Help for the Helper (Self Care Strategies for Managing Burnout and Stress) **By Babette Rothschild with Marjorie Rand** pp253 Pub Norton (£18.99)

Although I have previously heard a lot about Babette Rothschild's work in the field of post-traumatic stress and in spite of (or was it because of) being both a body orientated psychotherapist **and** a graduate in neuroscience, I have not yet read any of her books. When it was suggested that we review her latest contribution in S&S I decided that I'd take the opportunity to find out more about her work.

For therapists and counsellors to look after themselves is, at the same time, a basic given on all good training courses *and* an idea neglected by both new and experienced practitioners. Part of this may well be intrinsic to our motivation to become helpers and it is this 'helping others and neglecting ourselves' process which needs to be explored by every trainee therapist and counsellor. This is especially true of those who aim to work 'at relational depth' and is yet another argument for personal therapy as an integral part of counselling/psychotherapy training.

The strength of Babette Rothschild's book is that it locates the relational involvement, empathy, countertransference, projective identification etc, firmly in the body. The 'strategies' referred to in the subtitle, encourage the therapist/counsellor to be aware of her body processes and of their changes in response to what is being worked on in the therapy room.

I'm less comfortable with the neuroscience. This isn't new for me as I've been aware of other writers who are currently linking neuroscience and psychotherapy and have mixed feelings about their work too. Here my difficulty is with the idea of monitoring brain processes of which, by definition, we are unaware. My question is 'Do we really *need* to think in terms, say, of ANS arousal when monitoring our process with clients? What is wrong with breathing, tension, posture and general "felt sense"?' Having said this, I can appreciate that, for those with less background in physiology, the detailed explanation of the neurophysiological processes can do much to normalise a counsellor or therapist's inexplicable bodily responses to working with traumatised clients.

Help for the Helper consists of four main chapters, flanked by an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter sets out the risk to therapists who work at relational depth with clients. It gives definitions and a brief history of commonly observed phenomena in the counselling relationship such as empathy, projective identification and countertransference. Empathy is usually thought to be

advantageous in promoting relational depth, but Babette Rothschild identifies the danger of 'empathising too much' particularly when working with trauma victims. This chapter also contains definitions of commonly used expressions such as 'compassion fatigue',' burnout' and 'vicarious traumatisation'. In its context, the information in this chapter is new, but, in a wider context it is, as Babette says in her introduction, 'common sense'. Human beings are intensely relational and feel each other's feelings to an alarming extent. If this were not true, drama, music and poetry would make no sense at all.

Chapter two looks at the neurophysiology of empathy. It gives a detailed picture of the functioning of the nervous system and substantiates the concept of empathy as a somatic phenomenon. This chapter also includes a 'skill-building' section which gives strategies for controlling the usually unconscious process of mirroring between client and counsellor. The concept of somatic empathy is again, by no means new. Nathan Field's excellent paper, 'Listening with the body', written I think in the 1960's was groundbreaking in its time, but has been little followed or developed. Perhaps his concept of 'somatic countertransference' was contentious, particularly as it focussed on *sexual arousal* and therefore erotic countertransference.

I'm not sure about the assumption behind the skill-building section in this chapter, which seems to be that too much empathy is bad and must be controlled. I prefer Mearns and Cooper's more flexible approach. In essence, this suggests that the therapist needs to be *aware* of the effects of working relationally with trauma victims, but must then make a conscious choice to either move into that relationship or to stay nearer to the edge of it.

The third chapter is on arousal/calmness and is again subdivided into theory and practical sections. I found the case histories and practical exercises most useful, but the psychophysiological description of arousal is also beneficial. I particularly liked the section on boundaries and distance. Some humanistic trainees, in an endeavour to empower their clients, are reluctant to have any input into the distance at which they sit. Perhaps it is important to negotiate this, but we, as the therapists, need to feel ok in order to do our job effectively.

The fourth chapter is on the psychophysiology of clear thinking and is particularly important. Being able to think, as well as to feel, is a balance which is difficult to achieve both for the individual therapist and for those involved in training. Contemporary academic culture prizes thinking over intuition and feeling and it is important to redress that imbalance. In this chapter, Babette Rothschild is more concerned about allowing the brain to function in the presence of trauma or stress. This includes being able to make assumptions about our overall emotional state as therapists and I particularly liked the 'self-history' exercise which is worth repeating however experienced we are or however much 'work' we've done on ourselves.

Babette Rothschild concludes her book by revisiting some of the concepts she's dealt with in the body of the book and including a brief case history which illustrates the strategies she has discussed earlier.

Overall, I found *Help for the Helper* very readable book with some thought-provoking strategies and exercises. I shall certainly be using some of them, but others I found more geared towards control than suits my style of practice. Certainly I would recommend *Help for the Helper* to anyone working with trauma victims and especially to those without a background in either bodywork or neuroscience.

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The Integrity Model of Existential Psychotherapy in Working with the 'Difficult Patient'. **Lander, N.R. & Nahon, D. (2005)** (pp232) £18.99 London and New York : Routledge.

Nedra Lander and Danielle Nahon have produced both a fine tribute to the legacy of the late Hobart Mowrer and a potent example of how the ideas and practices of a distinguished psychologist can be developed and fashioned for a new generation.

One of Mowrer's key beliefs was that our vulnerabilities are really our greatest strengths. This book is a powerful example of that belief in action. The authors have been prepared to put their own professional and personal struggles on the line and to allow the reader to enter the heart of what it means to offer another human being a relationship where there is no facade and no retreat into techniques or pseudo expertise. Instead, the writers demonstrate what it means to remain resolutely faithful to their own values and to see human unhappiness and dysfunction as principally caused by a failure to live out such fidelity. The relationships they describe are characterised by a closeness of relating which gives fresh and invigorating meaning to Buber's concept of the I-thou encounter. They also demonstrate that there is such a thing as healthy and appropriate guilt within both client and counsellor and that this needs to be addressed, not in a spirit of judgementalism but with the deep acceptance which is the mark of stern love. In short, this is a book which encapsulates the existential approach to experience at its best. There is no pretence and no evasion. Instead there is a willingness to engage at the deepest level and not to be afraid. No wonder that the writers record such outstanding success with those who are often the most damaged and present therapists with their most intractable challenges.

The importance of honesty in relationships is clearly not a new concept, but the importance of Lander and Nahon's contribution lies in their insistence that honesty alone is not sufficient within the therapeutic relationship. Honesty needs to be deployed responsibly and not used, as is often the case in social interaction, in order to blame the other or in some way to point a finger of accusation. What

is more in Lander and Nahon's Integrity Model, great emphasis is placed on closing the psychological space with others. In some ways it could be claimed that their manner of working makes the creation of intimacy not only desirable but essential, especially in the case of those who are badly damaged or have earned some of the most powerful psychiatric labels. It is an intimacy, however, which in no way imposes itself or violates the other's being. On the contrary, it is a closeness which by its commitment and willingness to be vulnerable honours the other's identity and cherishes the opportunity to enter into relationship with them. For those who have perhaps been diagnosed, labelled and held at arm's length the restorative power of such intimacy can be quickly discerned. Lander and Nahon's moving case studies leave the reader in no doubt that here is a mode of working which can establish contact and bring new hope for those who have languished, perhaps for years, under the burden of diagnostic labels such as personality disorder, antisocial personality, addict, schizophrenic and post-traumatic stress disorder. The same three-fold principle of holding resolutely to cherished values, of maintaining a sense of profound responsibility and of seeking to close the psychological space is shown to be equally effective when applied to the resolution of cross-cultural difficulties and international conflicts. Final chapters are also devoted to an exploration of the Integrity Model within the context of the workplace, and in its application to issues arising from burnout and organizational stress.

The book is unlikely to be popular in current psychotherapeutic circles. In an age which seems to demand quick-fix solutions and is wedded to the so-called empirically validated approaches, Nedra Lander and Danielle Nahon present an altogether different path. It is not a path that will be entered on by the faint-hearted, for it demands of the therapist of whatever tradition a level of commitment, vulnerability and courage which our current culture does little to encourage. On the contrary, their book is likely to be dismissed as naive, lacking in scientific rigour or even as arrogantly grandiose. Perhaps such accusations are inevitable for here are two therapists who are bold enough to put their own life stories on the line (and their own professional relationship) and to state unequivocally that the practice of counselling and psychotherapy is essentially an ethical, moral and spiritual undertaking. They go further and join Ernesto Spinelli in not only allowing but inviting the 'world dimension' into the therapeutic relationship. If what we do as therapists in the privacy of our consulting rooms has no relevance to the current violence, anguish and bitter hostility within the global community it is perhaps wholly appropriate to question its validity. Lander and Nahon's book seeks to present a healthy form of relatedness which not only includes those who are often placed at the extreme end of the psychiatric continuum but has profound implications for couples, families, the workplace and even for international relations. Those who accuse them of naiveté, grandiosity and evangelical zeal are, I suspect, unwittingly pointing to the book's importance and seditious power.

Brian Thorne