

This book is a gift to counsellors and other psychopracitioners, wherever they are on their journey, as Rachel shares her learning from years of experience and vast breadth of reading and knowledge in a politically aware yet non-judgemental way, informing, challenging and enriching the reader.

Suzanne Keys is a person-centred counsellor/supervisor/trainer, and is on the editorial board of *Self & Society*.

R.J. Chisholm, *Uncovering Mystery in Everyday Life: Confessions of a Buddhist Psychotherapist*, Triarchy Press, Axminster, 2022, 152 pp, ISBN-13: 978-1913743482, price (paperback) £12.50.

Reviewed by **Caroline Brazier**

Psychotherapy is the art of encounter. The encounter between therapist and client is, of course, central to its process, but so too is the client's encounter with life; with the significant others in their life, with their own nature in all its twists and wrinkles, and, ultimately, with their own mortality and that of those they love. Too often, these encounters are avoided, or at least only partial, but through the therapeutic process they open up to something much more raw and real.

In this book, Chisholm leads us through a series of encounters based on his work with clients, giving us a glimpse of the intimate world of the therapy room from within the frame of the psychotherapist. By offering a collection of stories which draw on his years of experience in the role, he describes the minutiae of process which these therapeutic meetings involve and, as he does so, shares his own thought processes: the importance of listening with open attention and not foreseeing the outcome, and the complex dance between intuition and not knowing. This in itself makes the book an interesting read, for who is not fascinated by the thoughts behind the therapist's enigmatic expression?

The majority of chapters in the book centre on stories of particular clients. This narrative style allows a complex exploration of the different levels of thought, fact and interaction in the exchanges. Through this medium, the book addresses qualities of therapeutic relationship itself, and more theoretical material drawn from Buddhist psychology as the different stories illustrate different themes. Initially, the book starts by focusing on the therapeutic encounter itself. Subsequent chapters explore different areas of life experience, which are linked through reflective discussion to the author's Buddhist interests: the deeper implications of teachings of mindfulness in the therapeutic context and their roots in the early Buddhist texts; issues of love, death and attachment, and ways in which these can be explored as routes to awareness; the creation and nature of identity and the discovery of personal meaning. In its final chapters, the book addresses other areas of theory: the role of dreams in therapy, drawing on the traditions of Freud and Jung; and, in the final chapter, core Buddhist theory, and particularly the question of faith, which here manifests in a deep trust in the unfolding process of human interaction, and in life itself.

A theme which permeates this book is the paradoxical quality of the therapist's position. *Not Knowing* is an important principle for Chisholm, as his previous book suggests (Chisholm & Harrison, 2016); and a theme which emerges in this book, at least implicitly, is that, in fact, the task of remaining in the state of not-knowing is well-nigh impossible. It is also, at a simplistic level, inappropriate. What is described is a kind of ongoing koan, an insoluble puzzle used in some Buddhist schools, which, despite its nonsensical nature, provokes the practitioner to spiritual transformation. The task of setting aside assumption whilst drawing on experience likewise involves constant self-challenge, and a refusal to step ahead and propose answers or prescribe directions, despite exercising wisdom in choosing what response to give.

The therapist is inevitably curious about outcomes, and may continue to wonder about

them after the therapy has finished, as is described in the case of a young man called Simon who seemed to struggle greatly in life. When the therapy relationship ends, perhaps rather prematurely due to a career move, the therapist is left, on the one hand, struggling with a feeling of wanting some kind of conclusion to the story and the uncertainty of not knowing whether the therapy has been useful or not, whilst accepting the process as it has been, and trusting that what was needed has happened. For those of us in the therapy professions, this kind of outcome is all too familiar, and requires of us both faith and humility.

The tension between knowing and not-knowing, stepping back and being present, is evident in Chisholm's reflections and, as with many tensions, brings creativity and challenge to the process. The therapist, far from being the neutral blank screen mythologised by early analysts, invariably brings perspectives and experiences which shape their views and colour their responses; and part of the art of therapy is to negotiate this process whilst remaining focused on the client's needs and way of being.

Addressing the paradox, whilst the author emphasises the importance of challenging any inclination to 'know' what is needed for the client's well-being, he also demonstrates ways in which a lifetime's experience becomes the resource bank on which, as a therapist, he draws. He describes how, in his inner reflections, and, more rarely, in explicit interventions made during the sessions, the reservoir of human emotions and responses which he has accumulated through his own life experiences helps him deepen his understanding of the client's inner landscape. As he states, 'We would have little hope of understanding the personal experiences of our clients without drawing on similar personal experiences of our own' (p. 45).

At the same time, the author does not see personal experience in itself as sufficient qualification to help others therapeutically. The integration of raw experiences and the maturation of understanding which come from

both personal and theoretical reflection need to accompany it. '...[P]ersonal experience doesn't become an asset for practising therapy unless it involves a deeper questioning about the self and human nature in general.' (p. 104)

The therapist's investment in the story needs to be challenged, and the gap between personal experience and what is presently unfolding respected. The cases which are presented show how repeatedly, the therapist is surprised by what emerges. Our clients do not follow the paths we might predict. Whilst we can anticipate directions, our reading of the client's story is a constant process of reinterpretation. Such surprise is in fact, in all probability, one of the most significant aspects of the therapy process, because it represents that point in which the therapist, and probably the client as well, are startled out of habitual viewpoints, and encounter one another in a more real way.

The book is well written, and will appeal as much to the general reader as to the practising therapist. With its readable narrative, those considering therapy for themselves will find it helpful in demystifying aspects of the process of the therapy room, whilst honouring the inherent mystery of the life which is uncovered. For therapists and trainee therapists, it offers an in-depth picture of the therapeutic art, annotated with comments about the process and the theory which informs it. In this way, the book offers a multi-layered discourse. From his position as a human, a therapist and a Buddhist, the author introduces us to layers in his thinking about the people he works with and about human predicaments which they embody. We are taken into the intimate spaces of the therapist's process. At the same time, the book contains reflections on the practice of psychotherapy and the theory which lies behind it, drawing on the masters of the Western therapeutic tradition. It also draws parallels in Buddhist psychology, offering insights from that tradition into mindfulness, impermanence and the self. Chisholm approaches his work as a psychotherapist from a Buddhist perspective. This is something which he explicitly explores in a number of places through the book and, in

particular, returns to in the final chapter, where he explains a number of core teachings of Buddhism and their application in psychology. The chapter begins with an exploration of fundamentals: Buddhism gives him faith that life is *actually a great blessing* (p. 104), whilst at the same time inevitably involving unavoidable existential suffering. In this context he draws on central Buddhist teachings: *The Four Noble Truths* and the *kelshas* as the roots of suffering. He then focuses particularly on teachings of non-attachment and the constructed, illusory nature of the self. These explanations are likely to be useful to the non-Buddhist who is interested in Buddhist psychology, as well as to Buddhists practising psychotherapy.

In this explanation, however, readers from a Western therapeutic background need to be aware that Buddhist theories of attachment, to which the author alludes, are distinct from, and not to be confused with, Western theories of the same name. This distinction is not made explicitly in the book. In fact, the Buddhist theory of attachment can often represent an opposite phenomenon to that described by John Bowlby and others, being the manner in which identification and self-creation are projected on to the world of others, thus cutting the person off from real relationship.

There are times also when Chisholm can seem to lean towards the ascetic, particularly in his views on human relationships. For example, when he suggests that Buddhism has no interest in romantic love, and indeed *frowns on romantic love* (p. 74), it becomes clear, however, that it is not so much romance itself, as the compulsive grasping at relationship, to which he is referring: ‘...a deeper self-awareness may take root in the client, which may not only free her desire for love from its compulsive force... but may make finding a loving relationship more likely’ (p. 75). Put another way, releasing the need to grasp and cling allows for a deeper, more real kind of relating.

This, then, is a book grounded in the author’s own experience; experience of life, of working with clients, of a spiritual tradition and of many particular human encounters. As we read each person’s story and meet some of the clients with whom the author has worked, what comes over more than anything is an interest in and caring for each person’s unique presence here, now, in this moment of sharing. There are ideas and formulae, to be certain, but beyond these is the interest in how this person and this person and this other person lives out their life on its very particular path, and on the encounter which has taken place with them in the weekly therapy hour.

Reference

Chisholm, C. & Harrison, J. (eds) (2016). *The Wisdom of Not-Knowing: Essays on Psychotherapy, Buddhism and Life Experience*. Axminster: Triarchy Press.

Dina Glouberman, *ImageWork: The Complete Guide to Working with Transformational Imagery*, PCCS Books, Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, 2022, 336 pp, ISBN-13: 978-1915220028, price (paperback) £21.00.

Reviewed by **Graham Mummery**

Poet and UKCP-registered psychotherapist

Dr Dina Glouberman has made many contributions to Humanistic Psychology with papers, books, and even the creation of Skyros Holidays. Through her work she has profoundly influenced many lives for the better, including my own.

The holidays are run on the Greek island of the same name in the Aegean, and sometimes in other locations. She is also a psychotherapist, and has facilitated groups teaching her own approach to visualisation and creative imagination in a craft she calls ‘ImageWork’. She prefers the term ‘ImageWork’ over