

Finding Stability in the Eye of the Storm

Budotherapy and Compassion in turbulent therapeutic sessions

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Abstract

One of the most important features, yet threatening the therapeutic space in psychotherapy, is the encounter with fear, fears and attacks on the therapeutic relationship, on the therapist or among the clients in couples' therapy. This article deals with the term 'Stability in the Eye of the Storm' exploring the unique contribution of traditional martial arts in developing a stable therapeutic presence, serenity and wisdom within these destabilizing encounters. The article presents the 'Budotherapy' Approach, which emphasizes the development of compassion qualities in the therapist and clients as an effective way to maintain the scary therapeutic space, so as to enable mental growth, peaceful intensity and stable presence to continue walking along the road, for clients in crisis.

Keywords: Budotherapy, Compassion Focused Therapy, Mindfulness, Martial Arts, Psychotherapy, Supervision, Couple Therapy, Embodiment, stability.

Finding Stability in the Eye of the Storm Budotherapy and Compassion

"Even when my feet are standing,
there is a hole that opens up under me"

Gabriel Balachsan

"Move like a beam of light:

Fly like lightning,

Strike like thunder,

Whirl in circles around

A stable center".

Ueshiba, "The art of peace"

Introduction

This article deals with finding psychological stability in difficult and terrifying situations in the therapeutic session, situations in which we encounter rage of aggression and helplessness. In the training of therapists, there seems to be a lack of preparation for the encounter with the complexity of the physical-emotional experience, to which we are exposed during those moments, when we experience stagnation or a desire to escape or attack (Hiskey & Clapton, 2019; Fiaggianelli & Lukoff, 2006). These are real, powerful experiences, yet many a time we believe they do not belong in our compassion and love clinic. This belief only makes it more difficult, creating confusion, a feeling of weakness, physical blockages, and strengthens the processes of "freezing" of our freedom and mobility. Looking at psychotherapy from a martial arts perspective, from Budotherapy, a therapeutic approach which I have developed over the past twenty years of my experience in connecting between the martial arts and the art of mental treatment, enabling connection to deep wisdom of effective emotional-physical experience of stable presence, calm and compassionate in these terrifying situations in the treatment room.

Budotherapy

The idea of 'Budotherapy' (Weis, 2020) started when I clearly realized my fears. The fear which appeared when I got into a fight with a bigger, stronger opponent (that is, almost everyone) and the fear that was harder to identify and admit, as I sat on the therapist's chair. It was an encounter with moments, where I felt there was real potential for getting hurt. At times it was physical, but mostly emotional. Facing these fears in the therapy room was frustratingly difficult for me and damaged the therapeutic process.

That's where learning and practicing "The Way of the Warrior" (The Budo) comes in, where real and profound sense of compassion enter: staying stable within the dangerous space, calming yourself down and cleverly exploring the best way to manage the situation. The way to a better result, mental growth of increasing freedom and joy (Gilbert, 2010).

Traditional martial arts and mental health care have common goals, which can be reached via different methods (Fiaggianelli & Lukoff, 2006). The goal in the traditional martial arts and in mental health care is knowing and dealing with the "inner enemies" within each of us, blocking our development, damaging our happiness, our interpersonal relationships, our ability to develop love relationships and realize ourselves. In both martial arts and psychotherapy, we deal with fears and anxieties, anger and aggression, low self-worth and self-confidence, depression, avoidance and trauma. All these impair the quality of our lives, our ability to realize ourselves or create and maintain intimate relationships.

Traditional martial arts deal with developing the ability to be in a stressful, dangerous or painful situation. However, instead of acting out of the threat system with one of the typical responses, like flight, fight or freeze, switch to a stable presence from an inner strength and from that stability act calmly and wisely, to bring an end to the unpleasant situation and prevent its recurrence as much as possible (Gilbert, 2010). In Budotherapy we use the ancient wisdom of martial arts, Zen and Buddhist thinking – mindfulness and compassion – in order to develop those inner qualities of the compassionate-warrior of the therapist, who finds himself in complex situations and among the clients we work with.

Experiencing the storms

When therapy become difficult, when we encounter turbulent situations we are stuck in, in psychotherapy sessions which we are supposed to lead, our bodies and our mental-emotional experience, come across instability. We are exposed to intimate and startling contact, along with a feeling of tremour, the collapsing knees, the need to be supported by something external, the fear of crashing to smithereens. As therapists in the difficult encounter just like in situations of crisis and pain in life itself, physical sensations come and go just like that. We experience chest pain, blocking the throat and the contracted abdomen, as well as nausea. We want to escape in panic from the feeling of instability, from losing control over whatever is going on, from the winds that whip with irreconcilable intensity. We feel we are being swept away, we can't see the way, we lose meaning. Weakness and self-pity surround us; we are in danger of collapsing.

That's what it feels like to be in the eye of the storm, in the quicksand. That's what it's like with fear that doesn't end, in a panic attack. It could be our storm or the client's storm, which grasps us tightly, it's the same feeling, the very same mind-body experience. These are inescapable moments. Through the courage and wisdom of the peaceful warrior, we can see their importance and develop an ability to approach them in order to carry them in a compassionate way along with our clients.

According to Fiaggianelli & Lukoff (2006):

"The competent psychotherapist needs to deal effectively, powerfully, and caringly with his or her clients, often in potentially volatile and highly charged emotional situations".

They add that therapists who practice Aikido learn how to

"Maintain a calm state of mind, free from fears and illusions of the past, or of an imagined future, can relate to others compassionately and empathically".

Be an island unto yourself (Buddha)

We are at the heart of the Corona period in the world and in Israel, in it there are other storms, be it in the streets or in personal and family life of each and every one of us. I found myself thinking this morning, as I worried about how caring for life actually takes life away from us, our vitality, our happiness. My thought is nothing new or original, but when it comes from the inside, it feels different, maybe more committing, bringing about action.

At the core of the approach, we are dealing with here is the steady, brave walk across the narrow bridge across rough waters. So smart, so difficult. So easy actually, yet so many layers and barriers on the way there. Barriers that threaten to shrink us to stop our growth, thus "Life is growth. If we stop growing, technically and spiritually, we are as good as dead" (Ueshiba, 2007, p. 23).

The therapeutic thinking presented in here combines concepts from traditional martial arts, Buddhist thinking, Gilbert's Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT), and the thinking of Bowlby and Bion. Bion attaches high importance in his writings to developing the ability to bear fears and frustration associated with an honest encounter with things, as they really are. That, without attacking the thinking processes and the connections we have within ourselves, and between us and the closest people around us. As a result, and in order to aid in the mental development of his clients, the therapist must develop courage and the ability to calm himself, so that he can contain the difficult situation and encourage growth (Bion, 1962, Bion, 2012).

Bowlby's "Attachment Theory" also deals with the same stability from which exploration ability, learning and creativity grow. He imprints the term "Secure Base" (Bowlby, 1988) and shows the importance in creating this secure space, so we live a full and healthy life. A space that ideally comes from beneficial parenthood at a young age; yet, in cases where this basis is missing or undermined, we must strive to develop it later in life. Bowlby presents an image from the military space, of that secure base:

In these respects, it is a role similar to that of the officer commanding a military base from which an expeditionary force sets out and to which it can retreat, should it meet with a setback. Much of the time the role of the base is a waiting one, but it is none the less vital

for that. For it is only when the officer commanding the expeditionary force is confident his base is secure that he dare press forward and take risks. (Bowlby, 1988, p. 10).

These connections are underpinned by the "Budotherapy" approach (Weis, 2020), which engages in the experience of the therapist and the therapeutic encounter, from the wisdom of the martial arts on its way to the development of the qualities of compassion within us. In the following parts of the article, we will open the topic of stability and connection to the peaceful warrior within us, and how we develop and find this quality within us in when we are in the eye of the storm.

Knowing Collapse

"Everything can collapse. Houses, bodies and enemies collapse when their rhythm becomes deranged" (Musashi, 2002, p. 57).

We collapse facing fear, or losing our way, when there is no movement in our body, when it freezes. The skeleton is experienced melting, gravity appears to overpower our inner forces pulling us down. We may shrink trying not to fall, not to meet fear or we may move on to hyper-activity, rapid breathing, to a movement that doesn't stop, to a whirlwind of galloping thoughts.

I write these words, just a few black marks on the computer screen, innocent and neutral, but connect inside my body to those feelings that have passed and are passing through me on the journey of my life. I can feel the pain in my throat, and I feel like letting go of this article, stop writing. Maybe I'll do some meditation, listen to Lana del Rey, in full volume; maybe I'll do my Kata¹ and with it I will connect to the power within me. Anything, just to get away from the unpleasant experience with the choke in my throat.

I'm smiling, relax, I know you didn't open these pages just to hear about my suffering. If you're human beings, you must have enough of your own. Although it could be nice to see someone, who's been practicing for decades, to be as vulnerable and feel the same pain and weakness. At

¹ Kata is series of constant movements that have gone from teacher to student for centuries, which is a structured form of battle, a kind of a battle dance.

least that's what I tell myself: "Who do you think you are? That it won't catch you? Where's a little modesty"?

But I walk my way, and the way, the Do², helps me, my clients, and the clients of the therapists in my supervision. The way deals with learning the very presence within the storm. Developing a smart and effective presence, for our continued growth and life experience. Ueshiba, founder of Aikido, writes about the essence of the way and the presence within the storm:

"Place yourself in the center and stand there confidently in a triangular stance. Link yourself to the *ki* of heaven and earth, pivot around the front foot, and guide your partner around that center" (Ueshiba, 2007, p.116).

Developing Stability facing the storm

To illustrate the idea of inner stability and the ability to self-relaxation in turbulent and terrifying situations, I will use two stories. One about Funakoshi (founder of karate as a martial art, and also as part of the mental and psychological growth of Japanese Buddhism). With the second story, I will share a personal experience of mine. I will begin with a description of a Japanese author, who described the happenings on a roof in Japan around 1890, while one of the most frequent typhoons in those areas, was fiercely howling:

During one particular typhoon that I remember, all the people of Shuri huddled together within their homes, praying for the typhoon to pass without wreaking any great damage. No I was wrong, when I said all the people of Shuri huddled at home. There was one young man, up on the roof of his house, who was determinedly battling the typhoon. Anyone observing the solitary figure, would surely have concluded that he had lost his wits. Wearing only a loincloth, he stood on the slippery tiles of the roof and held in both hands, as though to protect him from the howling wind a tatami mat. He must have fallen off the

² Do or Dharma, the mental way to Buddhism.

roof for the ground time and again, for his nearly naked body was smeared all over with mud.

The young man seemed to be about twenty years old or perhaps even younger. He was a small stature, hardly more than five feet tall, but his shoulders were huge, and his biceps bulged...But all this is of little importance. What matters is the expression on his face: wide eyes glittering with a strange light, a wide brow, copper red skin. Clenching his teeth as the wind tore at him, he gave off an aura of tremendous power. One might have said he was one of the guardian Deva kings.

Now the young men on the roof assumed a low posture, holding the straw mat aloft against the raging wind. The stance he took was most impressive, for he stood as if astride a horse. Indeed, anyone who knew karate could readily have seen that the youth was taking the horse-riding stance, the most stable of all karate stances, and that he was making use of the howling typhoon to refine his technique and to further strengthen both body and mind. The wind struck the mat. and the youth with full force, but he stood his ground and did not flinch. (Funakoshi, 1975, pp. 45-46).

This story about Funakoshi touches the heart of the mental experience we come across, when we deal with treatments for difficult emotional situations in the struggle with typhoons which threaten to collapse and "kick us away".

How do we develop the same stable stance, the same determination? Is it easier to cope with an external typhoon, rather than with a storm fiercely whistling inside our body?

You can refer to these terrifying 'storms' in psychoanalytic therapy based on Bion's thinking:

In therapy we try to meet the storm and see what can be done with it, and if we could be benefitted by it. Psychoanalytic development is one in which the patient has a greater ability to bear doubt and withstand the storm and the pain involved, when meeting an emotional truth, without collapsing, lying or self-deception (Bion, 2012, pp. 52-53).

Bion refers to both the patient's ability, and that of the psychotherapist to maintain stability and clear thinking within the storm. We strive to develop the ability to move through this terrifying

space, which is often experienced either as impassable or as followed by a vacuum and a fall into a deep abyss, without collapsing in it or flee in panic from the edge of the abyss. This ability depends on the extent to which we can develop the same physical and mental stability, the psychological flexibility and courage to approach and act compassionately – an action in which we are prepared to meet pain for the sake of growth and reducing suffering - in the face of the typhoon gusts whistling fiercely inside and out.

When things begin to shake and spin, we panic and search stability. But we hold on to unstable, changing external things to stabilize ourselves. We will not be able to get hold of the wind, but rather move along with it. Flexible stability is a dual, or even paradoxical encounter between an infinite power and freedom from everything, which seems stable and permanent. This is the presence and movement we have been practicing for years, to which we strive to reach via martial arts, during an encounter with an enemy or many enemies, who are actually always inside us, reflected and resonant in our souls (Ueshiba, 2007). It is also the very same therapeutic presence that we seek in the art of mental health care, when encountering and fighting with the enemies inside our clients, with the demons that have been attacking him or her relentlessly for years. In martial arts training, like karate or aikido, we get to meet the scary situation over and over again and develop the same stability:

You have some crazy attacker coming at you, and your goal is be relaxed and centered and calm and able to absorb and join with, just be there with that energy, in a way that can accept and redirect it. A lot of what you do in therapy is the same thing – just be there and not be overwhelmed by what's going on.

(Fiaggianelli & Lukoff, 2006)

So, the warrior's way and that of mental growth are the same: developing stability, courage, power, and compassion. Developing the ability to connect with the peaceful warrior within us, within our clients, in the eye of the storm (Fiaggianelli & Lukoff, 2006; Weis, 2020). Pema Chodron writes:

Sticking with that uncertainty, getting the knack of relaxing in the midst of chaos, learning not to panic - this is the spiritual path. Getting a knack of catching ourselves, of gently and

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compassionately catching ourselves, is the path of the warrior. (Chodron, 2007, pp. 16-17)

The following poem, from the book “Budotherapy”, presents a “sketch” of the same idea:

Each of us floats on a
walnut shell boat
in the lake of life.
To keep from falling,
we regulate and calm ourselves.
Not leaning back too hard towards the past,
Nor bending forwards facing the future
Nor sideways in search of other places.
To keep stable,
Our body remains
Upright, yet relaxed;
Strong, yet flexible,
Alert, but at ease.
The soul will follow.

(Weis, 2020, p. 165)

A story: A Moment of Panic in the Sea

The second story took place in Sinai not so long ago. Many years have gone by ever since I last visited, together with longing for the beauty of the place; I especially miss the corals and fish you discover while snorkeling beyond the reef.

The visit was towards the end of November, literally the end of the season; the beaches were empty, and the sea was not as smooth and transparent as I had remembered from past visits in summer. During one of those days, we went out snorkeling with a couple of tourists. There were large ripples in the sea, and it was not ideal for snorkeling, but calm enough for us to do it safely together. We found an opening in the reef, and we saw that the corals continued without any openings back to shore for a much further distance. The four of us went in. We made sure to keep close together; the look was lovely and relaxing. Each one of us enjoyed the sea and the view at his own pace. After about one hundred metres, we glanced at each other, to make sure all are there, and continued snorkeling. And so, fascinated by the scenery and the sense of peace and sure that my friends are not far from me, I continued to advance another hundred meters along the reef. After I'd had felt pretty tired and saw that there was no opening through the reef to the beach, and the corals practically reach the surface of the water, I looked for my friends, in order to start going back together. I looked through my water mask under water, which had already become a little darker and murkier, and didn't see a thing. I took my head out of the water, removed the mask, as I was trying to keep myself stable over the waves. I still couldn't see anyone.

At that moment, panic began to creep into my body and thoughts. The experience of being alone in the middle of the sea always scared me, even as a child. I also immediately gained the feeling of suffocation because of my asthma that had been present since my childhood and the fear of a seizure in the middle of the sea or some lake. The panic grew for a few seconds, where I was the same asthmatic boy and I started turning around on the spot above the water and below, in an effort to find my friends. This movement of spinning, along with the tension that accompanied me, the sea that had become less and less pleasant and calm, and the fears from way back, that arose in me, brought me closer to a feeling of panic and basically to a really dangerous situation.

At the moment of truth, when I was whirling in panic, I came to a quiet and clear understanding, "What I'm doing right now is dumb, I'm exhausting and stressing myself, a bit longer and I'll be in real danger. I'm okay at the moment, it doesn't matter where they are, I have no reason to worry, and just as I have made it to here, I'll be able to make my way back and surely find them on the shore". This moment of connecting to the smart truth of "what would help me right now in

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battle" created a real and immediate change. I relaxed my muscles, took a deep breath, connected to my stable centre and went into a state of tranquility. I put on my diving mask and started snorkeling my way back. After a short while, when I went up to look above the surface of the water, I saw them waving to me from the shore, at the point we entered the water before. Instead of telling myself stories of disasters, with the help of self-soothing, I could think that everything was probably as fine as it could be, and it really was.

As with other situations we encounter in life, this story illustrates the transition from tension to shrinking, panic and feeling lost, to self-relaxation, exploration and connection to pleasant and effective wisdom and flowing movement. This transition, as I comprehend it, is the heart of wisdom of the martial arts, and perhaps the wisdom of the art of life and certainly the art of mental health care. This Connection, every time anew, to the compassionate-warrior experience, to self-relaxation, to the investigation and search for what would really help, enables me a stable, loose, and much more effective movement, in my encounter with these difficult situations, walking through with my clients in the healing space. Musashi writes about strategy in difficult situations:

"On the battlefield, even when you are hard-pressed, you should ceaselessly research the principles of the strategy so that you can develop a steady spirit" (Musashi, 2002).

Stability comes from connection to foundations

The same stability, incarnated in a soul-body in the shape of the pyramid in the "rider-on-a-horse" stand from the story of the typhoon, actually represents a trio: the quiet and stable body and mind of the compassionate-warrior, standing on two strong, yet flexible feet: one foot is the teachers and the wisdom of the ancient way, which is passed on to us in many years of learning and development through determined and difficult work. The second foot is the support we have received throughout life and the connections we have with significant and supportive characters, the community, family and our connection to all creatures, as well as earth itself.

As expressed in the key ideas of Compassion Focused Therapy, even if we were not as lucky to have been raised in a loving, supporting environment in reality, and adequately experience these beneficial connections in our lives, we could develop internal representations of these compassionate figures from the therapeutic connection and by practicing in our imagination, such as "Ideal compassionate other exercise" (Irons, 2019, p. 154). In doing so, we develop in our mind supportive and beneficial relationships with another compassionate party who believes in us, shows tender warmth and love and helps us connect to the courage and inner strengths inherent in us. These two stable feet, which are our "safe base" allow us to continue to grow and move flexibly and freely to explore the outer and inner world, and to work for peace and joy within us and our surroundings even during times of crisis, panic and hardship.

These ideas fit with what Paul Gilbert says about martial arts:

In the Martial Arts the focus is on learning how to be in the moment, and fight or defend from a point of stillness rather than rage, terror or desire to humiliate and harm. These are, of course, ideals to aim for but they recognize the importance of teaching people practices to work with bodily arousal. (Gilbert, 2010, p. 141)

The emphasis is on the importance of developing a stable and powerful movement, along with working with the imagination, where clients learn to meet their inner enemy, which has been attacking and hurting them for years. The importance of developing the peaceful warrior in the battle against the internal enemies, is also emphasized in the words of Van der Kolk, according to him:

Traumatized people are often afraid of feeling. It is not so much the perpetrators (who hopefully, are no longer around to hurt them), but their own physical sensations that now are the enemy. Apprehension about being hijacked by uncomfortable sensations keeps the body frozen and the mind shut (Van der Kolk, 2015, p. 210).

Against this scary and "well-trained" adversary, we must stand up and hold the battle for peace, courageously, resolutely, humbly with wisdom in love and in developing a peaceful stability and the qualities of compassion within us.

The Compassionate-Warrior's Journey in Budotherapy

Further to the accepted division in mindfulness and compassion-based therapies, Budotherapy also has four degrees of intervention, each based on its previous one:

1. The therapist practices using the Budotherapy observation method on himself and on the therapeutic space, during the therapy session.
2. The therapist teaches the client the basics of the approach, sharing the wisdom of the martial arts, so as to achieve cooperation and understanding of the journey to relaxation and providing hope and motivation.
3. Joint in-room practice, such as the inner compassionate warrior, via meditation and work with the imagination. Moreover, at this stage we learn the basic exercise of martial arts: Karate's basic stances, introducing kata and touch exercises from the martial arts, such as training battle practices in stability and working with grabbing and releases to detect contraction and relaxation.
4. The therapist refers the clients to learn and practice martial arts outside of therapy hours: home practice, joining Dojos (learning centres) of traditional martial arts, or referral to individual work with therapeutic martial arts instructors under the guidance of the therapist.

We will now elaborate on each of the steps of intervention.

The therapist practices and activates the Budotherapy method of observation on himself during the therapy session

Hiskey & Clapton (2019) show how training in traditional martial arts develops a therapist's ability to meet anger and aggression from a viewpoint of compassion and brave serenity. That is, to contain the aggression or fears he encounters in therapy out of a position of stability, high ability to self-relax and a willingness to stay close yet in the unpleasant situation, to create change and growth. From this base position, which is at the core of physical-mental development in martial arts, the therapist can think creatively, and bring positive thoughts of support and empathic

understanding to an unpleasant session and meet the frightened or angry client with a lighthearted, warm, physical comfort, kindness, and a relaxing, supportive manner.

As I write this part of the article, I have many memories of situations whereby I was attacked during the treatment session. A young client, shouting at me that I was useless and that she was sick of my keeping quiet (luckily, she helped me understand that I really should explore where these "therapeutic silences" are coming from); a client who expresses hatred for the entire community of caregivers; and especially memories of couples who attack each other during the meeting, while I'm preoccupied with my fears: that I won't be able to calm them down, that I won't protect them from continuing to hurt each other, especially the fear that the attack will pass on to me. During these encounters and the hours that followed, I acted out of my threat system. I fantasized that the clients would stop coming to therapy, or that I would fulfill my old dream of becoming a farmer, leaving behind my clinic and the storms in it. I could recognize anger rising in me, towards them, feeling miserable and self-pity. Since I had been well educated as a therapist not to attack, I experienced high levels of freeze, of defensive regression to "therapeutic silence". Even though these experiences were unpleasant, these therapeutic sessions, and many others that have reached me through sessions with my supervisee, psychotherapists and couple therapists, helped me understand the need to bring into therapy session the abilities I have been developing for years in the dojo, both as a student and as a teacher of traditional karate; to bring into the clinic the peaceful-compassionate warrior. Letting the big warrior inside me, lead and manage the turbulent expanses of encounter with aggression in the therapy room, in a safe way, which protects against injuries and enables growth and a supportive and healing emotional connection. Ueshiba wrote that:

"To injure an opponent is to injure yourself. To control aggression without inflicting injury is the Art of Peace" (Ueshiba, 2007).

From this physical-emotional position and experience of the martial artist, the therapist develops a growing ability to endure distress and maintain calmness and stability in the face of direct or indirect attacks, which are experienced within the therapeutic space (Hiskey & Clapton, 2019; Clapton & Hiskey, 2020).

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I remember in one couple's therapy, where the fight between the couple shrunk me, shortened my breath, and activated my sympathetic system, all my defensive antennas in a very strong manner. This situation was not a one-timer but lasted for many weeks. I felt that the clients were leaving our meetings injured and bleeding, that the meetings were useless to them. I felt myself despaired, weakened, unable. I noticed that my thinking about the couple and especially the woman, who expressed overt aggression at high intensity in the room, was becoming distant, with a desire to avoid and end their therapy.

At that time, I was developing a Budotherapy approach to working with turbulent couples, and this difficult and unpleasant experience pushed me into action and application. I realized the fight I was experiencing, was actually within me (Ueshiba, 2007; Weis, 2020) and in those meetings with them, I started paying attention to my body. I clearly saw my own shrinking, I noticed my breath, but instead of letting my "threat system" manage me, the contemplation and attentive presence has allowed me to look at the situation as a battle that I am currently managing in a dangerous and irresponsible way. The first change was my understanding that **this was a battle**, just like the hundreds or thousands of battles I fought as a karate student. I could also see them as two of my students in the dojo, who are fighting each other during training, but both are panicking and feeling terrified that they don't know how to "make a good, fun fight." They expected me to keep them from injury and the frustrating experience, as well as guide them in a way that allowed them growth and intensification.

As soon as I could physically feel the method and my experience as a teacher in dojo, as I was sitting facing them in my clinic, I could feel the transformation through my body and my presence in the room. And so, like heading a dojo, I started managing the situation with confidence, with an assertive compassion, with humour and peace. I loosened my posture on the chair of the therapist and breathed softly. I formed a bridge to my peaceful and creative brain functions, to my love for them, and my desire to help them stop making each other miserable. From this position I could have stopped them with gentle determination, I could share my experience with

them when I was with them, forming a bridge to connect us. A more protected environment was possible in the room, and the start of joint growth towards a workspace, where they reduce the punching of fists towards each other, as they develop compassion. Their willingness to be here for each other, to support and cooperate for mutual healing, has grown.

Case description 1: The Therapist and The Old Chinese Sensei

I will present an example of supervision work from Budotherapy. The supervisee therapist describes a burdensome sense of therapy, in which everything falls apart. Many variables whirl in the air, attacking the client, leaving him weakened and helpless. The therapist is absorbed into the frustration. He also feels attacked, choking and frozen, as if “lots of hands are holding me, gluing me to the place”. He feels he can’t stop, stabilize and create meaning from everything, which is attacking him inside the room. In the supervision session, we practice breathing and self-regulation in short meditation, followed by my request from the therapist to connect to a great warrior figure, let the figure help him and guide him through this battle. The therapist, who returned a few months ago from staying with an old kung-fu Sensei in a mountain hut in China, instantly connects to the quality of the old Sensei. He smiles, his body becomes looser, growing and expanding. “I see a picture, where I’m standing steady, throwing away all the hands that hold me”. I let him stay with that picture, and ask “What does it allow you now?” – “ah, now I have full attention to the client, I’m just with him”.

In another supervision encounter, the therapist raises difficulty in meeting a client who is undergoing crisis in her life. She is in a decomposing relationship system, which is characterized by her tantrums and her partner's avoidance. As a rule, her relationship is characterized by a very high level of criticism and anger, and the more the situation in the couple and family system deteriorates, the more defensive and aggravated she becomes. This virulent aggression and criticism enter the therapeutic space. The therapist presents the occurrence in therapy, in which he feels weakened and helpless. He describes the client as the image of a "woman-bull ". In describing the emotional experience, he can relate to whatever goes on in the sessions “I feel

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shrunk and frozen, it's hard for me to think in the face of this energy, her critical attacks against the whole world and me... to be honest, I sometimes really hope she wouldn't show up."

We practice the encounter with the old Chinese Sensei again. Out of practice, while his eyes are closed, the therapist becomes calmer. "He sees me working out and just sitting quietly on a tree trunk in the woods. I approach him, he does not react, remaining quiet and peaceful". "Can you imagine what he would have done with that 'woman-bull'?" The therapist smiles, "I can see him offering her green tea, looking at her with a pleasant, amused smile." His muscles are loosened, he breathes fuller, looser breaths and feels that the image of the green tea has helped him move from the threat's emotional system ("The Red System", according to The Compassion Focused Therapy) to the emotional system of containing, the emotional connection and peace ("The Green System", from The Compassion Focused Therapy). Now after practicing and connecting to the presence of the calm power within it, he can imagine a new connection to the client. A connection of compassion and support, without being alarmed by her, and without thinking she was a monster. In the following meetings with her, he now brings to the relationship the same peaceful support which he can now see that she or the damaged girl within her, needs so badly. Beyond this, the same psychological and neurological flexibility between the emotional systems, constitutes one of the key ideas of the compassion focused therapy (Gilbert 2009). The physical, cognitive, emotional connection to the qualities of the old Chinese warrior, which exist in the therapist, made the movement from the red system to the green one, possible. In the following meetings, he said that although he still felt the fear in his body, he came to meet the client with a wide, free mental container and in a soft, steady physical presence.

The therapist teaches the basics of the approach and practices with his clients to achieve a better ability to self-regulate, serene and a sense of inner stability

The second stage deals with the psycho-educational part, sharing martial arts wisdom along with understanding the structure and function of the brain and nervous system, evolutionary psychology, the structure and functioning of emotions, etc. The therapist shares relevant knowledge with the client, in order to assist him in reducing guilt, increase motivation to practice and grow and act out of compassion (Gilbert, 2010). In this discourse and learning, there grows

a common language and a growing understanding of the client regarding his difficulties and what would help him overcome them. In this space, the therapist and the client become partners in a journey that can be terrifying and challenging, though the shared walk and sense of progress along the way encourages continued movement. Just like the joint journey of the student and the sensei in the Way of martial arts.

Case Description 2: The understanding that there is a battle going on, and the development of the inner peaceful warrior to fight it

Ben, 35 years old, came to me because of growing anxieties that took over his life, until he almost stopped leaving his house. His body language and movements were limited, frozen and stiff. His tone of voice was flat. The thoughts attacked him incessantly. To help him let go, I first wanted to help him develop his sense of stability, “a safe base”, on which he could lean, to investigate his condition and work in the direction of change and development (Bowlby, 1988). The main intervention approach with him at the beginning of the therapy was to combine meditation practice to develop internal stability, like Mountain Meditation, guided imagery of a safe place, the development of Compassionate Self exercise (Irons, 2019), sharing stories and ideas about what was going on in his mind and the essence of the battle he faced.

Ben learned the idea that there was a battle taking place inside his mind, and that he was fighting a trained and frighteningly practiced opponent – the threat system and its proxies, which had been "practicing" for many years and for almost 24 hours a day. The realization developed that we both had to boldly see that such a battle was taking place within, and that it was a tough battle, where losses were expected in the rounds of fighting. With the help of examples of stories and common thinking, Ben was willing to trust me more and more and was bravely willing to take a risk and enter the battlefield. He slowly develops the belief that as the campaign continues, the compassionate warrior within him will become stronger, become more skilled and be able to tilt the campaign in his favour.

Joint practice in the room, such as developing the inner compassionate warrior, through meditation and working with the imagination

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Later on, and after Ben's anxiety declined, we could work together on practicing the basic stances in martial arts, such as “the warrior stance”, shared by yoga and karate (Zenkutsu-dachi), horse-riding stance (Kiba-dachi), which enables grounding and developing a sense of power. We also practiced the “warrior’s walk”, where the client is asked to walk as if he’s a great warrior, feeling it in his body, in his consciousness, in the emotional experience and in the way he is currently moving (Weis, 2020).

Ben is learning to calm himself with meditative sitting and a relaxing breathing. He applies what we have learned in meetings about the brain and the emotional systems, enabling a brave, honest encounter with his fears. As part of the practice, he observes the threat system in his ancient mind, the system controlled primarily by the amygdala in the limbic system. I asked Ben: What do you face now, when you are looking at your threat system? – I’m looking at my scared part. Terrified eyes, bent back, feeling weak, face full of tension.

Can you meet this part from the eyes of the “Peaceful Warrior”? – yes, I look at him, I’m big and powerful, I approach him, smile to him, reassure him it'll be okay for us to get over it. I see that in the imagination, the frightened part enters the strong part, as if absorbed into it, settling into the heart area. It's not easy for the warrior, but I get up, raising my hands high in the air, feeling my strength; I keep him inside me, and he doesn't break me up.

After completing the work in the visualized imagination, Ben wishes to practice together the powerful Kata, “Tekki Shodan”, a kata which reminds me of The “Haka Dance” of the New Zealand warriors, where a feeling of stability is developed, strong legs and a feeling of tremendous inner power, which shoos away any enemy thinking of approaching. This practice of meeting a compassionate warrior, aims to strengthen and support and guide Ben in managing the terrifying and dangerous battles that accompany his life, and which brought him into therapy. With stable legs and a sense of containing the terrifying emotions and physical experiences that go with them, Ben recruits courage and the qualities of self-compassion, taking his first steps in many months, outside his doorstep, to the world.

Case Description 3: Wonder Woman

When Dana approached me for therapy, she suffered from a high level of anxiety, a general feeling of weakness, a poor mood and social isolation. She felt that her work in I.T. for years in the same company was giving her stability, but she wanted to feel looser and more comfortable in her relationship with the staff. She felt her unpleasant thoughts and physical feelings, which were associated with anxiety and despair, were attacking her, freezing her body, and blocking her from living life the way she wanted so badly.

In the therapy we focused on developing her ability to self-regulate and develop a sense of inner strength and ability to cope with her difficulties in a sincere and courageous way, and out of generosity in her reference to herself and her difficulties. As part of her inner strength development, Dana was assisted by Wonder Woman as a compassionate-warrior figure. When she shut her eyes, entering practice, Wonder Woman came to her aid, becoming a protective and empowering figure in the battle against the internal attackers. While working together, Dana created a tangible image of the thoughts and feelings that seemed to attack her. She describes it as scary demons that do not let go, and attack her incessantly. Wonder Woman with her inner strength, her skill as a serenity warrior, and her compassionate qualities directed at Dana, arrived at Dana's internal battlefield. With the help of the shield and sword, Wonder Woman fended off the attacking figures, worked her way through, creating a breathing space, a sense of protection and intensive power. Dana connected to these images and felt Wonder Woman by her side and in the present experience of her body. She tapped into cautious optimism and feelings she had not come across in a long time: "I feel power flowing inside me, radiating out of me; I'm standing steady in the centre with the sword and the shield. Who would dare hurt me now? Who could beat me?" Warrior figures such as Wonder Woman present a combination of assertive power, a willingness to fight to defend themselves and their environment, and if needed – use a sword to threaten or eliminate the threatening demons". However, they are always characterized by quiet, calm intensity in kindness and often humour. They come with a willingness to risk themselves while helping those in distress and in a position of weakness. They are never aggressive, cruel, or vindictive.

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This repetitive experience left Dana with hope for change and improvement. She's experiencing a greater sense of self-ability, stable presence and peace of mind.

The therapist refers clients to study and practice martial arts outside therapy setting

Case Description 4: joining a dojo

When Anat first called me, before the therapy started, she shared that she was debating whether to join the dojo and study karate with me, or come to me for therapy. The dilemma Anat was presenting is highly important and central in Budotherapy. Sometimes it comes up from the clients and sometimes I am the one who feels that the most effective and compassionate intervention for a specific client is actually to follow the ‘**untherapeutic**’ path and to join the dojo team of trainees. I've emphasized here that joining the dojo is not therapeutic because it's a regular training session in the traditional martial arts, and in no way is it a therapeutic group. However, this training has many benefits in the field of growth and mental health, and a lot of academic research and writing can be found on these positive benefits and effects on traditional martial arts trainees (Clapton & Hiskey, 2020; Maynard, 2017; Weiser & Kutz, 1995; Twemlow & Sacco, 1998; Weis, 2005).

For Anat, this is a return to a balanced and orderly physical activity at the entrance to a stable workout routine and physical work, which emphasizes body connection and awareness. As part of martial arts training, she will be able to develop self-regulation through movement and breathing, she will connect to her inner power and stable physical, mental, and emotional presence. She will be able to cope with the automatic deterrence from social exposure, and act boldly to fulfill her deep need for belonging to a social group that achieves significant shared experiences. Choosing the path of joining training is a direct and powerful encounter with hope of change, but also with her fears, with her anxious thoughts and weaknesses. She will have to act with courage in order to overcome barriers that reduce her life and continue in the mental growth towards more freedom, joy, dealing with challenges and self-realization. Her choice to start practicing traditional karate and not get to psychotherapy was, to my understanding, a strong, courageous and compassionate choice for her, and not, as one may think, avoiding

handling her difficulties. In this context, it is important that we remember Funakoshi 's words that "Karate-do, aims at perfection of mind as well as body" (Funakoshi, 1975, p. 110), and "Those who follow Karate-do will develop courage and fortitude... Emphasis is placed on development of the mind rather than on techniques" (Funakoshi, 1973, p. 6)

Case Description 5: Combining Treatment and Karate

In another case, Adam, in his forties, married with three children, came to me for therapy after his company, where he had worked closed, and he began to sink into despondency and felt a decline in self-worth. He found it hard to get out of the house, and felt he was losing his *joie de vivre*, which characterized him in the past. His wife, who supported him and was very concerned about his condition, which seemed to be evolving in the direction of depression, tried to convince him, in vain, to go to therapy. It wasn't until he had a panic attack that he was sure he was having a heart attack and was rushed to the E.R. did he realize that he had to look for help and that is how he got to me for therapy. After about four months of compassion focused individual therapy, he began to feel more stable and peaceful, or in his words: "I feel like I recognize myself again". We began to look at the physical-movement component of his life, in connecting to a practicing community and his continuing personal growth along the Budo way. Adam initially pondered. On the one hand, he wasn't sure it was right for him. He was afraid it would be too late to start at his age and that he would be a burden to the group, resulting in embarrassment and shame. Nevertheless, he began to connect with feelings of excitement, inner energy, which awakens hope, and an ancient memory of a desire that always existed in a remote corner of his mind, to specialize in martial arts. At that stage, we dealt with the issues of our therapeutic relationship and would it be best for him to join my dojo or another dojo? Will we continue our individual therapeutic relationship at the same time, or will he join after we finish the therapy? Another important subject we discussed was that although the definition of joining the dojo was not "therapy" this move deeply meets its continued mental and emotional development, and could help with the challenges faced at this stage of the process, no less and perhaps even more than individual therapy. It was clear to both of us that this move required courage, a strong commitment to himself, along with subtle observation and providing space for thinking and

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exploring the emotions and fears that arise. After another month, Adam asked me to join the dojo, meanwhile without stopping the therapy. He told me he felt he trusted me and believes he'd feel less shame and embarrassment if he knew I continued to be a protective and growing figure for him. He also felt that such a transition period would help him maintain the safe base and allow him to bravely investigate his feelings and motivations, as well as his mental difficulties and pains he still felt with me, in the familiar and protected space of the clinic.

In exactly the same way, karate continues to be a space for my continued mental development and a safe basis for docking, a return to stability, and peace of mind during tougher times in my life. I remember periods of stress in my youth, when I was a psychology student at Ben Gurion University in The Negev, where the only thing that helped me "get back to myself" and a sense of inner stability, was to go down to one of the lawns and perform an ongoing and repetitive series of katas. With work I felt how the present experience changes, the body and breathing become lighter; I could manage to stand up and let hard feelings like anger or sadness get out of me while practicing. Working on katas on the lawn enabled me to meet myself again from a place of stability and inner strength, a modest acceptance of my difficulties and limitations and a feeling of love, generosity, and tenderness towards myself. Long before I knew the concept, which is so familiar today, I felt self-compassion; the karate and the teachers through which it came to me were a great guardian figure, supportive and compassionate to me.

Conclusion

This article dealt with finding stability and inner strength in situations of fear, weakness, confusion, and mental storm. Developing stability in the mind-body is the basis, from which to continue the journey in the direction of mental growth and a sense of freedom, developing self-worth and a sense of capability. These qualities are a key part of the work in developing compassion and is the heart of martial arts. The approach presented here is about looking at the quality of stability and the "safe base" in the psychotherapy process; it shows the connection between the martial arts that developed in the East and the art of Western psychotherapy and their joint action for the mental health of the client. The client and the therapist create a joint

act of courageous walking in a way that looks scary or blocked, and through developing the qualities of the compassionate warrior, connect to the inner stability experience, generate energy of movement and development, of strengthening, the development of courage to deal with the internal enemies, and connect to the experience of inner freedom, joy and vitality.

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