

## The Inner Sanctum: From the Director

At The Village Institute, we agree with the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion who wrote that mental health does not mean being without emotional problems. Rather, it means living well with problems we inevitably have while working on them at the same time. Mental health should be defined as possessing the willingness, courage and capacity to learn from the challenges and experiences that we all find in our lives. Thus, when we are depressed, or confused, or filled with anxiety or self-doubt, the long-term goal of psychotherapy should not be to feel "good" or "happy". Instead, the goal is to deeply and courageously examine the problems that we have, and to understand what these problems can teach us. The lives we live matter, our experiences matter, and so too do the emotional complexities that are a part of our lives. If we ignore these complex feelings, or take the stance that we should simply get rid of them, then we miss the opportunity to learn from them. Only by embracing our problems can we learn from them, and by learning from our past experiences we can understand who we are and thus bring calm to our present and future. Individuals are an amalgamation of experiences and feelings--some good, some great, some bad, some awful--not a list of psychiatric symptomatology. Positive mental health comes about by honestly confronting all emotions, embracing them, not rejecting them.

**"Mental health does not mean being without emotional problems"**

Is this philosophy of mental health relevant to the psychotherapist? Yes! The therapist, too, needs to have the courage and capacity to honestly examine all aspects of his or her life. The therapist needs to bring the experience of a deep and critical self-examination into the psychotherapy he or she does with others. At The Village Institute, we understand that the therapist needs to participate as a professionally trained clinician who has undergone rigorous academic and clinical training. But, more importantly, we believe that the therapist must engage in the therapy as a real person who understands the struggle that the patient is undergoing because the therapist has been through it too.

My training analyst once joked about my professional appearance, my tie and jacket, my serious demeanor and my meticulous method. He cautioned me to remember that it is not the theories and techniques that I had learned that would help patients; nor would it be my professional attire. He said what would help my patients get better would be me, and that what I had learned in my training should supplement who I really am as a person. "You are the therapist. You experience your life. You confront the challenges in your life. If you do not let your experience of having struggled guide your work with patients, then your patients will never be able to relate to you. They will feel alone, and they will not learn to embrace and learn from their own struggles as you have from yours."

My training analyst was right. Our personal experiences matter. This represents what we believe, teach and practice at The Village Institute. The most gifted therapist is not the one with the most degrees or the grayest hair or the finest office. The most gifted therapist is one who is willing to honestly examine his or her own problems and challenges, learn from them, and integrate personal experiences with his or her academic and clinical training. The gifted therapist participates as a real person and combines this with training. We want to know that our therapist can do the very thing that he or she is expecting of us: to honestly examine personal problems, learn from them, and apply this knowledge to the present and future. This willingness to struggle, then, becomes the common thread shared between therapist and patient.

Life is full of struggles. By engaging with these struggles and learning from them, we become emotionally healthier individuals. Lest you think, though, that we believe life is all about struggle, turn the page to Past Times where we advocate savoring feel-good moments as another important piece of mental health!  
*Thoughts from the THE INNER SANCTUM*

## The World We Live In

It was subtle. It didn't happen overnight or with a single government regulation or one industry action. But suddenly, or so it seemed, the insurance industry was in charge of mental health care. For a patient to have reasonable mental health coverage, his or her therapist needed to be a member of a "managed-care" or "in-network" plan. However, to be reimbursed under these plans, patients and therapists have to sacrifice several aspects of the psychotherapeutic relationship that this veteran psychotherapist considers sacrosanct: first, treatment plans are insurance driven, not patient/therapist determined; second, the notion of confidentiality seems to be null and void; and, third, the payment of a fee is no longer a clinical issue between patient and therapist. Under insurance company domination, these are three of the critical losses to the patient/therapist relationship. Furthermore, paperwork smothers the practitioner, and successful psychotherapy seems as dependent on the psychotherapist's bureaucratic skills as the psychotherapist's clinical skills. Under the managed-care system, psychotherapists become part of a bureaucratic system.

At The Village Institute, we believe in the highest standards of practice and care in our industry, and in our own personal and professional ethics. Consequently, we have resigned from all managed care panels throughout the U.S. We will not be answerable and beholden to insurance companies who wish to regulate how we treat our patients. Yet we recognize that, in THE WORLD WE LIVE IN, medical costs are highly burdensome and families must have insurance coverage to manage costs. When patients ask us "Why don't you take insurance?", we think it's a valid question. Here's the answer: First, we do take insurance and our patients can be reimbursed for "out-of-network" expenses if their individual policies provide this type of coverage--and many do. Second, we offer a sliding scale that can meet most of our patients' financial needs. By "opting out" of managed care plans, we are saying "No" to insurance companies invading the confidential space of the therapy office. We believe that this model establishes a respectful distance between the insurance industry and the patient, one that is necessary for maintaining excellence in the therapeutic relationship.

### IN THIS ISSUE:

**The Inner Sanctum:** A Discussion of Clinical Issues from the Director.

**The World We Live In:** Examination of global topics and world events of shared importance.

**Past Times:** A Discussion of leisure experiences that are pleasantly distracting, pleasingly informative or both.

## Past Times

On the one hand, we advocate embracing life's struggles and complexities as a normal part of our everyday existence. On the other hand, we favor moments of relief, pleasure and calm that are "vacations" from those necessary but difficult struggles. Otherwise, a productive life can grow to feel exhausting and unrelenting.

For example, every weekend, I go to the same breakfast place (depending on whether I am in New York or Fayetteville) and, yes, I often order the same thing. It's my "relief", my pleasure, my escape from the complexities of life. (Plus, both places offer superb cappuccinos and breakfast croissants - you know who you are!). One morning, I placed my order and the server said, "Water, no ice. Right?" This may surprise you, but that moment felt good--she remembered that I

liked water without ice, and I felt known and good, calm and peaceful, partly because I can't tell you how hard it is to get a glass of water without ice, but mostly because being remembered meant I belonged and mattered--and having struggled all week with life's challenges, I needed that. We all need moments such as these to feel reassured and revitalized. And while we can seek out these moments in various PAST TIMES, as in activities such as sports and hobbies and other pleasures, often these moments find us, as this one found me. Yet, before you decide that the take-home message is to be receptive to these moments, I've decided that maybe there is another take-home message here: as I think about how good I felt, I think I will look for opportunities where I will take a minute from my own busy schedule and personal struggles and try to provide a similar respite to someone else--to help a "stranger" feel not so strange, not so alone, but rather a part of a community. Until then, let me say to the server who remembered that I liked water, no ice, "Thanks."

***'Why don't you take insurance?' is a valid question. Here's the answer.***

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Comments and questions are always welcomed

SPOTLIGHT is a publication of  
The Village Institute for Psychotherapy.  
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