

### Self-reflection: My Spiritual Journey to Becoming a Therapist...So far

As my practicum nears its close, I can hardly believe I have made it this far. It seems like it has both taken forever and passed in a blink of an eye, like a journey is ending but also just beginning. Becoming a therapist was a new career choice, not only because of my love and passion for the science of psychology but because it felt like a calling that would allow me to weave my personal growth into my professional future. A way for me to share the richness of personal transformation with others in the hopes of helping at least one person feel the rewards of treating yourself with the love we so easily give to others but so often deprive ourselves of. As I think about the past eight months, the areas I will write about in the following paragraphs have played a key role in my development.

#### Being Present

Being fully present and “in the moment” with my clients in the therapy room is the main priority in my therapeutic practice. This has been a challenging experience for me as someone diagnosed with Severe Combined Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), given the difficulties I can experience in maintaining focus for sometimes even short periods. This journey has forced me to explore what affects my ability to focus, what I need to be mindful of, and the importance of self-care to ensure I am at my best for my clients. In addition, I have also developed my mindfulness skills to let go of distracting thoughts and tune into my client on a deeper level to help them feel heard and understood and create a sense of connection between us.

#### Embracing Vulnerability

The importance of the client’s ability to be vulnerable with the therapist was made quite clear throughout my coursework. The development of the therapeutic alliance was continuously emphasized and highlighted as the cornerstone to therapeutic success with clients. The importance of embracing my vulnerability, as well as my client’s, became increasingly apparent as my practicum progressed. Countertransference is often experienced when the therapist has a complementary reaction to the client’s transference (GoodTherapy, 2019). Before beginning practicum, I had developed the notion that I needed to avoid or be ashamed of countertransference. As I started seeing clients, I quickly saw that countertransference was unavoidable. I was aware of a deep sense of shame and uncertainty in my abilities when relating to a client. But, as time passed, and I am now in the final weeks of my practicum, I no longer feel that shame or uncertainty. I have learned how my self-awareness can help me to embrace those moments of countertransference and use them as a therapeutic guide in many instances, especially in determining good timing for clinician self-disclosure. I recently received feedback from a client on her thoughts and

feelings about how our time together has helped her. She specifically stated that one of the most transformational moments for her, a moment where her safety and feelings of being understood and “seen” were amplified, was when I had disclosed to her that I, too, was diagnosed with ADHD. As I reflect on that moment, I remember being struck with a feeling of deep resonance with her narrative about how difficult it was to watch everyone else seemingly breeze through life and when she tearfully used me as an example of someone whom she perceived this way, I took this as an opportunity to provide the client with hope through my self-disclosure.

### Navigating New Situations

Perhaps somewhat related to vulnerability, I have had many moments in the therapeutic space that have challenged my knowledge and skills as a new therapist. These moments, in the beginning, felt, at times, terrifying and frequently led to deep-rooted feelings of impostor syndrome, which, in turn, resulted in difficulty remaining fully present with clients in session. As someone who has struggled with the need for perfection and control over situations, this has been a spiritual journey of surrendering control to the wisdom of the therapeutic process, allowing myself some compassion around the fact that I am a new therapist developing my skills, and putting faith in the work that my client and I have put in to create the therapeutic space between the two of us.

Another area of growth for me has been in the arena of supervision. Self-sufficiency is another area that I have done much personal development in. I have a history of being unable to ask for help and guidance when struggling. While this is something that I have been working on in my personal life, I found myself having to sit with the discomfort of admitting I needed help in sessions with my Supervisor. I noticed my fears that my supervisor would perceive me as incompetent if I could not figure the situation out or come up with the “right” intervention. Fears of being unworthy of being a part of a profession I hold in such high regard. With the help of my Supervisor, I have learned to have more confidence in my abilities and to embrace the things I do not know as opportunities for meaningful discussion, curiosity, and personal and professional growth. I have also come to realize how important it is that I can do the work to let go of these insecurities to the care I can bring to clients.

### Compassion and Non-Judgement

A major lesson for me over the last 8 months has been around compassion and judgement, not only of others but, more importantly, of myself. Unconditional positive regard is central to Person-Centered Theory (Farber et al., 2018) and is something every new therapist is aware of when they begin seeing clients. However, my spiritual journey to becoming a therapist has taught me just how important practicing unconditional love and non-judgement

is not only towards my clients but towards myself. As I work with clients with personality disorders, different backgrounds, experiences, and belief systems, I am aware of how crucial (and sometimes difficult) it is to be aware of and leave my personal biases at the proverbial “therapeutic door.” Extending a compassionate heart to these clients allows me to be more understanding and open to their experiences, cultivating calmness and patience as we navigate their complex emotions and personal experiences. Often, it is more important for me to offer myself the benefit of non-judgement and the compassionate heart I mentioned earlier as I navigate these sometimes-difficult sessions, allowing myself the freedom not to be perfect and to recognize the positive things that come out of these sessions both for the client and my own personal growth.

### Gratitude and Mindfulness

Gratitude and mindfulness have become foundational for me in my journey as a new therapist. I have found that expressing gratitude for having been able to take steps toward making this drastic career change, to be able to follow my interests and passions, for being a part of the transformative journeys my clients are taking and for everything that I learn from them in sessions, help keep me grounded and present in why I chose to become a part of this profession. As I mentioned earlier, mindfulness helps me to remain present and connect with my clients on a deeper level to help foster a strong therapeutic relationship. But it also helps me stay aware of what is happening within me, not only in session, but in my personal life, allowing me to recognize when I am neglecting my needs and self-care. It has cultivated within me a sense of sacredness in caring for and being faithful to my needs, which is far cry from the feelings of selfishness that once existed in those spaces.

My journey in becoming a therapist has been both enlightening and humbling. I have realized that this profession requires continuous growth, both concerning professional skill-building and personal exploration and discovery. Having a deep understanding of my personal values and aligning my practice with those will play a vital role in shaping who I am as a therapist and how I show up for my clients. Going forward, one of my goals is to remain open to the experiences and insights that present themselves so that I can continue developing my skills as an authentic and effective therapist.

## References

*Countertransference*. GoodTherapy. (2019). <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/countertransference>

Farber, B. A., Suzuki, J. Y., & Lynch, D. A. (2018). Positive regard and psychotherapy outcome: A meta-analytic review. *Psychotherapy*, 55(4), 411–423. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000171>