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# Quakers MEET energy psychotherapy in Oxford

**Sandra Figgess**  
describes her work  
bringing a new form  
of trauma therapy  
to clients

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**A**s a meeting “gathers”... there gradually develops a feeling of belonging to a group who are together seeking a sense of the Presence. The ‘I’ in us begins to feel like ‘we’... we suddenly feel a sense of unity, a sense of togetherness with one another and with that something outside ourselves that we call God.<sup>1</sup>

I have found that there is a strong resonance between the connection that we experience with one another in a gathered Quaker meeting and the experience I can often have when working as an ‘energy’ psychotherapist. There can be the same sense of being guided, that the ministry comes ‘through one’ rather than ‘from one’ and that the source of healing is beyond and contains both therapist and client.

At a recent Quaker meeting, a Friend rose and quoted two lines from a poem: ‘We have come to listen to the silence, but the silence listens back at us.’<sup>2</sup> Later, another person spoke about the Shinto perspective, which fosters an understanding of the interrelated time frame of being human, and the slower, more infinite time frame of trees, rocks and silence. I found myself being reminded of writings by the Jesuit paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin, about how there is a level of consciousness in every aspect of the natural world – evolving from the internal drive of the particles that form rocks to arrange themselves in an orderly crystalline structure to the ‘omega point’ of consciousness and reflective thought in human kind.<sup>3</sup> He envisages a ‘noosphere’ that holds and transmits this medium of consciousness, as the atmosphere holds air. This seems to chime with ideas emerging in energy psychology that our energy systems hold information which can be communicated across distance and time. There is also an echo of the concept of ‘ether’, now considered archaic, which is still sometimes used to explain how similar ideas emerge at the same time in different contexts: ‘it is in the ether’.

### What is energy psychology?

The term was coined by Fred Gallo, a clinical psychologist, in the 1990s<sup>4</sup> and brings together modern Western ideas about the psychodynamics of the mind with ancient Eastern understanding of how energy moves in the body. It is now developing a substantial evidence base which is being drawn together by the US-based Association of Comprehensive Energy Psychology (ACEP).<sup>5</sup> Energy psychology has many variants, but its underlying discovery is that thought affects the body’s subtle energy system (chakras, meridians, biofield) just as disturbances in that system also lead to disturbances in thought, emotions, behaviours and physical health. Energy psychology uses simple techniques to stimulate the body’s subtle energy system so as to access and release disturbances in the information held in the body’s energy system. Energy psychotherapy is an integration of energy psychology techniques into the practitioner’s own therapeutic model.

brains and nervous systems contain hundreds of billions of neurons that each connect electrochemically with thousands of other neurons, creating an incomprehensibly complex electrical system. ‘Subtle energy’ is a form of energy that is activated by the mind and can affect physical matter. It is well established in many cultures around the world. *Qi*, the basis for acupuncture, is best known in the West. Our current scientific paradigm cannot account for phenomena attributed to such energies, but there are now many controlled studies which demonstrate ‘the physical impact from a distance of visualisation and prayer on people, animals, plants, organs, blood and cells’.<sup>6</sup> William Tiller, a respected materials scientist from Stanford, has devised experiments to demonstrate the influence of mind on matter and to provide a mechanism to explain this. He has demonstrated the existence of magnetic information waves which can be modulated by human intention, and proposes that this is the mechanism by which mind can affect matter.<sup>7</sup>

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### What is this energy?

There are two distinct forms of energy that are involved in energy psychology: electromagnetic energy and subtle energy. Electromagnetic energy in the body is relatively well understood. Our

Interestingly, Teilhard de Chardin also distinguishes two forms of energy. The first, which he calls ‘tangential’, is the form generally understood by science, while the second, which he calls ‘radial’, draws towards ever greater complexity – which is to move forward in evolutionary terms.

# Perspectives

## What does an energy psychology/psychotherapy session look like?

Most sessions start in a familiar way with the client, bringing something that has been disturbing or difficult in the previous week and the therapist supporting the client in finding a focus in the material that is brought.

Jane comes in distressed because she went to a carnival with James whom she was just starting to date. They met a number of her friends while there and she noticed that he suddenly withdrew from her after that. As we talk, the shock of the way he changed begins to emerge as the focus.

As the focus emerges, the therapist may suggest muscle testing to confirm this focus and decide what particular intervention to use. Muscle testing, derived from applied kinesiology, is also known as 'energy testing', and is used in many, but not all, energy psychology modalities to make enquiries of the client's embodied self. A common way to do this is for the client to hold out an arm parallel with the floor while making a statement. The therapist applies gentle pressure to the wrist. A firm response from the muscle indicates that the client is coherent with what has been stated while a slack response indicates a lack of coherence. Greater subtlety beyond a yes/no response can also be discerned by therapist and client together listening to the muscle tone. Muscle testing can be used to guide the work, to check its progress, to confirm hunches and to identify the earliest origins of a current issue.

Muscle testing confirms that we should work with the shock of James' sudden coldness, using a chakra clearing method. It also indicates that there are two internal objections or 'reversals' to clearing the energy around this. One reversal is that Jane is too angry to clear this.

Most forms of therapy have an understanding of resistances to change. In energy psychology these are often specifically sought out and identified and then gently 'cleared'. The clearing, which is a temporary setting aside, is often effected by tapping on the side of

the hand while making a statement that acknowledges the problem and pairs it with a statement of self-acceptance. Normally after doing this, muscle testing will indicate that the reversal is cleared.

Jane's arm was strong in response to the statement, 'I am too angry to be over this'. She tapped on the side of her hand while I also tapped on the side of mine and she repeated after me, 'Even though I am far too angry to be over this, I fully and deeply love, honour and respect myself and I respect my entirely justified anger and I ask for help in releasing myself from the bind of my anger'. After doing this, Jane's arm was weak in response to the statement, 'I am too angry to be over this.'

Once any reversals have been cleared, we move on to clearing the energy around the issue itself. There are many ways of doing this. The chakra-clearing method used here involves holding one hand stationary on the energy centre or chakra which holds the issue most strongly, and moving the other hand down the energy centres from crown to root, while naming the issue that is being cleared. The naming can be full and explicit or it can be very lightly allusive if the issue is too triggering to name. The breath is used for energetic release after each statement.

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## The breath is used for energetic release after each statement

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I guide Jane in moving her hands down the chakras while she says at each point, 'all my shock when James suddenly became so cold'. After she had reached the root chakra, we both remained silent until she was ready to speak. Then she says, 'I kept thinking of how my father would change very suddenly from being full of fun to being cold and rejecting'.

We muscle test and find that the incident with James has cleared, but we need to treat the earlier trauma with her father.

We repeat the chakra, clearing with the words, 'all the times and ways that my father suddenly became cold and rejecting'. Tears pour down Jane's face as she experiences a deep release.

In future sessions, we may explore other aspects of the earlier trauma released here. Or we may go back to allowing other issues to come to consciousness through working with triggers in the present.

## MEET in Oxford

Energy psychotherapy came to Oxford Quaker Meeting through 'MEET in Oxford', which was started by three experienced psychotherapists who are members of Oxford Quaker Meeting and have trainings in EMDR and/or energy psychotherapies.

Our idea of developing a very small trauma-focused therapy service at 43 St Giles, on Mondays, came to us early in 2013. The 'push' for this arose at a point where my own private practice was going through a low patch and I felt frustrated at not being able to make use of my training and skills in working with trauma. I was also very aware that those who most need this work are those least likely to be able to afford to pay for it. I approached two colleagues who were also members of the Meeting, and found that the idea of setting up a low-cost service together in Oxford was timely for both of them.

Oxford Quaker Meeting agreed to support us by offering us rent-free rooms and we agreed to work pro bono, claiming only minimal expenses as a contribution towards the costs of remaining accredited. This has allowed us to offer therapy sessions at very low cost. We see clients for up to 26 sessions and find that most can make significant progress within this time frame.

EMDR (Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) is NICE approved for the treatment of PTSD and is now broadly within the mainstream of psychological treatments, even though it is not well established in the NHS in Oxford and is still in the shadow of the better established trauma-focused CBT. Many of our clients have heard of EMDR

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but few have heard of energy psychotherapy. However, we find that many of those who come to MEET present with complex trauma and the gentle yet powerful techniques of energy psychology are better suited to working with these clients than is EMDR, which requires a longer period of stabilisation before working with complex trauma. Energy psychotherapy also has the advantage of offering clients tools they can use to continue to work on themselves, and many clients express their appreciation of this in their final evaluations. They also report feeling more in control of emotions and being better able to think positively about the future and make use of available support.

Four years after MEET in Oxford first began, we held a review to consider its future. In doing this, we noted that: 'We particularly value the containment and support of working from Quaker premises and being held by the wider Quaker community while offering this service to extremely vulnerable clients.' There is a graceful synergy in offering therapy which depends upon listening to information held in the energy fields within the context of a community which listens to the silence.

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### BIOGRAPHY

Sandra Figgess is an energy psychotherapist and Quaker and member of the Converging Streams team that teaches energy psychology methods to accredited therapists ([www.energypsychotherapy.co.uk](http://www.energypsychotherapy.co.uk)). Her previous experience includes teaching chemistry, reading theology, working in welfare rights, living as a religious sister and training as a Gestalt therapist.

