparent positive results. Consequently, individual clients may experience varied results from the same procedure, with some believing they’ve been greatly helped and others feeling no gain whatsoever.

The second outcome is loss. Consumers may end up wasting a lot of time and money pursuing dead ends and false leads. In some of these cases, clients may have fallen prey to unscrupulous, exploitative therapists; in others, they may simply have gone along with the enthusiasm of ill-trained, or faddish practitioners who themselves are caught up in believing in the curative abilities of a particular theory or treatment.

The third outcome is harm. Some consumers risk being harmed – psychological or otherwise – by some of the therapies currently in vogue. Each year countless individuals throughout the globe turn their innermost thoughts and feelings to a trusted counselor, only to be exploited and abused by some of them. When we go to a mental health professional or someone claiming to have special knowledge, we don’t suspect the worst; rather, we hope for the best. We go with open hearts and open minds.

But here are some of the outcomes Singer and Lalich have seen:

- “Joseph” went to a therapist for help with his anxiety and sleep problems. Dr. “P.” led Joseph to believe that his problems were caused by his having been abducted by extraterrestrials. Joseph became convinced of this past occurrence and began to tell his “abduction” story to all who would listen, including the part about having skinny tubes inserted into his rectum while on the alien spaceship. Joseph’s friends and coworkers became tired of his endless tales, and Joseph eventually lost his job for inattention to his duties and lack of concentration.

- “Jake” saw an ad for a therapist-led warrior weekend that boasted, “Find a new and healthy self. Never be fearful or physically anxious again.” At the weekend, Jake learned that he would have to do combat with martial-arts black-belt experts. During the evening combat session, Jake was permanently injured; he is now facing emotional distress, prolonged physical therapy, and job loss.
- Mr. and Mrs. “Johnson” went to therapy for typical marital issues. Dr. “T.” was a believer in aggressive methods of expressing feelings. Handing the couple some plastic bats, Dr. T. instructed them to fight it out as hard as they could. When the couple responded rather limply, Dr. T. sat on the sidelines yelling at them, insulting them, and urging them to be more forceful. The couple ended up bashing not only each other but a great deal of furniture in Dr. T.’s office, as well as taking a few swings at him. Afterwards, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson felt silly and never went back, but the following week they received a bill for \$ 5,000 in damages to Dr. T. and his office.
- “Carol,” a young professional, was seduced by her licensed therapist, Dr. “K.,” who violated professional ethical codes and state law. Even before the sexual liaison began, Dr. K. urged Carol to divorce her husband and wait for Dr. K. As a result of this affair, Carol lost custody of her children. Shortly thereafter, Dr. K. abandoned her. It was later learned that Dr. K. would frequently convince his female patients to enter into a relationship with him.
- “Shari” was told by a friend that the best thing that ever happened to her was the counseling she received at the “Rocky Mountain Road New Birth Center.” Feeling troubled by her relationship with her teenage children, Shari called the center for an intake appointment. At the first session, Ms. “R.” told Shari that her problems with her children would be solved by Shari reexperiencing her own birth trauma and then growing up again the right way (according to Ms. R.’s views). This would happen at a weekend session, Ms. R. informed Shari. In order to prepare, Shari was instructed to strip down to her underpants, sit on Ms. R.’s lap, and suckle her (rather suddenly exposed) breast.

Singer and Lalich have heard example upon example, like those just mentioned and worse, of maltreatment and exploitation by psychotherapists and counselors of all stripes. They have encountered the bizarre and the arcane, the violent and the greedy. And they feel that these injustices, these instances of devastating emotional harm and financial loss, this psychological manipulation and in some cases physical and sexual abuse must no longer go unheeded.

They also believe that the professional community and media are unaware of (and in some cases, they shudder to think, turning a blind eye to) the kinds of abuses that are rampant today in the fields of psychotherapy and personal transformation (one might add that the media on the contrary directly are supporting these tendencies – just look at Oprah Winfrey). They add “personal transformation” because over time they have seen that many so-called therapies actually have less and less to do with legitimate forms of psychotherapy as they have more and more in common with unscientific pop psychology theories and New Age techniques.

The general public today is confronted with a panorama of theories and practices said to address a variety of symptoms and disorders, ranging from the supposedly scientific to the ludicrous and unchallenged. An array of therapists, counselors, and healers promote the following techniques, among others:

Flower essence therapy	Hypnotherapy
Chakra and aura readings	Angel therapy
Sexual touching	Color therapy
Soul work	Yoga
Humor therapy	Past-life regression
Guided visualization	Alchemical hypnotherapy
Karmic astrology	Channeling
Alien-abduction therapy	Herbal brews
White goddess healings	Drumming
Crystal healings	Intuitive readings
Dreamwork	Breathwork
Mythmaking	Vibrational bodywork
Trance treks	Video work
Guided meditation	Rapid eye technology

Tarot readings	Overleaf charts
Aromatherapy	Ritual ceremonies
Chemical inductions (use of LSD, sodium amytal, and other drugs)	Shamanic counseling
Rebirthing	Facilitated communication
Intuition development	Hot tubbing
Fighting	Floating
Tours to sacred sites	Depossession

These techniques – for which a consumer can pay anywhere from less than one hundred to several thousand dollars – are purported to bring about results as the following:

Inner-child healing	Spirit releasement
Clear frequencies	Disharmonious energies release
Revelatory past-life journeys	Inner-child bonding
Smooth life transitions	Spiritual healing
Parents´ programming release	Inner purpose revealed
Alignment of fluid	Becoming a galactic human being
Intelligence systems	Deep, transformative healing
Reclaiming your missing self	Sexual karma revealed
The body´s energies rebalanced	Lifelong happiness
Insightful shamanic journeys	Transforming dragons
Personal empowerment	Soul retrieval

Pain control	Past-life integration
Planetary healing	Knowing essence twins
Soul integration	

These lists reveal the spectrum of offerings available today. How does a person evaluate whether something is legitimate or a waste of time, possibly beneficial or potentially harmful?

Because of my experiences with a spiritual crisis (see my articles **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena** and **The awakening of kundalini**) I will with this article (as well as my articles **Cathartic psychotherapies** and **Regression psychotherapies**) try to shed light on the potential dangers of some of these methods, including the increasing occurrence of iatrogenic damage, that is, damage to the client induced by the therapist.

Women in particular have been victimized by these therapies: rather than feeling empowered and more autonomous, some women have become dependent and needy, and some have been exploited and abused, psychological and/or sexually, by self-serving therapists.

So, the one face of this paradoxical Janus head is the empowerment culture, the other face is the victimization culture (and the connected recovery movement) - read more about this paradox in my article **Self-help and The Mythology of Authenticity**

The mere fact that some practitioners have degrees or a wall plastered with various fancy looking credentials is no guarantee that their work will be ethical and competent. Therapists with degrees have been known to provide services that range from excellent to negligent to out-and-out quackery. The “flying circuses of psychotherapy” whirl into town, display their unproven techniques, and vanish, leaving behind certain insecure therapists who adopt every notion, from the quaint to the downright dangerous.

Persuasion techniques within psychotherapy cults

Cults have the same characteristics as ideologies. That a thought-system has developed into an ideology shows in, that it is a closed system, which is shared by a large group of people. Such a closed system has especially two distinctive characters: 1) It allows no imaginable circumstance to talk against the ideology. 2) It refuses all

critique by analysing the motives in the critique in concepts, which is collected from the ideology itself (an ideology always thinks black and white, and therefore always has an anti-ideology, an enemy image, which it attribute on to everyone, who don't agree). An ideology is therefore characterized by, that it is not able to contain, or direct refuses, rationality and critical thinking. We all know how dissidents have been killed, jailed and tortured under totalitarian ideologies.

Ideologies are using propaganda in order to get their "truths" forced through. In that connection they use thought distortions. Thought distortions are "techniques" that, unconscious or conscious, are used from an interest in finding ways of getting on in the world, rather than an interest in finding ways of discovering the truth. Thought distortions are the background for poor reasoning, diversionary ploys, seductive reasoning errors, techniques of persuasion and avoidance, psychological factors, which can be obstacles to clear thought (read more in my article **The difference Between Philosophical Education and Ideological Education**).

The following is inspired by Margeret Thaler Singer's book *Cults in Our Midst – The Continuing Fight against Their Hidden Menace* (page 125-181)

In connection with cults techniques of propaganda are often referred to as 1) Thought struggle, 2) Brainwashing, 3) Thought reform, 4) Debility, dependency, and dread (DDD syndrome), 5) Coercive persuasion, 6) Mind control, 7) Systematic manipulation of psychological and social influence, 8) Coordinated programs of coercive influence and behavioral control, 9) Exploitative persuasion.

Generally cults and groups using thought-reform processes do not have a visible product, such as a computer or a book or a car, to sell. They have an invisible product. Therefore, those who offer psychological, political, or spiritual transformations and enlightenment have learned that either they need to prove that they have special knowledge of some kind and that a follower will gain something unusual by participating in their group, or they need to use specific persuasion techniques that will convince followers to stay with them.

If cult leaders can't give you "proof," then they can manipulate you into believing. Through a variety of skillful manipulations and deceptions, they will persuade you that they have the ultimate solution.

In general, cult leaders combine two methods of persuasion:

- Inducing predictable physiological responses by subjecting followers to certain planned experiences and exercises, and then interpreting those responses in ways favorable to the leaders' interests
- Eliciting certain behavioral and emotional responses by subjecting followers to psychological pressures and manipulations, then exploiting those responses to induce further dependence of the cult.

Since a central issue in my own teaching is spiritual crises - (see my articles **Spiritual Crises as the Cause of Paranormal Phenomena** and **The Awakening of Kundalini**) – I will focus on physiological and psychological persuasion techniques within psychotherapy cults.

Physiological Persuasion Techniques

Techniques producing predictable physiological responses

Following are some of the more frequent physiological methods of producing various mental and physical feelings taught to members as group activities. Members' responses to these activities are reinterpreted in desirable ways by group leaders or trainers, so as to convince both neophytes and devotees that the processes are good for them. The process of positive reinterpretation, sometimes called *proof through reframing*, is a persuasion technique commonly used by cults.

Hyperventilation

Hyperventilation is an overall label for the effects caused by overbreathing and repetitive sighing. The condition is easily induced by having people do continuous loud shouting, chanting, or speaking in tongues. For example, the effect can be produced by having individuals stand and repeatedly thrust their clenched fists outward while simultaneously shouting in a loud voice with heavy exhalation "Love our leader! Love our Leader! Love our Leader!" Overbreathing can also be produced through intense heavy expelling of air in more private, quite ritualized chants.

Mild hyperventilation produces dizziness or light-headedness; people feel "high" and experience loss of critical thought and judgment. More prolonged or vigorous overbreathing produces numbness and tingling of the fingers, toes, and lips; sweating; pounding of the heart; ringing in the ears; tremulousness; and feelings of fear, panic, and, unreality.

Even more vigorous and prolonged overbreathing can cause muscle cramps, including clawlike rigidity of the hands and feet, body cramps, and severe chest pain and tightness. Heart irregularities can develop, and convulsive tendencies can be exaggerated.

Hyperventilation also causes fainting. People often drop to the floor and are briefly unconscious. While they are unconscious, underbreathing occurs to compensate for the period of overbreathing and to restore the normal acid-base balance of the blood. People awaken limp, exhausted, and aware that they have been through a dramatic and frightening experience.

Cults, quacks, and manipulators have become aware of the predictable outcomes of hyperventilation – the giddiness, the out-of-control feeling, the possible loss of consciousness, the tingling, and the clenching of fingers and toes. Similarly, they have recognized the impact of immediately reframing the experience. By constantly reframing, or relabeling, the effects, thus confounding individuals' gut-level reactions that something unpleasant has happened, leaders turn a frightening state into a supposedly positive one, telling neophytes, for example, that they are “getting in touch with feelings,...becoming blissed out,...getting or receiving the spirit,...on the path.” In private, the leaders of some groups have names such as *lobstering* or *tunaing*, for the clawlike clenching and the falling to the floor produced by hyperventilation practices.

All in all, the hyperventilation syndrome is relabeled as progress, closeness to God, or a new level of enlightenment.

Repetitive Motion

Constant swaying motions, clapping added to chanting, or almost any repeated motion helps to alter a person's general state of awareness. Often the repetitive movements are combined with forms of chanting to blend the effects of hyperventilation and dizziness.

Dizziness can be produced by simple spinning or spin dancing (in which the person also whirls around and around), prolonged swaying, and trance dancing (often done kneeling and rocking from side to side and backward and forward, with rhythmic repetitive drumming and background music). Again, the effects of these motions are relabeled by group leaders as ecstasy or new levels of awareness.

Change in Diet, Sleep, and Stress

Abrupt, radical, or prolonged dietary changes, prolonged sleep loss, and increased general stress also bring about predictable physiological responses.

Gastrointestinal Distress and Other Diet-Related Effects

Many groups encourage and/or institute vegetarianism as part of members' conduct. In some cases, this dietary requirement may come only at later stages of membership or within certain select circles. Other groups simply institute cheap diets to save money and to modify behavior.

Vegetarianism can be healthy when individuals study and select proper daily combinations of foods. In contrast, a number of cults abruptly put new members on low-protein, improperly balanced vegetarian diets. Suddenly eating only vegetables and fruit with no concern for securing the proper proteins and amino acids produces odd sensations in the lower digestive tract. The manipulation in certain cults label this "doing battle with Satan" and tell neophyte members that their lower intestinal pains and churning are evidence of their basic sinfulness and their need to learn the group's ways in order to battle Satan. Some of the neo-Hindu groups reframe the digestive upsets as the working off of past-life karma.

People in the human manipulation business know that, after a time, the body adapts and the intestinal discomfort of a sudden change in diet decreases. When this occurs, the leaders tell the new member that it means he or she is properly submitting to the leader or is achieving a higher level of awareness.

Hormonal Changes

Stress, poor diet, and inadequate rest can result in hormonal changes that cause menstruation to cease in women and beard growth to diminish or cease in men. Manipulators deliberately misattribute these conditions, citing them as evidence that the women are pregnant with God and the men have become children of the leader, avatar, or guru.

Purgings, Colonics, and Sweating

Techniques involving purgings, colonics, and sweating are used in various cultic groups as symbolic cleansing rituals, but they actually serve the covert role of keeping members debilitated, docile, and dependent on the group for their well-being and care.

Reportedly, each of these procedures can produce visible body responses, which can be reframed and reinterpreted as desired by the group leader according to his philosophy. Again, such reframing is meant to demonstrate that a visible effect is generated not as an expected physiological response but as evidence of whatever the leader says.

Body Manipulations

Unusual physiological effects can be produced by a person acting either alone or with others to perform body manipulations. Leaders of cults and thought-reform groups employ a number of these manipulations and interpret the experiences to mean what they want followers to think.

Pushing on Eyeballs

Former members report that in the Divine Light Mission the lights would be dimmed and the guru would pass among the followers bestowing “divine light” on individuals by pressing on their eyes until the pressure on the optic nerve caused them to see flashes of light. This was reframed as Divine Light.

Pressing on Ears

In the same group, members were instructed to plug their ears with their fingers, pushing until they heard a buzzing sound which was interpreted as hearing Divine Harmony.

Painful Manipulations

Some former members of a psychotherapy cult have described a number of practices their leader instituted that were allegedly to balance members’ inner and outer selves but were, in fact, painful physical manipulations used to punish people and to get them in line with the leaders’ plans. These manipulations were called *bodywork*, and the point was to elicit pain and “awareness.” The motto was “No pain, no gain.”

Relaxation-Induced Anxiety

It has been known in the professional literature for some time that not everyone responds well to closed-eye relaxation techniques or to mantra meditation, in which the meditator repeats an incantation. Some individuals find these procedures relaxing and welcome, but a noticeable number experience discomfort and distress. The reason is due to how the energy is circling in the person. The problem is that most

meditation teachers don't combine meditation with energy-stabilizing techniques – they probably don't even know what that is. In relation to this most meditation techniques today are so-called upward meditation traditions. Only a very few meditation teachers are acquainted with the downward meditation traditions (which I myself recommend – and which my own meditation exercises are based on).

Even ancient literature on mantra meditation warns of the need for the experienced teacher to monitor learners and help them avoid difficulties, and those teaching mantra meditation and other closed-eyes techniques today have also learned from experience that many meditators experience some distressing responses. Instead of feeling relaxed, some feel increased tension, break out in perspiration, find their hearts racing, or become distressingly aware of many aspects of their body. Finally a number of people end up in a spiritual crisis, for example the awakening of kundalini (see my articles **Spiritual Crises as the Cause of Paranormal Phenomena**, and **The Awakening of Kundalini** – also read the articles **A Map of The Spiritual Journey** and **The Spiritual Crisis**, in my book *Dream Yoga*).

In recent years, it has been in vogue in management theory and coaching to speak of the stress of life and how to reduce it through meditation (the concept of Mindfulness is today very popular in the world of management theory). Many different cultic groups have therefore offered meditation as a cure-all for stress, and have done a real Madison Avenue packaging of the typical bodily responses found in a number of people when they close their eyes and attempt empty-mind meditation.

The cult groups call this *unstressing* and reframe any distress it causes as a necessary and positive response. This is a typical psychotherapeutic answer. An experienced meditation-teacher would see such responses as a warning signal that something is going wrong.

What is typically going wrong (when combining meditation with the stress of life) is that people are becoming more stressed if they are not changing their life as a whole. But a change of life-style is certainly not the intention within the management theories – the idea is that meditation can help people become even more effective within a business life which already is far too stressed.

The reason why people become more stressed is that meditation gathers energy to your life as a whole; that is: if your life is relaxed, meditation will help you getting more relaxed. If your life is stressed, meditation will make you more stressed (you add one more thing to do, to all the other things you also have to do). That is my whole point about that meditation is about philosophy of life as a whole, not just a part of it.

There are also many *different* kinds of meditation being promoted by various individuals, groups, and cults. In a recent copy of a California free newspaper, Singer counted advertisements for at least forty different meditation groups and courses, a portion of which were recognizable cultic groups.

The typical scene today is that meditation (and spirituality as such) is being mixed with psychotherapy and coaching (management theory – see my article **Self-help and the Mythology of Authenticity**). Many meditation teachers (who also often are business and success coaches) claim that their meditation techniques are based on science, and has been “liberated” from the religious and philosophical traditions the meditation techniques original were based on (life as a whole). This is of course a problem, since meditation with time will open up for the collective images of time, which are of religious and philosophical nature. When this happens for some people, the meditation teachers – who don’t have any experience of this themselves, and don’t have any religious and philosophical frame of reference as explanation and guideline - are completely lost. But they will typically call this *unstressing* and reframe any distress it causes as a necessary and positive response.

Often they even combine meditation with the four other categories of activities – hyperventilation; reptitive motions; changes in diet and in sleep and stress levels; body manipulations.

Singer mentions a few examples which illustrate former cult members’ range of impairments, some of which remain after many years out of the cultic group. The descriptions are typical examples of people who have ended up in a spiritual crisis, though Singer doesn’t mention the concept of spiritual crises. Therefore the phenomena described are not properly explained – for example: there is no doubt that the Kundalini power has been activated in these people – and when activated you can’t “deactivate” it – though you can stabilize it if you know how.

Read the following examples and try to compare the symptoms with the symptoms I have described in my article **Spiritual crises as the cause of Paranormal Phenomena** (also read my article **The Awakening of Kundalini**):

- *Blackouts, lack of sensory filters, and anxiety attacks.* “John,” age thirty-six, meditated off and on for nine years; during the last two years of that time, he was encouraged to do intensives. Formerly a business executive, now, one year after leaving a meditation-based group, he is living on public funds, having been diagnosed as mentally disabled and incapable of working. He suffers from fainting, blackouts, severe and frequent anxiety attacks, and exhaustion.

John feels he no longer has protective barriers for his senses. “There is no way to keep things out from the outside,” he complains. “Everything gets in through my senses. They taught me to fear that my body was filled with odd, bizarre, scary things over which I had no control.” Although he is in therapy, he is unable to function if there is any stress in his environment. He stays away from people, takes walks in the woods alone, and rests a lot.

- *Fog and space.* “Lisa” was in a meditation group for thirteen years. During nine of those years, she suffered from unique dissociative experiences in which she would “space out.” In looking across a room, Lisa would see a waist-high orange fog. In spite of finding herself in this peculiar state, with the interruptions and distractions it presented, she was able to carry on the simple, necessary tasks of daily living. Her level of functioning was poor, however, due to her preoccupation with the fog and to feeling detached and flat.
- *Altered states and memory difficulties.* “Rick” joined a meditation group in 1975, at age seventeen, and meditated for eleven years. He experienced his first distressing symptoms at his first advanced course, when overbreathing and yogic exercises were added to his mantra meditation. He described states of euphoria; periods of dissociation, depersonalization, confusion, and irritability; and memory difficulties. When he eventually left the group, he had difficulties with reading, memory, concentration, and focusing; had involuntary body shaking; and experienced frequent episodes of dissociation.
- *Loss of boundaries.* “Bruno,” an architect in his early forties, went to his first extended meditation event at a hotel in another city after a year doing the initial brief meditations. The out-of-town event was an intense program requiring many hours of meditation, overbreathing, and never being alone. He lost track of time and felt odd and not himself. He finally fled the course after an unsettling experience in his hotel room: “Suddenly I became one with the air conditioner. I just dissolved, and it seemed that when the air conditioner started up it just took me out of my body. There wasn’t any me on the bed – I was ‘at one’ with the motor sounds. It was unspeakable terror. I had dissolved and melded with a motor sound!” When he told the trainers how distressed he was, they told him “something good is happening” and instructed him to meditate more. After he returned home, he remained anxious, had trouble sleeping, and was very tired for some weeks. Temporary sedative medication prescribed by his physician aided his recovery.
- *Inappropriate and unrelated bursts of emotion.* “Tom,” age twenty-six, signed up for a course in which he engaged in his first extended meditating. During

this meditating, he developed symptoms that continued after the course was over. His worst symptom was feeling sudden surges of intense anger unrelated to anything that was going on. At other times – when he was on a bus, streetcar, elevator, escalator, or in a car – he experienced bursts of inappropriate aggressive sexual urges. He said motion was driving him crazy. He described the few minutes of monotony and motion just prior to the sudden bursts of emotion as having the same sensation as a waking dream. For several months, he feared he was losing his mind, and he was becoming phobic about going out alone to public places because he never knew when these episodes would occur.

- *Muscle jerking.* “Josh” had spent more than a dozen years in a meditation group, wanting to be a teacher. His major symptom – marked head and neck jerking that he could not control – developed during and after the group’s flying course. The condition was so severe that the organization wouldn’t allow Josh to appear in public. After leaving the group, he sought training in a career in which he did not have to deal with the public and his co-workers could be told what caused the jerking. Currently, his physician has prescribed an anti-seizure medication which Josh reports is very helpful.
- *Long-term emotional flatness.* “June” meditated and took courses for nine years. She had no complaints, but her husband, young adult children, parents, and siblings claimed she had become “depressed, spacey, unenthused, not careful or caring about things.” June was emotional flat – there was little variation in her facial expression, the pitch of her voice remained low and even, and her body and hand movements were minimal when she spoke, no matter what she was talking about. She reported to Singer that the only problems she had noted from the meditation were that she “lost a lot of time,” her eyes “went out of focus,” and she felt “stopped” quite often when alone. When asked about feeling stopped, she recalled numerous instances in which she lost an awareness of the passage of time and had a blank mind with no idea what she was supposed to do next. She would be released from that state when family members came home. According to her family, prior to her meditating, June had been a warm and compassionate person, responsive and involved with what was going on, even prone to temper blow-ups. Nothing in her history or responses indicated that she was a schizoid personality. Today, June appears impersonal in social situations and seems to have ceased experiencing and displaying strong emotional feelings, either positive or negative, as a consequence of her prolonged meditation.

- *Seizures.* “Calvin,” now forty, began meditation courses at age fifteen and soon wanted to be a teacher with the organization offering the courses. Early in college, he took his first prolonged meditation course, which consisted of yogic exercises followed first by slow overbreathing and then by increased meditation time. He also took a course that included overbreathing as fast as one could, alternately closing one then the other nostril, to be done after yoga exercises and prior to meditation. He suffered his first complex partial seizure (a form of epileptic seizure) in the fast-breathing program. He left the program, sought a medical diagnosis, and is still on antiseizure medication twenty-five years later. During his seizures (brief periods of loss of contact with what was going on around him) he made jerking, purposeless movements and loud sounds; afterward, he felt confused. His friends reported that during the seizures Calvin didn’t seem to hear them and that he lurched and staggered while jerking and grunting loudly.
- *Visual hallucinations.* “Caryn” meditated for seventeen years. “I saw little creatures with wings during intensive meditation periods,” she reported. “They were like my pets. They’d tell me things. I began to not be able to tell who was a person and who was a deva [a Hindu nature spirit].” The leaders in the group praised her and, no matter how distressed these events made her feel, told her to meditate more and longer. Caryn said she learned how to conceal her fear and confusion because she was terrified of being thrown out of the group. She had affiliated with it at age fourteen and was totally dependent on it. Having been encouraged long ago to break all contact with her family, she had felt she had no place else to go.

Singers examination of Physiological Persuasion Techniques and meditation groups are brilliant. The only problems are that she doesn’t seem to know anything about spiritual crises and how to handle them. Furthermore that she seems to think that ethical instructors of meditation have to be licensed psychologists or psychiatrists who use it as a therapeutic technique, or noncultic meditation instructors who teach meditation as a relaxation technique. This is of course alright, but a true meditation teacher *must* have had experiences to a certain degree, and *must* include the philosophical and religious aspects of meditation, as well as having knowledge about spiritual crises, and how to guide students around these pitfalls, or how to get students out of these phenomena if already in them.

In my article **A Critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**, I show why the effects of physiological persuasion techniques has nothing to do with spirituality - (though many of the descriptions sounds similar with true spiritual experiences) – and how they, on the contrary, are leading people on the wrong track.

Psychological Persuasion Techniques

Hypnosis and Trance

Hypnosis is classed as a psychological rather than a physiological method because it is essentially a form of highly focused mental concentration in which one person allows another to structure the object of the concentration and simultaneously suspends critical judgment and peripheral awareness. When this method is used in cultic environment, it becomes a form of psychological manipulation and coercion because the cult leader implants suggestions aimed at his own agenda while the person is in a vulnerable state.

A trance is a phenomenon in which our consciousness or awareness is modified. Our awareness seems to split as our active critical-evaluative thinking dims, and we slip from an active into a passive-receptive mode of mental processing. We listen or look without reflection or evaluation. We suspend rational analysis, independent judgment, and conscious decision making about what we are hearing or taking in. We lose the boundaries between what we wish were true and what is factual. Imagination and reality intertwine, and our self and the selves of others seem more like one self. Our mental gears shift into receptivity, leaving active mental processing in neutral.

What is happening is that the thought distortion *Magical thinking* is induced in the person. Again we have something that sounds like a spiritual practice namely passive listening presence and neutral observation. That is what seduces many people. But in a true spiritual practice people on the contrary learn to use critical thinking, or discrimination. Central in critical thinking is the discrimination between subject and object, dream and reality - and what are lie or illusion, and reality. The Dominican mystics call this steps *discriminatio*; the Orientals call it *viveka*, discrimination. This is also why all true spiritual masters are very critical towards hypnosis – for example Vivekananda and Krishnamurti (read more about *Magical thinking* in my book **A Dictionary of Thought Distortions** – also see the thought distortion *Confabulation*).

Trancelike states can occur during hypnosis, during complete absorption in reading or hearing stories, and during marked concentration. They are sometimes referred to as *altered states of consciousness*. While in an altered state, for the most part we experience an absence of our usual generalized reality orientation (GRO – which also has with discrimination to do) – that is, we are not actively noticing or aware of our environment and our part in it.

In normal waking life, our GRO is our frame of reference, serving as background to our ongoing conscious experiences, our awareness. Our GRO shapes a context within which we interpret what is going on. This frame of reference can fade away under certain circumstances: hypnosis, one-sided meditation, guided imagery, drug use, fatigue, and sensory deprivation. When our GRO is weakened, we become both more suggestible to outside influences and more influenced by inner fantasies.

A number of cults use techniques that put people into an altered state of consciousness, making them more compliant. They engage members in a fair amount of behavior that induces trances, as evidenced by the types and quality of the lectures and sermons and the required activities, such as prolonged chanting or meditation, and repetitive rote behavior. Trance induction is the model for some of the manoeuvres used by cult leaders to change the attitudes and behaviors of their followers.

Guided Imagery

Indirect trance induction also grows out of storytelling and other verbal experiences. Cult leaders often speak repetitively, rhythmically, in hard-to-follow ways, and combine with these features the telling of tales and parables that are highly visualizable. They use words to create mental imagery, commonly called *guided imagery*.

In these guided-imagery exercises, the listener is urged to picture the story being told. The speaker may say, "Stop reflecting. Just go with the picture." Those who do stop reflecting on their nearby circumstances and go with the picture suddenly feel absorbed, relaxed, and very focused. And guided-imagery stories lead many people to experience altered states of consciousness. For many persons, entering a trance state is pleasurable. It provides a respite from thought about the woes of everyday life

A considerable number of different guided-imagery techniques (for example reading poetry or being in regression psychotherapy) are used by cult leaders and trainers to remove followers from their normal frames of reference (again: see the thought distortion *Confabulation* in my book **A dictionary of Thought Distortions**).

Indirect Directives

Cult members often say to their families and friends, "No one orders me around. I choose to do what I do." Getting members to think that way is one of the manipulations mastered by cult leaders who have become skillful at getting acts carried out through indirection and implication. Accomplishing this task is easier when the member is in altered state, fatigued, or otherwise anxious or under stress.

Indirect, or implied directives are not only found in cults but are commonplace throughout society.

Trickery

I don't want to convey the idea that cult leaders sit down and plan on a drawing board how they are going to proceed in great detail. But often the leaders have sharpened their techniques as time goes by. Likewise, leaders of different groups may use the same technique.

One example on trickery is the use of the thought distortion called *Truth by Authority*.

There are today a vast amount of non-enlightened, self-proclaimed New Age/self-help gurus (in science of religion they actually have no numbers of this enormous market) who get authority by claiming, that their teaching/technique, either is coming from a state of enlightenment, is being channeled from some kind of divine source, or are coming from clairvoyant abilities (see my articles **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with channeling**, and **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with clairvoyance**).

They might very well have strange paranormal abilities, it doesn't matter in this question, because if such teachers put their teaching forward in this way, you can be hundred percent sure, that this teacher has a problem with *ego-inflation* (if he is not directly a fraud -and then there are thousands of within New Age). Why? Because no real enlightened master would argue in this way. True enlightened masters, or sober spiritual teachers, speak from their own source, and are always characterized by humility. Just look at Dalai Lama, who incessantly claims, that he hasn't reached the full Rigpa, and that he just is a beginner. True enlightened masters, as well as sober spiritual teachers, are also always philosophers, who are giving reasons and presenting arguments to support conclusions.

Truth by Authority is about taking statements to be true simply because an alleged authority (experts, teachers, states of enlightenment, divine sources, paranormal abilities, etc.) on the matter has said/justified that they are true. A level of critical thinking is always appropriate, because the statement may be based on different kinds of thought distortions, for example *Nondual bias*.

People, who in their arguments/teachings, again and again, have to defer to some authority (experts, teachers, states of enlightenment, divine sources, paranormal abilities) in order to justify their arguments/teachings, are hundred percent on the

wrong track, even if they should have some paranormal abilities. Again it is interesting to see, that true enlightened masters, as well as sober spiritual teachers, never do this. And interesting, that probably most of the many people, who have made a business on being clairvoyants/mediums/channelers etc., will fall for *Truth by Authority*.

Revision of Personal History

There is a widespread practice in cults of having the long-term members tell their tales, that is, stand before the group and recount for their personal histories. Groups have different names for this exercise.

Such revision of history is used in both live-in and live-out cults, and the cults' general purpose in the exercise is "to let members see why being with us is the right place to be."

Former cult members told Singer that they quickly learned how to tell their own histories by listening to those who had been in the organization longer. New members got the idea right away that they were to tell only sad, negative, unwholesome events, recount only disastrous relationships, and end with praise about the group.

They were never to tell about good times, fine parents, loving siblings, hardworking relatives, or positive life experiences. Families had to be portrayed as abusive, alcoholic, uncaring, self-centered, bourgeois or capitalistic, and otherwise despicable.

Since we are all prone to adapt to the environment in which we exist, it is not surprising that cult newcomers soon begin to revise their personal histories according to what they hear from others around them. With each telling, they will embellish how awful their families are; how meaningless their lives; how sinful, how drug-ridden, how selfish they were before joining the group.

There are several specific reasons why historical revision is important to cults. The group philosophy often rests on the idea that the cult is an elite organization, the new order, and made up of the most advanced beings. Therefore it is necessary for the leadership to make striking contrasts between group members and non-members in order to convince members that the outer world is bad and the group world is good.

New Age and psychotherapy cults are well known for their use of history revision to get members or "patients" to develop and accept a personal history that fits with and justifies the teachings of the cult.

Yet another kind of history revision occurs in groups that practice past-lives work. Various methods are used by the different groups, but as some point members learn they will be going back in time to “visualize and reexperience” their past lives (see my articles **Regression psychotherapy, Paranormal Phenomena seen in relation with clairvoyance** and **Paranormal phenomena seen in relation with channeling**, and the thought distortion *Confabulation* in my book **A Dictionary of Thought Distortions**).

Peer Pressure and Modeling

The old maxim “When in Rome do as the Romans do” underlies much of our adaption to new social groups. It is both convenient and congenial to adapt. We look around and see models, and we comport ourselves to be like them. Most cults train new members, either through overtly stated policies or by more implicit shaping, to act in ways desired by the group. To increase members’ recruiting potential, typically cults train members to smile, appear happy, be outgoing, and give attention to newcomers.

Peer pressure is an effective means to get people to fit their behavior to group norms. In cults, this works for new and old members alike, going far beyond what is generally seen in society at large. In an atmosphere that states or implies that there is only one way to be and this is it, it is most important to have models around to imitate.

Emotional Manipulation

When leaders do not browbeat members into conformity but instead make use of the way people in groups learn through what they see other group members doing, personal behavior and attitudinal changes are less noticeable to individuals. As one former cult member after another have told Singer, “I changed without being aware of it.” This unconscious change is partly due to the power of the contagion of mood in the groups. Cults induce feelings of guilt, shame and fear, and use sex and intimacy controls to keep members dependent of the group.

Psychotherapy cults

Psychotherapy cults provide good examples of cult leaders’ use of psychological persuasion techniques, in particular emotional manipulation and peer pressure. These cults tend to arise when legitimate individual or group psychotherapy becomes corrupted, or when opportunistic nonprofessionals simply deceive and prey the unwary.

A major deviance in psychotherapy cults revolves around the therapeutic phenomenon known as *transference*. Transference is an important aspect of insight-oriented psychotherapy. Normally, the client and therapist examine together the attitudes the client transfers from earlier life experiences onto the therapist as well as onto other authority persons. Often these are positive expectations, of a “good daddy” for example, but some clients transfer negative attitudes. Both the positive and negative attitudes come out of clients’ own expectations and are not founded on the therapist’s conduct and attitudes.

In cultic situations, however, rather than study and understand the transferences, the therapists/leaders promote their idolization by their patients.

Instead of having their personal autonomy encouraged, patients are led into submissive, obedient, dependent relations with their therapists. The improprieties of the role violations are compounded by the therapists’ use of indirect, deceptive, and coercive influence techniques (or thought distortions as such), which are leading patients to comply with the therapists’ wishes.

All in all: Some of the most potent and common psychological techniques used by cult leaders are trance induction, guided imagery, and indirect suggestion. These methods use thought distortions, and setting to decrease critical, reflective, evaluative thinking. But my claim is that this is not only happening in cultic environments. The whole of what I call The Matrix Conspiracy is based on a war against critical thinking.

And again: in my article **A Critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**, I show why the effects of psychological persuasion techniques has nothing to do with spirituality - (though many of the descriptions sounds similar with true spiritual experiences) – and how they, on the contrary, are leading people on the wrong track.

3) Precautions in relation to New Psychotherapies (Where Do They Go Wrong?)

An inability on the part of the therapist to properly diagnose a client’s problem or determine appropriate treatment is a recurring pitfall. This hazard is often rooted in the practitioner’s “single cause – single cure” approach to therapy, which has led

many a therapist down a dead-end trail and has created no end of problems for clients.

In life there can be many causes and contributing factors that bring on the various emotional disorders or discomforts that might lead a person to seek therapy. Each person's problems are unique. Therefore, a therapist should be thought of more as a custom tailor than as an off-the-rack salesperson. The custom tailor looks at and measures the client, discusses and plans with the client what the garment will look like, how long it will take, how many fittings are needed, and so on, so that the final product is made to fit the specific person.

The One-Way-Only School of Treatment

Some therapists, however, fall into a *modus operandi* in which they proceed as if there were only one cause and one cure for *all* mental troubles. They might apply their one therapeutic approach to everyone who comes into their office (and also often to people around them).

A devotion to one-way-only notions of treatment often grows out of certain limitations in training programs, wherein many student therapists are exposed to only a very narrow range of treatment methods. The single-minded approach also seems to stem from the fact that during graduate school, residency programs, and anxiety-producing field placements, certain therapists-in-training solve their anxiety by simply following without question the dominant theory of their most powerful, best-loved, or most anxiety-provoking supervisor.

Increasingly, however, other sources of one-way-only approaches have been pop psychology books, weekend seminars, and "trainings" from self-proclaimed gurus. In these cases, the assumptions and beliefs are often deeply felt because they resonate within the therapist, who tends to identify with something in the "new" philosophy: being abused, abducted, repressed; feeling like less than a man or woman; having unhappy thoughts about his or her own childhood. Happy to find an instant cure, these therapists actually believe that these single cause-single cure ideas are true and effective.

Latching onto a pet theory of personality or human behavior does a great disservice to clients. Too often, clients are not told that there are many, many theories of psychology, behavior, and personality, each composed of numerous constructs and concepts. A theory, after all, is a mere formulation based on hypotheses; it is a creation, not a truth etched in stone.

Relying on Personal Beliefs and Assumptions

Beliefs and assumptions personally held by certain therapists are either inadvertently or intentionally imposed on the client following in this vein of single cause-single cure. The therapists cling to their assumptions, using them as rationales for carrying out a personally motivated therapy. I do not propose to debate or challenge the existence of UFOs, reincarnation, spirit entities, and other notions involved in some therapies. My point is that some therapists themselves become fascinated with, invested in, and personally committed to belief systems that they then inflict on clients as if the assumptions associated with those beliefs were universally accepted and agreed-upon single pathways to cure.

Some of the more common assumptions fall within the following several major themes:

1. Extraterrestrials exist and are abducting and experimenting on humans on a regular basis, and there is a government conspiracy to cover up this information.
2. All humans have lived one or more past lives, aspects of which interfere with our current life. A subtheme is that various “entities” (human and nonhuman) – spirit beings from “the other side” – reside within individuals and are the cause of difficulties in a person’s life today.
3. Trauma and abuse experienced in early childhood is the root cause of all psychological and emotional problems. This includes having been subjected to incest and other forms of sexual abuse, having been raised by incompetent and “toxic” parents, and even having suffered through the trauma of the birth experience itself. A subtheme is that childhood sexual abuse, including participation in intergenerational Satanic ritual cults, is rampant.
4. It is possible to regress people to their birth moment, then “rebirth” them and bring them up correctly.
5. Emptying out the emotion attached to past and present experiences will cure people. The idea that catharsis brings cure, and especially that screaming out in anger or pain brings a curative release, sort of like an ex-lax for the mind.
6. Relieving traumatic experiences will cure people. The idea is to revivify and relive the remembrance, whether real or imagined.

7. It is acceptable for therapists and patients to have sexual relations, as it makes the patients feel better and is not harmful to them.
8. There is a human mental mechanism that prevents people who have suffered abuse and trauma from remembering this aspect of their lives, and certain techniques can help people retrieve these blocked memories. As visions of specific events come forth in more and more detail, they become like a motion picture of the past abuse and are to be accepted as valid memories.
9. The world is full of certain magical powers. These powers can reside in spirit guides and angels, symbols and archetypes, inanimate objects such as crystals and wands, and potions and herbal treatments. Special, gifted individuals can also have magical powers.

Using Simplistic Techniques

Taking the dearly held assumption, some therapists will then concoct a treatment (or will have learned one at a workshop) based on their preferred belief system. Some of these treatments are terrible simplistic and may play out as follows:

Technique A

1. On the therapist's urging, acknowledge that your parents had a terrible influence on you and, just as the therapist says, your mother was especially cold and unloving.
2. Let the therapist hold you like a baby.
3. Put on a diaper and drink from a baby bottle, which you should carry with you at all times.
4. Now you are better, if not cured.

Technique B

1. Relax and let the therapist hypnotize you.
2. While in the trance state, go back to a past life (guided by the therapist) and describe who you are, where you are, and what is going on.

3. Look for and encounter the traumatic event that took place during this other lifetime.
4. Afterward, in discussion with the therapist, you will come to an “insight” about how your past-life experiences are interfering with present-day events and actions.
5. Now you are better, if not cured

Technique C

1. Recall as much of the real-life incident that is troubling you as possible.
2. Imagine yourself back in the situation and feel the emotion you must have felt then.
3. “Let it all hang out” by expressing every primitive idea, emotion, and impulse that emerges, and this will make you spontaneous and free.
4. Now you are better, if not cured.

None of these techniques – neither A, B, or C, in and of itself – is a proven method of treatment.

Using faulty checklists

Some therapists’ opening maneuver is to get a brief history and then pull out one or another of the many checklists currently popular in the healing trades. Using the checklist, the therapist will indicate to the new patient that she meets many criteria of a person who has had certain specific past experiences and that therefore she suffers from x ailment, usually attributed from y past trauma.

Two factors are questionable here:

Checklists are heavily loaded with universal items to which most people might assent. On these checklists we see such phrases as “I dislike speaking before large audiences”; “I do not like going to the dentist”; “I frequently feel tired.”

Just about anybody could answer yes to many of these items, from which the therapist concludes patients are suffering from a particular disorder (maybe also one of the reasons why the victimization culture is spreading so much?).

Such lists resemble cold readings done by magicians and mentalists (about cold reading, see my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in relation with clairvoyance**).

Reasoning backwards from checklist responses is not an acceptable, scientific way to evaluate behavior or diagnose disorders. In essence, this approach leads to a “formula diagnosis,” and once again fails to consider clients’ individual differences. By making a snap diagnosis and asserting to the client, “You have features in common with persons who...,” certain therapists end up going off on ventures with their clients that tend to support the therapist’s idiosyncratic beliefs by essentially training the patient to fit preconceived patterns.

All in all: the one-way-only notion of treatment is characterized by the thought distortion called Hermeneutics of Suspicion (read my article **The Hermeneutics of suspicion (the thought police of the self-help industry) and why I am an apostle of loafing**).

Doing Harm

In some New Age psychotherapies we see a pattern of abuse and harmful effects on clients. These are here described in no particular order, as the consequences may vary for each situation, but as far as I’m concerned, they’re dire on all counts:

- *Most of these therapies are based on myth and fantasy, not on scientific study showing solid evidence of beneficial effects for the client. Clients are taught to adopt the thought distortion called *Magical Thinking*, which easily filters into all parts of their life and worldview. As a result, clients may tend to look for instant cures for any life obstacle or situation, rather than relying on logic and sound reasoning. This can affect their daily life on the job, their relationships with their friends and family, and their studies, hobbies, and other interests.*
- *There is rampant misuse and overuse of hypnosis and other trance-inducing techniques and exercises, such as guided imagery, one-sided meditation, yoga, and relaxed breathing. Meditation and yoga are useful in the course of a true spiritual practice (and under guidance of a competent teacher), and can have a noticeable healing effect. But when misused and abused – as they so often are when mixed with odd, unfounded psychotherapies and/or hypnosis adopted by poorly trained or single-minded practitioners – these procedures can in fact have a deleterious impact on clients. Practitioners of New Age psychotherapies tend to rely on a lot of hypnosis, as it makes clients more suggestible and compliant.*

- *Clients tend to waste time and money on these fad therapies.* Aside from what's already been spent, clients often need to start all over once they get away from the bogus care. Usually their original problems have not been taken care of, and often new problems develop because of previous practices. Sometimes a therapist abruptly ends the therapy when the client's insurance coverage runs out or the client can no longer afford the sessions. Ending a therapy precipitously, especially when instigated by the therapist, can often have detrimental effects on the client.
- *In some cases, clients are led to adopt religious or spiritual concepts* in which they previously had no interest and which may run counter to their personal belief system. Although the clients thought they were seeking psychotherapy, they were in effect put through a religious conversion. For example, being convinced by a therapist that you have lived many past lives is essentially adopting the idea of reincarnation, a concept present in most forms of Hinduism but one that is not accepted in other religions. Unexpectedly taking on this belief during the course of therapy can cause certain clients to experience upsetting internal conflict, and they may not recognize the source of their difficulty.
- *Many New Age psychotherapies rely on false notion of memory* and of the ability to retrieve memories. Therapists who didn't do their homework on memory and how it works tend to convey myths and misinformation to their clients, and in some cases set about tampering with clients' actual memory. For example, some clients are led to believe that they were abducted by aliens, a "memory" they did not have until they went to the therapist and were subjected to many sessions of hypnosis. From this, they can spin off and come up with other "memories" and begin to have an entirely new view of their life or background, which often causes separation from family and friends, who may contradict these new discoveries.
- *Countless clients are harmed through sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.* Some of these Singer and Lalich (I myself have also talked with a lot of such former clients and/or devotees) learn about when a client manages to escape the grip of her therapist and brings charges against the practitioner. But even then, most of these cases are settled out of court and never see the light of day, with the therapist rarely facing public censure, much less revocation of their professional slap on the wrist.

- *Numerous clients are not helped to become happier, better-functioning persons.* Instead, there are growing legions of conflicted, lonely individuals who find themselves bogged down in interminable therapy or who end therapy worse off than when they began. As mentioned earlier, they may have new problems engendered by the therapy, ranging from serious psychological difficulties to total estrangement from their families. They may even have adopted revised, fanciful, and often tragic personal histories.

Why Did This Happen?

Well, it is a part of what I call The Matrix Conspiracy as such (see my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**). I use the concept of The Matrix Conspiracy because there is no simple answer to the question of how and why we find ourselves in a society riddled with bizarre mental health offerings. In connection with New Age Psychotherapies Singer and Lalich can nevertheless identify three factors that have had a crucial influence: (1) the special nature of the relationship between client and therapist, (2) the emergence of the blame-and-change approach in the field of psychotherapy, and (3) the flight from rational thought in our society as a whole.

The Therapeutic Relationship

The relationship between patient and therapist is unique in important ways when compared to relationships between clients and other professionals, such as physicians, dentists, attorneys, and accountants. Consumers enter these relationships expecting that the training, expertise, and ethical obligations of the professional will keep the client's best interest foremost. The consumer does not expect his accountant to lure him into accepting a new cosmology of how the world works or to "channel" financial information from "entities" who lived thousands of years ago; or for this dentist to induce him to believe that the status of his teeth was affected by an extraterrestrial experimenting on him. Nor does the patient expect the orthopedist to lead him to think the reason he fell and broke his arm was because he was under the influence of a secret Satanic cult.

But seeing a therapist is a far different situation for the consumer. The key difference is present from first contact: *it is not clearly understood exactly what will transpire.* There is no other professional relationship in which consumers are more in the dark than when they first go to see a therapist. In meeting a therapist for the first time, most consumers are as blind as a bat about what will transpire between the two of them. At most, they might think they will talk to the therapist and perhaps get some feedback or suggestions for treatment. What clients might not be aware of is the

gamut of training, the idiosyncratic notions, and the odd practices they may be exposed to by certain practitioners.

Consumers are a vulnerable and trusting lot. And because of the special, unpredictable nature of the therapeutic relationship, it is easy for them to be taken advantage of. This makes it all the more incumbent on therapists to be especially ethical and aware of the power their role carries in our society. The misuse and abuse of power is one of the central factors in what goes wrong (see my article **The ego-inflation in the New Age and Self-help environment**).

Blame and Change

Parent bashing is a main theme that has permeated psychotherapy since Freud's day. This development has for the most part gone unchallenged as a core feature of much psychotherapy. Underlying this approach is a heavy reliance on one of two notions: one, that getting insight will automatically change conduct (for example Regression psychotherapy); the other, that emotional catharsis will make you a more perfect being.

Using a blame-and-change approach, the therapist never has to have cognitive, behavioral, or psychoeducational methods to assist clients to learn new behaviors. Essentially, blame-and-change therapies imply to the client that if you find whom to blame for your miseries, you will automatically get well and feel better.

Best of all, blame-and-change therapists rarely or never have to confront clients about their characterological problems. These therapists are spared from hearing stories of conduct that might suggest a real lack of sympathy on the client's part toward their partner, family, and fellow humans. Traits such as a sense of entitlement, self-centeredness, lack of compassion, greediness, lack of responsibility and lying require real skill of therapists to handle and help. But if the therapist is just doing blame and change, she doesn't have to worry about these other sticky wickers.

(Note: in the area of positive thinking – New Thought, Law of Attraction, NLP, etc. – there is a lot of hypocrisy in relation to blame-and-change therapy, since the therapists/coaches within this area often are talking about that you should not blame. But mostly this is about that you should not blame/criticize their *own* approach. If you go into it you will soon learn how much they are resting on the blame-and-change model – see my articles **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**, and **Self-help and The Mythology of Authenticity**).

Looking for someone to blame, or something, to blame became a big part of therapy (and also coaching). The philosophy seeped into the thinking of many mental health professionals and other types of counselors. Interwoven were the other two main threads we have discussed: (1) search your soul or memory for that one key insight that will suddenly make everything clear and better (Regression Psychotherapy), or (2) enact, reenact, and feel and emote to purge yourself of the bad feelings, and that will suddenly make everything clear and better (Cathartic Psychotherapy). Each of these three points of views presumes that there is one way and one answer: single cause-single cure.

Gone unchecked, these therapeutic strands – blame and change, insight, and catharsis – have had direct influence on the development of most of the modern New Age psychotherapies. The result has been that certain therapists tend to skip over the reality of the client’s problems, because they do not have methods for realistically helping and can only apply one method of therapy. One size fits all.

Flight from Rational Thought

For the past several decades there has been a trend in our society away from science and rational thought and toward magical thinking. Much of this is a result of trends that began in the 1960s with antiestablishment and antiauthoritarian movements and came to be known as New Age. Concurrently there has been a growing interest in self-improvement and self-awareness. Much of this took shape during the 1960s and 1970s and came to be known as the human potential movement. Combined, we have the potential for both expanded awareness and disaster.

But the flight from rational thought into the magical thinking of subjectivism and relativism is not anything new. We saw precisely the same in ancient Greece, with the wandering teachers called “Sophists.” Into the crowded space of Periclean Athens came these wandering teachers, selling their “wisdom” to the bewildered populace. Any charlatan could make a killing, if enough people believed in him. Men like Gorgias and Protagoras, who wandered from house to house demanding fees for their instruction, preyed on the gullibility of a people made anxious by war.

To the young Plato, who observed their antics with outrage, these “Sophists” were a threat to the very soul of Athens. One alone among them seemed worthy of attention, and that one, the great Socrates whom Plato immortalised in his dialogues, was not a Sophist, but a true philosopher.

In order to go further into this “flight from rational thought” you will need to go into my concept of The Matrix Conspiracy (again: read my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**).

So, as mentioned in the start of this article: a common thread in the blame-and-change model is the belief that a person having problems is not likely to be responsible for those problems. This is, among other things, due to their root in reductionism (again: see my article **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**).

4) Conclusion

In general, if your therapist is telling you that you have to get worse before you get better, is tearing you apart rather than building you up, is letting group members insult and ridicule you, is insisting that you must go deeper and deeper and deeper to feel the feeling, or is doing anything that smacks of old-fashioned ventilation theories, get out as fast as you can and look for a supportive therapist who will listen and respond with human decency.

If you are treated with disdain for asking about what you are buying think ahead: how could this person lead you to feel better, plan better, or have more self-esteem if he begins by putting you down for being an alert consumer? Remember, you may be feeling bad, and even desperate, but there are thousands of mental health professionals, so if this one is not right, keep on phoning and searching.

All in all: you should not trust your therapist, regardless of his or her reputation, fame, diplomas, certificates, etc., if:

1. He or she tries to have sex with you or claims that having sex with one's therapist is "good therapy." Intimate sexual behavior, including erotic kissing, fondling or lovemaking, between therapist and patient is always inappropriate. (The Sexual Predator)
2. He or she tries to have you move in and do chores, keep the books, work the farm, have sex, etc. (The Exploiter)
3. He or she spends a lot of time during your sessions talking about his or her own personal problems, such as her husband's illness, his wife's frigidity, another patient's hang-ups, his sexual needs. (The Neurotic)

4. He or she requires as a condition for therapy that you cut off all relations with your spouse, children, parents and other loved ones. (The Cult Guru)
5. He or she claims to know what your problem is and how to fix it, even though no thorough history of you has been taken. (The Savant Idiot)
6. He or she claims that you must be hypnotized in order to discover either hidden memories or hiding entities which are causing your problems. (The Exorcist)
7. He or she specializes not in treating people for specific problems such as depression or anxiety, but rather in treating people as if all problems have an identical cause. (The Johnny-One-Note)
8. He or she claims to have a technique which works miracles or works like magic, curing those who had heretofore been considered hopeless. (The Miracle Worker)
9. He or she has a checklist which is claimed to be an excellent way to find out if you suffer from whatever the therapist specializes in, and you have enough checks to qualify. (The Scientist)
10. He or she requires as a condition for therapy that you accept certain religious, metaphysical or pseudoscientific notions. To have good therapy you should not be required to believe in God, reincarnation, alien abductions, possession by entities, inner children, Primal Pains, channeling, miracles, or any of the many pseudoscientific theories popular among therapists. (The New Age Pseudoscientist)

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