

Book Reviews

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Self-Therapy Made Easy

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Marian is the author of eight books (www.marianvaneykmcain.com), co-editor of the magazine 'GreenSpirit' and also a blogger, columnist and book reviewer. A lover of all things green, she lives, very simply, in rural Devon with her soul mate and partner, Sky McCain. She welcomes visits to her books' Website (above) and to her primary Website at www.elderwoman.org

In this era of confusing proliferations of therapies and extreme boom of spirituality books and trainings promising instant relief and gratification, it is refreshing to find a book designed for the neophyte which is highly stranded in the long-established tradition. The book is a rare combination of simple and accessible wisdom, professional expertise, and wit and humour, the writer achieving the difficult task of offering serious support without taking herself too seriously.

"Self therapy made easy" is written for normal people empowered to solve their own problems and deal with their own issues and who are fully capable of doing so. Written by a highly qualified psychotherapist and based on many years of clinical expertise and personal practice, the book is an informative, inspirational and easy-to-read guide to understanding how the normal, human mind works and how we can all take charge of our own



psychological, emotional and spiritual health. By suggesting to try out the various practices and techniques in her book, the author hopes the reader will soon find the ones that suit him/her best.

The book is divided into three parts, each one dedicated to a different emotional growth stage.

Part One deals with understanding your inner world, is about self-knowledge and is a prerequisite for Part Two, which reveals the art, skills and techniques of self-therapy while Part Three is having a close look at the transpersonal self. The author herself is warning us that this is a book intended to be read in the order in which it is written, rather than “dipped into randomly”.

In Part One music metaphors and terminology are used in order to make the reader more aware about the unconscious and the conscious mind. It is emphasized again, for the unaware reader, that the unconscious dictates a large part of what we feel, think, react and behave in our daily life. “The Puppet master, the unconscious mind, influences us in choosing our careers, our homes, our friends and even our life partners. It influences pretty much everything we think and say and do and feel. So it is probably a good idea to get more familiar with its contents.” The idea is not new, shamans, spiritual healers, meditators, and other “Primitive” people have always known that the unconscious is a powerful storehouse of resources and ideas. Sigmund Freud considered the unconscious the place where you repressed memories from childhood and all the other junk you do not want. Jung, one of Freud’s disciples insisted on the novel idea of “collective unconscious” of the culture we live in. Thus, the unconscious became a touch less dingy, and a lot more of a “spiritual” component. Next comes Milton Erickson, who saw the unconscious as a massive storehouse of resources and memories that has the ability to help you change whenever you want, and will help you get what you want.

A rather novel view of Marian is the one of full orchestra, composed by the triad: The Observing Self, The Virtual Therapist and The Unconscious Mind.

A particularly careful look is taken to the motivations one has in order to turn to a therapist and also the model that separates the social worker’s activity from a psychotherapist’s work. Prior to becoming a therapist in private practice, the author has spent many year in training and working as a social worker, a special outlook is taken to the model used: client has a problem -client seeks help -client receives help problem solved -client discharged. Marian acknowledged that this model works just fine for practical problems like finding accommodation, sorting out household finances, but not all the problems were practical, most of the people who turn to a social worker for supports have been for long period s of their life in stressful situations like: eviction, divorce, etc. Then the psychotherapist enters the scene, dealing with the emotional issues the client has.

The author notices with extreme subtlety that a vast majority still perceives psychotherapy as a service that people are ashamed to be related to probably because of the and stigma associated to mental health in our culture. This is why visiting a coach seems to be much more desirable in our era, coaching being associated with sports, entertainment, performance and less with pathology and illness, especially life coaching. “At the same time, any model that focuses only on your future and your goals without taking a good look at how and why your unconscious mind might be sabotaging those goals, is working with only half the tools in the toolbox.” A valuable assertion, since the holisticity in theory and method is the princeps treatment choice.

Part Two is concerned with the self-therapy topic and induces the feeling that everybody can master the art of self-therapy providing he/she has some basic training. Even though this might be possible for the majority of us,

there are still human beings afraid to perform any kind of self-therapy other than bibliotherapy and even so, reading books that enhance their self-knowledge is still an exception rather than the norm. A particular look is given to the Shadow, in the Jungian paradigm and to the interpretation of dreams, in the same fashion. Also, individuation process is clearly explained in few paragraphs.

The “Observing Self” term has been used by some authors, such as Arthur Deikman in this paradigm: the reader is invited to try and locate that self to establish its boundaries. The task is impossible; whatever we can notice or conceptualize is already an object of awareness, not awareness itself, which seems to jump a step back when we experience an object. Unlike every other aspect of experience — thoughts, emotions, desires, and functions — the Observing Self can be known but not located, not ‘seen’.

Marian imagines the Observing Self as “a third level of mind which we can deliberately cultivate in order to observe in a totally neutral way—i.e. without blame, judgment or interference—our behavior, our thoughts, our feelings and moods and all the workings of our own minds.” She is very close to Deikman when stating that though total objectivity is impossible for the human mind to achieve and developing a strong and capable Observing Self is probably the closest we can ever get to it. Also, this Observing Self is probably the best state of mind to achieve when in therapy.

Part Three helps the reader to achieve a change in consciousness, by revealing him the transpersonal self, not in a structured manner as Kim Wilber does it, but having a more personal approach, using several landmark-concepts such as: quantum universe, worlds unseen, reinterpretation of time, sense of oneness and secret truth of relationships. Lots of examples accompany the descriptions of these concepts, making the journey so much easier and pleasant for the reader. Finally, the author invites everyone to live his/her life by using ‘Nothing in excess’ and reminding everyone to relax, kick back and have fun as well and not to be too hard on yourself if you sometimes fall back into old ways of thinking and behaving, because “changing patterns is not always easy”.

The book ends with common sense advice expressing a simple life philosophy, basically accessible information for the intuitive and empathic reader who is not afraid to speak his mind, experiment and access new information in a delightful and entertaining way. A captivating mix of spirituality, transactional analysis and gestalt concepts comprised in several case studies from her own clinical practice as a social worker and psychotherapist make the book a fascinating read for both trainee therapists and the novice readers receptive to psychological topics. “Self therapy made easy” fully justifies its own title, offering the type of information promised in an honest and subtle way, without aiming the goal to touch the analytical minds of all experienced practitioners in the world.