How often have you heard, “Listen to your body” or said, “Trust your feelings”? Isn’t the phrase “Words alone aren’t enough …” very familiar in your efforts to express deep feelings?

Although sound bites that clamor for our votes, our dollars or our attention, surround us, we know, deep down, that there is more to communication than words themselves. Experts tell us that more than two-thirds of our communications are nonverbal. That includes gestures, facial expression, posture, and attire. Nearly 50 years ago, in 1964, Marshall McLuhan took that a step further in his now familiar phrase, “the medium is the message,” insisting that the medium of delivery itself influences how a message is perceived. With all reverence, is this not what we celebrate in the Gospel of John as he proclaimed, “the Word became flesh and dwells among us” (John 1:14)?

Much of the focus in including “left brain” and “right brain” activities in planning meetings and chapters reflects the awareness that our best work requires an environment that relies on more than verbal communication. Images, sounds, textures and even fragrances can be vehicles for communication and learning. We communicate and receive information using all our senses – hence the role of “ambience” at our meetings and in our homes. Learning to receive, reverence and interpret the more-than-verbal input that surrounds us requires patience, humility, and holy curiosity.

The practice of communal contemplative sitting/meditation is also increasingly common. While to some it may seem a return to practices hitherto discarded, the intentionality and focus of the time together in profound silence is such that the energy and power of the Spirit moving among a group gathered for a common purpose can be almost palpable. Having a group of articulate religious or educated clergy sit in silence, refraining from voicing brilliant ideas or creative solutions during a meeting when time is limited and issues to be addressed are critical, can be a daunting discipline. Yet, the experience of shared wisdom that follows may seem well beyond the group’s apparent potential. It is encouraging that increasing numbers of men and women have dared to risk entering in to such sacred space.

What might all this mean to programming at a treatment center such as Southdown, where, by tradition, therapies are largely verbal? Programming at Southdown has long incorporated a variety of modalities, including the psychological, the spiritual and the physical, with the aim of moving toward integration through the healing process. In both individual and group modalities, clinicians regularly invite residents to go beyond words, using images, drawings or metaphors to explore deep feelings. The companion articles in this issue of the Covenant describe Psychodrama and Yoga here at Southdown. The authors share insights into the manner in which these modalities invite participants to listen to their bodies, to their experiences, and to the wisdom that often lies behind and beyond words used to describe past events and present complaints.

We offer these articles for two reasons. The first, most obvious, is to educate. These modalities are unfamiliar to many, and some have inaccurate perceptions of what they involve. Our aim, therefore, is to impart accurate information.

Continued on Pg . 4
All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

From Shakespeare’s As You Like It.

Dr. J. L. Moreno, psychiatrist, theorist and educator, first introduced group psychotherapy to the American Psychiatric Association in 1932. That same year he started the work of Psychodrama. Over the next 40 years he developed tools for Psychodrama and other expressive forms of therapy. He defined psychodrama as “the science which explores the truth by dramatic methods.” He envisioned that there could be therapeutic value if persons were allowed the freedom to play out roles and scenes relevant to their lives. This article explores the benefits of psychodrama and how Moreno’s vision supports the healing process at Southdown.

The most comprehensive description of Psychodrama is found in Peter Felix Kellermann’s book, Focus on Psychodrama:

Psychodrama is a method of psychotherapy in which clients are encouraged to continue and complete their actions through dramatization, role playing, and dramatic self-presentation. Both verbal and nonverbal communications are utilized. A number of scenes are enacted, depicting, for example, memories of specific happenings in the past, unfinished situations, inner dramas, fantasies, dreams, preparations for future risk-taking situations, or unrehearsed expressions of mental states in the here and now. These scenes either approximate real-life situations or are externalizations of inner mental processes. If required, other roles may be taken by group members or inanimate objects.

As described above, Psychodrama is an action-insight based form of psychotherapy. In this modality members are allowed to express themselves, to associate and act from within, to be true to themselves and honest with others. When this happens, significant inner material emerges spontaneously, transforming personal truths into issues of immediate relevance. Part of the difficulty in defining Psychodrama is due to the emphasis on spontaneous, unrehearsed action, much like play.

At its best, psychodrama moves people very quickly from their heads to their feelings. Often, what might take six weeks to emerge in talk therapy, can be accessed immediately in the work of a personal drama. Playing out roles and scenes relevant to their lives, members can quickly be open to insights. This is done in an atmosphere that is controlled, supervised, cohesive and, above all, provides safety.

Each Wednesday afternoon, residents at Southdown gather for two hours to participate in the Psychodrama modality. The first hurdle is getting past the name and the natural apprehension that comes with anything that is unfamiliar and unpredictable. The fact that most frequently needs to be communicated to new members is that no drama experience is necessary! The word “drama” refers to one’s story. In Psychodrama, group members are invited to bring their stories, past, present and future. Nothing is too big or too small to be looked at psychodramatically.

Generally, our weekly session takes the following form:

- We begin with a group exercise, often referred to in Psychodrama circles as a “warm-up exercises.”
- From there we move to a personal drama. The member who elects to do personal work is called the Protagonist. The Protagonist must articulate at the beginning of the piece his or her intent for doing this work. It is the job of the therapist as director to bring the issue to life using scene and characters, all guided by the intent of the Protagonist. One of the important lessons we have learned over the years is to allow the Protagonist to be as emotional or unemotional as he/she needs to be to do the work. Those asked to play a part in this drama are called auxiliaries, and those observing make up the audience.
- At the end of a drama, other residents have an opportunity to process the experience and to share how the drama relates to their lives. The culture we build in these sessions emphasizes that sharing at this stage be nonjudgmental. Participants are encouraged to speak from personal experience, thereby assuring the Protagonist that he or she is not alone in their struggle.

At Southdown, Psychodrama complements the inner work that surfaces in other therapies. Psychodrama is inherently corrective: it creates an opportunity to do and say in the here-and-now what one could not do and say at an earlier time, when it was too threatening, dangerous, or when one’s internal resources were not yet sufficiently developed. Psychodrama allows inner struggles to surface, be reconstructed and played out in the present moment, thereby releasing feelings that may have been suppressed or unresolved.

Continued on Pg . 4
Yoga is experiencing a surge in popularity. Thousands of North Americans now regularly practice yoga and, it seems, there are as many variations on the original theme as there are classes. It is not surprising, therefore, that while many residents arriving at Southdown may not have personally experienced yoga, they may have conflicting and confusing information about the practice. The aim of this article is to clear some of the confusion and to describe the purpose of yoga as one of the modalities in Southdown’s treatment program.

The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit yuj, meaning a yoke or union. There are different forms of yoga that emphasize this union in varying ways:

- Bhakti is the yoga of devotion
- Jnana is the yoga of study or knowledge
- Karma is the yoga of selfless service
- Hatha is the yoga of breathing and postural exercises.

It is the Hatha Yoga that is part of the therapeutic program at Southdown. Interpreting this in terms of a translation of the word yoga as union or yoke, the practice of Hatha Yoga is one that emphasizes the union between body and mind through the systematic approach of breathing and postural exercises.

Although in its origin yoga is presented as an ancient religious practice, it is important to recognize that the postures and breathing exercises that have come to be recognized as yoga in western popular culture are relatively new and generally divorced from influence of Eastern religious practice. Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra (approx. 400 BCE) is believed to be the earliest written guide to the practice of yoga. The sutras, or threads, are the equivalent to an in-depth step by step guide. There are no specific instructions as to form or posture other than “to move with steadiness and ease.” In essence, the basic concept is that some regular discipline of mindful movement and breathing would benefit the whole. This is a fairly simple concept, most easily translated as “healthy body, healthy mind.”

There is no evidence to suggest that the particular postures practiced in many yoga studios today are the same movements practiced over the thousands of years that yoga has been recorded. It is most likely that postures taught today have developed along with the popularity of yoga to resemble a particular form that can be named in order to facilitate easier, clearer teaching methods. Therefore, moving mindfully with awareness of breathing is the basic tenet for the practice. The form or shape that the body takes may be quite individual. This can be helpful in overcoming the apprehension that results from viewing media representations of yoga postures that give the impression that one should be able to morph into impossible contortions to be able to benefit.

Why is Yoga a Part of the Therapeutic Program at Southdown?

One of the positive aspects of the increased interest in yoga is that the scientific and medical worlds are now interested in measuring the benefits. Due to current technological capabilities, it is now possible to use evidence based criteria to support some of the claims espousing the benefits to regular practice. In general, there seems to be consensus that yoga can reduce stress, increase flexibility, strength, balance and co-ordination, and reduce risk for some common conditions such as osteoporosis and diabetes. However, there are many exercise forms that result in the same outcomes. So what is it that makes yoga different? Mindful movement and breath awareness compel us to connect to ourselves in a manner that is unique to yoga. It opens participants to a physical awareness of the Psalmist’s assertion that “I am truly, wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139)

We live in ever increasing externally stimulating environments, and residents have become accustomed to the many ways in which they are drawn away from listening and responding to the intelligence of the body. Those who struggle with depression, anxiety and experiences of trauma may present with additional factors that turn off the mind-body connection. Some view the physical body as “enemy,” to be ignored or overcome. Others who are dealing with pain and illness may view the body as the betrayer. For some, the nervous system may be in a state of hyper/hypo arousal. The extremes of over stimulation or under stimulation physically manifested in the body do not allow for connecting to the myriad of sensations that are in between, or for reading the messages of the body accurately.

Moving mindfully with breath awareness as in the practice of yoga can be a way to reconnect to one’s body in a positive manner. The movements do not need to be complicated. In fact many of the postures practiced in yoga sessions at Southdown mimic activities of daily living: reaching, standing, balancing, turning, twisting. The program accommodates residents with physical concerns by having them participate while sitting in a straight-back chair.

Continued on Pg. 4
Beyond Words... Continued from Pg. 1

While we assume that most of our readers are aware of the significance and power of communications “beyond words,” our second purpose in offering these articles is to invite our readers to reflect on the strategies they employ to listen to the subtle communications of their own lives, their body communications, the wisdom and needs of their histories. Our invitation is ever that of Jesus – “that you may have life and have to the full.” (John 10:10)

Psychodrama at Southdown... Continued from Pg. 2

Such emotions typically surface as they were originally felt, thereby allowing an opportunity to deepen self-awareness and learn new ways of coping. As children we may have been limited by our size, vulnerability, or position in the family, but as adults participating in Psychodrama we can claim our autonomy and power by finally giving back the internalized pain to the source from where it came.

As is true for all therapies, Psychodrama should always be used with care within the context of a resident’s overall treatment plan. Although inner conflicts and impasses are revealed, they may not be fully resolved in a given psychodrama session. Instead, residents are encouraged to bring their psychodrama experience to all of their therapeutic modalities. It is in this way that our approach to treatment at Southdown endeavours to be integrative.

As they leave Southdown, residents have repeatedly said that even if they have not done a personal drama, assuming an auxiliary role or being in the audience has helped them with their own work. Everyone’s personal drama moves other members forward in their quest for wholeness and healing.

What is Yoga?... Continued from Pg. 3

Actually paying attention to sensation and affect during movement can be a fascinating journey. There may be the experience of forms of movement that are enjoyable. There may be the experience of forms of movement that are slightly uncomfortable. The point is that the opportunity is there to experience the connection to bodily sensation in a safe and nurturing environment. Yoga allows time for exploration and response with the possibility of empowering individuals to determine what feels right for them. This is an opportunity to practice self-regulation: a necessary skill in journeying toward a more peaceful alliance with self and others.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that the outcome of a regular yoga practice is positive in terms of modulating stress response and regulating maladaptive nervous system arousal. The evidence does not yet decisively explain the process by which this outcome is achieved. However, as an addition to the therapeutic program, yoga can be an empowering and non invasive treatment approach.

In Memoriam

John Haley was a member of Southdown’s Spirituality Team from 1995 to 2004. We were saddened by the news of John’s death on September 20, 2012. We are grateful for his presence among us and for the wisdom he so generously shared. Please pray for John’s eternal rest and the consolation of his wife, Lynn.

Help Us Keep Current

Please let us know of any changes in your address, composition of leadership team, or suggested additions to our mailing list. Email the updates to administration@southdown.on.ca

Many thanks!