

Case Study: A Tale of Three Ducklings

Restructuring body tensions, anxiety and depression with Integrative Massage Therapy

Anissa was guilt driven and rigid when I first met her. This young woman was involved in a non-nurturing relationship for five years, unable to directly communicate with her partner about her feelings, her needs or anything that really mattered, and stayed with him although she was no longer in-love with him. She was depressed and stressed for as long as she could remember herself, and her shoulders and back were living evidence for that - suffering from chronic backaches. Her entire body was rigid and armoured. There were little pelvic movement and little emotional communication. Anissa lived within herself but was too fearful to change it, and claim her own life.

I have seen Anissa monthly over a period of six months. In the first session we used rapid hypnotherapy techniques to create rapport and trust. As Anissa's shoulders softened with massage, she was quite shocked how deeply she was touched, and how open she was in the session, talking about her feelings and fears. Anissa kept withdrawing and opening up in a rhythmic cycle. She released some guilt through working on pelvic movement and touch and by using visualisation and 2nd Chakra exercises.

When I saw her again, Anissa left her boyfriend and started her journey. She was surprised by the emotions that came up when her armouring weakened. Suddenly, she was flooded with bouts of sadness. For the first time after her father's death five years earlier, Anissa started grieving for him, crying and letting her anger be expressed. We have physically worked with core processes (during stomach massage) and with grounding (both physically, cognitively and with hypnotherapy). During visualisation she met her demon - fear; fear of being alone with herself, of learning to know and trust herself. Expressing these fears physically was extremely cathartic for her.

The third session was dedicated to explore charge and discharge patterns and to examine Anissa's relationship with her father, who was a key figure in her development. When he was alive, Anissa was frightened from her obsessive-compulsive father and at the same time was desperately looking for his acceptance.

These feelings became patterned in her, frequently creating shame, guilt and depression. Through bodywork and body psychotherapy techniques, we have explored her demon of fear and brought deep emotions to the surface, learning to contain them, to be needy, to be supported and then to ground herself at the end. We combined corrective regression processes with 'here and now' connection, strengthening her ego to enable Anissa release her holding patterns.

Anissa came to the fourth session like a new person. She started a new relationship and allowed herself to open up emotionally with her boyfriend. She started attending her body in various ways, and many of her holding patterns and stresses indeed dissolved. More than anything, Anissa said she was much more aware of the way she tensed her body when she felt insecure or angry, and how she could release these tensions quicker than before. In the session we worked with emotional energy - how to let it flow from her stomach to her head, working with Chakras and breathing patterns, massage, pulsation and biting. We examined anger through shouting and hitting, and noticed her tendency to collapse into depression when her anger overrode her - and how it manifested in the body. We have reached a new level of relationship, an extremely close and intimate bond was evident and Anissa was more present than in any of the earlier sessions.

The fifth session was a special one, since we worked around control issues and integration of self. Because Anissa could now tolerate higher levels of excitation, it became easier to work with the vulnerable as well as her powerful parts. While she was happy with her new life, and her exploration of her limits, Anissa missed some qualities of her 'old self', and to integrate them we used a body-hypnotherapy process, combining massage with guided visualisation, metaphor work and NLP in the form of storytelling. How much easier it is to drift into deep trance while you are touched! Sibling rivalry between three ducklings and a mother duck represented her different parts and, while working on representative bodily parts, the story explored each of the ducklings' virtues, until they have found a way of integrating their skills and becoming a nurturing family.

When Anissa came for the sixth session she told me how she learned to accept the fact that she deserves a lot, the fact that she is a feeling being, with vulnerability and fear,

joy and sadness, strengths and beauty. However, being with these feelings wasn't always easy for her. Part of the session was therefore purely tension release, working on muscles of chest and shoulders, stomach and neck, and massaging the legs for grounding. We used NLP repatterning to find better ways of relating to her boyfriend. Anissa was proud of herself for changing relationship patterns: although she felt frightened as her relationship deepened, she avoided her withdrawing habits and stayed with her feelings, and with her boyfriend. In the second half of the session we combined a shamanic journey with hypnotherapy and body-psychotherapy to meet her father and bring about reconciliation between the two. She expressed her anger and sadness to him, connected with him as an adult and reciprocated love in ways neither of them have done in the past.

There is nothing strange in the magic that life-energy brings to a person when it is allowed to flow. When I have first seen Anissa she was locked in a shell of her body, of her emotions, of her fear. Opening the shell was a gradual process, but once she was out there, after getting used to the overwhelming clarity of air, of pulsation, she needed nothing but permission to fly. When she was held and supported, when she allowed herself to feel, to express, to be - she was, nothing could stop her from being. I hope nothing ever will.

Anissa's journey with IMT was unique. We used different modalities and techniques, the metaphor work we did together was individually told for her, and the sessions were unexpected and unpredictable for both of us. In a way, the six sessions were six different stories and when Anissa got up from the fire and went home, I know she dreamt about each and every one of these stories. It was a long journey, a dream that shaped her outcomes in new directions. It took place six months within which structural and personality change happened. I know that if Anissa would come to see me again she will need a different story, because she is no longer the woman that sat and listened then.