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Welcome to the first issue of East-West Connections!

East-West Connections is a collaboration of seasoned psychotherapists, housed in two Twin Cities locations - St. Anthony Park in St. Paul (the East) and Loring Park in Minneapolis (the West). We share an affiliation, a connection, with each other because of deeply held values and perspectives as psychotherapists and mindfulness practitioners.

As part of our collaboration, we have decided to publish a newsletter that will be distributed to our colleagues and referral network, and to interested clients. In this newsletter we intend to share our thoughts and identify resources about a variety of topics that relate to mindfulness and the connections between the practice of mindfulness and the practice of psychotherapy.

In this first issue we will introduce ourselves to you and reflect personally on what connection means in our work. In future issues we'll explore a variety of topics relevant to emotional, physical, and spiritual well being and ways in which the wisdom of the eastern traditions can enrich our lives and the work of psychotherapy. We hope that by doing so we will nourish the well-being of all of us, and reduce the isolation and hostility in our lives and our communities. We welcome your comments and suggestions, and look forward to a variety of connections with many of you!

Cheri, Jil, Signe, Sandy, and Susan



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EAST-WEST CONNECTIONS: INTRODUCING OURSELVES

At the heart of psychotherapy, at the core of psychological, physical, and spiritual well being, is CONNECTION. To introduce ourselves, all five of us comment on how this crucial factor of connection impacts us, our clients, and the way in which we approach our work.

CHERI DESMOND MAY, MSW, MEd, LP

Connection and feeling connected seems to be such a basic human need. We are born social creatures, ‘in connection’ to one particular, other, human being, and from that moment on we are seeking to meet our needs through our relationships with each other. Feeling connected to others—our parents, our partners, our children, our families, our work, a higher power, the earth itself-- is a vital part of a healthy life. When it happens we feel great—understood, validated, close, supported, like we belong. When it doesn’t happen, when we’re *disconnected*, it’s disturbing, alienating, isolating, lonely. We yearn for connection, not only with others, but also with *ourselves*. How do we slow down enough, quiet ourselves enough, to know and explore our inner landscape—our deep feelings and beliefs, let alone discover our true nature? Then, how do we heal the tears in the fabric of our relationships? And, in this age of the global village, how do we cultivate connections, understanding, and compassion with those near and far who are very different from us? This is important life work, cultivating connection, learning how to see connection where there is disharmony, difference, conflict, misunderstanding. This is vital human activity. The world needs more of it, we will be wiser for it. We need to dedicate ourselves to this practice. ☺

Cheri Desmond-May has been a psychologist for 24 years and in private practice for the last 18 years, working with adults and couples. She is a certified Imago couple’s therapist and continually exploring ways to integrate a mind-body-spirit approach into her work with clients. She has a longstanding practice in mindfulness, meditation and Buddhist psychology. She may be reached at 651.698.0508 or cheri@desmondmay.com.

SIGNE NESTINGEN, PsyD, LP

Like waves marching one after the other, breaking on the beach, connection and compassion each inform, and give life to the other. When I am connected to myself I am relaxed; voice calm, humor and laughter available, thoughts and feelings accessible. Any of those often labeled negative emotions, anxiety, pain, anger, or shame can sever my connections to myself and/or others. I may disguise painful experiences of disconnections with distractions or escape behaviors. I am made mindful of my lack of connection by verbal cues like voice strain or noticing a barrage of blaming, angry, thoughts. When I sit, and listen from that soft and open place in my heart where compassion resides, reconnecting is possible. I listen with kindness, without judgment, to my unfettered thoughts and emotions. Listening to others, or myself, with compassion I notice that neutral or calm thoughts and feelings follow that first rush of painful and/or difficult emotions. I take a deep breath, then another. Calming myself, moving back to the soft and open space in my heart, I know I can find a way through any conundrum. I am awake to compassion's vitality. Just as a wave lapping on the shore is both separate from and part of a larger body of water, so are connection and compassion: distinct yet flowing together to form a seamless whole. ☺

Endlessly curious about those pockets of the self that pull, push, or prod us toward self understanding Signe Nestingen has been in private practice for almost 20 years. Work areas include trauma recovery, work issues, grief and loss, sexuality, anxiety, depression, addiction recovery, and other life challenges for adults and adolescents. Signe provides clinical consultation and supervision, and consultation for individuals and business groups. She may be reached at 651.690.2667 or Signe@nestconsult.com.

JIL LEVERONE, PHD, LP

The Buddhist practice tells us a lot about connection--its importance, its meaning, its application in our lives. One avenue of understanding is through a study of the brahma-viharas, translated as the “heavenly abodes”. These abodes, which we in the West refer to as love, include compassion, empathetic joy, equanimity, and loving kindness. Loving-kindness is about sustaining and nourishing our connectedness with ourselves and with each other. The practice of loving-kindness is a meditation of aspirations directed first towards ourselves. Then, in ever-expanding circles of connection, we repeat these aspirations with others in mind: those we feel a deep positive regard, those towards whom we feel neutral, then our enemies, then all sentient beings. Inherent in this practice is the awareness and understanding that we are all connected to one another and that we have an opportunity and responsibility to actively nourish those connections – on many, many levels. So, as a beginning to our wonderful East-West Connection among the five of us practitioners – to Susan and Sandy in the West, my office mates Cheri and Signe in the East – and our larger community of practitioners,

May you be free from suffering,
May you be healed.
May you be happy, and
May you be at peace.

Jil Leverone works with adolescents and adults, and provides consultation and supervision for agencies and individuals. She is an Associate Adjunct Professor at St. Mary's University with over 17 years of teaching and clinical experience. Areas of specialization include treatment of abuse and trauma and GLBT issues as well as working with adolescents, families, and children and providing parenting consultation. Jil is interested in the mind-body-spirit connection, has received training in this area, and has a personal practice in mindful meditation. She may be reached at 651.646.3687 or jleverone@mn.rr.com.

SANDRA KOSSE, MSW, LICSW

Decades ago, when I was an English major, I learned about the Great Chain of Being, a philosophy that, among other things, held that “as above, so below.” In other words, there was believed to be a one-to-one connection between our lives and the heavens. Thus, for example, when King Lear is going crazy because his daughters have betrayed him, the disturbance in his mind is matched by the ferocious storm that surrounds him. I believe that this philosophy was out of favor for a few hundred years, but I’ve always believed in its truth—perhaps not weather-wise, but certainly otherwise.

So what does this have to do with connections? I am particularly interested in the inner life, in what enhances it, what erodes it, what sweetens it and what turns it bitter. My own experience as client and therapist and my additional study of a method of therapy called Internal Family Systems has taught me this: as within, so without. The more I am fragmented within myself, the more that parts of myself are at odds with other parts of myself, the more chaos there is in my life. The more harmony I experience in my internal world—the fewer inner disconnects there are—the more ease and flow there is in my whole life. There are reasons that we have learned to feel separate from others and reasons that we have learned to feel separate from ourselves. There are ways that we can learn to stop disowning disagreeable thoughts, feelings and experiences and to bring more compassion and spacious acceptance to ourselves. When we learn and practice those ways, we are in a position to effectively connect with others and to decrease the hostility that exists inside and outside ourselves. As a therapist I am committed to practicing and teaching those ways. 🌈

Sandra Kosse has been practicing psychotherapy for over twenty years. She works with older adolescents and adults across the lifespan. Over the years she has focused on domestic violence, family sexual abuse, stress management, women's issues, marital concerns and families with adult children. She may be reached at 612.874.8608 or smkosse@yahoo.

SUSAN BOURGERIE, MA, LP

The pervasive myth of the separate self is the source of much suffering in our lives. The variety of ills that find their way into my office – shame, loneliness, anxiety, alienation, loss of meaning and purpose, rage, violence, obsession, addiction – all are rooted in a sense of disconnection rising from our unquestioned belief in that myth.

Just as the idea of separateness is the myth and the source of suffering, interconnection is the reality and the remedy for that suffering. The work of psychotherapy is to uncover and develop the possibilities for connection, and to facilitate changes that allow for the flow of connection to resume. This reconnection begins in the relationship between therapist and client, and with the internal relationship of client to self. Insight into internal process of thoughts and feelings is important; acknowledgement and unconditional acceptance of whatever arises is the foundation of change and healing.

And beyond focus on the internal process there is a wide-open field of potential for healing connections in relationship to others and the vast universe that contains and sustains us. To open up this field, I've learned and recommend the Japanese practice of Naikan ("inner seeing"). Reflecting on the questions of "What have I received?", "What have I given?", and "What difficulties have I caused?" in the course of daily living or in a retrospective review of important life relationships, reveals the rich and sustaining web of giving and receiving that sustains us all. Going beyond self to tap into those resources brings the reality of connection to life, along with gratitude and a sense of well-being. ☺

Susan Bourgerie is grateful to have worked for the past 16 years as a psychotherapist. Areas of special interest and expertise include depression and anxiety, relationships, work issues, divorce/blended families, stress management, and the intersection of spiritual practice and psychotherapy. She is a student and practitioner of Zen, and of Japanese forms of psychotherapy including Naikan and Morita Therapy. She may be reached at 612.874.8608 or sbourgerie@qwest.net.



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***East-West Connections* is a collaborative effort to publish information of interest to our colleagues, clients, and others on the integration of Eastern and Western approaches to psychotherapy.**

***East-West Connections* will be published 3 times annually. If you have comments, questions, or would like to request that your name be added to or removed from our mailing list, feel free to contact any one of us.**