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## HELPING CLIENTS GET OFF THE WELFARE SYSTEM USING THOUGHT FIELD THERAPY (TFT)

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As a graduate student at the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego, I was fortunate enough to work at a mental health clinic serving those receiving Cash Aid, or 'welfare.' Most of my clients were women, although there was the occasional single dad. The terms of the welfare agreement were that the client had eighteen months to 'get their lives together' and get a job, after which financial support would end.

More often than not, my clients had a history of childhood physical or sexual abuse. Their past traumas continued to repeat themselves in their lives, and their situations seemed hopeless - until I introduced Thought Field Therapy (TFT) into my treatment. Then, everything started to change. The receptionists at the clinic would make comments about how my clients literally 'looked like different people.' My clients started to show more confidence when they walked in. The psychiatrist at the clinic was baffled that my clients were no longer showing symptoms that fit their initial diagnoses. My clients were making huge leaps with their recovery.

Thought Field Therapy (TFT) is a technique for the elimination of emotional distress. It gives immediate relief for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, addictions, phobias, fears and anxieties. It eliminates any negative feeling previously associated with a thought. Its effects are postulated to act by directly treating the blockage in the energy flow created by a disturbing thought pattern. By tapping on key meridian points in specific sequences, it removes disruptions in the body's energy system. These disruptions are responsible for causing physical problems, negative emotions, addictions and cravings. It is truly a mind-body treatment using a combination of modern science, Oriental medicine, and the body's energy system.

While a trained therapist is present, patients are first asked to think about a troublesome issue. They are then asked to quantify their feelings on a scale of 1 to 10, with a 10 representing maximum distress. Next, patients are asked to tap on their own body in specific places, or energy points, in a specific order. For example, the sequence of points tapped for anger is the inner eyebrow, little fingernail, and the collarbone. The sequence for trauma is a little more complex. The points consist of the eyebrow, outside eye, under eye, under arm, collarbone, thumbnail, under arm, collarbone, little fingernail, collarbone, and lastly, the index fingernail. Following treatment, the patients are once again asked to think about their problem or issue and rate it, indicating how much distress they feel.

I will share a few of my cases in order to demonstrate how I incorporated Thought Field Therapy into treatment. 'Judy' was a twenty-one-year-old single mother with a one-year-old son. She had a history of methamphetamine use, but stopped when Child Protective Services threatened to take her son away. The judge ordered her to get therapy. She came into the assessment in a state of mania and

anxiety. She spoke a mile a minute, was tangential (rambling in her thoughts), and used swear words continually when describing men in her life. She appeared to be very angry, but had a sweet spirit and a child-like innocence about her. After two hours of working very hard to keep her on track, with very modest success, my head was spinning. She had told me about how her father would take her to a hotel room as a child, and he and his friends would take turns raping her over and over again. She spoke about this abuse with emotionless detachment. She had completely dissociated from the trauma and appeared to suffer from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I told her about TFT and asked her if she would be willing to use it. She agreed, and I began by introducing a protocol on anxiety to relax her a bit.

Judy had always had problems in school. She found it difficult to hold her mental focus and had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) from a very young age. Despite her racing thoughts, she seemed to be very intelligent. She had been unable to hold a job for very long. When she came into the clinic, she had just quit a job where she administered marketing surveys at a local shopping mall. She said she had had a misunderstanding with her boss. Throughout her treatment, I helped her address her trauma, anger towards her perpetrators, and various other distressing emotions, which were debilitating to her functioning. For instance, she said she had never been able to read because her mind could not stand still. After the treatments, she started reading books she had always wanted to read. She would come in with books on philosophy and science that were beyond my understanding. She was so excited about her new ability to sit still and enjoy these books. Her talents and intelligence began to emerge after the many years of stagnation and suppression. She started to attend adult education classes. She earned all A's and B's for the first time in her life. She began to see her future as a new realm of possibilities. I helped her develop a timeline and work on her organizational skills. We developed a step-by-step plan to achieve the goals she wanted to achieve. She enrolled in Cosmetology school and was finally able to have the confidence to follow through on her assignments.

Judy brought in poems to our sessions. Most of her poems were of trauma and abuse. When she spoke of her father, she did not seem angry. However, she did express much anger towards the other men involved in the abuse. I gave her an assignment to write a poem or letter expressing her anger towards the perpetrators. We also did some inner child work to help her forgive herself and understand that she could not have done differently. We did some meditations to help her visualize her adult self with her child self. The adult self vowed to protect her from harm and take care of her. This meditative healing work, along with TFT protocols for anger and resentment, helped her release the hold of her past and create new possibilities of trust and forgiveness for the future.

Sex addiction was a constant struggle for Judy. She seemed to be repeating the pattern of her abuse. She sometimes took on the role of perpetrator and seduced other women to having sex with her. The TFT protocols for anger helped her to release the emotional need to aggress towards others. The protocol for addiction helped to ease her uncontrollable physical need to release her sexual desires. At the beginning of treatment, Judy came in with stories of having sex with five or six different people during the week. Her mantra was, 'guys are assholes and just want sex.' Along with the TFT, we did some cognitive therapy to help her understand her black and white way of seeing the world. She started to understand that people were not 'all good' or 'all bad.' She started dating a man exclusively and gradually let herself become vulnerable with him. When she felt disrespected, we did role-plays in therapy to help her to communicate her feelings to him in an effective way. She started to take some accountability for her part of the relationship. As therapy progressed, it was amazing to see her change in attitude towards men. She began to trust and see that she did not have to fear men. She realized that relationships are a give and take, and developed a sense of empowerment and confidence.

As demonstrated by the work that Judy and I did together, TFT was a tremendous aid in helping her heal and evolve into the woman she was meant to be. As she matured as a woman, her attitude towards her son also changed. She had previously seen her son as a nuisance at times, and would often neglect his cries for attention. By the end of the series of therapy sessions, she enrolled in a

parenting class and was truly interested in appropriate discipline. She started reading to him more often and became interested in his healthy development. She also began to express an interest in meditation and spirituality. Free from the effects of the trauma of her past, Judy was able to see the world outside of her. She worked on her relationships with friends and family members, and broke off the relationships that were not healthy. Judy continues to evolve, and understands how to use TFT on herself when her emotions interfere with her ability to live her life effectively.

'Cindy' was another client of mine who also received Cash Aid. She was thirty-eight years old and had two teenage sons and one teenage daughter. She was a bartender, and had previously been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. She had been coming to the clinic before I started working, primarily to see the psychiatrist and pick up her medications. She complained of uncontrollable rage. As a consequence, she suffered from extreme guilt over the rage she exhibited towards her children, and was constantly apologizing to her children for her bouts of anger.

After doing a TFT protocol for rage, she said she was able to speak more calmly to her children. However, different issues arose. Her children started acting out because they were not getting the reaction from her that they were used to. We worked together on developing healthy communication and role modeling for her children.

When she met with the psychiatrist at the clinic about her symptoms, he was baffled that her symptoms had improved. She was not as angry, depressed, confused, and anxious as she had been before. Her extreme highs and lows from her diagnosed Bipolar Disorder had leveled out. The doctor tried to convince her that her symptoms would not just disappear like that. (That was always an interesting dynamic between the psychiatrists and my clients.) It was a challenge for my clients to change their expectations and beliefs, to accept that medications might not be the only answer to healing.

Cindy had also been sexually molested by a family member when she was a child. She had developed an addiction to sex as a repetition of her past trauma. She said that working as a bartender reinforced her habit. She would work nights, find a suitable younger man, and go have sex with him somewhere. Cindy's relationships were very controlled and she never let men see her vulnerable. Throughout therapy, we worked on her different issues one at a time, doing various protocols, which included trauma and addiction. Not only did she notice that her sexual cravings diminished, but her craving for cigarettes was curbed as well.

After a couple of months, Cindy felt she wanted a closer relationship with a man she met at the bar. She had been talking to him and was starting to develop an attraction beyond the sexual attraction she normally felt. She voiced her fears, stating, "I am scared I am going to ruin him." After working with her to change her thoughts and develop new ways of approaching relationships, she went out on a date with this man. She came in ecstatic the next week, exclaiming, "I went out on my first date without having sex. It was so amazing." She stated that the man treated her with respect. Their relationship flourished as she gradually let down her guard with him. At times, she stated that he was a little boring, but began to realize that having a more healthy relationship may not be as stimulating as an addictive one. She understood that what she was gaining was far more valuable than what she was giving up. For the first time in her life, she felt a true connection with a man. She had gained a companion who loved and respected her and her children.

Cindy began to realize that bartending might not be the best job for her. Her friends offered to pay for her to get a real estate license. I worked with Cindy along the way to eliminate many of her self-defeating beliefs about her abilities. TFT helped her to regain her confidence, along with practicing visualizations of succeeding. She made enormous progress and is now enjoying a life as a successful real estate broker.

Another of my clients, 'Lola,' was married and had three children. One of her sons was severely disabled, and she was having trouble coping with the stress. She had seen a rat in her kitchen, and

developed a debilitating phobia of rats. She started hallucinating - hearing and seeing rats everywhere. Any noise she heard in the house alarmed her, and she would grab her children and jump up on the couch for safety.

Lola and I did a protocol for phobias. After ten minutes of tapping the appropriate sequence of points, her fear completely disappeared. She was able to think of rats, but she was no longer emotionally affected. Lola was so grateful that she no longer had the preoccupation with rats. She became much more calm and content with her life. We worked on her coping skills and I encouraged her to take time out for herself to relax and have some fun. I worked with Lola to get some assistance for her son. She was able to get a part-time job at a local store.

Many of my clients at the agency had similar stories of remarkable results. Because of the rapid rate of recovery in my clients, I was able to help hundreds of people during my year-long internship at the agency. In conjunction with other techniques, TFT was an effective tool to relieve distressing thoughts and emotions enabling clients to learn healthy communication and relationship skills. They were able to move on from the past abuse and look forward towards lives of successful careers and fulfilling relationships.

**Kirsten Schulz** has had fourteen years of experience as a life coach. She has coached individuals and groups in both personal and professional settings. She has experience in the business world as a corporate trainer and consultant. She also holds a California teaching credential and has ten years of experience teaching high school business. Kirsten holds a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology, as well as a dual degree in Psychology and Business. Kirsten has a holistic and integrative orientation to her coaching. With empathy and professional skill, she helps her clients design the lives they desire. She coaches in the areas of relationships, career, education, motivation and goal setting, personal and spiritual fulfillment, organization, emotional blocks, and realization of one's life purpose.

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