

# NTU Psychotherapy: An Afrocentric Approach

Frederick B. Phillips  
*Progressive Life Center*

NTU psychotherapy is based on the core principles of ancient African and Afrocentric world view, nurtured through African American culture, and augmented by concepts and techniques of Western psychology. NTU psychotherapy is spiritually based and aims to assist people and systems to become authentic and balanced within a shared energy and essence that is in alignment with natural order. Furthermore, NTU therapy utilizes the principles of Nguzo Saba as guidelines for harmonious living. Basic principles of NTU therapy include: Harmony; Balance; Interconnectedness; Cultural Awareness; and Authenticity. The role of the NTU therapist is based on a spiritual relationship with the client system since NTU therapy recognizes that the healing process is a natural process in which the therapist assists the client system to rediscover natural alignment. The five phases of NTU psychotherapy are: Harmony, Awareness, Alignment, Actualize, and Synthesis.

The term *NTU* (pronounced "in-too") is a Bantu (central African) concept that describes a universal, unifying force that touches upon all aspects of existence (Jahn, 1961). NTU is the basic *essence* that unifies the universe and, as such, it is the *essence* of life. NTU is the force in which

Being and beings coalesce, and insofar as human beings are concerned, NTU is both immanent (a spiritual force inside), and transcendent (a spiritual force outside).

NTU highlights the interrelatedness between the intrinsic (psychic and immaterial) and extrinsic (social and material) factors that impact upon one's ability to both influence and respond to problems of daily living. NTU expresses not the effect of these forces, but their being. From an African world view the world is one of extraordinary harmony that is the natural order (Jahn, 1961; Nobles, 1986; Myers, 1988). The goals of NTU therapy are to assist people and systems to become harmonious, balanced, and authentic within a shared energy and essence that is in alignment with the natural order. Natural order implies that there is a unity of mind, body, and spirit throughout life and that the relationships within and between life are purposeful and orderly and, at base, spiritual. Natural order infers that our lives and our relationships have a purpose and a direction, and consequently it is our ongoing task in life to be in tune with the natural order. Furthermore, good mental health springs from being in tune (in harmony) with natural order, and healing is therefore a "natural" process.

NTU psychotherapy is based on the core principles of ancient African and Afrocentric world view, nurtured through African American culture, and augmented by Western techniques of Humanistic psychology. The core principles of NTU therapy are: harmony, balance, interconnectedness, authenticity, and cultural awareness. The discussion of each NTU phase will be followed by a brief overview of the central themes, techniques, and outcomes.

## *Harmony*

NTU psychotherapy is spiritually based. That is, there is a vibrant belief that there is a spiritual force to ail of life and that the spiritual dimension is the connective link to the mental and physical spheres of human kind. The NTU central belief in the ubiquity of spirituality is extremely important since spirituality provides a value system, a focus, and a direction to human endeavor, and through NTU psychotherapy, spiritually provides a base assumption as well a therapeutic direction and purpose (Myers, 1988; Nobles, 1986).

From a NTU therapeutic perspective, the overriding focus of life and, indeed the goal of the mentally healthy person, is to be in harmony with the forces of life. When we are in harmony with our mind, body, and spirit, we are experiencing confluence or the act of aligning ourselves from within (immanent) and from without (transcendent) (Asante, 1986). When we are confluent, we are experiencing an oneness with life and are "in tune with life. When we are harmonious, we are "at peace" whether or not the external forces surrounding us are fragmented since being in harmony depends more on our abilities to adapt through a clear process of organizing the disparate parts into a meaningful whole. When we are in harmony, we are NTU.

Being in harmony suggests that you are living life, not fighting or controlling life. It does, however, mean that you are in charge of your life, but that you are steering your lifeship while understanding that there are other forces that will, in part, determine how and in what direction you travel. To the extent that you are in harmony, then you are accurately processing the winds that are surrounding your life. Your "input signals" are clear and crisp; you are mentally and emotionally sharp; you are more readily able to direct your life in the most efficient and rewarding manner. You are in front of your life while still connected to it.

## *Balance*

The concept of balance is strongly related to harmony in that balance and harmony are different sides of the same concept. Balance refers to life as a dynamic process of energy fields and forces, and therefore our life task is to balance these seemingly competitive forces in a manner that brings about a unified whole (Capra, 1983; Davies, 1983). Life is not dichotomous at base, yet may often appear to be in its manifestations (for example, the socialized dichotomy between males and females). Rather, life from an Afrocentric world view is diunital, which suggests that phenomena are unions of opposites and that our task is to unify our various internal and external forces (Myers, 1988; Nobles, 1980). Diunital logic applied to the realm of masculine and feminine natures suggests that all of us are composed of both qualities in varying amounts and that we balance these expressions to achieve a healthy self-concept.

The concept of balance is similar to the concept of homeostasis in which a dynamic equilibrium is the true nature of any system, whether micro or macro. That is, all systems, whether at a cellular level or at a family level, are continuously utilizing energy to achieve balance. We must, for instance, continuously balance our material and spiritual selves. Problems or symptoms occur

when there are blocks to the fluid exchange of energy that encumber the normal process of healthy balance and dynamic equilibrium.

### *Interconnectedness*

NTU is a cosmic universal force, the essence of life and things that never occur apart from its manifestations. Furthermore, it is only modern rationalizing thought that attempts to separate or abstract NTU from its manifestation (Jahn, 1961). NTU is the connecting link among all phenomena and the link that binds all of the universe. NTU psychotherapy emphasizes the interconnectedness of human beings from within and without. There is a spiritual network that binds all of life, and it is this NTU that is the bridge on which successful therapeutic intervention is accomplished.

NTU psychotherapy is inclusively oriented as the bonding is primary. Thus, the concept of general systems thinking, and the later development of family systems' orientations are easily understood within the context of interconnectedness. In addition, the ideas of balanced ecology and of being at one with the environment are further expressions of this ancient concept.

The concept of balance, harmony, and interconnectedness are equally appropriate at any system's level and therefore are applicable when intervening with an individual, a group, or a family. When the therapist maintains a systems focus, which is a central component of NTU psychotherapy, then he/she is able to view any person or family as both composed of subsystems and also a subsystem of a larger organization. All levels of systems share common properties, and the intrinsic desire for system harmony, both internally and externally, is a major system characteristic (Davies, 1983; Dossey, 1982). Therefore, the term "client system" used throughout this paper is indicative of systems thinking in that the NTU principles are equally applicable to the various systems (individual, couple, family, group, etc.) that are the focal point of our attention at any particular moment. System thinking has been a living truth within Afrocentric thought.

### *Affective Epistemology*

*Epistemology* relates to the nature and basis of knowledge, and the term *affective* refers to the quality of one's feeling or emotional being. *Affective epistemology*, then, refers to the process and belief system of a people discovering knowledge and truth, i.e., awareness through feeling or emotion. This feeling orientation to knowledge is highly representative of African people and is recently experiencing a reawakening among many progressive Western thinkers and health professionals (Davies, 1983; Capra, 1983; Myers, 1988).

An affective epistemology is in contrast to the Western epistemology of knowledge through the measurement of objects and cognition. This is the so-called rational mind approach and is distinguished from affective knowledge that is considered intuitive and sensory. The entire analysis has been recently scientifically investigated and codified as the left brain/right brain distinction, where the left brain hemisphere is presented as the seat of rational, logical, analytical

process, and the right brain hemisphere is presented as harboring creativity, artistic, perceptual, and emotional powers. (Dossey, 1982; Capra, 1983).

What is the meaning of an affective epistemology for NTU? Simply stated, it is that people, certainly African people, come to awareness and process reality through an integration of both feeling experience, and verbal cognitive interaction. NTU psychotherapy, therefore, is both spiritually-intuitive and rationally-scientific and aims to help a person integrate both aspects of himself or herself.

The feeling experience integrates the knowledge and brings the information into reality. Therapeutically, we are able to access awareness, belief, and truth through the feeling component of the person, and do not rely on just "talking." We are directed to have people become an active participant in the therapy process; therefore, NTU therapy is an active, participatory therapy.

### *Authenticity*

Within the Afrocentric world view, the highest value lies in the interpersonal relationship between human beings. This priority on the value of the relationship places a premium on the authenticity of the person. It is the relationships that we build within the larger family/community of people that are accorded prominence. It is our connectedness with the essence (NTU) of others that brings fulfillment.

The authenticity of any particular person is colloquially referred to as his or her "Realness." As a community we ask that a person "Be for Real," and it is this authentic essence that becomes the basis for effective and satisfying relationships. It is similarly true that in the NTU therapeutic encounter the degree of realness that is experienced influences the direction and depth of psychological movement.

Authenticity is a state as well as a process. We may be able to acknowledge its presence in ourselves and in others and thereby take a mental snapshot of it, but the quality of authenticity is always shifting and growing. A mentally healthy person is continuously gaining in his or her authenticity as he or she becomes more closely connected to his or her spiritual self. We must nurture this quality whether we express it in ourselves or experience it in others. The very process of nurturing authenticity is itself an authentic act.

Being authentic implies spontaneity. A mentally healthy person/system is more able to respond to and interact with the environment in a natural, effortless manner. There is a lesser emphasis on thinking as such and more priority on responding holistically. By being spontaneous we are being more trusting of ourselves and of our connection to others. Because we are in harmony, then our intentions are trustworthy, and we can feel freer to respond naturally to our ongoing, ever-changing environment. When we are spontaneous, authentic, and harmonious, then our natural healing and problem-solving mechanisms are functioning properly. We are NTU.

## *Cultural Awareness*

Maintaining a balanced and authentic awareness of your cultural self is an important principle of NTU psychotherapy. Being aware and accepting your cultural self is a psychological given when one considers that the key psychological question of "Who Am I?" has meaning throughout the continuum of viewing ourselves as a collection of atoms and through viewing ourselves as belonging to the human species. Both of these facts of our atom structure and our human beingness contribute to our definition of self. Similarly, our connection to our cultural self is a major determinant of our full and healthy awareness of self.

The structure of an appropriate cultural awareness has been addressed by a growing number of Black psychologists. It has, for instance, been developed as the African self-consciousness by Joseph Baldwin (1981, 1985) and as psychological Blackness by Daudi Azibo (1982). Even though these and other psychologists have descriptions that differ slightly, the core principle is clear: that an Afrocentric paradigm conceives of healthy Black behavior as being in harmony with the authentic needs and social priorities of the African community. i.e., towards its affirmation, enhancement, survival, positive development, and fulfillment of its potential as a community (Baldwin & Bell. 1 985).

Joseph Baldwin stated that

. . .normal (healthy) Black behavior is neither negatively energized, nor is it merely reactive to negative and adversative environments. Normal (healthy) Black behavior, to the contrary, is positively energized under normal conditions and proactive in its thrust toward the affirmation and enhancement of African American Life (Baldwin, 1985, p. 62).

The above description of healthy, cultural self-awareness can be extended to measure the relative healthy balance of the cultural self that individuals within other ethnic groups might attain. A key to this human principle is that the person must be authentic and in harmony with the natural order to establish his/her cultural self properly. The relationship of an authentic and balanced cultural identity to good mental health is a universal principle.

## *Goals of NTU Psychotherapy*

The goals of NTU psychotherapy are two-fold: The first is to assist the client systems to function harmoniously and authentically within themselves and in their relationships within the context of natural order. The second major goal is that the client systems function within the guidelines of the Nguzo Saba, the seven principles of Kwanzaa.

In regard to the first goal, when a person-system is functioning harmoniously and authentically, then it is felt that one's natural healing forces are functioning properly and that one can not only resolve the present psychological difficulty, but also can have a system in place for the effective resolution of future difficulties. Harmony implies that a person or family is aware of themselves and their contact boundaries with others. To be fully aware, a person must be in contact with oneself mentally, physically, culturally, and spiritually as well as be confluent in his or her

interaction with the world. To have clear, crisp contact with oneself and with one's environment demands an open, receptive stance towards the world in which one's psychological defense mechanisms are utilized appropriately.

When we are harmonious, we have appropriate respect for ourselves and others. We are in tune to our own needs as well as sensitive to the needs of others. We are able to feel the continuity of and interconnectedness with the relationships between ourselves and others. We are, therefore, able to realize our interdependence with all of life at the same time being cognizant of our individuality. With the above realization, we then must follow through by providing satisfactory nourishment to ourselves as well as to our relationships. We grow through the process of sharing ourselves with others.

Authentic persons or systems are trustworthy and reliable because they are being their true selves mentally, physically, and spiritually. They are genuine because they are in tune with themselves and others. They are, in other words, to be believed.

The second major goal of NTU psychotherapy is to assist a client system to live within the Nguzo Saba or seven principles, since NTU views the Nguzo Saba as proper and effective guidelines for healthy living. The following chart presents each of the Nguzo Saba principles with corresponding key concepts, NTU therapeutic tasks, and therapeutic techniques.

*Nguzo Saba Princip/es*

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Key Concepts</i>	<i>Therapeutic Tasks</i>	<i>Techniques</i>
<i>Umoja (Unity)</i>	Harmony Inter-dependence of life	Experience closeness of being through group action	Rituals (libations, prayer, Afro drama, etc.)
	Unity is Natural	Experience Interconnectedness	Self-Disclosure, Humor, Reframing, Genogram
	High Value of Relationships	Awareness of Self-Barriers to Closeness	Being Real. Re-energize spiritually

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Key Concepts</i>	<i>Therapeutic Tasks</i>	<i>Techniques</i>
<i>Kujichagulia (Self Detennination)</i>	Empowerment	Cultural Awareness  Awareness of Self-Potential	Ugogram, Awareness Wheel, Rites of Passage Program
	Authenticity Self-Esteem	Positive Regard for self  Awareness of strength of Inner-Self (NTU)  Awareness of Psychological Barriers	Guided Imagery, Peeling the Onion, Cultural, Informative, Creative Visualization
<i>Ujima (Collective Work Responsibility)</i>	Balance Mutual Interdependence Extended Self Active Togetherness and Family	Balance "I" and "we"  Experience NTU	Multi-Family Retreat, Kinship Karamu, Effective Communication Exercises, Family Drawing
	Collective Past, Present, and Future	Experience importance of self and others  Effective communications including accepting responsibility for correcting others	Therapeutic Games, Modeling, Reframing

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Key Concepts</i>	<i>Therapeutic Tasks</i>	<i>Techniques</i>
Ujamaa ( <i>Cooperative Economics</i> )	Mutual financial interdependence	Experience money as a tool, not a source of pleasure	Family Budget, Tracing of income and expenditures, Guided Imagery, Values Clarification, Cooperative Ventures
	Shared wealth and resources	Awareness of multiple efforts that contribute to one's success	
	Balance	Sharing of resources to further health of extended self	
	Wealth and resources belong to all	Balancing money and communal responsibility	
	People before Profits		
Nia ( <i>Purpose</i> )	Authenticity	Experience our purpose through being NTU	Guided Imagery, Connection to our ancestors, Relaxation exercises, Self Awareness Exercises, Cultural Awareness Exercises
	We each have a unique contribution		
	Clear purpose has roots in identity	Relaxation and calmness	
	Provides direction and meaning to life	Access our internal voice  Awareness	

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Key Concepts</i>	<i>Therapeutic Tasks</i>	<i>Techniques</i>
Kuumba (Creativity)	<p>Authenticity</p> <p>Balance</p> <p>There is a creative spirit (NTU) within everyone</p> <p>We have the capacity to bring into being a New Reality</p> <p>Creative labor is self-defining, self-developing, and self-confirming</p>	<p>Balance feeling and sensing with thinking</p> <p>Trust inner-self</p> <p>Experience being in harmony and learning to re-balance</p> <p>Feel comfortable with allowing inner self to organize physical being</p>	<p>Action Techniques, Role Plays, Visualization, Humor, Reframing, and relabeling</p>

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Key Concepts</i>	<i>Therapeutic Tasks</i>	<i>Techniques</i>
<i>Imani (Faith)</i>	Harmony Interconnectedness	Alignment of ourselves in harmony and balance with our essence (NTU)	Prayer, Spiritual Readings, Unity Circles, Affirmations, Meditation, Relaxation Nature Study
	Call for a humanistic earth-oriented, earth-based, people-centered faith	Belief in the spiritual essence of all	
	Connection to our spiritual core (NTU)	Incorporate our being with a sense of the cosmic	

The principles of Nguzo Saba and, indeed, NTU psychotherapy can be universally applied. That is, they are equally applicable to European Americans, Hispanic Americans, and others since the concepts are based on a spiritual connection that human beings have with the life force. The values that Nguzo Saba espouse are human survival values that speak to the healthy promulgation of the human race. NTU psychotherapy is *culturally sensitive*, and the specific techniques can be appropriately modified given the uniqueness of the person, his/her family and cultural background, and the overall therapeutic needs of the client.

### *The Role of the Therapist*

NTU psychotherapy places a premium on the relationship between the therapist and client system for two important reasons. First, psychotherapy is a spiritual and sacred relationship; and second, the person-to-person orientation that is primary to the Afrocentric value system is strong. NTU psychotherapy recognizes that there is a spiritual dimension that is the

## PHILLIPS

basis of the therapeutic encounter. Furthermore, NTU psychotherapy views the healing process as natural a process for mental health as it is for physical health. For example, when there is a small cut on the finger, the body marshals resources to close and bind the wound (healing). This is true only if we do nothing to interfere with this natural process such as allowing the wound to become infected. Similarly, this is true with our mental health. Our ego may become bruised, but a natural healing emerges if we do not interfere or complicate our emotional matters with ineffective communication or low self esteem for example. We have an internal energy (NTU) that will guide us to health.

The therapist's task is to assist the **client systems to align themselves in an** authentic and harmonious manner so that the natural healing forces can become operative (NTU). The therapist appreciates that healing is natural, and it is *through* the therapist rather than being *caused* by the therapist that healing occurs. This distinction is extremely important because it relates to the proper utilization of therapeutic techniques.

The NTU therapist realizes that he/she is in the service of a spiritual healing force and that he/she exists within a sacred relationship with the client system. The fact that the therapist relationship is a sacred relationship and the fact that the therapist must view the relationship as sacred have many therapeutic and social implications. For instance, the sacredness of the relationship gives **definition and answers to the question of** confidentiality in therapy. When we, as therapists, are functioning with sacredness in mind, the client can feel protected because we communicate that we have his/her best interest at heart.

As the therapist grows in his/her appreciation of the sacredness of the therapeutic relationship, there is a heightened spiritual contact between the therapist and the client as well as more clarity of the meaning of the client's behavior. The therapist, through increased appreciation of the spiritual dimension, becomes more aware, in turn, of himself, his client, and the larger responsibility within which they both exist. As the therapist becomes more attuned, the spiritual forces that allow for intuition and inspiration or, what Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls described as the "Ah-ha" experience, are more readily available and likely to occur within the client's system. Similarly, when the therapist is more attuned, then she or he is more spontaneous and more accurate in her or his selection of effective and operative therapeutic techniques. The therapist just "seems to know" when to utilize this or that technique as opposed to rigidly following a prescribed plan. In the parlance of athletes, the therapist is "operating in the zone."

A therapist must certainly live the principles that he/she teaches for maximum therapeutic effectiveness (authenticity). This is obviously true since the therapist becomes more believable and genuine especially in the

cycs and hearts of the clients. Additionally, the therapist is able to be more reflective of his/her own problems and problem-solving mechanisms when he/she is living daily what he/she is preaching daily.

A person's overall life orientation is a necessary first step in developing a sacred relationship. There are subsequent options available to the therapist to heighten the spiritual connection of the therapist's encounter with the client. Before the session begins, the therapists should cleanse themselves spiritually and mentally. This can involve some kind of centering or relaxation exercise whereby the therapists can refocus mentally and pull together their spiritual energies. At this point the therapist should evaluate what transpired during the last session or event and take inventory of what he or she is feeling at the present. For instance, has the previous session left the therapist angry? Drunk with therapeutic prowess? Feeling less than adequate as a therapist? Any of the above distract from the therapist's ability to be fully available emotionally, spiritually, and physically for the next client. I

It was mentioned earlier that a person-to-person orientation is more of an Afrocentric axiology, and that this orientation is a second persuasive reason for the heavy emphasis on the relationship between the therapist and client in NTU psychotherapy. The client, especially the African American client, utilizes the relationship as truth seeking phenomena. What a client feels or thinks of the therapist as a human being is important since trust is withheld until there is a relationship of harmony. You, the therapist, become more genuine and real to the client system, and the true belief that you care and appreciate what is happening with the client system becomes more prominent.

As the process unfolds and as this care and concern is conveyed (not simply verbalized), the therapist is placing trust in the client, and thereby it will likely be reciprocated with increased trust on the part of the client. It is upon this bridge that the therapeutic techniques, suggestions, and directives must rest in terms of their utilization, participation, and ultimate effectiveness.

The therapist provides a lens through which the client systems view themselves and their relationships. Sometimes the lens can be more focused on the client, sometimes more on the therapist, and sometimes focused on the relationship between client and therapist. The therapist has the option (granted by the client) of refocusing the lens and the selection of the proper option rests on the therapist's being in harmony with the client so that the selection emanates from a shared experience.

The NTU therapist is a guide who, through his or her skills and spirituality, acts to "illuminate" the client's path (present, future, and past) so that the client is enabled to see his/her own way more clearly and is also equipped with stronger problem-solving skills. The therapist assists the client to see the path

## PHILLIPS

in sharper focus and, in the process, to see the options, potentialities, and internal directions. The therapist then gradually transfers/returns "the light" to the client so that he/she may continue to view himself/herself clearly, and see creative, authentic strategies of problem solving. In other words, although the therapist may begin the therapy assuming more responsibility, from the beginning there is a process whereby the client is becoming more responsible for himself/herself and, in turn, more authentic and confident.

The therapist can facilitate this developing relationship bridge by exhibiting a true sense of commitment to the client. This commitment is demonstrated and felt primarily during the ongoing **sessions even though there are** valid occasions external to the actual sessions that are opportunities for the realization of commitment. It is of primary importance that during the actual sessions the therapist be fully present, mentally, physically, and spiritually, and clearly communicate that she/he is, at the time, in the service of the client within a sacred relationship.

### *The Process of NTU Psychotherapy*

There is a general process to NTU **psychotherapy that guides the therapist** through the therapeutic experience. The phases of NTU therapy are: (1) Harmony; (2) Awareness; (3) Alignment; (4) Actualize; and (5) Synthesize. These phases of psychotherapy must be considered within the context of circular, not strictly linear, time so that the therapist perceives that all five phases can be occurring at one time or that the phases can occur "out of sequence." A technique can be utilized in one phase that has equivalent meaning for the client in another phase. The therapist when thinking circularly, rather than linearly, understands that therapy is never out of any one phase altogether, and that each phase has predominant needs that generally constitute the primary focus of the therapeutic moment. In other words, the phases are interconnected and continuous and form a complete gestalt in which, when we attempt to dissect and discuss the phases separately, they lose some of the identity and meaning. Although they will be discussed separately, the reader is advised to see them as holistic principles that occur inter-connectedly.

A case example is presented that will assist the reader in connecting the NTU phases with specific psychological and behavioral dynamics. The case is that of a 33-year-old African American, divorced female (Ms. B), whose presenting complaints were those of a depressed nature. She stated that she was "losing her grip" on life; that she was "not accomplishing anything" in life; that she didn't feel good about herself or her relationships"; and, that she always gets in relationships that "tear at herself."

Harmony relates to the initial phase of therapy in which the primary, though not exclusive, objective is to develop a shared consciousness or shared experience with the client system. Through the development of a shared consciousness, a bond or therapeutic bridge is created upon which the mutual trust of client and therapist can rest. Harmonizing includes the process of mutual sharing of information. It is a joining by the therapist to the client system and is a necessary first step.

Although there was initial rapport, this phase consisted of deepening the bonding between therapist and Ms. B. since a previous therapeutic encounter and her educational level had left her therapy-wise and able to verbalize cooperative statements without necessarily giving herself to the process. Techniques primarily utilized were: humor, self-disclosure and, in general, a sense of realness. A climate of nonpretentious and honest sharing was established wherein Ms. B. felt increasingly comfortable with sharing thoughts and feelings authentically as opposed to self-defeating mental screening.

The second general phase of therapy is the task of *Awareness*. To become aware in the therapeutic context is to experience connectedness of the various components of oneself or the family system, and to be able to distinguish between one's needs and boundaries and the needs and boundaries of others. To come into awareness implies an acceptance of one's own needs, strengths, limitations, and potentials. We begin to know **who we are at succeeding deeper levels of meaning and to feel increasingly comfortable with ourselves**

Almost paradoxically, we can become clearer about ourselves only as we strive to reach our potential. Consider the familiar examples from the world of athletics wherein a pass receiver tests his limits by extending himself to catch a pass, or the case of the gymnast who extends herself through increasingly intricate horizontal bar maneuvers. In both instances, the athletes have come to know their limitations through the process of striving for optimal functioning. Both become more aware of themselves.

*Awareness* implies *Recognition* whereby the client system develops initial recognition of his or her problem behavior from more or less a cognitive **perspective. In this phase** the person not only begins to recognize the presence of some destructive behaviors or patterns, but also begins to experience the therapeutic process as a healing force. He/she begins to accept both the problems and the therapy as valid facts.

Ms. B became increasingly aware of her lack of self-confidence; her fear of closeness; her need to caution herself about disappointment; and, the feeling that she was "living a lie." She further became aware of how she was operating on the belief that she was "better than others." A primary technique utilized to heighten awareness was a combination of relaxation and

## PHILLIPS

visual imagery in which Ms. B was directed to:

1. visualize herself resting on a cloud;
2. imagine that she could see the sketchy face of one of her ancestors (whether she had ever seen them or not, in physical reality, was immaterial!);
3. Listen to the voices of what her ancestors were saying to her (the little voices inside); and
4. discuss what the ancestors had said with the therapist.

The third phase of the therapy process is *Alignment*. A basic task of this phase of NTU therapy is to help the client to uncover and reconcile his/her core neurotic fear or anxiety. The client's (or family's) basic fear or anxiety usually surfaces during the process of self awareness. As the client becomes aware, he/she will often **need strong therapist support as well as other** environmental support. Typically, underlying fears are stated in terms as "I'm afraid I'll go crazy," or "I might die" or some other catastrophe. The continuing objective, then, of this phase is to assist the client with his/her boundaries, potentials, and fears. It is during this phase that the client, or family, must successfully overcome the fears and avoidance that have become clearer to them through the previous phase of awareness. This is commonly referred to as "working through" the issues of therapy. In Gestalt therapy this process is known as "moving through the impasse." Although there are different references, the key element is consistent. Awareness and information must be processed in order to achieve psychological growth.

During the alignment phase the client system confronts his/her fear(s) in order to achieve the outcome of assimilation and reconciliation of these psychological anxieties into a maturing, confident, and harmonious self. The client feels more at peace whenever there is a successful completion of this phase. The client has integrated his/her alienated self into a harmonious whole, and the fears become appropriate to the stimulus. One becomes more self assured and authentic, which allows one to *respond* to the environment rather than *react* to it. The act of the process of *Alignment* implies taking responsibility psychologically for oneself and ones' needs and actions. One cannot be fully aligned until acceptance and responsibility are connected to awareness into the total self that brings about alignment. |

Alignment can be accomplished in a number of ways, but the amount of emotion involved is usually in proportion to the amount of psychological energy, that the person/family system is using to sustain their present maladaptive attitude and behavior. That is, there is often a release of anger,

sadness, joy, or other intense emotion as this immobilizing fear is confronted. The extent to which this anxiety is deeply rooted in the client personality is a major determinant of the level of emotional energy that will be released.

The phase of alignment is integrative since the objective of the phase is not necessarily to expel a fear, but rather to come to terms with it (balance). The process of so doing, i.e., of assimilating, may include confrontation, but the latter is the means and not the end. The goal of alignment, as has been stated, is to develop a confidence by coming to terms with the actual, or potential anxiety.

Part of Ms. B's task in this phase was to acknowledge (to herself) that she felt inferior and was acting out in ways that punished herself and that projected a false security/identity. In addition, she had to replace this negative thought/feeling with a secure, positive, and balanced self-image. She had feared "going crazy" if she were to be herself, since she felt that there would simply be nothing there that was real, or solid, about her. Ms. B's other task in order to achieve alignment was to access her spiritual core that would serve as her foundation. She was directed to experience the part of her body that was shaky and to calm that component through relaxation and through positive and reassuring messages. She was able to experience the healing energy as **alignment progressed.**

**The fourth general phase of NTU therapy can be termed *actualization.***

It is at this point that clients can begin to practice and experiment with new attitudes and behaviors in the context of their regular environment. The clients take their budding awareness into real-life situations where they can experience themselves differently and achieve more positive outcomes. Even though the external environment may seemingly not have changed, what has changed dynamically is that the clients have a reconstituted internal perception of themselves and their environment. This liberated energy (NTU) positively influences the clients' response to, and interaction with, the environment, thereby creating opportunities for positive behaviors and attitudes within their environment.

The process of actualization can be as simple as a homework assignment for an adolescent or as a vocational or other life change for an adult. The magnitude of the actualization may vary, but the internal psychological process is similar; the client or family is able to witness the changing response to stress from the inside-out and to receive validation and empowerment from the actual fact of being different in a small but noticeable manner.

At the close of each session, Ms. B was directed to utilize her new awareness and learning in the context of a specific situation. At various times, it may have been an interaction with a family member, colleague, boyfriend, or a specific task that she wanted to accomplish for herself. Ms. B was also

## PHILLIPS

asked how these homework assignments were experienced at the beginning of the succeeding session.

The last general phase of NTU therapy is the *Synthesis* phase. Herein, the client is integrating the knowledge gleaned through the process of awareness realization together with the experience from having operationalized some of his/her changing attitudes and behaviors in real life. This integration is simultaneously occurring on physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions whenever the synthesizing phase is proceeding well. An effective integration denotes that the client has incorporated the NTU health process into his/her life so that, beyond the presenting or current difficulty, the client has an effective human problem-solving strategy that is readily available when future life difficulties arise.

Ms. B presented specific situations in which she demonstrated to herself and to the therapist that she had incorporated a healthier process into her daily life.

Ms. B was able to experience herself differently in her interactions with her boy friend and her supervisor. Specific encounters included being clear about her needs and communicating her wishes and desires in a more timely fashion.

The five phases of NTU **therapy—harmonize, awareness, alignment, actualize, and synthesize**—must be seen as a circular process. Clients continuously experience the phases and will be in different phases simultaneously. What may be different is the relative priority of any phase at any one point during the therapy process.

All five phases can occur during any one session, and the process even becomes a convenient guideline for therapy session review. Were all "bases" touched during the session? Was there a beginning, middle, and end? What synthesis occurred since the last session? What actual experiences did the client have? Or, for that matter, what synthesis did the therapist have that related to the client's process?

The phases of NTU psychotherapy have as their ultimate objective the empowerment of the client system in alignment with natural order. The client should leave the therapy process in control of himself/herself even to the point of expressing appropriate requests for termination. The client should be more keenly aware of self and others, engage life in a more authentic manner, and incorporate effective tools for clear identification, analysis, and resolution of future life difficulties.

## References~

- Akbar, N. (1979) African roots of Black personality. In W. Smith, K. Burlew, M.. Mosley, & W. Whitney (Eds.), *Refections on Black psychology*. Washington, DC: University Press of America.
- Asante, Molefi Kete. (1986) The Egyptian origin of rhetoric and oratory. In M. Karenza & J. Carruther (Eds.), *Kemet and the African world veiw l.os Angeles University of Sankore Press*.
- Azibo, D.A. (1983). Some psychological concomitant and consequences of the Black personality: Mental health implications. *Journal of Non-White Concerns*, 11 (2) 59-65.
- Azibo, D. A., (1984). Advances in Black personality. *In the Black personality: Selected papers of Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo*, Washington, DC.
- Baldwin, J.A.(1980). An afrocentric model of Black personality . *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Association of Black Psychologists*. (Summary), 23-25.
- Baldwin, J. A. (1981a). *Afrikan (Black) personality: From an Afrocentric framework*. Chicago: Third World Press.
- Baldwin, J.A., & Bell, Y.R.(1985). The African self-consciousness scale: An Afrocentric personality questionnaire. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 9(2).
- Capra, Fritjof. (1983). *The tao of physics*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Davies, Paul. (1983). *God and the new physics*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc.
- Dossey, L., (1982). *Space, time & medicine*. New Science Library: Boston & London.
- Jahn, J. (1961). *Muntu, an outline of new African culture*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.
- Jones, R. L. (Ed.) (1980). *Black psychology* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Karenga, Maulana. (1977). *Kwanzaa: Origin, concepts, practice*. Los Angeles: Kawaida Publications.
- Luther X (Na'im Akbar). (1974). Awareness: The key to Black mental health. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, 1, 30-37.
- Myers, L. J. (1988). *Understanding an Afrocentric worldview: Introduction to an optimal psychology*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, Co.
- Nobles, W. (1976). Extended self: Rethinking the so-called Negro concept. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, 2(2), 15-24.

Nobles, W.(1980). African philosophy: Foundations for Black psychology. In R. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

## PHILLIPS

Nobles, W. W. (1986). *African psychology: Towards its reclamation, reascension, and revitalization*. Black Family Institute, Oakland, CA.

Pedersen, P. B. (1983). The cultural complexity of counseling. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, 6, 177-192.

Semaj, L. T. (1981). The Black self, identity, and models for a psychology of Black liberation. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 5, 158-171.

White, J. L., Parham, W., & Parham, T. A. (1980) *Black psychology: The Afro-American tradition as a unifying force for traditional psychology*. In R. L. Jones, *Black psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper & Row.