

## Case Study: The Courage to heal - In the body

Recovering from sexual-abuse with IMT by Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar

*Credo quia impossibile* - I believe because it is impossible  
Tertullian

When Sam, 30 years old, came to see me she was panicking. The death of her abuser elevated fragments of memories, invasive pictures, unsolicited nightmares. She wasn't sure of the details, though. Was it real? She stopped having sex with her partner, and withdrew inside. Sam was lost and fearful. Her body was miles away from her mind, shivering in the corner. She sought help because she couldn't handle it anymore.

Like many other survivors of sexual abuse, Sam had a history of eating disorders and was easy to disassociate: from her feelings, from her loved ones, from her body. Like other survivors of sexual abuse, Sam was used to hiding, to enduring, to punishing herself. Dare she have her needs met? Dare she be helped?

When I asked Sam what she would like to achieve she said:

I want to be free of thoughts that are bothering me

I want to know what happened

I want to start drawing again

I want to enjoy sex and my body

I want to resolve the relationship with my mom

I have seen Sam in a short-term, goal-oriented contract for 10 sessions over a course of four months, in which we have done various journeys to meet her needs and fulfil her goals.

Integrative-Mindbody-Therapy (IMT) combines both goal-oriented and process-oriented therapeutic interventions. IMT draws experience and knowledge from three main pillars of therapeutic approaches: Cognitive, Subconscious (or somatic...) and Bodywork. The cognitive approach includes various psychotherapeutic and hypnotherapeutic processes aiding to gain insights; The subconscious approach includes NLP (and Neuro-Linguistic Psychotherapy), hypnotherapy and shamanic processes to tap into our subconscious resources and create profound change; the bodywork approach combines different types of massage, breathing work, deep bodywork and Reichian and neo-Reichian body-psychotherapeutic techniques, aiming at grounding and realising the changes on somatic, bodymind levels – embodying change and forming oneself.

When we began working together we made sure Sam is safe, setting the conditions for safety in the therapeutic space and making sure these are maintained. She courageously explored holding patterns in her body and, using hypnotherapy and touch, emotional and physiological release was encouraged. The session was highly charged, and very intense, but safe.

In the second session we used hypnotic regression to retrieve Sam's memories. With careful guidance (being aware of the dangers of False-Memory-Syndrome), memories slowly cleared and she became very angry. Using cathartic bodywork and hypnotherapy, Sam was invited to express her feelings emotionally, mentally and physically. .

An important part of the process was learning to maintain and protect her boundaries, and this body-psychotherapeutic process was further enhanced by trance. Things started to shift. Sam learned where she ends and others begin.

We used corrective-regression to 'rewrite' the past, together with inner-child work, incorporating miofascia work, storytelling (metaphor work) and movement. Sam no longer had invasive pictures; she began to dare be happier, 'full' and more alive. Sam started to reframe the relationship with her mom, and she began to understand and accept her mom.

While we worked together, Sam said she felt as if she began a second span of life - being a dependent baby again, a toddler throwing temper-tantrums, a young girl and an adolescent. This time, her body joined her in her maturation; this time - she was fully present. One session was dedicated to exploring the different body parts, touching them and talking to them, acknowledging them and validating their needs. Some neglected body parts demanded more attention; others were quite upset and yet other body parts felt loved and appreciated.

Sam started to shift her attitudes; she learned how to work with charge and discharge; she spat, hit and screamed, laughed and cried, expressed her heart and soul - manifesting more of what she fully was, letting the impossible dissolve into the real. She got back to drawing. She could slowly recognise and celebrate her femininity. Touch was helpful in connecting Sam with the pulsating energies and vitality of her body, and with the relation of these to her emotions. Her communication with her friends, family and partner improved.

Within these four months there were some difficult moments, where Sam was flooded with sadness or numbness, fatigue or fear of intimacy, and she still couldn't enjoy sex - in fact, she refrained from having any whatsoever. Sam questioned her relationships, her profession, her space and herself as she experienced her adolescent self changing. And then, at her own pace, she came home, back into her body, into herself. As her journey continued, Sam opened up; learning to tolerate higher levels of excitation, higher intensities of feelings, of sensations; she began exploring her sexuality and enjoying it. Her relationships became clearer and more open, her body less aching and more mobile, flexible, erect and dynamic.

When we ended our work together, Sam wasn't 'trouble free', but she was ready to continue her journey on her own. I know it will be interesting and fulfilling because she walks with her body, soul and mind together. I think Sam will soon be ready to fulfil another dream, and become a mother.